Should we dance?

A resource for effective partnering

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Based on discussions of the Partnership Dialogue,
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Table of Contents

Should we dance?
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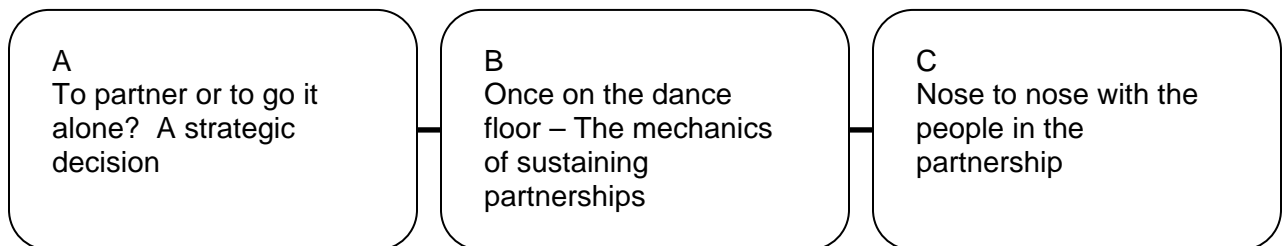## Introduction

Why this resource?
Beginning in September 2005, Boyle Street Community Services initiated a series of discussions to explore what makes partnerships work and what sustains them, especially through the stormy periods. The discussion involved a group of individuals drawn from sixteen organizations in Edmonton. Through a 'partnership dialogue', we wanted to look beyond the 'platitudes of partnership 101' to reach a deeper understanding. Participants took part in as many sessions as they were able (see Appendix A for Participant Dialogue Participants).

This reflective learning opportunity was an offshoot of Inner City Connections, a partnership to change the way child protection services are delivered, involving the provincial government and two inner city community agencies.

Should we dance? is one product of the partnership dialogue. Our intention is to stimulate thought and discussion if you are considering whether to form or enter into a partnership, or if you are reflecting on an existing partnership. The prevailing question is what it takes to sustain a healthy partnership.

Three major considerations
The resource is organized into three major areas:

A To partner or to go it alone? A strategic decision	B Once on the dance floor – The mechanics of sustaining partnerships	C Nose to nose with the people in the partnership

Within each area, we raise points and questions to open discussion, largely based on the ideas generated in the dialogue. We also bring in relevant material from some of the literature on partnership and offer links to the rich array of current resources on partnership.

A. To partner or to go it alone? A strategic decision

As issues surface within communities, individual members, groups, organizations or policy makers take steps to bring about change, alone or in collaboration with others.

To partner is to assume that the partnership will **add value and make a difference in outcomes** for the people served. By working collaboratively, and therefore 'differently', the partners may well experience gains that create benefits on various issues. Intuitively, if there is no value added, the best choice could be to 'take a pass on partnering'.

The number one question for 'partnership wallflowers' to consider, when asked to dance or asking another, is:

Why is this partnership necessary?
Should our organization address this issue alone? Why or why not?

The partnership may be 'nice' but not necessary. If it would be more effective to address the issue alone, then our reflections suggest a formal partnership is probably not the best option. If collaboration would be advantageous, we offer an array of questions to consider throughout this resource, as you venture forth.

1. Types of partnering relationships and implications
Because partnership is a term loosely attached to many kinds of collaborative arrangements among two or more parties, the decision of whether to partner ranges from a simple nod to weighing a complex set of implications.

At one end of a continuum of cooperation, players exchange information, an arrangement light on responsibilities and accountabilities but potentially of great benefit to maximize limited resources. At the other end, entering into a legally binding partnership agreement that integrates decisions and activities has multiple implications.

Funders often ask for evidence of 'partnership' in grant proposals. If the underlying intent is to promote cooperation and collaboration among organizations with common interests, how formal does the partnership need to be to achieve the desired outcomes? Is it easier for funders to fund partnerships than single organizations?

From a community development perspective, a partnership is a relationship where two or more parties, having compatible goals, form an agreement to work together in a mutually beneficial manner, often doing things together that might not be possible alone.

(Nicholls, C., Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, *Promising practices in community partnerships: lessons learned from Canadian rural partnerships,*
http://www.rural.gc.ca/programs/practices_e.phtml)

Frameworks that describe a range of partnerships
The resource draws on three organizing frameworks for the concept of partnership. The first uses broad models of 'cooperative', 'coordinated' and 'collaborative' partnerships, with increasing degrees of integration.

Three models of partnership

Cooperation
Two or more agencies **share general information about their mandates, objectives, and services.** They may work together informally to achieve their organizations' day-to-day goals, for example, through **support or referrals**. Cooperation requires a relatively superficial level of agency interaction, as in inter-agency meetings and informal networking.

Coordination
A multi-disciplinary approach where professionals from different agencies **confer**, **share decision-making**, and **coordinate their service delivery** for the purpose of achieving shared goals and improving interventions.

Collaboration
Unlike the other models of partnership, collaboration requires two or more agencies **working together in all stages of program or service development**; in other words, **"joint planning, joint implementation, and joint evaluation"**. There is a cooperative investment of resources (time, funding, material) and therefore joint risk-taking, sharing of authority, and benefits for all partners.

(Skage, S. 1996, *Building strong and effective community partnerships, A manual for family literacy workers*, http://www.nald.ca/CLR/partner/cover.htm, p. 19)

Similar to the broad categories above, the University of Wisconsin created a scale of integration, further refining the levels and placing *partnership* at the level of 'cooperation'. Their framework adds structures and purposes for each process.

Scale of integration			
Integration	**Process**	**Structure**	**Purpose**
LOW	Communication	Network, round table	Dialogue and common understanding. Clearing house for information. Explore common and conflicting interests.
	Contribution	Support group	Mutual exchanges to support each other's efforts. Build mutual obligation and trust.
	Coordination	Task force, council, alliance	Match and coordinate needs, resources, and activities. Limit duplication of services. Adjust current activities for more efficient and effective results.
	Cooperation	Partnership, consortium, coalition	Link resources to help parties achieve joint goals. Discover shared interests. Build trust by working together.
HIGH	Collaboration	Collaborative	Develop shared vision. Build inter-dependent system to address issues and opportunities. Share resources.

(Taylor-Powell, E., Rossing, B., & Geran, J., 1998, University of Wisconsin-Extension, *Evaluating collaboratives, reaching the potential*, http://learningstore.uwex.edu/Evaluating-Collaboratives-Reaching-the-Potential-P1032C238.aspx, p.5.)

We used the 'scale of integration' to examine partnership examples and concluded that it should not be viewed as a hierarchy, wherein highly integrated collaboration is necessarily the ideal. Rather, the structure has to fit the need and may change over time.

Partnership arrangements vary by a range of factors, according to the literature summarized in a study for Canada's *National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention*. The first three were reflected in the Scale of Integration while the remaining factors offer other ways of slicing the pie in considering characteristics of collaborating relationships.

Partnership variations

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
Purpose	Function	Formality of arrangement	Representation	Degree of inclusion	Diversity

7.	8.	9.	10.	11	12.
Extent of shared principles and values	Level of partner commitment	Partner contributions (e.g. knowledge, information, expertise, resources)	Allocation of responsibilities	Planning and decision-making processes adopted	Accountability arrangements

(Department of Justice Canada, n.d., *Partnership Study, National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention, Phase II*,
http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/ps/eval/reports/02/cppartner/toc.html)

As implied by 'allocation of responsibilities' and 'partnership contributions', effective partnerships do not require equal contributions. Partners play different roles and bring differing levels of investment and capacity to the table.

Legal considerations
Following the legal definition of a 'partnership', every partner is liable for the financial liabilities created by the actions (legal or illegal) of other partners. For this reason, some collaboratives deliberately avoid using the term partnership. Questions to consider:

- Which organization is accountable for the money?
- What decisions will fall to this agency in the event of disagreement?

Deciding on the level of formality
Within each of the three frameworks for partnership arrangements, there is a continuum of formality. How much formality do you need to achieve the desired outcomes? Factors to consider:

◆ What is the culture and history of making decisions within each organization? Does decision-making rest with the board? What authority do managers and staff have to make decisions? How quickly are decisions made?

◆ What is the nature of the work being undertaken? How much risk and liability is involved? Are legislatively mandated services involved?

◆ How much money is on the table?

◆ What kind of process is needed to formalize and document decisions? What accountabilities need to be formalized?

Regardless of the level of formality, people need to be sure they are using common language and have a shared understanding, upfront, of the kind of relationship being formed.

If there can be a single definition of partnership, it has to be inclusive enough to encompass variations:

> On the one hand, it could be argued that it may not be realistic, or even desirable, to try to confine the concept of partnership, as **elasticity** allows partnership to be an **organic, evolving concept**. On the other, the lack of definition — and hence parameters to the relationship — is not without its own risks.

> **Different perceptions** among partners of the **rationale** for the partnership, the **principles and values** behind the partnership, and **how it will work in practice**, may contribute to stressful operational environments and may limit the effectiveness of partnerships to achieve results.
> (Department of Justice Canada, n.d.)

2. Weighing benefits and costs

Entering into a partnership has the potential for both benefits and costs. It is easier to latch onto the benefits than anticipate the full range of costs. To make the partnership worthwhile, each partner has to experience a **sufficient return on the investment of resources** so that the partnership enhances rather than drains the organization.

> In the current environment, with everyone under siege, few …have the time or energy to engage in "extracurricular activities". Consequently, to make the collaboration a high priority for participants, [successful experiences] focus on pressing problems that partners face, and provide them with external resources and skills to address these problems

(Lasker, R., 1997, *Medicine and Public Health: The power of collaboration,* http://www.cacsh.org/pdf/MPH.pdf, p. 146).

We identified a set of 'possible upsides' and 'potential downsides' to partnering and present these as questions to consider before deciding whether to enter into a partnership.

Possible upsides

- ♦ Will program participants benefit from a partnership approach?
- ♦ Do the issues reach beyond the mandate of a single organization?
- ♦ Will partners maximize limited but complementary resources by working together?
- ♦ Can the partners' blend of expertise, knowledge and experience add value to what a single organization can generate on its own?
- ♦ Will organizations gain access to external funding by forming a partnership?
- ♦ Will partners share risks? Will the participants be able to stretch to the edge of their mandate by being part of a partnership?

Example

Our needle exchange program would not have been possible without a partnership. The 'harm reduction' partnership involved organizations whose formal endorsement was needed to go forward, including the local police, the provincial addictions organization, the regional health authority, and community organizations that had credibility with people with drug addictions.

Each organization needed the others to be on side to make the initiative possible. They all had interests in ensuring people were not going to be arrested when they came to exchange needles, in connecting with people based on trusting relationships and in addressing the health and addiction issues that would arise. The partnership has been in place for close to 15 years.

The Nuffield Institute of Health named the necessity as 'interdependence':

> Potential partners need to have an appreciation of their interdependence, without which collaborative problem solving makes no sense. If there is objectively no such interdependence then there is no need to work together. If there is some interdependence, but this is insufficiently acknowledged or inadequately understood, then further understanding needs to be acquired before any further partnership development can take place

(Nuffield Institute for Health, 2003, *Assessing strategic partnership, The partnership assessment too*, www.nuffield.leeds.ac.uk/downloads/pat.pdf, p. 14).

Potential downsides

- ♦ Are the philosophies compatible, e.g. beliefs, core values, practice models and ways of working with community? What differences can you accept? What values and beliefs cannot be compromised?
- ♦ Are you able to give up some control? What are your limits?
- ♦ What time, energy and resources are required? What capacity does your organization have to add new demands onto existing commitments?
- ♦ Will this partnership fit into the larger scheme of your organization's activity? Is this partnership central or peripheral to your operations? How will your other programs accommodate this partnership?
- ♦ What will be the impact of slower, more complex decision-making on your organization?
- ♦ If controversial issues arise, how will your organization respond?

The extent of resources needed and the future return on the investment are not easily defined at the outset. As the partnership evolves, partners will inevitably reassess whether they are continuing to experience a reasonable return.

The overture to partner can come from government bodies wanting to enter into a collaborative relationship with community organizations. Small organizations are sometimes challenged to come to the table and participate in partnerships because of the resources required. On the other hand, they may gain access to power by becoming involved. Among community organizations, generally large organizations have less of a need to be in partnerships to survive.

> The problems that partners face, and the benefits that each seeks to achieve through collaboration, are frequently different. Consequently, most of the collaborations in [our research] are less accurately characterized as partners working together toward a common goal, than as partners working together in a common enterprise to achieve benefits that are important to each of them, but which none can achieve alone.
>
> Successful collaborations do not shy away from acknowledging the motivating power of this self-interest. Quite the contrary, they recognize that since collaboration is hard work, partners need to obtain benefits that are valuable to them. Moreover, they recognize that these benefits often provide the means for improving the health status of individuals and populations (Lasker, 1997, p. 146).

3. Choosing partners

Choosing whom to include in a partnership is a strategic decision. Being strategic in the choice of partners means …

- ♦ Choosing organizations and people with whom you can and want to work. Consider lessons learned from previous collaborative efforts involving the same organizations.
- ♦ Choosing organizations that share a perspective on how the work is done and a passion for achieving particular outcomes.
- ♦ Choosing organizations whose leaders can commit to the partnership.
- ♦ Choosing organizations with the capacity to commit the required time, energy and resources to sustain the partnership.
- ♦ Choosing the number of partners based on a group size that can be sustained and does not become a logistical quagmire (e.g. arranging meetings, seeking approval, making decisions).
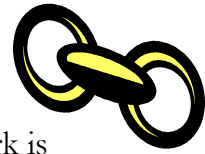
Questions to consider …

- ♦ Can you partner with perceived competitors? i.e. competing for clients, money, recognition, leadership?
- ♦ Can you be in a partnership with the funder?
- ♦ Can a voluntary organization partner with a mandated service? The two are not on equal footing; if there is a decision to be made, 'mandatory', legislated requirements will always trump 'voluntary' wishes.

All inclusive vs. strategic partners

- ♦ Strategic partners are committed people with a specific reason for becoming involved. Each partner is needed to achieve the desired outcomes. Beyond a reasonable number of players, the logistics and administrative costs of managing the partnership can soak up too much of the energy and resources required to advance the agenda.
- ♦ If a partnership is being used for the purposes of networking and inclusion, perhaps a partnership is not needed; instead, you may be looking to form a network or alliance or task force. This is not an 'all call' in which anyone who could possibly be interested is asked to join.

Changing membership

- ♦ Is there a succession plan?
- ♦ What knowledge (e.g. information, background, purpose, values and principles) is passed forward when there is a turnover of participants?
- ♦ How are new members received? Who takes responsibility for bringing them into the loop?

♦ Will the commitment from the partnering organizations survive the departure of their founding members?

4. Power

Inherent power differences as a fact

The theme of power has surfaced in several places in this first section, *To partner or to go it alone?* If an organization enters into a partnership with an expectation that power will be equally shared, frustration could set in at the first turn. Each organization benefits from an understanding that power will be distributed but not equal.

♦ We bring a degree of personal power from our (or our organization's) position, reputation or political influence. For example, partners with large bureaucracies and rules carry a power that serves as a constant backdrop in a partnership.

♦ Two or more players making decisions that are mutually acceptable involves negotiating power and control. The partner representing a large system, for example, will require far more complex communication protocol than those used by small organizations.

♦ The organization that controls or is directly accountable for the funds has a vested power, as does the organization with legislated responsibilities, such as a mandate for child welfare.

These differences are not necessarily good or bad but they are facts to acknowledge at the front end. (See Appendix B for the *Swindon People First Contract*, a British example of citizens declaring conditions for participation.)

B. Once on the dance floor – The mechanics of sustaining partnerships

The mechanics of sustaining partnerships over time have to do with the processes organizations put in place to create a mutually agreed upon plan and take action as a group. There are numerous resources on partnership with steps for establishing and sustaining partnerships. This section addresses topics of particular interest during the Partnership Dialogue. A reference list of valuable materials on partnership is included at the end of this resource.

1. Are we dancing to the same tune?

'How to' resources on partnerships almost always begin on the same note: 'develop a shared vision and goals'. Our reflections supported this notion but identified additional considerations and raised a number of questions.

- Partners need to articulate their starting assumptions, core values and a glossary of terms to ensure they are working from a common understanding of the language.
- By articulating a rationale for the practice models they will be using, partners develop a shared understanding of why they are approaching the work as they do.

EXAMPLE

At the beginning of our partnership, we had an all day session with an outside facilitator who understood the project but was not part of it. We established a common set of value statements that the project could work from which enable us to start being a 'we' rather than an 'I' or 'them'. It was a positive strategy to move the partnership forward. In retrospect, we also should have asked the question: What did we each want from the partnership? That would have given us the chance to clarify assumptions that were left unspoken.
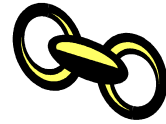
For an explanation on vision and goals, see:
Developing a shared vision and goals from *Building strong and effective community partnerships*, http://www.nald.ca/CLR/partner/cover.htm.

2. Are we committed partners?

Commitment was a central theme in the Partnership Dialogue, with several key questions:

- What does it take to create commitment?
- What are the behaviours and beliefs that demonstrate commitment?
- What helps sustain commitment? Does commitment mean 'forever'?

What does it take to create commitment?
- How will your partnership build commitment?
- Where is the 'client' in the process of building commitment?

Commitment needs to happen early but not preempt the process of building a relationship.

What are the behaviours and beliefs that demonstrate commitment? Does commitment mean 'forever'?
Partnerships require …
- A relationship with a level of trust before entering (see discussion on trust below).

- ♦ Resolve to address conflicts that arise.
- ♦ Willingness to give up some autonomy.
- ♦ Give and take; acceptance.

We said that a sign of commitment taking hold is when partners move from talking about 'I" to "we".

EXAMPLE

In one partnership group, each of our partners had other partners loosely tied into the whole. Different combinations of partners were meeting about similar visions, service models and processes to get there. No one knew exactly who all the various partners and combinations were or exactly what each was doing. Each partner organization had different levels of decision-makers involved.

We knew we wanted to dance. We had positive relationships with at least some of the others. We talked and talked and talked. Key decision-makers came together at an out-of-town, overnight, casual conference centre setting for two days, with a well-respected facilitator, to talk intentionally, to find the common ground and agree on courses of action, including staying or going.

We now have a broader and more focused leadership group. We are learning to speak the same language, to create intentional conversations among key teams, and build frameworks so that we have a service model that best supports the safety and well being of our service users – children and youth, their families and communities. The teams meet regularly, take minutes, keep each other informed, solicit each other's input and try to anticipate potential issues and work these out as soon as possible. The leadership group supports the frontline teams to create the service model, respecting their expertise and advocating on their behalf.

When we realize just how daunting all this is, or we 'drift', we focus on why we are doing this – for kids, for their families, their communities. It is not about 'us'. It can never be about 'us'.

Creating a formal agreement is one option. If you are creating a partnership in the legal sense of 'partnership', then a written agreement becomes a requirement.

Skage (1996) recommends partners create a firm, written partnership agreement, "outlining exactly what each agency will contribute and receive from the [joint project]. The partnership agreement is a vehicle to formalize the partners' commitment to the relationship." Skage's resource, *Building strong and effective partnerships*, outlines the following elements for an agreement:

Elements of a partnership agreement

- ♦ The terms of reference, objectives, procedures, roles, authorities and timelines are clear, detailed enough to guide the process, written in clear language, and available to all stakeholders.
- ♦ Any administrative questions are addressed in relation to financial records, reporting, etc.
- ♦ Mechanisms are in place to detect early signs of problems, and that corrective measures are identified.
- ♦ Expected services are identified.
- ♦ Eligibility criteria are identified.
- ♦ Financial, human resource, communication/information management, and accountability needs and commitments are established.
- ♦ Evaluation requirements, performance measures, and reporting arrangements are established.
- ♦ Flexibility is built into the agreement to allow it to be adapted to changing external/internal circumstances.

We qualified the second statement to include relevant administrative questions rather than a full range of administrative detail. We added to the list an agreement on the decision-making and planning processes the group will use to advance its aims. Another resource to consult is the Center for Civic Partnerships with the Public Health Institute (2006) http://www.civicpartnerships.org/docs/tools_resources/collaborative_agreements.htm.

What helps sustain commitment? Does commitment mean 'forever'?
- ♦ **Shared beliefs, values and passions**…both 'head and heart'.
- ♦ **Clarity and agreement on the rationale** for having the partnership and the vision and mission.
- ♦ Clear, measurable **outcomes** to maintain focus.
- ♦ **Understanding and buy-in from the highest levels** that ensure that the structures and resources are in place for the front line workers to do the work. Hierarchies influence commitment.
- ♦ **Designated funds to cover the time** it takes to participate in partnership processes.
- ♦ **Excellent communication** that allows for open, trusting and transparent relationships and support to withdraw respectfully if the benefits of the partnership cease to outweigh the costs.
- ♦ **Effective and clear leadership** that is shared, based on specific areas of strength.

♦ **Accountability** at all levels.
♦ **Technical support** to help groups work through processes.

3. What happens when we're out of step?

Dance partners may falter for a variety of reasons.

> Partners enter cross-sectoral collaborations with legitimate fears. They are concerned about losing control – over their own professional and institutional destinies, over the direction of the collaboration, and over the limits of their participation in the collaboration. They also are concerned that the collaboration per se, or one of its partners, will compete with them or attempt to take them over (Lasker, 1997, p.150).

We focussed on four tensions that can build within partnerships:

♦ Differences not valued.
♦ Trust is missing.
♦ Communication is not working well.
♦ Power is misused.

The literature offers a variety of ways to diminish these tensions.

Valuing differences

> In spite of …common ground …the **success** of cross-sectoral collaboration **depends on differences among partners**. … partners contribute complementary resources, skills, and expertise to the endeavor. By bringing diverse 'building blocks' together, the group as a whole is able to achieve results that no single partner could achieve alone.

Building trust

"At the heart of communication is trust." (Frank & Smith, 2000) From the start, mistrust based on assumptions and past experience can colour relationships, particularly between government and non-profit organizations, or between organizations competing for limited resources. By acknowledging the central element of trust from the start, partnerships have a better chance of success, recognizing 'good partnerships begin with great communication'. Trust takes a long time to build but it is easy to erode.

Establishing clear communication

Partnerships are a group process. Groups are said to move through four development stages of 'forming, storming, norming and performing', based on an enduring theory developed by Bruce W. Tuckman in 1965 in the United States

(Smith, M. K. (2005) 'Bruce W. Tuckman - forming, storming, norming and performing in groups, *The encyclopaedia of informal education*, www.infed.org/thinkers/tuckman.htm.)

As groups mature, so does their capacity to communicate effectively, creating a synergy among members and enhancing trust. Communication needs to be conscious and respectful with a continuous feedback loop, particularly to address ego needs that can sabotage collective efforts to respond to an issue.

The Partnership Handbook (Human Resources Development, 2000*)* identifies three important levels of communication:
   ♦ Within the partnership group
   ♦ From the partnership group to the community
   ♦ From the community to the partnership group
We added communication with funders as a fourth dimension.

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Good channels of communication are needed at every phase and level of the collaboration.

   ♦ To build a common language among partners.
   ♦ To foster trust and mutual respect.
   ♦ To support group decision-making.
   ♦ To keep partners fully informed about what is going on.
   ♦ To enable them to learn about each other's concerns, values and work.
   ♦ To air disagreements.
   ♦ To provide them with avenues to respond to changes and emerging problems (Lasker, 1997, p. 149)

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A communication plan identifies who needs information and what kind; who wants information and how much; and who should know about the partnership who may not be aware of it. *The Partnership Handbook* suggests that the plan include:
   ♦ Day-to-day information for the partnership group.
   ♦ Overview information for interested others — such as a brochure or handout.
   ♦ Specific information as required, for the media or for funding sources.
   ♦ Focused information for support and lobbying purposes.
   ♦ Information for the public or community at large (Frank & Smith, 2000, p.22).
At the same time, groups do not want to spend all their time 'managing paper and data'.

   ♦ **More information isn't necessarily better**, nor is it a measure of appropriate communication … Busy people often resort to saying 'tell me what I need to

know, when I need to know it and in a manner that will be useful' …The skill is in being able to determine, from a large amount of information, what the **main points** are and what they might mean to various individuals — without telling them what to think (Frank & Smith, 2000, p. 22)

♦ Telephone **conversations** with partners to solicit feedback and pursue relevant issues **between meetings** can multiply the opportunities to build relationships.

Lasker's monograph on collaboration between medicine and public health suggests:

♦ The types of mechanisms employed … are probably less important that the **example set by the leadership** of the partnering organizations. **If the people spearheading the collaboration trust, respect and understand each other**, it is more likely that others involved in the enterprise will do the same (Lasker, 1997, p.149).

♦ **A skilled facilitator,** who has the trust and respect of all the partners, can provide valuable guidance.

As part of a healthy process, you can consider the following questions:

♦ Has the design process identified areas of conflict (issues where we 'agree to disagree' but still proceed with the partnership) that need to be monitored? What are they?

♦ Have any potential areas of conflict or disagreement been identified?

♦ Is there a mechanism for partners to safely raise issues of conflict?

♦ Does the partnership need to devise a formal process to acknowledge and resolve conflict?

♦ What steps can you take if a disagreement becomes personal, and if the personality clash is hindering the progress of the project?

We suggest conflict often arises when information does not flow. The bottleneck leads to rumours and assumptions, based on gaps in information. Alberta Community Development suggests a set of questions for diagnosing the problem when communication breaks down:

♦ Has either partner found that there are issues (e.g. concerns regarding intrusion on their mandate, time commitment) [that] they did not adequately consider before entering the partnership?

♦ Does the conflict lie in assumptions we made about each other that have turned out not to be true?

♦ Does the conflict stem from differences regarding the overall strategy and purpose of the partnership?

♦ Did we overlook required details or get them wrong in the agreement?

♦ Does one partner feel the other is not being a 'good partner'?

♦ Does the conflict lie in evaluating our progress and outcomes?

(Alberta Community Development, 2001, Section 9.21)

Frank and Smith suggest three reasons to bring in an outside facilitator or mediator in the face of conflict:

♦ If the conflict is deeply entrenched and there is no neutral party to help resolve it, or if the skills are not available in the group, a skilled outsider is useful.

♦ [When] leadership is directly involved in the conflict; when there are matters of cultural or gender equity that need to be addressed and the ability to do so has not been demonstrated in the past, and when there are disagreements about whether or not there is a conflict.

♦ Outside help is also a good idea when the group wishes to acquire the skills and can use a model conflict as the example to work through (Frank & Smith, 2000, p. 52).
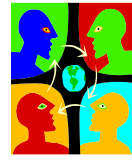
Addressing inherent power differences

EXAMPLE
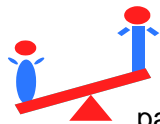
Four social service organizations have reaped benefits from a joint fund-raising project for many years, with a shared sense of having created a partnership. Our leadership team, as the lead organization, used *Should we dance?* as a reflective tool to consider whether this arrangement is, in fact, a genuine partnership. We were the founder of the fund-raising idea and initiated an arrangement in which the other three agencies purchase our services to manage the project and split the funds.
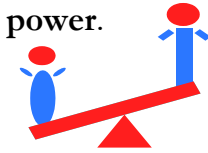
Power rests with our organization as the one that holds control over decisions and knowledge and skills the others do not have. We feel our involvement is pivotal to the project continuing. The players involved did not build the dream together nor have they developed shared values or principles; there may be a sense that we have more of the power and that the relationship is not equal. Significant questions arise as to whether we would want to or could shift into a partnership where power is shared, and what that would require, and whether the other three organizations could experience a different kind of relationship.

Organizations are 'rarely on equal footing when the resources and prestige of one partner are considerably greater than other (akin to the lion lying down with the lamb).' It is important to understand who holds the power and why, and what interests are being served.

People want to be heard and to know their input is going to be used in making decisions. If some dominate discussion and consequently have more 'voice' than others, the balance is tipped. The key is to figure out how to reflect the reality that power is unevenly distributed, yet enable partners to experience the partnership as genuine and valuable.

> Partnerships are about power: **individual power and collective power**. For some, the word power has a negative connotation and implies control, force or undue influence. Some think of power based on gender, race or rank. Power also has a very positive side in the sense of **strength, wisdom and ability**.
>
> **Partnerships combine powers** and **direct them in the best way possible for the benefit of all.** Power is always present and is rarely equal. We should value and acknowledge, openly and honestly, the different types of power that each individual or organization brings. By acknowledging it, we are able then to deal with any issues or conflicts that arise from the use of power. (Frank and Smith, 2000, p.15)
>
> The key to dealing successfully with intracollaborative control issues centres around choosing the **right structural arrangement** for the task at hand, and in making potential partners aware of the implications of that arrangement (Lasker, 1997, p.151).
>
> The success of partnerships depends largely on the **extent to which ownership, power and commitment are shared.**

Solving problems

Issues of trust, communication breakdown and power struggles arise. The mark of success is to be prepared for conflict by agreeing upon a problem-solving process from the beginning.

EXAMPLE

Youth, high-risk youth in particular, were coming to the attention of our partnership that was addressing child protection, through the work of an outreach agency. This agency was neither connected to nor would it become a partner in the initiative, given a history of tension with each of the partners. The dilemma was the need to attend to the issues of the youth, as an ethical responsibility, while operating outside the parameters of the partnership and taking away staff time that could have been invested in the initiative.

The partnership initiative and the outreach agency were able to work together for a common cause, increasing the credibility of the joint initiative with the youth. Despite the

---

> tensions, we shared a passionate consensus that these youth could not be pushed aside and that a different and creative intervention was needed to build relationships with them and help keep them safe. Some of the youth were served through the partnership while a new High Risk Youth Unit offered an alternative for those youth who had no connection to the partnership project.

Considerations:
  ♦ We can't figure out all aspects of the process beforehand. How do you create a partnership wherein people can grow, shift and adapt as the experience evolves? There is a need to continually 'work the process'.
  ♦ It is valuable to have a 'keeper' or 'nurturer' of the process.
  ♦ We need effective problem-solving processes and a commitment to working with them.
  ♦ If something worked once, you cannot assume it will always work.
  ♦ Each partner assumes responsibility for making decisions, recognizing that every decision potentially has positive and negative consequences.

(See Appendix C for a set of *Factors influencing the success of collaboration*, from the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation.)

4. Will this dance ever end?

Partnerships are not static. The larger environment, organizations and players are constantly subject to change, which in turn opens and narrows opportunities.
  ♦ To make the partnership's intent a **'living purpose'** means keeping it at the fore and intermittently **renewing** the reason for the partnership's existence in light of changing circumstances.
  ♦ Some people think of marriage as the ultimate partnership. In the idyllic form, partners stay together through thick and thin. In this context of organizational partnerships, do partners have the **right to leave**? What circumstances could cause your organization to withdraw from a partnership?

> Knowing when to end a partnership may be as important as knowing when to enter one.

The literature includes strategies for reflective evaluation of partnerships as a basis for continuous improvement. A group has the chance to make adjustments or decide a change is required. An excellent resource with valuable tools is *Evaluating Collaboratives, Reaching the Potential* from the University of Wisconsin (1998).

To make room for partnerships to end, renegotiated or renewed, or to move through a transition into a new form, people need a way of signalling the need for change without creating a sense of failure for everyone at the table.

> [Allow] for the possibility of dissolving the relationship. Sometimes partnerships are not the best way to address an issue. In some cases, groups find it too difficult to collaborate, or find that unilateral action would be much more effective.
>
> In cases where collaborators seem to have intractable disagreements, or are unable to find productive ways of working together, it is important to let the partnership go and to pursue other ways of addressing the issue the partnership worked on (Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy, 2005, p. 9)

There may come a time when one or more members feels the need to renegotiate the partnership. Renegotiation is a logical step when people want to continue the partnership, but:

♦ One or more of the partners cannot or can no longer carry out their responsibilities (because of staff changes, unrealistic commitments made in terms of time or resources, restructuring in their agency, etc.).
♦ A dispute arises that cannot be resolved within the current arrangement
♦ There is an opportunity to expand the original project.
♦ There is an opportunity to add new members to the partnership
(Skage, S., 1996)

One of the ways to increase the likelihood of smooth exits and transitions is to make it permissible, from the beginning, to discuss the potential that any partner may decide to leave.

C. Nose to nose with the people in the partnership

Our style of relating to others in a partnership is not mechanical. While everyone need not bond in close friendship, partners benefit by having respect for what others have to offer and trust that authenticity is shared. To find respect means being curious enough to inquire about and understand the other's experience, knowledge and skills, and the culture of their environments.

> In spite of … common ground …, the success of cross-sectoral collaboration depends on **differences** among partners. These enterprises work because partners contribute complementary resources, skills, and expertise to the endeavor. By bringing diverse 'building blocks' together, the group as a whole is able to achieve results that no single partner could achieve alone.

Tensions can develop when partners have different "languages" and values as well as different resources and skills. In these situations, the **viability of the collaboration depends on its capacity to foster tolerance, respect, and trust**. While communication and boundary-setting strategies are important here …., it also is essential to **help partners recognize that they do not have to agree about everything**—or even most things—to work together on a circumscribed project. Differences in political and economic values may be important in some venues, but they often are not directly relevant to the partnership's activities (Lasker, 1997, p. 148).

1. What creates mutual respect between individuals from separate organizations?
2. What causes that respect to be undermined?
3. How can differences be handled so as to maintain the focus on the value each partner brings to the table?

We recognize that partners do not necessarily have an equal investment, responsibility or capacity to contribute, as named earlier when we looked at power differences. However, by pooling resources, partners are giving up neither identities nor their missions and values.

> The power of collaboration derives from having each partner contribute what it does best or more efficiently. Consequently, the collaborative paradigm gives the **highest return to the unique perspectives and skills that each sector brings to the table.** Working in the context of this paradigm, each … maintains its own identity. [Partners] do not need to develop expertise in the other sector's knowledge base and skills, or take on responsibilities of the other sector … [It] does require them to understand each other's perspectives and to appreciate how their expertise and activities relate to, and can reinforce, each other (Lasker, 1997, p. 157).

D. Learning new steps

Should we dance? is meant stimulate reflection and dialogue and to be used as a dynamic resource. Please feel free to copy and distribute, adapt and build upon the content to fit your needs. We only ask that you give credit to this publication. The annotated 'evolving list of resources' (Part E to follow) will link you to a variety of valuable materials, all available on line. As we move in and out of collaborative relationships, we can celebrate our differences, communicate through thick and thin, and keep our eye on the ball so that we rise above the quagmire of partnership building to make a difference within communities.

E. EVOLVING LIST OF RESOURCES ON PARTNERSHIP
Partnership Dialogue

Annotated partnership resources available online:

Alberta Community Development and Wild Rose Foundation (2001). ***Working in partnership, Recipes for success.***
http://www.cd.gov.ab.ca/building_communities/volunteer_community/resources/partnership_kit/index.asp
A comprehensive, interactive kit with questions and checklists to consider upon entering a partnership and once in the partnership. Includes elements for partnership agreements and evaluation as well as annotated resources and templates.

Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy (2005). ***Partnerships for sustainability, how to make a partnership work.***
http://cielap.org/pdf/shortchecklist.pdf
Brief document with a checklist of ten qualities for effective partnerships, questions for each and steps for filling in the gaps.

Centre for the Advancement of Collaborative Strategies in Health, New York Academy of Medicine. ***Partnership self-assessment tool.***
http://www.cacsh.org/psat.html
Self-assessment tool designed for partners to complete in 15 minutes. Statements identify strengths and weaknesses related to synergy - leadership, efficiency, administration and management, and sufficiency of resources, perspectives on decision-making process, and benefits and drawbacks of participation. Includes guide to scoring.

Department of Justice Canada (2002). ***Partnership Study, National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention*, Phase II**
http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/ps/eval/reports/02/cppartner/toc.html.
Key findings of a study, based on literature and interviews across Canada, highlighting benefits, partnership development and challenges, including lack of communication and clarity, failure to be inclusive, trust, and the reality of competition, conflict and organizational autonomy.

Frank, F. & Smith, A. (2000). Human Resources Development Canada, ***The Partnership Handbook***
http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/asp/gateway.asp?hr=en/epb/sid/cia/partnership/handbook.shtml&hs=cyd
Thorough handbook with types of partnerships, steps for forming partnerships, skills and knowledge needed for partnering and a troubleshooting guide. Includes practical, interactive exercises and tools. Facilitator's guide complements the handbook.

Health Canada (1998). **Building Partnerships for Health: Lessons learned.**
http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/nutrition/pol/building_partnerships-creation_partenariats_e.html
Study of the structures and processes that facilitate effective intersectoral collaboration. Based on stories shared by partners in a process to create a national nutrition strategy. Areas include being sure of the purpose, clarifying authority, choosing partners, partners' accountabilities and powers, group processes, creating ownership and moving into action.

Health Canada (1994). **Intersectoral Action Toolkit, The cloverleaf model for success**,
http://www.dietitians.ca/resources/ISA-TOOLKIT-eng.pdf
Folder with pullout sheets on the stages for intersectoral action, including a vision and relationships built on trust and ritual, clarified organizational roles, action planning and continuity through community involvement and leadership. Tip sheets for intersectoral action and case examples.

Lasker, R. (1997). **Medicine and Public Health: The power of collaboration**
(Monograph prepared for the Centre for the Advancement of Collaborative Strategies in Health).
http://www.cacsh.org/pdf/MPH.pdf
Monograph [192 pages online] traces the history of the relationship between medicine and public health. Explores the potential for increased collaboration, including population health strategies and efforts to influence policy of common interest. Draws on case examples.

Nicholls, C., Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, **Promising practices in community partnerships: lessons learned from Canadian rural partnerships**,
http://www.rural.gc.ca/programs/practices_e.phtml
Based on an analysis of 42 rural, remote and northern federally funded projects between 1998 and 2004, partnership building and networking were seen as an essential element of building community capacity. Project examples address lessons learned about common values, goals and objectives, mutual benefits, shared responsibility and accountability.

Nuffield Institute for Health (2003). **Assessing strategic partnership, The partnership assessment tool.**
 www.nuffield.leeds.ac.uk/downloads/pat.pdf.
A set of checklists and explanations to assess the effectiveness of 'partnership working', before or during the life of the partnership, aligned with six 'building block' principles: Recognize and accept the need for partnership, develop clarity and realism of purpose, ensure commitment and ownership. Develop and maintain trust. Create clear and robust partnership agreements, monitor, measure and lean.

Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse, **Dynamic partnership***s* (Revised 2003).
http://www.opc.on.ca/english/index.htm
http://www.opc.on.ca/english/our_programs/hlth_promo/resources/collaboration/factors.htm
Reflections on aspects of partnering, tip sheets, and an excellent set of resources on partnerships, with electronic links.

Web site includes **Factors influencing the success of collaborations,** from Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, *Collaboration: What makes it work?* by Paul Mattessich and Barbara Monsey (1992).
19 factors, clustered under environment, membership characteristics, process/structure, communication, purpose and resources. Extract from full document, *Collaboration: What makes it work?* (see below)

Prince's Trust (2005). **Making partnerships work. A study of partnership-working in The Prince's Trust and a practical guide to building and maintaining effective partnerships**
http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/Main%20Site%20v2/downloads/MPWreport.pdf
Focused on the youth sector in the United Kingdom, this toolkit provides definitions, case studies, internal and external barriers, and a ten-step guide to creating an effective partnership.

Skage, S.,, **Building strong and effective community partnerships, A manual for family literacy workers.** Edmonton: Family Literacy Action Group of Alberta, 1996.
http://www.nald.ca/CLR/partner/cover.htm
Web-adapted manual with specific sections on the rationale for partnerships, steps for building and maintaining partnerships, barriers and key characteristics of successful partnership. Also includes worksheets and templates.

Tamarack – An institute for community engagement, **Learning Centre -- Communities collaborating,**
http://tamarackcommunity.ca/g3s8.html
As part of an extensive web site, 'communities collaborating' includes 12 stories of community collaborations, resources and 12 seminars featuring best collaborators (with audio files) and collaborations. Also includes 12 archived issues of Communities Collaborating newsletter.

Taylor-Powell, E., Rossing, B., & Geran, J. (1998), University of Wisconsin-Extension, **Evaluating collaboratives, reaching the potential,**
http://learningstore.uwex.edu/Evaluating-Collaboratives-Reaching-the-Potential-P1032C238.aspx

Thorough manual [190 pages] explores questions to evaluate aspects of collaboration, including self-interest, feasibility, process and outcomes. Includes methods and techniques for evaluation.

The Sustainability Network, **Planning guide – Developing partnerships**, Developing partnerships is one component of a step-by-step site to guide planning. Addresses advantages and disadvantages and choice of partners.
Includes several Canadian examples and links.
http://www.toolsofchange.com/English/PlanningGuide/default.asp?Section=Partners

Additional sources for partnership resources:

Amherst H. Wilder Foundation
http://www.fieldstonealliance.org/showproducts.cfm?FullCat=11
Recommended by Partnership Dialogue member:
Ray, K. *The Nimble Collaboration: Fine-Tuning your Collaboration for lasting Success*

Mattessich, P., Murray-Close, M. & Monsey, B. (2001). *Collaboration: What Makes It Work-A Review of Research Literature on Factors Influencing Successful Collaboration.*

Centre for the Advancement of Collaborative Strategies in Health Resources
http://www.cacsh.org/cresources.html

The Ginger Group Collaborative – Helping collaborative ventures come alive
Resources – Alliances, partnership and collaboration
http://www.gingergroup.net/resources.html#1

Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse
Dynamic partnerships - Resources
http://www.opc.on.ca/english/index.htm
Recommended by Partnership Dialogue member:
Winer, M. & Ray, K., *Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining, and Enjoying the Journey.*

Tamarack, An institute for community engagement
Resources
http://tamarackcommunity.ca/g3s82.html

Appendix A
Partnership Dialogue Participants

Beginning in September 2005, Boyle Street Community Services, in Edmonton, Alberta, initiated a series of discussions to explore what makes partnerships work and what sustains them. The discussion involved a group of individuals, drawn from sixteen organizations in Edmonton. Participants took part in as many sessions as they were able.

Bev Allard, Bissell Centre	**Hope Hunter**, Boyle Street Community Services
Wendy Batty, Christmas Bureau	
Rhonda Barraclough, Consultant	**Colin Inglis**, City Centre Education Project
Tracy Bridges, Early Childhood Development Support Services	**Jenny Kain**, Community Services, City of Edmonton
Yvonne Chiu, Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op	**Deborah Morrison**, Community Partnership Enhancement Forum, Edmonton and Area Child and Family Services
Maureen Collins, Edmonton John Howard Society	
Lisa Cotterell, Bissell Centre	**Liz O'Neill**, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton
Rebecca Edwards, Placement student, University of Alberta	
	Kate Quinn, Prostitution Action and Awareness Foundation of Edmonton
Karen Erickson, Community Solution to Gang Violence	**Peter Smyth**, Edmonton and Area Child and Family Services
Ann Fitzpatrick, Community Services, City of Edmonton	
	Barbara Sykes, Evaluator, Inner City Connections
Marilyn Fleger, Bissell Centre	
Dianne Gillespie, Healthy Alberta Communities	**Judi Weston**, Edmonton and Area Child and Family Services
Lorraine Green, Capital Health	**Cheryl Whiskeyjack**, Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society
	Monika Wichman, Community Services, City of Edmonton

Appendix B
Swindon People First Contract

The Swindon People First contract was developed by a group of adults with developmental disabilities, living in the United Kingdom, to let organizers know the conditions under which they would participate in committees. It is applicable to a wide range of initiatives seeking to engage citizen participation.

If you want People First to be on your committee you must agree these things to make it OK for us:

♦ We should have a voice to say what we want.
♦ You need to listen to us and give us time to talk.
  We won't come to your committee just so it looks good.
♦ You need to let us know why you want us on the committee.
♦ You need to tell us what we will get out of being on your committee.
♦ You have got to make minutes and agendas on tape if we want them.
♦ The committee should pay for a supporter.
♦ Everyone on the committee needs to be trained to know how to involve us.
♦ The Committee has to use words we understand.
♦ We must be able to stop meetings if we need you to say something again or explain it.
♦ Everyone should have their expenses paid.
♦ If the rest of the committee gets paid then we should too.

(From http://www.ccnap.org.uk/Guide/part1.htm)

Appendix C
Factors influencing the success of collaboration

Factors Related to the Environment
- History of collaboration or cooperation in the community.
- Collaborative group seen as a leaders in the community.
- Political/social climate favorable.

Factors Related to Membership Characteristics
- Mutual respect, understanding, and trust.
- Appropriate cross-section of members.
- Members see collaboration as in their self-interest.
- Ability to compromise.

Factors Related to Process/Structure
- Members share a stake in both process and outcome.
- Multiple layers of decision-making.
- Flexibility
- Development of clear roles and policy guidelines.
- Adaptability

Factors Related to Communication
- Open and frequent communication
- Established informal and formal communication links.

Factors Related to Purpose
- Concrete, attainable goals and objectives.
- Shared vision.
- Unique purpose.

Factors Related to Resources
- Sufficient funds.
- Skilled convener.

(Prepared by the Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse, as an excerpt from Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, http://www.opc.on.ca/pubs/collab/index.html)