



Stages of Partnerships

Although all partnerships are unique and different, they follow predictable stages that, when navigated skillfully, ensures success. These stages are not unlike traditional phases that any strong relationship encounters as the partners learn more about each other in the process of building trust and respect. The stages of partnerships listed below may serve as a guide for individual partners through a process that allows the partnership to grow from the early stages of coming together as strangers to a higher level of commitment.

STAGE I. NON-PARTNERING: THE SINGLES STAGE

A small group of individuals from different programs representing various early education entities come together to discuss their programs and ways to enhance services to children and families.

STAGE II. PRE-PARTNERING: THE SEARCHING STAGE

They reach out to include other community members working with families and children. They talk often about their common goals and (less often) about the practices and philosophies of their respective programs and their perceptions of one another.

STAGE III. ACTIVE PARTNERING: THE COURTSHIP STAGE

Members consolidate into an ongoing working group. They make a joint commitment to work together and agree on a unifying theme. To build greater trust and ownership, they share more detailed information about their programs and the children and families that they serve. Based on this information, they create a shared vision of an enhanced service delivery system: what it would look like and how it would work. They develop a mission statement and a set of goals to guide their future actions. Establishing shared leadership and responsibility, they set basic ground rules for working together and develop ways to support and advance partnership planning.

STAGE IV. CONSOLIDATED PARTNERING: THE BONDING STAGE

Focusing on a specific geographic area, partners begin to design a partnership structure that incorporates the elements of their shared vision. They discuss resources and explore ways to support the partnership's goals. They make concrete decisions about design and staffing. As they work with regulatory and funding agencies and other community programs, the partners are united in their goals. They also develop strategies, systems, and inter-agency agreements to put their plans into action. Together they begin to implement the partnership structure, knowing that some things will work well and others won't.

STAGE V. GOING TO SCALE: THE COMMITMENT STAGE

Partners honestly and regularly address issues of concern as they occur and work together for full resolution. They learn from experience and build on what works well. They apply their sound evaluation and communication systems to help them pinpoint where change is needed, make necessary mid-course adjustments, and assess outcomes. As partners they are fully committed to ensuring that the partnership fully benefits those it is designed to serve, advances the capacity of all staff, and achieves positive, measurable outcomes for all children and families.

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