

Communications Capacity-Building Program

Better Together: Building Strong Grassroots Partnership

Led by Kristen Vandaveer Nicholson, APR, vice president of strategic communications at mhp.si

Visit the program homepage for:

Upcoming Webinar Info & Registration

1:1 Consultations Requests

Webinar Resource Library

Feedback survey & request for future topics

<https://mhp.si/wff-comm-cap-program/>

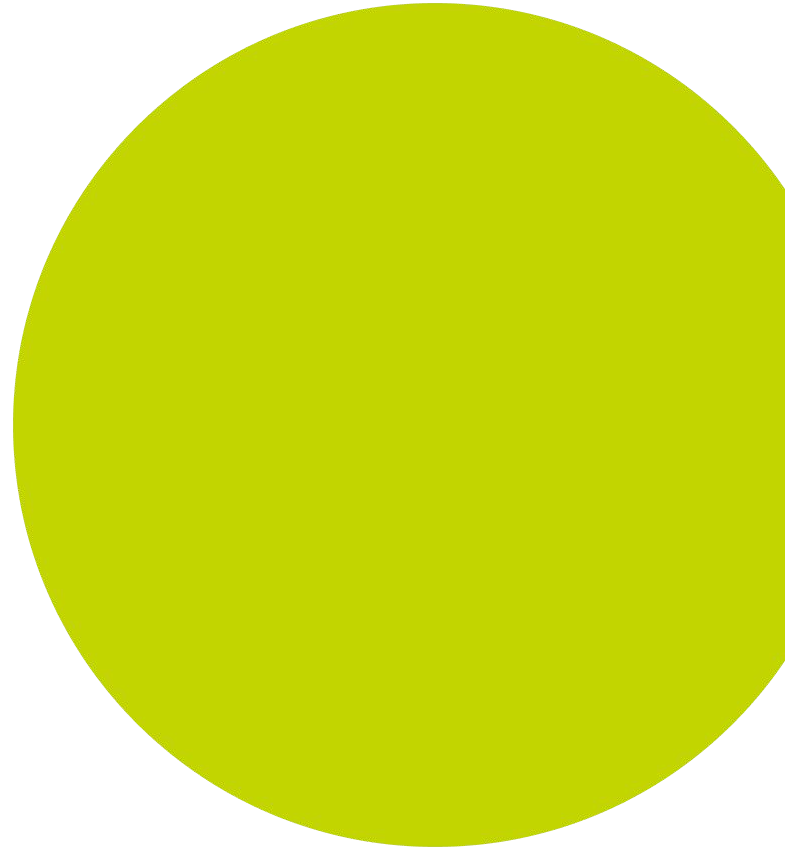
Upcoming Webinar

The New AI Landscape for Nonprofit Communications

Wednesday, July 22 • 11:00 am – 12:00 pm

Better Together: Building Strong Grassroots Partnerships

Kristen Vandaveer Nicholson, APR





Speaker Introduction

**Kristen
Vandaveer
Nicholson, APR**
**Vice President
and Shareholder
of mhp.si**



A little about **Kristen**

Vice President of Strategic Communications & Partner, **mhp.si**

- Award-winning PR strategist with 18 years of experience in strategic communications and crisis management
- Four-time PRSA Silver Anvil Award winner and PRSA 2026 Women of Impact finalist
- Founder of mhp.si's Content Studio, driving digital storytelling and social-first strategies
- Frequent speaker at PR conferences on crisis comms, influencer partnerships, and trends
- Accredited in Public Relations (APR) and dedicated to excellence in the profession
- Passionate about building relationships that strengthen reputations and create impact

"Strong partnerships are built on trust, shared purpose, and a commitment to collective impact."



Why Partnerships Matter

Why Community Trust Matters

People Trust:

- Friends and neighbors
- Local leaders
- Faith leaders
- Teachers
- Community organizations

People Trust Less:

- Advertising
- Institutional messaging
- Unknown organizations

Key Insight: **Trust is transferred.**

When trusted community organizations support your mission, their credibility becomes your credibility.

Grassroots partnerships are one of the most effective communications and marketing channels available to nonprofits. People trust people and organizations they already know.

Why Grassroots Partnerships Matter

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Expand Your Reach. **Amplify Your Impact.**

No organization has the resources, relationships, or influence to reach every audience alone.

Grassroots partnerships help organizations:

Reach audiences you cannot reach yourself

Earn trust faster

Increase attendance and participation

Strengthen word-of-mouth marketing

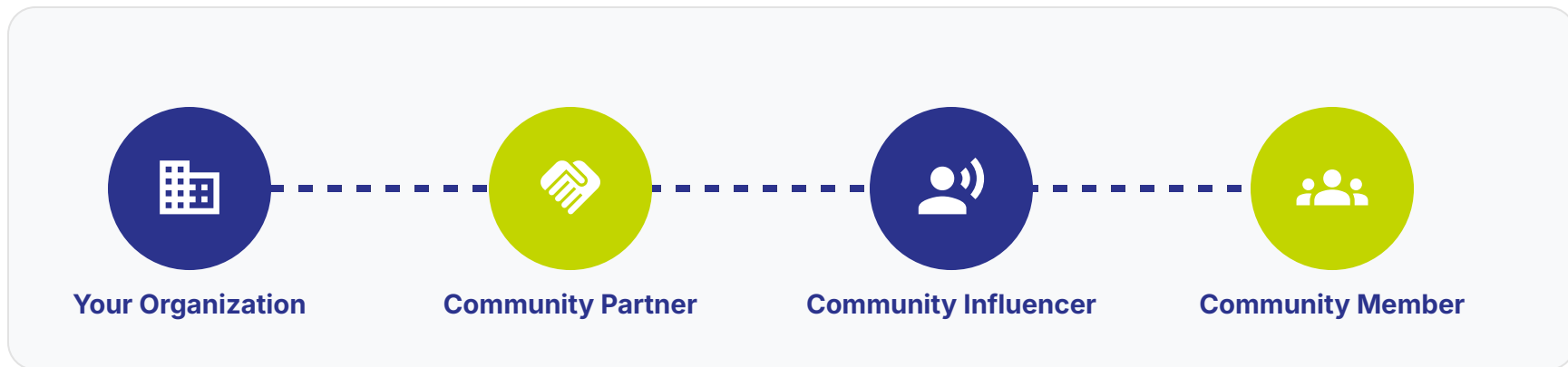
Improve message credibility

Create authentic advocates

Cost-effective but time consuming

Key Takeaway: The most effective communication channel is often a trusted partner.

The Trust Multiplier Effect



Examples of Grassroots Outreach and Partnerships

- Speaking Engagements
- Info Booths and Activations
- Civic Club Engagement
- Networking Events

The Multiplier: Leveraging existing networks to build instant credibility.

Grassroots Partnerships Are a Marketing Strategy

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Most nonprofits think of partnerships as:

Programs • Sponsorships • Coalitions

In Reality, They Are:

Distribution Channels

Partners help distribute:

- Messages
- Events
- Resources
- Stories
- Advocacy efforts

Amplification Networks

Every partner expands your communication ecosystem.

Key Strategy: Leverage partnerships as active communication channels and amplification networks.

Practical Communications Playbook

6 Communications Actions Every Nonprofit Can Take

1
Conduct a Trust Audit
Who does your audience trust?

2
Build an Influencer List
Not celebrities - trusted local voices

3
Create a Partner Toolkit
Assets for partners to share

4
Highlight Partners Publicly
Newsletters and social media

5
Listen Before You Launch
Gather community feedback first

6
Measure & Celebrate
Success through collective impact

Goal: Implement these actions to build a sustainable partnership ecosystem.

Partnership Mapping Exercise

Map Your Community Assets

Create Four Lists:

1. Influencers

- Trusted community voices

2. Implementers

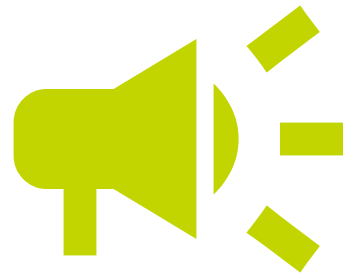
- Organizations delivering services

3. Donors/Grantors

- Funders and resource providers

4. Communicators

- Who can help tell your story?



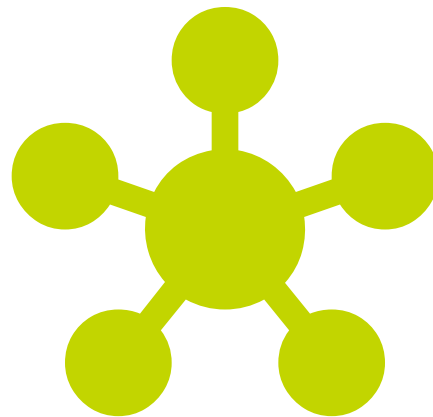
Goal: Identify where strategic alignment already exists.

Identify the Right Partners

Build an Ecosystem, Not a Rolodex

Potential Partners Include:

- Community organizations
- Government agencies
- Faith-based groups
- Civic groups
- Schools and universities
- Advocacy organizations
- Businesses
- Resident leaders



Key Question: Who already has trust, influence, expertise, or resources with key audiences you want to reach?

Who can help tell your story?

- Local bloggers
- News personalities
- Civic leaders
- Neighborhood associations
- Social media creators
- Community ambassadors
- Online facebook groups



Action: Engage authentically with these groups online and in person.

Building Community Ambassadors

The best grassroots partnerships create advocates.

Ambassadors:

- Share your content
- Attend events
- Recruit volunteers
- Recommend your services
- Defend your reputation



Turn supporters into storytellers.

The Trust Equation

Trust = Credibility + Reliability + Authenticity

Ask Yourself:

- Do partners believe us?
- Can partners depend on us?
- Are we showing up authentically? Are we highlighting advocate stories and reframing messaging through lens of WII-FM?

Leadership Insight: Partnerships often fail because of broken trust, rarely strategy.

The Trust Equation

Trust = Credibility + Reliability + Authenticity

Trust Builders:

- Consistent communication
- Showing up in the community
- Listening before speaking
- Highlighting community voices
- Delivering on promises

Trust Killers:

- One-way communication
- Over-promising
- Only showing up during campaigns
- Treating partnerships as transactions

Leadership Insight: *Partnerships often fail because of broken trust, rarely strategy.*

Co-Branding for Greater Reach

Amplifying Impact Through Shared Assets

Share Toolkits:

- Logos
- Stories
- Testimonials
- Social content
- Newsletters
- Events
- Photos/Videos
- Fact Sheets/ Infographics/ Flyers

Result:

One event becomes multiple audiences.

One story becomes multiple storytellers.

One campaign becomes community-wide visibility.

Partnership Strategy: *When partnering, shared assets lead to greater community reach.*

Create a Communication Rhythm

Consistency Builds Confidence

Establish:

- Regular meetings
- Shared updates
- Feedback loops

Questions to Answer:

- How often will we meet?
- How will decisions be communicated?
- How will challenges be addressed?

Rhythm Insight: *Effective communication is the heartbeat of a successful partnership.*

Measure and Celebrate Success

What Gets Measured Gets Improved

Track:

- People served
- Community outcomes
- Number of ambassadors and influencer partnerships
- Distribution channels (open rate, CTR, engagement rate, views, website visits, etc.)
- Measure benchmarks and track progress over time

Important:

Measure both impact and relationship health.

Success Insight: *"Quantifying outcomes validates the strength of the partnership."*

Partnership Reflection

Ask Yourself

Are We:

- Building relationships intentionally?
- Leveraging partnerships and communications channels effectively?
- Creating value for partners?
- Sharing communications assets?
- Centering community voices?
- Sharing feedback and success?

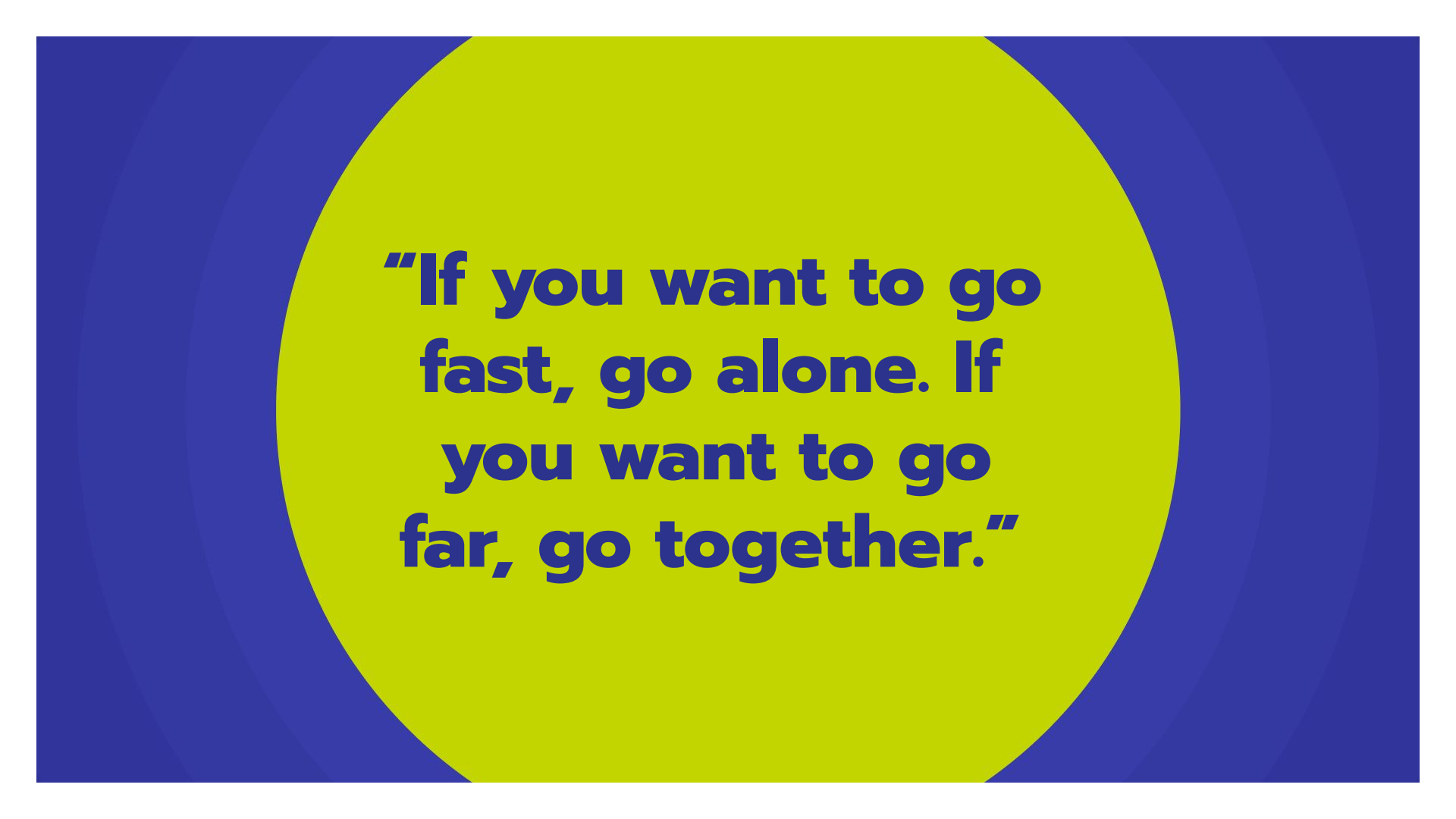
This Week's Challenge

Identify three organizations that already have the trust of the audience you want to reach.

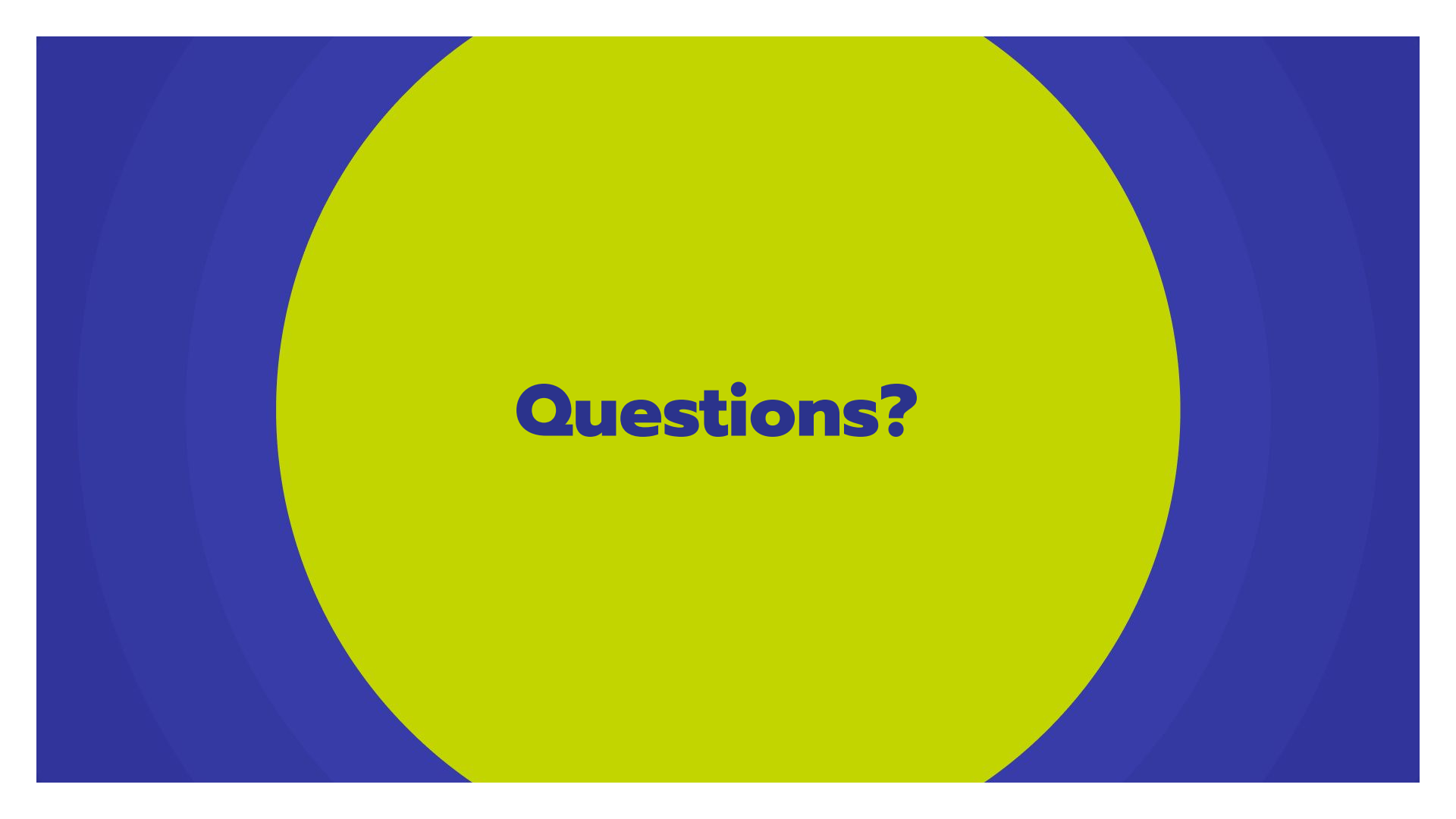
Ask:

"How can we work together to better serve our community?"

Action Insight: *Because the fastest way to build trust is to borrow it through authentic relationships.*



**"If you want to go
fast, go alone. If
you want to go
far, go together."**

The image features a large, bright yellow circle in the center. This circle is set against a dark blue background. Within the dark blue background, there are several concentric circles of varying shades of blue, creating a ripple effect. The word "Questions?" is written in a bold, dark blue font, centered within the yellow circle.

Questions?

RESULTS • STRATEGY • PERFORMANCE



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