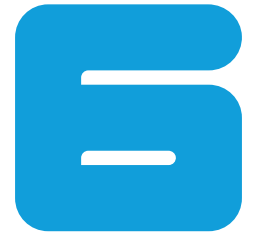


Partnership negotiations and communications



Partnerships in Practice Tool

Good communication is the basic building block for strong partnerships. This tool helps you to dive deeper into how you communicate effectively with partners and how to pre-empt any difficult negotiations. It will help you to practically and systematically consider ways to improve communications and feedback mechanisms with partners; and to improve external communications about your partnership. The content builds on WaterAid's guidance for leading 'effective conversations' – see Annex 1 for details.



Tool purpose

To undertake a systematic review of how you communicate in a specific partnership – exploring the mechanisms and processes that are in place to ensure clear, regular and effective communications. This will help identify what is and isn't working well within the partnership.



Practice message

Partnerships can be improved by proactively reviewing the way that both internal and external communications work and how these can be improved. This can help to avoid challenging situations and miscommunication.

If misunderstandings do arise, you can use the accompanying tools and resources to understand your and your partners' interests better and to make plans for more effective conversations.



Partnership message

Partnerships are most efficient and effective when partners communicate appropriately with each other and abide by agreed communications' protocols and codes of conduct.



Honest communications and honouring commitments

- We will freely share information regarding our common work and will not withhold information without substantial justification.
- We will honour schedules made with other Parties to expedite the joint work in this Partnership.
- We will work together as partners, communicating honestly, openly and maintaining flexibility.
- We will freely disclose our interests in or bias about the outcome of any matter being discussed among the Parties.
- The records of the Partnership will be open and accessible for all Parties
- We will respect the confidentiality of any information shared between Parties.

WaterAid's *Guidelines to Partnership Agreements, Code of Conduct (Annex A)*, (2018).

Step 1: If you have already carried out the exercise in the Partnerships in Practice Tool on governance and accountability, take your responses from the section on 'communications mechanisms between partners' in the table on that tool and re-read through your suggested improvements (Table 1).

If you did not do this exercise already, you can complete it now. Base your responses on an actual partnership that you are in, or if you do not work in an existing partnership, imagine what the communications mechanisms/protocols should be like.

Then, consider the same questions for your external communications about the same partnership.

Tip: Good practice in communication between partners is very similar to good practice in communication for managing staff. Skills in giving and receiving feedback, active listening and difficult conversations are all very relevant when working with partners.

Table 1: Partnership management instrument

Partnership management instrument	What exists?	How could it be improved? (i.e. what is missing?)
Communications mechanisms amongst partners – i.e. formal minutes; partnership progress reports; internal lesson sharing/knowledge management; are communications clear, frequent and transparent enough? What communication channels do you use?	[Your information]	[Your information]
Communications to those outside the partnership – i.e. agreeing and sharing lessons learned with the outside world; dealing with intellectual property rights; who speaks on behalf of the partnership?	[Your information]	[Your information]

Step 2: Next, discuss with colleagues – and preferably with your partner/s – how you might create a mutually relevant and supportive ‘communications protocol’ for your partnership. This basically allows you to have a frank and open discussion about how communications and feedback should happen and to hear your partners’ views and expectations too. Use the following table (Table 2) to structure your discussions and complete the final column with your findings.

Table 2: Communication mechanisms

Communications	Communications’ actions	Communications’ principles and protocols
<p>Communications mechanisms amongst partners (inside the partnership) – seeking to determine if communications are clear, frequent and transparent.</p>	<p>How do we communicate with each other? i.e. what is the feedback platform and communication media used? Do we use formal or informal communications?</p>	<p>[Discuss and agree answer to the questions posed in the column to the left.]</p>
	<p>Who is responsible or involved?</p>	
	<p>What type of information do we expect to share with each other? e.g. What type of decisions do we take together?</p>	
	<p>When do we expect each other to communicate and how regularly?</p>	
	<p>Why are we communicating? i.e. the reasons: is it for reporting? For problem solving? For learning/knowledge management?</p>	
	<p>Where is information kept and shared?</p>	
<p>Communications to those outside the partnership – partners should determine which information would be made public, how and when.</p>	<p>How do we communicate with others? i.e. what platforms and media are used? How do we use logos and branding?</p>	<p>[Discuss and agree answer to the questions posed in the column to the left.]</p>
	<p>Who is responsible or involved?</p>	
	<p>What type of information do we share with the outside world?</p>	
	<p>When do we ‘talk’ to the outside world about our partnership? Are we strategic in this?</p>	
	<p>Why are we communicating? i.e. the reasons: Reporting? Celebrating success? For learning/knowledge management? For profile?</p>	
	<p>Where is information kept and shared?</p>	

Step 3: In addition to the processes and protocols agreed above, are there any other overarching communications’ principles that are agreed for this partnership? For example, communications’ behaviours and competencies should encourage people to be open, responsive, polite, clear, etc.

Implementing the changes

Make a note of the communication protocols you have agreed with colleagues and partners. Share this with your team so that everyone involved has a common understanding of how you have agreed to communicate. This should be reviewed regularly to see how well it is working, and whether it needs to be adjusted to make it more realistic and effective. People often slip back into bad habits when it comes to communications, so it is important that partners and staff are able to hold each other to account based on the protocol.

References and tools

For further guidance on partnership basics, please see:

- [WaterAid's Partnership Toolkit](#)
- [WaterAid's Guidelines on finance partnerships](#)

Annex 1: WaterAid's guidance on effective communications

Framework for discussion

Having different points of view and difficult feedback conversations in a working context is common – the key is to be able to have effective, frank and honest conversations, and to agree a positive way forward. This tool aims to support conversations where two parties (or more) don't see eye to eye and it is impacting on the individual, team or partnership adversely. The following won't cover everything that you may wish to discuss and/or may include areas that you don't feel are directly relevant. That's ok – it's a guide in order to support a focused and productive meeting(s), and to ensure everyone is entering with the same understanding/purpose.

Purpose of the meeting

Be prepared to provide feedback to each other in line with our values and to agree a productive and effective way forward. This may be done over a couple of meetings or can be covered in the first – but regardless of the approach, the aim is always the same: to be factual in one's feedback, to hear and receive the feedback and agree an effective way forward. The key will be in building good working relationships where ways of communication (what, where, when and how) are agreed, and there is a clear and collaborative way forward.

Giving and receiving feedback

Giving feedback? Be evidence based and honest – and a good way to do that is to use the EEC model to help frame your feedback. (**Evidence. Effect. Change**). Remember if you are giving feedback, you need to be receptive to receiving feedback too, and for this you may find it useful to use the CAR model (**Confirm. Ask. Respond**). Below is a summary of the EEC and CAR models for feedback. For further information, don't hesitate to speak to your People team or line manager.

Giving feedback

Evidence

- Evidence should be factual and objective.
- i.e. What happened?
- i.e. What did you personally observe?

Effect

- What impact did this have?
- How did it effect you/others/the project?

Change (don't skip this step)

- What would you like them to do differently in the future?
- If you are talking about things you want them to continue doing – tell them this too.

Receiving feedback

- Confirm their concerns to show you have heard/check you have understood them (this does not necessarily mean you agree).
- Ask for more information or clarification, if needed.
- Respond – accept and make a suggestion to act on it, or if you disagree, state your point of view.
- **Finally** – agree a productive way forward.

Framework for discussion

Before you meet

It may be helpful to reflect before the meeting to aid your conversation. Other than EEC and CAR, below are some questions that may help you.

1. Current situation – what does this look like to you, what is working well, less well and what impact is this having on you?
2. Future situation – what does ‘success’ look like to you at the end of the meeting? What will it look like when things are working well?
3. How can you get to a point where you can both work collaboratively, communicate effectively – and for your teams/direct reports to do so too? What role can you both play in this?

Some specific questions that may support your thinking on the points above:

- What is the underlining issue? Is there something else that has contributed to the situation? If yes – what is it?
- How does the current situation make you feel? How does the current ways of communication make you feel? What feedback do you want to give to each other on this? What do you want to change? What do you think you can both do differently to support this?
- How do you want to receive feedback from each other after today?
- How do you think you could work together on gaining feedback from your team and colleagues or others that you work with or

provide a service to, that will improve ways of working and team cohesion and/or team delivery? How can you do this together?

At the meeting

It is important that you both have the opportunity to speak (uninterrupted), to listen and then to ask any questions to get clarification etc. Why not agree at the start of the meeting how you intend to conduct your meeting? Below are some points you should consider:

1. Both to have the opportunity to give and summarise their feedback – using the EEC model (in line with the questions/areas above or others you have prepared). From your own perspective, how are things working and what impact is this having on your role/how you feel? The other party should listen then you can swap.
2. Allow each other the time to seek clarity on any areas of feedback (or on anything else you are not sure on), ask questions to really understand the other person.
3. Each to explain what a good working relationship would look like. Do you have the same vision? If it isn't the same then discuss what you could each do differently to reach this. If you have different views, then identify what the gap(s) is/are. Explore this further and identify a middle ground.
4. Agree what actions you will both do to move forward – what are you going to do differently? What is going to remain? How will you maintain a channel of open feedback and communication etc.?
5. Agree to review how things are going. Depending on the situation, this could be monthly or more/less frequent as necessary. But agree when your next meeting will be to follow up, and who will arrange it. Then make sure you meet.

Post meeting

Feedback to your line manager the actions and discuss what support you may require from them. Agree to review in a set number of months/weeks – but keep the dialogue going and remember EEC and CAR.

Effective conversations: Conversation planner

1	What is your long-term goal in relation to this situation/person/partner?
2	What outcome do you want to achieve from this meeting – for you/WaterAid and for the other person/organisation?
3	What specific evidence/examples do you have of what you want to change or happen?
4	How will you open the conversation and state the objective of the meeting?
5	How will you deliver your feedback and/or say what you want?
6	What objections could they raise and how will you respond?
7	How will you keep a positive and constructive mindset in the meeting?

Think positive and be assertive

- Confident and objective
- Direct, open and straightforward
- Question and listen
- Show empathy
- Give reasons
- 'I' statements
- Seek win-win solutions
- Firm, calm tone
- Open posture
- Head up
- Sit/stand comfortably

A suggested structure for effective conversations

1	Introduce the conversation – what you want to talk about and your objective.
2	Build a connection ; maybe ask their view first.
3	State your idea/request/feedback and the reasoning behind it.
4	Ask how they see it.
5	Empathise and accept they may have a different view.
6	Explore their viewpoint – what they think, the reasoning behind it; what they want/need.
7	Listen actively – focus on them, not your own reactions; make eye contact, nod, ask clarifying questions, summarise your understanding.
8	Handle objections; focus on building agreement.
9	Ask for what you need from them.
10	Summarise what has been agreed.