

Self-assessment on the partnership building blocks



Partnerships in Practice Tool

Good working relationships between organisations rely on clear expectations, roles and responsibilities, and smooth mechanisms for managing all aspects of the partnership. Good relationships also rely on the attitudes and skills of the WaterAid staff who interact with the partners. Partnerships often go wrong when there are inconsistent messages and processes or when staff lack the necessary skills to work in a collaborative and strategic way with a range of different stakeholders.

WaterAid country teams need to make sure they have the right skills and processes across a range of functions to manage partnerships as effectively as possible. This tool sets out seven building blocks of a good partnership and a scale from 1 to 5, to help teams assess strengths and weaknesses, and where they need to develop further.



Partnership message

WaterAid teams need clear organisational processes and good collaborative skills to support the complex and dynamic partnerships needed in international development. It is important to invest in strengthening these competencies.



Practice message

WaterAid teams can use this tool to assess your own strengths and weaknesses across the different building blocks of partnership. Use this assessment to identify which processes to strengthen and where you need to develop stronger collaborative skills and behaviours in staff members.

Partnership building blocks

A set of seven building blocks of a good partnership were identified by BOND, the UK's International development network. These help to clarify what organisational and individual capacities are needed to maintain effective partnerships, with indicators that can be used to assess those capacities on a scale of 1–5.

The building blocks are: selection, shared values, roles and responsibilities, monitoring, staff capacity, staff continuity, capacity development and partner sustainability.

The self-assessment exercise can be carried out through group discussion. This could involve all staff, be carried out by the Senior Management Team or by a team specifically set up to conduct the exercise.

1. Read through the different descriptions of stages 1–5 of each of the building blocks. Discuss which level most accurately describes the current situation in the team. Share different experiences and examples as evidence to support the assessment. It is important to be honest and realistic.
2. For each building block, discuss which level is realistic and appropriate to aim for, depending on the size of your team and the nature of your partnerships.
3. Agree which areas to prioritise and draw up a road map, time scale and action plan to strengthen across the building blocks.
4. Repeat the self-assessment periodically to see what progress you are making.

Tip: These building blocks are not completely comprehensive. In your discussion, you will probably identify other key areas that need to be strengthened to improve collaborative working in your own context. You can add these and adapt the tool to make the self-assessment process as valuable as possible.

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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Building blocks of good partnership practice

For each building block, select which level best describes your Country Programme (CP).

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Agreed rating for your CP
Selection					
Our partnerships exist due to historical or personal links and their geographical location.	We have a basic checklist of things we look for in our partners which we use to make sure they can implement our projects.	We have an assessment process for choosing our partners which helps ensure that our choice of partners fits in with our strategy. We sometimes seek out the perspectives of others (Civil Society Organisations, beneficiaries, government etc.) as part of the assessment process to help inform our decision.	We have an assessment process for choosing our partners which we use consistently to ensure that our choice of partners fits in with our strategy. We regularly obtain the perspectives of others (Civil Society Organisations, beneficiaries, government etc.) as part of the assessment process to ensure an informed decision is made. We offer some opportunities for potential partners to better understand and assess if they wish to partner with us.	We take a strategic approach to choosing partners, systematically mapping and identifying our needs and those of our partners and ensuring a good fit. We always obtain a wide range of perspectives (Civil Society Organisations, beneficiaries, government etc.) as part of the assessment process to ensure an informed decision is made. We approach the process as a mutual assessment of each other and discuss the potential benefits and risks of the partnership.	
Shared values					
Our partnerships exist due to partners sharing our goal to fight poverty and their geographical location.	We identify the key shared objectives we look for in our partners and the benefits our partners can bring to our projects.	We and our partners share a commitment to some key values and objectives. We recognise the benefits our partners bring to our projects and organisation, and some of the benefits we bring to theirs.	We and our partners have a shared vision, values and objectives. We recognise the benefits our partners bring to our projects and organisation, and the benefits we bring to theirs. We identify how we can build on each others' respective strengths.	We and our partners have a shared vision, values and objectives. We recognise the benefits and learnings our partners bring to our projects and organisation, and the benefits we will bring to theirs. All of our partnerships build on our and our partners' respective strengths. The added value of working together is always clear and recognised by us both.	

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Roles and responsibilities					
<p>We have agreements with our partners that detail their responsibilities for delivering contracted project activities.</p>	<p>We have a standard programme agreement which we use with our partners that sets out the responsibilities of each side in relation to the contracted project activities.</p>	<p>We have agreements for all of our partnerships which set out the rights and responsibilities of each side in relation to the contracted programme activities and the functioning of the partnership.</p>	<p>We have an organisation-wide approach to working with partners (e.g. partnership policy/principles) and agreements for all of our partnerships which set out the rights and responsibilities of each side in relation to the contracted project activities and the functioning of the partnership.</p>	<p>We have an organisation-wide approach to working with partners (e.g. partnership policy/principles) and mutually-owned agreements for all of our partnerships which set out the rights and responsibilities of each side in relation to the contracted project activities and the functioning of the partnership. Our agreements are always balanced in what they require of each side.</p>	
Monitoring partnerships					
<p>We monitor our partners to ensure they are implementing projects as we agreed. We do not monitor the quality of our relationships with partners.</p>	<p>We monitor our partners to ensure they are implementing projects as agreed and sometimes use this opportunity to discuss the quality of our relationships with partners.</p>	<p>We monitor and review our partners' projects and the quality of our relationships with partners. We see this as an important opportunity to discuss how our relationships with partners are working and identify what we can improve.</p>	<p>We have a structured way of regularly monitoring and reviewing partners' projects and the quality of our relationships with partners that has been jointly agreed with them. Both we and our partners see this as an important opportunity to discuss how our relationship is working and jointly identify what we can improve. We always act on the outcomes.</p>	<p>We have a systematic way of working jointly with partners to monitor and review projects and the quality of our relationship. Both we and our partners are deeply committed to improving the quality of our relationships and always make adequate time and resources available for this. We track the quality of our partnerships across our organisation (e.g. through a partner survey) and use this data to assess and improve our overall effectiveness as a partner organisation.</p>	

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Staff capacity					
<p>We recognise the importance of good partner relations, but we have not yet identified the specific staff skills and knowledge needed to facilitate this.</p>	<p>We have identified the necessary skills and knowledge needed to manage partner relationships, and are looking at ways of building staff capacity.</p>	<p>Some staff have the necessary skills and knowledge needed to manage high quality partner relationships. They have knowledge of a range of tools and practices for managing conflict, building trust, ensuring openness etc.</p>	<p>Most relevant staff are skilled at managing high quality partner relationships and use a range of tools and practices for managing conflict, building trust, ensuring openness etc. We have integrated managing partner relationships into relevant staff performance reviews.</p>	<p>All relevant staff are highly skilled at managing high quality partner relationships and use a range of tools and practices for managing conflict, building trust, ensuring openness etc. They are able to consistently demonstrate through their performance reviews the actions they have taken to create open and trusting relationships with partners.</p>	
Partner sustainability					
<p>We only have short-term, project-based partnerships which end with donor funding. We do not discuss with our partners their sustainability beyond project funding.</p>	<p>We engage mainly in short-term partnerships along with a limited number of long-term partners. We are beginning to discuss how we can contribute to helping our long-term partners' move towards sustainability.</p>	<p>We engage in a balance of short term and long term partnerships. At the outset of a project we discuss how we can contribute to helping most of our long-term partners move towards sustainability.</p>	<p>We are committed to helping partners move towards sustainability and this commitment is clearly outlined in our partnership policy/principles. We discuss this at the outset of a project with all partners. We and our partners have a shared vision for how the partnership will evolve over time.</p>	<p>We are committed to investing in the long-term sustainability of our partners and this commitment is clearly outlined in our partnership policy/principles. Discussions on how we can contribute to helping partners move towards sustainability are prioritised at the outset of the project and followed through during the lifetime of the partnership. We and our partners have a shared vision for how the partnerships will evolve over time.</p>	

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Staff continuity					
<p>Sometimes changes in our staff disrupt our relationships with partners. We have no process for managing a smooth transition between staff.</p>	<p>We recognise the need for and are taking active steps to prevent changes in our staff disrupting our relationships with partners.</p>	<p>We manage staff changes using handovers and debriefings to minimise disruption to our relationships with partners. There are occasionally some problems.</p>	<p>We consistently manage staff changes through a combination of handover and debriefing processes, strong teamwork and documentation of knowledge to prevent disruption to our relationships with partners.</p>	<p>We always manage staff changes through a combination of handover and debriefing processes, strong teamwork and systematic documentation of knowledge to prevent disruption to our relationships with partners. We are recognised by partners for doing this effectively.</p>	
Capacity development					
<p>We usually select partners that are able to undertake our project activities and rarely support capacity development.</p>	<p>Our approach to capacity development tends to be a one-way process. We identify what capacity needs our partners have and suggest a capacity development plan for them that relates primarily to the implementation of the project activities.</p>	<p>We and our partners jointly assess their capacity needs and design, and implement an appropriate capacity development plan. We provide capacity building to enable better implementation of project activities, but also regularly respond to the wider organisational needs and priorities of our partners. Progress is regularly monitored.</p>	<p>We and our partners jointly assess their capacity needs and design, and implement an appropriate capacity development plan. Progress is regularly monitored and the plan is regularly updated. We are learning which approaches to capacity development are most successful. We sometimes look to see what we can learn from partners and how they can build our capacity.</p>	<p>Partners take the lead assessing their capacity needs and designing and implementing an appropriate capacity development plan. They identify where and how we can best provide support and identify other organisations that can provide the support we don't have the specialist resources to provide. Progress is regularly monitored by partners and the plan is regularly updated. We have evidence that our capacity support is leading to stronger organisations that can deliver better results. We proactively identify specific areas where we can learn from partners and how they can build our capacity.</p>	