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A leader in corporate responsibility since 1992, BSR works with its global network of more than 250 member companies to develop sustainable business strategies and solutions through consulting, research, and cross-sector collaboration. With offices in Asia, Europe, and North America, BSR uses its expertise in the environment, human rights, economic development, and governance and accountability to guide global companies toward creating a just and sustainable world. Visit [www.bsr.org](http://www.bsr.org) for more information.

**About CiYuan**

BSR's three-year CiYuan (China Philanthropy Incubator) initiative builds innovative cross-sector partnerships to enhance the value of social investment in China. With guidance from international and Chinese leaders in the field, CiYuan improves the capacity of local foundations and NGOs to serve as durable and effective partners with business. Ultimately, CiYuan will integrate philanthropy with core business strategy, foster collaboration, and inspire innovation. Visit [ciyuan.bsr.org](http://ciyuan.bsr.org) for more information.

**About China Youth Development Foundation (CYDF)**

CYDF, founded in 1989, is one of the first 5A national foundations rated by the Ministry of Civil Affairs of China. It is committed to helping young people build capacity and improving the environment for their growth by providing aid services, giving a voice to the interests of young people and by carrying out social advocacy.

## Nike and China Youth Development Foundation Partner to Empower Chinese Youth

July 2012

**Executive Summary**

This case study examines the evolution of the partnership between Nike and China Youth Development Foundation (CYDF) as they launched, implemented, and revamped a multi-city sports program for Chinese youth. The program aimed to empower Chinese youth to make a difference in their communities through sports. Initially a grants program, named Beyond Love, that launched in November 2010, the program relaunched in summer 2011 as GameChangers, which focused on mobilizing youth as volunteer coaches and mentors.

This particular case study highlights the issues in developing partnerships between a multinational company and an NGO, the challenges of promoting an innovative approach to address issues, and it explores how to widen a program's reach and engage the broader public. This case study tracks the partnership's formation and development as the program evolved from a micro-grants program to a volunteering format and how the partners integrated it into their organizational strategies. Here are seven lessons Nike and CYDF learned:

1. Monitor and evaluate smartly in order to use experiences and resources.
2. Align vision and strategy, but adapt as partners' strategies and priorities change.
3. Invest time in understanding your partner and making adjustments to support them.
4. Engage senior leadership early and consistently.
5. Understand and adapt to differences in structures and working styles.
6. Be honest and communicate openly.
7. Allocate resources effectively.

Lastly, we've included lessons specific to third-party facilitators of corporate-NGO partnerships in China.

**Partnership Background**

In early 2010, Nike was looking for a partner to help develop and implement a micro-grants program that would empower youth to use sports as a tool for positive change in their community. Research indicated youth were interested in making a difference but wanted to do it through nontraditional channels by conducting their own projects. Nike had been involved with successful small programs in recent years and sought a partner who could implement the concept on a larger scale.

In 2009, CYDF had partnered with the World Bank to launch the Inspired in Action youth grants program, enabling young people to pursue welfare projects of their own design. This program's approach built on their experience mobilizing youth as volunteers with their Project Hope schools, including one program focused on sports. At that time, CYDF was reassessing its strategy with a view to developing more innovative programs such as Beyond Love.

In spring 2010, Nike and CYDF agreed to align their interest in youth empowerment and experience to launch a novel program that would inspire and enable youth to take action in their communities through sports. Nike would seek to leverage its brand, experience, and expertise, and CYDF would use its reputation, experience, and reach; BSR was brought in to facilitate and support the partnership's formation.

## Partnership Roles and Resources

Nike and CYDF each had specific roles in the partnership, while BSR acted as a third-party facilitator, as follows:

<b>Nike: Funding, marketing campaigns, experience engaging youth in sports programs, and expert partners</b>	<b>CYDF: Experience engaging and coordinating youth, a nationwide network, and strong brand recognition</b>	<b>BSR: Partnership facilitation, understanding of both partners, partnership evaluation, training, and coaching</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expertise working on youth sports programs, including previously developed tools and curricula from its other programs and a pilot program with CBAC.</li> <li>• Expertise in marketing and branding and a wide network for bringing in sports trainers, judges, and sports professionals.</li> <li>• Brought in an IT company to build the Beyond Love website and a PR company to support public relations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expertise from previous programs to reach youth, manage judges, run training, and provide ongoing support to youth.</li> <li>• Network of provincial partners and teachers to promote program and support students.</li> <li>• Project Hope brand legitimized the program and helped it be accepted on campuses.</li> <li>• IT department created the GameChangers website and a volunteer management system to cope with the 11,000 applicants.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helped each partner gain senior leadership support and identified potential misalignment between the partners.</li> <li>• Provided training to CYDF and mentored both partners.</li> <li>• Evaluate the partnership in order to improve it.</li> </ul>

## Implementation Process

### Partnership Formation May 2010

Following a pilot by Capacity Building Assessment Center (CBAC), Nike and CYDF agreed upon a partnership in May 2010. Anticipating challenges in the partnership, BSR agreed to support Nike, and the three partners then held several meetings to plan the program.

### Beyond Love Preparation Summer 2010

The program's preparation was delayed due to CYDF's commitments related to the Expo in Shanghai as well as leadership changes in Nike. To help make up time, Nike brought in additional professional support to develop content for the website. The delay affected integration into Nike's seasonal marketing plans. Preparation began with development of recruitment, application, and management tools followed by a successful program orientation for CYDF's local partners attended by Nike staff and CYDF's senior leadership.

### Partnership Alignment Meeting September 2010

BSR surveyed each partner to identify how the partners aligned as well as any capacity gaps or conflicts they may face. At the partnership alignment meeting, they discussed these findings, how to make the partnership more effective for both partners, and how to increase the program's impact (based on a presentation by CBAC of their experiences with the pilot). This discussion brought some issues, such as judging and mentoring, to the forefront.

### Partners' Strategic Shifts September-November 2010

As CYDF finalized their organization-wide strategic review, it became clear that there would not be a strong shift toward programs such as Beyond Love. In order to maintain support for the program, BSR met with CYDF's senior leadership in September and November. The September meeting raised the profile of the partnership within CYDF and addressed CYDF's planning and staffing challenges. The November meeting addressed the limited success of the promotional events and CYDF's strategic decision to stay focused on the Project Hope brand and activities.

### Beyond Love Program Launch November 2010-April 2011

Since initial promotional events held by CYDF and their local partners generated less interest than expected, CYDF arranged additional promotional activities, while Nike promoted the program through their network. The program missed its target of 1,000 applications, receiving only 500. In January, a panel made up of Nike employees, development experts, and sports experts selected the 100 grantees. In April, two training sessions of two-days each were held in Hunan and Zhejiang for the youth. The training covered leadership skills, life skills, and capacity building.

Students began implementing their projects from April to August. CYDF and Nike used the Beyond Love website and Renren (a Chinese social network) to gather stories, videos, and photos from the projects to monitor progress and be used for promotional purposes later.

#### Beyond Love Grants Implementation and Evolution April-August 2011

In April 2011, both partners agreed to shift from providing grants to developing a program (named GameChangers) through which youth would become coaches in existing organizations' programs. This program revision was partly due to Nike's shifting focus toward coaching as a more effective approach and partly due to recognition that the youth were unable to grasp how to use sports to make a change—many of the Beyond Love applications sacrificed impact in order to retain the link to sport. Nike believed that the new focus on volunteer coaches or mentors might also be easier to link to its marketing plans, while CYDF believed it might better align with existing Project Hope activities that focus on pupils aged 6 to 12 with the help of volunteers.

BSR and Nike had a productive discussion about how to increase internal support for and ownership of the program by better integrating it into Nike's different sports categories; however, the program's success ultimately resulted more from fortunate alignment in timing and themes than approach.

#### Midterm Partnership Evaluation and BSR's Exit May-June 2011

From May to June 2011, BSR conducted a midterm evaluation to see how the partnership could be improved. Nike, CYDF, and BSR held a meeting to discuss the ratings of different project metrics, the report, and its findings. BSR then made individual follow-up calls to Nike and CYDF to help them utilize the findings. It was decided that BSR's role in helping develop and facilitate the partnership had effectively reached its end and that the partners were able to work adequately together. BSR's participation ended after it gave a training session to CYDF in August on strategic planning and how to manage projects based on the lessons learned from the midterm evaluation.

#### GameChangers Launch and Implementation May 2011-January 2012

In May and June, CYDF's IT team (with funding from Nike) developed the GameChangers website so that the program could begin recruiting youth in July. Outstanding youth from Beyond Love played an important role by attending Nike events promoting GameChangers. Nike was concurrently running a digital campaign to encourage youth to participate in sports, into which they integrated incentives to apply to GameChangers. This and other efforts led to 12,000 applications, far exceeding the target of 3,000.

From August 18 to 21, Nike held its Festival of Sports marketing event in Shanghai, which attracted 125,000 attendees, and concurrently conducted three days of training for the 100 youth selected as elite coaches, providing them with certificates of completion and awarding one team an internship with Nike. The training focused more intensely on leadership and sports; Nike used experts from the Capital Institute of Physical Education to develop training content. In December and January the additional youth coaches were selected to be trained in early 2012 for the school spring semester.

#### The Partnership Today Spring 2012

The partners remain committed to working together and are currently planning the next phase with increased organizational and leadership involvement on both sides. They are improving the partnership's resourcing strategy, continuing to simplify the program, and leveraging their respective strengths and external expertise.

## Lessons Learned from the Partnership

Through a detailed evaluation of the partnership, BSR identified the following key lessons:

### **1. Monitor and evaluate smartly in order to use experience and resources.**

Good partnerships are built on lessons learned from experience and pilot programs. The transition from Beyond Love to GameChangers showed how the partners incorporated previous lessons. For example, close monitoring of the program's progress, engagement with the youth, and the midterm evaluation showed clearly that there was a need to simplify the program to increase its impact. In GameChangers, both partners were better able to maximize their networks, existing brands, and existing programs; however, Beyond Love could have better utilized the resources developed from the pilot with CBAC.

### **2. Align vision and strategy, but adapt as partners' strategies and priorities change.**

In this partnership, there was a strong *alignment of vision* at the beginning; however, both organizations went through strategic reviews affecting their *alignment of strategy*. It is important for partners to be able to acknowledge the need to adapt programs and respond to strategic changes in their organizations. The change in strategy made it difficult to sustain support for the original program, yet it created an opportunity to develop a new program that was much more effective at leveraging Nike's and CYDF's assets and that generated a strong response from youth.

### **3. Invest time in understanding your partner and making adjustments to support them.**

It is important to set aside time to understand each partner's organizational cultures, decision-making processes, constraints, experiences, and resources, even if this evaluation process delays implementation. CYDF initially faced staffing challenges to manage more complex service programs, supervise program progress, integrate resources from different departments, and adequately address all students' needs and requests. Nike had similar challenges due to the long lead times to incorporate new initiatives into seasonal marketing programs. After weaknesses are assessed early on, partners should make adjustments to support each other either by transferring resources or recruiting external support.

### **4. Engage senior leadership early and consistently.**

To succeed, a partnership must engage both partners' senior leadership early on and on an ongoing, regular, basis. In both organizations, there was occasionally a difference in vision between those at the top of the organization and those implementing the work. This difference affected the initial readiness assessment (which may not have adequately represented each organization, but rather the individual involved) and the allocation of resources to Beyond Love, especially in relation to consumer engagement at Nike and to integrating the program into the partners' own organizational strategies. Later, after the partners saw that the GameChangers concept was better aligned with each of their strategies, both Nike and CYDF were able to better integrate GameChangers into their organizational strategies and structures and thereby support its execution.

### **5. Understand and adapt to differences in structures and working styles.**

Greater clarity about CYDF's organizational structure (which BSR could have provided), such as how they implemented programs through their local partners, would have helped set expectations and allow for solutions, such as bringing both departments within CYDF responsible for the programs together for meetings with Nike. Overcoming different operating styles is crucial. Nike follows a very rigorous written planning process, whereas CYDF has a more fluid planning process without written plans. CYDF struggled to communicate their plans to Nike and inspire confidence that they were managing everything effectively; Nike and BSR struggled to understand where the gaps were or whether the program was on track. Both partners adapted by developing common tools and compromising; they worked hard and devoted much energy to communication, reflection, and some mediation, but their cultural and communication challenges remain.

## **6. Be honest and communicate openly.**

Partners should share concerns and differing opinions with each other to prevent them from later developing into larger problems—partnership facilitators can play an important role here. CYDF had trouble meeting their recruitment targets but were reluctant to communicate their situation to Nike partly due to a lack of confidence stemming from a lack of experience in implementing service programs. Although communication between the partners increased during the course of the partnership, CYDF and Nike continue to face challenges overcoming their different communication styles and the assumptions that they made. Nike and CYDF had differing views of the program's evolution, but Nike had greater influence because it controlled the funding. It is important to create an environment where both parties drive the process together rather than one in which the funding partner holds more power.

## **7. Allocate resources effectively.**

Commitment is important, but so are each partner's resources. Partners should develop a clear time line and allocate responsibilities early on. Partners must ensure that there is no miscommunication about the time line and the division of responsibilities and not underestimate the amount of human resources necessary to manage a partnership and implement a program. Partners should not overestimate their capabilities and time resources, and at the same time they should try to integrate new programs into existing activities to reduce their burden and leverage their existing activities.

### **PROGRAM RESULTS AND LESSONS**

The two programs were successful on many fronts. They surpassed several targets, though others were harder to attain. Notably, the program successfully shared the youth's success stories through traditional media and live events. Beyond Love grants were made to 100 youth programs, involving 20 universities in 16 cities and provinces. The programs altogether held 400 sporting events, and 26,477 youth played sports or were physically active during the program—1,200 youth played sports for the first time.

Both partners gained important insights from the program:

- » Youth are strongly interested in making a difference but are unable to make intense, long-term commitments.
- » Applying for grants and conducting projects is much harder for youth than volunteering for existing projects and programs is.
- » Opportunities to improve prospects for employment and gain opportunities to network motivate youth to take action more than prizes do.
- » Youth need lots of training and guidance, specifically on how to coach others, how to leverage sports as an experience, and technical skills, including financial management, leadership, and how to meet reporting requirements.
- » Social media and digital platforms need a strong marketing push and lots of resources. GameChangers has not yet achieved its goal of a community of youth that exists both online and in the physical world.

### **Lessons for Third-Party Facilitators of Corporate-NGO Partnerships**

Third-party facilitators can play an important role in partnerships. From BSR's experience, facilitators should pay attention to the following:

#### **1. Clearly define the facilitator's role.**

Clearly define and monitor the facilitator's role, and when it is no longer needed, the facilitator should leave the partnership.

#### **2. Invest time in the partnership up-front.**

Even though partners are often in a hurry to develop plans and begin implementation, it is crucial to invest the time at the beginning to ensure that the partners' expectations are aligned, their working styles are compatible, they have a clear plan, and that they start off with a collaborative team spirit. Facilitators must push partners to slow down when necessary to ensure that they address all issues.

**3. Ensure that the partners have compatible communications, planning, and working styles.**

Facilitators must help partners overcome their different working styles and agree on how to communicate and plan effectively.

**4. Ensure that expectations are realistic, and test presumptions about partners' capacity.**

Partners may not understand their own capacity limitations, and thus facilitators need to challenge partners to ensure their expectations and promises are realistic, while also developing capacity assessments that correctly identify the partners' weaknesses. Partners need to be encouraged to be honest, if not with their partner, then at least with their third-party facilitator.

**5. View partners as organizations not as individuals.**

Individuals in partnerships may be aligned and have capacity, but facilitators need to test whether the rest of their organizations have the capacity to take on and support the partnership.

**6. Provide mentoring and one-on-one support to partners.**

Facilitators can provide training, but they must invest time with individuals in partnering organizations to review documents, develop tools, bounce around ideas, and encourage reflection.

**7. Adapt to partners' cultures.**

Facilitators need to dig into the partners' cultures to understand them and how they may conflict with each other and help bridge the gaps between different organizational cultures.