

Mary, Mary, quite contrary. How does your partnership grow?
Haverhill Partners For Literacy

A Community Partnership, like a garden, needs constant tending if it is to grow in any particular shape. Water it and offer it nutrition (food) and perhaps it will blossom. Leave it untended and flowers wither on the stem or plants sprawl across the landscape without definition or purpose.

My Partnership has endured both lean and bountiful years and sometimes there is no way to know, going into a new season, how it's going to shape up. I do know that without the Core group of people who have hung in there year after year there would be no Partnership. Our gains may be minor but our causes bring all the partners into play.

We have been able to rally around rescuing the Library's tutoring program, continuing the Family Literacy program once Even Start was discontinued, working together for cross referrals to other programs and occasionally raising money. Together we provide our GED graduates with a cap and gown graduation each year. We recognize that we have work to do and set ourselves tasks to be considered early in the new season. Some of these tasks are revisited yearly.

Each fall as the program begins to shape up, adult learners return to classrooms, staff reappears to take on their tasks of guiding learning and encouraging students, I begin to think about the Partnership. Summer time has lulled the press of meetings and life has taken on a gentler and kinder motif. Fall signals the revitalization of contacts, a more serious bent of focus and vision and an urge to get it right this time.

The question is "what's right"?
Questions to consider annually:

Who sits on your partnership?
Why do they continue to come?
Who doesn't come to the table? Why?
Keeping members interested. How? Bringing partners together to learn how to be partners.
Assigning tasks. What?
Giving up control. Who is in charge and of what?

(Feed them and they will come. A sure fire way of getting some people in the door. This might lead to a new perspective from someone who hasn't been around before.)

Is a 501 (C) 3 in your future?

Do you have or need By-Laws?
Reviewing the strategic plan and setting the focus. Outlining achievable goals.

Is beating your head against a wall the answer?

What are the Next steps for Community Planning Partnership? Areas to explore arise from the community needs.

- 3-4 month wait list in the volunteer Library tutoring program,
- Senior Latinos who would like ESOL at the Citizen's Center
- GED in Spanish
- Evening GED programs
- Programming for non GED bound candidates (basic reading and writing support)
- Additional ESOL classes needed
- High HS drop out rate in Haverhill

Community Planning and Community Partnerships have been around for a number of years and yet for some it still is a concept that is difficult to grasp or to bring to fruition. There are multiple barriers that may seem insurmountable including time constraints, programmatic issues, improbable calendars and too many meetings yet all programs must strive to bring community members together, overcome issues of territory, and identify common goals. Each new program is faced with its own community of issues and comes to its own solutions. Sometimes these solutions can be successfully adopted by other partnerships and sometimes the uniqueness of a community requires fresh ideas.