

BUILDING SUCCESSFUL ALLIANCES AND PARTNERSHIPS:

FOUNDATION ELEMENTS

Compelling vision. Partnerships need members and leaders who can develop compelling visions with a strong sense of purpose that defines the problem(s) to be addressed and the strategies to be used.

Strong, participatory leadership. Leaders need to demonstrate their eagerness to build shared ownership of the problem and outcomes; they need to see the potential for the partnership and communicate it in inspiring ways; and they need to understand and address the differing interests of all the organizations in the alliance. Leaders must help all members of the partnership understand and appreciate the ways in which the partnership can accomplish results that none of the individual members could accomplish alone. They must also encourage everyone to understand and respect the different motivations, interests, skills, concerns, and social/cultural norms that all members of the alliance bring to the table. Leaders must model trust-building actions.

Shared problem definition and approach. Partners need to agree upon the nature of the problem(s), the desired results, the analytical frameworks to be used, and the appropriate actions or strategies to be implemented.

Power equity. It is vital that all parties feel the other partners respect them and value their contributions. As well, each organization needs to feel it can influence the direction and focus of the partnership's vision and strategy.

Interdependence and complementarity. Early on, partners need to recognize their interdependence. Each partner brings skills, knowledge, or resources to the partnership that complement those of other members. Partners need to see that together the alliance will create new value—something the partners could not do on their own.

Clarity of needs. Partners come to the table not only because of their commitment to the cause and what they believe they can contribute, but also because of the ways in which they will benefit from participation. These explicit needs, if they remain unspoken, can become a source of conflict later in the process. Early on in the planning process, all partners should state clearly what they need to feel their participation is worthwhile.

Mutual accountability. Given the interdependence of partnerships, success depends upon each contributing member fulfilling its responsibilities and commitments in a timely fashion. Two strong motivational elements for holding partners accountable are shared ownership and a personal stake in the outcomes. However, partnerships with agreed-upon norms and sanctions, along with the willingness to exercise sanctions, are better able to hold members accountable than are those appealing only to good will.