



PARTNERSHIPS:

The Never Ending Resource

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There are many benefits in working in the field of the active older adults. We are popular! Partnerships are easy to form and a successful partnership can be beneficial to all parties involved. Some partnerships we look for and other good ones seem to happen by accident. But however they come about, it is very important to be sure that the partnership is what we want. If it is, we do our best to make it a long term relationship.

To begin, you must decide what you are looking for and then evaluate the possibilities of what you are able to do and what the organization is able to bring to benefit your facility, programs and patrons.

Why Use Partnerships

First on the list are certainly the financial benefits we can gain. Sponsorships allow us to do more with our programs. We can provide additional benefits for our participants, many times at a more reasonable cost. Partnerships are also excellent for our community exposure. It gets our name out with businesses and other organizations and gives us visibility. Many partners can provide volunteer assistance. Schools and community service organizations can give us help with special events, fundraising projects, and much more. Many partners have certain areas of expertise and programs that they can offer us that we can't do ourselves. An example might be assisted living facilities that can give us programs on memory improvement. They offer the program and our participants benefit with little or no cost to us. Most importantly, partnerships allow us to provide better service to our participants.

What to Look for in a Partnership

We need to find an organization that has a similar philosophy as ours and is going to compliment what we have to offer. To begin, you must decide what you are looking for and then evaluate the possibilities of what you are able to do and what the organization is able to bring to benefit your facility, programs and patrons. Are they going to be hands-on and available to your patrons? Will they come to your facility and be visible to the patrons and talk with them and get to know them? Are they legitimate in what they are offering you? Are they an established

organization that is reputable? Do they seem to be dependable and are they willing to commit on a long term basis? Decide if the partnership will be an equal one and if all parties will follow through and benefit from what each party is offering. Ask yourself in any partnership situation if the participants are satisfied, are you getting what you bargained for and are all promises being kept by your partner. Watch out for people who come in and offer a lot but in reality are just looking for names and addresses of your participants to further their business ventures. No one should be able to contact your participants without their consent. Once the partnership begins, evaluate it and see if the expectations are met. If not, talk to the resource about what is lacking and decide whether you would like to continue the partnership. There are many resources out there willing and able to do whatever it takes to make things work. Remember, it is ok to say "no" to a partnership that is not a good fit or is not working out.

Once you have found and made a successful partnership, you really want to keep it! There are three very important ways to do this. First, always be sure to fulfill your part of the partnership. It is up to both sides of the partnership to do what is expected of them. Proper recognition is also essential. Partners can be listed in your publications. Representatives from a partner can be allowed to introduce themselves at the sponsored event. Third, be certain that partners are not competitive. You do not want to have businesses coming into your facility and competing for the same goal.

Community Groups

There are so many partnership opportunities in communities. Civic groups such as Rotary and Kiwanis are two examples. Schools and colleges can also provide programs and volunteers. An area active adult program recently did a workshop where high school students came to the facility and showed participants how to use their smart phones. It was called "Smart Phones with Smart Kids." Local businesses may provide speakers, door prizes, and other donations in return for some good publicity. A great example was a local caterer that had served luncheons at our facility for many years. When asked about a cooking demonstration at our facility, they responded with a four month series on different types of foods. It was all provided free of charge to us. Retirement communities are everywhere these days and they provide a wealth of partnerships. These organizations look for special events and programs to support. Their financial support is also a benefit for our active adult programs. Many times the retirement communities offer interesting programs at their facility and our participants may choose to take part.



Partnerships are out there, so start looking! You may be surprised what it can do for your active adult program.

Other Park Districts

Many park district active adult programs are now working with one another. Trip co-ops have allowed smaller groups to get together and travel. It is often a cost saving on buses and theater tickets. It is also fun when park district programs can get together to hold special events and parties that save money. Addison Park District is now working on growing a larger senior chorus by working with other park districts in the area. Seniors from the area may participate at no charge.

Special Recreation Associations

Reaching out to our Special Recreation Associations (SRAs) can also prove to be a successful partnership. Dundee Township Park District partnered with their SRA in purchasing a handicapped accessible bus. Now they are able to provide rides to seniors for Bingo, parties and other events they were previously not able to attend due to lack of transportation.

Friendship Village

A very successful partnership is held in the Chicago suburbs. The Silver Game is a partnership with Friendship Village, Schaumburg Park District and Dundee Park District. Seniors from all of these facilities come together to participate in various active and also not as active events including water volleyball, bags, fishing, chair hockey, Sudoku and pinochle. Friendships are made and the seniors are staying active both physically and mentally.

Police Departments

Many senior centers partner with their local police departments. The police come regularly to the centers and give updates on scams and how best to prevent them from happening. In return, the seniors participate in programs with which the police department needs volunteer assistance. Addison Park District partners with the police department regularly. Their group is called Seniors and Law Enforcement Together (SALT).

Dundee Township Senior Center partners with Group Theater Tix. Regularly they have the opportunity to preview shows to see if they are suitable for their groups, are given early announcement of future shows, receive great ticket prices, and occasionally are given tickets to raffle off so others may enjoy the current running shows.

Most important, we can always make our partnerships very close to home. Within our own park districts, we have great resources. At Dundee Park District, there is a “brain fit” program where a fitness supervisor begins the program with exercise which is followed by “brain games” on the computer.

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