

MATCHMAKING Criteria for Selecting Agency and Church Partners

By Ellen Livingood

One of the crucial areas of a mobilizer's service as partnership matchmaker is to identify the key elements that will make successful collaboration possible. The following checklist is presented from the agency perspective but could be used as a basis for discussion by all potential partners.

Must every question be answered before an initiative can be launched? No, particularly not for non-complicated partnerships coordinated by a facilitator familiar with all parties. But it can be helpful in all cases to review the list of issues and discuss those areas important to any potential partner. For items deferred, note if/when they should be addressed.

1. Theological Compatibility

Is the church familiar with the agency's doctrinal position, and do the church leaders understand what are considered non-negotiables by the agency and specifically by the field/team with whom they will partner? Is the church aware of the theological position of national partners? Do they understand the parameters established by agency personnel and national partners regarding cooperation on the field with individuals and entities of differing theological persuasions?

Are the field personnel aware of the church's doctrinal positions? Are there written or unwritten theological distinctives or polity positions held by any potential partner that need to be clarified and/or explored?

2. Field Ownership/Approval

For partnership success, which field entities will need to at least approve of its adoption and which will need to have high ownership? An individual facilitator? An entire team? All of the agency's field staff in this city/country/region? International field leadership? The national church as an entity or one or more of its leaders? Other organizations working in the context?

Have these endorsements been solicited and achieved with more than lip service? In most cases, ownership

will require that field workers highly value the involvement of the local church via the participation of personnel who bring expertise, often on a short-term basis, but do not learn the language or come with extensive missiological training.

3. Facilitation

Has the role of the on-field facilitator been clearly defined? Has a person(s) been recruited for that role who is gifted and sufficiently prepared to fulfill it? Is he/she free to commit the time needed to make sure that the partnership can be effective for all participants?

Has a church-based champion or advocate been recruited? Is this person gifted and prepared to adequately serve in this capacity? Does he/she have the time necessary to serve in this role?

4. Partnership Goals and Decision Making

Have the goals of the partnership been as clearly defined as is possible at this stage of the relationship? Does everyone agree on what constitutes success? Is it clear how, when, and by whom goals can be amended and other decisions made? Does this process need to be put in writing so that all parties are clear on the procedures?

5. Strategy

What ministry philosophy and strategy have been adopted by the team/field? How much of this is non-negotiable? How is strategy determined? Are there unwritten values, assumptions, and/or priorities that need to be discussed? Is there field history that potential partners need to understand?

Does the church want to exercise a role in strategy development? If so, to what degree? Are the agency personnel involved comfortable with this level of church involvement? Is there clarity on how differences of opinion on strategy will be handled?

6. Ministry Needs/Church Resources Match

Have the specific needs of the target ministry/ministries been identified? Has there been some

analysis to see if the church can provide the type and quality of assistance needed? Are there elements essential to success that none of the partners can contribute? If so, how will these gaps be addressed?

7. Capacity to Utilize Ministry Personnel

Is there general agreement regarding the number and type of short-term individuals and teams the field can facilitate? Does the field need to expand its capacity in order to facilitate the church's involvement (for example, by recruiting a mid-term worker to coordinate logistics for field visits or by raising funds to rent a guest house)? Can the church partner help with this?

8. Stability

Does the partnership depend on one key facilitator on either side? What would happen if that person were suddenly removed from the partnership? Is the partnership heavily dependent on a single individual or entity for other essentials: finances, access, bridge-building, translation, etc.? Is there a back-up plan?

9. Length of Commitment

Is there agreement on how long the initial commitment to the partnership will last? Is the commitment renewable? Is there an agreed-upon exit strategy or plan to bring the partnership to a healthy conclusion?

10. Expectations

Have potential partners discussed expectations regarding short-term workers such as pre-field preparation, on-field orientation, frequency of visits, provision of logistical support, translation services, or finances for out-of-pocket expenses borne by long-term workers or nationals facilitating short-termers' work?

Will the church be expected to recruit and send mid- and long-term personnel? Are there clear expectations as far as partners' contribution of funding and/or time for partnership-related projects?

Are security standards clear and mutually acceptable? Has risk tolerance been discussed?

11. Financial Accountability

If funding of personnel and/or projects is included in the partnership, is there agreement on the type and frequency of reporting and shared definitions of accountability? If funds are contributed for the work of nationals, is it clear how such monies will be handled, what administration deductions will be levied, and how accountability will be defined and assured?

12. Communications Ability and Commitment

Since good communication is absolutely essential to

the success of a partnership, is there at least one person on the field side who is capable and willing to maintain a steady flow of high quality information to keep the church abreast of field activity and informed for prayer? Has the church designated a person who will be committed to receiving and disseminating information to the church body?

13. Direct Connection to Nationals

Are field personnel willing to help the church establish connections directly with nationals? If so, are there guidelines or limitations? Does the church understand the history of the relationship between the agency and the national church body/bodies?

14. Multiple Partners

Is the anticipated partnership solely between a single church and a single agency? Or is the church planning to partner with other agencies, NGOs, denominations, or other entities on the field? Will there be additional churches invited to participate? If so, does the relationship among the various partners need to be clarified?

15. Agency Support for the Church

What partnership benefits are anticipated by the church? Is the agency committed to help achieve these? Are there expectations in terms of visits by field personnel or nationals? If so, has it been clarified how these will be funded and how often they will occur? Will other agency personnel serve the church? If so, how and at whose expense?

16. Customization of Agency Policies and Services

Is the church asking for special consideration on such things as administrative fees, training requirements, travel back to the sending country for mid- or long-term workers, or other adjustments to the standard procedures of the agency? If so, has everyone involved signed off on these special arrangements?

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