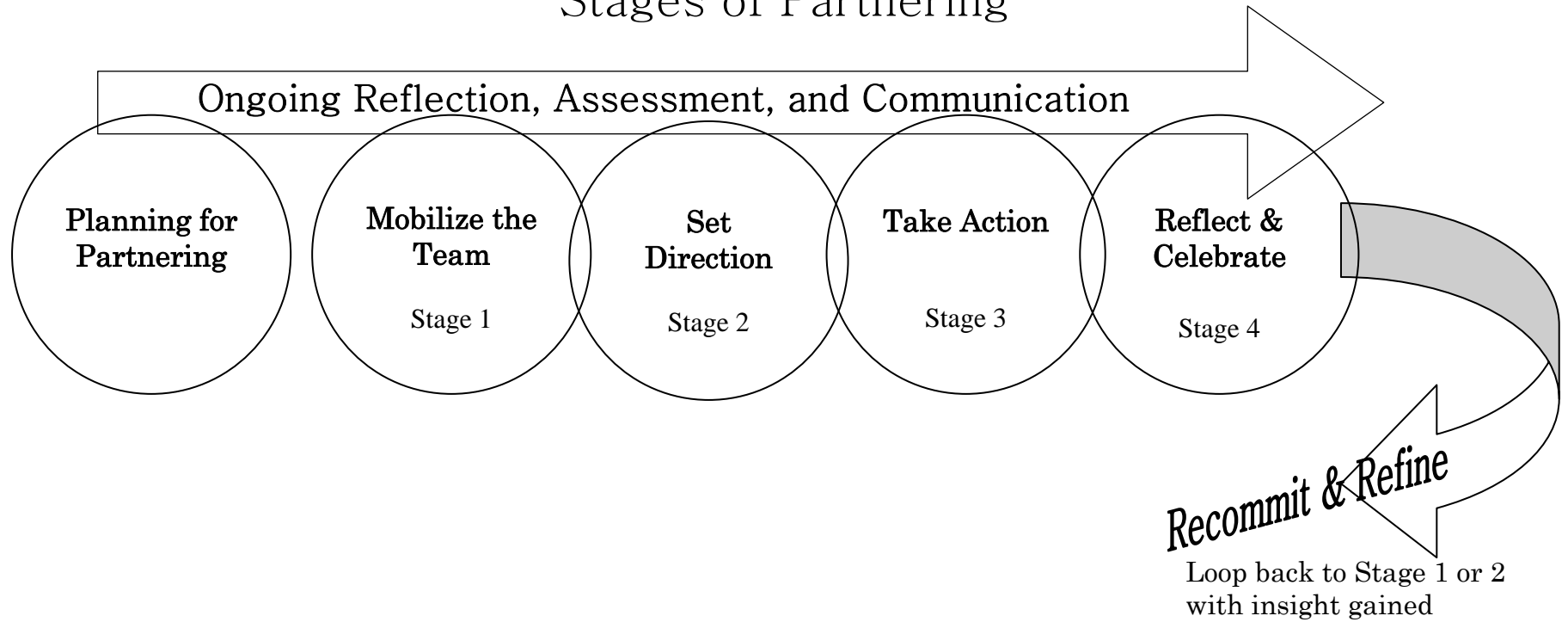




Stages of Partnering



**While this model presents the stages sequentially, the process operates in a dynamic environment. Actual partnerships will find themselves on different trajectories among the stages. How long a partnership remains in each stage will vary depending upon many factors.

Partnership is “a **relationship** between individuals or groups that is characterized by **mutual cooperation and responsibility**, as for the **achievement of a specified goal**”
-American Heritage Dictionary

CORE PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Pre-Partnering Stage: The initial step to community partnering entails recognizing a need to collaborate with other organizations and an appreciation for what a partnership involves, including the benefits and costs. Helping students succeed in school and beyond calls for complex solutions. No one entity can single-handedly prepare youth for higher education, rewarding employment, and responsible citizenship. It takes many segments of the community working together to achieve such ends, but partnering does not come without costs. If there is a group willing and able to undertake this work, it may begin the process. If not, advocacy may be necessary to build support and awareness.

Stage 1: Mobilize the Team. This early stage is critical to the team’s success. In addition to deciding who should be part of the team, the group must decide how the team will operate. How the group communicates with one another is essential to working together effectively, so it is important to take the time to establish good habits of open communication. The team should recognize shared issues and concerns, practice open sharing of ideas, seek common ground, and move towards agreement on a primary function for the partnership.

- **Effective partnerships have champions.**

The partnership includes or is convened by leaders who are committed to it and who have the power to legitimize its role.

Stage 2: Set Direction and Infrastructure. At this stage the team creates a shared vision and purpose, and agrees on goals. It identifies and prioritizes long-term goals and immediate objectives. Expectations, roles, and responsibilities of the partners and decision-making processes are clarified and solidified. The partnership establishes a system to evaluate progress.

- **Effective partnerships begin with the ends in mind.**

Partners work together to identify and agree upon the desired results for children and youth. Clear, up-front agreement on results enables mapping backward from those results to the services and opportunities required to achieve them, to the responsibilities of all partners, and to the baseline data required to assess progress.

- **Effective partnerships build civic capacity.**

Mobilization needs to occur around a problem seen in broad enough terms to concern people across different sectors of the community. In the next stage,

partners develop a common definition of the matter of concern and begin to move toward concrete plans of action.

- **Effective partnerships distribute accountability among partners.**
Acting under a guiding principle of distributed accountability, service providers and their stakeholders, instead of blaming problems on each others' shortcomings, would jointly assess effectiveness, identify what must be improved, and define the actions to be taken. They would recognize that most of their valued goals require efforts from more than one of the participants in the partnership.
- **Effective partnerships make good use of data.**
One clear lesson of effective partnerships is that data – from standardized tests, surveys, and budgets to interviews, focus groups, and anecdotal evidence – are powerful. Partners can use data on child and youth outcomes and other measures of program effectiveness to mobilize support for their efforts, manage programs, and create cross-sector accountability.

Stage 3: Take Action. Hammer It Out. Effective partnerships build in time for planning, for developing trust, for coming to a shared understanding of a problem, and, most importantly, for action. At this point the team details how it will achieve goals, share responsibilities, and monitor progress—and then does it. Steps include: develop strategies, determine action steps or tasks with time lines, assign persons responsible to each action step, implement the evaluation plan.

- **Effective partnerships are honest about partners' needs and resources.**
Partners need to be frank about the interests they bring to the partnership and what they need to get from it. While there is no recipe to develop trust, one key strategy is to demonstrate as early as possible that everyone in the partnership can get something from it.
- **Effective partnerships seek out and listen to students.**
Many effective partnerships engage youth through focus groups and by including youth representatives in key leadership, decision-making, and implementing roles.
- **Effective partnerships seek out meaningful relationships with parents.**
Effective partnerships consider parent involvement and parent engagement as a top priority and seek ways to provide meaningful and relevant opportunities for parents to fully participate as allies, advocates, and leaders in their children's education and in the partnerships that impact them.
- **Effective partnerships pool resources.**
Too often agencies from different sectors that serve youth needs – schools, police, recreational agencies, youth social welfare services, etc. – have been pitted against one another in a fight for funding. In effective partnerships, partners rally together to garner adequate funding.

Stage 4: Reflect Upon and Celebrate Results. It is important to celebrate the team's accomplishments, reflect on what has worked and what has not and make adjustments for the next steps.

- **Partners are realistic about progress and celebrate "small wins."**
Improving child and youth outcomes won't happen overnight. Part of the role of the partners is to educate the public, the media, and the political powers in their community about how much progress is realistic from year to year. Effective partnerships acknowledge the incremental progress they make and celebrate "small wins."

Stage 5: Recommit & Refine. At this point, the partnership renews its commitment to the shared vision and loops back to stage 1 or 2 with the knowledge and insight gained from the work thus far.

SUSTAINING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Developing effective partnerships is hard, but sustaining them is harder. How do partnerships survive under challenging and continually changing circumstances?

- **Partners reach out to new members.**
The importance of trust cannot be exaggerated. Effective partnerships have members who trust each other and who work together well. When circumstances change and new members are brought into the partnership, longer-term members deliberately seek to develop trust, educate them about the work of the partnership, and establish good working relationships with them.
- **Partners develop long-term structural and institutional supports.**
Embedding trust in institutions in different sectors and roles can only be accomplished if it is developed structurally, so it is not dependent on key individuals or charismatic leaders. For example, some partnerships incorporate collaboration into individual job descriptions and seek staff who are interested in partnership.

Excerpted from: [Developing Effective Partnerships to Support Local Education School Communities that Work](http://www.schoolcommunities.org/Archive/portfolio/effect_partnerships.html). Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, June 2002. found at: http://www.schoolcommunities.org/Archive/portfolio/effect_partnerships.html