



NO

organization is an island, especially when it comes to making the world a better place. Instead of going it alone, companies and advocacy groups are joining forces to launch social responsibility projects that are good for the planet, the people living on it—and, sometimes, profits.

But before diving in, both partners must employ the same forethought and planning that accompanies a traditional project. For companies, that means the proposed project should have a link to organizational strategy.

"Projects with non-for-profits must have relevance to the business," says Dr. Oren Cohen, senior vice president and chief medical and scientific officer at Quintiles Transnational Corp., a global pharmaceutical contract research organization in Durham, North Carolina, USA.

"These projects have to make sense on a number of levels," he explains. "They have to align with our business, our mission, and our global footprint. It's just like any other project in that respect."



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At the same time, nor-for-profits must ensure their mission doesn't get lost in the quest for added resources. "Many companies either don't know how or are unwilling to partner without taking over the project. It's not always easy to partner in a way that keeps the not-for-profit intact," says Dr. Peter Hotez, Ph.D., president of Sabin Vaccine Institute, a not-for-profit group working for the global control of infectious and tropical diseases.

As part of its work, the Washington, D.C., USA-based group has partnered with Quintiles and other organizations on its projects. To maintain a healthy balance in the relationship, Dr. Hotez urges for-profit companies to respect the not-for-profit's goals as well as their own imperatives. "You should look at these projects as any other successful venture and recognize the value your partner's success brings to your business," he says.

THE RIGHT ONE

Any proposed partnership should begin with a thorough vetting—even if it doesn't always translate to a happy ending. "With properly aligned goals, such collaborations can be fruitful for industries and not-for-profits that have synergistic missions, says Adriana Vela, founder and CEO of NanoTecNexus, a nanotechnology industry research organization in San Diego, California, USA. "But if a

potential partner isn't going to be a good fit for a specific project, I'm not opposed to walking away."

Dr. Cohen warns companies to move slowly and to assess all aspects of the project before making a commitment. "If you don't vet the ethical issues, the regulatory framework and the community impact of the project before moving forward, chances are it will blow up," he says. "Never go in cold. Take the time to effectively evaluate all of those touchpoints before plowing ahead."

For the collaboration to work, companies should pick projects that play to their core strengths, says Dr. Nilanthi de Silva, professor of parasitology and head of the Medical Education Centre at the University of Kelaniya in Ragama, Sri Lanka. But that may not always be obvious. "Take a holistic view of what you can offer," she recommends.