

## Partnerships in Practice Tools

### Partnership Governance – how does it work?

**Background:** The first three tools covered partnership basics. All three highlighted the practical links between efficient partnerships and effective programmes / performance. This tool focuses on what *binds* partners together by exploring the instruments (e.g. partnership agreements, governance structures, decision-making processes, communications tools, etc.) that are used to manage the relationship and to determine if they are appropriate.

In this tool the onus is on you to reflect analytically on what you have learned so far and consider ways to start applying it to your current partnership challenges. These reflections will also help the process of developing strategic partnership action plans.

**Tool purpose:** To undertake a systematic review of how partnerships are currently managed in your context and what governance structures are in place. This will help identify what's working well and what's working less well.

**Partnership message:** Partnerships are most efficient when they have clear and mutually effective governance structures and mechanisms that are 'fit for purpose'.

**Practice message:** Partnerships can be improved by proactively reviewing these governance structures and processes from time to time to address any gaps and improve the likelihood of positive outcomes.

**Materials:** large sheets of paper (e.g. flipchart), coloured pens, digital camera (optional).

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## Partnership Governance

This activity is less structured than previous tools. The aim is to provide an opportunity and space for critical and constructive reflection at the individual and Learner group level on current partnership governance and management practices.

**Tip:** Clearly, the open, reflective and internal nature of discussions may not be suitable for sharing more widely, so this tool can be used with partners or just with your fellow Learners. Focus on a specific partnership / relationship in order to draw out specific, practical lessons learned.

**Defining the concept:** Governance is the development and consolidation of responsibility and decision-making structures and systems that:

- Promote and maintain engagement **internally**
- Demonstrate legitimacy and credibility **externally**
- Ensure partners do what they have agreed to do
- Allow diversity, innovation and flexibility
- Move beyond individuals to systems

The first three tools raised important questions about partner incentives, roles and responsibilities, resource flows and the nature of formal and informal agreements (i.e. paperwork, hand-shakes, etc.).

Reflecting back on your key findings from those three exercises, use the table below to structure a group conversation and critique how the following governance elements contribute to partnership performance in your context.

**Note:** You don't have to discuss all 5 of the instruments noted below; focus on at least 3 that are the highest priority for you or those that are most problematic in your context.

Management Instrument	What exists?	How could it be improved?
<b>Partnership agreements</b> – i.e. MoUs; Agreements; Addendums; contracts; etc.		
<b>Governance structures</b> – i.e. partnership steering group; rotating Chair of meeting and scribes; partnership strategy with defined timelines, targets and financial plans; etc.		
<b>Decision-making arrangements</b> – i.e. regular meetings / forums; who leads the process?; formal / informal; what kind of decisions are taken by whom?; how fast / slow is the process?; are majority or consensus decisions preferred?; etc.		
<b>Communications mechanisms between partners</b> – i.e. formal minutes; partnership progress reports; are communications clear, frequent and transparent enough?		
<b>Grievance mechanisms</b> – i.e. recourse and feedback channels within the partnership; sanctions mechanisms for non-performance; conflict resolution process; etc.		
<b>Other</b> – another management instrument or practice you deem particularly relevant in your context. (Please name it.)		

These elements refer mainly to internal partnership mechanics that help to ensure accountability between and amongst partners.

**Open discussion** – Discuss the following with your colleagues:

How can partnerships create **mutually** accountable structures and systems for internal coordination and legitimacy while also being flexible and innovative?

## References and tools

For further guidance on partnership governance tools, please see:

- WaterAid Partnership Toolkit
- BPD's website: [www.bpdws.org](http://www.bpdws.org)

Evans, B., Mc Mahon, J., & Caplan, K. BPD Water & Sanitation, 2004, *The Partnership Paperchase: Structuring Partnership Agreements in Water and Sanitation in Low-Income Communities*

Caplan, K. BPD Practitioner Note Series, 2005, *Partnership Accountability – Unpacking the Concept*