

## **Exploring Toxic Partnerships Relevant to EWB**

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Relationships are the fundamental building blocks of EWB; they are what allow us to work together with our partners and allow us to design and implement our projects within the partner community. The utmost goal of a partnership, like those in EWB, is the respect, benefit, and justice of all groups.

However, there exists a fine line between toxic and healthy relationships. Several groups and organizations may not realize the connections they build with their partners are inherently toxic and in the long-term harmful to one or more parties despite the short-term work that was done. Relationships become toxic when one or more parties are abused by another, often at the benefit of the abuser. It's critical to recognize the signs of these kinds of situations to both prevent them from occurring and to mend them and provide justice to those abused by them. One dynamic that I'd like to discuss involves one-way and toxic giving, which often stems from white saviorism.

EWB, along with thousands of other organizations dedicated to helping others, are almost all born out of benevolence. Countless groups have the ideal of uplifting, empowering, and providing justice or resources to others, though the implementations and interpretations of these goals will vary. Some of the most common and easiest to implement solutions are charities. There are hundreds of organizations and items that can be donated to help others; food, clothes, toys, money, etc. but often these items are given away in one-way transactions within one-way relationships, so how do these items, in truth, affect those who receive them? Countless people truly need short-term and emergency aid, but continued use of short-term resources and

programs often keeps those in need, still in need. Imagine attempting to provide care to someone with hemophilia, a medical condition that causes excessive bleeding. Sure, you could treat the condition with bandages, a short term solution that stops the bleeding, but does that actually help the person manage their condition in the long term?

These solutions are attempting to solve long-term and systemic problems that require careful planning and commitment, with quick and easy-to-implement programs. These solutions keep people in a constant state of need without actually assisting or partnering with them in finding long-term and sustainable solutions to their problems. Instead, the problem persists, and a needs-based partnership forms that places all the power and authority on the giver, the benefactor - the patron. This is an example of a one-way relationship. It disempowers and humiliates the other group, putting them in almost a type of “don’t bite the hand that feeds you” dynamic while consolidating all the power and voice to the giver, regardless of their intentions.

When we assume our partners have no means to empower themselves - a white saviorist outlook, we don’t allow them to do so even though they may nearly have all the means to, only missing that which could be exchanged in collaboration with another person or group. While nearly all groups like EWB don’t have the intention to disempower others, one-way partnerships often lead to that result, which then creates a dependency and inherently toxic relationship with the giver. You do not treat hemophilia with a bandaid; you treat it with a plan long-term and care.