# Public Private partnerships

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he term “public private partnership” is elusive, because it can take many contractual forms, address any number of local initiatives, and be subject to local guidelines like procurement, zoning, and tax increment finance arrangements. They are worth exploring though, because when done well, public dollars can be heavily leveraged for community good. These basic steps can serve as a preliminary guide to partnering with the private sector to meet local sustainability goals:

Prioritize – Vetting ideas brought to local government by the private sector is difficult if there’s no clear sense of implementation priorities for your community. Sustainable strategy by nature must be a mix of ordering desired goals and outcomes, and then being flexible enough to go where the momentum is - be it fiscal, political, or community driven. To cut through all the planning jargon, a simple checklist for how to prioritize (anything) is [here.](http://www.inc.com/lauren-perkins/how-to-prioritize-when-everything-is-a-priority.html)

Be Selective – There is no rule that a Sustainability Director must hear all ideas that pertain (however remotely) to sustainability goals. If waste-to-energy plants are 5 years out, say so and save everyone a meeting that has no fruitful end. If there is no budget for a parking application and the caller can’t explain it in terms of carbon reduction, politely move on. People in every field deal with cold calls on a daily basis, and they can really take time from the to-do list. [Here’s](http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/cio-in-action/how-to-cut-to-the-chase-on-the-vendor-cold-call/) how one tech manager handles them.

Ask Questions - If a developer or entrepreneur approaches with an idea that that’s interesting (it hits on an immediate goal or there is momentum for it), have the meeting and give the floor. Listen more than you talk; this gives you the chance to really understand the idea, and they should be versed in your goals already from online sources. Once the pitch is made, clarify. If you have enough shared components (mutual goals, complimentary budgetary concerns, matching gives and takes), then take it to the next decision-making level. If you don’t, say so and be respectful of time. An example of an idea-vetting tool for organizations is [here.](http://www.asaecenter.org/files/Content3/idea_vetting_tool.pdf)

Start the Relationship Honestly – Clearly explain what the partner would be looking at in terms of timeline and resources, and don’t sugar coat. If it takes a contract an average of 6 months to make it through legal, note that. If there is a councilperson that will be an avid supporter or detractor, say so. This is the time to build the force for implementation, and it starts by both sides showing cards. If you do enter a relationship to achieve a shared goal, try these [tips](http://www.futureworksconsulting.com/blog/2005/10/13/teams-and-shared-goals/) for making sure it’s truly a shared goal.

Evaluate Risks and Costs – Make sure what you are building together as a team can actually be done in your community. For example, perhaps a peer city has successfully piloted green techniques that you want to use in infrastructure that compliments a private development. Take time to understand the feasibility, costs, and what will happen if doesn’t work. Make sure your benefit costs analysis reflects risks your community is willing to take. A sample toolkit for risk evaluation in public-private partnerships is [here](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ipd/pdfs/p3/p3_risk_assessment_primer_122612.pdf).

Learn and Document – Not everything goes well, even when plans are well made. The more experience you can put on paper, the stronger your community will be for it. Then, when you do have to say no, you can also clearly explain why, and what challenges a proposal would have to address before the “no” can become “yes”. Sample questions to ask of each project are listed on page 5 of [this](http://www.oecd.org/governance/50254119.pdf) document.