

European Association Summit 2020

Designing the Perfect Partnership (for your Association)

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“Wisdom of Crowds” check-lists

This is the amalgamation of results from Dubai Association Conference workshop session on the same topic (held Dec 2019) and the EAS 2020 session (held in March 2020).

These sessions challenged international association delegates to widen their perspectives on where and when to apply partnership thinking, which institutional and individual (and often surprising) partners can be recruited as collaborators, what types of value each partner can potentially bring to the table, and how to identify and overcome the many barriers that prevent partnerships from being successful.

Individual associations are frequently blinded by their own narrow historical experience, their business culture, perhaps the shadow of past failures, and institutional inertia. By bringing working together in a custom-designed, friendly, competitive environment, our delegates were able to identify a vastly larger range of opportunities and creative ideas than they could manage on their own, which we are sharing here to help any associations trying to navigate the new “Era of Uncertainty” that Covid-19 has ushered in.

One thing appears certain, working solo is a recipe for failure in today’s market! GAHP believes that partnerships are the future for associations that want to thrive.

A: OBJECTIVES, CHALLENGES & PROJECTS

Imagine a much wider range of purposes towards which you can apply partnership solutions! How many of these are you currently attempting to deal with only using the resources of your own association’s staff or volunteers?

- Stronger advocacy impact – policymakers
- Stronger advocacy impact – population
- Increase membership
- Spread knowledge more widely
- Increase certification adoption
- Increase event attendance
- Increase event profitability
- Develop new events
- Attract new sponsors/partners & fundraising opportunities
- Appeal to new generations

Deliver content in new languages
Access new or improved content
Joint creation of new content
Reduce overhead % (eg by sharing support services)
Overcome missing IT skills
Reduce direct competition
Launch a new product or service
Re-engineer an existing product or service
Obtain support during a crisis
Respond to increased competition
Respond to market disruption
Improve future-proofing/scenario planning
Improve/launch market surveys
Diversify revenue streams
Develop new networking platforms
Boost status via partner's reputation
Alignment with UN Sustainable Development Goals
Increase profile/visibility
Complementary offerings opportunities
Increase talent pool/scouting options
Accelerated growth
Economies of scale/market size/critical mass
Opportunities for cost cutting or efficiencies
Energy efficiencies
Capacity building
Risk sharing
Leverage assets
Increase influence
Create excitement
Build motivation
Improve waste control/recycling
Incite curiosity
Increase opportunities for new combinations/synergies
Trigger desired change
Obtain access to expert opinions
Access to specialist knowledge or understanding of target clients/customers
Expand networks
Improve inclusion
Link financial & human resources – resource efficiency
Exchange best practices
Increase time efficiency
Combined or co-organised events
Co-creation across multiple areas
Identify/access new leadership
Digitalisation

B: POTENTIAL PARTNERS

It's amazing how many new potential partners might be willing to team up with you, once you understand their objectives, values, and capacity. And don't forget, some partners may be for life, but others are for specific projects, regions, or timeframes. Be promiscuous in your partnerships!

Your own membership (all or sub-sections, eg Chapters – rethink your relationships)

Other complementary associations

Other competitive associations

IT companies (eg App producers; registration software)

Existing sponsors

New potential sponsors (who may be attracted by “partnership”)

Trade show and/or conference organisers

City authorities & agencies

Convention bureaux

EU/UN agencies

Media companies (trade & general)

Bloggers & influencers

Your own critics

PCOs

Association Management Companies (AMCs)

NGOs/Charities

Philanthropists

Universities/academics

Research institutions

Consultancy companies

Citizens

Destination suppliers (eg venues)

Venture capitalists/angel investors

Certification, accreditation & standards agencies

Hospitals/Medical schools

Ambassadors/consular bodies & officials

Students (high school/university) & teachers

Manufacturers

Banks

HR/Employment agencies

Artists

Airports/transportation companies

Chefs – F&B leaders/institutions

Start-up communities

Police/fire/emergency services (eg when dealing with crisis)

Tax advisors

Speakers/Celebrity experts

Local thought leaders (eg in your congress destination)

Licensing bodies

Social influencers

Photographers & videographers
PR, Marketing & Digital agencies
Display companies; florists; decorators
Telecoms companies
Printing companies
Office supply companies
Office rental companies

C: VALUE OFFER – YOURS & POTENTIAL PARTNER’S

Have you ever comprehensively audited the value your association could offer to potential partners? Or undertaken a “gap analysis” to identify what assets you would love to take advantage of but don’t possess within your own organisation?

Staff expertise
Member expertise
Mentoring skills
Access to audience/community
Cultural interpretation or access
Unique content
Data & data analytics
Existing events programme
Tech skills or systems
Design thinking skills & experience
Project management skills & experience
Training skills & systems
Existing government relations
Existing communication channels & media relations
Reputation & status & track record
Brand values & recognition
Existing certification programmes
Existing products & services
Money – access to liquidity or cashflow
Financial management expertise
Fundraising ability/skills
Access to Foundation funding
Bulk-buying opportunities
Cross-selling opportunities
Time
Relationship with sponsors/partners
Shared risk/shared reward
Use of buildings/offices/equipment
Patents/Intellectual property
Award programmes
Website
Legal expertise & advice
Feedback platforms
Training events & workshops

Crisis management skills & expertise
New career path opportunities
Exchange programmes
Market trends/trend analysis
KOL engagement (???) – not sure what KOL stands for?)
Digitisation/change management experience
Access to a younger membership/community
New business models
Health & Safety expertise
GDPR expertise
Access to specific geographical or sectoral markets
Endorsements

D: CONSTRAINTS & FEARS

Most new businesses fail; many partnerships also end in divorce or acrimony – understanding the risks, limits, barriers and other “failure factors” in advance is vital if you’re going to design partnerships that deliver the results you hope for! Experiment and be bold, knowing that some projects may not work out, but enter new partnerships with your eyes wide open.

History & past practices
Board conservatism & inertia
Leadership turnover
Lack of negotiating experience
No shared vision/mission
No shared cultural values
No articulation of value offering
Failure to define boundaries
Failure to articulate goals
Failure to articulate roles & responsibilities
Failure to adequately prioritise project
Money – eg insufficient liquidity or cashflow
Fear of time required
Insufficient time allocated
Suspicion of partner’s motives
Unwillingness to experiment
Potential loss of association’s unique culture or identity
Risk of moving away from specialisation
How will partnership be perceived by insiders/outsideers
Ego battles/power games
Micromanagement
Existing contracts & legal constraints
Stakeholder conflicts
Fear of increased bureaucracy
(Perceived) lack of innovative capacity
Fear of “mission creep”
Geographical distance

GDPR

Political environment

Economic environment

Non-profit vs for-profit clashes

Insufficient trust

Unclear project governance or management

Overambitious goals/unrealistic expectations

Lack of balance between partners' capacity

Reputational risk

Technological limits/constraints

Incompatible branding

Failure to agree governance of partnership

Lack of leadership

Excessive workload

Time zones

Different languages

Differing priorities

Inability to deal with criticism

Lack of competency or capacity

Wrong timing

Lack of clarity of objectives

Complacency