

Partnership Self-Assessment

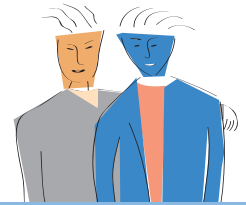
Toolkit



A Practical Guide to
Creating and Maintaining
Successful Partnerships



Partnership Self-Assessment Toolkit



A Practical Guide to Creating and Maintaining Successful Partnerships

Foreword by Anna Frearson, Health Partnership Manager, East Leeds Primary Care Trust

"You will never be lonely working in partnership!"

This toolkit provides a basic overview of best practice in partnership working. Over the past few years there has been a big increase in the number of partnerships. Although this trend is positive, many partnerships discover that effective partnership working is difficult and consequently they do not accomplish the outcomes they desire .

Too many partnerships spoil the broth!

A wide variety of partnerships exist in Leeds and there is broad agreement that there are simply too many partnerships. This means that there is potential for duplication of effort and a dilution of resources and expertise. In order to slow the development of yet more partnerships and to attempt to rationalise existing structures it would be useful for those involved in partnership working to consider the following questions:

- ◆ Is our partnership duplicating the work of other groups?
- ◆ Can we link more effectively to other groups to improve accountability and reporting arrangements?

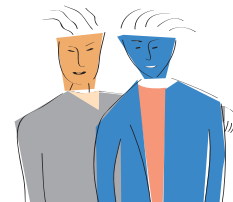
Where a new partnership is being considered:

- ◆ Is a new partnership really needed?
- ◆ Can an existing group be used?
- ◆ Is forming a partnership the best way of achieving the outcome?

I hope that you find this toolkit useful.

Anna Frearson

Health Partnership Manager



Background Information

Introduction

Partnership working is a powerful tool for tackling many of the issues faced by the health sector and its partners. It is one of the best ways of ensuring the most efficient and effective use of scarce resources. The Department of Health believes that *“partnership working is the best way to respond to the needs of individuals and communities, shaping services to suit them rather than working within organisational boundaries.”* (Department of Health 1998).

The ability to work effectively in partnership is an important requirement for many organisations. Although the number of partnerships continues to grow, it is increasingly evident that not all of them are working successfully.

This toolkit provides a brief overview of good practice in partnership working and includes a tool for assessing the effectiveness of a partnership group. It is broken down into sections, which you can refer to depending on what stage your partnership is at.

What is a Partnership?

Confusingly, a number of different terms are used to describe a partnership approach, such as inter-sectoral collaboration, alliances, and joined up working.

For the purpose of this toolkit the following simple definition will be used:

“When two or more people, or organisations work together towards a common aim”

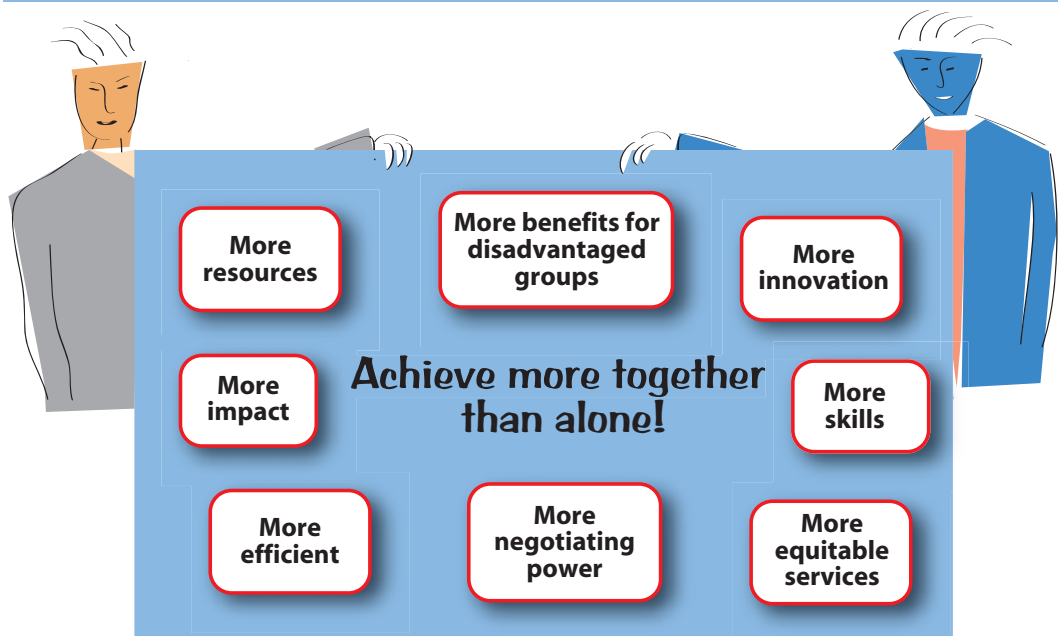
It has been suggested that partnerships are like “marriages” or “dancing the tango”! What these analogies do illustrate is that partnership working requires energy, great skill and complex co-operation.

Why Work in Partnership?

Although partnership working should be common practice, in some instances it is now a requirement. For example, NHS bodies and local authorities have a statutory responsibility under the Health Act 1999 to work together. To assist this process the Government has given more flexibility for resources to be shared between the NHS and local authorities. Equally in the voluntary sector, being able to demonstrate that groups are working together can be a condition for funding allocations.

Apart from the increasing pressure to work in partnership there are many benefits to be gained when different organisations work effectively together (see figure 1).

Figure 1: The Benefits of Partnership



If successful, partnerships can:

- ◆ Build on the strengths of organisations allowing them to pool resources, avoid duplication, and maximise impact.
- ◆ Fill service gaps and increase access to services for under-served groups.
- ◆ Provide opportunities to look at health in a comprehensive, holistic way.
- ◆ Attract new resources and use them efficiently.

What are the Barriers to Effective Partnership Working?

Research has shown that there are a number of reasons why some partnerships have not been successful, they include:

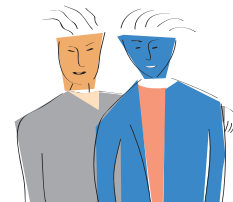
- ◆ Previous failed attempts.
- ◆ Different organisational cultures.
- ◆ Varying expectations of partners.
- ◆ Lack of senior commitment.
- ◆ Poor information exchange within and outside the partnership.
- ◆ Conflict between addressing local and national priorities.

What Makes a Successful Partnership?

There are a number of features, which are typical of a successful partnership, including the following:

- ◆ Commitment at senior level.
- ◆ Balance of responsibility between partners.
- ◆ Identifying the necessary skill mix.
- ◆ Understanding of organisational cultures.
- ◆ Clear shared vision and goals.
- ◆ Achievable outcomes.
- ◆ Regular evaluation.

Forming a Partnership



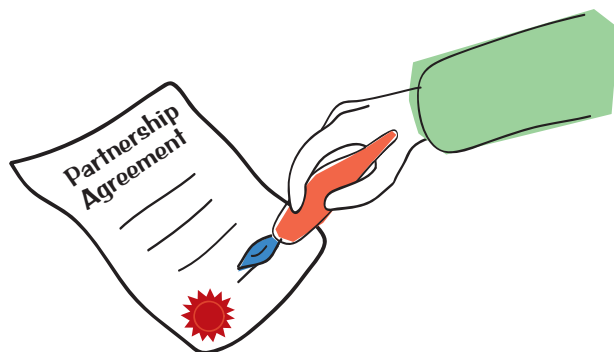
Creating a Successful Partnership

The steps involved in setting up a partnership are similar to those involved at the beginning of any new project or activity. Unfortunately many partnerships in their hurry for impact and results, ignore the importance of establishing the right environment for the partners to work well together.

This process involves regular communication, creating a culture of trust and respect, and encouraging the active participation of all the partners. In the early stages it is usually better to start with some smaller achievable tasks until the partnership matures. The following list of points should be considered when setting up a partnership:

Quick Start Up Checklist

- 3 Agree a shared, clear vision that defines the purpose of the partnership.
- 3 Create opportunities for partners to get to know each other.
- 3 Define the roles and responsibilities of each partner.
- 3 Set up a structure for communication within and outside the partnership.
- 3 Obtain the appropriate level of support and commitment from each partner.
- 3 Establish a governance structure that ensures open and active decision-making by the partners.
- 3 Determine what resources each partner has available for the partnership.
- 3 Define some clear tasks which have tangible outcomes.
- 3 Design a monitoring plan.



In addition, it is a good idea to formally constitute the partnership through signed letters of agreement from each partner organisation or other formal agreements. A sample partnership agreement is shown in figure 2 overleaf.

Planning a start up activity that will publicise the launch of the partnership and its joint efforts can be useful too.

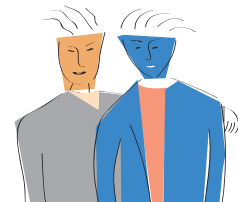


Figure 2: Sample Partnership Agreement

Partner Organisations

Name of organisation(s), with contact details, contact person, and brief description of organisation(s).

Common Aims, Objectives & Statement of Intent

We, the undersigned, acknowledge a common concern about/commitment to...

ie. what is the purpose of the partnership?

By working together as partners, we see the benefits and added value that each of us can bring to address this concern/fulfil this commitment.

Specifically, we expect each partner to contribute to the project/programme in the following ways: (Partner A, Partner B, Partners C, All partners).

Structures and Procedures

This section should specify membership, partner roles and responsibilities, administration, working group(s)/committee(s)/advisor(s), decision-making process, and accountability.

Resources

We will provide resources in the following ways: (core resources, project/program resources).

Review/Audit and Revision Arrangements

We will review the partnership itself every months

in the following ways

ie. How and when will performance be reviewed?

We will make adjustments to the partnership, including rewriting this agreement, should the reviews and audits indicate that this is necessary.

Information

In recognition of the importance of transparency, we agree to make all relevant information relating to this partnership available to the partners and stakeholders in the following ways:.....

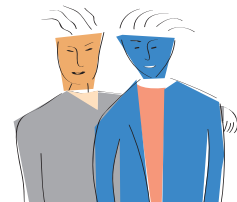
ie. What information will be shared within the partnership?

Signed

..... (date) on behalf of Partner A

..... (date) on behalf of Partner B

..... (date) on behalf of Partner C



Maintaining a Successful Partnership

Maintaining a successful partnership requires a lot of energy. All partnerships large or small, should be regularly reviewed to see how well they are working. The self-assessment tool on pages 9–12 will help you to do this. If any aspect of the partnership is not effective then action should be taken to give renewed vision and focus.

The assessment tool will help you to consider the different components of your partnership.

Section A: Foundations

If you have followed the points covered on page 4 in the “Quick Start Up Checklist” you will have laid some solid foundations for your partnership. However, as a partnership develops it is useful to revisit its purpose by looking at the **original vision and objectives**. Are partners clear about the direction and how it fits with their own objectives?

It can also be revealing to consider a partnership in terms of the **“added value”** it brings i.e. are partners achieving more than they would if they were working on their own? Does the partnership actually make decisions? What (if any) control, or influence does it have over resources? Can you estimate the total resources within the partnership’s control.

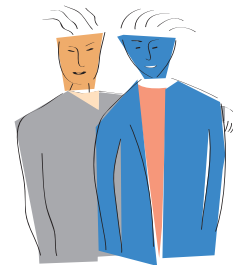
Section B: The Partners

It is vital to acknowledge the mix of different **individual and organisational cultures** within the partnership. This produces group dynamics which influence the way in which partners behave and may result in conflict. Time should be taken to help partners understand each other’s organisations through activities such as joint training and secondments.

Any partnership will contain a range of **knowledge and skills**, which should be recognised and used. Partners can learn from each other but sometimes skills will need to be brought in from outside the partnership. Some of the specific skills and knowledge required for partnership working include:

- ◆ Assertiveness
- ◆ Managing expectation
- ◆ Creative thinking
- ◆ Facilitation techniques
- ◆ Project Planning

In particular, the presence of effective leadership skills within the partnership can help to maintain the levels of stamina and enthusiasm needed to get things done. A good leader will ensure that the partnership has a clear and fair decision making process, plans its activities well, and shares information.



The partnership should seek to achieve a balance of power between all the partners. Sometimes more powerful partners dominate, causing others to lose interest and become less active. The partnership should be alert to this and make an effort to promote the active involvement of the “weaker” partners.

Section C: Communication & Involvement

Inevitably most partnerships rely on meetings even when they may not be the most appropriate way of working. Workshops or less formal events may be better for things like problem-solving or planning.

Where meetings are used, a **skilled chair and facilitator** makes a big difference. It may be necessary to change the partnership chair or provide some facilitation training for partners. Basic factors like the suitability of the venue and layout of the room can also affect meetings. Ground rules about the use of jargon, listening and not interrupting others, and keeping to time, improve meetings too.

Newsletters or e mail groups are simple ways of maintaining communication between partners outside of meetings.

It is important to **maintain a focus on the target community**. Wherever possible people like service users and carers should be represented on the partnership and be included in designing and implementing activities. Information and results should also be regularly communicated to the target community.

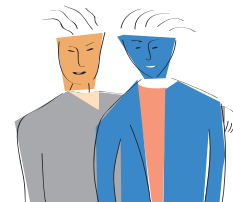
Section D: Measuring and Reviewing Success

Any partnership must have some way of measuring the impact of its work. Partners should be involved in setting objectives and targets and be committed to achieving them. All outcomes should be designed to clearly demonstrate when an objective has been completed. Progress should be monitored and regularly reported back to partners.

In addition the partnership itself should be reviewed to ensure that its structure fits its purpose. Areas such as terms of reference and membership need to be revisited.

Sometimes it may not be appropriate for a partnership to continue. If for example, the original objectives have been met then this should be celebrated and the partnership brought to an end with recognition of what it has achieved.

Assessing Your Partnership



How Effective is Your Partnership?

Completing the enclosed checklist will help you to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of your partnership and give you some ideas to improve its effectiveness. It is intended to be a quick overview and a prompt for discussion. More detailed checklists and assessments are available should you wish to use them (see section on “more information”).

Assessing Your Partnership

Using the Partnership Self-assessment Tool:

The checklist should be completed by several partners and then any actions discussed and agreed by the whole partnership.

There are only 16 questions and it should not take longer than 25 minutes to complete. A score will be produced, which means that the exercise can be completed in the future as a review mechanism and the scores compared to show improvement.

Where to Go for More Information...

Contact

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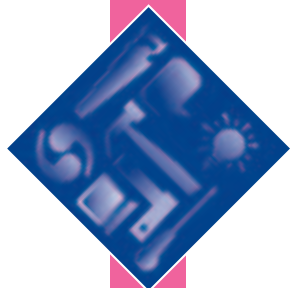
References

- The Audit Commission. 1998. *A Fruitful Partnership*.
- Department of Health. 1998. *Unlocking the potential; Effective partnerships for improving health*.
- Health Education Board for Scotland. 1998. *Partnerships for health: A review*.
- Local Government National Training Organisation. 2002.
Smarter Partnerships, website: www.lgpartnerships.com.
- Other toolkits covering: [User and Carer Involvement](#), [Communication](#), and [Evaluation](#), are available from the Leeds Health Action Zone Team Tel: 0113 3059581.



Partnership Self-Assessment Tool

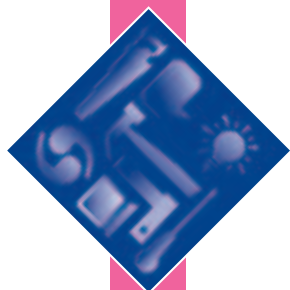
Assessment Question	Guidance notes	Assessment Decision Score	Action! To improve the effectiveness of the partnership
Section A: Foundations			
<p>A1 Does the partnership have SMART objectives shared by all its partners?</p> <p>(SMART = Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results Focused, & Time Limited).</p>	<p>Strategic objectives should be clear and all partners should agree on them. Are they SMART? It may be useful to think that if someone actually observed the partnership operate would they be able to identify what it was trying to achieve? Equally the partnership's objectives should be consistent with other relevant strategic plans & priorities.</p>	<p>NO (1) YES (2) YES (3) action is required but could be improved working effectively</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>A2 Is the partnership accountable to anyone? (Does it link or report to any other partnership groups?)</p>	<p>The partnership should have a clear line of accountability within the health and social care structures in Leeds. It may be accountable to an individual or another partnership group such as the Health Inequalities and Modernisation Board. It should also link where appropriate to other partnership groups to avoid duplication.</p>	<p>NO (1) YES (2) YES (3) action is required but could be improved working effectively</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>A3 Does the partnership make decisions?</p>	<p>The partnership may have a valid role as a networking forum. However, it should have a responsibility for completing a task, or setting priorities to be effective and not be regarded as a "talking shop". In terms of making decisions over resources it is important to define exactly what (if any) resources are influenced or controlled by the partnership.</p>	<p>NO (1) YES (2) YES (3) action is required but could be improved working effectively</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>A4 Are the costs of the partnership known and weighed up against the benefits?</p>	<p>Need to include the costs of organising and attending meetings & progressing work between meetings. Benefits could be considered in terms of the costs of not working in partnership i.e. what would happen if the partnership did not exist?</p>	<p>NO (1) YES (2) YES (3) action is required but could be improved working effectively</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>	



Partnership Self-Assessment Tool



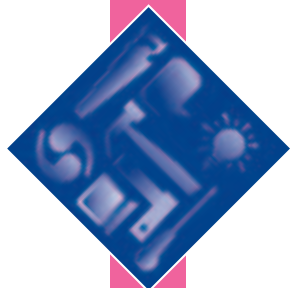
Assessment Question	Guidance notes	Assessment Decision Score			Action! To improve the effectiveness of the partnership
Section B: The Partners					
B1 Does the partnership take into account the different cultures of partners?	Different individual and organisational cultures should be recognised & worked with in a positive way. Shared training and time spent to understand each partner's organisation, culture and practices is invaluable and will reduce the opportunity for conflict. E.g. it is important that local authority colleagues understand the NHS culture is centrally driven and that NHS colleagues appreciate the political agenda driving the local authority.	NO (1) action is required <input type="checkbox"/>	YES (2) but could be improved <input type="checkbox"/>	YES (3) working effectively <input type="checkbox"/>	
B2 Is there commitment to the partnership at an appropriate senior level?	Without suitable commitment the partnership is likely to lack the ability to achieve its stated objectives. Partners may need to be able to make certain decisions on behalf of their organisations. Try to establish why senior level support is not there and give support to organisations trying to obtain commitment.	NO (1) action is required <input type="checkbox"/>	YES (2) but could be improved <input type="checkbox"/>	YES (3) working effectively <input type="checkbox"/>	
B3 Does the partnership have the necessary skills to fulfil its objectives?	There should be a learning culture within the partnership which allows partners to gain new knowledge & skills. Training and secondments may be useful. Alternatively other partners with the desired knowledge & skills may need to be brought in.	NO (1) action is required <input type="checkbox"/>	YES (2) but could be improved <input type="checkbox"/>	YES (3) working effectively <input type="checkbox"/>	
B4 Is there an appropriate balance of power in the partnership?	Is there is a hierarchy? e.g. does the statutory sector have a higher status & influence than the voluntary sector. If some partners dominate then others may become less active and lose interest. Power and responsibility need to be shared. This may require some partners to give some up and others to take more on.	NO (1) action is required <input type="checkbox"/>	YES (2) but could be improved <input type="checkbox"/>	YES (3) working effectively <input type="checkbox"/>	





Partnership Self-Assessment Tool

Assessment Question	Guidance notes	Assessment Decision Score			Action! To improve the effectiveness of the partnership
<p>Section C: Communication and Involvement</p> <p>C1 Are the partnership meetings effective?</p>	<p>Consider factors like: Attendance levels. Is the venue/room layout suitable? Do all partners actively participate? Do you need to set some ground rules about the use of jargon, keeping to time etc? Meetings may not always be appropriate, workshops or less formal events could also be used.</p>	<p>NO (1) action is required <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>YES (2) but could be improved <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>YES (3) working effectively <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>C2 Is there good communication within the partnership?</p>	<p>Documentation such as minutes could be in more friendly formats e.g. key action points/newsletter. Is enough use made of e mail? How do partners communicate outside meetings? There may be a reliance on informal networks which exclude some partners.</p>	<p>NO (1) action is required <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>YES (2) but could be improved <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>YES (3) working effectively <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>C3 Is information about the work and achievements of the partnership communicated to people outside it?</p>	<p>It is important that the partnership communicates with key stakeholders. May be appropriate to hold an annual stakeholder event, publish a newsletter, or make information available on the web. Such methods could be used to gain feedback to inform the work of the partnership.</p>	<p>NO (1) action is required <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>YES (2) but could be improved <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>YES (3) working effectively <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>C4 Is there effective user, carer or public involvement?</p>	<p>How much do they contribute? What support is in place to ensure effective representation e.g. could they have a "buddy" within the partnership. (Please refer to the User and Carer Involvement Toolkit available from the Health Action Zone team 0113 305 9581)</p>	<p>NO (1) action is required <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>YES (2) but could be improved <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>YES (3) working effectively <input type="checkbox"/></p>	



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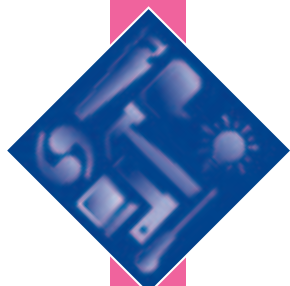


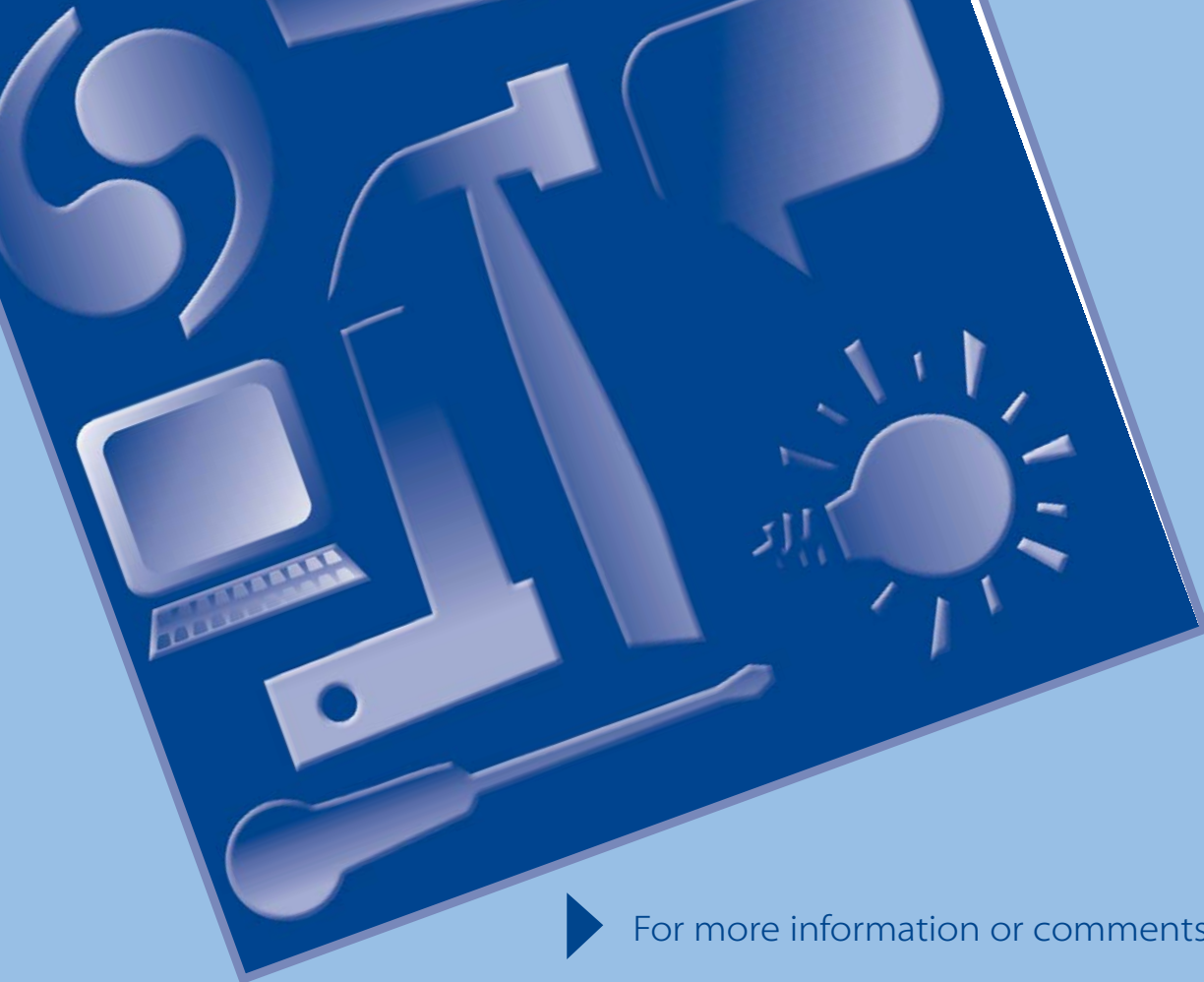
Assessment Question	Guidance notes	Assessment Decision Score	Action! To improve the effectiveness of the partnership
<p>Section D: Measuring and reviewing Success</p>			
<p>D1 Has the partnership set clear performance targets?</p>	<p>The partnership should have arrangements to measure the impact of its work. Outcomes may consist of numerical and other performance indicators. They should be designed to clearly demonstrate when an objective has been achieved.</p>	<p>NO (1) YES (2) YES (3) action is required but could be improved working effectively <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>D2 Is progress towards targets actively monitored and reported?</p>	<p>Progress against performance indicators should be monitored. Regular reports on progress should be given to partners e.g. quarterly.</p>	<p>NO (1) YES (2) YES (3) action is required but could be improved working effectively <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>D3 Is there an end point when the partnership's work is likely to be complete?</p>	<p>Some partnerships are created to undertake a specific task but still continue to operate once the task is complete. It is important to discontinue a partnership if it no longer has a clear purpose. An exit strategy may need to be considered for handing over the work.</p>	<p>NO (1) YES (2) YES (3) action is required but could be improved working effectively <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>D4 Are the partnership arrangements regularly reviewed?</p>	<p>Strategic objectives, terms of reference and membership should be regularly reviewed and revised accordingly. Reviews should take into account both process and task related issues.</p>	<p>NO (1) YES (2) YES (3) action is required but could be improved working effectively <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>	

Date of Assessment

TOTAL SCORE

Next Assessment due





► For more information or comments please contact:

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