Strategic Partnerships are Imperative in Helping Agencies Achieve their Organizational Goals and Objectives

Summary of Proceedings
June 14, 2005
SUMMARY

Strategic Partnerships are Imperative in Helping Agencies Achieve their Organizational Goals and Objectives

Washington, DC [June 15, 2005] Federal agency leaders agreed that creating strategic partnerships with non-profit organizations and private sector entities can play a vital role in their ability to achieve their agency’s strategic goals and objectives. This agreement came during an Institute for the Study of Public Policy Implementation Leadership Forum held on Tuesday, June 14, 2005.

“Government services are not delivered solely by government employees; rather, it is a mosaic of government employees, contractors, NGOs, and volunteers.” explained ISPPI Director, Robert M. Tobias. Stephen Goldsmith and William Eggers further emphasize this point in their recent book, Governing by Network: The New Shape of the Public Sector, “The ultimate goal of these efforts is to produce the maximum possible public value, greater than the sum of what each loan player could accomplish without collaboration.”

Donald Murphy, Deputy Director of National Park Service and Derrick Crandall, President of American Recreation Association discussed the successful ways in which the National Park Service has identified and developed many opportunities for creating strategic partnerships in its organization and the ways that these partnerships, especially the partnership with the American Recreational Association, have assisted NPS in achieving its goals through volunteers and dollars.

Among the topics discussed by participants was how agencies can create these partnerships, what types of barriers may arise in trying to establish these relationships, and what specific action participants can take as individuals to promote or improve strategic partnerships in their departments/agencies.

Participants left expressing their desire to:

- Help their colleagues see the resources that they can accrue and how they can benefit from strategic partnerships
- Figure out what they need in their organization that the could get more effectively from outside the organization than from within
- Ask for help from their organization in establishing these relationships
- Implement the realization that these partnerships do not have to start from the leaders in the organization but can also start at a grassroots level
PROCEEDINGS

Introduction and Discussion by ISPPI Director Robert M. Tobias

“How does an agency create strategic partnerships with non-profit organizations and private sector entities that will improve an agency’s ability to achieve its organizational goals and objectives?”

Introduction:
Institute for the Study of Public Policy Implement (ISPPI) Director Robert M. Tobias opened the meeting with a brief overview of the mission and goals of ISPPI, followed by a discussion of whether participants’ agencies had a business strategy to partner with non-profit organizations and private sector entities. While most participants agreed that their agencies did not have a formal business strategy for these partnerships, they recognized that they were occurring informally in their agencies, mainly at a grassroots level.

Tobias introduced the session by discussing the importance that strategic partnerships can have especially in light of the fact that Congress has reduced program dollars but have not reduced agency goals and objectives.

As expressed by Stephen Goldsmith and William Eggers in their recent book, Governing by Network: The New Shape of the Public Sector, “Government executives’ core responsibilities no longer center on managing people and programs but on organizing resources often belonging to others, to produce public value.”

According to Leadership Forum participants, there are various reasons as to why strategic partnerships are not being included in agencies’ business strategies. Some of these include:

- Legal limitations in forming these relationships
- The competition among agencies and private organizations in the procurement of resources
- The mentality in the agencies that the current method for delivering services is how it has always been done so why change it

However, these same participants recognized the importance of strategic partnerships, acknowledging that:

- It needs to happen at a higher level in the agency as well as at the grass roots level
- There must be alignment between the mission of the agency and its partners desires
- Common goals between agencies and partners can make the relationship more successful

All participants agreed that building strategic partnerships can be a very beneficial tool for helping to create a win-win relationship that helps agencies achieve their goals and objectives.
Presentation by
Donald Murphy, Deputy Director of the National Park Service

Murphy began his presentation by discussing the success that National Park Service (NPS) has had in building a network of strategic partners. He pointed out that the initial factor in motivating these partnerships had been the decreasing resources that his agency was contending with.

He recognized that early on his agency had come up against major legal impediments but that his agency was able to get legislation passed through Congress that provided for agreements with cooperating associations and volunteers.

The first strategic partnerships that NPS established began with school teachers who wanted to volunteer in the parks during summer time. After this partnership was established, private organizations began to contact NPS to provide in-kind services. Today NPS has partnerships with 65 Cooperative Associations, 150 Friends Groups, and 122,000 volunteers.

Additionally, the National Park Foundation has been chartered by Congress as the official non-profit partner for America’s national parks with their primary responsibility being to raise funds for the improvement of national parks. NPS, however, has found that due to the structure of their Agency and the fact that national parks exist throughout the United States, local organizations have actually been able to raise more money than the NPF. Murphy attributes this in large part to the fact that people do not want to donate to the NPF because they associate this with giving more money to the government in addition to their taxes; however, they are willing to donate to local organization where they know exactly where their money is going and can notice the impact that it is having.

Murphy pointed out that one of the crucial lessons that the NPS has learned through these strategic partnerships is that it is important that the relationship is tied to the mission of the agency and that all partnerships should be thoroughly developed before any projects between the partners are approved. NPS has worked hard to assure that all local as well as national foundations that they work with have clear objectives that are in line with NPS’ mission. NPS has also made large efforts to work with special interest groups that have a desire to partner with them. One example of this is the work that they have done with the International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA). NPS worked with IMBA to help introduce paths that mountain bikers can use in the park so that the wildlife that is not on these paths is not destroyed by bikers.

While Murphy acknowledged the huge success that NPS has had in developing these strategic partnerships, he recognized the difficulties that agencies can have in managing all of these relationships. In order to help deal with this, NPS has established a National Partnership Office where a full time staff member works solely on this task. In addition, NPS provides internal trainings on how to manage volunteers and has established a full time group volunteer manager position in many of its parks.

Finally, Murphy believes that it is self interests that brings both the agency and its partners together. He thinks that it is crucial to identify what specific interests organizations and people may have in working with a particular agency and then to develop and maximize these interests in order to maximize the support that an agency can receive from these partnerships.
The American Recreation Association (ARA) is one of the organizations that has developed a strategic partnership with the NPS. Crandall discussed the importance of this strategic partnership for many of the clients that the ARA represents.

Crandall began by pointing out the intricacies that can develop in creating and maintaining these partnerships and agreed that while they are important they can be diverse and hard to manage both on the agency side as well as the organizational side. He recognized that many of these partnerships can ebb and flow over time due to the changing interests of the parties. Additionally, he pointed out that many of the issues that emerge in these partnerships are found in the details of the relationships.

The ARA has three types of relationships with the NPS: philanthropic, partnerships, and business to business. In his presentation, however, he focused exclusively on the philanthropic and partnership relationships.

While NPS does have a specific office that deals with all of its partnerships, Crandall acknowledged that the relationship with NPS did not stop there but continued with many other people in the agency, including individual park managers and rangers.

One of the most successful programs that has emerged out of ARA and NPS’ partnership is the development of the scenic byways and park roads. Recognizing early on that interstate highway system had created a society in which a person could go from one end of the country to the other without seeing anything, ARA and NPS agreed in 1991 to work together to create 89 scenic byways through national parks so that people could drive through these areas while seeing the story of the country. The ARA has helped provide money for parking lots and other devices that encourage people to stop along their drive and get out of the car to enjoy nature.

Another project that ARA and NPS have worked jointly to create is called Take Pride in America. This project helps recruit volunteers for NPS and at the same time educates the public regarding the resources that exist in the national parks around the country. The goal of this project for both partners is to better connect people to the outdoors.

Finally, ARA and NPS have worked together to use technology, which can be a powerful lure to keep people inside, to encourage people to explore the national parks. The “pocket ranger” has recently been developed to assist in a variety of ways, including downloading interactive maps and information and providing a tour of the park through a GPS navigating system. This device can also use the GPS locator to assure that snowmobile users stay on the road and charge people for parking in the parks’ parking lots. The ability to use this technology to benefit park services has made it possible to not require as many park rangers in each park, saving NPS valuable resources.

Crandall is a huge believer that partnerships can help agencies proactively improve services before agencies are forced to deal with them through political pressure.