



**What Nonprofits Can Learn**  
**Successes and Challenges of Nonprofit-Government Collaborations**  
**in the San Francisco Bay Area**

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**Abstract**

Nonprofit organizations are fundamental to solving societal issues and problems but they cannot do it alone. While sometimes not the obvious choice, especially in the San Francisco Bay Area, the public sector can become essential collaborators for nonprofit organizations seeking to find solutions to society's most harmful social issues. There are many motivations for nonprofit organizations to partner with government agencies, but there are also considerable challenges that occur before success can be achieved. Sempervirens Fund and Common Sense Media are prime examples of successful nonprofit-government partnerships. Through these partnerships, this paper will provide key recommendations for any nonprofit leader interested in partnering with the public sector in the future.

**Keywords:** nonprofit, public sector, government, collaboration, partnership, San Francisco, success, challenges, conflict, recommendations

## **Table of Content**

[Abstract](#)

[Table of Content](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Why Partner in the First Place?](#)

[Research Says: Challenges and Conflicts](#)

[Research Says: Critical Success Factors](#)

[Notes from the Field](#)

[Sempervirens Fund](#)

[Common Sense Media](#)

[Lessons Learned](#)

[References](#)

### Introduction

Throughout history, nonprofit organizations have become the foundation of our society by helping to solve some of the most challenging of social issues, but they cannot do it alone (Bryson, 2006, p. 44). It would be difficult to imagine successfully addressing global problems, such as AIDS, without the cooperation and collaboration of different sectors (Bryson, 2006, p. 44). Nonprofits need the support of government to help develop societal solutions and create sustainable change. Cross-sector collaboration and partnerships between nonprofit organizations and government agencies are essential to create these societal solutions and improvements. According to Bryson (2006), these cross-sector collaborations are, “an effort that achieves a joint outcome that could not be achieved by the organizations in one sector separately” (p.44).

Cross-sector collaborations in the San Francisco Bay Area, in particular, have a rather complex relationship. In the last 10 years, this region has become engulfed with the thriving technology companies and startups such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Google, and Lyft. San Francisco Bay Area residents are concerned that tech companies are stripping the area’s cultural identity and not giving enough back to social services and nonprofit organizations (Garofoli, 2014). Many residents, also, think that this new tech culture is transforming the way philanthropy works with the San Francisco Bay Area (Cushing, 2013). While nonprofit organizations might see tech companies as disrupting their vision, many see their presence as a great opportunity for partnership (Cushing, 2013). With so many affluent tech companies to choose from, nonprofit organizations

might forget of the valuable partnerships that working with government agencies can bring. Government agencies provide an exceptional way for nonprofit organizations to achieve their missions and create sustainable change.

Theoretical researchers assessed common motivators, challenges and success factors that most successful nonprofit-government collaborations exhibit. Using this research as a foundation, this capstone paper will provide a comparative analysis of two nonprofit organizations, in the San Francisco Bay Area, that have successfully partnered with government agencies. The organizations, Sempervirens Fund and Common Sense Media, were strategically chosen to provide a diverse example of nonprofits working with the public sector to achieve their mission. Through the lens of these partnerships, this capstone will provide recommendations that other nonprofit leaders can apply for their future collaborative projects with the public sector.

### **Why Partner in the First Place?**

Although it has been proven that nonprofit organizations cannot go it alone, why should nonprofits partner with government entities? Can't they get enough of their funding and partnerships through other means? According to Gazley (2007), there are a lot of different motivators that are unique to the nonprofit-government relationship that might not be possible to attain with other cross-sector collaborations. The top four motivators for nonprofits to partner with government agencies are 1) increase financial resources, 2) improve community relations and/or build stronger communities, 3) avoid competition or duplication of work, and 4) fulfill the nonprofit's mission (Gazley, 2007).

***Increase Financial Support***

A very common motivation behind these partnerships is purely financial support. Nonprofits consistently struggle to find resources to support their programs and achieve their goals. Government, on the other hand, has a larger financial capacity to provide resources to the greater public (Donley, p.12). Nonprofits seek out government agencies due to this financial capacity. The most common ways government agencies provide financial support for nonprofits are through contracts, grants and fees for services (Smith, 2006). This financial support can help contribute to the nonprofit's various projects and programs that can directly benefit and create stronger communities.

***Build Stronger Communities***

Government agencies and nonprofit organizations are trying to build stronger communities and better community relations, just in different ways. As Gulati asserts, "governments are generally responsible for the broad goal of serving the public at large," while nonprofits serve a particular area and thus become specialized with the needs of those communities (2001, p.33). Governments need to see nonprofits as assets in understanding specific communities. Likewise, nonprofits need to recognize government's strength in working with the public at large. With these different approaches, nonprofits and government can work together to build thriving communities at the local and larger level (Baker, 2011).

***Avoid Duplication of Work***

Since both nonprofit organizations and government agencies work with building similar communities, duplication of work can become a problem. Partnerships can help to streamline efforts and provide more efficient social services by reducing the duplication of work. In that way neither sector is providing the same services to the same population (Wolff, 1992, p.7). Bryson (2006) believes that the fear of work duplication comes down to the fear of sector failure. These sectors, both nonprofit and public, have a lot of issues to address - from poverty, to education and domestic violence - and solutions to these complex problems are not always easy to determine (Donley, 10). By partnering with other sectors, there becomes a better rate of success, because rather than working separately on these issues, sectors can now collaborate and work together. These partnerships can begin to break down the duplication of work, and finally, get some of our societies most harmful issues solved.

***Fulfill Nonprofit Mission***

While all the motivators mentioned above are equally essential to building a strong nonprofit-government partnership, fulfilling the nonprofit's mission is the most important motivator for nonprofits. Nonprofits' missions are commonly linked to helping communities thrive. With limited financial capacity, leverage, and reach, nonprofits can struggle to achieve their goals of empowering and improving the communities they serve. In order to truly eradicate social problems and build stronger communities, nonprofits must seek the support of other sectors by, then, achieving and fulfilling their mission and vision.

### **Research Says: Challenges and Conflicts**

Realizing the motivators on why nonprofits should partner with government agencies is the easy part of cross-sector collaboration. The difficult part begins when partners encounter challenges and conflicts that they must overcome to reach success. Sometimes though, these challenges and conflicts will remain a part of the collaboration for entirety. In those cases, true success can then be measured by how partners can work alongside conflict and still reach success. Through various research studies, Donley compiled a list of common challenges of nonprofit-government partnerships that include 1) different cultures, 2) lack of trust, 3) fear of losing control, and 4) lack of capacity (p.12).

#### ***Different Cultures***

The first common challenge is dealing with different cultures. Most know the bureaucratic, often times slow, structure of government agencies. That and a lot of red tape can slow partnerships down and hinder their overall goal (Shaw, 2003, p. 116). For nonprofits, their culture often lacks financial resources that could also slow down their ability to be good partners. While it is hard to avoid conflicting cultures, it is important to recognize these differences and proceed with mindfulness.

#### ***Lack of Trust***

When building a relationship, trust is a key ingredient to success and without it any relationship is sure to crumble. This is true in nonprofit-government collaborations as well. Both entities need to establish and maintain a trusting relationship in order to



achieve success. If one entity is not being forthright with information or is skeptical of the other entity's motives or capacity, then there is no trust.

### ***Fear of Losing Control***

Another common conflict that can arise in a collaboration is the fear of losing control (Shaw, 2003, p.109). Often times, partnerships begin with an existing program or project that was previously established by one of the partners and then enhanced by partnering with another entity. Once another organization makes decisions and takes some ownership of the program that wasn't initially theirs, problems with fear of losing control come into play. Nonprofit organizations have several projects that help empower and engage communities, but if government steps in and begins changing the way the project functions, nonprofits might become worried that government is taking more control than anticipated. The key term in partnerships is collaboration, which essentially means taking away some control in order to create a greater benefit.

### ***Lack of Capacity***

Building a strong cross-sector collaboration requires a great deal of capacity and time, and without such dedication, the partnership will suffer. Employees of nonprofit organizations are known to work on various projects at a time, so to add one more project onto the plates of employees already inundated might be hazardous. Ideally, nonprofit organizations should first assess if they have the capacity, specifically staff time and resources, to take on a new partnership with other entities (Cairns & Harris, 2011, p.316). Lack of capacity is not just a nonprofit sector issue. Government agencies need to also assess their capacity of staff time and resources. Without proper capacity

assessment from other entities, there will most certainly be problems down the road when the nonprofit and government cannot keep up with the demands of the collaborations.

### **Research Says: Critical Success Factors**

Working across sectors is never easy and thus partnerships are bound to have challenges and conflicts. It is how these partnerships recognize and resolve these challenges that truly show success. Cairns and Harris did a research study that found several factors for having a successful partnership between nonprofit organizations and government (2011). While a partnership could have only one or two of these to be deemed successful, having all four could lead to a long-lasting successful partnership. Research has shown that these are the 4 critical success factors: 1) common vision, 2) build trust 3) clearly stated needs and responsibilities of both parties, and 4) ongoing communication (Cairns & Harris, 2011).

#### ***Common Vision***

A shared common vision that builds trust and recognizes the importance of all entities involved is crucial to have any successful collaboration (Strengthening Nonprofits, p. 5). A common vision is about getting the right people on the bus from the beginning. If there are partners that do not agree or understand the partnership's goals and aims, then the partnership will surely fail. Having the right people on the bus and aware of the direction of the bus will improve partner relationships, build trust, and create a better end goal. Thus, a shared vision helps lay the framework for other success factors that will soon follow.

***Build Trust***

A successful partnership is, also, one that is able to build and sustain a trusting working relationship. Bryson (2006) stated that, “trusting relationships are often depicted as the essence of collaboration...they are both the lubricant and the glue - that is, they facilitate the work of collaboration and they hold the collaboration together (p.48).” Each partner will vary in his or her levels of trust but any strong partnership will emphasize the importance of ongoing trust (Bryson, 2006, p.48). Even with the strongest trust amongst partners, the strength of the partnership can be tested when faced with challenges and conflicts. It is when these conflicts arise that partners can truly see if they have built trust that is sustainable. Trust manifests itself by having good intentions, following through on responsibilities, and sharing vital information and knowledge (Strengthening Nonprofits, p.7).

***Clearly Stated Responsibilities***

In addition, partnerships must have clearly stated roles and responsibilities in order to use resources efficiently. Who will take the lead? Who will be responsible for driving certain partnership projects forward? Is there anything clearly written that outlines partners’ responsibilities and agreement to the partnership (Strengthening Nonprofits, p.15)? These are all questions that must be answered amongst partners. Partners need to understand their role in making decisions, carrying out activities, and representing the partnership (Strengthening Nonprofits, p.15). In order to be the most successful, partners’ roles and responsibilities should be illustrated in a clearly written agreement, such as a MOU, to maintain partner’s accountability.

***Ongoing Communication***

Open and consistent communication should be the norm in every interaction and meeting within a partnership (Cairns & Harris, 2011). This communication needs to be at all levels within the partnership, including within the partner organizations themselves. Effective communication is the ability to share and access all knowledge and information within the partnership (Cairns & Harris, 2011). Partners should be able to engage in open and honest dialogue, especially in times of conflict. By maintaining a constant exchange of information, both partners will be able to create a successful partnership based on shared values, trust and responsibility (Strengthen Nonprofits, p.7).

**Notes from the Field**

This theoretical research has provided a substantial framework for the motivators, challenges and success factors that go into establishing and maintaining a nonprofit-government partnership. How do actual nonprofit organizations match up to this framework? With all the challenges and factors involved in having a successful partnership, does any nonprofit succeed? This section will analyze two very different nonprofit organizations, Sempervirens Fund and Common Sense Media, as they partner with government agencies to achieve their mission.

Interviews were conducted at both Sempervirens Fund and Common Sense Media to learn more about each organization and their respected government collaborations. For Sempervirens Fund, Reed Holderman, the Executive Director Emeritus, was interviewed. Holderman was the leader for 6 years and helped to

establish the organization's largest capital campaign yet, their Great Parks Campaign<sup>1</sup>. For Common Sense Media, Rebecca Randall, the Vice President of Education Programs, and Merve Lopus, the Western Regional Education Director were interviewed. Randall has worked with the organization for 11 years to help establish a precedent of integrating digital tools and resources to educators, parents and children nationwide. Lopus has worked at Common Sense Media for the last 5 years and has helped partner with schools districts to directly provide trainings and resources to educators and the broader community.

### **Sempervirens Fund**

Sempervirens Fund was founded in 1900 and is California's oldest land trust organization. It was founded by a group of conservation activists, namely photographer Andrew P. Hill, who saw it vital to protect the old growth redwood trees from logging in the Santa Cruz Mountains (Reed Holderman, personal communication, Oct 15 2015). It aims to, "protect and permanently preserve the forests, wildlife habitat, watersheds...and to encourage public appreciation and enjoyment of this environment" (Sempervirens Fund Mission Statement, website). In order to protect and permanently preserve, Sempervirens acquires private land and sells it to the California State Parks.

#### ***Sempervirens Fund: Motivators***

Sempervirens sought out a partnership with the State government in order to fulfill their mission, build stronger communities and increase financial resources. In

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<sup>1</sup> The Great Park is Sempervirens Fund's vision of a beautiful, healthy, accessible redwood forest between Silicon Valley and the Pacific Ocean. The Great Park protects remaining old-growth redwoods as well as second-growth redwood forests. The vision integrates both public and private land into a magnificent, resilient whole (Sempervirens Fund website)

1902, the then-named Sempervirens Club aimed to preserve the old growth redwood trees in the Santa Cruz Mountains but lacked financial resources to make it happen (Holderman, personal communication, Oct 15 2015). Sempervirens believed that by preserving this land, California residents would see the beauty in nature, learn from it and appreciate it, thus building a strong community of nature lovers. The organization lobbied the State government to provide key financial support and buy the land to protect it for centuries to come (Holderman, personal communication, Oct 15 2015). Without the State's support, the forest would have surely been destroyed and the habitat lost forever. Holderman asserts that if this partnership didn't materialize, Sempervirens Fund wouldn't be around and it would have been catastrophic to redwood conservation in California, as we know it (Holderman, personal communication, Oct 15 2015).

At the time, the California State government knew that the United States government had been working to protect similar natural resources in other parts of the country, but no state in the history of the country had ever preserved any natural space with the primary goal of preservation and conservation (Holderman, personal communication, Oct 15 2015)<sup>2</sup>. The state was cautious but also intrigued by the idea of building a strong community by providing natural areas for residents to enjoy and appreciate (Holderman, personal communication, Oct 15 2015).

After two long years of lobbying, the State Legislature finally approved to put aside money to protect these trees which would later become known as the first State

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<sup>2</sup> In fact, this was before the establishment of the U.S. National Parks and California State Parks Service.

Park in the nation, what is now known today as Big Basin Redwoods State Park (Reed Holderman, personal communication, Oct 15 2015). This joint understanding of protecting redwood trees in the Santa Cruz Mountains led to the establishment of the California State Park Commission and later the California State Park Service and thus began a long partnership with Sempervirens Fund.

### ***Sempervirens Fund: Challenges***

For such a long partnership, there are bound to be a few challenges along the way. One in particular was the recent State's lack of capacity to maintain their part of the partnership, keeping State Parks open. This appeared most notably in 2011 when Governor Jerry Brown signed a bill that proposed a shutdown of 70 State Parks due to budget cuts (Holderman, personal communication, Oct 15 2015)<sup>3</sup>. The State Parks no longer had the financial capacity to continue to protect land in California, which worried Sempervirens Fund whose success greatly relies on this government partnership. With the beloved Castle Rock State Park as one of the parks to close, Sempervirens Fund agreed to increase their financial capacity in the partnership by donating \$250,000 to cover the Park's operating costs for three years (Holderman, personal communication, Oct 15 2015).

In light of the State's financial crisis, Sempervirens stepped up and helped the California State Parks when they were at their absolute worst. And it isn't over. With the State Parks system still strapped for cash, Holderman stated that, "we are still in this crisis period where the nonprofit partners of the State Parks have been carrying most of

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<sup>3</sup> Luckily, the State was able to find some additional funds, albeit hidden funds, to keep the other State Parks open for the time being (McGreevy, 2012).

the load” (personal communication, Oct 15 2015). He asserts that this isn’t necessarily a good or bad thing; it’s just the way it is (Holderman, personal communication, Oct 15 2015). Gazley and Brudney assert that partnerships, “do not always bring the same or equal benefits to both parties” and sometimes one party will have to give more to the collaboration at a given time (2007, p.392). State Parks appreciates Sempervirens now more than ever because they have supported the State Parks through this difficult period. Sempervirens Fund hopes that once the State Parks get back on their feet, they will help Sempervirens out more than they have ever before, but that is yet to be seen.

Another major challenge of this collaboration is differing cultures. The California State Parks has a more bureaucratic and traditional way of running their agency, whereas Sempervirens wants to grow into a more innovative environmental nonprofit. As one could imagine, these cultures clash very much. These conflicting methods of doing business have led to the California State Parks being afraid of losing control, as more innovative and unique methods and concepts are introduced.

A particular disagreement that illustrates this fear of losing control is the current conflict of Sempervirens’ desire to create a more adaptive and innovative park by providing WIFI and allowing people to interact with the park on their mobile devices (Holderman, personal communication, Oct 15 2015). The California State Parks are resisting. Holderman states that, “if you are going to bring the current generation into the park, you will have to provide resources and applications to allow them to enjoy the park” (personal communication, Oct 15 2015). The State Parks has a different belief that the parks should be a device free environment, because mobile devices ultimately



take away from the overall experience of being in the park (Holderman, personal communication, Oct 15 2015). They seemed unwilling to compromise. However, since Sempervirens currently has a donor agreement for Castle Rock State Park, they have decided to go ahead with their adaptive idea and bring WIFI to the park as a way to pilot the concept and hopefully get further acceptance from State Parks (Holderman, personal communication, Oct 15 2015). For now, California State Parks agrees to these terms but is hesitant to bring such adaptive measures into their other parks.

### ***Sempervirens Fund: Successes***

Over the last century, Sempervirens Fund and the California State Parks have been in a true collaborative partnership due to their trusting relationship where both parties have a shared vision and successfully execute their roles and responsibilities. Even with the challenge of the State Park's recent lack of financial capacity, there was a great amount of trust that allowed them to overcome that challenge. The State Park was able to recognize that Sempervirens are strong partners that will be there even in the most difficult times. One can only hope that if Sempervirens needs future assistance, the State Parks will recall their own challenge and come to the nonprofit's aid. Even with their differing cultures and new methods, both parties have continued to work together. Changing another entity's system and outlook on the future is difficult, if not impossible, but due to this long trusting partnership the State Parks might be opening up to new ideas that could advance citizens' interactions with and appreciation for the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Both partners have a common vision of protecting the natural resources and open space in California, specifically in the Santa Cruz Mountains. This common vision has helped make this partnership successful. Both partners recognize that land needs to be saved from corporations and developers and must be preserved so that current and future generations can appreciate, learn from, and admire these natural wonders. Without such a shared vision, this partnership would not have lasted as long.

The final ways that this partnership is deemed a success are through both partners' constant communication and dedication to their responsibilities. The State Parks and Sempervirens Fund work together on land acquisition and conservation easements. Through these projects, both partners have defined roles and responsibilities that are mutually agreed upon. Sempervirens knows that their role is to find property available to protect, and the State Parks does their part of agreeing to buy that land and preserve it for generations to come.

Constant communication has, also, been a defining aspect of this partnership's success. California State Parks consistently informed Sempervirens Fund of the latest information on their financial crisis and kept them abreast to any serious issues incurred by the crisis. Likewise, Sempervirens did not lose contact or faith in their partner during this difficult time. Having a constant stream of communication and being a trusting partner for over 100 years, Sempervirens Fund and the California State Parks are a prime example of a successful nonprofit-government partnership.

**Common Sense Media**

Another great, yet different, example of a successful partnership is the relationship between nonprofit organization, Common Sense Media, and public school districts nationwide. Common Sense Media was founded in 2003 and is an education advocacy nonprofit organization based in San Francisco. The organization “is dedicated to helping kids thrive in a world of media and technology by empowering parents, teachers and policymakers with trusted advice and innovative tools” (Common Sense Media Mission Statement). One of their most successful and innovative programs is Digital Citizenship that helps educators and children to be safe and responsible online<sup>4</sup>.

Partnering with 14,000 school districts provides a scalable way to reach educators and children that is both financially feasible and, if done successfully, reaches the most educators with the least amount of staff time used (Randall, personal communication, Sept 9, 2015). This approach is much more attainable than reaching out to all 140,000 schools nationwide. Common Sense Media partners with school districts in a variety of ways, one being through their Digital Citizenship certification program. This program is, “dedicated to taking a whole-community approach to digital citizenship...certification is an official stamp of recognition from Common Sense Media” (Common Sense Media Digital Citizenship Certified Districts). The certification program gives school districts’ resources, tools and Common Sense staff time to ensure that the Digital Citizenship curriculum is integrated into school curriculums. In addition, Common

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<sup>4</sup> Digital Citizenship is a concept, which helps teachers, technology leaders and parents to understand what students/children/technology users should know to use technology appropriately. Digital Citizenship is more than just a teaching tool; it is a way to prepare students/technology users for a society full of technology.

Sense Media actively reaches out to school districts to encourage them to apply for certification.

***Common Sense Media: Motivators***

Common Sense Media's motivations to enter into a partnership with public school districts are to build strong communities through education and technology, to fulfill the nonprofit's mission, and to avoid duplication of work (Randall, personal communication, Sept 9, 2015). Common Sense Media's mission statement focuses on giving educators, parents and kids the resources and tools they need to be responsible online. The hope is that through this mission, the nonprofit can build stronger and more empowered communities that are not afraid of technology but embrace it and engage in it safely. As technology becomes more and more prevalent in our digital age, it only makes sense that stronger communities will come once these tools are better mastered. And, the best way to reach the largest amount of individuals is through classrooms and schools nationwide (Randall, personal communication, Sept 9, 2015).

Another motivator of this partnership is to avoid any duplication of work. For public school districts, they receive E-Rate funding which provides discounts for technology infrastructure for schools, so districts will have to create a system to train educators and empower students to be responsible with technology (FCC.gov, 2015). School districts will only get these financial resources if they implement trainings and curriculum on digital citizenship. With already limited financial resources, school districts do not have the capacity to take this on all by themselves. To avoid having too many cooks in the kitchen, it only makes sense for school districts to seek out Common

Sense Media, an organization that already has the skills and resources, to help implement these new teaching methods and concepts.

### ***Common Sense Media: Challenges***

Common Sense Media struggles to work with a government agency that has a very different culture and structure. Majority of the time, school districts think that digital citizenship curriculum is merely supplemental and do not make it a priority (Randall, personal communication, Sept 9, 2015). It becomes a matter of “nice to have” versus “need to have” (Randall, personal communication, Sept 9, 2015). Based on struggles from some districts, it is clear that they don’t see the importance of educating their teachers and their students on safe online practices. This seems surprisingly similar to Sempervirens Fund struggle of innovation while working with State Parks’ traditional methods. But as more technology gets integrated into schools and classrooms, Randall believes that having a Digital Citizenship curriculum will become an essential part of a student’s education (personal communication, Sept 9, 2015).

Along the same lines as differing cultures, public school districts have an extremely slow bureaucratic process and high turnover that makes it difficult to have a smooth and stable relationship with the public school districts. “There’s just a lot of red tape,” Randall said (personal communication, Sept 9, 2015). The process of implementing anything involving government takes a lot of time. Districts are extremely decentralized and schools themselves often times have no authority to implement such programs themselves without approval (Randall, personal communication, Sept 9, 2015). Even when a school district partners with Common Sense and begins rolling out

the curriculum to local schools, the districts cannot make a school implement the curriculum, only encourage (Randall, personal communication, Sept 9, 2015). So even after all the hard work of establishing a partnership with a district, the curriculum might not even make it into all the schools (Randall, personal communication, Sept 9, 2015). Randall also mentions that in the four years since the creation of this partnership, her department has dealt with three different EdTech Directors in Chicago Unified School District (personal communications, Sept 9, 2015). The extreme turnover along with the slow and decentralized districts make it very challenging to actually implement the Digital Citizenship curriculum and fulfill their mission.

### ***Common Sense Media: Successes***

While Common Sense Media's partnership with unified public school districts is relatively new, there are still signs of success. The critical success factors of having a common vision, ongoing communication and clearly stated roles and responsibilities are present even in these early stages of the partnership. Both the unified school districts and Common Sense Media share a common vision of providing essential resources to teachers, parents and children. School districts are taking a major first step in providing resources on digital safety to help keep kids safe and responsible online. Advancing such an innovative curriculum to schools nationwide will take time, but both partners are working together to achieve this goal.

Another success of this partnership is that all roles and responsibilities are clearly stated through written agreements. There are four different legal arrangements between school districts and Common Sense Media (Randall, personal communication, Sept 9,

2015). These different agreements include school district applications for resources, MOUs, Common Sense Media is incorporated into a foundation grant or corporate grant (Randall, personal communication, Sept 9, 2015). MOUs are the most common method in clearly stating each partner's roles and responsibilities. These MOUs allow both partners to have a legally binding relationship, so they can successfully work together to provide trainings and resources to incorporate the Digital Citizenship curriculum (Randall, personal communication, Sept 9, 2015).

Through the success of Common Sense Media's partnerships with unified public school districts across the nation, San Francisco Unified School District became interested in establishing collaboration. With the help from Salesforce, a grant was drafted to give \$6 million to the San Francisco Unified School District to help improve school's technological infrastructure (Merve Lapus, personal communication, Nov 2, 2015). The grant also outlined that Common Sense Media would play a starring role in the integration of tech resources and the Digital Citizenship curriculum into San Francisco schools (Lapus, personal communication, Nov 2, 2015). Common Sense Media is extremely excited to partner with San Francisco Unified and hopes that this partnership, with corporate support, will become a successful model that can be replicated in other cities in the Bay Area and possibly beyond (Lapus, personal communication, Nov 2, 2015).

### **Lessons Learned**

Although Common Sense Media and Sempervirens Fund are vastly different nonprofit organizations, they have led successful partnerships with government

agencies. Common Sense Media struggled through different cultures while working with unified public school districts to distribute their Digital Citizenship curriculum on a broad scale. Through their partnership, Common Sense Media is changing the way school districts are approaching technology and responsibility and that is a tremendous feat. Sempervirens Fund has had to take on a much larger role in their 113 year-old partnership with the California State Parks as the Parks department experiences a financial crisis. Even with the ongoing challenge, Sempervirens Fund continues to be a trusted ally that is working hand-in-hand with the State Parks to protect the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Nonprofit managers and leaders can learn a lot from the challenges and successes of the collaborative efforts of Common Sense Media and Sempervirens Fund. Nonprofits often believe that they are invincible and that they can achieve their mission without the support of governmental agencies or any other sector. The reality is that government agencies can become a true partner with nonprofit organizations. Government agencies can help provide financial support, build stronger communities, streamline work efforts, and ultimately help achieve nonprofits' missions.

Nonprofits should, of course, be cautious when entering such a partnership. Research and these two case studies can attest that challenges and conflicts are very common in these partnerships. From differing cultural structures, to lack of trust, fear of losing control and lack of capacity, nonprofit managers need to be ready to tackle these conflicts head first to make a successful partnership.

Once conflicts are realized and resolved, nonprofit leaders can truly create a



successful partnership with government agencies. Key success factors include having a common vision, building trust, having clearly defined roles and ongoing communication. These critical success factors are crucial for any nonprofit-government partnership to thrive. Through successful collaborations, nonprofit organizations and government agencies must combine their efforts and work together to help tackle some of our most difficult societal problems to hopefully and ultimately create a sustainable future.

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