Capacity Project Toolkit

Partnership Building: Practical Tools to Help You Create, Strengthen, Assess and Manage Your Partnership or Alliance More Productively

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Introduction

The complex and wide ranging challenges related to human resources for health in developing countries necessitate that stakeholders work together through inclusive alliances and networks. The World Health Report 2006, *Working Together for Health,* advocates the formation of cooperative structures to pool limited expertise and fiscal resources and to promote mutual learning.

In theory, establishing and operating such cooperative structures and partnerships appears simple. There is history to look to, best practices to draw upon and a body of literature to read and from which to learn. However, as we all know, partnerships are not created in theory. They are forged in reality with all the complexity, challenge and potential extraordinary accomplishment that human collaboration brings.

Therefore, this kit aims to offer those wanting to create a partnership, as well as those already working in one, some easily accessible tools to support that process. Using the wisdom and experience of those in the field as well as what the current literature offers, this toolkit offers some helpful, succinct guidance on identifying potential alliance partners; facilitating a dynamic and helpful kick-off meeting; creating an appropriate memorandum of understanding; and more.

It is our hope that these tools will serve as a foundation upon which to build your own wisdom and experience in partnering and collaboration as well as to assist in the achievement of your partnership's goals. The kit is relevant to those involved in large, formal partnerships as well those involved in smaller, less formal collaborative arrangements. The tools and guidance are suggestive only—designed to be adapted in a way that best meets the unique characteristics of your partnership arrangement.

In preparing this toolkit, we recognize the terms affiliation, alliance and partnership are often used interchangeably. In this toolkit we have tended toward the term partnership to describe a collaborative venture.

Tools and Techniques for Building and Maintaining Effective Partnerships

We have grouped the individual tools comprising the kit to correspond with the different stages in the overall "life" of a partnership. These stages are:

1. Exploration
2. Formation
3. Operation & Strengthening

The individual tools within each of these stages are as follows:

1. Exploration

Tool #1 Assessing Partnership Readiness

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1. Exploration

The tools in this section are most useful when an organization or group is considering establishing or joining a partnership.

Tool #1 Assessing Partnership Readiness

Organizations should engage in rigorous critical and strategic thinking before agreeing to join a collaborative venture. The human and financial resources of an organization must be carefully focused to achieve the purpose and goals of that organization. Whether or not to join an alliance is often a difficult decision to make. The following questions can help focus your thinking.

Please use the following point scale.

1 = Definitely not able/willing to do this
2 = Possibly, but would seriously stretch our capacities
3 = We could do this sufficiently
4 = Definitely able and willing to do this quite well

When finished, total up your points. The scores reflect the degree of confidence in your readiness. Lower scores (ten to 20) indicate a real concern, perhaps the partnership is not right for you now; middle scores (20 to 30) say you have some concerns, but with special attention devoted to what concerns you most, you think you should proceed; and the higher scores (30 to 40) indicate that this is a very good partnering opportunity for you.

______ 1. Is it clear how joining this partnership will facilitate the achievement of our strategic goal(s)?

______ 2. Does my organization have the resources—financial, people and technology—needed to contribute our portion of the partnership being considered?

______ 3. Can we honestly say these resources can be accessed when required? (Meaning they have not already been committed to several efforts and are seriously overloaded.)

______ 4. Are we willing and able to work in collaboration and mutuality with the other organizations that comprise this partnership?

_______ 5. Have we worked with any of these other organizations before, and was that a positive experience?

_______ 6. Are we willing and able to share control and participate in shared decision making with these particular organizations?

_______ 7. Are we willing and able to be flexible about how things get done and not be insistent that it be done our way, and will this meet our expectations of quality work?

_______ 8. Have we in the past and are we now able to work with our less resourced partners with mutual respect, avoiding any sense of domination and superiority? Would these organizations give us a high rating in this regard?

_______ 9. Is there support for this project within our organization, and would this partnership become a valuable part of our organization's portfolio?

_______ 10. Can we commit to devote the leadership and management time required of us in this partnership effort?

_______ 11. Have we had sufficient experience in working in partnerships so that we can say that our "partnering" competencies are good enough to carry out our performance commitments?

Tool #2 Identifying Promising Partners

Clearly, the partnerships that are the most effective are those that have brought together the best set of partner organizations and people. For that reason, it is important to identify what types of partner organizations would best complement one another to address the challenges at hand. Check where your potential candidates have the necessary criteria for partnering below. If you can't check the criteria below, what data do you still need that could be helpful in your decision-making process?

Criteria for Identification of Possible Partners or Alliance Members	***Candidate A***	***Candidate B***	***Candidate C***
1. Partner Motivation The motivation for this partner to join us is clear and positive; they speak to a commonly understood purpose and outcome to be achieved through collaboration of all partnership members.			
2. Partner Expertise This partnership member's expertise does not significantly overlap with other members' areas of proficiency, thereby ensuring complementarity rather than competition between partners.			
3. Willingness to Collaborate This partner congruently articulates the willingness to collaborate and share control while working toward the mutual benefit of all partners. They have demonstrated the behaviors of true collaboration—active listening, open and transparent sharing of information and engaging in genuine respectful dialogue in meetings leading to partnering.			
4. Partnering Culture This partnership member brings an organizational culture and support system that harmonizes with other partnership members' home cultures. Demonstrating a culture that promotes harmony, patience, collaborative practices and flexible decision-making and transparency will be important.			
Also, this prospective partnership member or partner has the technical support to enable partnering—IT systems and capabilities as well as necessary software and hardware to team virtually will be important.			
5. Background Check This partner has a good record; after reading annual reports, looking at their website, going on a fact finding mission and/or checking the public record, you can establish they have the resources to invest that they have			

claimed, and have historically shown themselves to be fiscally responsible.			
6. Reference Check This partnership member is in good standing with the rest of the community in regards to standards and practices of integrity and collaboration. You have contacted past partners and queried the candidate's ability to partner as well as verify self-ascribed strengths and weaknesses.			
7. Senior Management Support This partner has the support of its senior management, and participating in this new partnership will receive the proper attention required. Senior leaders have publicly committed to the time required to handle the complex issues of partnering, including participation in key teleconferences, annual review meetings, stakeholder gatherings and figural public relations opportunities.			
Total for Each Candidate			

Candidate A:

- ❑ Areas of Strength:
- ❑ Areas of Concern:
- ❑ Areas for More Data Gathering:

Candidate B:

- ❑ Areas of Strength:
- ❑ Areas of Concern:
- ❑ Areas for More Data Gathering:

Candidate C:

- ❑ Areas of Strength:
- ❑ Areas of Concern:
- ❑ Areas for More Data Gathering:

2. Formation

The set of tools in this section is most useful once the decision has been made to form or join a partnership and the focus has shifted toward establishing the partnership.

Tool #3 Delivering an Effective Partnership Start-up Meeting

Current literature tells us that *how* you start an alliance is critically important. Therefore, having a dynamic, positive and productive start-up meeting of all alliance partners is important. What follows is an illustrative template of how a first meeting of alliance partners could be facilitated over three days.

Start-up Meeting Assumptions:

- All alliance partners have committed the necessary resources to ensure their designated representatives can attend the meeting personally, thereby ensuring face-to-face contact with new alliance colleagues.
- Senior leaders of all alliance partners have in some way contributed to the launch of this meeting, giving their explicit endorsement to the alliance and its mission.
- The meeting will be facilitated, if possible, by an external facilitator, thereby ensuring the neutrality of interchanges between new alliance partners. As trust grows between partners, facilitation may evolve from within; however, initially, there is wisdom in having an external person with no vested interest in the process assist the alliance in its formation.
- The meeting lasts AT LEAST three days with all partners attending for the duration; remember the goal here is not only productive work outcomes but also establishing new and positive relationships between partners. Relationships and trust come with time and effort. The importance of this point cannot be underscored enough.
- Optimally, this start-up meeting would be delivered at an "off-site" location that allowed for new alliance partners to have social as well as professional time together; this means convening away from the office, e-mail, voice mail and the ties of everyday work and personal life.
- This is the first formal gathering of alliance partners dedicated to work on this alliance for the duration of the project.

Facilitator Guide:

Facilitator Note: *When using an external facilitator, it is important that he/she gather data on the alliance creation to this point by interviewing as many alliance partners and staff as possible. Likewise, the facilitator can use this data to help co-create and guide a relevant agenda for the meeting that will attend to all partners' expectations and hoped for outcomes.*

Possible Goals/Outcomes That Could Emerge from Consultation with Alliance Partners:

- Achieve an agreed upon vision and strategic direction for the alliance, including four key results for which partners will be held accountable.

- ❑ Articulate agreed upon principles of alliance membership.
- ❑ Clarify and agree upon (at a general level) alliance partners' roles and responsibilities.
- ❑ Define an agreed upon role for the Alliance Leadership Group (or a similar governance structure serving as a kind of steering committee).
- ❑ Create an agreed upon work plan for the next six months.
- ❑ Flag next steps and agree upon who will be responsible for addressing those with accompanying deadlines.

Possible Day 1 Agenda

8:30 Open with social time—coffee, breakfast and conversation. Encourage alliance participants to sit with new colleagues they don't know well.

8:45 Introduce the program. Include:

- ❑ Welcoming remarks by senior leadership of alliance partners or other appropriate stakeholders (ministries, donors and such).
- ❑ Goals and agenda for the meeting.
- ❑ Established norms and ground rules for how the group will work together to achieve meeting goals over the three days.

9:30 Present the key aspects of the grant proposal that was accepted by the donor. Following the presentation, ask the group to discuss and react, and invite any lingering questions.

10:15 Take a 15-minute break with coffee and snacks.

10:30 Reconvene—determine the four key result areas for which the partnership wants to be held accountable. (***Facilitator Note:*** Divide the participants into small groups to recommend four to six key result areas; have them put their recommendations on a flipchart.)

11:30 Report the small group recommendations to the larger group. (***Facilitator Note:*** Engage the entire group to reach agreement on the four key results—look for where groups agree initially and test for consensus.)

1:00 Lunch

2:00 Create working groups for each of the four key result areas. Try to ensure a partner mix in the enrollment of each group.

Facilitator Note: Explicitly articulate the working group's task.

- ❑ Define your key result area—what it does and does not entail.
- ❑ Develop four to six strategic objectives for your area.
- ❑ Put your work on flipcharts and select someone to report out to the larger group.
- ❑ Manage a 15-minute break for yourselves sometime before reporting out to the larger group.

4:00 Working groups report out to the larger group with facilitated discussion following each presentation.

6:00 Close

6:30 Party time! Have a reception with food, drink and music—have fun!

Possible Day 2 Agenda

8:30 Get started. (***Facilitator Note***: Check in with participants to see how they are feeling about yesterday. Initiate group discussion about what worked well yesterday and what needs to be changed today.)

9:00 Complete working group reports that were not finished yesterday.

10:00 Take a 15-minute break with coffee and snacks between reports.

10:15 Complete the last working group's report out.

11:15 Summarize key result area strategic objectives.

Facilitator Note: Ask the group:

- ❑ Does this reflect the direction we believe is best for this partnership project? (Work to achieve agreement in responses.)
- ❑ What are next steps in regards to these objectives, and who will be responsible for those steps? (Flipchart responses to both.)

12:15 Lunch

1:15 Create guiding principles for this alliance.

Facilitator Note: Explicitly articulate this task:

- ❑ Ask each person to reflect on his/her experiences, preferences, dreams, etc., and write down the five guiding principles they have for this alliance.
- ❑ Next, ask each person to select three they feel the strongest about and write each one on a card.
- ❑ Have the entire group post these cards on the wall.
- ❑ Ask the group to read the cards and begin to "cluster" cards that express the same principle. Check to see if there are obvious clusters of agreement.
- ❑ Once "clusters" have been identified, ask for two volunteers to word each cluster into a "guiding principle statement." These people will report back to the whole group tomorrow morning for total group agreement.

2:45 Take a 15-minute break with coffee and snacks.

3:00 Focus as a group to clarify and agree on the general roles of each partner.

Facilitator Note: Participants from each organization meet and develop a collective response to these three questions:

- ❑ Why our organization feels the work in this alliance is important—how it fits into the broader strategy of our entire organization.
- ❑ What we want to get from this alliance project.
- ❑ What we see as our primary areas of contribution to the project.
- ❑ What we see as secondary areas of contribution to the project.

3:30 Report out—each report out is followed by discussion and questions of clarification by other alliance partners.

5:00 Close

7:00 Celebration dinner!

Possible Day 3 Agenda

8:30 Get started. (***Facilitator Note:*** Check in with how participants are feeling about yesterday. Initiate group discussion about what worked well yesterday and what needs to be changed today.)

9:00 Reach overall agreement on areas of member contribution.

Facilitator Note: Where the group identified or felt significant overlap between or among members can be highlighted for an additional meeting scheduled for another time to work out specific agreements. Follow-up meetings can be open to anyone from the total group, but only members closely involved in the overlap are expected to attend.

10:00 Take a 15-minute break for coffee and snacks.

10:15 Check for a common understanding of the role of the Alliance Leadership Group. Presentation on the recommendations that have been made to date (senior leaders from each member organization will have to have met previously to draft these recommendations).

Discuss as a group to reach agreement.

11:15 Build a work plan for the next six months.

Facilitator Note: Form small groups to do big picture planning for each key result area. Give small groups this task:

- ❑ What are the critical steps that must be taken over the next six months to make certain that work in this key result area can move forward?
- ❑ What are critical problems or obstacles to watch out for and mitigate?

12:30 Lunch

1:30 Continue with small group work.

2:30 Report out and discuss.

4:00 Form Key Result Area Task Forces for each key result area. Clarify roles and responsibilities within the task force. Set dates for task force meetings.

5:30 Review agreements made during the last three days. Highlight any outstanding areas for further work and next steps. Identify who will be responsible for these next steps and set deadlines.

Facilitator Note: Ask the group:

- ❑ Reminding ourselves of what it will take to make this alliance truly effective, what do we feel good about in our work together? What remains to be done?

6:00 Close

Tool #4 Creating an Alliance Memorandum of Understanding

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) serves to capture the spirit of an alliance and usually focuses on ways to accomplish the common mission and outcomes of alliance partners. It is the commitment to share in the rewards of achievement and to persist in the midst of challenge. MOUs give guidance to alliance partners in good times and bad, and serve the higher purpose of reminding everyone that the alliance was founded on trust, collaboration and cooperation in the service of a greater good.

MOUs can be as informal as an explicit conversation and a handshake or as prescribed as a legal and binding contract between partners. Whatever form your MOU takes, vet your MOU against the following criteria to ensure your alliance has included all it needs to weather any storm and rejoice in any victory.

I. Governance of the Alliance	**Yes**	**No**
Does your MOU have: ❑ Membership to the alliance clearly defined?		
❑ Roles within the alliance plainly articulated, especially in regards to overlapping technical expertise?		
❑ Responsibilities of alliance members explicitly outlined?		
❑ Organizational structure clearly defined?		
❑ Decision making processes defined?		
II. Management of the Alliance	**Yes**	**No**
Does your MOU include: ❑ How the senior leadership (individual or team) will be selected?		
❑ Job description and expectations for this leadership in regards to the alliance?		
❑ Clear responsibilities for leadership to deliver and be held accountable for by alliance partners?		
III. Determining Mission and Vision	**Yes**	**No**
Does your MOU address: ❑ How the alliance's long-term vision will be determined and by whom?		
❑ How a collaborative strategy will be created to realize that long-term vision and by whom?		
❑ How long-term decisions having impact on the entire alliance will be decided and by whom?		
IV. Principles of the Alliance	**Yes**	**No**
Does your MOU speak to: ❑ Developing an agreed upon code of ethics for the alliance?		
❑ What the consequences of violating that code of ethics could mean for alliance partners?		
V. Work Allocation for Alliance Partners	**Yes**	**No**
Does your MOU reflect: ❑ An agreed upon process for apportioning work among partners to ensure equity, transparency and maximum project impact?		
VI. Alliance Communication	**Yes**	**No**
Does your MOU ensure: ❑ That key alliance meetings are scheduled regularly with clear expectations of attendance, participation, intention and such?		

❑ The consequences of not attending or supporting the attendance of key alliance meetings?		
❑ That communication expectations and strategies with donors and stakeholders and among alliance partner organizations are clearly articulated?		
VII. Monitoring and Evaluation Alliance Partnership Performance	**Yes**	**No**
Does your MOU indicate: ❑ The process for monitoring and evaluating member performance?		
❑ What the rewards will be for member excellence?		
❑ What the consequences will be for poor performance?		
❑ Who will be doing the monitoring?		
❑ What the procedure will be for addressing any performance issues that arise?		
VIII. Handling Authorship, Intellectual Property Rights and Ownership	**Yes**	**No**
Does your MOU state clearly: ❑ The agreed upon protocol for managing intellectual property rights, authorship and ownership for alliance members' home organizations and/or the alliance overall?		
❑ The consequences of violating the agreed upon intellectual property rights or ownership understanding by any one alliance member?		
IX. Handling of Alliance Finances	**Yes**	**No**
Does your MOU deal with: ❑ How alliance partners will shoulder the fiduciary responsibility of keeping transparent finances and report to donors and stakeholders on the judicious use of funds?		
❑ The consequences of alliance partners abusing the finances accorded to them?		
X. Handling Intra-Alliance Conflict	**Yes**	**No**
Does your MOU highlight: ❑ An agreed upon protocol for productively and effectively addressing intra-alliance conflicts between staff and partners?		
❑ Using the guiding ethics and principles of this alliance to reinforce that protocol?		
❑ The consequences of not adhering to the protocol repeatedly?		

Tool #5 Crafting an Effective Communication Strategy for Your Alliance

For an alliance to keep donors, stakeholders, partner organizations and others vested in alliance success fully aware of progress, learning and accomplishments, a concerted strategy for communication must be created and deployed. Ideally, a communication strategy must be flexible enough to target many groups with different needs; to move multi-directionally; to incorporate a range of information in a range of formats; and to be transmitted through a variety of information modalities. Therefore, it is a good idea for the alliance to engage in some candid stakeholder assessment and consider how communication might be shaped to meet the needs and specifics of each stakeholder group.

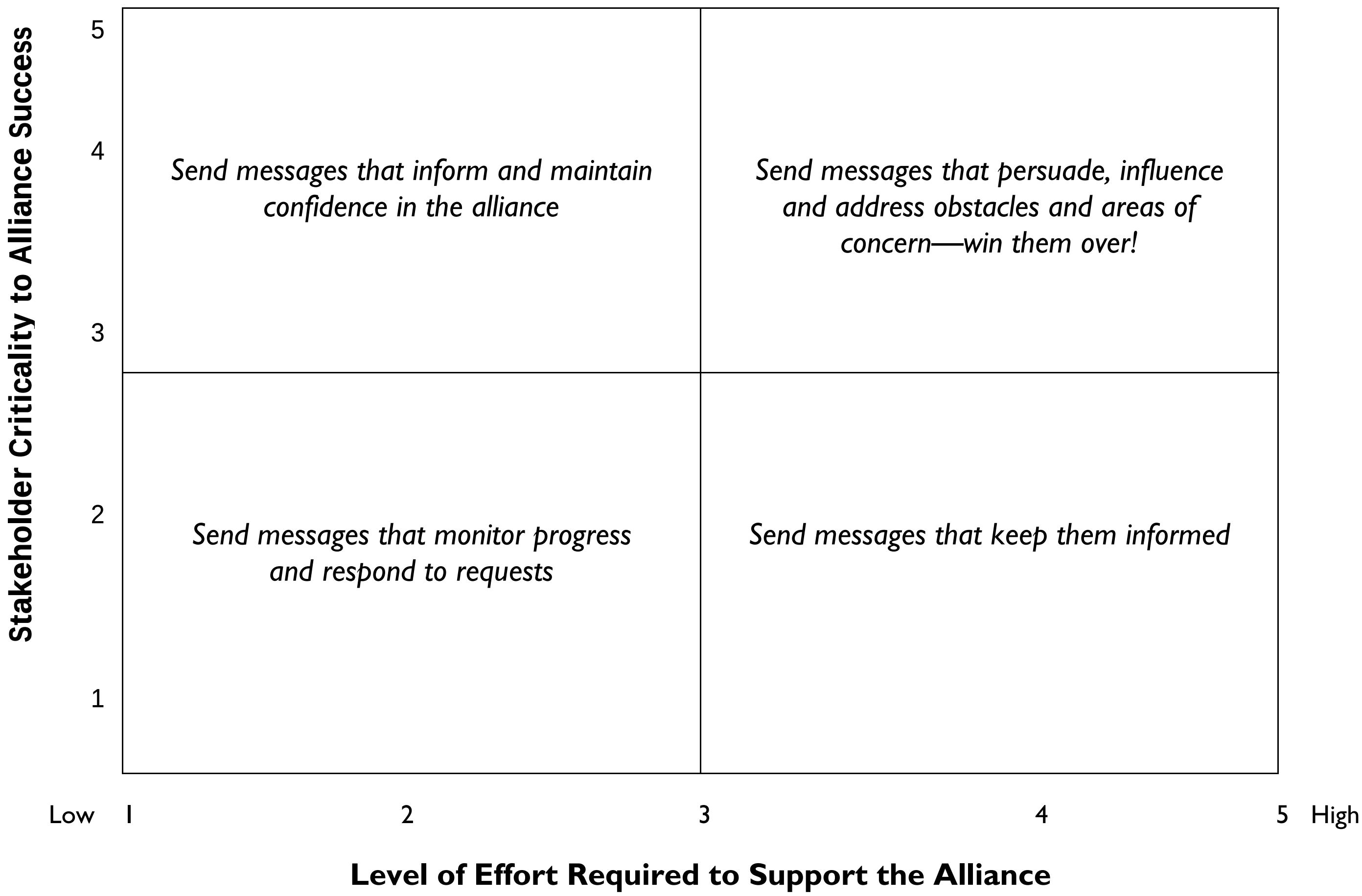
Stakeholder Assessment Template

Stakeholder or group	**Description**	**Criticality to Alliance success (1-5)**	**How the Alliance outcome affects this group**	**Level of effort required from this stakeholder to support the Alliance (1-5)**	**Concerns/issues…what this group needs**	**Degree of commitment (1-5)**

1 = Low; 5 = High

After assessing the range of stakeholders your alliance needs to enroll, take your findings and apply them to the following framework. Using the template, decide for each stakeholder if they are critically important for the success of the alliance but require a high level of effort to support your work; if they are critically important with a low level of effort; if they are neither critical nor require effort; or if they are not critical but demand a high level of effort. By delineating your stakeholders in this way, you can begin to prioritize and tailor the communication you want to establish with each to ensure impact and appropriate resource allocation in your communication strategy.

Stakeholder Communication Matrix: Kinds of Messages to Send



Reflect on the range of stakeholders that you have now arrayed in the framework above. How will you tailor your communication to fit the needs of each? Optimally, the focus of your communication should be aimed at your stakeholders on top, those whose participation is critical to the alliance's success. They are your linchpins, and if you are unable to get or keep them enrolled in the alliance's outcomes, the alliance itself could be imperiled. The stakeholders on the bottom require less focused communication but consistent communication, nonetheless. Remember, the goal of the alliance's communication strategy should be to provide the right communication at the right time to the right people consistently.

The following communication schedule provides a useful format to organize the key elements of your communication strategy. These include communication activity, schedule dates, message type and objective, media and materials, intended audience(s) and responsibility.

Stakeholder Communication Schedule

Activity	Schedule Date	Objectives/Message	Media (Materials)	Audience	Responsibility

3. Operation & Strengthening

The tools in this section are intended for those already operating as part of a partnership arrangement and seeking guidance in how to assess and strengthen the partnership's operation.

Tool #6 Facilitating and Assessing Effective Alliance Meetings

Meetings are the primary means for cross-alliance information sharing, problem solving and overall communication. When convening, the following checklist should be helpful in ensuring the efficacy and productivity of your meetings.

Checklist for Convening and Delivering an Effective Alliance Meeting

Prior to the meeting, have you:

- ❑ Constructed an agenda with optimal alliance partner input?
- ❑ Ensured that the appropriate people are invited?
- ❑ Circulated the agenda prior to the meeting so participants can prepare, if necessary?
- ❑ Tested any technology needed if some alliance members will be participating through conference call or videoconference? Likewise, have you forwarded virtual or telephonic participants any handouts or supporting documents you might distribute during the meeting so that they can easily refer to them even though they are not physically present?
- ❑ Reserved a meeting place that is conducive to maximum participation?
- ❑ Designated a facilitator for the meeting, especially if the meeting topic is potentially contentious?
- ❑ Assigned someone to be the note taker?

At the actual meeting, have you:

- ❑ Started the meeting on time?
- ❑ Discussed and gotten final agreement on meeting purpose, desired outcomes, length of meeting and agenda?
- ❑ Referred to the minutes of the previous meeting for amendment and agreement before moving on?
- ❑ Used the agenda to guide and run the meeting?
- ❑ Monitored time and run the meeting intentionally against time agreements?
- ❑ Helped everyone to contribute and keep the meeting participative but focused—especially ensuring participants by phone and videoconference are not forgotten?
- ❑ Paraphrased participants' contributions strategically to ensure collective clarity and understanding?
- ❑ Facilitated alliance members in moving between creative work as needed and analysis and decision making when appropriate?
- ❑ Tracked agreements and decisions as they are reached, possibly using a flipchart to support this?

- ❑ Summarized and checked for accuracy the important agreements reached during the meeting?

After the meeting, have you:

- ❑ Distributed the meeting minutes in a timely way that encourages correction and feedback?
- ❑ Done a periodic assessment to see if there is anything more alliance members would suggest to improve the productivity and efficiency of alliance meetings?

Some possible alliance meeting assessment questions might include:

Using the following scale:

1. *Not effective*
2. *Somewhat effective*
3. *Moderately effective*
4. *Very effective*
5. *Highly effective*

How effective are we as an alliance at:

______1. Ensuring the right people attend our meetings?

______2. Communicating clearly the purpose and specific meeting outcomes to meeting participants?

______3. Circulating a comprehensive agenda prior to convening the meeting?

______4. Ensuring the inclusion of alliance members who participate virtually, telephonically or by videoconference?

______5. Using the agenda to guide our meetings?

______6. Starting and ending on time?

______7. Being clear about the intention of the meeting (e.g., information sharing, brainstorming, problem solving, decision making)?

______8. Involving everyone appropriately during the meeting?

______9. Tracking agreements and decisions during the meeting?

______10. Avoiding letting dominant voices prevail?

______11. Facilitating alliance members in both creative activities and focused analysis and decision making?

______12. Summarizing decisions and agreements at the end of the meeting?

______13. Assigning responsibility for action items at the end of the meeting?

______14. Creating meetings that people see as energetic, productive and fun?

______15. Distributing timely meeting minutes that are an accurate reflection of what transpired in the meeting?

______16. Occasionally seeking feedback on how to improve alliance meetings?

What is the most useful aspect of how we currently meet?

What one piece of constructive advice would you offer on how to improve our meeting practice?

Tool #7 Assessing the Health of Your Alliance: How Are You Doing?

Successful alliances or partnerships spring from diligent attention to the process of collaboration. The health of an alliance is no different from the health of any other dynamic organism; it is only through preventative maintenance and regular checkups that overall well-being and productivity can be sustained. Likewise, periodic assessment provides the mechanism for diagnosing any ills that may be lurking and addressing them in a timely fashion. Therefore, it is wise to engage all alliance partners in regularly scheduled alliance assessments to maintain a clean bill of partnership health. Invite alliance partners to respond to the following assessment to create a holistic picture of alliance performance.

Alliance Partner Organization: ______________________________

Name (optional): ____

Alliance Role (optional): __________________________________

Please give your responses to the following regarding the current health of our alliance:

Elements of Alliance Effectiveness **Compelling Vision**	**Yes**	**No**	**n/a**
• Alliance members can articulate the vision of this alliance in clear and compelling language.			
• Alliance membership understands exactly how each alliance member organization creates value for the overall outcome and contributes to achieving that outcome.			
• I understand the role of each alliance member.			
• The vision is used as a reference point in prioritization of activities and resources and helps keep the alliance on track.			

If you responded "no" to any of the above, please offer at least one constructive suggestion as to how the alliance might respond to this more effectively:

Strong & Shared Leadership	**Yes**	**No**	**n/a**
• Members share leadership where appropriate, not overly relying on any one person for all of the alliance's leadership functions.			
• Leadership is facilitative rather than directive, involving alliance members in decisions, problem solving and planning.			
• Alliance members are willing and supportive followers, contributing to planning and problem solving and assisting leadership in a range of ways.			
• Members use both successes and mistakes as learning opportunities to increase skills in analysis and future decision making.			

If you responded "no" to any of the above, please offer at least one constructive suggestion as to how the alliance might respond to this more effectively:

Shared Problem Definition	Yes	No	n/a
• All alliance partners participate in the definition of the problem being addressed.			
• Members can paraphrase others' concerns and/or interests in the problem being addressed in a supportive and non-defensive manner.			
• Alliance members have and use a common approach for addressing problems.			
• Partnership meetings are held with enough frequency required to ensure full communication, adequate problem solving and efficient progress toward project goals.			
• Partnership meetings are designed and delivered in a clear and effective manner.			

If you responded "no" to any of the above, please offer at least one constructive suggestion as to how the alliance might respond to this more effectively:

Interdependency and Complementarity	Yes	No	n/a
• The alliance uses and respects the diverse skills, expertise and backgrounds of all its partners.			
• Alliance members believe that each member's contribution is essential to the total outcome of the alliance's goal.			
• Alliance members and their parent organizations have the skills necessary to meet the alliance's goals.			

If you responded "no" to any of the above, please offer at least one constructive suggestion as to how the alliance might respond to this more effectively:

Mutual Accountability	Yes	No	n/a
• Alliance members share a sense of responsibility for results, not just the results for which they or their parent organization are responsible.			
• Alliance members have agreed upon norms and practices for holding one another accountable and use them effectively.			
• Alliance members willingly assist others who are experiencing problems or needing assistance to meet deadlines or deliverables.			
• Alliance members give timely, specific and effective feedback to one another—both positive and constructive—when appropriate.			

If you responded "no" to any of the above, please offer at least one constructive suggestion as to how the alliance might respond to this more effectively:

Attention to Process	Yes	No	n/a
• Alliance members respond to feedback and critique without getting defensive.			
• Alliance members express ideas openly and honestly without irritating others.			
• Alliance members ensure that all voices are heard before decisions are made.			
• The alliance uses the norms set for itself and checks behavior against those norms periodically.			

If you responded "no" to any of the above, please offer at least one constructive suggestion as to how the alliance might respond to this more effectively:

Communication	Yes	No	n/a
• Members keep other partners appropriately informed about work, contacts, problems, accomplishments and overall progress.			
• Alliance members facilitate discussion among colleagues emphasizing open, inclusive and respectful dialogue for knowledge sharing and feedback.			
• Alliance members deal openly and constructively with problems and conflicts, not allowing these to impede alliance progress.			
• Alliance members keep parent organizations, donors and stakeholders appropriately apprised of alliance activities, challenges and progress.			

If you responded "no" to any of the above, please offer at least one constructive suggestion as to how the alliance might respond to this more effectively:

Decision-Making Power and Equity	Yes	No	n/a
• The decision-making process is clear and transparent to all alliance colleagues.			
• Alliance members can provide input and have equal opportunity to influence decisions and strategic direction.			
• Resource and work allocation within the alliance is transparent and aligned with agreed upon principles.			
• Decisions are recorded and shared with all those affected.			

If you responded "no" to any of the above, please offer at least one constructive suggestion as to how the alliance might respond to this more effectively:

Trust	Yes	No	n/a
• Alliance members share and act according to agreed upon values regarding the expected output of the alliance and the processes for carrying out work.			
• Alliance members deliver on promises and commitments.			
• Alliance members are direct about organizational interests and expectations, keeping "hidden agendas" to a minimum.			
• Alliance members are willing to compromise and make organizational sacrifices of self-interest so that the needs of other partners are met.			

If you responded "no" to any of the above, please offer at least one constructive suggestion as to how the alliance might respond to this more effectively:

Credit	Yes	No	n/a
• The alliance has explicit agreements on how to handle visibility, authorship and intellectual property of individual members and the alliance.			
• Alliance members recognize contributions made by individuals and their organizations.			
• Alliance members share responsibility to ensure the parent organizations demonstrate commitment to the broader alliance goals.			
• Alliance members are mindful of acknowledging others for their contributions.			

If you responded "no" to any of the above, please offer at least one constructive suggestion as to how the alliance might respond to this more effectively:

Tool #8 Alliance Member Competencies—Leaders and Staff

While alliance staff will be bringing the appropriate technical skill mix to achieving the alliance's goals, there is an array of competencies that both leadership and staff must possess that is directly related to alliance success. Beyond technical expertise, the abilities and capacities related to partnering, collaboration, cooperation and interpersonal fluency are fundamental. Therefore, having a set of "alliance-skills" competencies can be useful benchmarks when creating job-specific roles.

In assessing alliance leadership, the following competency inventory could be of use.

Note: It is often not necessary to use all inventory items when assessing member competencies. A useful approach can be to select those skills most related to an area where a problem or gap is suspected.

Alliance Leader's Name: ______________________________

Rating Scale: 1 = Never; 2 = Rarely; 3 = Sometimes; 4 = Usually; 5 = Always

Current Proficiency
She/He

1. Is a driving force in the vision of this alliance.	
2. Articulates the vision of what this alliance can effectively do or be both within and outside the alliance.	
3. Sustains a broad perspective that encompasses both inside and outside the alliance.	
4. Persuades others on the concept of the alliance, both inside and outside the organization.	
5. Has the credibility to attract funding.	
6. Has the authority to commit resources and key personnel to the alliance from own parent organization.	
7. Is figural and active within the alliance, not peripheral.	
8. Creates an atmosphere that fosters high energy and personal compatibility.	
9. Provides opportunities to strengthen and evolve the alliance and its members.	
10. Models the value of alliance membership for alliance colleagues to see.	
11. Rallies the right people at the right time.	
12. Creates mechanisms for support and understanding within the alliance.	
13. Maintains a vigilant focus on the ongoing business of the alliance.	
14. Broadcasts alliance successes and achievements.	
15. Is "hands on" and tactical.	
16. Displays competence in own technical area.	
17. Makes a significant emotional investment in contributing to the success of the alliance.	
18. Relies on a network of contacts to expedite and promote alliance business.	
19. Knows who to ask for help and when to ask.	
20. Accesses needed resources quickly and efficiently through others.	
21. Creates connections between internal networks of alliance parent organizations.	
22. Puts in face-to-face time to cultivate trust within the alliance.	

23. Engages in and encourages informal activities.	
24. Sees interpersonal activities as key and as worth committing resources.	
25. Encourages open, honest, straightforward and culturally appropriate communication among all parties.	
26. Facilitates transparent and effective reviews of the "state of the alliance."	
27. Conducts all interactions with diplomacy, tact and objectivity.	
28. Creates bridges between diverse parties with different interests.	
29. Resolves conflicts effectively and productively.	
30. Exhibits sensitivity to the needs of all parties.	
31. Manages own emotions appropriately.	
32. Shoulders responsibility for sustaining the alliance.	
33. Ensures that the alliance follows its prescribed path.	
34. Maintains relationships critical to alliance success.	
35. Maintains alliance partnership momentum.	
36. Facilitates decision making in a way that is transparent and timely and involves the right people for input.	
37. Solicits feedback on own performance and offers effective and helpful feedback to alliance colleagues—both positive and constructive.	
38. Models mutual accountability.	
39. Maintains a positive view of the alliance and alliance partners, even at the most challenging of times.	

Likewise, in assessing alliance staff, the following competency inventory could be of use.

Alliance Staff Member's Name: ______________________________

Rating Scale: 1 = Never; 2 = Rarely; 3 = Sometimes; 4 = Usually; 5 = Always

Current Proficiency
She/He

1. Understands and believes in the vision of this alliance.	
2. Understands how the alliance works operationally.	
3. Understands the value alliance partners bring to the alliance and draws upon their skills sets respectfully and appropriately.	
4. Shares knowledge in a consistent and helpful way.	
5. Has credibility and demonstrated competence in own technical area.	
6. Keeps parent organization informed of alliance activities, challenges and success appropriately.	
7. Demonstrates the ability to collaborate and is willing to compromise for the greater good of the alliance.	
8. Explicitly credits colleagues for their work and contributions.	
9. Stewards and uses alliance resources and funding responsibly.	
10. Listens actively to a range of viewpoints in the service of creating a "win/win" for all alliance members.	
11. Participates actively in the decision-making process speaking only for self and/or parent organization.	
12. Demonstrates support for alliance decisions taken, even when not agreeing personally or organizationally.	
13. Is dependable and reliable and honors commitments and deadlines.	
14. Demonstrates positive willingness to abide by operational demands of the alliance in regards to reporting, accounting and participating in a range of alliance functions.	
15. Is willing to be open about challenges and problems and works actively to solve them in a productive and positive way.	
16. Creates and maintains a network of professional contacts that enable the success of the alliance.	
17. Solicits feedback on own performance and offers effective and timely feedback to colleagues—both positive and constructive.	
18. Manages own emotions appropriately.	
19. Uses own creativity and values creativity in others.	
20. Models mutual accountability—holds self and colleagues accountable.	
21. Models willingness to mentor and coach new alliance colleagues from all partner organizations over the life span of the alliance.	
22. Sees interpersonal activities as key and as a worthy commitment of time.	
23. Speaks positively, both within and outside of the alliance and all its partners.	
24. Encourages open, honest, straightforward and culturally appropriate communication among all parties.	
25. Conducts all interactions with diplomacy, tact and objectivity.	

Tool #9 Diagnosing Alliance Challenges and Finding Effective Remedies

Using this diagnostic inventory, check the challenges facing your alliance. Once you have identified the issue(s), check which strategy or strategies might be most effective in addressing that challenge productively.

Symptoms of Alliance Challenges	Possible Remedies
❑ Our partner(s) are unreliable.	Given that, it might be helpful for us to: ❑ Take the initiative for consultation to raise the issue and address the situation in a thoughtful and timely manner. ❑ Demonstrate support and commitment to problem solving collaboratively. ❑ Create a window of opportunity for the unreliable partner to demonstrate a change in engagement and for us to be patient. ❑ Ensure the partner understands exactly what is expected from the Partnership Agreement. ❑ Consult the MOU for further clarity and guidance, especially if the problem persists.
❑ Human factors contribute to making our partnership challenging.	Given that, it might be helpful to: ❑ Invest in cultivating relationship building up front. ❑ Agree upon and train alliance partners and staff in productive communication practices and skills. ❑ Identify and leverage champions as allies within partner organizations to help manage. ❑ Ensure seconded and partnership staff's roles are aligned with areas of expertise and do not have overlap with one another. ❑ Confront personal conflicts immediately and model good conflict resolution practices—be consistent, compassionate and fair. ❑ Revisit the MOU if need be for guidance on any further process that needs to be followed.
❑ Our partners are inflexible and/or insensitive.	Given that, it might be helpful to: ❑ Gather information appropriately on larger conflicts that are cultural or organizational in nature. ❑ Retain an external consultant to craft and facilitate an appropriate intervention. ❑ Communicate clearly to the partner in question what the issues exactly are and how they are having a negative impact on the partnership.

❑ Seconded staff members are not properly balancing responsibilities to their home organization and to the partnership.	❑ Speak to the staff members involved immediately. Share the partnership's concern and listen to their perspective. Clearly articulate how the lack of balance is adversely affecting the partnership. ❑ Revisit secondment agreements and see if they are appropriate for the current context. If the host organization needs to renegotiate the terms of that staff member, involve them appropriately. ❑ Make certain all new secondments are fully apprised of partnership agreements about secondment protocol and expectations of work balance.
❑ One partner wants to leave the alliance.	❑ Try to fully understand the reasons why this partner wants to leave the alliance before putting the wheels in motion to separate. The data could be important for the alliance to consider in working with present and future partners. ❑ Facilitate collaborative support to help this process. ❑ Revisit the MOU for guidance on how to do this. ❑ Do not make threats or act out of an unproductive emotional state. ❑ Verify all has been done properly to ensure the leaving partner has met requirements and fulfilled obligations.
❑ A partner is either passive or dominant.	❑ If a partner is passive, investigate why this is so and try to facilitate re-engaging them in the partnership. ❑ If a passive partner refuses to engage, revisit the MOU for guidance on sanctioning or possibly expelling them from the partnership. ❑ If a partner is dominating, approach them sensitively and privately. Inquire which partners the dominant organization deems a peer, if any. ❑ Approach a sympathetic partner to create a collaborative approach for managing the dominant behavior diplomatically. ❑ Put the discussion of leadership and power equity on the partnership's agenda for ongoing thought and affirmation. ❑ Lead by example demonstrating the capacity to encourage all voices and share air time.
❑ An intrusive and negative donor is having unhelpful impact on the work environment.	❑ Try to fully understand the donor's needs. Ask what drivers are moving the donor to intrusive behavior. ❑ Devote time to cultivating and building strong donor relationships. ❑ Ensure consistent and clear channels of communication with the donors.

	❑ Engage in collaborative problem solving, which includes fully listening to their ideas and solutions. ❑ Inform the donor about partnership progress, especially when addressing their specific concerns. ❑ Diplomatically offer feedback on how donor engagement is having adverse impact on the partnership's progress. ❑ Give recognition and credit to the donor. ❑ Set boundaries on how much and how often you will respond to the donor. ❑ Pick your battles strategically and learn to let go of the rest.
❑ Some stakeholders are unrepresented and/or underrepresented.	❑ Clarify stakeholders' representation within the partnership and ensure they have authority to take binding decisions on behalf of their organization. The more stakeholders can fully participate in the partnership progress, the more likely they are to be represented. ❑ Be vigilant in ensuring the right stakeholders are present at important convening of partners and partnership meetings. ❑ Notice when stakeholders are unrepresented and/or underrepresented and seek them out to discover why. Try to facilitate agreement in ensuring their collaboration with the partnership.

Tool #10 Building Consensus

Collaborative ventures require organizations and individuals to work together to set goals and plan strategy. The ability to reach agreement and build consensus is essential. Consensus building is a process that:

- Results in true agreement about a plan, approach or steps to be taken
- Actively engages people in the process
- Results in people saying "my view has been accurately heard" and "I will support the decision even though it may not be my first preference."

Building consensus can be surprisingly difficult. The following are tips for leading groups in reaching consensus.

Considerations before the Group Meets

Building consensus is particularly useful when other people's active commitment is necessary to implement a decision or plan, when people have strong differences about an issue or when leadership needs a core of support for an approach or position they want to advocate. Usually this consensus is explored in discussions, either face-to-face meetings or teleconferences. Normally, these discussions end in mutually agreed upon decisions or choices. Before a meeting for this purpose, it is important to think through the following points:

1. **Be sure the right people are invited and are able to attend the meeting.** When preparing for a meeting where building consensus is important, a key question to ask is "who should be involved in this discussion?" One way of answering is to examine the impact the decision(s) will have on others and to include in discussions individuals who represent those affected by the decision, those implementing the decision and those whose support is necessary for implementation.

2. **Ensure that meeting participants are prepared to achieve the purpose of the meeting.** Everyone coming to the meeting should have a clear idea why this group is coming together and understand what you are trying to accomplish. This does not mean that the exact solutions or agreements are determined in advance, but it does mean that the person leading the discussion and other meeting participants need to be clear about the issues the group is facing and the outcomes that are desired. Group members may need to prepare by thinking through the issues and preparing their own alternatives or suggestions based on available information.

Building Consensus during the Meeting

Follow a plan for how the discussion will be organized. Typically discussions that truly involve people give them an opportunity to share their views and build commitment to a particular approach include these steps:

1. **Be clear about "what it is that we are trying to get done."** When working toward consensus, the first requirement is to keep the common purpose clearly in front of the group. Begin the meeting by stating or reaffirming the purpose of the meeting—what the issues are and why consensus is important. Give people a chance to ask questions to clarify their understanding of the purpose of the meeting.

2. **Ask for ideas about how the issue or problem could be addressed.** Use open ended questions to get ideas out. Make certain that group members are truly listening to one another's ideas. In some situations, people may have alternative proposals prepared before the meeting. Sometimes a single proposal will be the focus of discussion, but quite often ideas and thoughts building on earlier ideas come out quickly and spontaneously. It is very important to keep track of these different proposals. Use a flipchart or white board. Pause to summarize the ideas that have been put forth from time to time.

3. **Provide plenty of opportunities to clarify all ideas submitted.** After there are a number of approaches in front of the group, give the group an opportunity to ask and clarify questions about each proposal before debating preferences. The discussion leader may want to summarize each of the proposals before continuing the analysis.

4. **Identify and discuss strengths and concerns of the various proposals.** The leader may want to have the group discuss the pros and cons of each of the major ideas set forth. If there are too many ideas to discuss each one in this way, ask the group to identify those ideas that have the most merit. Then discuss each of those. The meeting leader will want to summarize points made before transitioning to the next idea.

   The leader may want to help the group combine parts of proposals and/or develop new proposals. This can be the most creative part of the discussion. The leader can use the following questions to guide this part of the discussion: "Given our concerns, what combination of ideas will best achieve the outcome we're looking for?" "Are there changes in any of the proposals that will address your concerns?"

5. **Test for agreement/work to resolve disagreements.** As the discussion proceeds, the leader should look for places to test for agreement. The following techniques can guide the discussion in this direction:

   - Summarize what you see as the "evolving" decision. "Here is the decision I hear us moving toward. Correct me if I've misstated it or left something out." Ask the group members if they all agree with this decision. Look around to see if every person has nodded or said yes.

   - When reaching consensus is getting a little tougher, take actions to help people move their position enough to achieve a decision they can live with.

"Do you agree that this is the best solution we can develop collectively?" Or "Based on this discussion and our need to take action, can you agree to this as a practical solution—perhaps one that is not ideal and not exactly what you want, but nonetheless achievable?" Or "Remembering that we all have to keep our common purposes in mind, do you agree that this is the best action we can jointly take?"

6. **When necessary, work to resolve disagreements.** There will be times when the meeting leader will need to work to resolve disagreements. Work to resolve disagreements when they happen openly and positively. Out of disagreement often will emerge creative solutions and agreements that people will carry out with energy. However, this cannot happen if disagreements are pushed under the table, or if they get out of hand and dominate the discussion unproductively. Here are some tips for facilitating disagreements.

   - Summarize major points of disagreement on the issue. Check to see if you have described these differences accurately. Go around the room and ask each person to state what decision they would recommend if it were up to them alone. If most people agree on one point, ask those who did not agree, "What would it take to change your mind?"

   - Another approach is to ask people to consider the main reason that's keeping them from agreeing. Allow some discussion and then test for consensus again.

   - At a certain point, you may decide to have the group vote. You could simply go with the majority or you can table the issue and agree not to decide. As meeting leader, it is a judgment call on when to push for consensus as opposed to going with a simple and quick vote. This judgment call should be based on: l) the importance of the issue; 2) the degree to which each person's or each organization's support is really needed for success; and 3) whether a decision has to be made about this issue during this meeting.

     When making this kind of judgment, you are trying to strike a balance between pushing participants to make a decision by voting, which doesn't ensure everyone's commitment to the action, and taking too much time to reach consensus, which risks developing a sense of wasted time, heightened disagreement and failure to achieve results.

7. **Make sure agreements are summarized.** When agreement is reached, the meeting leader should acknowledge it, summarize key points, identify actions, record the results and move on. In many cases it is important that this agreement is written and distributed after the conclusion of the meeting.

Resources

This toolkit has drawn upon the work of a variety of resources for inspiration and information, including:

- Cohen D. *The heart of change field guide: tools and tactics for leading change in your organization*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2005.

- Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH). Creating and sustaining collaborative alliances: a practical guide for PATH staff. Seattle, WA: Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH), 2003.

- Gormley W, Spink L. Selecting partners: practical considerations for forming partnerships. The Tips and Tools Series: Collaborative Alliances. Arlington, VA: The Organizational Change Program for the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and Training Resources Group, Inc. (TRG), 2000.

- Tennyson R. The partnering toolbook. The Partnering Initiative. London, England: The Partnering Initiative; 2003. Available at: http://thepartneringinitiative.org/mainpages/rb/pt/actual.php

The Capacity Project is an innovative global initiative funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The Capacity Project applies proven and promising approaches to improve the quality and use of priority health care services in developing countries by:

- Improving workforce planning and leadership
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PATH A catalyst for global health

IMA Interchurch Medical Assistance, Inc.

LATH Liverpool Associates in Tropical Health

TRG

MSH Management Sciences for Health — *a nonprofit organization strengthening health programs worldwide*

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