# Strengthening Partnerships Tool[1]

## How the Tool is Organized

The Strengthening Partnerships Tool is organized around four categories and 13 indicators of effective partnerships: 1) Foundations; 2) Systems and Structures; 3) Planning and Implementation; 4) Communications. Within each category, there are indicators with criteria and a series of questions that are used to help gain clarity and assess the extent to which each indicator is fully actualized. These "probing" questions are decidedly not "yes or no" questions; they are designed to create discussion about the ways the partnership fulfills the indicator as well as the role each has in its fulfillment. Each level of effectiveness is given descriptions to further teams understanding of where they are on the continuum.

## How to Use the Tool

The tool can be used to guide self-assessment of an existing partnership or provide guidance and direction for a new partnership. It is designed to support those within the partnership to internally evaluate and reflect upon a set of criteria designed to improve and strengthen partnerships. The tool specifically seeks to provide teams with questions to facilitate discussions about each entity's role in the partnership. Each response then enables participants to identify where they exist on the continuum of effectiveness and enables them to work within the partnership to identify next steps to move toward a more effective, equitable partnership. The discussion created as a product of this tool should lead to a mutually developed vision for the partnership that aligns with the research-supported indicators of effective partnerships.

[1]This Partnership Tool is adapted from Working Better Together: A Continuum Rubric for Self-Assessing and Strengthening Partnerships, Council of Chief State School Officers © 2018

**Foundations**

| Mission and Belief - Develop a shared mission and beliefs document that drives the partnership | | | | |
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| **Probing Questions** | *Emerging* | *Developing* | *Established* | *Transformational* |
| • Who was involved in the development of the mission and beliefs document?<br>• How does the mission reflect the common beliefs of each partner?<br>• How does the mission and beliefs document drive the partnership? | Partners have discussed the development of a shared mission and beliefs document. | Partners have developed a mission and beliefs document, but not all partners' needs were considered, or a shared mission and beliefs document was developed but does not drive the partnership. | A shared mission and beliefs document has been developed by everyone involved with the partnership, and it drives the partnership. | A shared mission and beliefs document that articulates the purpose of the partnership has been developed jointly and evolves to reflect the needs of all the partners. |
| | Supporting evidence: | | | |

| Shared Goals - Collaboratively develop goals that are measurable, attainable, based on the shared mission and beliefs, sensitive to the local context, and meet the common needs of all involved in the partnership. | | | | |
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| **Probing Questions** | *Emerging* | *Developing* | *Established* | *Transformational* |
| • Who was involved in composing the goal statements of the partnership?<br>• How are the goals attainable and measureable?<br>• How do the goals reflect the mission and beliefs and the local context?<br>• What data will be collected to assess progress toward the goals?<br>• How do the goals drive the work of the partnership?<br>• How do the goals meet the needs of all stakeholders? | Partners have not yet developed goals, or partners have developed goals that are not measurable and/or attainable. | Partners have developed measurable and attainable goals based on the established shared mission and beliefs that may or may not be sensitive to the local context. | Partners have collaboratively developed goals that are measurable and attainable, that are based on the shared mission and beliefs and sensitive to the local context, and meet the common needs of all involved in the partnership.<br>Data are collected and used to assess the impact of the partnership. | Partners have collaboratively developed well-defined goals sensitive to the local context that are aligned with the mission and lead to productive actions resulting in a positive impact. These goals are continuously revisited based on a thorough analysis of data measuring long-term effectiveness. |
| • In what ways will partners assess the impact of the partnership on their own educational setting and goals?<br>• How often will the goals be revisited? | Supporting evidence: | | | |

| Mutual Benefit - Ensure the partnership has a positive impact on all partners and/or organizations. | | | | |
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| **Probing Questions** | *Emerging* | *Developing* | *Established* | *Transformational* |
| • How will the partnership enhance the learning of P–12 students and teacher candidates?<br>• What are the benefits of being engaged in the partnership?<br>• How will all partners benefit from shared learning and professional development? | Partners have discussed what would make this partnership beneficial and effective for each organization but have yet to discuss specific data that indicate positive impact on either partner or organization. | Partners have discussed partnership reciprocity and have articulated data indicators but have yet to establish a system to collect data. | Partners have begun collecting data but have not developed a progress-monitoring plan or developed next steps to ensure a positive impact on both systems. | The mutual benefit of the partnership is articulated in the mission, beliefs, and goals, and data indicate that the work of the partnership is having a positive impact on all partners. |
| | Supporting evidence: | | | |

| Collaboration and Engagement - Seek innovative structures and strategies to strengthen the partnership by attending and fully participating in regular partnership meetings and provide multiple opportunities to interact and engage with one another. | | | | |
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| **Probing Questions** | *Emerging* | *Developing* | *Established* | *Transformational* |
| • How often will partners meet to promote strong collaboration?<br>• Who will be present at the meetings to represent each organization?<br>• How will the agenda be designed?<br>• How might a shared voice be established?<br>• What shared experiences do we participate in as partners to enhance the partnership and its impact? | Engagement is limited to attendance at a few meetings that serve primarily as check-ins. Partners are not yet engaged in collaborative practices or shared activities. | Attendance and full participation in meetings with a jointly developed and meaningful agenda are occurring. Leaders promote active participation in partnership activities. | Attendance and full participation in highly effective and collaborative meetings have resulted in the creation of innovative strategies that have expanded opportunities for input and involvement. Collaborative relationships built on trust and mutual respect are evident outside the parameters of the partnership meetings and activities. | The partnership provides multiple opportunities that solicit contextual input, equal involvement by all stakeholders, and high levels of engagement through a variety of methods. Meetings and activities are characterized by trust, transparency, honesty, and mutual respect. Participants communicate beyond partnership meetings and activities to strengthen ongoing collaboration. |
| • What are some possible initiatives that promote innovation and strengthen the partnership?<br>• How will we ensure a shared commitment by all stakeholders? | Supporting evidence: | | | |

## Systems and Structures

| Roles and Responsibilities - Partnership roles, responsibilities, and expectations are defined, understood, and aligned to support the mission and goals of the partnership. Organizational systems related to partnership work are coordinated so that partnership work is considered "usual and customary" activity.   Institutional leaders are responsible to one another and share accountability for achieving partnership goals. | | | | |
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| **Probing Questions** | *Emerging* | *Developing* | *Established* | *Transformational* |
| • How are the roles and responsibilities of each member of the partnership clearly defined and understood?<br>• How are the roles of the partnership operational within all levels of the organizations?<br>• How do leaders from each entity demonstrate commitment and responsibility for achieving the goals?<br>• How are roles and responsibilities shared across the organizations to promote stability and sustainability?<br>• How is partnership work considered "usual and customary activity," as opposed to being defined as a "special or ad hoc project"?<br>• What systems need to be coordinated across the respective organizational boundaries so that the goals of the partnership can be achieved?<br>• How do we ensure a shared commitment by all stakeholders? | Discussions have been initiated about the need to define roles and responsibilities and align systems. | Roles and responsibilities have been defined but are not well understood or fully operational yet. Leaders have not integrated the work of the partnership into their respective strategic plans. | Roles and responsibilities have been defined and are operational. System coordination is still only applicable on a project-by-project basis. | Each entity has established personnel with particular roles and responsibilities related to the partnership that are fully understood and operational. Leaders ensure that the work of the partnership is integrated into their respective strategic plans. Organization systems for resource allocation, data collection, project management, and communication are aligned to produce coherence and the continuing evolution and development of the partnership. |
| | Supporting evidence: | | | |

| Decision Making - Specify in advance how decisions will be made and how disagreements will be resolved so that each partner's needs are fully considered. • Guide partner decision making through the use of strategically acquired data.        • Ensure partners inform all-important stakeholders about decisions. | | | | |
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| **Probing Questions** | *Emerging* | *Developing* | *Established* | *Transformational* |
| • What decision-making protocols will we put in place?<br>• How will data be used to collaboratively make decisions about the partnership?<br>• How will the needs of each partner be assessed and addressed?<br>• How will disagreements be resolved?<br>• For particular issues or concerns that surface within the partnership, what processes will be used for addressing the issue Who are the comparable counterparts that can collectively address the issue?<br>• How are our stakeholders informed about our decisions? | Partners recognize the importance of establishing norms for symbiotic decision making and the need to use each other's data to guide the decision-making process. | Regular meetings of the partnership have created a platform for discussion of partner needs and issues.<br>Collaborative decisions and problem solving are taking place, but data is still needed to better inform this process and/or key personnel are not participating in discussions, causing issues to be only partially addressed. | The partnership has created agreements regarding decision making and data sharing that guide formal and informal interactions and activities. Systems are developed so that key personnel are involved in the decision-making process and/or the group has developed a plan to collect more data. Key stakeholders are agreed upon and identified. | Regular meetings of the partnership involving all essential personnel for decision making are done following the collaborative process established by the partnership. Decisions are made based on robust data. A communication strategy of this process is formalized, and all relevant, important stakeholders are informed when decisions are made. |
| | Supporting evidence: | | | |

| Sustainability - Partnership agreements specify, for each member, the responsibilities for staffing, operations, and finance to ensure the partnership continues. • Organizations include partnership sustainability within their respective strategic plans, operational goals, and resource allocation.   • Partnership effectiveness is assessed through strategically collected data. | | | | |
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| **Probing Questions** | *Emerging* | *Developing* | *Established* | *Transformational* |
| • How does the written partnership agreement ensure sustained efforts by each member?<br>• How is this partnership operationalized in each member's own strategic plan?<br>• What data will be used to assess the partnership and its impact on all involved? | Initial discussions have occurred concerning the development of a partnership agreement. | A partnership agreement that addresses issues of staffing, operations, and finance is under development. | A partnership agreement is in place and continuously evaluated to ensure effective staffing, operations, and finance. | Regular and systematic evaluation of the partnership agreement and the degree to which each entity is meeting its commitments and responsibilities are conducted to inform partnership improvement. Partners use data to continuously assess the quality of the partnership to ensure self-renewal and stimulate innovation. Partners advocate for one another to support the partnerships' continuous growth, development, and health. |
| | Supporting evidence: | | | |

**Planning and Implementation**

| Strategic Action Plan - Jointly create a strategic plan that is actionable, addresses key priorities, is aligned to the goals, and is supported by all partners. | | | | |
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| **Probing Questions** | *Emerging* | *Developing* | *Established* | *Transformational* |
| • What are the priorities that must be addressed first, and what is the timeline for achieving both short- and long-term partnership goals?<br>• What are the key activities/projects that must be jointly developed and supported?<br>• What is the timeline for accomplishing priority activities/projects?<br>• What are the potential barriers to achieving success, and how can they be mitigated? | Partners discuss the importance of and are considering the development of a strategic plan. | A plan with specific short-term projects has been jointly created and is supported by all partners. | A strategic plan with actions steps and joint projects is created and is supported by all partners. This plan will result in the long-term goal of improving the achievement of P–12 students and the effectiveness of teacher candidates. | A collaboratively developed strategic plan that acts as a living document guides the work of the partnership and results in positive outcomes for P–12 students and teacher candidates. |
| | Supporting evidence | | | |

| Progress Measures - Jointly develop a shared mission and beliefs document that drives the partnership. | | | | |
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| **Probing Questions** | *Emerging* | *Developing* | *Established* | *Transformational* |
| • Who was involved in the development of the mission and beliefs document?<br>• How does the mission reflect the common beliefs of each partner?<br>• How does the mission and beliefs document drive the partnership? | Partners have discussed the development of a shared mission and beliefs document. | Partners have developed a mission and beliefs document, but not all partners' needs were considered, or a shared mission and beliefs document was developed but does not drive the partnership. | A shared mission and beliefs document has been developed by everyone involved with the partnership, and it drives the partnership. | A shared mission and beliefs document that articulates the purpose of the partnership has been developed jointly and evolves to reflect the needs of all the partners. |
| | Supporting evidence: | | | |

| Resource Commitment - Commit the time and financial and human resources necessary to accomplish partnership goals. | | | | |
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| **Probing Questions** | *Emerging* | *Developing* | *Established* | *Transformational* |
| • What resources will each partner contribute that will be mutually beneficial?<br>• How much time and funding are necessary from each partner to achieve partnership goals? | The time and financial and human resources necessary to accomplish partnership goals have been assessed but not shared. | The time and financial and human resources necessary to accomplish partnership goals have been assessed and are sometimes shared. | The time and financial and human resources necessary to accomplish partnership goals are contributed by all partners. | The time and financial and human resources necessary to accomplish partnership goals are contributed by all, and partners collaboratively seek resources to build and sustain the work. |
| • Who are the people needed to move the partnership forward?<br>• How can resources be used in innovative ways? | Supporting evidence: | | | |

**Communication**

| Procedures - • Jointly schedule a yearly calendar of meetings and create communication norms that will be used consistently in each partnership meeting to promote a healthy dialogue among partnership members. • Establish a process for documenting and sharing decisions, meeting minutes, and next steps. | | | | |
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| **Probing Questions** | *Emerging* | *Developing* | *Established* | *Transformational* |
| • Who is responsible for scheduling meetings and ensuring participants are informed of any changes? • How will communication norms be established? • How do partners engage in productive conflict? • What strategies are used to share information with each other? | Regular meetings are scheduled, and the need for more formal protocols and processes has been discussed. | A meeting schedule for the entire year has been agreed upon, and a point person for all logistical information has been assigned. For each meeting, a designated person keeps minutes and tracks decisions and next steps. Following meetings, leadership shares information with all participants. | Regularly scheduled meetings are well attended and documented. Communication norms have been established and are being used consistently by a chosen facilitator. Partners have accepted responsibility for ensuring honest and open dialogue. Following meetings, leaders and participants have established strategies for ensuring everyone is well informed of all decisions and agreed-upon next steps. | Regularly scheduled meetings are held, and the agenda allows for additional stakeholders not necessarily part of the core team to be present. A designated skilled facilitator and at least one co-facilitator uphold the communications norms and dialogue framework. Facilitators help the partnership members learn how to engage in productive conflict. Healthy dialogue is promoted in all interactions through the communications norms. Partners take ownership to communicate all current and future project efforts. |
| | Supporting evidence: | | | |

| Dissemination - Share data and other information with stakeholders. Regularly communicate partnership progress toward collective goals. Celebrate partnership success. | | | | |
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| **Probing Questions** | *Emerging* | *Developing* | *Established* | *Transformational* |
| • How is partnership information distributed, and how are progress updates shared? • How effective is the current process for information dissemination? • How are partnership achievements recognized and celebrated? | Information and data about the partnership are not effectively disseminated. | Basic information about the partnership is being shared with stakeholders, but there is no consistent effort to share progress updates or celebrate success. | A consistent mode of information dissemination is regularly employed. Formal, written progress updates are shared with a wide variety of stakeholders on a regularly scheduled basis. Partners celebrate the partnership's success internally. | Information is disseminated in a consistent, timely, and effective manner. Written updates that include all recent and relevant data on progress are disseminated according to a predetermined schedule to facilitate continuous improvement. Successes are shared formally and informally within the partnership, as well as with other interested stakeholders and community members. |
| | Supporting evidence: | | | |

| Advocacy - Advocate for the partnership to the larger community to garner increased visibility, support, and resources for the continuous growth, development, and health of the partnership. | | | | |
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| **Probing Questions** | *Emerging* | *Developing* | *Established* | *Transformational* |
| Probing Questions: • How are partners sharing the responsibility of communicating the importance of this partnership to others? • In what ways does the advocacy effort go beyond education stakeholders to the broader community (including key political and economic stakeholders)? • What are the results of the advocacy efforts? | The partnership is newly established, and advocacy efforts have not yet begun. The partnership is discussed occasionally with other political and education stakeholders. | Partnership leaders have recognized the need to organize some deliberate advocacy efforts with stakeholders outside of the partnership. Support for the partnership has been growing within the institutions involved. | Numerous members of the partnership, including leadership, engage in advocacy efforts on a regular basis. Support for the partnership is evident among other important political and education stakeholders. There is increasing interest in how partnerships have improved teacher preparation. | Each member of the partnership advocates for the partnership. Some important education stakeholders outside of the partnership have become advocates as well. The broader political and economic communities have been informed about the partnership and are deeply supportive of it. The partnership has garnered additional resources. |
| | Supporting evidence: | | | |