

Written by Mel and Pearl Shaw  
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*Part three of a three-part series on private/public partnerships*

Securing \$58 million for a senior housing project is not easy. Cathy Davis, executive director of Bayview Hunters Point Multipurpose Senior Services, Inc. (BHPMSS) in San Francisco, CA speaks eloquently about compromise and engaging with the political system. "Everything will not go your way, and you have to be willing to compromise. Political connections are important for public partnerships that involve governmental assistance. "

**It's all about relationships.** "Partnerships are long term relationships that develop over time. They are with agencies, not with personnel of any of the partners because individuals change jobs," she advised. You must get everything in writing, so when individuals leave, the commitments remain. For example, due to his passing, we lost our executive director in the middle of the process. Our agency remained committed and I was selected as the new executive director. Having worked hand-in-hand with Dr. Davis, my husband, I knew what was required. When personnel changes, you enroll the next person on the importance of the project and the previous promises made."

In Davis' experience, the partnership begins at the top. "The executive director needs to begin the conversation and enroll others in why the partnership is needed and who will benefit. Dr. Davis decided on the vision and then found people who would help. He bypassed people who said it wouldn't work and went to those who supported the idea. You find the help you need by following through on leads and making friends along the way. Political allies need to be cultivated and connected to your agency's mission. The more we put it out there, the more opportunities came our way. It was important to us as a community-based organization that we solicit the partners we wanted to work with. We interviewed our development partners and ensured that we were considered their partner, not their charity."

Regarding board involvement, Davis speaks from experience. "Board members have to be willing to accept greater scrutiny and more responsibility for understanding the legal implications of the partnership(s). There are many changing parts, so board members have to be willing to utilize legal consultants and move forward at critical stages. They need to increase fundraising capacity and promote the agency."

## **FUNdraising Good Times: Compromise, relationships and faith**

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**We closed our interview with lessons learned.** "Don't quit until the miracle happens! Many times along it way, it did not seem that it would happen," Davis recalled. "Never lose sight of why the partnership exists in the first place. There are people depending on you to come through. At some point the project becomes bigger than you and bigger than your agency. It takes a strong partnership with the community to make a big project happen. Insert yourself and ask questions. It is important not to sell out your principles for the easy way or for money that has too many strings attached. You have to believe it will happen before it happens. When all else fails, your faith and passion for the mission will carry you through."

Learn more about BHPMSS at <http://bhpmss.org/>

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