Working Together in Partnerships

What Do Community Action Program for Children (CAPC) and Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP) in Alberta and Saskatchewan Say Is Important?

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INTRODUCTION

Working together in partnerships or collaborations, community groups and individuals can create real, measurable change in the lives of their communities. For some, the art and science of working in partnerships is familiar ground but for many of us, this is new territory. While we know that there is no one right path to successful collaboration, the purpose of this report is to learn from those who have walked this path before us.

Community Action Program for Children (CAPC) and Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP) projects are usually guided by a partnership of community groups. They are funded by Health Canada to deliver services to pregnant women and young children living in conditions that put them at risk.

This report draws on the wisdom and experience of CAPC and CPNP projects in Alberta and Saskatchewan as well as the literature. It summarizes findings from in-depth interviews with people from seven projects, survey results from 66 partnerships and discussions with an advisory panel. Because there are many different types of partnership, there is no one recipe for success but there is remarkable consistency in most responses.

We thank those of you who so generously shared your thoughts with us! Much of this report is in the words of these participants, particularly those who were interviewed, although they have been edited to clarify the context of the discussion and to reduce the length. Because the contents of the interviews and surveys were confidential, identifying details were also altered. The information from interviews has bullets at the beginning. In depth interviews were conducted in the following projects: Candora Society of Edmonton, Children's Haven Crises Centre (Prince Albert, SK), Edmonton Interagency Headstart Committee, Food for Thought Advisory Committee (Saskatoon, SK), Parkland Healthy Families Association (Stoney Plains, AB), The Children's Centre (Fort McMurray, AB) and Toward Healthier Babies (Ile-a-la-Crosse, SK).

THE INFORMATION WE GATHERED

An advisory panel including the executive director of the sponsoring agency, members of several CPNP and CAPC projects in Alberta and Saskatchewan, Health Canada staff, and researchers was convened. It provided advice about interpretation of the results of this study.

The literature about partnerships and collaborations was reviewed. A model of collaboration, along with several research questions, were developed from this review.

Next, 11 people, either project staff or members of the partnership, from seven projects were interviewed. Projects were selected to represent a wide variety of partnership types. Results of the interview were used first to develop a written survey and later, to help to explain and enrich the results.

Staff from 86 CAPC and CPNP projects in Alberta and Saskatchewan that had been funded for at least one year were asked to provide the names of up to five partners in their projects. A staff or sponsoring agency member, along with three randomly selected partners from each of the 69 projects that responded, received a mailed survey in late spring 1999. Participants had the option of involving more than one person in preparing a joint response for their project. In total, 271 questionnaires were distributed and 164 were returned. These 164 questionnaires represent 66 different partnerships.

Data collected from the survey, along with the interviews, the advisory panel feedback, and the literature were analyzed to prepare this report.

Graph #1: Types of project responding to survey
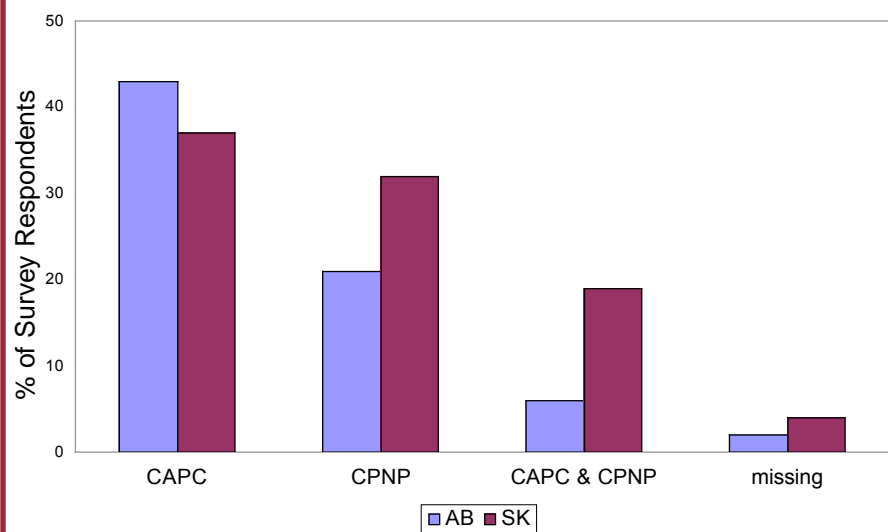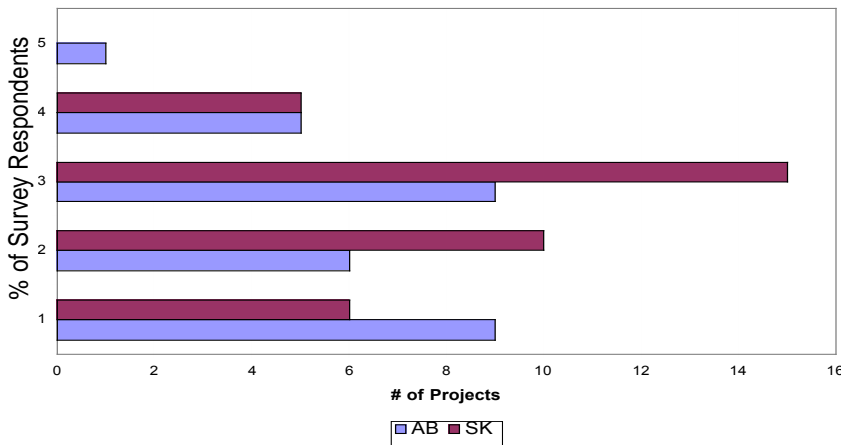
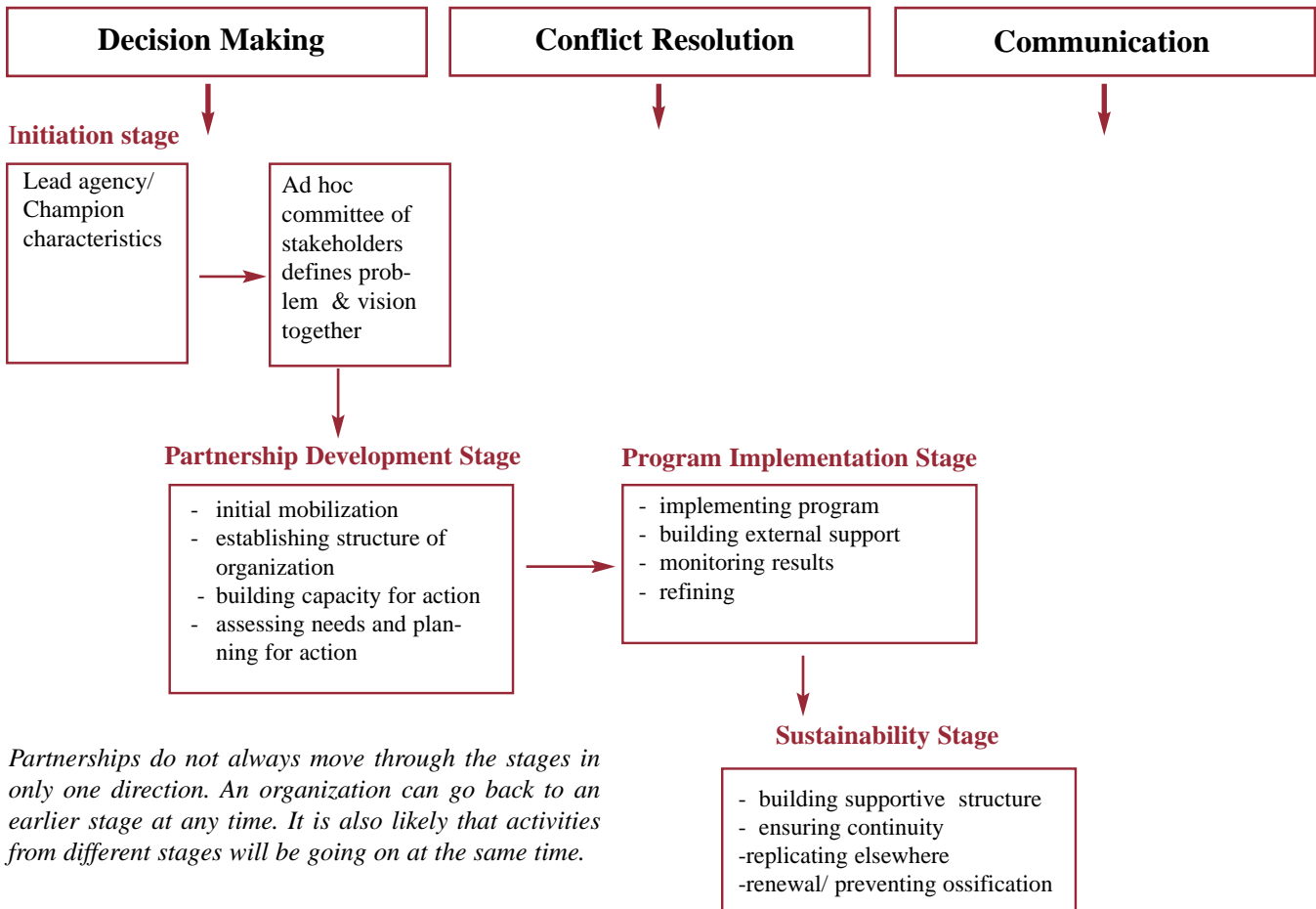In total, 49% of these respondents were involved with CAPC projects, 32% were involved with CPNP projects, and 15% were from projects that were a combination of CAPC and CPNP. For 15 projects (23%), only a single partner or staff member responded, while for 35 projects (53%), 3 or more partners/staff members responded to the survey.

PARTNERSHIPS, LIKE PEOPLE, CONTINUE TO DEVELOP

A comment early in this project was that partnerships seemed to keep changing. Can we predict some of these changes? It is hard for members to understand that what worked well at one time may need to change later or that just because change is required, it doesn't mean that they did something wrong.

A model of partnership was developed from the literature and discussion with the Advisory Panel. This was used as the basis of much of the study. Each stage in a partnership's development has certain tasks. Decision making, conflict resolution and communication affect the ability to perform well at each stage.

Figure 1- Synthesized Model for Organizational Change for CPNP and CAPC Projects

Decision Making	Conflict Resolution	Communication

Initiation stage

Lead agency/ Champion characteristics → Ad hoc committee of stakeholders defines problem & vision together

Partnership Development Stage

- initial mobilization
- establishing structure of organization
- building capacity for action
- assessing needs and planning for action

Program Implementation Stage

- implementing program
- building external support
- monitoring results
- refining

Sustainability Stage

- building supportive structure
- ensuring continuity
- replicating elsewhere
- renewal/ preventing ossification

Partnerships do not always move through the stages in only one direction. An organization can go back to an earlier stage at any time. It is also likely that activities from different stages will be going on at the same time.

The initiation stage involves a leader or leaders bringing together interested stakeholders to develop a vision of what they would like to see happen in their community.

Survey respondents were asked about their level of agreement with four statements concerning the partnership initiation process. For example, are partners from groups affected by the issue involved? Scores on partnership initiation could range from a minimum of 4 to a maximum of 16, with higher scores indicating stronger agreement that there was a defined reason for beginning the partnership. Scores for initiation were high; the mean score was 14.7. This is not surprising since we were studying only partnerships that were successful in being funded and operating a program for at least one year. Graph #3 shows the scores for partnership initiation from the survey.

Graph #3: Partnership initiation
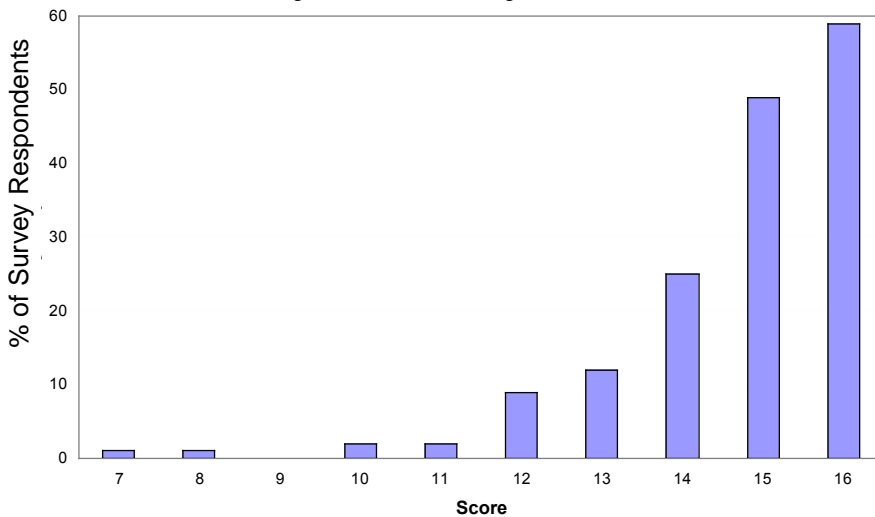
The interviews provide some valuable insights into how partnerships are initiated. These are some of the things said about different aspects of partnership initiation:

Lead agency/sponsoring agency
- I think it needs to be an organization with some history in the community.
- I think it needs to be a grass roots organization. I think it has to be an organization with a history of working well with families and the community in a supportive way. It needs to honor their strength and capacity.

- It needs to be able to be fiscally responsible and make wise decisions. It also needs to have the time to manage the project because a $90,000 grant can be more time consuming than a $5 million dollar operating budget.

"The ideal place is where the community centres around. The chair or leader needs to know how to work with people."

- The ideal place is where the community centres around. The chair or leader needs to know how to work with people.
  - It can start out as a partnership of agencies that come together because they recognize there is a need.

"The organizations that people come from need to stay outside the room. Everybody needs to be at the table with a common purpose."

"Our general philosophy, goals and mandates have stayed the same; we've just broadened them."

Other stakeholders
- The organizations that people come from need to stay outside the room. Everybody needs to be at the table with a common purpose.

- A partnership with an agency can be made or broken by who comes to the table. If that person who is very passionate about the subject leaves the agency, you may not get a representative to replace her.
- It's very difficult to represent an agency. There's always the question of what's the true commitment of the agency.
- They are there for the good of the people and the good of the program. Some people sit on boards just to sit on boards and I don't think that's fair because your heart isn't really in it.
- If you take the time to pick your board members you will save yourself a lot of grief.

"One amazing woman spoke up at a meeting with the mayor and said, we cannot continue to live in housing complexes like this. This is shameful"

People with a vision in common come together
- You could feel the tension in the community, read about it in the newspaper and hear about if talking with others (before the program started.)
- Our partners have a strong commitment to prenatal women and children. I think that's the glue that holds us together because everyone is sincerely, deeply interested in those issues.
- One amazing woman spoke up at a meeting with the mayor and said, we cannot continue to live in housing complexes like this. This is shameful.
- Our general philosophy, goals and mandates have stayed the same; we've just broadened them.
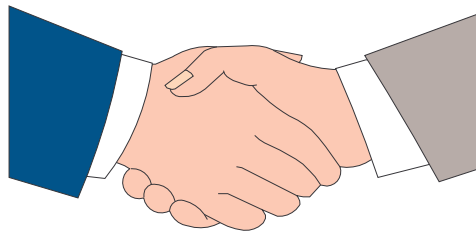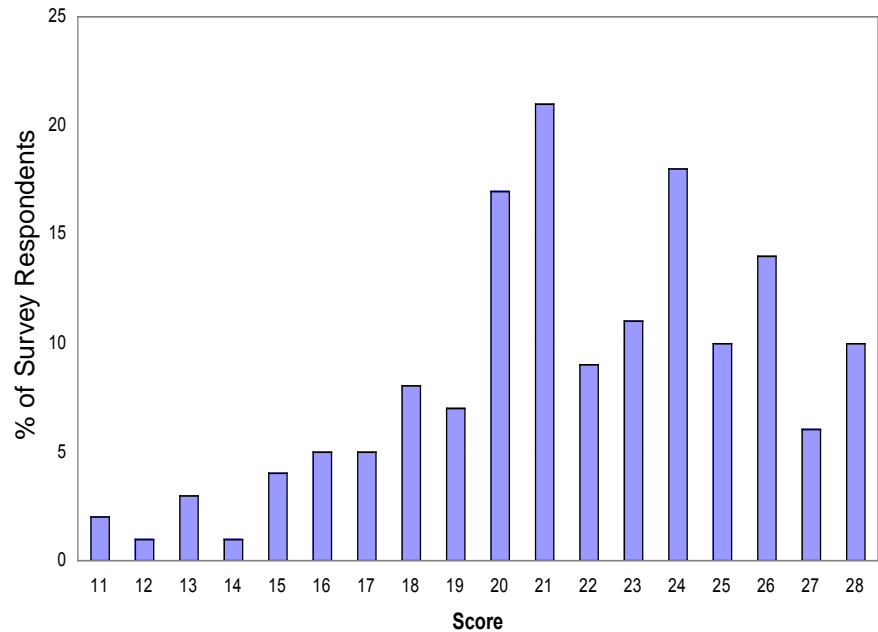

PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Partnership development involves establishing the ways the partnership will work together, building capacity for action and assessing needs and planning to meet the needs. The roles of members are clearly defined, members of the groups affected by the issue are at the table, there is a strategic plan and, if needed, there is training and education for all members.

Survey respondents were asked about their level of agreement with seven statements concerning partnership development. Scores on this development index could range from a minimum of 7, to a maximum of 28, with higher scores indicating a stronger agreement that the partnership was well-defined and members had clear roles. Scores for development tended to be high; the mean was 21.8. The scores for partnership development are shown in Graph #4.

From the interviews we heard:

Graph #4: Partnership development scores

Getting Started
- When we started there was a lot of romanticism. Of course there have been pitfalls. Volunteers can end up feeling very stretched.
- Ken Blanchard talks about the stages of partnership as forming, storming, norming and performing. Coming together is the forming part and then the storming is debate about turf protection and similar issues. Norming is establishing what the normal behaviors and attitudes will be and what needs to get done. Performing is doing the work. The process can be very circular.
- I'd be really cautious about entering into anything without asking a few questions about what's the exchange, are we really stakeholders, is this really valuable, is this worth our time? One thing you have to learn to do is to say no. There's a whole ton of meetings out there that really have not demonstrated benefits.

Establishing the structure of the organization
- You need to have a structure.
- People are amazed that we don't have a formalized structure. We do everything by consensus and democratic discussion. Sometimes it worries me that we don't have anything on paper and other times I think, thank goodness we don't because then we might have too much rigidity. Sometimes we fly by the seat of our pants and other times we're really well grounded. (Note that this organization has what appeared to the interviewer to be a well-organized but flexible structure with clear communication and decision-making processes. They hadn't, however, chosen to write the structure down in formal agreements.)

- There is a formal, written partnership agreement. We see community partners monthly plus we meet informally. Working together needs to be comfortable.
- You need to know your boundaries and if we go outside of those there is someone there to tap us back.
- You need to have a very structured set of bylaws; you need to follow them to the letter tee. You follow them because they are there to protect your programs.
- We are very flexible. Anybody in the community can attend board meetings. There isn't a formal chair.

Building capacity for action
This involves orientation for members, outlining tasks that the group needs to do to function and building links with other organizations. Empowerment issues may also be included.
- We were pretty green when it came to some things so we just went to the community and said, can you help us?
- We hire staff from the community. They are the experts in their own lives. If people are used to other people telling them what to do or how to think, when you say, will you tell me what you think, you're the

expert, that's a huge shift for people. It does take quite awhile for people to say, do you really want to hear this? And then to own their decisions. It's just like being caged and then set free. One woman said, "I may be poor but I'm not stupid." When we hire, you don't have to have all your training beforehand.

"You need to know your boundaries and if we go outside of those there is someone there to tap us back. You need to have a very structured set of bylaws; you need to follow them to the letter tee. You follow them because they are there to protect your programs."

- We use "Board Building: Recruiting and Developing Effective Board Members for Not-for-Profit Organizations" from the Muttart Foundation. They're only $5 each.
- We've chosen people strategically for the board for their skills and abilities.

"We've chosen people for the board for their skills and abilities"

- A collaborative approach is very important. Some agencies don't seem to get the value and power of that kind of collaborative effort. The funders are less likely to look at a single agency. When you look at what our partnership has accomplished, you just couldn't do that alone. People have to really value collaboration and understand its positive power or it won't work.
- When we're inviting program participants to the management table, we do a little orientation session for them to make it clear what their roles will be and how they can be involved. We welcome them to the board so they don't feel intimidated.

Needs assessment and planning for action
This includes joint information seeking, exploring options, setting priorities, reaching agreements on goals and objectives and committing to a plan.
- We didn't do a formal needs assessment. The phones were ringing with parents in crisis. You could feel the tension in the community.
- The planning process for the partnership is not formal. If need arises, somebody calls a meeting and starts the process. For example, concern for high-risk teen moms soon got 10 people together and they started to plan.
- We have monthly meetings and talk about the needs of each program. There is no formal priority setting. There's no overabundance of materials. We lend and borrow.

"We were pretty green when it came to some things so we just went to the community and said, can you help us?"

Note that the project proposals to Health Canada would have included information about the needs of the community and how the project proposed to meet these needs.


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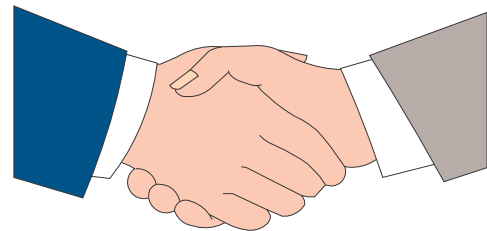
PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION STAGE

This stage includes having a plan to manage time and resources, working with other agencies, evaluating the results and making changes. Because of the great variety in the CAPC and CPNP programs, we did not attempt to evaluate and compare how successful projects were in delivering services but instead concentrated on whether they had some of the capacities necessary to do this. For example, it wouldn't be reasonable to compare the numbers of pregnant women who participated in a program in an isolated rural area with the numbers of children and their parents who participated in an ongoing preschool program in a city.

The survey included 12 statements that related to program implementation. Implementation scores could range from 12 to 48, with higher scores indicating stronger agreement with this set of statements. Implementation scores were very high; the lowest was 22 and the mean score was 38.6. The results are shown in Graph #5.

Graph #5: Program implementation scores from survey
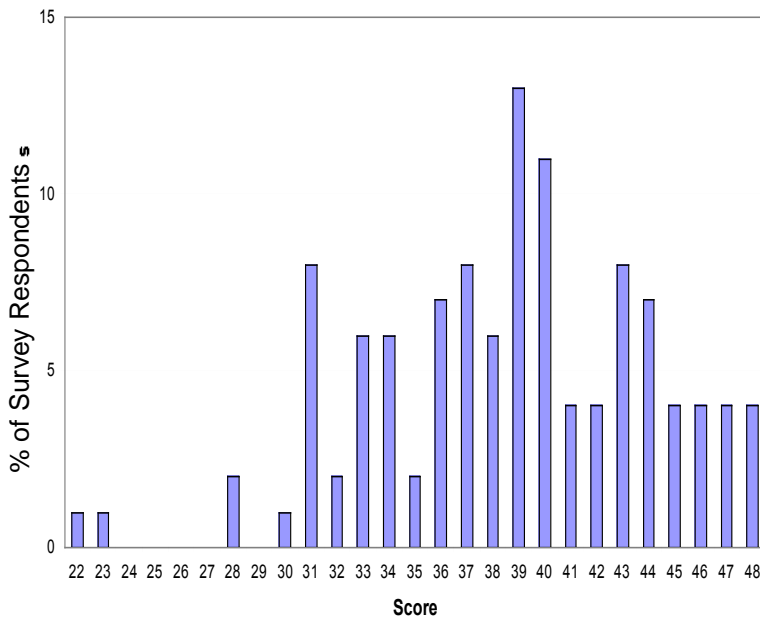
The following insights come from interviews:

Implementation
This includes having action plans with timelines, a budget and assigned responsibilities.

• I think it's supporting people to do some of the things that they don't think they can do but give them the option to try even if they fail. We had staff who, when they first came, were terrified of taking a first aid course and found that they have a skill for it when they worked with it.
• It's always, let's just do it and we'll learn from it.

Building external support
This includes being sure that members of the organizations represented by partnership members are supportive. Other agencies and politicians that play a part in the success must also be onside.

"We do a lot of promotion in schools. The kids really support us."

• We actively survey to see what other agencies feel about our partnership. If there's a complaint from an agency that has a member on the board, we get them to give their input. We invite them to be more involved so they understand what we're doing.
• The boards that are external (they each send a representative to the central board) have difficulty understanding why we're not territorial, wondering why we don't want to take control. I think part of my role is to explain to my board about the benefits of collaboration, to show the kinds of things we've been able to accomplish.
• Sometimes it's a little overwhelming. We do a lot of personal promotion. I'm involved in a lot of things in the community and everyone knows that I work for _____. Whatever else I'm involved with, I'm always wearing my agency face, my agency halo.
• We do a lot of promotion in schools. The kids really support us. There's a bag of pennies from ___ School. They don't have a lot of money but everyone's got a penny or can find one on the sidewalk. One little girl saves her pop cans and at Christmas she phones and asks what she can buy the kids.

"It's always, let's just do it and we'll learn from it."

- Another girl heard about us on the radio and pledged a dollar. She wrote to say, I think you guys are doing a great job so I gave $1 more. When something like that happens we know our message is getting out. Those little girls are going to grow up and become someone who will go out and help somebody else.
- The member of the legislative assembly lives in our community. He's a personal friend.

"We did public awareness campaigns like planting flowers outside City Hall. We had a birthday tea for the mayor."

- We did public awareness campaigns like planting flowers outside City Hall. We had a birthday tea for the mayor.
- When you work here and live in the community, you are recognized. I used to not shop here sometimes because I knew it would take me two hours to go through the store. It does make me feel wonderful to be helping but we also need to see that when we hire people who live in this neighborhood, this is additional baggage for them.

Monitoring results
This includes evaluation. Are objectives being met?

- Evaluation was built into the program. It includes logic and structural models and parent surveys. The program staff knows the strengths and changes needed and where things need to be expanded. It took two years for staff to buy into the evaluation. Now we take it for granted. We make changes as a result of evaluation and we know when to pat ourselves on the back.
- We look at evaluations internally to see where we can make improvements. We're also going to be able to take that lovely document and sell our program to funders.
- We're thrown into the lion's den with evaluations. We asked for help.
- Just counting the number of women who come to a chat group doesn't tell us what they get out of it. It's a lot easier just to write a report on them rather than asking them. Our program doesn't fit the national evaluation protocol. We sent out a survey to all of our people asking, do you think we're doing these things? We work with the feedback. We resist evaluation models that quantify things, that don't allow for people's stories.

Although many recognize that there is great value in evaluation, it can also be a problem when it is perceived that it takes too much time away from service delivery or isn't measuring what the program is accomplishing.

Refinement
This includes using the evaluation data to improve the program, identify gaps and add new strategies to move towards a comprehensive community program.

- We focus on prenatal teaching but it's gotten a bit broader. We've done things like adding parenting groups.
- We identify problems like not enough housing and jobs. We talk about the groups that could offer resources. If we identify an issue, there are probably about 10 agencies that agree.
- I would like to see a greater degree of parent literacy. We have these new Canadians and that's wonderful. We're helping the kids to prepare for English-speaking school but we're leaving the moms behind. She doesn't have the skill to read the note that comes home from school or the directions on the medicine bottle. What's really worse is that parents back off from being part of school because they feel inadequate. They're not going to present the school in a positive light to their kids.


"We identify problems like not enough housing and jobs. We talk about the groups that could offer resources. If we identify an issue, there are probably about 10 agencies that agree."

SUSTAINABILITY

This stage has been recognized only recently. It involves making the adjustments necessary to ensure that the partnership and/or its work will continue into the future. Many of the partnerships are too new to have had experience with this stage.

The survey included seven statements that dealt with the sustainability of the partnership. Scores on this index could range from 7 to 28, with higher scores indicating stronger agreement that the partnership had a future role or mandate in the community. Very few survey respondents scored low on this index, indicating that they had strong beliefs about the continuation of the partnership. The mean score was 21.6. Graph #6 shows partnership sustainability scores.

Graph #6: Partnership sustainability scores from surveys
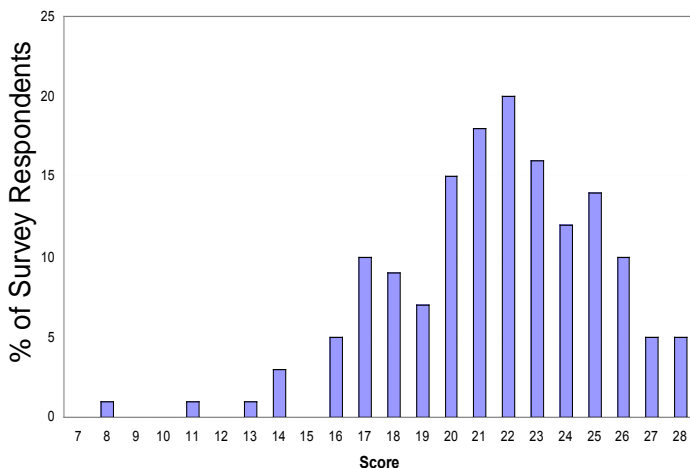
This is what the interviews said about sustainability:

Building supportive structures
Building a supportive structure includes integrating the project's work with the ongoing work of member organizations, dividing work among groups and members and authorizing individuals or committees to act for the whole.
- It's in partners' best interests to stay involved. We share so many programs. There's a large exchange of resources. We used to get requests for service that were not exchanges of services, not a partnership.
- Our staff has been asked to participate in other partnerships.
- I would like to see a more formal provincial network of partnerships like ours.

Ensuring continuity
This requires training new leaders and partners, recruiting new members and building in some redundancy so the work can continue even if some members leave.

- We had some new board members come on and it was suggested that each of those people spend half a day in the agencies.
- There's no training for board members because there's no money. Not that I don't think it's a good idea. I think it's something that they should be looking at.
- There's a large contingent of people in each organization to draw from if someone leaves the executive.

> *"I don't think this organization relies on the board to make it happen, to make it continue. It's really something the community has taken on as their own and the board doesn't play the primary role."*
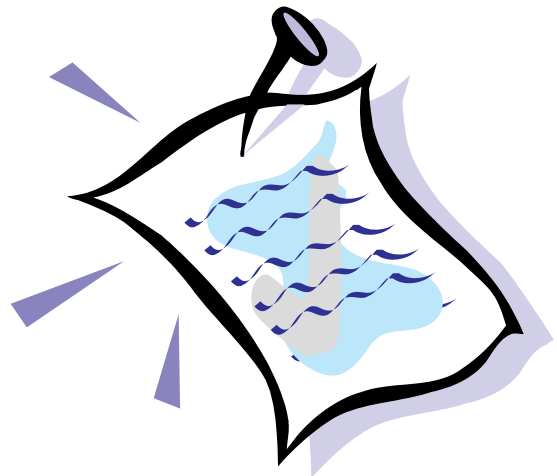
- Potential board members come to a minimum of one board meetings before they actually come on the board. The philosophy is very clearly laid out.
- I don't think this organization relies on the board to make it happen, to make it continue. It's really something the community has taken on as their own and the board doesn't play the primary role.
- When they bring someone on the board, they're assigned a partner and that person will meet with them beforehand and walk them through meetings.
- We're about to experience another change. Now I'm a little bit more cautious because I will be the last of the original members. I think that although we've grown larger and stronger, this year we should really emphasize the success. Next year, with so many changes, may be a coasting year. We're keeping the partnership together but we're having to do more strengthening until we bring our new people up to snuff.

"We implemented a supervised family visiting program. They've implemented it in other locations in the province and we've had calls from other provinces too. There was a manual drawn up."

- We would continue if a lot of partners left because we're financially independent and experienced in getting resources.

Replicate elsewhere
Part of sustainability is sharing programs and experiences so others can use them.
- We've expanded to two other sites.
- I think the philosophy is shared. It just won't look the same anywhere else because the very nature of our philosophy is to develop so the program looks like what the people of that community need it to look like.
- We act in a consultant role to others outside the agency. In our second year we ran a provincial conference so that other projects could come and we could talk about guidelines.

"We review our vision, mission and goals every year to see if we're on track."

- We've been asked about going to other locations but there's just me so there isn't enough time to do it.
- Other programs call and ask about our evaluation, mentoring and how to start a board. Our staff has provided training at other locations. One of our staff members was seconded to work in another program.
- We've sold our manuals to many different places.
- Our community garden facilitator was hired to set up gardens in _____ (another location.)
- We implemented a supervised family visiting program. They've implemented it in other locations in the province and we've had calls from other provinces too. There was a manual drawn up.

Renewal/ preventing ossification
This requires periodic reassessment of the mission and evaluating progress so partnerships don't become "stuck in a rut." It can also involve growth of the program into new areas or expansion to other sites. More mature partnerships are more likely to reach this stage.

- We review our vision, mission and goals every year to see if we're on track.
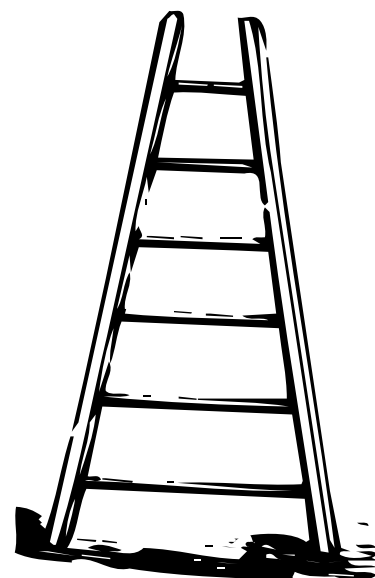
DECISION MAKING, CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND COMMUNICATION- THE UMBRELLA OVER THE PARTNERSHIPS

All of our information sources showed that these three practices are absolutely critical to the ways that partnerships function.

The survey included several statements that were used to examine respondents' views on these three topics. Six of these statements dealt with decision making, so the scores on this index could range from a minimum of 6 to a maximum of 24. For conflict resolution and communication, four statements each were used to evaluate the elements of these practices; total scores for each of these indices could range from 4 to 16. While scores for decision making tended to be quite high, there was substantial variability. The minimum score was 13 and the mean was 20.3. See Graph #7. Conflict resolution and communication scores were similar, with mean values of 13.1 and 13.7, respectively. See Graph #8.
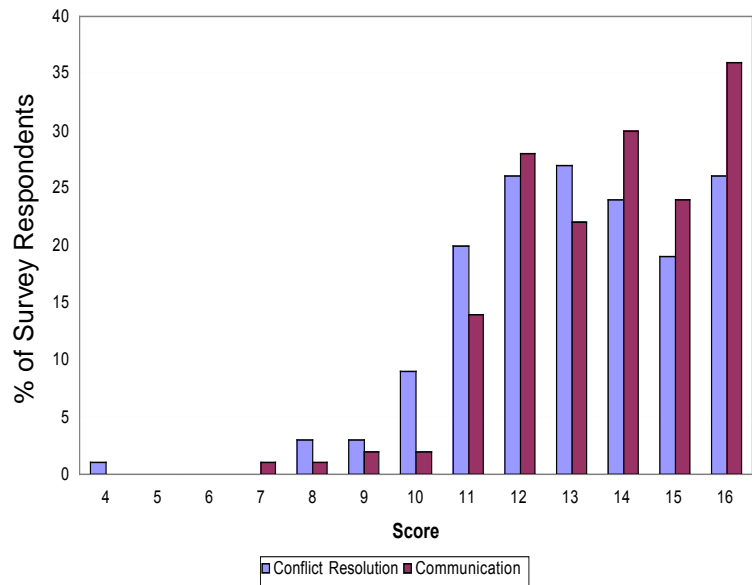
Graph #8: Conflict resolution and communication scores from surveys

Graph #7: Decision making scores from surveys
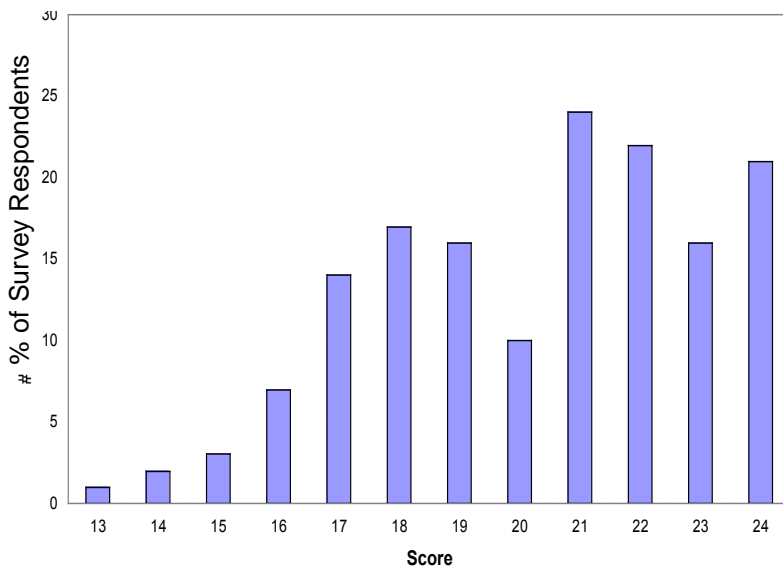
Decision Making

There are several styles of making decisions. Most groups say that they discuss an issue until they reach consensus, some groups vote and in others the sponsoring agency makes most of the decisions. This latter decision making method may work for some but from comments made on the questionnaires by different members of the same partnerships, it appears that it is essential that all partners agree to how decisions will

be made. If one agency feels it can make all the decisions but its partners believe they need to be able to contribute to the decisions, the partnership can be in jeopardy. Trust is, no doubt, a key if there is to be agreement that only one organization will make the decisions.

Here is what those interviewed said about decision making:
• What the parents say is very much supported by the board. We had an interesting dilemma. The board members had some philosophical difficulties about doing bingos and we talked to the participants about it and they said, this is where we're going for our social time; it's our money and we want it to go to the project. So the board agreed.

"We reach decisions by consensus. We've never had a vote. I think there's a fair amount of trust in our staff."

- Everyone gets a chance to voice their opinions. You have to leave personal feelings out of it. Their organizations stay outside the room and you remember that you're there for one common purpose.
- Some organizations anticipate every potential problem. What I loved about it here is that we just dealt with what happened.
- We reach decisions by consensus. We've never had a vote. I think there's a fair amount of trust in our staff.
- On the executive, each member has a vote. Each member has equal power. Everyone has a chance to speak. And then, it's not personal.

Graph #9: Decision makers regarding use of staff time
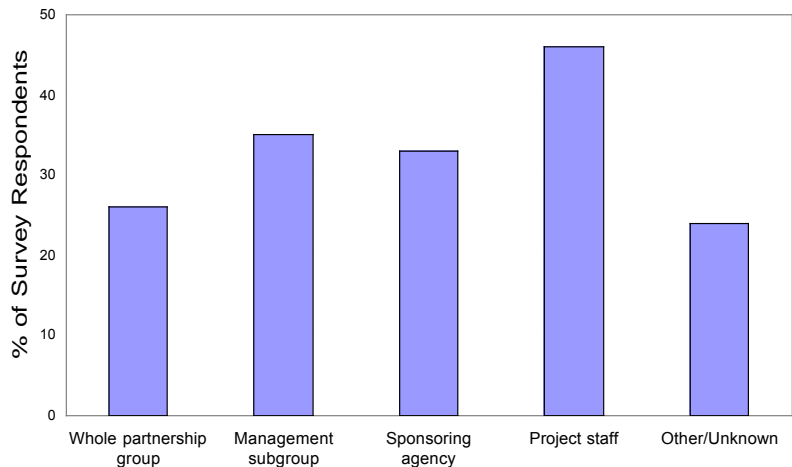
"Everyone gets a chance to voice their opinions. You have to leave personal feelings out of it. Their organizations stay outside the room and you remember that you're there for one common purpose."

- Sometimes someone is unhappy with another member or the direction of the board. He or she tries to keep bringing up issues of protocol instead of just addressing the fact that others don' t agree.
- In our project, the decisions are usually made by the sponsoring agency, not the steering committee. All the money goes through the sponsoring agency. It works fine.

Who makes most of the day to day decisions?

To explore one aspect of decision making, we asked who makes most of the important decisions with regards to how the project uses staff time. Survey respondents indicated that most often the project staff were responsible for decision-making (28%) followed by a management subgroup of the partnership (21%). See Graph #9 for results.

Are scores for program implementation linked to who makes most of the important decisions about staff time? When we compared responses to the question about who makes most of the decisions with scores for program implementation, there wasn't a great deal of difference. Those partnerships in which the staff makes most of the decisions about how their time is used had a mean program implementation score of 37.7 which is slightly lower than those partnerships in which either a management subgroup or the whole partnership was responsible for decision making. The mean program implementation scores for the latter two types of partnerships were 39.8 and 41.0 respectively. See Graph #10.

Graph #10: Program implementation scores for different decision makers

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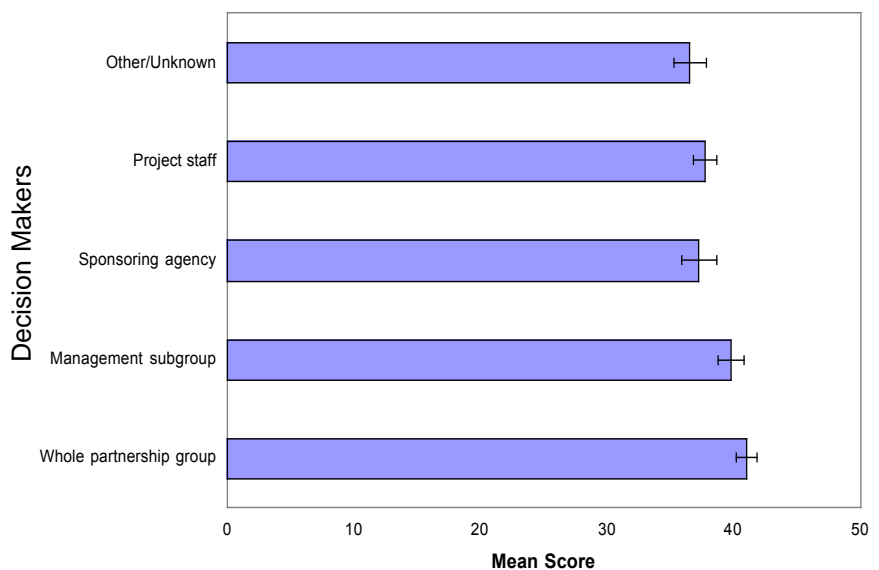
The interview provides insight into the balance needed when it comes to making decisions.

• It just makes sense that if the staff can make some decisions, they'll be more committed to their work.

"We staff members make the decisions in the organization. We have a flat structure so we have planned staff meetings every second week and that's where we discuss the planning of the program."

• If it's to do with purchasing and finance, we staff members make most of the decisions. If it's to do with putting in a proposal or maybe looking at a new program, we inform the board. But if it's something a bit bigger, we'll bring information to the board and ask them to discuss it. For example, we would just take it and run if it was something like adding cooking or budgeting classes. If it was bigger, the board would hold the reins.
• We staff members make the decisions in the organization. We have a flat structure so we have planned staff meetings every second week and that's where we discuss the planning of the program.
• The board leaves the day to day operations to the staff. The board knows that we care about the program more than our pay cheques so they respect our advice just the same as we respect theirs. A lot of the board members have a lot of history and good knowledge but they still respect the decisions we make.
• I know of boards where they're into micromanagement and then they start to dictate how you spend your money on things like field trips. Then the whole process breaks down. When the philosophy is honoring, it works.
• You run into problems where there is interference from members of boards that don't actually see the day to day operation of the interagency partnership. It isn't about being the only program of our type or being the very best of our type; it's about being part of an excellent group. It's not competitive. It's

community based and needs to be reaching out to the community and serving the community.
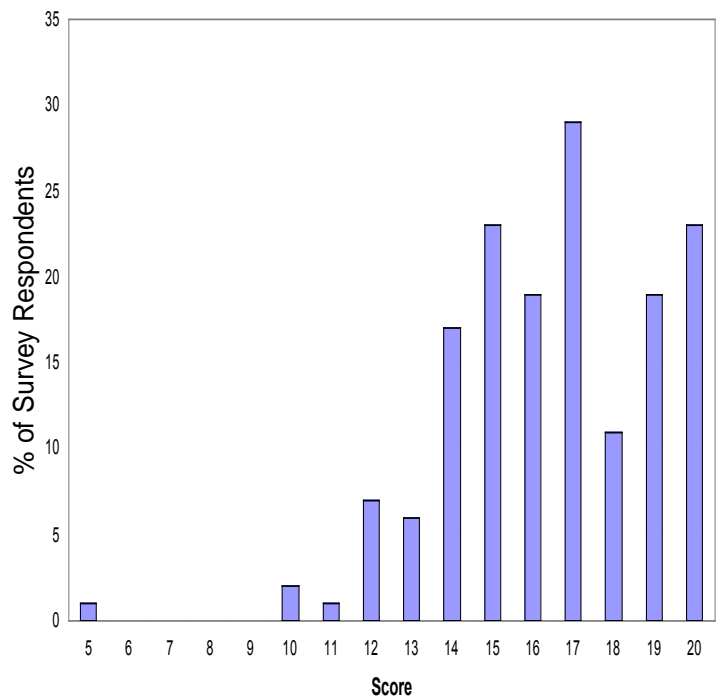
Problem Solving/ Conflict Resolution

Dealing with difficult situations is a reality for most partnerships. They range from fairly mild problems or disagreements to major conflicts. It's wise to anticipate that it will happen and when it does, to deal with it effectively and quickly.

The survey included five statements that were used to examine respondents' views on problem solving. The scores could range from a minimum of 5 to a maximum of 20. While this full range of scores was represented in the survey results, scores were quite high; the mean was 16.4. See Graph #11.

If the score for problem solving was high on a survey, it is very likely that the score for program implementation was also high. The statistical correlation between problem solving and program implementation was 0.75 which is considered extremely strong. The correlation between problem solving and partnership development was 0.59 which is also strong. These findings, as well as the results from interviews, support the importance of effective problem solving and conflict resolution in a partnership.

Graph #11: Partnership problem solving scores from survey

This is what those interviewed said about problem solving and conflict resolution:

- I don't think there's a board or an organization in existence that hasn't had some disagreements but it's the way you look at it.
- I think disagreements need to stay in the room. When you leave, the staff don't need to know about it; your clients definitely don't need to know about it. I'm not saying you should cover things up but it should be settled between you.
- Some members are proud of what we do but they are always questioning decisions that are made by community residents.
- What do you do if there are disagreements? We ask people. We have meetings. In so many places efficiency is the law so we often try to find the fastest way to get to the conclusion but along the way people don't get to discuss true issues. We just keep talking it through until, even if we don't get 100% consensus, people at least understand the debate and what we are talking about. What we ended up with was not half as important as the process. Even if there's a bit of disagreement, people are at least appreciating the differences. Conflict management is a very integral part of what we do so we had workshops on it.

"I don't think a perfect partnership has no problems."

- There should be a dispute resolution process. Something has to be in place beforehand because once it happens, it's generally too late. Even if you have a process, people need to know who to go to.
- I don't think a perfect partnership has no problems. I think the perfect one is where problems are just seen as part and parcel of the partnership. They're good. They're opportunities for growth. When everything is going perfectly smooth, it can be that people are oblivious to what's going on which means that there are going to be problems.
- My approach would be to listen and do a group solving around it if that's appropriate. Deal with conflict face to face rather than by letters. I think it's important to listen to the others' issues and to give them a chance to put their issues on the table. It must be done in a safe way. When you're beyond your capacity as a chair, seek outside help to mediate.
- We sometimes have to pause and go away and leave a disagreement for awhile and then come back and discuss it. Everybody makes an effort to keep things moving smoothly. We've traveled down that road and there have been bumps and potholes in the road but that has never stopped us from moving quickly.
- We have decided to discontinue some partnerships because we felt we were being sabotaged. You need to address conflict, to hit it head-on and have the strength to confront it quickly.
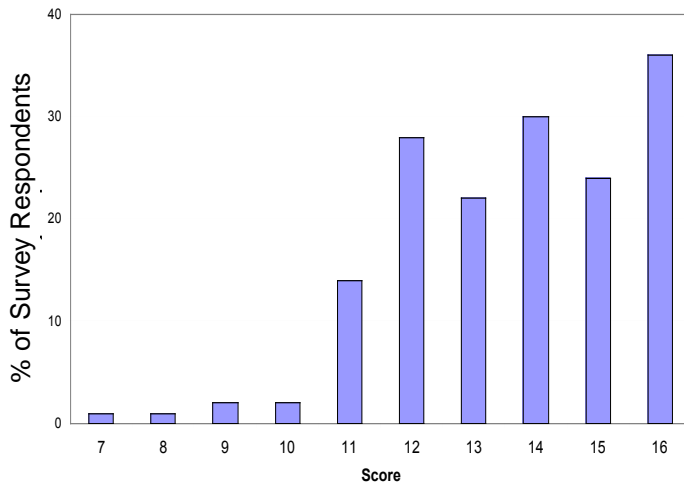
Communication

Communication is critical for effective partnership. As with many of the other partnership processes we have reviewed, there are many similarities in how partners communicate but there are also many different challenges. Some partners live in the same communities and are in very regular contact. Some, although they live in the same city, may see each other only when a meeting is called. Other projects cover very large geographical areas so face-to-face meetings are infrequent. The solutions may vary but the outcome of good communication can still be achieved.

Survey respondents were asked about their level of agreement with four statements concerning communication in their partnerships. Scores on this communication index could range from a minimum of 4 to a maximum of 16. The actual range was from 7 to 16. Scores for communication were very high; the mean was 13.7. See Graph #12.

There was a very strong link between communication and program implementation scores. Communication and partnership development scores weren't as closely tied. The statistical correlation between problem, solving and program implementaion scores was 0.74 which is considered extremely strong. The correlation between communication and partnership development was 0.56 which is also strong. This suggests that communication plays an important role in the partnerships.

% of Survey Respondents

(bar chart, x-axis labeled "Score" with values 7 through 16, y-axis 0 to 40)

Insights about communication from the interviews:

• The board is approachable and we discuss things with them. Communication is very open within the bounds of confidentiality.
• We have several methods of communicating. We have regular meetings in the community agencies. Then there are minutes of the meeting. If there's news about the project, then I would fax a memo or, if it's really exciting, I might call people. I think probably the most common way would be through our project coordinators who regularly work at the sites. I'm sure there's lots of informal chit chatting and problem solving.
• Anybody coming to this community finds a bit of a steep learning curve because everybody has so many interconnections. People know each other so it's more than just coming together when we meet a few times a year.

"The board is approachable and we discuss things with them. Communication is very open within the bounds of confidentiality."

• Most of our communication is one-on-one. We're in a very close geographical location.
• I think there's less room for miscommunication if there are face-to-face meetings. The environment needs to feel safe and nonthreatening. Some people operate better one-to-one than in groups.
• We share any interesting information that comes in.
• We all personally like each other which I think is a real bonus.
• Whenever people talk about cooperation, I always say it's very time consuming in the sense that communication is so key. You inevitably have more meetings, more paper work.

"Anybody coming to this community finds a bit of a steep learning curve because everybody has so many interconnections. People know each other so it's more than just coming together when we meet a few times a year."

• I think the amount of communication is directly related to the success of the project.
• Partners talk together regularly, both at meetings and informally between meetings. We're busy though so we don't spend a lot of time sitting around discussing.

"Whenever people talk about cooperation, I always say it's very time consuming in the sense that communication is so key. You inevitably have more meetings, more paper work."
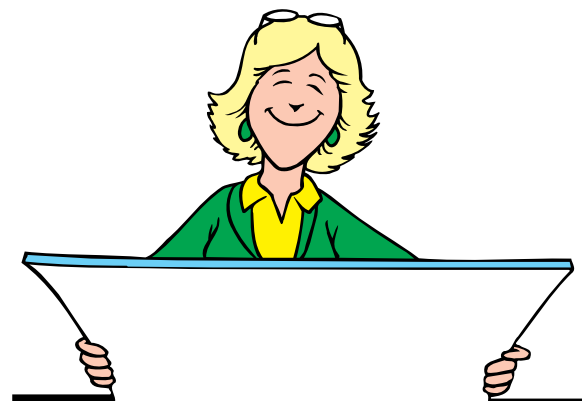
PARTNERSHIPS COME IN MANY FLAVOURS

The Conference Board of Canada describes a partnership as a relationship involving two or more organizations that have agreed to work cooperatively with the common goal of addressing human/community issues. A partnership requires the sharing of power, work, support and information with others (Health Canada 1997). Others call this same type of organization a collaboration or a coalition.

CAPC and CPNP partnerships in Alberta and Saskatchewan take many different forms. Some have a formally selected governing board that meets on a regular basis and has strict bylaws. Some have an informal advisory group, usually including people from agencies that share services but open to anyone; this type of group usually meets frequently and the sponsoring agency may make most of the larger decisions. Most fall somewhere in between. Members of one project said that they consider parents the primary decision-making partners and the formal executive serves a largely facilitative function. Some may be part of a larger community partnership for which the CAPC or CPNP project is only one of many programs. Some respondents to the survey commented that the complexity of their structures made it difficult to answer some of the questions; they have many levels and types of partnership.

"Someone called me the day before a grant application was due (not for a CAPC or CPNP project) and wanted me to sign a partnership agreement with them. That is not a partnership. That's coercion."

A few people said that their project didn't really have a partnership so they couldn't respond. In some instances the location was so remote that there was no one with whom they could partner. A few projects provide support or service to other projects rather than delivering services directly to mothers and children. In one project the original partnership had been dis-solved because of conflict. A small number of those surveyed said that they didn't consider themselves to be partners or that the arrangement was really a partnership "in name only"; they supported, in principle, the work that was being done, but had no real role as a partner. (This latter response may have occurred because we asked for the names of five partners and not all projects have that number of close partners.)

Although it is often very difficult to categorize a partnership, it is useful to recognize that there are different kinds. The National Network for Collaboration describes the following types:
- a network with a loose, flexible structure that serves as a clearinghouse for information
- an alliance with a central body of people as the communication hub and leverage for raising money
- a group that shares resources to address community issues and has independent leaders to make decisions
- an organization in which members are formally involved in decision making, roles and relationships are defined, and leadership is shared
- a collaboration that accomplishes a shared vision and builds interdependent systems. Decision making is shared equally.
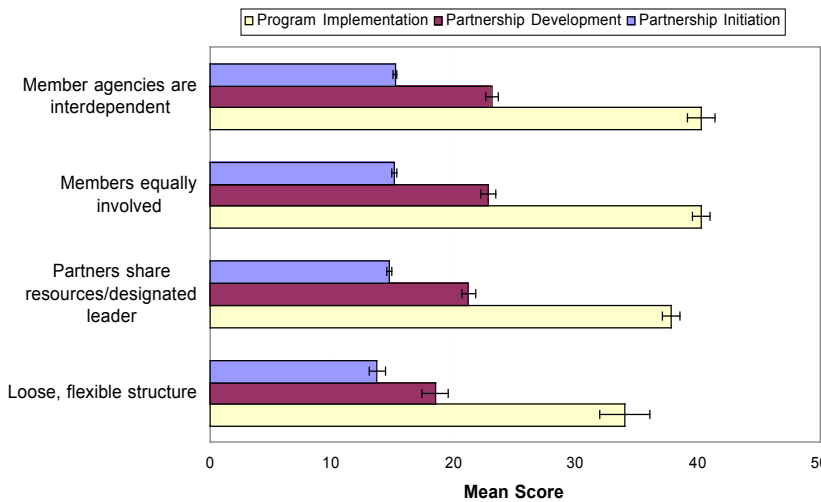
Projects often fit into a number of types and relationships with different partners may take different forms.

We asked survey participants to select the type of partnership that they had:
- 15 (9%) selected a loose, flexible structure that acts as a clearinghouse for information;
- 52 (32%) indicated that their partnership was a group in which partners share resources and there are designated leaders who make many of the decisions;
- 45 (27%) felt that all members are involved in making decisions and sharing leadership;
- 35 (21%) indicated that the member agencies are interdependent and ideas and decisions are shared equally;
- 7 (4%) selected the other category, and another 10 (6%) felt that their partnership reflected a combination of these structures, and so these individuals selected more than one category.

We then used this categorization scheme to compare respondents' scores for partnership initiation, development, and program implementation. We anticipated that partnerships that were more tightly connected and shared decision making would score higher for other partnership functions but that's not what the survey results showed. It is very difficult for survey participants to put themselves into one category; the categories are particularly difficult to understand because they combine decision-making and the amount of interdependence of partners. As a result we can't place a lot of faith in the results of this question. The analysis showed that there were slightly higher scores for projects that were more interconnected and shared decision making but, in practical terms, there wasn't enough difference to make recommendations about which type performs best. See Graph #13. We suggest that it would be better to concentrate on having clearly agreed decision making, problem solving/conflict resolution and communication processes which did prove to be strongly associated with high scores for partnership development and program implementation.
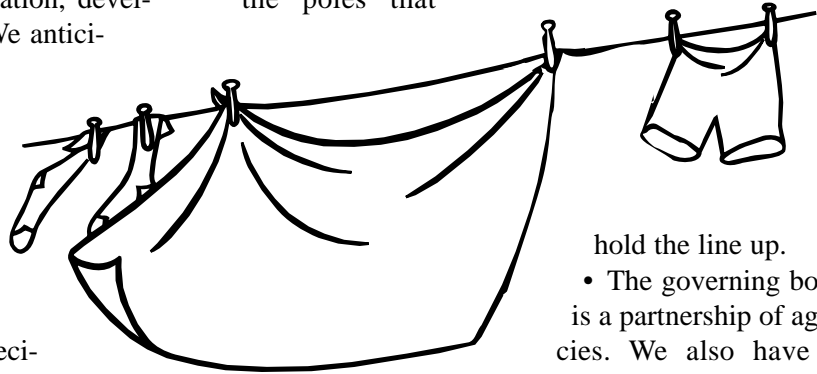
sponsoring agency is the poles that

hold the line up.
• The governing board is a partnership of agencies. We also have an advisory board made up of different community agencies.
• I think it's a lot of networking, connections, a lot of referrals, trying not to duplicate things that are happening so we can make the best use of the dollars. People who live in the community and staff know each other so we don't need to have that formal structure that says we have to get together. We had people who wanted us to put our structure up on a board and draw connections between people. We started but we couldn't do it.
• Someone called me the day before a grant application was due (not for a CAPC or CPNP project) and wanted me to sign a partnership agreement with them. That is not a partnership. That's coercion.

Graph #13: Type of partnership: comparison of initiation, development, and implementation scores

Description of partnerships from interviews:
• We describe our partnership as a washing line. The washing line is the thread that holds us together. Some of us might be pants and some of us might be shirts and some of us might be underwear but we're all clothing and we all hang on the washing line. The

"We describe our partnership as a washing line. The washing line is the thread that holds us together. Some of us might be pants and some of us might be shirts and some of us might be underwear but we're all clothing and we all hang on the washing line. The sponsoring agency is the poles that hold the line up."

THE ROLES OF LEADERS AND SPONSORING AGENCIES

Leaders who are the most effective in addressing public issues are those who have the credibility to bring together the right people to create a common vision and solve problems. Leaders and sponsoring agencies all play a facilitative role but their involvement with day to day operations varies considerably. Participants did make a number of observations about what they looked for in leaders.

Graph #14: Changes in roles of partners/leaders and staff over time

"Vision is very important. The leader helps the process keep moving along."
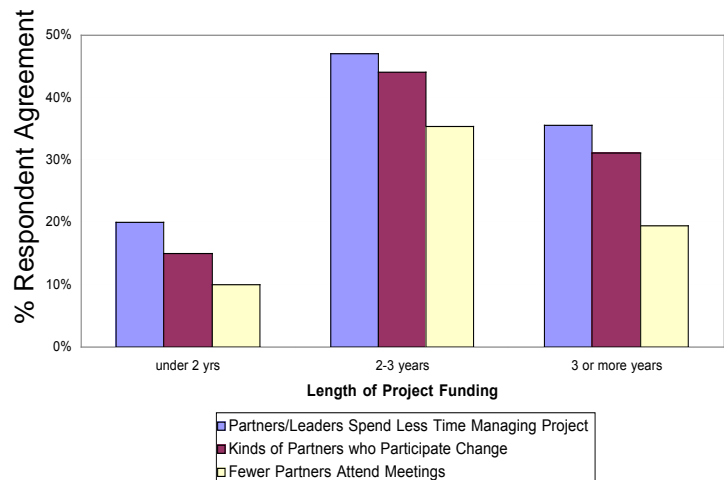
- Vision is very important. He helps the process keep moving along.
- I think they need some expertise in the programs. They also need to know when to listen and when to speak. When you're the chair, you're really not supposed to voice your opinions.
- You need to be accountable and credible.
- A good organizer.
- You need someone who knows the bylaws.

The Roles of Partners and Staff Change

As partnerships mature, the roles of the partners and the staff change. Partners who were excited about getting people together to create a vision and make a plan may have less enthusiasm when the project is up and running. Many partners just want to provide a service that they see as absolutely critical; they have little patience for working on the vision and administrative details of a partnership. Members of a partnership may change. Just as partners' roles change over time, so too staff members' roles change. They develop more experience and may assume more of the day-to-day operational planning.

Graph #15: Changes in the roles of partners/leaders and staff over time
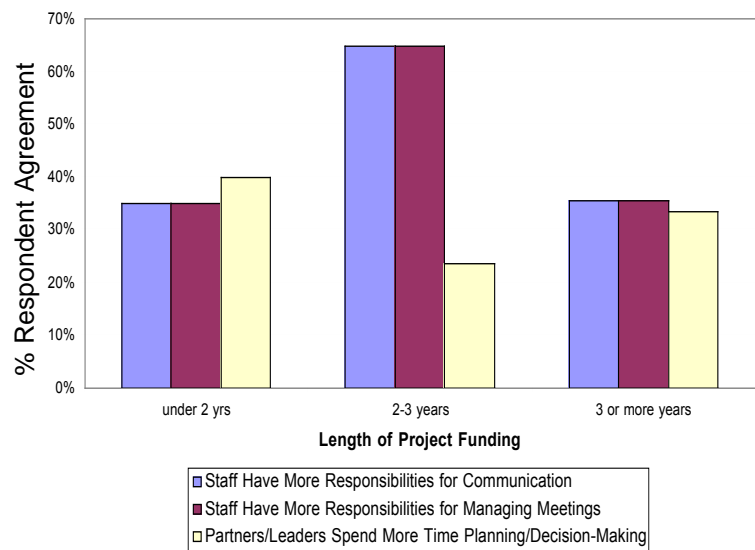
The longer a project had been funded, the more likely it was that partners or staff members had seen changes occurring in time management, kinds of partners who participated, meeting attendance, communication responsibilities, and meeting management. However, for projects that were relatively new, more respondents felt that there was increased time necessary for planning and decision making among the partners. Graphs 14 & 15 show the percentage of respondents who indicated that they had seen the changes listed. These figures have been displayed based on the length of time that a project has been funded.

"Leaders need to know the bylaws."

19

IT'S NOT ALL ROSES AND TEA

As a number of people told us, it's not all roses and tea or words to that effect. The needs in communities are large and the people affected pull on the heart-strings. Working in partnerships has the potential to spread the load but, quite frankly, it is also time consuming and can be frustrating. In this section, we acknowledge the problem and share the ways that some projects cope.

"We use a lot of humor here. It's a stress buster."

- Maybe we've made it sound like all roses and tea and it's not. We do have some rough spots but, again, it's not how many times you fall down; it's how many times you get up and move on.
- We use a lot of humor here. It's a stress buster. Whether it's stress over a client or our funding. You probably would have thought we were crazy when we came close to having to close this facility; lots of times we would come into this office and just look at each other and start laughing like children.
- Now the job is getting more demanding and there seems to be more paperwork. It's even hard to go out and do home visits because you have to do all the different things in the office. (This was a common theme.)
- When you go home at the end of the day, how do you turn it off? The program changes constantly and it takes extremely capable and resilient people to continue working that way on an ongoing basis. Sometimes, we just have to say, we're not going to change anything for a month or two.

"There are always ups and downs with partnership."

- If we get together for two hours, let's do a good job with the time. Let's not spend a lot of time on "retreats".
- We've had some healing sessions and counseling done for the board so they can move on and become trustful again. There was some healing done for staff as well.

"Maybe we've made it sound like all roses and tea and it's not. We do have some rough spots but, again, it's not how many times you fall down; it's how many times you get up and move on."

- There are always ups and downs with partnerships. The upside is the services that you get. The downside is that you're only one administrator running large social businesses. I have seven different funding partners. Each one wants me to jump through whatever colored hoop however high it is. That requires extensive amounts of my time and yet I still have to be fairly connected to my staff, my family and my community. My dream would be that funders get together so you could write one proposal and you only report in one way.
- Everybody seems to want to be our partner but you have to keep it manageable for the people at the front lines and at management level too. Each of these partners has different reporting requirements. You have to have some decisions about what are really key things to include and that you can't partner with everybody. It's important to keep a balance. We're glad to have the services but it's the expectations of the partnership. That's where we feel we're partnered out. We don't feel we can attend one more partner's meeting, that we can do one more partner's evaluation and send off one more partner's funding statement at the end of the month.
- I'm truly hoping that I'm going to have the strength to do my job here when there are so many changes expected in our program plus there are new evaluation requirements. I think I'm capable of doing it but I'm not sure we're moving forward.

WHAT IS SUCCESS?

We asked what respondents were most proud of or what success looked like. Most told us about clients' progress or development of a new program. Although it wasn't our purpose to evaluate the outcomes of projects, their successes tell us something about what keeps partners active and interested. It will come as no great surprise to those who work with these programs that there is a tremendous commitment to them! Of course, this does not mean that we can assume that they can keep going no matter what the pressures are.

"We had a five year old boy who had never even held a crayon when he came to the program and a year later he could write his name."

- We had a five year old boy who had never even held a crayon when he came to the program and a year later he could write his name.
- Is it more important that a child can count to five or that he has a sense that he's making a choice in real life?
- We have had other programs say, because of your program, we see young women and street people who have never set foot in our door before. They're coming because it's a safe place and it's fun and when you're hungry, a place like that offers food. Although it's not a feeding program, it tends to bring people in just by virtue of the smell.

- Funding partners tell us that they are really happy with the job that we're doing. We take great pride in this.
- Clients are referring themselves. I also got a call from the hospital. When a patient was having a problem with breastfeeding, they phoned me up to come and see her although she's not in my area.
- I think the ideal is when clients are really keen on coming, even just to walk in just to say hi. I think the biggest success is that it usually ends up being a good pregnancy.
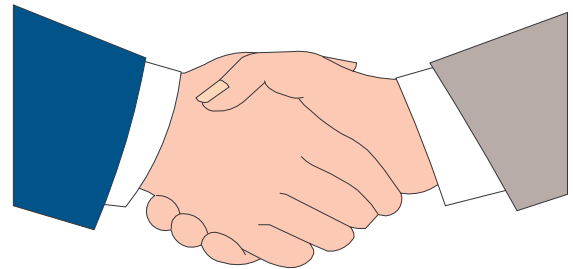
WHAT DOES THE IDEAL PARTNERSHIP LOOK LIKE?

- The ideal partnership is where all the stakeholders who need to be there are there. They're all there for the right reasons. There's no hidden agenda. There's a genuine willingness to work together. That doesn't mean that there might not be bumps and conflicts along the way but that they're genuinely there for the collective good and that there is an environment of trust where everyone values each other's views and thoughts and that the diversity is good. That it has time to evolve and is not rushed or forced because a grant has to be sent in. There is a strong commitment to work together at the table. I'm not sure that there's an ideal partnership. I think that all partnerships go through some growing pains and have really good times and maybe not so good times.

"There's no hidden agenda. There's a genuine willingness to work together. That doesn't mean that there might not be bumps and conflicts... there's good time and some not so good."

CONCLUSIONS

Partnerships have tremendous potential to create real results in communities, to impact the root causes of a problem. Because they are time consuming, however, the problems they address must be sufficiently complex to justify their use.

To summarize some of the key points to successful partnerships:

Partnerships change with time. There are stages of development, each with some key tasks. During the initiation stage, trusted leaders bring interested stakeholders together. It is essential that they agree on a common purpose for their partnership. The partnership development stage involves establishing the ground rules, developing a plan and acquiring the skills and resources needed to do the work. In the program implementation stage, the work begins, alliances with other agencies may be developed and evaluation is conducted in order to celebrate successes and make necessary changes. Some partnerships may have reached the sustainability stage in which adjustments are made to ensure that the partnership and/or its work will continue into the future. This includes replacing members as needed and sharing results with other groups who can use the information or expanding the program. The vision and goals broaden as the partnership progresses. There are opportunities to look beyond the immediate problems to the underlying issues in the community as a program develops. Partnerships do not always move through the stages in one direction. It is also likely that activities from different stages will go on at the same time.

Decision making is absolutely critical to success! There are many styles of decision making, with deciding by consensus being mentioned most often. What is most important is that it be absolutely clear how decisions will be made and that all partners agree to this and feel that they have a role in the process. For day-to-day decisions, partnerships in which staff members had the power to decide were recommended.

Problem solving or conflict resolution is another key element. Partnerships are going to encounter some difficult situations. While you wouldn't want to spend your time anticipating every possible thing that could go wrong, it is wise to acknowledge that there will be disagreements and decide how they will be handled.

In the words of one participant and in our results, the amount of communication is directly related to the success of the project. No matter what the geographical, time and other constraints, it is essential that partnerships communicate effectively.

Just as the stages of partnership change with time, the roles of partners and staff change too.

Working in partnerships can be very difficult and at times draining. There are many ways of coping from laughter to healing sessions to recognizing that there are limits to how much the partnership can take on. The difficulties of working in partnerships may add to the load of those who feel deeply about the lives of the people with whom they work. At the same time, although no one said it specifically, an effective partnership can be a tremendous source of support in both good and difficult times.

What does the perfect partnership look like? There probably isn't such a thing as a perfect partnership but one with the right people present for the right reasons working together in an atmosphere of trust and respect would be good. The ideal partnership handles decision making, problem solving/conflict resolution and communication effectively. Successes are celebrated. Good partnerships take time to develop.

To give the last words to survey respondents:
- It's hard!
- It takes lots of patience.
- Partnerships could be a full time job for one person.
- The people we are working with are always at the top of the list.
- We take pride in identifying all who are our partners.

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