Partnership Development

There are many different ways to define partnership. The common thread amongst these many definitions is “organizations/agencies coming together to work towards a shared goal or vision”. Partnerships involve building relationships between more than one individual, group or organization. Often, each partner has different objectives, activities, resources and expectations about working in partnership.¹

Community partnerships can be defined by the level of interaction between partnering individuals and organizations. The level or intensity of the partnership depends on its need, goal and purpose. You may be linking with your partners so that you understand what’s available in your community and can refer clients to them. You may be collaborating with partners, by partnering on an event or short-term initiatives. You may even be working to achieve change on a larger scale, such as joint planning or policy work.²

Partnerships tend to go through predictable developmental cycles, with some fairly common objectives, including: building a common understanding of an issue, creating a shared vision of “what could be”, engaging additional relevant stakeholders, and developing, implementing and monitoring activities. Understanding this cyclical framework can add clarity and purpose to your groups’ work. As partnerships form, choosing a suitable model of governance provides clarity, transparency and accountability.

There are many benefits to working in partnership; it can help us to deepen our understanding of issues, bridge gaps, share resources, and increase our reach. Working with community partners often allows us to accomplish more than we could working on our own. There are also common challenges, such as: clarifying a shared purpose, bridging organizational cultures, maintaining good communications and making time to reflect together. This selection of resources, websites and other materials will ‘get you started’ in addressing these and other challenges to developing partnerships.

HC Link’s Collaborative Partnership Development Webinar Series

The cyclical partnership framework mentioned above was the focus of this three-part webinar series in 2015. Each webinar addressed the importance and “work” of each phase, outlining common challenges, suggested resources, approaches and tools, as well as case studies with collaborative leaders and members from across Ontario. This blog post recounts the main messages of the series and webinar recordings and slides are available at the links below.

1. Genius of Partnerships: New relationships & diverse perspectives within a common vision
   Focussed on connecting with others, fostering a shared understanding of issues, and building a common vision. Practical frameworks and supporting tools were highlighted.

   Addressed how partnerships can work collaboratively for change, and featured practical tools and related resources to support local work.

3. Thinking Back, Moving Forward: Celebrate and evaluate...to renew
   Covered ways to evaluate partnership development, the importance of celebrating accomplishments and ideas for “taking stock” of your partnership development efforts so that it stays energized, relevant and focused.
Resources

1 **Partnership Development**  
   *HC Link, 2009 (revised 2015)*  
   This resource covers several concepts related to community partnerships - including various levels of partnerships, conditions for success - and explores measures that can be taken to maximize the efforts of your partnership.

2 **Governing for Partnership Success**  
   *HC Link, 2010 (revised 2015)*  
   This practical resource provides examples of common governance structures used by community organizations, and highlights key areas that partnerships should consider within their organizational framework.

**Models and Elements of Collaborative Governance**  
   *HC Link, 2011*  
   This resource supplements information found in “Governing for Partnership Success”, expands on governance theory for collaborative groups and profiles the structure and functioning of a sampling of governance models and frameworks.

**Terms of Reference Builder**  
   *HC Link, 2014*  
   An up-to-date, comprehensive Terms of Reference (ToR) provides groups an opportunity to manage expectations by determining the scope of the group’s work, along with the responsibility of each individual member. This Terms of Reference Builder will guide you through the process of developing ToR that are relevant for your group.

**Measuring Partnership Effectiveness Series**  
   *HC Link, 2011*  
   **Part 1 - Introduction** provides an overview of some of the many approaches to evaluating the functioning of partnerships as well as some principles that should guide decision-making early on in the process.  
   **Part 2 - Tools** describes a number of existing tools and resources that can help evaluate your partnership’s effectiveness so you can quickly identify which ones might suit your local needs.

2 **Community Partnerships Resource Guide**  
   *Quality Improvement & Innovation Partnerships, 2009 (amended 2010)*  
   This 23-page toolkit, developed for QIIP by Health Nexus, describes several levels of partnerships and provides a six-step process for partnership development. It also contains an extensive list of links and resources for further exploration.

**Creating Welcoming Places Workbook**  
   *Community Activators, 2004*  
   This workbook was designed to help any group assess its current welcoming capacity and make plans for improvement. When members feel welcome, and their individual skills are being utilized and appreciated, groups can sustain their membership and achieve goals.
Working in Partnership: Recipes for Success  Wild Rose Foundation, 2001
This resource from Alberta, provides a comprehensive framework for partnership development, as well as useful tools to assess an organization’s readiness to partner, identifying potential partners, creating partnership agreements, as well as implementing and evaluating partnership initiatives.

The Stakeholder Wheel  Public Health Ontario (formerly The Health Communication Unit)
This framework allows groups to document how its stakeholders represent different sectors, as well as their overall degree of involvement. It helps groups to identify gaps in representation, determine the specific roles for each stakeholder in the planning process, and allows groups to engage potential partners in meaningful ways.

Community Tool Box  Work Group for Community Health & Development, Univ. of Kansas
A free, online resource for those working to build healthier communities and bring about social change. It boasts 46 chapters and 16 toolkits that provide practical, step-by-step guidance in community-building and partnership development skills. Two of the Community Tool Box’s toolkits are particularly relevant to partnership development: Creating and Maintaining Partnerships and Increasing Participation and Membership.

Collaboration & Partnerships for Healthy Communities  Joan Roberts & Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition
This online course is designed to help practitioners engage in and support the work of collaboration more effectively. It contains easy-to-follow modules, and offers a variety of exercises, quizzes, case studies and resources.

For additional resources on this topic...visit the Partnership Development page on HC Link’s website.

HC Link can support your partnership efforts!
HC Link supports community groups, organizations and partnerships working on partnership and network development through:

- Resources and webinar recordings on the topic
- Consulting services to meet your specific needs
- Tailored workshops on many aspects of Partnership Development

Contact us online or at 1-855-848-1575 to start the conversation!

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HC Link works with community groups, organizations, and partnerships to build healthy, vibrant communities across Ontario. We offer consulting services, learning and networking events, and resources in both English and French. Our services are funded by the Government of Ontario and are provided free of charge where possible.

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