Partnership Practice Guide

Guide 3: Sustaining the Partnership

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Introduction

Welcome to the third Partnership Practice Guide of a series of three guides on partnering[1] 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.

This Guide

Guide 3: Sustaining the Partnership provides hints on how to keep the partnership alive, troubleshooting strategies and finally evaluation techniques to measure success.

Sustaining the Partnership

The success of any partnership depends on sustaining the process, particularly as leadership, administrations, and policy makers change.

Initial commitment and energy of partners commences the partnership, however the following components are the key to sustaining partnerships over a long period or until they conclude naturally through meeting their goal (time limited):

- creating a sense of interdependence
- recognising and rewarding members
- combining planning with action, and
- creating a learning partnership

VCOSS
Victorian Council of Social Service

Partnership in Practice

Case Study

A partnership comprising 10 organisations ranging from small to large in size was established six months ago. One of the larger organisations is the auspice for the funding and is responsible for reporting the overall partnership outcomes on a regular basis to the funding body.

The governance structure has 3 levels – strategic, operational and working groups.

A senior member of the auspice organisation chairs the Strategic Group for 12 months and has committed resources for administrative support (for which they have received funding).

The partnership has experienced some initial problems resulting in:

• its failure to achieve deliverables and accountability requirements on time

• disengagement of partnership members with low meeting attendance and

• difficulty in managing and expending the budget.

The Chair struggled with the time commitment required to sustain the momentum due to her own organisation increased workload and agended an item to review progress. Members were contacted directly and asked to attend this meeting to contribute to a review and to identify strategies to invigorate the partnership.

In the above case study, a time issue has been identified within 6 months of its commencement. Partnerships go through stages, often referred to as lifecycles and the partnership needs to have an understanding of this process and a means to deal with such issues.

Understanding Partnership Lifecycles

Partnerships go through different stages of development and growth at different times depending on where the partnership is in its life cycle. The stages are adapted from Tuckmans model[2]. Understanding the challenges at key points will help the members identify appropriate strategies to implement in order to sustain the partnership.

Five Stages of Partnerships

The five common life-cycle stages of organisational behaviour, in this instance the partnership are as follows:

1. **Forming**

   The partnership is a group of individuals coming together. This newly formed partnership is characterised by members who are extremely polite or silent with minimum initiative or commitment shown.

2. **Storming**

   Part of the process of being able to work together may involve working through conflicts and differences, either by raising and resolving them or by agreeing to move on and around them. Some issues may be fundamental to the partnership, for example, resourcing, that must be dealt

2 Tuckman, B & Jensen, M 1977, *Group & Organization Management,* Vol. 2, No. 4, 419–427 1977

with. This stage is characterised by strong opinions, vying for position or authority, adjusting to meeting process and resource issues.

3. **Norming**

   The partnership will usually develop a set of common understandings and operating procedures that will enable productive activity to commence.

4. **Performing**

   This is a mature partnership and the optimum point in life cycle… goals are achieved, there is balance of control and flexibility, and it has refined its core business. The partnership still has room to grow, change is embraced.

   A mature partnership would have strong networks in the community and across government and is well resourced. It may be well connected and seek out opportunities to input into strengthening its partnership, forging new partnerships and impacting on broader policy. This stage requires robust processes and innovation to keep the partnership alive.

5. **Adjourning**

   The partnership members move on once the work of the partnership has been completed. For ongoing partnerships this stage resembles 'decline' where members lose interest and leave, policies and practices may need revamping and the partnership withers.

These stages are not distinct and often merge into each other. The duration of each stage is less precise, and partnerships can regenerate (expand) or go through several rebirths (member changes; new growth funds etc).

Strategies to Support and Sustain the Partnership

a) Servicing the partnership

A competent, well-supported partnership is essential to its success. It is important that the roles, responsibilities and expectations of members are clearly identified and agreed. In addition, the level of administrative support and who will provide the funds will need to be agreed.

Where there are specific skills or information the partnership lacks, appropriate training or briefings may be required or specialist expertise located. This might include any special resources the partnership requires and how these will be provided.

b) Ongoing monitoring

Ongoing monitoring and shared reflection of how the partnership is working is critical to strengthening and sustaining relationships and achieving effective outcomes.

c) Regular reporting of progress

Regular progress reporting will help maintain support and enthusiasm for the partnership and its activities.

Brief, structured reports linked to the Strategic Plan and annual Action Plan enable members to monitor progress and to take prompt action where required.

Adopting a project methodology to plan for and report against indicators, timeframes and milestones, will enable tracking of any deviations and implementing corrective action.

Reports are also a means of communicating with participating organisations and those whose support is required. They can be used to promote successes and to build and maintain support.

Partnership fails because:

1. Rationale behind the establishment of the partnership was not clearly articulated, understood or accepted by stakeholders

2. Underestimating the time to establish a partnership – developing a trusting relationship of reciprocity (mutual benefit) takes time and effort

3. Partners do not recognise their interdependence and the value of partnering

4. Lack of clarity of purpose or failing to recognise potential participation constraints

5. Lack of authority – partnership does not have authority to make decisions nor key responsibilities

6. Failure to lead – partnership suffers from lack of shared vision or purpose or direction

7. Inadequate resourcing of partnership activities

Strategies for a Failing Partnership

Every partnership will go through lifecycles. Some partnerships may not survive strategies to revamp it; some partnerships choose to struggle on; finally some partnerships acknowledge their difficulties and seek outside support. Options may include:

1. Terminate or discontinue the partnership

2. Reorganize the group from a partnership to an 'arrangement'

Both options require careful navigation to acknowledge the achievements of the partnership and plan for alternate arrangements. In some instances, closing the formal partnership can be a positive measure of success. It also may have achieved its purpose and have no further need to continue.

Action required to terminate the partnership:

• Identify the partnerships major accomplishments and acknowledge those people and organisations who have contributed

• Determine how to inform people – both inside and outside the partnership of the decision to dissolve

• Document the partnerships history and the lessons which can be drawn from its operations

• Recommend an appropriate alternative to the current partnership

• Select a time, place and event to celebrate what has been accomplished

Evaluating the Partnership

Evaluations may be conducted for a variety of reasons including assessing whether the methodology is working; assessing the benefits of individuals and organisations; justifying expenditure of resources and confirming and promoting success.

Informal Tools

There are a number of tools available to evaluate a partnership.

Brief questionnaire

In its simplest form, a partnership evaluation could address the following questions:

1. Why did we decide to work as partners? Are the reasons still valid?

2. Did we achieve what we set out to do?

3. What else has happened as a result of our working together?

4. What have been the impacts on our organisations and our clients/community?

5. Were the achievements worth the expenditure of time, effort and other resources?

6. Do we need to still work together to achieve these outcomes?

7. What have we learnt?

8. What revisions need to be made to the partnership and how will we use the evaluation findings?[3]

The discussion method provides the opportunity for members to reflect on the partnership they have established and on ways to strengthen it.

3 Social Compass, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Partnership Tools: Tool 6: Evaluating the Partnership and its Program, http://www. socialcompass.com/index.cfm/Partneringtoolkit/

Evaluation Criteria and Evidence Base

Evaluating the Collaborative Process[4]

Evaluation criteria	Evidence
Participant assessment of the collaborative process Changes in *attitudes and knowledge* that support development of a partnership and sustain it over time including: • indications of trust; • a familiarity with the partner's identity, aims and capacity; and • the perception that the relationship is worth continued investment. Can such attitudes be detected? Are they gaining or losing strength over time?	• Anecdotal evidence (of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, increased trust, etc) • Formal assessment of participant satisfaction via surveys, focus group discussions, etc. • Attendance rate at meetings.
Changes in how partners act	• tangible *actions* that reflect progress on commitments that partners make to each or to the larger community • resources invested to carry out the partners' joint work.
Partnership accomplishments	• *outputs* that indicate what partners' joint activities are actually producing that might have tangible value, such as jointly delivered health care.
Improvements in service which could not have been achieved without collaboration Improvements in efficiency which could not have been achieved without collaboration	• Partnership outcomes (distinguish improvements attributable to collaboration – eg. improved health of families as a result of partnership outputs) • Comparison with outcomes without collaboration • Identify difficulties minimised or removed through collaboration. • Project outcomes (distinguish improvements attributable to collaboration) • Comparison with costs and efficiency without collaboration • Cost savings attributable to collaboration • Changes to organisational systems (distinguish changes attributable to collaboration) and demonstrable benefits of these

4 P 45 Building Rural Health Partnerships: Toolkit for Success, *Department of Human Services Victoria* Draft 2008

Evaluating the Collaborative Process[4] (continued)

Evaluation criteria	Evidence
Collaboration model chosen was the simplest, cheapest and least disruptive needed to achieve the outcomes	Indicative comparison with other possible models.
All relevant parties were involved	Identification of any relevant organisations and stakeholders included late or found to have been overlooked.
Cost-benefit of collaboration	Additional costs attributable to collaboration, compared to benefits and savings achieved.
Spin off benefits attributable to collaboration	• Other initiatives resulting from relationships made through this partnership • Improved community perceptions of organisations • Skills gained by organisations • Improved morale and job satisfaction for participating staff

Formal Tools

Two other more common tools are listed in Templates 1 and 2:

Template 1: VicHealth Partnership Analysis Tool (and example)

This tool is designed to reflect on the partnerships and ways to strengthen it through engaging in discussion, and

Template 2: New York Partnership Self-Assessment Tool

This tool was designed to help partnerships understand how collaboration works and what it means to create a successful collaborative process; assess how well their collaborative process is working, and identify specific areas they can focus on to make their collaborative process work better.

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.*

Tuckman, B & Jensen, M 1977, *Group & Organization Management,* Vol. 2, No. 4, 419–427 1977

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.vcoss.org.au/

Social Compass

http://www.socialcompass.com/
index.cfm/Partneringtoolkit/

VICHEALTH

http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/
en/Resource-Centre/Publications-
and-Resources/Mental-health-and-
wellbeing/Mental-health-promotion/
Partnerships-Analysis-Tool.aspx

Template 1: VicHealth Partnership Analysis Tool

This tool is designed to facilitate partnerships across sectors by:

- assisting organisations to develop a clearer understanding of the range of purposes of collaborations
- reflecting on the partnerships that have been established
- focusing on ways to strengthen new and existing partnerships by engaging in discussion about issues and ways forward

VicHealth Partnership Analysis Tool

Rate your level of agreement with each of the statements below, with 0 indicating strong disagreement and 4 indicating a strong agreement.

	0 Strongly disagree	1 Disagree	2 Not sure	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
1. Determining the need for the relationship					
There is a perceived need for the relationship in terms of areas of common interest and complementary capacity.					
There is a clear goal for the relationship.					
There is a shared understanding of, and commitment to, this goal among all potential partners.					
The partners are willing to share some of their ideas, resources, influence and power to fulfil the goal.					
The perceived benefits of the relationship outweigh the perceived costs.					
TOTAL					
2. Choosing Partners					
The partners share common ideologies, interests and approaches.					
The partners see their core business as partially interdependent.					
There is a history of good relations between the partners.					
The relationship brings added prestige to the partners individually as well as collectively.					
There is enough variety among members to have a comprehensive understanding of the issues being addressed.					
TOTAL					

	0 Strongly disagree	1 Disagree	2 Not sure	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
3. Making sure relationships work					
The managers in each organisation support the relationship.					
Partners have the necessary skills for collaborative action.					
There are strategies to enhance the skills of the relationship through increasing the membership or workforce development.					
The roles, responsibilities and expectations of partners are clearly defined and understood by all other partners.					
The administrative, communication and decision-making structure of the relationship is as simple as possible.					
TOTAL					
4. Planning					
All partners are involved in planning and setting priorities.					
Partners have the task of communicating and promoting the coalition in their own organisations.					
Some staff have roles that cross the traditional boundaries that exist between members.					
The lines of communication, roles and expectations of partners are clear.					
There is a participatory decision-making system that is accountable, responsive and inclusive.					
TOTAL					
5. Implementing					
Processes that are common across members such as referral protocols, service standards, data collection and reporting mechanisms have been standardised.					
There is an investment in the relationship of time, personnel, materials or facilities.					
Management rewards reciprocity between organisations.					
The action is adding value (rather than duplicating services) for the community, clients or the members involved in the relationship.					
There are regular opportunities for informal and voluntary contact between members of the relationship.					
TOTAL					

	0 Strongly disagree	1 Disagree	2 Not sure	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
6. Minimising the barriers to relationships					
Differences in organisational priorities, goals and tasks have been addressed.					
There is a core group of skilled and committed staff that has continued over the life of the relationship.					
There are formal structures for sharing information and resolving demarcation disputes.					
There are informal ways of achieving this.					
There are strategies to ensure alternative views are expressed within the relationship.					
TOTAL					
7. Reflecting on and continuing the relationship					
There are processes for recognising and celebrating collective achievements and/or individual contributions.					
The relationship can demonstrate or document the outcomes of its collective work.					
There is a clear need and commitment to continuing the collaboration in the medium term.					
There are resources available from either internal or external sources to continue the relationship.					
There is a way of reviewing the range of partners and bringing in new members or removing some.					
TOTAL					

Aggregate Score TOTAL

	0 Strongly disagree	1 Disagree	2 Not sure	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
Determining the need for a relationship					
Choosing partners					
Making sure relationships work					
Planning					
Implementing					
Minimising the barriers to relationships					
Reflecting on and continuing the relationship					
TOTAL					

Checklist Score

0–49   The whole idea of a partnership should be rigorously questioned.

50–91   The partnership is moving in the right direction but it will need more attention if it is going to be really successful.

92–140   A partnership based on genuine collaboration has been established. The challenge is to maintain its impetus and build on the current success.

Example

Partnership Analysis Tool Results

A total of 7 tools were completed for 7 members of the partnership. Below are the results:

Item	Average score (possible total 20)
1. Determining the need for the relationship	14.1
2. Choosing partners	12
3. Making sure relationships work	12.1
4. Planning	10.5
5. Implementing	10.6
6. Minimising the barriers to relationships	10.2
7. Reflecting on and continuing the relationship	11.1
Overall totals	**108**

The total average score of **108** from the VicHealth Partnership Analysis Tool places the overall perception of the partnership assessed through this process in the highest of three categories with the following description:

92–140: A Partnership based on genuine collaboration has been established. The challenge is to maintain its impetus and build on the current success.

Other categories for results are:

50–91: The partnership is moving in the right direction but it will need more attention if it is really going to be successful.

0-49: The whole idea of a partnership should be rigorously questioned.

Template 2: New York Partnership Self-Assessment Tool

The *Partnership Self-Assessment Tool* was designed to help partnerships:

- Understand how collaboration works and what it means to create a successful collaborative process;
- Assess how well their collaborative process is working;
- Identify specific areas they can focus on to make their collaborative process work better.

The Tool measures a key indicator of a successful collaborative process – the partnership's level of synergy. The Tool also provides information that helps partnerships take action to improve the collaborative process.

It identifies the partnership's strengths and weaknesses in areas that are known to be related to synergy – leadership, efficiency, administration and management, and sufficiency of resources. It also measures partners' perspectives about the partnership's decision-making process, the benefits and drawbacks they experience as a result of participating in the partnership, and their overall satisfaction with the partnership.

Partnership Self Assessment Tool

Questionnaire

The questionnaire focuses on a number of categories requiring one of 5 answers ranging from extremely well to not well at all (or slight variations on this 5 scale, e.g. All of what it needs to don't know)

The categories are as follows:

Synergy

Please think about the people and organizations that are participants in your partnership.

a. By working together, how well are these partners able to identify new and creative ways to solve problems?

b. By working together, how well are these partners able to include the views and priorities of the people affected by the partnership's work?

c. By working together, how well are these partners able to develop goals that are widely understood and supported among partners?

d. By working together, how well are these partners able to identify how different services and programs in the community relate to the problems the partnership is trying to address?

e. By working together, how well are these partners able to respond to the needs and problems of the community?

f. By working together, how well are these partners able to implement strategies that are most likely to work in the community?

g. By working together, how well are these partners able to obtain support from individuals and organizations in the community that can either block the partnership's plans or help move them forward?

h. By working together, how well are these partners able to carry out comprehensive activities that connect multiple services, programs, or systems?

i. By working together, how well are these partners able to clearly communicate to people in the community how the partnership's actions will address problems that are important to them?

Leadership

Please think about all of the people who provide either formal or informal leadership in this partnership. Please rate the total effectiveness of your partnership's leadership in each of the following areas:

a. Taking responsibility for the partnership

b. Inspiring or motivating people involved in the partnership

c. Empowering people involved in the partnership

d. Communicating the vision of the partnership

e. Working to develop a common language within the partnership

Please rate the total effectiveness of your partnership's leadership in:

f. Fostering respect, trust, inclusiveness, and openness in the partnership

g. Creating an environment where differences of opinion can be voiced

h. Resolving conflict among partners

i. Combining the perspectives, resources, and skills of partners

j. Helping the partnership be creative and look at things differently

Please rate the total effectiveness of your partnership's leadership in:

k. Recruiting diverse people and organizations into the partnership

Efficiency

1. Please choose the statement that best describes how well your partnership uses the partners' financial resources.
    - ☐ The partnership makes excellent use of partners' financial resources.
    - ☐ The partnership makes very good use of partners' financial resources.
    - ☐ The partnership makes good use of partners' financial resources.
    - ☐ The partnership makes fair use of partners' financial resources.
    - ☐ The partnership makes poor use of partners' financial resources.

2. Please choose the statement that best describes how well your partnership uses the partners' in-kind resources (e.g., skills, expertise, information, data, connections, influence, space, equipment, goods).
    - ☐ The partnership makes excellent use of partners' in-kind resources.
    - ☐ The partnership makes very good use of partners' in-kind resources.
    - ☐ The partnership makes good use of partners' in-kind resources.
    - ☐ The partnership makes fair use of partners' in-kind resources.
    - ☐ The partnership makes poor use of partners' in-kind resources.

3. Please choose the statement that best describes how well your partnership uses the partners' time.
    - ☐ The partnership makes excellent use of partners' time.
    - ☐ The partnership makes very good use of partners' time.
    - ☐ The partnership makes good use of partners' time.
    - ☐ The partnership makes fair use of partners' time.
    - ☐ The partnership makes poor use of partners' time.

Administration and Management

Rate the effectiveness of your partnership in carrying out each of the following activities:

a. Coordinating communication among partners

b. Coordinating communication with people and organizations outside the partnership

c. Organizing partnership activities, including meetings and projects

d. Applying for and managing grants and funds

e. Preparing materials that inform partners and help them make timely decisions

Please rate the effectiveness of your partnership in:

f. Performing secretarial duties

g. Providing orientation to new partners as they join the partnership

h. Evaluating the progress and impact of the partnership

i. Minimizing the barriers to participation in the partnership's meetings and activities (e.g., by holding them at convenient places and times, and by providing transportation and childcare)

Non-financial Resources

A partnership needs non-financial resources in order to work effectively and achieve its goals. For each of the following types of resources, to what extent does your partnership have what it needs to work effectively?

a. Skills and expertise (e.g., leadership, administration, evaluation, law, public policy, cultural competency, training, community organizing)

b. Data and information (e.g., statistical data, information about community perceptions, values, resources, and politics)

c. Connections to target populations

d. Connections to political decision-makers, government agencies, other organizations/groups

For each of the following types of resources, to what extent does your partnership have what it needs to work effectively?

e. Legitimacy and credibility

f. Influence and ability to bring people together for meetings and activities

Financial and Other Capital Resources

A partnership also needs financial and other capital resources in order to work effectively and achieve its goals. For each of the following types of resources, to what extent does your partnership have what it needs to work effectively?

a. Money

b. Space

For the following type of resources, to what extent does your partnership have what it needs to work effectively?

c. Equipment and goods

Decision Making

a. How comfortable are you with the way decisions are made in the partnership?

b. How often do you support the decisions made by the partnership?

c. How often do you feel that you have been left out of the decision making process?

Benefits of Participation

For each of the following benefits, please indicate whether you have or have not received the benefit as a result of participating in the partnership (yes/no answer only).

a. Enhanced ability to address an important issue

b. Development of new skills

c. Heightened public profile

d. Increased utilization of my expertise or services

e. Acquisition of useful knowledge about services, programs, or people in the community

f. Enhanced ability to affect public policy

g. Development of valuable relationships

h. Enhanced ability to meet the needs of my constituency or clients

i. Ability to have a greater impact than I could have on my own

As a result of your participation in the partnership, have you experienced the following benefits:

j. Ability to make a contribution to the community

k. Acquisition of additional financial support

Drawbacks of Participation

For each of the following drawbacks, please indicate whether or not you have or have not experienced the drawback as a result of participating in this partnership.

a. Diversion of time and resources away from other priorities or obligations

b. Insufficient influence in partnership activities

c. Viewed negatively due to association with other partners or the partnership

d. Frustration or aggravation

e. Insufficient credit given to me for contributing to the accomplishments of the partnership

f. Conflict between my job and the partnership's work

Comparing Benefits and Drawbacks

So far, how have the benefits of participating in this partnership compared to the drawbacks?

The scale ranges from 'Benefits greatly exceed the drawbacks' to 'drawbacks greatly exceed the benefits'.

Satisfaction with Participation

The scale ranges from 'Completely satisfied' to 'drawbacks greatly exceed the benefits'.

a. How satisfied are you with the way the people and organizations in the partnership work together?

b. How satisfied are you with your influence in the partnership?

c. How satisfied are you with your role in the partnership?

d. How satisfied are you with the partnership's plans for achieving its goals?