



PARTNERSHIP GUIDELINES

**Prepared for APHA
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I. INTRODUCTION

The Alberta Public Health Association (APHA) is a provincial not-for-profit association that **strengthens the impact of those who promote and protect the health of the public by speaking out for health, advocating on issues that affect health, and facilitating educational and networking opportunities.** The following slogan guides the activities undertaken by the APHA: **“promoting and protecting the health of the public through advocacy, partnerships and education”.**

Health is defined as a holistic concept. The determinants of health include such factors as: income and social status; social support networks; education; employment and working conditions; physical environments; social environments; biology and genetic endowment; personal health practices and coping skills; healthy child development; health services; gender; and culture. Based upon this definition, strengthening the impact of those who promote and protect the health of the public requires a multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral approach. To fulfill its mandate, the APHA must therefore work in partnership with other agencies and organizations.

II. COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Collaboration and partnerships are terms that are frequently used synonymously. Although they are closely linked, they have distinct meanings.

Collaboration¹ is a strategy for building relationships and doing work (Winer & Ray, 1997). Gray (1989) and Winer & Ray (1997) make clear distinctions between collaboration, coordination and cooperation. Gray (1989) suggests that cooperation² and coordination³ “often occur as part of the process of collaboration” (p. 15). They are informal interactions that lay the foundation for the development of more formal relationships. Similarly, Winer and Ray (1997) suggest that all three of these concepts exist along a continuum of increasing intensity with cooperation at one end, coordination

¹ Barbara Gray (1989) defines collaboration as “a process in which those parties with a stake in the problem actively seek a mutually determined solution” (p. xviii). Collaboration may be motivated by a desire to advance a shared vision or a need to resolve conflict. The expected outcome of collaboration may be the exchange of information or the development of a joint agreement (Gray, 1996). Participating organizations form a new structure to address the mission. Such relationships involve detailed planning and communication as well as the pooling of resources.

² Winer and Ray (1997) describe cooperation as shorter-term informal relations that exist without clearly defined mission statements, structures or plans. The participating organizations retain authority and keep their resources separate.

³ Coordination describes more formal relationships that have a shared mission and more formal structural and planning arrangements. Participating organizations still retain authority but may make resources available to advance the mission (Winer & Ray (1997).

in the middle and collaboration representing the more intense end of the relationship scale.

Partnerships are a type of collaboration. Partnerships occur when the purpose of collaboration is to advance a shared vision of a need and the expected outcome is to develop a joint agreement to address the problem and bring the vision into reality. As a result, referent organizations (i.e., managing bodies such as committees)⁴ are usually created to address agreements (Scott-Taplin, 1993).

Some commonly identified characteristics of partnerships include:

- shared authority, responsibility and management;
- joint investment of resources (time, work, funding, material, expertise, information) and reputation;
- the development of a new structure;
- comprehensive planning;
- detailed communication strategies;
- the distribution of power - it may be unequal; and
- shared liability, risk-taking, accountability and rewards (Health Canada, 1996; Winer & Ray, 1997).

III. PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The partnership tools that guide the partnership activities of the APHA were developed from a study conducted in 1993 (Scott-Taplin, 1993). The purpose of that study was to generate substantive theory regarding the development of effective partnerships among community agencies working with vulnerable populations. Since that time, this framework has been used in several different settings and has demonstrated utility for guiding the development and evaluation of partnerships.

A. The Partnership Framework

The partnership framework (Table 1) is comprised of six categories: external factors, domain, partner characteristics, partnership characteristics, communication, and operations. Each of these categories is defined below.

1. External Factors

External factors are described as the external influences on the partnership, including the social context and the political and economic systems within which the partnership is based. All programs are situated within social contexts. Although external factors may not play a predominant role in a partnership, they must always be considered. External factors that may influence the partnership were distinguished by whether they exerted influence at the administrative level or at the service provision level. The informants

⁴ A referent organization is formed as a result of a collaborative effort. The functions of this organization include: regulation of relationships and activities; appreciation of emergent trends and issues; and infrastructure support (Gray, 1989; Trist, 1983).

identified organizations, individuals and communities external to the partnership as potential sources of external influence.

2. Domain

The domain is the sphere of interest at the partnership level. Partners may come to a partnership representing interests in several different domains. However, at the partnership level, these disparate interests are focused in an attempt to address one particular domain. If the existence of the domain is recognized and supported by all players (i.e., funders, the community, potential partners and program personnel), partnership initiatives are more likely to succeed.

3. Partner Characteristics

Partner characteristics are those factors that distinguish the partners. Each partner will bring distinctive characteristics to the partnership that will directly and indirectly influence its development. These characteristics include:

- ◆ the organizational structure of the partner agency;
- ◆ the resources that the partner and the partner representative are able to contribute to the partnership initiative;
- ◆ representation of the target group in the partner agency; and,
- ◆ the reputation of the partner, of the personnel working for the partner, and of the group(s) served by the partner agency.

The importance of formal representation of the target group in the partner agency was something that was discussed by all informants. The characteristics of this representation varied from partnership to partnership. For example, some agencies involved the target group at the Board/management committee level while other agencies sought such feedback through questionnaires or informal meetings.

4. Partnership Characteristics

Each partnership initiative is unique. This uniqueness is a function of the way in which a partnership is established and the individuals and organizations that participate in its development. The characteristics that distinguish a partnership include:

- ◆ the groundwork completed prior to the initiation of the partnership initiative;
- ◆ the organizational structure of the partnership;
- ◆ the resources that are available to the initiative;
- ◆ the representation of the target group within the partnership; and
- ◆ the reputation of the partnership.

Based upon the analysis of the data from this study it was identified that partnerships that were effective were those that developed partnership characteristics to break down professional territorial barriers. These characteristics included the implementation of communication strategies and professional development opportunities that encourage collaboration.

5. *Communication*

Communication affects all of the categories previously discussed. Recognition of formal and informal types of communication is vital to the success of a partnership. The type of communication that takes place between partners will directly or indirectly affect the partnership. Informants discussed the need for both formal and informal communication strategies. It is suggested that ongoing evaluation of communication strategies will facilitate the determination of strategies that are appropriate for the partnership at a given time.

6. *Operations*

Operations are the administrative and service provision activities performed on behalf of the partnership. The operations clearly influence the success of the partnership. The type of operations that are carried out in all areas that are associated with the partnership may directly or indirectly affect the external environment, the domain, partner characteristics partnership characteristics, and communication. Care must be exercised to ensure that the vision of the partnership will be advanced by the type of activities that are performed and the manner in which they are performed. The types of activities performed by the partnership are influenced by the time frame for completion, the available resources, and knowledge of similar programs.

B. *Partnership Configuration*

The configuration of categories, properties and dimensions must be unique to the specific requirements of the partnership. It is recommended that all six categories and their associated properties and dimensions be appraised and adapted to meet the specific needs of individual partnership initiatives.

Although properties and dimensions reinforce the distinctiveness of each of the categories, these categories must never be considered in isolation. Each of these categories interacts with each of the other categories. Changes in one area may directly, or indirectly, influence changes in all other categories. Just as the cogs within a toy must all work together to propel the toy, within this framework, all of the categories and their properties and dimensions must be considered and configured to advance the partnership toward a common vision.

The configuration will vary from partnership to partnership with some categories taking precedence in some partnerships and other categories taking precedence in other partnerships. Failure to assess each of the elements in the framework to determine its appropriateness for a specific partnership model may result in some essential elements being neglected (Figure 1), some non-essential elements being implemented (Figure 2), or some essential elements being implemented improperly (Figure 3). In any of these situations, the result may be that increased work will be required to ensure the success of the partnership or the partnership may fail to achieve the vision.

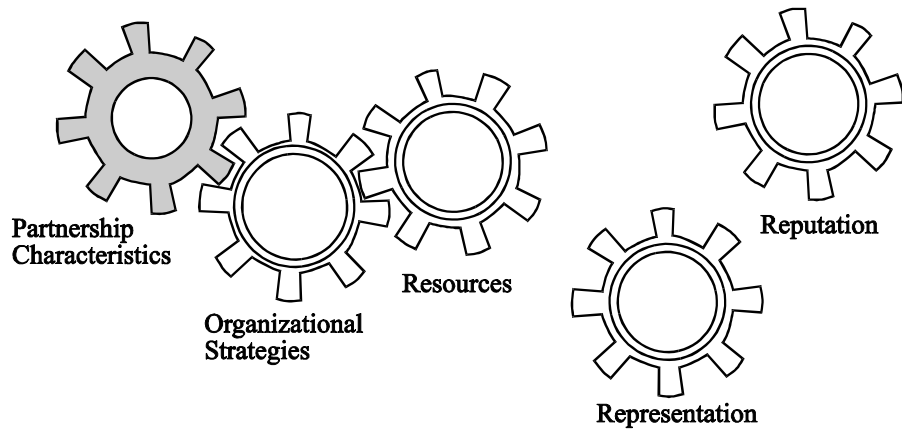


Figure 1. Failure to include essential elements in the partnership. In this example, the partnership has failed to address the issue of representation of the partners. As a result, the partnership is not as successful as it otherwise would have been.

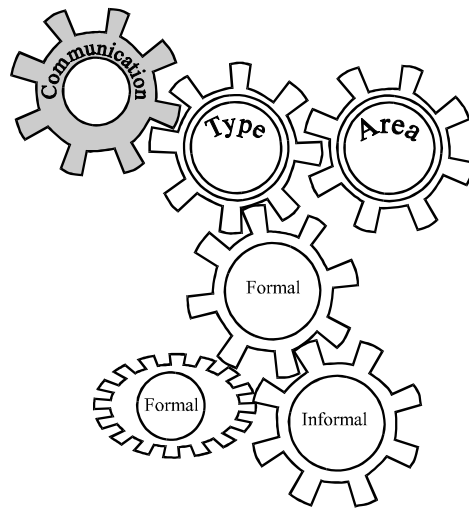


Figure 2. Inclusion of non-essential elements in the partnership. In this example, some unnecessary formal communication strategies have been implemented. As a result, effective communication is essentially blocked.

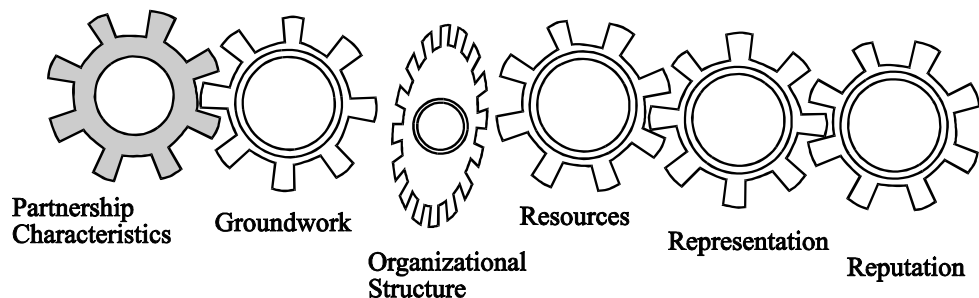
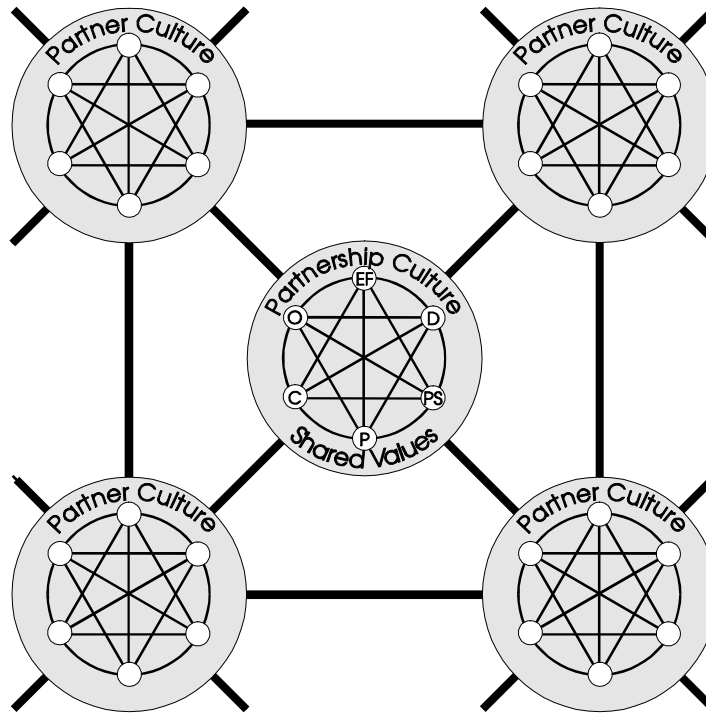


Figure 3. Improper configuration of elements in the partnership model. In this example, the organizational structure that has been selected does not meet the needs of all of the partners. As a result, more work is required to advance the vision of the partnership.

C. Partnership Organization

The model of partnership organization (Figure 4) extends the description of partnership configuration. This model portrays the categories of the partnership framework enmeshed in the partnership culture. All of the categories are displayed in a relationship of mutual dependency with one another. The linkages (direct and indirect) between each of the categories within the model will vary from partnership to partnership.

It is important to note that although the characteristics of the partners are part of the partnership culture, the organizational culture of individual partners may overlap with, or be distinct from, the partnership culture. The similarity between the partnership culture and the culture of the individual partners should be carefully considered when forming a partnership. If the partnership and partners' cultures are in conflict, decisions will have to be made about whether the partnership is appropriate for some partners or whether the inclusion of those partners is important enough to warrant extra resources being devoted to support their participation. For example, there may be some additional strategies required to make successful a partnership between a government organization that is based on hierarchical structures and a non-profit organization based on feminist principles of equity and consensus building. It is also important to recognize that partners may develop relationships with one another that are external to the partnership. Consideration should be given to how such external relationships may influence the partnership.



EF – External Factors	P – Partner Characteristics
D - Domain	C - Communication
PS – Partnership Characteristics	O - Operations

Figure 4. A Model of Partnership Organization

D. A Process Model of Partnership Development

It is one thing to recognize that specific elements in the partnership framework are essential or non-essential for the development of a partnership; it is quite another to determine when to implement each of these elements. The process model describes some phases of partnership development (Figure 5).

The development of a partnership is an **iterative** process. The elements of the process are arranged around a circle. However, after the partnership has been initiated, the order in which these activities occur will vary from one partnership initiative to the next. As the partnership evolves, some elements of the process may need to be revisited.

The process begins with the awareness of a need. It is important to discuss the formation of the partnership with potential partners early in the process. This informal group will formulate a vision for the collaborative initiative. When the vision has been formulated, this group will be able to:

- ◆ identify potential actions/operations that will advance the vision;
- ◆ identify external factors which may affect the partnership;
- ◆ identify essential partnership characteristics;
- ◆ identify the characteristics of other potential partners;
- ◆ contact the partners that are so identified; and
- ◆ identify communication strategies.

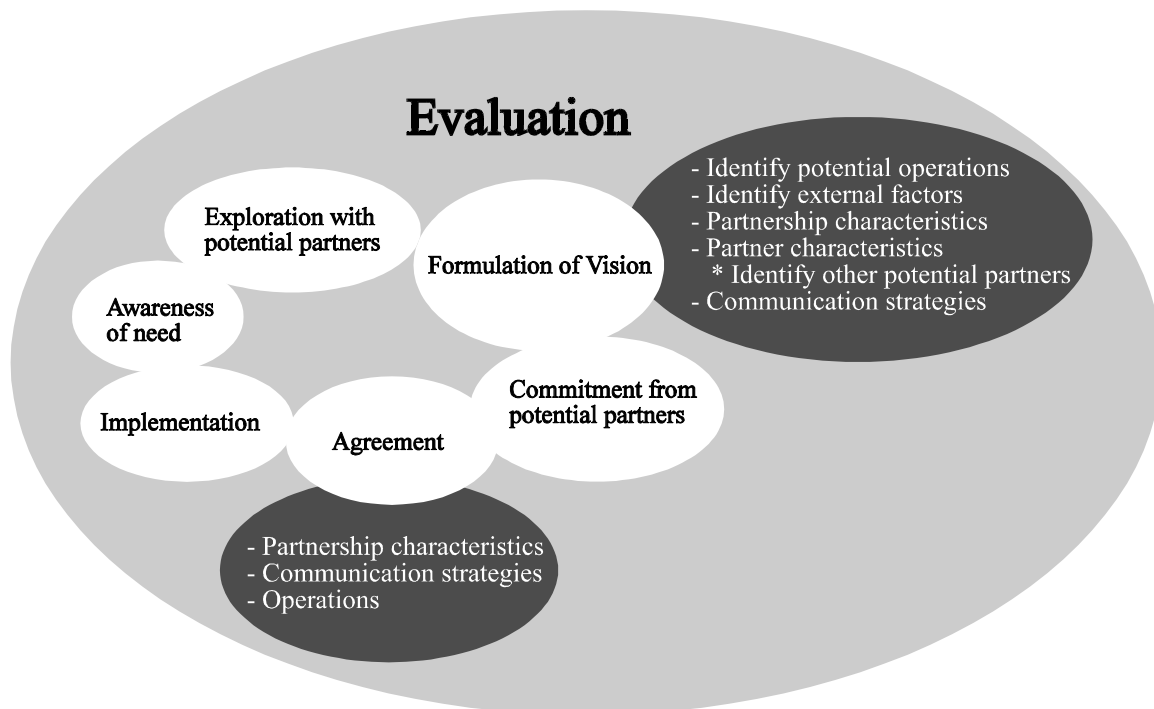


Figure 5. A Process Model for Partnership Development

The next stage of the process involves going to the identified partner agencies to discuss their potential commitment to the project. Before proceeding, it is recommended that potential partners achieve agreement on issues relating to partnership characteristics, communication strategies and operations. Once these factors have been established, the partnership initiative can be implemented. Evaluation procedures are an integral part of the entire development process.

IV. APPLICATION OF THE TOOLS – KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The complex interactions within and among categories implies that there is no one way to develop and structure a partnership initiative (Scott & Thurston, 1997). The proposed framework and models must only be used to guide such initiatives. This being said, the framework suggests some actions that may encourage the success of these ventures.

A. Groundwork and Evaluation

Prior to developing a relationship of the intensity and formality of a partnership, some coordinating activities are necessary. The completion of groundwork prior to the establishment of a partnership and the implementation of ongoing program evaluation may facilitate the identification of the elements of the framework that are required for a specific partnership. Issues relating to external factors, domain, partnership characteristics, partner characteristics, communication strategies and potential operations should be discussed early in the development of a partnership initiative.

Failure to complete these activities may result in some essential elements of the framework not being identified or being improperly implemented. When all elements of the partnership framework have been reviewed and appropriately implemented, the partnership is more likely to succeed.

An evaluative component should permeate every aspect of the partnership. An overall commitment to evaluation may ensure that the partnership is responsive to the external environment and that it meets the changing needs of the people that it serves.

B. Partner Identification

Partners may be identified based on their ability to contribute to the goals of the APHA. Before entering into partnership agreements, it will be important for the Board of the APHA to identify basic criteria to guide the identification of potential partners.

Each potential partner will seek specific benefits from participation in the partnership. These reasons for participation should be acknowledged through open discussion. If it is not possible for the partnership to meet these individual needs, partners should be given the opportunity to withdraw from the initiative.

It is particularly important that the people who are approached to act as partner representatives be committed to the issue that will be addressed by the partnership. It is essential to develop strategies to maintain a high level of commitment as experienced partner representatives leave and as new partner representatives join the partnership.

In the current economic climate there is increasing pressure on partnership initiatives to achieve the objectives that they identify. In this environment, it will be necessary that partner representatives possess the skills and knowledge required to advance the partnership toward the shared vision. Care should be taken to select partner representatives who will provide the different skills required for advancing the partnership.

An additional factor to consider in the identification of potential partners is the implications of differences between the organizational culture of the partnership and the organizational culture of potential partners;

C. Partnership Characteristics, Communication Strategies and Operations

It is not possible to over-emphasize the importance of clearly describing the reason for the partnership. It is essential to develop agreement on definitions regarding the vision, the goals and the objectives of the partnership. All of the partner representatives must be talking the same language when they come to the partnership table. Agreement on these and other partnership characteristics, communication strategies and partnership operations should be in place before a partnership is formally established. Some of the more successful partnerships have implemented a formal time for discussing partnership issues during each partnership meeting.

D. Guiding Principles

The results of research regarding the development of partnerships have emphasized the need for partners to agree on the basic guiding principles for the partnership. The principles that will guide APHA partnerships are the vision and values of health promotion. These principles are respect, trust, equity, collective responsibility, participation, and sustainability and are described in the Action Statement for Health Promotion in Canada (Canadian Public Health Association, 1996).

While specific principles that are adopted by a partnership will vary, the following general principles have been identified as being valuable for creating sustainable partnerships:

- membership is not assumed. Partners will agree to the mission, goals, objectives, activities and guiding principles that have been established for the partnership;
- all partners and partner representatives are recognized for their unique and essential contributions to the partnership;
- all partners agree to share the risks, responsibilities, and rewards associated with the partnership;
- all partners agree to the distribution of power within the partnership. Power is shared but may not be equally distributed among the partners;
- all partners recognize the need for the partnership to enhance the capacity of individual partners while working to achieve a common purpose;
- the structure of the partnership will remain flexible to accommodate changing needs;

- administration of partnership contracts will be assigned to members as appropriate;
 - all communication (formal and informal) on behalf of the partnership or relating to the partnership will embody the principles of health promotion; and
 - all activities performed on behalf of the partnership will embody the vision and values of health promotion.
- (Thurston & Scott, 1996; Himmelman, 1995; Labonte, 1993, Winer & Ray, 1997)

While the guidelines and principles described in this document will form the basis of APHA partnerships, specific guidelines and principles will be developed with potential partners and may vary from partnership to partnership.

PARTNERSHIPS			
CATEGORIES	PROPERTIES	DIMENSIONS	
EXTERNAL FACTORS	Administrative	Organizational	
	Service Provision	Individual	Community
DOMAIN	Recognition	Funders	Partners
	Support	Community	Personnel Vulnerable/Target Group
PARTNERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS	Groundwork	Research	Activities
	Organizational Structure	Administrative	Operational
	Resources	Funding Personnel Material	Space Time
	Representation	Areas	Characteristics
	Reputation	Positive	Negative
PARTNER CHARACTERISTICS	Organizational Structure	Administrative	Operational
	Resources	Commitment Knowledge Skills	Funding Time
	Representation	Areas	Characteristics
	Reputation	Partners Personnel Vulnerable/Target Group	
COMMUNICATION	Type	Formal	Informal
	Area	Service Recipient Personnel Partner	Partnership Community
OPERATIONS	Type	Administrative Service Provision	
	Area	Service Recipient Personnel Partner	Partnership Community

Table 1. Partnership Framework

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