

7- ALLOW YOUR PARTNERSHIP TO EVOLVE

Partnerships are not static. As they grow and develop, partnerships evolve and typically go through stages of “forming, storming, norming, and performing,” (see **Section 4: Actively Invest in Group Dynamics**).

In the longer term, some partnerships become institutionalized with partners making an ongoing commitment to continue and expand their work, while others eventually come to a close. A partnership focused on a single hazard may end once a solution has been found and broadly implemented, or it may move on to tackle a new issue. A partnership focused on improving overall safety and health in an industry segment may go on indefinitely.

The lifecycle of a partnership is driven by its vision, mission, goals, and objectives (see **Section 3: Develop a Shared Vision, Mission, and Goals**), and influenced by the experiences and adjustments it makes to the initial plan or group norms along the way.

This section focuses on concepts and tools to help partners reflect on where their partnership is in its evolution, changes that may need to be made, and next steps.

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7.1 PLAN FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Partnerships evolve over time as important industry issues arise and players change. As your partnership moves from a new partnership to an established one, it is important to periodically revisit your partnership’s vision, mission, goals, and processes, and confirm or reset your course. Planning for sustainability is an important step for partnerships to take, and it is best to start early, before funding runs out or the partnership’s current r2p effort ends.

The following case study showcases the SafeBuild Alliance, a partnership that adapted its goals, scope, and activities over the last 20 years as it grew and evolved, shifting from a single-owner mandated safety effort to a self-organized non-profit organization focused on using a regional approach to improving construction safety culture with over 100 members.

Case Study: SafeBuild Alliance

Construction is one of the largest job markets in the Portland, Oregon area. In the 1990s, Intel was the state’s largest private employer and the source of a significant amount of ongoing construction. As a world-class leader in the high-tech industry and primary user of construction services in the area, Intel strove to lead in the area of safety and health in construction and create injury-free work environments. They also recognized they were in a position to advance worksite safety culture on a large scale.

They began with a goal to shift the paradigm from “construction is inherently dangerous,” to “all injuries are preventable.” They started insisting that any contractors and subcontractors who wanted to work with Intel had to get on board with the new safety culture and way of thinking. Intel took steps to ensure that safer equipment and work practices were used and instituted safety and training standards that every contractor and worker had to comply with in order to access one of their jobsites. Over time, the approach to changing safety culture became less Intel-driven, but the language and the cultural shift Intel had initiated had already taken hold. A committed group of contractors, subcontractors, labor representatives, and other stakeholders decided to continue the momentum and effort started by Intel and created the Portland Injury-Free Consortium in 2002. The group became a nonprofit called the Greater Portland Construction Partnership in 2006, and then the SafeBuild Alliance in 2013. The partnership’s mission was to take a regional approach to transform workplace cultures to achieve incident-free construction projects. SafeBuild has provided regular forums for safety and health professionals and those in the construction industry interested in safety culture to network. They have also provided education and informational resources on best practices in safety and health, and a safety-oriented Prequalification Assessment Certification Program for general contractors and subcontractors. Its latest initiative is a new mentor-mentee partnership program that gives contractors the opportunity to learn about and improve safety on the jobsite from others who have exceptional records of their own.

This non-profit partnership, which began with a volunteer board with six members and a small number

of organizations who joined as partners, now supports an Executive Director, has an expanded board with 15 members, and over 100 partner organizations and individual members of the larger partnership.

Throughout its history, the SafeBuild Alliance maintained its mission of zero incidents through collaboration. Today, the non-profit's membership represents a range of players in the construction industry including general contractors, subcontractors, owners, public and private entities, design professionals, architects, engineers, construction affiliated organizations and companies, building and construction trade associations, industry vendors, and insurers.

Today's SafeBuild Alliance continues to evolve and look forward as it grows its membership, efforts, and reach to promote safety culture in construction.

When considering sustainability, it may be helpful to revisit and discuss findings from your partnership evaluation to come up with a shared understanding of what sustainability means for your partnership and to begin planning for the longer term.

TOOL 7-A: WHAT DOES SUSTAINABILITY MEAN TO YOUR PARTNERSHIP?

It is important for partners to come to a common understanding of what sustainability means for their partnership and what criteria will be used to decide if the partnership or its components can or should be sustained.

Instructions:

1. Discuss these questions about sustainability in small groups, or with the partnership as a whole:
 - ❖ Has the partnership gained recognition and influence within the industry for its work to advance safety and health?
 - ❖ Once your partnership accomplishes its goal(s), is there a continued need for the partnership?
 - ❖ Are there outstanding issues that the partnership still needs to work on or new ones that had not been previously identified?
 - ❖ Is the partnership in a position to move on to address new issues that may have previously been considered out of reach?
 - ❖ What does the partnership need to continue its work in the long-term (e.g., funding, resources, a high level of commitment from the partners, etc.)?
 - ❖ Is there a need to bring in new partners?

2. Ask each small group to briefly report back on highlights of the discussion.

[Adapted from: Examining Community-Institutional Partnerships for Prevention Research Group. (2006). *Developing and Sustaining Community-Based Participatory Research Partnerships: A Skill-Building Curriculum*. www.cbprcurriculum.info.]

The following case study describes a partnership that started as a pilot project CPWR would learn from and evolved into an ongoing research to practice focused partnership.

Case Study: Planning for Sustainability with the Masonry r2p Partnership

The Masonry r2p Partnership was originally established to help CPWR develop a model industry-wide partnership focused on research to practice and to understand how such a partnership could leverage the influence of its core partners over industry practices on a broad scale and be sustained. Unlike other safety and health partnerships that relied on individual champions to keep the partnership going, this new model focused on obtaining the organizational buy-in and commitment upfront from all participating organizations to ensure the partnership could be sustained when individual participants leave an organization. Since the Partnership's formation in 2010, CPWR's r2p staff has maintained a close working relationship with it and documented the transition from a pilot model partnership to an established and sustainable entity.

From 2010 – 2014, the CPWR r2p staff member responsible for developing the industry r2p partnership model played an integral role in shaping, supporting, and facilitating the Partnership, including:

1. Bringing together and obtaining a commitment from the leader of each organization to establish an industry r2p partnership and allow CPWR to learn from their efforts.
2. Providing guidance to the Partnership on how to identify priorities, select research to support, disseminate results, and track progress.
3. Engaging researchers and identifying others – temporary partners -- from government and manufacturing, for example, to support the Partnership's work.

By 2014, the Partnership was meeting regularly, had made progress on key priorities, was actively engaged in disseminating research findings, and was positioned to support new research initiatives. At this juncture, the question was whether the Partnership could sustain itself if the level of support from r2p staff was reduced. Discussions were held with the partner organizations leaders and they agreed to continue the Partnership and to appoint an internal facilitator. This internal facilitator would be responsible for continuing to build relationships with researchers and other safety and health professionals and keeping research and dissemination efforts moving forward. The internal facilitator selected possessed strong organizational skills and was well known and respected by the three partner organizations.

For the next five years (through 2019), the r2p staff followed the Partnership's work to understand what was needed to have a sustainable r2p focused industry partnership. The following were found to contribute to the Partnership's sustainability:

1. Having the partner organizations' commitment, rather than relying on individual champions from those organizations, contributes to a partnership's sustainability. Between 2010 and 2019, several individuals assigned to represent the partner organizations retired or left. These changes had little to no impact on the Partnership's efforts.

2. Appointing a facilitator or point-person that has an established and positive working relationship with all partner organizations and the authority to make decisions to keep work on priorities moving forward
3. Engaging in regular communication on the Partnership's priorities with researchers and to stakeholders to set expectations and maintain focus and momentum. (See Case Study p. 22).
4. Becoming a self-sustaining partnership does not require severing ties with or no longer receiving support from other organizations. While in the beginning CPWR was devoting time and resources to the Partnership's development, the Partnership is now supporting CPWR and NIOSH research projects on existing and emerging hazards (e.g., exoskeletons, and nanomaterials), providing access to target audiences for research, dissemination and evaluation, and initiating the development of practical tools and translational products for use by a broad cross section of the construction industry (e.g., a COVID-19 Planning Tool).

The Masonry r2p Partnership is now a widely recognized and ongoing entity, which supports safety and health research and dissemination across the construction industry.

7.2 FOCUS ON A NEW ISSUE

Once you have assessed your partnership and have a better idea of the partnership's current status and sustainability, you will be better able to consider "what's next?" Will the partnership continue its existing work? Will it take on new issues?

In considering next steps, it may be helpful for the partners to revisit what issues are important to its members and the constituencies represented. (See **Section 3.3 – Develop Partnership Goals and Objectives**).

The Asphalt Paving Partnership, as described in the following case study, is an example of a partnership that was formed to address one issue, but, as a result of its success, decided to take on new issues and continue to work as a partnership.

Case Study: Asphalt Paving Partnership Spin-off Projects

As described in other sections of this toolkit, the Asphalt Paving Partnership was initially created to address workers' exposure to asphalt fumes. The result of their initial effort was the creation of a voluntary agreement that led to the universal adoption of effective engineering controls on highway-class pavers in the United States. This experience of working together laid a foundation for their continued collaboration in two main ways.

First, it proved that a cooperative approach could work and gave them an important success on which to build. The group's efforts garnered recognition including awards for partnership and innovation from the National Occupational Research Agenda and Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

Second, the partners developed an infrastructure for future work together, including: the establishment of cooperative, trusting relationships between the diverse partners, shared norms and principles for working together, and a collective identity as an open, innovative, and forward-looking group actively seeking to protect the safety and health of workers.

The partnership chose to build on its success by creating successive "spin-off" collaborations focused on other safety and health issues:

- ❖ *Warm-mix*: Promotion of a lower-temperature "warm-mix" asphalt that releases fewer asphalt fumes. This new form of asphalt also requires less energy to prepare, providing environmental and economic benefits as well.
- ❖ *Silica/Milling*: Testing and development of engineering controls to suppress silica dust on asphalt milling machines.
- ❖ *Work-zone safety*: The development of training and educational materials to improve roadway work-zone safety.
- ❖ *Dermal exposures*: Research to assess and characterize workers' dermal exposures to asphalt in the paving industry.

7.3 END YOUR PARTNERSHIP

Some partnerships continue indefinitely. Others reach a point where the partners determined that there is no longer the need for or commitment to sustain the partnership. Some partnerships decide to dissolve after they meet their goals and objectives, some conclude when funding for the partnership ends, and others when the partners are no longer effectively working together.

It is important to remember that while the formal partnership may be coming to an end, it is often the case that some or all of the partners may continue to work together in some capacity or work together in the future. Ending a partnership amicably often requires acknowledging the partnership's accomplishments and setting a foundation for working together in the future.

Sustaining the Issue When the Partnership Ends

One important question partners will have when the partnership ends is: How will the issue that brought us together and the resulting solution be sustained and remain in use? Since the partners have invested time and energy into the partnership's efforts, there will likely be a strong interest in ensuring that attention to the issue does not end with the partnership. Before ending the partnership, it may be advantageous to take inventory of any partner organizations, outside organizations, or governmental agencies that are willing to continue to work on the issue.

TOOL 7-B: STEPS OF PARTNERSHIP DISSOLUTION

As the partnership's work winds down, use the remaining meetings to discuss and document the following for the final partnership meeting record:

Steps of Partnership Dissolution	
1	Identify the partnership's major accomplishments and acknowledge those people and organizations who contributed to these accomplishments
2	Determine how to inform people – both inside and outside the partnership – of the decision to dissolve
3	Document the partnership's history and the lessons which can be drawn from its operations (e.g., peer-reviewed papers, on your website, in the newspaper)
4	Recommend an appropriate alternative contact organization or resource for the issue
5	Select a time, place, and event to celebrate what has been accomplished and to move on

[Adapted from: The Collaboration Roundtable. (2001). *The Partnership Toolkit: Tools for Building and Sustaining Partnership*.]