

**INVESTIGATING PARTNERSHIP SUCCESS BETWEEN A FAITH-BASED
ORGANIZATION AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN FLORIDA TO SUPPORT PROGRAM
SUSTAINABILITY AND GROWTH IN COMPLICATED TIMES**

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION	PAGE
Acknowledgments	3
Executive Summary	5
Introduction	7
Organization Context	8
Problem of Practice	10
Synthesis of Evidence	11
Conceptual Framework	16
Project Questions	18
Project Design	20
Findings	26
Recommendations/Intervention	34
Project Limitations	38
Conclusion	44
References	45
APPENDICES	48
APPENDIX A Sample Framework for Collaboration between LTLSF & Schools	48
APPENDIX B Volunteer Facilitators Survey	51
APPENDIX C School Site Administrator Survey	53
APPENDIX D School Site Representative Interview Protocol	55
APPENDIX E Volunteer Facilitator Interview Protocol	57

DEDICATION/ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Jeremy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Organizational Background

Live the Life South Florida (LTLSF) is a faith-based nonprofit headquartered in Tallahassee, Florida. The organization focuses on supporting healthy relationships through education programs for adults and teenagers. Our area of focus is the pilot program that LTLSF implemented in Broward County, Florida. The pilot program provides specialized social-emotional learning classes to students in public schools during the regular school day. In 2016, LTLSF provided program classes to three schools. In 2022, more than twenty schools requested services, but LTLSF only had the resources to fulfill eleven of those requests. LTLSF states that they use only the curriculum approved by the Department of Health and Family Services. The curriculum includes units on topics such as creating healthy relationships, positive communication skills, understanding emotions and trigger reactions, and sexual health education. The program is funded solely by grants and private donations.

Problem of Practice

LTLSF has a more significant request for services than it has capacity. The increase in school requests has dramatically increased over the last four years. To meet the growth in demand and ensure the existing partnerships are fruitful, LTLSF needs to continue fostering existing partnerships and develop a better understanding of how to shape future partnerships. This improvement project aims to understand what factors lead to successful partnerships with public schools and to identify where areas for opportunity and growth exist within the partnership program. The organization also wants to explore the motivational drive of its volunteer facilitators in order to improve its volunteer recruitment practices.

Project Questions and Findings

We identified two research questions based on our understanding of the literature and the problem of practice. The first question aims to develop an understanding of why volunteers participate in the program. The second question focuses on identifying what factors support partnership success and those that may create challenges for the partnership.

We conducted a mixed-method study employing multiple data collection tools. We created a questionnaire informed by the literature, provided it to facilitators, and partnered school administrators. We also conducted interviews to develop a clear understanding of our problem of practice. Our data collection tools included questionnaires, interviews, observations, and field notes. The data was analyzed independently by each researcher and then combined in order to validate and triangulate our results.

Research Question 1: What motivates volunteers at Live the Life South Florida?

Finding 1: Working with students is the top motivation for LTLSF Facilitators.

Research Question 2: What contributes to successful partnerships between LTLSF and schools?

Finding 1: 100% of respondents from both organizations believe the partnership successfully achieved its goals while maintaining the integrity of separation of church and state.

Finding 2: Partnerships owned by the leader have a more positive perception of success by the participants.

Finding 3: Commitment was identified as an essential success factor for the LTLSF partnership.

Finding 4: Communication was an area of growth for the LTLSF partnership.

Finding 5: External factors, such as the political environment at the state level, were noted by school site participants most frequently as a significant challenge to the continued existence of the partnership.

Recommendations

We divided our recommendations into short-term and long-term recommendations. Short-term recommendations

1. LTLSF can use the understanding of facilitator motivation to inform future recruiting and retention practices.
2. Commitment is essential to partnership success. Therefore, LTLSF should ascertain commitment by collaboratively establishing expectations for partnership processes, behaviors, and desired outcomes before each school year or before establishing a partnership.
3. Communication was an area of growth. We recommend that LTLSF develop a communication plan for the partnerships, outlining processes and check-up points for the two organizations.
4. Our study showed partnerships where the leader felt ownership had a higher perception of success. To build relationships and a sense of ownership, LTLSF should provide a dedicated liaison for each school.

Long-Term Recommendations

1. Mitigate external factors through support and advocacy. To address the external factors, one recommendation from the literature was to create or join a nonprofit alliance. Aligning with other groups to increase awareness and understanding in state and local governments will help Live the Life be an active participant in the political arena. This could also be accomplished using a lobbyist to gain access and support from key political influencers.
2. Share the story: Develop a comprehensive marketing plan. Developing and implementing a comprehensive marketing program to increase local awareness of the program offerings is another way to address the environment. One strategy to share their story is making personal visits to church services and events, sharing the outcomes and hopes of the program – raising interest by congregation members both in becoming volunteers and providing feedback regarding their thoughts about - and apprehensions of- having the program in schools.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, Live the Life of South Florida (LTLSF) presented a routine donation renewal request to its most significant foundation partner and was surprised by a denial of the funds. The donor foundation shared they were unsure of their mission and that LTLSF's program was aligned. The donor requested additional supporting evidence that their funding was positively affecting the community. Live the Life of South Florida did not have specific evidence to support their claim that their work in public schools was making a difference in the lives of teens and within the schools themselves. This pivotal event caused LTLSF to embark on reflective practices. LTLSF realized they needed to take the time to understand the factors contributing to successful partnerships with schools in order to continue their collaboration with schools.

Our client is Live the Life South Florida. It is a subsidiary of Live the Life, a faith-based nonprofit organization headquartered in Tallahassee, Florida. The goal of this organization is to strengthen and support marriages and families using Christian values and biblical principles. Live the Life supports families through healthy relationship education delivered in pre-marital classes, counseling, marriage workshop retreats, and family counseling services. After years of providing adult relationship support and training, they scaled their program to reach a younger audience. The Real Essential curriculum is used with middle and high-school-aged youth. Their workshops target teens in church youth groups and faith-based after-school programs. In 2016, Live the Life South Florida began working with Broward County Public Schools- offering an elective class during the school day. The program is funded by Federal Grants such as the TSP (Teen Sex Prevention Grant), as well as private grants and local donations.

As the popularity of the free program increased, LTLSF found that it did not have the financial and human resources necessary to meet the demand from schools. In this improvement project, we attempt to understand the factors present in successful partnerships and the motivational drive of those volunteer facilitators who are most committed to the program. Our goal is to provide the organization with a framework that can be used to support the partnerships with schools and to inform their volunteer recruitment practices.

To provide an understanding of LTLSF's partnerships with schools, we first performed a literature review of partnership characteristics as well as one on nonprofit and faith-based worker motivation. With the information gleaned through the review, we were able to construct a conceptual framework and develop questionnaires that we administered to both organizations in order to collect data for analysis. Once collected, we analyzed the data, identifying themes and developing findings, which are described at length in the data analysis and findings sections. We applied our understanding of the research to our analyzed data to develop recommendations for the organization.

ORGANIZATION CONTEXT

Live the Life of South Florida (LTLSF) is a nonprofit, faith-based organization in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The organization provides relationship education aimed at helping families and youth develop healthy relationships. LTLSF operates as a subsidiary of Live the Life, which is based in Tallahassee, Florida. The mission of the organization is to “strengthen marriages and families through healthy relationship education beginning in middle school and continuing through and beyond post-secondary education into adulthood.” (Livethelivesoflo.org). The organization offers a variety of relationship education programs to support healthy marriages, families, and relationships in general. Its youth program curriculum focuses on social-emotional skills and behaviors that support sexual risk avoidance.

While all the Live the Life organizations have a relationship education focus, LTLSF realized there was a need for prevention programs targeting teens and young adults. Their program provides instruction using the only relationship education curriculum approved by the Florida Department of Health (REAL Essentials). The group uses a specific curriculum to instruct young adults about social-emotional and relationship decisions, such as healthy conflict resolution, forgiveness, sex education, parenting education, and unplanned parenthood prevention.

LTLSF has been piloting a partnership model in which the organization comes into the schools (both public and private) to provide classes and workshops using LTLSF volunteers/subcontractors who are certified trainers in the Real Essentials Curriculum but do not necessarily have a background in education. Using primarily their volunteer facilitators, LTLSF delivers instruction to thousands of students annually. They provide these programs at no cost to the schools as Federal and State grants and donor contributions fully fund the organization. LTLSF is the only branch of Live the Life that has partnered with public schools and provided the program to students within the regular school day. They offer several instructional delivery models. In some schools, they offer a half-credit elective course. In other schools, they meet as a class once a week throughout the year with one grade level. In their Middle School model, they collaborate with a peer counseling teacher and provide weekly lessons for 18 weeks. They also offer another version, an 8-session after-school program run by the YMCA in high schools. All instruction delivery models must comply with the grant requirements to receive funding.

Volunteer facilitators are integral to Live the Life of South Florida’s ability to provide the program to public schools at no cost. The facilitators are required to make a substantial commitment of time and intellectual talent in exchange for the opportunity to volunteer with the school program. Facilitators must first obtain the required curriculum certification and training and then commit to a fixed schedule and location, albeit of their choosing, for the entire school year. While teachers share concerns about low wages and struggle with challenging work environments, somehow, facilitators are willing to perform similar tasks in the same environment without financial compensation. One has to wonder what their motivation is. We begin our investigation by looking at literature about worker motivation within the non-profit sector, followed by volunteer motivation. LTLSF also requires all facilitators to be Christians even though the program is secular, and facilitators at public schools are informed and trained to refrain from sharing religious information and personal beliefs or views.

Stakeholders and Project Objectives

The main stakeholder for this improvement project is our client organization, Live the Life of South Florida; however, the project will also impact the schools partnering with LTLSF. The director of student programs, Amanda, has been working with the middle and high schools in Broward County for approximately eight years. During this time, she began piloting the in-school, during the regular school-day, relationship education workshop. The program gained popularity among middle and high schools, and demand for the program has increased each year.

While evaluating partnership performance can be challenging because it is difficult to connect outcomes to specific activities of the partnership (Gazley & Guo, 2020), partnership success in terms of partnership structure and group dynamics can serve as a valid measure of the partnership processes (Israel et al., 2019). For this improvement project, we found that partnerships also produce measurable intermediate and short-term outcomes, which can be evaluated by assessing key aspects of the processes of partnership work. An example of "process" includes evaluating how the partnership functions as a group to work toward the outcome objectives (Schulz et al., 2002).

We will provide the client with an understanding of the attributes identified through research as essential factors in establishing successful partnerships. The program director, Amanda, will be able to share this information with the foundation's leadership and key donors. As program director, Amanda will use the information gleaned from this study to help her team determine which partnerships exhibit the factors and qualities of successful partnerships and identify those in which there are growth opportunities within the factors. She will also be able to use the information to collaboratively set expectations concerning how the partnership should function at each school site to support successful partnership work.

In addition, as grants begin to sunset and Christian donors become increasingly weary of investing in public schools, LTLSF recognizes that reflecting on lessons learned and adjusting the program is critical to maintaining the level of commitment of all stakeholders. LTLSF needs to evaluate the quality of its partnerships with schools and the organization's ability to achieve desired outcomes.

PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

In 2016, LTLSF was partnering with three schools. Two of their full-time employees worked on the pilot roll-out, and four volunteer facilitators were involved. During and after COVID-19 school closures, the demand for LTLSF’s program, with a curriculum that focuses on SEL and relationship skills, increased dramatically. Figure 1 illustrates the number of program requests and LTLSF’s capacity to satisfy the demand.

In addition to LTLSF’s inability to meet the total demand for its program last school year, additional challenges arose throughout the year. One donor took back its \$100,000 annual pledge, citing LTLSF’s program goals were not aligned with the foundation’s core mission of discipleship. Compounding the financial and human resource struggles, four facilitators who had been trained at a cost of \$10,000 to LTLSF resigned at the end of the school year.

Amanda, the program director, found herself in a precarious situation. She was not sure where to invest the organization’s limited resources nor how she could continue to scale the program. To address the problem of practice, LTLSF wants to better understand the characteristics of successful partnerships between faith-based nonprofits and public schools. They would also want to develop a better understanding of the motivations driving its volunteers as they believe this understanding could help the organization recruit and hire people more likely to stay committed to the program.

Table 1

Live the Life of South Florida Program Capacity vs. Demand

Live the Life South Florida Capacity to Demand Comparison Year 2 vs. Year 6	
2016-2017 SY	2022-2023 SY
3 Program Requests	21 Program Requests
Personnel Available	Personnel Available
2 Full-time Workers	3 Full-time Workers
4 Part-time Facilitators (volunteer workers)	11 Part-time Facilitators (volunteer workers)
Fulfillment of Program Requested	Fulfillment of Program Requested
3 of 3 Programs Fulfilled	11 of 21 Programs Fulfilled
100%	52%

Note. Number of *program requests* for school years 2016, 2017, 2022, and 2023

SYNTHESIS OF EVIDENCE

This literature review is designed to outline the problem of practice regarding the nature of the partnerships between LTLSF (Live the Life of South Florida) and schools, as well as the characteristics of sustained partnerships, we first wanted to understand the concept of partnership and the factors that characterize its quality and success. In defining partnerships, we realize the complexity of the term and the many facets that can be used to understand the continuum of partnerships. We categorized the various terms for characteristics of successful partnerships into five themes: balance of power, communication, commitment, motivation, and trust. We also synthesized the information to understand how we evaluate the nature of partnerships. Worker motivation was viewed through the lenses of nonprofit, faith-based, and volunteer workers. We identified the underlying motivation for these workers primarily as intrinsic. Our review is organized into two sections: one for each area we seek to better understand, worker motivation theory and factors impacting partnership success.

First, we look at worker motivation theory to understand the motivation of our volunteer facilitators at Live the Life of South Florida. LTLSF's partnership with schools depends entirely on a volunteer workforce. The two full-time employees (the program director and the assistant program director) fulfill the roles of instructional staff, administrative support, marketing, new business development, and old-business program maintenance. LTLSF must maintain a full roster of trained volunteers to achieve its goals. Hence, volunteer engagement is a critical driver of a non-profit success because it cannot exist without this resource. (Ilyas, et al., 2020).

What the literature says about nonprofit and faith-based nonprofit worker motivation

The most significant difference in worker motivation theories is that workers in for-profit organizations are motivated by extrinsic and monetary incentives. In contrast, workers for nonprofits are more compelled to engage in an organization where they can satisfy their intrinsic motivations (Leonard, 2013). Looking specifically into the motivation of faith-based workers, Bassous (2014) examines six major psychological work-related motivation theories within the context of a faith-based organization to assess monetary and nonmonetary, extrinsic, and intrinsic motivation factors that drive workers in faith-based international nonprofit organizations to perform effectively. His study reveals a positive significant correlation between workers' motivation level and nonmonetary incentives and no significant relationship between worker motivation level and monetary incentives.

Faith-based workers trade financial compensation for value-driven compensation. They are driven by the values espoused by the organization. (Macy, 2006). Whether it is their faith, serving the community, or following their personal values, these workers receive satisfaction from accomplishing the work because the work aligns with their life mission. Workers in faith-based nonprofit organizations were inclined toward internal job satisfaction, including job enrichment factors such as achievement, recognition autonomy, responsibility, and work itself. The faith-based workers' motivation was associated with higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, like self-actualization, social, and self-esteem. Job meaningfulness was the most decisive intrinsic motivational factor (Bassous, 2015).

Finally, Bassous found that faith-based workers' intrinsic motivation was closely related to personal faith, a calling, and personal values—a vocation, and they excelled in their performance because of internal stimulation rather than external rewards.

While nonprofits have similarities, faith-based organizations appeal to a moral imperative to serve and a faith-based practice of human service programs (Bassous, 2015). Faith-based workers "adopt the concept of altruism and exhibit high social commitment that increases their level of intrinsic motivation." (Bassous, 2015. p. 375). Similarly, we found that much of the theory around volunteer motivation describes altruism as the compelling reason behind volunteer action. The literature distinguishes between helping, a spontaneous and reactive behavior, and volunteering, a proactive, planned, and goal-directed helping behavior. Given that volunteers are not driven to do the work for remuneration, understanding what drives volunteers to stay committed and get involved is vital to understanding how the LTLFSF partnerships can operate to support positive organizational work outcomes.

Volunteering fulfills psychological functions. In the Volunteer Functions Inventory, six specific functions are identified as internal drivers: values, understanding, career, social, enhancement, and protective. (Clary et al., 1998; Tsai et al., 2023; DeClerk et al., 2022; Erasmus and Morey, 2016). The six functions are summarized for conceptual clarity of them are:

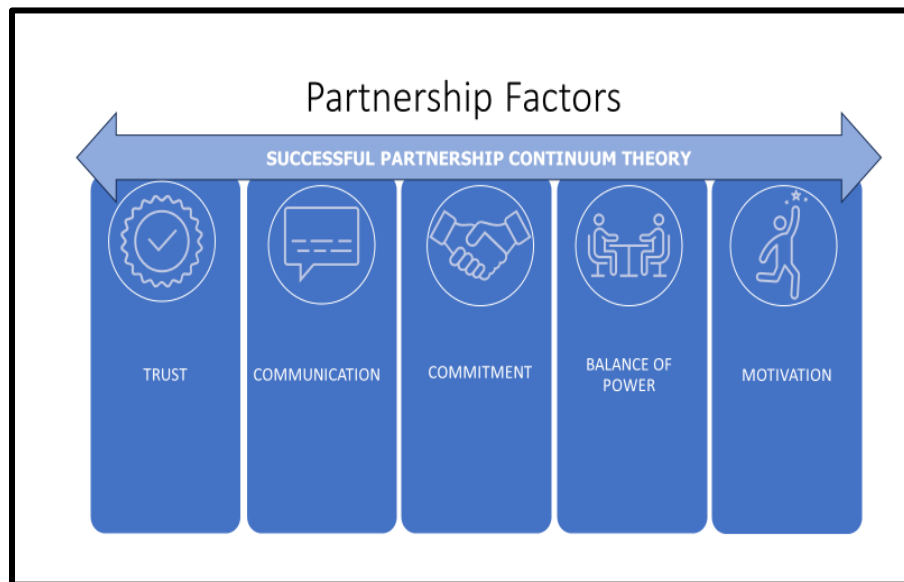
- Values – Volunteering to express personal values, belief in helping others and supporting causes
- Understanding – Volunteering to learn new skills or obtain different perspectives, such as the certification volunteers at LTLFSF go through prior to facilitating in schools
- Career – Volunteering to advance one's career by practicing employable skills such as leading groups of volunteers, making presentations, and networking with potential employers
- Social – Volunteering to respond to social expectations by maintaining social relationships and spending more time with friends and family
- Enhancement – Volunteering to enhance self-esteem and empowerment by feeling important and needed
- Protective – Volunteering to reduce negative feelings about personal issues, loneliness, guilt, or feelings of incompetence

Later work by Erasmus and Morey (2016) created an inventory specifically geared to faith-based volunteers. This inventory combines enhancement and understanding into one function titled enrichment and eliminates the protective function, which was found to be ego-driven and irrelevant as a function for the faith-based volunteer. The theory suggests that the volunteer may be driven by one or several of these functions simultaneously or at various times.

In fact, sometimes one of the functions may be the motivation to get involved, to participate, and another to remain committed. As we seek to better understand LTLFSF's volunteer

motivation, the Faith Volunteer Function Inventory, we developed survey questions for facilitators with this information in mind.

Figure 1
Partnership Success Factors and Continuum Theory



The Theoretical Foundations of Partnerships

To understand the partnership problem of practice, we focused our research on the characteristics of successful partnerships and the factors that make them successful. Figure 1 above is a graphic representation of the synthesis of our literature review regarding the nature of the partnerships between LTLSF (Live the Life of South Florida) and schools.

There were two streams of research we reviewed. One was the elements present in successful partnerships, and the other was the way in which the elements affect the quality of the partnerships. We categorized the elements into five broad themes, as seen in the vertical boxes. The arrow above, covering all the elements horizontally, represents the continuum theory, which states partnerships can take a range of forms from loose to integrated and sustained, with the forms depending upon how the elements are manifested within the partnership. This inquiry helped us develop our understanding of the qualities present in Live the Life of South Florida's partnerships with schools, as well as determine areas of opportunity to improve the partnerships.

Although all the literature indicated there is no imperative definition of the term partnership, other labels of the term include collaboration, alliance, network, cooperation, coordination, and joint venture: a working arrangement between two independent organizations that join together to achieve a common goal (Mohr & Spekman, 1994; Wildridge et al., 2004; Dowling et al., 2004; Gazley & Guo, 2020). According to Mohr and Speckman, a comprehensive definition and purpose of partnerships is, "Partnerships are purposive strategic relationships between interdependent firms who share compatible goals, strive for mutual benefit, and

acknowledge a high level of mutual interdependence. Partnerships afford access to markets, to knowledge beyond the firm's boundaries, and access to complementary skills." (1994, p. 135).

In the qualitative study of the education industry in the UK, Dhillon (2013) analyzes the factors of partnership processes that contribute to the levels of effectiveness, sustainability, and success of partnerships. In this conceptualization, partnerships include the process of working towards a progressively stronger partnership. Rather than analyzing elements of the partnership and working to determine if they exist within the partnership, Dhillon posits that partnerships operate on a continuum of effectiveness, sustainability, and success. In his model, partnership attributes are not simply present or not; they exist within an intensity range that gives the partnership its form, from loose collaboration to integrated and sustained partnering. The quality and sustained success of a partnership depends on the combination of factors that are present, as well as the intensity to which each factor is manifested.

The successful partnership continuum theory suggests that the more intense each of the factors is manifested, the stronger and more successful the partnership will be. For example, a loose collaboration may have motivated partners, but they may not be as committed or invested in fostering transparent communication. In contrast, a sustained and integrated partnership will have elevated levels of trust between the organizations, information will flow without barriers, ensuring effective communication, and the leaders of the organizations are committed to a shared vision, and both organizations hold themselves accountable for partnership outcomes.

The literature about partnerships stipulates a variety of behavioral characteristics associated with how partnerships function. Our focus was on factors that affect group dynamics, and we grouped the factors thematically. These factors include concepts such as commitment, trust, communication behaviors (e.g., information sharing between the partners), conflict resolution techniques, reciprocity, joint problem-solving, leadership, networks, governance structures, norms, and values linked to partnership motivation and decision-making (Israel et al., 2019; Dhillon, 2013; Mohr & Spekman, 1994). We categorized the factors into the following five themes: balance of power/reciprocity, commitment, communication, motivation, and trust, and explore them more fully below.

Balance of Power/Reciprocity

Reciprocity refers to how each organization perceives mutual benefits resulting from their collaboration. In successful partnerships, both entities recognize there are advantages attained through the partnership that could not occur independently (Mohr & Spekman, 1994). While partnership work may have designated boundaries of influence, within the context of the collaboration, both contributing entities must feel involved in order to maintain engagement (Wildridge et al., 2004). Decision-making processes and conflict-resolution strategies can express levels of reciprocity or balance of power. All relationships are prone to conflicts; this includes inter-organizational relationships such as partnerships. How conflicts are resolved within the partnership can indicate the level of success the partnership achieves (Mohr & Spekman, 1994; Wildridge et al., 2004; Dowling et al., 2004).

The stronger the partnership, the more likely one will observe conflicts being resolved through joint decision-making. Partnership success is enhanced when both parties seek to resolve problems with win-win criteria, that is, seeking a mutually satisfactory solution. (Dhillon, 2013; Wildridge et al., 2004; Mohr and Spekman, 1994). When partnerships are effective and sustainable, decisions about and direction for the partnership's activities are determined collaboratively, and both organizations are accountable for the results and outcomes (Wildridge et al., 2004). Strategies such as coercion, domination, confrontation, smoothing over, or ignoring issues altogether demonstrate an imbalance in the status of one partner and disregard the value each partner contributes to a shared goal. These strategies tend to harm the partnership (Dhillon, 2013; Mohr & Spekman, 1994). Therefore, when organizations use joint decision-making strategies and problem-solving techniques to resolve disputes or conflicts, both entities recognize they have equality in their participation, a key feature of strong partnerships (Dhillon, 2013).

Commitment. Mohr and Spekman (1994) define commitment as "the willingness of trading partners to exert effort on behalf of the relationship." In Dowling et al. (2004), partners' commitment is also touted as a critical indicator of successful partnerships. "Successful partnerships are believed to depend on the level of engagement and commitment of the partners." The level of engagement, dedication, or commitment each organization has to achieve the collaboration's desired goals influences the partnership's strength and success. Shared values and goals will influence the level of commitment each organization has to the partnership (Gazley & Guo, 2020; Wildridge et al., 2004; Dhillon, 2013; Dowling et al., 2004; Mohr & Spekman, 1994). Commitment levels can vary depending on the motives behind the partnership's formation. Forced partnerships have less support in the form of commitment, although the level of commitment can change throughout the partnership. When there is a mutual interest in the partnership and an internal passion with shared beliefs, there is an increased commitment by each partner. Accordingly, when the partnership is entered into freely or because leadership is committed to a shared vision and outcome, the level of commitment is higher, and the partnership tends to be more successful (Spitz et al., 2021; Dhillon, 2013). In Dhillon's research of senior managers working in partnership, leaders identified shared goals as one of the most crucial factors contributing to a partnership's level of commitment and effectiveness. (Dhillon, 2013).

Communication. Communication and sharing of information refer to the flow of information between the two organizations. "The role of clear, consistent communication is at least implicit and sometimes explicit in much of the literature" regarding partnership (Wildridge et al., 2004, p.3). Communication that is not encumbered by bureaucratic protocols and is exchanged accurately, timely, and credibly is essential for partnership success (Mohr & Spekman, 1994; Dhillon, 2013). Communication in high-functioning partnerships includes all stakeholders, and the purpose may range from informing priorities to just letting each other know about daily happenings (Wildridge et al., 2004). In an effective and successful partnership, we often see the development of shared communication codes among partners. Shared communication codes among members are a key feature of strong and successful partnerships (Dhillon, 2013). Furthermore, consistent and clear communication between both organizations helps to maintain good relationships and is essential in reinforcing trust (Gazley & Guo, 2020; Wildridge et al., 2004; Dhillon, 2013; Dowling et al., 2004; Mohr & Spekman, 1994).

Motivation. To fully understand factors that contribute to successful partnerships, consideration must be given to the human interactions within the inter-organizational operations—to do so, we consider the motivation of the inter-organizational workers. According to a study by Spitz et al. (2021), a manager's motivation to engage in a partnership will have an impact on the intensity of the collaboration. A shared belief or value for solving social or environmental issues drives the cooperation and collaboration between nonprofit organizations and businesses. (Spitz et al., 2021). This same drive works within the nonprofit environment.

Another aspect of motives is described in the work by Dickinson and Glasby (2010); their article describing the pitfalls of partnerships shares the negative impact of forcing partnerships without the buy-in of all organizations involved. Finally, in the study of post-16(year-old) education partnerships conducted in the UK by Dhillon (2013), leadership's motivation depends on shared goals and is one of the principal factors contributing to the effectiveness of partnerships. The study's findings indicate that motivation from the participating organization and individual leaders is one of the most essential attributes leading to successful partnerships.

Trust. Trust is the level of belief in the reliability of a party's ability to fulfill its obligation (Mohr & Spekman, 1994). The level of trust can range from the negative perspective of mistrust or distrust to fragile trust to the most positive form, implicit and unconditional trust (Dhillon, 2013). Trust is critical to the success of any productive relationship, including partnerships. Successful partnerships are characterized by higher levels of trust. The literature uses terms such as reliability, integrity, competence, honesty, fairness, responsibility, helpfulness, and confidence to describe the various dimensions of trust. Trust is also a precursor of commitment and successful relationships (Mavondo & Rodrigo, 2001).

Trust can be established within business relationships through calculated logic, experience, or instinct (Dhillon, 2013; Wildridge et al., 2004). In calculated trust, partners calculate the risk of each action taken, while in instinctive trust, the partners behave from the belief that they have shared values and are committed to the same cause. The more fragile the level of trust, the greater the need to provide formal mechanisms, such as contracts, to safeguard and regulate joint work processes (Dhillon, 2013). The most successful partnerships work hard at developing and maintaining elevated levels of mutual trust. (Wildridge et al., 2004). These principles and ideas anchored our understanding of volunteer motivation and partnership theory, which we used to create a conceptual framework for our study.

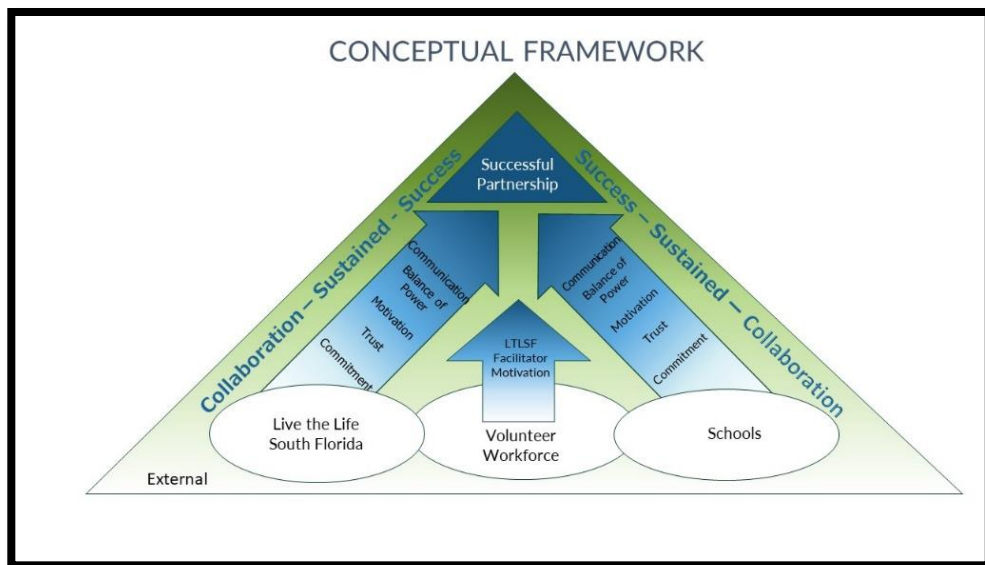
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The central premise of this framework is that successful partnerships contain specific common attributes. We identified the five major categories as trust, communication, commitment, motivation, and balance of power or reciprocity (Mohr & Spekman, 1994; Wildridge et al., 2004; Dhillon, 2013; Dowling et al., 2004). The second piece of the foundation is the impact of the actors' interactions with the factors to achieve successful partnerships (Bassous, 2014; Ilyas et al., 2020).

The framework includes all the elements we are analyzing to understand the client's problem of practice. The members of the partnership are represented by three ovals. The factors that are integral to the successful partnering processes are contained in the action arrows moving towards the peak performance or goal of a successful partnership, indicated by the boldly shaded blue triangle on the top of the pyramid. Figure three is a visualization of our conceptual framework informed by the literature and used to help us frame our improvement project to answer the partner organizations' questions.

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework



Another significant dimension of partnership is the successful partnership continuum theory. The theory states that there is a range of partnerships, from loose collaborations to sustained and integrated partnerships. The quality and sustained success of a partnership depends on the combination of factors that are present, as well as the intensity to which each factor is manifested.

The theory is represented within the coloring and along the outside of the arrows within the walls of the pyramid. At the foundation, we see the form of partnership indicated by collaboration. Loose collaboration would be exemplified by the presence of some factors and manifested with low intensity. The quality and sustained success of a partnership depends on the combination of factors that are present, as well as the intensity to which each factor is manifested (Dhillon, 2013). These principles are depicted by the arrows moving toward a successful partnership. The intensity of the color from white to blue represents not only the presence of each factor but also the increasing intensity of each factor in the partnership. The ovals represent the three main actors, the school, the volunteer, and LTLSF, and their interactions with each other and within the factors.

As we progressed through our project, it became apparent that these partnerships do not occur in a vacuum. The environment also plays a role, and the sizeable, shaded green triangle represents this interaction. As the intensity of the green increases, its impact on the partnerships decreases, allowing for an increase in success. Therefore, for all entities, as we move up in the diagram, the quality and intensity of each factor increase, and thus, the partnership is more successful. At the same time, the more successful the partnership is, the less the environment has an impact.

PROJECT QUESTIONS

Equipped with knowledge of our partner organization and the identified problem of practice, we developed two research questions for our improvement project. The first question aims to understand what drives the facilitators to participate. Specifically, what motivates them to volunteer at LTLSF? Our second research question focuses on our research-based model to explore the partnership between LTLSF and the schools, making meaning of what makes it work and what challenges may exist. The goal is to provide LTLSF with a better understanding of why the partnership is successful and the areas of opportunity for growth and refinement.

Research Question One

What motivates volunteers at Live the Life South Florida?

Research Question Two

What contributes to successful partnerships between LTLSF and schools?

PROJECT DESIGN

The project design that best fit the goals of this study was a mixed methods descriptive research approach. The use of multiple tools, data analysis approaches, and our own research positionalities enabled us to better understand the factors, impacts, and correlations within the partnership. Specifically, we chose this design to identify and understand what factors and the intensity of those factors lead to successful partnerships between schools and a faith-based support organization with a volunteer workforce. The design also allows us to explore faith-based volunteer motivation and commitment drivers. LTLFSF will use the findings to refine its school engagement strategy, volunteer sustainment, and recruitment and create a standard working agreement or memorandum of understanding for LTLFSF to use for future engagements.

Our study used multiple data sources and coding methods to identify key themes. We used literature to establish categories for the identified themes. The methods and tools utilized also allowed us to identify conceptions not directly discussed in the literature. The unit of analysis for this research is the LTLFSF organization, LTLFSF volunteers, and partnered public schools.

Participant Selection & Research Site Selection

LTLFSF provides services across the state. Our goal of participant and site selection was to understand the relationship between LTLFSF, volunteers, and participating schools. We chose purposeful sampling to accomplish this goal. Ravitch and Carl (2021) describe this sampling approach's benefits as allowing investigators to delve into a specific group or area because of their precise experience in the relationship. We selected current LTLFSF volunteers and administrators who are participating in the program pilot.

We broadened our school administrator criteria to those teachers or administrators at the schools LTLFSF provided services in the last three years. Twelve facilitators participated in the study. One of the facilitators is also the director of the pilot program. Eleven schools participated in the research project, resulting in seven total paired partnerships between facilitators and administrators. The schools are a combination of middle schools and high schools. Of the seven paired partnerships, two are middle schools, one is grades 6-12 combination school, and four are high schools. Five of the schools meet Title One classification requirements. Two of the schools do not meet Title One classification requirements. The Florida Department of Education describes Title One Schools (2023) as those with economically disadvantaged students. Because of the diverse school settings and environments, the information gleaned should provide a viable cross-section representing various dynamics in the relationship between schools and LTLFSF. Due to time constraints, we leveraged personal and professional relationships within this school district and LTLFSF to identify and access willing participants.

Table 2 below shows the participation and response rates broken down by tool. One hundred percent of administrators participated in the questionnaire responses, but only two participated in the interviews. The facilitator response rate was eighty-six percent for questionnaire responses, and three participated in interviews.

Table 2*Data Type and Completion Rate*

Data Type	Completion Rate
Facilitator Questionnaire 16 Questions	14 facilitators 12 – 86%
Administrator Questionnaire 14 Questions	9 Administrators 9 – 100%
Formal Semi-structured Interviews	3 Facilitators and 2 Administrators Completed One facilitator is also the director
Open Ended Interviews	11 Facilitators Completed
LTLSF Facilitator Monthly Meetings	Attended 2
Bi-weekly meetings with the program director	From May 2022-December 2023

Note. Participation and response rates broken down by each questionnaire

Data Collection

We employed two main tools in our data collection. We used a combination of forced-choice and open-ended questionnaires as the primary collection source. Ravitch and Carl (2021) discuss the benefits of employing a questionnaire as cost-efficient, respondents' anonymity, and it has limited effects on the sample population. We utilized the literature to identify questions to use in the questionnaire. Questions fell into three main categories: basic information like years in their current role and whether they will be returning, questions that provided data for factors that drove facilitator motivation, and questions that provided data to better understand what factors contributed to successful partnerships. The questionnaire included eighteen questions in total.

The tool's first three questions describe the respondent's role, longevity, and responsibilities in the LTLSF or school organization. The subsequent three questions describe the respondent's motivation to participate in the program. Questions seven and eight focus on the program's goals and whether the goals meet the desired end state. Questions nine through twelve delve into what success looks like, the factors contributing to the program's success or failure in achieving its goals, and any mitigation steps the respondent made. Questions thirteen and fourteen focused on conflict resolution and communication between the facilitator and the school. Question fifteen allowed the respondent to identify how the school shows value in the partnership. The final research-driven survey question focused on whether the respondent planned to participate in the program in the future. We created questions that aimed to capture information for each theme identified by the literature and our conceptual framework (See Appendix B).

Once we created the questionnaire, colleagues and the director of the client organization reviewed the material to ensure the questions were clear and acceptable to the organization. We conducted a pilot of the questionnaire with the facilitators of LTLSF during a regularly scheduled LTLSF meeting. The LTLSF Director gave us a few minutes to introduce the research team and present the study concept. Following the meeting, we sent the Microsoft Form Link to all the facilitators in the organization, along with an email introducing and reiterating the purpose of the research. To increase the response rate, we attended a second meeting and provided the opportunity to complete the questionnaire during the meeting. We still sent a follow-up email with the questionnaire link to the LTLSF volunteers to provide flexibility and ease of access.

We fashioned the administrator questionnaire in the same mold as the facilitator questionnaire. The literature informed the questions we created. The difference with the administrator questionnaire was that it focused on research question two, which was to better understand the factors that contributed to the success or challenges of the partnership. We still asked baseline questions to understand the respondents' roles and longevity. The questionnaire contained sixteen questions. Again, we used peers and the LTLSF director to review the questionnaire for the partnered school administrators. We then sent an email introducing the study and the request to complete the survey. We made follow-up phone calls to all the administrators; if they were unavailable, we left a message introducing the questionnaire request. We followed up with calls and emails to solicit participation and answer any questions about the research project (See Appendix C).

In addition to questionnaires, we also conducted multiple interviews with administrators, facilitators, and LTLSF leadership members. We used summary memos from meetings with the program director, in addition to three types of interviews: Natural conversations, in-depth open-ended, and semi-structured interviews. We engaged with the director every two weeks from May 2022 through November 2023. We conducted semi-structured interviews with both administrators and facilitators. The questionnaire-informed interviews took place between August 23, 2023, and September 30, 2023. We conducted three interviews with facilitators and two with administrators. We used the semi-structured format to provide flexibility in our data collection approach. We used our interview protocols, as seen in appendix four and five, as a framework and still maintained the flexibility of employing this tool. If we heard something that could increase our understanding, we would veer from the plan and briefly explore with the interviewee. We were able to add context and a greater understanding of the data from the questionnaire with the use of the interviews (See Appendix D).

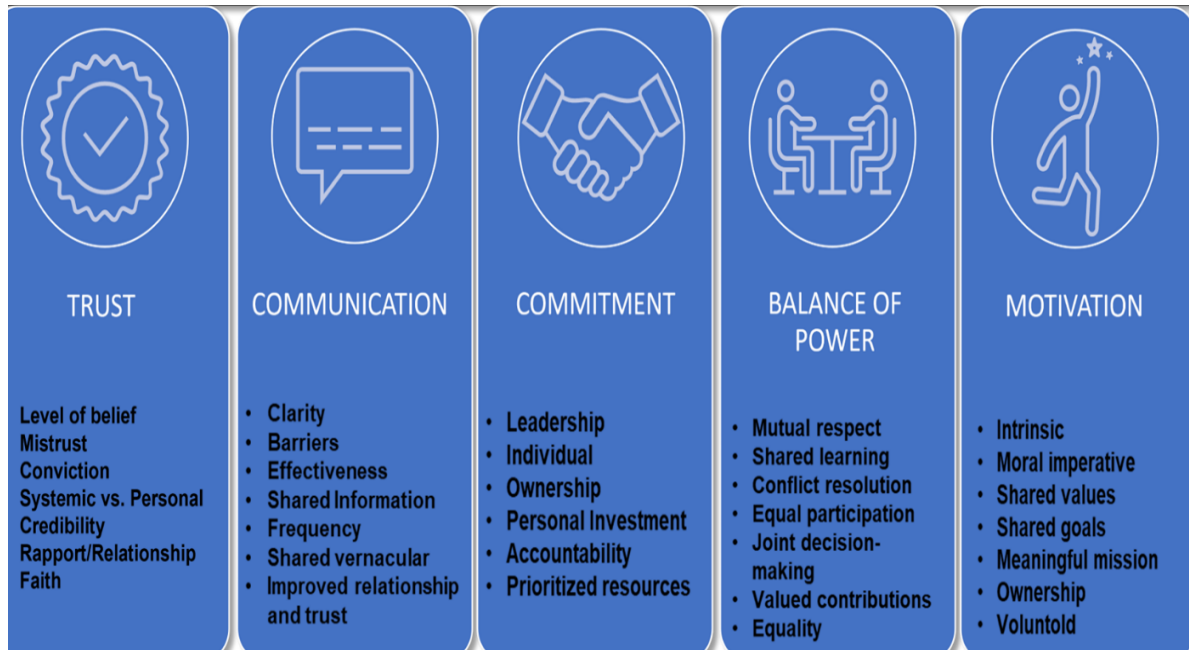
Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study covers three areas for data collection. We took an iterative approach to our data collection and analysis. Ravitch and Carl (2021) describe this as a process starting when collection begins and continues to build on itself as the research continues. We conducted multiple engagements with the data between each tool used. The first review of the data was an unstructured reading used to familiarize ourselves with the data. Ravitch and Carl (2021) argue this is a crucial aspect of the overall process. We conducted this separately using the multiple coding approach. Ravitch and Carl (2021) argue that multiple coding enables the researchers to identify if the individual researcher's interpretations are similar, match, or go in

different directions when viewing the same data. The approach helped us to ensure our ability to identify themes or divergent ideas that needed more exploration.

In the second reading, we used an inductive approach to identify the themes or ideas in the data set. We reviewed each question separately and identified the theme of the response. The factors and their associated themes are depicted below in Figure 3. We collected responses and compared them to identify trends or themes. We discussed the trends to determine if there were any outliers between our two readings. The themes and outliers informed our initial follow-up questions for the interviews.

Figure 3
Partnership Factors by Theme used for coding



Note. Adapted from Basile and Forrer 2023

Subsequently, we conducted a third examination of the data, adopting a more deductive approach. We categorized the ideas into the predefined buckets identified during our literature review. Apart from allocating them to the established categories, we also scrutinized the data for

any anomalies or outliers. The final structured analysis of the questionnaire data focused on evaluating the responses of each facilitator and administrator to similar questions.

Figure 4
Initial Thematic Coding

Question		
7	In what ways do you think the partnership has been successful in attaining its goals?	
1	They are dedicated to their goals of helping students and have always made sure to be accommodating to my schools.	Commitment
2	Helping students who struggle with issues.	Commitment
3	Always looking for ways to improve program and interaction with students.	Commitment
4	Building relationships with students	Commitment
5	Brought awareness to many issues that adolescents/teens face in south Florida.	Communication
6	I believe more students now understand the importance of health education.	Communication
7	It has been consistent as she has supported our students for 5 years.	Commitment
8	Execution of the program and the ability of the instructors to deliver the curriculum and build relationships with the students.	Commitment
9	Consistent classroom visits allowing students to participate and have a contact to reach out to if they are in need.	Commitment

Note. Facilitator and Administrator were asked similar questions

The fourth figure shown above illustrates the survey questions posed to administrators along with the responses from nine school sites. For the second analysis, we categorized responses based on themes. The right side of the table in this phase exemplifies the third analysis, where a more refined thematic structure was employed for coding. Utilizing these outcomes, we sorted responses into five thematic categories drawn from existing literature.

Figure 5
Side-by-side response comparison of researchers' coding

	What are factors you think contribute to the success of the program at your school site(s)?RQ1	What are factors that you think prevent the successful attainment of the program's goals at the school site? RQ1	What does a successful school partnership experience look like to you? RQ1
	Sq9/	sq10	sq11
Facilitator	Communication	communication	Commitment/personal motivation
Facilitator	Commitment/Community/Relationship	rapport, commitment	Commitment
Facilitator	Personal Motivation/ Faith	Internal motivation	Commitment both
Facilitator	Personal Motivation/Community	Commitment	other
Facilitator	Program Expertise	Commitment	commitment/communication
Facilitator	Commitment	Commitment	Commitment
Facilitator	Commitment	Commitment	external
Facilitator	Cooperation/Trust	rapport, commitment	other
Facilitator	Trust/relationship	rapport, commitment	commitment/other
Facilitator	Personal motivation/Trust(faith in program)	Internal motivation	commitment/trust/Communication
Facilitator	Commitment	Commitment	commitment
Facilitator	Commitment/Trust	Commitment	other/commitment
	communication		
	commitment		
	Trust		

The fifth figure shown above illustrates a comparison of our two coding approaches was facilitated by placing the results side by side. This comparative analysis enabled us to merge the coding results, revealing overarching themes among both facilitator and administrator participants. Subsequently, we juxtaposed the questions from facilitators and administrators to examine and contrast the perspectives of the two groups.

Table 3
Partnership Heat Map

Partnership Profile	SES Status	Assigned/ owned	TRUST	COMMUNICATION sq14/sqa10	COMMITMENT sqa4&sqa13/sq16	POWER BALANCE sq13/sqa11& sq15/sqa12	MOTIVATION sq6
Partnership 1	Title I	Owned					
School Admin			3	3	3	3	3
Facilitator			3	2	3	3	3
Facilitator			3	1	2	3	1
			3	2	2.7	3	2.3
Partnership 2	Not T1	Owned					
School Admin			2	2	2	3	2
Facilitator			3	2	3	3	3
Facilitator			1	2	3	2.5	3
Facilitator			1	2	3	2.5	3
Facilitator			3	1	3	3	3
			2	1.8	2.8	2.8	2.8
Partnership 4	Title I	Owned					
School Admin			3	2	2.5	3	3
Facilitator			3	3	3	2.75	3
Facilitator			3	2	2	2	2
			3	2.3	2.5	2.6	2.7
Partnership 5	Title I	Assigned					
School Admin			2	2	2	3	1
Facilitator			3	2	1	2.5	1
Facilitator			3	2	3	3	3
			2.7	2.0	2	2.8	1.7
Partnership 7	Title I	Owned					
School Admin			3	3	3	3	3
Facilitator			3	1	3	3	3
			3	2	3	3	3
Partnership 8	Title I	Assigned					
School Admin			2	3	2.5	2.5	1
Facilitator			2	1	2	3	2
			2	2	2.3	2.8	1.5
Partnership 9	Not T1	Assigned					
School Admin			2	3	1	3	1
Facilitator			1	1	3	2.5	3
Facilitator			2	2	3	3	3
			1.7	2	2.3	2.8	2.3

The third table shown above represents the heat map we created to understand the intensity of each respondent's response concerning the five aspects of partnerships identified in the literature. The twelve responding facilitators and nine responding administrators were matched to seven partnerships, which became the sample for the analysis of the partnership factors. This time, we placed the responses in groups with their partnered administrator and facilitator. An intensity factor was given to each response. One was negative or a low response. Two was neutral response, and three was positive or a high response. Red represents the negative or low intensity. Yellow represents a neutral relationship regarding the partnership factor. Green represents a positive or a high intensity.

Using the map allowed us to understand better how the facilitators and administrators viewed the same topics through a level of intensity lens. We used the heat map results to identify areas for improvement in the partnerships. We used the numeric value assigned to each partnership's response to determine the mean for the partnership for that factor. In addition, we

took the mean scores across the factors to determine the success rate of the partnership. The use of the quantitative approach allowed us to interpret the responses and better understand areas of success and opportunities.

Interviews

We recorded and digitally transcribed the semi-structured formal interviews. We both reviewed the transcribed interview two times. We reviewed each transcript a minimum of three times during the study. The third reading is to check for accuracy. In some cases, we examined the transcripts a fourth time if we felt there was additional information we might have missed during a specific engagement. The interviews provided more depth and context to the questionnaire responses. The combination of collection and analysis methods allowed us to triangulate and better understand our interpretations to draw conclusions, leading to our recommendations for our partner organization.

FINDINGS

Research Question 1: What motivates volunteers at Live the Life South Florida?

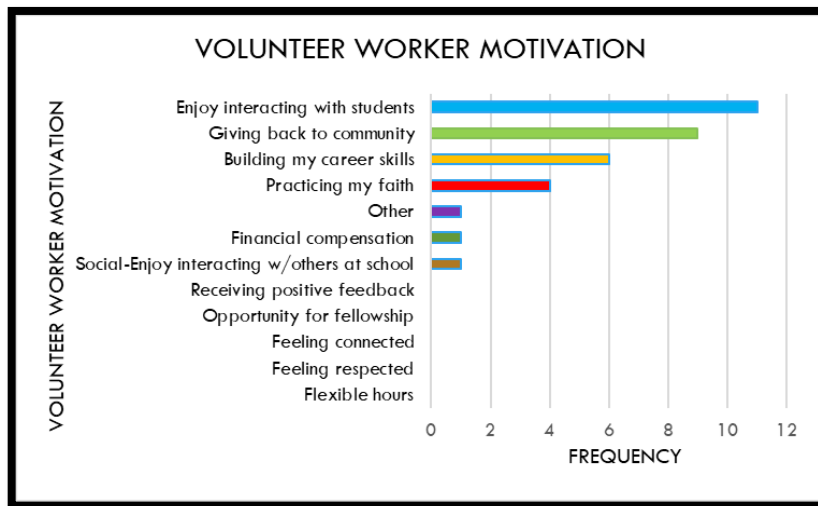
Finding R1-1: Working with students is the top motivation for LTLSF facilitators.

Facilitators were presented with twelve options related to motivations for performing volunteer activity. Figure eight shows the summary of the responses from all twelve facilitators. The options were loosely based on the Faith-based Functions Inventory discussed in the literature review (Erasmus & Morey, 2016).

Respondents were asked to select up to three drivers for volunteering. All, with the exception of one, facilitators selected “Enjoy interacting with students.” Nine of the twelve chose “Giving back to the community,” six of the twelve selected “Building my career skills,” and one-third of the facilitators selected “practicing my faith.” This clearly indicates that the students are the most significant appeal to the volunteer workers.

Figure 6

Facilitator’s Survey Response to “Why do you do this work?”



While the survey data shown in Figure 6 indicates that the primary reason that most facilitators participate in the program is that they enjoy engaging with students, the interview data suggests that their motivation for working with students goes much deeper than simply enjoying being around students. In fact, facilitators were engaging with students for a purpose- to positively changing the lives of students and make a difference for the next generation.

For example, one facilitator described wanting to make a difference because students “are our future.” Another facilitator described the goal to be a positive example and “have a lasting

influence.” Other facilitators described wanting to engage with students who may be struggling. For example, one facilitator shared that they wanted “to be a source of encouragement and hope for many students struggling with identity issues.” Another shared how the program provided opportunities for students to be themselves- noting that students in the program loved “freely expressing and sharing their thoughts, beliefs, and interests without being judged.” In each of these examples, for the facilitators, doing this work was more than enjoying time with kids- it was about how the time engaging with students in meaningful activities was making a positive difference in the lives of students.

These passionate responses exemplify the facilitator's dedication to supporting students' well-being and indicate their intrinsic motivation for working at LTLSF. We also matched the responses of the four facilitators who selected "I am practicing my faith" with their responses to the extended response and found their answers aligned with the theme of helping children, and none mentioned faith, specifically in their extended response. However, facilitator #12 stated that the program provides an *"opportunity to teach biblical principles in a public school without mentioning Christianity."*

Given that LTLSF is a faith-based Christian non-profit organization, our initial assumption was that a significant number of volunteer responses would highlight faith as a primary motivation for their involvement. Surprisingly, only four respondents, constituting one-third of the volunteers, identified manifesting their faith as one of the top three reasons for their commitment to the program. Nevertheless, a closer examination, aligned with existing literature on faith volunteers, validated our findings. In a 2016 article by Erasmus and Morey, it is highlighted that the primary motivator for faith-based volunteers is the Values function, defined as "people's deep-held belief in helping others and supporting causes that are important to them" (Clary et al., 1998). Our facilitators echoed a similar sentiment, expressing their desire to "help" students/kids.

The school administrators' observations regarding facilitators confirm that facilitators are driven by their desire to help students. When we asked schools how the facilitator impacted the school (SQA12), they often described how facilitators work with the students. One administrator echoed the facilitator's claim that they create a safe space for students; she shared, "Many of the students appreciated the class and the subject matter. The instructor gave a place that many of the students felt comfortable in." Another comment that stood out was very simply stated by a school administrator, "She loves my kids. She threw them a party." This comment not only indicates the intentions and drive of the facilitator, but one can also see that the administrator is also motivated by a desire to help improve the lives of the students.

While we were surprised to learn the significance working with students had in motivating our faith-based volunteers, we believe that the volunteers' desire to "help others" aligns with what the literature indicates is the principal driver of faith-based volunteers.

The remaining findings all relate to our second research question, which sought to identify the factors contributing to successful partnerships, “What are the factors that contribute to successful partnerships between LTLSF and schools?”

Finding R2-1: One hundred percent of the partnership respondents believe the partnership is successfully achieving its goals.

Our initial finding revealed that all participants, representing both facilitators and school site administrators, unanimously agreed that the partnership was effectively achieving its intended goals. This conclusion was drawn not only from the forced response but also from a comprehensive analysis of open-ended responses in which participants from both organizations were able to consistently articulate the program's goals and their belief that the goals were being achieved.

This conclusion was drawn from a comprehensive analysis of responses to both open-ended and forced-response questions. Specifically, we examined participants' responses to open-ended questions regarding:

- The specific goals of the partnership and
- Perceptions concerning the achievement of these goals.

Participants spoke clearly about the program's focus on relationships and social emotional skills. While administrators were brief in their description of the program goals, as this administrator shared, "to create an open discussion regarding health and social-emotional health." One facilitator articulated very clearly the program goals:

"The goal of the program is to equip kids with the necessary knowledge to build healthy relationships with themselves and others, in order to prevent future relationship conflict and toxic behavior patterns."

Our analysis concluded that both facilitators and school site administrators held a shared understanding of the partnership's goals and desired outcomes. They consistently articulated the program's focus on equipping students with strategies for making healthy life and relationship decisions.

To further corroborate this finding, we followed up the open-ended question about goals with a forced-choice question asking participants, "Do you think the partnership is successful, and is it accomplishing its goals?" Notably, all participants responded with a resounding YES as shown in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7
Results from the Administrator and Facilitator Survey



This discovery displayed in Figure 7 holds importance as it aligns with the fundamental tenet that this faith-based collaboration effectively aids public schools in attaining their non-religious objectives while upholding the separation between Church and State.

Table 1*Partnership Profile and Heat Map with Factor and Overall Mean for Each Partnership*

PARTNERSHIP PROFILES				TRUST	COMMUNICATION	COMMITMENT	POWER BALANCE	MOTIVATION	SCHOOL
	SES Status	Yrs.	Assigned/Owned		sq14/sqa10	sqa4&sqa13/sq16	sq13/SQA11	sq6	Overall Mean
P 1	Title I	3	Owned	3	2.7	2.7	3	2.3	2.7
P 2	Not T1	8	Owned	2	2.0	2.8	2.4	2.8	2.4
P3	Title I	4	Owned	3	2.3	2.5	2.7	2.7	2.6
P 4	Title I	7	Assigned	2.7	2.0	2	1	1.7	1.9
P 5	Title I	8	Owned	3	2	3	3	3	2.8
P 6	Title I	3	Assigned	2	1.5	2.3	1	1.5	1.7
P 7	Not T1	4	Assigned	1.7	2	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.1
Partnership Mean for Each Factor				2.44	2.09	2.52	2.23	2.37	

Findings two through four will refer to Table 4, which is a heat map summarizing the responses of all the members of each partnership. This heat map provides a summary of the participants' perceptions regarding the partnership success factors. The factors and their mean scores are listed vertically, and the individual partnerships are listed horizontally. Each category can range from 1 to 3 and represent negative to positive, respectively. One is represented in red and denotes a negative perception; two is neutral and yellow; as the score approaches three, we see green intensify. Also included in the table is a profile for the school partnership. The SES column represents the Socio-economic status of the school population. Partnerships that have a high population (over 51%) of students on free or reduced lunch programs are denoted as Title I. The “YRS” column represents the number of years the partnership has been at the school. The column with “Assigned/Owned” indicates if the partnership was initiated by the site administrator completing the survey or if the school site administrator was assigned or “voluntold” to manage the partnership.

Finding R2-2: Commitment is an essential factor in the partnership.

We found that commitment is an essential factor for success. Looking at the column totals at the bottom, we see that Commitment has the highest overall score, indicating that it has the most intensity and, according to our conceptualization, is an essential component in successful partnerships.

To further support this finding, we also reviewed the extended responses from facilitators and school administrators, and we saw both groups describe commitment as a priority for successful partnering. The comments regarding commitment were expressed by the volunteers as a need for “support from school administration.”

When the facilitators were asked what they attributed to the success of the partnership, the facilitators stated that there was a need for support from the school staff. One facilitator shared that to be successful, the partnership needed “classroom and programming support from the principal, assistant principal, guidance counselor, and classroom teacher.” This sentiment shows the importance of commitment from the entire organization, not just leadership. Conversely, when asked about the factors that prevent achieving the partnership’s goals, another facilitator shared, “Not good support from the teachers.” When school site teachers were not part of the commitment model, the program easily went off course. Not only because they made the environment less hospitable to the facilitator but also because students could sense the lack of commitment from the teacher and were less likely to pay attention to the facilitator and the information they were sharing.

Facilitators also described commitment as the determination to stay the course, especially when there are external environmental challenges. One facilitator shared that in successful partnerships, “each partner upholds(s) and maintain(s) their obligations to one another, and (it) does not corrode or deteriorate from its original goal because of new or difficult challenges.”

Responses from administrators when asked the same questions reflected similar perceptions to the facilitators. Administrators described commitment as the facilitator being dedicated to student outcomes, being able to adjust quickly, and being dependable. The commitment to students was shared by one facilitator, “they are dedicated to their goals of helping students and have always made sure to be accommodating to my schools.” Another sign of commitment, according to the school administration, was a belief in continuous improvement. At one school site where the facilitator had remained consistent for five years, the administrator shared he appreciated the facilitator’s willingness to “always looking for ways to improve the program and interaction with students.”

Because this partnership is perceived as successful by both groups, we did expect to see that all five themes were manifested. However, we see that commitment is perceived as more significant by both groups. This finding also aligns with the research on partnership success. The researchers agree that successful partnerships depend on the level of engagement and commitment of the partners (and community members) (Dowling et al., 2004; Mohr & Spekman, 1994).

The finding that both groups agree that commitment is essential is also consistent with the findings, as we see that it is not “just the commitment of the individuals on the ground who implement partnerships that are important but also a high level of trust and commitment at executive/senior management levels in the organization” (Dhillon, 2013, p.743).

Finding R2-3 The partnerships where the school administrator owned/initiated the partnership had the highest overall perception of partnership success.

We found that partnerships with the highest overall partnership success mean score occur where the leader brought the partnership to their school, denoted by ownership. In Table 3, we see the commitment cells for P1, P2, P3, and P5, which are shaded in green, indicating a positive level of perceived commitment. In addition, the Overall Mean cells are 2.7, 2.4, 2.6, and 2.8, respectively. Conversely, we can also see where the administrator was assigned or “voluntold” to manage the program, the Commitment scores were lower, as were the Overall Mean for partnerships.

To determine the level of ownership, we used administrators' responses regarding how they became involved with the partnership. The categories were dependent upon whether the person completing the survey perceived the partnership as originating with themselves (owned) or if the principal or other “boss” had told them to manage the partnership activities (assigned). Of the seven matched partnership administrators, four were designated as owned, and four as assigned.

In one of the partnerships, we saw a teacher who had managed the partnership at one school, and subsequently, when she was promoted to the position of administrator at another school, she brought the program with her to that site. In an interview with this administrator, we further inquired about the role commitment played in the success of the partnership. Her responses indicated that there was a mutual commitment to the success of the program. When asked about why the program was significant, she shared,

“So, the fact that she is willing to come back loves our kids..., gives me the required number of periods that I need, stays connected with me during the summer, and is committed to [school name redacted]. Then I have to give that back in return.”

This finding is also in alignment with the literature, which indicates that leadership commitment is a key factor in the successful implementation of partnerships, and conversely, when partnerships are forced, there may be less commitment from leadership and less successful implementation (Dowling et al., 2004; Wildridge et al., 2004; Spitz et al., 2021; Dickinson & Glasby, 2010; Dhillon, 2013).

Finding R2-4: Communication is an area of growth for the LTLFS partnership.

We found communication to have the lowest factor average across all schools, with an average score of 2.09 overall. Of the seven partnerships, five schools had neutral (2.0) to negative (1.5) perceptions regarding partnership communication. The two remaining partnerships had scores of 2.3 and 2.7.

We also found that communication was experienced differently between the school site and LTLFS facilitators. Although most school sites did not perceive barriers, all the facilitators believed they were not well informed by the school and had to receive communication through the parent organization (LTLFS). When asked about communication, four of the seven school

sites described communication interactions positively. There was a noticeable difference in the facilitators' and the school site's perceptions regarding this factor. With the exception of two facilitators, the nine remaining facilitators felt that the information flow between the schools and themselves was challenging.

We asked the school administrators about communication between the school and LTLSF and how they kept each other informed of daily happenings. In most cases, the administrators shared that there was a good flow of information between the two organizations. They described communicating via texting, phone calls, and emails. The school site shared that "Communication between the lead instructor and the instructors assigned to my school was seamless. We communicated via text message, email, and phone call." In this example, we see that the administrator is focused on the methods of communication but not really on the type of information flowing nor on the quality of information being exchanged between the school and the facilitator. This narrow focus on communication may be the reason for the discrepancy between the two organizations' perceptions of communication.

When facilitators were asked about communication and information flow, responses indicated a neutral to negative perception. Many were able to identify challenges they experienced within the communication process. One facilitator appeared frustrated by what she perceived as a lack of information flow. She shared, "I did not feel well informed. We would communicate by email...I don't want to be disrespectful, but this wasn't always very swift" Most of the facilitators indicated that their primary source of information came from interactions with LTLSF staff and not directly from the school site. The flow of information was also not bilateral, as one facilitator shared, they did not communicate directly with the school but depended on LTLSF to relay information back to the school, "I speak with my supervisor at Live the Life, who relays information to the school." When the communication process was viewed positively, it was often between a school-site teacher and the facilitator rather than the administrator. As one facilitator shared, "I give my cell number to the teacher. We communicate via text or email. This works well for us."

The literature indicates that for a partnership to be successful, there should be structures that enable "information flows and speedy communication between organizations and individuals to underpin successful partnerships." (Dhillon, 2013). We identified one partnership with a score that was significantly more positive than all the others. Their score of 2.7 was almost double the score of the lowest school (1.5).

When we interviewed the administrator at the site, we found she had prioritized increasing facilitators' access to school information. She was able to add the LTLSF facilitators and leadership team to the email distribution list and always invited the facilitators to important in-service informational meetings throughout the school year. In addition, she personally communicated directly with the LTLSF team members via email and phone calls. She shared, "I am the one who communicates with LTLSF, and we inform them via email and phone calls. I make sure that they are added to our staff list."

We asked the school administrators about communication between the school and LTLSF and how they kept each other informed of daily happenings. In most cases, the administrators felt that there was fluidity in communication and a good flow of information between the two

organizations. They used texting, phone calls, and emails as regular forms of communication. A typical answer from the administrators was,

"Communication between the lead instructor and the instructors assigned to my school was seamless. We communicated via text message, email, and phone call."

We also asked the program director, who is also a facilitator, specifically about the communication with that school site, and she shared that it was the "model" communication process. All the facilitators benefitted from the communication structure of that one partnership because LTLSF leadership is able to share critical operational and district-specific information gleaned from the communication structure.

Mohr and Spekman's understanding of characteristics associated with successful partnerships includes communication processes as foundational support for all the organizational functioning and, therefore, is critical to the partnership's success. An integral aspect of the communication function is information sharing. In both the facilitator and program director's comments, we see the desire to increase the systematic availability of information needed to complete tasks efficiently and effectively (Mohr & Spekman, 1994). Improving the communication between the school and LTLSF will be an area of growth for LTLSF.

Finding R2-5: External factors were the single most frequently cited partnership challenge.

Identifying the factors present in successful partnerships is essential in helping the client improve the partnership processes. However, it is also vital to understand what can impede the partnership from becoming successful and attaining its goals. We expected one of the five identified factors to be the cause of challenges or impediments to the continuation of the partnership, and while two site administrators cited commitment of resources, four administrators mentioned factors that were external to the partnership and not among our factors for success. The identified unique challenges have the potential to be the reason for terminating at least two of the partnerships.

When school site administrators were asked about the challenges, they had to overcome to accomplish the goals of the partnership, the political environment at the state and district level was cited most frequently. The political agenda being promoted at the State level regarding parental rights and the censoring of curriculum are having an unprecedented impact on accomplishing partnership goals. Four of the nine schools cited concerns about "new rules by state" and "newly passed bills of laws" as challenges they were facing this year. The challenge was manifested by one school as uncertainty regarding the future of the program in the school. The principal shared, "We would like to. I have been in touch with their leadership and plan on meeting with them soon... However, there are some concerns with the curriculum and new Florida guidelines." The school leadership wants to continue, but the school does not work autonomously and is clearly impacted by the external environment.

Facilitators also shared how they experienced the adverse effects of the political environment in the schools. Facilitators explained that school-site teachers who hosted the program feared their teaching licenses could be revoked if they supported instruction that went against the changing health and sexual education curriculum standards.

A significant divergence in this challenge was demonstrated in one of the partnerships. In an interview with one of the school sites with one of the highest partnership success scores, we asked how the current political climate affected the partnership at her school. The administrator responded that external factors would not impact their partnership. In her judgment, the benefits her students received from the LTLSF program were too significant, and the political climate would not be given consideration. She shared the following comments,

"The kids also enjoy the class. They talk, they move around, they have discussions, kids like that...They're (LTLSF) willing to take on our students, and we have, you know, our group of students are not the easiest group of students. ...the relationship that we have with one another is why it works, and I love the fact that our students love the class."

She shared that she would continue to work with the group until she was explicitly told to stop. The administrator's response provides a model for what a strong partnership between the school and LTLSF could be.

Therefore, while external challenges can have a negative impact on partnerships, there are conditions in which they can be mitigated by the organizations. When success factors are intensely manifested, that is, there is a high degree of commitment, there are fluid communication channels, trust is well established, and both organizations are bound by a shared vision and motivation to achieve the partnership goals, external factors may be less challenging.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The partnerships examined in this study provide insight into each partnership's potential and pitfalls. LTLSF wants to provide a value-added experience that the schools alone could not achieve independently. Given the specific findings gleaned through our research and the literature's deeper understanding regarding the nature and processes of successful partnerships, we have developed three short-term and two long-term recommendations for Live the Life South Florida. Recommendations one through three address findings one through three.

The long-term recommendations aim to address the external factors that impact partnerships, as discussed in finding four. We did not formulate any recommendations regarding volunteer workforce motivations and commitment to the organization, subject of research question 1, because our findings indicated that the volunteers, while important to LTLSF as an organization, did not significantly influence the overall perception of the partnership by the school site. This idea was corroborated by the fact that facilitators are interchangeable and not solely assigned to one school site. Therefore, the partnership's success varied according to the relationship between the school and LTLSF leaders, regardless of the volunteer placed at the school.

Recommendation 1: Collaboratively establish expectations and outcomes.

We recommend collaboratively establishing a memorandum of understanding with clear, realistic expectations and outcomes, a clear understanding of LTLSF's driving purpose, and an outline of the practical details of the day-to-day school operations. These parameters will not only help ensure an environment that can produce a successful partnership, but they will also help avoid the common pitfalls of partnership work.

Within this study, successful partnerships have been defined as lasting inter-organizational relationships, and a successful partnership is one that is re-engaged year after year. However, this definition does not fully serve as a metric for either organization. As LTLSF has already seen, donors and volunteers need to know that the goals and objectives are clearly defined and are being met. Our study into the factors that contribute to the successful partnership processes (i.e., trust, commitment, communication, balance of power, and motivation) will help to increase how LTLSF understands their partnership working. However, it will also require a practical application of this knowledge. We suggest LTLSF share the successful partnership framework and establish a mutual understanding of the requirements and expectations with each school site leadership to maximize the partnership functionality. Each element and expectation must be developed collaboratively by the LTLSF liaison and school leader to ensure an equal balance of power and invested commitment and trust between the organizations.

We recommend that LTLSF also provide an opportunity to outline the desired outcomes for the partnership and program. This exercise, completed jointly, will allow each organization to evaluate partnership success in more tangible metrics than simply continuing to exist. In this same way, the partnership will be seen as more valuable if the goals and outcomes of the school site are delivered along with those established by the LTLSF organization's board and grant requirements. Delineating expectations for processes and outcomes and monitoring these expectations will help establish trust and commitment and demonstrate the power balance between the organizations.

In Dickinson and Glasby's 2010 article "Why Partnership Working Doesn't Work," the authors share that one of the pitfalls of partnership working is not being honest about organizational drivers. We have seen this in LTLSF's partnerships. One of the partnership challenges shared by the schools in the questionnaire and follow-up interviews was the "religious" nature of the organization. In addition, one of the challenges shared by the program director was that this year, the most prominent donors pulled funding from the organization because they believed the partnership work was not meeting their goals of establishing new members of faith. By not being transparent about the organization's driver for their in-school program, LTLSF loses the trust of stakeholders.

Therefore, we suggest that during the initial collaboration, LTLSF make clear if the driver is to create Christians or to help teens enjoy healthy relationships throughout their lives. By addressing this underlying concern in the initial establishment of partnering work, school leaders will have the opportunity to share their concerns, and LTLSF will be in a better position to address the concerns and make any necessary modifications to the program delivery or to stop the partnership and reallocate those resources to a better match. As for the donor aspect, if the primary goal is not to proselytize in schools, then other sources of donorship may be available and should be explored. These pre-work conversations will help to establish the honesty and communication levels required for successful partnerships.

Providing clear and concise guidelines and a mutual understanding of what is required for a successful partnership will allow each organization to enter into an agreement with a better understanding of what each partner must provide and concede to attain fruitful outcomes. The document should be reviewed annually (at minimum) and updated to ensure the needs of both organizations are reflected and kept current. A sample memorandum is included in the appendix.

Recommendation 2: Develop a communication plan to improve communication between LTLSF and school sites.

Finally, to address the discrepancy in communication processes as perceived by the facilitators and school-based administrators, we recommend that LTLSF develop a plan outlining how information should be shared between the two organizations. The plan should include:

- Specific details regarding communication channels and frequency of communication.
- Request for schools to provide facilitators with access to important operational information, such as student schedules, student demographics and special programs, and faculty and staff contact lists.
- Request for schools to provide facilitators with access to inter-school electronic distribution lists.

Communication and information flow are integral components of successful partnerships (Dhillon, 2013; Dowling et al., 2004; Israel et al., 2019; Mohr & Spekman, 1994; Wildridge et al., 2004). The ease with which information flows between the organizations helps to ensure that both organizations feel they are part of a common unit with a common goal and vision for success. Ensuring that the LTLSF personnel are privy to the general communication of essential day-to-day operational requirements will help ensure the facilitators are well-informed and can follow any rules and procedures at the school site. Providing the facilitators access to school electronic bulletin boards and whole school email blasts by adding them to the email distribution requires a one-time effort by the school and automates the process of informing facilitators.

During an interview with a school site administrator, we found that this process was being utilized at that specific location and one additional location where the administrator had previously worked. LTLSF can use this existing protocol to help other schools that may require practical details for implementing this inclusive practice. In addition, we recommend that this be one of the expectations discussed in pre-partnership meetings and documented in the partnership memorandum of understanding.

Recommendation 3: Provide a devoted LTLSF Liaison for each school.

Provide a dedicated liaison for each partnership to establish, build, and maintain strong interpersonal relationships between LTLSF leadership and school site leadership. As we conducted our research and interviews, a theme that repeated itself with every person involved was the importance of their relationship with someone in the partnering organization. Whether describing their motivation for getting involved as a volunteer with LTLSF or the introduction and establishment of the program in various schools, respondents cited the relationship as their reason for committing to the organizational outcomes and trusting the positive intentions of participants.

According to work by Mavondo and Rodrigo (2001), "organizational relations are built through the interaction of organizational members at the personal level..." Their study indicates that cooperation, trust, and interpersonal commitment increase as social bonding increases. Which in turn increases commitment in the inter-organizational relationship. Given our findings that commitment and trust are critical elements for successful partnerships and that strong interpersonal connections increase commitment and trust, it follows that LTLSF should invest in building and maintaining relationships with leaders in the school. During our interviews, we found that the most committed school-based leaders had invested a significant amount of time training, talking, or observing class instruction with a member of the LTLSF team. However, when asked, the program director shared that time to build and maintain relationships with the school leadership was not an established part of anyone's job description.

Due to the lack of volunteers this year, all of the full-time LTLSF employees are facilitating between two and four classes across two and sometimes three locations each day. There is no dedicated time to work on cultivating relationships with key school personnel. To solidify the implementation in public schools, we suggest each of the three full-time employees be allocated a minimum of one hour per week to visit schools and meet with leadership or other key personnel to do a check-in on the program and inquire about how they can help the school community in other ways. While each conversation may not provide fruitful outcomes, consistent and positive interactions can lead to increased social and interpersonal bonding, which leads to increased trust and commitment. While there can be more than one person at each school who interacts with LTLSF, we recommend that one LTLSF person who has decision-making authority be assigned to maintain and nurture interpersonal relationships with the school.

Long-Term Recommendations

Two long-term recommendations complement the short-term recommendations and address the impact of external environment on the interactions between LTLSF, schools, and volunteers. LTLSF needs to attempt to mitigate and shape those influencers to the best of the organization's ability.

Recommendation 4: Mitigate External Factors through Support and Advocacy

LTLSF should look for opportunities to mitigate external factors by developing a presence within the state and local governments. At the state level, there is growing concern about the impact of politics on education. Teachers and administrators hesitate to allow faith-based nonprofits on their campuses or classrooms. The hesitation is not out of fear of the services the children receive but out of fear of violating new state policies. One way to begin to address this concern is through advocacy at the state government level. Leroux and Goerdel (2009) describe how nonprofit organizations engage in advocacy through "collaborative networking," which can be financially or influence driven. LTLFSF receives funding from grants and private donations. Both financial streams depend on producing results, whether reaching a certain number of students or realizing outcomes. State policies are impacting LTLFSF's ability to meet the requirements of both stakeholders. There is a need for advocacy at the state level to address the impacts of new policies. One option for advocacy is joining or forming a nonprofit association with similar organizations to increase awareness and reduce costs (Leroux and Goerdel (2009). Another avenue to gain advocacy at the state level is through lobbyists. Leroux and Goerdel (2009) submit that this can be done through association or independently by nonprofit organizations. LTLFSF would benefit from increasing its voice to influence the education policy in Florida.

Continuing to build partnerships and opportunities for collaboration outside of necessity can help further the impact and reach of LTLFSF. There is a need for more resources and the shaping of local policies to continue providing services to school-age children in South Florida. Collins and Gerlach (2019) discuss the misperception of people who think partnerships between nonprofits and local governments happen out of need. LTLFSF has a mission to provide social and emotional education to teenagers. The local government wants future generations to be productive community members. Providing a service not readily available by the local government creates an opportunity for both organizations to benefit the community. Collins and Gerlach (2019) illustrate that local governments do not always have the expertise required to provide certain services to the community. LTLFSF can add to the services in the community. Partnerships can be mutually beneficial in resource-constrained environments like local governments and nonprofit organizations (Collins & Gerlach, 2019). The key to this endeavor for LTLFSF is the relationship with the local government. This relationship can impact future decisions and opportunities. Gazley and Brudney (2007) found that in cases where there are similarities between organizations and their goals, the partnerships benefit both the organization and the community.

Building and fostering relationships and networks at state and local levels benefits LTLFSF. As the environment continues to influence LTLFSF and its partners, the ability to influence becomes increasingly critical. Joining an association, employing a lobbyist, and partnering locally allow LTLFSF to shape its future environment.

Recommendation 5: Share the Story: Develop a Comprehensive Marketing Plan

In addition to establishing advocates at the state and local levels through networking with other organizations, LTLFSF needs to tell its story. The fifth recommendation is to develop a marketing plan to share the story, stimulate volunteer interest, and foster community support. Since marketing campaigns can be time-consuming and a resource drain, LTLFSF must establish a creative approach to accomplishing marketing goals. The questionnaire responses show that most

volunteers and partner schools came through word of mouth. While this is great and shows a positive reputation, the organization needs more.

Identifying opportunities to tell the message of the work LTLFSF is doing in the schools needs a plan focused on nonprofit attributes. Briones et al. (2009) argue that traditional marketing plans do not work for nonprofit organizations due to the varying interests of those they are trying to reach. LTLFSF must communicate with volunteers, donors, and potential clients with limited resources. In a 2009 study, Waters found that interpersonal communication is the key to donor relationships. Creating opportunities for continuous communication between LTLFSF and donors allows for dialogue and a temperature check. From a fiscal perspective, LTLFSF needs to ensure that the donors understand the programming, and it is also crucial for LTLFSF to understand what remains essential to the donor. Holding regular donor engagements and using newsletters, phone calls, and emails takes time but is the easiest way to cultivate the relationships behind the resources.

The use of social media is another opportunity for telling the story. LTLFSF has a website that is maintained regularly. The organization does a weekly message through a podcast. Based on Briones et al. (2009) findings in their research on the American Red Cross, using multiple social media platforms to reach the various stakeholders, volunteers, and potential schools is the most productive. LTLFSF needs to continue to get the message out. In the age of constant communication, social media outlets are the most feasible. Dialog with potential clients, donors, and volunteers allows LTLFSF leadership to maintain awareness of the external environment and shape views. Briones et al. (2009) also found that the dialog between the Red Cross and the targeted audience is faster and can create a sense of community. The ability to increase the reach through social media outlets and increase the sense of community through a shared understanding of the need for the services LTLFSF provides benefits everyone.

The long-term recommendations, though separate recommendations are complementary. Both involve engaging with external stakeholders, whether in state or local government, donors, prospective volunteers, or clients; these recommendations involve communication and building relationships. Establishing a presence at the local level has the opportunity to be mutually beneficial. The city can extend services it could not before, and LTLFSF gets access to more clients and funding strings.

Establishing coalitions to influence policy at the state level is another critical venture that takes time. LTLFSF's ability to unite with other organizations to create an economy of effort is critical. Creating a multidimensional marketing plan is essential to long-term sustainability. Telling the story of the work and impact that LTLFSF is having on children stimulates interest in volunteers and current and potential donors. The more the story is publicized, the more significant the interest, and the greater the interest, the stronger the influence at the state and local levels.

PROJECT LIMITATIONS

This descriptive improvement study employed a qualitative methodology utilizing several data collection techniques. We experienced challenges in understanding the relationship dynamics between the facilitators and their partnered schools. While we identified the aspects of the relationship that led to successful partnerships, there are areas of opportunity in both the design and tools employed in this study.

There are understood limitations to the data collection tools employed. We attempted to mitigate the limitations of the forced-choice questions by also using open-ended questions to gather data. We also paired the questionnaire with semi-structured interviews. To help provide more context and supplement the questionnaires. Validity and replication are concerns based on the number of responses for the study. Compiling the data for multiple years would increase the sample size and validity.

Resources such as time and access were two of the critical resource limitations. We had a roster of members for the current year. Looking at the research from a different angle, we would have liked to have been able to contact previous facilitators to help understand their experience and inform our recommendations for future opportunities. Another access limitation was the ability to schedule time with the administrators. The data collection period ran into the beginning of a new school year, which is their priority.

Understanding the value of nonprofit organizations and their contributions to society has been studied at length. There is a delta in the understanding of nonprofit partnerships with schools, which increases when you look at faith-based nonprofit partnerships with public schools.

CONCLUSION

Embarking upon the culminating chapter of our exploration, let us now distill the essence gleaned from our comprehensive analysis. Our journey with Live the Life South Florida (LTLSF) has uncovered vital insights into the dynamics of their partnerships with public schools and the motivations driving their dedicated volunteer facilitators. As we reflect on the key elements of this Capstone Paper, it is clear that LTLSF faces a significant challenge in balancing the growing demand for its services with the limited resources at its disposal.

The findings from our study shed light on the motivations of LTLSF facilitators, with a resounding emphasis on their genuine passion for working with students. This intrinsic motivation serves as a powerful asset for the organization and should be harnessed to inform future recruiting and retention practices.

Examining the factors contributing to successful partnerships, we discovered that commitment, clear communication, and a sense of ownership significantly influence the perceived success of these collaborations. Our short-term recommendations underscore the importance of solidifying commitment through collaborative establishment of expectations and addressing communication gaps with a well-defined plan.

Looking toward the long-term, mitigating external factors emerges as a crucial strategy. Advocacy and support, potentially through the formation of a nonprofit alliance, can position LTLSF as an active participant in the political arena. Additionally, a comprehensive marketing plan can amplify the organization's impact by sharing its success stories, not only within schools but also within the broader community.

As LTLSF navigates the path ahead, it is essential to recognize that the landscape of nonprofit work is dynamic and requires adaptability. By implementing our recommendations, LTLSF can build a robust foundation for sustained success in their mission to strengthen relationships and support healthy communities. The dedication of their facilitators and the positive outcomes of their programs provide a strong basis for optimism.

In closing, this improvement project not only addresses the immediate challenges faced by LTLSF but also lays the groundwork for continued growth and impact. By understanding the motivations of their facilitators and refining their partnership strategies, LTLSF can evolve into an even more influential force for positive change. As the organization looks to the future, we remain hopeful that our insights and recommendations will serve as a compass, guiding them towards continued success in their noble mission.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A– Sample Framework for Collaboration between LTLSF & Schools

SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS



Shared Ownership

Successful partnerships require both organizations to believe in and support the reason for the existence of the partnership.



Trust

Partnerships that work have confidence in the level of expertise each member brings to the partnership. Each organization knows with certainty that its best interest is being considered. The individual organizations keep commitments and behave with integrity in all interactions.



Commitment

Partnerships that excel are dedicated to the successful attainment of shared goals. Each partner organization prioritizes resources needed to overcome challenges and attain the objectives of the partnership.



Communication

Clear, concise, and regular communication is the cornerstone of any strong and lasting relationship, including working partnerships.



Reciprocity



Within successful partnerships, each member's contributions are recognized and valued. Both partners strive for a balance of give-and-take.

What can we do to ensure these factors are successfully implemented?

Shared-Ownership

- ✓ We believe together, we can reduce poverty, homelessness, incarceration, addictions, domestic violence, and a host of societal ills by improving the relationship literacy of our families.
- ✓ We know that together, we have the ability to make our community the best place to live, work and raise families.

Our goal is to support you and your students as we work to create communities in which families can thrive. To support your school and vision, we need to know:

-  In what ways can we support your students and community?
-  What are your goals for our partnership this year?

Trust

You can trust our instructors.

- ✓ Instructors pass rigorous security screening processes administered by Live the Life South Florida,
- ✓ Vetted through the BCPS substitute clearance and obtained.
- ✓ Level 2 Volunteer clearance by BCPS



You can trust our curriculum:

- ✓ Our curriculum is the only one approved by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- ✓ Instructors are fully credentialed in the Real Essentials Curriculum

Commitment

- ✓ We commit to providing you with the best facilitators and curriculum.
- ✓ We commit to ensuring all classes are covered by a credentialed and vetted Live the Life Instructor.






We need your commitment to:

-  Consider student's individual learning needs and instructional plans (e.g., IEP, ELL designation) prior to placing students in the class. (Our instructors may not have ESOL or ESE credentials and may not be the best placement for students with unique needs).
-  Ensure our classes are located in an area of the school that is easily accessed by administration and security if our instructors are working independently of a school faculty or staff member.

Communication





- ✓ We will communicate with your team regularly and provide class and student progress updates.
- ✓ We will ensure we provide you with at least 24 hours' notice in the event of an unscheduled absence of an instructor.
- ✓ We will promote all the good news happening at your school.
- ✓ We will never breach the confidentiality of any student and school matters that require discretion.
- ✓ We will accept feedback and critique with an open-minded and positive attitude.

To ensure we communicate efficiently and effectively, here are additional strategies we have seen work well:

-  Set up regularly scheduled check-ins with your Live the Life liaison. (These can always be canceled if there is nothing to discuss, but we find it better to have a set time and place scheduled.)
-  Add your Live the Life South Florida liaison and instructor to the school inter-office email. This enables us to communicate with your staff easily and minimizes your need to communicate critical operational changes and events with us individually.
-  Assign a point-person to provide “in-time” decision-making for minor concerns and questions that may arise during Live the Life classes.
-  Provide instructors with weekly/monthly calendars of activities and events (ensure instructors know where to find information that students.
-  Provide your assigned instructor with training on all school operational procedures (e.g., emergency procedures and emergency drill schedules), school-specific discipline guidelines, adult and student dress codes, and anything that helps to make us a seamless part of your team.

Reciprocity

We want your students and school community to receive the maximum benefit from this program. We want to learn and benefit from your wisdom as well.

-  Please share in the process of planning and individualizing our classes to meet the specific needs of your school.
-  Please feel free to visit our classes and share your insight and feedback.
-  Please let us know if we can provide your community with workshops for healthy relationships. We are happy to create programs to be used with families on parent nights or PTSA meetings.
-  We are funded by grants that may ask us to administer or collect voluntary survey data from students or other community members. Please let us know the best way to obtain your approval and the necessary procedures to be followed should the opportunity arise.

Thank you for allowing us to partner with your school. We appreciate all you do for our community.

Live the Life South Florida

Key:

✓ = Live the Life responsibilities  = Partnering school responsibilities

Appendix B- Volunteer Facilitators Survey

Elements of Partnership between schools and a Faith-Based Organization

Facilitator Survey for a doctoral study at Vanderbilt's Peabody College. Your participation in this survey is voluntary, and responses are completely confidential and anonymous if you prefer. If you do choose to participate, we are extremely grateful for your time and help. You are an integral component to the successful conclusion of our doctoral studies.

Thank you.

1. What is your current role with LTLSF?
2. How long have you been a part of the Live the Life South Florida Team
 - 1 year or less
 - 1 - 3 years
 - 4 - 7 years
 - More than 7 years
3. How would you describe your responsibilities in this role?
4. How did you become involved with the student program aspect of LTLSF?
5. LTLSF organization is interested in understanding why facilitators participate in this program. What do you think keeps you coming back?
6. Why do you do this work? (Select up to 3)
Please select at most three options.
 - The work fulfills my desire to give back.
 - I enjoy interaction with students.
 - I enjoy interacting with the school personnel.
 - The hours are flexible.
 - I am building my skills (e.g., presenting, counseling, leadership, teaching, etc.)
 - Opportunities for fellowship
 - I feel connected and supported.
 - I feel respected.
 - I receive positive feedback from others.
 - I receive financial compensation.
 - I am practicing my faith.
 - I appreciate the additional financial resources.
 - Other
7. What are the goals of the program you facilitate?

8. Do you believe the goals are being achieved?

- Yes
- No

9. What are factors you think contribute to the success of the program at your school site(s)?

10. What are factors that you think prevent the successful attainment of the program's goals at the school sites.

11. What does a successful school partnership experience look like to you?

12. What are some challenges you had to overcome to accomplish the goals of the partnership?

13. In any partnership conflicts may arise. Please think back to any conflicts that occurred this year (e.g., classroom needed to be moved, a substitute was needed, a student issue, etc.)
How were conflicts resolved within the partnership?

14. Can you briefly describe how communication occurs between you and the school site? (e.g. How do you find out what is going on, and how do you let the school know what is going on).
Did you feel well-informed?

15. How does your school site demonstrate that it values this partnership?

16. Will you continue doing this work next year? (If you answer yes, will you remain at the same school site?)

17. Would you be willing to do a follow-up interview?

- Yes
- No

18. If you are willing to do a follow-up interview, how may we contact you? (e.g., cell phone, email)

APPENDIX C- School Administrators Survey

Understanding Elements of Successful Partnerships

Partnership Survey for a doctoral study by Vanderbilt's Peabody College

Your participation in this survey is voluntary and responses are completely confidential and anonymous if you prefer. If you do choose to participate, we are extremely grateful for your time and help. You are an integral component to the successful conclusion of our doctoral studies. Thank you.

1. What is your current role at the school site?
2. How are you involved in the partnership between Live the Life of South Florida (LTLSF) and your school?
3. How long have you held this role?
 - 1 year or less
 - 1 - 3 years
 - 4 - 7 years
 - More than 7 years
4. How did you become involved in the partnership between LTLSF and your school site? (e.g., assigned by principal, volunteered, requested by you)
5. LTLSF organization is interested in understanding the best ways to successfully accomplish goals through this partnership. What do you think are the goals of this partnership?
6. Do you believe this partnership has been successful?
 - Yes
 - No
7. In what ways do you think the partnership has been successful in attaining its goals?
8. Why do you think the partnership has not been successful? What would success look like? *
9. What were some of the challenges this year to accomplish the goals of this partnership?
10. What can you tell me about communication between your organization and LTLSF? How were you able to keep each other informed about daily happenings (e.g., testing schedules or teacher absences)?
11. Conflicts are part of any partnership. Please think back to conflicts that occurred this year (e.g., the classroom needed to be moved, a substitute was needed, a student issue, etc.). How did conflicts typically get resolved?
12. If you are familiar with the facilitator of the program, can you share a little about how the facilitator impacted the outcomes of the partnership. (e.g., Have they been helpful or difficult in accomplishing the tasks)

13. Do you know if your school will be partnering with LTLSF again next year? If not, why do you think that is?
14. What, in your opinion, could be done by the school or by LTLSF to improve this partnership?
15. Is there anything else you think would be helpful for me to know regarding how this partnership works at your school?
16. Would you be willing to participate in a follow up interview? If yes, please share how we can contact you.

APPENDIX D- School Site Representative Interview

SCHOOL SITE REPRESENTATIVE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

This interview will be conducted via Zoom, Teams, telephone, or in person.

Before turning the tape recorder on:

1. Explain the purpose of the interview.

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. In this interview, I will ask you questions about your organization's partnership with Live the Life of South Florida. We are interested in your perceptions of partnership attributes and your perspective regarding successful partnerships.

2. Consent Process: In all cases, tell the participant:

Before we begin the interview, I want to remind you that participating in this study is voluntary, and your responses are completely confidential. At any point during the interview, if you would like me to turn off the recording, just tell me to do so. Do you have any questions about the study before we begin?

Turn the recording on:

It is (date) at (time). This is (interviewer's name), and I am interviewing (participant's first name) at location _____.

Introductory Questions

(Just to clarify) what is your current role with your organization? How long have you been with them?

1. How would you describe your role within the partnership between LTLSF (Live the Life of South Florida) and your organization? How long have you had the role?
 - a. Follow up: how did you specifically get involved with this partnership?
2. What do you believe are the reasons the school is partnering with LTLSF?
3. LTLSF organization is interested in understanding the best ways to successfully accomplish goals through this partnership. What do you think are the goals of this partnership?
4. Would you describe this partnership as a success?
 - a. If so, why do you think it has been a successful partnership? Is there a secret to success?
 - b. If not, why do you think it was not successful?
5. What can you tell me about communication between your organization and LTLSF?
 - a. How were you able to keep each other informed about daily happenings (e.g., testing schedules or teacher absences)?
6. What can you share about some of the challenges you may have had working to accomplish the goals of this partnership?
7. In any partnership, conflicts may arise. Please think back to any conflicts that occurred this year (e.g., the classroom needed to be moved, a substitute was needed, a student issue, etc.) How were conflicts resolved within the partnership?
8. If you are familiar with the facilitator of the program, can you share a little about how the facilitator impacted the outcomes of the partnership?
 - a. Would you want to have the same facilitator next year?
9. Do you know if your school is partnering with LTLSF again next year?
 - a. If not, why?

10. What could be done to improve this partnership?
11. Is there anything else you think would be helpful for me to know regarding how this partnership works at your school?

APPENDIX E- Volunteer Facilitator Interview

VOLUNTEER FACILITATORS INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

This interview will be conducted on Zoom, Teams, telephone, or in person.

Before turning the tape recorder on:

1. Explain the purpose of the interview.

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. The purpose of this study is to provide LTLFSF with insight into what they can do to continuously improve the services they provide in their partnerships with school sites. In this interview, I am going to be asking you questions about your feelings and motivations for the work you are doing with Live the Life of South Florida as a classroom facilitator, as well as your perceptions of partnership attributes with partner schools.

2. Consent Process: Ensure there is consent from the participant. If s/he has not consented, provide a consent form. In all cases, tell the participant:
Before we begin the interview, I want to remind you that participating in this study is voluntary, and your responses are completely confidential. At any point during the interview, if you would like me to turn off the recording, just tell me to do so. Do you have any questions about the study before we begin?

Turn the recording on:

It is (date) at (time). This is (interviewer's name), and I am interviewing (participant's first name) at location _____.

Introductory Questions

(Just to clarify) what is your current role with LTLFSF? How long have you been with them?

1. How would you describe your responsibilities in this role?
2. How did you come to be involved in the organization?
3. LTLFSF organization is interested in understanding why volunteers participate in this program. What do you think keeps you coming back?
 - a. (We are looking for verification of these motives and others. If none of these are mentioned, ask about them individually).
 - i. Increased Interaction
 - ii. Fulfilling ulterior motives
 - iii. Provides flexibility.
 - iv. Fellowship
 - v. Building skills traits (e.g., leadership, practicum)
 - vi. Being around the kids/other teachers
 - vii. Emotional support
 - viii. Leadership charisma
 - ix. Incentives, extrinsic (e.g., compliments from personnel, respect from others.)
 - x. Incentives, intrinsic (e.g., my faith)
4. Thinking about the school you are partnering with, what do you think are the goals of this partnership?

5. Do you think the partnership has been successful in attaining its goals?
 - a. If yes, what do you think is the “secret sauce” that makes the partnership successful? (What is their definition of success)
 - b. If not, why do you think it is not successful?
6. What are some challenges you had to overcome to accomplish the goals of the partnership?
7. In any partnership, conflicts may arise. Please think back to any conflicts that occurred this year (e.g., the classroom needed to be moved, a substitute was needed, a student issue, etc.) How were conflicts resolved within the partnership?
8. If there were something to make the partnership experience more productive, what would it be? Why?
9. What do you think about the balance of power in this partnership? Can you briefly describe how important information was shared between LTLSF and the school site this year? Did you feel well-informed?
10. How does your school site demonstrate that it values this partnership?
11. Final question: will you continue in this role next year?
 - a. If yes, why? And will you stay at the same school?
 - b. If not, do you mind sharing why you will not be coming back?