Tools for Building and Sustaining Publicly Funded Preschool and Head Start Program Partnerships

This tool is designed to assist publicly funded preschool programs to build and maintain partnerships with Head Start. It has been developed as a result of working with the first cohort of the federally funded Preschool Development Grants (PDG). The PDG program seeks to ensure that grantees enhance and sustain high-quality preschool programs. The tool is based on research of effective partnerships and it reflects the practices PDG state programs have employed.

SECTION I: BUILDING YOUR PARTNERSHIP

This section is designed to be completed by publicly funded preschool programs and Head Start programs to lay the foundation for a positive and productive partnership. It can be seen as an integral part of a collaborative exercise that can be used to kick off the partnership. Each partner can complete these exercises individually for self-reflection purposes and then complete them together as a full partner team. This will help both preschool and Head Start programs assess areas of agreement and differences and more effectively align their thoughts and action steps.

The Foundation for an Effective Partnership

A joint understanding of the key characteristics of an effective partnership and the foundational steps for building a strong relationship provides a baseline for partners to use in completing this tool.

Characteristics of an Effective Partnership	Foundational Steps to Building a Good Relationship
☐ Power and accountability are shared	☐ Identify the common need for the partnership
☐ Goals and objectives are clear	☐ Create a shared vision
☐ Agreed upon roles and responsibilities	☐ Lay out each partner's role and responsibilities
☐ Key stakeholders are engaged in partnership	☐ Identify key stakeholders
☐ Members problem solve and learn from mistakes	☐ Identify and leverage one another's resources, strengths, and skill sets
☐ Transparency and honesty are valued	☐ Communicate regularly using agreed upon communication tools
☐ Accomplishments are shared and celebrated	☐ Create an ongoing opportunity for sharing constructive feedback
☐ Individual strengths are leveraged	☐ Establish a written partnership agreement (e.g., Memorandum of Understanding)
☐ Jointly committed time and resources	☐ Create agreed upon metrics for measuring success
☐ Decisions made through a joint leadership structure	☐ Identify a leadership structure and main liaison(s) to move decision-making

Developing a Shared Vision for Your Partnership

Crafting a Joint Vision

A key step in building your partnership is creating a shared vision. A clear, jointly created vision creates commitment from all involved to the end goal of your partnership. To complete this process, consider the following:

- Think about a clear end destination (What is your end goal? The clearer you are, the more tangible the desired destination is.)
- A vision needs to be big and it should create a challenge that your partnership is energized to meet.
- The shared vision should be built on an established foundational purpose. (The purpose needs to be effectively communicated to reach your end goal, the "why" behind the work).
- The development of strategic goals comes AFTER you have your shared vision in place.

Example Vision Statements:

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

All young children thrive and learn in a society dedicated to ensuring they reach their full potential.

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER)

Improve the learning and development of young children by producing and communicating knowledge that transforms policy and practice.

Draft your shared vision.

Setting Your Partnership Strategic Goals

The strategy is the path to reaching your vision. Set high-priority goals for your team to work towards. Goals should stay aligned with the shared vision. Keep goals big picture—tasks can be assigned later to each goal.

Goal 1	
Goal 2	
Goal 3	

Identifying Your Partnership Opportunities and Challenges

Assessing benefits and risks for each partner will encourage the partnership to be mutually beneficial. The following exercise will help partners identify initial benefits and challenges and others that might emerge as you grow and deepen your partnership.

Anticipated Opportunities	Resulting Benefits
(e.g., Coordinated recruitment and enrollment)	(e.g., Shorter waiting lists, more children enrolled in early education programs, more choices for families)

Anticipated Challenges	Potential Mitigation Strategy
(e.g., Preconceived notions about each other)	(e.g., Each partner provides accurate information and openly addresses the other's concerns)

Specifying Your Partnership Communication Strategies/Protocols

Ongoing, transparent communication is essential for developing AND maintaining an effective partnership. Jointly developing your communication protocols early on will help ensure that this occurs. Identify how and why you will routinely communicate.
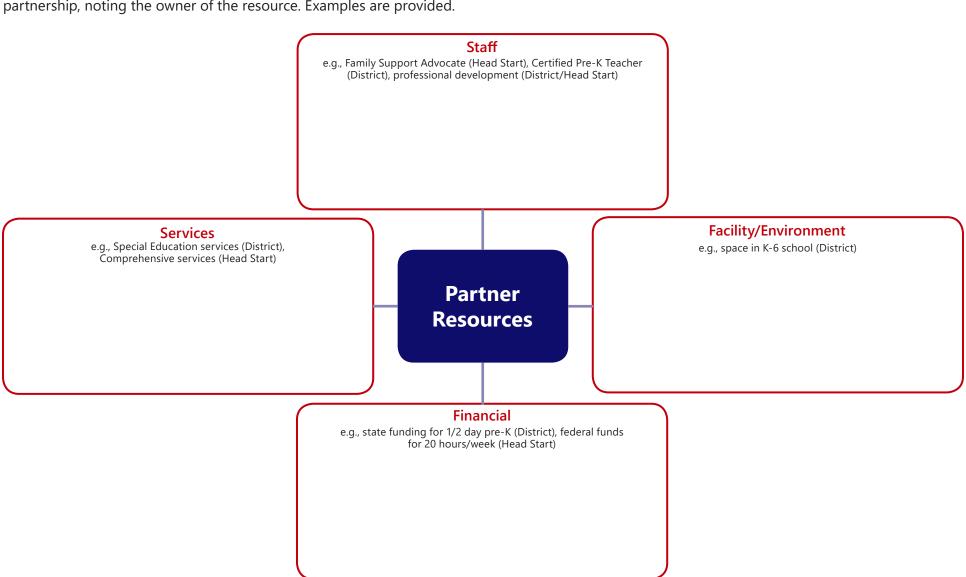
Communication Vehicle	Main Function	Frequency
(e.g., Partners Meeting)	(e.g., To discuss progress and issues)	(e.g., Monthly, preferably in person and conference line if necessary)

Assessing Your Partnership Resources

Resource mapping allows both partners to identify what resources are needed upfront and who will provide them. This exercise should be aligned with gaps identified through needs assessments conducted by the state or program. Resources to identify include financial contributions, staff capacity, facility (space)/the environment, and services. Fill in the sections below with the resources each partner plans to contribute to the partnership, noting the owner of the resource. Examples are provided.

Staff
e.g., Family Support Advocate (Head Start), Certified Pre-K Teacher (District), professional development (District/Head Start)

Services
e.g., Special Education services (District), Comprehensive services (Head Start)

Partner Resources

Facility/Environment
e.g., space in K-6 school (District)

Financial
e.g., state funding for 1/2 day pre-K (District), federal funds for 20 hours/week (Head Start)

Measuring Success

Partners will need to identify how the success of your partnership will be tracked and measured. This is important in gauging progress and creating joint accountability for the partnership.

What are your markers for success facilitated by the partnership?

How will you track and measure those markers to document success?

SECTION II. SUSTAINING YOUR PARTNERSHIP

This section includes tools that are designed to be completed by one or both partners, ideally every six months, to take stock of the partnership, assess progress, and identify issues that need to be addressed.

Completing the Effective Partnership Checklist

Complete this exercise as a team to identify foundational partnership activities that remain to be completed.

Partnership Activity	Yes	No	In Progress
1. A partnership agreement has been drafted that:			
a. defines objectives so that all parties know what they can expect from the arrangement			
b. defines roles and responsibilities of each partner			
c. clarifies management processes to be used for decision making, delegation of authority, and monitoring/reporting mechanisms			
d. outlines financial obligations and resource commitments			
e. includes agreed upon evaluation and assessment objectives			
f. provides for a process to resolve conflict and to terminate the partnership if the relationship runs into difficulty			
2. A shared vision has been created and communicated to team			
a. Goals have been identified for the vision			
b. Tasks have been assigned to goals			
c. A process for tracking task completion has been established			
3. Communication protocols have been established			
a. Communication vehicles have been set up			
4. Assets and resources have been inventoried			
a. Needs have been identified			
b. Resources from each partner have been allocated			
5. Agreed upon metrics for gauging success have been identified			
a. A measurement system is in place to document and track your partnership's mutual benefits			

Completing the Relational Survey[1]

An important element of partnership development is the relational aspect of the partnership dynamic. This exercise examines the emotional development of the partnership to ensure a healthy, balanced relationship. Complete the survey individually, noting examples to support your responses. Convene partners to review results as a full team, collaboratively discussing your individual responses. The result of this survey and discussion is to create a calibrated perception of your partnership's relationship as it stands today and identify areas for improvement, as well as strategies for getting there. (Note: This is an exercise that requires respect, honesty, and understanding.)

For each item, write down your personal rating from 1 (not very well) to 5 (very well) in the blank spaces at the end.

	Ranking (1-5)	Example to Support Ranking
1. How well do we build trust between us?		
2. How well do we solve conflicts between us?		
3. How well do we solve problems using new and creative techniques?		
4. How well do I get my important needs met in the partnership?		
5. How well do we share information between us?		
6. How well do we focus on future events vs. past mistakes?		
7. How well do we respect each other's time?		
8. How well do we reinforce our vision with each other?		
9. How well do we monitor our relational expectations?		
10. How well do we rely on our partners to help us meet our objectives?		
11. How well do we give each other constructive feedback?		
12. How well do we reach decisions that were truly supported by everyone?		
13. How well do we address the "hard" issues?		
14. How well do we support each other outside of the partnership?		
15. How well do we celebrate our accomplishments as a team?		

[1] Partnership Relationship Manager http://www.partneringintelligence.com/documents/5.03_Partnership_Relationship_Management_WP.pdf

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Acknowledgements