



Environmental NGO-Corporate
Partnership Taskforce
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GOLD AND GREEN TOGETHER: THE SEARCH FOR BUSINESS AND ENVIRONMENT PARTNERSHIPS

**Report of the Task Force on
Corporation-NGO Partnership Potentials¹**

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¹ See Appendix II for names of task force members and staff.

INTRODUCTION

The coarse relationships between businesses and the environmental movement in the 1970s, in which epithets and slogans substituted for basic communication and lawsuits served as the main means of interaction, have evolved and become far more sophisticated in the ensuing four decades. Businesses and their leaders now understand the importance of many environmental issues, including their potential for incorporating them to secure comparative advantages and additional profits. Environmental organizations and their leaders have likewise matured and many of them now realize that open conflict with business may result in fewer “green” gains than engagement and efforts to inform and assist their business counterparts to improve environmental performance. Indeed, a recent survey indicates that partnerships are considered important by more than 85 percent of the largest of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and businesses in the UK.² A lengthening history of reaching out, to what each side initially believed to be “their enemy,” has produced a tapestry of increasingly widespread alliance experiences between businesses and NGOs. For example, in California in the early 2010s, another survey suggests that over 70 percent of nonprofits and about 90 percent of corporations have engaged in multiple business-NGO partnerships.³ Some have been “successful,” although the criteria to measure “success” are not well understood or generally applied. Some have been “OK,” but did not result in lasting relationships or longer-term changes much beyond the limited terms of engagement. Some have “failed,” but for what reasons and whether failure was inevitable or simply a matter of happenstance or lousy chemistry between the principals no one usually bothers to figure out.

Nonetheless, there is no doubt that enthusiasm for partnerships has emerged and grown over the years. Partnerships between corporations, NGOs and even partnerships involving governmental bodies abound. The partnership model is often justified, as evidenced in the growing literature celebrating and recommending them.

Businesses and environmental organizations seek out one another for many reasons and often rely on partnerships to do so. A key motivation is dealing with the number and diversity of complex environmental management challenges. Securing environmental and economic benefits that were impossible to gain alone is a key characteristic of successful business-environment partnerships.⁴ Businesses seeking ways to pursue social responsibility, legitimacy, enhanced good will, and even increased profitability, may benefit from environmental NGO expertise: to set standards, to offer consulting expertise, to mobilize corporate employees for “green” volunteer activities, and/or to mediate in conservation arrangements. Partnerships also preempt conflict and bad publicity by reducing criticism from environmental groups and the public at large. Environmental organizations now realize that working with businesses is a way to garner environmental improvement while simultaneously benefitting from corporate visibility, obtaining insights into particular industries, and gaining positive regard and funding from involved businesses and environmental donors.

Experience also tells us that corporate-NGO partnerships are not a panacea, nor are they always advisable. Many differences exist between the cultures, capabilities, resources, and goals of businesses and environmental organizations. These pose large, sometimes insurmountable, challenges

² C&E, *Corporate-NGO Partnership Barometer Summary Report* (2010).

http://www.caneadvisory.com/sites/default/files/report_abridged.pdf [Accessed: 4/7/2015.]

³ Burtch, B. W., *The 2012 Burtch Report* (San Francisco: 2012).

⁴ Austin, J. E. and M.M. Seitanidi, “Collaborative Value Creation: A Review of Partnering between Nonprofits and Businesses,” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, Parts I and II (2012).

to success. These experiences require the closer examination provided in the following report. The report is based on case studies as well as the experiences of Task Force members from corporations, NGOs, government, and academia. It lays out considerations to take into account while thinking about forming and executing partnerships, including whether to pursue them and, if so, what the best arrangements might be to improve performance.

Caution is recommended, for at least three basic (and many more specific) reasons. First, the prospective partners have different goals and expectations so deciding what will constitute “success” can be difficult. Assessing eventual outcomes of partnerships is not simple and may also make collaboration a challenge.⁵ Second, prospective partners have other means to pursue their own objectives. Corporations can create in-house expertise or hire specialty consultants to resolve environmental problems. The greatest value of working with an NGO may not be technical so much as it is reputational.⁶ At the same time, environmental organizations can do what they customarily do to raise money, publicize and provide guidance to corporations, and mobilize support for more stringent environmental regulations.

Third, partnerships involve costs and present risks over and above “business as usual” for either entity. For corporations, there are direct financial and staff-time costs. Because partnerships typically occur over extended periods, these may add up. Other particular risks also occur. These range from relationships that sour or blow up usually because of unattainable and unreasonable expectations, unexpected high costs, or because of opportunistic commitments by partners. New initiatives, even the best intentioned, can sometimes peter out or fizzle, and this may leave the corporation with expenses, no benefits, and some awkward explaining to do. NGOs also have costs and risk losing one of their more valuable assets: credibility. This affects small organizations especially when staff diversions and partnership controversies result in reduced programming and fund-raising success.

Both parties are at risk in terms of reputation and credibility. A failed partnership potentially harms a business’s reputation—a main reason for its having entered into the relationship. As mentioned above, failure for the environmental NGO threatens its credibility, especially when commercial public relations outweigh substantial environmental improvements. Toning down or even foregoing criticisms of the corporate partner is a potential cost for the NGO, especially when subsequent questions about aiding and abetting corporate “green-washing” surface. Green-washing is “the act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service.”⁷ Perceived and sometimes real risks exist for an environmental organization of becoming financially dependent, co-opted, or even selling out to the corporate partner. Smaller NGOs and long-duration partnerships are especially susceptible to these risks.

Three main questions about the dimensions of business/environment partnerships over the last 30 years help frame the analysis.

1. What objectives underlie and motivate the creation of partnerships?
2. What characteristics delineate the methods and means partnerships are structured and carried out?
3. What costs and benefits relate to various objectives and means?

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ An NGO may provide enhanced credibility, clearer vision and more creativity than a technical consultant.

⁷ "The Sins of Greenwashing," *The Sins of Greenwashing: Home and Family Edition*. <http://sinsofgreenwashing.org/> [Accessed 5/2/ 2014.]

If we help others decide whether a partnership is a good way to achieve shared environmental goals, (or if not, then whether other means could be considered), we will have attained one of our two primary Task Force objectives. If we are also able to suggest ways to minimize the costs and risks of relying on a partnership, then we will have attained our other main objective.

PARTNERSHIP BENEFITS AND OBJECTIVES

Many benefits can result from partnerships—for corporations, NGOs, or both. Several stand out and help illuminate different experiences. These benefits and motivations arise from multiple sources: resource complementarity, distinctive competencies, mutual dependency, and interests that promote innovation.

Positive Environmental Impact

Promoting enhanced environmental protection is the ultimate shared goal of partnerships. Other benefits and goals are linked to potential positive environmental impacts beyond what each partner could produce alone. Partners may start by seeking other goals. However, partnerships that do not produce tangible, beneficial environmental impacts seldom last long.

Corporations partner to access environmental skills, experiences, and expertise they don't have—at least initially. Over time, however, many corporations come to the conclusion that having such capabilities in-house or readily at hand is actually essential just to do business. Experimenting with risky and undependable partnerships could be on the decline.

For example, once an NGO and a corporation work together and figure out ways to reduce energy consumption, water usage, amount of waste, and so on, why continue with the partnership? McDonald's seminal and pioneering partnership with EDF to improve packaging and waste reduction is illustrative. McDonald's made the recommended changes, realized improved environmental performance and internalized these and other lessons in terms of its sustainability staff and operation, which was incidentally until recently headed by Robert Langert, the original "partner" with EDF's Jackie Prince Roberts.

The Langert/Prince Roberts story is interesting. The original McDonald's/EDF partnership was one of the very first when it got started in late 1989-1990. Bob and Jackie were at the time very junior members of each organization and considered themselves to be "expendable" if things didn't turn out well. Neither one was sure what to expect from the other, and as the partnership developed both expressed concerns that they were "sleeping with the enemy" and causing concerns in their home bases. As luck and their good efforts played out, however, the story actually became a very positive and encouraging one—for Bob and Jackie and for their organizations.

Langert became the "go-to-guy" at McDonald's for a continuing collection of partnerships over the years with other environmental organizations and individuals. Issues confronted include securing a soy moratorium in the Amazon with the help of Greenpeace, additional work with EDF on a variety of topics, Conservation International on biodiversity, and WWF on sustainable beef. Bob worked well with some "uncompromising" environmentalists, such as Temple Grandin, as well as some hard-core business suppliers such as Cargill. His successes working as a constructive partner earned him the job of Vice President for Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability, a position from which he recently retired after more than 30 years with McDonald's.⁸

⁸ Marc Gunther, "What a Long, Strange Trip It's Been for McDonald's Bob Langert." <http://www.marcgunther.com/mcdonalds-bob-langert-what-a-long-strange-trip-its-been/> [Accessed: 3/7/2015.] GlobeScan Dialogues: Recognizing Leaders, "An Interview with Bob Langert,

Jackie's career also follows a strong partnership pattern. Starting with the McDonald's/EDF effort, she created and lead EDF's Corporate Partners Program which involved outreach and work with many Fortune 500 companies, including UPS, Fed Ex, Starbucks, Chevron, Calpine, and Forest Trends. In February 2014 she joined The Carlyle Group in a newly created position of Chief Sustainability Officer, which is the senior position for environment, social, and governance issues. Carlyle is a significant asset management and investment group, with about \$200 billion in assets, based in Washington, DC.⁹

While there may be a shared environmental goal, the primary motives of each party still differ. Improving the environment is the core reason NGOs participate. For businesses it is usually something else, such as obtaining a cost savings (from improved energy efficiency), avoiding a risk, complying with regulations, improving environmental management credibility, and so on. For businesses the environmental project is a means to these ends. Different motivations may create tensions as when a business is ready to declare victory but the NGO feels too little has yet been achieved. Expectations must be clear from the outset. Even a partnership with tangible achievements may fail because the parties had different ideas about what would constitute "success."

Legitimacy, Reputation and Credibility

Corporations and to a lesser degree environmental NGOs often enter into a partnership to bolster environmental legitimacy, reputation, and credibility. Enhanced credibility is one of the strongest contributions the NGO brings to a partnership because it provides independent validation of the business claims. Global public attitude surveys indicate that over 66 percent of respondents indicate greater "respect for companies" partnering with non-profits organizations to resolve social problems.¹⁰ Partnering allows corporations to explain more believably how they are working to meet society's environmental expectations. Achieving and maintaining acceptable levels of environmental legitimacy help companies gain and sustain their licenses to operate. Environmental legitimacy refers to the generalized perception, by multiple stakeholders, that a firm's corporate environmental performance is desirable, proper, or appropriate. These stakeholders include the government and other environmental regulators but also local communities, the media, employees, suppliers, prospective business partners, and investors.¹¹

Failure to meet environmental expectations increases the risks of enhanced monitoring, and the enactment of more stringent regulations, as well as provoking investor demands or boycotts, any or all of which potentially harm a company.¹²

Environmental legitimacy concerns can focus on corporate environmental deficiencies and lead to remedial partnerships. Concerns can also result from a desire to improve environmental

VP CSR & Sustainability, McDonald's." <http://www.globescan.com/news-and-analysis/conversationsa-with-leaders/bob-langert-vp-csr-sustainability> [Accessed: 3/7/2015.]

⁹ Jackie is married to Carter Roberts, the President and CEO of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), which is itself a major environmental partner with several different business organizations, including Coca Cola, Procter and Gamble, and Walmart.

¹⁰ GlobeScan, *Corporate Social Responsibility Monitor* (2005). http://www.deres.org.uy/home/descargas/guias/GlobalScan_Monitor_2005.pdf [Accessed: 4/7/2015.]

¹¹ Rivera, Jorge, *Business and Public Policy: Responses to Environmental & Social Protection Processes*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹² Rivera, Jorge., "[Institutional Pressures and Voluntary Environmental Behavior in Developing Countries: Evidence from Costa Rica](#)," *Society and Natural Resources*, vol. 17 (2004):779-97.

performance, which then leads to proactive partnerships. In either case, partnerships promote external stakeholder involvement.¹³ Remedial partnerships may improve a corporation's tarnished environmental reputation. An environmental accident or disaster might move a company to seek an NGO's help. The size of the disaster matters, as the 1989 *Exxon-Valdez* and the 2010 *BP-Deepwater Horizon* spills demonstrate. These disasters were so egregious that no single remedy could possibly suffice.

On the other hand, companies with solid environmental records, such as Patagonia and Whole Foods, may seek proactive partnerships to enhance corporate reputations and brands in efforts to increase market share and price premiums. A positive green image may also bolster the ability of proactive green companies to attract/retain and motivate valuable employees. Surveys and studies consistently show that over 75 percent of employees prefer to work for businesses with good social and environmental reputations.¹⁴

Some NGOs engage in partnerships to improve their reputation and credibility as constructive multi-sector agents by working with the private sector, governments, major foundations, and international agencies.¹⁵ The approach can be controversial, especially for some environmental groups that regard corporations as objects of scorn and targets for litigation.¹⁶ An intriguing variant on this theme occurs when watchdog environmental organizations target a large and well-known corporation to gain media attention and bolster fund raising. Paradoxically, this "watchdog" behavior and the tension among environmental groups noted previously may actually facilitate partnerships between businesses and more moderate NGOs. The real or imagined threats posed by more aggressive environmental organizations often convince reluctant companies to seek the advice and help of more moderate ones.¹⁷

Knowledge Exchange

Knowledge exchange occurs when an NGO provides expertise to help a business solve specific environmental problems. Both parties "win."¹⁸ Environmental NGOs become known for their specific expertise, e.g., The Nature Conservancy for its record in biodiversity and habitat conservation and the Clean Water Network for its extensive knowledge of water quality matters. Len Sauers, Vice President of Global Sustainability at Procter & Gamble notes that when P&G forms partnerships, the NGO *must* possess technical ability and external credibility in order to be considered as a reliable partner.¹⁹ The knowledge partnership can be collaborative, as was the case when the Environmental Defense Fund and Fed Ex shared knowledge each alone possessed to develop a hybrid truck fleet—a totally new product innovation.

Partnerships can provide many types of knowledge besides narrow technical matters. Working

¹³ United Nations, *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment: Business Synthesis Report* (New York: United Nations 2005).

¹⁴ Austin and Seitanidi, *op cit*.

¹⁵ Conservation International and Rain Forest Alliance have operated in this fashion.

¹⁶ Greenpeace and Rain Forest Action Network come to mind as examples here.

¹⁷ Conner, A. and K. Epstein, "Harnessing Purity and Pragmatism," *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Fall, 2007): 61-65.

¹⁸ Reisfield, Meredith, "Enabling Successful Environmental Partnerships," *CMC Senior Theses*, Paper 688 (Claremont, CA: Claremont McKenna College, 2013). http://www.scholarship.claremont.edu/cmc_theses/688.

¹⁹ Sauers, Len, Phone Interview by Apoorva Rangan (Claremont: CMC, Roberts Environmental Center, April 3, 2014).

together heightens awareness of how each perceives social and corporate trends and demands. It may also enhance their expertise in conflict management, negotiation, and communication across social sectors. NGOs often have detailed knowledge of local environmental conditions that may affect business investment decisions in new geographic areas.²⁰

Long-term Stability

Corporations and NGOs also seek partnerships to aid institutional stability. From the corporation perspective, partnerships can improve and maintain both environmental performance and public perception. As many more stringent environmental laws and regulations come on scene, corporations have increasing incentive to partner with NGOs to improve their performance in an increasingly environmentally-concerned society. Somewhat similar incentives exist for certain kinds of public/governmental organizations, too.

The U.S. National Park Service has for many years partnered with “experiential environmental education” NGOs to provide outstanding venues to train school-aged children and to offer constructive partnering opportunities for private sector organizations to be involved. A solid example here is Nature Bridge (formerly the Yosemite National Institutes) and its deep and long-standing relationship with the U.S. Park Service in Yosemite, Olympic, Presidio, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, and several other national parks. This relationship has over the years increasingly included private sector, corporate partners in specific activities as well as for general financial support.

Environmental NGOs that partner with corporations enjoy improved financial security and stability in many possible ways. Corporations funding joint ventures with an environmental NGO, especially where the relationship works well and for some time, often provide corporate donations to help fund other aspects of their work, or even general, non-designated funds. This is very clearly the case with the Ford Motor Corporation and its relationship to the Greenfield Village Museum in Dearborn, Michigan.

From the environmental NGO perspective, partnering with a corporation allows for greater financial security and general stability. It may open access to other corporate sponsors, based on early good experiences of the partnership and the informal, word-of-mouth conversations among business executives. In the competition for philanthropic resources, many NGOs are focusing on means to earn income which may involve private sector, corporate partners directly. In many different ways, partnering may help NGOs continue to do their work and have an impact in years to come.

Employee Involvement

Long-term stability is also enhanced when a corporation’s employees get involved in constructive and meaningful environmental activities. An environmental NGO is often able to suggest options and then help the corporation execute what it decides to do. More than simple public relations are involved especially as successive generations of employees and their families and children become more environmentally aware and involved. Sometimes employee engagement focuses on measures and means to improve a corporation’s sustainability. Simple recycling activities may well lead to much more sophisticated ones involving advanced principles of industrial ecology and other ways to improve a firm’s efficiency and competitiveness. Employee outreach to the communities where they

²⁰ Yaziji, M. and J. Doh, *NGOs and Corporations: Conflict and Collaboration* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

live and raise their families can frequently be focused on an array of environmental educational tools and techniques best provided by a qualified environmental partner. Interestingly, securing direct involvement of the NGO's employees alongside corporate ones in these kinds of activities also fosters mutual understanding and better relationships in communities where they all live together.

As Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices become widespread, corporations look for ways to engage employees in volunteer activities. NGOs and corporations can work together to promote human resource development and employee engagement. In the most common form of exchange, NGOs design programs that corporations can implement to engage their employees. For example, the environmental NGO Earth Share works with companies to connect employees with CSR and sustainability goals. Earth Share has a complete toolkit that includes online giving programs, volunteerism, and “green teams” to connect and engage employees on specific environmental issues.²¹ NGOs and corporations can together engage their employees and clientele and so provide shared experiences. For example, the NGO Global Explorers developed a “community day” with a tech company that provides a joint learning experience for each organization's employees as well as the NGO's target population.²² Uncommon, these types of partnerships provide constructive experiences and ideas for others.

Access to New Markets

Partnerships have helped in the discovery of and access to new markets. They have helped corporations develop new eco-friendly products and attract new environmentally friendly consumers. In 2008, Clorox collaborated with The Sierra Club which, in turn, endorsed Clorox's *Green Works* line of “natural” cleaning products. This allowed Clorox to target the growing natural cleaner market to the point where Clorox gained a 40 percent share of it within a year or two. The partnership also helped Clorox increase its overall revenue by 12 percent by the end of FY 2009.²³ Corporations can gain a competitive advantage by partnering with environmental NGOs to become “first movers” in new technology within their respective industries. Setting new industry standards and capturing market share as a consequence happens because first movers can adopt these standards quickly and efficiently.

New markets can open up to NGOs, too. For example, EDF's partnership with Fed Ex allowed it access to the delivery standards market by their successful joint development of hybrid, fuel-efficient, and cost-competitive trucks that the whole industry around the world adopted later. WWF's partnership with Procter and Gamble, one of the world's largest consumer products companies, allows them to affect the supply chain of a large multi-national company. Working with different firms, their employees, and other stakeholders can help NGOs gain experience and knowledge that allow them to be more effective—particularly as they reach out to new and different businesses, which is the equivalent to a “new market” for an NGO.

Outreach is not all positive or risk-free for the NGO. The Sierra Club received enormous grief from the environmental community because of its partnership with Clorox. Significantly, much of the backlash came from local and regional branches of The Sierra Club itself!²⁴ Clorox's long-standing record of poor environmental public relations was well known, but The Sierra Club chose not to address this as it entered the partnership. The overriding issue for The Sierra Club was getting a chance

²¹ Earth Share, Earthshare@Work Works (2012). <http://www.earthshare.org/earthshareatwork.html/>

²² Dubin, Julie, Phone Interview by Simone Berkovitz. Roberts Environmental Center (December 11, 2013).

²³ Reisfield, op. cit.

²⁴ Ibid.

to promote affordable green products to an extremely large market. It succeeded but it got burned by loads of negative publicity for defending (or at least overlooking) Clorox's environmental record.²⁵ There may be significant risks for NGOs trying to access new markets, in general, but especially by teaming up with a corporate partner with an unsavory history and environmental baggage. The experience can also turn out poorly if the selected NGO already has a poor reputation with key corporate stakeholders.

Access to Funding

Despite huge differences in nearly every other aspect, all NGOs share one common characteristic: They always need funds to sustain, promote, and expand on their basic missions. Partnerships of the sort we discuss here are often a means by which an NGO secures more cash to do its good works. Asking for or taking the cash is hardly ever easy and it is even less likely to be done without strings and conditions being attached. The ancient idea of *quid pro quo*—something for something—holds constant.

Philanthropy and contributing to a partnership are not equivalent, and the differences between them must be carefully drawn and understood by the participants. Corporate philanthropy allows corporations to demonstrate environmental commitment by helping to finance NGOs. It may also create a conflict of interest, especially if the NGO's independence can be called into question as a consequence. In the partnership mode this issue is mitigated when the business partner is paying for services rendered by the NGO. If the company is also a major philanthropic funder of the NGO, the independent environmental validation sought in the partnership may be diminished or compromised.

It is important to stress that even for poor environmental organizations cash donations are not enough to sustain a partnership able to produce jointly created benefits for all involved.²⁶ To maintain their alliance, money needs to flow on an ongoing basis. This is unlikely to happen if the partnership cannot move beyond corporate philanthropy to generate other important co-created benefits discussed in this report: new environmental management capabilities, higher environmental protection performance, greater network of contacts, better environmental conflict resolution skills, and—of course—enhanced profits through reduced risk management, higher productivity, more Customers, better reputation, reduced regulatory monitoring, and so on.²⁷ Achievement of any of these benefits requires active involvement of the corporate donor beyond mere cash donations.²⁸

Four kinds of corporate funding exist: one-time donations, contributions to agreed-upon projects which may continue over extended periods, consulting tasks, and/or ongoing operating support to be used at the discretion of the NGO's leadership. Companies most often make voluntary one-time donations to fund specific NGO projects. Occasionally they make them as a consequence of court orders. For example, after a court decision against the Swiss chemical corporation Sandoz in November 1986, when a chemical spill into the upper Rhine River ignited and caused great damage, Sandoz was ordered to pay for the clean-up and in addition about \$1 million dollars for "environmental education." This was not the only penalty, but it was one that forced a one-time environmental pay-out to INSEAD, a French business school that then created an endowed chair in environmental management, which in turn led to an environmental enrichment of the teaching

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ One should not ignore the possible importance, especially to small or struggling NGOs, of one-time gifts delivered when needed most.

²⁷ Yaziji, M. and J. Doh, op. cit.

²⁸ Husted, B., D. Allen, and Jorge Rivera, "[Governance Choice for Strategic Corporate Social Responsibility: Evidence from Central America](#)," *Business and Society*, vol. 49 (2010): 201-15.

programs that persists to this day.²⁹ Though less spectacular, many other legal decisions and actions have and continue to result in one-time payouts to environmental organizations.

Specific project donations allow corporations to support a particular activity or cause. The corporation often has genuine interest and so becomes a vested stakeholder and sees the project to fruition. An example is the nearly 30-year partnership between The Nature Conservancy and 3M. Beginning in the early 1990s with a donation of \$3.4 million, 3M's contributions to TNC are now more than \$20 million.³⁰

Consulting projects that take advantage of specific expertise with an environmental NGO are an interesting means of collaboration. As Sempra Energy's Cartmill notes, her company "partnered with the San Diego Zoo and Instituto de Ecologia in Baja California on a multi-year study to understand flight patterns of the California condor, golden eagle, and other birds and bats that could be affected by a proposed wind farm."³¹

The "best kind of money of all" from the NGO perspective is given without strings, that is "discretionary" or completely "untied" monies. Corporate partners on occasion may provide this kind of support, although in even the most benign of circumstances, the specter of quid pro quo looms, usually and at least in the form of a positive acknowledgement by the NGO for the money. While the Public Broadcast System is "commercial free" it is still bound to acknowledge at some length corporate and other private support for most of its programming. So, too, is the case for "general support" and "discretionary" funds provided by corporations to environmental organizations. To be fair to corporate leaders, one must remember that philanthropic budgets exist because of corporate profits which would otherwise be returned to shareholders or invested back into the corporation itself. Alignment between corporate interests and funds provided to the NGO is quite understandable and even reasonable under the circumstances.

Mediation/Conflict Resolution

Partnerships to facilitate mediation and to help resolve conflicts exist. The environmental NGO may act as a third-party consultant to a business venture to ensure overall, sound, and effective environmental performance. The development of recreational (such as ski areas) and ecotourism projects and facilities often use environmental NGOs in this role. Mediation may require an environmental NGO to intervene into an existing conflict between other entities in hopes of finding resolution short of formal legal proceedings.

For example, an environmental NGO with extensive experience in land transactions and management, such as the Nature Conservancy, may act as a third party in a land deal between a timber company and a smaller environmental non-profit created specifically to preserve the land for public use. In this case, the intermediary ensures that the transaction goes smoothly. Without the expertise of the larger NGO acting as mediator, the transaction might fail and so, too, would the ultimate goal of land protection and preservation fail.

A few exemplary businesses with strong reputations for proactive environmental management have served as mediators to resolve conflict between corporations and activist environmental groups.

²⁹ The Sandoz Chair in Environment and Management, since renamed the Novartis Chair, was in 1992 awarded to Robert Ayres who created a number of courses in industrial ecology, sustainability, and efficient manufacturing processes for use in the MBA and executive education programs of INSEAD.

³⁰ The Nature Conservancy, *Conservancy Corporate Partners: 3M | The Nature Conservancy*. <http://www.nature.org/about-us/working-with-companies/companies-we-work-with/3m.xml> [Accessed: 4/7/2015.]

³¹ Cartmill, Molly. Private communication 8/15/2015.

For example, in 2006 Aspen Skiing Company facilitated conversations between top executives from Kimberly-Clark and Greenpeace, which at the time was leading a boycott against Kimberly-Clark. These conversations ended Greenpeace's boycott and Kimberly-Clark agreed to purchase all its wood fiber from green certified suppliers.³²

Policy Making and Regulatory Compliance

Partnerships may help corporations comply with, or even preempt, new environmental policies and regulations. Regarding compliance, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has mandated several new regulations to combat the problem of rising greenhouse gas emissions. To meet the terms of these new regulations, corporations and NGOs have developed partnership programs. Regarding preemption, George Wyeth, a senior attorney with the EPA, notes that “the anticipation of regulation is one of the drivers for business sustainability initiatives.” Better to anticipate and demonstrate concern and improvement than to be forced to conform to ill-fitting or Draconian rules and regulations. This is especially relevant to greenhouse gas emissions.³³

Failure to comply with environmental regulations, results in time-consuming litigation and costly penalties. A recent report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office tracks the lengthy and expensive enforcement or litigation in nine different cases, one of which took nearly 23 years to resolve.³⁴ In this sense, partnerships may avoid litigation, especially when the hostile environmental groups are preempted and engaged constructively in the partnership itself. Environmentalists in the United States have their own powerful tools, such as citizen-litigation provisions of environmental laws, to bring cases to court, especially when less aggressive and more constructive means are not available or fail.

Preemption could avoid even stricter environmental regulations than existing ones or those that arise due to prior litigation. When EPA issues new or amended regulations, parties may take issue with specific provisions. GAO reported that industry may become involved in litigation related to the development of regulations because it wishes to be part of the process and negotiations that result in a mutually acceptable rule.³⁵

Partnerships also have the constructive, positive potential to influence and shape emergent policies such as those dealing with climate change. The GAO's Susan Iott highlights these partnerships along with voluntary efforts to address climate change, despite the lack of international or national policies. With partnerships, corporations can go beyond strict and often narrow and confining regulatory compliance, and experiment with other “ideas and incentive[s]” that can “persuade consumers and create demand.” NGO-corporate partnerships provide a variety of alternative means for complying with environmental regulations, and therefore, “they can act as laboratories for different practices that business or government may adopt.”³⁶ The conventional, zero-sum, winners vs. losers

³² Toffel, M. and S. Van Sice, *Aspen Skiing Company* (B). Harvard Business School Case. (2001).

³³ Wyeth, George, Email Response. Roberts Environmental Center (March 2014). His participation in the Task Force was in his personal capacity and as a representative of the EPA.

³⁴ US GAO, *Environmental Litigation: Impacts of Deadline Suits EPA's Rulemaking is Limited*, GAO 15-34 (Washington, DC: December 15, 2014). <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO15-34>

³⁵ US GAO, *Environmental Litigation: Cases Against EPA and Associated Costs Over Time*, GAO-11-650 (Washington, DC: August 1, 2011). <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-11-650>.

³⁶ Iott, Susan, Email Response. Roberts Environmental Center (March 2014). The importance of different situations and circumstances (or context) are often run over rough shod by necessarily general, uniform, “one-size-fits-all” rules and regulations. Innovation and creativity in meeting desired

legalistic model is particularly costly in terms of its discouragement of and limitation on experimentation and innovation.

Efficiency

Reducing waste, water, and energy, as well as generally improving a company's efficiency can make a positive environmental impact and save money. Eliminating waste to improve profitability is a classic sustainability means.

An NGO partnership may help a company reduce waste. This happens when the business value of waste reduction is not obvious until an external agent stimulates or requires it. In such cases, the NGO could provide "cover" for an exploratory effort. For example, McDonald's partnership with EDF in 1990 helped the company save about \$6 million per year by reducing waste by 30 percent over the course of 10 years.³⁷ The McDonald's/EDF partnership has since served as a positive model for many other corporations seeking efficiency gains. Even sophisticated and well financed businesses may enlist NGO partners to enhance their credibility. A more recent example involves Walmart's ambitious partnership with EDF and other environmental groups. In the first two years, these collaborations resulted in about \$80 million dollars in savings from improvements in Walmart's management of plastic waste, fuel efficiency in trucks, product packaging, and refrigeration and lighting efficiency gains in stores.³⁸ Walmart might have taken these measures by its self, but bringing in NGO partners evidently added reputational advantage.

Fuel and water use are key focal points for many corporations seeking more "sustainable" operations. NGOs can help corporations here. For example, WWF is helping Procter & Gamble transition to more sustainable product sources, such as renewable forest products (much as Greenpeace did previously for Kimberley-Clark). The P&G/WWF partnership also seeks a replacement of at least 25 percent of today's petroleum-based raw materials for products and packaging with sustainably sourced renewable materials. WWF is also partnering with Coca Cola to secure worldwide dependable sources of affordable fresh water. This goal is as staggering in its scale and dimension as it is in its critical importance to Coca Cola's long-term prospects as a corporation. By helping corporations become more efficient, environmental NGOs begin to fulfill their ultimate goal of making a large and long-lasting environmental impact.

INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS

Commitment, involvement, personalities, trust, rules, and experiences all matter in creating effective and enduring partnerships. There are no guaranteed methods or means. On the other hand, there are many degrees of uncertainty, lots of risks, and some clear ways not to succeed. Sufficient experience now exists to see and understand why some partnerships work while others don't. We start with the positive and spend a moment analyzing why one of the first, even foundational, partnerships worked as well as it did.

environmental goals and outcomes also suffer under a tight regulatory regime based on past histories of bad practices and experiences.

³⁷ "Better Packaging with McDonald's EDF+ Business," *Environmental Defense Fund* (2014). <http://www.business.edf.org/casestudies/better-packaging-mcdonalds> This occurred in 1990. In today's setting where the business value of waste reduction is appreciated more such an effort involving EDF might not be as essential.

³⁸ Demend, L. and E. Plambeck, 's *Sustainability Strategy Case*. Stanford Graduate School of Business (2007).

Top Executive Commitment and Involvement

One very important element in the success of the McDonald's/EDF partnership, and most subsequent ones, is the extent of involvement and commitment by each organization—especially the top leadership—to the activity.³⁹ Leaders need to engage in the collaboration in a clear-cut, genuine way for the long haul. This involves commitment by top managers to be active participants beyond the initial partnership launching effects.⁴⁰ Otherwise, it becomes very difficult to agree upon feasible shared goals and to assign responsibility for specific resources and tasks to accomplish. Top leaders' continued involvement is also critical to establish direct performance incentives to reward subordinates for dedicating time and resources and taking the professional risks to support the partnership.⁴¹

The joint efforts of McDonald's and EDF led to the creation of new standards for the fast food industry and ultimately saved McDonald's over \$6 million annually.⁴² McDonald's transitioned from polystyrene foam “clamshells” to paper packaging, which reduced total waste by nearly 90 percent.⁴³ The success of this first partnership sparked a wave of change, not only for the production standards of the fast food industry, but also throughout the corporate world as improving manufacturing efficiencies were shown to result in decreased long-term costs. From the standpoint of the NGOs, this was an opportunity to “gain a public voice at the corporate decision-making table.”⁴⁴ The green case need not be costly; it could actually improve the bottom line. But how does one move forward to take better advantage of it?

Clear Goals and Responsibilities

A successful partnership requires more than two willing participants. Mutually agreed and clear goals, well defined responsibilities for specific tasks, transparent rules about contracting, financing, and settling disputes, and so forth are all essential. Something as obvious as agreeing to a time and place must be taken seriously.⁴⁵ The business must be aware that it has an environmental problem or opportunity for which “normal” means are not working or are unavailable. The NGO must be realistic about its competence and mastery of the environmental essentials required by the problem and circumstances. This issue is particularly sensitive for smaller environmental NGOs as they size themselves up as a potential partner to larger, much better financed businesses. Setting a precedent in a field of business or for a type of environmental organization entails the risk of the unknown. Being a “first-mover” from either perspective is harder by far than following the lead of

³⁹ Rondinelli, Dennis A. and Ted London, "How Corporations and Environmental Groups Cooperate: Assessing Cross-Sector Alliances and Collaborations," *JSTOR* (February 2003).

⁴⁰ Austin, J. E. “Strategic Collaboration between Nonprofits and Business,” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, vol. 29, suppl. 1 (2000): 69-97.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² "McDonald's: The First Corporate Partnership." *Environmental Defense Fund*. Web. <http://www.edf.org/partnerships/mcdonalds> [Accessed 5/5/2014.]

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Reisfield, Meredith, *Enabling Successful Environmental Partnerships*, op. cit. (2013).

⁴⁵ Whose place? Who gets “home-field advantage? How about a neutral, off-site location? Corporate “posh” or deep green and “bare bones?” Formal meetings or informal working groups? Set a timetable and deadlines or keep it informal to see how things develop? Off the record or transparent (whatever either may mean to each)? The answers to these questions are potential land mines, especially when relationships are just getting underway.

others who have had some success. Specific contextual details (a.k.a. “the circumstances”) matter, often decisively.

And finally, one of the most important, even essential, requirements is the nature of the personal relationships that exist and can be cultivated between the leaders of each organization and, in time, between those carrying out the specific jobs the partnership involves. Trust is the essential “coin of the realm” at every level.

Personal Relationships

Personal relationships dominate almost all partnerships, especially in the early formation stages. Most partnerships begin with individual interactions between both parties. Contacts within one’s network can be the key to a partnership and individual connections are necessary to help a partnership form and grow. Establishing and sustaining communication, understanding, and cooperation by people and organizations having different goals, cultures, expertise, and resources is very difficult, even when desired or ordered by top executives. Personal relationships foster trust and smooth working relationships, but risks are also involved, especially for smaller organizations and for those “in the trenches” at the working level. Julie Dubin, Director of Global Explorers, cited partnerships between individuals as one of the greatest risks for her NGO. “If a partnership is only supported by an individual, there is a great risk that if the individual leaves the company that partnership may no longer be supported. Successful partnerships must be supported by top-level executives in both organizations and must move beyond individual relationships.”⁴⁶

Trust

Because of multiple reputational, financial, and technical risks, trust is difficult to establish but critical to succeed.⁴⁷ Trust means being willing to take risks and be vulnerable to the intentions and actions of one another, especially when clear control over the situation is uncertain.⁴⁸ Getting and establishing trust are generally challenging in human affairs. Doing so when the potential partners think, act, and even speak different languages, even to point of being at odds or in open conflict, makes all of this a substantial barrier to confront and overcome. Barrier or not, trust must be a central ingredient in any successful partnership.

The corporate perspective is captured in a report by the Business Social Responsibility Education Fund, *Guide to Engaging with NGOs*, which includes a concise discussion of the role a lack of trust plays: “[A]t the core of why companies are resistant to partner with NGOs is the fear that they cannot trust NGOs, or that by engaging with them, companies will be opening themselves up further to future stakeholder criticism.”⁴⁹ As the report suggests, corporate leaders are accountable to their stakeholders and hence fear their reactions to associating with “environmentalists” and environmental NGOs. A breach of trust can occur at any time, even when things have been going well for some time. Julissa Sanchez of Walmart described problems created by several unnamed

⁴⁶ Dubin, Julie, op. cit.

⁴⁷ Leana, C. R. and H. J. Van Buren, “Organizational Social Capital and Employment Practices,” *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 24, no. 3 (1999): 538-55.

⁴⁸ Mayer, R. C., J. H. Davis, and F. D. Schoorman, “An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust,” *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 20, no. 3 (1995): 709-34.

⁴⁹ Business for Social Responsibility, “The Corporate Angle: Using Partnerships to Meet Strategic Goals,” *Guide to Engaging with NGOs* (San Francisco: 2001).

Central American NGOs whose unsavory reputations made it very difficult, even impossible, for Walmart to participate with them in partnerships and alliances.⁵⁰

Environmental NGOs often distrust corporations and so hesitate to enter into partnerships. Many NGOs are afraid their reputation with donors and peer environmental organizations could suffer. Oxfam, for example, “feared a negative reaction from the NGO community and did not want to be seen as ‘selling out’ by working with Starbucks.”⁵¹ Molly Cartmill of Semptra Energy said that there is always a “risk that *other* environmental organizations will put pressure on the NGO a corporation has chosen to work with, or even attack them in the media.”⁵² Additionally, because an NGO’s reputation blends with a corporation’s reputation in a partnership, corporate actions that antagonize the environmental community are threatening. Likewise, an NGO’s reputation, actions or tactics may antagonize a company’s stakeholders, such as its employees, customers, suppliers, or investors. A corporation could also simply be using the environmental NGO to bolster its reputation and an NGO could simply be using a corporation to bolster its pocketbook. Earning trust is a two-way street paved with honesty, respect, transparency, and a commitment to one another.

Money—Yet Again

Financial donations from corporations are hardly enough to sustain partnerships long-term, and they may involve risks—for *both* parties. Sustaining the many elements of a partnership in fact requires that all collaborators continue to be actively involved to shape and share goals and to work together with the same high levels of commitment. This financial arrangement is decidedly not the same as a simple, one-time corporate philanthropic cash donation.⁵³ Other practical, but not well understood, financial outcomes color the prospects for partnerships.

Jon Pratt outlines many of these and the dilemmas nonprofits face as a consequence. Many struggle to maintain their autonomy and reliability as organizations.⁵⁴ Pratt states that autonomy, “is directly related to the extent of their reliance on suppliers of funds” and the “variety of conditions that are attached to funding.” Autonomy for Pratt can be categorized into low, medium, and high levels. For high autonomy, Pratt includes funding such as “small to medium-sized individual contributions, fees for services, foundation operating grants, endowments, memberships.” For Pratt, corporate charitable donations are medium reliability while corporate sponsorships are low reliability.

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RISKS AND PITFALLS

⁵⁰ Sanchez, Julissa, Phone Interview by Shane Griffie. Roberts Environmental Center (March 29, 2014). While Sanchez did not speak of specific environmental NGOs, her remarks clearly highlight the problem.

⁵¹ Damlamian, Corinne, "Corporate-NGO Partnerships for Sustainable Development," *ScholarlyCommons*, vol. 1 (2006): 41. Oxfam had never entered into a corporate partnership before, which added to its sense of risk.

⁵² Cartmill, Molly. Task Force Meeting, notes.

⁵³ Husted, B., D. Allen, and Jorge Rivera, op. cit.

⁵⁴ Pratt, Jon, "Analyzing the Dynamics of Funding: Reliability and Autonomy," *Nonprofit Quarterly* (May 2004).

<http://www.elderberry.org/images/contentImages/1a%202004%20pratt%20autonomy%20reliability>. [Accessed 4/12/2014.]

⁵⁵ Ibid.

A general pitfall can be avoided if everyone realizes that the business-environment partnership always includes a third, sometimes not-so-silent, partner: the public sector. Government actions including laws and regulations shape the setting and circumstances where business and environment interact. Granted, the public sector is usually not a reactive participant nearly as much as it is a “driver” or causative one as a result of its defining of the rules of the game and the objectives to be obtained. Nonetheless, the public sector deserves careful consideration. But no matter the complete definition of the cast of characters, partnerships create definite risks for everyone involved.

Loss of Credibility

Appearing to sell out or to be co-opted by their business partners is a great reputational risk for NGOs. On the other hand, corporations risk being accused of deceptive green-washing practices, often just for seeking out basic environmental help.⁵⁶ These kinds of risk are quite real and threaten the loss of credibility.

Co-optation may involve taking advantage of influence gained by corporate donations and the capture of environmental board of director positions. Consider, for instance, that in 2008 top corporate executives constituted 63 percent of the board members at Conservation International, 56 percent at Environmental Defense, and 52 percent at The Nature Conservancy.⁵⁷ In the past, TNC in particular has been criticized and forced to disassociate from questionable partnerships involving its corporate board members.⁵⁸ The U.S. Congress investigated TNC in 2004 after *The Washington Post* published critical articles about questionable financial deals TNC made with corporations.⁵⁹

The Sierra Club/Clorox partnership noted previously is another example of lost NGO credibility in a partnership. In sum: The Sierra Club endorsed Clorox’s new *Green Works* line and then received a percentage of sales of *Green Works*’ products. Clorox got endorsed by one of the world’s most well-known, even “hard-core,” environmental organizations. Sierra Club members were outraged by the endorsement. The fact that The Sierra Club did not verify claims made by Clorox about *Green Works*’ products hardly helped. The Sierra Club’s leadership “sell out” to Clorox lost it many members. Two general lessons about lost credibility flow from this specific example: 1. Even if the NGO means to endorse only one business practice or product, its endorsement may seem to be general and covering all or most of what the business partner does. 2. The endorsed item may be regarded by outside environmental bodies as insignificant or trivial and therefore unworthy of any endorsement at all.

Lost credibility also happens when someone pulls out of the partnership early. This happens for different reasons. Internal conflicts within or between the parties may bring everything to a halt. Global Explorers’ Julie Dubin tells of one corporation’s pulling out of an arrangement with her organization because of internal conflicts and its consequent failure to support the partnership. Unfortunately and painfully, the corporation pulled out after Global Explorers had already started publicizing the partnership, which put Global Explorers’ reputation at risk.⁶⁰

Failing to Meet Agreed-to Goals

⁵⁶ Reisfield, Meredith, op. cit.

⁵⁷ Rivera, Jorge, *Business and Public Policy*, op. cit. (2010).

⁵⁸ Ottaway, David and Joe Stephens, “Nonprofit Land Bank Amasses Billions: Charity Builds Assets on Corporate Partnerships,” *The Washington Post* (May 4, 2003).

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Dubin, Julie, op. cit.

To be successful, everyone must agree upon and meet realistic goals. Molly Cartmill of Semptra Energy believes corporations must be “honest and forthright; but don’t promise things that can’t delivered.”⁶¹ Open and honest discussion of goals is essential to ensure that goals can be met. To avoid being overwhelmed and to provide milestones along the way to longer term goals, a series of incremental goals may help. For example, WWF created a series of year-by-year goals to help Procter & Gamble replace 25 percent of petroleum-based materials with renewable ones. Both parties had to agree, which they eventually did.

Failure to achieve goals damages reputations all around. NGOs may appear to be unrealistic and incompetent while corporations may look adamant, duplicitous, or worse. Bad relationships in the future are essentially guaranteed. Corporations that provide financial compensation to NGO partners risk losing their investments. Lacking clear goals, failure may bring the company even more negative publicity.

Failure to balance environmental and economic goals results in failure of partnerships. Failed trust also dooms them. Trust takes time to build and occurs because of patient, respectful and open behavior. Partners must respect each other and work to clarify and value each others’ views. Without trust, nothing much constructive will happen.

Green-washing

Corporate green-washing is a risk for both the company and its NGO partners. Corporations know they must meet financial targets and benchmarks, but increasingly they are also measured on environmental and social metrics. Many corporations set up environmental partnerships as a consequence. But in their eagerness to display environmental commitment, through their public relations and media campaigns, they often overstate or distort the impact created by their partnership.

Greenpeace provides four different green-washing categories: Dirty business practices, advertising bluster campaigns, putting political spin on activities, and lastly, “It’s the Law, Stupid.” Keep in mind that Greenpeace is considered to be a controversial environmental advocate. Their four categories may not be readily embraced by all businesses—clean or dirty. Dirty business practices describe a corporation whose core business is environmentally unfriendly, but where management heavily promotes its production of environmental products or programs. Energy companies are susceptible here, as the “Beyond Petroleum” campaign of British Petroleum prior to the Gulf disaster to focus on its miniscule renewables business demonstrated.⁶² Ad blusters refer to a corporation that exaggerates results and impacts of a specific partnership—particularly when nothing much has had a chance to happen. Political spin occurs when a corporation publicly endorses “green” commitments, but is simultaneously lobbying hard against environmental regulations. Lastly, “It’s the Law, Stupid” refers to companies promoting their actions as different, ground breaking, and voluntary, when in fact they are mandated by law.⁶³

Trumpeting “success” prematurely, companies invite green-washing charges. Experienced corporate leaders know to wait for positive results from a partnership before advertising them. Miscues, mistakes, and surprises *always* accompany partnerships—even the very best of them. “Too good to be true” public statements usually are. They also invite skeptical and critical comments which might have been avoided by solid doses of honesty and humility for both parties.

⁶¹ Cartmill, Molly, Email Response. Roberts Environmental Center (April 2014).

⁶² Energy companies are hardly alone here, as the recent Volkswagen diesel engine environmental deceit attests.

⁶³ “Greenpeace Greenwash Criteria.” *Greenpeace*. <http://www.stopgreenwash.org/criteria> [Accessed: 5/2/2014.]

Green-washing can also be caused by a lack of industry-wide standards for communicating environmental messages.⁶⁴ This deficiency is closely related to poor or non-existent measures of environmental performance in general.⁶⁵ Additionally, green-washing occurs when the partners fail to agree upon and coordinate communications. The different audiences sought by each partner naturally produce different messages in both form and content. What one partner considers normal and customary the other might find totally unsuitable—which in turn resolves down to various forms of green-washing.

To avoid accusations of green-washing, businesses have been steadily increasing their participation in voluntary environmental certification programs. Through these certification programs firms and industries commit themselves to improve their environmental protection practices beyond the minimum requirements established by regulations. To be effective, voluntary certification programs need to include the following critical necessary conditions to reduce “free-riding” behavior by participant businesses:⁶⁶

1. Specific performance-based standards of environmental protection adopted by participant companies;
2. Periodic independent third-party audits that verify the adoption of these standards; and,
3. Rewards and sanctions that publicly recognize the different levels of audited performance obtained by certification program participants.

Green-bashing

Not all corporations are “bad” and not all environmental organizations are “good,” in terms of their treatment of others in partnership arrangements. Zealous attacks against corporations and their leadership by environmental interests could very well prove unfair, even hypocritical and carried out primarily to gain support from the green faithful. Possible reputational risks to corporate leaders and their firms present a different, but possibly potent, reality than those better known from the environmentalist perspective.⁶⁷

CONCLUSION

The vast majority of business-environment partnerships will be asymmetric and the imbalance of financial capability will be the major distinguishing characteristic. NGOs need resources to pursue their mission, and getting a check from a business partner is only one among many different ways to pay the bills. We have listed several risks and adverse consequences that may occur in accepting and cashing the corporate check. In fairness, the asymmetries here once again work against the

⁶⁴ Horiuchi, Rina, Ryan Schuchard, Lucy Shea, and Solitaire Townsend, *Understanding and Preventing Greenwash: A Business Guide* (London: Futerra Sustainability Communications, 2009).

⁶⁵ "Event Reviews." *Business and Biodiversity Campaign..* <http://www.businessbiodiversity.eu/default.asp?Menu=120&News=1381> [Accessed: 5/2/2014.]

⁶⁶ deLeon, Peter, and Jorge Rivera, eds., *Voluntary Environmental Programs: A Policy Perspective* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield for the Policy Studies Organization, 2009).

⁶⁷ This important capacity to view partnerships from several different valid perspectives is seldom stressed sufficiently, a point emphasized by several Task Force members.

environmental partner and so raise the legitimate questions of “Why bother?” and “Are there equivalent or better ways to ‘green-up’ and improve business practices?”

“Why bother?” is nearly self-evident. The environment is just too valuable, important, and fragile not to treat it with serious respect—or even reverence. Old-fashioned thinking about cost-free externalities of doing business are simply wrong; wrong because there is no “away” to throw our waste and wrong because it burdens future generations to deal with the messes the current generation is making. A considerable contribution of environmental activism to corporate activities reveals these and other costs; however, at least as important are contributions that highlight economic benefits to be gained by not taking the environment for granted. Business-environment partnerships have played an essential role in this first phase of joining Gold and Green together. Corporate leaders are beginning “to get” these fundamental green truths and messages. Encouraging signs and behavior exist in more and more sectors, fields, and realms. Environmental leaders are beginning “to get” the message that they have been fairly successful; however, they are also more and more aware that partnering can be both risky and costly. Under these evolving circumstances, we have crafted systematic guidance and assistance to prospective partners in the form of the appended *Corporate Check List*.

A second large collection of activities could be considered under the changing circumstances. We next imagine several newer and potentially more effective ways than partnerships to promote environmentally responsible behavior from leaders of all kinds of organizations—private, public, and non-profit. We do not pretend to know all the future possibilities, of course, but several tantalizing developments bear closer investigation and possible adoption.

1. *Policy Forums*: These are issue-based intermediary organizations that allow for access and interactions between diverse interests and individuals. Collaborative or adversarial—different sizes, members, purposes. Face-to-face and/or internet based. They are being used to learn, negotiate, and build trust in a wide range of subjects, policy arenas, and problem settings.⁶⁸
2. *Knowledge Networks*: A key and relevant model is the Social Enterprise Knowledge Network (SEKN) which is a collaboration among top-level international business schools and the Avina Foundation that formed in 2001. It publishes cases studies that seek to promote social enterprises, most particularly, sustainable development in all its aspects, but often those related to environmental practice and performance. The basic idea of a Knowledge Network includes a large array of generally interested and competent parties whose specific experiences, skills, and talents can be accessed quickly as needs arise. The longer-term matters of documenting experiences and training others to participate in the network necessarily involve academic and other “learning” organizations.⁶⁹
3. *Standard Setting Organizations*: Third-party organizations that provide common definitions, standards, and practices which often help to set goals and objectives for businesses. The Sustainable Purchasing Leadership Council is a good example as it provides clarification and rigor for product labels. A logical addition to these kinds of organizations would be efforts to collect,

⁶⁸ Hendricks, C.M. “Participatory Storylines and their Influence on Deliberative Forums,” *Policy Sciences*, vol. 38 (2005): 1-20; Selsky, J. W. and B. Parker, “Cross-sector Partnerships to Address Social Issues,” *Journal of Management*, vol. 31, no. 6 (2005): 849-73.

⁶⁹ <http://www.sekn.org/en/index.php>

pool, and disseminate data related to environmental business standards and practices. The potential contribution here to measurable partnership goals is large and essential.⁷⁰

4. *Investor Groups and Organizations:* Organizations such as CERES, the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board, Integrated Reporting <IR>, and Trucost all, in their individual ways, are working to create environmentally robust measures and means to keep track and manage complex interactions between businesses and the environment.⁷¹ Forging partnerships in the future will be facilitated and well served by contributions from such organizations.
5. *Universities:* Many universities are embracing business and environment linkages and training. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs are logical venues to supplant/replace the usual partnerships that have been used previously. Universities provide safe havens and access for business and environmental organizations. One of the most extreme commitments is probably Arizona State University, which has a professional school and several endowed institutes devoted to sustainability. The University of Michigan, Yale, Duke, and several others are also breaking free of traditional silos and disciplines. Specialized law schools, e.g., Vermont, Pace, Lewis & Clark and the practical clinics and outreach they provide deserve consideration. On-line and Extension Schools and programs are mostly untapped resources that could readily focus on business and environment training and practice.
6. *Professional Fields and Societies:* Industrial ecology. “Green Chemistry.” Civil and environmental engineering. Society of Mechanical Engineers (building efficiency, renewable fuels and systems), and many other professional associations could be important sources for businesses in search of environmental help.
7. *Consortia of Industry Firms and Relevant Environmental Groups:* Groups of companies and NGOs may come together to share experiences and information and so promote better environmental practices and corporate performance. For example, deforestation by the palm oil industry because of planting in so-called high carbon stock (HCS) forests led to the creation of the HCS Steering Group consisting of companies and NGOs seeking appropriate definitions of HCS forests and subsequent rules and guidelines to protect them. Similarly, the Global Forest and Trade Network that WWF helped create focused on environmental problems in the pulp industry.
8. *Consulting Firms:* There are several specialty and sub-specialty consulting practices that are emerging. A problem here is that ESH (environment, safety, and health) operations in businesses have long focused almost exclusively on regulatory compliance. This early demand on businesses motivated and paid for business consultants, first in general practice and increasingly in better trained specialty environmental practices. The net result of this history is that many consulting firms who offer up an “environmental practice” are still too narrowly focused on ESH and not the much wider and more complex range of issues and topics we want to emphasize and need to pursue.

⁷⁰ deLeon and Rivera, op. cit.

⁷¹ <http://ceres.org> <http://sasb.org> <http://integratedreporting.org> <http://trucost/published-research/99/natural-capital-at-risk-the-top-100-externalities-of-business>

Appendix I PARTNERSHIP GUIDE⁷²

When addressing environmental issues, potential partners have a wide range of options. Before getting involved many considerations exist; questions must be raised and answered. While there is nothing like a firm-and-fast nor sure-fire way to proceed, there is enough accumulated experience that common considerations and basic questions are showing through to help construct an effective partnership.

First and foremost, should one even do it? If so, then with whom should the business partner and how should it proceed? If not, what other ways exist to improve a business's environmental performance? The answers are often colored by the different perspectives and needs of the business and environmental organizations trying to decide. These differences, as the Task Force emphasizes, can matter significantly. The business is strong in wealth and power while seeking environmental skill and knowledge from its prospective partner. Finding a comfortable balance and exchange in these values must be realized by gaining and maintaining a balance of respect and trust—by definition a two-way proposition. Much of what we report in our experiences and cases can be distilled in these general terms, and finding the balance marks the difference between many successes and failures in practice. If the business decides that an NGO might be a good partner, specific tactical questions usually arise that demand attention to establish and sustain requisite respect and trust to allow the essential balance to thrive. If the basic decision is negative, but the business still seeks ways to work on its environmental problem, several alternative pathways next need to be explored.

Governmental organizations, contrary to the cynical message contained in the comment, “We’re from the Government and we’re here to help,” are actually being asked by businesses to help as a means of preempting or helping to fashion regulatory structures that attain mutually satisfactory environmental outcomes. This need not mean or even imply regulatory capture by the business, although very clear rules of engagement and transparent processes must be worked out and maintained for obvious reasons.

Consulting firms with specialty environmental practices are also available, and many of these are realizing strong business support as environmental and financial elements of business intertwine and force more sophisticated strategic planning and programming to the fore. The days of simply doing the minimums necessary to meet legal requirements, as evidenced in the outdated and isolated Environment, Safety, and Health (ESH) approach are yielding to far greater integration of environmental with traditional business units and practices. Consulting firms may be employed for a range of environmental needs, ranging all the way from helping out with one specific environmental

⁷² Student analysts of Claremont McKenna College’s Roberts Environmental Center, Simone Berkovitz, Haley Conner, Shane Griffee, Erin Larsen, Damini Marwaha, Khadjia Omerdin, Apoorva Rangan, Chad Redman, Sarah Sanbar, Jake Shimkus, and Annushka Shivnani, provided essential research assistance for this Guide, as well as background research for the body of the report.

issue all the way to helping with wholesale cultural and organizational changes to enable a firm to become truly “sustainable.” Most partnerships are more focused and far less ambitious.

A third basic option for a business is to use existing environmental knowledge and skill within the organization itself. So called in-house environmental groups sometimes are based on an experienced ESH operation now challenged to redefine the company’s larger environmental needs and opportunities. Creating in-house environmental consulting capacity is a different approach to consider. In-house task forces, with a specific problem focus, budget, and mandate sometimes work well, although this presumes that somewhere within the organization there exists knowledgeable and skilled talent to call on.

The following *Partnership Guide* is intended to be useful as business leaders think about their environmental needs and the basic means to deal with them. Many of these questions should also serve environmental and governmental leaders. Perspectives differ, as we stress, but asking and answering many of these questions mean to join and focus potential partners in constructive ways. At least that’s what we hope will happen.

WORKING WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS?

Three different phases exist as a business considers its specific environmental challenges.

Phase I: With Whom to Partner?

The first is whether to work with an NGO or other kinds of organizations and arrangements, such as consultants, in-house staff, or the government. If the answer is to work with an NGO, the second phase focuses on questions about the characteristics and qualities of different prospective partners. Once identified, the third phase revolves around issues to clarify and specify terms of engagement. Common questions follow for a business to consider once the decision to partner with an NGO is made.

Phase II: Strategic Issues

Characteristics and Qualities of a Prospective Partner

Mission:

What is the stated/formal mission of the organization? What priorities are reflected in its strategic policies? Do formal aspects of its mission square with actual programs, past and current? Do the mission and policies of the NGO align with our company and our shareholders?

Does working publicly with an NGO serve a purpose versus working with government and others through a multi-stakeholder forum?

Knowledge:

What specific knowledge and skill does the NGO have to offer, especially those we don’t have?

What is the experience of their leadership, including education, training, and past work experiences?

Are key NGO staff members, particularly those with whom we might be working, truly knowledgeable about our issues and challenges?

How large is the NGO and what kinds of talent do they have on hand? “Small may be beautiful,” but it may not be big large enough to get our job done.

Past Experiences:

What is the NGO's general reputation? Has the NGO participated in other partnerships in the past? If so, how did that turn out? Should we worry about how they operate and behave? How do business peers of ours regard them? Do any of them work now (or previously) with this NGO?

Has the NGO done anything that would potentially reflect positively (or poorly) on our company?

What have they required from companies in the past? Can we find out what they need from us? Have they signed contracts with partnership companies? Are those contracts available for us to review? Would they be willing to sign one with us?

Have they accepted non-disclosure agreements in the past? Were there any breaches of security? If so, what happened?

Constituents and Base:

Who is the NGO's target audience? What is their membership like? Is their focus mainly global, national, regional, or local? Given their geographic focus, do they connect and relate well with people and organizations "on the ground" there?

Who are their donors? Do other companies support them?

Are they politically active and do they lobby? Do we agree with their political agenda and, even we don't, can we still live it and them?

Financial Matters:

Does the NGO even accept corporate money for something like this? Some of them don't take cash directly, but still may expect us to pick up the tab for expenses and costs. What financial resources can the NGO contribute and for what purposes?

How much are we prepared to spend to get them as partners? For this amount, do we have even a *rough* idea what to spend the funds on?

Do our accountants and lawyers know of any tax or regulatory concerns to be aware of? For instance, should we use a disinterested intermediary to process funds or perhaps solicit individual donors or organizations to fund this activity?

* * *

This is far from an exhaustive list of questions and concerns. However, it should help companies new to the partnership game decide whether to link with an NGO. Striking out with an initial prospect should not discourage trying again for a more suitable one. If the pursuit succeeds, then specific, detailed matters and tasks arise in Phase III as the partnership gets underway.

Phase III: The Pre-Nuptial Agreement/Details That Matter

Common Goals, Constraints:

Align the company's mission, to the extent possible, with the NGO's. If there are glaring discrepancies, reveal and decide what to do about them in the spirit of "agree to disagree" if possible.

Identify mutual or common goals and, to the extent possible, focus the partnership's efforts on them. Focus should be on the specific project elements each wants to pursue as these are developed together in a jointly written project proposal. It is important to set out realistic expectations about what the parties can hope to accomplish and what they will view as success.

For the areas of shared missions and goals, then *honestly* discover and reveal to one another actual constraints and limitations that exist and might affect the operation of the partnership. Figure out ways to tell all those involved about the constraints so that there are no big "surprises" later on. It's never too soon to begin building trust.

Specialized Knowledge/ Communication:

Be very explicit in communicating the overall, shared goals and the specific project tasks to accomplish for each of the two partners meant to accomplish the goals.

Designate the top leadership responsible for these goals and ensure that they know they will be held to account for the success or failure of the operation.

Create a Task Force project planning team, ensuring that everyone doing the work is included, at the very least by being well informed. Tasks to be accomplished must be simply and clearly described and the persons and groups responsible for each of them must be identified on both sides of the partnership. This yields the Task Force operations order and plan, which becomes the basis of the partnership's contract. There are still important personnel matters to confront before making the agreement.

Human Resources:

Be sure that the personnel commitments are explicit and understood by both partners. Phase II due diligence should have disclosed any deficiencies in personnel availability or needed skill sets and levels. Address any remaining problems before the project gets underway.

Establish clear lines of authority and reporting within the partnership and between the partnership and relevant others in each of the two organizations.

Establish documentation and communication protocols to record operational procedures, processes, and outcomes. These will become the primary means of communicating within the partnership and between the partnership and others in the company and the NGO. This is especially important for partnerships that exist for long periods of time where personnel turn-over might occur and new people need to be brought up to speed quickly.

Contract or Agreement:

Pre-nuptial agreements are always “about the money,” and partnerships are no different. Make sure everything is in writing and that the principals are all involved. If Phase II has been carried out successfully, then the financial wherewithal of the NGO should be known and both parties ought to have a good, general idea of any financial demands and whether these can be met. Likewise, if there are previous partnerships involving the NGO, one ought to have a good idea if it can do the work done on budget and on time. If there are problems here, discuss and resolve them beforehand.

Write a clear, simple budget based on the Task Force operations plan.

Specify means by which financial matters are revealed, discussed, and resolved from the beginning to the end of the project. The objective, as with most other elements in the Phase III, is to do everything possible to establish, foster, and sustain trust from beginning to end. Compromised trust is the same as a failed project.

Security:

Ensure that the corporate project manager is senior enough and well enough informed to access privileged information needed by the project while, at the same time, knowing what can be disclosed to the NGO and to the public.

Negotiate and write a non-disclosure agreement for the NGO, particularly those directly involved in the partnership itself. Make sure everyone complies with the agreement.

External Communication and Dissemination:

Craft a simple, clear communication protocol and dissemination strategy as part of the project plan. Include the public relations and government affairs staffs of both organizations from beginning to end of the project. Be particularly attentive to the needs of the NGO's audience and donor support

bases as well as to the company's stakeholders. Prevent any premature disclosure of partnership results without having had prior review by both parties.

Ending the Partnership:

Figure out what it takes to end the partnership, and then ensure it's done right when the time comes.

Finally, write a clear, simple contract and then stick to it.

If your company decides not to partner with a non-governmental organization, what then? Other options exist.

WORKING WITH GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS?

Phase I: Nature of Partnerships and Facilitation

Government “partnerships” are fundamentally different compared to the business/NGO varieties. Foremost among the differences is the decided shift in power and wealth between the two parties. In these dimensions, governments, especially the federal government, dominate most individual business and even collections and associations of businesses. Rather than partners, the two parties are actually “collaborators,” which literally means “working together.” One would hope, and the participants should aim for, a working relationship with respect and at least a modicum of trust if the arrangement is to succeed. As was the previous NGO case, clear rules and transparency—at the very least between the parties—must be established and maintained. Nonetheless, in even the best of working conditions, the danger of regulatory capture of the government agency by the business (even the perception of it) and the risk of lost proprietary information from the business to the government (and hence to competitors) must be guarded against.

Collaboration may help a business conform to existing government regulations, which are often by necessity written in broad, general terms that do not easily translate into specific circumstances where the business operates. Another form of collaboration may occur in the development of new policies and regulations. Government agencies rarely, if ever, collaborate solely with one interest group to develop new policies and regulations. Balanced inputs from a variety of sources and public, open, transparent communications are the rule.⁷³ The forums so created provide businesses an opportunity to register concerns, especially with respect to practical matters of implementation. The forums also offer chances to discover common ground with NGOS, the government, and other interested parties by means of multi-stakeholder processes.

A more challenging activity would be for a business or groups of businesses in association to collaborate with a governmental entity before or while official rules, regulations, and guidelines are being designed and promulgated. The benevolent objective would be to help government develop regulations that attain the intent of a law while simultaneously being technically and practically feasible for the business. Getting this wrong readily results in justified concern about rigging the game and regulatory capture of the agency noted earlier. Politicizing collaboration for whatever the reason is not a worthwhile outcome for anyone.

⁷³ Literally, “the rule”: *Federal Advisory Committee Act*, “FACA.”

Securing positive recognition may also be a goal for businesses seeking public approval of its practices or products, as in the case of EPA's Green Power Partnership or the Energy Star certification program.⁷⁴ However, some of the risks and concerns described earlier about corporate "green washing" must be attended to.

Collaborating with the government should be more secure from reputational and competitive assaults resulting from unauthorized, illegal, or even defamatory releases of information than is the case when engaging in an NGO partnership, especially those lacking non-disclosure agreements. Federal, state, and local laws and regulations afford more protections. Likewise, the sometimes limited or shaky financial circumstances of an NGO partner are not an issue in the business/government arrangement.

In thinking about working with the government one general question stands out, but is seldom discussed explicitly: Are the benefits of working with an agency greater than the risks of exposure and the chances of increased scrutiny of a business? The individual parallel is not calling undue attention to oneself at tax filing time.

As was the case for deciding about an NGO partnership collaborating with the government involves three distinctive phases. Phase I is being sure that your business should work with the government instead of not bothering or doing the job with others. Phase II focuses on strategy, and Phase III gets into the gritty tactical details. Assume working with the government is the preferred option, so we next move to broad questions for consideration during Phase II.

Phase II: Strategic Issues

Hassle Factors:

How difficult will it be to enter the government program? What are the requirements, hurdles to jump, potential pitfalls, and the like?

If the program has been around for a while, what are reports and reactions of other business participants to it and how it operates?

Exposure:

What information does the government require? How much of that required is likely to be sensitive or proprietary? Can we take a chance that sensitive corporate information will be shared or made public? Are we willing to open up to potential FOIA, legal deposition requests, or similar demands to provide and share information because of this collaboration?

Will involvement stimulate additional auditing, e.g. because of the program or because the government might gain access to non-program related matters?

Costs & Benefits:

Why are we doing this? What do we expect to gain from the collaboration? If other businesses have done this or something similar, what did they get for their efforts?

For what we might gain, roughly how much time, money, and human resources are we prepared to put on the line? How much is the government likely to contribute, if anything?

What are the chances the government will cut or seriously modify the program before we are done?

Shareholders:

⁷⁴ "Green Power Partnership," (Washington, DC: EPA, n.d.). [Accessed: 4/22/2015.]; <http://energystar.gov> [Accessed: 11/5/2015.]

What is the likely reaction of our shareholders if we do this?

Proposed Contract Review:

Is a contract involved? If so, how demanding are the government's terms and requirements? Is government compliance (or any sort) required or likely to increase existing requirements? The last thing we want is to incur million dollar compliance costs as a result of trying to gain thousands of dollars of goodwill because of this.

Presuming the government will require a contract, will we be able to get everyone involved internally to agree and sign-on to it? If there are serious objections, should we be willing to negotiate better terms, even if doing so opens us up to closer scrutiny?

* * *

Most of these questions are routine enough in the business world and as such will be pursued in customary ways. Some of the actual working issues to anticipate are not so usual and deserve some special attention.

Phase III: Getting to Work

Contract, Plan, Budget:

Circulate the contract to all relevant departments to provide details of the program and also for them to flesh out human resources required and other operational details.

Build a detailed plan and budget; make operational assignments based on deliverable tasks.

Assemble the project team. Spend time with the team to ensure they understand the goals and objectives, timeline, sensitivities, constraints, and other important details of the program.

Assign accountability for specific tasks. If certain tasks cannot be properly or fully covered with existing company personnel, figure out ways to compensate.

Compliance:

Immediately review all company activities to discover any deficiencies in government compliance. Fix the problems to the extent possible.

Open communication to all departments about need for heightened attention to compliance issues.

Secure and consolidate records of compliance.

Management Information:

Create documentation for time, money, effort related to the program to provide to government as well as to monitor and control internal program activities.

Create documentation on company compliance in relation to the program. Be prepared to share this with government collaborator if asked.

Communications and Public Relations:

In general, try to be as transparent and forthright as possible. Erroneous or disingenuous communications pose great risks—usually exceeding what anyone could imagine initially once revealed.

Assign public relations staff directly to the program and hold them accountable for all communications related to the program. Have them assess popular perceptions of the program and the company's involvement in it.

Focus and increase the information flow to shareholders and to corporate employees about the nature, existence, and goals of the program. Decreased misperceptions and no surprises are the goals.

Prevent premature release of information to the general public until the work is completed if possible.

Establish clear rules and procedures affecting sensitive and proprietary corporate information. Pay special attention to relevant contractual details as these may differ from prevailing company practice. Establish internal controls for sharing; be careful.

The End Game:

Prepare even as the program gets underway for what needs to be done for a smooth and clean termination. Do not fail to execute it!

If neither the NGO, nor the government options appeal, the private sector may prove more attractive. Consulting arrangements and reconfiguring or beefing up a company's own environmental capabilities are two such options.

* * *

RELYING ON CONSULTING SERVICES/IN-HOUSE OPERATIONS?

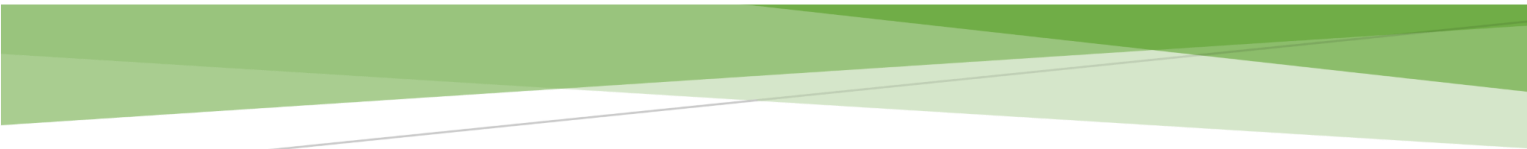
Once the private sector option is generally picked, it may be useful to consider consulting and in-house operations as two somewhat different means to satisfy a company's specific environmental needs. While not exactly interchangeable, each exists within a business-oriented culture quite different from the non-profit and government ones we have described. Operating within the business culture has its advantages, but may be problematic in circumstances where the business's "environmental problems" are rooted in different even conflicting perspectives, expectations, and demands within and between the private, public, and non-profit sectors and cultures.

Similarity's advantages are based on the heightened control business leaders exercise over key aspects of the circumstances. Prior experiences with business-oriented consultancies mean that both parties will speak "the same language" and will act predictably as members of the same culture. Reputations are known to one another, or can be readily discerned. Consultancies that fail to "deliver the goods" and to do so on budget and on time are quickly identified and eliminated from consideration. Being trustworthy, especially being able to guard sensitive information is also known or knowable. For many larger corporations, there will likely be a history of past relationships with the consultant, albeit for problems not densely environmental. These experiences will reduce or eliminate most of the "getting to know you" issues and trust concerns that highlight NGO partnerships and government collaborations.

Shared cultures, perspectives, and language are not all for the good, however. Environmental matters stem from netherworlds not well known to many professional business people. These issues are also presented in alien languages and scientific terms, neither of which can be dismissed in the interest of "the bottom line in the next quarter." To the extent that the consultancy is as like-minded as the corporation one expects comparable like-mindedness in the nature and scope of recommendations from it. To the extent a consultancy is eager to please the corporate client one should also expect it to emphasize palatable messages and recommendations.⁷⁵

These higher concerns give way quickly to more mundane matters of scope, work plan, budget, and deliverables for a project once the NGO and government options have been ruled out. In these respects, tactical and procedural matters differ very little from what one confronts in the previous two options. What is relevant is the decision whether or not to commit and acquire permanent staff to deal with the immediate problem and similar ones coming in the future. In practice, the answer to this

⁷⁵ A cynic once characterized a successful consultancy thus: "Success is a happy client. Ultimate success is a follow-on contract."



is what most likely determines the choice of consultancy or in-house. A hybrid model is conceivable in which a consultant works directly with existing in-house environmental staff to train them while working on the immediate problem. As experience is acquired in-house, the need for the consultant diminishes and clarity about needed permanent replacements leads to a growing in-house capability.

Whether a company elects to hire an outside consultant or to do the job alone with in-house staff, the operational challenges created are going to be fairly well known—certainly as compared to the numerous and very different ones that occur in the NGO and government options. But as the Task Force emphasizes, when businesses engage the non-profit and public sectors and cultures in partnerships and collaborations benefits of richer insights and better understandings for everyone develop through contact and interaction.

Appendix II

Task Force Members and Affiliations

[All members participated in their individual capacities; views expressed in the report should not be interpreted as the positions of any organization with which they are affiliated.]

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