



CANADIAN INSTITUTE FOR
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L'INSTITUT CANADIEN DU
DROIT ET DE LA POLITIQUE
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Partnering for Sustainability: A Checklist for Successful Partnerships

Achieving sustainable development requires that social equity and environmental quality be integrated with economic development in all aspects of decision-making, at all scales, and across the three sectors of business, government, and civil society¹. Realizing these goals requires the use of new and innovative tools that enable decision-making to be participatory, consensus-oriented, and equitable. For this reason, partnerships are being increasingly recognized as one of the tools that can facilitate sustainable development initiatives.

Canada's partnership experience, as presented at the *Partnering for Sustainability* conference held in Toronto in April of 2002, provides evidence that the value of partnering is substantial, not only because it contributes towards sustainable development goals, but also because it can generate considerable mutual benefit for the partners involved.

However, it is also important to recognize key challenges that can stand in the way of partnerships, which must be identified and addressed to ensure the greatest chance of success. Of all these challenges, perhaps the most difficult one to acknowledge is that

partnering may not always be the appropriate strategy to achieve a particular goal.

What is Partnering for Sustainability?

Partnering for sustainability brings together two or more parties, often across sectors, to share resources in order to achieve a common goal that has social, environmental, and economic benefits and which would have been more difficult to achieve had the partnership not been undertaken. It is also important to recognize that partnerships can take on many different forms depending on their mutual goals and the degree of association.

The Value of Partnership

In addition to aiding parties with similar backgrounds, partnerships enable those with diverse interests, concerns and expertise to collaborate. Such collaboration contributes to achieving sustainable development because it helps to facilitate decision making that considers environmental, social and economic concerns in a more holistic manner.

Partnerships can:

- Build understanding, trust and respect between traditional adversaries.
- Concentrate relevant skills and expertise from different partners.
- Facilitate the sharing of resources, knowledge and decision-making.
- Capture a wide range of interests.

Checklist for Successful Partnerships

What makes a good partnership? The Canadian experience demonstrates that successful partnerships have the following characteristics in common:

- ✓ A clearly articulated vision, mission and goal, are agreed upon by all parties.
- ✓ Clear benefits are demonstrated for each partner.
- ✓ An equitable decision-making process is established to ensure each partner a voice.

- ✓ Commitment of time and resources is made by each partner.
- ✓ A 'Laser-beam' focus is maintained on the goal(s) of the partnership.
- ✓ Transparency, accountability and credibility of the partnership is ensured.
- ✓ A structured evaluation system is established.

Challenges and Risks to Partnerships

Partnerships are not a panacea. While partnering can have wide-ranging benefits, it is important to recognize some of the challenges and risks partnerships can face. They include:

- Establishing and maintaining the key elements of partnering outlined in the checklist above.
- Attempting to replicate other partnerships (successful partnerships cannot be considered blueprints).
- A regional/national/international regulatory framework which constrains a partnership.
- Dependency of partners upon other partners and the partnership itself.

For more information please visit
www.cielap.org/partnering



¹ CIELAP (2001), Sustainable Development in Canada: A New Federal Plan