The partnerships analysis tool

A resource for establishing, developing and maintaining partnerships

Partnerships are an important mechanism for building and sustaining capacity. This emphasis is particularly relevant when working across multiple sectors and with a range of organisations.

Partnerships are an important vehicle for bringing together diverse skills and resources for more effective outcomes. Partnerships can increase the efficiency of systems by making the best use of different but complementary resources. Collaborations, joint resourcing and planned action can also potentially make a bigger impact on outcomes across diverse sectors.

If partnerships are to be successful, however, they must have a clear purpose, add value to the work of the partners, and be carefully planned and monitored.

This resource is based on the evaluation of a range of initiatives undertaken to promote mental health and wellbeing.

It was first produced in 2005 by John McLeod on behalf of VicHealth to support partnerships across sectors.

It is designed to help organisations:

- develop a clearer understanding of the range of purposes of collaborations
- reflect on the partnerships they have established
- focus on ways to strengthen new and existing partnerships by engaging in discussion about issues and ways forward.

 "If partnerships are to be successful they must have a clear purpose, add value to the work of the partners, and be carefully planned and monitored."
Who should use this tool?

The partnerships analysis tool is for organisations entering into or working in a partnership to assess, monitor and maximise its ongoing effectiveness. It was revised in 2011 and now includes information on changing organisations. It is available online at www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/partnerships

What is the aim of the tool?

The aim of this tool is to help organisations reflect on the partnerships they have established and monitor and maximise their effectiveness.

The tool is divided into three sections:

- **Changing organisations:** How to embed partnerships as an ongoing way of working.
- **Exploring the nature of partnerships (Activities 1 and 2):** Why is the partnership necessary in this particular project? What value does the partnership add to the project? This involves designing a map that visually represents the nature of the relationships between agencies.
- **Analysing existing or potential partnerships (Activity 3):** This involves completing a checklist that defines the key features of a successful inter-departmental, inter-agency or inter-sectoral partnership. The checklist is designed to provide feedback on the current status of the partnership and to suggest areas that need further support and work.

How to use the tool

The tool is designed to provide a focus for discussion between agencies. Wherever possible, the activities should be completed by participating partners as a group. The discussion involved in working through the activities will help to strengthen the partnership by clarifying ideas and different perspectives. In some cases, it may indicate that the partnership is not working as intended.

Where a lead agency has initiated or is coordinating the partnership, they would normally assume responsibility for facilitating the three activities.

Completing the activities will take a number of hours because there will be a variety of perspectives among the partners and different evidence will be cited as a way of substantiating the views people hold. The various partners need time to reflect on the partnership and how it is working. The discussion that occurs around completing the tasks will contribute to the partnership because ideas, expectations and any tensions can be aired and clarified.

The tool can be used at different times in the partnership. Early on, it will provide some information on how the partnership has been established and identify areas in which there is a need for further work. A year or so into the partnership, it provides a basis for structured reflection on how the partnership is developing and how inter-partner relationships are forming. With longer-term partnerships,

it may be worth revisiting the tool every 12 to 18 months as a method of continuing to monitor progress and the ways in which relationships are evolving.

The tool may also be useful to a lead agency as a tool for reflection when forming and planning partnerships.

Changing organisations

Organisational change is not easy, but the benefits are huge in terms of embedding partnerships as an ongoing way of working.

In most cases, getting organisations (no matter how small or large) to embrace partnerships requires significant change.

Here are some phases of organisational change that may be helpful.[1]

- Motivating change
- Developing support for change
- Managing the transition
- Sustaining momentum

1 Adapted from Cummings TG & Worley CG, 2004, Organization Development & Change, 8th edition, South-Western College Publishing, Mason, Ohio and McNamara C, 2005, Field guide to consulting and organizational development, Authenticity Consulting, LLC. To obtain the latter book, select 'Publications' at www.authenticityconsulting.com

Phase 1: Motivating change

Not everyone wants to change. One of the key strategies is to build on self-interest. Workers and the organisation as a whole need to be convinced that partnership development will have something in it for them, otherwise it may be perceived as just an extra burden. Strategies can include the following:

- Introduce people to the possibilities and value of partnerships.
- Outline the current position of the organisation and where it could be in the future. Visions can be powerful motivators.
- Develop a medium or longer-term work partnership plan so people know where they are going.
- Highlight some realistic approaches to change and how they could be implemented. Start small.
- Address resistance and the reasons for it, including feelings of inadequacy, lack of conviction that change is necessary or that there may be negative impacts on existing jobs.
- Listen to people's concerns and take them into account.

Phase 2: Developing support for change

This phase of change management is often overlooked, yet it is a phase that often stops successful change occurring.

Some people in organisations have a vested interest in preserving the status quo.

Strategies can include the following:

- Ensure senior management and the board have an understanding of partnerships and are committed to them at every level, from policies to individual interactions.
- Recognise that partnerships may change the existing power structures and address this. For example, clients or others may make more decisions. How do paid staff feel about this?
- Engage the key power players to lead, manage and embed partnership thinking and practice into the organisation and, if they have concerns, address them promptly.

Phase 3: Managing the transition

This phase occurs when the organisation works to make the actual transition from the current state to the future state.

This establishes partnerships and makes them work.

Strategies can include the following:

- Engage in ongoing coaching, training and reiteration of new policies and procedures.
- Undertake formal professional development.
- Design clear milestones and celebrate their achievement.
- Adjust plans on the basis of feedback and changed circumstances.
- Design work plans that emphasise partnership development and analysis.
- Communicate to stakeholders about where you are as an organisation, what the next step is, and how everybody's efforts are contributing to the ultimate goal.

Phase 4: Sustaining momentum

Often this is the most difficult phase in managing change. It is difficult because staff move jobs, people get bored, they cannot see the 'pay-off' or they feel under-resourced for any extra work they are expected to do.

Strategies can include the following:

- Provide support, often in the form of resources, along with professional development and coaching.
- Affirm efforts and celebrate successes.
  Reward successful activities and change.

Activity 1: Assessing the purpose of the partnership

Activity 1 is designed to explore and clarify the purpose of the partnership. In order to complete it we suggest you adopt the following approach:

1. Have each participant write five answers to each of the following questions on a piece of paper and rank them in order of importance:
   - Why is the partnership necessary in this particular project?
   - What value is it trying to add to the project?
2. Compare individual lists by starting with the reasons that are most important and following through to those that are least important.
3. Look for the points of consensus, but also be aware of any differences.
4. Find out if organisations have a clear understanding of what each one can contribute to the partnership.

Activity 2: A map of the partnership

The concept of partnerships used in this tool implies a level of mutuality and equality between agencies. There are different types of partnerships in health promotion, ranging on a continuum from networking through to collaboration (see next page).

Not all partnerships will or should move to collaboration. In some cases, networking is the appropriate response. The nature of the partnership will depend on the need, purpose and willingness of participating agencies to engage in the partnership.

As a partnership moves towards collaboration, it will need to become more embedded in the core work of the agencies involved. This has resource and structural implications. In particular, collaborative partnerships require the support and involvement of senior agency personnel, since project workers may be relatively junior or on short-term contracts. This can affect their capacity to mobilise the agency resources required for collaboration.

Completing the mapping exercise

This mapping exercise is designed to map all of the partners in relation to each other. Lines are drawn between them to show the strength and nature of the relationship. Mapping the partnership is a way of clarifying roles and levels of commitment to the partnership. This is important as partners may have different understandings and expectations of what their involvement means. If done collectively, this exercise can help to strengthen a partnership because people are able to raise issues of concern. This provides an opportunity to address areas in which there is a lack of consensus.

It is interesting to note patterns in the relationships and how these change over time. Many partnerships are strong on networking and coordinating but considerably weaker on collaborating. Completing the map provides an opportunity to look at ways that relationships can be strengthened and made more productive.

Look at the example on this page then follow this suggested approach to complete the mapping exercise:

1. List all the agencies involved in the partnership. The lead agency (if there is one) can be placed in the centre.
2. Using the legend, link the agencies in terms of the nature of the relationship. The lead agency is likely to have a relationship with all of the others; however, there may also be important links between partners that do not rely on the lead agency.
3. Where possible cite concrete examples as evidence of the strength of the partnership. The strength of the links between partners should be based on evidence of how the partnership works rather than how people might like it to work or how it may work in the future.

The continuum of partnerships

A distinction can be made between the purposes and nature of partnerships. Partnerships may range on a continuum from networking through to collaboration.

Networking

Involves the exchange of information for mutual benefit. This requires little time and trust between partners. For example, youth services within a local government area may meet monthly to provide an update on their work and discuss issues that affect young people.

Coordinating

Involves exchanging information and altering activities for a common purpose. For example, the youth services may meet and plan a coordinated campaign to lobby the council for more youth-specific services.

Cooperating

Involves exchanging information, altering activities and sharing resources. It requires a significant amount of time, a high level of trust between partners, and an ability for agencies to share turf. For example, a group of secondary schools may pool some resources with a youth welfare agency to run a 'Diversity Week' as a way of combating violence and discrimination.
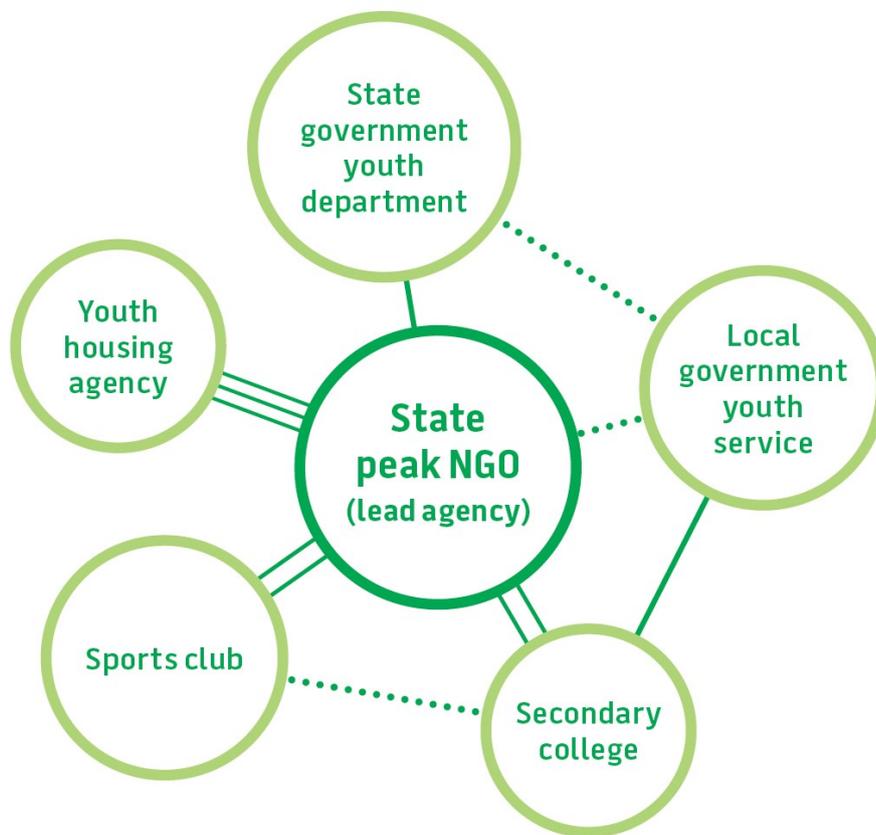
Collaborating

Includes enhancing the capacity of the other partners for mutual benefit and a common purpose. Collaborating requires the partner to give up a part of their turf to another agency to create a better or more seamless service system. For example, a group of schools may fund a youth agency to establish a full-time position to coordinate a Diversity Week, provide professional development for teachers, and train student peer mediators in conflict resolution.

Adapted from Himmelman A 2001, 'On coalitions and the transformation of power relations: Collaborative betterment and collaborative empowerment', *American Journal of Community Psychology*, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 277–284.

Mapping example

A state peak non-government organisation (NGO) is leading a project to increase social connection and participation in physical activity for young people at risk. The project involves linking secondary school students to an after-school program run by a local sports club.

Legend

Nature of relationship between partners

| Networking | · · · · · · · | Cooperating | ═══ |
| Coordinating | ——— | Collaborating | ≡≡≡ |

Nature of relationships

State peak NGO for children and young people
- The lead agency; coordinates funds and project steering group.

State government youth department
- Provides funds for the project and requires a report at the completion of funding.

Sports club
- Provides sports facilities, equipment and a coach.

Youth housing agency
- Provides office for project workers; coordinates and provides transport for young people to travel from school to the club.
- Provides training for volunteers, sports coaches and generalist workers about youth issues, and promotes this project.

Secondary college
- Refers young people to the project.

Local government youth service
- Member of steering committee.

Activity 3: Providing feedback using a partnership

This activity involves the completion of a checklist that defines key features of a successful partnership.

It is designed to provide feedback on the current status of the partnership and suggest areas that need further support and work.

The checklist is organised into seven areas:

- 1. **Determining the need for the partnership.**
- 2. **Choosing partners.**
- 3. **Making sure partnerships work.**
- 4. **Planning collaborative action.**
- 5. **Implementing collaborative action.**
- 6. **Minimising the barriers to partnerships.**
- 7. **Reflecting on and continuing the partnership.**

You are asked to rate the success of your partnership in terms of each statement. Success is based on the level of addressing, implementing and embedding each of the issues. The scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

This scale is self-scoring. It could be useful to revisit the exercise after, say, 12 months to see whether there has been any change. Higher numbers show greater consistency with the concepts in this resource.

There are three ways to complete the checklist:

- The lead agency can fill in the checklist and present the results to a meeting of the partnership stakeholders. Canvassing the various partners' views at a meeting is a way of testing the accuracy of the lead agency's perceptions.
- Each partner can be given a copy to complete independently. They can compare and discuss the results at a meeting. This approach ensures the views of every partner are given equal weight.
- The checklist can be completed as a group activity. This approach will tend to emphasise consensus among members.

The checklist is a global measure that accepts there will be different perceptions. Consequently, there is some value in citing different examples that either confirm or test the global result. For example, most partners may be working well but one or two may be seen to be less cooperative. The 'outliers' need to be considered but they should not skew the dominant response. Similarly, a partnership may rate well against some of the key features and not others

What use is a checklist?

Checklists act as summaries of complex actions and interactions between various stakeholders. They point out the things to look for and consider. They are valuable because they synthesise the factors that contribute to a successful partnership and direct attention to the range of issues to be considered in assessing effectiveness. They can also guide future action as well as provide a focus for reflecting on the current state of affairs.

"Partners may have different understandings and expectations of what their involvement means. Mapping the partnership is a way of clarifying roles and levels of commitment."

The checklist

Rate your level of agreement with each of the statements below, with 1 indicating strong disagreement, 2 indicating disagreement, 3 indicating unsure, 4 indicating agreement and 5 indicating strong agreement. To subtotal your score for each section, add up the ranking for each question (for example: 2+3+1+5+2=13).

1. Determining the need for the partnership

Rate each 1 to 5

There is a perceived need for the partnership in terms of areas of common interest and complementary capacity.

There is a clear goal for the partnership.

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 partnership outweigh the perceived costs.

Add up your subtotal

2. Choosing partners

Rate each 1 to 5

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 partnership 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.

Add up your subtotal

3. Making sure partnerships work

Rate each 1 to 5

The managers in each organisation (or division) support the partnership.

Partners have the necessary skills for collaborative action.

There are strategies to enhance the skills of the partnership 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 partnership is as simple as possible.

Add up your subtotal

4. Planning collaborative action

Rate each 1 to 5

All partners are involved in planning and setting priorities for collaborative action.

Partners have the task of communicating and promoting the partnership in their own organisations.

Some staff have roles that cross the traditional boundaries that exist between agencies or divisions in the partnership.

The lines of communication, roles and expectations of partners are clear.

There is a participatory decision-making system that is accountable, responsive and inclusive.

Add up your subtotal

5. Implementing collaborative action

Rate each 1 to 5

Processes that are common across agencies have been standardised (e.g. referral protocols, service standards, data collection and reporting mechanisms).

There is an investment in the partnership of time, personnel, materials or facilities.

Collaborative action by staff and reciprocity between agencies is rewarded by management.

The action is adding value (rather than duplicating services) for the community, clients or agencies involved in the partnership.

There are regular opportunities for informal and voluntary contact between staff from the different agencies and other members of the partnership.

Add up your subtotal

6. Minimising the barriers to partnerships

Rate each 1 to 5

Differences in organisational priorities, goals and tasks have been addressed.

There is a core group of skilled and committed (in terms of the partnership) staff that has continued over the life of the partnership.

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 partnership.

Add up your subtotal

7. Reflecting on and continuing the partnership

Rate each 1 to 5

There are processes for recognising and celebrating collective achievements and/or individual contributions.

The partnership can demonstrate or document the outcomes of its collective work.

There is a clear need for and commitment to continuing the collaboration in the medium term.

There are resources available from either internal or external sources to continue the partnership.

There is a way of reviewing the range of partners and bringing in new members or removing some.

Add up your subtotal

Combine your subtotals from the above statements to reach your aggregate score

1. Determining the need for the partnership – subtotal

2. Choosing partners – subtotal

3. Making sure partnerships work – subtotal

4. Planning collaborative action – subtotal

5. Implementing collaborative action – subtotal

6. Minimising the barriers to partnerships – subtotal

7. Reflecting on and continuing the partnership – subtotal

Add your subtotals together to reach your total score

End table

Checklist score

35–84   The whole idea of a partnership should be rigorously questioned.

85–126   The partnership is moving in the right direction but it will need more attention if it is going to be really successful.

127–175 A partnership based on genuine collaboration has been established. The challenge is to maintain its impetus and build on the current success.

Credit:

VicHealth