

# Building Sustainable Networks and Partnerships

- A document for NPI members -

## Networks...

are often created by a broad group of stakeholders coming together to share information, discuss mutual interests, and create a comprehensive vision and action plan for the community. Partnerships and projects may result from this meeting or it may be simply an opportunity to learn about what other stakeholders are doing. *Thus, a network becomes a compilation of partnerships and projects all working collectively to achieve a common vision.*

Networks include a diversity of people and institutions that together provide an extensive knowledge-base, numerous resources, skilled and passionate volunteers and organizers, and a common vision for global change. As information is passed within a network, the community becomes more informed, more empowered, and more mobilized to take collaborative action.

Building sustainable networks often involves:

- ❖ Establishing formal procedures for network members to share ideas, participate in collaborative planning processes, and contribute talents and resources.
- ❖ Creating evaluation processes that allow members to express their sense of value and accomplishment, as well as measure the actual results achieved by their contributions to the network ( ie, measuring both process and outcome).
- ❖ Developing a clear vision based on the knowledge generated by the diversity of network members, and monitoring and communicating all partnerships and projects in existence that serve to move the community closer to achieving its desired vision.

## Tips and tools for developing your network..

- ✓ Develop a name and identity for the network.
- ✓ Build and disseminate a vision and mission.
- ✓ Ensure background materials and current plans are available to members.
- ✓ Create an administrative structure (ie. minutes, meeting schedules, communication lists, etc..)
- ✓ Create guidelines for becoming an informal member or formal member.

Example guidelines for <u>Informal</u> members of the network:	Example guidelines for <u>Formal</u> members of the network:
<p>Receives minutes.  Aware of network and activities.  Willing to receive requests.  Open to partnerships.</p>	<p>Attends network meetings.  Participates in planning and evaluation.  Contributes time and resources to activities.  Involved in partnerships and represents the network within their own organizations.</p>

## Partnerships...

are usually referred to as informal or formal agreements between two or more organizations. In most cases, a partnership demonstrates organizational commitments to work together to achieve a common goal. Therefore, embedded within a large community-based project (network) are several partnerships, strategically developed to move a community towards achieving an overall long-term vision.

Here are just a few of the many elements often characterizing sustainable partnerships:

- \* Mutual respect, understanding, and trust among members.
- \* A defined goal, clear roles and contributions, and established communication links.
- \* A clear contribution to the long-term vision of a community.
- \* Commitment to shared learning and responsibility in process and project outcomes.

## Sustainability...

for NPI projects, in its simplest form, can be described as long-term commitments made by stakeholders and members of the community, to ensure that a project will continue into the future even after the NPI funding has ended. These commitments assume that initial project funding serves only as the first source of resources that help bring people together to develop a common vision for change in their community.

In order to obtain a level of sustainability, project stakeholders and community members must identify long-term commitments that will aid in the long-term viability of the project. These commitments can be in a variety of forms, such as human, in-kind or financial resources.

Below is a small list of activities that could be considered in a sustainability plan:

- \* **B**uilding a common vision and effective planning processes (i.e., regular meetings, planning forums, participatory evaluation) so that stakeholders feel a sense of value and accomplishment.
- \* **I**dentifying both the fiscal, human, and in-kind donations that each stakeholder can contribute.
- \* **D**eveloping and maintaining a large and skilled stakeholder and volunteer base.
- \* **C**reating plans to build relationships with other government funders and private institutions.
- \* **F**ocusing on creating critical partnerships between stakeholders that will promote new initiatives. These initiatives will bring in new partners and promote long-term commitments to the network.
- \* **E**xpanding the diversity and number of project stakeholders.
- \* **C**reating partnerships that promote new initiatives, in order to bring in new stakeholders and promote a long-term commitment to network collaboration

**Mini Self-Assessment Checklist for Developing Sustainable Partnerships and Networks.**

1. Have we contacted all community members and institutions that have a potential interest in the goals of the network? Yes/No
2. Do we know the mandate, services, and priorities of stakeholders? Yes/No
3. Have we established a clear vision, goals, and objectives? Yes/No
4. Are there clearly defined procedures for meeting, communicating, and resolving conflicts and issues? Yes/No
5. Have we provided an opportunity for stakeholders in the network to fully understand our mandate and see how they can contribute human, fiscal, and in-kind resources? Yes/No
6. Is the progress of each activity being reported and communicated to all stakeholders? Yes/No
7. Have we developed an evaluation plan that measures if our network is achieving its intended results? Yes/No
8. Do we have an evaluation plan that measures the effectiveness of how we are organized (structure, meetings, planning, communication, etc.)? (This is also called a process evaluation plan). Yes/No
9. Do we provide learning opportunities for network members? Yes/No
10. Are we actively searching for additional funding and resources? Yes/No
11. Is our network contributing to the ongoing development of our knowledge base? Yes/No
12. Are roles and responsibilities for each member defined? Yes/No

Description of actions to be taken: \_\_\_\_\_  
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