

8 Sustaining Longer-Term Partnerships

Creating a sense of interdependence is key to sustaining longer-term partnerships. Partnerships that bring diverse individuals and organizations together to find new and creative ways to address shared problems are the ones most likely to achieve interdependence. The tools and strategies discussed throughout the chapters of this *guide* will help you and your partners to achieve this interdependence:

Strategies for Sustaining Longer-Term Partnerships

- Recognize and reward partners
- Combine planning with action
- Create a learning partnership

Chapter 3. *What Successful Health-Related Community Partnerships Have in Common*

Chapter 4. *How Well Do You Know Your Environment?*

Chapter 5. *Determining Your Purpose and Choosing Partners*

Chapter 6. *Creating a Sense of Ownership*

Chapter 7. *Making Decisions and Making Progress: Structure and Decisionmaking Issues*

Chapter 11. *Evaluating and Measuring Success*

Chapter 12. *Selling Your Success to Others: Getting Support*

Recognize and Reward Partners

Showing sincere appreciation to partners is important. Here are a few simple ways partners can be acknowledged:

- As partners arrive for a meeting, personally thank them for attending.
- When partners have made a valuable contribution during a meeting, send them an e-mail or handwritten note that reinforces how important they are to the partnership.
- At meetings, regularly acknowledge the value of work done since the previous meeting and thank those involved.

At least once a year, take the time to formally celebrate the partnership's achievements and to recognize the partners making outstanding contributions. When formally acknowledging partners, certificates of appreciation and plaques are often meaningful. Encourage partners to share any cultural distinctions that may exist associated with recognition and acknowledgement, then plan your activities accordingly. Inviting colleagues and family members to attend a recognition event should also be explored. Including family and friends may make the recognition more meaningful to recipients, while spreading the word about the partnership and its accomplishments.

Things to Keep in Mind

- When you clearly share throughout the year what is being done and by whom, partners know who is doing the most work. Giving the outstanding contributors special recognition tends to encourage all partners to increase their level of commitment. Failure to do so can demoralize your hardest working partners.
- Let people know in advance that you are planning to acknowledge them. Determine whether there are any issues that need to be addressed with individual recipients. For example, some religions prohibit women from shaking hands with men.
- Some recipients may be shy, and issues associated with anxiety may need to be addressed. Explaining that acknowledging the partner is likely to encourage others to follow the recipient's outstanding example may help to ease his or her anxiety.
- Decide whether you want recipients to say a few words when they are acknowledged. If so, let them know well in advance so they have time to prepare.

Combine Planning with Action

Discussions held with colleagues in TB partnerships while developing this guide revealed two common sources of frustration:

- Partners expressed frustration when they felt their level of participation was confined to implementing predetermined plans.
- Partners expressed frustration when they felt that too much time was spent on planning, and not enough was spent on effective actions.

Thus, it is important to strike a good balance between planning and action. One way to approach this is to divide the time on partnership meeting agendas to include both planning and action-related items. Agenda items aimed at identifying and then reporting on work that partners can carry out between meetings can help. Activities should be consistent with the partnership vision and purpose. An evaluation of the effectiveness of these activities should be included when reporting. This approach allows partners to make and measure progress while grappling with longer-term planning processes.

Things to Keep in Mind

When partners are involved in longer-term partnerships, it is important for them to identify significant milestones that will be reached and celebrated along the way. Milestones can be applied to both planning and implementation activities.

Create a Learning Partnership

A learning partnership is one in which partners frequently and consistently analyze and improve their performance. A number of organizational theorists use two categories of learning that can be useful to those trying to create learning partnerships:⁵²

- Single-loop learning occurs when organizations, such as partnerships, focus exclusively on fine-tuning their existing operating systems, policies, and practices.⁵³
- Double-loop learning occurs when organizations question the validity of their current operating systems, policies, procedures, and objectives. Assumptions underlying current practices are identified and questioned. The consistency between what the organization says it does and what it actually does is publicly tested. The goal of this learning process is to improve outcomes by fully accepting and exploring successes and mistakes.⁵⁴

Learning partnerships carry out both single-loop and double-loop learning. In learning partnerships, members:

- Explore and seek to fully understand the underlying assumptions, approaches, and structures guiding their current systems, plans, and actions
- Monitor their environments in order to anticipate and understand significant changes
- Evaluate and question the appropriateness of their current assumptions, operating systems, policies, and practices
- Allow new assumptions, approaches, operating systems, and actions to emerge that better respond to their environmental circumstances and their ability to realize their common vision

Related Resources

Those wishing more information about organizational learning may wish to read:

- Argyris C. 2003. Double loop learning. www.infed.org/thinkers/argyris.htm
- Argyris C. 1994. Good communication that blocks learning. *Harvard Business Review* (July-August).

⁵²Argyris C. 1994. Good communication that blocks learning. *Harvard Business Review* (July–August).

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Argyris C. 2003. *Double loop learning*. www.infed.org/thinkers/argyris.htm.