



## PART FOUR: ON THE WAY

### CHAPTER 10

#### ON THE WAY PART ONE: EXPLORATION

---

##### *CORE IDEA*

*We usually don't choose to take the long road. Life is a journey on which, all too often, we look for shortcuts. Getting God's people to work together in partnership is no different. All of us wish there were an easy way to overcome barriers, build relationships, develop trust and common vision, and see wonderful outcomes. But, the early, Exploration stage of a partnership is no place for shortcuts. Make your strategic investments of time, prayer, and energy here, and you will see rich dividends later. This chapter shows you what's involved and how to do it.*

---

In the vital Exploration phase of partnership development, a lot of time is spent one on one. You'll be asking questions and *listening*, expanding your personal base of information, and multiplying relationships. You'll also be broadening your understanding about the realities of the vision you have in mind and the perceptions of *others*. Remember, an individual's *perceptions* are usually his or her *reality*—even though their perceptions may be quite different from yours!

During this phase you'll also need to identify who will serve as the partnership's facilitator or facilitation team. Later, an entire chapter will be devoted to this key person or group of people. You may be that person. Or you may be instrumental in finding him or her. It's extremely helpful for the longer-term facilitator to be involved in these early stages—meeting people, getting a good sense of the issues, and helping design the process.

In any case, the facilitator(s) must be patient, tenacious, and committed to the vision. This person needs to demonstrate the spirit of a servant while bringing the partnership to life and keeping the fires burning. This “honest broker” must be a person of integrity who will keep on, despite all discouragement. The facilitator is prophet, servant, and resource person, who must be trained, nurtured, and encouraged.

*PARTNERSHIP IN PRACTICE: The Exploration phase of a particularly challenging international partnership I worked on went like this. In the early stages, with colleagues, we identified approximately twenty ministries that either had already done something on this project or had said they were interested in doing something in the next two to three years. Because the project was located in a country in which the borders had been closed to outsiders for a long time, only a handful of people had personally visited the project location.*

*Over a period of eighteen months, I visited the top leaders in sixteen of these ministries. One of the great challenges was that these ministries were scattered from Finland to Holland, from Germany to Australia, and from the U.S. to the U.K.! Great skepticism and interpersonal problems meant that, in many cases, I had to meet multiple times with the same leaders to build relationships and an initial level of trust.*

*This was not a matter of driving across town for a cup of coffee with an interested party. These were expensive airplane trips. Once there, the meetings often took three to four hours. Before the Exploration phase was complete, dozens of these meetings had taken place. During this time, I could tell absolutely no one about this quiet, behind the scenes work, except those I was calling on. Before any leaders were invited to a meeting to discuss the project and a possible partnership approach to it, nearly \$30,000 had already been invested in phone, fax, air fares, hotel, taxi, and food bills!*

Imagine having to write up a progress report on an initiative like that. Yes, quiet, behind the scenes progress had been made. But there certainly wasn't much to show for all this investment of Kingdom resources—at least not yet. Talk about a journey of faith!

You could say, “But, I just want to do something here in my home town. I don't need to do all that complicated stuff!” Absolutely true. However, remember that, while each person I called on had an affiliation with some ministry, each was, first and foremost, *an individual*—a real person with emotions, hopes, dreams, families, and a history. And if you're thinking and praying about a partnership of God's people in your home town, you need to spend time with people—first as individuals. If they are with an organization or ministry, their personal feelings may be intertwined with their ministry's agenda. We'll talk more about those challenges later. But first, they are people.

Your partnership Exploration journey probably won't be so arduous. But done prayerfully and carefully, it will always take the same level of commitment and patience.

? *Potential Resource:* You might like to review sections of Chapter 5, which explores the process of change. There always has to be “stone clearing, planting, and watering” before “reaping” can occur. By exploring a potential partnership, you are proposing change. It's a process and takes real patience.

#### *YOUR KEY ACTION POINTS*

- You will have your prayer team in place!
- You will get to know who is doing what.
- You will identify the most influential and knowledgeable people in the field (as you know, they aren't always the same!).
- One on one, you will talk with, listen to, and get to know these leaders: their background, vision, and current involvement in the issue that concerns you.

- You will expand your knowledge, your network of relationships, and your personal credibility.
- You will identify the potential partnership facilitator or form the facilitation team (see the next chapter, “Formation”). It’s vital for them to be involved in these early stages and get the training they need for their important role.



GET WELL CONNECTED FOR MINISTRY  
BUY THE BOOK AT [WWW.CONNECTEDBOOK.NET](http://WWW.CONNECTEDBOOK.NET)

?

#### *A KEY PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE:*

- In effective partnership development, someone has to be at least acquainted with everyone!

Why? Someone has to be acquainted with all the main issues. And someone has to know where the historical, relational, and operational land mines are located! The facilitator or the facilitation team need to know as much as possible: about the history, relationships, players, current feelings and relationships between the players, and what they think about the vision under discussion.

This information and this relational “bank account” are major assets. Make the investment now, and it will pay major dividends.

Particularly as you move into the next phases of your partnership’s development, you want to *minimize* the surprises and *maximize* the consensus. No matter how diligent you’ve been, count on it—there will still be plenty of surprises!

Whether your vision is for your neighborhood or community, a whole city, or a group of people somewhere else in the world who need Jesus’ love and freedom, investing the time in this first phase, Exploration, will pay huge dividends as you move forward.

So how do you actually go about this key phase called Exploration? Who does it? What are the main steps? How is it done? What are key indicators that you’re ready for the next phase of your partnership’s development? Let’s take a look.

#### *WHO DOES THE EXPLORATION?*

The simple answer is—the person with the burning vision for the partnership and its potential.

This is not something that can be farmed out to someone else—neither well-meaning volunteers nor even paid staff. The vision has to be strongly felt, a conviction deep inside, for a person to play this critical role.

So if you’re the person with the vision, you are likely the one to do this all-important groundwork. But before you say, “Whoa! No way. I don’t have the time or the ability,” consider a few things.

Depending on your time availability and the urgency of the vision, there may be alternatives.

- You may be able to work on the project part time, meeting with potential partners (individuals or ministries) as you can. It may take a little longer, but you can assure continuity of vision and approach.
- If you have a friend or colleague who has the *same vision and same commitment*, you may be able to split the work and speed up the process.
- If you have a small, preliminary working group of people who *are fully behind the vision and share your level of commitment*, you may be able to select two or three people to serve as an Exploration team. In turn, these “explorers” can meet regularly with your working group, report on the feedback they get and fine tune their interview process.

If more than one person is involved in the Exploration, each one must be saying the same thing, taking the same approach in the meetings/interview, and be looking for and ready to report on the same kinds of information.

See Chapter 13, “The Partnership Facilitator: The Vision-Powered Servant Leader.” It’s full of suggestions for identifying this key person or facilitation team and effectively preparing and nurturing them for the role.

*PARTNERSHIP SUGGESTION:*

- When you actually get into the Exploration interviews, it’s very easy to get sidetracked. It may seem obvious, but it is vital that you stick closely to your objectives and planned approach. I cover some of the challenges you will face and approaches to take a bit later. See, particularly, the suggestions in “How’s The Exploration Done?” later in this chapter.

*CONTINUITY IN LEADERSHIP*

The person or persons doing the Exploration phase *must be active participants in leadership or facilitation when you get to the critical Formation, go, no-go phase of the Partnership*. That’s why it’s important to identify this person or team early.

The knowledge base you build, relationships you establish, and trust you or your explorers develop all come into play at the crucial partnership Formation point (next chapter). Potential partners will be face to face, talking and praying about the possibility of working together on a common vision. They need to be working with individuals they have already met and come to know.

*THE MAIN STEPS IN EXPLORATION?*

1. *Be knowledgeable about your topic.* Not an expert. Certainly not *the* expert. But in doing the Exploration interviews with potential partners, ministries, or individuals, an important part of your credibility will be your own knowledge of the topic. Whether you meet with senior pastors, ministry leaders, or community agency personnel, they all have

had to deal with too many well-intentioned but uninformed people with a new idea! Get as many facts as possible about the problem that has inspired your vision.

For the sake of illustration, let's suppose you want to launch a partnership for ministry to street kids in your city. You need a *pretty good idea* of their current situation: How many there are, who they are, their demographics, what services are currently offered, who is providing the services, how services are funded, and where gaps and overlap in service may exist. Possibly most important, you should know what previous efforts, if any, have been made to encourage cooperation in working with street kids—and what became of those initiatives.

You can immediately begin to see that if more than one person is working on this Exploration phase, actually interviewing/talking with potential partner agencies, each one has to be working from the same knowledge base. Impossible? No. But it means that coordination, full information sharing, and mutual feedback are critical.

2. *Find out who is already involved.* If you feel you've already developed a good understanding of who is doing what, great. If not, you need to know which individuals, agencies, ministries, churches, and so on, are currently trying to deal with the challenge of street kids. You not only need names, addresses, and phone numbers. If you're talking about ministries or community agencies, you also need to know the names of the leaders. In the "How's It Done?" section just below, I strongly recommend that you always start with the leader. More on that later.

*A KEY PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE:*

- If at all possible, it's important that your partnership or network team include individuals who represent the group you are trying to serve or reach. Trying to develop a partnership to reach or serve the street kids in your city? Better have some who have "been there, done that" in your discussions and planning. Hoping to change the way ministries coordinate their efforts? Better make sure leadership from those ministries is involved. It may seem obvious. But many times this key principle is overlooked—particularly when language, cultural, or social circumstances are natural barriers. The conscious effort to include these people will pay rich dividends.

Beyond names and contact information, you need to know at least something about what a particular individual or organization does. Demonstrate that you have taken the time to learn something about them and the role they play. It's another step in establishing your personal credibility. (We've all dealt with a salesperson who tries to sell us something by pretending to be interested in us—but who clearly doesn't *really* know anything about us and obviously cares just about as much!)

So before doing your first face-to-face Exploration interviews, you need to have an initial database of information about who is involved and, generally, what they are doing. Phone books, local government agencies, public libraries, Internet Web sites, and Internet search engines can all yield valuable information. If you feel you already have a fairly thorough idea of who is working in the field, fine. Experience suggests that the Exploration process can expand your understanding, strengthen your credibility, and deepen relationships. So if you know you need more information, think of the obvious sources first.

*PARTNERSHIP IN PRACTICE: Over the years I have found that an honest, interested approach can yield a treasure of information. From my days as a journalist, it's called the "front door" strategy.*

*Let's take the street kids challenge, for example. Even if you think want to engage the wider community, it is usually important for a core group of individuals, churches, and/or local Christian ministries to come to consensus about the need first. A natural question is, "Which local churches or Christian ministries already have initiatives for street kids under way?"*

*Among the explicitly Christian groups, you might want to talk with the leadership of Youth for Christ, Young Life, or other Christian youth agencies in your area. It would also make sense to contact the youth or urban ministry staff of three or four key churches, especially ones that you or others know have a commitment to ministry outside their four walls—in the city. When you call, use the same approach with each. Seeking information from multiple sources helps you get a more complete, objective idea of what's going on.*

*In the general community, you might try calling the police community relations department. Simply indicate you're an interested citizen and ask if 1) they have a list of agencies or organizations working with street kids, or, 2) lacking a list, could they give you the names of two or three groups they know are actively working with street kids?*

*There may be a juvenile crime prevention group in the city. Look for a Youth or Youth and Family Services department or agency. The local United Way could be a valuable source of information.*

*When you make these initial "who is doing what" calls, I strongly recommend not raising the issue of partnership or cooperation. At this stage, you are just trying to become as knowledgeable as possible. Even mentioning the word "partnership" now will probably raise questions you're not ready to answer—particularly on the phone. You don't want to needlessly raise barriers to a face-to-face meeting. This is not deception. Your vision will emerge at the right time. Remember, men and women in a growing love relationship may think about the possibility of marriage for quite a while before they actually talk about it!*

The vision and goals of your project may differ sharply from those of a partnership focused on street kids. The Appendix suggests further resources and sources of information. You may find it helpful.

3. Based on your initial round of information gathering, *decide which individuals, organizations or ministries are your first personal interview priorities.* As you conduct the interviews, keep in mind that you are likely to uncover new information about these individuals or ministries. That new information may, in turn, expand or modify the list of those you want to interview face to face.

To prioritize your interviews, here are a couple of factors to keep in mind:

- In these initial contacts, which names have most frequently been mentioned? Are there certain leaders, agencies, ministries, or churches that people have consistently referred to?
- In your initial conversations, have you heard phrases like, “Mary Jones is by far the most knowledgeable person,” or “Agency/organization X really seems to be the most active”?

Combined with any other research you have done (on Web sites, etc.), this kind of information can guide you to natural starting points in your Exploration process. If your vision is for your neighborhood or community, this initial round of interviews may involve only a handful of leaders or ministries. But a vision taking in a larger area or larger population group could involve talking personally with many more.

If your vision is reaching and serving a town or large city, you face special challenges. See Chapter 18, “Special Cases, Special Opportunities—Partnership: The Challenge of Cities,” for specific suggestions, ideas, and illustrations.

4. Once your Exploration interviews are complete, *use the information you gather to make a decision about moving on* to the next phase of partnership development—Formation. The next section, “How’s It Done?,” will help clarify the types of information you or your exploration team will gather, some of the challenges you may face, and the outcomes you can expect.

#### *HOW’S IT DONE?—THE EXPLORATION INTERVIEWS*

It may seem strange, even counterintuitive, particularly with a vision that may be burning in your heart, but remember: In this phase of partnership development, your goal is *not* to convince ministry leaders to be part of a partnership! Your goal is to collect information, build relationships, and *seek positive consensus around two very simple but central questions* (using the street kids challenge as the example):

1. “Do you think there is anything that *might* be accomplished more effectively with street kids if the various interested groups worked together rather than each one doing its own thing?”
2. “If there *are* other agencies/ministries interested in exploring possible areas of greater collaboration in serving street kids, would you have any interest in being part of those discussions?”

If you get a positive answer to these two questions, even if the response is tentative, you have all the commitment you need—for the moment. During the interview, you may get varied responses.

- *Indifferent to negative.* Don't be discouraged! See ideas on what to do with leaders/agencies who say no.
- *Strongly positive.* That's great!
- *Initially negative* but, as you discuss the ideas further, turning to conditional openness.

Note that with these questions you are intentionally *doing* certain things and *avoiding* others. You are:

- Not assuming that a partnership *will* be born. You're exploring what people think about the idea of *possibly* working together.
- Not asking people to endorse a partnership, much less join one. You're exploring their readiness to sit down and talk about the potential added value of cooperation with others.
- Not defining what the primary priorities might be for a partnership if it did come together. That is something the *group* has to decide when the leaders meet together—if they decide to move forward.
- Not defining in specific terms how such a partnership might be structured and function. If the group meets, talks, and prays, then decides to go forward, *they* will have to develop a consensus about what structure is needed and how it will operate.

*PARTNERSHIP IN PRACTICE: Joanna had been working as a nurse practitioner in a Southeast Asian country for nearly ten years. Medical services had proven to be a valuable practical demonstration of Christ's love for the people in this country, where so many had so little access to basic health services. She was a senior person in her own ministry and knew many of the people in the other five ministries doing medical work in the country. Through informal talks with friends and colleagues, Joanna sensed major gaps and, at times, overlap in the work of the various medical organizations. Collaboration between ministries was lacking. And as a group, their communication with the government's department of health was not coordinated.*

*A meeting with a ministry partnership specialist living in the region bolstered her confidence and helped her map out the initial steps of her strategy. Eager to move things along, in the first meeting she had with the leader of another medical ministry, Joanna proposed that the various ministries could work together in some kind of partnership. Even though she had known this leader for several years, she wasn't ready for his skepticism. "We're all spread too thin as it is," he said. "We don't have time for more meetings. Besides, my experience has been that most talk about cooperation really goes nowhere."*

*After several e-mail exchanges with the partnership specialist, Joanna revised her strategy. In the interviews with the four other ministry leaders she took a different approach. She focused on where the leaders felt there were gaps in health service in the country and the main*

*roadblocks they faced in their own work. When she asked about their interest in sitting down with others to explore ways to address these challenges, she found them much more interested.*

Joanna had recognized a key reality in partnership development: To even consider working with other groups, people must sense some need—either in their own ministry or among the people they are trying to reach or serve. Without that sense of need, there is little motivation to seriously consider working together more closely.

? *Potential Resource:* You might like to review sections of Chapter 6. It deals with *motivation* and the crucial role it plays in ministry direction and in bringing real change to individuals. Effective partnerships are only launched or sustained by *motivated* individuals.

Whatever the response in the interview, keep moving forward, stay positive, and don't try to argue about the value of partnership. Here are things that need to come through clearly and strongly to the individual you're interviewing:

- Your love for and commitment to the vision (street kids).
- Your respect for the person you're interviewing, their history, commitment, and service.
- Your desire to know more about their work and their vision.
- Your sincere belief (not dogmatism!) that working together really makes sense. You believe coordinated efforts in other situations have been shown to have real, positive value to (the kids) and to the participating organizations.
- Your goal at this stage is solely to explore the *possibility* of partnership and facilitate the process. Ultimately, any decision about working together has to be made by those actively involved—when they meet and talk.

Does this mean you are passive? Hardly! Already, commitment to this vision and the Exploration process has taken a great deal of time, prayer, work, connections, and initiative. And you know there is more ahead. So while you're a listener/learner at this stage, by simply being there, expressing clear interest in the issue, and positively exploring the potential of working together—you are *active*!

Any "selling" of the partnership vision may be more implicit than explicit at this point. But you *are* an ambassador, an advocate for the vision.

Assessment:

- You have done your advance research and feel fairly comfortable about your general awareness of who is doing what.
- You have decided which individuals and/or ministry leaders are your priorities for personal interviews.
- You have a pretty good idea of what you want to cover when you are face to face with these people.
- You have, ideally, identified who the facilitator or facilitation team will be. These people need to be actively involved in this process!

### *TYPICAL CHALLENGES YOU MAY FACE*

When you make the call to set up the interview appointment, what challenges are you most likely to face?

Remember, if you are talking with experienced people in the field—street kids, for example—they:

- Are skeptical of strangers with new ideas. As we discussed earlier, they've had their share of well-intentioned but naive people coming to them with "hot new ideas."
- Are skeptical of talk about collaboration. They've had bad experiences; they think it's a waste of time; they are already overworked and under resourced; or they can't see any potential added value for their agency or ministry.
- Will wonder about your motivation. So much talk about partnership is really a strategy by *one organization* to strengthen its own private mission. Often, partnership talk is really about a private agenda, not one that serves everyone.
- Will find it hard to believe that you really are only committed to two things: the welfare of street kids and helping the various organizations become more effective, individually and collectively.
- Will question your credibility, wanting to know, "What do you know about street kids?" and, "Who asked *you* to take this initiative?" (See the box below on what this really means and your potential response.) Remember that, even among Christian leaders, there are often well established ideas about others' ministries. Those perceptions may be positive or negative!

### *THE NUTS AND BOLTS*

When you actually sit down with the individual, it is important to ask if you can take notes as the two of you talk. This lets them know you respect them and their time, you take their desires seriously, and want to make sure you can accurately recall the main points of your discussion. Do not, under any circumstances, try to use an electronic recorder of any type. Too threatening!

So, what do you want to accomplish in these interviews? Here's a checklist:

- Understand the history, purpose, current activity, and future plans and dreams of the individual or the agency/ministry with regard to street kids.
- Get a sense of the interviewees—their personality, style, history, "call" to their work, frustrations, and hopes.
- Learn what they feel are the priority challenges in dealing with street kids.
- Discover what resources they think are needed for more effective work with street kids.
- Find out what they see as the main roadblocks to progress on better, more complete service to street kids?

- Learn from them what other individuals or organizations are working with street kids. Can they give you their sense of what these agencies actually do? (Note: In this area of the interview you want to stay focused on *objective* information about other people or agencies—their vision, work, etc. However, be alert because, as you would expect, most of the leaders have their own *subjective* idea about others working in the field: their style, the quality of their work, their reputation, and so on.
- Find out if this individual or ministry has collaborated or is now collaborating with other agencies to serve street kids. If yes, what’s the purpose of the cooperation and—very important—how do they feel about the results?
- Do they know of any other partnerships or collaborative efforts, past or present, for street kids? If yes, ask for their description and assessment of those efforts.

When you have covered this much, you will have a pretty good sense of the kind of person you’re talking with, the purpose and nature of their agency or ministry, and some indication of their openness to working with others. So, at last, you come to the two key questions we covered earlier:

- Does the leader feel there is *anything* that might be accomplished more effectively for street kids if the various interested groups in the area worked together more fully and consistently? If so, what might that be? If not, why not? (Note: This is obviously a critical point in the discussion. Make good notes and ask questions to make sure you understand what the leader is saying. The chapter on the partnership facilitator has suggestions on active listening that may help.)
- If, in the course of these interviews, other agencies or ministries serving street kids indicate an interest in exploring the possibility of working together more closely, would this leader want to be part of those discussions?

*Suggestion:* Before you meet, write out the key questions you want to cover. The list needs to be short—no more than six to eight questions. In the interview, those six to eight basic questions may, of course, lead to related questions or issues. But *stay focused* and always get back to your core questions. You want to be able to at least informally compile and compare the feedback from the different interviews. To do that you need to be consistent in your approach. This is particularly true if you have a team of explorers working with you. *Everyone needs to be working from the same page with the same limited objectives in mind.*

At the end of the interviews, thank the leaders for their time. Assure them that if your interviews with other individuals suggest there is interest in exploring collaboration, you will keep them fully apprised. Even if people have expressed skepticism about cooperation, ask if they would want to be informed if any further talks were planned. Most leaders, even if they are negative, want to know what’s going on with others!

*PROCESS SUGGESTION:*

- You believe the issue you're concerned about is important. You believe partnership could be a key to more effective service and witness. You believe that prayer is central to enabling God's people to work together. Now is a good time to bring all of these elements together. Based on your assessment of the person and the situation, you may want to suggest closing your meeting in prayer. This is no time for pious formulas. Now is the time for honesty and candor—in what you say and how you pray. The person you've met with, his or her work, the larger challenge, and the potential for collaboration would all be natural prayer points. Again depending on your assessment of the person and the situation, you may want to invite the leader to pray with you. Or you may simply ask if you can lead in prayer to conclude your time together. Authenticity is key.

*A KEY PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE:*

- The more neutral the partnership facilitator is, the easier it will be for that person to approach others with experience in the field. It is usually very hard for staff from a ministry already engaged in the issue to facilitate a partnership's development. Many will fear that they really represent their *own organization's* agenda—not the common good.

Is it impossible for an insider to facilitate such a process? No. But, without hiding their identity, an insider has to take off their own organization's "hat" and consciously seek to be a neutral honest broker.

"Who asked you to take this initiative?" This question addresses your credibility, experience, motivation, and organizational affiliation. Let's look at it in more detail.

## “WHO ASKED *YOU* TO TAKE THIS INITIATIVE?”

Stated or unstated, this question, in one form or another, is likely to be in the minds of many you interview. Count on it! It’s not personal. It’s not negative. It’s natural. What it really means can vary. It may mean:

- “What is your *real* agenda?”
- “I don’t know you. I know everyone who’s doing anything with street kids. I’ve never heard of you, so you must not have much experience in this field.”
- “Why do you think *you* should take initiative like this?”
- “I don’t like the idea of someone else taking an initiative like this. It might preempt one of my own pet projects—or threaten my own inflated sense of my leadership in this field.”
- “What organization are you with? I know all the organizations working with street kids and have real questions about some of them.” (Getting your organizational affiliation is a shortcut to pigeon holing you and your likely agenda.)

Don’t be discouraged. Remember, *working together is worth it*. But if it were easy, everyone would already be doing it—right? You can establish credibility with these agency leaders through several means:

- Their foregoing knowledge and positive impression of you or the organization you represent.
- Your demonstrated knowledge and/or experience in the field.
- Your previous involvement in successful partnership development and/or knowledge of effective collaboration undertaken by others in this field.
- Your conduct—both in the initial phone contact and in the interview.
- Your demonstrated, genuine interest in them and their ministry.
- Your demonstration of integrity—especially by what you say and don’t say about other relevant ministries and their leaders.
- Your faithfulness to your promises. You do *what* you say you will do, *when* you say you’ll do it.

Remember: Honesty is the best policy!

Have open eyes, ears, and heart and a closed mouth. **Never** talk about others you have previously interviewed in a judgmental way. “Revealing” anything but factual information can be the kiss of death to your credibility. Rightfully, the person you’re interviewing expects that the things the two of you discuss will be the same things you’ll discuss with others. Why should they be open and honest with you if you betray their trust? It often takes weeks or months to prove your integrity, as a person waits to hear from others what you’ve said about them!

## THE CHALLENGE OF ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATION

Embedded in the question, “Who asked you to take this initiative?” are established ideas that individuals working in the field have about *others* working in the field. The “others” may be individuals, ministries (churches, agencies, and so on), or a combination of the two. You may be fortunate and already affiliated with an agency or ministry that is known to be competent in the field—and neutral. Finding both qualities in the same organization is rare. But if that is the case, you probably have a good base from which to work. On the other hand what if that’s not your situation?

If you’re not affiliated with a known, respected, neutral agency or ministry:

- Check around for one that might share your vision and could become the home base for your efforts. If you ask diplomatically, people knowledgeable in the field may agree that there’s one agency or ministry in the city or region who fits this description.
- Check with others about existing networks related to your area of interest that may already exist. Those networks may specialize in fields like youth, media, urban, or ethnic ministries. It may be that pastors are already meeting regularly in your area. You might want to explore the potential of presenting the vision to the pastors. In this case, your main agenda may *not* be getting their actual involvement in a partnership. Rather, at this stage you may seek their endorsement of *exploring* the partnership idea among other individuals, churches, and ministries in the area—and *using their pastor’s group as your base of reference*. If you’re working internationally, the networks may be focused on evangelism and church planting; scripture translation, production, or distribution; or relief and development.
- In this early phase, if you and maybe a few of your friends are the only ones committed to the vision, say so. Ideally, you have this vision because you’ve been involved with the work for some time and see unrealized potential for ministry. If so, better to just say, “I’ve worked as a volunteer for (x years) with (xx organization) and have gotten to know a number of people in the field. I’ve seen how, in other cities and other types of ministry, collaboration has often been very helpful. As I talked with a few others, we felt it would be worth exploring the potential for more collaboration in ministry (to street kids) here in our city.”

Again, honesty is the best policy. Better be up front, because in ten to fifteen minutes of talking, an experienced person in the field will know whether you know what you’re talking about or not anyway. Honesty itself greatly strengthens your credibility.

It may seem obvious, but the scale of the area or complexity of your vision tends to dictate whom you need to interview. If it’s your neighborhood, the number you need to talk with may be limited. But if you’re dealing with a big project—a city, an unreached people group, or another complex initiative—you can’t interview everyone. Therefore, it is all the more important to identify *key or influential* parties.

*A KEY PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE:*

- You don't need to have *all* the players ready to talk about possible cooperation. But you do need *a few* of the leaders or ministries already recognized as credible and competent in the field. I have found that if you have thirty to fifty percent of the more influential people, you have a good start. The initiative will become linked to their credibility. If the partnership moves forward, the others looking on will eventually be drawn in.

*PARTNERSHIP IN PRACTICE:*

*In a partnership I facilitated, the wider group kept bringing up a certain agency they felt should be involved. However, the leader of the agency was known to be quite independent. I got stuck with the assignment of going to visit the leader in person to encourage the participation of that ministry in the partnership process. On my first visit I was hospitably received, shown every courtesy, and told, "That idea of working together for this project is good for some, but we are very clear on what we are doing. Thank you for coming—and do come back any time."*

*I felt I had been patronized and the larger group's efforts trivialized. But over the next two years I made two other trips to visit this ministry, encouraging their participation. Each time I got the same reception and the same answer. Then, at the beginning of the third year, one of the partnership's task forces was holding a meeting on a topic that fell in the reluctant agency's area of primary activity. After the task force sent out notices for the specialized working meeting, no one was more surprised that I when the reluctant agency's leader for that kind of work showed up, was personable with everyone, and contributed effectively in the meetings. Following that, the agency became a long-term, active part of the partnership—something that never would have happened if we had not made the patient commitment to communicate with and relate to them in the early stages.*

*SIGNPOSTS OF SUCCESS*

OK, take a deep breath! Where are we in the process? Here's a short check list. You have:

- Identified most of the individuals, agencies, or ministries relevant to your field of interest.
- Identified the partnership facilitator or facilitation team and helped them get the training they need.
- Put your prayer team in place and engaged their active involvement.
- Identified the individuals and ministries that seem to be the leaders in the field because of their size, reputation for quality work, available resources, or innovation.
- Personally interviewed at least the majority of these key people.
- Developed an initial personal relationship with these leaders so that you are known to each other and your motivation and vision are established. (You will

have to keep on demonstrating your pure motives and neutrality. Be patient! It's a process, not an event!)

- Compiled the main points of your findings and identified key concerns/issues that the people and/or their ministries have in common.
- Come to a much more complete understanding of the perceived challenges and roadblocks in your field of interest.
- Learned a great deal about how the existing leaders feel about the priority issues—and about each other!
- Developed a fairly clear sense of which leaders feel greater cooperation might have value and are willing to invest some time in seriously exploring the possibility.
- Have met with your core group of friends and/or colleagues who are committed to this vision with you. Together, you have reviewed progress to date, prayed about it, and decided on next steps.

Have you made it this far in the process? Have some of the key players indicated their desire or readiness to meet and explore possible cooperation? Great—and congratulations! You have completed one of the most challenging and often discouraging stages of effective partnership development.

Make sure those committed to the vision—colleagues, your prayer support team, and others—know how things have gone. They need to share the fulfillment of knowing that God has brought you this far!

As you move forward, you will never regret the investment of time and energy you have made in this Exploration stage. Ready for the next step? The Formation stage is potentially the most challenging of all: intensive, stimulating, and rewarding.

Get your prayer team, review your vision, and press on!



GET WELL CONNECTED FOR MINISTRY  
BUY THE BOOK AT [WWW.CONNECTEDBOOK.NET](http://WWW.CONNECTEDBOOK.NET)