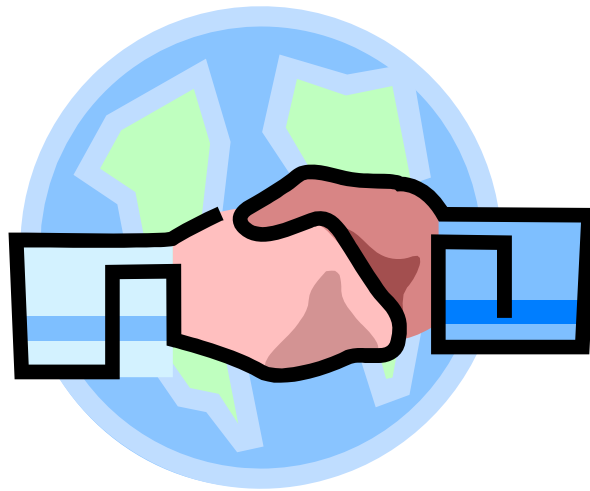


# Building Effective Partnerships



A Guide

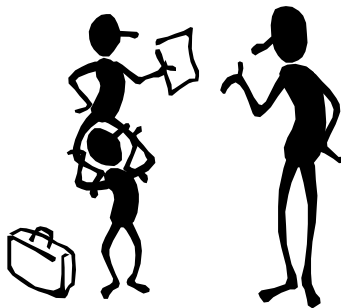


BC Non-Profit  
Housing Association

# Building Effective Partnerships

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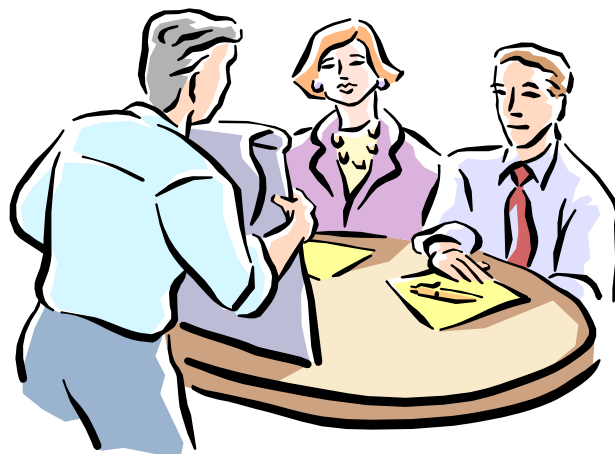
## Background

Early in 2004, the BC Non-Profit Housing Association (BCNPHA) embarked on an initiative – Building Bridges – to facilitate networking and information-sharing sessions among non-profit housing providers and community service agencies to alleviate homelessness in the Greater Vancouver region. The plan was to bring together people who work and volunteer in these two sectors, to network, discuss common goals and interests, and explore the potential for greater collaboration and partnerships. Ultimately, BCNPHA's goal was to encourage, build and grow partnerships between these sectors, to provide needed stable housing for homeless or at-risk, along with some level of support from the community service agencies.

At the sessions, BCNPHA facilitated information sharing and relationship building, which encouraged open communication and raised awareness about the challenges that each sector faces, as well as common goals and values. The project did begin to build bridges, and the response was very positive.

One of the results of the Building Bridges initiative was a recognition that partnerships need to be encouraged between the non-profit housing sector and a *variety* of sectors: health, social services, and private. This emerging need to partner was also identified in the 2004 BCNPHA study, *Sustaining the Non-Profit Housing Sector in British Columbia*. As government social housing programs and funding become ever more restrictive, it is imperative that groups and individuals concerned with providing accessible, appropriate services to a wide range of the province's citizens pool their talents and resources to sustain the social safety net.

BCNPHA has prepared this guide to assist non-profit, governmental, and for-profit organizations to build the foundations for successful partnerships.



## A Partnership Guide

This guide identifies some of the key elements needed to develop an effective partnership. It provides a suggested framework for the organization and identifies the ingredients common to successful partnerships. The first step focuses on preparing the foundation for the organization to represent its own interests and to manage its own risks. A basic SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat) analysis can be used to review both opportunity and risks.

While gaining an understanding of a prospective partner is important, the real preparation for the organization begins at home.

The foundation for a successful partnership is a clear vision of the organization's purpose, mandate and goals. Knowing your strengths and weaknesses provides a realistic basis for negotiation. While effective partnerships will balance the interests of the partners, the process of achieving that balance typically involves ***negotiation and collaborative solutions*** for all the partners. Developing a successful partnership is often contingent on being able to identify the difference between what we *want* and what we really *need*.

### Managing Risk

In the course of their normal work and activity, most businesses and organizations make decisions and take actions that involve risk. Although there is a tendency to think of risk in financial terms, it is beneficial to consider a much broader perspective. A decision may be sound financially, but if other risks are not explored unintended implications may surface over time for an organization, such as conflicting roles or mandates, loss of identity, or overloaded staff resources.

By taking a broader view of risk management organizations can safely enter into partnership arrangements. In taking the initiative they need to remember that while **effective partnerships balance the interests of the partners**, it is not your partner's responsibility to represent your interests. **Each partner is responsible for coming to the table with its own foundation in place, ready to represent its own interests.** The resulting changes should be planned, not an unintended by-product of the partnership. A partnership should never negate your organization's fundamental vision or core values.

### The Internal Planning Process

The internal planning for a partnership initiative should start with the organization's mission and vision statements. The mission statement defines the organization's purpose over the long term, while the vision statement expresses where the organization sees itself in five to ten years. The planning process should also review the organization's core

values, the set of beliefs that specify universal expectations and preferred modes of behavior. Core values create a foundation of attitudes and practices that support long-term success. Mission, vision, and values drive the organization's operational goals and objectives.

An internal planning session might involve:

**1. Review Mission and Vision Statements**

- What is the mission of the organization?
- Where does the organization see itself in the long term?
- How would a new partnership fit the organization's purpose?
- What could a partnership achieve that the organization might not be able to achieve on its own?
- What are the constraints to consider?

**2. Review Core Values**

- What are the core values of the organization?
- How might they influence the development of a partnership?

**3. Review Current Goals and Objectives**

- What are the organization's current goals and objectives?
- What are the potential impacts of a new partnership on the current goals and objectives?
- What adjustments, if any, would be required?

**4. Program Agreements**

- How do program agreements limit or influence:
  - i. populations to be served;
  - ii. funding availability;
  - iii. partnering or other resource-sharing?

**5. Analysis**

- What are the organization's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)?
- What are the benefits to be achieved from a partnership –the ideal end state? **Note:** These would be the organization's ideal goals and objectives; not necessarily the final goals and objectives of the partnership.
- What are the barriers to forming a partnership?
- What would the potential partnership contribute to:
  - i. The organization's current strengths?
  - ii. The organization's current weaknesses?
  - iii. Would a partnership generate new opportunities?
  - iv. Would a partnership generate new threats?

- 6. Prioritization** (Note: Only items of critical importance to the organization's operation should be classified as "needs". At this stage your prospective partner has not been part of the process. A restrictive approach can negate the potential partner's ability to respond with their ideas regarding partnership solutions.)
- Which of the list of benefits for the partnership are *wants* (the organization would like it)?
  - Which of the list of benefits are *needs* (the organization must have a solution)?

## **Partnership Ingredients**

There are a number of factors common to developing and maintaining successful partnerships. As well, there are some assumptions about partnerships that can interfere with arriving at an agreement. Understanding these ingredients can provide guidance in the partnership building process.

### **1. An Understanding of Partnerships**

- Partnerships are defined as sharing or taking part with another or others, esp. in a business, with shared risks and profits.
- Equality is defined variously as the same in quantity, quality, size, rank, etc.; evenly balanced; having the same rights.
- The word partnership for many people implies a level of equality. While that may turn out to be the case, it is not a requirement for success in developing a partnership.
- Balancing the interests of the partners does not require that the benefits of the partnership be equal, but that each partner is able to achieve some of their key goals and objectives.
- Successful partnerships are frequently described as creating a "**win-win**" situation. While this is fundamentally true, it does not require equality but it does require fairness.
- Role sharing, levels of risk, financial and other resources, and investment do not have to be equal to have an effective partnership.

### **2. Compatible Corporate Values**

- The partners' corporate values need to be compatible, but not necessarily identical. For example; while social housing sector operations are generally supportive of their tenants, they often tend to put a greater focus on overall community health or well being, On the other hand, for the health sector, the focus would most likely be on support for the individual client.

### **3. Clear Corporate Goals**

- The partners' respective corporate goals need to be clearly understood to develop and maintain a successful partnership.
- The partners' goals need to be mutually acceptable to each other. They can be different but should not be conflicting. Conflicting goals will create an environment for potential disagreement and confrontation.

#### **4. Communication**

- Good communication among participants is essential. Viewpoints, issues, and concerns need to be expressed openly and honestly. Hidden agendas hinder the process.
- Open, honest communication builds mutual understanding among the partners.
- Seeking clarification will assist in avoiding misunderstandings, which can lead to conflicts.
- Participants need to keep others in their organizations informed who may not be directly involved in the process.

#### **5. Trust and Respect**

- Trust and respect are critical to the long term success of a partnership. Both are factors that are earned over time as the partners work together.
  - Involve all partnership participants as early as possible in the process to build mutual understanding.
  - Use clear, open, honest communication throughout the process.
  - Recognize the value and importance of the partners' input and contributions.
  - Meet as often as necessary to understand your partner's vision, goals and activities related to the shared project.

#### **6. Commitment to Overcoming Differences**

- Differences are not fatal. When there is a disagreement, listening to the issue is the first step.
- While agreement in all things may not be possible, attaining a level of mutual understanding is the more important goal.
- Actively listening to the partner's expression of "wants and needs" can help identify some alternatives or solutions.
- Partners that are committed to the values of the prospective outcome will work together to overcome issues and meet each other's needs.

#### **7. Supportive Partnership Cultures**

- Effective and lasting partnerships exist best in an environment where the partners recognize and respect the other's role and contribution.
- Partners affirm their commitment to the partnership goals.
- Partners look for solutions to issues, are prepared to consider alternatives, and adjust where necessary.
- Partners show respect and support for each other's core values.
- The success of partnerships will depend on the level of cooperation and understanding achieved at all levels of the partnering organizations.



## 8. Leadership

- Successful partnerships most often have a strong leader who plays a central role in maintaining relationships and building trust and respect among the players.
- The leadership role is not a function of the size, money or resource commitments or the organization – it is likely more reflective of the leader’s commitment to the need for and value of the prospective partnership.
- The leader ensures that everyone is involved in the process and dealt with fairly.

## Building the Partnership

In the previous section, we encourage organizations to identify the goals and objectives for a partnership from their perspective. These goals and objectives are then prioritized through the “wants and needs” process. To build an effective partnership they must now begin to work with their potential partner to establish **partnership goals and objectives** that will balance the interests of the partners. In the final stages the partners may have to negotiate some adjustments.

The previous section identified some of the key ingredients for success. Applying them through the final steps will enhance the opportunity for success. Take the time necessary to ensure that all partners are provided opportunities to participate throughout the process.

### 1. Gaining Familiarity

- Learning each organization’s mission, vision, and core values
- Understanding each organization’s goals and objectives
- Learning each organization’s organizational structure and culture; how decisions get made
- Understanding each organization’s wants and needs

### 2. Identifying a Partnership Foundation

- Identify common elements of mission, vision, and values. Identifying areas of commonality will provide a philosophical base for the partnership discussions.
- Identify the common goals and objectives that each organization has identified for the partnership.
- Clarify differences where conflict could occur.

### 3. Partnership Goals and Objectives

- Focusing on the areas of common values and interest, develop the goals and objectives for the new partnership. Achieving a shared understanding of the goals and objectives creates a framework for addressing the partner’s wants and need issues as the process moves forward.



#### 4. Addressing Wants and Needs

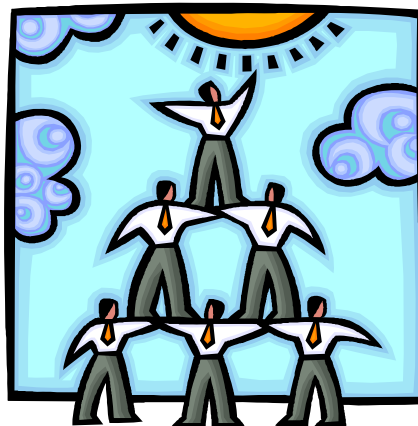
- First establish a process to address issues. One approach is to simply create a “problems basket”. Any issue that represents a problem to a partner is put into the “problems basket” to be dealt with later. In some cases what appears to be a problem or issue is resolved or mitigated by subsequent items. As well, there is more incentive for collaborative solutions later in the process as a final agreement gets closer.
- Within the framework of the partnership goals and objectives, review each partner’s “wants and needs” and identify how they could be responded to and who would be responsible for the response. Use the agreed upon process to address unresolved issues.
- At the end of the process, return to the items left in the “problems basket”. Clarify the issue, identify its importance (i.e. is it a “want” or a “need”) and why the issue is important to resolve.
- Identify which of the partners will be responsible for bringing forward potential solutions to the issue.
- Evaluate the results.

#### 5. Roles and Responsibilities

- The process of identifying the roles and responsibilities in the partnership will have already begun in the “wants and needs” part of the process. This may need to be expanded upon to address specific operational or decision making issues.
- Together with the goals and objectives, the agreed upon partnership roles and responsibilities are the key requirements for maintaining an effective working relationship among the partners.

#### 6. Final Decisions

- Review and seek collaborative solutions to outstanding issues.
- If there are key outstanding issues that remain unresolved, the partners will need to make a fundamental decision regarding whether to withdraw or to proceed conditionally.



## Partnership Agreement

While there is no requirement for a partnership to have a written agreement, there are advantages to having a Partnership Agreement for a new initiative. A written agreement spells out clearly the following items, and in the event of a conflict, provides clarification of the partnership components. An agreement should contain the following:

- The overarching purpose of the partnership;
- The partnership's goals and objectives;
- The areas of responsibility for each partner;
- The resource and / or financial commitments of each partner;
- The operating framework for responding to issues that arise; including
  - a process for decision making and
  - a process to resolve conflicts;
- A process for evaluation;
- A dispute resolution process; and
- A process to terminate the partnership if that should become necessary.

**Note:** The memorandum or agreement between the partners suggested above focuses primarily on the major elements and principles of the partnership. It identifies a process to deal with issues as they occur rather than just documenting all the details. However, any agreement should contain enough detail to provide a reasonable level of comfort to the participants.

A Partnership Agreement template is included as Appendix A.



## Partnership Development Checklist

A checklist is included as Appendix B. It follows the partnership development process from its initial stages through to the completion of a partnership agreement. This form can serve as a guide in taking your organization through a partnership development process.



## Conclusion

This guide was developed to outline the steps to forming partnerships. Operating in a successful partnership allows organizations to most effectively utilize their resources and talents. Forming a partnership takes much thought, preparation, and hard work; however, the benefits of partnering can be huge. We encourage you to take the time to explore partnerships, using this guide, checklist, and agreement template.

If you have suggestions for improving these resources, please contact Marg Gordon, Member Services Coordinator, by emailing her at [marg@bcnpha.bc.ca](mailto:marg@bcnpha.bc.ca).



# Appendices

Appendix A.....Partnership Agreement Template

Appendix B.....Partnership Development Checklist



## Partnership Agreement Template

THIS AGREEMENT DATED FOR REFERENCE *{Date}*

BETWEEN:

*{Name of organization A-B -C}*

*{Street address}*

*{City, Province}*

*{Postal Code}*

(Hereinafter referred to as the “A-B-C”, e.g. Service Provider)

AND:

*{Name of organization X-Y-Z}*

*{Street address}*

*{City, Province}*

*{Postal Code}*

(Hereinafter referred to as the “X-Y-Z”, e.g. Health Authority)

WHEREAS the ABC *{Specify services, client types, etc.}*; and

WHEREAS the X-Y-Z; *{Specify services, client types, etc.}*; and

WHEREAS the A-B-C and the X-Y-Z wish to ensure successful *{Specify services or outcomes}*;

THIS AGREEMENT sets out the terms and conditions under which the A-B-C and the X-Y-Z will collaborate to provide *{Service}* to *{Client type}* clients (hereinafter referred to as the “Client”).

### **Statement of Purpose**

Our purpose for this partnership is: *{e.g.: The partnership between ABC Services Society and XYZ Health Authority provides supports to persons living with mental illness.}*

### **Goals and Objectives {Outcomes}**

The goals for this partnership are: *{Broad statements of what the partners want to achieve}*

*Note: A work plan can be attached as an appendix to the agreement. The work plan would specify steps towards achieving the desired outcomes. See attached sample, Appendix A*

## **Roles of Partner Organizations**

*Describe who will do what in the partnership, who will be responsible for what, who will report to whom, and how the partnership and its activities will be managed. For example:*

### ***A-B-C Responsibilities***

*The A-B-C will:*

- 1. assign a liaison with the X-Y-Z*
- 2. enter into a Service Agreement with the Client;*
- 3. provide defined services to the Client;*
- 4. request the X-Y-Z's intervention if the Client's behaviour puts their supports at risk; and*
- 5. work with the X-Y-Z to support the Client's continued support services.*

### ***X-Y-Z Responsibilities***

*The X-Y-Z will:*

- 1. assign a liaison to the A-B-C*
- 2. monitor the Client on a regular basis and ensure adequate supports are provided to the Client;*
- 3. work with the A-B-C to resolve any issues with the Client that might put their services at risk; and*
- 4. in the event of a termination of service, work with the Client to find other support.*

*Note: the more detail you include, the less opportunity for misunderstandings and conflict. For example, role descriptions (task assignments) for the partnering organizations' representatives could be attached as an appendix.*

## **Resource Commitments**

*This section is used to describe staff, facility, and/or in-kind commitments*

## **Financial Commitments**

*This details the financial contributions of each partner. It is useful to include a budget under this section, e.g.:*

<i>Budget Item</i>	<i>Total Budget {\$}</i>	<i>Amount, A-B-C</i>	<i>Amount, X-Y-Z</i>
<b><i>Personnel</i></b>			
<i>Management</i>			
<i>Supervisors</i>			
<i>Staff</i>			
<i>Volunteer expenses</i>			
<b><i>Total Personnel</i></b>			
<b><i>Expenses</i></b>			
<i>Partnership meetings</i>			
<i>Travel, etc. etc.</i>			
<b><i>Total Expenses</i></b>			
<b><i>PARTNERSHIP TOTAL</i></b>			

**Communications Plan**

*A communications plan would outline both internal {to each partnering organization} and external {the larger community} communications*

**Evaluation Criteria**

*Evaluation based on the objectives and indicators under Goals and Objectives*

**Decision Making**

*A mutually satisfactory decision-making process, e.g.: majority rule or consensus*

**Dispute Resolution**

*A mutually satisfactory dispute resolution process, e.g.:*

*Where differences arise, the partners agree to:*

- o Address their differences in a timely, open and honest manner;*
- o Attempt to resolve issues at the staffing level at which they occur;*
- o Engage an independent mediator, if appropriate, to assess the partnership and/or the situation, either when required or as part of a formal evaluation.*

## **Termination of Partnership**

*A mutually agreed-upon termination process, e.g.:*

*The partners would acknowledge that their partnership is no longer viable and may be impeding the achievement of the goals and objectives. If such occurs and the issues cannot be satisfactorily resolved following the process identified under Dispute Resolution above, the partners agree to dissolve the relationship, honourably and without acrimony, following:*

- o Management Committee discussion of the situation and alternatives to the current arrangements;*
- o Notice being served in writing to all pertinent stakeholders; and*
- o A transition period of {number of} months.*



IN WITNESS OF THIS AGREEMENT the parties have executed below:

{NAME OF A-B-C}  
per its authorized signatories

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Print name and title

---

---

Print name and title

{NAME OF X-Y-Z}  
per its authorized signatories

---

---

Print name and title

---

---

Print name and title

Appendix A

***Sample Work Plan***

<b><i>Tasks to Do</i></b>	<b><i>Criteria for Excellence</i></b>	<b><i>Agency Primarily Responsible</i></b>	<b><i>Deadline or Schedule</i></b>
<i>Conduct internal planning process as outlined in “Building Effective Partnerships” Guide</i>	<i>Six components completed. Planning process approved and supported by a minimum of 75% of board and senior staff</i>	<i>A-B-C and X-Y-Z</i>	<i>By June 30</i>
<i>Convene workshop of partners’ board and staff members</i>	<i>A minimum 75% of participants rate the workshop as “very useful”</i>	<i>A-B-C</i>	<i>By August 1</i>
<i>Convene meeting of partners’ board and staff members to review “Partnership Checklist”</i>	<i>A minimum 75% of items on checklist checked off as completed</i>	<i>X-Y-Z</i>	<i>By September 1</i>
<i>etc.</i>	<i>etc.</i>	<i>etc.</i>	<i>etc.</i>

## Partnership Development Checklist

*Use the following checklist to identify what has been accomplished and what is outstanding in your partnership development process. Some items are applicable to an individual organization while others pertain to both partner organizations.*

✓	<b>Mission and Vision Statements and Core Values</b> ( <u>Vision</u> is a succinct and inspiring statement of intentions that are broad, inclusive and forward-thinking. <u>Mission</u> is the organization's reason, purpose, and passion, - its <i>raison d'être</i> . <u>Core values</u> [beliefs] specify organizational expectations and preferred behaviours.)
	1. The mission statements of each partner organization have been reviewed.
	2. Common elements of the mission statements have been identified.
	3. The vision statements of each partner organization have been reviewed.
	4. Common elements of the vision statements have been identified.
	5. The core values of each partner organization have been reviewed.
	6. Common core values have been identified.
	7. A partnership statement of purpose has been developed collaboratively.
✓	<b>Partnership Goals and Objectives</b> (“Think of the goals as the treasure at the top of a stairway, and the objectives as the stairs.” – Craig Miyamoto)
	8. The organization has conducted a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) analysis.
	9. The organization has developed a list of ‘wants’.
	10. The organization has developed a list of ‘needs’.
	11. The organization has examined its current goals for potential partnership conflicts.
	12. The partners have mutually defined goals for the partnership.
	13. The partners have developed objectives for reaching partnership goals.



✓	<b>Organizational Structure</b> (“What is important is that there be a fit between the organization's structure, its size, its technology, and the requirements of its environment.” – Stephen P. Borgatti)
	14. The organization has reviewed its program agreements for potential partnership conflicts.
	15. The organization has a clearly articulated management structure.
	16. The organization has a defined decision-making process.
	17. The partners have identified roles and responsibilities for the partnership.
	18. The partners have approved a decision-making process.
	19. The partners have approved a dispute resolution process.
✓	<b>Partnership Agreement</b> (“A partnership agreement is a voluntary contract between two or more [organizations] ... with the understanding that there will be a sharing of the profits and losses between/among partners.” – From <i>Wikipedia</i> , the free encyclopedia)
	The partnership agreement contains:
	20. A statement of purpose.
	21. Goals (intended outcomes).
	22. Role descriptions for each partner organization.
	23. Role descriptions for individual representatives from each partner organization.
	24. Resource commitments for each partner.
	25. Financial commitments for each partner.
	26. An internal communications plan for each partner.
	27. Measurable evaluation criteria.
	28. A decision-making process.
	29. A dispute resolution process.
	30. A partnership termination process.

