

# Government and Nonprofit Sector Partnerships

## Presenters

David Graham, Deputy Chief Operating Officer, City of San Diego  
Salvatore Giametta, Chief of Staff, San Diego County Supervisor Ron Roberts, Fourth District  
Sue Reynolds, President and CEO, Community Housing Works  
Abdi Mohamoud, Executive Director, Horn of Africa

## Facilitated by:

Lyn Corbett, President, The Pivotal Group Consultants Inc.

## Topic Discussed:

Partnerships between local government and the nonprofit sector are essential to effectively deliver vital public services in our San Diego communities. The panelists presented an insider's view of how the City of San Diego and County of San Diego approach their relationships with nonprofit organizations, including funding requests, the RFP (Request for Proposal) process, how to navigate these partnerships, and how to communicate and work together to achieve the best results. Audience participation created an interactive discussion which led to some creative and useful takeaways for everyone.

## Key Questions and Concerns:

1. How can government and nonprofit organizations work together to increase their impact?
2. Is it possible to streamline the application process for government grants and make it less cumbersome?
3. How does the government identify needs?

## Key Takeaways:

**Identifying needs:** Presenters mentioned there are various ways to identify needs to determine the RFPs that will be created for the year. Advisory boards and task forces at the county are watching trends and observing what is happening in the marketplace and the community. The city created a survey to determine what the citizens wanted. Others on the panel mentioned focus groups and surveys to obtain information about what is important to their community. Government participants suggested nonprofit organizations send representatives to community and government advisory groups to help identify and clarify needs in their community.

**Relationships:** Panelists felt in order to increase impact it is crucial for nonprofit organizations to develop strategic relationships with government staff that work in the area of interest of the nonprofit organization. All panelists agreed finding the appropriate staff member to work with was more important than trying to build relationships with the elected officials. Panelists mentioned these relationships should be sustained throughout the year, and not just when it is time to discuss or apply for funding. Some of the ways to help facilitate these relationships include:

- Getting involved with the agencies and joining community and government advisory groups that work on the issues most important to your nonprofit organization.
- Meeting people from outside of your organization as well who may be working on complementary issues to your own.
- Joining community forums and advisory groups convened by various stakeholders in the community, including government, to voice concerns and raise awareness about an area of interest.

**Align the story:** Nonprofit organizations and government should work together to align the story of the San Diego region. Panelists also advised organizations to pay close attention to what the government advisory councils and task forces are discussing to make sure it aligns with the current priorities. Organizations seeking government funding should look to stated governmental goals and agendas. Working towards common goals can help both sectors collaborate to define the narrative of how San Diego defines itself, and how, as a community, we confront shared issues.

**Cut the “red tape”:** Panelists and attendees mentioned the need to “cut the red tape” involved in the RFP process. One panelist suggested government staff should fill out the forms to learn first-hand what a nonprofit organization must go through in order to apply for grant money and then find ways to make the process less cumbersome. Organizations mentioned they often try to design the proposal to maximize the points possible and this can lead to mission drift. The panelists mentioned they are open to change and welcome working with nonprofit organizations to create RFPs that support programs for the betterment of the community.

**Collaboration:** Panelists mentioned that collaboration with other groups is very important to move issues forward and work toward the betterment of the community. Panelists stressed that although collaboration between nonprofits and the government is important, it is also important for nonprofit organizations to collaborate with one another. When applying for grants, if a nonprofit organization is collaborating with others, rather than working in silos, they present a stronger application by leveraging multiple organizations to tackle complex social issues.

#### Summarized by:

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