



GUIDE TO BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

There are no blueprints for building and maintaining partnerships, but it is useful to have an understanding of the stages of partnership development, from formation to implementation, maintenance, and achievement of goals.

The processes are not linear and rigid, but flexible and repetitive, and there is considerable overlap between one stage and another. Some of the factors associated with the effectiveness of each stage recur in other stages – others are stage specific and might even be counterproductive in other stages. Hence, personal and collective judgments are crucial. It is important to note that, in the early stage, the factors will also depend on the “baseline” commitment and abilities of the stakeholders. The suggestions given here do not provide a complete or conclusive checklist – nor is each factor a “one off”, but rather an ongoing issue that stimulates multidirectional dialogue. The suggestions are intended both as a guide to awareness for those involved in partnership work and as a means of increasing partnership effectiveness.

For the world of Sustainable Land Management - to make the concept of building partnerships somewhat easier to visualize, we use the analogy of farming – preparing the ground, sowing the seed, and nurturing the growing plants with the right tools to ensure a good harvest.

BUILDING A PARTNERSHIP IS LIKE FARMING

PHASE I: PREPARING THE FIELD

This is the contemplative stage. It is characterized by the development and gathering of collective insights.

- Mutual need – Interdependence. We need each other to accomplish a task.
- Vision – What do we, as a partnership, wish to accomplish? Vision guides the partnership mission, protocols, and constitution.
- Mission – How and in what ways are we going to accomplish our task?
- Value systems – Do we, as stakeholders, value similar things in the same way and to the same extent?
- Inclusion – What kind of stakeholders do we require as future partners?
- Wavelength – Are we all on the same “wavelength”?
- Simple language – Are we all “speaking the same language”?
- Cultures – Are there differences in the working cultures of our potential partners?

USEFUL TOOLS:

- Identify the stakeholders.
- Communicate with them.
- Set meetings.
- Are all potential stakeholders represented?
- Do any of these agencies have any previous experience of working together?
- Are there any historical or traditional barriers between the agencies?
- Is any jargon or technical language used that could be a barrier?
- How do stakeholders feel about establishing a partnership?
- Are there any barriers to developing a common vision?

PHASE II: SOWING THE SEEDS

In order to progress freely towards its aims, it is essential for the partnership to be able to rely fully on its partners. This phase occurs at the initiation of funding. Training and development are also important at this stage:

- Catalyst – Is a facilitating agency required to bring the stakeholders together as partners?
- Scope and view of the partnership – Are the objectives of the partnership many and overwhelming or few and manageable?
- Representation – Have we contacted as many agencies, constituencies, and organizations as we think necessary to solve the problem?
- Priorities – What are the priority issues and concerns that are common to all our agencies?
- Accountability – To whom are we accountable? Our organizations, the community and general public, or the donor?
- Rules, roles, responsibilities, and duties – All require clarity and may need to be written down.
- Communication – How are we going to have timely, consistent, useful, and comfortable communication that meets our needs?
- Democratic consensus and consultation – How democratic are we going to be? Democracy can sometimes be very time-consuming – how can we get a quick decision when necessary?
- Power – Is the distribution of power in the partnership a negative or positive factor?
- Socialization – The partners need this at an early stage in order to be comfortable with one another.
- Skills and expertise – Do we collectively, as a partnership, have the skills necessary to accomplish our aims?
- Funding cycles – Are we aware of the different financial calendars of the partners and how they affect the timing of the inputs?

USEFUL TOOLS:

- Establish communication channels.
- Ensure the free flow of information.
- Revisit representation.
- Define structure and management of the partnership.

- Provide by-laws, rules, and procedures.
- Check for the required skills and competencies.
- Plan for training and development.
- Monitor the formal and informal power-bases.
- Hold social events.
- Attempt to secure long-term financial commitments.
- Harmonize programme needs with donor funding cycles.

PHASE III: WEEDING AND TENDING THE GROWING PLANTS

Needs assessments can be undertaken in Phase III to determine the extent and nature of the concerns of the constituencies. The results of assessments are used in implementation to develop interventions.

- Frozen and latent periods – Is there a time difference between formation of the partnership and acquisition of funds for implementation?
- Strategy – Are we going to roll out the partnership’s projects one by one or will everything start at the same time?
- Time frames – Is it likely that the projects can be undertaken in the proposed time frames? Are the time frames realistic or too ambitious?
- Coordination – Is there good coordination between the implementing agencies? Is there any fragmentation or duplication?
- Compatibility – Are there any signs of incompatibility, tensions, competition, or conflict between organizations or individuals?
- Urgency – Are we aware that SLM expansion is urgently needed and that the partnership is for action rather than just talking.
- Direction – Are we overlooking anything important that might have been pushed aside in the rush?
- Evaluation and monitoring – What, how, where, who, why? Knowing the past is the basis for improving the future.

USEFUL TOOLS:

- Draw up and communicate the strategy clearly.
- Finalize the “direction” of the projects.
- Capitalize on opportunities and enthusiasm.
- Coordinate actions and programmes.
- Watch out for incompatibilities.
- Ensure that time frames are realistic and that deadlines are met.
- Plan and evaluate both partnership and intended change.

PHASE IV: HARVESTING

Phase IV is characterized by the institutionalization of the effort. It includes the monitoring of committees and the planned activities.

- Routine of partnership – Are the partnership operations now settled and embedded in the routines of the participating agencies?
- Maintain linkages – Preserve, nurture, and expand the relationships that have been forged.
- Interim reports – What “proof” and indicators of partnership success does the donor require? How often is feedback provided and what is its quality?
- Continuity – Today’s problems come from yesterday’s solutions. Plan early for sustainability and anticipate the unexpected or worst-case scenarios.

USEFUL TIPS AND TOOLS:

- Establish partnership working as the “usual way of doing business”.
- Facilitate the institutionalization of programmes.
- Build on connections and capital.
- Maintain the momentum and vigour of the partnership.
- Report to donors, seek further grants, look for new sponsors.