



Expanding Opportunities Worldwide

# Private Sector Engagement Toolkit

**Partnership  
Health  
Assessment  
Tool:  
COMPANION  
GUIDE**

May 2021

## About this Series

The Private Sector Engagement (PSE) Toolkits draw upon insights from USAID guides, ACDI/VOCA staff experiences, and other PSE resources.

The toolkits are intended to be living documents and will periodically be updated.

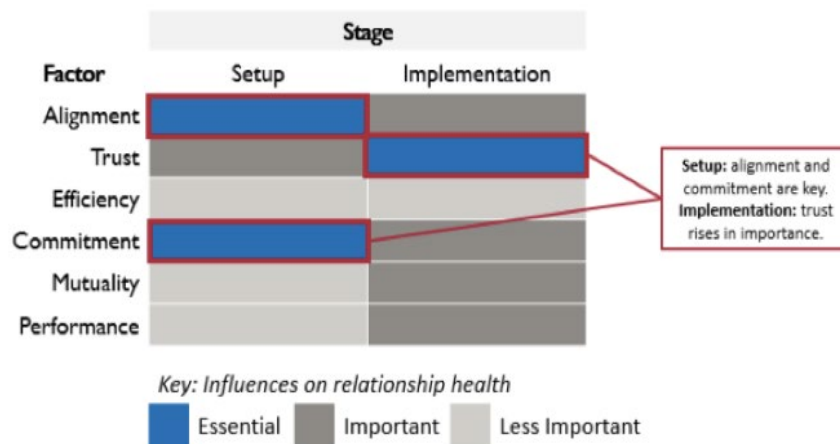
## Introduction to Partnership Health

Healthy relationships are essential for **effective collaborations with the private sector**. Investing in the health of a partnership is valuable, but it is not often prioritized. ACDI/VOCA encourages its teams collaborating with the private sector to invest time and energy in the relationship health of its partnerships by supporting partnership relationship managers and prioritizing the “felt experience” of its partners. By better understanding the importance of the experience of our private sector partners — and identifying the actions that create thoughtful, trusting engagements — we believe we can harness the critical and unique capabilities of these partners to address pressing challenges and achieve critical development impact.

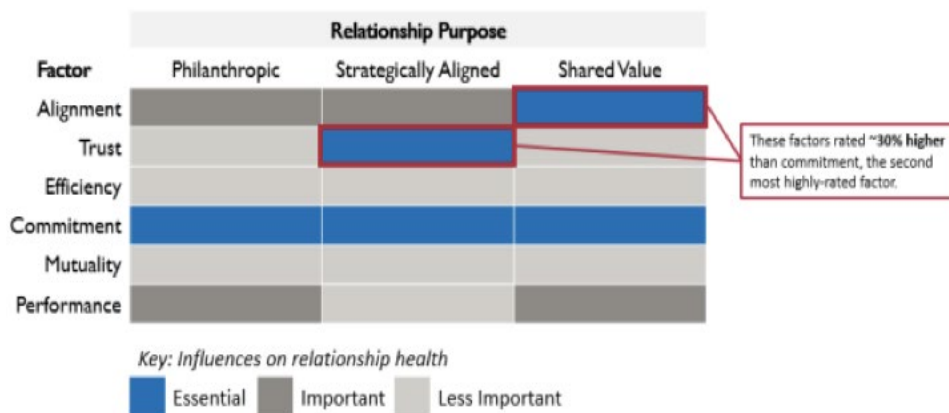
Strong relationship health leads to collaborations that are more likely to **exceed expectations in their progression toward agreed-upon outcomes**, and that can **better navigate the inevitable challenges** that arise in these types of collaborations. Healthy relationships tend to have fewer challenges, more time to focus on results, and strong performance.

In a **partnership health study** carried out by USAID with Dalberg Global Development Advisors, they identified [five key findings](#) of why relationship health is important to the success of partnerships with the private sector, what factors are most important during different partnership stages, and how these factors influence and support relationship health. These key findings include:

- **Relationship health contributes to partnership performance.** The research found that incremental improvements in relationship health were linked to incremental improvements in the partnership’s performance.
- **Early-stage partnerships need alignment and commitment, while implementation requires trust.** In early-stage partnerships aligning understanding of objectives, clear cultural expectations between partners and a joint commitment to goals are key to beginning a healthy relationship. Additionally, commitment at both the executive and staff levels provides an incentive for all sides to buy into the partnership and champion its success. This focus on alignment and commitment in the early stages helps partners overcome obstacles that may derail new relationships. Once a partnership is off the ground, trust is essential to relationship health, becoming increasingly crucial during the implementation of a partnership. A trusting day-to-day relationship ensures those engaged in the work can address challenges and obstacles to sustain progress.



- Strategic partnerships rely on trust, while shared value partnerships need alignment.** Strategically aligned partnerships — alliances focused on improving societal or environmental conditions in which business and development organizations operate — require strong trust between partners. On the other hand, the health of shared value partnerships — intentional investments into societal issues that strengthen a company’s competitive advantage and potential for profit — relies more heavily on the alignment of interests, goals, and objectives. These partnerships often require shared decision-making and close coordination in the development of project scope, inputs, outputs, and outcomes of project activities.



- Established norms and proactive communication support relationship health.** The establishment of agreed-upon operating norms — for example, how decisions are made and what milestones will be measured — are important actions in supporting relationship health. Proactive communication also creates a critical foundation of trust. Candid communication is particularly important as it helps to avoid unnecessary work and maintains consistent, high levels of trust between partners.
- Addressing partnership pain points is critical to success.** The research highlighted specific pain points in working relationships: staff transitions, a lack of experience or understanding about how the other sector works, and misaligned expectations. Staff transitions rated as the most

pressing challenge as they can derail partnership progress and hinder relationship health. Creating “point of contact” teams, as opposed to relying on one individual, has proven helpful in addressing inevitable staffing transitions during the course of a joint project. Developing written primers on the partner organizations can also help ease personnel transitions. Private sector partners unfamiliar with USAID or the U.S. government found it difficult to jointly develop a venture or get a partnership off the ground. Orientations for new private-sector counterparts may help educate partners about policies, language, and procedures, encouraging mutual understanding from the outset. Finally, partners who feel that they have misaligned expectations — that decisions are not being made fairly or resources are not being invested proportionally — should hold those difficult conversations early in the process and build partnership pathways that outline how collaboration can and should evolve. This establishes trust from the start and sets the tone for the partnership’s success going forward.

### What is a Healthy Relationship?

- **Relationships determine how well activities will happen.** Relationships are related to but distinct from formal agreements, activities, and outcomes underlying a partnership. While formal agreements describe the partnership's focus, relationships help determine how that will happen
- **Partnership management** sets the tone, focus, and overall health of a partnership.
- Healthy relationships lead to collaborations that **exceed expectations AND enhance the ability to adapt and overcome challenges.**

### Three Important Aspects for Healthy Relationships

**Ensuring Health:** Shared understanding of objectives, working culture, and expectations. Achieve alignment by selecting business partners that value using a development activity to accelerate their entry into the base of the pyramid market and identifying clear performance milestones that include both business and development performance targets. Partnership due diligence and negotiation begins the process, and it must be revisited for ongoing partnership management.

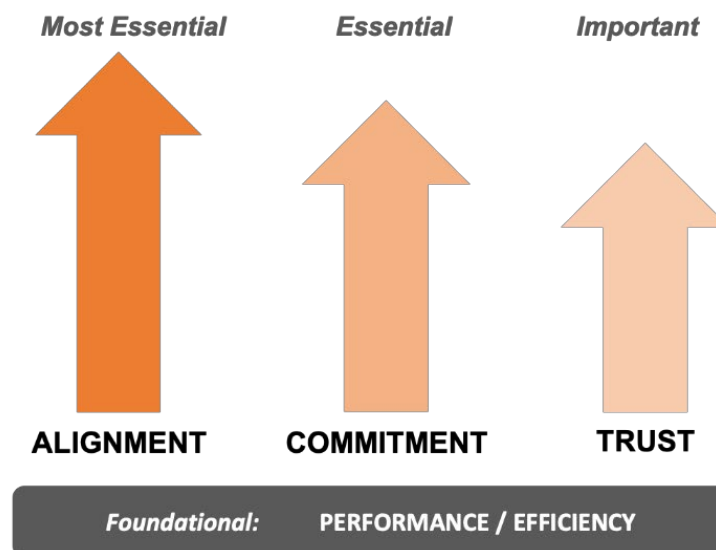
**Unique Value:** Another important aspect of managing partnership health is providing unique value. What know-how and support can be provided to the private sector partner that it could not do as well on its own? What are ways to accelerate their progress towards achieving their business goals? What can the private sector partner do better to achieve development goals? This kind of support can also include identifying opportunities that resonate with a partner’s strategic goals as well as brokering collaborations that help them achieve an objective that they care about but couldn’t achieve on their own. It is important to thoughtfully provide unique value as early as the RFA stage. Doing so helps all potential partners have a quality experience even if they do not end up being negotiated into full subawards.

**Implementation:** A third critical aspect of partnership health is supporting effective implementation. Effective implementation demands that resources and expertise are leveraged to help address unforeseen partnership challenges. Alignment, commitment, and trust are necessary for enabling the troubleshooting of such challenges. If they are not there, then communication will be stifled, and proactive implementation will not be established.

## Areas to Focus on for Developing Healthy Relationships

**Alignment** on inclusion is critical to build meaningful partnerships that advance or transform inclusion issues.

- Achieve **alignment** by selecting partners that value using a development activity to accelerate their sales and identify clear performance milestones.
  - Alignment is the most essential aspect of the partnership management process. Where business interests and development interests do not align, the partnership is not likely to succeed. Alignment also sets the pre-conditions for negotiations and partnership.
  - Include application criteria that show how smallholder farmers integrate into a business model to ensure development outcomes are tied to business outputs. Build alignment at each stage of partnership development and management. Example: Facilitate clear, transparent negotiation processes for developing milestones that support a long-term business strategy.



To build **inclusion commitment**, we don't want to force gender and social inclusion (GSI) activities on a partnership simply because it's part of a project's goals/objectives. We must integrate GSI in a way that fits a partner's business model and frame inclusion in business language to build partner commitment.

- Develop **commitment** by working with the partner to identify and address challenges and making an effort to understand them.
  - Shared satisfaction and dedication to the partnership are critical to the partnership's success.
  - Ensure that company decision-makers are involved in partnerships. Often, company leaders, once champions, remain champions, to do the difficult work of commercializing a product or service in rural markets. They inspire their team members to go the extra

mile. Using regular management calls and acceleration services to troubleshoot for commercial success shows the leaders and their team that the donor funded project is as invested as they are and that an equal partnership mindset is essential to get to commitment.

- Increase **trust** by being responsive and providing honest and transparent feedback.
  - Mutual belief in the truthfulness, competence, and reliability of each partner. Trust is achieved when the partner believes we are responsive; have their best intentions in mind; are open in our communication; candid and honest in our advice; able to assist them with navigating to the right resources and points of contacts; and that we know the company well.
  - Provide the company the space to figure out how best to achieve the agreed-upon milestones while also offering support and guidance to troubleshoot any issues as needed; proactively communicating with the partners and conducting regular check-ins; helping them efficiently navigate through and understand bureaucratic process such as milestone modifications; and being thoughtful about the reporting requirements for the award to minimize asking companies for data and information that isn't also valuable for their efforts.
- Ensure **performance** by having shared perceptions of progress towards outcomes.
  - Shared perceptions of progress toward the partnership's outcome is important. It bolsters trust, commitment, and alignment throughout a partnership timeline.
- Aim for **efficiency** by providing guidance on how the partnership works, developing templates, and creating streamlined communication channels.
  - Mutual ability to accomplish partnership activities with a minimum of unnecessary time, resources, and effort.
  - Provide clear guidance on the award cycle; developing templates for plans and reports required from the partner; fostering efficient lines of communication and processes with USAID; signaling any upcoming changes or shifts; and helping the partners make any necessary modifications to their award in a timely manner. Overall, efficiency relates to the ease of collaborating with one another and creates the foundation for the other partnership factors.

### Ongoing Practices that Support Relationship Health

**#1: Provide **constructive** feedback:** provide feedback on the company's initial application, their commercialization strategy, and throughout the partnership process.

**#2: Proactively address partner **challenges**:** Despite the best efforts of all parties, partners may have difficulty achieving their milestones for a variety of reasons. In some cases, these challenges may be beyond the partner's control, such as extreme weather, government policy, or shipping delays. In these cases, you may consider modifying the partner agreement (see section on modifying agreements). In other cases, the challenges may be an issue of management capacity or technical expertise, and you may want to consider whether internal resources such as staff or consultant-provided technical assistance could affect the partner's ability to achieve milestones. In addition, consider if there are other local partners, distributors, financiers, or donor-funded programs that could contribute to the success of the partner's activities.

**#3: Communicate clearly and often:** Kick-off and monthly calls. You should coordinate a regular monthly phone call with the partner's technical lead or project manager to ensure that you both get in the habit of regular communication. On the monthly calls, check-in with partners on any upcoming milestones, current activities, future activities, donor coordination, or any pending action items. If project implementation is not going according to plan, the monthly check-in call is also a good time to discuss this issue with the partner to troubleshoot challenges they may be facing and to ensure that milestones and funding goals are still achievable. You should take meeting notes for every monthly call and save them in the partner's file, as well as track the level of partner engagement during your monthly check-ins by filling out a partnership health assessment every quarter. Finally, you should also share any updates on milestone progress, potential activity delays, and any other partnership management issues with the other members of your team to help coordinate activities across the program

**#4: Provide capacity building services:** In addition to providing partners with technical assistance to address specific problems, you may also recommend that partners receive targeted, customized expertise from local consultants, technical experts, and business mentors to assist with scaling up their businesses. This support is often coordinated through annual partner site visits where you have the opportunity to work with the partner in person to develop a technical scope of work (SOW) and a list of qualifications for the proposed consultant. Partners interested in these acceleration services are prioritized according to the potential impact of the provided services, their subaward end date (partnerships that are coming to an end are given higher priority), and the internal resources available. **One area of capacity building for private sector companies could be around Gender and Social Inclusion, as it's not likely companies have integrated women and youth into their business models.**

**#5: Support M&E processes:** To ensure that the data partners submit is of the highest possible quality, perform milestone verification surveys for the final cumulative sales milestone or any sales milestone with a corresponding payment of more than \$100,000. This is an opportunity to further establish a relationship with the partner and demonstrate how this information will support their business decision-making. **Where required, it's important to establish why sex-disaggregated is needed and provide support if needed so that they are able to do so, especially if it's something more complex like sales disaggregated by sex.**

**#6: Ensure you have relationships with the right contacts, multiple points of contact at the company, and that someone else can easily step into your partner management role:** Transitions of key points of contact on a private sector partner's team can be challenging, particularly because they are generally not discussed until after the changes are made. Therefore, during initial negotiations, the donor funded project should require a meeting with top business leaders to review the draft and final scopes of work. Additionally, always requests that the private sector partner also includes two points of contact present for check-in meetings and site visits.

### Critical Skills for Fostering Relationship Health

- Good **facilitation** is key to effective partnerships. It ensures collaboration in making decisions, addressing problems, or planning ahead.
  - Some concrete tips for this approach are to always start with the simplest questions before building up to more complex ones. Avoid yes or no questions that allow partners to give an easy answer without scratching under the surface of their ideas. Instead, ask how or what questions to facilitate a more productive conversation. At the same time, avoid asking why questions, which might cause participants to get bogged down in too

many details that don't contribute to decision-making. Finally, try to avoid summarizing participants' responses, which can put your words in someone else's mouth; instead, ask them clarifying questions to help develop their ideas.

- You will have to **negotiate** to maximize outcomes and improve the possibilities of success.
  - Partnership activities proposed by partners should not be simply accepted at face value. You have valuable knowledge of the business landscape, smallholder market, and active development portfolio in the countries in which you work, and this information should be used during negotiation to streamline and improve a partner's proposed activities. In addition, partners will naturally be conservative in their estimates for potential impact, so you should push them to build their capacity to achieve the highest possible targets. Remember that a partnership is a collaboration between two equal partners, so if you simply accept a proposal from a partner, then not only did you fail to support them in designing the strongest possible activity; you also failed to ensure that the proposed activity achieves your development goals for the best possible value. In addition, tough negotiations upfront can help streamline your management requirements and reduce potential problems later on by ensuring that expectations for the partnership are clear to both you and the partner before both parties move forward with the agreement. Finally, negotiation is an inherently transparent process that allows both parties to determine performance, funding, and reporting goals collaboratively.

When establishing GSI objectives/targets for a relationship, it's important to understand how the partner arrived at that proposal - is it based on GSI market information or more on a firm's intuition? Based on the project's knowledge and understanding of gender norms and the social context, is the target realistic? We want to push partners in their targets but also recognize if this is a GSI pilot that for example is moving women into a new role that they've never had before, it's ok to set lower targets with the caveat that it would be expanded if the pilot proves successful.

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- Spend time investing in **relationship building** to build trust, facilitate open dialogue, and foster collaboration.
  - As the investor, you hold more power in the partnership relationship, so it is your responsibility to take a proactive approach to partnership management that builds trust, facilitates open dialogue, and fosters collaboration. To achieve this kind of relationship, it is crucial that you go beyond simply ensuring compliance with a subaward agreement, and that you also work constructively with partners to maximize outcomes, address challenges, and ensure partner sustainability. This approach also requires you to view partners as equal parties working toward common development goals rather than as contractors being paid for services rendered.
- Be **adaptable** to working with businesses. Businesses are constantly dealing with changes to their operating environment. How can the activity be adaptable to those changing circumstances?

### Common Issues

- **Managing partners' expectations:** partners require support for standards and certification, sometimes they request support beyond MOU.



- *Examples of support include: providing short-term technical assistance to selected partners or seeking organizations who can provide commercial (fee-based) business development services to the companies*
- Ways to address: communicate clearly and often; proactively address partner challenges
- Primary skills: facilitation, adaptation, relationship building
- **Aligning timelines:** timeline alignment can be a challenge
  - *Examples include: procurement of equipment has been slow because of challenges with finding the right vendor as per USAID regulations. Partnership managers with the support from grants are putting all their effort to facilitate the process and negotiate with partners to come to a consensus.*
  - Ways to address: communicate clearly and often
  - Primary skills: facilitation, negotiation
- **Partners' level of understanding of the activity's documentation and other policies:** partners' understanding of activity documentation requirements and policies is inadequate.
  - *Example: understanding an activity's procurement process*
  - Ways to address: orienting the partners on all documentation requirements and different policies; providing capacity development support to partners; share all forms with the partners during co-creation; ensure written consent is taken from the partners for all sorts of commitments.
  - Primary Skills: adaptation, relationship building
- **Internal coordination & communication:** coordinating internally, especially with the GSI advisor, before communicating and committing any support to the market actors.
  - Ways to address: strengthen internal coordination before committing any additional support to partners; communicate the activity's requirements to partners clearly.
  - Primary skills: facilitation, relationship building
- **Adjustments to partnership targets; alternative strategies**
  - *Examples: adjustment of MEL targets; change in plans for market actor*
  - Ways to address: for every issue or challenge that arises with implementation, the partnership managers and teams must discuss in detail both internally and with partners and try to find alternative strategies, adapt plans as necessary, and exercise adaptive management.
  - Primary skills: negotiation, adaptation, relationship building

## Pivot Strategies

Managing private sector partnerships is tricky. Sometimes we have shared goals (alignment), but we come at shared goals from different approaches, incentives, and perspectives. Other times we get into partnership implementation and realize that there was never alignment (or additionality) to begin with! Keep these tools and tactics in mind when a partnership is not meeting its intended objectives or outcomes.

- Identify the source of the problem

- Listen to the partner
- With project support, can the partner address the challenge?
- Is the partner still committed to the goals of the partnership?
- Tools/Tactics
- Document partnership negotiations/conversations
- Review the partnership agreement
- Identify the range of stakeholders who will be affected by the end of a partnership
- Modify the agreement
- Terminate the agreement (or don't renew)

### Considerations for Ending a Partnership

At their core, strategic alliances are mutually beneficial relationships. Alliances are therefore terminated when the effort and resources required to continue such relationships are not producing the expected benefits. Sometimes partnerships don't work for a variety of different reasons.

- The inability of a partner to manage their "end of the bargain"
- A corporate or strategic shift from the company that makes the partnership no longer viable
- External circumstances change the development/donor focus or significantly impact a business in such a way that they can't possibly meet outcomes
- Lack of buy-in from top-level management
- Non-responsiveness

#### Steps in the process:

**Resolution:** Your first step in ending an unsuccessful partnership in most cases is asking yourself if you did everything possible to try to remedy the underlying issue. Note that some partnerships should not be saved, and in this case, termination is your best action.

**Review agreement:** What "escape" clauses exist between the parties? What processes do you need to follow to make sure the partnership has officially ended? Make sure the partner also understands anything they need to do on their end.

**Identify a range of stakeholders:** Notify USAID and provide some context on why the partnership ended. If there were any direct links with beneficiaries, government officials, or other stakeholders you may want to notify them as well. Make sure any partner action post the partnership does not reflect negatively on you.

**Terminate the agreement/don't renew:** If a partnership is not worth keeping alive, then terminate. Your agreement mechanism should have guidance. In the case of MoU's or more flexible mechanisms, there may more flexibility in ending a partnership based on joint consent.

**Keep communication and relationships open:** Try to end things on a positive note and keep communication open.

Learn from failed partnerships: It's critical to understand **why** a partnership did not work. This is a frequently overlooked but critical aspect of adaptive management and ensuring future healthy partnerships. It's so important, it has created a buzzword, "fail forward."

## Tools and Tactics for Partnership Management

In an ideal scenario, this is how we would be able to manage private-sector partnerships. Note that some are time-sensitive (ie. quarterly or six-month surveys), and others happen across the life of an activity (milestone reviews and approvals). Others, such as Pause and Reflect sessions can happen at a frequency that makes sense.

Start-up	Implementation	Closeout
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Host kick-off meeting/call</li> <li>• Initial monitoring visit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct periodic monitoring visits</li> <li>• Milestone reviews &amp; Approvals</li> <li>• Partnership Health Assessment Tool:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Quarterly survey</li> <li>○ Six-month survey</li> <li>○ Annual pause &amp; reflect</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exit Interview</li> </ul>

### Kick-Off Call

Launch a new partnership by discussing the goals, roles, and timelines

- Strengthens alignment between the company and the ACDI/VOCA activity
- Ensures partners are oriented on monitoring, evaluation, and learning forms, grants requirement, communication channels, gender, and social inclusion objectives, etc.
- Ensures buy-in from senior leadership
- Provides a foundation for future engagement
- Sets expectations in terms of what the partner needs to submit, roles and responsibilities

The kick-off call is an opportunity for partnership managers to walk new partners through the goal's phases, roles, and timelines of your partnership. Before the kick-off call, considering sending the partner an agenda, covering topics such as roles and responsibilities, partner expectations, partnership mechanics, required reporting, and communications protocols. By the end of the call, the partner should understand how their agreement works, how to submit milestones, when to contact the partnership management team, and what to do if they might not achieve a milestone by the deadline. You should take notes during the call, share them with the partner, and file them in the partner's ongoing file.

### Monitoring Visits

Visit the partners operations (in-person or virtual), meet with impacted stakeholders, and help the partner troubleshoot.

- Get the partner (and donor) excited about the activities
- Ensures the activities are reaching the intended stakeholders
- Identify new/additional partners
- Help troubleshoot with the partner if things are not going as planned

The focus here is not to catch them off guard or call them out. The purpose is to ensure see the product/service in action. The timing and agenda for these visits will depend on partner availability,

product seasonality, and coordination with other partner site visits, conferences, or local events. Once you're in the field, plan to meet with partner contacts, senior management, sub partners, retailers of partner products or services, and farmers (male and female) that the partner activity affects. In addition, meet with other local development practitioners or other key actors in the field to identify potential market outlets for the funded products, or other potential alliances. Finally, you may also want to coordinate with your donor to organize local partnership meetings, where partners have the opportunity to meet with local donor staff, develop business relationships with other partners, share best business practices, and improve their management systems.

## Partnership Health Assessment Tool

Given that many benefits of partnership work derive from the relationship itself, there is benefit in providing guidance on how to support and monitor good relationships. Based on research and rigorous studies described in the previous section, this tool prioritizes two key questions:

1. If staff members have a couple of hours a week to invest in partnership health, what behaviors and practices most contribute to partnership health? (It can serve as a job aid for partnership managers, and to help guide their performance)
2. How can we proactively monitor the strength of the relationship, and course correct as needed? (Noting that when partnership health improves, development results improve. So taking time to pay attention to and invest in partnership health leads to a valuable return on investment on the development results side.)

Through using this tool, the goals are to:

- Encourage regular reflection and adaptation to improve the health of the partnerships, thus leading to improved results
- Provide an early indication of the partnership's ability to achieve desired outcomes

Teams are encouraged to look through the indicators and refine any of the concepts based on the local context. Annex A provides more information about the content of the tool.

## Quarterly Survey

For the ACDI/VOCA activity staff that are assigned the role of partnership manager, every quarter they should take 15-20 minutes to answer a series of questions to assess the health of the relationship for his/her assigned partners. This survey is meant to focus on the **resources** (*time, money, effort*) invested into the partnership that contribute to relationship health. These aspects include:

- **Responsiveness:** Over the past three months, when you reached out to your main POC, what was the typical response?
- **Informal Engagement:** Over the past three months, how often did you communicate with this partner (aside from formally scheduled meetings and events like the monthly check-in call)?
- **Senior Leadership Engagement:** Over the past months, how would you best describe the level of engagement demonstrated by the partner's senior leadership?
- **Leverage:** Over the past three months, to what degree did the partner leverage its own resources (staff, in-kind, etc.) to contribute to partnership activities?
- **Milestone progression:** Over the past three months, how well did the partner progress in meeting/working towards milestones?

- **Connections:** Introductions/connections the team facilitates for the partner. Connections are a valuable but frequently overlooked aspect of partnership health. As partnership managers, we are both investors and facilitators, identifying connections and opportunities for our partners that may strengthen their operations.
- **Acceleration Services:** Degree of acceleration (and/or technical assistance) services provided to the partner.

### Gender, Youth, and Social Inclusion (GYSI) Considerations

- Use the gender activity tracker to monitor progress and capture lessons learned.

### Six-Month Survey

The six-month survey allows for both companies and the partnership managers to provide insights on additional aspects of the overall relationship health of a partnership. The survey looks at the **behaviors** that contribute to relationship health and the **factors** that denote the strength of that relationship. Often, someone from the MEL team sends out these surveys and aggregates the results in case there might be more sensitive responses that the partner wants to share. The survey focuses on the following factors.

- **Openness:** Over the past six months, how often would you describe the degree of openness you experienced with your assigned partnership manager/partner? (Degree to which your organization feels like it is informed on the status of issues, and understands any potential challenges; partnership manager is willing to offer candid insights, and share relevant information)
- **Staff transition readiness:** (critical factor) If your current POC left the organization, what is the likelihood that the partner organization would be able to maintain its momentum on its partnership activities?
- **Competence:** Over the past six months, to what degree did your partnership manager help you organize effectively navigate the conditions of the award, and/or point you to helpful resources?
- **Integration: contacts:** Over the past six months, to what degree did this partner follow-up with introductions to other organizations/ individuals made by members of the ACDI/VOCA team?
- **Integration: recommendations:** Over the past six months, to what degree did your organization integrate the recommendations and advice offered by the project?
- **Alignment:** Do you feel that your organization and your partnership manager shared an understanding of the objectives of the partnership, each other's working culture, and established mutually beneficial expectations?
- **Commitment:** Do you feel that your organization and your partnership manager shared satisfaction with each partner's engagement level, dedication to the relationship, and dedication to the goals of the partnership?
- **Trust:** How would you best describe your current relationship with your partner/partnership manager?

- **Unique Value:** To what degree did your partnership manager provide support beyond financial resources that your organization could not do as well on its own and/or that helps to accelerate your progress towards achieving the business and development goals for the partnership?

### Annual Pause and Reflect

Pause and reflect sessions are meant to provide an opportunity for partnership managers and private sector partners to think about how well the partnership is going, and any desired changes. The ACIDI/VOCA activity team can hold an internal pause and reflect session based on the aggregate results of the most recent six-month survey. Be sure GSI topics are woven into the pause and reflect sessions, including facts/challenges and interpretations. Areas of reflection include:

- **Facts/Challenges:** Areas of strong relationship health, areas to be improved, and alignment (or misalignment) between donor and partner's perception of the strength of a relationship.
- **Interpretations:** What does the data suggest about what we are doing well, what we could do better, and what else we would like to know?
- **Implications:** What do our reflections mean in terms of changes to the way we contribute to partnership health, types of interactions we want to prioritize with our partner, and potential adjustments needed to a partnership agreement.
- **Next steps:** Based on the implications, what are the high-level next steps to improve the partnership (no more than three- identify timeline and people responsible)?

Partnership managers can also host individual sessions with their assigned private sector partner to discuss how well the partnership is going.

### Additional Considerations When Using the Tool:

- Have someone other than individual partnership managers oversee this entire tool. This will reduce biases, allow for an independent review across the portfolio for common trends, and also allow for easier decision making in the event partners are not performing.
- Keep surveys for partners and internal staff “lean”: Focus on acting as a catalyst rather than a hindrance for partnership managers. Seek to identify why certain things might be happening.
- Focus on resources, behaviors, and relationship factors, but realize that there are other aspects of partnership health that may be important for the project. Focus on what’s most important. For example, acceleration services may not be of interest to a particular partner.
- Partnership health leads to systemic change. Keep your eyes peeled for indicators of larger system change indicators, including but not limited to accelerated progress, the extent to which collaboration/competition is happening.
- Have those tough conversations: There will be times when a partner may not be performing the way you had thought. It’s worth investigating why and course-correcting to ensure shared value and alignment throughout the partnership process.
- Pause and Reflect: Make sure that you take the time to assess how the partnership is going both internally within your project team as well as with the company.

## Closing Out Partnerships

An **exit interview** with a partner is a great opportunity to assess the impact of the partnership on their business. The exit interview results should be shared with the team for lessons learned and to identify any trends or common issues that could inform the activity's future implementation.

- Understand a partner's experience
- Understand partners behavior change
- How the activity's funding led to the achievement of business and development outcomes
- What aspects of the partnership the business will continue to invest in.

Closing out partnerships is an opportunity to improve processes, reinforce learning, and improve future partnerships. A formal exit interview allows us to go deeper than just progress towards metrics, but also look at some of the other relationship health factors of a partnership and glean valuable insights.

An exit interview with a partner is a great opportunity to a) understand a partner's experience engaging with an activity; b) understand how our interventions have changed a partner's behavior; c) understand how the activity's funding led to the achievement of business and development outcomes, and d) understand what aspects of the partnership the business will continue to invest in.

An exit interview can include:

- Overall experiences
- Gender and social inclusion
- Business and market impact
- Other organizations partnering with

## Additional Resources

- [USAID's PSE Website](#)
- [Partnering for Innovation's Practitioners Guide](#)
- [USAID's Partnership Health: 5 Lessons](#)

## Annex A: Partnership Health Assessment Tool

OVERVIEW OF TOOL			
INDICATOR CATEGORIES	RESOURCES	BEHAVIORS	RELATIONSHIP FACTORS
	Time, money, effort invested in partnership	that contribute to relationship health	that determine the strength of relationships
INDICATORS	<b>Responsiveness</b> Informal Engagement Formal Engagement Senior Leader Engagement Connections Acceleration Services Leverage	<b>Milestones Progression</b> Openness <b>Staff Transition Readiness</b> Competence Integration: Connections Integration: Acceleration Services	Alignment <b>Commitment</b> <b>Trust</b> Unique Value
DATA TRACKERS	Quarterly Partnership Manager (PMs) Survey  Engagement Tracker  Connections Tracker  Acceleration Tracker	Quarterly Partnership Manager (PMs) Survey  6 Month Survey for PMs and Partners	6 Month Survey for PMs and Partners
ANALYSIS	Aggregate Results Worksheet	Results Reflection Guide + Action Plan	
ROLES	<b>Partnership Managers:</b> Regularly enters relevant Connections, Engagements, and Acceleration Services into the tracker; completes Quarterly and 6 Month surveys; participates in reflection sessions & develops action plan  <b>Partners:</b> Complete 6 Month Survey  <b>MEL Specialist:</b> Sends out surveys; enters results into Aggregate Information Table and develops findings report; facilitates 6 month pause & reflection sessions  <b>Chief of Party:</b> Participates in 6 month pause & reflect sessions; leads organizational efforts related to relationship health		

CONTENT OF WORKBOOK	
Indicators Table	List of all indicators along with definitions, suggested ways to rate them, measurement tool, and notes
Aggregate Information	Within one worksheet, shows ratings for all the partners over multiple time periods
Quarterly PM Survey	5 question multiple choice survey to send to each quarter to the partnership managers



CONTENT OF WORKBOOK	
6 Month Survey	10 question multiple choice survey to send to partners and partnership managers every 6 months
Connections Tracker	Tool to log/track every connection that a PM makes for the partner
Engagement Tracker	Tool to log/track partners involvement in various events and engagements
Acceleration Tracker	Tool to log/track additional support provided by the project to the partner
Pause and Reflect Guide	Discussion guide for PMs and other staff to use when analyzing quarterly partnership health data, and how to act upon it

### Partnership Monitoring Tool: Relationship Health Indicators

Indicators with a \* denote ones that are particularly important to pay attention to as signals for the health of the relationship

INDICATOR	DESCRIPTION	RATING	DEFINITIONS	SOURCE/ TOOL	NOTES
<b>Resources (time, money, effort) invested into the partnership that contribute to relationship health</b>					
<b>Responsiveness*</b>	Level of responsiveness based on amount of time it typically takes the partner to respond to requests/inquiries	High / Medium / Low / None	<b>High</b> - Usually within 24 hours <b>Medium</b> - Usually within 2 days <b>Low</b> - Usually requires a nudge before the partner responds	Quarterly PM Survey	KM will translate responses provided by the PMs into High/ Medium/ Low and enter those ratings into the Aggregate Information sheet
<b>Informal Engagement</b>	Level of interaction with the partner outside of formally scheduled meetings and events	High / Medium / Low / None	<b>High</b> - Almost daily <b>Medium</b> - Almost weekly <b>Low</b> - A couple of times	Quarterly PM Survey	KM will translate responses provided by the PMs into High/ Medium/ Low and enter those ratings into the Aggregate Information sheet
<b>Formal Engagement</b>	Degree and type of partner's participation in formally scheduled meetings and events	High / Medium / Low / None	Determined based on optimal score (# of opportunities [per portfolio] provided within a certain time frame) and % of those opportunities the partner participated in and how.	Engagement Tracker	Rating determined by KM specialist using information provided in the tracker

INDICATOR	DESCRIPTION	RATING	DEFINITIONS	SOURCE/ TOOL	NOTES
<b>Senior leader engagement</b>	Degree to which senior leaders from each organization are aware of the partnership's activities, provide positive recognition of the partnership, and interact with senior leaders from the other organization	<i>High / Medium / Low / None</i>	<b>High</b> - Senior leader(s) knowledgeable about the partnership's activities, and proactively discusses it in public meetings/forum; dedicates time and energy to ensuring the success of the partnership's activities <b>Medium</b> - Senior leader(s) aware of the partnership's activities, and may attend meetings/events related to the partnership <b>Low</b> - Senior leader(s) has some awareness of the partnership but not as familiar with the specific activities; not very engaged in meetings / public events related to the partnership	Quarterly PM Survey	KM will translate responses provided by the PMs into High/Medium/Low and enter those ratings into the Aggregate Information sheet
<b>Connections</b>	Introductions/connection s the team facilitates for the partner	<i>High / Medium / Low / None</i>	For a set period of time (such as the last 3 months), determine the average number of connections facilitated among all partners [within a portfolio]. <b>High</b> - number of connections for a partner is higher than that number <b>Medium</b> - number of connections is similar <b>Low</b> - number of connections is lower	Connections Tracker	Rating determined by KM specialist using information provided in the tracker
<b>Acceleration Services</b>	Degree of acceleration services provided to the partner	<i>High / Medium / Low / None</i>	Thresholds for each level determined by the team. Could be determined based on a "dosage" level. How many hours of acceleration services provided and type of service provided. Calculate every 3 months based on services provided during that time period	Acceleration Tracker	Rating determined by KM specialist using information provided in the tracker
<b>Leverage</b>	Resources provided by the partner alongside grant funding. Typically in-kind, such as staff time.	<i>Exceeding / Meeting / Below expectations</i>	Thresholds for each level determined by PMs. Could be related to number of managers working on partnership activities as well as their level of effort.	Quarterly PM Survey	KM will translate responses provided by the PMs into High/ Medium/ Low and enter those ratings into the Aggregate Information sheet; Complement with Leverage Reports provided every 6 months by the partner
<b>Behaviors that contribute to relationship health</b>					
<b>Milestones Progression*</b>	Degree to which partner is on track for meeting agreed upon milestones	<i>Exceeding / Meeting / Below expectations</i>	Thresholds for each level determined by milestone agreement negotiated with the partner	Quarterly PM Survey	KM will translate responses provided by the PMs into High/Medium/Low and enter those ratings into the Aggregate Information sheet

INDICATOR	DESCRIPTION	RATING	DEFINITIONS	SOURCE/ TOOL	NOTES
<b>Openness</b>	Degree to which each organization feels like it is informed on the status of issues, and understands any potential challenges; willingness to offer candid insights, and share relevant information	<i>High / Medium / Low</i>	<b>High-</b> Partner/PM often / always demonstrates openness <b>Medium</b> - Partner/PM sometimes demonstrates openness <b>Low</b> - Partner/PM rarely demonstrates openness	6-month survey	Compare partner and PM responses
<b>Staff Transition Readiness*</b>	Likelihood that partnership activities will maintain their momentum after a primary staff person / point of contact leaves the organization	<i>High / Medium / Low</i>	<b>High</b> - 2 or more staff deeply knowledgeable about the activities, relationships, and procedures related to the partnership activities; would take about one day to share information/records about the partnership's activities to date to bring new POC up-to-speed. Likelihood that partnership would continue its momentum after key staff person leaves is high. <b>Medium</b> - 1 staff person deeply knowledgeable about the partnership plus 1 or more staff with some familiarity; would take about 1 week to organize materials for the hand-off to the new POC. Likelihood that partnership would continue its momentum after key staff person leaves is medium. <b>Low</b> - Only 1 staff person knowledgeable about the partnership; very little records about the relationship and partnership activities; likelihood that partnership would continue its momentum after staff person leaves is low.	6-month survey	Compare partner and PM responses; For PM readiness, KM will determine that rating based on level of information available in shared platforms and if more than one person on the PM team is knowledgeable about that partnership
<b>Competence</b>	Degree to which the PM and partner POCs can navigate to the right resources within their organization to benefit the partnership activities, and ability to understand each other's organizations well	<i>High / Medium / Low</i>	<b>High-</b> Partner/PM often / always demonstrates competence <b>Medium</b> - Partner/PM sometimes demonstrates competence <b>Low</b> - Partner/PM rarely demonstrates competence	6-month survey	Compare partner and PM responses
<b>Integration: Connections</b>	Degree to which the partner organization follows-up on connections made	<i>High / Medium / Low</i>	<b>High-</b> Often / always followed-up on connections made <b>Medium</b> - Sometimes followed-up on connections made <b>Low</b> - Rarely followed-up on connections made	6-month survey	Compare partner and PM responses

INDICATOR	DESCRIPTION	RATING	DEFINITIONS	SOURCE/ TOOL	NOTES
<b>Integration: Acceleration Services</b>	Degree to which the partner organization incorporates recommendations from acceleration services	<i>High / Medium / Low</i>	<b>High</b> - Often / always integrated recommendations from acceleration services <b>Medium</b> - Sometimes integrated recommendations from acceleration services <b>Low</b> - Rarely integrated recommendations from acceleration services	6-month survey	Compare partner and PM responses
<b>Key relationship health factors that determine strength of relationship</b>					
<b>Alignment</b>	Degree to which there is a shared understanding of objectives, working culture, and expectations	<i>High / Medium / Low</i>	Thresholds for each level to be discussed among the PMs to ensure consistent application of the ratings across all the partners	6-month survey	Compare partner and PM responses
<b>Commitment*</b>	Degree to which there is a shared satisfaction with each partner's engagement level, dedication to the relationship, and dedication to the goals of the partnership.	<i>High / Medium / Low</i>	Thresholds for each level to be discussed among the PMs to ensure consistent application of the ratings across all the partners	6-month survey	Compare partner and PM responses
<b>Trust*</b>	Degree to which there is a mutual belief in the truthfulness, competence, and reliability of each partner.	<i>High / Medium / Low</i>	<b>High</b> - each partner considers the other a trusted advisor, and frequent consult one other on issues related to strategic planning and/or how best to achieve desired goals <b>Medium</b> - each partner considers the other a useful point of contact but would not necessarily engage them in conversations around sensitive information <b>Low</b> - each partner consider the other a point of contact; interactions feel more transactional and limited to the mechanics of the award	6-month survey	Compare partner and PM responses
<b>Unique Value</b>	Degree to which the team provides support to the partner that it could not do as well on its own and that can accelerate its progress towards achieving the business and development goals for the partnership	<i>High / Medium / Low</i>	<b>High</b> - The partner organization would struggle to achieve the development / business goals on its own (or within the same amount time) without the support provided through the partnership <b>Medium</b> - The partner organization would be able to achieve most of the goals on its own, but support helps to accelerate achievement of those goals <b>Low</b> - The partner organization could likely achieve the desired goals on its own, and/or prefers not to take advantage of the support provided through the partnership	6-month survey	Compare partner and PM responses