4 - ACTIVELY INVEST IN GROUP DYNAMICS

Partnership development and innovation take time. Effective communication, trusting relationships, awareness of team dynamics and stages, and keeping partners engaged are essential to sustaining partnerships over the long-term.

It takes a long time and you have to develop a level of trust between the two parties. The labor side has to understand that management looks at them as a very important resource and a part of the industry. And management has to understand that labor wants to work with us and they want to make things more successful to create more job opportunities for people they represent. It can be a win-win situation if you approach it the right way.
– Masonry r2p Partner

Successful partnerships are often characterized by:

- Trust, openness, and mutual concern
- Patience, flexibility, and adaptability
- Understanding and respect for the mission of each partner's organization
- Recognition of and respect for what each partner does well
- Respect for the autonomy of each partner
- Willingness to share resources for the benefit of all
- Willingness to make decisions

[Adapted from: National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. (2012). Partnerships for Environmental Public Health: Evaluations Metrics Manual, Chapter 2, Activity 1: Identify Partners, http://www.niehs.nih.gov/research/supported/dert/programs/peph/.]

These characteristics have been described as the "glue" that keeps partnerships together.

This section focuses on the types of activities partnerships can undertake to strengthen their group dynamics and ensure that partners remain engaged and are prepared to address and overcome potential conflicts.

Section 4 Contents **Page #**

4.1 DEFINE THE PARTNERSHIP'S STYLE

Anyone who has collaborated on a project, committee, or partnership can describe characteristics of group interactions that did or did not work well. Having a clear understanding of what the partners believe contribute to positive group dynamics will help your partnership set ground rules for making decisions, working as a team, and communicating effectively.

> *If all that we do is focus on tasks and objectives, you might eventually get there, but you won't get there as fast and you won't get there as effectively….[It's about] how partners work together, how they listen to each other, how they collaborate. – Asphalt Partner*

Tool 4-A can help partners identify and build off of both positive and negative experiences they have had in other collaborations as they begin to establish ground rules for their work together.

TOOL 4-A: PARTNERSHIP STYLE – WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOESN'T

Instructions:

1. Depending on the group's size, this activity can be done with the partnership as a whole or by breaking the partners out into two groups.

   Use the following activities to identify what the partners feel were the strengths and weaknesses of past collaborations. If using two groups, ask Group 1 to do Activity A and ask Group 2 to do Activity B.

   Activity A – Ask the group to think about experiences with partnerships or groups that they have been a part of that were successful or that they enjoyed participating in.

   a. Have each person in the group individually write out a list of partnership characteristics that they believe contributed to a positive experience.

   b. One at a time, ask each person to share one characteristic from their list with the rest of the group.

   c. Record each one on flip chart paper or a whiteboard. As each characteristic is listed, ask if anyone else has it on their list, and keep a tally next to the characteristic.

   d. The process continues around the group, without discussion, until all individuals' lists have been exhausted.

   Activity B – Ask the group to think about less successful groups or partnerships that they found challenging to be a part of.

   a. Have each person in the group individually write out a list of partnership characteristics that s/he believes contributed to a negative experience.
   b. Go through the same process described in Activity A.

2. If the partners were working in groups, bring the groups back together and ask each group to report on the characteristics they identified. Discuss or clarify ones on the list with the option to collapse very similar characteristics into one. Be careful not to lose unique ones just to reduce the number of responses.

3. On a new flip chart or whiteboard create two columns. In the first column write "Our Style" at the top. Using the lists of positive and negative characteristics, brainstorm core characteristics for your partnership and write those in the first column.

4. Discuss how you might achieve those characteristics within your partnership. Write these ideas in the second column. Some examples of ways partnerships may achieve these characteristics might include: establishing an approach for dealing with sensitive issues that arise, regular communication, and collecting (anonymous) feedback on the partnership's process at specific intervals.

5. Keep a record of these characteristics and revisit them periodically. You may want to include them in your partnership evaluation effort (see **Section 6: Evaluate Your Work Together**).

[Parts adapted from: Becker, A. B., Israel, B. A., & Allen, A. J. (2005). Strategies and Techniques for Effective Group Process in CBPR Partnerships. In B. A. Israel, E. Eng, A. J. Schulz & E. A. Parker (Eds.), *Methods in Community-Based Participatory Research for Health* (pp. 52-72). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.]

4.2 WORK EFFECTIVELY AS A TEAM

Partnerships are about being able to work effectively as a team. Teams go through different phases over time and, as with any collaboration, there may be points of potential uncertainty or conflict. Typical stages of a partnership include: *Forming*, *Storming*, *Norming*, and *Performing*.

Stages of Group Development	
Forming	Partners are getting to know each other. Roles and responsibilities are not clear. Shared purpose has not yet been realized.
Storming	Partners experience conflict and competition. The partnership's rules, structure, and authority may be questioned. Patience, tolerance, and the ability to listen will help a partnership push through this phase.
Norming	Partners are engaged and value each other's contributions, and the group has started to figure out how to work together. Partners are willing to change their preconceived ideas and are open to and interested in what each other have to contribute. Partnership morale is high and the group is able to function productively.
Performing	The partnership shows cohesion and interdependence, whether working independently, in subgroups, or as an entire partnership. *Not all partnerships reach this stage.*

[Adapted from: Tuckman, B. & Jensen, M. (1977). *Stages of Small Group Development. Group and Organizational Studies*, 2, 419-427.]

Even though a stage such as *Storming* might seem unproductive or better to avoid, each stage has value, and going through it can contribute to a partnership's strength and ability to achieve its goals.

Forming Stage – Partners are getting to know each other.

At this stage, partners may be just getting to know each other or be working together for the first time on safety and health issues. Creating a group resume (**Tool 4-B**) is one way to help your partners become better acquainted and aware of the knowledge, skills, and experience each partner brings to the partnership. This activity can be especially effective if the information gathered for the resume is focused on the reason your partnership is being formed.

TOOL 4-B: FORMING – PARTNERSHIP RESUME

Instructions:

1. Introduce this exercise by telling the partners that they represent an incredible array of talents and experiences. Explain that this exercise is intended to identify the partnership's collective knowledge, skills, and resources that they are bringing to bear on the issue(s) the group is addressing.

2. Depending on the size of your partnership, you may want to divide the group up into pairs or small groups. Using a flip chart or a whiteboard to keep track of responses, ask each group (or the group as a whole) to list the items that would be included in their collective resume. Explain that a resume can include the following types of information, as well as any other relevant categories the partners come up with:
    - Work experience
    - Educational background
    - Knowledge each partner brings to the table related to the partnership's issue(s) and/or goal(s) (the purpose of the partnership)
    - Positions held
    - Professional skills
    - Major accomplishments
    - Professional organizations
    - Other

3. Bring everyone back together and ask each small group to present its resume to the entire team. If the partners did this as one group, skip this step.

4. Acknowledge the total resources contained within the entire partnership.

5. After the meeting, assemble the notes into one collective resume for the partnership and distribute a copy to all partners. This document may come in useful as a quick reminder of the skills and resources available as your partnership's work progresses.

[Adapted from: UC Berkeley Center for Organizational and Workplace Effectiveness. Team Building Toolkit: KEYS - Keys to Enhance Your Supervisory Success, http://hrweb.berkeley.edu/files/attachments/Team-Building-Toolkit-KEYS.pdf.]

Storming Stage – Partners experience conflict and competition

At this stage your partnership is up and running but the partners are figuring out how to make decisions and establishing and understanding each other's roles (**Section 4.3**). Since this also often coincides with the stage when partnerships begin to set plans and timelines, it is a time when conflicts may arise about the scope, goals, and next steps. Even partners who share the same values and goals may not always agree on how to move forward.

Although the word "conflict" sounds negative, conflicts are natural and can be healthy. Partnerships that learn to work through differences often end up with better ideas and outcomes, as well as stronger working relationships.

> "The first time I heard about the 'storming' stage, I was hoping we'd be able to skip that part. But I found that it's important to go through, and now I think you should be happy when you get to 'storming' because that shows you're making progress."– *SafeBuild Alliance Partner*

During the storming stage partners may become competitive. There may be a question of who is in charge, personal differences may arise, or conflicting views may surface. Since everyone is human, this is often the point where a person's best and worst personality traits may surface. It only takes one partner being uncooperative or disruptive to slow down or jeopardize the partnership's work and ability to work together.

Tool 2-B: Partner Diversity, Expectations, and Challenges can be a useful exercise in surfacing and addressing underlying tensions and concerns that partners have about working together. Findings from the ongoing partnership evaluation can also help identify issues with group dynamics (see **Section 6: Evaluate Your Work Together**). Later in this section, **4.6: Recognize and Address Conflict** includes tips for facilitators on how to work through areas of conflict in proactive and positive ways.

The following chart, "Identifying and Addressing Dysfunctional Behavior," lists the types of behavior that people may exhibit during the Storming stage (or other stages) and actions the facilitator can take in response. It is designed to help the facilitator identify and address problem behavior before it interferes with the partnership's work.

Identify and Address Dysfunctional Behavior		
Behavior	**Description**	**Facilitator Action**
Backbiting	Partners complaining and finding fault with one another, then talking with outsiders about this instead of the partnership as a whole	Be aware of partnership dynamics; establish ground rules around direct communication; conduct a general group discussion about the issue without blame
Blaming	Not taking personal responsibility; pointing the finger at others/situations for a problem that has arisen	Address the problem as a group problem and an opportunity to learn; conduct a debrief session outlining all contributing factors and ways to do things differently next time
Bullying	Being inconsiderate of other partners; attacking and intimidating behavior	Begin with a separate conversation with the person; monitor behavior; if behavior continues or escalates seek help from either another partner or someone outside the partnership who is in a position to get the person's attention and deal with the behavior
Discounting	Interrupting others; ignoring comments or suggestions; putting down partner contributions as irrelevant	Establish or revisit ground rules on active listening; establish a way to capture comments and suggestions that have not received air time; ask the group how they want to handle those items
Distracting	Digressing, getting on tangents, conducting side conversations	Refer back to prepared agenda; active facilitation; revisit ground rules; "parking lot" (create a separate list on a flip chart or whiteboard) of tangent items for a future agenda
Dominating	Pushing own (not group) agenda; excessive talking, interrupting others, criticizing, speaking for others; arguing too much on a point and rejecting expressed ideas without consideration	Paraphrase using some of the speaker's own words to indicate understanding; use direct questions to draw out other partners and gather other opinions; have a separate conversation with the person to address the behavior
Excluding	Forming cliques or factions that result in partners distrusting and suspecting one another	In an effort to integrate the partnership, assign quick win projects (attainable in the short-term) to partners who may not know each other or do not usually work together, and/or plan a team building activity
Feuding	Bringing baggage/issues from other situations and creating an uncomfortable environment; partners openly complain about and find fault with one another	Conduct an offline conversation with the person(s) involved in the disruption; monitor the situation, and if problem escalates seek outside intervention
Joking	Excessive playing around, telling jokes, mimicking other partners	Return to the agenda and timeline; if behavior continues conduct a general group discussion about the issue without blame
Labeling	Using labels that have an emotional charge or negative connotation to attack self-esteem rather than addressing the problem	Check for understanding and ask for clarification; if behavior is chronic, conduct a separate conversation with person
Nay-saying	Chronic attention paid to what is wrong rather than what is right or finding fault without providing alternatives	Immediately use a countering statement to refocus team on solutions
Non-participating	Acting with indifference; not contributing to discussions and activities; holding back opinions and ideas; not taking initiative; arriving late or leaving early	General group discussion about the issue without blame; break out into pairs or small groups; increase accountability by initiating project plans, agendas, minutes and action items, timelines, milestones

[Adapted from: *Team Building Toolkit: KEYS - Keys to Enhance Your Supervisory Success*. UC Berkeley Center for Organizational and Workplace Effectiveness, http://hrweb.berkeley.edu/files/attachments/Team-Building-Toolkit-KEYS.pdf.]

Norming Stage - Partners are engaged and value each other's contributions:

Partnerships that reach the Norming stage have learned to work through differences in the Storming stage. At this point your partnership may be starting to implement its plan and work toward its goals (see **Section 5: Identify and Disseminate Solutions**). Work during this stage may take time, so it is important for partnerships to take steps to keep all of the partners engaged and informed.

Your partnership may want to consider setting milestones during the planning process to recognize the partnership's accomplishments. This recognition can be something as formal as a press release or articles in the partners' publications, or something as simple as taking a moment at the beginning of your next meeting to acknowledge the success and thank all the partners for their hard work.

Acknowledging success can lead to more success. Recognition and celebration can give partners that extra boost of energy or confidence to keep things going when the going gets tough. When partners feel good, their good feelings reverberate into other interactions.

Performing Stage - The partnership shows cohesion:

Partnerships at the performing stage are working effectively as a team. That does not mean the partnership should be on autopilot. At this stage it is important for the partners to continue to pay attention to group dynamics, review lessons learned, successes, and goals, and make changes, if needed, to reflect internal (e.g., the partners, their organizations) and external (e.g., economy, industry) factors that could impact the partnership's work. This may be the stage to expand the partnership's scope or establish new goals.

4.3 DETERMINE DECISION-MAKING APPROACHES

How a partnership makes decisions has a direct impact on partnership dynamics and outcomes. For these reasons, it is important to decide early in the developmental stage of your partnership how decisions will be made and who will make what type of decisions.

Dynamics of Decision-Making

Being able to reach consensus and make group decisions is central to a partnership's work, but doing so is often challenging. As partners introduce new and different ideas and grapple with sensitive issues, there is the potential for the discussions to lose focus or for misunderstandings to occur. Agreeing upfront how decisions will be made can help your partnership avoid such difficult dynamics.

How will decisions be made?

All partners should be involved in determining the best decision-making approaches for your partnership. While using Roberts Rules of Order (http://www.robertsrules.com/) can be advantageous in terms of efficiency and structure, some partners might find that such an approach stifles participation and may prefer a more informal approach with shared leadership or consensus decision-making.

Your partnership should discuss and agree on guidelines for reaching decisions: Will decisions be made by consensus? Will there be a leadership structure that makes decisions, such as a steering committee? Which decisions can be made by subcommittees vs. the whole group? Will there be different decision-making approaches for "high stakes" or time-sensitive decisions than for "low stakes" or non-urgent decisions?

A decision-making approach geared toward keeping all partners informed and providing them with the opportunity to participate in making decisions tends to lead to the greatest ownership of the decisions and their outcomes, but productivity may be enhanced when individual or small groups of partners are empowered to make certain types of decisions. By choosing appropriate approaches for different types of decisions, a partnership can achieve balance of ownership and productivity.

There may be times when an issue comes up and all of the partners agree on an outcome without debate. This type of spontaneous agreement makes everyone happy and unites the partners – "we're all on the same page." When this type of spontaneous agreement does not occur, there are other approaches your partnership can use for different types of decisions.

Decision Making Approaches

- **Consensus building** involves raising all aspects of an issue and providing all of the partners with an opportunity to express their opinions and offer solutions or recommendations. Once all of the partners understand the issue and are aware of each other's concerns and recommendations, the group discusses and refines how to deal with the issue until they come up with a solution that all of the partners believe is "workable" and they can "live with." This collaborative approach is time consuming, but it can help to unite the partners and builds a sense of commitment to the outcome and the partnership.

- **A negotiated approach or compromise** may work best if an issue is very controversial and the solutions are at opposite ends of the spectrum. Through this approach each side works toward a middle position – everyone wins and loses some points from their original position. To avoid dividing the partnership, when this approach becomes too adversarial, the partnership should consider tabling the issue and asking each side to come to the next meeting with alternative solutions.

- **Multi-voting** is a technique used when a variety of options that all have merit have been presented during a discussion or brainstorming session. Through this approach, each partner is given a number of votes and asked to vote for the item(s) he or she views as the best option(s). A new list of options is then created that reflects the ones that received the most votes. This process continues until the partners have narrowed it down to the option they feel is best. This approach involves less discussion than consensus building or negotiations, but for certain decisions where there are many viable, non-controversial options this non-competitive approach may work best. (*The Facilitator's Tool Kit*, referenced in Additional Resources later in this section, has more details on how to carry out Multi-Voting Decision-Making.)

- **Majority Voting** is systematic, objective, democratic, and may be a useful approach for issues where there may be differences of opinion, but the differences are not divisive. Once the partnership has thoroughly discussed an issue, asking the partners to vote through a show of hands, a ballot, or some other mechanism may be a reasonable and efficient decision-making approach.

- **Allocating authority** to one or more partners to make specific types of decisions, such as ones that are time-sensitive, can help keep the partnership's work on track. This approach also helps to involve different partners and build commitment. It should not be used for decisions that could have a significant impact on the partnership's work, alters the goals and objectives, or could end in results that some partners "can't live with." If this approach is used, it is important to make sure the partner given the authority has the option of bringing the decision back to the full partnership if s/he feels it warrants further discussion.

- A decision continuum, such as the **Gradients of Agreement**, is another way to think about consensus-based decisions and gauge the specific level of each partner's support or opposition to an idea or action. This approach allows individuals to register specific responses to a proposal – both before and after discussions – and helps the partnership clarify what partners actually mean when they say "yes" or "no" when asked whether or not they support or "buy into" a particular decision. Is someone who says "yes" enthusiastically supporting the decision or simply hoping that the meeting will end soon? Are participants who say "no" trying to communicate that they cannot live with the decision or would minor adjustments help them become more enthusiastic supporters? This approach can also help the facilitator determine if there is enough support (rather than unanimous support) to move forward with a proposal. **Tool 4-C** walks you through how to use this decision-making approach, and **Tool 4-D** raises discussion questions to help your partnership develop an overall strategy or framework for when to use different decision-making approaches, such as those described in this section.

[Adapted from: Leading Space. (2009).*The Six Decision-Making Processes,* http://leadingspace.wordpress.com/2009/02/28/the-six-decision-making-processes/ , and The Office of Quality Management. (2000). *Facilitators Tool Kit*, http://www.uspto.gov/web/offices/com/oqm-old/Facilitation.pdf.]

TOOL 4-C: GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT

Instructions:

1. Draw the gradients of agreement scale (below) on a flip chart or whiteboard so the whole group can see it. Review the four levels.

    Tips:

    - *Explain the decision approach before discussing the idea, goal, or issue.*
    - *Let the group know that after sufficient discussion a proposal will be developed and everyone will use the scale to register their level of support for the proposal.*

4	3	2	1
I fully support this proposal	**I support this proposal with minor changes**	**I support this proposal with major changes**	**I do not support this proposal**

2. Discuss the proposed idea, goal, or issue. After determining that there has been sufficient discussion, the facilitator or another partner can ask for or suggest a short proposal (one to two sentences) describing the partnership's intended response to the issue being discussed. The proposal can be modified so that it reflects the partnership's thinking. Write the proposal for everyone to see.

3. Ask each partner to use the scale to indicate his/her level of support for the proposal. The facilitator should restate the proposal, and then go around the table so that each individual can indicate his/her level of agreement with the proposal.

    Tip: Making a check mark in the appropriate box to record each person's level of support helps the entire group see the distribution of responses. The group can then determine if there is enough support for the proposal to move forward.

4. Ask those who indicated a "2" or "3" on the scale to describe their reservations and what change(s) could help move them up one level (sometimes these are easy changes to make).

5. Determine if there is sufficient support to move forward. Decide:
    - ✓ There is enough agreement to formalize the decision (a majority of "3" and "4" responses to the proposal), or
    - ✓ There is not enough agreement to make a decision and the team should continue to discuss the issue (a majority of "1" and "2" responses).

    Tip: To save time, if you sense general agreement before a topic is even discussed, suggest a straw poll using the Gradients of Agreement. If everyone is a 3 or 4, the group can often move on to the next agenda item without an extended discussion.

[Adapted from: UC Berkeley Center for Organizational and Workplace Effectiveness. *Team Building Toolkit: KEYS - Keys to Enhance Your Supervisory Success*, http://hrweb.berkeley.edu/files/attachments/Team-Building-Toolkit-KEYS.pdf.]

TOOL 4-D: DEVELOP A DECISION-MAKING STRATEGY

Instructions:

Raise the following questions with the whole partnership. If you have not already done so, you may want to present the decision-making approaches described in this section and the gradients of agreement in **Tool 4-B** to aid in the discussion. Use the last question to formally decide on the appropriate decision-making strategy for the partnership.

Decision-Making Questions for Discussion

1. Does everyone always need to be at the table when decisions are made? Is there a difference depending on the type of decision to be made? If there are differences, what types of decisions should involve all of the partners and what types could be deferred to an individual partner or a sub-group?
2. Who gets the final say? Who must be involved on which issues (e.g., setting priorities, budgets, solutions)?
3. Should decision-making responsibilities be rotated over time? How?
4. How will the group balance process (e.g., allowing enough discussion on a topic) and action (e.g., making a decision and implementing it)?
5. How long should it take to make a decision? Remind partners that decision-making is challenging and that it is natural for groups to have to work through misunderstandings to arrive at a satisfactory outcome.
6. Which decision-making approaches will work best in which circumstances (e.g., **Consensus** – everyone must agree to pass an effort? **Majority Voting** – percentage of votes passes an effort?)

[Adapted from: Greene-Moton, E., Palermo, A.G., Flicker, S., Travers, R. (2006). Unit 4 Section 4.4 Making Decisions and Communicating Effectively, *The Examining Community-Institutional Partnerships for Prevention Research Group. Developing and Sustaining Community-Based Participatory Research Partnerships: A Skill-Building Curriculum*, http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/cbpr/u4/u44.php.]

Additional Resources

For more tips and resources on decision-making, visit the following resources:

- **Facilitator's Toolkit –** http://www.uspto.gov/web/offices/com/oqm-old/Facilitation.pdf
- **Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making -** Kaner, S., Lind, L., Toldi, C., Fisk, S., & Berger, D. (2007). *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

4.4 COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

At every stage, ongoing and effective communication among partners is needed to build and maintain trust. Communication must occur both inside and outside of meetings, and is needed for your partnership's work to progress.

What are the best ways to communicate? Communication methods should reflect the preferences and needs of your partnership. While face-to-face meetings, phone calls, and email are primary mechanisms for communicating, other options are available that can offer unique advantages. Instant messaging can be effective at communicating quick and short pieces of information. A Facebook or other social media account can also be set up to facilitate conversations between partners, provide a central space to find meeting dates and locations, and create a place where partner organizations and constituents can visit to stay informed about the partnership's work and learn about upcoming opportunities to help with this work. Online resources, such as Google Groups (https://groups.google.com/forum/#!overview) and Dropbox (www.dropbox.com), also provide free options for efficiently sharing materials. The options you choose will depend on the comfort level of the various partners with the different methods.

Communication check-ins: A regular communication check-in is a great way to identify and address problems early on and keep partners engaged. Use check-ins to discuss the status of your partnership's work as well as an opportunity to gauge how well your communications methods and system are working.

Consider the following questions:

1. Are communication methods (e.g., meetings, emails, etc.) engaging all partners equally in decision-making?
2. Are there adequate opportunities for input outside of meetings?
3. How well do communications contribute to high levels of trust, engagement, and morale?
4. Are communications being effectively used to manage or address problems?
5. How well are communications encouraging participation outside of meetings?
6. How well are communications facilitating greater involvement in meetings?
7. How well do current communications methods allow participants to respond to change quickly?
8. Are the current levels and forms of communication sustainable?

[Adapted from: Kaiser Labor Management Partnership. *Path to Performance Toolkit: High Functioning Teams Materials*, http://www.lmpartnership.org/tools/path-to-performance/sponsorship/level-5.]

Communication Tips:

- ❖ Make sure all communications are respectful, open, honest, and speak directly to issues or concerns.
- ❖ Identify an optimal frequency for communications; you may want to set a regular schedule for touching base.

- Since some terms may mean different things to different groups, avoid slang, spell out terms, and make sure everyone feels comfortable asking for clarification.
- Ask for volunteers to assist with communications or rotate responsibility among the partners (e.g., a monthly volunteer to take and send out meeting minutes).
- Use technology to save time. Set up a Dropbox (www.dropbox.com) or internet-based space to store materials, and online tools such as Doodle (www.doodle.com) to schedule meetings.
- Avoid communication overload. Identify who should be contacted for specific purposes or activities.
- Identify which partner will be the main point of contact for researchers and others reaching out to the partnership.
- Maintain a list of the best ways to reach partners. For each partner, collect the information listed in **Tool 4-E: Creating a Partnership Directory** in an Excel spreadsheet, Word document, or database, share it with all partners, and update it regularly.

TOOL 4-E: CREATE A PARTNERSHIP DIRECTORY

Instructions:

1. Depending on the number of partners or other stakeholders associated with the partnership, you may decide to create a simple Word document or, for a larger partnership, a spreadsheet or database to store everyone's contact information.

2. At the initial meeting, ask everyone to fill out an index card with the information below. For those who are not at the meeting, or for new partners joining later, be sure to send an email collecting this information. Compile the information, share it with the group, and make sure to update it regularly.

Organization	
Partner Name	
Position	
Areas of Expertise	
Preferred Email	
Preferred Phone	
Best Time to Contact	

Additional Resource:

For more tips on effective communication, visit the following resource:

- **Making Decisions and Communicating Effectively** – http://www.cbprcurriculum.info/

4.5 MAINTAIN PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

Keeping all partners engaged is a challenge for all partnerships at every stage of development. In addition to facilitating effective meetings (see **Section 2: Facilitate the Partnership Process**), and promoting communication (see **4.4: Communicate Effectively**), engagement can be fostered through networking, holding small working groups, and involvement in partner organizations' events and programs.

As mentioned in the discussion of a partnership's "Norming" phase, celebrating the partnership's work and success is a way to promote further success and keep momentum going. Continued relationship building also helps because as relationships develop, partners are more likely to be willing to help and hold each other accountable.

> *That's the beauty of a partnership… although you certainly work on tasks, it's really relationship-based...just like in any other type of healthy relationship, there's that, "Hey, my partner has an idea. I want to listen to that. I want to see if there's a way that we can create a win-win scenario here." – Asphalt Partner*

A partnership can make relationship building a priority by setting up opportunities for unstructured communication and networking. This can be as easy as providing lunch and some free time to eat and chat during a regularly scheduled meeting or going to happy hour as a group afterward.

> *We start [our quarterly meeting] at 4:00 in the afternoon and people have the opportunity to stay until 7, 7:30, 8:00 if they want. And the venue where we have it provides an opportunity for them to go to another area and continue their evening if they want to do more networking or have dinner or more beverages…. So we really structured it so that it would enhance networking opportunities. – SafeBuild Alliance Partner*

Partners can also show interest and support by attending or participating in each other's non-partnership events. Creating a partner events calendar, either web-based or hard-copy, separate from partnership activities is one way to ensure such information is available to all partners. Each partner should provide the name and time of upcoming events that would be appropriate for other partners to attend as guests or participants, or support in some way. For each event include the type of participation that would be appropriate (e.g., giving a presentation, just attending, running a booth), and the type of support that would be helpful (e.g., placing an announcement in a newsletter). These detailed dates and explanations should be completed by each partner organization and updated on a regular basis.

4.6 RECOGNIZE AND ADDRESS CONFLICT

In the real world conflicts happen. While conflicts can create challenges, they can also be opportunities to work out important problems and strengthen relationships.

To help your partnership succeed, it is important to be able to set outside issues aside and focus on the safety and health issues that brought you together. Remember that despite possible differences in the partners' organizational motivators, missions, and cultures, there is common ground – concern about safety and health.

Acknowledging and respecting these differences is the first step in developing ways to discuss disagreements and avoid conflicts. This process starts with the first partnership meeting and continues through all stages. Activities such as developing a partnership agreement, (see **Tool 3-J: Partnership Agreement Outline and Steps**), providing opportunities for input on meeting agendas, planning, and actively working together to build collaboration and cooperation help to address and limit conflict.

The following case study from the Massachusetts Floor Finishing Safety Task Force shows how identifying an area that had little chance for agreement among all the partners (in this case, the need for a regulation to address the hazard) and being willing to find alternatives ended up moving the process forward. The potential issue of conflict that could have jeopardized the partnership in its "Storming" stage ended with broad-based support that developed organically.

Case Study: Meeting Challenges Head-On in the Floor Finisher's Safety Task Force

Between 2004 and 2005, two separate fires killed three floor finishers from Dorchester, MA when the chemicals they were using ignited. While this was not the first case of a fire in the industry, the tragic deaths quickly drew the Dorchester community's attention to the hazards associated with floor finishing. The Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health (MassCOSH), the Vietnamese American Initiative for Development (VietAID), the University of Massachusetts, Lowell, the Dorchester Health Center, and additional stakeholders such as government advisors, small business contractors, and product distributors came together as a statewide Floor Finishing Safety Task Force to try to make the industry safer. They quickly identified the use of lacquer sealer as the main hazard to be addressed, but agreeing on how to address it took longer.

With so many different people at the table, initially there was some difference of opinion on what measures should be taken to address the safety hazard of lacquer sealer. Specifically, there was resistance to any regulatory solutions from partners who were business owners and product distributors. Acknowledging the crucial role these groups would play in addressing any change within the industry, the other partners agreed to focus on educational efforts and voluntary discontinuance of selling or using lacquer sealer.

This approach met with some initial success as all product distributors in the area agreed to take lacquer sealer off the shelves. However, when one of the distributors later backed out, it left the others at a serious competitive disadvantage. Those who were initially against regulatory options began to agree that it was the only way to guarantee a level playing field. The partnership took steps to make a policy level change, which resulted in the Massachusetts legislature banning the commercial use of the sealers for floor finishing. Consensus on this regulatory solution was able to emerge because of the partners' trust in each other, understanding of the issue, and willingness to try different alternatives.

The following Tip Sheets may help create an environment where potential conflicts are identified, dealt with, and prevented from undermining the partnership's work. They are designed to help a facilitator navigate the diverse personal reactions and issues that the partnership may encounter. Along with the table in **Section 4.2: Identify and Address Dysfunctional Behavior**, these tips can serve as useful resources to deal with conflict when it arises.

Tip Sheet #1: **"Baggage Handling"**

- Everyone comes with "baggage" – encourage partners to "check it at the door"
- Work to form common ground. Make efforts to regularly remind the group of shared values and interests
- Arrange the room and breakouts to ensure interaction
- Don't allow underhanded or coded comments or jokes. One way to accomplish this is to ask the person to explain what they just said
- Validate important fights and history
- Help the group stick to the issue at hand

Tip Sheet #2: **Inviting Participation**

- Directly solicit input from a partner who is not participating
- Give partners the time and space to pause, reflect, and think critically
- Validate different forms of participation
- Don't let one person take over or sabotage the conversation
- Don't create unnecessary divisions

Tip Sheet #3: **Interrupting Power Plays**

- Look out for conflict in the room. Be particularly cognizant of individuals retreating because they felt attacked and/or disrespected
- If there is conflict from a power imbalance in the room, be careful not to step in too harshly. You may want to shift the topic and create the space to review group norms and ground rules and recreate equilibrium
- Call a break to lower tension
- Use tension as an opportunity to learn

[Burke, B., Geronimo, J., Martin, D. A., Thomas, B., & Wall, C. (2002). *Education for Changing Unions* (Chapters 7 and 8). Toronto: Between the Lines.]