



# Engaging Partners: Build Lasting Relationships in SNAP-Ed & EFNEP

The key concepts below can apply to relationships at and between all levels of community nutrition education: regional to national, state to state, agency to agency, and intra-institutional. Building and maintaining these relationships takes deliberate effort. The value and importance must be clearly communicated by leaders in the organization.

## Relationships are Key!

- ◆ **Build relationships from a perspective of plenty.** People who function from a perspective of scarcity may be hesitant to develop relationships. Those operating from a perspective of plenty may feel there are enough resources for everyone and be more willing—even eager—to share methods, mechanisms, and/or tools to create more resources.
- ◆ **Engage with people from other organizations likely to be involved in healthy eating and physical activity.** When pressures mount, the tendency may be to disengage from meetings that take time. However, attending those meetings is often where you learn what is happening and where opportunities exist to effectively collaborate.
- ◆ **Focus on the mission.** To build a relationship, focus on a mission bigger than the mission of participating organizations.
- ◆ **Trust, honesty, openness, fairness and appreciation are a must.** People are key. Value people within your organization who are skilled relationships builders. Often, a few people may have many relationships.
- ◆ **Searching and connecting is everyone's responsibility.** Although a few people may do most relationship building, everyone can look for new projects, directions, trends, and people with vision. Sharing this information with relationship builders can help make things happen. Provide feedback to contributors about what happened to keep them in the loop, informed, and engaged.
- ◆ **Exchange is fundamental.** Everyone has to gain for the partnership to endure. “What can you bring?” “What can others bring?” “What are you willing to give up?” “What are they willing to give up?” These are questions that must be answered while keeping the goal in mind - quality nutrition education for eligible people.
- ◆ **Be aware and respect your organization's guidelines about forming relationships.** Avoid the frustration of getting to the point of agreement, only to learn you are unable to formalize the partnership, i.e., with foundations, businesses, charitable groups, etc.
- ◆ **Dialogue with administrative personnel in your organization.** Include them in special events and apprise them of accomplishments. This builds appreciation for and support of your work and its contribution to the larger goals and mission of the organization.
- ◆ **Provide a structure where interaction is vital.** The State Nutrition Action Coalition (SNAC) mechanism recommended by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service may serve this role.