

APPOINTING A PARTNERSHIP BROKER

Guidance for those involved in making the appointment & assessing the performance

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Introduction

This paper is designed to build confidence and capacity in those involved in appointing and assessing partnership brokers. It provides, we hope, a step-by-step approach with, where appropriate, prompts and questions for consideration.

Much of the material has been adapted from an earlier publication: *The Brokering Guidebook – Tools for Navigating the Partnering Process*¹. This publication contains a fuller overview of the changing brokering role during the life of a partnership as well as more exploration of brokering challenges and opportunities. An additional resource is the leaflet: *What is a Partnership Broker?*² This leaflet provides an introduction to the idea for partners, decision-makers, donors and other interested parties.

This paper should be used in conjunction with: *Partnership Broker's Profile – Brokering Archetypes, Personal Attributes & Technical Skills*³. This is a paper designed for those operating as partnership brokers and we advise all brokers to read and to use it as they explore and build their understanding of the role and their own professional competencies).

As part of our commitment to raising awareness and setting standards in this field, we make this material freely available. Our only requirement is that whenever it is used (whether in whole, part or in adapted form) it always includes a written acknowledgement of the source as well as a reference to the website: www.partnershipbrokers.org

Whilst we are convinced that brokering must remain flexible and highly adaptable and that attempts to formalise the role risk being over-prescriptive, we also know from experience that much time and effort can be wasted in making unnecessary mistakes.

Our experience over 20 years convinces us that the broker is critical to effective partnering, but it is important to sound a note of caution. The role of a broker must always be kept in perspective. Good brokering is not a substitute for good partnering. It is always the partners themselves that are central to, and ultimately responsible for, making their partnership work.

We hope you find this material helpful and will always be pleased to hear your comments and to consider adapting the materials in the light of your experiences.

Ros Tennyson

on behalf of The Partnership Brokers Association

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1 Published in 2005 by The Partnering Initiative and available in hard copy (for sale) or to download (free) from: www.ThePartneringInitiative.org

2 Available from www.partnershipbrokers.org

3 Available from www.partnershipbrokers.org

Why appoint a broker?

Multi-sector partnerships for sustainable development are complex. They critically depend on establishing strong working relationships between key individuals often from radically different working cultures and backgrounds. For this reason, they can take considerable effort to both establish and nurture to maturity. It is not uncommon, as many have found to their cost and disappointment, for partnerships to fail to reach their goals and potential.

It is a serious challenge to form strong and productive collaborative arrangements that work efficiently and effectively without being prohibitive in terms of risk and investment or involving unacceptable levels of compromise.

How can such a robust partnership be built? And, as importantly, **who** will be best placed to help the partners to build it?

Brokers⁴ are increasingly seen as playing a critical part in effective multi-sector partnering. The brokering role consists of taking responsibility for building robust working relationships between the partners; ensuring that the partnership is innovative, appropriate and effective as well as encouraging the partners to achieve maximum positive impact with a focus on sustainable outcomes.

Sometimes a broker will simply emerge from within the partnership and grow into the brokering role. For the purposes of this paper, however, we have chosen to focus on the conscious identification and appointment of an individual.

Brokers have such a critical role - they can be seen as personifying a new form of leadership (we have coined the term 'invisible leadership') with a somewhat non-traditional set of leadership attributes including:

- Capacity to **create clarity** in the midst of a complex, information-rich, rapidly moving, politically unstable and economically unequal world
- Skill at convening and **facilitating productive interaction** between diverse groups of people
- Willingness to **carry a level of risk** on behalf of, or for the benefit of, others
- Ability to **inspire others** with their vision of a more cooperative future
- Being **modest with regard to their own achievements** so that others are genuinely empowered

Quite often a broker will be expected to take on a wider range of roles – whether by invitation, instruction or, even, intuitively as he / she sees what is needed for partnering to work in the specific context and circumstances. These broader roles can include:

- **Seeding the idea** of partnering with potential partners, policy makers and / or donors – explaining how it can work and how it may be better than alternative approaches
- **Inspiring decision makers** to follow a multi-sector approach to their sustainable development efforts
- **Building active collaboration** between the partners themselves as well as between the partners, other stakeholders and external donors
- **Encouraging (and role modelling) good partnering behaviour** that will help the partnership to function effectively and creatively
- **Protecting the vision** and core principles of the partnership. In any event – whether or not the brokering remit becomes this broad – to be effective at any level, partnership brokers always need:
- **Recognition** and acceptance of their role by partners and key others
- **Engagement** in the form of active involvement with, and practical support from, partners
- **Clarity** in terms of their tasks and timeframes
- **Supervision**, with appropriate management and appraisal procedures pre-agreed.

The brokering role will inevitably change during the life cycle of a partnership.

⁴ This is not always the term used and we are aware that in some contexts it is an inappropriate term – in these situations, other terms that are used instead include: change agents, process managers or intermediaries.

Potential Roles for Brokers in the Partnering Cycle

SUSTAINING OUTCOMES

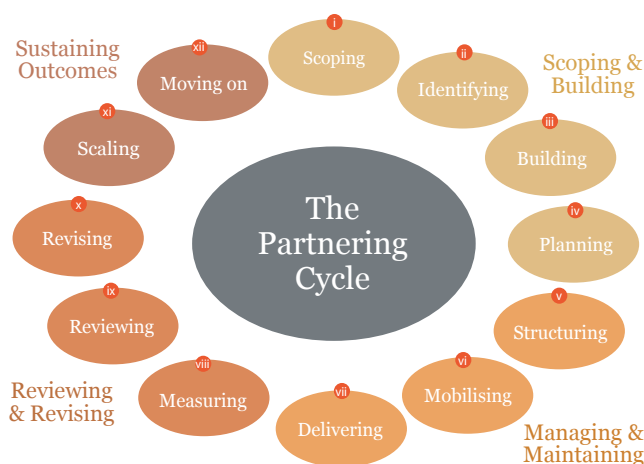
Brokering roles can include supporting partners in their:

- Discussions on 'moving on' choices
- Recognition and celebration of the partnership's achievements
- Reaching agreement on type of information for the public domain
- Identification of further champions and spheres of influence
- Work to ensure that outcomes are sustained
- Closure / moving on management

REVIEWING & REVISING

Brokering roles can include helping partners to:

- Agree evaluation procedures
- Assess the impact of the partnership
- Draw out and apply lessons
- Review efficiency of the partnership
- Review the added value to partners
- Brainstorm new ideas /developments
- Make any necessary changes to project or partnering arrangements



Cycle: Copyright The Partnering Initiative

SCOPING & BUILDING

Brokering roles can include:

- Initiating the idea of partnering
- Making the case to potential partners / donors / decision-makers
- Energising and enthusing
- Scoping the possibilities
- Early relationship building
- Managing expectations
- Initial / outline planning
- Helping partners to reach agreement

MANAGING & MAINTAINING

Brokering roles can include working with partners to:

- Secure resource commitments
- Build governance arrangements
- Deepen organisational engagement
- Develop a communications plan
- Build partnering capacity
- Problem solve constructively
- Agree benchmarks for later evaluation

A good broker works continuously to build capacity and systems within the partnership – thereby promoting healthy interdependence between the partners rather than partner dependence on the broker.

A really good broker understands their role as important but temporary and they behave accordingly.

We hope that this overview helps to explain why a partnership broker is necessary and why you should seriously consider identifying or appointing one.

Considerations in appointing a broker

1. Should the broker be 'internal' or 'external'?

Internal Brokers are those who manage a partnering process from within one of the partner organisations (often, but not always, the organisation that took the lead in initiating the partnership). Tasks include:

- Preparing their organisation for collaboration in a multi-sector partnership – this might also include taking on an initiating or convening role within the partnership
- Negotiating and representing their organisation's involvement in a partnership
- Playing a key role in managing, developing and maintaining the partnership arrangements

The most obvious risk for the internal broker is the risk of being (or perceived as being) too partial to their own organisation and therefore unable to be objective enough in helping partners make key decisions about the partnership.

External Brokers are those operating as independent professionals contracted either by one of the partner organisations or by the partnership itself. Such responsibilities could include:

- Exploring the feasibility of adopting a partnership approach
- Facilitating negotiations to develop a partnership and / or a partnering agreement
- Maintaining or monitoring the effectiveness and / or added value of the partnership over time
- Building institutional capacity (of either the partner organisations or the partnership itself) to deliver effective programmes and sustainable outcomes

For the external broker, the risk (actual or perceived) may be that they are too distant and have too little vested interest in the partnership's success to maintain their commitment when things get difficult.

In any partnership there may be a case for a mixture of the two types:

1. An internal broker being someone from one or other of the partner organisations carrying the process management role over a period of time by agreement with the partner group
2. An external broker being brought in to undertake specific tasks – for example, to be a 'neutral' facilitator of a series of workshops / meetings or to undertake a partnership review on a regular basis.⁵

2. Should the broker be one person or should the brokering role be carried by several people?

The answer to this question depends, to some extent at least, on the scale, complexity and ambition of the partnership. Some partnerships start with one broker and expand the role to incorporate others as needed. Over-reliance on one individual can make for serious levels of stress as they strive to fulfil a wide range of roles. It can also create undue dependency from the partners. Spreading the role too widely, however, can add unnecessary levels of confusion and be wasteful of resources.

Some solve this conundrum by creating a series of short to medium-term contracts with specific tasks and time-bound goals. Others solve it with a much more fluid approach where it is simply accepted that the role will transmute over time or that it will be shared between a number of different people (whether internal or external to the partnership) as appropriate.

3. What are the other considerations in making such an appointment?

Whether the appointment is of an internal or external broker and whether the broker is one person or the brokering role is shared, there are a number of questions to be asked in advance of making an appointment. These include:

- Should the broker be given a **reactive** or a **proactive** mandate?
- Over what **term** should the broker(s) be appointed?
- How will they be **line-managed** on a day-to-day basis?
- How far will the broker be expected to be **accountable** to the partners as a group?

All these – and any other key questions – should be discussed fully with potential / actual partners wherever possible in advance of drawing up a role description and making an appointment.

⁵ During the life of a partnership, it may become clear that at certain times an external broker is preferable, in which case those acting as internal brokers can step back into a different role (perhaps simply acting as a representative of their own organisation within the partnership). It is, in fact, not uncommon for individuals to move from being an internal to an external broker (or vice versa) as the requirements for the role change and / or their working relationship to the partnership metamorphoses over time. For example, an internal broker may be seconded to the partnership or an external broker may be employed by the partnership for a period of time.

Creating a role description

Brokering requires a specific set of skills:

BROKERING SKILLS	NOTES
Negotiation	Brokers will need to help partners to differentiate between 'hardball' negotiation (where everyone's objective is to have their own way no matter what the cost) and negotiation based on meeting each other's underlying interests (aiming at win-win-win scenarios for all players)
Facilitation	Successful convening and relationship-building – particularly in the early stages of a partnership – requires brokers to manage a range of encounters between key players, whether in the form of one-to-one meetings, small group activities or larger task-oriented workshops
Synthesising information & record keeping	Brokers will need to be highly capable of managing complex data and layers of information and experience. They will need to ensure that meticulous records are kept of meetings and decisions – either by themselves or in overseeing someone else in undertaking this important function.
Communication & presentation	Brokers will need excellent communication skills especially in: social interaction; active listening; empathy; concise speaking; ability to tailor written communications to different audiences and conducting meaningful conversations. A broker may well need to present the idea of partnering or details about the partnership itself to different audiences. This requires good story-telling and presentation skills (whether formal or informal in style).
Coaching & capacity building	As a partnership progresses, the broker will have a new focus – transferring responsibilities to partners (or project staff). This involves stepping back from a front line role and working in the background to support and coach individual partners or staff in building their own partnering and brokering skills
Institution- building	Brokers may have a crucial role in increasing the engagement of partner organisations as well as helping each organisation become more 'fit for purpose' in their partnering approach. Brokers will also need to help partners build governance and accountability procedures as the partnership itself becomes more 'institutionalised'.
Reviewing & revising	Partnerships benefit from regular reviews to ensure that they remain animated and do not lose momentum. As someone with close knowledge of the partnership, the broker is uniquely placed to facilitate reviews themselves or, if they are seen as too close to the partnership to do this objectively enough, to brief someone else to facilitate the review on behalf of the partners. They may also have a critical role in revising the partnership based on experience.

Once a decision has been made on what type of partner / broker relationship will suit the partnership best, it is advisable to draw up a detailed Role Description (see below).

Suggested headings for a broker's role description

1. Description of the partnership, its goals and its context
2. Key skills and competencies required in the role
3. Outline of main activities and how they may change over time

Refer to the Partnering Cycle and the changing role of the broker during each phase.

4. Timetable for completion of specific tasks

Assuming the broker's role is seen as 'temporary' (the time commitment having been agreed in advance of the appointment), it is important to build in milestones and a timetable for the completion of specific brokering tasks.

5. Clarification of line management and accountability systems

6. Details of assessment procedures

7. Terms and conditions of appointment

This section should include:

- Annual salary (if employed) or fee (if self-employed) or terms of any pro bono arrangement
- Duration of the contract / agreed period of work
- Entitlements (holiday, pension, expenses)
- Conditions under which the contract can be changed or terminated by either party

Whatever skills and competencies a broker does (or does not) possess, there are certain personal / professional qualities that will carry them a long way in their brokering role. These may ultimately be more important /valuable than specific professional skills. Such attributes include:

- Dedication to core partnering principles (equity, transparency and mutual benefit)
- Ability to keep calm under pressure
- Trustworthiness by maintaining an independent and fair stance

The application process

In addition to providing a CV and a statement of interest and suitability for the brokering role, it is a good idea to solicit more detail about the applicant's partnering experience and / or brokering track record. Questions to ask in advance could include:

- What different types of cross-sector partnerships have you been involved with?
- What types of 'brokering' have you undertaken to date?
- What do you see as your key brokering strengths?
- What have you found to be typical brokering / partnering challenges in your work to date?
- Are you a qualified partnership broker (ie an accredited member of the Partnership Brokers Accreditation Scheme)?

In terms of references – it is valuable to try and secure endorsement of an applicant's suitability by having a conversation with someone who is familiar with their brokering work and track record.

Conducting an appointment interview⁶

When conducting interviews for a broker, it is a good idea to consider whether or not the person demonstrates the following attributes – do they seem able to:

- Get inside different partner perspectives?
- Demonstrate clarity of purpose and focus?
- Provide practical, productive and tactful interventions?
- Be meticulous in record keeping and communicating?
- Support rather than dominate in the way they behave towards partners and stakeholders?
- Accept that they would be serving / managing a partnering process
- Be ready and willing to 'let go' of the role and hand over to the partners when the time is right and, most importantly,
- Provide the right 'fit' in terms of the specific context, culture(s), needs and challenges?

⁶ It may be a good idea (especially in the case of an external broker) to arrange for the short-listed candidates to meet partners and / or visit the proposed area of work or any existing project as part of the interview process. It is important that partners are confident about the choice and that the broker actually **demonstrates** some of the range of skills they will need in the role.

Drawing up a contract⁷

The nature of the contract may vary due to a number of factors. For an internal broker, for example, where the role may be more informal, the kind of document needed may be more along the lines of a **scope of work** agreed in advance with the partners.

For an external broker, being brought into the partnership as a paid expert, a **formal contract** will be necessary.

Box: Elements to include in a Broker's contract

1. Outline of the actual / proposed partnership
2. The anticipated type of role the broker will be expected to play
3. The timeframe for the duration of their role
4. Milestones in relation to the partnering cycle
5. Scope of work / outline of key responsibilities
6. Line management, appraisal and review procedures
7. Hand over strategy

In addition, contracts should clarify all terms and conditions of appointment (including salary / fees and holiday entitlements) as well as details of grievance procedures and, where relevant, legal and insurance issues. In addition, contracts should summarise line management and accountability arrangements.

Supervision and accountability

From an early stage, partners need to agree how and to whom the partnership broker is accountable. There are two types of accountability. These are:

- Day-to-day line management – most efficiently conducted on behalf of the partnership by a nominated individual
- Ultimate accountability – this invariably involves all the partners using some pre-agreed reporting and appraisal system.
- Partners will need to understand and distinguish between these. They will also need to create and adhere to appropriate reporting arrangements for brokers. The broker will also need early clarification on:
 - Communications mechanisms that will ensure partners provide them with regular inputs, feedback, support and (where appropriate) critique
 - Responsibilities, authority and accountability requirements for partners (to each other as well as to their individual partner organisations)
 - Circumstances in which the partnership can be terminated (and the implications for the brokering role)
 - Circumstances in which, and procedures whereby, the role of broker can be challenged, changed or terminated
 - Grievance procedures that they can resort to should it be necessary.

Brokers will invariably be accountable to partners as well as to a line manager and / or the employing organisation. This may prove difficult to manage in a way that is streamlined and fair since it can easily become a clumsy and over-laborious process that can tend to inhibit the broker / partner working relationship.

All those involved need to take the broker's role seriously and give due respect and attention to the broker's needs. This includes being open and honest about issues of concern as well as taking the broker's review and assessment process seriously.

At all times, partners and line manager should offer their views in a professional and helpful manner – the partnership should ideally be strengthened, not weakened, by reviewing the broker's role.

⁷ Given the particular nature of the broker's role – specifically that it will need to be quite fluid and is also likely to be temporary (handing over to partners or project managers in due course) – short to medium-term contracts are probably more suitable than open-ended or long-term contracts.

Performance review procedures

The line manager should encourage the broker to undertake some form of self-assessment in advance of a review meeting.

BROKER'S SELF-ASSESSMENT

If a broker has been developing a reflective approach to their work they should have a fairly good sense of how well they are fulfilling the role and it should not be difficult to complete a self-assessment prior to a formal review. The self-assessment may not actually be given to the line manager (although it could be a requirement, if that is agreed in advance) but will enable the broker to be better prepared for a review meeting.

The line manager should also initiate a process of collecting information from the key people involved – offering them an opportunity for considered reflection, identification of tangible examples of good and less good practice as well as their ideas for any changes that could usefully be made to the brokering role.

PARTNER'S ASSESSMENT OF THE BROKER

It is important to access the views of the partners and partner organisations about how effectively the broker is undertaking their role. This can be done on a formal basis (for example, asking each partner / partner organisation to complete a questionnaire) or an informal basis (for example, having a discussion with the partners as a group at the end of a business meeting – perhaps even with the broker present, though this may inhibit frank discussion).

In any case, the partners' views are important and should be taken seriously. In fact, a well-conducted review process can be a useful way for partners to think through more fully the developing nature of the broker's role and their own changing responsibilities in the partnership. The process itself may play a significant part in partners recognising their responsibilities and lessening their reliance on the broker as the partnership moves through the partnering cycle.

The issues that partners should be asked to consider are largely the same as those listed in the table above (skills / key tasks / relationships / management / new priorities). Since partners are likely to be busy people, the process should be kept simple. However, it is important that partners are encouraged to use their assessment of the broker to:

- Review their own activities / behaviour within the partnership and how this has impacted the broker's ability to undertake their role well
- Consider the totality of the broker's role and whether or not their requirements as partners are realistic
- Reflect on how they (or others in their organisation) should / could be taking on more of the brokering activities
- Take stock of the partnership's achievements and how much more could be achieved with appropriate changes / developments
- Present their comments in a creative and constructive manner (even where there are grounds for dissatisfaction)

The line manager should also plan carefully how they will pull together different perspectives on the broker's performance and will conduct a review session in a way that is open, honest and productive – all the time working to enhance the effectiveness of the partnership.

REVIEW GUIDELINES FOR LINE MANAGER

Having asked for input from partners in advance of the review meeting, the line manager will be in a good position to present a comprehensive picture to the broker on behalf of the partners. The task for the line manager is to conduct the assessment with the broker by:

- Tracking their activities against the terms of reference in their contract
- Measuring their achievements in the light of pre-agreed goals and delivery timetables
- Considering governance and line management issues
- Exploring the views of partners and broker
- Clarifying any areas for improvement
- Discussing forward planning (including consideration of broker's changing role; transfer of responsibilities; planned strategy for handing over responsibilities and / or exiting from the role)

Conducting a broker review meeting

Given the complex nature of a broker's role and (possibly) their double accountability – to a single organisational line management structure as well as to the partners as a group – it may be appropriate for the assessment interview to be conducted by both the line manager and one other person nominated by the partners to represent their perspective.

Structuring the review meeting is important – with those interviewing being well prepared. In addition to a comprehensive review of how the broker has fulfilled their role, it is important to offer an opportunity for the broker to feedback their experiences – particularly to identify any management or contextual issues that may have had unexpected impacts on their ability to achieve pre-agreed goals.

Those conducting the interview may also need to be reminded that the broker will be understanding their role as temporary and therefore that success will also need to be measured as much by how much they have handed over than how complex and comprehensive their portfolio of activities is.

Decision-making, feedback and moving on

Once the review has been completed, any conclusions and proposals for future work should be given in writing to the broker and communicated appropriately to partners. The written report should include revised and clear targets for the agreed next period. Where it is necessary or desirable for changes to be made in terms of management / behaviour / focus of either the broker or partners, these should also be itemised and discussed with those involved – wherever possible with practical suggestions and a timetable for changes to be implemented.

It may be useful to see the review procedure as a way of taking stock in order that all those involved can better understand the changing requirements of the broker as the partnership develops over time. Part of the assessment process should be to enable the broker and the 16 partners to move on rather than getting stuck in habitual and over-dependent working relationships.

Of course, there may be some circumstances where the broker's work is deemed to have been unsatisfactory. If it is agreed that there is no room for improvement, the role should be terminated according to the terms and conditions outlined in the contract⁸.

Where the role has been undertaken on an informal basis (for example, an internal broker having simply adopted the role to fill a clear gap), it may be more a case of a frank discussion with the partners as a group about how the role can be more widely shared in the future or handed over to another person whether internal or external to the partnership.

In any event, it is important to remember that brokering is a relatively new professional area and as such there are few norms or benchmarks in place against which to measure brokering competence. Brokers are there to support partners and to serve the needs of the partnership rather than to build a permanent position for themselves, so in assessing how well they are fulfilling the role, managers and partners may be looking for subtle rather than obvious qualities. Good brokering should ultimately be measured by how effectively the partnership develops and by how systematically the role of broker becomes unnecessary.

⁸ It is very important the decision-maker checks that the broker is not being made a 'scapegoat' for the failures of the partners or the partnership – for the health and wellbeing of the partnership broker as a professional as well as for the partnership itself.