

## Partnership Essentials

*Advice from Experienced Church Partners  
and Two Examples of Partnership Agreements*

*Catalyst has been informally polling church leaders with significant experience in international partnerships. We asked them to identify what they found to be the most critical elements of successful partnerships from their perspective and also what they had discovered to be major hindrances. Here is the compilation of their responses.*

### Ingredients of Successful Partnerships

#### #1. Quality Communication

The highest priority on many lists was the ability and commitment to communicate well among partners. This includes both face-to-face dialog and written communication that keeps partners connected when they are a continent or more apart. Few of the other essentials of partnership are possible without good communication.

A number of people noted that a competent facilitator is key to quality dialog. It is no mean feat to facilitate meetings where those sitting around the table speak different languages, come from diverse cultures, and likely embrace varying conscious and subconscious presuppositions and expectations. The skilled facilitator, it was emphasized, makes sure that everyone's voice is heard and works to create a setting where participants are comfortable expressing themselves, especially those whose culture dictates that negative messages be conveyed indirectly.

Another aspect of quality communication that was highlighted was the importance of asking questions and taking the time needed to really listen to the answers. Good listening often takes longer in a cross-cultural setting, especially if some participants are using a second language in which it is more difficult for them to express nuances of meaning. Advice from one veteran: Beware of too quickly assuming that partners understand each other.

Another aspect of communication practitioners saw as crucial was the commitment to keeping the partners connected to the ministry via consistent phone calls, emails, letters, video presentations, and/or visits. Someone onsite must be able to identify what partner churches need to hear and then be able to "tell the story" in such a way that it grips the hearts and minds of the people in the pews. Such communication seems to be equal parts ability, commitment, and self-discipline. It

was noted that partners can help to achieve this goal by sending short-termers whose specific assignment is to bring back the story in a way that will engage those in their churches.

#### #2. Intentional Relationship Building

This begins, as one respondent clarified, in partners' commitment to spend the money to create the face-to-face setting in which relationships can develop. They emphasized the importance of rejecting the attitude that getting to know one another was an insufficient reason to buy a ticket and spend time together. Many confirmed that establishing the relationship is the first, and by far the most important, task.

One partnership veteran spoke to the importance of learning the language and understanding the insider perspective of the culture. While most partnerships rely largely on translators or a limited number of bilingual participants, those polled for this survey repeatedly emphasized sensitivity to culture. Though words may be translated accurately, cultural differences can/will make partners see the same facts in very different lights.

How do you know if you have developed a meaningful level of relationship? One person noted that interactions are marked by mutual respect and humility. It becomes "we" rather than "they," a

relational depth distinguished by a willingness to sacrifice some personal agenda for the benefit of the partner. Yet another leader said, "Partnerships must be based on relationships strong enough to bear the weight of money."

#### #3. Mutually Owned Goals and Expectations

Partners emphasized the need to come to agreement on the definition of success. What is the end result that everyone is willing to work toward? How will each partner contribute? When these factors have been clarified, they need to be put in writing. **Later in this issue of Postings, you will find two sample agreements.**

Responders added: Clearly define how and when regular assessments and evaluations will take place. Speak to the question of who will be responsible for which tasks and agree on at least a general timetable, both for the partnership as a whole (if it will have a defined lifespan) and for the various elements. As specifically as possible, define what the partnership does and doesn't include.

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***"Partnerships must be based on relationships strong enough to bear the weight of money."***

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One partner warned again that cultural differences may make people see the goals or their achievement very differently. In the minds of non-Westerners, relationships almost always will trump task goals.

Culture also impacts how disagreements are handled. Partners noted the importance of clarifying how differences of opinion will be surfaced and resolved. Defining the accountability process was also mentioned as an important part of assuring a happy collaboration.

#### #4. High Levels of Trust

One respondent compared a partnership to a marriage—don't make a commitment until you have found a partner you trust and in whom you have confidence. Trust is important not just with those on the field but also with the agency/agencies involved in the partnership.

"Assume the best motivations," one person admonished. Another said bluntly, "Keep promises."

### Partnership Quagmires

What are the red flags these experienced partners identified? Answers about what doomed partnerships were more diverse, although three dangers ranked high on many lists:

#### #1. Partnerships Built around Funds

Many partners have seen high potential scuttled because money became the focus. Leading with funds rather than relationships, they caution, spells disaster. "Our best partnerships involve little or no money," one shared. Others also emphasized that the Western church's contribution was presence, encouragement, training, etc., more than funds.

#### #2. One-Sided rather than Reciprocal Partnerships

Eager to give, Western partners often fail to adequately recognize the crucial role their national partners play in the success of a shared venture. Third-World partners themselves often downplay the importance of their contribution. But reciprocal ministry provides a crucial stimulus to the growth and maturing of the Western brothers and sisters. A one-sided relationship is not really a partnership. "Give and receive with equal joy," one partner suggested.

#### #3. Rushing to Achieve Results too Quickly

Many things called "partnerships" are just a camouflage for yet another Western effort. Rushing in and announcing a partnership without due process in the long run serves no one. Fulfilling all of the previous suggestions will take time and may seem to be foot dragging, but veterans assure partnership newcomers that it is well worth the time invested to get started right.

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***"Give  
and receive  
with equal joy."***

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Other pitfalls mentioned:

- Diffusion of the church's energy in too many directions at once.
- Lack of quality involvement of the church's lay members.
- Unknown cultural or worldview differences.
- Imposing Western ideas: doing what we want to do rather than what the national church desires.
- Meeting after meeting with no tangible efforts or results.
- Relying on doing everything in English.
- Aligning with those who are good English speakers but may not be the most qualified in other crucial ways.
- Not getting enough input from third parties.
- "Partners must be convinced that they are more than the sum of their parts. It is always easier to do ministry alone; partnership is hard work and there is a danger of deciding it is too difficult and so just going back to working alone."

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Not all partnership agreements need to be as detailed and formalized as the following examples, but these provide some areas to be considered as partners define roles and expectations.

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## SAMPLE AGREEMENT #1

### PARTNERSHIP TO REACH THE J PEOPLE

#### Introduction

D church, Y mission agency, and K NGO (non-government organization), share a common passion for seeing the kingdom of God increase amongst the J People who are presently unreached for the Christian gospel and, therefore, live in a culture void of the manifestation of the gospel in the social, economic, political, and spiritual spheres. The purpose of this agreement is to establish the framework within which this partnership will operate in order that the great command and great commission be accomplished among the people in J.

#### Mission Statement

To see an indigenous church raised up among the J People.

#### Goal

The goal of this project is to bring the Kingdom of God to the J People, discipling them into mature faith, incorporating them into a local congregation, and encouraging a demonstration of their faith in all sectors of society.

#### Vision

It is the vision of D church, Y agency, and K NGO to create a synergistic partnership that will facilitate a long-term church planting team, program staff, and national staff to ultimately lead these works. D church and Y agency will jointly appoint career missionaries. The expectation is that recruitment will come from a collaborative effort of D church, Y agency, and K NGO.

**Project Team Members**

All career team members will be trained by Y agency.

D church and K NGO will recruit and send short-term teams for the purpose of vision casting to the church, raising up laborers, assisting the career team in ministry, and developing programs. Other teams may be recruited for the ministry with J People at the discretion of the Mission Director of the J region.

**Ministry Administration**

The J region is an approved mission field of D church's denomination and is a part of the ministry of Y agency. The strategic planning for J People ministry is done jointly with the Global Ministries Committee of D church, the J People ministry team, and administrators of Y agency and K NGO. The core administrative team will be Area Director for Y agency, Mission Director for J People, the Pastor of Global Ministries of D church, and the Executive Director/Program Director of the K NGO.

Accountability for field ministry will follow normal structures of Y agency, D church, and K NGO for ministry reports.

**Finances**

D church will be responsible for 50% of the missionaries' faith fund with the remaining 50% to be raised according to Y agency structures. D church will also contribute to non-D-church workers who are a part of the ministry team. Y agency will provide direct consultation and approval to specific Y-related expenses. K NGO will provide direct consultation and approval to all K-budget expenses. The overall field budget will be reviewed through the collaboration of all partners.

**Summary of Responsibilities**

**D Church**

- Leadership in recruitment from their own congregation.
- Short-term teams from the congregation.
- Financial support for missionaries and project as per agreement.
- D church support team continues with agreed upon responsibility.
- Participation in strategy development and implementation.
- Provides pastoral care to the ministry team.

**Y Agency**

- Screening and approval of missionaries.
- Training of missionaries.
- Administrative structures for mission support (salaries, insurance, benefits, and area directors).

- Financial support for missionaries and projects as per agreement.
- Set up Special Projects funds as agreed upon.
- Participation in strategic planning and implementation.
- Accountability to Y agency policies.

**K Non-Government Organization**

- Provide leadership, strategy, and accountability to K programs.
- Provide leadership in the financing of the programs.
- Provide the necessary training for the workers involved with K.
- Participation in strategic planning and implementation.
- Accountability to K policies.
- Short-term teams from time to time.

**Review**

This ministry agreement is in place for five years and is to be reviewed annually.

Beginning date: \_\_\_\_\_.

Signed by:

Y Agency	Date
K NGO	Date
D Church	Date

**Church Planting Goals**

**Year 1**

- 3 cells (6 total) and network 12 cells or fellowships
- 15 salvations (60 total)
- Begin outreach to X place
- Begin discipleship with the leadership material that has been translated
- Organize several evangelistic events with the network
- Prayer meetings completely lead by J's
- C workers take the lead of youth meeting
- P family goes to America

**Year 2**

- 5 cells (11 total) and network 17 fellowships
- 25 salvations (85 total)
- X place has 2 groups begun
- J workers to begin formal Bible training for the ministry
- Team to additional site in the summer

**SAMPLE AGREEMENT # 2**  
**COALITION PARTNERSHIP**

**Preamble**

In view of our shared vision to see the Kingdom of God and the Church of Jesus Christ expanded in Latin America—specifically in X country—the undersigned organizations covenant together in formation of a coalition for the purpose of

advancing a multiplying network of P churches in Y city, X country and with hopes of developing a model of partnership that might benefit the future expansion of the gospel throughout Latin America.

### **Mission and Vision**

The mission of the Coalition is to assist and equip a network of P churches in Y city to evangelize and disciple their nation.

The Coalition's role will be to: (1) Form a cooperative multi-church and para-church partnership; (2) Unite the strengths of church and para-church into a more effective ministry model; and (3) Concentrate human, financial and spiritual resources to serve as catalysts in equipping the Y city's P churches to be self-sustaining and multiplying ministries.

### **Core Values**

Each member shares the following core values: (1) A focus on prayer; (2) A recognition and respect for the diversity of mission, history, organizational structures and contributions of each partner; (3) An affirmation of the principles of the strategy in establishing a multiplying network of churches (for further information see the supplemental document); (4) A Kingdom perspective that remains open to the addition of other evangelical partners; (5) A respect for the participation of local leadership in the decision making process; (6) A commitment to developing churches and related ministries that will be self-sustaining and multiplying.

### **Anticipated Relationships**

The Coalition is open to additional evangelical partners who will commit to the mission, vision and core values outlined in this document and will provide strategic enhancement to our ability to fulfill our goals and objectives.

Beyond the partners comprising the Coalition, we anticipate working closely with: (1) The Network of Y city's P churches; (2) The denomination (USA and X country); and (3) the fraternal association of P churches in Latin America.

### **Anticipated Outcomes**

The Coalition believes that more can be accomplished through partnership than in working individually. To this end, the Coalition anticipates that its work will help: (1) Expand the network of P churches in Y city through the development of a multiplying church planting movement; (2) Stimulate the development of more local church leadership; (3) Secure the logistical self-sufficiency of churches that comprise the Y city initiative and aid in their spiritual growth; (4) Stimulate cross-cultural and cross-social outreach; (5) Coordinate varied contributions of Coalition members in concert with identified strategic plans; (6) Develop a new model/paradigm of unity and effective partnership between North American churches, para-church mission organizations and churches located internationally.

In addition, Coalition members acknowledge the benefits that each anticipates receiving as a byproduct of fulfilling the objectives above: (1) Stimulate respective constituencies toward becoming more globally-minded Christians reflected by increased prayer and increased giving toward missions endeavors; (2) Success in achieving the goals of the Coalition will encourage and stimulate increased giving toward similar

missions endeavors; (3) Learn from one another through varied perspectives and approaches to missions challenges; (4) Learn practical steps necessary to reproducing similar coalitions and initiatives; (5) Manage risk by sharing responsibility and finding shared solutions to common challenges.

### **Operating Scope**

The operational scope of the Coalition is concentrated on the churches that form the Y city initiative as outlined by S agency in consultation with the Network of these churches.

Coalition partners are not exclusively bound to this partnership above all others and may engage in partnerships with other churches and organizations. Coalition partners recognize that a special relationship exists between members of this Coalition and affirm their intent to give careful consideration before engaging in partnerships with some Coalition members to the exclusion of others. Peripheral partnerships of this nature should only be entered into if they do not compromise the successful fulfillment of the goals and objectives of the Coalition. Furthermore, Coalition members affirm their willingness to be sensitive to the relational and logistical impact that such peripheral partnerships may have on unity within the Coalition.

### **Anticipated Contributions**

Each Coalition partner brings unique strengths to our alliance. While additional contributions may emerge in the future, the following represent the anticipated contributions of each founding partner.

#### **N American Churches A and B**

- Contextual Experience – practical experience of administrating a large church that ministers in middle and upper-middle class contexts similar to those of the Y city churches.
- Leadership Development – strong pastoral and lay leadership that can assist in leadership development activities in Y.
- Diversified Ministry Programs – wide range of ministry programs that can serve as models and/or training platforms for Y city church staff and lay leaders.
- Short-Term Teams – mission sending capacity for providing catalytic short-term teams aimed to stimulate evangelism, social outreach and cross-cultural ministry.
- Resources – capacity for providing ministry helps and tools, medical supplies and equipment, and financial assistance for church facility development.

#### **S Agency**

- Networks and Relationships – ministry relationships and networking capacity with people and organizations throughout Y city, Latin America and internationally.
- Overarching Strategy – a defined vision for multiplying churches in Y.

- Church Multiplication Experience – 20+ years of experience utilizing the church model – a proven strategy for establishing self-sustaining and multiplying networks of churches in urban contexts.
- Concentrated Focus – the para-church nature of S agency permits the concentration of time, personnel and resources to be centered exclusively on helping develop networks of churches in urban centers of Latin America.
- Financial Resources – capacity to raise resources designated for the advancement of church networks primarily through the construction of church facilities.

### Governance and Evaluation

The Coalition is comprised of the original signed members to this agreement and any additional members accepted as part of the Coalition at a future date. New members must agree to the terms of this partnership agreement and be unanimously accepted by all the Coalition partners. Each partner retains its own organizational identity and administrative structures and is not subject to any commitments beyond those outlined by this agreement.

The primary governing body for the Coalition will be the Coalition Executive Team comprised of one designated representative from each partnering organization. The Coalition Executive Team will be responsible for:

- (1) Stimulating and fostering unity and relationships between all Coalition members and the organizations and people of the Y city network of churches.
- (2) Preserving the core vision of the Coalition;
- (3) Establishing the design plan for how the Coalition will function;
- (4) Overseeing and managing Coalition activities;
- and (5) Developing a Master Plan in concert with the Y city network of churches that sets forth yearly goals and objectives for Coalition activities, coordinates the provision of resources for Coalition activities, and outlines the criteria and methods for evaluating progress toward these anticipated outcomes.

The senior leadership of each organization is committed to:

- Assuring that their organization's involvement in the Coalition is in keeping with the goals, objectives and expectations of their respective governing bodies.
- Providing input and direction to the Coalition as deemed necessary and appropriate within their organizational context.

- Championing the Coalition to respective personnel, congregations, donors and potential partners.
- Designating a representative to serve on the Coalition Executive Team.

### Expectations

Each Coalition partner is expected to:

- Understand the basic concepts and principles that frame the strategy.
- Commit to mutually encourage one another, the various ministry teams and the Y city churches with whom we partner.
- Agree by faith to place a priority on raising and contributing funds for projects of the Y city initiative.

### Amendments to the Partnership Agreement

Coalition Partners recognize that this is a relationally-based partnership that is organic in nature. As such, this agreement can be amended by the unanimous consent of all Coalition Partners.

### Termination of Partnership Agreement

This Partnership Agreement terminates on December 31, 2011. Partners are free to renew this agreement or to enter into a new agreement at that time. The partnership can be terminated in advance of the date above, but only after proper discussion has been conducted by the Coalition partners. A special meeting may be called for this purpose. Six months notice of termination is required from any Coalition partner.

### Covenant Statement

We, the undersigned, agree to work together through this Coalition partnership agreement for the glory of God and the building up of His Church.

This agreement is effective \_\_\_\_\_.

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