

Guide to Evaluating and Sustaining Community Partnerships

Proudly produced by
The Centre for Community Child Health
at The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne

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About this resource

The Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) designed this Guide to help Community Partnership Groups monitor the effectiveness of their collaborative efforts. It forms part of Phase 4 of the Platforms Service Redevelopment Framework, which is devoted to evaluation and monitoring processes.

This Guide is divided into two main parts:

Part 1: Sustaining a community partnership

Part 2: Evaluating a community partnership

An overview of the process for evaluating and sustaining a community partnership is outlined in seven steps. These steps are based on the assumption that there is a Community Partnership Group working collaboratively to improve outcomes for young children and their families.

Sustaining a community partnership

Many community partnerships start well, but have difficulty sustaining their collaborative efforts. This is particularly challenging when government funding that initially supported the partnership is reduced or ceases altogether. This Guide describes:

- the barriers and enablers to sustainable partnerships
- what actions can be taken to build sustainability
- how to monitor the sustainability of a partnership.

Evaluating a community partnership

While it is essential that Community Partnership Groups undertake an evaluation of their collaborative early childhood initiatives, it is equally important that an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Community Partnership Group itself is undertaken. Such groups have the potential to work effectively to plan, organise and implement an initiative, however an effective partnership does not necessarily form automatically, particularly when the group includes people from different professional backgrounds and organisations. As a result, many partnerships do not reach their full potential.

This Guide describes how a Community Partnership Group can:

- assess how well the group works together, and build upon the positive attributes
- identify those aspects of the partnership that are not working well so that something can be done to rectify this
- improve the group so that it is able to achieve the planning, organisation and implementation of a community initiative.

Background

This Guide provides a Community Partnership Group with a step-by-step process for evaluating how well the partnership is working and addressing the barriers to the sustainability of the partnership.

The development of this Guide has been achieved with support from the Australian Government, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) as part of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (SFCS) 2004–2009.

This Guide is one of a suite of resources that have been developed and distributed by the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) to support communities in the planning, organisation and implementation of a successful community-based initiative to improve the outcomes for children and their families. The following resources make up this suite of resources referred to as the Platforms Service Redevelopment Framework.

For further details about the *Platforms Service Redevelopment Framework* and the resources available within this framework, refer to the section titled Introduction to Platforms and accompanying resources.

How it was developed

The content selected for this resource has been strongly influenced by:

- the learnings and practical resources from large and smaller-scale initiatives such as Sure Start, Good Beginnings, Head Start, Best Start, Communities for Children, Department of Victorian Communities.
- the work of the Centre for Community Child Health in:
 - translating the evidence around early childhood development and community capacity building
 - working with communities in planning, delivering and evaluating early childhood initiatives
 - providing training and professional development to community workers and service providers.

Structure of the resource

- Sustaining a community partnership
- Evaluating a community partnership
- The seven-step process for evaluating and sustaining community partnership
- Further resources
- References

Note: This resource was developed between 2006 and 2008 and published in 2009. The websites and related links to relevant documents were correct at the time of publication.

Sustaining a Community Partnership

Sustaining a community partnership introduces the concept of sustainability, explaining why it is important and what barriers and enablers of sustainability exist in a community partnership.

What is sustainability?

According to Rogers (2006), sustainability usually refers to sustained benefits after the funding period ends. However, there are many different types of possible sustainability, and it is important to be clear about the types of sustainability that are appropriate and feasible in each instance.

Rogers and Williams (2008) have identified other forms of sustainability on the basis of evidence from published research and the experiences of Communities for Children projects funded under the Australian Government's Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004–2009. Their review focused on achieving sustainable change for families and young children. Sustainability, in this context, refers to the likelihood of achieving benefits from a time-limited intervention (project, program or policy) that are sustained after the intervention (project, program or policy) has formally ended.

It is clear from this review that sustained benefit does not always involve continuing project activities. Although it is sometimes important for these activities to continue, through securing alternative funding, or through their incorporation into the activities of an ongoing organisation, other types of sustainability can be just as important.

- Sustained capacity of families – including skills and knowledge about parenting and about local services.
- Sustained capacity of organisations – including processes to improve accessibility and coordination, as well as the skills and knowledge of staff about effective practice with families.
- Sustained idea or service model – including general approaches to working with families and specific programs.

As Rogers and Williams point out, these different types of sustainability are not ends in themselves, but different means of achieving the real end or aim, that is, improved outcomes for young children and their families.

In the case of a Community Partnership Group, sustainability refers to *the ongoing capacity of the group to continue to collaborate effectively in planning and delivering integrated*

services to young children and their families. This is the form of sustainability that is the focus of this Guide.

As we have seen, such collaboration is a means to an end rather than an end in itself. The ultimate aim of a community partnership is to improve outcomes for young children and their families, and the underlying assumption is that one of the ways in which this can be achieved is through integrating services more effectively.

Why is sustainability important for a Community Partnership Group?

Sustainability is an important issue for a Community Partnership Group for a number of reasons. Perhaps the most important is that improving outcomes for young children and families is a complex and challenging task that will take sustained effort over many years to achieve. As part of that effort, a Community Partnership Group needs to be able to remain committed, active and effective over a number of years.

CCCH's experience in working with a Community Partnership Group is that many make a good start but have difficulty sustaining their collaborative efforts. This is particularly challenging when government funding that initially supported the partnership is reduced or ceases altogether. However, it is also part of the natural life cycle of groups, so can occur even when funding is not an issue. An understanding of the typical life cycle of a partnership helps in understanding what action is needed to ensure the sustainability of a partnership.

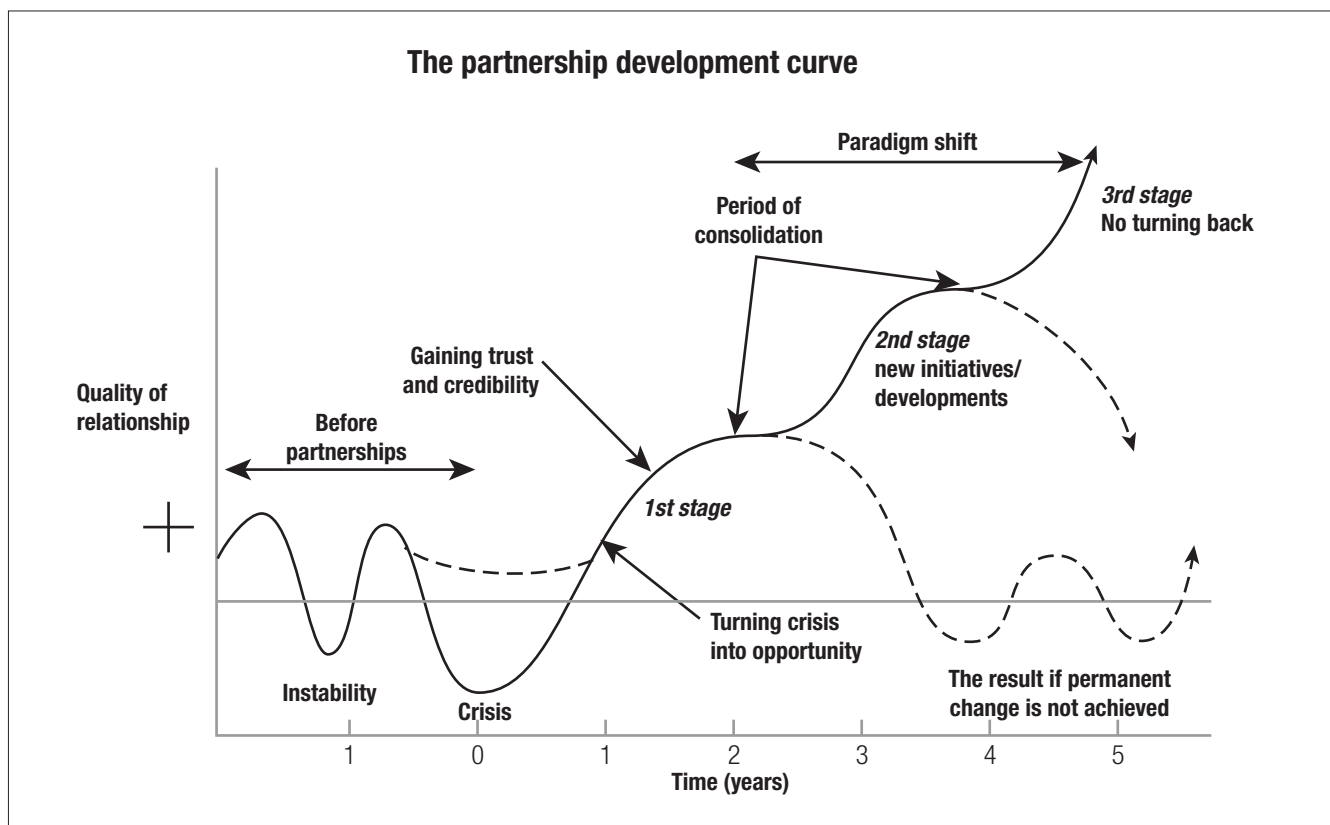
Over time, collaborative partnerships evolve through a number of definable stages. One account of this process (Clark et al., 2006) identified four major stages.

- The first stage is **formation**. Factors that stimulate coalition formation by communities include a shared view that coordination of efforts will improve a situation. Collective recognition of a mutual need is another stimulus to coalition formation. Scarce resources can lead to the creation of coalitions, as can the failure of existing efforts to address a problem of common concern. External forces can also cause the establishment of coalitions, such as legislative or administrative mandates or the availability of funding for forming such entities.

Sustaining a Community Partnership

- The second stage of coalition development is **implementation** of activities designed to enable the coalition to reach its goals. This is characterised by the formulation of ways in which the stakeholders will work together. It can include creation of formalised rules, roles and operating procedures. In this stage, the emergence of leadership is thought to be essential for movement into the next stage of development.
- The third stage of coalition development is **maintenance**, meaning the ability of the collective to continue until the accomplishment of its goals. The major feature of maintenance may well be that the stakeholders find sufficient benefit in their participation to offset the costs. It is reasonable to assume that many, if not most, community coalition members represent a constituency or organisation, and benefits to participation must be evident to both the individual and the entity that person represents. As coalition members work to maintain their organisation and meet their goals, relationships are likely to reform and evolve as new members come on board and others depart. Strong coalitions appear to comprise members who may initially come to the table simply as stakeholders, but over time become partners in change.
- The final stage in coalition development is **attainment of goals**, including sustainability of the organisation and/or its impact. Measuring goal attainment across complex communities is not an easy matter, so it is no surprise that this is the stage for which there is the least amount of empirical data available.

It is rare for partnerships to progress smoothly through this process, and not uncommon for some collaborative initiatives to break up before reaching the final stage. As Lendrum (2003) notes, partnerships and alliances are dynamic living entities whose rate of progress and direction can be changed by a host of internal and external factors. He depicts the development of partnerships as an undulating ascending line with periodic plateaux that represent points at which the partnerships may begin to fall away or may instead be strengthened. True change in reality does not occur until this kind of transformation has happened two or three times.



The partnership development curve table shows what might happen to a partnership over a five-year time span. The first phase involves a period in which the partners build up credibility and trust in one another, and the quality of the relationship steadily rises. Typically, the partnership reaches a plateau after a couple of years, and unless a renewed effort is made to introduce new working arrangements, the relationship will begin to fall back to the previous low levels. The second phase therefore involves new commitments and initiatives, but this too is likely to plateau after another year or so. Again, the risk at this point is that the partnership will begin to unravel unless a further commitment is made involving even closer working arrangements. By then, the changes are becoming so entrenched that they constitute a paradigm shift in working practices – working in partnership has become the standard way of operating, instead of an additional task.

There are several key points to note from this example. First, it takes a significant period of time to consolidate major changes in working practices. Second, over this time, periodic efforts to renew the commitment to partnership and introduce further partnership initiatives are needed. Third, each time this occurs, the partnership shifts to a new level of collaboration.

Thus, collaborative partnerships do not remain static but evolve in the form or level of collaboration they achieve. The various forms of collaboration and partnership fall along a continuum from coexistence to integration, as shown in the following table (*from Guide to Integrated Service Delivery*).

Coexistence	Services operate independently, and have no formal or informal links.
Cooperation	Services operate independently, but meet to network and share information.
Coordination	Services operate independently, but coordinate to provide multi-agency services to families with multiple needs.
Collaboration	Services operate independently, but collaborate to provide a multi-disciplinary / multi-agency service.
Integration	Services combine to form a single entity, providing integrated interdisciplinary services.

The evolution of collaborative partnerships is from initial coexistence to eventual integration of services. As described by Claiborne and Lawson (2005), each phase in the progression is increasingly more complex and challenging. Prior to collaboration, stakeholders remain separate, maintaining minimal risk and expenditures. Their activities entail identifying goals, establishing initial roles, conferring with each other and experts, and engaging in consensus building activities that lead to increasing trust in one another. As the progression toward collaboration continues, stakeholders begin more complex activities of coordinating resources to meet joint endeavours. In the later developmental phases, complex organisational structures are developed, in the form of formalised leadership and new organisational structures, shared liability and costs, and a new collective identity.

Thus, the sustainability of a Community Partnership Group is not just about keeping the group together for a number of years, but also about its ongoing growth and development. The ultimate aim for a partnership group therefore is twofold.

1. Collaborative partnership procedures to become a standard part of how services are provided.
2. The services to become progressively more integrated over time.

One of the most important ways of supporting this growth process is for the Community Partnership Group to evaluate its own functioning and effectiveness on a regular basis.

Barriers and enablers to sustaining community partnerships

Community partnerships are formed by a strategic alliance of partners from government, the public and private sectors, and civil society (Seddon et al, 2008). These collaborative networks are established to develop innovative solutions to sometimes complex social and economic issues arising in local communities. These solutions should be sensitive to local people, encourage synergies between local agencies, and build practical and user-friendly relationships between people and services. However, the capacity to achieve this is dependent upon the partnership operating successfully, in terms of both governance and delivery of services.

Sustaining a Community Partnership

Effective collaboration is not always easy to achieve or maintain. As Claiborne and Lawson (2005) note:

Collaboration is a form of collective action. It involves two or more entities called stakeholders because they have a stake in mobilising and developing capacities for collective action. They decide to work together in response to special interdependent needs and complex problems. They collaborate because no single stakeholder can achieve its missions and goals, improve results, and realise desired benefits without the contributions of the other stakeholders.

A number of barriers and enablers to effective and sustainable partnerships have been identified.

This list of barriers and enablers is a synthesis of those identified by a range of studies, including Billett, Clemans and Seddon (2005), Claiborne and Lawson (2005), Orr (2004), Rogers (2006), Rogers and Williams (2008), and Seddon, Billett, Clemans, Ovens, Ferguson and Fennessy (2008). See the Reference list for further details.

Factors that facilitate effective and sustainable partnerships

A partnership has developed a shared vision and goals

This involves identifying the partners' interests and concerns, and developing a framework for collectively realising goals. This is the most important prerequisite for an effective partnership. The goals and outcomes that the group has identified should be kept in mind at all times. Each initiative that the group undertakes should be judged according to whether it contributes to achieving the desired outcomes.

This vision is shared with others

The partnership seeks to share the vision with others, progressively broadening the stakeholder base.

All key stakeholders are involved in, and support the process

The credibility of the partnership group is enhanced when all the important agencies and stakeholder groups endorse the partnership and are represented on the group.

Time is allocated to building the partnership

The partnership group itself devotes time to building relations with each other, building trust and commitment, encouraging participation, and developing inclusive and respectful processes.

There are opportunities for ongoing training and support

Working collaboratively involves a distinct set of skills that few will have received training in, such as skills in negotiating and mediating different interests. Effective partnerships recognise this and provide appropriate training and support.

The partnership is regularly evaluated and reviewed

Partnerships are more likely to last when they regularly evaluate the partnership processes and review the goals.

There is strong leadership

Effective partnerships need champions, people with the commitment and drive to lead the group effectively.

There are clear management structures

Effective groups have well-established and efficient means for decision-making, communication, resource management and record keeping.

Effective change management strategies are used

Collaborative ways of working are often new to practitioners and agencies, and ensuring their widespread adoption requires effective change management strategies.

Initiatives are linked and resources shared

Partnerships are more effective when they are bringing similar initiatives together and sharing resources. Some flexibility in the use of funds is desirable.

There is thorough ongoing community consultation

Partnerships are more effective when they meaningfully consult and engage consumers and other community members on a regular basis, and are therefore able to respond to emerging community needs.

There is parent and community support for the partnership

When parents and communities understand and endorse what partnership groups are seeking to achieve, they are more likely to be sustainable.

Government policies and funding models that support multi-agency collaboration

Most recent government policies and initiatives in human services support various forms of collaboration.

It should be clear from this list that effective collaborative partnerships are not an additional task for agencies to take on, but entail pervasive institutional change.

... when proposals for collaboration are combined with proposals for integrated services, they fundamentally alter relations among people, professions, organisations and societal sectors (e.g. the education sector, the health sector). More specifically, collaboration and its frequent companion concept, integrated services, entail genuine changes in roles, rules, responsibilities and accountabilities, boundaries and jurisdictions, language systems (discourses), power relations, and both socialisation and attribution mechanisms. Viewed from this institutional perspective, collaboration is not merely a new, rather simple technology for organising work and mobilising workers. (Claiborne and Lawson, 2005)

Barriers to effective and sustainable partnerships

There are many potential barriers to achieving effective and sustainable partnerships.

Failure to establish a shared vision

Groups that lack a shared vision are less likely to work together effectively or to be sustainable.

Failure to engage all key stakeholders

If key stakeholders are not involved or committed to the project, then its viability and sustainability will be compromised.

Lack of dedicated time for partnership work

Effective and sustainable partnerships are built on trust and this needs time to develop. When those involved are not able to devote time to this task because of other commitments, the partnership will inevitably be less effective.

Professional barriers restrict collaborative efforts

Professional barriers derive from restrictive job descriptions, professional rivalries, and efforts to protect traditional professional client bases and expertise.

There is limited flexibility in the use of funds

This hinders efforts to link related initiatives and pool resources.

There is a lack of continuity of staff directly involved in the partnership

Effective partnerships are built on the trust that develops between the members of the partnership, and this is difficult to build when the members change too often.

Decision-making processes are unclear and communication is poor

Misunderstandings and mistrust are more likely when people do not understand how decisions are made or are not kept fully informed.

Staff involved lack skills and training in collaborative ways of working

When this happens, misunderstandings and lack of trust can happen.

There is an unwillingness to test new ideas and practices

A number of agencies and practitioners are likely to resist change.

The role and authority of the partnership group is unclear

This can happen when the group is not well endorsed by key stakeholder groups or when there is no formal governance structure that covers the relationships between the group and its member organisations.

There is little effort made to consult or engage the community and parents on an ongoing basis

This lessens the support for the work of the partnership group and also means that the work of the group is less likely to be responsive to local needs.

Sustaining a Community Partnership

There are uncertainties about the long-term future of the partnership

Fears around sustainability can hamper progress and this can be an inhibiting factor.

Based on these barriers and enablers, we can derive a set of strategies for promoting the sustainability of a partnership group. These are described in Step 5 of the seven-step process for evaluating and sustaining a community partnership.

Evaluating a Community Partnership

What is evaluation and why is it important?

Evaluation is a systematic, ongoing process of gathering information to assess the extent to which an initiative is being delivered as intended, and to determine whether an initiative has achieved the immediate effect that it set out to achieve. This information helps those involved in the initiative to reflect upon what has been learned along the way, and to consider what implications this has for future practice.

For a full explanation of the nature and role of evaluation, see *Guide to Planning, Implementing and Evaluating a Community Initiative*.

Why is evaluation important for a Community Partnership Group?

While it is essential that a Community Partnership Group undertake an evaluation of the early childhood community initiative, it is equally important that an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Community Partnership Group itself is undertaken. The Community Partnership Group has the potential to work effectively to plan, organise and implement an initiative. By bringing together different people and agencies, more can be achieved than working alone, but this will depend on how well this partnership functions. An effective partnership does not necessarily form automatically, especially when the group includes people from different professional backgrounds and organisations. As a result of these complexities, many partnerships are not able to reach their full potential.

Undertaking an evaluation of the Community Partnership Group enables the group to:

- assess how well the group works together, and build upon its positive attributes
- highlight aspects of the partnership that are not working well so that something can be done to rectify this
- improve the effectiveness of the group so that it is able to achieve the planning, organisation and implementation of a community initiative to improve the outcomes for children and their families.

Partnership evaluation is a form of **process evaluation** (see the *Guide to Planning, Implementing and Evaluating a Community Initiative* for a full account of process evaluation). In evaluating a community partnership, the partnership group is checking to see if the process of partnership building is occurring as intended, or

if there are any steps that need to be taken to ensure that the full potential of the partnership is realised. Partnership evaluations provide answers to questions such as:

- Does the partnership group have a clear vision or focus?
- Are members of the group able to work together to achieve this vision?

It is important to note that unlike program evaluations, partnership evaluations do not involve impact evaluation components. A well-functioning Community Partnership Group contributes to an initiative's overall success, but it is not an outcome in itself. Outcomes are always related to the end result, that is, the ultimate changes that improve outcomes for children and their families.

The relationship between sustainability and evaluation

The sustainability of a partnership depends in part upon the quality of the partnership. The more effectively the partners work together and the greater the level of shared trust and commitment, the more likely it is that the partnership will last. Through a regular process of self-evaluation, partnership groups can reflect upon the quality of the partnership, and take steps to strengthen the collaboration. Thus, *evaluation is a tool for helping ensure the sustainability of the partnership group*.

Partnership evaluation tools and frameworks

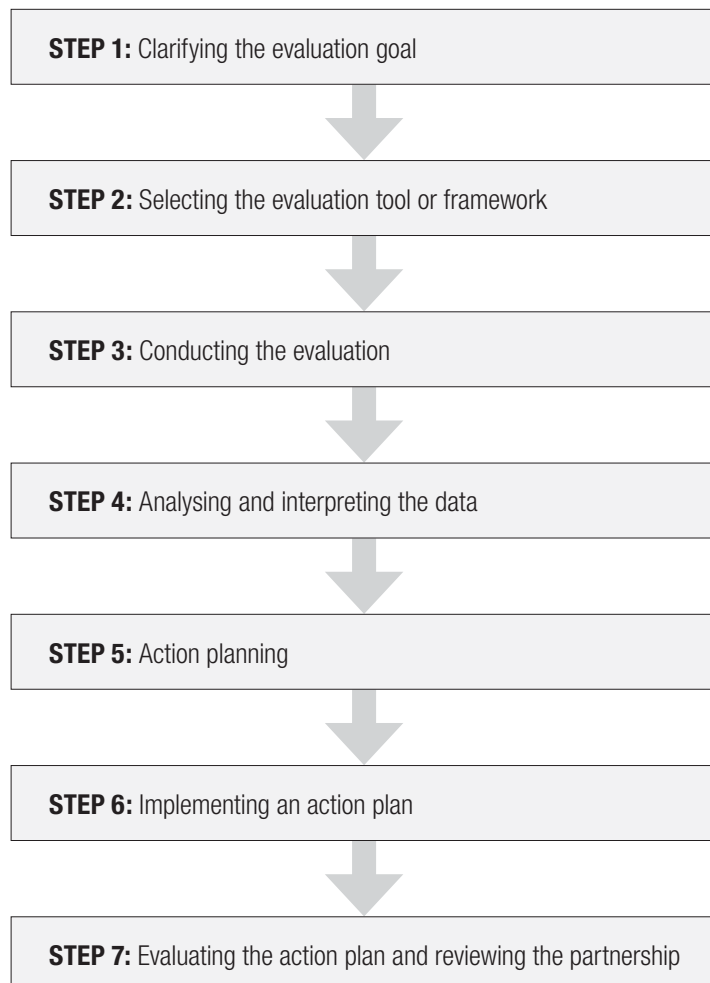
There are a variety of approaches available to enable self-evaluation by partnership groups. These fall into two main groups.

- **Evaluation tools.** These are established questionnaires or surveys, some completed online, that all members of the partnership agree to complete. The results are collated, and can be used by the group to determine what action is needed to improve the efficacy and sustainability of the group.
- **Evaluation frameworks.** These are sets of criteria or questions that a partnership group can use to reflect upon its processes and outcomes. They can be used in a variety of ways, but are probably best suited to a workshop format in which the partnership group works through the criteria or questions with a facilitator.

Five partnership evaluation tools and three evaluation frameworks are described in Step 2 of the seven-step process for evaluating and sustaining a community partnership.

The seven-step process for evaluating and sustaining a community partnership

These steps are based on the assumption that there is a Community Partnership Group or equivalent that is working collaboratively to improve outcomes for young children and their families who live in their community.



Step 1: Clarifying the evaluation goal

The first step in this process is for the partnership group to agree upon the need for an evaluation of the partnership, and to understand how this contributes to the ultimate outcomes that the partnership is seeking to achieve.

The discussion of this issue should be guided by the following questions.

What are the outcomes that the partnership group is seeking achieve? If the group already has a clear vision and outcomes statement, then this will be an opportunity to remind all partners of what that includes. (If it does not have such a statement, then the first task of the group is to develop one.)

Why should the partnership group conduct a self-evaluation? How will the evaluation contribute to the desired outcomes? This discussion should seek to elicit an understanding that the evaluation process is a contribution to improving the sustainability of the group, and that this is in turn a contribution to achieving improved outcomes for young children and their families.

It is important that all members of the partnership understand the reasons for the evaluation exercise and are committed to the process.

Step 2: Selecting the evaluation tool or framework

On the basis of the agreements reached, a tool or framework should be selected that best meets the partnership group's needs. As discussed in the previous section of this Guide, this may be a ready-made tool that all partners complete independently, or a discussion framework that is used to guide an evaluation workshop. If the latter, an independent facilitator may be needed to lead the process.

Partnership evaluation tools

Here are five useful partnership tools that have already been developed. You may wish to look at these and decide which questions apply to your Community Partnership Group.

The Partnerships Analysis Tool

John McLeod, on behalf of VicHealth, produced The Partnerships Analysis Tool to facilitate partnerships across sectors based on the evaluation of a range of initiatives undertaken to promote mental health and wellbeing. This is a resource which:

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

The tool suggests that the following questions be asked of all collaborative partnerships:

- Does the group have a clear vision of focus that has the support of the members?
- Does the group have measurable goals in terms of child and family outcomes?

- Are the proposed results/goals measurable? Are there agreed-upon criteria against which proposed strategies can be measured?
- Are the right partners at the table to accomplish the goals and the mission?
- Have personal or organisational self-interests been declared?
- Does the decision-making process allow for shared leadership and equal participation of partners?
- Are there skilled convenors or facilitative leaders in place who can build consensus and gain the trust of members?
- Is there an open and accessible mechanism by which families can provide feedback?
- Does the partnership have the technical assistance required?
- Is there a communication strategy that will maximise information sharing among the members? Do formal and informal communication links exist?
- Is there a deliberate strategy to build trust and resolve conflicts among members? Are members giving sufficient support to the effort?



McLeod, J. (2003). *The Partnerships Analysis Tool: For Partners in Health Promotion*. Carlton South, Victoria: VicHealth: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation. <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/en/~media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/General/VHP%20part%20toollow%20res.ashx>

Partnership Self-Assessment Tool

The Centre for the Advancement of Collaborative Strategies in Health at The New York Academy of Medicine developed this partnership assessment tool, providing partnerships with a way to assess how well their collaborative process is working. The website includes a questionnaire that covers questions on partnership synergy, leadership, efficiency, administration and management, financial and non-financial resources, decision-making and participant satisfaction.

This tool was developed to assess whether partnerships are achieving their ultimate goals and how well their collaborative process is working. It helps partnerships to:

- understand how collaboration works and what it means to create a successful collaborative process
- assess how well the collaborative process is working

- identify specific areas to improve the collaborative process.



Centre for the Advancement of Collaborative Strategies in Health at The New York Academy of Medicine. <http://www.partnershiptool.net/>

Assessing Strategic Partnerships: The Partnership Assessment Tool

This is another practical self-assessment tool for partnership working. It can be used to:

- provide a development framework for establishing healthy and effective partnerships
- provide a means to help existing partnerships take stock of the effectiveness of their partnership working – a ‘health check’
- help partnerships experiencing difficulties to systematically diagnose areas of conflict and develop a remedial action plan.

The purpose of this tool is to provide a simple, quick and cost-effective way of assessing the effectiveness of partnership working. It enables a rapid appraisal (a quick ‘health check’), which graphically identifies problem areas, allowing partners to focus remedial action and resources commensurate with the seriousness and urgency of the problems. Using the tool avoids exhaustive, lengthy and costly investigations of partnership working in general. And for those just setting up partnerships the tool provides a checklist of what to ensure and what to avoid. It has been designed explicitly as a developmental tool rather than as a means for centrally assessing local partnership performance.



Hardy, B., Hudson, B. and Waddington, E. (2003), *Assessing Strategic Partnerships: The Partnership Assessment Tool*. London, UK: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/135112.pdf>

ITMA – Integrated Teams Monitoring and Assessment

ITMA (Integrated Teams Monitoring and Assessment) is designed to be used as a method of self-assessment by established teams – or those which are newly formed – to examine several key dimensions of their partnership arrangements. ITMA provides a relatively simple and cost-effective way of assessing the effectiveness of team working. It enables a rapid appraisal of the ‘health’ of a team and identifies areas of difficulty, including internal functioning and external factors and strongly

focuses on further action commensurate with the significance of the problems.



Integrated Care Network (2007), *ITMA – Integrated Teams Monitoring and Assessment*. London, UK: Integrated Care Network. http://www.integratedcarenetwork.gov.uk/_library/Resources/ICN/publications/ITMA_May_Launch_Version.doc

The Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory

This 42-item tool assesses how collaborations are doing based on 20 research-tested success factors. This can be completed online, with results provided, including summary scores for each of the factors.



Mattesich, P.W., Murray-Close, M. and Monsey, B. (2001). *Collaboration: What Makes It Work (2nd Ed)*. St. Paul, Minnesota: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation. <http://wilderresearch.org/tools/cfi/index.php>

Partnership evaluation framework

A number of evaluation frameworks have also been developed. These differ from the partnership evaluation tools listed above in that they are not designed to be used as questionnaires that are completed by each partner separately, but are instead frameworks for discussion.

Intervention framework for collaboration

This framework provides suggestions on how to evaluate and measure collaboration outcomes, which are the ‘achievable results generated by the activities, processes and agreements of stakeholders occurring during the developmental phase’.

It provides a framework of eight collaboration outcomes and measures. The idea is that data is collected according to the measures in order to establish whether collaboration has been successful. Outcome measures in this case should not be confused with individual organisation goals, instead, the collaboration outcomes measure the extent to which the overall collaboration has been achieved.

Step 2: Selecting the evaluation tool or framework

Example outcomes and measure include:

OUTCOME	MEASURE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders' mission statements reflect shared vision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mission statement for collaboration is developed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innovations in processes and products occur 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innovations in work tasks, services, interventions or new technologies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership is representative, in which 'one voice' acts as the collective instrument of goal attainment and control is mutually shared 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership is representative which acts for a collective in negotiations and contracting



Claiborne, N. and Lawson, H.A. (2005), An intervention framework for collaboration. *Families in Society*, 86 (1), pages 93–103. <http://www.familiesinsociety.org/Show.asp?docid=1881>

Tasks, tips and tools for promoting collaborative community teams

Hayden, Frederick, Smith and Broudy (2001) recommend that partnership teams should formally evaluate themselves at least annually in relation to the team's accomplishments and challenges, operational structure and team member relationships and involvement. They suggest that the following tasks can assist the team in this effort.

Review the team's priorities

- Have they been met?
- How well?
- Is working on these priorities benefiting both the collaborative team/community and the participating agencies?
- What priorities remain or are emerging?
- Do previously set priorities continue to be relevant to all members of the team?
- What changes in internal (agency) and external (community, state, federal) environments are likely to impact priorities of this team?

Assess membership involvement

- Are all members actively involved? Why or why not?
- What can be done to get active involvement of all members?
- Do activities or membership need to change so that active involvement of all members will be more likely?
- As new individuals or agency members are added to the team, what is done to help them adapt to the team and to help the team adapt to them (e.g. orientation or refocusing priorities to address new members' interests)?

Evaluate the outcomes and impact of team activities

- Did we do what we said we would do?
- Are these helping to achieve the goals set for each of the priorities?
- Are they effective?
- Are they beneficial enough to warrant the time and other resources allocated to them?
- Can we replace any current activities with others that may now be considered more worthwhile?
- Do members consider these activities a good use of their time given their individual agency responsibilities?

Consider the team's continued existence

- Does the team need to continue to exist?
- Whom does it benefit?
- Given the time and effort involved, is there a return on investment?

If the benefit derived from the team is questionable, celebrate accomplishments and bring the team to an end. If the team is determined to be effective, identify the next steps for team continuation. This should include reaffirmation or revision of the team's focus and consideration of who needs to be involved as you proceed in your efforts to promote collaboration to benefit children and families in your community.



Hayden, P., Frederick, L., Smith, B. and Broudy, A. (2001), *Tasks, Tips and Tools for Promoting Collaborative Community Teams*. Denver, Colorado: Collaborative Planning Project for Planning Comprehensive Early Childhood Systems, University of Colorado at Denver. <http://www.nectas.unc.edu/~pdfs/topics/inclusion/TaskstipsTools.pdf>

'Routinisation' criteria

Another approach to evaluating a Community Partnership Group is to examine the extent to which partnership procedures become embedded in organisational structures and practices. Scheirer (2005) discusses how this can happen with individual programs, and how program initiatives that were originally funded with special grants can be adopted into an organisation's core services after the funding has ceased. This is a process that Yin (1979, 1981) calls routinisation, and he suggests that, for a new program or procedure to become fully 'routinised' or absorbed into the ongoing organisational system, it should meet the following 12 criteria.

In the case of a Community Partnership Group, what we are seeking is the 'routinisation' of partnership procedures, so that they become absorbed into the operational planning and procedures of all those involved in the partnership. The following table below shows Yin's 12 criteria for 'routinisation' adapted for purposes of evaluating a Community Partnership Group.

Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the partnership is supported by change from soft to hard money the partnership survives annual budget cycles
Personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> partnership activities become part of member agencies' standard operations the partnership survives the turnover of partnership group members and agency leaders agency representatives on the Community Partnership Group have a senior role within the partner agencies partnership activities spread to all potential users within a community
Supply and maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> administrative support is supplied through one of the partner agencies on behalf of the partnership administrative support is maintained despite changes in the agency providing the support
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> partnership skills taught in many training cycles partnership skills become part of professional standards
Organisational governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> partnership procedures are recognised in manuals, procedures and regulations the inter-agency partnership is formalised through a governance arrangement to which all partner agencies are committed

These criteria could be used by a Community Partnership Group as part of a self-evaluation process.



Adapted from Scheirer, M.A. (2005), *Is sustainability possible? A review and commentary on empirical studies of program sustainability*. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 26 (3), 320–347.

Step 3: Conducting the evaluation

Step 3 involves the evaluation being conducted as planned.

If a **partnership evaluation tool** is being adopted, then the partnership group needs to decide the following:

- Who will take responsibility for distributing the tool?
- Is the tool to be completed anonymously?
- Will an external person collate and present the results, or will a partnership group member undertake this task?
- If an outside person is to be engaged, who will it be and who will engage them?
- When will the tool be distributed?
- When will the group convene to consider the results?

If an **evaluation framework tool** has been chosen, the partnership group needs to decide the following:

- Is a facilitator to be employed to lead the group deliberations or is one of the partnership group members to act as facilitator?
- If a facilitator is to be employed, who will that be?
- Who will negotiate with the facilitator on the group's behalf?
- How will the facilitator be paid?
- When and where will the workshop be held?

Step 4: Analysing and interpreting the data

Following the evaluation process, the Community Partnership Group will need to schedule a meeting to consider the results and their implications. The presentation of results will take different forms, depending upon the evaluation method used.

If a **partnership evaluation tool** is used, then the designated person will prepare a report or summary of the results. It is not necessary to write a lengthy report for a partnership evaluation. However, the main findings should be presented clearly to all members of the partnership group.

If an **evaluation framework tool** is used, then all members of the partnership group will be part of the process and will know the outcomes. Nevertheless, if an external facilitator was engaged to run the evaluation workshop, then the group might decide to ask the facilitator to attend a follow-up partnership group meeting to help them reflect upon the implications of the evaluation.

Interpreting evaluation results

One of the issues that might emerge from an evaluation is that there are some fundamental disagreements about certain issues. Conflict during collaboration is a natural and expected phenomenon. Whether or not it hampers the functioning of the group depends upon how it is managed. In some cases, agencies that have traditionally been competitors will be members of the Community Partnership Group, and may initially be very cautious about sharing information about their services. Unless their concerns are brought to light and handled sensitively, the collaboration effort will be hindered or fail. When conflict is managed effectively and viewed as an asset, it can provide impetus for innovations. Partnership groups may consider engaging an external consultant to help them manage such situations effectively.

Step 5: Action planning for sustainability

Step 5 involves drawing up an action plan based on the outcomes of the evaluation. The overall aim of the plan will be to improve the functioning of the partnership process itself, so as to increase the sustainability of the partnership group.

Note: This action plan for partnership sustainability should be distinguished from the service delivery action plan that is described in the Guide to Planning, Implementing and Evaluating a Community Initiative that deals with services to be delivered. The partnership sustainability action plan addresses sustainability of the partnership itself.

For the purposes of evaluating a Community Partnership Group, the key elements of an action plan are:

- What actions are to be taken?
- Who is responsible for each action?
- What is the timeline for each action?
- When will the action plan itself be evaluated?

In determining what actions are to be taken, the group will be guided by questions such as:

- What needs to change within the partnership to respond to the findings?
- Are any improvements required?
- What actions might need to be taken to strengthen the partnership group?

Depending upon the answers to these questions, the Community Partnership Group can choose appropriate strategies from the following list. This list has been generated from some of the same sources that were used to identify the barriers and enablers to effective partnerships. While it is by no means comprehensive, it is included here as an aid to Community Partnership Groups that are seeking to strengthen the efficacy and sustainability of their group.

Strategies for building sustainability

Build and maintain the vision

The partnership group should regularly plan to reflect upon, review and revise its goals, identify achievements and renew commitment. The focus should be on the partnership goals, rather than on operational issues, in order to foster close and trusted relationships among partners

Take small steps and be prepared to stay longer

To create a strong community vehicle to address health, social, educational and other community problems needs a 10-year timespan or longer.

Clarify the expectations of the partnership process

Funding bodies sometimes have unrealistic expectations for their initiatives. It is important that the partnership group sets clear and realistic expectations, and seeks to communicate these to stakeholders and funding bodies.

Build the stakeholder base

Regularly review the active stakeholder base, identifying other potential stakeholders who are not yet involved, and develop a strategy for engaging them.

Keep all stakeholders informed of developments

Stakeholders include the partnership members but also their auspice organisations, families, community members etc. The partnership group should seek to progressively document and evaluate the outcome achieved by the services delivered by the partnership and communicate these results to all stakeholders

Maintain relations with partners

Plan to endorse and consolidate existing relationships, recognising partners' contributions, and building links with any new staff, particularly those in management roles.

Develop a communication / publicity strategy

Use 360 degree approach – ‘sell’ the work of the partnerships ‘up’ (to managers and directors), ‘sideways’ (to colleagues and services not directly involved in the partnership), and ‘downwards’ (to those directly receiving the service, as well as to the wider community).

Develop an ongoing strategy for community consultation and engagement

This could include establishing an advisory group for the partnership, including families using the service, other community members (e.g. local businesses).

Regularly monitor and evaluate progress of the partnership itself and Communicate the results to all stakeholders and Use change management strategies to ensure the progressive adoption of partnership practices

Proven change management strategies involve empowering enthusiastic individuals or groups to pilot the new processes, giving them enough time and resources to make the changes and show measurable results, broadcasting their successes widely, then driving the change down through the organisation or team.

Provide training and supervision in developing collaborative skills

The partnership group could coordinate interagency training and supervision in inter-disciplinary teamwork, inter-agency collaboration, mediation and conflict resolution and general relationship building strategies.

Explore governance options for the partnership group

Ultimately, the sustainability of the group will depend upon finding a governance arrangement that embeds the partnership process into the fabric of the service network.

Take sustainability seriously

A focus on sustainability is a legitimate consideration for a partnership group and should be a regular part of the group’s planning from the earliest stages.



For more detail on action planning, see the *Guide to Planning, Implementing and Evaluating a Community Initiative*.

Step 6: Implementing an action plan

Step 6 involves implementing and monitoring an action plan. The tasks to be undertaken during this step are as follows.

Individual responsibilities

The action plan will specify who is responsible for each aspect of the plan, and these individuals or agencies will implement these on behalf of the partnership group.

Monitoring the action plan

Over the course of this period, the partnership group should seek updates from those responsible for different aspects of the implementation process. These reports should be scheduled as part of regular meetings of the partnership group.

Recording the implementation process

Those responsible for implementing the action plan should keep records of what was actually done and how effectively each aspect of the plan was carried out. When it comes to reviewing how effective the plan was in strengthening the partnership, it will be important to know how faithful the implementation was to the original plan.

Revising the action plan if necessary

If any problems emerge (e.g. if the person responsible for a particular action is unable to carry it out, or if an action takes longer than expected to carry out), then the partnership group may need to revise the plan.

Step 7: Evaluating an action plan and reviewing the partnership

Step 7 involves evaluating an action plan and reviewing the state of the partnership. The tasks to be undertaken during this step are as follows.

Process evaluation

Process evaluation involves assessing whether the plan was carried out as intended and whether the implementation was done competently. To do this, the records kept by those responsible for the implementation should be reviewed and summarised.

Impact evaluation

Impact evaluation involves assessing whether the actions taken had the desired impact. To do this, the initial evaluation process should be repeated, i.e. the same partnership evaluation tool used in Steps 2, 3 and 4 should be readministered. If the action plan has been effective, there should be some positive change since the initial evaluation.

Interpreting the results

The impact evaluation will show whether the partnership weakened, stayed the same, or improved over the course of the evaluation cycle. In interpreting these results, it is important to understand the possible causes for the outcomes that were observed. When the results show that the partnership weakened or was unchanged, the possible causes include:

- not all aspects of the action plan were implemented
- the implementation was poorly executed
- the strategies chosen turned out to be inappropriate or ineffective
- not all members of the partnership were fully committed to the evaluation process
- other external factors intervened.

Reporting the results

A report of the final results should be compiled for distribution to the partnership group. This can be done by a designated member or members of the group, or by an external evaluator. The report should include an account of the action plan implementation, the results of the impact evaluation, and an interpretation of the results.

Reviewing the partnership

The partnership group should set aside time to discuss the report and to consider the implications of the results for the partnership. If there are any contentious issues raised by the report, it would be advisable to have this session chaired by an external consultant or facilitator. The results should be used as a basis for the next action plan and evaluation cycle.

Disseminating the results

The final step is to disseminate the findings of the evaluation and the decisions taken subsequently by the partnership group to all stakeholders. This includes the managers of the agencies involved in the partnership group, other relevant agencies, and the families receiving services from the partnership members.

For more details on evaluation, see the *Guide to Planning, Implementing and Evaluating a Community Initiative*.

Conclusion

It should be clear that this seven-step process is cyclical, and constitutes a form of action research. It is also a tool for self-reflection, enabling the partnership group to refocus on its aims and reflect on its achievements.

It begins with a reminder of what the partnership is seeking to achieve and goes through a staged process of exploring how well the partnership group is contributing to these outcomes. In this process, it identifies and implements strategies for addressing barriers to effective collaboration and for strengthening the partnership. Finally, it returns to the original question: how well is the partnership working and how effectively is it achieving the outcomes that it was hoping to achieve.

This cycle may take anything from six months to two years to complete. To ensure the eventual sustainability of the partnership, the cycle should be repeated regularly. With each iteration, the partnership group should be striving to improve its collaborative practices and to make these a permanent part of the way services are planned and provided.

Further resources

- Center for the Advancement of Collaborative Strategies in Health: www.cacsh.org.
- Department for Education and Skills (2006), *Making It Happen: Working together for children, young people and families*, London, UK: Department for Education and Skills. <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/resources-and-practice/IG00130/>.

As part of the Every Child Matters initiative, the Department for Education and Skills (2006, in the UK) has published a booklet, 'Making It Happen', to support the development and implementation of effective frontline integrated working across the children's workforce. 'Making It Happen' provides explanations of integrated working policies, illustrated with real-life examples from frontline staff. It focuses on information sharing, the Common Assessment Framework, the lead professional role, the information sharing index and best practice in multi-agency working. It shows how these separate initiatives work together to support effective practice.

See further information on integrated working on the Every Child Matters website: <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/deliveringservices/integratedworking/>.

- Family and Parenting Institute (2007), *Listening to parents: A short guide*, London, UK: Family and Parenting Institute. http://www.familyandparenting.org/Filestore/Documents/publications/listening_to_parents.pdf.
- Centre for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA (2008), *Working Collaboratively: From school-based teams to school-community higher education connections*, Los Angeles, California: Centre for Mental Health in Schools, University of California Los Angeles. <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/worktogether/worktogether.pdf>.

Across the country, groups of people who often haven't previously worked together are combining their talents and resources to improve outcomes for children and youth. They often form groups called collaboratives.

This resource provides guidance for what makes collaborative efforts successful and what gets in the way. It is designed as an introduction to the nature and scope of working collaboratively at various levels of intervention. Specifically, the content focuses on clarifying that:

- collaboration is a process for carrying out delineated functions
- accomplishing different functions often require different mechanisms or structures
- data can help enhance collaboration
- sustaining collaborative endeavours over time requires attending to systemic change.

Also included are a set of resources to draw on in developing effective ways to work together to strengthen children and youth, families, schools and communities.

- Patricia Rogers (2006), *Sustainability*, West Perth, Western Australia: Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. http://www.aracy.org.au/scriptcontent/aracy_docs/document_65.pdf.
 - Centre for Community Child Health (2008), *Evaluation of Victorian Children's Centres: Literature review*, Melbourne, Victoria: Office for Children and Early Childhood Development, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/earlychildhood/integratedservice/childcentrereview.pdf>.
- This literature review includes a review of the evidence for various forms in partnership and collaboration.

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On evaluation

See listing of resources and references in the *Guide to Planning, Implementing and Evaluating a Community Initiative*.

