



During the last decade the partnership model has really advanced and become central to activities in all sorts of fields. The interagency and public-private nature of broad partnerships naturally provides benefits for implementation of anything from health initiatives to local and regional growth initiatives.

For many years we have been coaching partnerships dealing with rural development and we believe the partnership model will spread even more in existing and into new fields. Successful partnerships obviously open up opportunities that no single actor can accomplish. Below, we mention a couple of the key factors for success.

When reading these tips we would like you to bear in mind one risk with broad partnerships that rarely is acknowledged; while a partnership gets strong through a broad base of key stakeholders the output from the partnership work may turn out to be the “least common denominator”. In critical situations or situations that require very forward-looking, innovative and/or unconventional solutions, a least common denominator might not be enough. In those cases strategic and dedicated interventions may be needed to advance the cause. But more on that in a later post.

The following tips are general for most kind of partnerships and are based on our coaching and evaluation of partnerships.

1. Pinpoint and make explicit the real needs the partnership potentially could address and harmonize every stakeholder's expectations against those. A shared perspective on the underlying rationales for potential collaboration items is fundamental for a successful partnership.
2. Make sure to implement a process that makes everyone's voice heard on equal terms. Very often an informal power structure creates an imbalance already from start in a partnership. The first measure for success is to establish a neutral forum.
3. Pinpoint and aim for outcomes that lie close and are concrete. Unite your efforts first around achievable short term outcomes that help the learning and partnership to grow before aiming at long term outcomes or visions. Aiming for concrete short term results is a good way to get the dogs to learn how to pull the sled in the same direction.
4. Make explicit how every stakeholders' unique strengths contribute to the achievement of the outcomes agreed upon. Being explicit about the assumption on how a program expects to work increases the chance for success.
5. Involve the partnership immediately in evaluation planning and engage stakeholders continuously in the learning process as well as data collection if possible. Reflect collectively on outcomes relative expectations and aims. The shared learning is the biggest boost for enhanced success.