

Partnership health check



Partnerships in Practice Tool

Collaboration with many different stakeholders is critical to achieve WaterAid's mission. For this we need to nurture healthy and constructive working relationships with other organisations. Maintaining such relationships is always challenging, especially when working on difficult issues in dynamic and complex situations. Successful partnerships benefit from regular opportunities to review the health of the relationship, to consider what aspects are working well and where there are issues that need to be addressed. Honest discussions about what each partner can do to address difficulties at an early stage can avoid costly and damaging problems arising later.



Partnership message

Partnerships are important and dynamic, they need regular health checks to keep them operating smoothly. Both parties should feel able to engage in honest discourse in an open and constructive manner.



Practice message

It is important to create a good environment to openly and respectfully discuss where things are going well and where they could be improved. Discussions should be conducted in the spirit of mutual accountability to achieve a common goal.

Adequate time should be allowed both to prepare for and participate in the review, and both parties should be prepared to be open to giving and receiving feedback.

Partnership health check



This health check looks specifically at the relationship between different stakeholders. It is different from the project-focused discussions with partners about the work you are doing together.

This activity should be carried out regularly (once or twice a year) with all core partners. You can do it with one partner at a time or with all the partner organisations involved in a project.

1. Read the section from the WaterAid *Partnership Toolkit* on 'Partnership behaviours: Monitoring and support'.
2. Discuss the purpose of the exercise with partners and emphasise that it is a 'health check' to keep things running smoothly, even if there are no particular problems to address.

Tip: You can also do this exercise to help address a particular problem, emphasising that it is very normal for relationships to have difficulties and everyone involved needs to take time to reflect on what they can do to improve the relationship.

3. Find a time and place to have a meeting that will enable honest feedback. If possible, find a neutral venue. Organise the discussion as a 'round table' format so that everyone is at the same level to create a good atmosphere for mutual feedback. If the meeting has to be held online take care to ensure everyone has an equal chance to contribute. It might be helpful to have an external facilitator to maintain constructive conversation, especially if there are pre-existing tensions. Ask someone to take notes of action points that come out of the meeting.

4. At the meeting, clarify the purpose of the meeting and the need for everyone to participate in a constructive spirit, focussing on how to make the relationship as effective as possible. Everyone should listen carefully to each other in a spirit of mutual respect and accountability, and to avoid being defensive.

Option 1: structured discussion

Discuss the following questions to cover different aspects of the partnership, adapting to your context if required:

- **Review of roles and responsibilities:** Are these working in practice? Do they need to be changed?
- **Are all partners including WaterAid participating as expected?** Are there any obstacles to participation? Are all partners delivering on their commitments? Do the partner representatives have support from their organisation?
- **Are there any gaps in roles or resources?** Can these be filled by existing partners? Do they need support for capacity development or is there a need to bring in new partners?
- **Are the governance structures functioning effectively?** Do they need streamlining or strengthening? Are clear systems in place to address grievances? Are there clear rules for decision-making?
- **Has the context changed?** Has this affected partners' capacity or incentives to be involved?
- **Does the partnership agreement need to be changed?** (including objectives, targets etc.)
- Does the partnership need to amend its **exit or transition strategy?**

Option 2: 360 feedback

Where time does not allow for a fully structured discussion, the suggested points below would enable a shorter, but productive, discussion.

- What is going well in the partnership?
- What could be improved?
- What can the different partners do to make the partnership work more effectively?

You can discuss these points together with partners, or partners and WaterAid can prepare feedback in separate groups first and then discuss together.

Follow-up discussion and changing practices

The discussions (under option 1 or option 2) are likely to raise many issues, and it is important to agree on some actions at the end of the discussion.

1. Remember to celebrate where the collaboration is working well and express appreciation of each other's contributions to the work you are doing together.
2. Which of the issues raised can be addressed quickly by the different partners? For example, if there are issues of poor communication, what can be done by the different actors to improve this? If the discussion has identified gaps in capacity, what can be done to fill those gaps, or is it better to adjust expectations to be more realistic?
3. Which issues require more long-term shifts in behaviour and practice? Do different partners need to reflect on their behaviours towards each other? How can they support each other to make those shifts?
4. Are the actions fairly distributed between the partners, recognising that everyone involved in a relationship has a part to play in making that relationship work better?
5. Celebrate where the collaboration is working well and give credit to the contributions different people are making to maintaining a positive relationship.
6. How will the partners support each other and hold each other to account to make the changes agreed?

References and tools

For further guidance on partnership basics, please see:

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

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