From Pain Point to Partnership: Exploring Strategic Collaboration

September 30, 2026

A Nonprofit Resilience Hub program in partnership with Forefront

Today's Agenda:

- Strategic Partnerships Overview
- Collaboration in Action – Southside Together
- Working Session – From Pain Point to Partnership

Why Collaboration?

Nonprofits matter.

Sustained collaboration is a path to long-term strength and greater impact.

Catalysts for Collaboration

- Starting a Nonprofit
  - Starting a nonprofit is a major endeavor. Before assuming that a new organization is the best way to get a great idea or program, consider how you could partner with an existing organization.
- Strategy & Planning
  - Strategy and planning is about determining what's most important for your organization to do and then figuring out how best to get those things done.
- Innovation & Scale
  - Boards and leaders are smart to consider whether a strategic partnership with another organization could support these efforts and unlock even greater potential for impact.

Catalysts for Collaboration

- Adapting to Change
  - Adapting to change is constant, and some instances require board-level thinking about how your organization may need to adjust or change to serve your core purpose best.
- Executive Transitions
  - When an executive transition is on the horizon, executives and boards often find it easier to consider the possibilities of a strategic alliance or restructuring openly.
- Closing the Doors
  - Closing down an organization or program requires tough decisions about services, personnel, and the communities and people served.

Not all partnerships are mergers. Collaboration can take many forms:

Alliances and Networks	Shared Service Arrangements	Integrated Organizations
• Coalitions • Collaborative Partnerships • Movements • Collective Impact Efforts	• Co-Location • Shared Staffing • Back-Office Consolidation • Fiscal Sponsorship	• Joint Ventures • Parent-Subsidiary Relationships • Asset Transfers • Mergers

Strategic Partnerships: Alliances & Networks

Coalitions

A coalition is a temporary alliance of distinct parties, organizations, or states for joint action to achieve a common goal. Coalitions often form to address specific issues and may dissolve once the objective is met. Example: Multiple arts education organizations forming a coalition to lobby for arts funding for public schools.

Movements

Movements are large, often informal, groupings of individuals or organizations that aim to facilitate societal change. Unlike other forms of partnerships, movements are often less structured and can be driven by grassroots efforts. Example: We See You White American Theatre, which involves many organizations and individuals advocating for racial equity in theatre.

Collective Impact Efforts

Collective impact is a structured form of collaboration where multiple organizations come together from across sectors to solve a specific social issue. This approach usually involves a "backbone" organization that coordinates the efforts and measures the impact. Example: Multiple theatre venues serving as collection-points for a mutual aid organization's supply drive.

Strategic Partnerships: Shared Service Agreements

Co-Location

Co-location involves two or more organizations sharing the same physical space to reduce costs and improve service delivery. This arrangement allows for easy sharing of resources but usually does not involve any deeper level of integration. Example: An art gallery and a dance company co-leasing a facility to present their work.

Shared Staffing

In a shared staffing model, an organization can share its competencies with an affiliate organization through agreements whereby employees work for multiple organizations, dividing their time and expertise between them. This can help reduce costs and increase efficiency for all involved parties and share talents across organizations. Example: Two theatre companies pooling resources to hire a full-time production manager who splits their time between the two theatres.

Back-Office Collaboration

Back-office consolidation involves organizations sharing administrative functions like HR, accounting, or IT services to reduce overhead and improve efficiency. Each organization remains independent but benefits from shared services. Example: Several small venues sharing a ticketing system.

Fiscal Sponsorship & Agency

Through fiscal sponsorship, a nonprofit organization provides its nonprofit status as well as fiduciary oversight and other administrative services to other groups and organizations. Example: A large, well-established dance company acting as a fiscal sponsor for a newly formed group.

Strategic Partnerships: Integrated Organizations

Joint Ventures

A joint venture is a business arrangement where two or more organizations create a new entity to pursue a specific project or business activity. Each partner contributes assets and shares risks and rewards. Example: A group of film festivals creating a joint venture to develop a new ticketing platform, which can be used by all members of the venture, and which can be licensed to other venues to generate revenue for the venture members.

Asset & Program Transfer

Asset transfer involves the transfer of assets—like property, equipment, or intellectual property—from one organization to another. This can be part of a merger, acquisition, or other restructuring. Example: A music group transferring its education program to another group in order to focus its energy on performance and touring.

Mergers & Acquisitions

A merger occurs when two or more organizations combine to form a new single entity with a new name or identity. An acquisition occurs when one organization becomes a wholly integrated part of another organization, which retains its name and identity. Mergers and acquisitions are often done to expand reach, broaden service delivery, or achieve greater efficiency. Example: Two neighboring storefront theatre companies merging during an executive director transition, each retaining their venue and their unique artistic vision but operating as a single entity with one board and a unified staff with greater administrative capacity.

Q: Are there barriers to more collaboration?

NONPROFIT CEOS' RANKING OF THE BARRIERS

1. Identifying potential partners
2. Defining partner relationships and roles
3. Cultural integration
4. Costs of collaboration
5. Concerns about risk
6. Communications and branding
7. Defining and measuring success
8. Integration of programs and services
9. Integration of operations

FOUNDATIONS' RANKING OF NONPROFITS' BARRIERS

1. Defining partner relationships and roles
2. Cultural integration
3. Concerns about risk
4. Costs of collaboration
5. Defining and measuring success
6. Integration of programs and services
7. Communications and branding
8. Integration of operations
9. Identifying potential partners

The Bridgespan Group
THE LODESTAR FOUNDATION

Q: Are there barriers to more collaboration?
A: Yes, identifying partners in particular

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1. Identifying potential partners	1. Defining partner relationships and roles
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4. Costs of collaboration	4. Costs of collaboration
5. Concerns about risk	5. Defining and measuring success
6. Communications and branding	6. Integration of programs and services
7. Defining and measuring success	7. Communications and branding
8. Integration of programs and services	8. Integration of operations
9. Integration of operations	9. Identifying potential partners

The Bridgespan Group

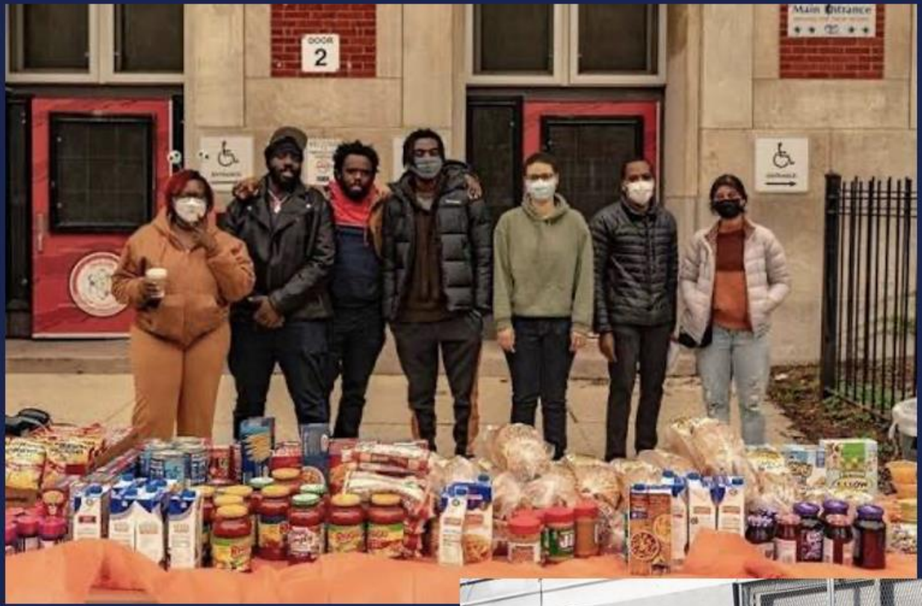
THE LODESTAR FOUNDATION

Success Factors

Objective, experienced, neutral consultants and technical support are essential.

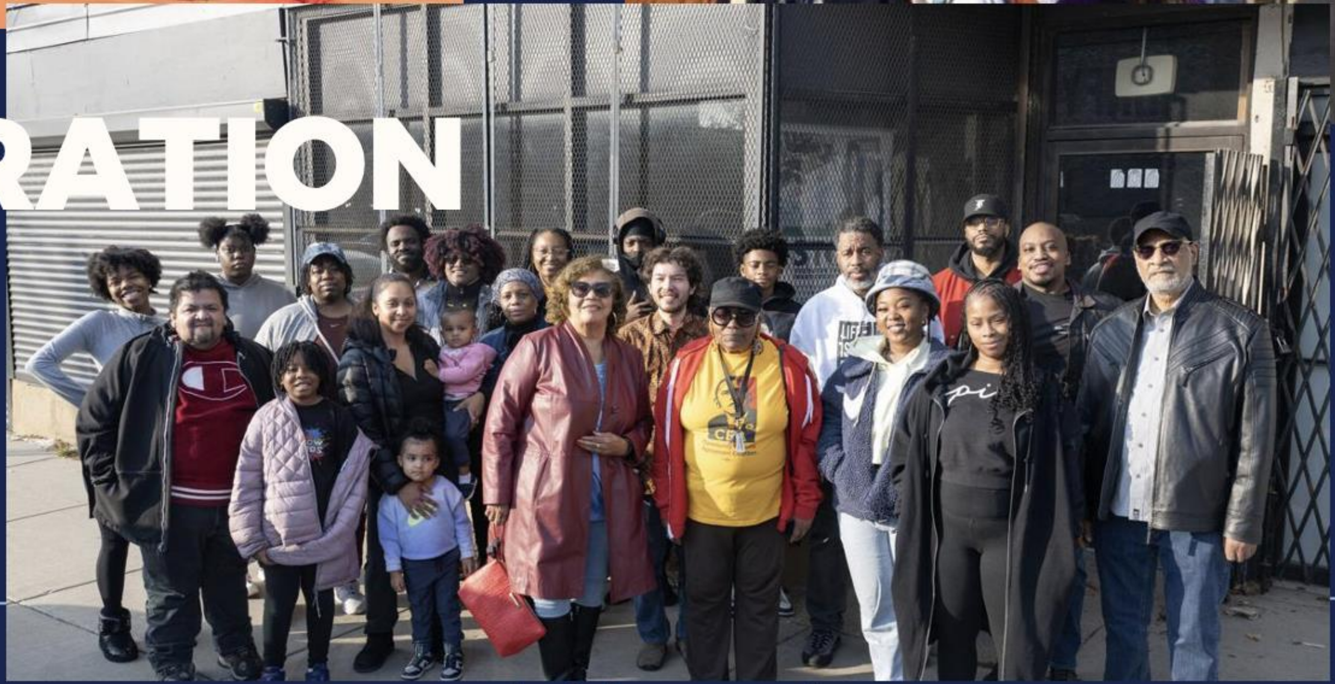
- Mission focus and alignment
- Flexibility in pursuing mission
- Risk-taking, growth orientation
- Not in an immediate crisis
- Internal champion / board support
- A lack of divisiveness
- Positive relations with potential partners
- Clarity regarding desired outcomes

NOT ME WE
2020 Mutual Aid



STOP
2011 Mental Health Campaign

COLLABORATION IN ACTION



Southside Together

Not Me We

- South Shore
- Younger Adult Members
- Mutual Aid Drives

4 years pre-merger
100 members pre-merger

Southside Together

- Tenant Union Organizing
- Youth & Family Organizing
- Average Income $37k
- 80% Renter Community
- Primarily Black & Brown Residents

S.T.O.P

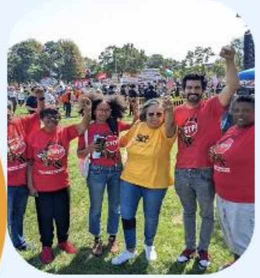
- Woodlawn
- Older Adult Members
- Health Justice Organizing

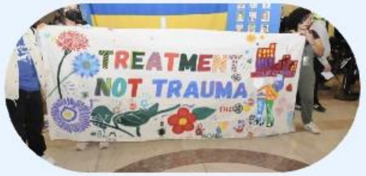
20 years pre-merger
350 members pre-merger

TOGETHER, WE HAVE :

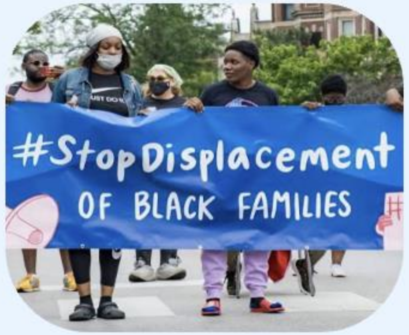
4 CAMPAIGN EVENTS
ON AVERAGE PER MONTH, ACROSS ORGANIZATION

700+ MEMBERS
ORGANIZING IN WOODLAWN AND SOUTH SHORE





ONE NEW ISSUE AREA GROWN BY LEADERS



Mission Statements

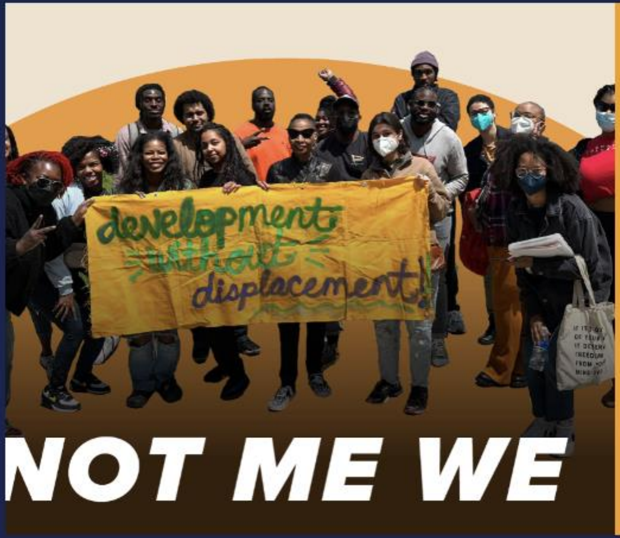
Forefront

Not Me We

Organize Black, Poor & Working Class Community members in order to build grassroots infrastructure that allows for collective and individual repatriation of resources & power in South Shore and adjacent neighborhoods.

Vision:

- A Chicago where black families can experience joy and humanity
- Families can afford to live and care for themselves
- Community members have self determination



Why Merging Built Power

- Expanded geographic power
- Expanded knowledge from experience

S.T.O.P

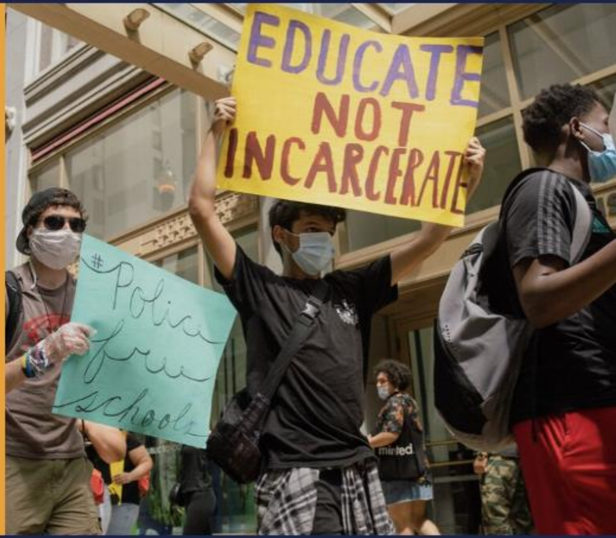
We build people power in our community beginning with the most directly impacted and we meet them where they are at. We are committed to revolutionary ideas and the struggle for racial, social, and economic justice

Vision:

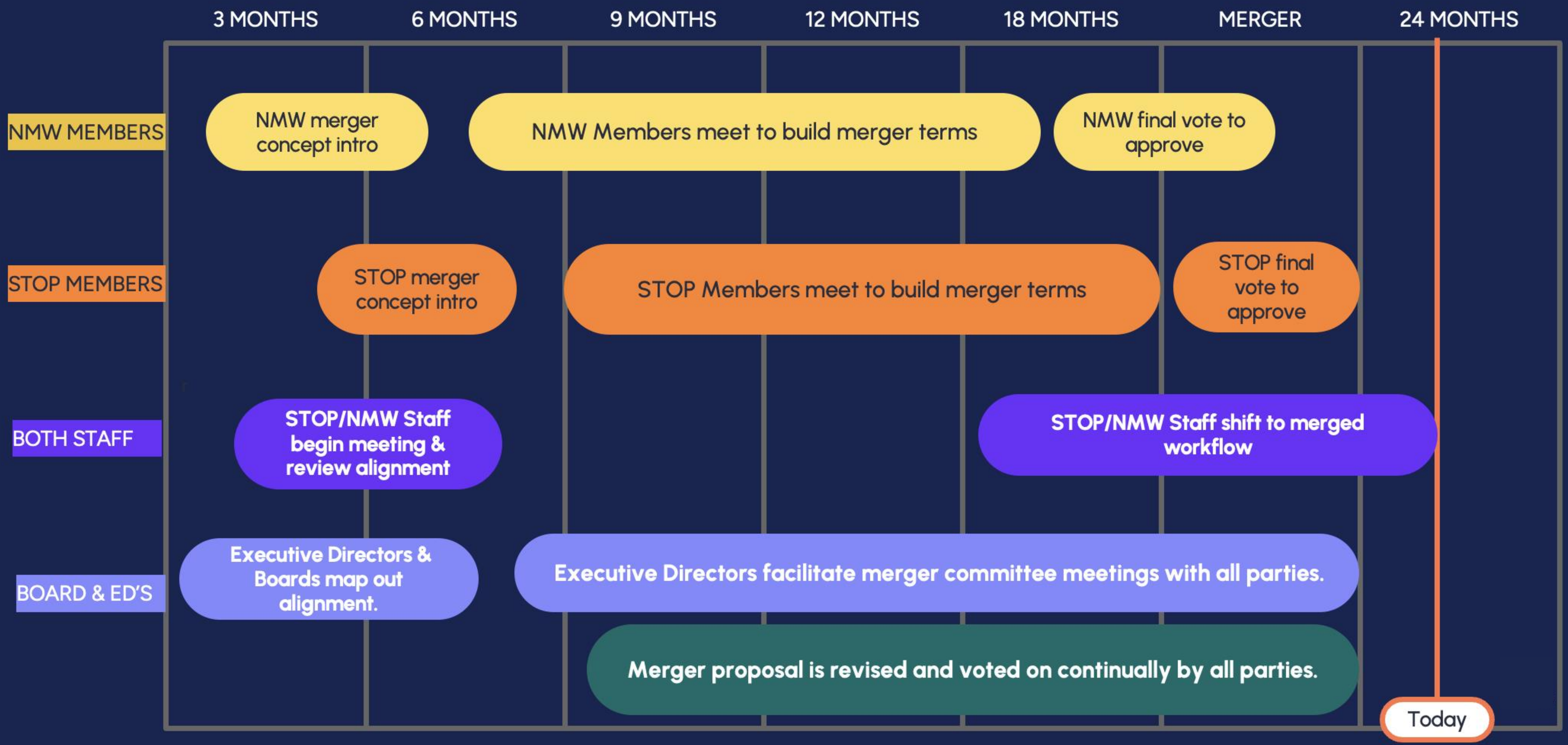
- A strong intergenerational base of leaders in our community
- A community with safe, affordable housing and schools without police
- Compassion and care for all members of our community

Why Merging Built Power

- Grow organizing capacity
- Expand intergenerational leadership development



Merger Phases



NONPROFIT RESILIENCE HUB

Forefront

Exercise – From Pain Point to Partnership

From Pain Point to Partnership

Question 1

What is your pain point?

Every serious collaboration conversation starts with a real organizational problem — not a trend you feel pressure to follow. Before naming a partner or a structure, name the pain.

From Pain Point to Partnership

Question 2

What skills or resources might address that?

Before you think about partnership types, think about what would actually solve the problem if you had it — regardless of where it came from.

From Pain Point to Partnership

Question 3

Question 3: What type of partnership would you consider?

Collaboration isn't one thing — it's a continuum, from informal cooperation all the way to fully integrating two or more organizations in ways that change the legal structure or operating model. The right response depends on the problem.

From Pain Point to Partnership

Question 4

Question 4: Who do you know in your network?

Successful collaborations rarely start with a formal RFP, a legal team, or a grant — they start with a relationship. Someone you already trust, in a room you're already in.

From Pain Point to Partnership

Question 5

Dream about what's possible!

Before due diligence, before board approval, before any of the hard mechanics — give yourself permission to imagine the best-case scenario.

Feeling Inspired?

Reach out to a trusted partner and invite them to coffee – see what themes emerge!

NONPROFIT
RESILIENCE
HUB

Forefront

WHAT ARE WE

What is the Nonprofit Resilience Hub

Nonprofit Resilience Hub is a confidential, collaborative resource for Illinois nonprofits with operating budgets of $10 million or less that are affected by federal actions. It offers a structured starting point to help organizations, assess challenges inherent in a changing federal landscape, and identify pathways forward.

WHAT WE DO

Our Services

The Hub offers four core areas of support to help you stabilize, adapt, and lead with confidence.

LEGAL ASSISTANCE

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

PROSPECT RESEARCH

SERVICES

Strategic Partnerships

Expertise on mergers, collaborations, and strategic partnership development, helping nonprofits explore, assess, and structure partnership opportunities that strengthen mission impact.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Services for the Nonprofit Resilience Hub

Confidential Conversations

Free, confidential conversations.

Webinars

Open access learning sessions.

Consulting

Match organizations with expert consultants for early-stage explorations conversations.

Grants

Cash grants for later stage exploration and implementation.

SERVICES

Legal Assistance

Legal information, advice, and assistance to assess risk and compliance across three key nonprofit areas, including DEI, 501(c)(3) status, and federal funding certification requirements.

SERVICES

Financial Management

Expertise on financial planning, monitoring, and operations with a focus on strengthening nonprofit financial resilience in turbulent times.

SERVICES

Prospect Research

Data driven strategy and research support based on your organization’s unique goals and funding needs, by subject expert librarians and leading databases.

NONPROFIT RESILIENCE HUB

Responsive Programming

Upcoming programs include:

- October 8th at noon - Getting Your Ducks in a Row: Legal Compliance and Best Practices (Virtual)
- October 15th at 10am - Establishing Your Fundraising System (Virtual)
- October 21st at - Maintaining Your Fundraising System (Virtual)
- October 28th at 10am - Introduction to Prospect Research: Finding Grants (Virtual)

HOW TO APPLY

Fill out the form

Describe your needs and goals
on our introductory form.

Time 5-10 min

SCAN