Partnership Conversation Starter: A CLiP Template

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This resource was coproduced by partners of the Collaborative Leadership in Practice (CLiP).

Background

This Partnership Conversation Starter Template was developed as part of the Collaborative Leadership in Practice (CLiP) project to strengthen collaborative and equitable leadership in the non-profit sector - specifically in the context of partnerships and networks. For more information and resources about CLiP, visit www.clip-lcp.org.

Audience

This template was designed for organizations, networks, and groups/communities that are initiating a partnership or those being approached to engage in a partnership. This template recognizes that in many cases the initiating organization is in a position of more power, privilege and access to resources. We hope that in situations where an individual from an equity-seeking group or community brings this template to an initiating organization, that organization will welcome the opportunity to use/adapt this template as an approach that supports anti-oppression practice.

Purpose

The Partnership Conversation Starter template can support organizations and individuals to practice anti-oppression in partnerships for research, building capacity, serving communities or other shared goals. It is designed to provide a common reference point for clarifying and negotiating types of involvement and co-leadership; this template can help to ensure that all parties will benefit from the collaborative work. It highlights particular questions for partnership involvement conversations, based on anti-oppression frameworks and Indigenous Knowledge principles (e.g. respecting local context and reciprocity). By encouraging open dialogue on questions of decision-making power and resource allocation, it is designed to favour a shift towards more collaborative and equitable partnerships and networks.

Clarifying types of community involvement promotes equity. It can also improve results because when partners are satisfied with the type of involvement they have in activities (e.g. program, policy) their participation is more effective[1].

How and when to use this template:

It is important to use this template with a spirit of reciprocal dialogue, mutual learning and consensual negotiation. Since inequitable and oppressive structures dominate our lives and work, partnership involvement conversations will be uncomfortable at times. It helps to approach these conversations with an anti-oppression lens and to make time for critical reflective practice[2]. If your organization members are unclear on what these frameworks are and why they are important, hold an information session and training on equity, anti-oppression frameworks.

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[1] http://phobos.ramapo.edu/~vasishth/Readings/Wilcox-Guide_To_Effective_Participation.pdf p.9

[2] http://static1.squarespace.com/static/55106381e4b047c7162f4e45/t/55354784e4b044cf6c8d22a2/1429555076753/CRP+Workbook.pdf

The Partnership Conversation Starter template is designed for use when developing partnerships. It can also be used within an existing partnership to support reflective (evaluative) dialogues and/or planning about partnership structures and activities moving forward.

This template will be most useful when the initiating organization has already identified:

a) What activities they would like to partner with other organization(s) or individual(s) on; and

b) The type(s) of community involvement that are possible for potential partner organization(s) or individual(s), in light of the initiating organization's policies, available resources and willingness to seek out new opportunities (e.g. find new funds/partners to cover honoraria for community partner involvement).

This template references three types of community involvement: consult, collaborate and lead. Our choice of types is grounded in broader frameworks of participation, in particular the *Ladder of Participation* by Arnstein (1969) and the IAP2: *Spectrum of Public Participation* (2007) [3]. The three types presented all require some commitment to power sharing from the initiating and/or better resourced (privileged) organizations within a partnership. If we want collaborative, equitable and inclusive partnerships, community partners representing equity-seeking groups and individuals need to control some or all of "who gets to the decision-making table and what gets on the agenda." [4]

To use this template, consider the potential roles and reflect on the examples provided. Then use the questions to explore your unique situation and to identify challenges and opportunities. This reflection can be done separately by the community partner and/or initiating partner followed by a joint dialogue and negotiation, or it can be done jointly from the beginning. Practice anti-oppression by ensuring that individuals and groups from equity-seeking communities are provided time and respect to share their knowledge and perspectives.

NB: The template provided is in excel with the intention that you can adapt it to best meet your needs.

Tips for using the template:

- If the initiating and/or better resourced organizations (with power and privilege) have not had the opportunity to do a broader analysis of power and oppression/colonisation, they should invest time in training, using an exercise such as the Power Flower[5], to understand their power and how to act as an ally in relation to equity-seeking organizations and individuals within the emerging/existing partnership.

- Partners will prefer different types of involvement depending on their interests and situations. What matters is ensuring the type of community involvement suits the situation and priorities of the community partner.

- Be explicit about your goals for the partnership and take time to understand what other partners' goals are.

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[3] http://www.demokratie-dialog.de/work/Participation-Models-20110703.pdf see p.4 (Arnstein) and p.23 (IAP2)
[4] https://www.justassociates.org/en/resources/tools-analyzing-power-inclusion-and-exclusion (Dynamics of Power, Inclusion and Exclusion - pg. 2)
[5] https://www.justassociates.org/en/resources/tools-analyzing-power-inclusion-and-exclusion (Dynamics of Power, Inclusion and Exclusion - pg. 7)

- Openly talk about the important pre-conditions to a successful partnership (e.g. prioritizing the development of trust, recognizing conditions of power and privilege).

- Move away from the dominant type of involvement, which is to 'consult'. Commit to building capacity on all sides of your partnership (among initiating and community partners) that support a shift towards having equity-seeking communities collaborating or leading activities.

- Think critically about possible negative consequences that can result when equity-seeking communities partner with organizations that hold power and privilege. For example, explore whether a community partner's goals may be (have been) co-opted in the process of collaborating[6].

- Dialogue to identify roadblocks that may (or already) prevent the achievement of the preferred type of community involvement (e.g. the partner would like to collaborate but resource shortages leave staff too stretched to participate in collaborative activities). Seek solutions to prevent or overcome threats.

- Remain open to further dialogue about the type(s) of community involvement a partner(s) would like to have. Initially a partner may prefer a 'consultative' type of involvement. Over time, however, they may want a more 'collaborative' or 'lead' type involvement in one, several, or all of the partnership activities. Enabling a partner to move between different types of involvement can increase the sustainability of a partnership.

- Make time to listen to each other and to reflect in participatory ways to build and renew insights, trust and energy within the partnership[7].

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[6] http://equityhealthj.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12939-015-0252-1
[7] http://www.hclinkontario.ca/images/PowerOfReflection.pdf

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Partnership Conversation Starter: A Template for Collaborative Leadership in Practice

Prepared by: Stephanie Massot and Gillian Kranias with files from Christelle Thibault

EXPLORE YOUR SITUATION

What is the structural relationship between the (potential) partners?

Identify: access to power/privilege/resources, experiences of stigma/marginalization/violence, etc.

TYPES OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT	CONSIDER POTENTIAL ROLES		EXPLORE POTENTIAL ROLES		
	Community Partner Role	Initiating Organization Role	What would this type of involvement look like for each partner/role?	When might this type of involvement face roadblocks, or	In what ways can this type of involvement transform power relationships and
Consult	Commits to providing input and/or limited involvement at specific points during the process.	Takes responsibility for planning, implementating and evaluating the initiative and looks to the partner for input and/or involvement at specific points during the process.			
Collaborate	Collaborates with the initiating organization as a co-leader in designing, planning, implementing and evaluating activities.	Collaborates with the partner as a co-leader in designing, planning, implementing and evaluating activities. This organization may conduct more of the background and admin work, but the decision-making and framing of all actions are "side by side".			
Lead	Takes responsibility for planning, implementing and evaluating the activities.	Contributes resources (financial, communications, technical) and social capital (connections, legitimacy).			

EXAMPLES

TYPES OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT	Community Partner Role	Initiating Organization Role
Example #1 – Research Partnership		
Consult	Participate in interviews, focus groups, and other research	Design, conduct, and report on research activities.
Collaborate	Co-design, co-facilitate, co-analyse and co-report on research.	Co-design, co-facilitate, and co-report on research activities.
Lead	Design, facilitate, analyse and report on research activities.	Transfer resources so partner can lead the work. Help disseminate research and resources produced.
Example #2 – Capacity-Building Partnership		
Consult	Give feedback on training and educational material plans.	Develop training and educational materials. Consult with partners for guidance. Lead trainings.
Collaborate	Co-develop training and educational materials. Co-lead trainings.	Co-develop training and educational materials. Co-lead trainings.
Lead	Develop training and educational materials. Lead trainings.	Transfer resources so partner can lead the work. Support outreach for trainings.
Example #3 – Partnership to Serve Communities		
Consult	Participate in consultations about program design and content.	Design and develop program content. Consult with partners for guidance. Lead program implementation and evaluation.
Collaborate	Co-design and co-develop program content. Co-lead program implementation and evaluation.	Co-design and co-develop program content. Co-lead program implementation and evaluation.
Lead	Design and develop program content. Lead program implementation and evaluation.	Transfer resources so partner can lead the work. Help partner build networks to support program success.

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An excel version of this template is available on the project website www.clip-lcp.org

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