

Article: Achieving Meaningful Partnerships with Nonprofit Organizations: A View from the Field (Mendel 2013)



This article addresses a topic of vital importance to the nonprofit sector: the dominant preference of institutional funders for visible partnerships and the reality that most of these are shallow relationships entered into by their participants to obtain funding. The article focuses on the not-so-subtle variations in the use of the term "partnership" by public, private, and nonprofit sector actors as a cause for misaligned performance expectations. The article also introduces "meaningful partnership" as a desired outcome for partnership endeavors involving at least one nonprofit organization. In this usage, meaningful partnerships are those that are transformational in some fashion, going well beyond transactional contract-for-

services relationships and lead to benefits that strengthen the participants in some manner. The article concludes that entering into meaningful partnerships offers the promise for nonprofit leaders and decision-makers to apply performance benchmarks that they may use to receive greater return-on-investment in their partnership endeavors.

The benefits and costs associated with nonprofit organizations involved in public and private sector partnership are important components to the realization of public policy. One of the assertions of this article is that policy-inspired collaborations and partnerships bear greater scrutiny by those encouraging and entering into them than is typified by public managers and grantmakers through requests for proposals. Practical experience shared by nonprofit executives shows that meaningful partnerships have a return on investment that can contribute to the greater good and offer the greatest potential to solve public problems with limited resources.

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