



DoD

Department of Defense

PARTNERING

Partnering is a process by which two or more organizations with shared interests act as a team to achieve mutually beneficial goals.

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Key Elements in Partnering

Partnering is a commitment to:

- Participate in partnering workshops and joint training
- Remove organizational impediments to open communication
- Provide open and complete access to information
- Empower the partnering team to resolve most issues
- Reach decisions by consensus as much as possible
- Develop and follow a process for resolving disagreements
- Jointly consult with other interested parties
- Take joint responsibility for the partnering relationship

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The Two Phases of Partnering

Phase I: Initiating the Partnering Process

There are two phases to partnering. Phase I includes the initial partnering workshop and development of a Partnering Implementation Plan. Steps during Phase I include:

1. Initiate the process
2. Obtain senior management support
3. Identify partnering champions
4. Decide on the participants
5. Select the facilitator(s)
6. Organize the partnering workshop
7. Participate in the partnering workshop
8. Develop a Partnering Implementation Plan

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The Two Phases of Partnering

Phase II: Sustaining the Partnering Process

The goal of Phase II is to turn the commitments made in the partnering workshop and implementation plan into the reality of a team in which all team members hold themselves mutually accountable for the success of the project and the success of the partnering relationship.

This may involve follow-up sessions, additional training, orientation of new members, and setting up mechanisms to evaluate performance.

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Steps in the Partnering Process

Phase I

Initiate the Process

There is no standard way to invite others to participate in partnering. Sometimes partnering is proposed by senior officials, other times by mid-level people or attorneys. Start with the partners you know must be included — probably contractors or regulators — and consult with them about who else needs to be included.

Partnering is always voluntary. If people agree to it but don't really believe in it, this will show up as lack of commitment during implementation.

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Steps in the Partnering Process

Phase I

Obtain Senior Management Support:

Senior management support is a precondition of success. In particular, senior management support is needed to empower the team to make and keep commitments.

As a starting point, distribute copies of the Partnering Guide to prospective partners for distribution to management. If the management of any of the parties is uncertain whether to commit to partnering, the most credible source of information will be another manager (preferably of equivalent level or higher) who has had experience with partnering. An alternative is to bring in a partnering consultant who can explain the process.

Steps in the Partnering Process

Phase I

Identify Partnering Champions

The champion actively encourages the use of partnering throughout the organization and defends it if it comes under attack. He or she is most likely to be found in an organizational role that places a high value on what partnering can accomplish (e.g., a chief of construction or an attorney who supports a preventive approach to dispute resolution) or uses similar tools and concepts (such as TQM).

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Steps in the Partnering Process

Phase I

Decide on the Participants

Evaluate who has a stake in the success of the project. By participating in the process they will become more committed to making the program happen. Only some individuals and groups can accept the shared obligations required to be a member of the partnering team. Others should be consulted but won't be members of the partnering team itself. Consider both internal and external stakeholders:

External Stakeholders

- Contractors
- US EPA
- State and local Agencies and Officials
- Adjacent landowners
- Community and interest groups

Internal Stakeholders

- "Home teams" of Partnering team members
- Senior managers
- Program implementers, e.g., procurement
- Organizational constituencies

Steps in the Partnering Process

Phase I

Select the Facilitator(s)

A facilitator is usually needed to design the partnering workshop, lead it, and conduct any training that is part of the workshop. Facilitators are trained specialists in how groups work together, as distinct from being experts on a technical subject.

Without a facilitator, the risk exists that the group will engage in competition, struggles for leadership of the meeting, and disagreements over what should be included on the agenda.

The Service Contact Points, listed on page 15, can advise on how to retain an experienced facilitator.

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Steps in the Partnering Process

Phase I

Organize the Partnering Workshop

Principals from the participating organizations need to determine which individuals will be regular members of the partnering team and who will attend the partnering workshop. Participation in the partnership is not restricted to just the working team. The workshop may be used to build support for partnering among other people in each organization.

The team should identify its goals for the workshop and then consult with the facilitator on the actual design.

The initial workshop is best held off-site, away from phones and other disturbances.

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Steps in the Partnering Process

Phase I

Participate in the Partnering Workshop

Key elements in the partnering workshop are:

- Team building and training
- Establishing team goals and objectives
- Agreeing on norms for team member behavior
- Developing an empowerment plan
- Developing a process for resolving disagreements
- Agreeing on a community involvement approach

The document that summarizes the agreements reached during the partnering workshop is called the Charter. Some teams have turned their Charters into posters that are hung on the wall in each office.

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Steps in the Partnering Process

Phase I

Develop a Partnering Implementation Plan

Charters usually do not contain all the details needed to implement the agreements reached during the partnering workshop — a more detailed plan should be developed. A Partnering Implementation Plan might include:

- Roles and responsibilities
- Measurable objectives for each goal
- Standard steps for reaching decisions
- The process to resolve disagreements
- How to get timely decisions on issues beyond the team's authority
- Community involvement plan
- Mechanisms for sharing risks and benefits
- A process to orient new members of the team to partnering

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Steps in the Partnering Process

Phase II

Sustaining the Partnering Process

Phase II requires sustaining the commitments made in the partnering workshop and building a “real” team. The best the initial partnering workshop can do is start the process of creating a team. You don't want a group that is a “team” in name only. That can detract from the performance of individual team members without achieving any joint benefit.

Building a “real team” means building a common purpose and an approach for which all team members hold themselves mutually accountable.

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Characteristics of Successful Partnering Programs

Ethical Considerations

There is no single formula for how to build a successful team. However, most successful partnering programs have the following elements:

- A strong performance ethic
- A critique process built into team meetings and activities
- A continuous process of evaluation, measurement, and improvement
- Regular follow-up workshops
- Continued use of facilitators for process critique and follow-up meetings
- Continued joint training to improve skills
- A process for orienting new team members to partnering
- Partnering sessions with others internally whose work affects or is affected by team actions

Partnering alters the traditional “arms-length” relationship between the DoD agency and other agencies, contractors, communities, or stakeholders. The arms-length relationship often turns into an adversarial relationship that can lead to situations in which none of the parties achieve their objectives.

DoD attorneys encourage DoD agencies to engage in partnering, but it is important to remember the ethical and legal sideboards that must be observed even during partnering.

The basic thrust of DoD standards and regulations is that federal employees act impartially and not give even the appearance of preferential treatment to any private organization or individual. If there are questions, consult with a DoD Ethics Counselor.

For more information:

See:

*Partnering Guide for
Department of Defense
Environmental Missions*

*To get copies:
FAX (703) 428-8435*