



This report sums up the results from an international survey and a theater workshop about partnerships. It is conducted by the project: "Out of the box" by Aarhus Public Libraries and Roskilde Libraries. The project is supported by the the Danish Agency for Libraries and Media.

How Do We Get Out of the Box?

Partnerships are *not* about money they are about doing something for the people. By strengthening the library's network, resources, competencies and place in the local community partnerships make way for creating something completely new!

Partnership Drivers: What makes it happen?

- Be prepared for change
- Be prepared to loose ownership of your library
- Partnerships should be part of the library strategy
- Staff and management must have a common picture of the library's strategy
- New competencies
- Active staff members
- Have more partners to avoid monopoly
- Cluster your partners for diversity
- Think partners both in the civic, public and market sector
- Let partnerships be about serving the users
- Consult library users to identify user needs

Partnership Barriers: Why isn't it happening?

- There has to be a win-win situation!
- Partnerships are not a transaction – it's a relational thing
- There has to be something at risk
- Find the connection between your and your potential partner
- Keep an open mind, avoid fixed roles
- Know what kinds of partnerships are relevant to your library
- Too many changes at once is not necessarily a good thing
- The library needs a strong brand to become a serious partner
- Do not dismiss the potential of a commercial partnership

Why and what?

Why partnerships?

The public library can benefit from partnerships in many ways. By entering into partnerships the library can gain a broader network, it can generate more resources, new competencies can benefit the library and the library can secure and develop its position in the local community as well as gain access to new target audiences.

Other benefits from partnerships could be:

- Improved services
- New expertise, sustainability
- A richer or more diverse programme to support cultural learning
- Sharing resources
- More diverse events
- More diverse services

Defining partnerships

Partnerships can be defined as a co-operation between two or more parties, which leads to the creation of something that either party could not manage on their own. Furthermore, partnerships are characterized by having all parties contributing to – and all parties gaining from – the co-operation.

It is important to see partnerships as something distinct from funding or sponsoring. They are all different aspects of co-operating and there are different rules that apply to each of the three.

Partnerships are about service and about serving the users. It is a relational thing, a method, where you together with your partners move forward in creating something new – sometimes defined by a contract, sometimes not.

Sponsorships or funding on the other hand implies that you have to understand your limits beforehand – and whether you are ready to compromise or not. You have to be careful not to get in over your head and therefore you have to consider your values and your ethics – what is the limit for your library, what can be integrated into your library's brand.

A partnership should create something new!

In a real partnership everyone must be prepared for change. Partnerships can be seen as a mash-up that creates something new – different organizations, staffs, users, visions and strategies meet up and something that did not exist prior emerges.

Partnerships should bring something new to your organization, something your organization couldn't bring about or do by itself – and that goes for all the involved parties. There has to be something at risk if the partnership is to have any real meaning or importance.

Partnerships are not about money – it is about doing something for the people! Partnerships can not be viewed as a simple transaction where you invest a certain amount of time, staff or money and in return get a similar return on your investment. Partnerships are about relations and are something we create through our relations on a daily basis.

This doesn't mean that working with partnerships is without purpose or strategy; it only means that partnerships are a method to coordinate visions, ideas and to set up goals between different organizations in order to create something that did not exist prior to the partnership.

For the library to have meaningful partnerships it has to be part of the overall strategy. Partnerships have great meaning if we want keep our services up to date with the public and society at large.

Strategy

To engage in partnerships: you must have a strategy!

When forming a strategy one should find out what the library's passion and mission is, what are the ambitions? When searching for partners you should find out what their passion and mission is and the level of their ambitions. Finding the connections between your strategy and the strategy of a potential partner is the foundation of creating a meaningful partnership.

Instead of working out your strategy internally in your organization, you could see the process as part of your partnership efforts, by inviting your partners to help you form your strategy with you! For instance by having a large get-together for partners and organizations you work with and have them participate in the creation of your strategy – this way the strategy will also reflect the needs and expectations of your future partners.

When working with the creation of a strategy for your partnership efforts you should consider: How to cluster your partners, how to define partnerships in your organization, how to work with partners and the changes this will bring to the physical library space - and how the library staff will react to these changes.

You should also think about innovation in your partnership strategy: Innovation is not a given in a partnership, but if you want to make room for innovation to emerge it is more likely to happen if you and your partners do not have fixed roles – you should be able to meet each other and reach each other with new ideas.

Management should involve staff

Making a strategy for your partnership efforts is the only way to ensure that the right staff can commit their effort in the right way. Strategy is important, but making it happen often depends on active staff members who embrace partnership mentality!

You have to ensure that everyone – staff and management have a common picture of where you are going. Therefore you should discuss: what kind of partnerships is relevant for our library. This way you also contribute to creating a common understanding of what partnerships are to be in your organization.

A partnership does sometimes mean that we loose influence or ownership of our library. Therefore staff members should be involved in strategy planning. Letting partners enter into the library and therefore changing it does not only have consequences for the staff, but also possibly for the library's local support – too many changes at once is not necessarily a good thing – there has to be some stability.

Know yourself!

Before entering into any partnerships: What is a library?

The library needs a strong brand to become a serious partner. The library should know itself: what do you want, what are you passionate about, what is the mission of the library? To get to know yourself you also have to consult those who use, what you offer! What do others need from you?

Maybe the library should not concern itself as much with content as with being a platform for other actors and partners to meet and co-operate?

Maybe we have to redefine what the library is all about? Basically the library is about looking backwards! Most libraries are specialized in looking backwards. They store knowledge – everything that *has* taken place. If you want to use knowledge and not only store it you need other competencies to do this. The library should set new standards for itself and let partners help define what it is going to be.

But you should also remember that partnerships are about becoming equal. If you want to have partnerships you have to understand; not only yourself, but also your partners and their goal in life. That is a real partnership! The library is the platform that enables partners to interact.

Clustering!

If you are going to set up a strategy on how to do partnerships you should think about how you can cluster your (potential) partners. This is one method to ensure variety and avoid putting all your eggs in one basket. You should not work with or pursue one certain partner but a group of potential partners within the same work field or subject area. A library should not see 1, 2 or 3 different partners as relevant – but see a lot of partners in children/families, public education, local history and so on.

Working with clusters also opens up the possibility of larger partnerships and cross sectoral partnerships as with the triple helix approach. This way we increase the possibility of partnerships that can achieve something new that we could not have done ourselves – the possibility of service or product innovation.

Think about civic, market, public

When clustering partners it can be helpful to look at them as civic, market or public partners. Partnerships with the civic, market and public are on an equal level. The purpose of having libraries is to strengthen the relations between the public library and the society surrounding the library – this means including partners in both civic, market and public.

You have to legitimize the library today, the continuing existence of the public library is not a given any more – to do that you have to strengthen the relation between the library and the surroundings. And partnerships are an important tool to do that.

Partnerships with the market

Public libraries often tend to speak about commercial partners as the enemy, but we should not dismiss the potential of a commercial partnership so quickly. On the other hand we should keep in mind that the public library is a commercial-free space – it might be the only one left!

If you invite commercial partners in you need to remember to have more partners to avoid a monopoly. Another risk by only having one or a few partners is that they in time will take the partnership for granted. The library needs to be a free arena and not restricted by ongoing partnerships and pay attention to potential conflicts with the library's strategy or values.

What do the commercial partners gain from a partnership with a public library? They get credibility when they work with a public library. It gives them a good reputation, which should not be underestimated.

Users

Partnerships – a way to focus on user needs

What are partnerships? We do need everyone to come together to help making sure that users needs are met. Partnerships are about serving users.

Partnerships are a tool that can help secure the library being on the front edge of users needs. Partnerships are a way to create dynamics and ongoing change to meet user needs.

Part of setting up a partnership is to define what sort of users are to benefit from this partnership. Therefore it is a good idea to consult library users to identify user needs - What do people need from the library and its potential partners.

New competencies are needed!

We have to bring in new competencies to be the best partner for our partners. The director of a library is not the actual executor of partnership activities. Members of the staff should therefore be able and willing to realize and enter into partnerships on a local level.

What competences are needed? First of all you have to be able to get out of the box. You must be able to do role-playing – to see thing from another perspective, take on the character of your

potential partners and to see yourself with other people's eyes. This might be difficult for the average librarian, but is it not something that could be trained?

Another way of viewing things is that bringing in partners also brings new competencies to the library. You need partners, because you can not do everything yourself if you are going to do it well.

Finding partners

How do libraries seek out partners? Some ideas:

- Newsletters distributed to partners and potential partners to keep them updated about the library's work
- Letting your users know about our partnerships – for instance by having a flyer that informs about the library's partnership strategy
- By actively making partnership proposition to potential partners
- Librarians are required to reach out into their neighborhoods and look for other organizations that could help the library further its mission
- By using sponsors and fundraisers to make new connections: Donors are interested in making connections between the different organizations they support.
- Some libraries have such a strong brand, that partners are coming to them at the moment!

Who are the partners of public libraries?

Some inspiration

- Museums
- The public sector in general
- Children learning organizations
- Public /private schools
- Cultural organizations
- The symphony orchestra

- Local theaters
- Science Centers
- International institutes
- The Zoo
- Literacy organizations
- Universities
- Children day care centers
- Nursing homes
- Senior centers
- Health exchange: A venture between the library and the local health authority
- Business: large and small
- Voluntary organizations
- Community groups
- Telephone operators
- It-businesses
- University students doing their thesis