

Greater NY

Cross-Sector Leadership

GREATER

NY

Greater NY was launched in response to the financial crisis of 2008 to support leaders of New York City human service and cultural institutions at a time of unprecedented stress and diminished resources. The initiative was conceived as a two-year project of the Bloomberg Mayor's Office and paired executives from the nonprofit and private sectors to meet one-on-one, an hour a month, to talk confidentially about management and leadership issues.

What began as a two-year project to support nonprofits has grown to be an independent 501c3 that has launched over 100 partnerships and is building the conditions and relationships to encourage cross-sector collaboration for a strong and equitable New York City.

This paper explores the unique ways in which Greater NY partnership relationships develop skills for cross-sector collaboration. Specifically, the paper describes four practices that have emerged with remarkable regularity throughout Greater NY partnerships and which participants identify as core to the program's unique value. This paper represents our efforts to organize the qualitative data collected across 100+ partnerships and frame Greater NY's ongoing inquiry into building strong, collaborative, cross-sector relationships.

GREATER NY CROSS-SECTOR RELATIONSHIPS

When Greater NY was launched, it paired leaders in the nonprofit and private sectors in relationships intentionally described as "partnerships." The driving vision was for leaders in different sectors to come together at a critical time for New York City.

This approach sought to position partners as peers and upend the assumption that private sector partners would mentor nonprofit leaders. Over time, we have learned that each partnership finds its own balance of partner/mentor, but the original structure has been successful in creating the conditions for a unique relationship that operates beyond the traditional relationships of leaders in the private and nonprofit sectors.

Greater NY partnerships have led to diverse outcomes including mergers and collaborations, new business lines, strengthened management teams, Board transformations, and executive transitions – to name a few. But when Greater NY participants talk about what they have accomplished together, they most frequently focus on the development of a powerful relationship that is unlike any other in their network.

The Greater NY partnership relationship is Greater NY's core innovation and most consistent output. In many partnerships we've heard that this relationship develops beyond an individual executive resource to becoming a touchstone for other relationships. As this emerged, Greater NY's evaluation began to include a focus on understanding the contours of the partnership relationship with the goal of identifying what pieces might be replicable – for future partnerships and beyond Greater NY.

IDENTIFYING CORE ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS

Understanding the core components of the Greater NY relationship involved deep listening to corporate and nonprofit partners during and after their partnerships. It involved looking for patterns, qualitative data tagging, hypothesis building and testing, and pivoting when our hypotheses didn't hold up. This work led to the identification of four discrete "practices" that occur with remarkable regularity as core dynamics of Greater NY partnership - and have positive impacts for both nonprofit and corporate participants.

We deemed these dynamics "practices" because they embody actions and behaviors that emerged as Greater NY partners worked together, confidentially discussing and problem solving around a few mutually chosen goals. Much has been written about leadership "characteristics." We were less interested in the individual characteristics each partner brought to the table and more interested in what was sparked by being at the table together.

GREATER NY LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

Building Leadership Relationships

making time for trust-based relationships with leaders across sectors

Engaging in Partnered Mindset

forging a shared approach to problem solving

Activating Network Agility

trading insights on how to build better external relationships

Embracing "Greater" Social Capital

helping each other become more powerful actors for New York City

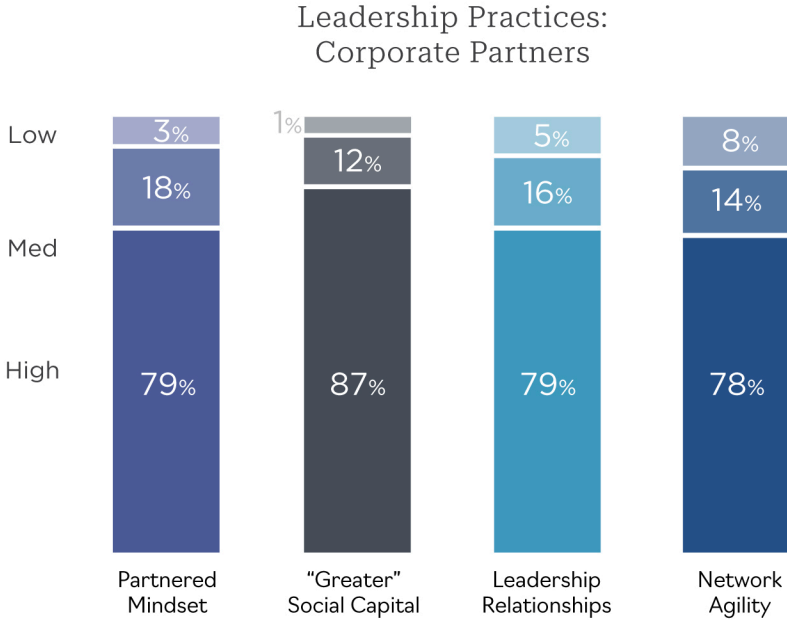
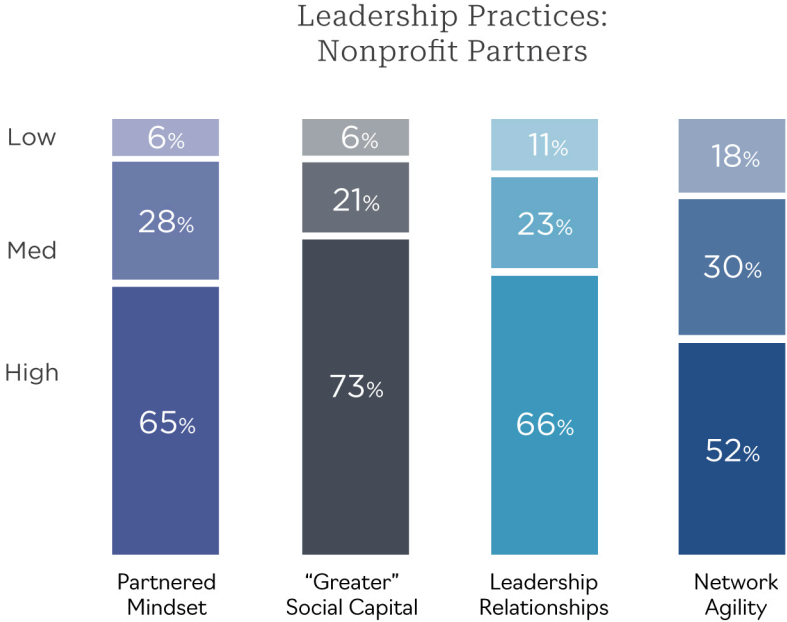
We knew that coming up with labels for "practices" risked a reductive or gimmicky language. Our goal was the opposite, we wanted to add heft to the development of important soft skills that come out of Greater NY partnerships and where we saw potential for impact beyond the partnership.

COLLECTING AND MAKING SENSE OF THE DATA

After having identified the practices, we developed a methodology for measuring them. In the final survey at the end of their Greater NY partnership, corporate and nonprofit partners are asked to respond to 16 statements about the Greater NY relationship and rate their experience on each statement as "Low" "Medium" or "High." Low indicates the statement does not correlate with their experience, Medium indicates the statement corresponds with their experience, and High indicates the statement strongly corresponds with their experience.

Each practice is tied to four statements that serve as indicators. In the interest of keeping this document brief, we will not detail the statements/indicators here, but they are described on Greater NY's website in the Impact & Innovations section under Conversations.

The chart below shows aggregate data on the four practices collected from partnerships launched since 2016 when Greater NY became an independent nonprofit.



As we looked at aggregate data, the results raised immediate questions. Why did the corporate partner experience correspond more strongly with the statements? Why did "Greater" Social Capital lead practices for both corporate and nonprofit partners? How could we increase the nonprofit experience of network agility? We will continue to explore these questions, among others, as we collect more data and are able to further extrapolate details from these practices.

DEVELOPMENT OF LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AS A PROGRAM MANAGEMENT TOOL

Identifying and naming leadership practices helps Greater NY understand important partnership outputs. It helps identify the outcomes we hope to promote in all partnerships and provides a management tool by showing us where we can do better and push harder. It helps staff manage and coach partnerships more uniformly.

Greater NY works to offer every partnership the same chance of success and the ability to get the most out of their two-year partnership relationship. This is important as an equity issue, but it also provides a framework as we scale a program that emphasizes this unique relationship. Focusing on a discrete set of leadership practices will help maintain the core structure and overall quality as we grow – both in the number of partnerships we match and as we engage an increasing diversity of nonprofit organizations, leaders, and corporate sectors in Greater NY.

CONCLUSION

With four years of data to support our hypothesis about leadership practices, our next step is to refine how we use them to drive program improvement and understand their long-term impact.

But the greater opportunity ahead is to understand how good conditions for partnership relationships can lead to building the conditions for effective networked relationships and cross-sector collaboration. The challenges for New York City cannot be addressed by one sector alone. What started as Greater NY's two-year experiment on how two leaders in different sectors can think together in crisis has evolved into a larger experiment on how networked leaders from different sectors can work together on complex challenges that impact all New Yorkers.

More is on our website: www.greaterny.org/conversations/impact and innovations