

Partnership Assessment Tools: Procedures

December 7, 2012 (Submitted by the Priority VI. 1 Team, pending Lib Exec review)

Strategic partnerships have been identified as a central means through which Cornell University Library will fulfill its core mission:

CUL Vision: Empowering Cornell's research and learning community with deep expertise, innovative services, and outstanding collections strengthened by strategic partnerships.

The potential advantages of partnerships are many, but two are most important: First, partnerships can bring greater efficiency, allowing us to use funds on other projects. Second, they allow us to contribute skills, expertise, content, and other resources to work with partners to accomplish work that no single partner could accomplish independently.

CUL has two tools to help you think about partnerships. These tools were developed by Priority VI.1 Team in 2012. The Assessment and Communication Department will be the keeper of the tools.

- The [Pre-Partnership assessment tool](#) is for those considering whether to engage in a partnership. It is intended to guide the thinking of CUL partnership leads as they assess the value, costs, and risks of a new potential partnership.
- The [Existing Partnership assessment tool](#) is intended to help partnership leads determine whether an existing partnership is functioning as well as it could be.

In addition, there are resources available to assist you in the process of determining whether to partner and, if you do, to help make sure you take proceed in the most expeditious way. These include:

- Dedicated resource staff: Barbara Berger-Eden (grants), Zsuzsa Koltay (assessment and communication), Tami Magnus (finance), and Ed Weissman (CUL and campus coordination).
- The Associate University Librarians, who set CUL's overall priorities and commitments.
- Experienced partners: the leaders and participants in CUL's many successful current and past partnerships.

Finally, you can consult the CUL partnerships and initiatives webpage (<http://www.library.cornell.edu/aboutus/culpartners>). This is a good starting point for staff to perform due diligence and tap into local expertise as they form decisions.

How to use the partnership tools?

We designed the tools with flexible use in mind: They can be used as conversation starters, checklists, formal or informal surveys. If used with candor and analyzed critically, they can help partnership leaders, managers, administrators and participants to better understand the strengths, weaknesses, and requirements of partnerships.

Who should use the partnership tools?

The partnership evaluation tools are designed to be completed by the person who is responsible for the partnership or the person who is initiating one, ideally in conjunction with the individuals or institution that they are partnering with. More often than not the evaluation might become a team effort, since different staff might be most knowledgeable about specific aspects of the project.

When should the partnership tools be used?

The Pre-Partnership Check-up tool should be completed when there is a reasonable amount of information known but prior to committing to a partnership. It will be a rare occasion when the leader or team will have answers to all the questions on the tool. Whatever gaps there might be on the form will provide guidance about areas to further explore and define as the partnership gets established and developed.

The Existing Partnership Check-up tool should be completed at least once a year and shared and reviewed with the supervisor and the appropriate decision-maker(s). Additionally, the tool should be completed as needed if problems or issues arise, if expansions or continuations of the agreement are being considered, or if the resources or personnel required for the project change significantly.

Who should review the completed form?

Partnerships, like other projects and initiatives, must have the necessary political and financial support from the appropriate level of management. The appropriate level of management depends on the size, scope and resource commitment (staff time, funds, etc.) involved, and whether the partnership is informal or there is a formal signed agreement (e.g., a Memorandum of Understanding or contract). Resource commitments can vary from one or more staff member's work time to funding for travel or other expenses to a formal, binding services contract.

Once the partnership leader and team feel that the completed form represents the project, it should be shared with the leader's supervisor and reviewed by the resource commitment decision-maker(s). Every situation is different and potential leaders are responsible for determining the likely resource commitment and the relevant decision-maker(s) for that project. Most often:

Resource commitment:

If the partnership can be resourced at the unit/department level, then the unit/department head, in consultation with the Associate University Librarian (AUL), is the decision-maker and is responsible for providing the senior level of management commitment.

If the partnership requires resources beyond what the unit/department can furnish then the AUL in consultation with either the AULs providing additional resources and/or the University Librarian (UL) are the decision-makers/providers of senior level of management commitment.

If there is a formal agreement associated with the partnership, such as a Memorandum of Understanding or a contract that binds the Library or the University, then the University Librarian, the Associate University Librarian for Administrative Services, and appropriate university offices (e.g., Office of University Counsel) must approve the terms of the MOU or contract.

In the spirit of focusing on what we do well with limited resources, it is important to recognize that some partnerships are the right answers, some have a limited natural life span. Both tools may reveal issues that require attention of the partnership project initiator, the project leader, his/her next level supervisor, or other stakeholders. Such issues might include lack of clarity among the partners with regard to the goals, differences among the partners with regard to priorities, or the continuing relevance of an existing partnership relationship. The tools do not provide solutions but do provide an opportunity to surface issues of significance.

Assessment of the tools

The Priority VI.1 Team has asked several past and current partnership participants to test these tools. Improvement of the tools have been built into the tools themselves. At the end of the tools there is a link to a separate evaluation for assessing the tools themselves. As the keeper of the tools, CUL Assessment and Communications will evaluate and update the tools periodically based on feedback.