



Case Study

THE COST OF BEING “LEADERLESS” MULTIPLE GLOBAL SITES

A promising effort to ‘outsource’ proven social marketing and education efforts with an expert partner is delayed by the absence of a designated partnership manager.

RARE¹ is a conservation nonprofit that uses grassroots social marketing techniques to turn charismatic flagship species and threatened ecosystems into symbols of local pride through songs, church sermons, music videos and puppet shows. These targeted awareness-raising initiatives build social momentum for conservation.

In a partnership where the Nature Conservancy (TNC) and RARE agreed to leverage their complementary skills, TNC helped identify and prioritize important sites, and RARE initiated campaigns in the selected geographies. TNC committed \$1.5 million, and RARE committed \$1.25 million in a partnership that has supported over 30 campaigns with 30 partners across the world from Asia to the Pacific to the Caribbean.

RARE, a lean operation with fewer than 50 staff, assigned several people to provide overarching, hands-on capacity and coordination. Conversely, TNC was working in a highly decentralized way with no dedicated staff to manage the partnership and coordinate the multiple projects. As a result, RARE staff sometimes found themselves communicating information between TNC in-country directors and TNC headquarters staff to ensure that funding obligations were met, as TNC’s funds sometimes had to be transferred internally between programs.

Without a partnership manager, TNC had difficulty managing multiple relationships across the many RARE project sites. In one case, confusion within TNC about funding delayed a project by almost a year. Lack of coordination on TNC’s end often created challenging situations for RARE staff, who needed to move forward on contracts and materials in order to complete their part of the joint projects.

The RARE partnership provides an important snapshot of why it is useful to have and track an over-arching agreement and to have a designated lead person or team to coordinate and oversee the larger, organization-wide relationship. A partnership manager can ensure that the right agreements are produced, that they have the approval of upper TNC management, and that the productivity of the wider relationship is supported with clear benchmarks and communication at the project level.

Perhaps the most telling statement about how the “headless” nature of this project affected the partnership came from a RARE staffer, who said that they needed to work with TNC units to

¹When the organization was established in 1973, RARE was an acronym for Rare Animal Relief Effort. Though RARE has gone through many incarnations during its three-decade history, the name has stuck.

4.D.1. Manage Multiple Relationships with One Partner

“[ensure that] funding is set aside before we start, because priorities shift and money disappears when it’s needed.” RARE had to do the coordination work within TNC that TNC should have done itself. Situations like this carry serious reputational risks as it can appear that TNC is promising funds that it then spends elsewhere.

Fortunately, the shared commitment to making conservation happen in new places and in new ways helped RARE and TNC staff overcome these setbacks and create programs of enduring value, and yield great lessons about how to better partnership management.

For more information about RARE, visit <http://www.rareconservation.org>.