

Developing Mission-Driven Partnerships: A Guide

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Guide Purpose

This Partnership Guide is designed for cities and local foundations to examine their current working structures and styles, and to seek opportunities to advance shared goals together.

Sometimes city and local foundation partners are new to each other and still brainstorming ways to work together. Others have a long history of collaboration. There are lessons learned from those who have established relationships:

- **Start small:** it takes time to build relationships, and often they begin with a short-term project
- **Meet frequently:** spend time together in professional and other settings to keep dialogue fresh
- **Build trust:** a willingness to be vulnerable and to disagree means listening and also taking a stand
- **Invest in long-term alignment:** relationships are constantly evolving and can withstand staff changes if shared values are identified and maintained
- **Get out of silos:** look outside of city limits and regions to learn new approaches and methods
- **There is power in partnerships:** what can be done without funding is just as important to consider as what can be done with it.

This guide is designed for cities and their local foundation partners to use as they jointly consider their local ecosystems in light of their climate goals. It should be used to identify gap-filling potential while exploring city climate actions, opportunities, potential partners, and existing efforts with similar goals.

Understanding Resource Streams

Governments and the nonprofit sector are increasingly partnering with problem-focused philanthropic funds to make communities sustainable and resilient in changing political and physical climates. A deep understanding of how people are working together and

how they are resourcing those efforts allows for decision-making that best leverages a community's partnership ecosystem. Grant support from philanthropic investors is only one example of how mission-driven work is supported and accomplished within a community. Table 1 categorizes ways that local cause-based work is resourced by various types of community partners.

Table 1. How Community Partners Fund Mission-Driven Work.

Support Type	Capacity Needed to Gain Support Type	Example Organizations
If seeking individual donations of time and money:	Must be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> designate staff for outreach in multiple locations appeal to many people by communicating needs simply and concisely identify engagement avenues for volunteers 	Disease-specific associations who host community events, or organizations that take annual or monthly donations from individuals
If seeking donations given by those who have benefited from a service:	Must be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> create individual benefit that is also perceived as an important social good foster a strong sense of loyalty from individuals receiving the benefit communicate with many individuals regularly 	Universities soliciting alumni donations, or hospitals fundraising for wings, buildings, or treatment centers
If seeking dues from membership bodies:	Must be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure members feel like the organization is directly benefiting them, even as the benefits are shared involve members in fundraising activities understand what matters to membership, even if this means not pursuing strategies that fail to resonate or saying no to funding opportunities 	Networks of practitioners paying dues, churches receiving a percent of parishioner earnings
If seeking connections or fiscal support from one or more large grantors:	Must be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> create a real solution to a major problem in a specific timeframe articulate how large-scale funding will allow stated goals to be achieved know if wealthy individuals and/or foundations/funds are interested in the issue 	Environmental organizations with a specific cause or research institutions with a specific medical cure to develop
If seeking support from government entities:	Must be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> provide more impactful and less costly options to make the case for outsourcing supply evidence the program works and be willing to renew contracts annually gauge pressures that allow approaches to change 	Organizations working closely to fulfill a government mission, like addressing homelessness, managing parking, or removing/processing waste
If seeking support for an intermediary organization:	Must be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrate superior ability to connect resources to needs for a common benefit develop deep relationships and support services to realize and maximize common benefits design new programs and improve ease of use for the recipient 	Organizations who serve as a platform between things like funding sources and funding recipients, programs and service providers, or between networks
If seeking support for a consumption-based organization	Must be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> access a steady material source to redistribute keep current on industry trends to be able to weather market fluctuations strategize to fund operations in times of lower intake 	Organizations who take donations to sell, or supply facilities with and/or use waste streams to create a product

1 In this context, partnership is defined as two or more individuals or organizations pooling skills and resources to problem-solve together while sharing the associated risks and rewards of their efforts proportionally.

If seeking support for a market-driven organization	Must be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify individuals or groups with financial interest in supporting the work • navigate legal systems and explain ethical reasons why the service is provided • have a trusted brand, and deal with frequent audits 	Land trusts that provide tax breaks to donors, or health organizations that provide a service at a reduced rate
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Understanding support types leads to the identification of possible funding sources, potential funder motivations, funding style preferences, and decision-making structures. When considering partnership models around any action, it is important to identify who:

- funds the action, their funding mechanism, and what motivates them to do so
- makes programming decisions, oversees the work, and measures the progress
- benefits from the action in terms of quality of life improvements and/or income

Questions to consider include:

- **Source:** Can support be unlocked by outreach from one national or local partner to another on behalf of a city's goals?
 - Diversity in support streams can protect against the starvation cycle² that can occur around an effort when a primary funding source reprioritizes or changes strategy.
- **Motivation:** Can partners who are new to the table get excited about what the city is trying to do? Are they passionate about the programmatic goals that are presented? Are they confident in the partner ecosystem's ability to deliver on goals and measure progress? Do they want to cultivate specific relationships?
- **Preferences:** Do potential partners have an investment style? Do they prefer steady renewal funding that can cover partner operating costs to do the work, or do they like to invest for a shorter amount of time on restricted, specific things? Do they like to deploy non-fiscal support, such as in-kind resource for convenings, donated time, or unlocked connections?
- **Decision-making:** Who is responsible for making programming and investment decisions in each partnership: the funding partner, city partner, non-profit partner, an intermediary partner, community stakeholders, or some combination of these? How does the flow of resources influence the power balance and determine where the decision-making authority lies? Who is helped and who is harmed by the ensuing structure?

Making the Case

Supporting resources should prioritize building capacity to ultimately reduce dependencies. When communities have greater capacity to create and manage their desired changes, efforts are longer lasting, and work plans can be adaptable to address new circumstances. Strong educational, social, organizational, and physical

² The expectation that an organization can do more work with the same amount of funding or do the same amount of work with less funding.

infrastructures emerge from this community-driven approach, much more so than with top-down or donor-driven programming.

Problem-solving investments happen from within an organization or in partnership with others through the following mechanisms:

- Resourcing bigger and longer-term initiatives from within. Local government can:
 - Evaluate ways to expand or re-distribute existing revenue streams
 - Deploy capital via traditional funding mechanisms such as debt issuance, loan guarantees, equity balances, real and/or liquid assets, etc.
- Resourcing specific work within broader initiatives in partnership. Partnering teams:
 - Seek grants that are expected to yield social, economic, and/or environmental returns
 - Approach mission/social/angel investors who pursue and measure non-financial effects like environmental and social performance
 - Make multilateral arrangements between three or more parties or groups
 - Example: shared procurement policy across cities in a state or region to impact sourcing of goods
 - Leverage public-private partnerships between government and a private enterprise, often referred to as PPPs or P3s
 - Example: energy service performance contracting with shared revenue streams

There are two studies that happen, usually with research partners, before and after resourcing work:

- Before: feasibility studies, which includes knowledge gathering for:
 - proof the initiative can work in its proposed context
 - required resources, life cycle costs and/or payback periods, and expected benefits
- After: performance assessments, which includes evaluating a project for:
 - functionality to insure it is working the way it is intended to work
 - actual outputs, to ensure that
 - intended consequences are being realized
 - any unintended consequences can be proactively addressed

Gathering this information informs programming and project design. It can be used to:

- make the case for funding support
- report on outputs, outcomes, and impacts
- make adjustments to achieve desired results

Understanding Partnership Models

There are many working and successful models for cross-sector partnerships. Box 1 outlines the design and impact of the well-known Partners for Places grant program. Figure 1 shows support and service flows in a limited partner ecosystem: community, local

government, service provider, local philanthropy, and national philanthropy. As seen in the support flow options, the way partnership models are designed can and should depend on the preferences, tolerances, and structures of the parties involved. Partnerships should be built to play to the strengths of each participant.

Box 1. Example Model of National and Local Philanthropy Partnering to Support City Goals

Design. Partners for Places is a competitive grant fund run by The Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities. In this model, cities and one or more local foundation partner(s) apply to a pool of national philanthropic funds. These funds are designated to provide a one-to-one match to local foundation investment. If awarded, The Funders Network typically sends funds to the local foundation or non-profit partner to manage and disperse over the life of the grant. This entity works closely with the city, serving as a fiscal agent and sometimes service provider for the duration of the funded work.

Impact. The Partners for Places grant portfolio shows that 59% of the local government and local funder relationships that form around matching grant proposals and subsequent projects are on-going and result in significant additional investments to advance local climate goals. For example, since the fund began in 2012, it has awarded \$6,346,690 and captured \$7,448,134 in matching local foundation funds for a total initial investment of \$13,794,824. This investment has thus far leveraged \$65,834,726 in ongoing capital investments in these communities by both parties and their partners together over time.³

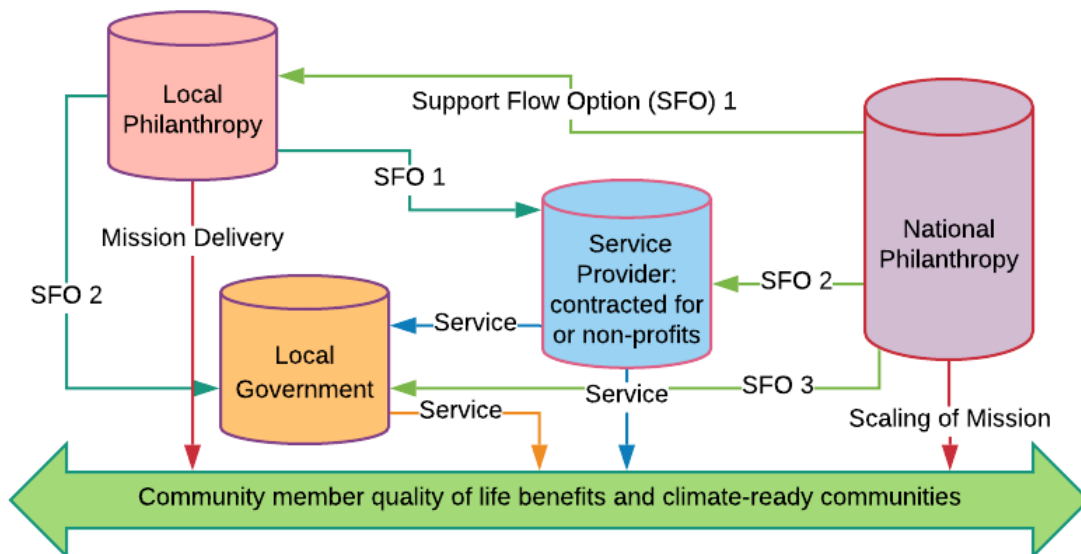


Figure 1. Philanthropic Support and Service Flows Around Local Government Work.

³ Reference: *Partners for Places 2018 Annual Report*

The following structural options for local government and local foundation partnerships are based on successful city and local foundation relationships. Local models are most often exhibited as a combination of one or more of these examples, and can evolve or devolve with time and change of personnel at either organization:

- **Thought partners:** The local government and local foundation meet regularly and discuss their ongoing projects. This may or may not result in shared work but ensures that both parties are actively considering local investment and local government policy and action together. They may sit on each other's boards and/or committees and bring in other community partners to explore the pros and cons of possible new programming options designed to attain shared goals. They share data to develop a common vision and approach to affect the changes they want to see in their communities. They operate from the perspective that all stakeholders play a role, including decision-makers from government, philanthropy, business, and nonprofits, as well as individuals and families. The local funder is usually at the table from the beginning on city initiatives, helping to develop the goals and vision. Over time, they may make grants to support some or more of the emerging strategies. Both parties insist that community members maintain involvement in shaping services, offering perspectives, and providing services to each other, not just as focus-group participants. Thought partners also build local strengths by being:
 - **Convening partners:** The local government and local foundation jointly engage the community around short-and-long-term planning efforts. Costs can be shared and/or in-kind, such as event hosting, catering, printing, and outreach by either party.
 - **Capacity-building partners:** The local government and local foundation work to strengthen a specific sector, such as developing a workforce around energy efficiency or renewable energy. As with convenings, costs can be shared or in-kind to do things like host training events and track their effectiveness.
- **Resource sharing partners:** The local government and local foundation cost share to implement pilots or other projects. City funding can be from annual or sustained sources such as operating and capital budgets, and foundation funding can be one-time or on a renewal basis. Both parties work to secure contributions to build social and physical infrastructure. They foster long-term involvement and new engagement by offering matching funding to each other and to third parties. They do not shy from supporting dedicated staff to build the necessary structure for long-term system change. They understand the value of in-kind contributions and modest investments, and can be:
 - **Donor and donor-recipient partners:** The local government requests and receives direct funding from the local foundation to address a chronic need or to take advantage of an acute opportunity. This could be small-scale, like

- covering travel expenses to expose key staff to new ideas, or large scale, like paying for green infrastructure improvements.
- **Third-party service provider partners:** The local government requests and receives indirect funding from the local foundation to meet an identified need. The local foundation then pays another organization to do work on the city's behalf and in close partnership with the city.
 - **Third-party funding partners:** The local government and local foundation work together to apply for funding from another funding source, such a national foundation, another government entity (state, federal), or a fund that pools national funds from a variety of sources and sectors. This can be a passive relationship, or the start/continuation of something deeper between the city and foundation.

Developing Partnership Models

While not exhaustive, this list of examples provides many valuable ways in which local government and foundations can and do work together. When considering partnership:

- **Keep it simple.** Articulate one and not more than two possible partnership structures that all named parties can feel comfortable with in terms of roles and resource flows.
- **Think big but start small.** Determine the scale of need and then break it into manageable pieces. Consider small sustained efforts and investments that do not overwhelm staffing structures or tip power balances, but that quietly chip away at long term system change. Tap the knowledge of national networks and experts to test ideas about what to try and what to avoid.
- **Go long.** Be realistic in approach and accept the constraints: it takes time and many different people to change systems, and governments are not built to turn on a dime. Even when goals are met, they require maintenance. This is a marathon, not a sprint.
- **Build capacity.** Invest in leadership skill development within the community. All successful partnerships need honest, trusted, neutral leaders to keep decision-makers engaged over time. Seek out those who are willing to push for change in ways that do not alienate others.
- **Consider the playing field.** Sometimes it is not new funding sources that are needed, but a change in how budgets and policies are set. Sometimes resources can be more effective when they are reallocated. Although it may seem cleaner at times to start new services to fill gaps, much attention needs to be paid to duplication within existing stakeholder missions and resource streams. Stakeholders with clear overlap should be encouraged to align programming and resources when appropriate to achieve shared goals.

- In many cases, this will mean putting aside real or perceived organizational boundaries and working together to target efforts toward particular people groups or neighborhoods.
- **Practice evidence-based investing.** To show need and unlock solid funding sources, consider what data needs to be gathered, managed, and used to make investment decisions. Data informs next steps, and programs and projects can be adjusted based on findings to improve results over time.
 - Using data to identify needs that are inside the circle of priorities may mean pulling resources from other places. Successful partnerships are proactive about staying attuned to new information and adapting their processes as it becomes available. Deliberately align investments around what has been proven to work.
- **Embrace new ideas.** In some cases, what has been proven to work needs to expand. Trying something new and focusing resources on a potentially high-impact opportunity that can leverage or increase the effectiveness of public and private funding streams is worth the risk. Track the outcomes over time to learn the value of these investments.

Partnership models usually take one to two years to establish. There is a period of trial and error in structure and investment design, regular evaluations to know what is and is not working, and data-informed adjustments. The best time to develop partnerships is around an influx of resources so that there is space and budget to convene and plan. Clarity of intent and articulated programmatic goals provide a solid foundation to build on. Newly developed and developing strategies can be leveraged to shape partnerships around program goals and specific project actions. Some actions will be linear, with a beginning and an end: setting up a commercial PACE program is one example. Some will be ongoing: building codes, for instance, are never done because they are perpetually updated to match building industry developments. Each action can be considered in terms of space and time:

- Spatially: who are the best owners of this action?
 - The best funder(s)?
 - The best implementer(s)?
 - The best entity(ies) to maintain it and the momentum around it over time?
 - Does it need to expand?
- Temporally: does this action need to accelerate?
 - If so, how?
 - Does it have a clear ending point that it is fully resourced through?
 - Or, does it continue indefinitely, requiring resources that are not in hand?

Summary

Several areas have emerged showing where local partner support could be especially helpful in advancing city climate work:

- Support to convene local partners and build capacity around specific goals
 - Example: Workforce development partners are gathered with local utilities to plan a series of training workshops to bolster local solar supplier skills
- Support to retain specialists to problem-solve climate issues
 - Example: A marketing specialist is contracted to develop an outreach campaign around shared-use mobility hubs
- Support to gather and rapidly deploy resources that allow emerging opportunities to be seized
 - Example: Legal support is obtained to influence state legislation that can enable advancement of renewable energy and/or distributed energy systems at the city-level

Therefore, successful partnership efforts:

- **Build relationships.** Local partner relationships are built and strengthened around the city climate scope of work: conversations begin, and goal alignment occurs
- **Convene.** Local partners meet to share ideas, learn from each other, and develop aligned investment approaches to specific climate actions
- **Respond rapidly.** Local partners consider offering matching support to other funding streams to seize opportunities and/or to implement specific climate projects
- **Find and fund technical and specialist support.** Local partners consider offering matching support to help the climate implementation teams navigate the nuances of specific climate projects

Use the Appendix templates to map partners, assess actions, and determine next steps.

APPENDIX. Workshopping Templates

Template 1. Identify Possible City Partners: Use this template to identify local partnership options

Template 1. City Partner Ecosystem.

Partner Name	Partner Type	Potential Connection	Possible Mission Alignment	Source
<i>Example: Local Apartment Association</i>	<i>Network</i>	<i>-Building energy code enforcement -Building retro-commissioning</i>	<i>Reduce Building Energy Use</i>	<i>Noted in work plan</i>

Template 2. Map Partnership Options: Use this template to pair possible partners with high priority climate goals

Identify capacity building opportunities. What capabilities should be developed and/or efforts aligned with partners in the city’s ecosystem (or others) to achieve climate goals? Use the template below to organize your thoughts.

Template 2. City Action Assessment.

City Action Categories	Opportunities	Potential partners	Existing efforts with similar goals
<i>Example: Comprehensive Solar Strategy</i>	<i>Training for solar installers</i>	<i>Partner X could be funded to host a series of training workshops</i>	<i>Partner Y is training building contractors; could possibly supply workforce contacts</i>

Template 3. Map Partnership Options: Use this template to articulate what each partner is committed to doing in follow-up

Determine a next step. Based on your discussion thus far, decide on one thing you are ready to commit to testing together. This can be as simple as meeting monthly to discuss progress climate and continuing to seek partnership opportunities.

Template 3. City and Partner Next Steps.

Partner Name	Opportunity Description	Actions by Partner	Actions by Funder	Immediate Next Steps
<i>Example: City Name</i>	<i>Capacity building around renewable energy workforce development</i>	<i>City to convene workforce development partner(s) to have a planning session</i>	<i>Foundation to consider offering/matching a rapid response grant once project and implementation partner are identified</i>	<i>City to conduct outreach to partners X and Y upon return</i>
<i>Example: Foundation Name</i>	<i>Capacity building around renewable energy workforce development</i>	<i>Foundation to join planning convening and consider matching a rapid response grant once plan and implementation partner are identified</i>	<i>Foundation to consider matching the foundation's rapid response grant once project and implementation partner are identified</i>	<i>Foundation to touch base with partners A and B to discuss potential strategy</i>