

# PUT the 'PARTNER' in PARTNERSHIPS

**W**hile effective professional learning necessitates identifying and leveraging the expertise that exists in schools already, external vendors and technical assistance providers also have an important role to play in building educators' capacity.

Expectations for these third-party vendors are shifting and may now include reframing their roles so they act as collaborative partners, critical friends, coaches, and experts who bring new perspectives and help manage change.

Use the tool on p. 61 as a guide for developing productive relationships.

Given the spectrum of possibilities for engaging in external partnerships, educators will need to carefully align their needs, goals, processes, and expectations to achieve the best results for students.

• **Collaborative relationships:** Educators may consider today's external assistance providers as extended members of their

learning teams, working in collaboration toward mutual goals and benefits, ultimately for the purpose of student success. Transparency, trust, strong communication, and the ability to honestly assess results are key to these types of partnerships.

• **Careful planning:** While it may be tempting to forgo a complicated planning process and jump into implementation, especially when a provider has a ready-to-go system at hand, a thorough planning process builds a strong foundation for a productive, sustainable relationship. There are many important questions for educators to answer in the initial phases of selecting and working with an external partner.

• **Ongoing review:** Just as any effective professional learning system operates within a cycle of continuous improvement, so, too, do effective external assistance partnerships. From the beginning, measures of success and reflective touch points are helpful to guide and monitor the relationship, content, delivery, and results of partnerships.

Access Transform Professional Learning at [www.learningforward.org/publications/transform](http://www.learningforward.org/publications/transform).

## TRANSFORM PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Each issue of Learning Forward's action brief, *Transform Professional Learning*, examines an essential professional learning topic, featuring system, school, and teacher leader perspectives and tools to advance practitioner knowledge and skills. A one-page summary of each issue is available as a free download to share with colleagues (see image at right).

The January 2014 issue focuses on developing effective vendor relationships in professional learning. Practitioner perspectives include:

**Teacher leader:** Corrie Freiwaldt, an instructional facilitator in Washington, explains three important steps she took to successfully integrate high-quality and freely available resources into her district's professional learning system.

**Principal:** Dwayne Young, a principal in Virginia, shares how he and his leadership teams manage the process for vetting, initiating, and nurturing relationships with multiple external assistance providers.

**System leader:** Vicki Kirk, a superintendent of schools in a rural Tennessee system, provides a comprehensive look at how she manages her relationship with a consultant to build sustainability.



# Partner

MAKE SURE YOU PUT THE 'PARTNER'  
IN PARTNERSHIP

**POTENTIAL PARTNERS SHOULD CAREFULLY CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THEMSELVES IN DEVELOPING A PRODUCTIVE PARTNERSHIP.**

1	How will this partnership add value to our existing goals and planned strategies?	
2	What benefits, real or intangible, will each partner realize?	
3	What are the costs — real, intangible, or possible — of the partnership?	
4	What are the expectations and requirements for each partner with specifics about a timeline for delivering?	
5	What procedures or protocols will be used if one partner wants to alter any aspect of the partnership plan or terminate the relationship?	
6	Which decisions related to the partnership will both partners make together? Which ones may partners make independently?	
7	What is the communication process? Who will speak for the partners?	
8	How will disagreements be handled?	
9	Who will be responsible for managing or supervising the partnership?	
10	What criteria will be used to measure success? What benchmarks?	

**Source:** Adapted from “The perfect partnership,” by Joellen Killion, 2011, *JSD*, 32(1), pp. 11-15. Copyright 2011 by Learning Forward. Adapted with permission.

Special supplement to *Transform Professional Learning*, a digital action brief from Learning Forward, [www.learningforward.org](http://www.learningforward.org).