

## 3.2 Framing the Partnership

Partnerships, coalitions, and collaboratives come in all sizes and vary in scope, depth, and timeframe. This section provides some ideas about how to structure your partnership in a way that is appropriate for your project and manageable for your organization and your partners.

First, it is important to understand that you don't always have to build a coalition to accomplish your goals. If the challenge you are addressing is relatively focused, well-defined, and time-limited, and if your organization has the capacity to deliver the outputs and outcomes, it may be more efficient to work alone. The structure of the project can then be aligned with your organizational structure, and project activities can be aligned with your regular work. In this context, you will also have the ability to measure outcomes and use and report the data as needed. You can still invite other organizations to participate in your work as appropriate and in an ad hoc way (for example, by asking a partner organization to send a speaker to your meeting or to publicize the event through their network). These opportunities to support each other can be mutually beneficial, but they are not strategic partnerships (although they may set the stage for more coordinated efforts in the future).

Sometimes, however, involving partners at a more strategic level can greatly enhance your project and may even be necessary to accomplish your conservation goals. This may be the case when:

- The issue you're addressing extends beyond your agency's jurisdiction and you need to partner with another agency to achieve your goals.
- You need partner organizations to provide financial assistance, technical assistance, or products and services to enable landowners to take the actions you're promoting.

- You are trying to reach a new and unfamiliar audience and need the local knowledge and networks of your partner organizations.
- You simply do not have sufficient capacity and resources to conduct your program at the scale needed to have an impact.

Partnership structures can range from informal agreements to remove invasive species along a shared boundary to formalized arrangements in which organizational lines become fluid, with staff helping across organizations and audience information and tracking data housed in a shared location. Organizing collaborative efforts is easier when the roles that partner organizations are asked to play are well aligned with their existing work responsibilities and directly advance their own goals. Partnering becomes more difficult when you ask partner organizations to alter their operations or priorities to help achieve specific collaborative goals. Deeper levels of collaboration require more coordination management, more organizational commitment, a significant focus on relationship building and communication, and a willingness to permit decision-making to occur within the collective. However, these deep collaborations also have the potential for much greater impact and are necessary for addressing certain kinds of complex, multi-dimensional, and multi-jurisdictional conservation challenges.

It is useful to think of the depth of your collaboration along a continuum (see next page). No point on the continuum is better or worse than the others; the important thing is to find the level of collaboration that fits the scope of the problem and capacity and motivation of the partners involved, and to align roles and expectations accordingly. You can also be flexible, deepening or lessening engagement as the project progresses, or working more closely with some partners than others.

**Partnerships entail different levels of engagement and alignment. As a general rule, deeper partnerships have greater potential for impact but also require more management time, effort, and skill. It is important to set up your partnership in a way that suits project goals and matches your organization's investment in building and managing the coalition.**

### 3 WORKING WITH PARTNERS

TABLE 3A: COLLABORATION MODELS ON A CONTINUUM

	LESS COLLABORATION .....➤ MORE COLLABORATION		
	<b>Working Alone (with ad hoc support from other organizations)</b>	<b>Working Together to Implement a Project</b>	<b>Forming a Partnership to Address a Complex Issue</b>
<b>Nature of the Problem</b>	Suited to address problems that are focused and well defined, and the lead organization has the skills and capacity to deliver meaningful results.	Works when problems are focused and well defined but partner skills and resources, or cross-jurisdictional efforts, are needed. Partners must coordinate actions to deliver meaningful results.	Needed when the issue is not well defined or is a set of interrelated cross-jurisdictional problems. Many partners must take complementary actions to deliver meaningful results.
<b>Project Objectives</b>	The project objective is set by the lead organization and it addresses their mission.	The project objective is set by the lead organization but aligns with participating organizations' missions.	The partnership's objectives are determined jointly to address a landscape-level need.
<b>Partners' Obligations</b>	The lead organization requests specific help as needed, and partners provide help as they are willing and able.	Partners commit to making some contribution to the project. These contributions usually involve altering their existing activities to increase impact through coordination.	Partners commit to the objectives established by the partnership and adjust their work to meet them.
<b>Measuring Results</b>	The lead organization tracks results as needed for organizational or grant requirements.	Each organization tracks their own results as needed for organizational or grant requirements. Partners share tracking or summary data with each other as they are able.	The partnership tracks all actions across organizations to assess overall progress and the interactions of different activities. Results are shared with partners to direct future work.
<b>Potential Impact</b>	The impact of the project is limited by the lead organization's jurisdiction and resources.	The impact of the project is limited by the jurisdiction and resources of partnering organizations, with possible efficiencies from coordinated actions.	Efforts by partner organizations interact with and feed into each other, leading to impacts that would not otherwise be possible.
<b>Example</b>	The lead organization supports oak regeneration through landowner workshops and tree giveaways. They make requests to partners to present at events and to use their offices as distribution locations for tree giveaways.	Partners support oak regeneration through cross-boundary management actions that are coordinated to create a larger area of contiguous management. They also coordinate their landowner outreach to focus on this region.	The partnership supports the stabilization of oak habitat by changing how forests are managed in the region across all ownership types. They work to engage all relevant audiences, including landowners, loggers and policymakers, to reach their objectives.