BY WILLIAM L. GERTZ

There is an art to developing and sustaining a successful strategic partnership. For every partnership that bears fruit, there are many that fail due to poor planning or execution. When contemplating an institutional relationship, it is important to assess the compatibility of the organizations and their respective missions, avoiding being swayed by the "prestige" of working with a certain institution.

In the field of education, there has been a marked increase in the number of institutional partnerships, fueled by the knowledge that to accomplish a globally-minded academic mission one needs to reach out and expand program offerings. Also, institutions can share best practices, increase recruitment, and become more attractive to students as they broaden their scope.

Throughout its history, AIFS has partnered with dozens of international institutions in creating study abroad programs for U.S. students. In each of its locations, AIFS first identifies an academic partner that has the ability to develop and deliver a strong academic program for visiting students. AIFS handles the recruitment of students, flights and transportation, insurance, housing, meals, and logistics, while the international university or college provides the venue, teaching, and academic transcripts. At each location, AIFS employs a Resident Director who provides student services, excursions, and activities designed to help students adjust to life abroad and safely maximize their time. This model, while revolutionary in the 1960s when we developed the concept, is now the norm.

AIFS also partners with U.S. institutions that bring groups of students abroad with their own faculty and curriculum. Again, AIFS handles all the logistics, including securing classroom space, providing academic support services, arranging housing and meal options, and developing field activities and excursions. These "three way" partnerships are much easier to arrange than they were a decade ago, with such tools as email, Skype, and video chat now available. In addition, the rise in English language proficiency makes the old adage that you should "sell in the language of your customer" almost trite.

Even with these new tools, the work in engaging a successful partner needs to be approached with exceeding care to make up for any potential cultural or technical misunderstandings. We have found that sometimes a partnership can take years of cultivation by both institutions and a series of visits before an agreement can be fashioned. Once an agreement is made, the real work begins. The measure of success needs to be identified before the agreement is finalized. A multiyear analysis needs to be conducted. There is a lot of work required, but the perseverance will pay off when there is a relationship that works seamlessly and is a benefit to both parties.

The AIFS Foundation is once again pleased to partner with IIE. This is our sixth Global Education Research Report, which we hope leads to new initiatives for your institution.

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