



The Partnering Alliance

Driving the quality and effectiveness of multi-stakeholder collaboration for the post-2015 development agenda

Introduction

In September 2015, the UN will announce the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals. While specific targets and indicators are still being finalised, one aspect is clear: multi-stakeholder partnerships between business, NGOs, government, the UN and communities will be essential to achieve the goals and they will be needed at a scale and quality that dwarfs current levels of collaboration.

This is a heavy demand to place. The process of partnering is generally slow, with different levels of understanding around partnership, high transaction costs and with partners often finding themselves falling into the same traps and reinventing the wheel. And while many existing partnerships are beginning to have a serious impact on development, others have not lived up to expectations. Between the extremes of 'good' partnerships (efficient, well-run partnerships delivering real impact) and 'bad' partnerships (poorly run or set-up partnerships that are failing to deliver), the majority of existing partnerships are not delivering at full efficiency or effectiveness.

This is understandable. Partnering across sectors with different interests, motivations, cultures and timescales is challenging. However, partnerships are no longer – or should no longer be – the experiment they once were. The partnership community has come a long way in its understanding of what makes partnering effective – we know what works and what doesn't.

To achieve the necessary step-change in the quality and effectiveness of collaboration will require the widespread adoption of best practice in partnering. And while there may be different, effective ways to collaborate, by agreeing to use common definitions, common principles and common approaches to partnering – by ensuring everyone is on the same page – the development of well-functioning, impactful partnerships can be greatly sped up and mainstreamed.

The objective of The Partnering Alliance – a multi-stakeholder partnership itself – is to develop open source best practice reference standards for

collaboration that can be widely adopted by all sectors of society and support the highest quality and continuous improvement of the majority of types of cross-sector partnerships for development.

By integrating common best practice into how organisations approach collaboration, into the development and implementation of partnerships, and into partnering training, tools and guidelines, we aim to instil a shared partnering language and approach that will provide an essential boost to scaling up the effectiveness and impact of cross-sectoral collaboration worldwide.

What is The Partnering Alliance?

The Partnering Alliance (TPA) is a multi-stakeholder initiative with the following aims:

- To agree a **common language, definitions and typology** around cross-sector or public-private collaboration thereby both demystifying the area and ensuring that potential partners have the same clear understanding of the form of relationship they are planning to engage in;
- To provide **best practice reference standards** to which new partnerships are developed. This will give partners a clear, shared understanding of the process and milestones they are heading towards (and so help to speed up the process of partnering); ensure that partners have discussed and agreed the critical elements required and ensure that the partnerships are set up for success;
- To provide a reference against which existing partnerships can measure their current level of good practice, and understand the steps that might need to be taken to further develop their partnership, and so provide an opportunity for **continuous improvement**.

To ensure the highest quality and take-up, TPA is made up of **1) technical experts; 2) major users of partnerships** and **3) financial supporters of the initiative**. Members of the Alliance may be in more than one category.

How will the reference standards be developed?

A draft set of definitions, common language and best practice reference standards will be developed initially by the technical experts. These reference standards will then undergo extensive consultation with the users of partnerships who will provide in-depth comments and input based on their own experience. The draft will be updated and sent out for a second round of consultation and adaptation before version 1.0 is released.

The aim is to develop best practice reference standards that are simultaneously rigorous and highly practical so that they will be adopted as far and wide by as many organisations and partnerships as possible. This will begin with the TPA major users of partnership who, assuming they agree with them, will officially adopt the reference standards as the aspiration for all the partnerships in which they are involved. As the number of adoptees increases, both through publically adopting the reference standards, and through requesting their partners to agree to use them, so the reference standards should spread through a snowball effect.

What will the reference standards look like?

The best practice reference standards will look at multiple aspects of the *process* of partnering across the whole partnering lifecycle, the *setup* of the partnership, the *operations* and *governance* of the partnership, the *relationship* between and the *commitment* of the partners and the *monitoring and measurement* of the partnership.

In each of these areas it will set out best practice principles, criteria for measuring against those principles and example ways to fulfil those criteria.

How will the reference standards be used?

- **Organisations** which adopt the reference standards will aspire to introduce them into all new and existing partnerships in which they are working. This would be supported through the internal adoption into their partnership strategy and policy, into their template partnering agreements, into training they may provide to their staff and into any tools and guidelines they create. Many organisations are in any case developing their internal policy and procedures and the reference standards would provide them with a welcome shortcut to incorporate best practice.

- To support **partnership continuous improvement**, partnership health check tools (both online and consultant-driven processes) will be developed by TPA and – using the open source reference standards – by third parties, which can be used by partners to assess their partnership against best practice criteria, understand in which areas the partnership should improve, and see examples of how such improvements could be made.
- **Training courses and tools or guidebooks** on partnering can be written or adapted to be fully compatible with TPA reference standards and carry the TPA logo.
- **When developing new partnerships**, partners can agree in advance to aspire to the TPA reference standards. TPA-compatible guidance notes for new partnership development can then ensure that partners all have the same understanding and expectations for the development and good practice set-up of their partnership (including using a TPA partnering agreement)

Who is behind this?

The Partnering Alliance is initially being convened by two organisations that for over a decade have separately pioneered the theory and practice of cross-sector collaboration: The Partnering Initiative (TPI) and the Collective Leadership Institute (CLI). They are coming together to combine their experience and tried-and-tested approaches together with the work of academics and other similar organisations to form the technical group.

A number of multinational companies and international NGOs have expressed strong interest in joining the Alliance and the list of 'user' members and the technical group will be continuously updated as the members are formalized.

How do I get involved?

If you would like to discuss becoming a member of The Partnering Alliance in any of the three membership types, please contact:



**COLLECTIVE
LEADERSHIP
INSTITUTE**

Petra Kuenkel
Executive Director
petra.kuenkel@collectiveleadership.com



the
partnering
initiative

Darian Stibbe
Executive Director
darian.stibbe@partnerinit.org