

Partnership Practice Guide

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Guide 1 Preparing to Partner

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Introduction

Welcome to the first Partnership Practice Guide of a series of three guides on partnering¹ designed to provide information, tools and resources to staff in the health, housing and community services sector and government departments.

The three guides are complementary to other guides and manuals available in the sector and can be read in conjunction with a) the Memorandum of Understanding 2009–12 between the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Health, Housing and Community Sector, and b) the Collaboration and Consultation Protocol.

Who are the Practice Guides for?

The guide has been designed for any staff person or member of the partnership who has an interest in partnerships or partnering activity and is wanting an easy guide to commencing or sustaining a partnering arrangement.

1 The project was an initiative of the Human Services Partnership Implementation Committee (HSPIC) which has representatives from both sector organisations, including the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) and DHS.

The Next Guide

Guide 1: Preparing to Partner provides a description of the critical factors to consider in the preparation for partnering.

Definition of Partnership

The term Partnerships is described as two or more organisations that ...'make a commitment to work together on something that concerns both, to develop a shared sense of purpose and agenda, and to generate joint action towards agreed targets'².

In addition the commitment could include a formal agreement, for example, a memorandum of understanding, terms of reference, or partnership agreement. Finally within the health, housing and community sector, the partnership would have an ongoing service delivery focus.

It implies the sharing of decision-making, risks, power, benefits and burdens. A partnership should add value to each partner's respective services, products or situations.³ Implicit in the idea of partnership

2 Stern R & Green J (2005) 'Boundary workers and the management of frustration: a case study of two Healthy City partnerships' in Health Promotion International, 20(3): 269–276

3 Frank and Smith, 1997; Collaboration Roundtable, 2001.

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are expectations of a degree of interdependence between the organisations involved and of a time limited or long term relationship.

Why Partner?

Working in partnership across government departments and organisations and community to achieve integrated services will contribute to improving outcomes of people experiencing disadvantage.

Partnerships are a key mechanism to achieve a more coordinated service, to address service gaps and to pool resources to meet the needs of those accessing services.

Many funding bodies now specify the forming of partnerships as a condition of funding for the above reasons. Examples include Child FIRST, Primary Care Partnerships (PCPs) and Front Door.

Types of Partnerships

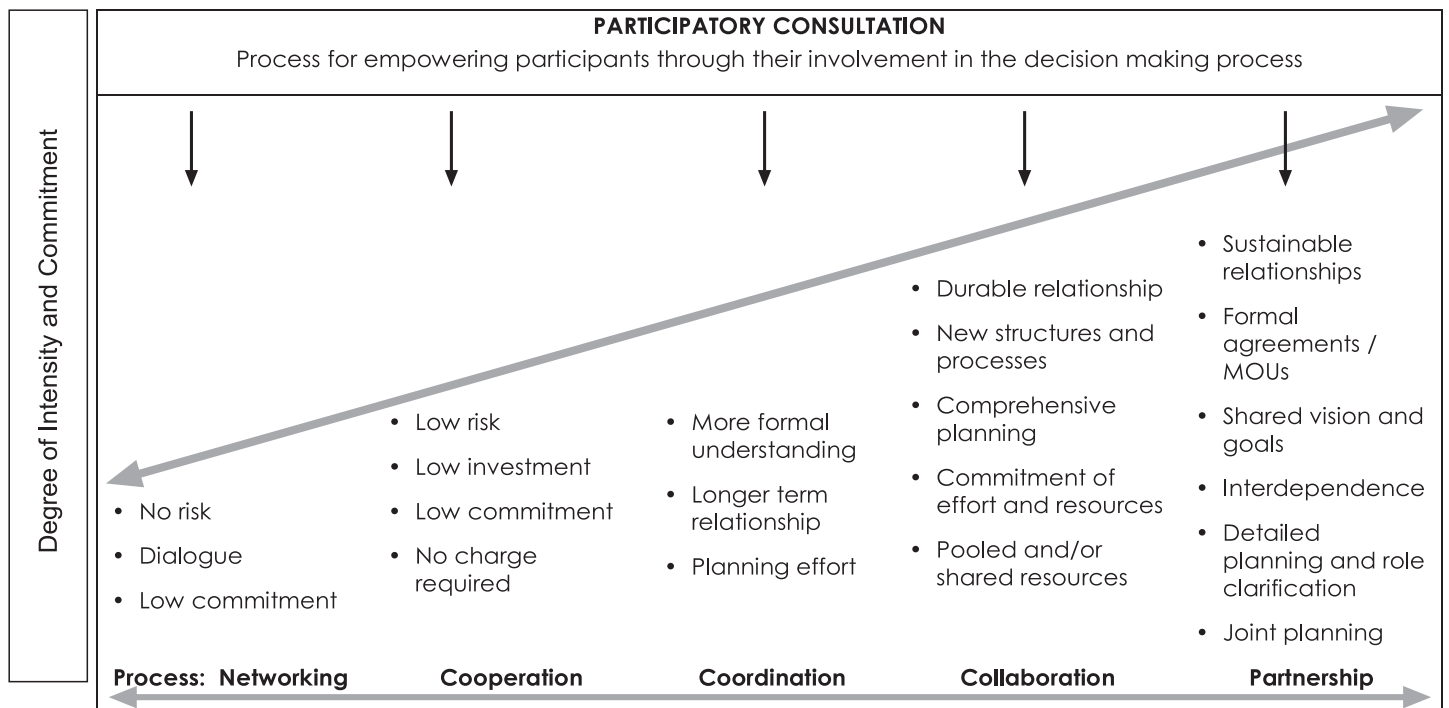
There are different forms of working together between organisations which can be represented along a continuum.

The Continuum of Joint Effort⁴ model helps to clarify the type of partnership between organisations depending on the outcomes desired.

From networking, cooperation, coordination, collaboration and finally partnership. Underpinning each of these commitments is the need for strong and effective participatory consultation with all stakeholders.

Partnership arrangements come in many forms and must be adapted to the needs and characteristics of each individual initiative and the partners involved. Different objectives will necessitate different partnership approaches. The key factor inherent in the term 'partnership' is the concept of sharing.

Continuum of Joint Effort



@ Success Works 2002

⁴ Developed by Success Works, 2002 and included in *Putting Partnerships into Practice Final Report*. Report prepared for the Department of Human Services 2004.

Benefits of Partnering

The following benefits of working in partnership with other organisations include:

- partnerships can allow for diverse thinking and values to lead to better outcomes
- partnerships provide opportunity to share a workload and resources
- partnerships build capacity of their members
- partnerships can create the environment for taking risks in developing new service models
- partnerships create the motivation for people to pull together, which in turn drives and sustains the partnership

Challenges of Partnering

The following challenges have been identified in working in partnership with other organisations:

Partnership for what?

The reasons for establishing the partnership must be clearly articulated, understood and accepted by members.

Realistic expectations and an accurate appreciation of capacities, including authorities, skills and resources of the other partner's environment is also crucial.

Trusting the other

Considerable work may be required to overcome some initial suspicions about the partnership and its purpose.

Leadership

At both an individual and organisational level, leadership is a key attribute and is required from all members of the partnership – from chair, from partners on behalf of their organisations or the group they represent, and from partners who are required to lead on particular issues⁵. To promote a sense of ownership, staff at the operational level also need to lead.

Membership of partnership

Consistency of membership from an organisational and individual level is important to maintain the connection and momentum between and across partnership members. The level of skill, knowledge and experience of members is equally important as is the role of the Chair in helping to drive the agenda.

Authority of partnership

The partnership must be able to make decisions; it must have authority; breadth of power and responsibility. The partnership must have the apparent and executive authority to ensure that partnership aims are realistic and adopted globally and within individual organisations.

Adequate resourcing of partnership

Adequate resourcing of the partnership activities is important such as administrative support (i.e. agendas, minutes and overall coordination, joint actions, initiatives, planning and evaluation). Resourcing issues should be considered from the establishment of the partnership.

Doing the Groundwork

It takes time to develop successful partnerships. Developing a trusting relationship where all partners feel that there is mutual benefit from the partnership is essential for success. This cannot be achieved in one or two meetings or where there has been a history of tension with another partner or organisation.

It requires an environment of trust, mutual respect and consensus building. Partnering moves from:

From ⁶	To
Control	Influence
'my' & 'your'	Our business
independence	interdependence
Myth of hero leaders	Shared leadership
Superficial solutions	Culture change
Changing one service	Aligning many
Focus on task	Process/attitude

⁵ Boydell, L 2001 *Partnership Framework: a model for partnerships for health*. Institute of Public Health in Ireland, Dublin

⁶ Developed by Tony Morrison *Understanding & Leading Inter-agency Partnerships Seminar* 29 Jan 2009 sponsored by Berry Street Victoria

Below is a step by step approach to commencing the partnership:

a) Preparation within an Organisation

This is a critical first step which identified a person(s) in the organisation who will manage the partnership. The person's skill and authority (to make decisions) is of prime importance in addition to holding an understanding of governing structures and support mechanisms including role clarity.

Key partnership skills include communication, judgement, discretion, openness, integrity, loyalty, leadership, negotiation and an understanding of different partnership roles.

This step should identify how much time the person can commit (weekly, fortnightly, monthly) to the partnership. It also involves the identification of resources available (financial and non-financial) to commit to the partnership.

b) Conducting an Exploratory Meeting

Preliminary discussions should be held with potential partners including funding body(ies) to discuss relevant issues prior to making a decision that a partnership is desirable. It is important to ensure that each organisation is ready, willing and able to partner. Time spent up front in establishing a firm foundation will pay off in the long run by greatly increasing the probability of success.

The kind of support required from each organisation and the action to be taken to gain and maintain the support required should be identified up front. The benefits to each organisation of supporting the partnership should also be considered. Organisations will be more supportive if there are clear benefits to them.

At this initial meeting, the agenda might include the following items:

- Understanding each others organisation and its possible contribution to the partnership
- Possible governance structures that might suit the partnership (or is it specified in the funding agreement?)

- Resourcing – what contribution is possible (and funded?) from each organisation?
- Membership – who are the best people from which organisation for this partnership and who is best to chair?
- What protocols and communication processes will we need to make this work (Memorandum of Understanding or Partnership Agreement)?

c) Assessing the Need for Partnerships⁷

provides four key questions to consider, understand and address about partnerships and partnership building in order to make the best choices about developing these alliances:

1. Should we partner?

Partnerships should be strategic alliances, with risks and rewards weighed. Partnering is one strategic option for getting something done.

Decision Issues

Can we do it ourselves, or do we need to develop this capacity? How much control do we need over the process and output? What would partnering enable us to accomplish over and above the alternatives?

Learnings

Many partnerships are hastily entered. Partnering often sacrifices control for the sake of unique gains.

2. What overall purposes would this partnership serve?

Partnerships may produce something special or produce it more effectively through joint work. They also often provide the legitimacy or political support that complex problems require.

Decision Issues

Who are the key stakeholders, and what are their expectations? Who has the credibility and capacity needed to act on this issue or problem?

Are we ready to hitch our *reputation* to theirs? Do we *trust* their motives as well as their competence?

How will *other* stakeholders respond?

Learnings

Taking a “multilateral” approach is often crucial for complex problems. An ineffective partnership, however, may make it harder for the individual players to “deliver the goods” that stakeholders expect.

3. How should we define success?

Too many efforts forget to evaluate the multiple dimensions of performance in partnership work. Partnerships often face great expectations and confusing demands.

Decision Issues

What *outcome* (change in the “state of affairs”) do we want to create together? What measurable *outputs* (of our work) will those outcomes require? What kinds of *knowledge* and what *operational processes* will help us produce the outputs?

Learnings

Not all successful relationship building leads to improved joint output, which requires learning, risk taking, and new behaviour. Partners may also ignore the external factors that affect outcomes, creating a relational success and an outcome failure.

4. How partnered should we be?

Partnership arrangements can operate at various levels of depth or “integration” in terms of the partners’ activities and resources.

Decision Issues

Based on our capacity and aims, do we envision “light” cooperation arrangements or deeper, blended activities and pooled resources? Or something in between?

Learnings

Partnerships struggle when participants have different, and often unexpressed, assumptions about the right *degree* of partnership.

⁷ Adapted with permission from DHS Draft Building Rural Health Partnerships: Toolkit for Success P13

d) Structuring the Partnership

The most appropriate type of partnership structure will vary according to the nature of the partnership, pre-existing coordination arrangements and prior history of working together and other context and operating factors.

The structure needs to suit the purpose they are to achieve. Simplicity is the most powerful criterion. Partnerships require a structure through which the participating organisations are able to communicate and negotiate agreements. This might include working groups to work on particular issues.

Partnerships work best when supported by clear structures and formal written agreements developed collaboratively, that clearly set out partnership purpose, common goals, joint objectives, roles and responsibilities, performance expectations, review mechanisms and an exit strategy.

It requires a clear governance structure that states how the partnership is controlled, and the systems and practices in place to manage this partnership. Members benefit from agreements on how they will communicate, protocols to guide their work, and a means for dispute resolution when things go wrong.

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

An MoU describes the goals, governance structures and management arrangements of a partnership. It is not a legal document and is distinct from a funding and service agreement.

An MoU might include:

- Context and Rationale
 - Mission or Purpose Statement
- Values & Principles
- Governance structure and authority
- Goals and Objectives of the Partnership – what is to be achieved in terms of the relationship
- Partnership Coordination
 - Membership
 - Structure
 - Roles and responsibilities of all partnering members, including Chair
 - Meeting schedule
- Signatures to the MoU

An MoU might also include protocols for working arrangements such as:

- Communication, information sharing and consultation processes
 - Meeting – purposes, agenda, minutes and processes
 - Roles and Responsibilities
 - Resourcing meetings
 - File management
 - Accountability mechanisms – performance monitoring and reporting to the Partnership
 - Complaints handling

- Problem or dispute resolution processes
- External stakeholder or network engagement across geographic areas
- Budget or resources management and allocation
- Partnership performance – monitoring, review and evaluating the partnership

Terms of Reference (ToR)

The ToR document describes operational working arrangements for the partnership. These are generally drafted prior to the first meeting and agreed for discussion and/or ratified at the meeting. These might include:

- Purpose
- Membership
- Partnership coordination and management arrangements
- Service operations – planning; day to day operations – who does what; when and how; communication and information sharing
- External stakeholder or network engagement – will the membership expand, who needs to be at the table?
- Meeting schedule
- Dispute resolution processes
- Administration and other systems support
- Review and Evaluation

d) Partnership Review

Consider how the partnership will be monitored, reviewed and evaluated. What should be in place at the beginning to ensure data and information is recorded for measuring success?

This will be discussed in more detail in Guide 3 Sustaining the Partnership.

Case Study

A State Government department is funding a number of organisations in a geographical area to work together to deliver an integrated service response.

The department wants to build a comprehensive and integrated service platform by streamlining a program so that recipients of the service receive a more accessible and targeted service. This includes a common referral process and pathway through the various service options.

The department has invited five organisations to be involved, two of whom have a history of tension with the other. Three of the organisations have met at networking sessions but have never worked together in any integrated way.

The first meeting has been arranged by the department as an exploratory get to know meeting and to more fully understand the government's intent and how the organisations might contribute. Resourcing is agreed also.

The first meeting will need to clarify a number of issues, for example, the nature of the departmental led partnership, who is at the table and what is their organisations culture, history and values; what role will each organisation play; how will members communicate between each other and back to their organisation; how to resolve issues and disputes, and finally resourcing.

The discussion around the above issues will assist members to understand how the partnership might work. In addition, tabling the four strategic questions previously discussed will help members build the partnership.

Guide 2: Commencing the Partnership

This guide provides suggestions and tools in the early stages of the partnership. It covers systems, communication and workflow processes as a vehicle for control between members in the partnership to promote consistency and continuing commitment.

Further Resources

Boydell, L 2001, 'Partnership Framework: a model for partnerships for health'. *Institute of Public Health in Ireland, Dublin*

Boydell, L 2007, 'Partnerships: A Literature Review, *Institute of Public Health in Ireland, Dublin Ireland* ISBN 978-0-9555912-3-5

Carson, E. & Kerr, L 2006, 'Evaluating government/third sector partnerships in Australia', *Governments and Communities in Partnership: From Theory to Practice, Conference hosted by Centre for Public Policy, University Of Melbourne Australia. September 2006.*

Pope, J & Jolly, P 2008, Working in Partnership: Practical advice for running effective partnerships, *Department of Planning and Community Development. Melbourne, Australia.*

Acronyms

The following acronyms are used in this Guide

CSO	Community Services Organisation
DHS	Department of Human Services
HSPIC	Human Services Partnership Implementation Committee
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
TOU	Terms of Reference
VCOSS	Victorian Council of Social Service

Links

Partnership Forums and HSPIC

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/operations/regional-operations-performance/partnership-unit/partnership-forums-and-hspic>

VCOSS

<http://www.vcooss.org.au/>