



Self-assessment framework: measuring the effectiveness of partnership governance arrangements

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We can't do this alone. We work as part of the Defra group (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs), with the rest of government, local councils, businesses, civil society groups and local communities to create a better place for people and wildlife.

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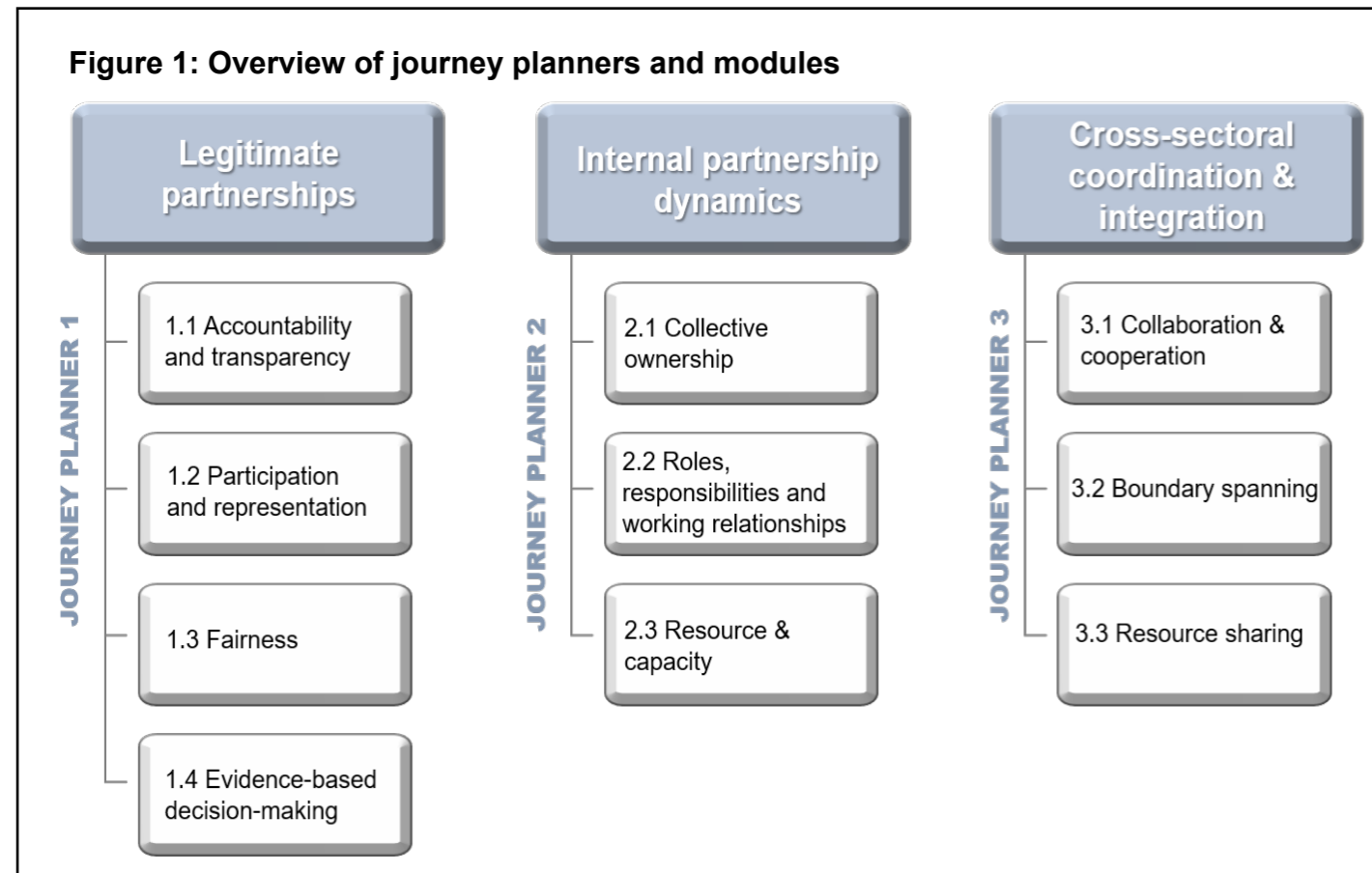
Self-assessment framework

Measuring the effectiveness of partnership governance arrangements

Focus: Partnerships related to flood and coastal erosion risk management, water management or broader partnerships featuring these aspects.

Background

The self-assessment framework draws from two research projects; the Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) Research and Development Programme (Environment Agency, Defra, Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales) funded research project '[Understanding effective flood and coastal erosion risk management governance in England and Wales](#)' (2019-2020) and an internal Environment Agency project on water governance and catchment partnerships (undertaken in 2018/19). Both projects identified governance challenges that are encountered through partnerships and key conditions for successful partnership working within FCERM and integrated water management more widely. These lessons have been combined and translated into practical guidance on effective governance – where *governance* refers to the way in which decisions are taken and implemented to realise a collective goal.



The guidance takes the form of ‘**journey planners**’, focusing on three core aspects of effective governance:

- **Journey Planner 1** – Legitimate partnerships
- **Journey Planner 2** – Internal partnership dynamics
- **Journey Planner 3** – Cross-sectoral coordination and integration

These themes and the structure of the journey planners were selected and refined through two virtual workshops (November 2020 and May 2021) with a core user group; including representatives from the Environment Agency (with team representatives from partnerships and strategic overview, environment programme, stakeholder engagement, people and places, and strategic catchment partnerships), Natural Resources Wales (FCERM and People and Places team) and Welsh Government, among others. The guidance was further developed in consultation with key members of the steering group.

The journey planners are made up of modules, which include objectives, advice and good practice examples. Whilst the journey planners are numbered (1 to 3), they do not need to be read in order or in their entirety: users can navigate to specific modules of interest to suit their needs and priorities. See Figure 1.

Purpose

To accompany the journey planners, this **self-assessment framework** enables partnerships to either i) assess the quality of established governance arrangements, or ii) to help inform the design of new or emerging partnership arrangements. The assessment is structured in three parts to mirror each journey planner, as follows:

- [Part 1 Legitimate partnerships](#) – To what extent is the partnership guided by the principles of legitimacy and legitimate practice established?
- [Part 2 Internal partnership dynamics](#) – To what extent has the partnership established the right enabling environment for successful partnership working?
- [Part 3 Cross-sectoral coordination and integration](#) – To what extent is the partnership able to coordinate and integrate its activities with other relevant actors and sectors, where required?

This exercise is intended to help you identify the current strengths and weaknesses of the (existing or emerging) partnership arrangement and direct you to the appropriate journey planner (and modules) should you find areas for improvement. You may also wish to use the results to stimulate discussion within the partnership to help identify opportunities for improvement and to track progress.

As with the journey planners, you do not need to complete the self-assessment in sequential order or in its entirety: you can navigate to specific modules of interest to suit your needs and priorities.

Instructions for completion

The self-assessment is a starting point for discussion and critical reflection. You may want to complete this as a collective and work through each module in turn. Alternatively, individual partners could complete this form separately before discussing as a group.

For existing partnerships, we recommend that all partners are involved in completing the self-assessment to provide a rounded view on how the partnership is working in practice. It may also be useful to consult stakeholders outside the partnership to gain an external perspective.

For new or emerging partnerships, we recommend completing the self-assessment collectively to help establish a shared view on the structures and procedures you would like to see within the partnership going forwards.

There is no 'one size fits all' – partnerships can take different approaches for different reasons. Moreover, not all items of the self-assessment may be relevant for the goals of the partnership. When completing the assessment, you should consider what is '*appropriate*' to the aims and scope of the partnership; therefore a 'low' score may not necessarily be a weakness providing it can be fully justified. At the end of each part, additional space is provided for you to reflect on your answers and consider what improvements might need to be made or integrated into the design of the partnership; or equally to highlight and celebrate what the partnership is doing well.

Target audience

The assessment is intended to support existing partnerships, specifically related to flood and coastal erosion risk management, water management or broader partnerships featuring these aspects. It may also be useful for those looking to establish new partnerships as it outlines key questions to consider and embed within new governance arrangements.

Part 1: Legitimate partnerships

Legitimacy is regarded as essential for good governance. Legitimacy is dependent on several interlinked factors related to: accountability and transparency; participation and representation; fairness; and evidence-based decision-making. You should use this section to assess how the partnership is guided by the principles of legitimacy and to determine the extent to which legitimate practice is established.

Advice and good practice examples are outlined in [Journey Planner 1: Legitimate Partnerships](#).

Module	Key questions	Low	Medium	High	Score (Low, Medium or High)
1.1 Accountability and transparency Mechanisms should be available to hold actors accountable for decisions and actions taken. Transparency is a pre-requisite for this and means that the decision-making process, not just the outcome of this process, should be visible and important information accessible and understandable to others. Partnerships should be open to an appropriate degree of internal and external scrutiny to ensure accountable decision making. <i>Some example mechanisms:</i> formerly assigned roles and responsibilities, established terms of reference, progress monitoring, internal and external reporting commitments, publicly available records of meeting minutes.	To what extent are accountability mechanisms established and used to help maintain accountability?	There are no or few accountability mechanisms within the partnership. These are typically informal and internal, or solely reliant on mandatory reporting mechanisms.	There are several accountability mechanisms within the partnership, which support internal and external scrutiny to varying degrees. Alternatively, mechanisms may be present, but not well utilised. There is some scope for improvement.	There are established and effective accountability mechanisms within the partnership, which support internal and external scrutiny and accountability to the appropriate degree.	
	To what extent is the partnership's decision-making process, and outcomes of these decisions, transparent to those outside the partnership?	The partnership could be described as a 'closed shop'. The decision-making process, and outcomes of this process, lacks transparency and is poorly communicated to those outside the partnership.	The partnership is moderately transparent about certain aspects of the decision-making process; however, there is a tendency to communicate outcomes only (rather than how decisions were made).	The partnership is very open and transparent about how decisions are made and the outcomes of these decisions.	
1.2 Participation and representation The interests of all relevant stakeholder groups, including the public, should be represented to an	To what extent does partnership membership reflect the diversity of stakeholder interests?	Only a limited number of stakeholder groups are represented within the partnership.	Most, but not all, relevant stakeholder groups are represented within the partnership.	All relevant stakeholder groups are represented within partnership membership.	

Module	Key questions	Low	Medium	High	Score (Low, Medium or High)
appropriate degree within the decision-making process. Representation can take many forms; for instance, stakeholder representatives may be active members of the partnership. Alternatively, partnerships may rely on consultation and engagement processes, at various or specific stages of the decision-making process.	To what extent is public engagement embedded in partnership activities?	Public engagement is very limited and often reliant on one-way knowledge transfer or basic consultation procedures. Public input into the decision-making process is lacking or severely limited.	Public engagement is a part of partnership activities, although there is scope for improvement. Engagement may be limited to consultation procedures or limited to a specific stage of the decision-making process.	Meaningful public engagement is sought and embedded into partnership activities where appropriate; this means that efforts have been made to tailor engagement approaches and use different techniques to maximise reach. Public perspectives and local knowledge are factored into the partnership's decision-making.	
1.3 Fairness The principles of fairness should be embedded into the decision-making process and outcome of this process; this is often described as essential for ensuring procedural and distributive justice in governance. Accountability mechanisms and participation are particularly important for procedural fairness (see rows above). Consideration should also be given to the impacts of specific decisions and how these will be distributed across different groups.	To what extent are issues of fairness considered and addressed through the decision-making process?	There appears to be little to no consideration of fairness or how decisions could potentially impact different social groups, across areas and over time.	Due consideration is given to fairness, although this is limited in focus and the potential impacts of decisions on different social groups, areas and over time are not always considered or communicated.	Substantial consideration is given to the impact of decisions on different social groups, across areas and over time; including the potential impact of unintended and indirect knock-on effects of partnership decisions and activities. This is clearly communicated and transparent to those both within and external to the partnership.	
1.4 Evidence-based decision making Decisions should be underpinned by the best available evidence, drawing from trusted sources and different types of evidence (for example scientific data, economic data, social science, and local knowledge). This is an important part of	To what extent are decisions and activities supported by the best available evidence?	The evidence used is very limited in scope, type, source, and date. Evidence-based decision making is severely restricted by the lack of resources and lack of mechanisms to facilitate evidence gathering, collective understanding, knowledge	Decisions are based on available sources of evidence, however there is scope for improvement in scope, type, source, and date. Resources are partially allocated and certain mechanisms are in place to facilitate evidence gathering, collective understanding,	Different types of evidence (from trusted sources) have been fully considered, as befitting the nature of the decision at hand. Resources are appropriately allocated and mechanisms established to facilitate evidence gathering, collective	

Module	Key questions	Low	Medium	High	Score (Low, Medium or High)
<p>building trust and enhancing the acceptability of decisions and actions taken by the partnership.</p> <p>It is important to allocate resources and mechanisms to facilitate evidence gathering, knowledge (co)production and the integration of evidence in decision making.</p> <p>Some example mechanisms include data sharing protocols, the use of 'living' strategies or plans, methods and resources for engaging local citizens in 'citizen science', or maximising opportunities for sharing knowledge with and between relevant organisations and other partnerships.</p>		(co)production and integration in decision making.	knowledge (co)production and integration in decision-making; however, these are not fully sufficient.	understanding, knowledge (co)production and integration in decision making.	

Space for reflection

Why did you select the options above? What improvements could be made?

Part 2: Internal partnership dynamics

Effective governance structures and mechanisms are essential for creating the right enabling environment for partnership working within partnerships. These can be grouped into 3 core sub-themes related to – i) collective ownership; ii) roles, responsibilities and working relationships; and iii) resource and capacity. You should use this section to assess the extent to which the partnership has established the right enabling environment for successful partnership working.

Advice and good practice examples are outlined in [Journey Planner 2: Internal partnership dynamics](#).

Module	Key questions	Low	Medium	High	Score (Low, Medium or High)
<p>2.1 Collective ownership</p> <p>Establishing (and crucially maintaining) a shared vision and direction for the partnership is essential for cultivating ‘buy-in’, shared ownership and commitment to delivering the partnership’s goals. Various strategies exist to support this, such as co-creating a mission statement or vision strategy and defining measurable goals and targets to help sustain momentum.</p>	<p>To what extent have steps been taken to establish and maintain collective ownership and commitment to delivering the goals of the partnership?</p>	<p>No or few steps have been taken to establish and maintain collective ownership and commitment. The goal(s) of the partnership are not clear or are not agreed.</p>	<p>Efforts have been made to establish and maintain collective ownership and commitment; however, there is scope for improvement.</p>	<p>Significant steps have been taken and highly effective governance structures and mechanisms established to maintain collective ownership, commitment and momentum within the partnership. Goals are clearly identified and agreed.</p>	
<p>2.2 Roles, responsibilities and working relationships</p> <p>For partnerships to be effective, roles and responsibilities must be clearly assigned, and internal working structures established to facilitate collaboration and delivery. Simultaneously, it is vital that partnerships take the time to get to know one another so that members understand each other’s roles, remits and crucially the constraints within which they are working outside of the partnership, while establishing trust. This might be supported</p>	<p>To what extent are roles and responsibilities and clear, effective internal structures established to deliver the partnership’s goals?</p>	<p>There is a lack of clarity over the roles and responsibilities of partnership members; and an absence or lack of internal structures to facilitate partnership working.</p>	<p>The roles and responsibilities of partnership members are mostly clear, however there is scope for improving the internal structures within the partnership to better facilitate partnership working.</p>	<p>Roles and responsibilities are clearly assigned and highly effective internal structures are in place to deliver the partnership’s goals.</p>	
	<p>To what extent is effective leadership established to enable the partnership to meet its goals?</p>	<p>There is a lack of clear and effective leadership within the partnership.</p>	<p>Leadership role(s) are assigned; however, the effectiveness of this role is constrained by other factors and barriers that need to be overcome.</p>	<p>Leadership role(s) are clearly assigned and highly effective in enabling the partnership to meet its goals.</p>	

Module	Key questions	Low	Medium	High	Score (Low, Medium or High)
<p>through the frequency of meetings, secondments or internal seminars, for example.</p> <p>Clear mechanisms should be established to maintain 'line of sight' to ensure adherence to agreed roles and responsibilities, while supporting delivery and accountability.</p> <p>Effective leadership is important for maintaining focus, facilitating internal working, and resolving potential conflicts, alongside other structures and processes.</p>	<p>To what extent are mechanisms established to help maintain 'line of sight' between the vision and goals of the partnership and delivery?</p>	<p>No or limited mechanisms are established to maintain line of sight within the partnership.</p>	<p>Key mechanisms are established to help maintain line of sight within the partnership; however, there is scope for improvement.</p>	<p>Highly effective mechanisms are established to maintain line of sight within the partnership.</p>	
	<p>To what extent does the partnership facilitate efforts to build inter-personal and institutional understanding and trust?</p>	<p>No or few efforts are made to build inter-personal and institutional understanding and trust within the partnership.</p>	<p>Efforts are made to build inter-personal and institutional understanding and trust within the partnership; however, there is still scope for improvement.</p>	<p>Significant efforts continue to be made to build and sustain inter-personal and institutional understanding and trust within the partnership. This is seen as an essential part of the partnership and its success.</p>	
	<p>To what extent are structures and processes in place to facilitate constructive conflict engagement and management (if and when needed)?</p>	<p>No or limited structures and processes are in place to facilitate conflict engagement and management. Capacities for constructive conflict engagement are low.</p>	<p>Certain structures and processes are in place to facilitate conflict engagement and management; however, these may lack effectiveness and the partnership does not feel confident in their collective ability to engage constructively. Capacities for constructive conflict engagement are medium, with scope for improvement.</p>	<p>Highly effective structures and processes are in place to facilitate conflict engagement and management. The partnership feels confident in their collective ability to engage constructively. Capacities for constructive conflict engagement are high.</p>	
<p>2.3 Resource and capacity</p> <p>Resources can take many forms, including data, technological capabilities, financial resources, and human resources (personnel, skills and expertise, authority and power).</p>	<p>To what extent does the partnership maximise resource efficiency?</p>	<p>There is an absence or severe lack of structures, processes and mechanisms for supporting the efficient use of resources.</p>	<p>There are some structures, processes and mechanisms in place to support resource efficiency to some degree, but these are limited in number, scope and effectiveness.</p>	<p>Highly effective structures, processes and mechanisms are established to maximise resource efficiency and enhance the capacity of the partnership.</p>	
	<p>To what extent does the partnership (and its members)</p>	<p>Those within the partnership and attending partnership</p>	<p>Some, but not all, members of the partnership have the</p>	<p>All those within the partnership have the</p>	

Module	Key questions	Low	Medium	High	Score (Low, Medium or High)
<p>The effectiveness of partnerships depends on their ability to adequately source, allocate, share and use limited resources in an efficient way. There are various ways this can be achieved – for instance, partnerships may i) establish dedicated resources for administering the day-to-day operations; ii) establish effective structures to facilitate resource sharing between members; or iii) invest in ‘in-house’ training and capacity building.</p> <p>Finally, members must have the appropriate authority to make decisions and act upon tasks and activities agreed within the partnership.</p>	<p>have the appropriate authority and power to act?</p>	<p>meetings lack the authority to make and implement decisions. This severely limits the extent to which the partnership can take decisive action, thus undermining the effectiveness and efficiency of the partnership.</p>	<p>necessary authority to make and implement decisions. This sometimes limits the extent to which the partnership can take decisive action, with negative implications for effective, efficient working.</p>	<p>necessary authority to make and implement decisions. The partnership has the capacity to take decisive action.</p>	

Space for reflection

Why did you select the options above? What improvements could be made?

Part 3: Cross-sectoral coordination and integration

Where possible and appropriate, partnerships should endeavour to coordinate and integrate their activities with other relevant actors and sectors to support the delivery of multi-benefits and enhance resource efficiency. Different types of bridging mechanisms are essential, related to: collaboration and cooperation; boundary spanning; and sharing resources.

Advice and good practice examples are outlined in [Journey Planner 3: Cross-sectoral coordination and integration](#).

Module	Key questions	Low	Medium	High	Score (Low, Medium or High)
<p>3.1 Collaboration and cooperation</p> <p>Individuals, organisations and groups or partnerships must be willing and able to collaborate and cooperate. Specific structures, processes and mechanisms can support this. For example, representatives from other groups can become partnership members and vice versa (cross-membership); supporting secondments or job rotations; establishing formal cooperation agreements or memorandums of understanding, or even informal expectations and a culture conducive to collaborative working; and active communication channels.</p>	<p>To what extent are effective structures, processes and mechanisms established to facilitate meaningful collaboration and cooperation?</p>	<p>There a lack of interest and willingness to collaborate. There is an absence of structures, processes and mechanisms to identify and support cross-sectoral collaboration and cooperation, where appropriate.</p>	<p>There is a clear interest and willingness to collaborate. There are established structures, processes and mechanisms to identify and support cross-sectoral collaboration and cooperation, where appropriate; however, there is scope for improvement. While collaboration and cooperation may be an aspiration of the partnership, the ability to effectively and consistently deliver this in practice is constrained.</p>	<p>There is a strong interest and willingness to collaborate. There are established, highly effective structures, processes and/ mechanisms to identify and support cross-sectoral collaboration and cooperation, where appropriate. Collaboration and cooperation are embedded in the partnership's culture and ways of working and delivered in practice, with clear examples of success.</p>	
<p>3.2 Boundary spanning</p> <p>One of the biggest barriers to coordination and integration often relates to the boundaries of organisational working, including remits of responsibility, planning and funding cycles, and administrative jurisdictions. This challenge is further exacerbated by the complexity of natural processes, which span across these boundaries. Therefore, strategies or mechanisms for resolving these barriers are essential.</p>	<p>To what extent are effective structures, processes and mechanisms established to resolve boundary issues?</p>	<p>Partnership coordination and integration barriers relating to cross-sectoral differences remain. Efforts to resolve barriers, such as incompatibility of planning or funding cycles, have not been undertaken or have been unsuccessful.</p>	<p>Efforts to bridge cross-sectoral differences have been successful in some situations. However, some barriers remain which limit the effectiveness of cross-sectoral working. There is scope for improvement.</p>	<p>Coordination and integration barriers are either non-existent, or have been successfully resolved through governance mechanisms and boundary spanning activities.</p>	
<p>3.3 Resource sharing</p> <p>The ability to transfer, share, co-invest or even co-create resources is key for facilitating coordination and integration. Resources can take many forms,</p>	<p>To what extent are effective structures, processes and mechanisms established to facilitate resource sharing?</p>	<p>There is an absence or severe lack of structures, processes and mechanisms to facilitate resource sharing within and between other relevant actors and sectors.</p>	<p>There are some structures, processes and mechanisms in place to facilitate resource sharing within and between other relevant actors and</p>	<p>There are highly effective structures, processes and mechanisms to facilitate resource sharing within and between other relevant actors and sectors.</p>	

Module	Key questions	Low	Medium	High	Score (Low, Medium or High)
<p>including data, technological capabilities, financial resources, and human resources (personnel, skills and expertise).</p> <p>Some example mechanisms include: data sharing agreements, sharing personnel, one organisation undertaking the responsibilities of another organisation, and joint-funding agreements.</p>			sectors; however, there is scope for improvement.		

Space for reflection

Why did you select the options above? What improvements could be made?