

GIVE / GET RATIO



For cooperative work to thrive, participating groups give time, money, expertise, and much more to the effort. They also get benefits – progress towards their mission or a goal, new relationships, wider expertise, learning, and clout. We call the relationship between the two the Give/Get Ratio. The balance isn't easily calculated or simply transactional; the nuances and sustaining benefits are different for each group.

Each group gives in a unique way. There may be standard methods, such as an annual financial contribution or participation in the governing group. Typically, the “give” part of the balance is based on the values and resources of each group. Acknowledging a wide spectrum of what is given and received is critical for maintaining the balance over time in cooperative efforts.

Too often, leaders in cooperative efforts feel like the hard work it takes to participate is out of balance for the benefits gained. Frequently we jump into a coalition or alliance because it's the right thing to do, and only later do we realize that it takes more effort than we can sustain. Sometimes we hesitate to express what our own group needs because we're afraid of raising competitive tensions with other groups. But if we don't ask, our participation will begin to fall away because we are not getting back what we need to sustain our involvement.

Likewise, we don't always explore the values and norms of other leaders and groups in the collaborative to fully understand what giving and getting means to them. We may unconsciously view their participation through our own lenses, which can lead to misunderstandings.

As leaders of a cooperative effort, it's our responsibility to ensure that all the involved organizations can emerge stronger. If the effort is successful, chances are good that there will be new opportunities that require even stronger cooperation. Addressing this early in a structured way makes it much easier to manage.

By paying attention to the Give/Get Ratio, the cooperative effort can encourage each group to also plan to build their individual organization. For example, encourage each participating organization to define its self-interest for:

- Attaining a specific goal or outcome
- Gaining members
- Earning publicity
- Encouraging new leaders
- Adding new donors or resources
- Building relationships
- Developing new organizational capacity, such as new/expanded expertise, a new computer or additional staff.

Practical ways to understand give/get needs:

- One on one meetings
- A group activity at the meeting (including an opener)
- A regular assessment of what groups most want (and if they are getting it) and what they can give
- Survey – reviewing the results together
- Other: