

A guide to Strategic Partnerships

**Structured collaboration
between academia and
wider society**





Contents

Foreword.....	5
1. Introduction	7
2. About strategic partnerships	9
Background and definition of a strategic partnership	10
Strategic partnerships in Sweden	10
Added value of strategic partnerships.....	12
Structure for collaboration within a strategic partnership	13
Summary: About strategic partnerships	13
3. The phases in a strategic partnership.....	15
Starting up a new partnership.....	16
Running the administration and activities of the partnership.....	20
Evaluating an established partnership.....	26
New start – when a partnership needs a change.....	28
Phasing out a strategic partnership.....	30
Summary: The phases in a strategic partnership.....	31
4. Toolbox.....	33
Strategic Partnership Canvas	34
Risk and suitability assessment.....	38
Round table discussions.....	40
Self-evaluation interviews.....	42
Summary: Toolbox.....	43
Postscript.....	44

A guide to Strategic Partnerships
© Linnaeus University, 2020

Issued by

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Graphic design and production

Länge Leve kommunikation AB

ISBN 978-91-89283-42-8

With funding from:



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Foreword

"Collaboration is all about three words: communication, communication, communication." So said one of the contributors to this publication. There is truth in the belief that communication is a must, both within a higher education institution and within a partnership. At the same time, collaboration within strategic partnerships is more than just communication. It is also structure, strategy and problem-solving.

Those of us who work with strategic partnerships need to be good communicators, but also coordinators, conflict resolution specialists, therapists, educators, fire-fighters, intermediaries and even visionaries. The more we have met, discussed and mulled over collaboration in all its many aspects and dimensions, the clearer it has become that this is a role that requires multiple competences.

The sharing of experience has resulted in recognition and a shared identity. What has emerged is a network of employees with responsibility for strategic partnerships. The greatest values generated by this sharing of experiences and work methods are brought together in this guide.

We in the project management team would like to thank everyone who has been involved. Your openness and generosity with your knowledge and perceptions have been amazing! Without you, we would have had no lessons learned to compile.

We hope that you, the reader, will be able to benefit from this Guide and find inspiration, support, ideas and tools that can help you progress in your professional role.

Good luck! You are an important part of the collaboration between academia and wider society!

*Åsa Rydell Blom, project manager
Hjalmar Eriksson, editor
on behalf of the project management team.*



1.

Introduction

This guide is the result of a collaboration between 16 Swedish higher education institutions¹, and it aims to provide an experience-based foundation for work with strategic partnerships. In this context, the term “strategic partnerships” refers to collaboration between higher education institutions and organisations outside the higher education sector (see definition in Chapter 2 About strategic partnerships). In the text, the higher education sector is referred to as “academia” and other sectors of society as “wider society”.

This guide is aimed at staff working to manage and develop strategic partnerships at a higher education institution. The target groups are coordinators for strategic partnerships, management teams at higher education institutions and academic leaders with ultimate responsibility for strategic partnerships. A coordinator is an employee, usually in operational support, who is responsible for managing a partnership. It is quite a common role.

The higher educational institutions in this collaboration have contributed to the text based on their own practical experience. In many cases, groups of authors have written background information that an editor has processed to create a whole. Shared experiences and references have crystallised out as the work has progressed, in the interplay between the development work of the higher education institutes and the sharing of experiences between them.

The text is interspersed with examples and tips, in specially highlighted text boxes. The examples are actual experiences from the higher education institutions with strategic partnerships and use their own words. The tips are recommendations based on the co-authors’ practical experience of success factors and pitfalls in strategic partnerships.

The guide is divided into chapters. Chapter 2, About strategic partnerships, provides a more detailed introduction. Chapter 3, The phases in the strategic partnership, describes activities and processes in the various phases of a partnership. Chapter 4, Toolbox, presents practical tools for systematic work with strategic partnerships. The guide concludes with a postscript, suggested further reading and annexes.

Summary: Introduction

- This guide has been written based on the perspective of a higher education institution and is aimed at coordinators of strategic partnerships, management teams at higher education institutions and academic leaders.
- The text is based on tried and tested experience and reference material from 16 higher education institutions.

¹) Under the leadership Linnaeus University and with funding from Vinnova, taking part were Blekinge Institute of Technology, Chalmers University of Technology, the University of Gothenburg, Halmstad University, Kristianstad University, Karolinska Institutet, Karlstad University, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Linköping University, Lund University, Malmö University, Sophiahemmet University, Stockholm University, Södertörn University and Umeå University.

2.



About strategic partnerships

A strategic partnership is a wide-ranging, long-term relationship between a higher education institution and an organisation in wider society, a form of collaboration that is becoming increasingly common. This can be viewed as part of a common development in which both academia and actors in wider society try to satisfy internal and external needs for, and expectations of, a systematic approach and structure for collaboration between different sectors in society.

The engagement of higher education institutions in strategic partnerships stems from the mandate of academia, pursuant to Chapter 1, Section 2 of the Swedish Higher Education Act, “to collaborate with wider society and provide information about its activities, and strive to ensure that benefit is derived from research findings”.

Collaboration and the impact on society were further emphasised in the 2016 research bill². The expert group for collaboration at the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions has confirmed that academic freedom, integrity and openness combined with “well-developed relationships between higher education

institutions and other actors in society and business create ... conditions for the long-term skills supply for society”³.

Collaboration can be considered both a way of securing society’s long-term knowledge and skills supply as well as a means of resolving complex social, environmental and economic challenges. Well-developed collaboration spans both sectors of society and subject boundaries, as current social challenges cannot be resolved by means of initiatives in individual research areas or by individual industries or sectors. A distinctive characteristic of challenges in areas such as the environment, energy, migration or democracy is that they can be international in nature and that few organisations, if any, have the capacity to deliver solutions and results through their own efforts.

More and more organisations in wider society are now actively selecting a limited number of higher education institutions as strategic partners. Expected benefits of this are that deep, long-term relationships develop over time that provide the parties with the conditions to further develop collaboration and competitive advantages.

2) “The Government sets out the following interim goals that can be followed up for the ten-year period: [...] There shall be an increase in collaboration and the impact on society.” Prop. 2016/17:50 p. 20. 3) Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions (2019). *Lärosätenas samverkan med det omgivande samhället – utgångspunkter och principer (Collaboration of higher education institutions with wider society – starting positions and principles)*. AMOTryck AB, Solna 2019.

Background and definition of a strategic partnership

Strategic collaboration and partnerships with wider society have been looked at before in Sweden. The DARE project, in cooperation with Luleå University of Technology and Umeå University, dealt with strategic collaboration, in the sense of the collaboration that takes place between both management teams and operational activities. The report produced by the project, “Det samverkande universitetet”⁴ (“The collaborative university”), emphasised the importance of both structure and culture for collaboration, in order that added value can be realised through strategic collaboration.

The KLOSS project, with nine participating higher education institutions, included a sub-project about strategic partnerships⁵, which recounted lessons learned from a handful of examples. The KLOSS project’s definition, however, referred to collaboration with other academic institutions. English-language literature includes the anthology “Strategic Industry-University Partnerships”⁶, about strategic partnerships between higher education institutions and the business sector, this too a collection of examples of partnerships with a summary of associated lessons learned.

This publication takes the issue further in the form of a practical guide to establishing, managing and developing strategic partnerships. The definition has also been developed and delineated, with the contributing

higher education institutions agreeing on the following minimum common denominator for strategic partnerships:

“A strategic partnership is a formalised collaboration across a higher education institution with a partner organisation outside academia. The partnership is characterised by the engagement and participation of management, at both the higher education institution and the partner. The partnership is based on mutual, long-term commitments, common goals and challenges, and encompasses a diversity of forms of collaboration and joint activities. The partnership generates and adds mutual benefit and values that neither party could achieve on its own.”

This definition forms the starting point for this guide.

Strategic partnerships in Sweden

The higher education institutions that have contributed to this guide include not only older, larger universities, but also new universities and colleges, as well as some of Sweden’s biggest specialist universities. All have some form of collaboration that is similar to a strategic partnership. The same is also true of many other higher education institutions in the country. Some higher education institutions have partnerships that might not fulfil all parts of the definition. Others might not use the specific term “strategic partnerships”.

4) Development area research and entrepreneurship, DARE. (2013) Det samverkande universitetet. Fokus strategisk näringslivssamverkan. (*The collaborative university. Focus on strategic business collaboration.*) Project report. 5) Schuber, J., Blaus, J., Dobers, P. och Karlsson, M. (s.a.) Strategiska partnerskap. (*Strategic partnerships.*) Full project report, sub-project 2C within KLOSS. 6) Frølund, L. and Riedel, M. F. (editors) (2018) Strategic University Partnerships. Success-Factors from Innovative Companies. Amsterdam: Elsevier. 7) Brorström, A, Feldmann A, Kaulio, M (2019) Structured relations between higher education institutions and external organisations: opportunity or bureaucratisation? Higher Education 78:575–591.

Strategic collaboration agreements similar to partnerships between academia and wider society in Sweden have also been observed in research⁷ and have been characterised as follows, perfectly in line with the definition in this guide:

- Are on a significant scale, i.e. involving several faculties and embracing different issues and challenges.
- Are expected to be long-term.
- Involve both education and research.
- Define forms of collaboration between the parties at a high level.
- Have a joint evaluation of the partnership.
- Define resources that each partner allocates during the term of the agreement.

Academia's partners in the wider society can be categorised in general terms as being within the public sector, business or non-profit sector. Higher education institutions in Sweden have primarily had strategic partnerships with actors in the business and public sectors. Most strategic partners are in the world of business, primarily multinational companies with a strong presence in Sweden.

Partnerships with large manufacturing companies often involve research and development of products or manufacturing that contribute to commercial and business development. Many companies are interested in gaining access to innovation systems in higher education institutions as well as new supplies of knowledge and skills. The latter tends to be of key importance for partners in all sectors.

Partnerships with the public sector are also common, for example regions and municipalities, and relate to their areas of responsibility regarding common welfare. Such partnerships also often aim to maintain and develop good, long-term relationships for local and regional social development and its attractiveness.

When it comes to strategic partnerships with the non-profit sector, there are few, if any, examples in a Swedish context. There are, however, many examples of strategic collaboration between individual researchers or groups of researchers and the non-profit sector. This also takes place in bigger partnerships or agreements, in which several non-profit actors, as well as representatives of the public sector, take part.

Examples of types of actors



BUSINESS

Industrial companies
Pharmaceutical companies
Transport companies
IT companies
Industry organisations



PUBLIC SECTOR

Government agencies
Regions
Municipalities
Public sector companies
Intergovernmental organisations



NON-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS

Popular movements
Religious organisations
Non-profit associations
Companies with limited profit distribution
Foundations

Added value of strategic partnerships

Partnerships are a strategic tool that can be used to fulfil a higher education institution's mandate and drive development. They can also contribute to a better understanding of the world at large, changes and trends. Strategic partnerships can be viewed as one of many ways of achieving a higher education institution's goals in a mutual exchange with a central collaborative partner.

In successful partnerships, a higher education institution and a partner will agree on issues and challenges of common interest and will draw equal, mutual benefit from the collaboration.

The higher education institutions that have contributed to this guide have identified a number of values that they receive, and expect to receive, from strategic partnerships:



QUALITY

Drive and support quality in research, education and collaboration.

Examples: increased relevance in research, increased links to the workplace in education, structure and scalability in collaboration.



RESOURCES

Provide direct access to resources and greater opportunities for external financing.

Examples: financing of joint initiatives from the partner, access to infrastructure, stronger applications for external financing.



IMPACT ON SOCIETY

Serve as a platform and context for impact on society.

Examples: implementation of research findings at the partner, increased link to society in research and education.



INFLUENCE

Constitute an alliance to drive issues in social debate and towards decision-makers.

Examples: raise awareness of needs for special initiatives, highlight social challenges and possible solutions.



REPUTATION

Make the higher education institution visible and contribute to its distinctive profile.

Examples: recruitment of employees and students, evidence of the role of the higher education institution in society.



CULTURAL CHANGE

Constitute a basis for prioritisations and a context for collaboration.

Examples: combine forces around joint initiatives, communication of collaboration to employees.

If there is to be justification for developing and maintaining a partnership, ultimately it must deliver these kinds of added value to the higher education institution. At the same time, each higher education institution must decide how much value a partnership

needs to contribute within a given period of time, and how it is to be followed up and evaluated. Strategic partnerships are long-term and complex, and it can take time to achieve these added values, even if the higher education institution does have a suitable partner.

Structure for collaboration within a strategic partnership

A strategic partnership encompasses many relationships and forms of collaboration at different levels, in different parts of the partners' organisations. Such complex relationships need their own, mutual structure in order that the collaboration can be cohesive and strategic.

Different higher education institutions use different organisational models in different partnerships, although these will often have the following shared characteristics:

- Mutual relationships and engagement at corresponding organisational levels in each organisation.
- Earmarked resources with associated assignments at all organisational levels.
- Internal support structures to coordinate and promote exchange within the partnership.

The common structure of mutual relationships can be divided into the following three levels, with representatives of different parts of the partners' organisations:

GOVERNING LEVEL	- Senior management teams
COORDINATING LEVEL	- Operational areas - Project management teams - Coordinators
OPERATIONAL LEVEL	- Operations

The governing level is where decisions are made for the partnership and usually comprises representatives from the partners' senior management teams. The function of the coordinating level is to coordinate collaboration and promote synergies between different joint projects and different parts of the partners' organisations. The coordinating level is where representatives from different operational areas and project management teams from partnership projects can meet. The partners will usually also each have their own designated coordinator, who will collaborate on an ongoing basis around the coordination of the partnership. The operational level comprises the actual cooperation that takes place between the partners' different operations. The organisation of a partnership is described in more detail in Chapter 3, The phases in the strategic partnership.

Summary: About strategic partnerships

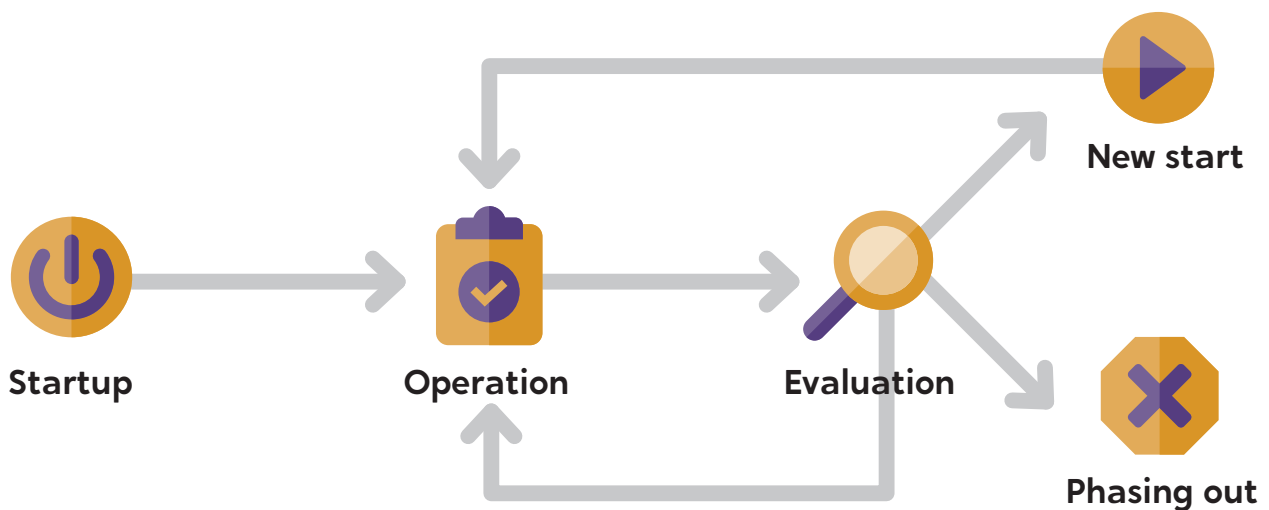
- The role of academia in society, and its importance for the development of society, has increasingly been highlighted by political decision-makers, and it is in this context that strategic partnerships exist today.
- More and more organisations are choosing to build long-term relationships with a small number of higher education institutions.
- A strategic partnership is a long-term collaboration across a higher education institution with a partner organisation in wider society.
- Strategic partnerships exist among all kinds of higher education institutions in Sweden, most commonly with business or the public sector.
- A mutual exchange enables strategic partners to contribute to each other's long-term goals, and each higher education institution needs to assess which, of several possible, added values a partnership should contribute in order to be justified.
- A strategic partnership encompasses many relationships in different parts of the partners' organisations and needs a mutual structure if collaboration is to be cohesive and strategic.
- In addition to a joint structure, the partners need internal resources to be earmarked for the partnership.



The phases in a strategic partnership

Experiences, observations and examples from the higher education institutions that have contributed to the guide are presented here in a model depicting the five phases in a partnership's life cycle. The phases are refined from situations in which a partnership can find itself. The life cycle model and its five phases are a didactic tool. The phases must be viewed as collective headings, with subjects placed in the phase most appropriate for them. The life cycle model begins with a partnership starting up and proceeds to operation and evaluation, after which there are three options.

An evaluation can either lead back to the operational phase, to a new start or to a phasing out of the partnership. Moving from evaluation back to operation represents a partnership that is continuing as before, until it once more reaches an evaluation phase. Moving to the new start phase represents a partnership that takes on other forms after an evaluation and enters the operational phase in a new form. Moving from evaluation to phasing out represents a strategic partnership that is coming to an end. Each phase has its own section in this chapter.





Starting up a new partnership

When strategic partnerships are established, they are often based on a combination of a higher education institution's general strategies and goals with a high degree of confidence between the parties. One common case is the partnership that emerges organically, when an existing collaboration grows and increasingly involves senior management from each party. Such a situation can engender a need to formalise the collaboration in a strategic partnership, in order to develop and manage it better.

Strategic partnerships can also emerge where there has been no significant collaboration previously. In this case, the initiative is based on the strategic opportunities and benefits identified in a partnership. The startup process will then be more about increasing awareness of and confidence in each other.

Senior management bears the responsibility when new strategic partnerships are being developed, and in this respect they have the initiative in sounding out a new partnership. At the same time, the suggestion for a strategic partnership can come from different sources: from the operations part of an organisation or from management, or from the higher education institution or a potential partner. It is more common for the suggestion to come from the operations, if there is an established collaboration with a part of the partner's organisation. Senior management will often take a strategic decision to initiate preparations for a strategic partnership.

Selection criteria for the choice of partner

The capacity to maintain strategic partnerships is limited, and not all relationships are suitable to become one. There is therefore always a selection process, albeit more or less expressed, in which different higher education institutions emphasise different reasons for their selection. Guiding considerations when choosing a partner include: strategic consensus, mutuality, previous collaboration, multidisciplinary breadth, long-term view, resources, and reputation.



STRATEGIC CONSENSUS

– conformance with strategy, focus areas and challenges, as well as contributions to goals.



MUTUALITY – equality and level of both mutual benefit and value creation.



PREVIOUS COLLABORATION

– extent, experience and confidence in previous relationships.



MULTIDISCIPLINARY BREADTH

– relevance for the different parts of the higher education institution, both separately and combined.



LONG-TERM VIEW – time horizon for objectives and commitments, and durability of current relationships.



RESOURCES – the partner's financing opportunities and infrastructure, as well as relevance for public financing programmes.



REPUTATION – renown, profile and acknowledgement in relevant areas.

Additional criteria that play a role are a partner's geographical proximity – for example as a major employer in the region or by locating research and development close to the higher education institution – and the range of collaborative forms that might be considered.

There is even greater variation among the partners of higher education institutions when it comes to how they choose whether to enter into a strategic partnership, and also which higher education institution they wish to approach. Large, knowledge-intensive manufacturing companies in particular have well-developed processes and selection criteria. For business, the profile and renown of a higher education institution is often of central importance: what resources the higher education institution has in the form of specialist expertise in relevant areas for commercial and business development.

For partners in the public sector, geographical location and the role that the higher education institution can play in local and regional development is often decisive. As there are few partnerships with the non-profit sector, it is difficult to make any statement on general selection criteria for partners in that sector. But there is a common theme that most large partner organisations, in whichever sector, choose a higher education institution on the basis of its capacity to offer skills supply and knowledge development.

BEAR IN MIND

Mutual awareness of each other's, often different, motivation and driving forces makes collaboration easier.

Preparing a new partnership

Management will usually appoint a working group charged with the task of preparing a new partnership. This can differ between higher education institutions and from one case to another. There is often a representative of senior management, researchers and teachers, as well as operational support in the area of, for example, collaboration, law and communication. The allocation of roles in a working party can vary, and sometimes one person can be given sole responsibility for preparing the partnership. The working group can often form the basis of what later becomes a coordination group for the partnership.

The task of the working group is usually to work together with the proposed partner to develop an agreement for the strategic partnership. Preparation can also include producing an inventory of current and potential partnerships, drawing up activity and operational plans, building relationships and running pilot activities and projects. A risk analysis rarely forms part of the preparation, although it has been requested by many higher

education institutions. Chapter 4, Toolbox, contains a risk and suitability assessment that can be used to meet this need.

EXAMPLE

Ahead of an agreement, preparatory work was carried out by working groups with representatives from each organisation. The university provided one coordinator and two representatives from the administrative department for research support and collaboration, including the head of unit. Preparatory work on the agreement with a region also involved the assistant dean of the Faculty of Medicine. Before this agreement, the working group carried out preparatory work with the aid of the Strategic Partnership Canvas. Each management team then had to separately comment on and adjust the suggestion on the canvas to create the version they preferred. At a two-party meeting before the agreement was signed, the management teams agreed on a joint canvas, based on the two suggestions.

The time perspective for preparation can be short or long, and the scope can vary. Sometimes the parties want to initiate new collaboration and activities before an agreement is completed. As it is the higher education institution's senior management team that ultimately confirms and signs a partnership agreement, the working group's task will often include having one or more status reviews with them. The proposed partner will usually set up a similar structure and process.

The exchange between higher education institution and partner needs clear contact paths, internal coordination and dialogue at several levels. Not least of all, engagement and ownership from senior management at each partner is decisive in concluding an agreement for a successful partnership. The Strategic Partnership Canvas (see Chapter 4, Toolbox) is a tool used to illustrate the direction and scope of a partnership and can be used as a basis for, or documentation of, a management dialogue when preparing a new partnership.

Expectations of and goals for a partnership can develop in different directions during preparation. A number of status checks, both formal and informal, will often be needed during the startup phase.

BEAR IN MIND

Acceptance at the higher education institution during startup

Alongside the actual preparation work, acceptance is decisive if the partnership is to develop on a broad front. Acceptance is achieved through communication and the involvement of several parts of the higher education institution, and is best achieved when senior management is actively involved. Acceptance also benefits from being able to reach several employees at the higher education institution and when it can be based on actual partnerships and relationships between the higher education institution and the partner. Establishing a new partnership also gains legitimacy if management assigns resources for the preparatory work.

Appointing academic staff to the preparatory working group can promote the involvement of more parts of the higher education institution. This can take place by appointing researchers or teachers who already have experience of, or ideas for, collaboration with the partner. It can also take place by involving academic leaders with a good overview of the parts of the higher education institution and who, through their position and network of contacts, can involve several people from different areas.

Communication about the preparations ahead of a new partnership also contribute to acceptance. Senior management can lend legitimacy to the process by being the sender of communication and invitations to information meetings and work meetings. Communication support is a central function in producing messages and a schedule, preparing press releases and the like. Organisations in different sectors of society work in different ways, with different driving forces and cultures. One decisive goal in communication during startup is therefore to create a mutual understanding of each other's differences. Communication also contributes to acceptance at the higher education institution if it explains what a partnership means and what the incentives are for collaborating – both for the higher education institution as a whole and for the individual researcher or teacher.

It is easy to underestimate the need for acceptance. The higher education institution's partner also needs to make room for the partnership in its internal communication.

Formalising the partnership in an agreement

A partnership is usually considered to be formalised when a written agreement has been signed, even though a verbal agreement should also be valid as an agreement. What the agreement looks like can vary a great deal in both scope and level of detail. There is value in permitting variation, as functional agreements are generally adapted to their specific context and purpose. Some agreements specify focus areas, objectives and key indicators, while others are more general, with separate operational plans and action plans that govern direction and follow-up. Most partner organisations are inclined to write agreements based on roles and responsibilities, in order to deal with the mutual commitment involved in managing the partnership.

When it comes to the legal effect of the agreement, there are a few points⁸ that are often useful in agreements on partnerships between academia and wider society:

- **Content of the agreement:** Introduction to the agreement that could be understood even by an outsider.
- **Purpose:** The partnership as a commitment and how it is regulated.
- **Term of the agreement:** The period of time for which the agreement is valid.
- **Structure and scope:** General organisation and which operations are involved.
- **Special rights and obligations:** For example rights of use, compensation, confidentiality.
- **Expected outcome:** What the parties are expected to achieve together, possibly with key indicators.
- **General terms and conditions:** Terms and conditions that can or must apply for joint activities or projects.
- **Termination:** Terms on which notice may be served to terminate the agreement.
- **Disputes:** How disputes under the agreement are to be resolved.

An agreement will generally specify the lowest acceptable level at which the higher education institution and the partner are to perform towards each other. For partnerships that involve research and innovation, agreements need to address both existing knowledge assets and any future ones that may arise within the partnership.

Framework agreement, memorandum of understanding and letter of intent are common designations (headings) applied to partnership agreements. The agreement's designation has no inherent legal significance; it is always

⁸ This list is based on a brochure from Karolinska Institutet: Karolinska Institutet (2017). Samarbetsavtal. Avtalsskrivning med externa parter. (*Partnership agreements. Drawing up agreements with external parties.*) E-Print, October 2017.

the content that is decisive for an agreement's legal effect. These agreements, however, have a more or less standard content that can be summarised as follows:

A Framework Agreement is a detailed, general agreement on what governs the relationship between the parties and future, specific agreements between them. It sets out in detail what the partnership involves and specifies positions in principle regarding matters in the areas of intellectual property rights and confidentiality. The content of a framework agreement is legally binding with a regulated term of agreement and dispute resolution.

A Memorandum of Understanding, MoU is a general acknowledgement of the relationship between the parties, without any legal commitments. It describes desired areas and forms of collaboration. The memorandum of understanding states that the commitment is voluntary and specifies that legal terms and conditions are regulated separately.

A Letter of Intent, LoI is a written statement that gives expression to the parties' joint intent to conclude agreements in the future. It states briefly what the intent relates to and can include a plan describing how the agreement is to be prepared. A letter of intent usually states that the commitment is voluntary and that the parties have the right to withdraw. But there can be time-limited agreements on exclusivity in order to enter into a partnership on specific issues or on confidentiality during negotiations.

BEAR IN MIND

Be aware that the partnership is not expressed as a relationship between purchaser and executor. A partnership must be mutual.

Focus areas for operational collaboration

In addition to the formal structure that an agreement lends to a partnership, many higher education institutions reach agreement with a partner on focus areas around which to collaborate. Focus areas are specified thematic areas, including research and education, in which there is a mutual interest and that embody the overall purpose of the partnership. In practice, focus areas can be based on:

- Overlapping or complementary objectives or areas of activity.
- Shared issues or challenges.
- Mutual dependencies.

The theme of an ongoing collaboration often forms the basis of proposed focus areas. More ideas for focus areas can emerge while a partnership is being prepared. The identification of initial focus areas is valuable in terms of quickly getting started and broadening the partnership.

Producing an inventory in connection with startup also provides a baseline to relate to in evaluation and follow-up.

BEAR IN MIND

Preparing desired focus areas before entering into discussions with the partner can facilitate and promote mutuality in the partnership. Many people refer to inventories of the operational partnership that are already in place when looking for ideas for focus areas. Another way is to refer to social challenges that are relevant for the strategic partner and match these with subject areas at the higher education institution. Round table discussions are one tool used to identify opportunities and generate ideas that can be used both during startup and later (see Chapter 4 Toolbox).

Partner organisations from the same sector can have similar preferences regarding focus areas. For companies, focus areas are often aimed at development and innovation of both processes and products. Partner organisations in the public sector are often keen to link focus areas to various aspects of welfare and to their various administrations. Both companies and government agencies can be interested in basing focus areas on the broader development of society, for example in the form of general social challenges or global sustainable development goals.

Based on a thorough mapping exercise in each organisation, four relatively general areas were highlighted in which the partner was facing major challenges and the higher education institution was strong in research and education. Based on these areas, a series of workshops was organised in three parts, where the partner's business managers and employees met researchers and teachers from the higher education institution and discussed needs and preferences as well as linked projects and activities for these. The results formed the basis of an operational plan with focus areas, which is evaluated and updated on an annual basis.

EXAMPLE



Running the administration and activities of the partnership

A strategic partnership encompasses so many different parts, in both parties, that a special organisation is needed with a few fixed roles. Ongoing coordination usually takes place through a designated coordinator from each party. It is also necessary to organise regular status checks at various levels, less frequently at the governing level and more frequently in operational partnerships. There are different ways to organise operational activities, and organisational solutions can change even within one single partnership. This means that the depiction of a partnership's organisation and its roles is schematic.

In addition to the organisation, a few ongoing or recurring support processes are fundamental elements of the administration and development of a partnership. Effective operationalisation requires a certain structure and systematic approach, which can be achieved, for example, through an annual cycle and regular operational planning. Few partnerships have new suggestions for collaboration without some process support in the form of an inventory process or round table discussions to generate ideas. Finally, well-considered and well-targeted communication can make a significant contribution to realising the potential of a partnership.

Coordinator – an adapted operational support role

Strategic partnerships are so wide-ranging and complex that adapted operational support is almost a must if

they are to run smoothly. Operational support is usually organised through one person serving as designated coordinator for the partnership. This role often comprises only a small proportion of a full-time position and is filled by a person in a collaboration unit, Grants Office, innovation office, external relations unit or similar.

A coordinator for a strategic partnership needs the right competence and suitable personal qualities. The work requires good ability to cooperate as well as an understanding of the systems for the conditions in both academia and other sectors of society. The coordinator has a crucial, intermediary role within the partnership and must understand the different circumstances of the parties. It is also important to have an ability to identify work methods and activities that contribute the greatest mutual benefit. The coordinator documents and follows up on the partnership, prepares supporting data, conveys contacts and provides process support to both management and operations. For the partnership to move forward, it is also important that the partner has a coordinator, and that these two people have regular status checks on how work is progressing.

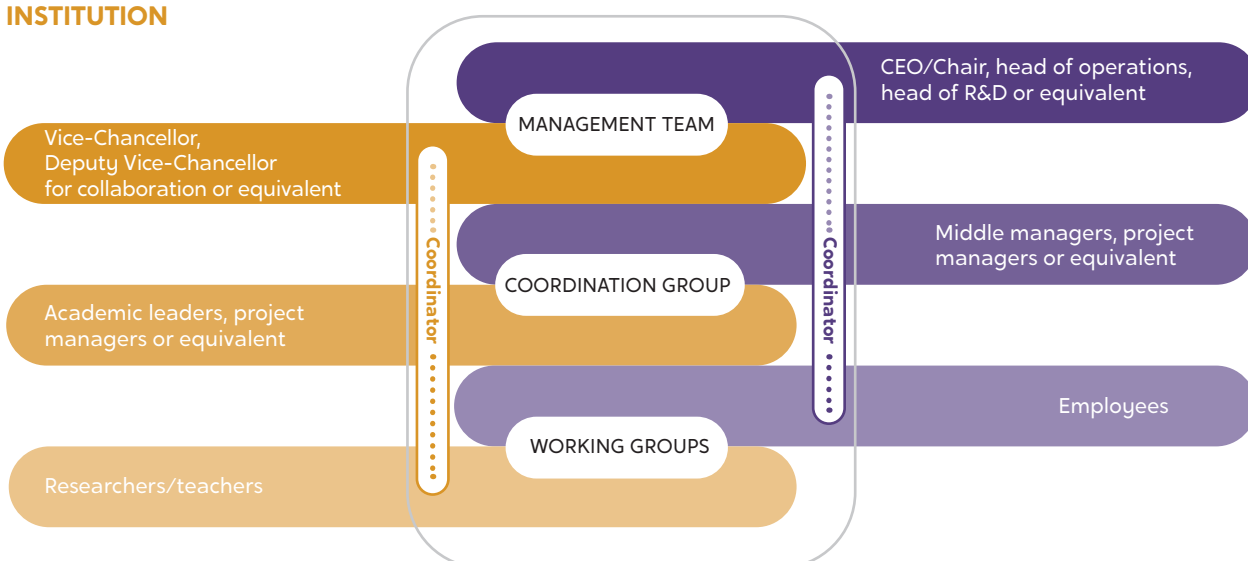
A coordinator needs to nurture relationships with senior management, core operations and support functions, and also with the partner organisation, not least with the partner's coordinator.

BEAR IN MIND

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

PARTNER ORGANISATION



Management and coordination of partnerships

The exchange between the parties' senior management teams is usually formalised in regular meetings, which also serve as the partnership's ultimate decision-making body. This is referred to here as the partnership's management team, although it can also be called a steering group. The role of the management team is to take decisions about the partnership and its strategic direction. It can also serve as a reference group for issues of a general nature. The representatives in the management team have a mandate to take decisions regarding the partnership on behalf of their own respective management teams. The higher education institution provides the Vice-Chancellor or another representative of senior management, often a Deputy Vice-Chancellor for collaboration or equivalent. The partner is also represented by a senior executive, depending on the kind of organisation, possibly a CEO, chair or head of operations, or a head of R&D or equivalent.

A management team can meet one or two times a year. The agenda will usually contain summary reporting on work within the partnership, any items requiring a decision and a discussion about the current situation and the future. In addition to representatives from each management team, a coordinator can take part, for example in the role of rapporteur or secretary.

EXAMPLE

Members of senior management from each organisation meet once or twice a year. The next level consists of a strategic working party with representatives from research in the thematic areas on which the partnership is focused. The partner organisation has corresponding operational managers. Members of the strategic working party work on the matching and initiation of projects and events, and on disseminating information about the agreement and the opportunities it provides. Work can also involve operational development of the collaboration or following up on projects and activities. In agreements with opportunities for financing, the working party prepares decisions on project financing. There is also a coordinating administrator for every agreement within each organisation. This person supports work within the management team and strategic working party, as well as researchers and teachers involved.

Sometimes the higher education institution's management team will appoint one of its members, or another person in a senior position, to have ongoing responsibility for the partnership on its behalf. Such a role can sometimes be referred to as partnership manager.

Many partnerships have an additional, general grouping, which makes sure that operations run smoothly, and facilitates and promotes further collaboration. Here it is known as a coordination group, but it can also be called a strategic working party. A minimal form of coordination group consists of one designated coordinator from each party. The composition of other participants can vary. From the higher education institution, academic leaders can take part as representatives of their academic field or subject. Corresponding participants from the partner might be a middle manager with some kind of operational responsibility. Another kind of participant can be project managers or similar, with responsibility for cross-functional themes and projects.

The coordination group's meetings can take place a couple of times per term. The focus can be on following up on operations, finding solutions to shared problems, sharing information and planning joint operations or activities. One alternative solution to a fixed group could be continuous status checks with representatives from ongoing partnership projects. The partner organisation's representatives could also be invited to such meetings where relevant.

Coordination needs researchers and teachers from different parts of the higher education institution, as no individual person can maintain an overview of which of all the operations might be relevant for collaboration. Without a coordinating level, with both a designated coordinator and researchers and teachers, the partnership might find it difficult to make progress, as contacts are made slowly, new ideas can fall between two stools and obstacles in the partnership remain unaddressed.

The higher education institution's representatives in management and coordination groups can meet at internal preparatory meetings in order to prepare themselves ahead of meetings with the partner.

BEAR IN MIND

Other operational roles and working groups

The partnership is realised in the actual operational cooperation between researchers and teachers at the higher education institution and employees at the partner. This can involve all kinds of collaboration that are mutually value-adding for both parties. Actual cooperation can be organised as separate programmes, projects or activities, with a number of roles adapted for the specific collaboration. It can also take place through working groups with responsibility for operations within a focus area or a group of joint operations.

Operational roles in the partnership tend to become clearer, the more the activity is integrated into the core activities of higher education institutions: research and education. When there is an ongoing or established partnership, operational work can often take place without any involvement from senior management or coordinators. When it comes to other kinds of collaboration, which are not as formalised and agreement-based (such as pilot activities or student projects), more active coordination is often required.

Thematic working parties, with responsibility for focus areas or a group of partnerships, can be joint or internal within the higher education institution. Such working parties often report to a coordinator or a coordination group, but are otherwise independent.

All forms of collaboration⁹ can be relevant as operational activity within a partnership, for example joint research projects, degree projects and student placements, as well as personal mobility and shared services.

Operational planning of process support and operational activity

Systematic work within a partnership includes some form of operational planning. The purpose of operational planning is partly to ensure that work can be more efficient, and partly to prevent operations that are too dependent on individuals. Planning can take place on an ongoing basis or be done on the basis of one or more years. There can be annually recurring elements in operational planning that can be summarised in an annual cycle. A basic operational plan creates a structure in which spontaneous meetings and individual relationships can occur.

A rolling operational plan with recurring elements, an annual cycle, will usually include a planning phase, crucial dates in each operation, ongoing status checks and a follow-up phase in order to summarise the year. There are approximate times for the meetings of fixed groups (management team, coordination group and various working groups).

Planning operational activities requires the core operations of both parties to contribute suggestions for new partnerships. New ideas often emerge on an ongoing basis, based on partnerships already under way or through new people gaining an insight into the partnership. At the same time, it can be necessary to broker new contacts in order to set up partnerships based on these new ideas. But this is rarely enough to fill in the operational plan, renew the partnership and realise its potential. Activities are needed that can generate new ideas. More about this can be found in the next section.

⁹ For an overview of collaborative patterns, see, for example, Perez Vico, E., Hellström, T., Fernqvist, N., Hellsmark, H. och Molnar, S. (2014) *Universitets och högskolors samverkansmönster och dess effekter (Collaborative patterns at higher education institutions and their effects)*. Stockholm: Vinnova.



EXAMPLE

Before a new agreement was prepared, a coordinator had to produce a draft operational plan for two years. A lot of work was required to get the operations to submit proposals for collaborative activities. To convey the information, short presentations about the partnership were made at the central research and education councils and at the faculties' administrative director councils. The administrative directors took it upon themselves to inform their operations of the opportunity for collaboration. Relevant proposals arrived from all faculties. Close contacts with a management representative made sure that the plan's format turned out as desired. Having an operational plan in place when the agreement is drawn up requires a lot of preparatory work, but prevents the risk that there might otherwise be a period of uncertainty.

Generating new ideas for collaboration

A partnership is renewed and developed when new ideas result in new relationships and actual partnerships. In a dynamic, established partnership, new ideas are usually generated automatically and can be highlighted by coordination groups and management teams. It can at the same time be necessary to promote the generation of new ideas in order to keep a partnership alive.

Maintaining an inventory of current or desired collaboration can contribute to the generation of suggestions for cooperation. At higher education institutions that regularly take an inventory of collaboration in core operations, and with a possibility to include issues of the needs of different educational programmes for a link with the workplace, an inventory can serve to provide supporting data in finding work placements, project proposals and degree projects.

A critical mass of activities is often needed in order to achieve an increase in interest and engagement in the partnership.

Round table discussions are another way of involving employees while at the same time developing activities within a strategic partnership. This is a form of dialogue on equal terms about one or more predetermined subjects, with the aim of working together to draw up proposals for actual activities (see more about this in Chapter 4, Toolbox). One benefit of round table discussions is that they result in project concepts being better adapted to the needs and conditions of operations, as it can be a challenge to achieve a consensus and mutuality between researchers and teachers at the higher education institution and employees at the partner organisation.

Another way of generating new partnerships is to hold an event with a focus on the parties getting to know one another; this is sometimes referred to as a partnership day. Invitations can be sent to anyone who has been involved or is interested in a collaboration with a given partner. Other programme items that promote collaboration are often combined with presentations of the parties and their operation, of the partnership and of previous and ongoing collaborations. Such a day can create awareness of the strategic partnership, highlight opportunities – and in the longer term contribute to new relationships and collaborations.

EXAMPLE

Based on a mapping of collaboration between the higher education institution and the partner, a series of workshops took place. The first workshop only involved one working group, which identified areas of interest based on the mapping process. All researchers and teachers were invited to workshops two and three, together with more people from the partner's operational areas. To link up with the series of workshops, project funding of up to SEK 150,000 was set aside, which researchers and teachers could apply for to set up a partnership, if the partner contributed a corresponding sum. There was also an opportunity to apply for funds for personal mobility: to spend 20 per cent of working hours over six months in the partner's operation. Having a series of workshops enabled individual relationships to develop.

Communication within and around the partnership

There are many bodies that need to access information about the partnership, and there need to be ways in which the operation can contribute information about activities in the collaboration. Information that creates understanding and inclusion contributes to making it possible for the partnership's potential to be realised. It involves both targeted and general information, which is broad and openly available, for key individuals and groups. Communication support contributes expertise to communication within the higher education institution, with the partner and to the world at large. It is the role of communication support to disseminate awareness of a higher education institution's strategic partnerships, to contribute to creating understanding among its own and the partner's employees, and to inspire a desire to get involved in collaboration with the partner.

Information about established partnerships should be visible on the higher education institution's website. This can include general information about the higher education institution's strategic partnerships (e.g. which focus areas are included), inspiration (e.g. ongoing projects or good results) and contact details for the coordinator responsible. It is also important to create good dialogues with faculty management teams, education and research councils/boards and collaboration councils, and to reach agreement on what kind of information has to go to which bodies. By drawing up a communication plan, you can structure which information is to be issued via faculties, the intranet, newsletters, staff magazines, local newspapers, etc., and in which phases of the partnership's life cycle (not just when the agreement is signed).

Joint communication from the higher education institution and the partner can have major potential to have an impact on the community at large.

BEAR IN MIND

Communication can be broadened by involving departmental coordination managers, which some higher education institutions have. At others, it might rather be a case of identifying individuals in the core operations who might possibly become involved in a given partnership. Researchers and teachers with a special interest

can also serve as information-sharers and “ambassadors” in relevant departments. It is important to respond to and involve researchers and teachers who are running projects within the partnership in internal dialogues, and their perspectives need to be conveyed to area and university management teams.

Targeted communication aimed at special groups or parts of a higher education institution can serve different purposes. In a case with a totally new partnership, it might be about creating a shared understanding and confidence based on relatively limited prior knowledge of each other’s operations. In an established partnership, it might be about proactively encouraging engagement, for example, to broaden collaboration (in a multidisciplinary agreement within the higher education institution, across business areas in industry or across administrations in the public sector).

BEAR IN MIND

Communication about a partnership that is aimed at researchers and teachers might need to be adapted based on academic field and subject in order to be relevant.

Financing of administration and operations

It is common for both parties to finance their own share of administration and operations, such as staff costs for coordination and joint events. It does, however, happen that one partner assumes responsibility for financing the whole coordination function. At a higher education institution, financing for a partnership usually comes from central funds, as a grant to the coordinating unit. In addition to this there are special funds from the Vice-Chancellor for the development of partnerships for use in operational activities, such as actual partnership projects and activities.

To carry out joint research projects, it is common to apply for additional external financing from national or international financiers. This can be made easier if there is seed financing for actual partnership, i.e. funds for a feasibility study linked to the generation of ideas. In certain partnerships, the higher education institution’s partner finances operational activities. It is common to contribute cash funding or time, but sometimes the two are combined. The contribution can be specified at the outset when the agreement is drawn up, or it can be added during the course of the partnership. The partner’s contribution usually consists of co-financing for feasibility

studies before joint applications are made for external funds. In addition to this, a partner can finance contract education, industrial doctoral students, adjunct professors and joint events, and also provide access to research infrastructure.

The principle of financing one’s own commitment applies in many strategic partnerships, although this can create challenges if it only covers operational and administrative personnel. Without non-restricted funds, it is difficult to carry out operations other than those already fully integrated into the parties’ core operations. Joint applications for external funds are difficult, as some form of seed financing might be needed in order to develop a concept or an initiative to a point at which the time is right to initiate an application process. Time is required for those employees in the core operations that are to be involved in developing the content of a partnership. One possible model is that both parties allocate funds during a certain period of time, with the objective of applying for a given percentage of additional funds from external financiers. Another model is to link a partnership to a programme or thematic area that has its own non-restricted development funds. In this case it is only the higher education institution’s staff who are financed by the development funds, while the partner finances its own share of the initiative.

For organisations in the non-profit sector, financing is a recurring obstacle to collaboration, which can be part of the explanation why there are few strategic partnerships with this sector. Smaller organisations and associations usually base their operations on voluntary work and have few employees. Other organisations have an increasingly professional structure, financed through a combination of association contributions and project financing. Greater competition between different organisations for available funds, combined with growing scepticism towards projects as a financing form, have resulted in an increased emphasis on the necessity to develop more long-term, sustainable collaborative structures. The issue of financing can, however, be a challenge in the development of collaborative structures in the form of strategic partnerships.



Evaluating an established partnership

Evaluation can drive quality and verify that a partnership is contributing value. It can constitute a joint starting point for a dialogue around a partnership's strategic direction and offer a welcome contribution when the partnership has achieved a number of interim goals or arrived at a plateau phase. Every evaluation is performed with some form of evaluation model, either explicit or implicit.

An evaluation can contain different components, for example follow-up. In this guide, evaluation is used as a general designation for a precise, systematic assessment of an operation's performance and processes. Follow-up is more specific and involves a process in which data about a number of predetermined variables is collected regularly. Data from follow-up can serve as supporting data in assessing the operation, i.e. as supporting data for an evaluation.

Starting points when evaluating partnerships

Collaboration that is evaluated according to defined goals and criteria is clearer for the core operation, management, partners, political decision-makers and supervisory authorities such as the Swedish Higher Education Authority. In addition to the quality aspect of the partnership's contribution to research and education at the higher education institution, the activity in the partnership should be evaluated. A partnership with a low level of activity or none at all might be relaunched or phased out.

All evaluation models have some form of assessment criteria used to evaluate the operation that is to be examined. The best conditions for evaluation exist if you have identified and defined a shared strategic objective, goals, strategies, work methods and possible indicators on which to evaluate the partnership. The Strategic Partnership Canvas, which is included in the toolbox in Chapter 4, can be used to both develop and document such a strategic objective.

One experience from a strategic partnership is the importance of being open to the fact that established goals and indicators can be supplemented during the course of a partnership. A joint follow-up revealed that there was far too little focus on the effects resulting from running student and degree projects. Such activities represent an investment in future recruitments and in methodological and technological development. When the higher education institution and the partner moved from counting student and degree projects solely as quantitative "pins" and started instead to discuss the consequential effects, it became evident that student and degree projects were what formed the core of that particular strategic partnership.

EXAMPLE

Previous experiences of the evaluation of collaboration between academia and wider society provide a starting point for evaluating strategic partnerships. The Commission of Inquiry on Governance and Resources¹⁰ confirmed that it has not been possible to select quantitative indicators that provide a fair picture of collaboration. At the same time, the importance of viewing collaboration as being an integral part of research and education and of management collaboration in existing quality systems was emphasised. Many higher education institutions also advocated the integration of partnerships into the existing quality systems for research and education. Such a structure makes it natural to regularly evaluate partnerships as an element of national quality audits and higher education institutions' own research evaluations.

Without trust and confidence an evaluation may result in the partners identifying problems and deficiencies in each other.

BEAR IN MIND

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Different models for evaluating partnerships

There is no single evaluation model that can be generally recommended for strategic partnerships. The parties need to make a joint choice within each partnership. But what effective models do have in common is that they are accepted by both parties, drawn up jointly, are based on the partnership's overall strategic objective and have a scheduled, resourced implementation process. Follow-up on key indicators can be one component,

especially if the partner is used to this, but it is not sufficient to provide a complete picture of collaboration within a partnership. It is also common to perform ongoing or regular evaluation in the form of an internal review and reflection. Some higher education institutions also organise regular evaluation studies, with external contributions. In summary, the following evaluation models are used within strategic partnerships:



FOLLOW-UP ON KEY INDICATORS:

Key indicators are quantitative measures of performance and efficiency (for suggestions of commonly used key indicators, see the Strategic Partnership Canvas in Chapter 4, Toolbox). Follow-up on how key indicators can be developed can take place on an ongoing basis or ahead of regular status checks. A coordinator's duties will often include documenting the development of key indicators in their own organisation and reporting them, either separately or together with the partner's coordinator. In a partnership with no coordinators, follow-up can be carried out at joint meetings with representatives from all ongoing collaborations.



ONGOING SELF-EVALUATION:

Self-evaluation means that the parties themselves review and assess the partnership. Each part of the evaluation is usually carried out separately, before being merged. One model has those who are operationally active in the partnership documenting their progress on an ongoing basis or at certain intervals and assessing this with reference to their own plans. Supporting data for a self-evaluation can also be prepared by each coordinator and either reported internally, ahead of a dialogue with the partner, or compiled to produce a joint operational report used as basis for the management teams jointly evaluating the partnership.



EXTERNAL EVALUATION STUDIES:

Summarising, retrospective evaluation studies are conducted in order to acquire an overall assessment of the operation over a given period of time. These are often conducted by professional evaluators or by committees. This usually involves external expertise – partly in the form of evaluation experts, partly in the form of expert assessors – with professional experience of collaboration at other higher education institutions.

The basic concept of the evaluation model for a higher education institution's partnerships is that evaluation takes place on an ongoing basis. The regular management dialogues provide feedback on activities completed and results as a basis for determining mutual added value, dynamics and strength of the partnerships. Participants at these regular progress meetings are people with responsibility from management and for the partner, plus managers from the partner, in a discussion on work methods, challenges, methods, strategic objectives and results.

All evaluation models have their benefits and drawbacks. The development of carefully selected key indicators can offer a pointer to the scope of a partnership and how it is progressing. These must, however, always be interpreted and evaluated based on a broader understanding of the context. There tends to be a high level of acceptance for self-evaluation, although this does require clear instructions and structure in order to achieve consistent quality. The self-evaluation interviews in Chapter 4, Toolbox, are one method that can be used as part of the self-evaluation. If external evaluation is something that higher education institutions in general have plenty of experience of, the partner in wider society might be less familiar with it. As is generally the case in strategic partnerships, trust and confidence make life easier, which in turn increases the possibility that evaluation studies can contribute to learning and development.

Self-evaluation is when the whole evaluation process is carried out internally by an organisation or a project. Self-evaluation is a measurement method in which an individual produces an estimate of a subjective metric.



New start – when a partnership needs a change

A well-founded and structured partnership withstands changes in personnel and leadership. There are, however, examples of situations that do, to a greater or lesser extent, require a restart. This often coincides with key individuals within the partnership being replaced, for example in a management team, and those taking over responsibility not sharing the same visions for the collaboration. In these cases it can be a good idea to have a re-think, in which the parties give consideration to what they themselves want to get out of the partnership and set out a new direction for it.

Other reasons for a new start can be factors that emerge over time, for example in connection with evaluation. One example is the discovery that it is primarily one party that is benefiting. Another might be that only limited parts of the higher education institution are involved in the collaboration. The partnership can work well with a specific faculty or department, while management wants it to embrace the whole higher education institution. Another example might be a low or declining level of activity within the partnership, which might reflect the fact that selected focus areas are not stimulating new ideas.

One higher education institution has experience of the necessity for a new start, when the partner acquired a new CEO, which involved a reorganisation. This drew both time and effort from employees in the organisation. Many of the roles linked to the higher education institution became unclear, and it was difficult to know who to contact. There was an activity plan with several items, for which the driving force lay primarily with the external party's now departed CEO. As these items were of a strategic nature, the activity plan now appeared unclear to those responsible for collaboration. Before the annual management meeting, a decision was therefore made on a new start, which was at the same time a good introduction to the new CEO and other individuals who had not previously been involved.

A new start can involve drawing up a new operational plan or designating new focus areas. In those cases where it is felt that major changes are needed, it can be necessary to adjust an existing agreement or sign a totally new one. The degree of change required is often something that emerges in a joint process in which the partnership is renegotiated.

When there is a new start, it is important to make use of lessons learned and experiences, and to work in a structured way, with the aim of institutionalising the collaboration. This can be a challenge, as a partnership often depends on individuals and centres around specific, previously involved researchers, teachers and other key persons. At the same time, a new start can be used as an opportunity to both systematise and institutionalise the partnership, and to open it up to new ideas and engage more people.

Many of the tools described in Chapter 4 are useful in a new start: the Strategic Partnership Canvas can offer a systematic approach. If the partnership has already drawn up a canvas, a review can highlight what needs to be changed in it. It can also be useful to collect and analyse perceptions and desires about the partnership from each actor by means of self-evaluation interviews. Round table discussions or similar, interactive and inclusive meetings can involve more employees and generate ideas and engagement.

Setting aside time and resources to secure acceptance are just as crucial in a new start as in a startup.

BEAR IN MIND





Phasing out a strategic partnership

The initiative to phase out can come from either party and have internal or common causes. The higher education institution's partner might change its strategy: for example, an operation on which the partnership is based might be closed down. Correspondingly, a higher education institution can change its priorities. Regardless of who takes the initiative, the phasing out of a partnership is a joint action that should take place with a consensus, which is much easier if the agreement sets out clear terms and conditions for serving notice to terminate a partnership at the outset.

Another reason to phase out a partnership might be expectations that cannot be met. It may turn out, for example, that the potential for collaboration does not exist to the extent that characterises a strategic partnership. Partnerships that involve a smaller number of subjects and operations have proven to be more vulnerable to changed prioritisations and obstacles in the collaboration. Even though there is potential for collaboration, unsuccessful results can result in a phasing out, either because of the disappointment this causes or because it is not possible to justify the partnership's use of resources. Partnerships should produce results, and if an evaluation highlights weaknesses, phasing out is one possible course of action. A shortage of resources can make phasing out more likely.

It is referred to as phasing out rather than closure because phasing out a strategic partnership does not need to mean the end of relationships between the higher education institute and the partner, not even in the formal sense. A higher education institution's partner usually has an established position in the local community, which means that they are actors to which the higher education institution needs to relate, regardless of any partnerships. There may also be formal and informal agreements on collaboration at an operational level, which can be quite extensive.

There is always good reason to manage parts of the collaboration that are working. In certain cases, a strategic partnership across a higher education institution can be phased out by moving over to a partnership at faculty or department level. Initially signing a central partnership can even be part of a strategy, through engagement from each party's senior management, to institutionalise collaboration, which can then be transferred to a faculty or a department.

One higher education institution never needed to fully end its collaboration with a strategic partner. They converted it instead to a different kind of partnership. This was because follow-up revealed that management at the higher education institution and the external party were no longer holding any meetings, but all contact was between researchers and project managers. The higher education institution has a number of areas of strength, and during phasing out responsibility for the partnership was transferred to the head of each of these areas.

EXAMPLE

Communication about phasing out a partnership needs to be aimed at both the partner and the operations involved at the higher education institution. It is by no means certain that all employees will share the view that the partnership should be ended. Good relationships are promoted by clarity, not only around the end of the partnership, but also why and based on which criteria. Similar assessments made ahead of a new partnership can serve as supporting data for decisions ahead of phasing out. Both selection criteria from the startup phase in this chapter and the risk and suitability assessment in Chapter 4, Toolbox, can help to justify a decision to phase out a partnership.

Summary: The phases in a strategic partnership

- The preparation of a new partnership involves developing an agreement, but it can also include producing an inventory, planning, analysis and pilots. It is usually carried out by a preparation group appointed by senior management.
- The legal effect of an agreement is determined by its content, which is ideally tailored to suit each individual case. Besides an agreement, the direction of a partnership is often operationalised by decisions on thematic focus areas for collaboration.
- It is common for a partnership to be organised with fixed management and coordination groups that meet regularly, operational support in the form of a designated coordinator from each party, and a combination of permanent and temporary working groups and projects.
- It is fundamental to have operational planning, of both the partnership's ongoing management and operational activities, including activities to make contacts and generate ideas, as well as general and targeted communication.
- Many partnerships apply the principle that each actor assumes responsibility for their own costs. It is, however, often necessary to apply for external funds in order to be able to carry out operational projects and activities.
- There is no generally accepted model for evaluating collaboration, but a model based on the partnership's strategic objective can contribute to development, quality and transparency. Common models for evaluation are follow-up on key indicators, internal self-evaluation by each party and external evaluation studies.
- Well-established partnerships are renewed organically, but can need to make changes ahead of changed conditions. For example, if a partner's strategy is changed fundamentally or if the partnership fails to meet expectations.
- Partnerships that are no longer prioritised may need to be phased out, possibly by being transformed into a different kind of partnership at faculty or department level. Clear terms and conditions in the agreement describing how notice is to be served to terminate promote continued good relationships between the parties.

4.

The areas of application of the tools during each phase

- Strategic Partnership Canvas: a template with a visual structure that illustrates a partnership in six dimensions.
- Risk and suitability assessment: a model for assessing a partner's suitability and potential risks in a partnership.
- Round table discussions: a model for the implementation of thematic group discussions on equal terms to involve more employees and generate new ideas for collaboration.
- Self-evaluation interviews: a model for an interview-based study that creates insight into and understanding of values and driving forces.



AREAS OF APPLICATION

Strategic Partnership Canvas

Risk and suitability assessment






Round table discussions

Self-evaluation interviews

Toolbox

Effective collaboration depends on both structure and the ability to adapt. This chapter contains a selection of methods and processes that can serve as tools in work with strategic partnerships. The fact that they are called tools indicates that a certain level of competence is required, partly to know when they are to be used, partly to be able to use them effectively. The toolbox contains four tools with different areas of application that can

offer assistance in different phases of a partnership. All are general models that can be adapted according to the needs of the individual higher education institution or partnership. They are not complete records or recipes, and should be used by someone with a level of experience and understanding of collaboration. The table below offers suggestions of what the tools can be used for in the different phases of a partnership.

				
STARTUP	OPERATION	EVALUATION	NEW START	PHASING OUT
Systematise structure	Illustrate structure	Evaluate structure	Systematise structure	Justify phasing out
Prepare decision /risk-assess		Evaluate risk and suitability		Justify phasing out
Generate ideas and contacts	Generate ideas and contacts		Generate ideas and contacts	
		Evaluate perceived values	Understand driving forces	

Strategic Partnership Canvas

The tool referred to as the Strategic Partnership Canvas (originally the University Partnership Canvas¹¹) creates a systematic approach to strategic partnerships. It was developed by Lars Frølund¹², Max Riedel¹³ and Fiona Murray¹⁴ to be used in strategic partnerships between higher education institutions and companies.

The Strategic Partnership Canvas is about formulating expectations, and structuring and illustrating what the parties need to agree on. It is particularly useful for identifying similarities and differences in the attitudes of the actors to collaboration, and it clarifies the consequences of goals and work methods being changed. The tool can also be used to clarify different reasons for ending a partnership.

The contents of the Strategic Partnership Canvas highlight six central dimensions for strategic partnerships to be run in a structured, systematic way. These are countered by the following six fundamental questions:

- **Goals:** What are the partnership's goals?
- **Focus areas:** What are the partnership's focus areas and do they correspond with the goals?
- **Partners:** Who are the primary collaborative partners, and on what basis were they selected?
- **Format:** Which collaborative formats are most suitable for the focus areas and goals?
- **People, processes and organisation:** Which people, processes and organisational structures support the partnership?
- **Follow-up:** Which key indicators can be used to follow up on the results of the partnership?

Using the Strategic Partnership Canvas

A blank canvas template can be used as a workspace for a workshop. It is also possible to use the template to represent the higher education institution's own view, or the shared one, of a partnership. The canvas can not only be used to formulate a new partnership, it is also useful to illustrate the current status.

When working with the canvas, it is recommended that the parties first ask themselves the central question of what the partnership's goals are (see table below for examples). When the overarching goals have been defined, they can proceed with focus areas, collaborative formats, organisational structures, competences and processes to achieve the goals. The parties also need to consider which key indicators can be used to follow up to make sure that the partnership really is delivering in terms of defined goals (see table for examples of focus areas, collaborative formats and key indicators for follow-up).





The structure of the canvas makes it relatively easy to see where differences can be found in attitudes between the parties, for example in terms of the level of ambition and what competence and expertise are required to achieve the partnership's goals. When such differences, tensions and deviations have been identified, the tool can also be used to address them, by the partners working together to formulate how they can be resolved and minimised.

¹¹) The tool has been adapted from the original with the permission of the originators. See Frølund, L. och Riedel, M. F. (editors) (2018) *Strategic University Partnerships. Success-Factors from Innovative Companies*. Amsterdam: Elsevier. ¹²) From the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Innovation Initiative. ¹³) From Siemens Corporate Technology University Relations. ¹⁴) From MIT Sloan School of Management.



Illustration of the canvas's six dimensions. Adapted from the original with the permission of the originators Frølund, L. and Riedel, M. F. (editors) (2018) Strategic University Partnerships. Success-Factors from Innovative Companies. Amsterdam: Elsevier.







Examples of goals, focus areas, formats and key indicators in the Strategic Partnership Canvas.

 <p>GOALS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Acquire competence · Build networks · Gain access to financing and other resources · Communicate knowledge, technology, capacity and risk · Resolve actual problems and challenges · Gain access to or create new patents/patterns and knowledge · Improve the quality and relevance of research and education · Create societal change and influence societal actors and decision-makers · Build brands and carry out marketing
 <p>FOCUS AREAS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Bioscience and Medicine · Culture · Technology · IT · Democracy · Logistics · Infrastructure · Public health · Environment and environmental degradation · Urban planning
 <p>FORMATS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Procured research projects · Publicly financed partnerships · Shared research centres, technology platforms, test beds, etc. · Targeted calls for proposals · Workshops, hackathons, design competitions, etc. · Management meetings · Joint appointments or memberships · Placement or exchange programmes · Doctoral and post-doctoral programmes
 <p>FOLLOW-UP</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Projects with involvement from both parties · External financing with involvement from partner · Co-publications · Mobility and shared services · Co-financing of infrastructure, platforms, test environments, etc. · Student projects with involvement from partner · Participation from each party in guest lectures/seminars/case studies

The Strategic Partnership Canvas can easily be modified for use in different situations and interactions, both within and between organisations. This flexibility can

be exemplified by how the questions differ when the tool is used for interaction with a new partner or in an ongoing partnership (see table below).

Examples of different questions around the dimensions in the canvas, depending on whether the exercise is conducted with a new or an existing partner.

	NEW PARTNER	EXISTING PARTNER
 GOALS	What are the goals of each actor in the partnership? What are our common goals?	What were the goals when the partnership started? Have they changed or will they be changed in the future?
 FOCUS AREAS	Which focus areas should we choose to work on together?	Which focus areas are we collaborating on? Which focus areas should be promoted? How did we select the focus areas and should we adapt this process?
 PARTNERS	Which organisations and institutions should collaborate within which focus areas? Do we need more partners? If so, what kind?	Which organisations and institutions are already collaborating? Which organisations and institutions should we bring closer together? Do we need more partners? If so, what kind?
 FORMATS	Which forms of collaboration formats are most suitable for our areas and common goals?	How do we collaborate? Do the formats really correspond with our focus areas and common goals? Should we explore new forms of collaboration?
 PEOPLE, PROCESSES AND ORGANISATION	Which people and processes and which organisation are leading and offering support to the partnership?	Are the right people, processes and organisation providing support to the partnership? Which new competences or specialist knowledge need to be incorporated into the partnership? Which can be discontinued and replaced?
 FOLLOW-UP	Which key indicators are the most useful for following up on the partnership? Within which time frames and at which times do we want to be able to follow up on the partnership?	Which key indicators are we using right now to follow up on the partnership? Do these key indicators correspond to our goals and formats? Do we need to refine and change the key indicators?

Risk and suitability assessment

This tool is an aid for higher education institutions in assessing the suitability and risks in a strategic partnership across a higher education institution that is to be or has already been established. The tool can also be used for other wide-ranging partnerships.

The purpose of an assessment tool is to contribute to transparent, responsible collaboration at Swedish higher education institutions. Even if there are some endowed university colleges in Sweden, all higher education institutions are state-funded and are responsible for exercising governmental authority. The Instrument of Government states that government agencies must observe objectivity and impartiality in their activities. A public authority is also subject to the principle of public access and must adhere to the public service ethos¹⁵. Apart from fulfilling the value concerning transparency that is manifested in the principle of public access, the principles of the public service ethos of legality and objectivity are central for this tool. When a higher education institution enters into a strategic partnership, this should take place on factual grounds, be legally secure and ethical, and be based on impartial and objective considerations of suitability and risks.

Content of the risk and suitability assessment

Attached as an annex is a form that serves as a model for a qualitative risk assessment and action plan. It can be used to carry out and document a risk and suitability assessment. Every aspect of the list on the opposite page is rendered tangible in the form through a number of questions. The questions refer throughout to an existing partner, so if considerations are taking place before a decision is made on a partnership, this reference should be read as the “prospective strategic partner”.

Using the risk and suitability assessment

The tool should be viewed as a general framework that needs to be adapted to the needs, priorities and values of each higher education institution. This is in relation to the partner in question and the current phase of a partnership. Adaptation to the higher education institution means determining to what extent the different questions in the tool are relevant and assessing what is an acceptable answer. Higher education institutions and partnerships are free to adapt and develop the content of the risk and suitability assessment to their own tool.

The questions are best answered in a dialogue with the strategic partner and using supporting data from public sources: the partner’s website, public media or company databases. The answers to many of the questions will change due to their nature, so it is appropriate to return to them during the different phases and life span of a partnership, i.e. when a partnership is to be initiated, evaluated or phased out. While this tool should be used to assess risks that might arise with a strategic partnership, no single aspect should be viewed as being disqualifying. The value of performing an assessment with the aid of this tool lies in actively and systematically reflecting on risk, strategy and ethical issues. The expectations and demands placed on a strategic partner should always be reasonable and proportionate, and the risk analysis is not about eliminating risks, but about gaining awareness of them.

15) The Swedish Agency for Public Management (2019). Den statliga värdegrunden – gemensamma principer för en god förvaltning (*The public service ethos – common principles for good public administration*). Available at http://www.statskontoret.se/globalassets/forvaltningskultur/skrifter/vardegrund_tillg.pdf, downloaded 24/04/2020.

Considerations surrounding risk and suitability are formulated as questions in the following areas:



GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT, which depends on how well the strategic partner's strategy fits in with the higher education institution and how well-developed the strategic partner's structures are to collaborate with higher education institutions in general. For a strategic partner to be suitable, there need to be interfaces with interdisciplinary breadth that can serve as a basis for mutual focus areas and mutual contributions. As a strategic partnership encompasses all organisational levels, it is also important to assess how the strategic partner has structured governance and management of the collaboration.



CAPACITY, RESOURCES AND FINANCING, which is about the strategic partner's capacity for collaboration and how work in the partnership can be resourced. Collaboration must generate results, but requires initiatives for this to be achieved. How much the partner intends to invest in the partnership is a central factor. Depending on what the partnership is intended to include, it is also important to determine whether the capacity and resources will be available to collaborate. Perhaps the partnership can even contribute resources to operations at the higher education institution?



ETHICS AND APPROACH, which is about how the strategic partner relates to fundamental values and whether there is anything that might affect the reputation of the higher education institution. The partnership links the strategic partner to the higher education institution, and it must be possible to justify the relationship, both externally and internally. Different organisations have different values, and a partnership is based on a degree of mutuality in fundamental issues relating to values, in the same way as mutuality is needed when it comes to strategies and goals. A strategic partnership contributes to the reputation of the higher education institution, and even if the partner is fully responsible for its own operations, it is important that the higher education institution can justify the relationship if it is questioned.



REGULATORY FRAMEWORK, which focuses on provisions that are particularly relevant with regard to the circumstances surrounding a strategic partnership. A strategic partnership is a long-term commitment with a party that has a different governing regulatory framework. Being familiar with the regulations that govern the partner contributes to understanding. Other important aspects to consider are regulations relating to knowledge assets and information security, and what the partner's position on these is in principle. In connection with strategic partnerships, higher education institutions otherwise need to observe the same regulations that apply in general for research and development partnerships.¹⁶

¹⁶ These regulations include, among other things, rules on government aid; the Swedish Public Procurement Act; intellectual property law (patent, trademark, design and copyright law); intellectual property rights of academic staff; the Swedish Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act; higher education law; the Swedish Public Employment Act; and, for partnerships with other government agencies, also what is stated about collaboration in the Swedish Administrative Procedure Act and about coordination of resources in the Swedish Fee Regulation. It is recommended that the higher education institution's legal experts always be involved when entering into an agreement on collaboration.

Round table discussions

Strategic partnerships are based on the sharing of experiences and ideas in networks that span boundaries – within and between both higher education institutions and partners. Networks grow when people meet around factual matters that interest and engage them. One common feature of a strategic partnership is to hold workshops on various themes and with participants from different parts of the higher education institution and the partner's organisation. The core of such a workshop is often some form of group dialogue that can ideally be organised as a round table discussion. Round table discussions are group dialogues on a specific theme, but with no formal agenda, in which all participants are equal parties to the discussion. This structure enables round table discussions to serve as neutral arenas.

Round table discussions can serve a dual purpose. On the one hand, they can generate new ideas for focus areas, partnerships or activities; needs can meet resources in other participants, enabling an exchange. Conversations can crystallise issues where there is a shared interest in finding an answer, resulting in new

collaborations. On the other hand, they can contribute to extending networks within a partnership. Neutral meetings about relevant factual issues are a breeding ground for professional relationships. Not only do participants share their own views on the specific theme, they also access each other's various profiles and expertise, which can result in collaboration on other issues as well. Participants in a round table discussion are also exposed to the partnership as such, which can lower the threshold for putting forward suggestions or becoming engaged when an opportunity arises.

Content of a round table discussion

There is an annex in the form of a guide with a workflow to provide support in organising round table discussions. The workflow to organise round table discussions includes the following steps:

1. Decision and responsibilities
2. Organiser
3. Interview questions and implementation
4. Snowball selection
5. Documentation
6. Evaluation



The composition of theme and participants are central elements of the content, although these do depend on the situation. The annex therefore has no precise instructions on the selection of theme and participants. As a general rule, well-chosen themes are those that open up many angles, both practical and academic, and based on different subject areas. Themes also need to be relevant and interesting for both parties' core operations, without necessarily having to be specific to any single area of research or operations. As relevance and interest are crucial in attracting participants and bringing about a productive discussion, one accessible route is often to develop themes in a dialogue with intended participants.

Using round table discussions

Round table discussions always need to be adapted to their specific context. It is possible to conduct discussions on several different themes in parallel on one occasion, and round table discussions can be integrated into a longer programme. One such event could be the partnership day that are held at some higher education institutions. This is where both actors in one or more partnerships gather in order to share knowledge and experiences and make new contacts.

Round table discussions can be used in phases where it is relevant to develop a partnership's content and networks. Round table discussions can serve as a basis for work to generate focus areas for a new partnership. Similarly, round table discussions can be organised to renew a partnership in a new start phase, regardless of whether there are new focus areas or a partnership needs to be revitalised by means of a number of activities. It is also common to organise regular workshops similar to round table discussions every one or two years. This forms part of a partnership's annual cycle or its regular operational plan.



Self-evaluation interviews

Evaluating collaboration is difficult. One aspect that contributes to the complexity is that the value of collaboration is often different to different parties and people. To understand what collaboration contributes for the actors and its different levels, you can conduct self-evaluation interviews. This is the guide's own term for a kind of interview-based study that has been tested at some of the higher education institutions that contributed to development work. Put briefly, it means that key individuals themselves have to put words to the values they see in the partnership. It is a qualitative way of examining and documenting perceived values in a partnership.

The purpose of the self-evaluation interview is to broaden the understanding of what the partnership has contributed – and can contribute. Internally, it can provide insights into how the partnership's added value and quality are perceived by different parts of the operation. It can increase the mutual understanding between the partners and provide an insight into how their own operations complement the other. And vice versa. It serves as a basis for the joint development of the strategy for the partnership as a whole.

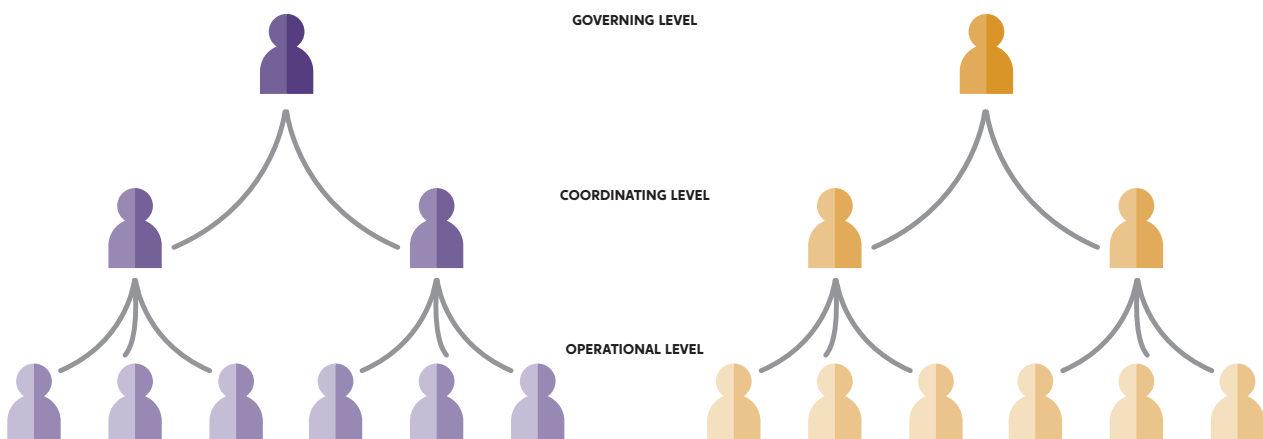
Content of self-evaluation interviews

The annex contains a guide to self-evaluation interviews, with a workflow that includes the following steps:

1. Decision and responsibilities
2. Interviewers
3. Interview questions and implementation
4. Snowball selection
5. Documentation
6. Evaluation

This structure includes the interview being conducted in a certain format with a number of basic questions, as well as a method for selecting interviewees. The format of the interviews and the questions are inspired by an interview technique known as laddering¹⁷, which aims to explore in depth the perceived added value in the actual activities within the partnership.

The snowball selection method means that the first interviewees are asked to suggest additional people to interview. To supplement the snowball method, the self-evaluation interviews with members of senior management, and interviewees are suggested further down in the organisational structure. This enables the partnership to be explored starting with the perspective of the management teams, which is reflected against perspectives in operational activities.



17) Reynolds, T. J., and Gutman, J. (2001). Laddering theory, method, analysis, and interpretation. I T. J. Reynolds & J. C. Olson (Red.), Understanding consumer decision making: The means-end approach to marketing and advertising strategy (pp. 25–62). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Using self-evaluation interviews

Self-evaluation interviews place perceptions of the partnership side by side when people find themselves in different parts of the organisations. This becomes a test of to what extent perceptions match up, both between groups and with the intention set out in written goals and strategies. When, as in this case, there is a clear hierarchy between management and operational activities, the interviews must be confidential. This is so that decisive differences can emerge. The people conducting the interviews need to have the ability to establish and maintain this confidence, and be able to present dividing lines in a diplomatic way.

In the life cycle of a partnership, self-evaluation interviews are a tool that can be used in the evaluation phase and the new start phase. In an evaluation phase it serves as a qualitative complement to follow-up on key indicators or other more quantitative data sources. As the results represent a comparison of different ideas about how a partnership creates value, it also works well as a basis for developing a strategy. For this reason, it is an appropriate tool in a new start phase, if additional material is needed in order to define a new direction.

Summary: Toolbox

- The Strategic Partnership Canvas illustrates a partnership by setting out six different dimensions in an easily accessible layout. Filling in a canvas can be one way of reaching agreement with a new partner or an exercise to develop further an existing partnership.
- The risk and suitability assessment offers support to managers and operational support at the higher education institution. It is intended to contribute a systematic approach for factual, impartial supporting data for decisions about a partnership.
- Round table discussions are thematic group discussions in which all participants are equal. They can be held independently or as an element of a longer programme, not only in the startup and new start phase, but also as a regular feature of the partnership. The aim is to generate both new ideas and new relationships.
- Self-evaluation interviews are an interview-based study in which key individuals themselves have to put words to the values they perceive that the partnership contributes. The interviews can be used as a qualitative contribution to the evaluation of a partnership or to increase understanding of the partnership ahead of a new start.

Postscript

Work on this guide was carried out in a collaboration involving a network of coordinators, and others with similar roles, in the field of strategic partnerships. It became clear in meetings between those involved that many are facing similar challenges in their professional role. The sharing of experience also made it possible to identify constructive approaches and solutions. The guide is an attempt to reproduce parts of the professional expertise that emerged in the joint discussions, as a response to the need for practical resources for the professional group in question. It is intended to provide a basis for introducing new employees and for continued development of the professional role, both in and beyond the network that has been formed.

During the course of the project, it became evident that there is still a need to develop approaches, work methods and tools for strategic partnerships. This guide represents a starting point rather than an endpoint. A clearer definition and practical tools increase the possibilities of developing work on strategic partnerships.

Want to find out more?

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Annexes

1. Risk and suitability assessment Best filled in digitally. Download Word template: [link](#)

2. Round table discussions in strategic partnerships You can find background information about round table discussions on page 40 of the guide.

3. Self-evaluation interviews in strategic partnerships You can find background information about self-evaluation interviews on page 42 of the guide.



TO FACILITATE work on strategic partnerships, 16 higher education institutions in Sweden have produced a guide, within a partnership with funding from Vinnova. The "Strategic Partnership Guide" is a description of and a guide to strategic partnerships. It is formulated from the perspective of a higher education institution. The target group is staff working with collaboration in the area of operational support at Swedish universities and colleges, to provide support in their professional role. The guide may also be useful for vice-chancellors, management teams at higher education institutions, executive boards or academic leaders, to help familiarise themselves with this kind of collaboration. The guide provides an introduction to strategic partnerships and compiles experiences and lessons learned that can facilitate work when getting started with or further developing partnerships.

