



# NAVIGATING SCHOOL COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: *A Roadmap to Success*

The following is a road map of some key tips and considerations when navigating and negotiating a new partnership. These have been developed through conversations and interviews with many individuals across Alberta working in various types of partnerships from physical literacy, breakfast programs, after school programs, greenhouse initiative and more.

## Build Strong Relationships

Network with as many potential partners as possible  
Take time to meet in person and to listen to one another.  
Be patient and put in effort to grow the relationship.  
Be mutually supportive and flexible with one another.

## Partnership Make-Up

Reflect and think about who needs to be in the partnership.  
All partners will bring something to the table.  
Include a variety of multidisciplinary organizations in the partnership to give an enriched perspective.

## Assessment

Conduct a needs assessment  
Decide upon the purpose of the partnership.  
Use the results for a variety of purposes including uncovering barriers, gaps and school/community needs.  
Identify the program population to be targeted.  
Take a holistic approach and attempt to gather multiple voices; those of students, teachers, parents, community members and other stakeholders.

*"I believe it is a necessary part of a community to partner with schools. Children are the future for us and with partnerships children can learn from others and be more willing to put their time back into the community."*

## Program Purpose

Develop community-specific programs that benefits all partners based on the results of the needs assessment.  
Design programs with the target population's needs at the forefront and developed in conjunction with them.  
Think outside the box - Don't just do what you've always done.

*"Someone who has a vision to bring the groups together and provide some organization is always helpful in moving forward."*

## Shared Vision and Goals

Agree upon what goals you are hoping to achieve and what success looks like - creating a shared vision.  
Create a partnership agreement that outlines each partner's roles and responsibilities to ensure accountability.  
Take a team approach - everyone agrees on the desired end result, and success as a group is more important than individual needs. There should be a sense of shared responsibility.  
Be realistic, need generally exceeds capacity and resources available, think to yourself: "What can we do well?"

## Resources

A program coordinator help to keep the project moving. Develop a program budget at the start - be transparent. Ensure funding is in place before you start. Take time to think, "Who and what are our internal and external resources?" Schools can be used as a community hub.

*"Working together and utilizing everyone's resources provides the best possible education and opportunities."*

## Communication

Discuss realistic ways to partner and how to avoid barriers you have experienced in the past. Create a communication plan. Be honest, talk about what's working and what's not, and how to move forward.

## Data

Embed research, evaluation and knowledge translation from the start of the partnership. Communicate results back to the community to enhance buy-in. Tailor the messaging. Monitor the program for adjustments to strengthen effectiveness. Consider how you want to measure success. What methods will you use to assess your program? Determine what you want to evaluate; the partnership, the outcomes, the process or all?

## Community Involvement

Involve people outside the partnership, including families and other community volunteers will make the program sustainable. Local businesses are very valuable connections to be made. They can provide volunteers, space, resources, or become part of the partnership. Take time to think who in the community could be an asset to your partnership and program.

*"It takes a leader to engage the various partners in seeing a common vision and purpose and visualizing what part they can play."*

## School and Administrative Support

Foster a culture that is open to community partnerships, where the door is open for organizations to come in and have a conversation. The openness needs to be facilitated by the principal who should be a champion for pursuing this type of work in order to embed it in to practice.

The potential impact of a successful partnership between schools and communities is immense, with improved health, social connectedness, academic performance, and more, being possible outcomes of a very strong program.