



Collaboration

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There has been a great deal in the news lately about collaboration as non-profits in today's economic climate are realizing that working together can increase impact, save resources, attract new donors, and benefit each organization in more ways than working solo does.

While some are actual mergers of two non-profits, or legal collaborations with MOUs, there are many benefits to less formal, yet still strategic, collaborations. In preservation and conservation, collaboration can be an effective means of advocating for the field - by bringing together the various stakeholders to address issues of local, regional, and national significance.

Here are a few things to think about when considering collaboration:

1. How do you find a partner?

Any successful collaboration must be a win-win for both organizations. Therefore, it is best to start your search by seeking a partner whose mission compliments your own. Other factors to consider include looking to those organizations whose programs can fill your gaps or that have the capacity - both human and financial - to fulfill their part of the project.

2. You found your partner, now what?

Establish goals that benefit both. Whether it is educating or expanding an audience, providing new programming, or being introduced to new funders, have clear expectations of what the collaboration will achieve.

Once you determine the goals, you can develop the associated activities to reach them. For example, one of our clients, The Barnum Museum, has completed very successful collaborative projects with the Mark Twain House & Museum. In 2010, both received a grant to embark on a year of collaborative programming

and interpretive development that focused on the Barnum/Twain friendship. Through a combination of family programs, special events, lectures, and exhibitions, the project allowed the audience to explore their relationship and its effect on the cultural landscape. It was considered a great success as it engaged a wider audience than each institution could have reached individually, served as a model for other organizations interested in joint programming, and encouraged both to continue building their outreach programming. The key is being creative and doing something that will engage your audience, but is strategic so you reach your goal.

3. What are the benefits?

The benefits of collaboration can be innumerable when it's done correctly. Those listed in the many articles that have come out of late include program expansion, improved delivery of services, geographic growth, audience development, resource leveraging (i.e. back-office), and new donor acquisition.

The real benefit, however, is increased impact. It is through collaboration, and not competition, that the conservation and preservation fields can be strengthened as financial resources are being shared, not fought for; leadership, both in the staff and on the Board, is being cultivated, rather than the best people being hoarded, and advocacy can be better communicated by a coalition rather than a lone voice. In other words, we are more powerful together than alone, and let's face it, if we are to raise awareness of our preservation efforts - we need all the help we can get.

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