COLLABORATION
GUIDANCE NOTE

Prepared for ACFID by Learning4Development
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CONTENTS

This _Collaboration Guidance Note_ is part of a suite of resources, also including a _Guide to Developing and Managing Partnerships_ and a _Partnership Agreement template,_ provided to assist ACFID Members in the implementation of their obligations in relation to collaboration in the Code of Conduct and to strengthen practice over time.

1. PURPOSE, AUDIENCE AND BACKGROUND

The complexity of addressing global development and humanitarian challenges demands a comprehensive approach in which multiple actors collaborate together in different ways to tackle the most intractable problems and achieve sustainable development outcomes.

This Guidance Note articulates why it is important for Australian NGOs working in international development and humanitarian practice to collaborate with others in a multitude of ways and with a variety of institutions, organisations, networks, communities, and individuals.

Collaboration amongst development actors to achieve shared social or development outcomes and impact is at the heart of the work of ACFID Members. This recognises that for the most part, the work we are engaged in is complex and challenging, with effective outcomes dependent on multiple factors and actors – some being enablers and some being inhibitors - and that more effective change can be achieved through the joint efforts of, or engagement with, those actors. It recognises that there are different roles to be played and that change will be achieved through leveraging the varied strengths and influence of different actors, whether those actors are the primary stakeholders, government entities, private sector entities, international NGOs, local NGOs/CSOs, church/faith based bodies, multilaterals, regional bodies or individuals.

Understanding of partnership principles and partnership practice has evolved considerably in recent years. Broadening our approaches beyond transactional partnerships to embrace collaboration as a broader and more holistic concept and practice, is reflected in the language and obligations throughout the ACFID Code of Conduct. The Code reflects the importance of joint negotiation, shared goals, and effectiveness in all collaborative approaches whether they are loose or informal coalitions or contractually bound formal partnerships. Whatever the arrangement, in our sector, we define quality collaborations as those that are based on mutual respect, transparency and understanding. Accordingly, this Practice Note places a

strong emphasis on mutuality and accountability in the way that we collaborate and partner with others.

The Guidance Note is intended to support staff of ACFID members involved in international development, humanitarian and advocacy responses to consider how collaboration can increase the impact of their work. It provides guidance on the way Members may think about and shape their collaborations and partnerships and to provide prompts and examples of practical tools to inform the management practices of Members. It is designed to support Members in their implementation of practices that will be compliant with the Code of Conduct and to assist Members to work towards good practice. It will also be useful for actors across the development sector including NGO practitioners, government agencies, managing contractors, consultants and academics.

The Guidance Note has been informed by discourse within the sector on the principles of partnership, new models of working and complex systems change and draws heavily on the sectoral insights and experience of the authors, partnership approaches of ACFID members and partnership literature.

2. WHY COLLABORATE?

The traditional approach of bilateral partnerships between donors and implementing partners is still a dominant way of delivering aid. It's an approach that continues to endure for many international and Australian NGOs whereby they sub-contract the delivery of a project to a local implementing entity. However, our understanding of complex global challenges has become more sophisticated and our experience and evidence has shown us that the most effective development initiatives leading to enduring change, involves collaboration amongst many players – primary stakeholders, civil society, governments, international agencies, and the private sector. This recognises that there are many actors and factors that inhibit and enable change and that it is only when multiple players work together, and use their respective resources, expertise, networks and ability to influence, that complex challenges can be addressed.

Similarly, while the traditional notion of time-bound, activities-based projects implemented through bilateral partnerships also continues to endure, increasingly development institutions, including NGOs, are recognising the value and power of global partnerships, networks, consortia and social movements, in achieving social change.

These realisations and paradigm shift are changing the way that civil society organisations think about how they can make change happen. Recognising that endemic social systems change cannot be created by a single project or program, or by a single actor, or even within a single sector, NGOs have become compelled to adapt their partnering models and approaches.

NGOs must identify who are the brokers of change, who are the agents of influence, who has resources that can be leveraged for good, what institutions can help to

create enabling environments, who should have a voice that does not and then imagine what is possible when all of these actors work together. This of course requires deep analysis of complex development problems to develop an understanding of the interrelationships between stakeholders, markets and sectors.

This nuanced and more sophisticated understanding of how we, as NGOs, can contribute to change, requires us to re-think the way that we work. If we have not undertaken deep systems analysis and carefully identified other actors with whom we can create a vision and collaborate with in realising that vision – our efforts to create change are likely to be short lived and limited.

Underpinning the importance of collaboration is recognition that there are actors who must have a seat at the table if we are serious about effecting change. They include organisations with values driven goals and expertise, power brokers whose absence will stall any great initiative, companies that have resources that have enormous potential for global development, investors that are ready to invest in social impact, advocates that represent the marginalized or hidden voices, entrepreneurs with new ideas or technologies, leaders whose endorsement is critical, market analysts that understand the impact of change, academics who have invested in research, and networks that bring a swell of support and experience. We quite simply cannot create sustainable development change without truly understanding these actors and collaborating with them in realising a shared vision.

It is for these reasons that ACFID has identified 'Collaboration' as one of the Quality Principles of the ACFID Code of Conduct. It calls on ACFID members and others in the sector to cooperate, coordinate, collaborate and partner with a wide variety of actors, in different ways, in order to optimize the effectiveness of our development and humanitarian responses.

3.   FORMS OF COLLABORATION

There are many different types of collaborative relationships and arrangements, ranging from loose commitments to cooperate, to network affiliations with a shared and coordinated interest, to full collaborative structures with complex and formal relationships and documented arrangements. All of these involve 'collaboration', the difference between types relates to the purpose of the collaboration, the complexity of accountabilities desired or required and the degree of organisation, structure or formality.

There is no absolute system of categorisation of different forms of collaboration. Organisations and methodologies vary in their use of terminology, language and definitions, although there are many similarities. The key shift as outlined in the previous section of this paper and which is reflected in the ACFID Code of Conduct, is that NGOs must embrace a range of collaboration approaches to address the demands of complex social change. This means that while the traditional bilateral or multilateral transactional type of partnership remains relevant in many contexts, other forms of collaboration have emerged and are vital if we are serious about supporting enduring social change.

This section of the paper provides some prompts for thinking about different forms of collaboration without being prescriptive. Each organisation should consider its own unique context and define its own forms and characteristics of collaboration and the associated operating practices required to support them.

Figures 1 and 2 on the following page come from Collaboration for Impact[1]. Both provide representations and characteristics of the range of relationships that are possible along the collaboration continuum. Figure 1 shows the characteristics of the range of relationships categorised from loose arrangements through to tight and trusting arrangements. Figure 2 shows the characteristics of the range of relationships categorised from cooperation through to collaboration.
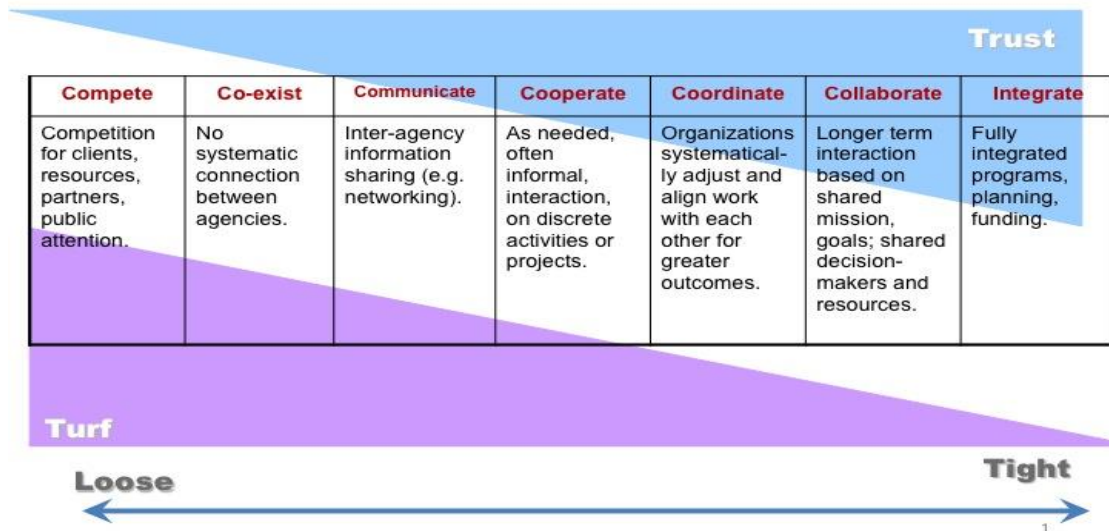
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[1] http://www.collaborationforimpact.com/collaborative-approaches/ca-subpage-2/

Figure 1

The Collaboration Continuum

Compete	Co-exist	Communicate	Cooperate	Coordinate	Collaborate	Integrate
Competition for clients, resources, partners, public attention.	No systematic connection between agencies.	Inter-agency information sharing (e.g. networking).	As needed, often informal, interaction, on discrete activities or projects.	Organizations systematical-ly adjust and align work with each other for greater outcomes.	Longer term interaction based on shared mission, goals; shared decision-makers and resources.	Fully integrated programs, planning, funding.

Trust

Turf

Loose   Tight

1

Figure 2

COOPERATION	COORDINATION	COLLABORATION
• Loose connections, low trust • Tacit information sharing • Ad hoc communication flows • Independent goals • Adapting to each other or accommodating others actions and goals • Power remains with organisations • Resources remain with organisation • Commitment and accountability to own organisation • Relational timeframe short • Low risk/low reward	• Medium connections, work-based trust • Structured communication flows, formalised project-based information sharing • Joint policies, programs and aligned resources • Semi-interdependent goals • Power remains with parent organisations • Commitment and accountability to parent organisation and project • Relational timeframe medium-based on prior projects	• Dense interdependent connections, high trust • Frequent communication • Tactical information sharing • System change • Pooled, collective resources • Negotiated shared goals • Power is shared between organisations • Commitment and accountability to network first and community and parent organisation • Relational timeframe—long term (3 years) • High risk/high reward

Table 1 below provides another way of viewing the range of categories. These categories have been drawn from numerous sources and the authors' experience. While these are presented in a linear fashion with an inference of a hierarchy from informal to formal, in reality, collaborations frequently develop a mix of the various attributes and rarely develop in a linear manner. It is also the case that different organisations use the terms differently. What one organisation defines as a 'network', another organisation may refer to as a 'coalition' or 'affiliation'.

Table 1:

Form of collaboration	Characteristics	Purpose
Networks	• Involves a group of organisations or individuals • Usually informal with no documented obligations • Some point of shared interest between participants but not necessarily a defined or shared objective • Minimal or no accountability to each other • Non-hierarchical	• To share information, resources, tools, lessons • To enhance communication or support
Examples of a Network: Plan International, Research for Development Impact (RDI) Network		
Coalitions	• Involves a group of organisations • Shared objectives • May have pooled funds or resources to achieve objective • Some level of accountability amongst members	• To campaign, promote, or advocate for change towards a shared issue or objective • To increase profile and awareness of an issue • To bring together individuals from a community, often activists, on a single issue.
Examples of a Coalition: Make Poverty History, Campaign for Australian Aid.		
Alliance	• Involves a group of organisations, often with a shared mission or identity • Some level of formal, documented obligations • Some level of accountability although may not be 'policed'	• To promote or advocate for change towards a shared issue or objective • To enhance cohesion amongst a 'family' of organisations. • To promote shared approaches, quality standards or consistent branding amongst members.
Example of an alliance: Child Fund Alliance, Oxfam International		
Consortiums	• Involves a group of organisations with a shared objective. • May only join as a consortium for a particular objective or program outcome. • Formal, documented obligations • Shared accountability to central entity, often a donor. • Would enhance effectiveness if the group took a systematic 'Collective Impact'	• To access funding grants • To create 'collective impact' • To tackle an issue that is too large for any single member to tackle alone

		approach.
Example of a consortium: Vision 2020 Australia,		
Global Partnerships	• Also referred to as multi-stakeholder partnerships or global programs • Involves large groups of entities – governments, donors, NGOs - joining forces on a shared issue with specific objectives • Often have complex governance structures • Have become dominant structures in international development sector in past few decades	• To coordinate the distribution of large scale funds • To coordinate or harness localised efforts on a single issue or objective of global importance
Examples of Global Partnerships: The Global Fund (for the fight against) AIDS, TB and Malaria, the Global Water Partnership.		
Formal Partnerships	• 2 or more organisations coming together in a formal relationship with a shared mission or objective • May be time bound or continue indefinitely with new objectives • Formal documented management arrangements • Shared risk, benefits, resources and accountabilities.	• To implement a program or achieve a shared objective • To establish shared understandings, roles, responsibilities and accountabilities • To establish a shared framework or platform for ongoing or potential programs or objectives.
Examples of formal partnerships: DFAT's Australian Humanitarian Partnership, bilateral partnerships between many ANGOs and their in-country government or CSO partners,		

Each ACFID Member organisation should reflect on its own unique context, attributes and objectives to define how it will collaborate to achieve different objectives. The nature of the collaboration should differ depending on the unique circumstances of the issue or initiative. The forms of collaboration and their associated characteristics outlined above may provide a framework to guide your own analysis.

4. PRINCIPLES OF COLLABORATION

With so many forms of collaboration, it is important to recognise the core principles that should underpin the collaborative process to ensure that no matter the nature or form of the collaboration, it will always be based on consistent and sound principles. Regardless of whether it is a loose network, a transactional formal partnership or a multi- stakeholder collaboration, it should be underpinned by principles. The principles of collaboration provide the foundation upon which a collaboration is built. They inform the way we think about who we collaborate with, the terms upon which we are prepared to collaborate, and the way that we intend to relate to each other or multiple partners within a collaboration.

Many organisations have defined their own set of principles. Each organisation should consider these and determine their own principles. Discussing and negotiating agreed or shared principles with potential partners is also an important step in any collaboration.

Four core principles that are consistently recognised as being foundational to effective collaborations and which appear in many organisation's partnership principles are:

- Equity
- Transparency
- Accountability
- Mutual respect.

There are other principles that might also be considered, depending on the values base of your organization, your organisation's approach to collaboration and partnering, the unique circumstances of a collaboration or your partners' views. Some of these might include:

- Shared interests
- Mutual benefit
- Autonomy and Independence
- Clarity of roles and responsibilities

Definitions for these principles will differ slightly with each author. The following definitions are provided as a guide.

Equity: In any relationship, there will be divergences of power, resources and influence. Equity recognises that all parties have an equal right to be part of and benefit from the collaboration, decision making and outcomes.

Transparency: Sharing accessible information. Transparency is a pre-condition for accountability and both are required for trust. Transparency will enable accountability to primary stakeholders, partners, donors and other stakeholders.

Accountability: Taking responsibility for our actions and commitments. Involves accountabilities to and amongst all stakeholders at all levels.

Mutual respect: The participants must respect each other's mandates, obligations and independence and recognize each other's strengths, constraints and commitments. Mutual respect must not preclude organizations from engaging in constructive dissent.

Shared interests: This enables solidarity between parties and is critical to any form of collaboration. The degree of mutuality may differ with different types of collaborations from a shared interest or mission, to fully negotiated and mutually agreed objectives and outputs.

Mutual benefit: This is linked to shared interests. While benefits for the various parties may differ, all parties should benefit in some way if they are contributing to the collaboration. Neither party should be just serving the purpose or interests of the other party.

Autonomy and independence: All parties should be able to determine their own identity and manage their own governance. These principles are linked to mutual respect. Be aware of power imbalances that might undermine autonomy and independence.

Clarity of roles and responsibilities: Trust and transparency come from understanding the expectations, roles and responsibilities of all parties. These may differ depending on the relationship and the parties involved but it is important to have shared and clear understandings of expectations and accountabilities.

5.   ELEMENTS OF COLLABORATION

Regardless of the form or structure of a collaboration, intentional and systematic planning, development and management will enhance its effectiveness and sustainability. The following section outlines some of the steps or processes to consider when embarking on a collaboration. Some of these are required to ensure compliance with the Code of Conduct and the others would meet the Code's good practice standards. Further detail is provided in the supplementary document.

Governance/strategy/policy level

a)   Develop a policy, statement or guidance note outlining your organisation's position and philosophy or approach to collaboration. **This is a compliance requirement of the Code of Conduct.** Ideally this document would have Board level support and approval providing high level leadership to the organisation. Depending on the size or scale of your organisation, this may be a detailed policy document or it may be a simpler statement of intent or guidance note. Whatever form it takes, it would ideally outline:
   - your organisation's rationale for collaboration
   - the principles that will underpin and inform your collaborations such as mutual respect, transparency, accountability and equity
   - the different forms or structures collaborations might take; and
   - expected accountabilities including how the role of your partners will be communicated and attributed.

b)   Include reference to collaboration in your organisation's strategic plan or equivalent. This could include defining what effective collaborations would entail and associated performance indicators. This would provide your organisation with a framework or platform to assess the performance of its collaborations and enable accountability to stakeholders in regards to your commitment to collaboration.

External Communications

c)   Acknowledge and ensure fair and accurate attribution amongst partners in all communications materials. This could include newsletters, your website, formal reports etc.

Operational level

d) Develop a set of documented partnership management procedures to inform all of your collaboration and partnership management. These are often included as part of a programs manual or equivalent. Having this in place would meet the Code's good practice standard.

e) Outline a process for the identification of partners. This could include:
- a description of the common methods of identifying new partners. For example, your organisation may only collaborate with other members within your organisation's network or it may only collaborate with government structures.
- a list of criteria or characteristics to guide choices.

f) Outline a process for the assessment of partners. **This is a compliance requirement of the Code of Conduct.** It does not infer that you should only collaborate with partners of a certain capacity, but it does ensure you will understand a partners' values, structures, capacities and strengths. To meet the compliance requirement of the Code, this must include undertaking a due diligence and capacity assessment. This must be a documented process and cover an assessment of the following:
- Alignment with Members' values and objectives
- Governance and legal registration
- Financial systems
- Reference checks of partners against prohibited entities listings
- Capacity assessment for implementation of key safeguarding and risk policies (e.g. child protection and prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment).

Undertaking this type of process in a manner which supports the joint assessment of each other and covering a more comprehensive range of organisational approaches and capacities, would meet the Code's good practice standard. This could include a structured process that enabled equal participation by your organisation and your partner which allowed each party to jointly assess the other, fostering mutual understanding and trust. A comprehensive assessment could consider additional aspects including: human resources, project cycle management systems, risk management, broader financial management and general policy compliance.

g) Develop a process to support the capacity strengthening of partners. **This is a compliance requirement of the Code of Conduct.** This could be a relatively informal process of working with partners to enable them to identify areas of strengthening, it could be integrated within project designs, or it could be a structured and documented process undertaken jointly with partners. Implementing a systematic process, negotiated jointly with partners and outlining areas for capacity building in a documented plan would meet the Code's good practice standard.

Reflection and learning

h) Develop a process to periodically review the performance and effectiveness of collaborations and partnerships. **This is a compliance requirement of the Code of Conduct.** This might first involve working with partners to jointly articulate what the intended outcomes of the collaboration are and what an effective collaboration would look like. Undertaking this process in manner which supports the joint assessment of each other and enables mutual feedback would meet the Code's good practice standard. This could also include the joint assessment and mechanism for mutual feedback of capacity building initiatives and the documented arrangements such as MOU's or agreements.

Governance of the partnership

i) Develop a partnership agreement template. **This is a compliance requirement of the Code of Conduct** that applies where ACFID members have formal partnerships. It could take the form of an MOU, an agreement or a contract. At a minimum the agreement should cover:

- Value and contribution of each party
- shared goals, roles and responsibilities of all parties
- financial and non-financial resources and support offered by and required of each party
- dispute resolution process, and
- mutual accountabilities for reporting, sharing information and communication.
- Specific statements about child protection, prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, and incident reporting.

6. REFERENCES

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