

KEY PRINCIPLES OF A COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIP “PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS”

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INTRODUCTION

The NASDA State-Federal Program Review Task Force recommends that the principles contained in the following document be used by the state departments of agriculture as a guide when considering cooperative programs with USDA and other federal agencies. These principles were patterned after the partnership concept used by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

This document is intended to define what is meant when we use the term "partnership agreement" and is specifically intended to be used in the development of written negotiated "Partnership Agreements" with state and local agencies, as well as associations of officials of such agencies.

The fundamental goals and process concepts can also be applied to partnerships with other federal agencies, educational and research organizations, trade and industry associations as well as consumer groups, the media and other organizations where it is beneficial to develop cooperative efforts on either an ad hoc or continuing basis.

PARTNERSHIP CONCEPT

The current environment of government downsizing, competing priorities, increasing resource constraints, consumer demands, and industry's concern for a level playing field necessitates changes in the way we do business. What we have done in the past in the area of Federal/State cooperative programs has served the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and state governments well, but we must now use broad, innovative strategies to ensure agency mandates are achieved, and industry and consumer concerns are addressed.

The goal remains now, as before, to maximize the utilization of available resources in the most efficient and effective manner while achieving the highest level of service delivery. NASDA believes the USDA should be given the authority to enter into cooperative agreements with the states in implementing all policies and programs of the department when such agreements would benefit the state and federal governments and U.S. producers and consumers.

As used in this document, a partnership is defined as a "working relationship characterized by mutual participation and joint interest." The partners could include federal, state, and local agencies, industry, academia, and other organizations.

This is especially important in planning program activities and working to maintain and enhance the level of knowledge and expertise within the partnership. Each involved party has specific program authorities, responsibilities, and interests that are mutually beneficial.

PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Background

The partnership concept presented in this document involving state agencies will be utilized as a model to establish the framework upon which partnership initiatives with other entities may be constructed. The ultimate goal is to utilize existing relationships, or establish new relationships, with federal/state/local

agencies, industry, academia, and other organizations, to build cooperative partnerships to assist the USDA in meeting current and future challenges as it carries out its mission.

Partnership agreements will clearly define roles and responsibilities of the partners. The primary objective of such agreements is to increase the efficiency of service delivery in specific program areas. This can only be achieved through joint planning, improved communication, and each partner demonstrating equivalent commitment. This will lead to greater acceptance of one another's scientifically sound inspection and analytical work.

The activities conducted under partnerships (i.e. planned meetings/conferences, inspections, sample collection, joint development of shared databases, etc.) may be a part of a formal agreement or an informal (non-written) agreement.

The partnership relationships are defined as follows:

- "Partnership Agreements" are formal, written documents which are intended to clearly define specific goals, activities, and responsibilities of each partner. Partnership Agreements are developed to produce measurable outcomes relatable to programmatic objectives and/or operational needs. Such agreements may be negotiated at the regional or national levels.

- "Partnership Activities" are informal arrangements or other working relationships that are not reduced to a formal, written document. Partnership activities, separate and apart from formal agreements, are reportable within the guidance provided by this document.

- "Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)" is also a formal, written document. Unlike Partnership Agreements, MOU's are general in scope and contain broad statements of cooperative relationships. MOU's are not intended and generally do not produce measurable outcomes.

Definition of "Partnership Agreement"

A "Partnership Agreement" is a written, negotiated agreement intended to accomplish a specific program goal between USDA and the partner organization(s).

It includes:

- Identification of goals and priorities
- Identification of resources to accomplish goals
- Detailed tasks and responsibilities
- Performance measures & evaluation mechanism
- Specific time-frames
- Recommendations for further actions

Performance Goals and Activities for "Partnership Agreements"

"Partnership Agreements" may be negotiated to achieve a wide variety of possible, mutually beneficial goals. Such agreements should be realistic and practical.

Each agreement should be focused to achieve specific program goal(s) (anticipated outcome) and related activities necessary to accomplish the goal(s) within available or planned resources and within a specific time frame (preferably the current fiscal year).

To measure the degree to which goals are met, each agreement must include a mechanism to monitor in-process activities (outputs) and contain a means of conducting a final evaluation (outcome). Resulting benefits (ultimate outcomes), or lack thereof, should be fully described along with relevant and appropriate recommendations.

Examples of goals and activities for "Partnership Agreements":

- Increase consumer protection
- Eliminate duplication
- Expand technology transfer
- Expand training opportunities
- Improve communications
- Develop joint training courses
- Establish shared databases
- Improve efficiency-cost savings
- Improve consistency of enforcement activities
- Enhance information sharing, exchange, and dissemination
- Increase levels of industry compliance
- Assure emergency response capabilities
- Increase staff proficiency (USDA/state)
- Empower cooperating organizations
- Increase in program productivity/coverage

HOW TO DEVELOP A "PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT"

Following are specific process steps which should be taken to develop "Partnership Agreements" along with a recommended format for the written document which constitutes the particular agreement made. Annual renewal is recommended for longer term initiatives.

A. Establish policies of partnership.

1. Obtain field/regional management and staff understanding and commitment to the partnership concept.
2. Establish a mutually agreeable policy of cooperation with partner agencies.
 - Indicate USDA support from field/regional management.
 - Solicit cooperating agency agreement.
 - Establish agreement with face to face meetings between top management of respective agencies (i.e., state/local, department or agency directors, commissioners, secretaries).

B. Identify program areas for partnership.

1. Local management teams of cooperating agencies meet to identify mutual program priorities for partnership consideration.
2. Mechanism is established for regular interaction between cooperating agencies.
3. Specific USDA and cooperating agency contacts (either groups or individuals) are identified for project coordination and management purposes.

4. Assurances are developed that statutory authorities are available to accomplish agreement goals.

C. Formalize each "Partnership Agreement."

1. Statement of agreement to establish partnership.
2. Agreement on purpose, goals and time frame.
3. Identify specific program area(s) for partnering along with appropriate priorities, contacts, and statutory authority.
4. List responsibilities. For each partner, list anticipated output activities.

USDA (be specific) such as:

- Supply Training.
- Supply Equipment.
- Supply and share Information.
- Conduct Inspections.
- Evaluate Inspections.
- Analyze Samples.
- Evaluate Work Results.

Cooperating party (be specific) such as:

- Supply Training.
- Supply Equipment.
- Supply and share Information.
- Conduct Inspections.
- Evaluate Inspections.
- Analyze Samples.
- Evaluate Work Results.

5. Identify resources needed to be used to accomplish goals such as:

- Personnel
- Money
- Time
- Equipment
- Training

6. Establish performance measurements. Each agreement will have two types of measurements:

- a. Outputs (number of activities)

For Example:

- Number of inspections vs. planned.
- Number of samples analyzed vs. planned.
- Number of people trained.

- b. Outcomes (consequences of outputs)

For Example:

- Increase Compliance level (% or other).
- Decrease in violations identified.
- Increase in Voluntary compliance.
- Decrease in Average cost of activity.

Increase in Quality & Quantity of goods in commerce.

D. Evaluation of agreement results.

1. Interim (in-process) monitoring.
 - Frequency/milestones at which progress is measured.
 - Purpose of interim assessments.
 - Who is responsible.
 - Assessment of extent of progress on output and outcome measurements.
 - Conduct a face to face discussion with partner agency coordinators.
 - In-process adjustment identified (as needed) and implemented.
2. Final evaluation.
 - Done at completion.
 - Performed jointly by partners.
 - Assess degree to which goals were met (outputs vs. outcomes).

EXAMPLE:

- Rate of inspection accomplishment.
- Number of volatile goods removed from commerce
- Resources saved by work activity.
- Was increased level of coverage of industry achieved?

E. Conclusions and Recommendations.

Review of activities and accomplishments. Were goals met? Provides for a final report including discussion of results of partnering efforts along with recommendations for follow-up action if warranted. Follow-up recommendations-- continue/modify/eliminate.

F. Signatures of Responsible Parties.

FORMAT OF "PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT"

1. Statement of agreement to establish partnership.
2. Partnership purpose and goals.
 - a. Identify specific time frames--beginning--ending periods.
 - b. List anticipated outcomes.
3. Program area and activities.
 - a. Identification of program area and priority.
 - b. Cooperating agency contacts.
 - c. Affirmation that there is a statutory basis for partnership activity.
4. Responsibilities.
 - a. Anticipated output activities of partners.
 - b. Identify USDA responsibilities.
 - c. Identify cooperating agency responsibilities.

5. Resources planned to carry out partnership.
6. Performance Measures/Evaluation.
 - a. Based on anticipated output activities and anticipated outcomes.
 - b. Interim (time frames).
 - c. Final (time frames).
7. Conclusions and Recommendations.
 - a. Were goals met?
 - b. Follow-up recommendations.
8. Signatures of responsible parties.

PARTNERSHIP EVALUATION

1. TYPE: _____ Partnership Agreement _____ Partnership Activity
2. [USDA] REGION/DISTRICT: _____
3. STATE/OTHER PARTNER: _____
4. PARTNERSHIP SUMMARY: _____
5. INCLUSIVE DATES: _____ TO _____
6. RESOURCES: _____
7. OUTPUTS:
8. OUTCOMES:
9. EVALUATION OF PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT: _____ ANNUAL _____ FINAL
10. RENEW PARTNERSHIP: _____ YES _____ NO
11. NEW DATES: _____ TO _____
12. SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____

Please type name and sign

