How to Develop a Partnership in Your Local Community!

I. PA Forward® Why It’s Important to Pennsylvania

PA Forward® | Pennsylvania Libraries, an initiative of the Pennsylvania Library Association, was created to give voice to what the library community knows, that with the right support, libraries are ideally positioned to be community centers of information, technology and learning that will fuel educational and economic opportunity for all citizens.

Libraries are pivotal in solidifying Pennsylvania’s future success. Libraries are multi-purpose in nature and are not “just” the bricks and mortar buildings known for warehousing books; add value to their communities, serving as a hub for activity and engagement beyond more traditional uses of research and writing; enhance individual success which in turn supports the overall, collective success of an area. Results in an environment of life-long learners; and are good for all ages, races, gender identities, religions, and educational levels, fostering diversity and inclusion.

Libraries specifically provide the fuel for this success because of the programming they do to further literacy in five fundamental areas: basic, information, civic & social, health and financial literacy that are essential for success in a 21st Century society.

It is a framework which helps our libraries to communicate the value of their services and the impact that they have on their communities to their stakeholder. PA Forward® has two specific initiatives to give voice to these communications: strategic statewide partnerships, and the PA Forward® Star Library Program.

PA Forward® is guided by the Pennsylvania Library Associations commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. It also is committed to the American Library Association Library Bill of Rights and the American Library Association’s Statement of Professional Ethics.

The Five Literacies of PA Forward®

In an era when the public is demanding greater efficiency and program consolidation at all levels of government, Pennsylvania’s libraries – public, academic, and school libraries – serve as models of cost-effective service.

Libraries stretch the public’s resources through sharing books, computers, DVDs, facilities, and expertise. By their very definition, libraries serve the public broadly and efficiently.

Yet, much potential remains for libraries to do even greater things to prepare Pennsylvanians to compete successfully in the Information Age labor force and to live healthy, productive lives.

Our libraries – when properly leveraged – can help solve economic and societal problems.

To refocus and reinforce the ways in which libraries can support Pennsylvanians in leading successful, productive lives, the Pennsylvania Library Association’s PA Forward® initiative redefines the library’s role in our communities.
Using the context of five essential literacies to frame libraries’ programs and resources, they are collectively demonstrating how Pennsylvanians succeed as citizens, parents, students, employers, employees, and consumers:

- **Basic Literacy** – Early learning, functional literacy, workforce development, STEM, stopping recidivism, Adult Basic Education courses

- **Information Literacy** – Ability to access multiple vehicles of information; Distinguishing between credible and non-credible news sources; Understand digital literacy.

- **Civic and Social Literacy** – Knowledge and skills needed to improve an individual’s life, to participate and contribute effectively to the community, government, and society, and to connect with one another through discourse.

- **Health Literacy** – How to partner with healthcare providers in managing self care and family care. Higher literacy rates can equate to lower rates of hospitalization.

- **Financial Literacy** – Personal finance, investing, real estate, college planning, budgeting, retirement, and tax planning.
PA Forward® and Partnership Development

PA Forward® supports library services available to all Pennsylvanians because it helps to develop partnerships in the greater community to bring subject matter experts into our libraries and to strengthen the library ecosystem. Subject matter experts are essential for libraries to tackle real fluency in each of the literacies. Library workers are subject matter experts in the areas of acquiring, organizing, and providing access to information. Library workers are not necessarily subject matter experts in financial planning, health care systems, or computer security. Strategic partnerships can provide those experts to your programming.

PA Forward® supports the library ecosystem of Pennsylvania by bringing together libraries of different types to work on common programming which can help each type of library to meet their unique mission. If our community’s public library is not meeting its specific mission in the community, it puts pressure on its academic and school libraries to pick up the slack. The same is true of each of the other types of libraries. Partnering helps libraries share common work so that each other library can concentrate on its unique mission.

Working together, through PA Forward® benefits include:

For academic libraries, PA Forward® supported partnerships strengthen the public’s perception that academic institutions provide great benefits to their local communities by sharing resources and services with the community as well as students and faculty.

For school libraries, PA Forward® supported partnerships reinforce what experience tells us: Students in schools with strong libraries learn more, get better grades, and achieve higher test scores than their peers who attend schools without libraries.

For public libraries, PA Forward® supported partnerships position them as essential to a growing customer base of private and municipal organizations and individuals and as high-quality early learning providers that ultimately save taxpayer dollars otherwise needed for remedial program.

PA Forward® Star Library Program

Libraries are more than a place to conduct research or to complete assignments. They house more than shelves of books and multi-media devices. Libraries are integral parts of our societies, serving as hubs for activity and engagement, adding value to their communities.

Our libraries envision a Pennsylvania where citizens know how to use online resources and current technology to improve their education, to enhance their job skills, and to fully participate in a digital society.

In January 2017, the Pennsylvania Library Association’s PA Forward® Initiative launched its PA Forward® Star Library Program.

The PA Forward® Star Library Program requires libraries to “brand” their programs and communications and to talk with their communities about how libraries across the Commonwealth are moving PA Forward®.
There are several steps to becoming a PA Forward® Star Library requiring libraries to submit documentation of their efforts, which is reviewed and verified by a committee of peer library workers. Those steps demonstrate that the library has incorporated the five key literacies into their programming and communication.

The PA Forward® Star Library program awards a bronze, silver, or gold star to a library as it adapts and integrates the initiative’s core values.

Bronze Star

This level demonstrates that a library has adopted the core literacy terminology, and it is using that language in its communication plan. The library is making the public aware of its programming and services. The library is taking part in the training and taking advantage of the PA Forward® free resources made available by the Pennsylvania Library Association.

Silver Star

A silver star is awarded to a library when it demonstrates that it has carried out quality programming in an essential literacy. A library can receive one silver star in each of the essential literacy areas.

Gold Star

A gold star is awarded once a library has achieved the Bronze Star and Silver Star status in each of the five literacies and has shown how it has fully integrated the PA Forward® Initiative into its programming curriculum and a commitment to providing the programming fuel to move PA Forward®.

When a library displays their bronze, silver, or gold level star, visitors to that library can be assured that the star has meaning. It means the library has gone through training and developed its programming to further its support of the five essential literacies outlined in the PA Forward® Initiative. It also means that its programming was reviewed and verified by a committee of
library peers and that those peers have recognized the quality of its programming by granting the library its star level.

PA Forward® is implemented on the local level. Each library decides what fuel their communities need. The initiative does not mandate any specific programs, collections, or communication methods; it provides support and contacts for the local library to develop partnerships with the subject matter experts available in their community.
Introduction to Partnerships

Resources available to libraries are continually strained and stretched to the absolute limit. Our users continue to require different services as their circumstances change. The pandemic illuminated the amazing flexibility of libraries when a revolution in those requirements manifested in a matter of days, not years.

This recent revolution has stretched and strained our library workers more than they have been at any point in collective memory. Libraries are looking for ways to further their core mission and to relieve the feeling of being overstretched.

Partnerships are a way that libraries can share the strain of those community needs and spread the workload and responsibility with similar organizations.

Seasoned librarians have often described both successful and challenging partnerships they have experienced.

Not all partnerships are equal. Partnerships should be pursued based upon the strategic compatibility of both organizations. Each organization’s missions need to be aligned and they need to share at least one common goal.

Many library workers have suffered from misaligned partnerships or forced partnerships which added work to their days, never solved their problems, and led to the other organizations taking credit for any success. This is a toxic partnership. Partnerships for partnership’s sake are not healthy. Libraries can be used by another organization to achieve their goals. That leaves the negative impression of partnerships among library workers.

There are times when a library works with other organizations to communicate some information on their behalf. There are times that libraries will distribute items or documents (think tax forms or public record documents) for other organizations even though it is not core to our mission. This work is to raise our stature in the community. However, they are not partnerships as defined in this document.

In the rest of this section, we will continue to look at the benefits of partnerships and how we can distinguish a strategic partnership from a toxic partnership.

What are some of the benefits to your organization by pursuing strategic partnerships?

The first benefit from developing a strategic partnership is to strengthen your programs. Partners can provide your community access to greater subject matter expertise. PA Forward® emphasizes the work that libraries do in five fundamental literacies. All libraries already have programming available in all five literacies (presentations, displays, collection development, and electronic databases), however, quality programming in some of these literacies may require a deeper understanding of the subject than
library workers generally have. Library workers are subject matter experts in the areas of acquiring, organizing, and providing access to information. Library workers are generally not subject matter experts in the areas of estate planning, diabetes maintenance and cultural enrichment. Therefore, libraries are compelled to find trainers who can carry out quality programming in those areas. Developing partnerships with other non-profits, for profit, and social organizations can help to find those subject matter experts to deepen the quality of your programming.

A second benefit which strategic partnerships is the ability to take advantage of complementary capital resources and abilities. Libraries may have physical space for programs which can be utilized by partners, or if a very small library does not have a meeting room, a partnership with another organization can provide a classroom or meeting room. A partner may have skills in the areas of advertising or graphic design which could be used by the library or library workers. The partner may be experts at organization so the library can rely on the partner to organize an event, or our organization may have that expertise to pull together a meeting which the partner is not able to do.

A third benefit could be improved efficiency. Every library worker will have to face the question of duplication of effort. If another entity in your community has a similar mission or goal, you may find yourselves duplicating workload. Working together will save both organizations time, staff costs, supply costs, and confusion by the public about strategic mission.

Partnerships also have the possibility of building capacity for both organizations. Shared workforce or labor to develop an event, program, or cultural series can really help smaller libraries expand what is available in their communities. In some cases, a formal partnership could lead to shared staff or equipment purchase which can bring a cost saving benefit to both organizations. An example of this could be a shared projector which can be used by both organizations when they need it for themselves or for the programs they do jointly.

A fifth benefit of developing partnerships are shared increase in stature. Partnerships are viewed as community good. When two organizations come together to accomplish a shared goal, they are viewed more positively by funders, stakeholders, granting agencies, and individuals. This can mean more resources for both organizations. Increasing their ability to impact their unique priorities.

Partnerships build leadership skills. This may seem counter intuitive since you are joining forces, but the work in a partnership must be directed and coordinated by someone. In an organization without staff to oversee, partnerships provide an outlet for those isolated library workers to be able to develop management and organizational skills which benefit both the individual and the institution.
What to Consider when evaluating a possible Partnership:

Ask yourself if the partnership makes sense. Does this particular organization fit your needs? Partnerships should be about a shared culture, or a shared community need, which through your partnership both of you have a bigger impact than trying to work alone.

Three important aspects of evaluating the possibility of a partnership:

1. Will it reduce costs
2. Will you or other staff develop new skills
3. Will it improve your status in the community

You will need to ask yourself what the overall costs of the partnership going to be. Do you have the internal resources to carry out the partnership? It is important to recognize that your labor is not free. When we plan the cost of a library event, we often forget to calculate the cost of library worker’s labor. Many managers see it as the staff would be working anyway. However, when communicating this to granters, funders, donors, and stakeholders, we must include the labor to get a complete cost analysis of an event. Do not underestimate the value of your work! The question then is whether we have the staff time to commit to the partnership. The partnership should reduce the costs of labor, if the partnership plan does not do this, it will not be beneficial to the library or the community.

A caution here. A partnership should not be in reality library workers doing all the labor and the partner reaping all the benefits. There are times when it will raise your stature to do good work in the community, think selling tickets to a school play, even if you don’t receive any cut of the revenue. But the costs have to benefit the library in increased community stature more than those costs of the lost labor of your circulation staff. A better partnership would be that the library promotes and sells the play tickets and receives a small cut of those ticket sales.

It is important to consider whether you personally will learn anything from the partnership. Does the partnering organization have a unique perspective on the community? An example would be that because the partnering organization works closely with at risk youth in your town, they can provide insight into their needs which then guides your local children’s programming development. Maybe the partnering organization is involved with People of Color in your community, and you don’t have any BIPOC on your staff. This can give insight into the local needs of your BIPOC residents and help you to be more inclusive in your strategic planning.

Another area that should be considered is whether the partnership has a Halo Effect. It is generally understood that a partnership with a library provides a substantial halo effect for the other organization. Libraries are considered trusted, nonpartisan and a community good. This is why libraries are frequently sought for partnerships. However, libraries need to consider if their partnership furthers their reputation or tarnishes it. This can be different for each community, so examples are not easy to cite. In terms of public libraries, it would be good to survey your Board to determine if there is a positive impression of the organization in your community. For academic libraries, surveying your students would be a useful effort to determine if the partnership would enhance or tarnish your image.
Provided here is a tool which you might use to evaluate the development of new partnerships. It is called an Inclusive Business Checklist. The full checklist can be found at:

The document highlights a series of questions you should consider before developing a partnership and it gives you a matrix to score the value of that partnership to your organization.

This checklist notes these possible benefits for entering into partnerships. They are worded in the manner of business, but focus on the question: Does the prospective partnership create significant value? Will it increase any of the following items:

- Market creation (a community need which is not currently recognized)
- Market entry (tackling a specific community need not tried before)
- Access to key resources including non-tangible resources such as social capital. (Image improvement)
- Capacity building of key players. (Develop new skills of employees)
- Increased capacity to deliver (establishing distribution networks)
- Access to new networks/ constituencies
- Building trust – of consumers, distributors etc.
- Creativity / innovation/ sustainability
- Positioning / visibility
- Improved relationship with partners
- Improved relationship with other stakeholders
- Political benefits/ influence
- Positive branding/ reputation

Overview of PA Forward® Statewide Partnerships

The two initiatives of PA Forward® to support the Pennsylvania Library community are training of library staff about the importance and implementation of literacy training in their local libraries and developing partnerships with local organizations which can bring subject matter expertise to the literacy training carried out in libraries.

Pa Forward® established partnerships with state departments, non-profits, professional associations, and public companies which had a statewide footprint. These partnerships are nurtured to be conduits
for subject matter experts for local libraries doing literacy training. As the Pa Forward® manager, I nurture and caretake these partnerships on behalf of the larger library community.

I find that managing these relationships to be the greatest impact Pa Forward® has on the greater library community. It allows for a unified message distributed from a statewide organization with a statewide perspective to go to a larger audience than would be otherwise possible from multiple libraries in disparate geographic areas.

The nurturing of these relationships has also been the challenge of the initiative during the last five years, given that more than half of that time has been impacted by the Covid lockdown. Turnover among the library community is mirrored in our partner organizations and much time has been spent rebuilding these relations as new leads are introduced into the process.

Below you will find an evaluation of the partnerships which were most successful over the last five years, what partnerships we see being critical to nurture it the next five years as libraries reinvent their programming goals in a post-covid operation and what partnerships are strategic for the long-term health of literacy training in libraries.

Partnerships which were most impactful in the past five years:

**KINBER (Keystone Initiative for Network Based Education and Research)**

KINBER has been an integral part of the Information Literacy Summits which have been sponsored by the initiative. The summits were hosted annually through 2019 and then in 2021, training hundreds of library workers about the evaluation of information and how to train their users to flag inaccurate or disinformation. The partnership has also helped to communicate the need for low cost, reliable broadband which is lacking in so many areas of PA. Pa Forward® worked with KINBER to be a voice for libraries in these discussions.

**NATIONAL NETWORK OF LIBRARIES OF MEDICINE, MIDDLE ATLANTIC REGION**

The NNLM have been a long-time partner with Pa Forward® and has partnered with many libraries over the years to provide health literacy training directly in libraries. In 2021, Pa Forward® received a grant from NNLM which allowed the initiative to specifically develop the Pa Forward® Virtual Programming Library. NNLM – Mid Atlantic Region has moved in this year from the University of Pittsburgh to the University of Maryland. We have been developing new relationships with the current staff over the past few months.

**PENNSYLVANIA HUMANITIES COUNCIL**

Pa Forward® has been active in connecting libraries to the programs made available by the Pennsylvania Humanities Council. Pa Forward® has been asked to participate in their evaluation process and in their planning process to be inclusive of EDI concepts.

**ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION**

The partnership between Pa Forward® and AA has focused on connecting AA to libraries to help them develop their training programs. They rely on libraries to provide locations and support to carry out
focus groups to evaluate their trainings and find where gaps exist in their training curriculum. AA also provides direct trainings in libraries and provide local Subject matter experts to the library for an AA program.

CENTER FOR RURAL PENNSYLVANIA

Over the last five years, this partnership has helped to launch several legislative research projects supervised by the Center but focusing on the needs of rural Pennsylvania Libraries. In 2020, a research project carried out by Dr. Sara Grove of Shippensburg University studying the need of broadband in rural public libraries recommended that rural libraries participate in the Pa Forward® initiative to help “to promote partnerships that emphasize shared resources”.


PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Over the past five years, this partnership has been successful in getting out information to Pennsylvania Libraries about the Affordable Care Act (ACA) programs and how libraries and users can implement the program. In the past year, Pa Forward® has been the primary conduit of information about the launch of the ACA app PENNIE to libraries on PA.

PENNSYLVANIA TREASURY

The Pennsylvania Treasury department has worked with Pa Forward® to promote their Keystone Scholars program. Treasury has done a partner program at the last three PaLA conferences to distribute information about the program. They created materials targeted toward the last two summer reading programs and offered them for every library in PA.

ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEMS

From the launch of the initiative, APPLS has provided deep support for the initiative. In early years, they provided substantial financial support for the program to support the development of other statewide partnerships. In recent years, they have been active in promoting training opportunities for their member libraries and sponsored trainings at their member meetings.

PENNSYLVANIA ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY BANKERS/CONSUMER FINANCIAL PROTECTION BUREAU

The relationship between Pa Forward® and PACB has directly helped to connect libraries to local financial literacy trainers. In 2021, Pa Forward® worked with Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and PACB on a pilot program to develop model financial literacy curriculum in 6 libraries throughout PA. This model will be evaluated and used by CFPB in their partnerships with other states throughout the country.

Pa Forward® has worked with CFPB to host numerous webinars highlighting their resources for library workers in programming and information services work in their libraries.

PENNSYLVANIA CITIZENS FOR BETTER LIBRARIES

PCBL has worked with the initiative to help to train its members at their summits about communicating the impact of the library in their communities. We anticipate being able to continue this partnership when they are able to host summits again for their friends’ groups.
PENNSYLVANIA NEWSMEDIA ASSOCIATION

The partnership between the Pennsylvania Newsmedia Association and Pa Forward® has focused on making connections between the initiative and media outlets and making connections for local libraries to work with the local newspapers and television outlets to communicate the literacy work they are doing. The Association has also presented at both the conference and Information Literacy Summit about sending press releases and educating the public about reliable news sources.

PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL LIBRARIANS ASSOCIATION

The PSLA has worked with the initiative specifically in the areas of the Information Literacy Summit. As part of the partnership, Pa Forward® has been able to make presentations at their annual conference and specifically presented at their Annual conference in April 2022.

Other Partners:

These partnerships have remained active during the last five years, but they have mostly been one way information exchange where Pa Forward® provided information to the library community about their initiatives but did not have any significant coverage in the past five year by their organization to their members about libraries work in literacy. Generally, the sharing of information has involved sharing of social media on the Facebook and Twitter platforms.

CROSSTATE CREDIT UNION ASSOCIATION
PENNSYLVANIA INSTITUTE OF CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS
PENNSYLVANIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE
PENNSYLVANIA BANKERS ASSOCIATION
PENNSYLVANIA CHAMBER OF BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS’ ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA
THE HOSPITAL & HEALTHSYSTEM ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA
PALCI (PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMIC LIBRARY CONSORTIUM, INC.)
PENNSYLVANIA INSURANCE DEPARTMENT
PENNSYLVANIA ASSOCIATION FOR ADULT CONTINUING EDUCATION (PAACE)
AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS, PENNSYLVANIA CHAPTER
ASSOCIATED COLLEGE LIBRARIES OF CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA
ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGE AND RESEARCH LIBRARIES, DELAWARE VALLEY CHAPTER
PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF LABOR & INDUSTRY
THE PENNSYLVANIA JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE COMMISSION
PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
Additional work with other organizations which do not have formal partnership agreements:

**Pennsylvania Borough Association**

The Pennsylvania Borough Association has covered the work of libraries in the Pa Forward® initiative in the past five years in their member publication. The Association also invited Pa Forward® to be the subject of their regular television program which is broadcast on local cable networks and the Pennsylvania Cable Network.

**PHEAA**

In 2019, Pa Forward® developed a partnership with PHEAA. PHEAA has provided trainers to libraries throughout the state to provide reliable student aid programming for libraries. PHEAA has also shared information in their newsletter to their employees about Pa Forward® and the work that libraries do around Financial Literacy.

**Primer on Developing Local Partnerships**

All partnerships need a direct tie to your library’s strategic plan. Strategic Plans don’t need to be in-depth. They don’t need to be hundreds of pages. They are your strategic direction. They set your strategic actions and give you direction about where you will focus your limited resources. A Strategic Plan should be flexible enough to be able to take advantage of a unique opportunity, but specific enough for you to see that this “unique opportunity is not outside of your library’s scope and mission.

That said, if you don’t have a strategic plan or don’t know where to get started, I would reference you to a program which PA Forward® sponsored at the 2021 Annual Conference about using PA Forward® as the foundation of your strategic plan. It can be found at the PA Forward® Niche Academy Site here:

https://my.nicheacademy.com/paforward/course/41131

Once you have a solid set of goals your library wants to achieve, you are ready to develop partnerships with other organizations.

**Partnership Actions:**
1. Reach Out
2. Set up one-on-one meeting
3. Have a conversation (not a lecture)
4. May have a break here for contemplation
5. Select common goal
6. Set expectations
7. Plan an activity
8. Evaluate

It is time to reach out to potential partners. You will need to identify the potential partners in your community. In an academic library this could be what other offices on your campus offer general education workshops for your student body. In school and public libraries, it would be to do a community overview of active organizations. This would be a good use of your Board in a public library or a staff meeting in an academic library to identify who works on common goals in your community.

When you have set priorities and ranked those organizations to determine the most likely partner, you reach out. That involves actually contacting someone. You can send an email, but it is much more powerful to actually speak to the person who would control the partnership directly.

During the introductory messages, you should set up a one-on-one meeting. It can be at your office or their office, but more powerfully, it is best to have it a neutral location. I drink way too much coffee. A local coffee place is a great place for these kinds of meetings. Anyplace that you have in your community which would elicit conversation and make it a safe space for all involved is appropriate.

During the conversation, ask them questions about what their short- and long-term goals are. Ask them about the communities they serve. Ask them about their organizational aspirations. Hopefully, they will ask you the same questions.

Conversation starters for this meeting:

1. Tell me about your mission.
2. Who are your typical clients?
3. What are you currently concentrating on in your strategic plan?
4. What do you see as the biggest needs of the community?
5. Tell me about your organization and what expertise you have on staff.

At this point, you want to take a small break. The point of this break is to evaluate whether or not the goals of each organization align. If you find that you have different or oppositional aspirations, then it is not a good partnership, and you move on to another organization.

If there is common ground, set up another meeting to discuss what you think is a common goal. It is extremely important to be honest about what your goals are. Trust between the organizations is imperative for success. If you agree to follow up with information or if you agree to take an action, be sure to follow through. Clearly state your organization's strengths. As a library, you have community contact and an expertise in finding information. Do not promise any skills to a partnership of which you do not have explicit knowledge or a staff member who does.
Once the two organizations have agreed on the common goal to work upon, clearly define each organization’s expectation. This can be done with a formal written agreement if this partnership requires substantial commitment of resources by each party. The formal written agreement should outline goals, timeline, commitments, and evaluation process.

If the partnership is less formal, a verbal understanding of expectations and commitments is fine. However, it is imperative that each party agrees to the outcome of the activities. Although it does not need to be written down, it does need to be clear.

Once you formalized what you want to achieve, plan an activity which works toward that outcome. This should build on each organization’s strengths and should provide a win/win for each organization.

After the activity is completed, it is important to evaluate. This is an evaluation of the event. The next section will talk about evaluation of the partnership. However, critically looking at whether the specific activity was successful in moving toward the outcome saves frustration and the wasting of resources in the future. It is recommended that the team develop a single evaluation form.

Make it simple. The most important piece of information about the program is that you have reached your common outcome.

Some outcome specific questions (these assume a matrix of level such strongly agree, agree neutral etc.):

1. Because of today’s program or activity, you learned something which you will use in your personal life.
2. How comfortable are you at applying the concepts of today’s program to your personal situation.
3. You learned something today which will help your family.
4. Because of today’s budget presentation, you will create a personal budget to use in personal finances.

If attendees learned, then you have had an impact.

Quick Review:

1. You reach out to potential partners
2. Listen to their goals
3. Find mutually shared goals
4. Formalize an activity to work on together
5. Clearly state the outcome
6. Carry out the activity
7. Evaluate your work together

Evaluation of Partnerships after an Event

“The idea of collaboration intuitively makes sense to most people, but how do we really know that the sum is truly greater than its
parts? Do the hypothesized benefits of partnership truly result in advantageous change and meaningful impact? If so, how can partnerships demonstrate that they are truly making a difference?”

https://www.onetam.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Partnership_Impact_Evaluation_Guide.PDF, page 8

Evaluation seems to be a lost aspect of most of our library programming. In my most recent PA Forward® statewide survey, 47% of libraries said they do not do any evaluation.

Some libraries have spectacular evaluation processes for their programming. However, many libraries reply on looking at outputs solely on the success of their programming. They count attendees, number of sessions, books read, or handouts taken.

The power of our programming is best communicated in the impact that our programs have on the attendees. How many people learned something they will use in their daily life? How many people changed their opinion about a subject because of the program? How many people feel better equipped to take action or implement a plan?

Even less common is a formal evaluation of a partnership. If partnerships are evaluated, again they are usually evaluated on the basis of what inputs went into the partnership. How much money was spent? How many employee hours were spent? How many new users did we get from the partnership?

This is all important! However, proving that the sum of the actions taken by each partner is greater than the work of each organization on their own is even more difficult than finding out if attendees at a program learned something.

Partnerships can be evaluated either on the macro or micro levels. The macro level of evaluation is looking at the partnership from the 30,000-foot level, did it make a positive impact on the organization as a whole. The micro level is how did the partnership impact each user or participant and then how does the aggregate of those individual impacts add up for the whole.

On the macro level, you look at things such as:

1. Were you able to reallocate resources as you anticipated (This is the one area where your outputs/input analysis might give you an answer)
2. Were your users able to take advantage of resources they would not have been able to without the partnership
3. Did individual goals not associated with the partnership get achieved because of the partnership
4. Did your organization’s status increase because of the partnership?
Measuring any of those questions is difficult. This requires talking to people outside your organization and possibly people who are not part of your regular circle. This can be measured by focus groups, community surveys done by professional firm, or community surveys carried out by volunteers outside your organization. This has a high cost in time and possibly money.

Evaluating on the micro level involves surveying participants at each event and then aggregating the data to determine how broadly the impact may be. This is easier than the macro level but doesn’t have the overall power of an outside evaluation tool. For the library community in general, this would be the recommend evaluation process.
RESOURCES USED:


https://www.soapboxengage.com/blog/2122-how-to-develop-strong-community-partnerships-for-your-nonprofit#key

1. Start with your goals
2. How will resources be shared in the partnership
3. Gather data and evaluate the partnership regularly

https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesnonprofitcouncil/2021/05/19/building-mutually-beneficial-partnerships-11-tips-for-nonprofits/?sh=16143d0b47de

1. Find where you Intersect
2. Be intentional and authentic (Trust)
3. Enable Honest, Ongoing Communication
4. Know how to build and sustain trust
5. Find the core value and culture fit
6. Clarify expectations
7. Share your strengths
8. Always try to find a win-win
9. Have an Ally at the other company
10. Make the other company look good
11. Listen to the community

https://www.onetam.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Partnership_Impact_Evaluation_Guide.PDF, page 8

https://www.allbusiness.com/12-ways-to-evaluate-if-a-potential-business-partnership-will-be-lucrative-104220-1.html

https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/blog/assessing_partnerships

1. Be Clear about the Purpose of the Partnership
2. Don’t assume ‘nice’ partnerships mean better partnerships
3. What are we measuring?
4. Triangulate perception data with more objective indicators
5. Linking partnerships to project outcomes
6. How can we assess this in a more rigorous way?
The MSP Tool Guide: Sixty tools to facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships Companion to The MSP Guide Herman Brouwer and Jan Brouwer

https://mspguide.org/


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