
Section Three

LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES



LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF PARTNERSHIPS

As you embark upon your journey to sustain NES project services beyond NASA's three-year formal commitment, keep in mind the following lessons learned/best practice strategies that have been documented by over thirty years of education partnership practice, as well as from formal research studies. Based upon an extensive review of the education partnership literature and from input from practitioners who have successfully cultivated sustaining partnerships, we present to you below the Do's and Don'ts of Partnership Development.

Collectively, these lessons learned confirm the benefits of applying a cyclical, systems approach to securing and sustaining partnerships for the NASA Explorer Schools. It is our hope that you will find these 'Lessons Learned/Best Practices' and the 'Seven Stage Partnership Development Process' helpful in your long term efforts to secure partnerships that enable you to enhance and sustain NES Project Services beyond NASA funding.

#1 Don't begin a relationship by asking for money or other resources!

- ❖ Do begin building relationships and potential partnerships by thoughtfully promoting visibility, awareness and understanding of the NES project within your community. Invite a broad base of diverse, community stakeholders to learn about NES even during the planning stage, as well as encourage their attendance and active participation in special events. Be sure to acknowledge them and their organization/institution at the events.
- ❖ Do invest time required. Successful community based partnerships are built upon strong relationships. Cultivating such relationships requires a significant investment of time and involvement in the community.

#2 Don't address partnership building casually, nor plan activities in isolation.

- ❖ Do use a Systems Approach to Partnership Development that is compatible with both the goals of system-wide STEM Education reform and the design of the NES Project. By using an annual, cyclical approach to partnership development, partnerships can evolve, mature, remain responsive to changing needs, and become more robust.
- ❖ Do map the community to identify potential partners from a broad base of diverse education stakeholders; and assess their STEM interests, needs and goals as a basis for designing mutually beneficial relationships (i.e. partnerships).



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- ❖ Do cultivate initial top-level buy in and long-term commitment from leadership at each of the partnering organizations/institutions. Sustained partnerships require on-going and committed program leadership and Community Champions.
- ❖ Do create formal organizational structures to effectively manage the partnership and ensure effective communication on a regular basis. Two key organizational structures include an NES Partnership Steering Committee and a designated individual to be responsible for partnership development efforts and coordination; this role is recommended to be filled by the NES School Administrator or an NES School District Representative who has ample opportunity to network during business hours, as well as the authority to make commitments on behalf of the school/school district.
- ❖ Do engage in consensus-based decision-making at Partnership Steering Committee Meetings to encourage partners to develop a shared vision and action plan outcomes/expectations.

#3 Don't depend on one source of supply for resources.

- ❖ Do diversify outreach to a broad base of STEM Stakeholders to create an ever-expanding portfolio of resources; tap the government (local, state and federal levels), corporate sector, community-based groups, education institutions (K-16), and informal education institutions.
- ❖ Do create an annual partnership and sustainability plan that is aligned to the goals and objectives of your NES Project and broader STEM Education Reform Efforts. Annually, define resources needed to sustain project services, identify gaps in funding, establish strategies for how to secure funding, design goals, objectives and strategies for leveraging existing relationships, and identify new partners to maintain and expand the effort.
- ❖ Do document and quantify all partnership contributions. Small amounts add up!

#4 Don't assume a shared vision among community partners is sufficient for realizing school-wide improvement, and STEM education reform.

- ❖ Do ensure there is a staff member in each partnering organization/institution responsible for organizing communication among the partners and with the public.
- ❖ Do develop internal and external communication strategies that articulate your NES partnership vision regularly and consistently, throughout the cycle of partnership development.



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- ❖ Do design and communicate consistent and compelling messages to stakeholders throughout the year. Utilize multiple media channels to outreach to the greater community; e.g., Create Talking Points/ Fact Sheets, Internet/Website Postings to create awareness, solicit interest, cultivate buy in and participation, and celebrate success, as well as design and disseminate press releases, multimedia presentations, and reports that both herald and document special activities. Celebrate & recognize NES progress & partner achievements.
- ❖ With the local community: Design and disseminate a variety of formal and informal communiqués to both further understanding and to sustain enthusiasm critical to the growth and development of partnership relationships.
- ❖ With the partnering organizations: Utilize open communication strategies that foster consensus-based decision-making and encourage written commitments. Additionally, develop plans to communicate with the community and market the partnership.
- ❖ With the national STEM community, including NES team members: Discuss opportunities and challenges surrounding effective partnership development and sustainability best practices. Explore opportunities for focused dialogues on partnership sustainability issues and advance an NES Community of Practice.

#5 Don't assume partnership success

- ❖ Do engage in continuous monitoring and evaluation to ensure that there are data to drive reform & enable your school to shift from a program driven model to a strategic data driven model.
- ❖ Use data throughout the cycle of partnership development, from determining NES project needs, vision, goals and objectives, to guiding NES Partnership Development strategies and processes, and to demonstrating accomplishments on an annual basis: specifically, use evaluation to spotlight both growth of the partnership processes and the impacts of the programs and partnerships on students, families, schools, and community partners.

#6 Don't be overwhelmed by the breadth and scope of long-term visions and partnership goals

- ❖ Do take it one step at a time. Partnership success is built on consistently leveraging small successes and communicating those successes to the various communities.