

# **Partnerships “A Conceptual Approach”**

Developed by:

The Nature Conservancy (TNC)  
Mesoamerica and the Caribbean Conservation Partnership Program  
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**TNC Mission**

*The Nature Conservancy's mission is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.*

**TNC Vision**

*The vision of The Nature Conservancy is to keep portfolios of the functional conservation areas within and across ecoregions. Through this portfolio approach, we will work with partners to preserve a full array of ecosystems and viable native species.*

**TNC 2015 Goal**

*By 2015, The Nature Conservancy will work with others to ensure the effective conservation of places that represent at least 10 percent of every major habitat type in every major habitat type on Earth.*

## Why do we work in partnership?

Our challenging mission compels us to work in partnership. Our vision states that *we* will work with partners, and our 2015 goal explicitly declares that we will work in partnership to ensure the effective conservation of 10 percent of every major habitat type on Earth.

Hence, partnerships are mentioned in our methodological conservation approaches, philanthropy and marketing materials. Moreover, our new organizational values demand us to “respect people, communities and cultures”, as well as demonstrate our “commitment to diversity”, and these can only be achieved by successfully working with others.

Finally, Steve McCormick, TNC President believes that “partnership leverage for biodiversity conservation is the most important contribution of The Nature Conservancy to support the conservation efforts around the world.”

We work in partnership because it is the only way to accomplish our mission. We are aware that

- “We cannot do everything”  
We need:
  - implementation capability
  - representation at the site locations
- Partners provide local knowledge, political capital, relationships, and resources.

They:

- provide information about places and people (politics and culture)
  - contribute with their expertise and their different or complementary skills.
  - provide information about real needs, at different levels, to face problems or seize opportunities
  - provide different types of resources
  - bring their capital of relationships, credibility, and capability.
- Partners foster synergy and allow us to interact with other partners.
    - They open doors for coordinated interaction.

We work in partnership because our work demands it. We can only achieve the 2015 goal if we work in cooperation with others. Therefore, we need to build a strong constituency for conservation that will involve international NGOs, local organizations, governmental institutions, educational centers, research centers, corporations, multilaterals, and many others. It will require strengthening the capacity of some organizations, fostering and developing new partnerships, and finding innovative models to work with new organizations that can contribute to leveraging the efforts of achieving our goal. Hence, we have the responsibility of becoming more systematic and strategic in the improvement of our internal capacity to select, build, and

manage successful partnerships. We need to improve our skills and become efficient in the art of partnering.

### Who is that other, the partner?

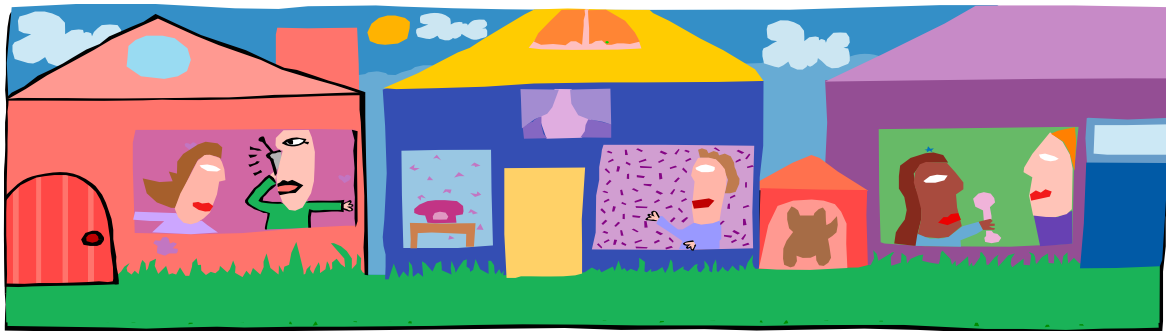
In brief, a partner is:

*An organization or group with whom The Nature Conservancy (TNC) cooperates at a local, national, or global level to accomplish the shared goals of a mutual conservation agenda.*

This is a general comprehensive definition that enables the selection and development of a suitable partnership pursuant to the conservation work to be performed.

TNC partner groups or organizations are different in nature and correspond to TNC's particular conservation objectives. Therefore, of outmost importance is choosing the most suitable organizations or institutions as partners for the accomplishment of our conservation goals. Chart 1 lists the most common types of partner organizations.

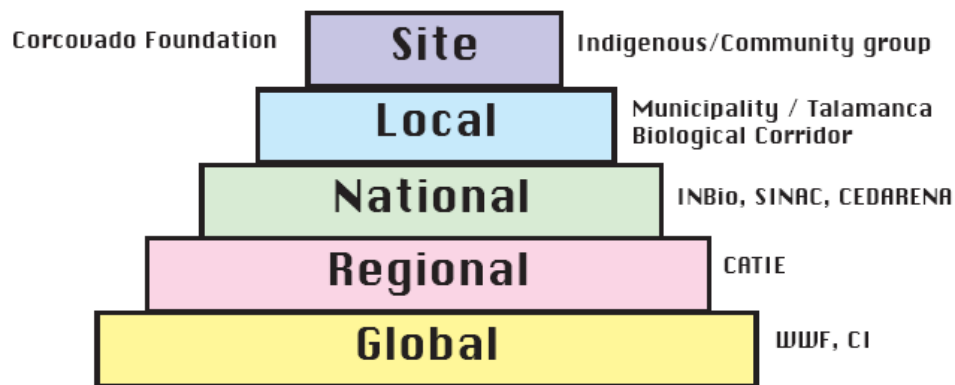
### Chart 1. Types of Organizations



- Community-based informal/formal group
- Non-governmental organization
- Professional Network
- Training Institution
- Indigenous community or organization
- Government agencies
- Multi/bilateral agencies
- Research Centers
- Academic Institutions
- Private Enterprises

The organizations with which we work are of different types and operate at different geographic levels. Some organizations focus their work on a specific place or community; others work in several areas of a country or at a national level. These organizations include national, regional, and global groups that implement projects and activities in situ or at a local level. An organization's operative geographic scale is almost irrelevant as long as the organization is the most suitable group to achieve our goals.

**Chart 2: Partnership's Geographic and Operative Scale**



**What does partnering mean?**

TNC's partnering approach allows for the incorporation of best partner relationship management practices. Working with others, or partnering, as we usually refer to it, involves entering into a collaborative mutually profitable relationship between TNC and the partner. This relationship implies a careful combination of skills and values, as well as operative compliance with the policies and procedures of the involved parties.

**Values, Attitudes, and Skills:**

As with any relationship, partnering is a dynamic process that demands flexibility, responsibility, openness, dialog, humbleness, self-criticism, and a constructive spirit. Although these requirements might seem evident, implementing them is not always easy, and sometimes, we do not know how to go about it; therefore, reflecting on these relationships and developing skills and tools to manage collaborative relationships productively is fundamental.

In these relationships each party must be able to express openly and frankly, respectfully and assertively, agreements and/or disagreements of the process, as well as outcomes of the work. Parties must trust each other; recognize their capacities and appreciate the fact that, without the others' contribution to the work, it would not be possible to achieve conservation objectives

Crucial to a productive relationship is understanding that having different visions and perceptions is part of human relationships and, therefore, part of relationships between organizations as well. Differences are inherent to any interaction, and acknowledging them is essential for the productive resolution of conflicts.

## Some Key Values and Attitudes to Achieve Effective Collaboration

<u>Values</u>	<u>Attitudes</u>
Responsibility	Openness
Respect	Humbleness
Trust	Constructive spirit
Transparent communication	Flexibility
Equity	
Shared responsibility	

### Policies and Procedures:

Institutionally, TNC has developed a partnership management approach that identifies key processes for our work with partners. Implementation of these processes ensures that our interaction with partners is appropriately conceptualized, focused and targeted to conservation priorities, and driven by a common set of administrative procedures.

This partnership approach, in many ways analogous to our conservation approach (conservation by design), details a series of interrelated and complimentary stages for developing and managing partnerships.

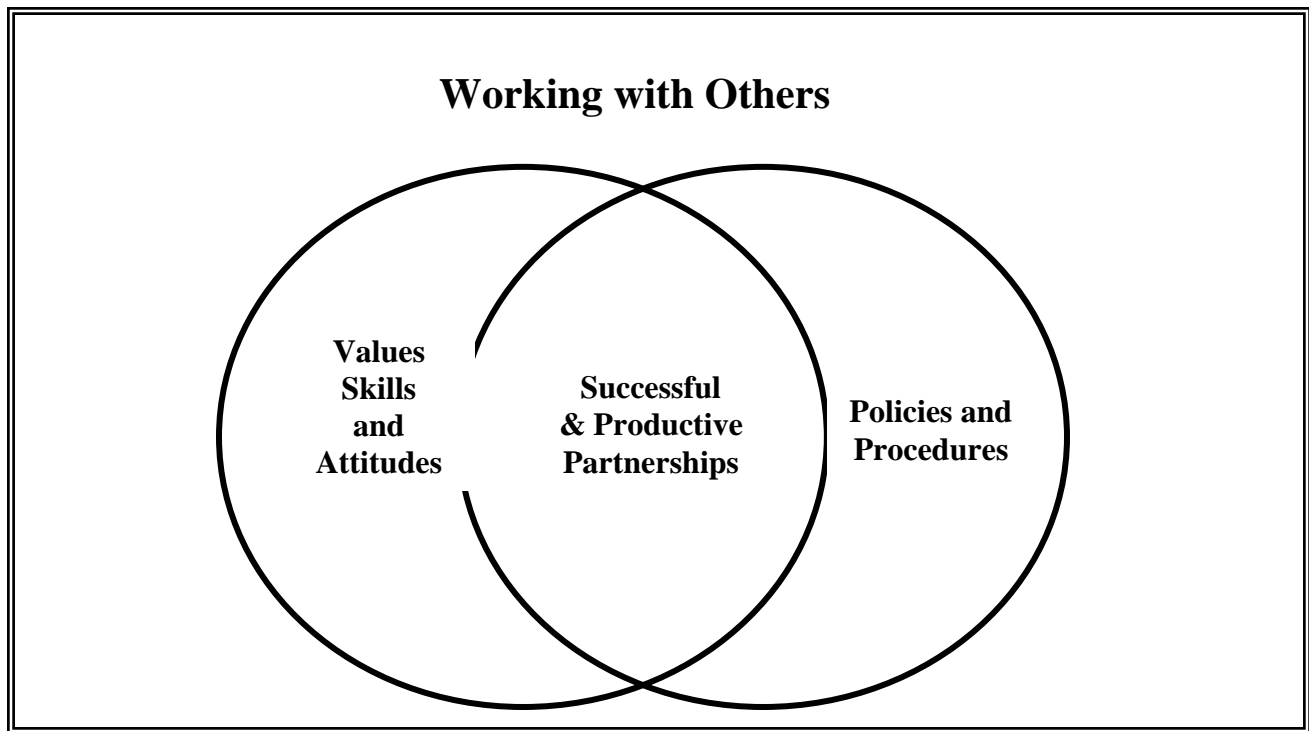
The partnership approach begins with the *identification and selection of partners* a stage equivalent to setting priorities in the conservation approach. This first stage in the conservation approach tells us where to work; in the partnership approach it tells us with whom to work.

The next stage in the partnership approach resembles the developing strategies stage of the conservation approach since it details what will work on with the partner and how we will do it. During this stage, the *relationship is formalized through written, often legal, agreements*; terms of the collaboration and the work plan are put into writing

Then, just like in the conservation approach cycle, implementation of all that was negotiated and agreed begins, in essence, *we take action*.

As work develops, we *monitor and measure progress*. We assess and adapt accordingly to accomplish our conservation goals while keeping a productive relationship.

Each operational stage is supported by specific guidelines and tools oriented to its successful implementation. In addition, each stage depends, to a great extent, on the collaboration of our legal and grants departments.



The key values, skills, and attitudes can be considered the fundamental elements for developing the art of partnering. On the other hand, policies and procedures are essential to developing the science of partnership. Combined, such elements can help build successful productive partnerships, “effective partnerships”.

### **Partnership Approach Operationalization**

This operational approach includes six relationship management steps. The six steps are the model’s formal systematic frame for relationship or partnership management.

These operational steps are briefly explained below:

#### **Identification and selection**

##### ***Step 1. Scoping***

Scoping is a Formal method to identify the most suitable organization or group to potentially implement biodiversity conservation strategies and reduce threats.

##### ***Step 2. Partner selection*** (Due diligence)

It refers to the deeper research about the institutional capacities of a reduced number of organizations previously identified through scoping. This process allows for a more informed selection of partners, and the identification of prospective partnering risks.

## Formalization of Agreements

### *Step 3. Negotiation*

A series of dialogues between directors or program managers and the partner over a series of points that need to be agreed upon. Points to discuss and define include: the partnership's goals, expected results, corporative identity of the common project, expectations, geographic scope, thematic approach, financial needs and, in general, all the conditions of the relationship.

### *Step 4. Written Agreement*

The legal document (agreement, contract, etc.) that attests and codifies the previously negotiated points, and clarifies roles and responsibilities. The agreement should include, among others, a communications protocol, amendment provisions, and a procedure for dispute resolution.

### *Step 5. Work plan*

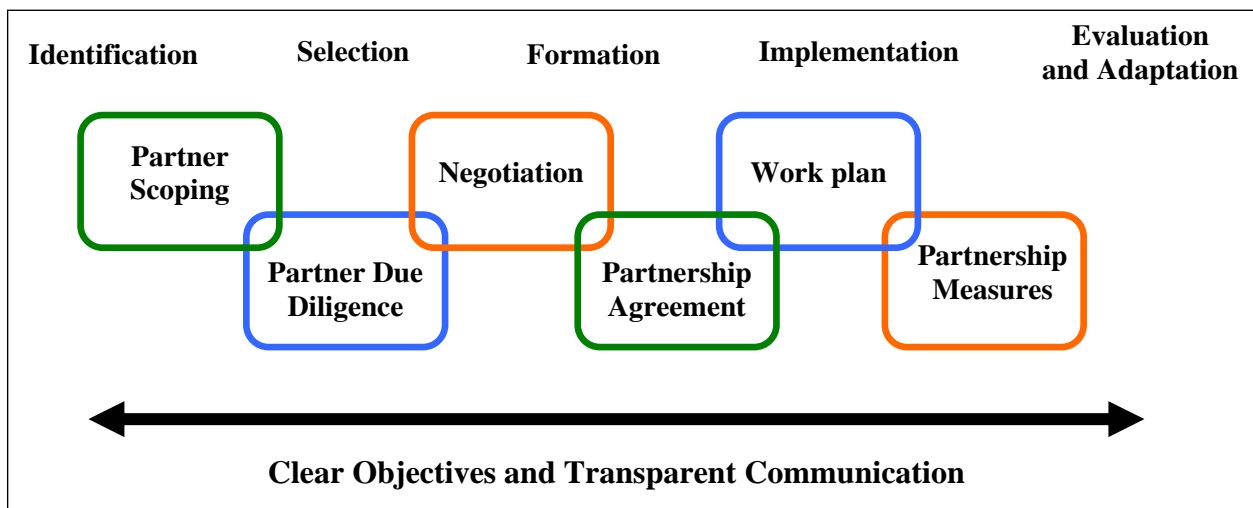
A strategy and activity plan that includes the main actions to be developed with specific given time periods. It specifies products and expected results; details a budget, and defines people in charge of implementation.

## Monitoring

### *Step 6. Partnership Evaluation*

These are monitoring and evaluation activities. The observations and results from these show: if the partnership has rendered the expected conservation benefits; the costs of achieving those benefits, and the success of the relationship in itself. This step measures the partnership effectiveness.

## Partnership Management Operative Approach



Although the Partnership Framework shown above seems to be a linear process in practice, the various stages represented by the colored boxes are interrelated, and can take place at different times throughout a relationship depending on whether the relationship is beginning, developing, well established, or ending. The time and the way these stages will be implemented depend on the different local realities and the particular context of the work done with a partner.

## **Partnership Management Operative Approach**

### **Daily situation**

As mentioned previously, the partnership framework is neither a linear series of steps nor is it a prescriptive approach. Working with others, like all human relationships is a dynamic and fluid process full of particulars and intricacies. Furthermore, our myriad work with other organizations is in different stages of development. In some cases, we have conservation programs with partnerships that are well established and productive. In other cases, we are beginning relationships, and yet in others we have to search for organizations with which to work. All of these factors, plus any specific nuances associated with working with others in a particular local context will determine how we apply the steps of the partnership framework.

For instance, well established conservation programs with well established partnerships will not require a full scoping process. However, it is always a good idea to re-evaluate the partnerships at the beginning of a new project. Since essential to successful conservation work is the selection of the most appropriate organization for the work that needs to get done.

Entering into a new geography, beginning a conservation project, or simply necessitating partnerships of a different sort to achieve conservation goals will require a scoping process. Once desired organizations are selected, a long process of negotiations and conversations will begin in order to determine best approach for working together. These conversations also allow for rapport and trust to develop. With new partners it might be a good idea to extend the time frame for getting to know each other, and it also might be a good idea to begin with a partnership that implies minimal risk.

Well established relationships could benefit from solid yearly work planning and partnership measures. It is never too early or late in the relationship to implement measures based on a well thought out and detailed work plan. A working relationship can only benefit from this. Furthermore, even the most established relationships evolve and change. Conservation priorities may change, personnel can come and go, and administration and management can go through periods of instability. Therefore, maintaining the relationship will require constant communication and periodic re-negotiation of the agreements under which to work.

All partnerships should have the proper legal agreement, at a minimum an MOU. It does not matter if you have been working with an organization for a long period of time. Now is the right time to bring them to the table to talk about your work together, to re-negotiate, to clarify expectations, roles and responsibilities, and to capture all of this in a legal written agreement. A written agreement with proper management of the relationship can only strengthen the work performed together.

## **Which TNC's staff works closely with partnership?**

Many different staff in TNC works with partners directly or has responsibilities that affect the work we do with partners. However, the day to day management of the majority of our site based partners is the responsibility of the of the site program manager. Often, this responsibility is shared with other conservation site program staff. Nevertheless, partners often interact with other key staff positions such as grants specialists, attorneys, finance and operations managers, partnership specialists, and other thematic specialists like conservation scientists. It is important to understand how these staff positions interact with each other and partners so that any given staff member can communicate these roles to a partner, if needed, and avoid misunderstandings related to administration of grants or project implementation. The primary responsibilities of key staff positions relative to partner relationship management are listed below.

**Program Manager and Conservation Program Staff:** They manage the day to day relationship and share in the successes and failures of their partners. They represent TNC to the partner and serve as the primary link for the partner to TNC and other staff relevant to smooth partner operations. In essence, they set the tone and demarcate the court for other TNC staff and perhaps outside actors to interact as effectively as possible with partners in order to maintain a productive relationship and achieve desired conservation outcomes. Specifically, program managers and conservation program staff negotiate work plans, monitor progress on activity implementation, transfer funds to the partner and oversee all administrative procedures related to operationalizing the partnership; they resolve conflicts in the relationship, and look to building the institutional capacity of the partner if necessary.

**Grants Specialists:** These staff usually has close relationships with the program manager or other key conservation program staff since they are responsible for overseeing the management of the money that a conservation program may transfer to a partner. The relationship with the partner is usually via the conservation program staff but often grants specialists have direct communication with the partner. In either case, key to a smooth relationship is to ensure that the conservation program staff is always aware of any communication the grants specialist may be having with the partner. With relation to the conservation program and the partners related to that program grants specialists specifically perform:

- **Subaward/Grant Administration:** Maintains official award files; Prepares, revises and approves agreements; Review of quarterly financial reports centers for allowable costs and issues related to agreement requirements and ensures that budget center corrections are made timely; Interprets the rules and regulations for staff and partners; Administrative contact for all agreements
- **Program support:** Trains project staff on TNC P&P and donor rules and regulations; Assists Program staff with completion of Due Diligence requirements; Assists Project manager on budget development; Ensures adequate tracking and resolution of audit findings by program staff and documents for the files; Provides quarterly financial reports to Project Managers

- **Partner Support:** Trains partners on TNC forms and general administrative requirements; Reviews Partner financial reports, makes determinations on allowability of expenses and approves payments; Provides tools and resources to assist partner in addressing audit findings; Reviews the first financial report with partner (upon request - travel expenses paid by Program)

**Attorneys:** They review the grants, sub-grants, and contracts entered with and between the organizations.

**Finance Specialists:** They are the link between partner organizations and grant specialists. Finance specialists check the partner's financial reports in support to the project/program directors and managers. If partner organizations have any doubts or need financial information, these specialists are there to support them. They do not approve any expense or procedure. Instead, their role is providing support and guidance.

**Partnership Specialists:** They work to develop the strong foundation between the Conservancy and its partners. They support country teams, primarily program managers and conservation program staff, to develop partner leverage strategies, to identify partners, to negotiate and manage agreements, and conduct collaborative planning with partners. These positions also take the lead in training TNC staff to become competent managers of partnerships. These Specialists also work to strengthen partners' organizational management skills in the areas identified through institutional self assessments, such as board development, fundraising and financial management.

Our mission, vision, and 2015 goal demand partnering. As we define conservation priorities and develop strategies, we will search for different types of organizations that will help us achieve our conservation goals. We will encourage effective relationships based on trust, mutual respect, and transparent communication. Partnering will be crucial to find innovative alternatives to achieve tangible lasting conservation results. Relationship management depends on our strengths and values and also on the effective implementation of fundamental partnering-related financial policies and procedures. Partnering is what we do and will continue doing. To implement our 2015 goal successfully, we have to work in partnership.

**In summary, “working with others” provide a solid conceptual basis to build up sound partnerships:**

*The Nature Conservancy is committed to the creation of effective partnerships based on the commitment to people and equality among partners.*

We prove that commitment by:

- Understanding that the efforts on the partnership are justified by the attained results
- Founding our partnerships on mutual agreement, benefit, respect, transparency, and the understanding that each of the involved parties has something valuable to contribute
- Considering that our partners work on equal basis with us, and recognizing that both TNC and our partners may be teachers and learners alternately
- Taking the time and making the effort to truly understand our partners and their condition before getting involved in any commitment or obligation
- Acknowledging that partnerships are dynamic; we should be flexible and willing to adapt to changes and new situations
- Keeping an open, active, multi-level communication with our partners
- Fostering the partner’s involvement with the work from the beginning, and first placing emphasis on their work rather than on ours
- Supporting the strategies that enable people to manage their own resources and solve their problems through participatory processes.