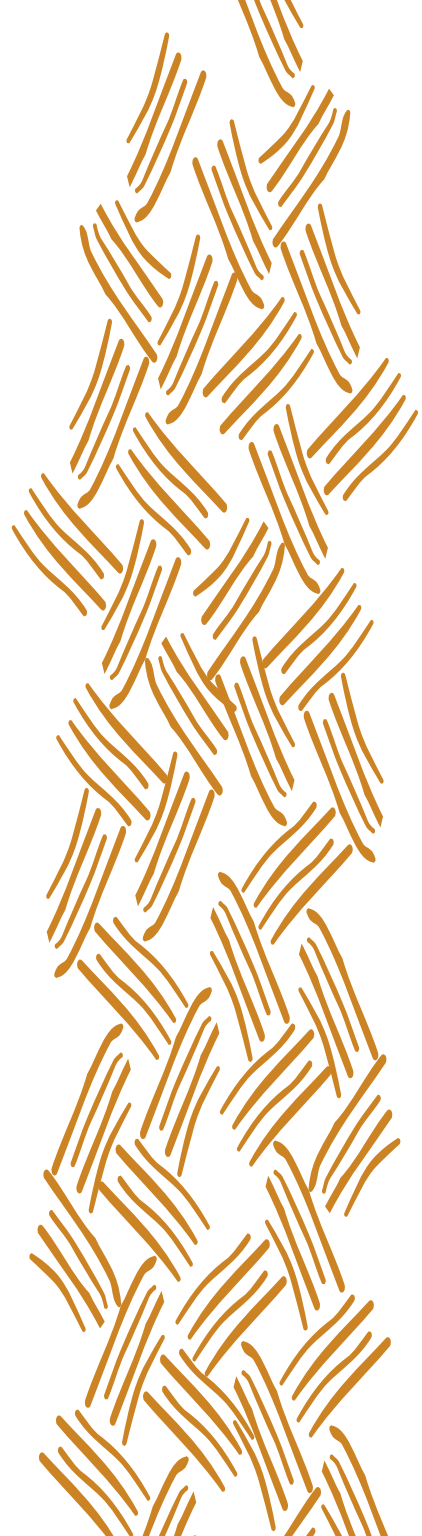# ENSURING
SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS
A TOOLKIT

Africa Liaison Program Initiative > InterAction

Before the completion of the Partnership Assessment & Monitoring Tool (PAT), we learned that Carolyn Jefferson (USAID/REDSO/Kenya) had suddenly passed away. Carolyn was an instrumental force in all ALPI activities and played a prominent role in shaping the PAT. She was a strong advocate for effective partnerships throughout her work at USAID/REDSO. Caroline was a dynamic, genuine colleague and a warm friend. We will miss her.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

In relief and development assistance, "partnership" is a term with many meanings and forms—from alliances to contracts to grantor-grantee relationships. Yet, the use of "partnership" stems from the growing conviction that solving a society's problems requires a combined effort of diverse institutions, including aligning and combining competencies and functions. Often times, "partnership" brings together parties with very different objectives, resources and incentives around shared goals and equitable allocation of authority, efforts and resources. The international aid system now recognizes and even encourages "partnerships," but provides little to no real guidance on how to equitably create and function in a partnership.

InterAction's Africa Liaison Program Initiative's (ALPI) work is focused on improving the quality of the relationships between the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and U.S. and African nongovernmental organizations in delivering the United States' humanitarian and long term development assistance to Africa. Strong partnerships are critical to the overall impact of that work. Therefore, the formation and maintenance of equitable and productive development partnerships are part of ALPI's main objectives.

In any collaborative work, partners should regularly assess how their relationships are working in practice. ALPI has developed a tool to address this issue. ALPI's Partnership Assessment and Monitoring Tool (PAT) is designed to help evaluate and improve the quality of both bilateral (between two organizations) and multilateral (among a network of organizations) partnerships.

PAT uses a methodology of self-assessment to evaluate the quality of partnership relations from the perspective of the partners themselves. It is a fast and easy method, using a three-step process and a set of practical tools, to analyze twelve clearly defined principles. The analysis uses evidence in the form of facts

and examples generated throughout the partnership to determine its level of performance, while enhancing partners' collective understanding of effective partnerships. The periodic use of this assessment methodology will help guide and track progress in partnership relations as they develop.

Time and resource commitment

We recommend that your organization make the following commitments to the assessment process:

- Assign a minimum of three partner representatives with knowledge of the partnership and representing different levels and areas of your organization's management.

- Assign one of your representatives to serve as a co-facilitator. The co-facilitator must take the responsibility to: (a) ensure that the necessary meetings with partners are scheduled; (b) encourage your organization's completion of a pre-assessment quiz; (c) ensure meeting attendance; and (d) serve as co-facilitator of the two partner meetings—assessment and action planning—to complete the process. At the conclusion of the assessment meeting, your co-facilitator should spend approximately two (2) hours working with your partner's co-facilitator to produce a summary of the assessment results.

- As a team, spend approximately 1-2 hours: (a) reviewing the partnership principles; and (b) completing a pre-assessment quiz for your organization.

- Conduct the assessment and action planning meetings, of approximately three (3) hours each, within a two-week period.

- **assign at least three partner representatives**

- **assign one partner representative to serve as a co-facilitator**

- **review the partnership principles & complete the pre-assessment quiz**

- **conduct subsequent meetings within a two-week period**

Commitments to the Assessment Process

Partnerships

Partnerships between organizations are critical to successful humanitarian and long-term development initiatives. But it can be difficult to evaluate the progress and effectiveness of these relations. Unlike contractual relationships that often involve an exchange of goods and services, some elements of a partnership are intangible, which makes trust and transparency even more important.

Before conducting a partnership assessment, please review this section to refresh your thinking about the guiding principles of partnership. You will be asked to consider the following two sets of partnership principles, as identified by the ALPI program:

• Partnership formation
• Partnership operation

Partnership Formation

Principle #1: Understanding
This principle emphasizes the importance of a balanced commitment to the relationship and reasons for working together. When one organization is committed and the other is not equally enthusiastic, the partnership may not function well. Forming a partnership requires similar levels of enthusiasm and dedication. If this is not possible, the partnership should consider identifying new partners.

Principle #2: Representation
A partnership can only act through persons. To operate effectively, partner representatives (the persons representing each partner organization) need to be carefully chosen. Although organizations may be motivated, if the representatives are not inspired and able to convey a sense of commitment both internally and externally, the partnership will likely falter.

Partnership Operation

Principle #3: Power

In complying with this principle, partners ensure that no one overpowers the other or dominates discussions or decision-making. Rather, balanced power involves shared decision-making and partners' use of previously agreed procedures to address issues. Balanced power means equitable methods are applied for terminating membership, so a smaller or more vulnerable partner is not disadvantaged if the relationship must end.

Principle #4: Openness

Power differences usually exist among partners. Open and candid discussions about the types of power within the partnership and how they can influence the relationship and work can lead to transparency and trust. These discussions cannot be expected to remove power differences, but instead ensure that they are recognized, and managed reasonably and productively.

Principle #5: Loyalty

A contractual relationship is typically an exchange of services or goods often for payment. On the other hand, a partnership is based on a common purpose and responsibility toward both the goal and each other. As such, partners reflect a duty of care and loyalty to each other.

Principle #6: Joint action
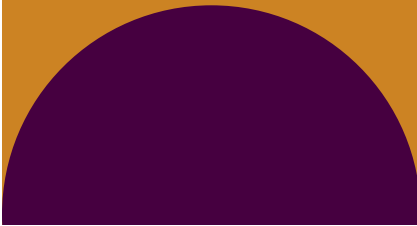
Evaluations and reports are common ways of gauging and being accountable for development work. Partnership with shared accountability calls for planning and acting together, including evaluating joint work and reporting to donors and others.

Partnerships between organizations are critical to successful humanitarian and long-term development initiatives. But it can be difficult to evaluate the progress and effectiveness of these relations.

Unlike contractual relationships that often involve an exchange of goods and services, some elements of a partnership are intangible, which makes trust and transparency even more important.

Defining the Guiding Principles of Partnership

Principle #7: Ownership

Partnership work belongs to the collective partnership and not to any single partner alone. All partners participate in and take credit and responsibility for the partnership's actions, both achievements and failures.

Principle #8: Information

As partners, no single partner owns the reports or documents generated through collaborative work in the partnership. Rather, partnership documents are open to all partners for review and comment, as well as reference and use.

Principle #9: Communication

Partners communicate directly, respectfully and candidly with each other.

Principle #10: Respect

Mutual respect is demonstrated in a way that ensures that the interests of partners are taken into account in negotiation and decision-making. Trust is built from experience of consistency between word and deed as well as adhering to the spirit of agreements beyond the formal and the written.

Principle #11: Values

As partners develop their plans for action they work to understand each other's views of development or the particular work in which they are engaged. Through this understanding, they work to identify common approaches and learn from each other.

Principle #12: Vision

Partners should not only share common development approaches, but should seek to find ways to operate the partnership with shared operational priorities. As such, they can work to agree on how to address all partnership related issues: complex issues such as finances, program activities, information sharing, as well as basic issues such as meeting schedules and logistics.

From 1998 to 2003, ALPI organized a series of discussions in the U.S. and Africa to examine the institutional relationships between U.S. and African NGOs and USAID missions. This process culminated in 2004 in the commission of a number of case stories from Ghana, Malawi, Niger, Senegal, and Uganda. The stories were published in a compendium titled Partnerships in Practice: Case Stories.

The lessons from these case stories formed the basis for the twelve partnership principles in this tool. At the core of these principles are three issues critical to the quality of development relationships:

Accountability
Mutual, equitable, transparent accountability among organizations.

Ownership
Shared ownership among partners and the communities they serve.

Trust & Respect
Mutual trust and respect are critical for successful partnering.

How do you assess partnership quality??? follow these steps >>>

Overview

step #1: the quiz

Representatives of each partner organization gather to complete a pre-partnership assessment quiz. This step will help to orient thinking towards knowledge of your own organization and your partner organization.

step #2: the assessment matrix

This process should last approximately three (3) hours and will be facilitated by the partnership co-facilitators. You will first compare and discuss your responses to the quiz. Then, with the assistance of the facilitators, participants will discuss each partnership principle and score individually each indicator or statement. The score for each indicator or statement will be measured by the examples provided on the current state of the partnership. The assessment tool will enable you to review statements—using as many examples as possible to reach a numerical score about how the principle is being achieved in practice.

step #3: the action plan

This step should last approximately two (2) hours and will be facilitated by the partnership co-facilitators. Co-facilitators will share their summaries of the assessment results, and facilitate a discussion of the results and the development of an action plan.

step #1: the quiz

Issue/Question	Our Organization	Our Partner	Agree	Disagree
What is our organization's guiding mission?				
What are our organization's partnership principles?				
What is our primary reason for interest in this partnership?				
What are our strengths as an organization ?				
What are our weaknesses as an organization ?				
What lessons, if any, about partnership has our organization learned and now applies?				
What are the particular technical skills our organization brings to this partnership?				
In what area is our organization interested in receiving capacity strengthening?				
In what area is our organization qualified to provide capacity strengthening?				
What is our organization's long-term (5 year) strategy in this sector/project area?				
What are our primary reservations about entering into this partnership?				
What is our organization's anticipated budget for this project?				

How well do we know each other?

Assemble your representatives for a meeting of approximately 1-2 hours.

As a group, review and comment on the partnership principles and complete the quiz.

Ask one member *(other than the co-facilitator)* to take notes and bring them to step #2.

step #2: the assessment matrix __

What is the matrix of statements, scores and supporting facts?

This partnership assessment tool—the matrix—outlines the twelve ALPI "principles in practice" to assess organizational relationships. All principles are described in a number of statements or indicators. Based on experience and examples when compared with the statements or indicators, the assessment task is designed to assign a score to the achievement of each principle in practice.

How to complete the matrix

Each assessment task requires an award of a minimum of zero (0) to a maximum of four (4) points. The zero (0) point means that no examples support the specific principle or statement evaluating the partnership. An award of four (4) points means that several factors support and demonstrate that the partnership is working according to the principle.

Completing the matrix

For each of the following pages:

1. **Read the list of partnership statements** (left hand column) that relate to the partnership principle.

2. **Consider examples that you believe support or counter awarding points** on the statements, and note them in the right hand column.

3. **Award points that rate the partnership on the specific principle** (from zero to a maximum of 4).

   0 points: no facts support the statement

   1-2 points: at least two (2) facts support the statement

   3-4 points: several facts support the statements

4. When all 12 principles are assessed, **please fill in the summary table.**

Recommendation:

Please accurately and factually assess each principle, as it now exists, not as you would like it to be.

A candid assessment will help the partnership improve its practices. In short, please be as accurate as possible; rather than "polite."

Three Steps in the Partnership Assessment Process

step #2: the assessment matrix _

Principle #1: Understanding

Statements	Assign points (0-4)	Examples to support score
We have a shared understanding of what makes a partnership different from other types of relationships.		
Roles in the partnership have been collectively defined and operate on the basis of mutually accepted guidelines.		
We have similar views of the importance of this partnership effort and have made necessary investment in its success.		
Both operational and senior management have a firm commitment to the partnership.		
	= _____	

Principle #2: Representation

Statements	Assign points (0-4)	Examples to support score
Our partner representatives have the necessary knowledge of the partnership project or program.		
Our partner representatives have the authority within their organization to ensure commitment to the partnership work.		
Our partner representatives act with the authority needed to renegotiate previously agreed conditions.		
Our partner representatives understand and act consistently with agreed principles.		
	= _____	

step #2: the assessment matrix

Principle #3: Power

Statements	Assign points (0-4)	Examples to support score
Performance criteria are agreed for each partner and do not reflect a bias against those with less power.		
All members participate in all critical decisions made in the partnership.		
We have equitable processes for termination or cancellation of the partnership.		
The lines of command of our partnership activities are independent from those that apply to financial resources.		
	= _____	

Principle #4: Openness

Statements	Assign points (0-4)	Examples to support score
There are regular discussions about our differences, including power.		
There are agreed forms of decision-making that reflect power differences and are used to guide discussion.		
We understand our diverse approaches and try to find mutually acceptable ways to adapt to our differences.		
When differences negatively affect our work, we discuss the subject openly and deal with the issues involved.		
	= _____	

"The ALPI partnership toolkit is extremely useful in bringing forth what members of an organization think of their association as individuals and as partners.

The toolkit helped me, as a CEO, to identify the gaps existing between reality and the ideal working relationship..."

—CEO of NGO in Kenya

Three Steps in the Partnership Assessment Process

step #2: the assessment matrix __

Principle #5: Loyalty

Statements	Assign points (0-4)	Examples to support score
We demonstrate care and professionalism in conducting the operations and activities of this partnership.		
We recognize and honor our obligation to be accountable to the partnership and each other.		
We freely disclose to each other our bias or interests in the outcome of any partnership matter being discussed.		
Adequate notice is given to organizational factors that may affect the partnership.		
	= _____	

Principle #6: Joint action

Statements	Assign points (0-4)	Examples to support score
We collectively design the monitoring and evaluation systems used to assess the partnership's activities and impact.		
We report to each other on all critical programmatic and budgetary activities related to our partnership objectives.		
We periodically assess each other's performance and monitor our collective achievements.		
All partners participate in the selection of external evaluators to review partnership activities and projects.		
	= _____	

"PAT provides the space for a two way process where both organizations go through a self reflection process to understand their partnership and the gaps that need strengthening.

Both partners commit to addressing gaps in a mutual fashion, promoting mutual trust which is critical in any partnership."

—PAT Trainer

step #2: the assessment matrix

Principle #7: Ownership

Statements	Assign points (0-4)	Examples to support score
We developed all critical activities in this partnership through joint planning exercises.		
We collaboratively reassess the fit between our partnership objectives and our individual organizational priorities.		
We assist each other to ensure that our collective objectives are met.		
We continuously monitor our working relationships to address emerging challenges in a timely fashion.		
	= _____	

Principle #8: Information

Statements	Assign points (0-4)	Examples to support score
We share all monitoring and evaluation reports relevant to our partnership activities.		
All partners share programmatic reports.		
We report to each other on all occasional and planned communications with our donors.		
We share all technical/sectoral information and knowledge available to us to advance our partnership.		
	= _____	

"The tool brings out very fundamental issues when applied; issues often regarded as minor or taken for granted in partnerships.

Most important, the tool can be used to turn around relationships, such as from grantor-grantee, to complete partnerships."

—Participant in Kenyan study

Three Steps in the Partnership Assessment Process

step #2: the assessment matrix

Principle #9: Communication

Statements	Assign points (0-4)	Examples to support score
We have open access to data, documents, programmatic reports, donor communications and other partnership records.		
If differences in communication style arise, our partnership encourages open discussion for better understanding.		
We honor our commitments to have regularly scheduled meeting and discussions about partnership activities.		
We are open about our discussions of this partnership with third parties, and any criticisms of the partnership are first raised with our partners before they are discussed outside of the partnership.		
	= _____	

Principle #10: Respect

Statements	Assign points (0-4)	Examples to support score
Our partnership takes into account each partner's needs, strengths, and weaknesses, as relevant to our common objectives.		
We frequently evaluate our individual comparative advantage and the value added of our collaboration.		
We have established a two-way communication mechanism that allows for a timely exchange of ideas.		
We create opportunities such as a staff exchange and/or mutual invitation to board meetings and staff retreats to learn about each partner's organizational realities and aspirations.		
	= _____	

"We will use this tool:

1) to further understand the various dimensions of measuring partnership efficacy and

2) to understand how partnership relationships contribute to partnership effectiveness"

—Representative from a U.S. private voluntary organization

Three Steps in the Partnership Assessment Process

step #2: the assessment matrix

Principle #11: Values

Statements	Assign points (0-4)	Examples to support score
Our views of social development are well-aligned, such as concepts of management, sustainability, advocacy and program evalutation.		
We have similar views of the role of civil society and NGOs.		
We have similar views about the ethics of development and using multi-sector approaches.		
We have similar views about the need to modify projects and programs in response to field experience, and expect to modify our partnership work as needed.		
	= _____	

Principle #12: Vision

Statements	Assign points (0-4)	Examples to support score
We have discussed the relevance of this partnership to our individual organizational missions and long-term goals.		
We have identified and agreed upon the benefits of this partnership to the constituencies we work with, serve or represent.		
Prior to entering this partnership, we shared our individual organizational values, purposes, and priorities with each other.		
We undertake joint activities that add value to our partnership such as research/publications, field visits, staff development or sectoral strategy formulation.		
	= _____	

"I facilitated the training as a way to enhance my own skills in using the tool and my understanding of the concept and practice of partnerships.

Based on my experience with organizational capacity assessment, PAT is an exciting addition to the tools for assessing gaps for capacity building."

—Facilitator in Kenyan study

Three Steps in the Partnership Assessment Process

matrix scoring summary

#	Partnership Principles	Score
	Partnership Formation	
1	Understanding	
2	Representation	
	Partnership Operation	
3	Power	
4	Openness	
5	Loyalty	
6	Joint action	
7	Ownership	
8	Information	
9	Communication	
10	Respect	
11	Values	
12	Vision	
	Total	

example performance graph

Legend: ■ Organization A ■ Organization B

X-axis categories: understanding, representation, power, openness, loyalty, joint action, ownership, information, communication, respect, values, vision
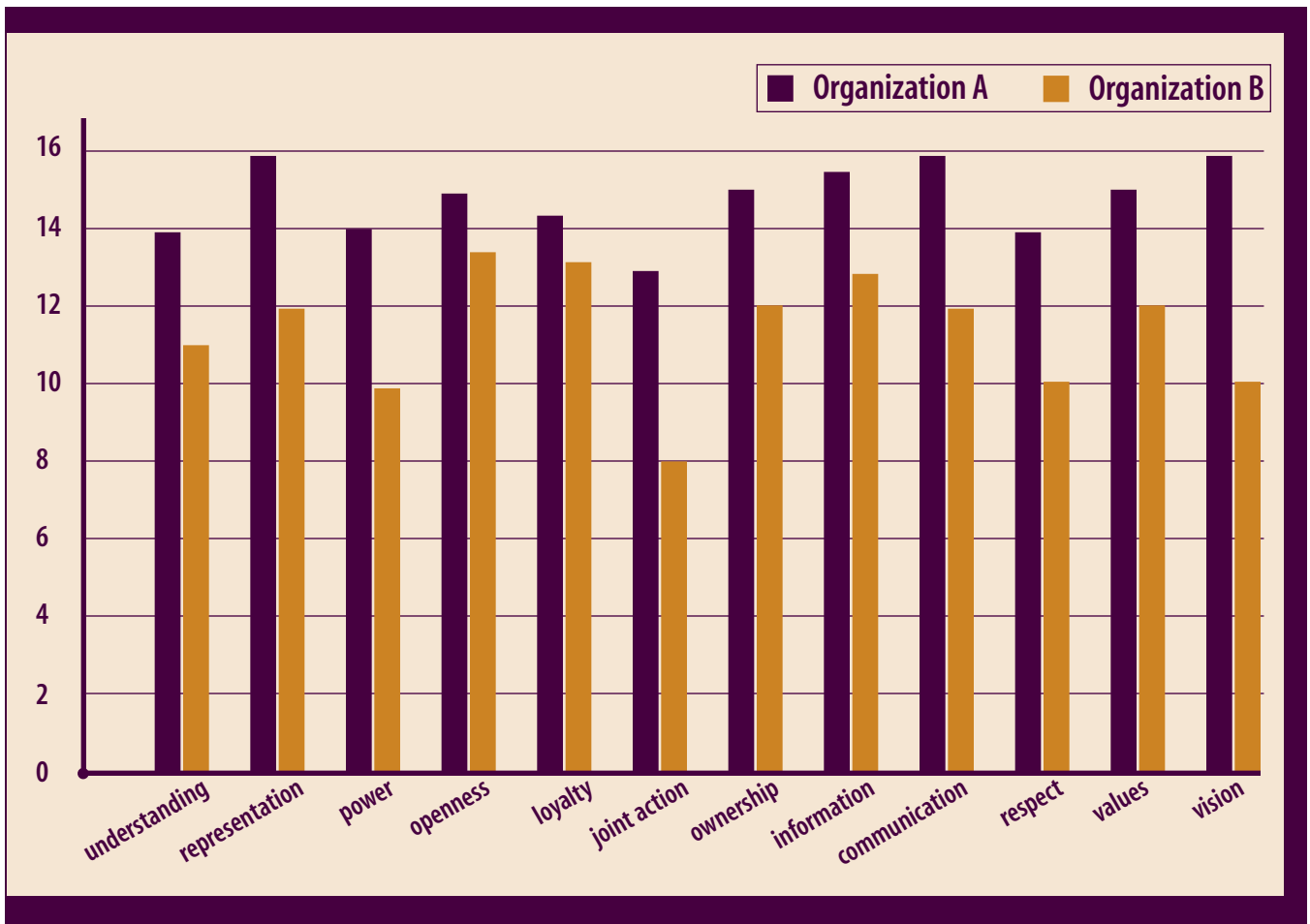
step #3: the action plan

Results reporting

After the completion of the assessment matrix, using an Excel spreadsheet (sample below), co-facilitators should collect the score sheets from participants and record and process the scores.

Each partner's average performance score for each statement or indicator is obtained by adding up all scores (from the partner's participants) and dividing the total by the number of scorers. Each partner's total score for each principle is obtained by adding up the average performance scores for all statements (a total of 4) under that principle.

Principles	Description	Average Scores (0-4)		Total Scores (0-16)		Comments
		Part A	Part B	Part A	Part B	
Balanced power relations	Evidence of transparent and participatory decision-making mechanisms in the partnership					
	1.					
	2.					
	3.					
	4.					

Review and compare the scores

The analysis consists of identifying similarities and differences in how the partnership principles are experienced in practice (as reflected in the scoring). The Excel spreadsheet generates a graph for a comparative representation of total scores for both partners. Co-facilitators should summarize the results, which along with the Excel graph should serve as the basis for Step #3, the action plan.

Translating scores into action

This step will be held approximately one or two weeks after Step #1, the quiz, to review the assessment results and to devise a plan of action, if necessary. Discussions should focus on the discrepancies in views and experiences as demonstrated in the difference in scoring for each principle. For more details, refer to the score sheets for examples and comments recorded. In this partnership assessment methodology, an average performance score of three or more indicates a good performance for an individual statement and a total score of twelve or more indicates a good performance for the overall principle assessed. A difference of 0.5 points at the individual statement level or 1.0 point at the principle level between partners' scores should command attention from partnership managers during both discussions and action planning following the assessment.

Disclosing sensitive comments and inability to complete the process

In completing this process, if you need to make statements that may be extremely sensitive or uncomfortable in the face-to-face discussions, please contact the co-facilitators.

Step #3 Agenda

Introductions and comments on the process:
10 minutes

Review of summary to see how both individual and organizational responses differed and the potential impact on the partnership:
15 minutes

Facilitated discussion about the overall assessment findings:
35 minutes

Completion of an action plan for making any appropriate changes to the partnership's operation.
60 minutes

A case study

In December 2005, ALPI tested PAT with a Kenyan coalition of forty local and international NGOs committed to effective partnership. This coalition is managed by a secretariat with oversight from a steering committee selected from its elected board. The members and the secretariat participated in the PAT trial as the two entities assessing how well the coalition had adhered to the partnership principles.

The trial offered an overview of how PAT can be used to assess partnerships. In addition, the assessment results provided a "bird's eye-view" into the critical issues that organizations are grappling with in their partnerships.

A perfect score consisting of the highest possible mark for all statements for all principles is 192. The secretariat gave a score of 152.1 to the coalition, while the membership gave a score of 153.2, an 80% performance for the coalition.

Dissenting views between the two assessment teams were relatively few, as reflected by the respective total points. However, differences in views between the two teams were most noticeable in the assessment of the principle addressing loyalty:

Principle #5: Loyalty

A contractual relationship is typically an exchange of services or goods often for payment. On the other hand, a partnership is based on a common purpose and responsibility toward both the goal and each other. As such, partners reflect a duty of care and loyalty to each other.

Principle #5: Loyalty — Secretariat: 11.4 vs. Members: 14

Both parties recognized efforts taken to *demonstrate professionalism in conducting the operations and activities of the partnership* (4.0 vs. 4.0).
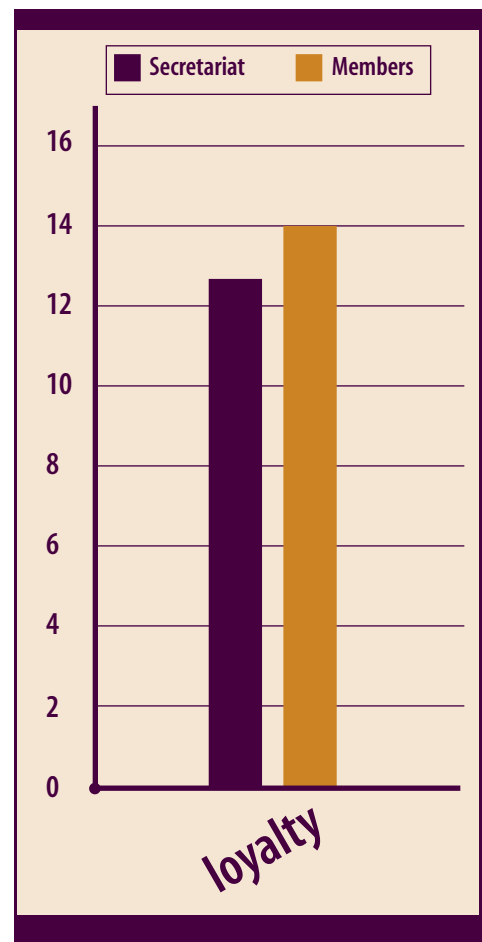
While the Members found that each partner *recognized and honored its obligation to be accountable in the partnership and to each other*, the Secretariat did not always find this to be the case (2.7 vs. 4.0).

The Secretariat and the Members also disagreed that partnership members *always gave adequate notice of organizational factors with potential impact on the partnership* (2.0 vs. 3.6).

They agreed that not enough effort is put into *disclosing freely individual biases and interests as they relate to partnership matters* (2.7 vs. 2.4).

Conclusion

In evaluating the PAT, most participants felt that the statements were straightforward. They lauded the tool for its learning potential and the opportunity it gives partners to express and collectively address issues related to the overall functioning of their partnership. The facilitators had expressed concern that the combined task of scoring and recording the evidence would slow down the assessment process, but the participants felt that that task did not complicate the process and positively forced each participant to be as objective as possible. Participants noted that some statements called for repetitive answers, but the facilitators explained that repetition was intentionally built into PAT to allow for cross-referencing of information, to ensure consistency in answers, and to reduce subjectivity in scoring.

loyalty

notes: partnership assessment tool

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