

Partnerships in Practice Tools

Partner selection or transition & exit strategies

Background: Throughout the *Partnerships in Practice* training, two key areas of practice were identified as warranting further analysis and understanding. These are: ‘partner selection processes’ and ‘transition and exit strategies’. Hence, this tool provides a choice of 2 exercises:

1. **Partner selection processes:** WaterAid’s new Global Strategy envisages a continued focus on service delivery with the purpose of influencing and strengthening the WASH sector. It also focuses more on **collaborating** or integrating with other development areas such as addressing inequalities and hygiene / health. WA’s current portfolio of partners may need to change to meet these aims. Hence, having a clear *process* to select partners that can support WA’s vision is vital. Some teams already have consistent and clear processes in place. This exercise is helpful for creating or enhancing existing partner selection *processes*.
2. **Transition and exit strategies:** Throughout this training this area in particular has been seen as a challenge for WA’s staff. What is the process for transitioning relationships or exiting from partnerships that are no longer fit for purpose? Will some of the existing partnerships shift their focus in light of the new strategy? How can less relevant partnerships be ended? Does the current guidance on transition and exit strategies need revising? This exercise is helpful for CPs / teams to design the *process* for transition and exit.

Facilitate **ONE** of the exercises noted above with fellow CP Learners (and partners if appropriate). If you are feeling ambitious, please feel free to do both exercises! These exercises are less structured and more generative (and challenging!) than the first four tools. The results should be practical and applicable for using across your CP or team for any partner selection or partner transition / exit process in the future.

	1) <i>Partner selection processes</i>	2) <i>Transition and exit strategies</i>
Tool purpose	To revise (or devise) a clear process for partner selection.	To revise (or devise) clear and simple partnership transition and exit strategies.
Partnership message	Working with the ‘right’ partners to achieve <i>mutual</i> goals requires clear and consistent partner selection processes.	Partnerships should ‘ <i>start with the end in mind</i> ’. Ideally, partners should have a process in place for ending a partnership before fully entering into the relationship!
Practice message	For the new strategy, it is vital to work with partners (of any nature) that understand WA’s aims and share a similar vision. This may mean collaborating with new and different partners and ensuring all parties’ capacities and skills are maximised.	In order to manage partnerships effectively from start to finish, it is vital to develop (preferably in collaboration with all parties involved) and understand the processes for transitioning relationships from one sort to another and to know when and how to exit a relationship.
Materials	Large sheets of paper (e.g. flipchart), coloured pens, digital camera (opt.).	

Practical Activity 1 – Partner selection processes

WaterAid’s new Global Strategy envisages a continued focus on service delivery with the purpose of influencing and strengthening the WASH sector. It also focuses more on **collaborating** or integrating with other development arenas such as addressing inequalities and hygiene / health. WA’s current portfolio of partners may need to change to meet these aims. This exercise is helpful for creating or enhancing existing partner selection *processes*. This exercise can be undertaken with or without partners, depending on your context and current relationship with your partners.

The key steps for this activity are:

1. Please read the current guidance on The Partner Selection Process in Annex 1. This is taken from WaterAid’s current Partnership Framework and Toolkit. Please familiarise yourself with the 3 phases of partner selection: 1) starting from the sourcing of partners (**looking for partner**), assessment and checks (**courting**), through to agreements and planning (**tying the knot**).
2. Using this Partner Selection Process and any existing CP / departmental process for sourcing partners *in your context*, discuss the following questions with your colleagues and complete the table:

3 phases of partner selection	Process (current or required)	What tools are needed?	Who is involved in this process?
<p><i>How do you source partners to meet strategic objectives?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ For service delivery ➤ For generating evidence for influencing ➤ For advocacy ➤ For influencing other sectors ➤ For challenging inequalities ➤ Etc. 	<p><i>(Respond to the questions on the left here)</i></p>		
<p><i>How do you ‘court’ partners?</i></p>	<p><i>(Respond to the question on the left here)</i></p>		
<p><i>How do you ‘tie the knot’?</i></p>	<p><i>(Respond to the question on the left here)</i></p>		

The discussions should generate some practical ideas for making systematic changes to partnership practices and procedures. Consider how your CP / department / team could prioritise and make these changes.

Practical Activity 2 – Transition and exit strategies

Throughout this training, this area in particular has been seen as a challenge for WA’s staff. What is the process for transitioning relationships or exiting from partnerships that are no longer fit for purpose? Will some of the existing partnerships shift their focus in light of the new strategy? How can less relevant partnerships be ended? Does the current guidance on transition and exit strategies need revising? This exercise is helpful for CPs / teams to design the *process* for transition and exit. This exercise can be undertaken with or without partners, depending on your context and current relationship with your partners.

The key steps for this activity are:

1. Please read the current guidance on Transition and Exit Strategies in Annex 2. This is taken from WaterAid’s current Partnership Framework and Toolkit.
2. Using this Transition and Exit Strategies guidance and any existing CP / departmental procedures for transitioning / ending relationships with partners *in your context*, discuss the following questions with your colleagues and formulate your response as guidance notes or a check-list which could ultimately form a standard ‘strategy’. The aim of the exercise is to think through and design the generic *process* of a transition / exit strategy – so that the same process could be discussed with partners at the start of a relationship and used in any future partnership agreement / MOU which is then tailored for the context.

Tip: If you are undertaking this exercise with partners in a particular relationship, you could design the generic process first and then tailor it to that specific partnership context – thereby designing a real, useable strategy that could be incorporated into a specific partnership agreement or MOU.

Decision-making	Communications	Process of transition
<p><i>What are the criteria that would bring about transition or exit? (e.g. unable to scale-up, no influence potential, change in geographical location, change in strategic focus and therefore intended joint outcome, etc.)</i></p> <p><i>What is the process of decision-making? (i.e. who can take what decision and when? Do all parties agree? How are decisions recorded?)</i></p> <p><i>What is the required level of authority / approval process required for making the decision?</i></p> <p><i>What evidence could be used to back up decisions? (e.g. CPEs, partner reviews, partnership reviews, etc.)</i></p> <p><i>What dispute or grievance mechanism is used?</i></p>	<p><i>Who communicates what to partners and how? (e.g. should formal communications always be followed up by personal communication?)</i></p> <p><i>Where do discussions take place? (i.e. in what forum – at a regular meeting or a special one).</i></p> <p><i>What communications methods / media are used?</i></p> <p><i>When does the transition / exit communication start? What is the anticipated timescale?</i></p> <p><i>What communications’ principles and/or behaviours should be shown by all parties involved?</i></p>	<p><i>What are the steps each party will take towards transition / exit? In terms of making changes to or withdrawing from:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) <i>The project / programme / activity;</i> 2) <i>The partnership.</i> <p><i>What resources will be required? (i.e. finance levels, time, buy-in, people)</i></p> <p><i>Do you need a sustainability plan?</i></p> <p><i>What happens to any shared asset? (i.e. what is the asset management plan?)</i></p>

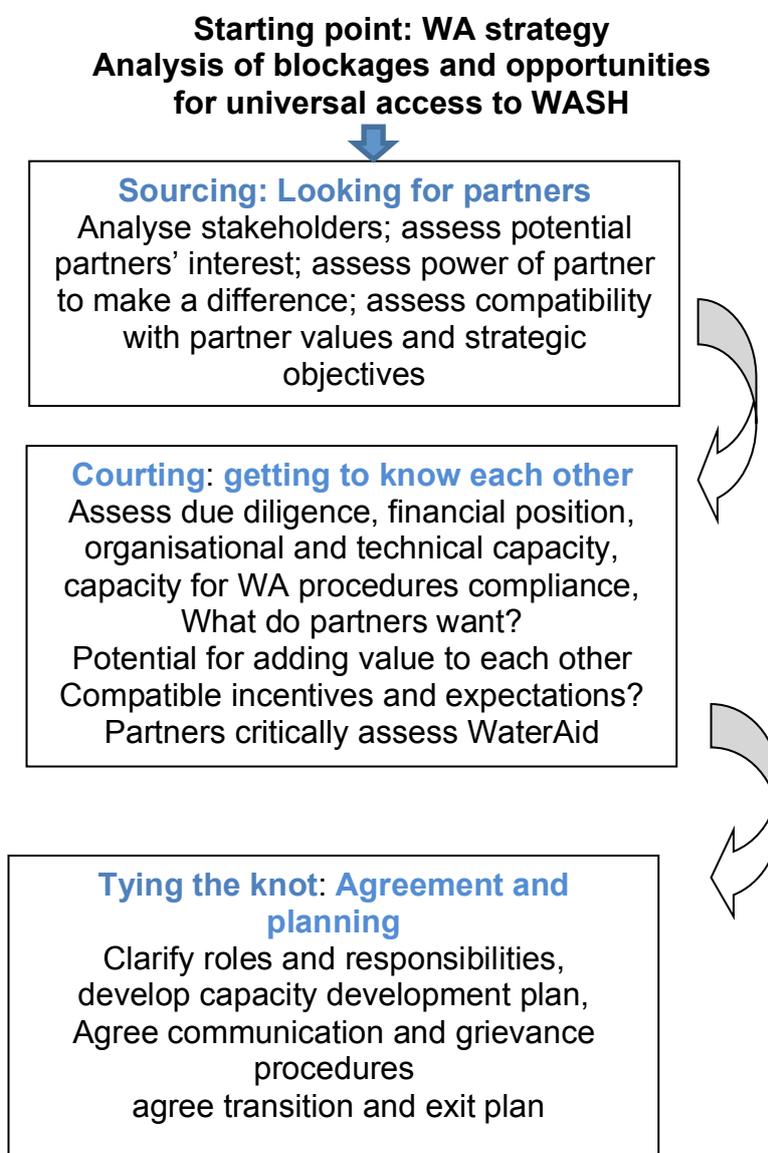
3. Discuss how the transition / exit strategy should be reviewed and the frequency of that review. For example, is this something that is discussed with partners on an annual basis to ensure it remains fit for purpose? Are there other questions that need to be answered in your context?

Annex 1: *Partner selection processes – existing guidance from the Partnership Framework and Toolkit (Version, December 2014)*

The partner selection process

There should be a representation from a cross-section of the organisation in the partner selection process. Senior staff must also be involved in the making of these decisions. The last phase of the process is to agree and sign partnership agreements or MoUs. Guidance for the drafting of agreements is available on the source.

The diagram below captures the flow of the selection process; starting from the sourcing of partners (*looking for partners*), getting to know each other through assessment and checks (*courting*), through to agreements and planning (*tying the knot*).



Risks within partner selection

Careful selection and assessment procedures can mitigate against the risks of finding out that the partners' strategies or incentives are not compatible, that there are hidden agendas, or that the partners do not have the capacity required for their roles and responsibilities.

The following table sets out some **suggested processes and tools of partner selection**, and who should be involved. These should be adapted for your context.

	Process	Tools	Who should be involved
Sourcing: Looking for partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Networking ➤ Recommendations ➤ Organisations working in same area / theme ➤ Staged interactions (informal, formal; short- to long-term, field visits) ➤ Competitive / open tendering processes ➤ Direct invitations ➤ Advertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Scoping studies ➤ Stakeholder or power mapping analysis ➤ NGO / Gov databases ➤ Selection check-list ➤ Monitoring framework ➤ SWOT analysis ➤ Recommendation reports ➤ Contract / MOU / Partnership agreements ➤ Partnership strategy / guidelines ➤ Calls for expression of interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ CR / SMT level ➤ Operational staff ➤ Regional managers ➤ Inter-departmental committee ➤ Partner heads and staff ➤ Referees ➤ CBOs ➤ Community ➤Depends on context
Courting: Getting to know each other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Getting to know each other – informally and formally (vision, mission, values, styles, cultures) ➤ Setting a culture of mutuality, transparency & accountability ➤ Planning for mechanisms & norms ➤ Seeing each others' work ➤ Capacity Needs Assessments ➤ Skill mapping... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Incentives mapping ➤ Roles and responsibilities mapping exercise ➤ Check-lists (below) ➤ Capacity needs assessment for technical and organisational capacity ➤ Ethical checks ➤ Risk assessments ➤ EoI review process ➤ WA partnership guidelines ➤ Induction discussions ➤ ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ CR / SMT / head of potential partner organisations ➤ Relevant departments ➤ Other data sources: community; newspapers; websites; WASH networks; other NGOs ➤ Finance / audit / legal firms ➤ ...

Tying the knot: completing agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Clarify objectives, roles & responsibilities, intended results, length of relationship ➤ Clarify resources needed to carry out the work ➤ Develop capacity plan ➤ Negotiate paperwork ➤ Plan for regular communication and review ➤ Focus on joint purpose and win-win spirit throughout ➤ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Roles & responsibilities map exercise ➤ Action plans ➤ Paperwork templates (adding in areas identified by partner) ➤ Grievance / exit strategies ➤ ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ SMT / CR / partners' directors ➤ WA & partner staff ➤ Relevant departments ➤ Other WASH sector actors ➤ ... <p>Depends on context</p>
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Selection Criteria

It is important to assess partners according to key criteria to ensure there will be a minimum standard of administration, management and delivery within which both parties operate. There also needs to be a clear understanding of capacity and resource needs. WaterAid CPs have developed some good tools and the following checklist includes some of this information. Sometimes it may be difficult to find partnerships that meet all the criteria and this has to be acknowledged and addressed in capacity development plans.

Each country should adapt this checklist to its own context, and some criteria may not apply to all partners.

Partner selection checklist

N°	Criteria to be met	Criteria met	
		Yes	No
1	Governance/organisational and Legal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separation between management and trustees • Trustee manual developed • Board independence • Board of trustees/directors in operation • Statutory compliance • Legal existence • Strategy • Business plan • Going concern • Structure in place for organisational development • Arrangement in place for personal development of staff • Political neutrality • Declaration of conflicts of interest to enable the assessment of working relationships between parties • Notoriety • Reliability • Evidence of commitment to the cause and engagement with the sector and assurance of dedication • Ability to fundraise 		

N°	Criteria to be met	Criteria met	
		Yes	No
2	Technical Ability (for delivery of programmes of work) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior experience • Track record • Management and staff skills • Adequate resources to enable delivery • Geographical location and the practicality of working arrangements 		
3	Programme and Management controls <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to conduct effective PME. Arrangements/processes in place to ensure monitoring and reporting, for example, with regard to, counting users, WQ testing, sustainability and the application of equity and inclusion principles. • Healthy community relationships • Ability to capture learning • Documentation • Linkages established with other stakeholders • Strategies for scaling and mainstreaming 		
4	Financial management and control <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systems in place to support the production of good quality financial reports • External audits performed • Procedures in place for efficient cash management • Effective banking controls • Documented chart of accounts in use • Processes in place for budgeting and budget management 		
5	Ethical checks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethical values consistent with those of WaterAid's • Previous reputation • Indictments (staff and trustees) • Work ethics – child rights, human rights, equality • Terrorism checks; Internal Audit to be informed 		

Other checks for WaterAid

N°	Check	Detail
1	Value addition, specific strength of partner that can add value to WA and other partners for sector strengthening	
2	New/old partner balance; fit with current portfolio and ability to manage increase; state resources.	
3	Approval process; formally approving new partnerships	
4	Capacity building plan; to be developed from the capacity needs identified	
5	Documentation of selection process; formal reports to be filed after each process	

Annex 2: Transition and exit strategies – existing guidance from the Partnership Framework and Toolkit (Version, December 2014)

Minimum commitments on exit strategy:

Partnership behaviour and approach: Allow time and communication for equitable feedback, complaints, health checks and reviews. Exit strategies are discussed from the beginning and regularly reviewed. Contributions from all partners are fully respected and recognised including non-tangible as well as tangible contributions.

An exit or transition strategy refers to the way in which WaterAid leaves, ends or changes its partnership with other organisations. This may be planned or unplanned to varying degrees. For example:

- The partners involved in a programme may change over time and some may exit in a planned process;
- A partnership can end or change in a planned way after the partnership objectives have been achieved;
- Unplanned exit may occur due to non-compliance, poor governance and accountability, changing incentives and other unforeseen factors;
- Change of vision or mission arising from new strategy or direction.

WaterAid's Partnership Agreement Guidelines (2013) set out the following advice:

A well-developed phasing-out and sustainability plan is particularly relevant for long-term partnerships. But even in short term partnerships it is important to consider how to end or transform the relationship at the end of the Partnership Agreement period. This includes:

- Planning how to **phase out the *Project*** to ensure the sustainability of the outputs and outcomes of the project, and all relevant stakeholders should be involved in developing the plan.
 - Key elements are likely to include: management roles and responsibilities, training, financing mechanisms for operations and maintenance and asset maintenance, long term sustainability monitoring.
- Planning how to **phase out the *Partnership*** to ensure a smooth transition and limit any negative impact on the partner organisation and its staff – particularly if the organization is reliant on its partnership with WaterAid for funding. The plan should consider how to sustain the capacity that has been developed through the partnership, and explore opportunities to develop a non-funded partnership.
 - Key elements may include, sourcing alternative funding, organisational development, opportunities for future collaboration (e.g. advocacy, networks).

Exit strategies should be planned from the start of any partnership and be carefully implemented to ensure the benefits of the partnership are sustained for all parties, even beyond the lifetime of the partnership. With funded partnerships in particular, there can often be a sense of financial dependency. This can be addressed through developing an organisation's capacity to raise its own funds and develop a fundraising strategy.

An exit strategy needs to consider the following to ensure a smooth, effective and efficient exit for both parties:

Decision-making

- Develop guidelines setting out decision-making, dispute and communication processes and key activities towards exit.
- Involve senior staff from each organisation.
- Regular partnership reviews to revise and refine the exit plan.
- Consider the potential implications of organisational reviews and evaluations on each partnership and modify the exit plan as necessary.

Communication

- Partnership agreements should include exit processes and these should be discussed at the start between partners.
- Formal communications should be followed up by personal communication.
- Develop a communication plan for all stakeholders to ensure everyone is aware of any change in the relationship.
- Communication should be open, honest, clear, empathetic, with feedback and active listening by all.

Processes

- Exit plans should be adapted to specific partnerships.
- Exit plans should include the process of withdrawal from the project and the partnership.
- It may be necessary to extend partnerships, and allocate sufficient resources for this, so that the exit process can be managed more effectively.