COLLABORATION BEST PRACTICES

A Summary Guide from Chapters 9 & 10

Beyond the Walls: Executing Your Vision | Kris Eldridge

SECTION 1: THE BIBLICAL & STRATEGIC CASE FOR COLLABORATION

Effective ministry collaboration is rooted in both Scripture and strategy. Chapters 9 and 10 of *Beyond the Walls* establish a compelling theological foundation before offering practical tools, reminding leaders that partnership is not merely pragmatic — it reflects the very nature of the body of Christ.

> **Key Scripture**
> "My prayer is not for them alone... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you... so that the world may believe that you have sent me." — John 17:20-21

Why Collaboration Matters

Isolation weakens ministry while collaboration multiplies it. Churches and parachurch organizations each possess irreplaceable strengths: churches bring congregational stability, pastoral care, theological depth, and long-term community presence, while parachurches offer specialized expertise, operational flexibility, and focused mission clarity. Neither can fully accomplish the Matthew 25 mandate alone.

Churches Bring	Parachurches Contribute
• Congregational stability & long-term presence • Theological depth and pastoral care • Volunteers and relational networks • Facilities and financial giving capacity	• Specialized knowledge and certifications • Established community credibility • Operational flexibility & proven programs • Access to populations churches struggle to reach

The Core Mindset Shift

The most important transformation for any outreach leader is moving from an institutional mindset to a Kingdom mindset. Competition between churches and ministries directly contradicts Jesus' prayer for unity and damages the witness of the gospel in the community.

Old Mindset (Avoid)	New Mindset (Adopt)
• "We need to do everything ourselves" • "Parachurches compete for our volunteers" • "Writing a check is enough engagement" • "I know the leader — that's good enough"	• "Partner if possible; create when necessary" • "Parachurches extend our capacity" • "Engage through Prayer, People & Provision" • "Assess every partnership systematically"

The Golden Rule: Partner If Possible, Create When Necessary

Before launching any new ministry initiative, leaders should thoroughly research whether an effective parachurch already addresses the need. Creating new ministries should be reserved for situations where no viable partner exists, a geographic gap is unserved, or there is a clear and unique calling to pioneer new work. This principle prevents resource waste, duplicate services, and unnecessary organizational competition.

> **Foundational Requirement**
> Never pursue partnerships without first completing your foundational work: define your community ministry mission and vision, identify your community's greatest unmet needs, assess your church's assets, and develop strategies to meet those needs (Chapters 3–6). Without this foundation, partnership decisions are driven by personal relationships and emotional appeals rather than strategic fit.

SECTION 2: FRAMEWORKS FOR SELECTING & MANAGING PARTNERSHIPS

Both chapters provide structured, repeatable systems for identifying the right partners, evaluating them rigorously, and building partnerships that are sustainable over time. These frameworks apply regardless of church size or partnership type.

The Five-Point Partner Evaluation Framework (Chapter 9)

Every potential parachurch partner should be assessed across five equally weighted criteria. Avoid rushing into partnerships without completing this due diligence — superficial screening is one of the most common and costly mistakes church leaders make.

1. Ministry Effectiveness

Evaluate the organization's track record of meeting goals, sustainability over time, measurable outcomes, and financial stability. Look for clear metrics and consistent results. Red flags include constant financial crises, high staff turnover, and vague impact claims.

2. Evangelistic Impact

Assess the organization's ability to reach people who don't yet know Jesus, their openness to spiritual conversations, and how naturally faith is integrated with their service delivery. Avoid organizations hostile to faith or that use manipulative evangelistic pressure.

3. Access to Target Population

Confirm they have direct service relationships with the marginalized communities your church cares about, strong community credibility, and inclusive practices. A disconnect between the organization and those they claim to serve is a significant warning sign.

4. Leadership Strength

Look for experienced, stable leadership with clear governance and board accountability, healthy organizational culture, and a positive reputation. Frequent leadership changes and weak oversight structures are serious concerns.

5. Communication Quality

Assess responsiveness, clarity, transparency in reporting, and a collaborative spirit. Poor communication habits surface in early conversations — they rarely improve after a formal partnership begins.

The Three-Tier Service Model: Prayer, People, Provision

Healthy partnerships involve all three dimensions of engagement. Financial-only partnerships are transactional rather than transformational and miss critical discipleship opportunities for church members.

PRAYER	Regular intercession for the organization and its clients, corporate prayer during services, and joint prayer gatherings. Begin every partner meeting by asking: "How can we pray for you?"

PEOPLE	Consistent volunteers (monthly commitment), one-time service projects, skills-based volunteers providing professional expertise, and leadership roles like board service.
PROVISION	Monthly financial giving, annual special gifts, in-kind donations (equipment, supplies, facility use), and project-specific funding for strategic needs.

The Five Pillars of Collaboration (Chapter 10)

Chapter 10 expands this framework to cover partnerships beyond parachurches — including other churches, local government, businesses, sports teams, and secular nonprofits. Across all these categories, the Five Pillars provide a universal collaboration framework:

Pillar: Prayer

Shared intercession is the foundation of every partnership. Pray for partners in church gatherings, fast together for breakthrough, and hold quarterly joint prayer meetings. The question that builds lasting partnerships: "How can we pray for you?"

Pillar: People

Share human resources — volunteers, professional expertise, board service, and mentorship. Conduct a congregation asset inventory so you can efficiently match member skills with partner needs.

Pillar: Propositions

Share ideas, curricula, systems, and lessons learned freely and generously. Hoarding program ideas reflects institutional thinking; sharing them reflects Kingdom thinking. Your idea in a partner's context often generates new innovation.

Pillar: Purposes

Align around shared community goals — reducing homelessness, improving literacy, addressing food insecurity — rather than organizational growth metrics. Collaborative visioning should involve leaders from all partner organizations and even community members.

Pillar: Provision

Pool financial resources, facilities, equipment, and expertise. Joint fundraising, cost-sharing, collaborative grant applications, and in-kind donations multiply each organization's capacity beyond what it could achieve independently.

SECTION 3: PARTNERSHIP CATEGORIES, PITFALLS & UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLES

Five Partnership Categories (Chapter 10)

Chapter 10 provides detailed guidance for five distinct partnership categories, each with unique dynamics and practical models:

Other Churches

Start with informal coffee meetings — no agenda, just listening. Find common ground on shared community concerns while accepting theological differences on non-essentials. Begin with a single service project as a test, then build on success. Models include service collaboration (multiple churches serving one initiative), rotating responsibility, and specialized contribution (each church contributing its unique strength).

Local Government

Government provides access to community data, referral pathways, and resource multiplication through funding and infrastructure. Navigate church-state boundaries carefully: churches can serve publicly without religious requirements and partner on community development but must avoid proselytizing in government-funded programs or using government funds for explicitly religious activities.

Businesses

Corporate partners bring financial capacity, professional expertise, and organized employee volunteer groups. Approach by proposing specific opportunities (not vague partnership), making participation easy, and starting with a single service project. Models include corporate volunteer days, pro bono professional services, and skills-based volunteering.

Sports Teams

Athletic teams are an often-overlooked partnership opportunity. Many schools require community service hours for athletes, and service projects build team character. Keep projects simple (2–3 hours, clear tasks, visible results). Models include neighborhood serve days, community sports clinics, food bank service, and school beautification projects.

Secular Nonprofits

Secular organizations often have established community credibility, specialized expertise, and access to funding churches cannot obtain. The key: be authentically Christian through the excellence and love of your service, not through explicit evangelism during partnership activities. Focus on shared community goals; do not attempt to redirect secular nonprofits toward faith-based approaches.

Critical Pitfalls to Avoid

Both chapters identify the same categories of failure that derail partnerships across all organization types. Awareness of these patterns is the first step to avoiding them:

- **"I Know a Guy/Gal" Syndrome:** Choosing partners based on personal relationships rather than strategic fit. Solution: require every potential partner to complete your formal assessment process, regardless of personal connections.

Partnership Overload: Taking on too many partnerships simultaneously, diluting impact and burning out volunteers. Solution: start with 1–2 partnerships and master them before expanding. Recommended scale — small church: 1–2; medium: 2–4; large: 4–8.

Inadequate Screening: Rushing into partnerships without checking financials, references, and governance. Solution: use the five-point framework for every candidate, review IRS 990 forms, and conduct a 6-month pilot before any annual commitment.

One-Way Relationships: Financial giving without volunteer engagement or relationship. Solution: require all three pillars (Prayer, People, Provision) in every partnership agreement.

No Evaluation: Continuing partnerships without regular assessment. Solution: conduct quarterly check-ins and an annual comprehensive review. Continuation should require demonstrated effectiveness — it is never automatic.

Competition Disguised as Collaboration: Protecting turf, seeking credit, or measuring comparative success within a collaborative initiative. Solution: adopt Kingdom metrics — measure collective community impact, not institutional contribution.

Complexity Paralysis: Collaboration structures so complicated that administration overwhelms mission. Solution: if you cannot explain your collaboration structure in five minutes, it is too complex. Limit partners to a manageable number and minimize documentation requirements.

Universal Principles — All Sizes, All Partnership Types

Across both chapters, the following principles emerge as non-negotiable regardless of church size, partner type, or geographic context:

- Complete your foundational work (mission, vision, needs assessment, asset mapping) before pursuing any partnerships.
- Relationships must precede programs. Approach every potential partner asking, "How can we help?" — not "Here is what we want to do."
- Consistency builds trust more than grand gestures. Reliable presence over months and years opens doors that programs never could.
- Quality over quantity at every scale. Depth of partnership creates greater lasting impact than breadth of activity.
- Move toward development-focused, relational engagement over time. Relief addresses symptoms; development addresses root causes.
- Measure success by community transformation and relationship depth — not church attendance, organizational growth, or credit received.
- Sacrificial leadership is required. Someone must coordinate, follow up, solve problems, and maintain momentum — often without recognition. This is Kingdom work.

- Regular evaluation is essential. Every partnership must be assessed annually. Honesty about what is not working protects both organizations and the community you serve.

> **Closing Reminder from the Author**
> "Churches cannot address the Matthew 25 mandate alone. We lack the expertise, capacity, and specialization to address every need effectively. Strategic partnerships multiply our impact, enabling us to serve 'the least of these' more excellently than we ever could independently." — Kris Eldridge, Beyond the Walls

About *Beyond the Walls: Mobilizing Your Church for Community Outreach:*

Beyond the Walls provides a comprehensive, step-by-step framework based on Nehemiah's model for mobilizing churches to create genuine community transformation through strategic outreach, moving beyond quick-fix programs to sustainable partnerships that address real needs. Drawing from 25+ years of ministry experience, this practical playbook equips church leaders with proven strategies, templates, and tools to systematically build prayer foundations, assess community needs, map congregational assets, recruit leaders, and mobilize entire congregations for measurable kingdom impact both locally and globally.

This two-book series is organized around six steps drawn from the book of Nehemiah, which provides a beautiful picture of mobilizing God's people to accomplish significant community transformation

Pick up *Beyond the Walls* at https://kriseldridgebooks.com.