Developing Stakeholder Partnerships Internally and Externally for Successful Grants Q&A

This document should be viewed as a supplemental document to the NSF Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide. The following list of questions and answers related to grants and innovation.

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Categories of Questions:
- Engaging new stakeholders; is there a hierarchy of approach?
- How to structure that first meeting with a new partner?
- Letter of support, letter of commitments, MOUs – what's the difference?
- Examples
- Does a partnership always involve money?
- Is breaking up hard to do?

Engaging news stakeholders, Ann, you've done a lot of engaging people over the years, what's your best advice? How do you manage it? How do you treat engaging a new stakeholder? Why don't you tell us your story?

Ann Beheler - Sure, happy to do so. I am sure there are details that I will leave out in this as we go through so feel free to ask additional questions as we go along. You ask if there's a hierarchy, I don't think there's a hierarchy; there are partners that are necessary at all sorts of different levels. For example, I think we talked last time that seldom is a grant just with one college except, perhaps, those grants for people that are new to ATE. Typically, there's more than one institution involved. What I did and I'm going to give my example for when we started the regional center, because some of you might recall that I said that I was hired to grow IT enrollments at Collin College just north of Dallas shortly after the 911 tragedy and right before the dot-com bust. When I was hired, we would never ever be able to have enough IT workers to fill demand and shortly after the dot-com bust; we had excess faculty; we had people being laid off in the North Texas region alone; we had seventy to a hundred thousand people related to IT that were actually laid off. So, in that situation, the problems that we were dealing with at Collin that being that we had staffed-up to be able to produce more IT graduates. The fact that we were getting people hired right and left, all of a sudden, all of that changed and we had a problem that we had too many faculty. At that point in time, I don't know what your institutions requirements are, but our requirement for someone to teach IT was just an associate's degree in IT or something related. The problem with that is that faculty members probably couldn't necessarily teach something else so that was a bit of a problem, but we were not alone it wasn't just us. When we talk about North Texas or the DFW Metroplex, typically, that includes at least three major college districts Tarrant County, Dallas County and Collin County and those are adjacent counties. But, at the time in the early 2000s, these different districts were, I won't even say they were in co-op-etition with one another, they were in competition with one another. If one of them did something really good, the other one copied it, but

didn't really talk to the one that had the first success. We were all in the same boat in terms of having problems with precipitously low enrollments in our IT courses. Businesses really didn't particularly want to talk to us much about hiring our people or buying our training or buying our education or supporting people coming to school, because they had immediate issues and those immediate issues were - how do we retain profitability at least in some manner so that we can stay in business -. So I reached out to the two adjacent county school districts and had to search around a bit for the right person to talk to, but I decided at that point who I wanted to have involved. I also thought it was probably a good idea to have a university involved. The university that is a public university and actually was amenable to talking to us about taking transfers from our programs was the University of North Texas so we started working with them. When targeting the institutions, pick the ones you want, don't necessarily wait for people to come to you. In terms of businesses, this is kind of interesting, I always start with the highest level individual with a company in a given area and that might be the CEO/owner, maybe it's a one-person shop or it might be a giant concern like Dell or Cisco. Nevertheless, I went for the very highest person in the area. I created a script for going after those people and I tried to figure out from my viewpoint what would be in it for them. They were laying workers off; what's in it for them? In some cases, it was thinking about the future and wanting to hold out hope for the future that we would in fact be ready to provide right-skilled candidates for their jobs when their business came back and that worked. It wasn't always the case that that worked, but that was a major proposition with them. Then, the workforce boards had a problem on their hands and we kept them involved. We also kept some CBOs (Community Based Organizations) involved; there are several that work with more disadvantaged students and they were beneficial as well. Regardless, after targeting, make a true list about which institutions, which businesses, workforce boards, CBOs - who do you, want to have involved to make the proposal and the work a success-. How are you going to go about it? What are the potential, I call it the "WIFIMs," what's in it for me? What are the benefits for those particular target bodies? What's the benefit for them to be involved? Internal partners are a little bit different because we're asking people within the college to do more work and in that case, it's important to sell people on the value of the work that you're proposing to do. I would say though, that we talked about an "elevator speech", the "elevator speech" is basically the *here's what I want to do, why I want to do it and why it matters*. Remember, three or four sentences at most and that's a very important thing to have in terms of selling the internal organizations on helping you to get the work done. In all, remember that grants are not gifts, they're not quite contracts, but they're close. It's possible, depending on the granting agency, to change what you're doing after the fact, but it's not easy. So it's very important that not only are the stakeholders involved for what they're going to get out of the grant, but also involved because they're willing to commit to working in the grant. In terms of the businesses, what they committed to do was to help us prepare curriculum for the next new wave of IT, when the businesses would hire again. Now remember that your partners are strategic; they are targeted. Well, why do you pick one over another? Well, I have to say originally in 2003 time frame, we took the adjacent county districts, because we were all facing the same kind of problem, but I also knew that we had many, many institutions across the U.S. facing a similar problem. In our new proposal, what we have done is pick the partners such that each has their own particular mission, their expertise, such as, in one case, we have a college that is very good at data visualization and business intelligence, another that's very, very good at diversity and so each of the partners have a goal. They have work they have to do in order to be a full partner in the grant. Everyone benefits and everyone leads, I think that's a really, really important thing and that everyone leading part is what helps the engagement. Now with respect to businesses, it's important to have a variety of businesses not just your trusted friends and other comfortable acquaintances, the people that have been on your business advisory council for years, but maybe those folks plus new people. Before we went on, I was talking to Mike and what I really like is to see the businesses challenge one another. What do they want in workforce ready job candidates, they don't always agree. Someone told me along the way if you've got

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two people and they always agree, one of them is superfluous. So it's really nice to have businesses with different missions, with different sizes, different issues. We keep coming back to the vision. What is your vision? How are you putting that (vision) in the "elevator speech", and how do you know it's somewhat new or at least new to the set of institutions you are going to work with, so that it has a chance of being funded? Then, in going after stakeholders, it's very, very important to make this a high-touch operation if you have tried to add to your business team by sending out a mass email. I suspect it probably hasn't been terribly successful. We're buying for time from these businesses and it's truly very beneficial to make it very high touch. We have had really good luck with phoning and again, I said phone the highest level person within the company. Very often that's not the right person, but either that person tells you who to talk to or that person's assistant can tell you who to talk to in order to get the appropriate people on your team. You do need to be willing to develop what each partner's role will be, or what your expectations are with some flexibility to be willing to adapt to whatever they think is important to them. It's also important to do some follow-up. If you just leave one voice message, it's not appropriate to say well I left a voice message on March 10th with so-and-so of XYZ company and they haven't call me back so I guess they're not interested. These business people are extremely busy and the fact that they don't see your email or don't hear your voice message is really not personal, it's just they're incredibly busy. Regardless of what you do, always be respectful of their time; be sure to tell them what kind of time you're expecting. In our case, we meet four times a year. One meeting is face to face and its four to six hours. The other three meetings are an hour and a half and they're done by a WebEx. So we're looking for about 10 hours a year minimum and then, I have a whole list of other opportunities for people to be engaged. Also, remember to name-drop, having a National Science Foundation grant or going for a National Science Foundation grant or a DOL grant or any other grant can carry some weight. Again, have a script, be sure on that script that you have several frequent questions or objections answered and be willing to add to that list as you work with various people. The biggest advice is be ready to pivot, if you call someone and don't have the right person be willing to ask for who should I really be talking to. Secondly, it's very important to be willing to adapt to what they need and what they're willing to do. Again, I would say that it's important when you're calling the folks to get them involved as stakeholders to be able to talk about that initial meeting and at that point, this I think is something we're going to have Marilyn talk about, but before we go to that, I'd like to ask if either Elaine or any of the presenters have something they'd like to add to what I just said?

Elaine Johnson - I think that you've hit many nails on the head and reminded us of some of the very critical pieces to developing these partnerships. The strategic part, I think, is a great help to all of us as we plan how we're going to approach new partners. The idea of your strategies and the fact that you've done this and in a very structured way, it is really good. I think that when you talked about the downturn in the IT industry; I think that we can all agree that we need to match the needs of the workforce with the education that is required and then, also fit it in with the needs of the students and their ability to engage and be confident that they're going to get a job when they finish their program. Those are a few comments that I have. Marilyn might have some more.

Ann Beheler - Well let me address something real quickly with you, we were in a position where we were going after a National Science Foundation support to figure out the next new thing originally and in IT that's not hard to do, because the next new thing is about thirty percent of what you need to be doing every single year. However, it was in a way it was sort of not nice, because I wasn't asking the businesses to join our team to immediately make commitments to internships or hiring people or sending people for training. I predicted it was going to take two or three years for the industries to come back enough to be able to be willing to hire, because again, when IT goes down, it goes down for a while and when it comes back up it comes back up differently. I don't think that's anything different from any other

industry, but figuring out what that difference is ahead of time was really a luxury. We were able to develop curriculum over a time period that was somewhat reasonable as opposed to always being behind which is more like what we're doing currently. It worked out very, very well to have the businesses involved, have the faculty involved and have new curriculum ready and new graduates ready by the time the industry came back, which was more or less 2006-7, a little bit into 8 but our first graduate was 2007. It was very, very rewarding to realize that she (first graduate) had something like eight interviews and three or four job offers within about two weeks or so after graduating. That was the first time that we had any real proof, other than just faith, that what we were doing was really working. Marilyn what are your comments?

Marilyn Barger - Let me just say two things; one is just emphasizing some important facts and points that have been made. One is being very strategic about your approach and being very deliberate about your partners and your selection of partners. The second point that I'd like to emphasize from what's been said so far is that you need to really be very flexible in allowing your potential partners or your partner to fill in and work with you at the places and spaces that they want to work at; the things that are important to them, that could be at the company level or at the individual level. So if the individual changes that interaction might shift a little bit and we need a lot of different kinds of interactions with - the colleges do with their industry partners -. So, sliding one company from one bucket to another bucket and being able to do that I think is an important thing. Just to keep the relationship going no matter where they're sweet spot is for what they're really interested in.

Ann Beheler - I agree one hundred percent Marilyn. It's also really, really important to make sure that you communicate regularly with these folks, even when you're first getting them involved. When you get to a "yes" and you think you have the right person from within their company, it's important to kind of keep them involved in how you're putting things together. I was working with a group today that is building a BILT for the very first time, Business and Industry Leadership Team, which our process is for them to co-lead our work and that was a little bit scary for them to co-lead the work when we weren't really sure exactly where they'd take us. But, ultimately businesses are the ones that are going to hire our graduates so they have a stake in it. Sometimes it takes several weeks or even months to put together that very first meeting and so it's very important to not be out of sight, out of mind with the people that have already said yes. Maybe send them a weekly update that says, "Here we are, here's what we're doing, here's what our plans are. We estimate that that first meeting is going to be on a third week of April, fourth week of May," whatever that might be.

Elaine Johnson - I like that Ann. The importance of the regular communication and particularly at the beginning when somebody is committed to something and then, there's a space of time before the actual meetings take place. I think that whole idea of regular communication is absolutely critical.

Ann Beheler - We also follow up at least annually and talk to the person that is on our BILT about what works and what doesn't, that's part of our survey. Rather than sending them a survey, "Hey fill this out on Survey Monkey." We do the high-touch approach so that values them because, frankly, it is about relationships. It is about almost dating.

Marilyn, how do you prepare for that first meeting or how do you structure that first meeting?
Marilyn Barger - I want to emphasize the strategic part, one more time, because the strategic part falls into this category as well. I think a good approach is to really do a lot of research or some research about the potential partner and make your list of some places where you think there's good potential for partnering. Where they can help you and, also, not unimportantly, where you can help them reach their

goals. Sometimes that's probably challenging to do with the new partner, because you may not know that much about the institution, the organization, or the company. You might not know enough about them and you might not know enough about the specific person you're going to interact with or persons. It may be more than one of them at that initial meeting. So I think it's really important to be really clear about your own goals and objectives, and I like to think of it as like a card deck. I have all of these different things that we're engaged in as an organization and I try to listen really carefully to them and learn from this pre-research to see where they may be best integrated into our organization and partner with them. So doing that homework, setting up the meeting, spending some time at the meeting, having both, or whatever number of organizations are there, giving everyone plenty of time to present what they do, in an informal way - this shouldn't be formalized I don't believe - . What they do; what their niche is; what their personal passions are, because that certainly plays a role and make sure you listen really carefully to what they have to say. Then, be ready to respond to their needs first and see if you can find a right place for yourself, your company or school, your organization to match what their particular needs are and pick it up from there. It's a really challenging conversation the first time, if you really want the partnership or really think it's important for your college or for your brand or your center, then, you really need to be well prepared for the meeting with a lot of different options for the company. If you don't get the one you really wanted, then, maybe it's the goal for down the road into the future and I would say go to the place where you can get somebody the first time, whatever that passion is and then, bring them in. I think we've been really successful doing that and keeping partners for a long time, getting them more engaged as they go through, as time goes by in different aspects of our of our organization. Lastly, but not least, the follow-up part is incredibly important; I tell my Center folks that it's our responsibility to reach out and communicate, the communication thing both Elaine and Ann have mentioned in response to the first meeting is really important, by email, by phone, by as many ways as you can; reiterating the commitment that you've talked about and perhaps, hopefully, there's some commitments that you've actually made.

Ann Beheler- Yeah, Marilyn, I think that's really important. In thinking back, if I was not sure what some of the companies were in the area, because some of the smaller and medium-sized companies were less well known to me, I actually contacted, not Chamber of Commerce, then - although that would work well too - but I worked with the people at the workforce board at the time. I also contacted the Economic Development Corporation; also, contacted some of the higher administrators, VPs and the president for relationships that they might already have in the area. We have to be a little careful when we work with an outside entity and outside businesses, because they may have been approached by six different people in the college that don't know the other five are approaching them. Also, when you talk about strategies or strategic mission, it's very important that whatever you want to do for the grant aligns with the strategic mission of the college, extremely important and if it doesn't, it's going to be a hard sell to get the grant approved and even harder to get it to happen.

Do you use any collaboration software that helps remind you to connect with partners about pending meetings? Do you use anything to help structure the way you manage that relationship on a software side?
Marilyn Barger- No, the short answer is no. Just some variety of regular communications that we've structured in the processing of setting up our different organizational infrastructure. So we have processes in place that say you will send out first meeting notices if it's related to a meeting on X number of weeks before, we will follow up with individuals if we want them to participate in a particular way. I do that personally, most of the time to make sure we keep that relationship. So typically, it's by email or phone call. I think Ann's comment about calling is important. We try to see the mountain in the

community as often as we can, as well in different events that may not be our events or meetings that are not ours.

Michael Lesiecki - Here at Maricopa, we experimented with something called HubSpot, but that's largely one of these CRMs, you know, the customer relationship managers and we largely use it for how to manage an inbound connection, you know, somebody that wants to know if we do something or if we can provide something. We haven't used it, so much, as a relationship management tool.

What about you, Ann? At Collin, do you use anything software wise?
Ann Beheler -Not even speaking about Collin, I think there's a big difference when you're building relationships and when they've already been established. If I wanted to use collaborative software now, I probably could get acceptance for that from the group, but in the beginning this is super high-touch and as you're getting commitment for stakeholders. I don't do any of the commitment business through email, period. It's either through a printed letter that is hand signed, put in an envelope with a hand address on it and a real stamp on it. I just happened to do that once, because I didn't have time to call everyone and that actually worked very, very well. Think about it, how many hand addressed envelopes with a stamp on it do you get? Not so many. You want to stand out, email is hard. We do email all over the place now in terms of sending out save the dates, preliminary agendas, requests for involvement, opportunities for people to mentor students, be on panels or whatever. We use email for that fairly frequently now. But it's very different now because in 2003 we were putting together a group of people that really didn't know each other. I would say that Marilyn's had good luck with this and so have we. We have people on our board that are still on our business and industry team since 2003 and I don't think they would be there if they weren't getting out of it what they thought was important and if they didn't feel valued. Very, very important that it be high touch phone calls, snail mail, email is okay for after they're committed. Sometimes we'll be coming up to the BILT quarterly meeting and we have responses from maybe six businesses out of the 40 active ones that we're working with. If we do not get a response, it does not mean don't want to be there, it means they overlook the email. So it may take a phone call follow-up.

Elaine at City College of San Francisco, do you use anything in the more formal sense to help track your relationships?
Elaine Johnson- I have to say that we rely heavily on Sandra Porter who's in Seattle. She's the person that sets up our website and she's also the person that likes to try new software, new methods of communication, but she has a particular talent for gathering data and reporting and we like to be able to tell our partners that we'll share that data with them so that we can provide information about jobs around the country, directions, hot spots so to speak. You said the word HubSpot as far as software, I'm not talking so much about the particular software, but more what we can share and how that information is gathered. So that's a little different take on this. It seems to work really well. We also have blogs and people sharing on a regular. We have a hard newsletter that we send out, but we also have ongoing constant blogging about what's working, what's not working. I think that's been a strategy that's worked well for us.

At the beginning, it was mentioned that seldom is a grant with just one college, but in this particular case they're involving a single college with multiple community organizations, do you think from a reviewer standpoint they will look askance at the single college? Do you think that would be an issue from a reviewer standpoint or maybe a red flag?
Ann Beheler –Well, if I could figure out exactly what a group of panelists all think on a review, I would be probably worth a million dollars an hour. A panel is composed of probably four to six or eight of peer

reviewers, but the peer reviewers may in fact be quite different in their perspective. I think it's a matter of making the case in the proposal for why it is important; why the work is important with this one college and emphasizing the fact that you're working with lots of different stakeholders. I don't know, it could be compelling, but then again, it might not. I know that we have had situations where the reviews have come back, one of them, saying you're trying to do too much and another one saying you're not doing enough. So I don't know what I could say about that. Typically, when there is more than one college and the roles of the colleges are clear as well as the commitment from business is clear, then, that typically bode pretty well. But again, what a given reviewer is going to think, I don't know.

Michael Lesiecki -I think the point was, is that it's more than a single college you made that point clearly. But I think, whether your partners involve other colleges or other institutions that depends, obviously, on the project you're proposing and the case you can make for it. So I think that is probably the best answer there.

Marilyn Barger- I would like to disagree. I think it really depends, on I know and work with a lot of projects that actually are just single college that are involved very deeply and trying to get more involved more deeply in their own community. Now, it's a variety of organizations, institutions including their pathway so their high school, their k-12 districts, etc. But, those projects don't really involve other colleges.

Ann Beheler – But, if you're involving high schools, I wasn't very articulate in that involving an institution other than one's own. I think that makes a lot of sense.

Elaine Johnson- Also, a point of the size of the college, some colleges have multiple campuses and are huge, others are very small. So there's each and every case. It's looking at what you've got to work with; what your industry is like around you; what are your special qualities and to maximize those.

Now you've done your first meeting, how do you formalize any agreements made as a result to that meeting? Do you ask for a letter of support or a letter of commitment? Do you actually create a memorandum of understanding? What's your sense of what's the best approach here or is there a best approach?
Ann Beheler - I could just share what we do, I don't know its best, but it has served us well. If somebody is getting money from us, if they are one of the partners that are both producing work and receiving benefit; if they're receiving money they're receiving what's called a sub-award that always has an MOU attached to it. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) that has a statement of work that they're expected to do on a particular timeline to get the money that they'd like to have. I have not done that with businesses. The businesses don't get money from us, in fact, usually it's the other way around, they provide in-kind services. They've often provided equipment. What I do ask them when I put a proposal in is for a letter of commitment for what they are going to do in the future to help make the work of the grant a success. They're signing a letter of commitment is very important and in that letter of commitment, it's not just, "Oh, we think what you're talking about is great and we support you and think that NSF should fund you," it's more, "Oh, we think it's important and here's what we're willing to do in this next grant period to make your work a success." So I think it's a mixture. MOUs are hard to do; I learned that a long time ago, especially, if you're doing them with institutions in different states. The state laws are widely different, but with the businesses we've never found the need to have an actual letter or MOU other than the letter of commitment that goes in with a proposal. Interestingly enough, the last time we submitted a proposal our letter from our BILT team was actually signed by several of

the members on the BILT as opposed to having each one of them have a different letter. I think that probably is a good thing to do if you already have a well-established business team.

Michael Lesiecki - Here at Maricopa we use that same strategy. Our recent submission had six co-signers of a letter saying in effect, "We, the undersigned, commit the following," I think it was effective approach we are using now.

Elaine, when you submit either with your grant or for other purposes do you use letters? Do you use memorandums? Do you use this multiple signing of the same letter? What do you think works for you?
Elaine Johnson- I think that as you look at the solicitation, it's from the National Science Foundation, the partners are asked to write a letter of commitment; it's not just a letter of support. So I would say that we use a letter of commitment and then, I agree with Ann, that if we have sub awards, we always have a memorandum of understanding and to go through exactly what that means. But, the commitment part is one that not everybody knows how to write. They don't know what that commitment might look like. So there were in the questions last time the request to say, "What are some examples of commitment." I'm prepared to address that, but I think that everyone, all of us, could give certain examples of what a commitment might look like.

Give us one example of where someone has done something that really stands out as a commitment to you.
Elaine Johnson - The top of the list for our particular industry seems to be internships and the companies are often times reluctant to commit to an internship, but we have over many years now provided expectations; talked about what that might look like; who the mentor might be for a student that goes to work in a particular industry; what the outcomes will be; at the end of the internship will there be some reporting back. We have a networking event where all our interns share what they've done and we have expectations that the companies will support those students in some way. They will commit to having the interns work in teams, learn presentation skills, and do mock interviews. So within the internship, itself, there is a tremendous amount of commitment, but it's a difference than just saying we will offer an internship, it's a real way of committing to a successful experience for both them and the students. In our case, this is often times the way students get hired permanently, because the companies like the intern so well and they know what they can do and they've had a chance to really interact with them. So that's one example.

Marilyn Barger - I would put it the top of our list, a commitment to work with students. For us, it's typically a broader statement than a particular internship and I agree with all Elaine said that the internship is very much like a partnership where you need to really know what the expectations are on both sides, both from the institution, the student and the company as well. In some cases an MOU if college credits are involved. A lot of bulk there, but in the letter, I think, stating that you're going to work with the students and that may be in terms of internship for us a lot of times and maybe similarly for biotech, it's working on projects, mentoring students in projects, research projects or design projects in the engineering field. Think very specifically that they'll commit some time so the organization or themselves, personally, depending on the letter that you're writing with students. I think the interaction with students, however it is, is right up there in the kind of priority list, it's a lot of time commitment on their part. The money part, I think, is not to be mentioned, because we're not supposed to have that kind of commitment, I think, in those letters anymore, so some type of time commitment. I often see in a letter that the letters built in three parts: I understand what you want to do, this is your project idea in a nutshell; this is what we do and what we need. And then, here's where we are going to help you if

you're funded, and that sometimes is simply put in a short bullet list. We'll work with the program managers of the program directly on their curriculum. We will interact with students with internships and/ or student support in this other way project, research, mentoring and those kinds of things and that short bullet list stands out in the letter as something that they're actually going to do.

Michael Lesiecki - We use a similar three tiered structure. So sort of picking up on what you said, the partner says, "This is what we understand you're going to do;" number two, "Here's why we think it's good," and then, number three, "Here's what we will do to help you." So that's the important paragraph at the end. Elizabeth Teles from the National Science Foundation says avoid love letters. I thought, "That's a very funny term here." You know, we think this is wonderful. Well, yeah, how about a bit more than that. So avoid the love letters.

Ann Beheler – Well, I think commitment to work with students is very important, but again, we feel that the whole BILT approach and having the four meetings per year is essential. Its essential foundation for what we do, it promotes engagement, and it keeps us not out of sight out of mind but presently in mind. In the original regional proposal, we had individual letters from businesses and that was long enough ago that it was not absolutely forbidden to have love letters. And I'm afraid, probably; some of ours were love letters at that point in time. People were saying we're going to support, because remember they're laying off. They couldn't say a whole lot other than they would participate with us in the BILT process to prepare the curriculum of the future, because they were betting on the future in the industry. Now that the businesses actually have built relationships with one another, it was actually their suggestion, this last time, that they have a joint letter and list the things that they have done in the past and are prepared to do in the future to support the work and not the least of which was participating in the BILT four times a year; giving trends three times a year and working on the actual curriculum alignment once a year. But, also working with students; working with students from the standpoint of one-on-one mentoring; working with students from the stand point of presenting; coming to the campuses across the nation to actually present to a classroom full of individuals and then; they listed several other things. They; over time; have provided professional development for us for free and they committed to continue to do that and they do. It's not every single business, every year that does that, but they do over time. So I think it's very strong for them, for a amateur BILT, to have the one letter with multiple signatures. However, it didn't start that way, but it is a focus on commitment now: what are we doing; what's their understanding of what we're doing; who are they; why is it important if you're talking about a company that does not have name recognition? It's very important to make sure that it's clear what that company does and why they care about your work. Then, what are they committed to do.

Michael Lesiecki - From our side here, in addition to the ones internships are tough, because it really does involve a commitment from industry and they are very valuable. Another thing that we've enjoyed the commitment for is subject matter expertise. So as we look at curriculum of our program, does our program currently meet industry needs? If you can get the time of one of their subject matter experts, let's say, in digital manufacturing or some area like that, it can really enhance what you're doing. You can say, "You know this is vetted with this industry." You don't want to have a single company giving you their own opinion necessarily, but I think subject matter expertise is it is a great commitment. We talked a little bit about partnerships involving money, Marilyn, you made a comment, and I thought I might elaborate on it a little bit. Although a partnership can involve money within a grant application, you're right, you can't suggest that there's an in-kind contribution from a partner that's no longer allowable as part of budgeting process, but there may be other ways outside of the grant process, itself, that could work.

Is breaking up hard to do? Have you had to break up with a partner? Did you just let it wither on the vine or did you do something active to say let's end our relationship here? Did you ever come across that instance?

Marilyn Barger – Sure, several times of course, but we operate primarily under the idea that I coined, the *coalition of the willing.* It takes a lot of work from our side, our organizational side to keep the *willing group* growing and as opportunities change, our direction and emphasis may shift slightly. Some have weaned themselves out because the interest overlap is not really there. I don't know that we've run into a case where we actually quote "divorced" someone, because we don't have those kinds of arrangements with any institutions or organizations. But we have made conscious notation where conversations with organizations say, "This isn't really working; we've gone a different path; we're on a different mission," and shifted at least in some verbal communication and made kind of a clean cut. In other cases, we've let them just drift away. So I think that could depend on the actual partnership and perhaps the exact person who you're working with or persons that you're working with. Who may have changed either their jobs, or they're their own emphasis within the company.

Michael Lesiecki - If I could editorialize here a little bit on my own area, we allow substitutions. For example, as you said people change or maybe their structure changes. We make it clear from the front end of this that sure it's okay to have a substitution. We want the commitment from the company, we'd rather have a substitution than you not showing or not being part of it is the idea.

Now a partner has committed to you by either a letter or MOU form, what if they don't do it? What if they don't do the things, is there a way you can hold their feet to the fire or do you have to break up or what?

Ann Beheler - Oh yes, and it's not pleasant. How many breakups have you ever had that were pleasant? We've gone to quote unquote "counseling" before to come to a new approach. Again, it's not so much in working with the businesses; it's working with the actual partners that get sub awards. That's why it's very, very important to have a statement of work with each of those sub award that says you will do this, this, this, this and this in order to get the budget that you have asked for. We've had a partner who just never showed up or anything, but wanted the money, that didn't last. We negotiated with that person. We went to that person's boss and that person's boss's boss and tried to work it out. We finally got a different person on at that college that we could work with and that did work out. So we didn't break up with the college, but we broke up with the individual. We have actually had a situation where one of our partners was a very, small college and they only had one person for us to be able to work with and it just did not work out. Sometimes people can be quote "partners," we throw that word around a lot, but sometimes they can be partners without an SOW and their stellar but with an SOW and money coming they can be difficult and not get the work done. So, yeah, we had to eliminate that entire college and say, "You're welcome to be involved in our work, but you won't get money from us anymore." You know, let's face it, it's taxpayer money, we have a fiduciary responsibility to make sure that that money is well spent and that the government, NSF, we get value for money spent. Yes, it's very, very hard. Interestingly enough, on sub awards it's up to the prime institution to manage those to ensure that they're working, to ensure that the partner is producing what they're supposed to produce and if they're not to negotiate a solution that works for both sides if in fact it can be. It's always nice to substitute something that also works, but if it can't be, breaking up is hard to do, but very necessary.

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