

## Partnership Pitfalls: Campus & HQ Edition

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Our field can oftentimes be rewarding, exciting, and energizing. However, it can also be challenging, infuriating, and exhausting. Together, we want to help you avoid common pitfalls in our work. One area of tension for many is the “campus vs HQ” narrative. For some, this narrative exists because of their reality, and for others, it’s simply a propagated idea. Regardless of how it got there, we want to erase this notion from your lexicon. We aren’t necessarily experts, rather we’re your colleagues and partners. We hope this article enables you to have more productive, positive, and enriching partnerships in your work.

### Turnover

One struggle we have in our field is the desire to build long-lasting relationships. After all, we work in an industry that exists off the notion of lifelong brother/sisterhood, right? It is a difficult but necessary lesson to learn in this field that many of your relationships will not stand the test of time. That doesn’t mean they’re worthless, or less deserving of your attention, rather they need a special kind of care and consideration.

There are generally two pitfalls when it comes to turnover: neglect and over-investing. Neglect occurs when one (or more) of the parties feel as though the relationship is undeserving of their attention. These feelings can arise from a multitude of reasons. They might believe the relationship is doomed from the beginning, not worth their time, or frivolous. Other times, the relationship never even crosses one party’s mind.

Over-investing can be draining and destructive. When we view a partner as a lifelong professional companion or champion, we often time set ourselves up for failure because relationships change and so do the needs of the people involved. When we’re honest and transparent from the beginning it enables us to have a mutually beneficial and positive experience. When the success of our students is at the forefront of our decision making, we tend to head in a better direction.

### Blanket Beliefs

It’s important to be mindful of the varying structures that exist within various (inter)national/local organizations, as well as within different universities. It’s easy to assume that all organizations/campuses operate similarly, but that’s not always the case. On some campuses, there may be only one staff member who oversees fraternities and sororities and



potentially a handful of other functional areas as well. Some headquarters rely heavily on volunteers and have few paid staff; they don't have the same resources as other organizations. It seems apparent, but it's often difficult to recognize (especially in your first year!) that your organization's resources will vary greatly than others.

### **Self-Sabotage**

We struggled with this one because it seems so obvious. Rather than ignore it, or repeat what we believe you know, we want to take a new angle.

Self-care. You've heard the term, you've seen the posts on Facebook, but you might not really know what it is. We want to clear the air. Let's start with what self-care isn't. Self-care isn't about random slices of cheesecake, a once a year trip to the spa, or 5 minutes a week of silence where you can get away. Self-care is rebuilding your life into one you no longer need to break away from.

Self-care is consistent, positive for you, and necessary for mental health. But sometimes, it can be ugly too. That difficult conversation you've been putting off? Having it and coming to a resolution is self-care. Logging into your bank account, creating a budget, and paying off debt rather than hoping nothing goes wrong, that's self-care. When we convince ourselves that one massage a semester or one weekend off a year is self-care, we are actually practicing self-sabotage.

Some ways we can practice self-care in these partnerships are:

1. Say no - when we always say yes we are bound to overcommit and create stress.
2. Think before you request - sometimes we ask others to do work, knowing it places them in an untenable situation. If you know your request can only create harm, is it worth requesting?
3. Speak up - if you've got something you want to say, or have been holding back, it might be time to say it.

### **Waiting for Drama**

Most, if not arguably all, student affairs professionals are overworked. Some of us advise multiple councils/chapters, and some of us only do this as a volunteer, not as our full-time job. We are often so busy managing programs, having 1:1s with students, and sitting through meetings, that taking the time to actually pick up the phone to talk to a campus or HQ partner isn't exactly top on our list of most important things to do.

It is so easy to put off developing relationships with each other until the #!\*\$ really hits the fan and demands our full attention. We take a reactive approach, rather than a proactive one. In the end, it only hurts the chapters and students we are trying to help. If we are really doing our jobs well, we wouldn't wait for the next emergency or Fireside Chat to have a conversation.

Here are some tangible tips you can use to move from reactive to proactive in your relationships with your partners:

1. Pick up the phone. Emails are impersonal and get lost in the shuffle.
2. When you are new in your role, reach out to your various contacts to establish a relationship.
3. Share the good and the bad. It's important to have a holistic relationship and accurate understanding of what is going on.
4. Build the necessary bridges. Sometimes you are not the only campus/HQ contact for an organization. Be sure to loop in other stakeholders, such as Student Conduct staff, so everyone remains on the same page.
5. Take time to understand the preferred method of communication and set expectations. You might want emails returned within 24 hours, and they might think 72 is acceptable. Talk about it so you avoid unnecessary conflicts.

## **Conclusion**

Much, if not all, of our work is dependent on building strong and trusting relationships across campuses and headquarters. Avoiding these common mistakes will go a long way in helping you develop the positive partnerships needed in order to ensure our members' and organizations' success.

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