

Achieving the Promise of Cross-Sector Partnerships

The magnitude and complexity of many of today's public issues—the need for housing, the impacts of climate change, economic recovery, etc. – can no longer be addressed solely by the public sector acting alone. We have learned that piecemeal and siloed responses are not sufficient to get at these kinds of problems. These kinds of challenging issues require concerted, joint action from multiple sectors, often over a long period of time. To adequately grapple with these issues, savvy public leaders understand they must look beyond their own boundaries for opportunities to leverage external resources and expertise. There is growing recognition that the private, philanthropic, and civic sectors need to engage and work with the public sector to respond to present day challenges to achieve the desired outcomes.

This is not exactly a new concept. A literature survey reveals that multi-sector partnerships are being employed to address social and environmental problems in many areas of the world. However, in this country, outside of transportation and construction, there are few examples of multi-sector partnerships being employed to address social, environmental, and economic issues.

We believe what is needed that what is missing are systems dedicated to brokering and initiating these cross-sector partnerships – entities that can provide leaders with the structures, expertise, and support necessary to bring the sectors together to address public needs and achieve effective and equitable outcomes. That is what we are attempting to do in Oregon.

The Oregon iSector

Partnerships are not always easy. Each sector has different modes of operating, different timelines, incentives, constraints, etc. To help overcome the challenges to working across sectors, we have developed the Oregon iSector as a new sector in our state, one that offers elected officials, business, and civic leaders the structure and support they need to achieve and scale the promise of cross-sector partnerships.

The Oregon iSector provides a platform where leaders from the public, private and civic sectors can work together to address public needs. Our goal is to assist leaders by providing them with the capacity they need to seize opportunities to work together to address complex economic, environmental, and social challenges.

In our experience it takes leaders, particularly elected leaders, to successfully initiate cross sector partnerships to address public needs. And public leaders need external champions, leaders from other sectors who join them in support of their partnership efforts. Without this kind of leadership, institutions alone are not successful at launching and sustaining these kinds of partnerships.

Public leaders need to understand that while they may not have all the tools and resources they need to address tough issues, they do have the power to convene other leaders from across sectors – bringing them together to work toward solutions that will benefit their

communities. For leaders to play this convening role, these are the basic supports we believe they need:

1. Leaders need to have the capability at hand to develop strategic alignments and connect with other leaders from across the public, private and civic sectors in joint purpose. They need assistance with working across agencies and brokering partnerships with other sectors. They benefit when they also have access to additional capacity from an outside resource with expertise in initiating and conducting public-private partnerships. That is the role the Oregon iSector plays.

2. Leaders need a set of principles to guide their cross-sector work. Cross sector partnerships that are undertaken to achieve public purposes need to operate according to democratic principles. To date, some public-private partnerships have come in for criticism for practices and outcomes that have not stood up to scrutiny. The iSector provides a set of fundamental principles:

- Joint convening, co-ownership, and joint decision making
- Transparency and accountability
- Agreed to protocols for sharing information, communicating, and decision making
- Shared commitments to effective and equitable outcomes to meet community needs

The iSector has a model template for partnerships to adopt called the Declaration of Cooperation. It outlines the operational principles and protocols for the partnership and includes a statement of the partnership's purpose and the commitments partners make to each other and to the community.

3. Leaders need access to capacity to support the partnerships they initiate. They need help with providing process management, meeting information and resource needs, and handling communications. This is another need the iSector fulfills. Once the partnership has developed agreement on plans to achieve their desired outcomes, they need to locate resources and organizational capacity to manage the implementation.

4. Leaders need advocates to help champion and build institutional support for working across sectors. It takes advocacy to help potential partners understand how this approach can work to meet their objectives. It requires advocacy to remove barriers in existing governing systems, policies, and practices that prevent partnerships from getting off the ground, let alone achieving their potential. It could also require changes in the ways philanthropies think about grant making and the private sector deploys resources to leverage resources from other sectors to address the issues. Advocating for and securing the resources to support public, private, civic partnerships is critical to success and an important role for the iSector.

What An Oregon iSector Partnership Looks Like

Headed into 2020, Oregon had a deficit of more than 5,800 emergency shelter beds. When COVID-19 struck, existing shelters were no longer safe, and people with housing who needed to isolate or quarantine often lacked adequate space to do so. Then, the 2020 Labor Day fires destroyed more than 4,000 homes across eight counties. With winter looming, the

one-two punch of the pandemic and the fires had nearly doubled Oregon's already severe deficit of emergency shelter beds.

In response to this need, the Project Turnkey Partnership was initiated by the Oregon iSector. Co-conveners included the League of Oregon Cities, the Association of Oregon Counties, and the Oregon Community Foundation. Key partners included Hacienda CDC, Oregon Housing and Community Services, Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association and others. Together the partners developed a strategic plan to address both immediate and long-term shelter housing needs.

The partners called on the State Legislature to allocate funding to allow local governments and community organizations to buy local motels and convert them into emergency shelters. These facilities would keep residents safe from COVID-19, provide a comfortable, short-term refuge to people who lost homes in the fires, and add to the permanent housing inventory. Oregon lawmakers ultimately approved \$75 million for Project Turnkey. At the request of the Partnership, the Legislature named the Oregon Community Foundation as Project Turnkey's fiscal agent and administrator.

Project Turnkey created new temporary housing quickly and economically. In less than seven months, 19 new shelters in 13 counties were purchased and they comprise 865 new units of housing; that is a 20% increase in the state supply of shelter beds. Project Turnkey sites were developed for less than half (and in many cases, less than a third) of the typical cost for affordable housing. Statewide, the average cost per unit of affordable housing is \$226,000. The average unit cost for Project Turnkey properties was \$87,700—more than 50% less

The Conundrum: Creating Infrastructure, Resources, and Capacity for Cross Sector Partnerships

Cross sector partnerships do not magically come together. We believe lack of capacity is the largest barrier to the wider deployment of these kinds of partnerships. If the promise of this approach is to be realized, entities need to be created that provide infrastructure, resources, and capacity to:

- Identify the highest priority issues of government and the private, philanthropic, and non-profit sectors and seek alignment in those priorities
- Serve as a broker and intermediary, introducing and connecting leaders from across sectors and helping them form partnerships to address their priorities
- Provide management support for the partnership - meeting information, communication, and logistical needs
- Help in identifying and leveraging resources and creating needed infrastructure
- Provide guidance on sound operating principles and practices.

Looking around the country, we have found only a few examples of entities designed to meet these needs. In California state and local leaders have recently initiated two models that foster and provide the structure and capacity for cross sector partnerships. In 2020 Governor Newsom established a Senior Advisor position in his office that is responsible for initiating multi-sector partnerships to address the state's most persistent challenges,

including the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, this innovative effort has spearheaded 44 public-private partnerships throughout the state. These partnerships have leveraged more than \$4 billion in corporate and philanthropic contributions and engaged more than 1,600 community-based organizations. In 2021, public-private partnerships resulted in additional investments of \$138 million in communities across the state.

In Los Angeles County, the Board of Supervisors established the Center for Strategic Partnerships within the County Executive's office that is focused on developing cross sector initiatives to address issues affecting vulnerable children and families.

Both efforts are being managed by a small staff of skilled people and receive strong, ongoing support from the California philanthropic community. These kinds of programs do not need to be large endeavors, but they do need to be staffed by people highly skilled in building relationships and promoting trust across the different spheres.

Looking to the Future

If we are to make a dent in the complex challenges we face - the crisis of homelessness, the challenge of providing attainable housing, the impacts of climate change, etc., we need to promote the kinds of innovation in governance that can come from engaging the talents and resources that become available when all the sectors work together. Unleashing the potential for this kind of innovation in governance will require establishing dedicated infrastructure and capacity for this purpose. And it will take enlisting champions from the private and philanthropic sectors as well as from government.

What we ultimately hope to create in Oregon is a new sector that is independent of the public, private and civic sectors but serves to bring them together in joint action to develop new and innovative approaches to the tough issues we face. To effectively sustain this new sector as a vehicle for cross sector partnerships, we believe it is essential that it be co-owned and operated by leaders from across the sectors. We hope to develop and scale a set of supports that help connect leaders and create the kinds of capacity, resources, and advocacy that will enable them to create multi-sector partnerships to meet the challenges of governance in the 21st Century.