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Power in Numbers



When planning public infrastructure projects, especially in trying economic times, it often is advisable to get by with a little help from private-sector friends. Public-private partnerships are increasingly prevalent in the U.S., a testament to the slew of potential benefits they offer the parties involved.

Rather than assume absolute responsibility for their infrastructure projects, public entities can adopt private-sector partners and share the risk; in the event of project success, the private partners benefit by a return on their investment.

As they mitigate risk, so too these partnerships can help manage costs. The agreements encourage private

partners to protect their bottom line by operating as cost-effectively as possible, ultimately reducing demand on taxpayer-funded public funds.

With a reliable cash flow and because responsibilities are assigned and consolidated based on areas of expertise, partner projects also can be completed more quickly than those delivered via traditional methods. And because two (or more) heads are better than one, the final results may be more imaginative and publicly beneficial.

Up against strapped budgets, aging infrastructure and ever-more-stringent water quality standards, public groups are looking more than ever to collaborate with the private sector—and the results can be pretty remarkable. A quick Web search will pull up partnership results ranging from a beachfront redevelopment incorporating substantial greenspace to erosion control testing at a Western ski resort.

As the authors of this issue's funding article (see page 12) suggest, consider "widening the partnership circle" to overcome ongoing or forthcoming storm water and erosion control obstacles. Challenge yourself to flex some creative muscle when taking projects to the drawing board. Leveraging the resources, skills and goals of cooperative groups can help you and yours address infrastructure needs in a new, perhaps improved, way.

Caitlin Cunningham, managing editor
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