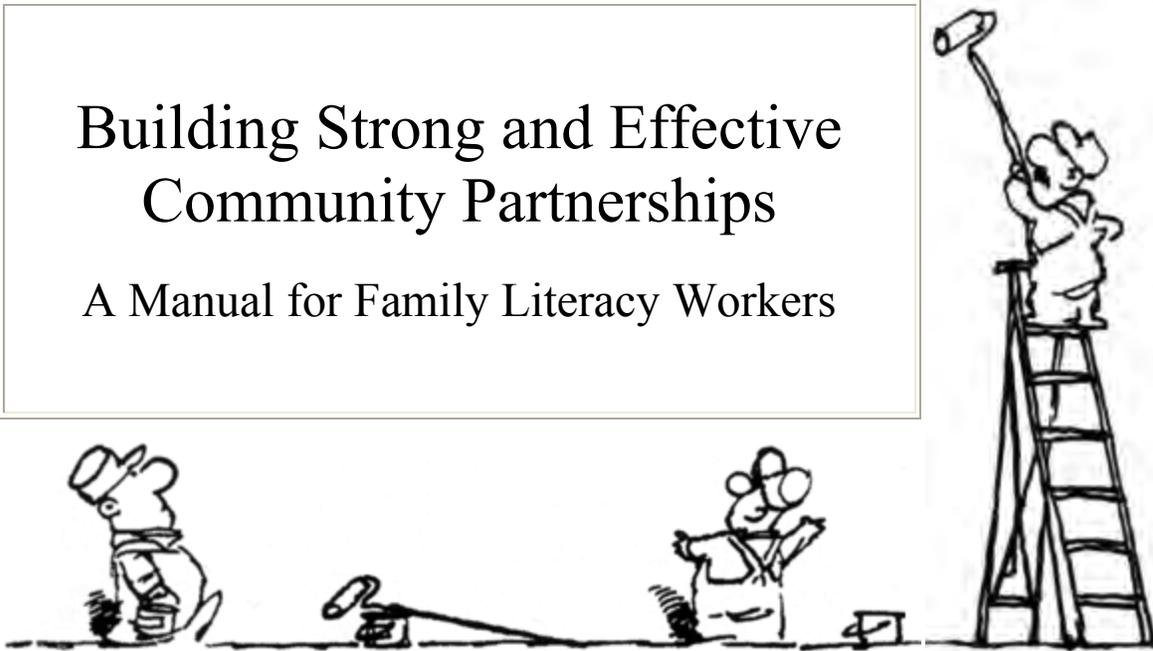# Building Strong and Effective Community Partnerships

A Manual for Family Literacy Workers

The Family Literacy
Action Group of Alberta

Researched and written
by Sharon Skage

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Acknowledgements

In the way that organizations are changing right now, it's true that there are a lot of barriers, there's a lot of difficulty, the lack of funding certainly is very restrictive, but there have also been a whole raft of opportunities. For example, some of those structural changes are responsible for the fact that (the family literacy coordinator and I) could simply throw this thing together by ourselves. In a more structured environment, in an environment less in the middle of change and evolution, we might not have been able to do that. We might have been so locked in to structure and definitions, rigidity, that it would not have been a possible program initiative.

Adult Basic Education instructor
FLAG interviews 1995

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Chapter I
Introduction

The introduction of the partnerships manual provides an overview of the Family Literacy Action Group, its history and activities. It also gives some background on the partnerships project, and describes how the manual was developed and how it is organized.

It's important to note that the manual has been developed to accommodate those who are initiating partnerships in the very first stages of developing their family literacy program. It's our belief that the most effective way of building support and commitment for your program is to give your community partners significant roles in all stages of program development. As the saying goes, "People will support what they help to create." That being said, if your program is already established or in the process of being developed, and you are now looking for partners or wanting to strengthen the partnerships you have, you will still find relevant, useful information here to support your efforts.

I. Introduction

The Family Literacy Action Group

History
The Family Literacy Action Group (FLAG) was formed in 1993 in response to a need identified at the Roots of Literacy Symposium in Brooks the previous year. That symposium brought together people from across Alberta and beyond who saw family literacy as having great potential for preventing the cycle of low literacy and for strengthening and supporting the family.

Bonnie Annicchiarico, Kathy Day, Yvon Laberge, and Maureen Sanders were among those attending the symposium in Brooks. They saw the need and possibility for an organization which could help network people interested in family literacy. Such an organization could also work to raise public awareness of the importance of family reading, and could inform other agencies who would be targeting the same client group. By 1993 this core group had formed FLAG.

Activities
Since it began, FLAG's activities have included:

- research into family literacy activities, resources, and issues. FLAG is currently also conducting research on evaluation in family literacy programs.
- publication of the Practical Guide to Family Literacy (1995), a biannual newsletter, a position paper on family literacy (1995), and various brochures and information sheets
- networking family literacy practitioners and sharing information on developments and issues that affect Alberta families.
- promotion and celebration of family literacy, including participation in the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families, the National Conference on Family Literacy, and various provincial literacy conferences.

FLAG's Partnerships Project
Research conducted by FLAG in 1994/95 identified two key areas of concern for family literacy workers in Alberta. The first is the need for on-going funding sources for family literacy programs. The second is the need for strategies to deliver services to families most in need of this type of support.

Experience in existing family literacy programs has shown that the most effective means of addressing these two issues is through strong community partnerships. The benefits of inter-agency partnerships can include sharing limited budgets, sponsorship and donations, as well as meeting funding agency criteria. Partnerships also address recruitment challenges through facilitating referrals, making groups available, incorporating family literacy into existing programs, and creating greater awareness. Working with other agencies not only helps to address funding and recruitment issues, but also leads to sharing expertise, pooling resources, and other mutual benefits. Interestingly, since our partnerships project began, the Alberta government has undertaken a new early intervention initiative to improve services to children and their families. To access funding through this initiative, projects and services must demonstrate clear and significant partnerships with other community agencies.

> Involving either individuals or organizations, collaboration and cooperation are distinctly different operational processes. They are both valued models, each serving a unique purpose. Each requires different kinds of input, and each yields a different return.
>
> Hord 1986: 22

While many literacy workers recognize the value of community partnerships, most are over-extended to the point where it is very difficult to find time to research methods and strategies for building partnerships. As Mawhinney (1993) states, "there is no single model for restructuring services that best enhances the capacity for flexible responses. Much must be learned about the design and implementation of successful collaborative initiatives" (emphasis added) (37). We need to understand "the complexities and deeper organizational issues" involved in forming partnerships and collaborations (33).

Having identified the need for information on how to sustain programs, and having also identified the benefits of partnerships and collaborations, FLAG submitted a proposal to the National Literacy Secretariat in early 1995. One component of the proposal was to research and develop a practical resource on community partnerships.

About the Partnerships Manual

How it is organized
The manual has been published in binder format to enable you to add it to other resources on family literacy, and to accommodate future research.

Our objective with this manual has been, first of all, to establish a context for community partnerships, in order to provide an understanding of the benefits, issues, and challenges which are attached to forming partnerships. This makes up the first part of the document. The second half contains practical, useful information on building community partnerships from the ground up.

In addition to the Table of Contents found at the beginning of the manual, there is a description of contents at the beginning of each chapter to provide you with an overview and to assist you in locating information.

At the back of the manual, you will find a set of worksheets that you can use to put the recommended strategies and exercises into practice. There is also a set of appendices that contain sample documents that you can use in your development work, plus a list of works cited and recommended resources.

Sources of data
Primary information used for this manual includes: FLAG's 1994-95 research, including the 1994 survey of Alberta literacy practitioners; personal interviews with selected Alberta family literacy practitioners and their community partners (see below); and discussions and correspondence with family literacy practitioners.

Secondary information includes: reports, articles, and books in FLAG's collection; 1995 literature review specific to collaboration; documents shared with FLAG by government agencies and literacy practitioners; and theses and dissertations specific to partnerships or family literacy.

Personal Interviews

The following criteria were used to select five communities for conducting personal interviews with family literacy workers and their partner agencies. We wanted to visit communities that had indicated in our 1994 survey that they had experience in building partnerships to support their programs. We also wanted to get a cross section of the various family literacy program types in the province, as well as representation of the geographic and demographic diversity in this province. Some communities had more than one type of family literacy program in operation.

Coordinators of the programs identified through this process were contacted in the summer of 1995 to gain their cooperation. They assumed responsibility for contacting their community partners, establishing a schedule of interviews, and obtaining appropriate locations for conducting the interviews.

Two different questionnaires were developed, one for the family literacy program coordinator and one for their community partners. The questionnaires used a semi-structured format. They sought to identify how partnerships are developed, what the barriers are, how they can be improved, and what the needs are for successful partnerships. In essence, they attempted to identify what works and what doesn't in developing community partnerships. In order to encourage community partners and practitioners to speak frankly about their experiences, their comments are presented without being associated with specific individuals or programs.

The family literacy program types that were included in these interviews were:

- Books for Babies
- Homespun
- Parents in Partnership
- PAL Project
- various parent workshops

Additional Sources of Information
This manual is not intended to be a complete guide to establishing a family literacy program. Its purpose, rather, is to provide background information and step-by-step instruction in building partnerships. For additional information on developing family literacy programs, see FLAG's publication A Practical Guide to Family Literacy (Skage 1995).

Many parents told us about the frustration they have experienced when they have tried to find the right department or agency to help them. They said it would be helpful if there were just one place to go -- a place where someone knowledgeable could assist them in finding the information and help they need.

Finding a Better Way, 1994: 16

Chapter II
Overview of Family Literacy

Family literacy programs are increasing in number in our province. To encourage the interest in this relatively new approach to literacy development, we've included an overview of family literacy to provide you with a handy source of information to draw from as you build your community partnerships. Specifically, the chapter contains two of the most commonly used definitions of family literacy, a rationale for programs, a brief discussion of family literacy as a type of community development, a summary of research, and a description of family literacy models currently in use or planned for Alberta.
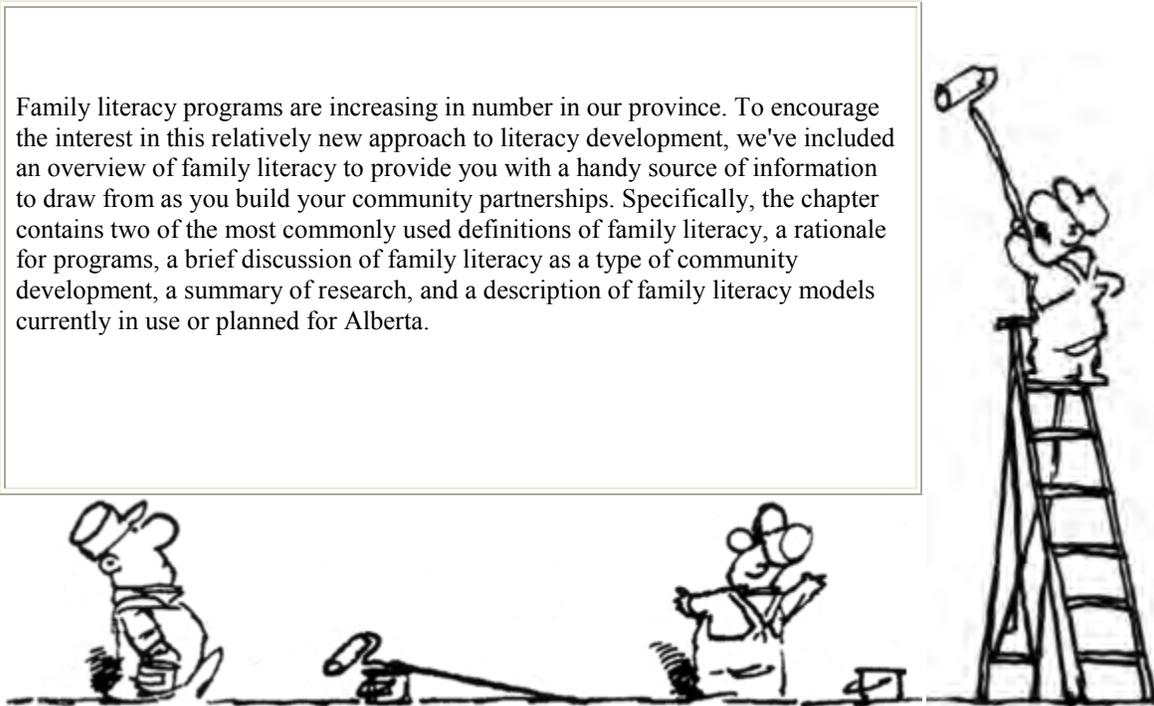
II. Overview of Family Literacy

Definitions
For those new to this field, one of the first things evident is that there is no universally accepted definition of family literacy. The number and diversity of programs operating towards the goal of improving literacy skills within the family as a whole contributes to the range of definitions available. The International Reading Association's Family Literacy Commission offers the following as considerations in defining family literacy:

1. Family literacy encompasses the way parents, children, and extended family members use literacy at home and in their community.
2. Family literacy occurs naturally during the routines of daily living and helps adults and children "get things done."
3. Examples of family literacy might include using drawings or writings to share ideas; composing notes or letters to communicate messages; keeping records; making lists; reading and following directions; or sharing stories and ideas through conversation, reading, and writing.
4. Family literacy may be initiated purposefully by a parent, or may occur spontaneously as parents and children go about the business of their daily lives.
5. Family literacy activities may also reflect the ethnic, racial, or cultural heritage of the families involved.
6. Family literacy activities may be initiated by outside institutions or agencies. These activities are often intended to support the acquisition and development of school-like literacy behaviours of parents, children, and families.
7. Family literacy activities initiated by outside agencies may include family storybook reading, completing homework assignments, or writing essays or reports.

(Family Literacy: New Perspectives, New Opportunities)

In contrast, Katherine Ryan (1991) proposes a definition for family literacy programs based on the following characteristics:

> The program is conceptualized around the concerns of the family as a unit in contrast to serving only an individual family member.

> Program components are developed on the basis of the community needs assessment and participant recommendation.

> Adults who need to improve their literacy skills and the child or children for whom they are responsible are the target population.

> Parenting education is offered and literacy activities are provided so adults can attain a level of proficiency in basic skills that is sufficient to meet individuals' goals and social and economic demands for proficiency.

> Literacy, pre-literacy, and developmentally appropriate activities for children are provided.

> There are formal and/or informal activities with varying degrees of systematic adult and child interactions focusing on parents as teachers.

> The programs serve as a liaison with community agencies which focus their resources in basic problems faced by the families. (2-3)

Rationale for family literacy

A child's literacy development begins at birth, and is shaped by his or her experiences in the home environment. Supporting parents and caregivers of young children in their role as their children's first teachers can have a positive impact on the child's emerging literacy skills and attitudes toward learning. This positive impact has implications not only for the child's future success in school but for their entire lifetime (Nickse 1989, Morrow 1989, Heath 1983, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines 1988).

Early intervention for the purpose of impacting children's literacy skills is not the only rationale for family literacy, however. These programs may also improve parents' and caregivers' literacy levels, promote parental involvement in their children's education, and

encourage positive home-school relationships (Padak et al 5). Perhaps as important as skill development and taking a more active role in education, family literacy has important implications for relationships within the family:

> The goal of a family literacy program is to enhance the lives of parents and children through the joy of reading, and not incidentally, to also improve the literacy skills, attitudes, values and behaviours of both. Evidence from adult basic education, early childhood education, cognitive science, emergent literacy and family systems theory tells of the importance of adults in children's early literacy development. Sharing books in families, when appropriately undertaken, sets a pattern for talking together about things and ideas, and adds to the pleasure of each other's company. Through shared activities, the social uses of literacy are incorporated along with orientations to concepts about books and print materials, and the cognitive tasks of asking and answering questions which are so important to the children's school success….
> Quezada and Nickse 1992: 7

Family literacy as community development

Family literacy does not just offer benefits to families, however. By contributing to the development of healthier, stronger families, family literacy programs assist in the formation of healthier, stronger communities.

We believe that literacy is intimately connected to community development when one accepts that community development has to do with working to enable people to make informed choices about how they live, to have an impact on the world of their experience and a voice in their community. Such participation includes voting, reading newspapers, letters, bills, notices from schools and bureaucracies, and formulating responses verbally and/or in writing.

Isserlis et al 1994b: 8

Literacy is much more than reading and writing. It is interwoven with health, social welfare, and education. Family and intergenerational literacy includes and encompasses "interactions across generations and around literacy in its broadest sense. Literacy is understood to be a vehicle for communication, learning and community development, as well as a process through which people can gain greater control over their lives" (Isserlis et al 1994a:10).

Summary of research

There has been a great deal of research done on emergent literacy, and more recently, on family and intergenerational literacy. This research can be summarized as follows:

- Children acquire their basic cognitive and linguistic skills within the context of the family. (Sticht and McDonald 1989, Smith 1984, Heath 1983)
- Much literacy learning takes place in the years preceding formal instruction in the context of family-based interactions and activities. (Taylor 1982, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines 1988, Teale and Sulzby 1986)
- School achievement and test scores are higher for children whose parents have more education and books in the home. (Applebee, Langer, and Mullis 1988)
- Parents who are low-literate may not be able to support their children's literacy learning nor pass on positive attitudes about schooling and the importance of learning to read and write. (Newman and Beverstock 1990, Smith 1984)

Research has also shown that children's literacy development largely depends on their socialization in their early years (Taylor 1983, Teale and Sulzby 1986, Morrow 1989, Nickse 1989, Smith 1984). "Children learn about language by attaching themselves as apprentices to people who are using language as a tool to accomplish particular and self-evident ends…. Literacy develops because the child sees what reading and writing can do and because it is relevant to the child's own creative and constructive purpose" (Smith in Mom, Read, Read, Read 1993: 3).

Family literacy models

The following describes the family literacy models currently operating in Alberta. In addition to programs based on these models, there are numerous family literacy events and promotions, such as special book give-aways at the hospital, or family fairs to promote education.

Homespun

Perhaps the most well-known of family literacy programs in Alberta is the *Homespun Family Literacy Project*, developed at Brooks Campus of Medicine Hat College. *Homespun* officially began in January 1991 with the mandate of reaching at-risk families and providing parents and caregivers with instruction on how to read with their children and how to encourage a supportive literacy environment in the home.

Homespun is based on a model developed in Raleigh, North Carolina called *Motheread*. In the *Motheread* program, mothers met once or twice weekly to share children's literature centred on a particular child development theme. The Homespun instructor/coordinator received curriculum and training from the *Motheread* headquarters.

Modifications to the *Motheread* model to more truly reflect our population and to include Canadian content led to the evolution of the new model, *Homespun*. Three primary components make up *Homespun's* curriculum: 1) a focus on children's literature as well as extended discussion about the book and activities related to the story, 2) opportunities for parents and caregivers to explore ideas on encouraging an environment in the home that is conducive to literacy development through readings, discussion, videos, and instruction, and 3) exploration and development of the parent's own literacy abilities, beliefs, and attitudes through personal journals, writing for children and discussing adult readings.

Although there are variations from one program to the next, *Homespun* sessions usually run for fifteen weeks, with evening or daytime workshops offered for two hours each week. There are an average of ten parents in each workshop.

Books for Babies
Another model used in Alberta is the *Books for Babies*
program, which originated in Cardston. *Books for Babies* is
based on the philosophy that since children spend the first
(and most critical) five or six years at home, parents need
support in becoming more effective "first" teachers.

The *Books for Babies* program has three distinct phases.
Phase One is the hospital presentation phase where the
program presents a book bag to new mothers at the local
hospital. These canvas bags are stencilled "Books for
Babies" and contain an information sheet on the importance
of reading to babies and young children, a tip sheet on
family reading, a number of children's books, and a
colouring book. In addition to the book bag, there is a video
presentation at the hospital on the importance of reading to
children.

The second phase of the program consists of informal
follow-up activities and keeping in touch with the parents.
When the babies are brought in for check-ups and
immunizations, health unit staff talk to parents about the
importance of reading to their children, and ask them if
they received a book bag and whether they've had time to
use the materials. There is a book bag on display at the
health unit, and the family literacy video is also shown at
the health units and local libraries.

Other follow-up activities include a newsletter produced
twice each year, and a workshop for parents of newborns
held once each year. There is also a *Books for Babies*
section at the local library.

The third phase of the program is the evaluation phase. In
Cardston, the program is in its fourth of five years; running
Books for Babies for five years will enable them to evaluate
the effects of the program on children entering
kindergarten. The evaluator for the program is an educator
in the public school system in Cardston. In other *Books for
Babies* projects, evaluation cards are distributed by health
unit staff to parents participating in the project.

Partnership Approach to Literacy
The Partnership Approach to Literacy program (PAL) began in Pincher Creek in 1989 as a special preventative project focused on literacy development. It offers one-on-one support and modelling of the enjoyment of reading by tutors to school students who do not enjoy reading, do not choose to read, and are in the bottom third of their class. Its approach is based on literacy development principles and on the work of the National Reading Styles Institute of New York, which proposes that we teach students how to read through their strengths and preferences, rather than dwell on their weaknesses. Tutors are volunteers, or are peer tutors from junior high and high school. Training is conducted in conjunction with the Read/Write Adult Literacy Project.

PAL recognizes the importance of parents reading to their children, and "reading for enjoyment" workshops are held to give parents strategies. There are "Read to Me, Mom and Dad" workshops for parents of pre-school children, and "How to Make Your Child a Better Reader" workshops for parents of school children. In-services are held for teachers in understanding learning styles, and student profiles are developed and discussed with staff.

Children participating in the PAL Project are referred to the program by their school, their parents, or themselves. They meet with their tutor at the school during or after school hours, usually once a week for an hour and a half. The pair uses reading material selected by the student and prepared by the tutor based on student interest. Activities include learning reading strategies such as predicting, DRTA, language experience, phonetics, and many "hands-on" experiential activities.

Alpha Familiale à St-Paul (Family Literacy in St. Paul)
Alpha Familiale began in St. Paul in February 1995, a project of the Adult Literacy Program. The adult learners in the program asked the staff to implement a family literacy component so they could help their children and grandchildren with reading, comprehension, and writing skills. Alpha Familiale did not use any particular model for their program, but rather used the specific needs of participants as its basis. Adult learners have been and are involved in planning and developing the program.

The main goal of Alpha Familiale is to break the cycle of illiteracy among French families in the community. Other goals are to develop better communication between the parents and their children; to increase parents' knowledge in French in terms of reading, writing, and comprehension; and to generally increase interest in reading in French.

The group meets together for two hours one afternoon a week. (Because clientele are from a rural community, access is an important issue.) For the first hour, parents and children spend time reading together. The focus is on understanding the story, word comprehension, vocabulary extension, and building writing skills using story vocabulary. In the second hour, parents go to their literacy class while children work on homework with a tutor's assistance.

Seeing their parents in a classroom is a great motivation for children. They are proud of their parents and very supportive. Another motivating factor is that there is more free time in the home because the program includes time for homework for both children and parents.

Alpha Familiale was developed initially for the French adult learners in the Adult Literacy Program and their families. The program hopes to eventually open to the rest of the community.

Parents as Tutors
Parents as Tutors (PAT) is a partnership project between the Rainbow Literacy Society and the schools in the County of Vulcan #2. The objective of the project is to provide training and support to parents who are interested in helping their child become a better reader through a process known as Paired Reading. (Paired Reading was developed by the Northern Alberta Reading Specialists Council in 1991. See Works Cited for reference.)

PAT is available to families who have elementary school children in the County of Vulcan. A trained person from the community goes into the family's home five times a week for eight weeks. These sessions are fifteen minutes long, and are used to demonstrate Paired Reading. The trained community person is a non-teacher who acts as a

liaison between the school and the family. This person's primary role is not to tutor the child, but to provide training and positive support to the parents as they develop skills as their child's tutor. In order to join the program, parents must agree to participate in each of the Paired Reading Sessions, and to take over from the tutor before the end of the sixth week.

Parents in Partnership

Parents in Partnership is a National Literacy Secretariat-funded project which began in Pincher Creek in 1995. It operates in all schools in Pincher Creek and the outlying district. The program is an outreach to "invisible parents," parents who don't feel comfortable coming into their children's schools, who separate the home and the school. These parents feel they have no part to play in their child's education, or have given up on it, perhaps based on their own school experience. The program is based on the Parents as Partners and similar programs in the United States.

Parents in Partnership looks not only at the mechanics of getting parents involved in the schools, but also at metacognition and the understanding of how one learns that can develop in the parent. The goal is to develop a recognition of the value of learning by both the parent and the child. Objectives include having parents get over the feeling of uncomfortableness or inferiority when it comes to dealing with teachers or the classroom situation.

Parent-Child Mother Goose Program

One of the most recent family literacy models to come to Alberta is the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program. Based on a project piloted in Toronto in 1984, the program is aimed primarily at parents who feel unsure of their ability to communicate with and enjoy their children, or speak English with difficulty because it is not their first language.

Parents are usually divided into two groups: birth to 2 1/2 years and 2 to 4 years. Once a week the parents and their children meet to learn rhymes and songs together. They sit in a circle on the floor, with lots of holding, touching, bouncing, and laughter. The idea is to introduce the parents and children to the magic of language. The session ends with a story told to the parents so they too

can appreciate the joy of language and listening. During the 30-week program (ten weeks at a time), parents gain skills and confidence while children are introduced to language and memory development. Equally important, parents build a repertoire of rhymes, songs, and stories, regardless of their literacy skills. As the sessions progress, and parents feel more comfortable with each other, rhymes from other cultures are shared as well.

Among the benefits cited for the program are bonding between the parent and child; pleasurable ways to deal with fussy, cranky times; strengthening language and memory skills; the pleasure of listening to stories while building up a verbal library; cost-free family fun which strengthens emotional and intellectual development; and a relaxed atmosphere which helps build lasting friendships.

One noteworthy aspect of the program is that the majority of *Mother Goose* teachers in Toronto, where the program has been operating for eleven years, came into the program as participants.

The *Parent-Child Mother Goose Program* is being offered in Edmonton in partnership with Prospects Literacy Association. A number of literacy workers in the province have also attended a training workshop and will be adapting the program for use in their communities.

Learning and Reading Partners
Another family literacy model that is being introduced to Alberta this year is the *Learning and Reading Partners* (LRP) program. Developed in Prince Edward Island, this approach to family literacy is aimed at supporting parents of school-age children. There is also a program being designed for parents of pre-school children, and one for parents with literacy difficulties.

Through a series of workshops and supporting program binder, LRP teaches parents strategies to use with their children to enhance learning and school success. These strategies are divided into those focusing on process of thinking, process of reading, process of writing, processing information, understanding the learner, and life management. *Learning and Reading Partners* is being piloted in Edmonton by Prospects Literacy Association. (See MacIsaac, Maitland in Works Cited for reference.)

Chapter III
Definition and Rationale for Partnerships

In this chapter we present a definition of partnerships, and explore the different types of relationships that are included under that general term. We also look at why partnerships are considered to be an important step in improving services and creating healthy families and healthy communities. Specifically, we look at reasons behind partnerships in general, partnerships in education, and partnerships in family literacy. We also look at some of the concerns and reservations that have been expressed about collaborative services.
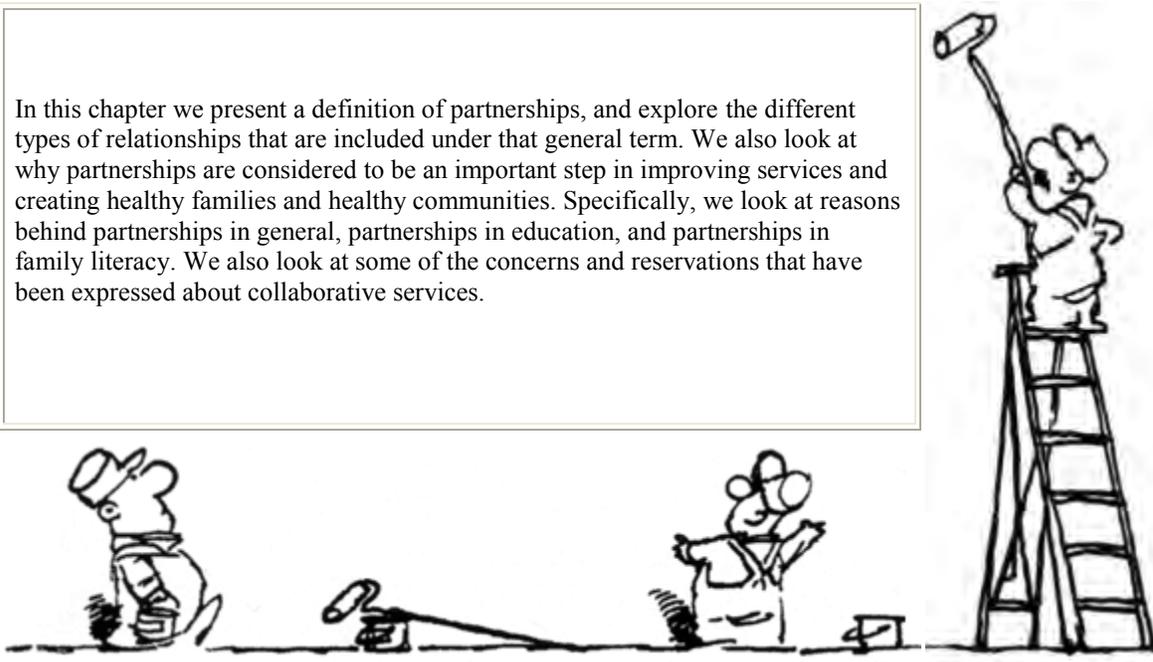
III. Definition and Rationale for Partnerships

What do we mean by "partnerships"?

The way that we understand and interpret language significantly impacts our interactions with each other. Hord (in Mawhinney 1993) warns that conflict among collaborative stakeholders can occur because of differences in how we define and understand cooperation, coordination, and other linkages between agencies (33).

For the purposes of this manual, therefore, we have used the following definition of partnership, and of other key terms:

partnership - encompasses a broad number of types of relationships. It is "an undertaking to do something together…, a relationship that consists of shared and/or compatible objectives and an acknowledged distribution of specific roles and responsibilities among the participants which can be formal, contractual, or voluntary, between two or more parties" (Partnership Resource Kit 1995). The types of partnerships discussed later in this chapter are funding and sponsorship, cooperation, coordination, and collaboration.

community - a group of people bound together through mutual interest and sense of shared destiny. The "boundaries" can be geographical (like a neighborhood, town, city, or region) or non-geographical (such as an interest group dispersed across the province, a workplace, business organization or professional association) (Government of Saskatchewan 1994).

family - families have many different forms and can be defined as any combination of two or more persons bound together by ties of mutual consent, birth and/or adoption. Families together share responsibility for some or all of the following: physical maintenance, care, and nurturance of family members; addition of new family members through birth or adoption; and socialization of children.

Types of partnerships

"Partnership," then, is a broad term that includes many different types of relationships. It's important to consider what types of partnerships you are looking for, and which are available.

Hord (in Mawhinney 1993) proposes that inter-agency interactions can be placed along a continuum of cooperation that ranges from coordination to collaboration (37). Researchers agree that successful interventions require, at minimum, the coordination of professionals who are providing services for children and families. Some argue, however, that a more expansive approach requires collaboration where "organizations join to create improvements in children's services that are no single agency's responsibility" (Kirst in Mawhinney 1993: 37).

If we look at types of partnerships on a continuum, as Hord suggests, where as you move along the continuum interactions become more complex and expectations for mutual benefit increase, we can describe their different characteristics as in Table 1 on page 23.

"Partnerships," therefore, can include a number of different types of relationships. A community project to support family literacy can involve different types of partnerships with different agencies simultaneously. You might have a relationship based on sponsorship with the Rotary Club, for example, and also have a cooperative arrangement with Social Services where they provide referrals into your program. Relationships with community partners will almost inevitably change and evolve as the project progresses.

Why are partnerships important?

There has been a great deal of attention and emphasis placed on partnerships and collaborations in recent years. The reasons behind this focus have been economic, political, and social.

We have seen a marked increase, not only in Alberta but across Canada and beyond, in holistic approaches in the ways in which we support and deliver services to individuals, families, and communities.

Ties to business and industry in each local area can be strengthened. Where some business input is now provided by PIC staff or by spouses of program staff who are influential in the business community, it appears that programs could benefit from the marketing, fund-raising, and management skills of the business community…. One partner… expressed the business community's attitude towards the program, saying, "Just the atmosphere of the town is something the business community needs. It's not for things for all of us to make money off of."

Seamen et al 1992: 28

Many human service agencies have come to realize the inadequacies of systems based on fragmentation and categorization of the needs of adults and children. These needs have traditionally been met by a diverse and separate array of government departments, social and human service agencies, and educational institutions. Without the links provided by partnerships, these agencies may be unaware of the extent and range of their clients' needs, of the services and support offered by other agencies, and therefore of where the gaps in service delivery exist (Bradford 1993). As Kunesh and Farley (1993) and Mawhinney (1993) point out, the challenges and barriers that many members of our communities face are interactive and interrelated. Children and families who experience one are likely to experience others as well. Therefore, our solutions and services must also be interrelated.

A synthesis of lessons from past efforts suggests that although such problems cannot be solved without money, money alone will not solve the problems. There is growing agreement that 'measures to make services more comprehensive, and better coordinated' are fundamental components of the structural agenda for the new community.

Mawhinney 1993: 33

Table 1: Models of Partnerships

donation - one-time financial or non-financial contribution to support program or service. Donors expectations may include public recognition or tax credits. An example of this would be a service club donating $1000. to a local family literacy program, or donating a set of books or a computer.

sponsorship - providing financial support for a specific time period or cycle of program, or providing contribution in kind for the purpose of supporting a program or service. For example, the local college might provide office space or equipment, or the library might make meeting space available, or provide memberships for family literacy participants. Again, the sponsor might expect public recognition in return for the support.

cooperation - two or more agencies share general information about their mandates, objectives, and services. They may work together informally to achieve their organizations' day-to-day goals, for example, through support or referrals. It is a relatively superficial level of agency interaction, as in inter-agency meetings and informal networking.

Agency procedures, policies, and activities remain distinct and separate and are determined without reference to the procedures and policies of the other agencies. The agencies are autonomous, function independently in parallel fashion, and work toward the identified goals of their respective programs. It demonstrates a peaceful co-existence, but is neither genuinely interactive nor interdependent (Swan and Morgan [1993] in Government of Saskatchewan: 71)

coordination - a multi-disciplinary approach where professionals from different agencies confer, share decision making, and coordinate their service delivery for the purpose of achieving shared goals and improving interventions.

Coordination is characterized by deliberate joint and often formalized relations for achieving shared or compatible goals. It involves establishing a common understanding of the services committed to and provided by each agency and by determining each agency's accountability and responsibility to specific groups…. Interagency coordination differs slightly from cooperation, but represents a more sophisticated level of interagency interaction. It is a process of engaging in various efforts that alter or smooth the relationships of independent organizations, staffs, or resources (Swan and Morgan [1993] in Government of Saskatchewan). For example, public health, social services, mental health, and school staff might hold case conferences to coordinate services for at-risk school children.

collaboration - Unlike any of the other models of partnership, collaboration requires two or more agencies working together in all stages of program or service development; in other words, "joint planning, joint implementation, and joint evaluation" (New England Program in Teacher Education [1973] in Hord [1986]). There is a cooperative investment of resources, (time, funding, material) and therefore joint risk-taking, sharing of authority, and benefits for all partners (Government of Canada 1995).

The term collaboration has been used to describe integrations that result from blending provider disciplines and usually involves several organizations working together in a unified structure (Mawhinney 1993 37).

In addition to providing an integrated, holistic approach to providing services to individuals and communities, partnerships also allow us to avoid duplication of services. Duplication wastes limited resources, can be confusing to clients, and can discourage the community from supporting important initiatives. The fact that we are living in an era of diminishing resources and increasing competition for funds has created a political and economic climate where inefficiency is no longer tolerated.

Inter-agency support, cooperation, and collaboration is therefore seen as desirable because it improves services and because it is a more cost-effective way of using limited resources. It is not uncommon, therefore, for provincial and federal funding criteria to now include a demonstration of strong, significant partnerships with other agencies.

Applicants must form partnerships with other groups or organizations to help integrate services….

The redesign of children's services will introduce an integrated approach -- where service providers form partnerships with other service providers and children -- to improve planning, the kinds of services provided, and delivery…. Integrating services will help improve coordination and provide people opportunity to address, and be part of, the services that affect their lives.

Early Intervention Program Funding Guidelines.
Alberta Office of the Commissioner of
Services for Children, May 1995.

Fox and Faver (1984) identify four benefits that scientists perceived in working in collaboration with other scholars: joining resources and dividing labor, alleviating academic isolation, sustaining motivation through commitments to the other collaborator, and creating energy through the interpersonal relationship to complete projects.

Hord 1986: 23

Not only are governments encouraging cooperation, they are also redesigning their own operations and services to allow for increased cooperation and integrated planning. In Alberta, the departments of Justice, Health, Education, Aboriginal Affairs, and Family and Social Services are working together with the Office of the Commissioner of Services for Children to redesign children's services in the province. Improved services, avoiding duplication, and eligibility for funding are not the only motivation behind building partnerships, however. It is not the inefficient use of funds but the insufficient amount of funding available that often makes it necessary to look beyond one's own agency to try and meet clients' needs. Staff are often already over-extended when they identify additional

needs; rather than trying to develop and deliver additional services on their own, they realize the importance and even necessity of involving other agencies and drawing on other resources and expertise.

Let's look at an example of an inter-agency partnership. The Wood County Literacy Coalition in Wisconsin is a partnership of state- and federally-funded employment and training agencies, local non-profit agencies, and area vocational and technical colleges. The objective of the Coalition is to increase the coordination of basic skills and literacy instruction. They report that "co-locating" programs allows for necessary day-to-day contact to maximize coordination and communication, and also reduces rental costs for office space. Co-location also allows for sharing office equipment and certain support staff by agencies. Other aspects of the partnership include coordinated planning and systems implementation (collaboration) and the development of uniform assessment, employability, referral, case management, and file systems (Irwin 1994).

In the fall of 1995, FLAG interviewed eighteen community agency staff members who have worked in partnership with family literacy coordinators in Alberta. The perceived benefits of entering partnerships with other agencies, and with family literacy programs, can be summarized as 1) financial or economic, 2) sharing resources and expertise, 3) referrals, access to families, and finding supports for clients, and 4) an integrated approach to better serve clients' needs. (See Chapter IV for information on why agencies enter partnerships.)

Partnerships in education

Partnerships have played a significant role in school reform in Canada and elsewhere. Educators have recognized the need to address the physical and emotional needs of their students as well as their academic needs. Students often come to school with complex social, emotional, health, and developmental problems that create a barrier to learning. A collaborative, approach is seen as necessary for a child's team development and success; not only does that collaboration involve institutions and agencies, but parents, families, and community members as well.

The (school) superintendent… started a whole process of strategic planning which included the grassroots involvement of business, community, parents, everybody getting together…. (We asked,) "what are our needs, where are we going, what directions are we taking?" …That really got us going in the direction of preventative programs, early intervention programs, and working together collaboratively with all agencies to work on these programs.

community school counsellor
FLAG interviews 1995

An example of this recognition is found in the recommendations that resulted from UNESCO's international conference on early childhood intervention held in The Hague in 1993. The third recommendation states that

> concern for literacy should be combined with concern for the survival and optimal development of the well being and competency of the child. This implies an integration of health, nutrition, psycho-social, and cognitive interventions, in a fashion appropriate to local needs.

<div align="right">UNESCO 1993: 344</div>

The collaborative model proposed by many goes beyond providing integrated services for school children. Schools are seen as the site or broker for community- or neighborhood-based social programs and services, such as health clinics, welfare, criminal justice, alcohol and drug abuse, and recreational programs. These services would be cooperatively planned and provided (Kirst in Mitchell and Scott 1993). As Jeffers and Olebe (1994) point out, it isn't difficult to see that supporting learning means supporting families. By working with other agencies and acting as the host site for services, schools can value and support families and at the same time, allow administrators and teachers to focus on their primary objective: student learning (4).

There have been numerous, sometimes dramatic examples of school reform and the movement toward integrated, school-based services since the late 1980's. Among these is the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA), which was spawned by a Supreme Court ruling which struck down Kentucky's existing system of public school funding as being in violation of a state constitutional mandate that all children be provided with adequate education. Especially significant about the ensuing reform is that it went beyond academic matters to address the broader issues affecting children.

> KERA is grounded on the precepts that (1) all children should begin school ready to learn, (2) parental and family involvement is critical for educational success, and (3) the community should provide services to increase the educative capacities of families and schools.

<div align="right">Russo and Lindle 1993: 179</div>

Under the new system, schools and social service agencies act as partners in education. Family Resource/Youth Services Centres are provided in or near schools throughout the state of Kentucky, and coordinate social service delivery to children from pre-school to high school, and their families.

Closer to home, in 1992 the Saskatchewan government began exploring more coordinated and collaborative approaches to delivering services to at-risk children and families. A number of pilots for integrated school-linked services were undertaken across the provinces, with the objectives of:

- providing the physical, social, emotional, cultural, and spiritual supports children require in order to learn, and to remove the barriers to learning and to success in life experienced by children at risk;
- create a collaborative culture among human service systems and providers in order to establish a coordinated, comprehensive, and responsive continuum of human services;

- make the most effective and efficient use of existing community and provincial resources;
- enhance family and community participation in and shared responsibility for education and the well-being of children;
- increase the participation of Indian and Métis people in the planning, management, and delivery of education and other human services; and
- enable teachers to focus on teaching and student learning, and empower schools and other human service agencies to enhance their effectiveness by working collaboratively with one another to meet the needs of children holistically (Government of Saskatchewan 1994: 3-4).

I really like partnerships because of that. They've got the clients, they've got the expertise, they know their clients and their membership. And we know our materials and what is available, different projects that we can do. That matching is a really positive thing. We're not repeating, if they want to do a literacy project, they're not starting over, they're not starting from scratch. Then once we have something in place there, they can choose to continue it. And they'll have learned along the way.

family literacy coordinator
FLAG interviews 1995

Partnerships in family literacy

> …there are all kinds of resonances when an adult returns to school…. No matter what the subject matter of the class is, things begin to happen, and have resonances of their own. Homespun resonated in, for example, their own English classes. What we were doing resonated… with Homespun. …The focus on what good parenting skills might be, and what it might be like to be a really good parent…. I don't think it would have been successful if it stood by itself.
>
> Adult Basic Education instructor
> FLAG interviews 1995

All of the reasons to support partnerships generally also apply to family literacy. Motivating factors for family literacy practitioners to work with other agencies include

- limited or inadequate funding;
- sharing expertise;
- improving services and access;
- meeting funders' criteria; and
- working toward the common goal of supporting and strengthening the family.

Just as a team approach is required to meet the complex needs of young school students, as described above, so too do we need to take an integrated approach to supporting participants in family literacy programs. *Literacy is interwoven with other social issues, and is a critical strand of community development* (Isserlis et al 1994b) (emphasis added). *Literacy skills significantly impact on an individual or family's interactions with agencies and institutions, and can determine their participation and access.*

> At-risk families have so many other issues going on; literacy sometimes can be the last thing that needs to be addressed. We really felt we needed some of these other partners, and people who would be able to make an impact on the families. We also felt the need for the clientele to have that broad range of services as soon as they made contact with one agency, so that whatever their need was, all the agencies could work together to try and find what could help them best.
>
> family literacy coordinator
> FLAG interviews 1995

Brizius and Foster (1993) give the following reasons for family literacy programs to build partnerships with other agencies:

- to use existing resources and expertise, as much as possible, to create and implement a family literacy program;
- as a means of identifying and learning about your community's needs and resources from those directly involved;
- to gain the support of agencies, institutions, and government;
- to raise the resources to do a good job; and
- to prepare the community for a family literacy program (79)

The reasons family literacy coordinators gave for seeking partners during our 1995 interviews are given in Table 2 in Chapter IV. They can be summarized as:

- recruitment/access to target group
- financial reasons
- to include family literacy as one component of another program
- because it "makes sense" in terms of natural evolution of community services, being the most efficient, effective means of delivering programs
- to create a greater awareness of family literacy

Finally, one coordinator explained her reasons for seeking community partners in terms of a recognition that family literacy collaborations may strengthen the family unit, and increase the self-concept of individuals within a family so that they can be less than helpless.

Concerns about partnerships

While an integrated approach to meeting individual and family needs is generally acknowledged as beneficial and desirable, there are those who raise important concerns. Capper (1994) cites a range of sources to support the idea that inter-agency coordination in itself is no guarantee of positive changes in service delivery and may lead to the following problems:

- centralization of services, which can limit client choices, result in organizational goals to meet organization rather than client needs, and put pressure on limited financial resources by increasing access and demand for services (258);
- increases in family and community surveillance and power inequities (270);
- imposition of values and norms by both agency members and clients/residents (271-273).

In addition to these concerns, some literacy coordinators fear that partnerships could result in rising expectations for their workload:

> The only thing I worry somewhat about is that the government likes this idea of collaborations themselves. They're going to put more of it on the community level, and they're going to tire people out so much that…. We'll see a large swing towards it, and then something else will have to come out of it because people will get tired, the dollars will decrease, and the job expectations will be so high. And you have to have paid community workers in the forefront of collaborations; it can't all be done by volunteers, and it can't be done by extending your hours for ever and ever for those who are paid.
>
> family literacy coordinator
> FLAG interviews 1995

Doughty (1995) cites the "time to negotiate and maintain a partnership, the loss of autonomy and decision-making authority by the various stakeholders, and the organizational disruption created by the varied ways stakeholders approach the activity" (53) as significant costs of collaboration.

Mawhinney (1993) reminds us that, if our motivation to develop collaborations is to better serve the needs of 'at risk' children and families, then we must not ignore a major underlying cause of risk -- poverty. "Coordination or even collaboration cannot overcome poverty, nor will they resolve all the problems of fragile families" (43). Similarly, Capper (1994) warns that the risk factors affecting many program participants are "but symptoms of societal racism, classism, and other inequities that are beyond the reach of inter-agency collaboration efforts" (274) and that we must be careful that our collaborative efforts do not "mask or divert attention from the pervasiveness of such inequities."

Despite concerns like those described above, the need for and value of an integrated approach to working with and supporting families is widely recognized. What is not so clear is how they are to be achieved and sustained.

Chapter IV
Initial Steps in Creating Partnerships

Now that the background for partnerships in family literacy has been established, the content of the manual turns to practical matters. This chapter outlines the first steps you need to take in initiating a partnership in your community.

The first section in this chapter looks at establishing a context and reflecting on what you already know about needs and services in your community. Next you'll look at what the needs and resources are in your own agency that justify building a partnership. There are a number of important considerations that can affect how feasible a partnership is.

The next section of this chapter describes strategies for identifying potential partners, preparing information, contacting the agencies you've identified, and making agency visits to build interest in and support for the partnership.

Finally, strategies for holding an inter-agency meeting to bring interested parties to the table to discuss the proposed partnership are provided.

IV. Initial Steps in Creating Partnerships

The first steps you take in creating partnerships in your community will depend on your particular circumstances. There will be many variables, both internal and external, that will determine what are necessary actions and what has already been accomplished. In order to provide support to the largest number of family literacy practitioners and those interested in the field, the following steps assume you are in the initial stages of creating a community partnership.

Establishing a context: Reflecting on community needs and resources

Before you begin looking for community partners, you need to establish a context and a clear understanding of what you are looking for, and where you will look.

What caused you to consider family literacy in the first place? Was it because you saw a need in the community that could be addressed by this kind of program? But what do we mean by "community"? When you consider delivering a family literacy program, and looking for community partners, who does that include, and in what area?

What do you already know about the needs in your community? Perhaps your work has given you insight into the needs and challenges faced by families and individuals. Perhaps literacy has been identified as an important part of community development.

On the other hand, you might know of another agency that is delivering support to families that seems similar in many ways to family literacy programming. Or you might know someone who is working with a group of people who would be just perfect for your first class. You need to consider what services already exist in your community that relate to family literacy.

To organize your thoughts on needs and resources in your community, turn to Worksheet 1 at the back of this manual, and spend a few moments answering the questions there. Don't worry about researching needs and resources at this point; that will be done more systematically later in the process. For now, just use your own knowledge of the community to reflect and develop a context for the work you're going to do.

Choosing a possible program model

Before you begin looking for community partners, consider the needs and resources you have identified in your community. Do you already have a family literacy model in mind that would address those needs? If not, this is probably a good time to review the description of models in Chapter II. Having a model in mind, even as a possible option, can be helpful in determining who would be an appropriate partner.

Identifying needs and resources in your agency

Once you have identified a type of family literacy program that you think might work in your community, you need to consider why your organization wants to partner with other agencies. Although we discussed the general benefits of partnerships in Chapter III, it is important to clearly and systematically identify what your needs and motivations are. Based on the type of family literacy program you've chosen as a possible model (or the program you are actually delivering), think about what your needs are for that program. For example, if you are interested in Books for Babies, you will need access to parents of newborns. If you want to run a Homespun program, you need a supply of sets of children's books. You'll need a comfortable, non-threatening facility for hosting *Mother Goose* workshops.

Consider the following questions. The focus is on needs at this point, not on specific partners.

- What do you hope to gain by forming partnerships with other agencies that you cannot accomplish or provide internally?
- Do you hope to gain financial or in-kind support? If so, what would that support consist of?
- Do you hope to access expertise in other disciplines? If so, what kinds of expertise are you looking for?
- Do you want to receive or make referrals to or from other agencies? • Do you or your agency have expertise that others could benefit from? If so, what is it?
- What other reasons do you have for seeking partners?
- What value would be added to the proposed project by involving partners?

You will also need to consider what benefits or value you could offer to other agencies. THE PARTNERSHIP MUST BE OF MUTUAL BENEFIT, OR IT WILL NOT BE SUCCESSFUL. Think about what potential benefits working with your agency would offer to other organizations.

If you would like to jot down your ideas on these questions, turn to Worksheet 2 at the back of the manual.

Table 2 on the following page summarizes the reasons given by five family literacy practitioners for seeking community partners. The information was collected during FLAG interviews in 1995.

Important considerations
Before initiating the process of finding and developing partnerships, consider the following issues and weigh their importance. (Adapted from the Partnership Resource Kit 1995.)

Financial considerations
Funding acquired through partnerships may have to be divided among different programs. Also, funding allocated may be less than requested, with implications for your program.

Also consider what financial resources will be needed to identify and contact potential partners, and to facilitate the development of the partnership.

Bear in mind, however, that partnerships may open doors to funding that individual programs and agencies might not be able to access.

Human resource considerations
Although partnerships may eventually offset your workload, facilitating the development of a partnership is time- and energy-consuming. Is this a realistic undertaking, and is it the right time for it?

Once the partnership is established, much of its operations will be conducted through consensus and shared decision making. Research shows, however, that partnerships function best with one strong leader. Will your organization be able to provide that leadership, at least until the partnership has coalesced and a leader can be chosen by the group? Or can you work through the leadership of another group (such as the local library board)?

Training
Training and development may be required to give partners the necessary skills and framework for success. Are you willing and able to identify and invest in appropriate resources for effective partnership development?

Fox and Faver ([1984] in Hord [1986]) divide the costs of collaboration into two categories: process costs and outcome costs. Process costs include time for negotiation and communication; expenses such as telephone, mail, and travel; and the personal investment necessary to sustain the partnership. Outcome costs include possible delays; evaluation problems and allocation of project credit; and possible quality loss.

Table 2: Reasons family literacy programs seek community partners	
Recruitment/access to target group	• looking for agencies who have a 'captive audience' or group already formed (Adult Basic Education, friendship centre, hospital, public health nurses) • looking for a good location, where parents can be contacted • looking for agencies who have early contact with parents of newborns
Financial reasons	• family literacy/literacy programs don't have the resources or finances to do a full-fledged promotion and recruitment • for general financial assistance • finding partners was a requirement for funding
To include family literacy as part	• family literacy seen as fundamental to health of another program by coordinator and nurses • another agency's proposal included family literacy as one component
Because it "makes sense"	• agencies share similar goals • agencies are trying to reach the same kinds of people • collaborating seemed like a natural evolution • coordinator wanted a holistic approach to supporting families • coordinator wanted to improve families' access to other services • collaborating with health agency seemed like a natural step
To create a greater awareness of	• literacy and family literacy programs have to family literacy let other agencies know they exist • having collaborated has created a very educated group that will not drop literacy because it's now a priority

Identifying potential partners

You may be one of many literacy coordinators who are already members of an inter-agency group or community services network in their communities. Perhaps you sit on one or more boards or committees in your community, or have had experience in collaborating on other projects. Perhaps your literacy program has an advisory council which includes members from other disciplines. If so, you are well on your way towards forming a partnership for a family literacy program, because you are already familiar with other community members who recognize the value of cooperation and mutual support.

Earlier in this chapter we discussed the reasons why family literacy coordinators seek community partners. Now we'll look at who these partners might be.

The number and nature of potential partners will vary from one community to another. Variables include whether a literacy organization is situated in a rural or urban area; the size of the community; and the number of government departments, human service agencies, businesses, industry, and educational institutions in the area. Situations can also vary depending on whether the community has a strong history of inter-agency cooperation and networking, and whether there is a pool of volunteers that can be accessed. The support of leaders and key decision-makers in the community is also an important variable that can affect the success of family literacy initiatives (Practical Guide 1995).

When you start developing a list of potential partners, consider agencies or groups in your defined area who

- deliver services to children and families
- have supported literacy in the past or who have an interest in improving literacy
- have access to or contact with families you want to reach
- would benefit from having their name associated with this project
- have funding available for community development or early intervention
- can help provide opportunities for valuing and promoting literacy development within the community

As an additional preparatory step in identifying potential partners, it's useful to consider why community agencies enter partnerships, from the agencies' perspectives. The table on page 38 outlines the reasons given during FLAG's partnership interviews in 1995.

Table 3: Reasons Given by Agency Staff for Joining Partnerships

Financial benefits
- more efficient economically in a time of restraint
- for sponsorship, fund-raising
- pooling resources because of funding difficulties
- avoiding duplication & wasting precious resources
- funding requirements often include building ties to community, obtaining community support, etc.

Sharing resources & expertise
- utilizing people's strengths
- offsetting the workload when it is too much for one agency
- sharing materials and access to libraries
- input from other communities (aboriginal)

Referrals, access to families, and finding supports for clients
- greater awareness of other agencies' services and programs
- clients don't always connect with agencies that can help them
- provides a way for all partners to reach more families
- certain agencies have access to "hard to reach" families
- some agencies have more time, staff, and resources to recruit hard to reach families

An integrated approach to better client needs
- sharing information, new serve clients' needs ideas to create better services
- inter-disciplinary case conferencing to identify and address
- providing clients with more consistent information and services
- streamlining services for clients ("one stop" services)
- avoiding duplication of services

Why community agencies join family literacy initiatives

In addition to the information given on joining partnerships in general, the following are reasons given by community agencies for partnering with family literacy programs:

- previous involvement with a literacy organization (e.g. board membership, previous collaboration)
- familiarity with or confidence in the literacy coordinator or program

- personal interest in or experience with literacy (e.g. tutoring)
- recognition of the importance of literacy and early intervention
- awareness of literacy needs in the community

- "made sense" (shared goals with literacy program, such as developing better parenting skills; mutually beneficial relationship; good resource for clients; location more comfortable for clients than college; complementary services or programs, such as prenatal classes; belief that family literacy can alleviate social and educational problems)
- access to potential clients (seen as a way for agencies to reach hard-to-reach families; to help the family literacy program to reach families; agency has the staff and resources to recruit participants, where family literacy program doesn't)
- to lend expertise and experience to other programs to make them more appropriate for low-income families

Mapping your community

By now you should have a sense of what your community needs are, which program would possibly address those needs, and what your agency would need to realize that program. You're now ready to identify potential partners in your area.

An exercise that we've found very effective for identifying resources in the community is one that Kathy Day of Pincher Creek adapted from Dr. Ruth Nickse's session at the Roots of Literacy Symposium in Brooks in 1992. It's called "Mapping the Community," and it is an easy, practical method of identifying, locating, and preparing to contact agencies. You can find instructions for the exercise on Worksheet C on page 87.

When you are finished, you'll have a list of three categories of partners: those who regularly interact with families, those who can help meet needs your agency can't address internally, and those who have contact with specific target groups. These categories will be helpful when you make contact with the organization, in terms of why you are contacting them and how you think you can work together.

Possibilities for partnerships

The list in Table 4 was put together from the proceedings of a number of family literacy conferences, and a survey we did in Alberta of family literacy programs. It may give you some ideas for possible partnerships that weren't identified in the previous exercise.

Table 4: Potential Community Partners

- literacy, adult basic education, and English as a Second Language programs and organizations
- schools (teachers, school councils, school boards and trustees, kindergarten and early childhood, parent-teacher groups, colleges and universities, alternate programs)
- parent groups
- infant and youth services (infant daycare, group daycares, pre-schools, special needs children's services, youth recreation, guidance and counselling programs, children's clubs such as Girl Guides and Boy Scouts)
- libraries, library personnel, and community library advisory boards
- reading councils
- media (newspapers, community television, book publishers)
- business and industry
- book stores
- service clubs
- health services (hospitals, community clinics, nurses, physicians, mental health and rehabilitation services
- community organizations (Native, Métis, seniors, multicultural, abilities centres, and transition houses)
- housing authorities
- Social Services (teen and young parent programs), Employment, Immigration (most federal and provincial government agencies)
- correctional centres
- charitable foundations
- churches and ministerial groups
- speech therapists
- food banks
- counselling (individual and family counselling, parent and family support services)

Preparing an information package

Before you contact your potential partners, make sure you're prepared to present information and answer questions. We recommend assembling an information package to mail out to potential partners after you have made the initial contact.

There are three main types of information to include:

- a brief, clear explanation of family literacy and its benefits
- the need for the program
- an indication of why a partnership is essential

For the explanation of family literacy, see Chapter II of this manual for definitions and a rationale. If your organization has already identified a family literacy program that it thinks is a viable option, include a description of it and its intended outcomes.

The need for the program can be based on the information leading up to your agency's decision to implement a family literacy program. Has your organization conducted any needs assessments in your community or area to justify literacy programming in general? If so, use this information to demonstrate the need for the program. If you haven't, you can contact the Alberta Association for Adult Literacy (AAAL) in Calgary for information from Statistics Canada on literacy levels. The AAAL has broken down the national survey into statistics for federal ridings.

Finally, your information package should clearly explain why community partnerships are essential to early intervention initiatives of any kind. A brief rationale for partnerships can be summarized from Chapter III, highlighting the following points:

- to meet the interrelated needs of family members with integrated services and approaches
- to be aware of the services and support offered by other agencies
- to avoid duplication of services
- to pool resources and expertise
- to improve access to families and potential clients
- to meet funding agency criteria

See Appendix A for a sample information sheet for potential community partners.

In order to prepare information for your community partners, it's useful to consider what their needs might be. We asked community agency staff what they needed in the way of information to decide whether to join in partnership with the local family literacy program. Their responses are summarized in Table 5.

In some cases, it was not the information presented to the community agencies, but rather personal experience of agency staff that led to the decision to join the partnership. For example, agency staff were familiar with literacy program or coordinator, or they had worked together in a previous partnership. Some agency staff had previous experience in literacy, most often having volunteered as a tutor. Knowing someone who needed the support that could be provided by a family literacy program was also cited as motivation to join the partnership.

Contacting potential partners

When we spoke to family literacy coordinators about how they approached potential partners, we found a number of similarities as well as differences in their experiences. In small towns and rural areas, coordinators stressed the importance of informal conversations (such as in grocery stores, libraries, or at other meetings) as opportunities to introduce the idea of partnering for family literacy.

Table 5: Information Needs of Community Agencies

Relevance for agency and clients

- flexibility in terms of developing the program and working with the literacy coordinator
- respect by the literacy coordinator for their clients
- ability of the family literacy program to blend with their program
- awareness that their agency would be part of the discussion on what the best way would be to deliver the program.
- knowledge that the program would be appropriate for clients

Resources available

- knowledge that someone was willing and available to coordinate the program
- knowledge that it wouldn't take too much time or cost too much
- awareness that there were adults in the community who could help kids who need individual attention

Community need

- explanation of the need for the program
- literacy statistics

Family literacy information

- to have a presentation on how the program would work
- to have information on programs operating in other communities

Most of the coordinators that we spoke to recommended using existing structures to approach people, such as inter-agency or community development meetings.

For other coordinators, initial contact was made by making "cold calls" to the agencies and groups they had identified as potential partners.

The process used by the coordinators we interviewed to approach potential partners can be compiled and summarized as follows:

1. informal conversations where possible
2. making agencies aware of the proposed program and the need for partnership through existing channels and structures
3. telephone calls to set up an appointment to explain the proposed program and learn about agency's services and clients' literacy needs
4. presentation to agencies, leaving information package and possibly a video
5. hosting of meeting or focus group with interested parties

One coordinator in Alberta described how, after making appointments with potential partners, she goes in and talks with agency staff about what they have observed in terms of literacy needs in their clients. She then uses the United Way video Litrasee? Put it on the List to demonstrate how different professionals adapt their approaches to accommodate low-literacy clients. She also takes information on the proposed program to leave with the agency staff and administration.

Prompt sheet

During the telephone call to agencies, whether as an initial contact or as follow-up to informal discussion, it's important to be well prepared in terms of what you are asking for and what information you're presenting. We suggest using a telephone "prompt sheet" that includes the following information in the message:

- your name and who you are with
- that your organization is in the preliminary stages of planning a program to support families and improve literacy in the community
- that you are putting together a group of stakeholders to help determine directions and goals for the program
- that working together on this project would benefit both organizations by reaching families that need the support and improving their access to services
- that you would appreciate the opportunity to visit their agency to discuss their role in the community, who they serve, and how you might work together to meet needs in the community
- tell them that when you visit their agency, you'll bring an information package that explains the proposed project more fully
- that you see it as essential that parents and caregivers have the opportunity to express their needs and have input into planning the program. Explain that you would like to discuss the possibility of meeting with a group of the agency's clients to discuss the program.

Try to get a definite time and date during this phone call for you to visit the agency. It is possible that the person you speak to will not be the appropriate contact person. If this is the case, get a name and telephone number to call, and make the call again. Above all, be persistent, positive, and emphasize the potential benefits for all partners.

Agency visits
Visiting each potential partner has three primary objectives: 1) to learn more about the organization and who it serves, 2) to interest them in being a partner in the proposed family literacy program, and 3) to obtain permission and the opportunity to discuss the proposed program with a small group of their clients.

The first few moments of your agency visit should be used to briefly restate who you are and why you are there. Indicate that their agency's perspective and expertise will be important in establishing directions and

goals for the proposed family literacy program.

To learn more about the organization and who it serves, consider the following list of questions adapted from Isserlis et al (1994b: 39):

- What is your mandate or mission statement?
- What services do you offer and to whom?
- How do clients come to you? How are they referred and by whom?
- If you can't help clients, who do you refer them to? What are some problems your agency doesn't address?
- What have you observed about the literacy needs of your clients? What about their parenting needs?

To interest agency staff in being a partner in the proposed program, you need to make the connection between family literacy and what they have stated their agency objectives and client needs to be. As stated before, partnerships must be seen as in some way mutually beneficial, or the chances of success are minimal.

If the organization you're visiting works to support children and families through health promotion and community health services, you need to emphasize the importance of literacy in accessing health information and services. Talk about the challenge and importance of reaching at-risk families as being a concern of both organizations.

If you are meeting with administration or staff from the local school district, talk about the importance of school readiness and positive attitudes toward learning, and how family literacy addresses those issues. Listen to what they have to say about their goals and their client needs, and make the connections between their programs and services, and what you are proposing.

If you are talking with social service providers, talk about the intergenerational nature of low literacy skills, and the implications that has for employment, training, and success for their clients and their clients' children.

I think the first thing that happened was when the adult learning council and the literacy offices moved into our building, and our office was next door to theirs. …I think that these types of people should be housed in one physical setting. It's much easier to go next door and say, "Are you doing this?" If I had to phone, and do whatever, it wouldn't happen. Plus the informal contact over a cup of coffee…. She was talking one day about literacy, and I was talking about how I had to get to some of these parents, it's the ones that really need it that I can't reach, and she's saying, well, that's really exciting, our literacy group could have a story (where) the content could be what you're…. And I'm thinking, right on, that's what we need. They could be reading this story to their child, but it could be about health care. Like the Berenstein Bears Go To The Doctor.

Prenatal educator
FLAG interviews 1995

> No professional or professionals can substitute or supplant the caregiving role of the family. In addition, every family, regardless of socioeconomic or cultural status, has strengths and resources that should be identified and used to enhance the development of the child. Enabling and helping families increase their parenting skills will have a positive effect persisting far beyond early intervention years and affecting other family members.
>
> Boavida and Borges 1994: 44

Also, make sure you emphasize to agency staff that their perspective and expertise would be invaluable in establishing directions and goals for the proposed program. This would be a good time to give them the information package that you have prepared.

Getting parents involved
Lastly, you want to make this initial meeting an opportunity to make contact with parents and caregivers in your target group. Their input and participation in planning the program can't be overemphasized. Discuss with the community agency staff the importance of community-based programs, and how you think that parents and families are in the best position to identify the needs the proposed program should address. See if the agency would be willing to assemble a group of parents for you to talk to about the proposed program, and to hear their needs, suggestions, and ideas.

Be careful not to be too over-zealous in this first meeting, or to inundate agency staff with information. You want to listen and learn about their organization, you want to make the connection between their objectives and family literacy, and to find an opportunity for parental input into program planning and delivery. The idea is to get them interested; and if they are, the planning meeting or focus group will be the place to further develop the partnership.

Organizing an inter-agency meeting

Planning the meeting
Once you have finished your visits to individual agencies, and have spoken with parents and families who are clients of those agencies, the next step is to organize a meeting of interested and receptive agencies and potential partners. The purpose of the meeting is to further explore a partnership that will 1) support families in the community and 2) plan and develop a family literacy program.

Experience tells us that it is difficult if not impossible to set a time and date for a meeting that will suit everyone's schedule. By inviting people well enough in advance, you can hope that the majority of them will be able to attend, or designate someone else from their agency if they already have commitments.

Sending a letter of invitation is recommended over telephone calls. Include a proposed agenda in the invitation, as well as a reply date and telephone number so they can confirm their attendance.

As you organize this initial meeting, remember that the input, trust, and feelings of ownership of those participating are essential to successfully building a collaborative project.

Objectives of the meeting

Although you want people at the inter-agency meeting to feel that they are equal partners, be prepared for the fact that they will likely look to you for leadership and facilitation, at least during this meeting. It's important to have objectives defined for the meeting and included in the agenda. These objectives might include

- getting to know each other, and becoming familiar with each other's activities, services and mandates
- discussing the proposed family literacy project
- discussing the proposed partnership
- exploring what agencies and individuals have to offer and want to gain from the partnership
- scheduling the first planning meeting for the new partnership

For the first objective, you might want to have agencies and individuals give you feedback on the proposed family literacy model(s), and whether they see it as appropriate for the community. You might want to talk to them in more detail about family literacy in general and justification for the proposed program. This might include using a video, or describing a family literacy program in another community that uses the same model. Members of the group might have questions or concerns arising from your visit to their agency or the

information package you left with them. You might also have questions arising from previous discussions, regarding their agency or individual needs, and whether the proposed program will address those needs. Why do they think a family literacy program is needed in the community? What do they think the desired features of the program would be?

The second objective of sharing information on what agencies and groups do and what services they offer can best be achieved informally, rather than through formal presentations. As we'll discuss in following chapters, it is important to make all members of the group comfortable, especially parents, and to maintain an appropriate balance between formality and informality. You will also want to avoid a situation where formal presentations take most of the time available for the meeting.

The third objective of discussing and exploring the proposed partnership can be achieved in a number of ways. Members of the group can discuss what their concept of partnership is, and why they think it is important to the development of the proposed program. What would the purpose of the partnership be? What are some possible goals? What experiences have people had previously with partnerships and collaborations? What did they find productive, and what could have been improved?

The fourth objective is to determine what agencies have to offer and want to gain from the proposed partnership. In other words, why are they at the meeting? You have already had discussions with individual members during your agency visits on what the partnership could offer to them. Now you have the opportunity for group discussion on what expectations are for the project.

Finally, you want to be able to schedule a follow-up meeting with members of the group who are interested in being involved in the partnership. If you have a large number of interested members, you should discuss whether a smaller advisory committee or council is necessary, with the possibility of additional sub-committees.

What you need to prepare
The following are suggestions for what you need to prepare ahead of time for the inter-agency meeting.

Be sure you are fully versed in what you want to achieve from the inter-agency meeting, and that you can satisfactorily answer questions about the proposed program.

Will you want to use overheads or hand-outs on literacy that will add to, not duplicate the information sheet you gave to potential partners when you made your agency visits? You might want to prepare a brief presentation based on the recent International Adult Literacy Survey from Statistics Canada and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (1995). You might also present information from the Statistics Canada Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities that relate to the relationship between parental education and children's school success. See the *Practical Guide to Family Literacy* (Skage 1995: 16).

Prepare information (overheads or hand-outs) on the proposed family literacy program model(s), including examples of programs in other communities.

Prepare overheads or hand-outs on partnerships, how they are defined and what their benefits are.

Have a worksheet or exercise on identifying previous experiences with partnerships and how they could have been improved, as well as what participants' expectations are for the partnership, what they feel they can contribute as an individual, and what they feel their agency can contribute (Quezada and Nickse 1992).

Be sure to consider who will be responsible for recording the meeting. If you will be facilitating, perhaps someone else from your organization would volunteer to take notes.

Hosting the meeting
If your organization does not have a room available for the meeting, see if you can have it in another suitable location, such as the library or local school. If you already have a commitment to the partnership by another agency, perhaps they could provide space for the meeting.

The meeting should be long enough to thoroughly discuss the items we've identified, but be reasonable in terms of the time commitment required. Be sure to provide coffee and juice, and to ask the group to determine the need for breaks.

You may want to consider an agenda combining large group discussion, presentation to the large group, and small group discussion with lots of opportunity for interaction (Quezada and Nickse 1992).

As stated earlier, one of the objectives of this inter-agency meeting is to determine who is willing to make a commitment to this partnership. You may find that participants express concern over the time and staff commitment needed for such an undertaking. Bradford (1993) suggests that this "cost" needs to be balanced against the previous and current difficulties and costs experienced by families and professionals, which can be alleviated by the additional resources and better coordinated services offered by the partnership.

Remember, the final objective of hosting this inter-agency meeting is to form a group of people who are willing to be involved in planning, developing, and guiding a family literacy program. It will be easier to set a date for the first planning meeting while you are still together; you should try to hold it fairly soon after this inter-agency meeting so that people don't lose their interest and enthusiasm.

Finally, as you plan and host the inter-agency meeting, it is worth considering what it takes to bring about organizational or institutional change, for what we are talking about when we discuss partnerships truly is "changing the way we do things." Beckhard (in Hord 1986) says that institutional change (to more cooperative or collaborative modes) will not occur unless the following conditions are present:

- There must be real dissatisfaction with the status quo, a high enough level of dissatisfaction to mobilize energy toward some change.
- There must be in the organizational leaders' "heads" some picture of a desired state which would be worth mobilizing appropriate energy.
- There must be in the organizational leaders' "heads" a knowledge and picture of some practical first steps toward this desired state, if energy is to be mobilized to start (23).

Chapter V
Building and Maintaining a Partnership

This chapter give suggestions and strategies for the stages of development that follow the formation of a partnership. We'll look at considerations in forming an advisory committee, developing a shared vision and goals, conducting a needs assessment, and developing a plan of action.

Determining roles and responsibilities, including some discussion of partnership agreements, is included in this chapter. Ideas on keeping partners informed, solving problems, and renegotiating are also included. Finally, we'll give some suggestions for evaluating the partnership and planning for improvement..

V. Building and Maintaining a Partnership

Congratulations! You now have a partnership. The inter-agency meeting gave you and your potential partners the opportunity to ask questions, share information, and clarify what would be involved in forming a partnership to support a family literacy program in your community. At the end of the inter-agency meeting you set a date for the first planning meeting for the new partnership, during which you'll begin to address some of the issues outlined in the rest of this chapter. It is worth a note of caution, however, to point out that the effort it will take to involve the whole group in planning is well worth it.

> One of the issues which seemed to be of concern to partners in some programs was not being involved in the actual planning efforts for the partnership. After the initial meeting has been called to determine which agencies and organizations are interested in participating, the planning and organizing activities are conducted by one or only a few of the partners, leaving the others outside the decision-making role. Therefore, roles and responsibilities of all partners are never understood, and cooperation is never attained, reducing the effectiveness of the program.
>
> Seamen et al 1992: 62

Forming an advisory committee

Forming an advisory committee is the next step in building the partnership and an essential step in developing the family literacy program. Once again, involving a broad representation of community members on the advisory committee will ensure creating a sense of meaningful participation, ownership, and commitment from important stakeholders. Depending on the number of people from your initial inter-agency meeting who are interested in forming a partnership, you may need to create a smaller group to act as the advisory committee for the project. Again it bears mentioning that special effort will be needed to ensure the participation of potential clients, parents who are in the best position to identify the need for this type of program, and advise on how the program should be developed to meet those needs.

> … certain factors are supportive of active parent participation in meetings with multiple professionals. They include the preparation parents receive before meetings; inclusive language by professionals; a comfortable level of formality; structural elements, such as familiarity of the physical environment; and a balance in the ratio of professionals to parents.

<div align="right">
Friedman and Glass in Translating Research
into Practice 1993: 239
</div>

What is the function of the advisory committee? Initially, it is to guide, develop, and implement a community needs assessment, if one has not already been done to determine the need for a family literacy project in the community. Based on the needs assessment findings, the advisory committee will develop a set of objectives for the program, and an action plan which will guide its development and delivery.

Beyond the initial stages of planning and developing the family literacy program, the advisory committee also provides on-going support to the program and plays a lead role in promotion and recruitment. The advisory committee will also be responsible for developing assessment and evaluation strategies for the program. Members may also be involved in fundraising.

Developing a shared vision and goals

After the advisory committee is formed, the first task is to develop a shared vision for the partnership and to identify short-term goals for the group. Not only will a shared vision and goals help to group move forward and set parameters for their efforts, but as Kadel and Routh (1993) point out, it will enable members to justify spending time on the committee.

In their discussion of how to develop and implement collaborative services, Kadel and Routh recommend that members focus on what is best for children and families as they develop a shared vision for the partnership. Successful partnerships are characterized by a vision that encompasses a family-centred approach, a preventative focus, comprehensive services, and flexibility (124).

Goals for the partnership will initially be short-term and should focus on developing the partnership and taking the preliminary steps in developing the family literacy program. Examples of short-term goals could include establishing leadership for the group; developing a common definition of key terms, such as "family," "community," "at-risk," and "family literacy"; developing communication mechanisms and meeting schedules; and deciding how activities and objectives will be measured. As the project progresses, intermediate and long-term goals can be set based on the information gathered in the needs assessment, and decisions made on how to best address those needs.

In order to develop goals for the partnership, it is necessary to develop a framework for the project that not only sets an overall objective (developing or supporting a family literacy project), but that also integrates the goals and interests of participating individuals and organizations (Alary 1990).

Conducting a needs assessment

Conducting a needs assessment will ensure that the program you develop is appropriate and realistic for your community. It will systematically identify needs in the community that relate to literacy, family literacy, early childhood education, and family support. It will also identify existing programs and services in the community that relate to the identified needs, as well as programs and services that would complement a family literacy program. These might include parenting and family resource programs; literacy, adult basic education, and English as a second language programs; or library drop-in programs for children and families.

By comparing the information on community needs and existing programs, you will be able to identify where gaps in service delivery exist.
By involving your advisory committee in the development and implementation of the needs assessment, and by involving other community agencies and individuals, the process builds ownership, awareness, and support among stakeholders. It gauges the level of support for the proposed program, and determines similarities and differences in how literacy needs are perceived.

The needs assessment can also ensure that realistic goals are set for the proposed program, in terms of assessing not only needs but available resources.

For more information on conducting a needs assessment, see "Doing it Right" by the Edmonton Social Planning Council, or the "Practical Guide to Family Literacy" (Skage 1995).

Developing a plan of action

Based on the information gathered in the needs assessment, the partnership should be able to decide if the proposed family literacy model(s) will be effective in addressing community needs, if it should be modified or adapted, and how it can best be delivered. The next step is to develop a list of objectives for developing the program, and a plan of action based on those objectives.

Specific action plans are a vehicle for increasing staff understanding, facilitating program start-up, and solving specific problems related to the early phases of program delivery. "Action plans, complete with lists of tasks, timelines, and persons responsible, can provide blueprints to enable successful resolution of problems or challenges" (Rasinski and Padak 1994: 12).

The details of your plan of action will obviously depend on your particular circumstances. Some of the decisions and issues you will have to address might include:

- identifying similar situations in other communities and drawing from the experiences of others
- choosing a facility or location for the program (taking into account access for clients, availability, cost, co-location with other agencies, client perceptions or attitude, proximity to other services
- establishing family eligibility for participation (if there is a "target group," if it will affect funding or fundraising, etc.)
- the need for confidentiality and how this will affect referrals and record sharing
- defining roles and responsibilities (individual and agency) among the partners (see below)
- making use of available funds and resources

- recruitment of families
- promotion and public awareness
- program development
- funding and fundraising
- program and partnership evaluation (see below)

You will need to develop timelines for specific objectives as part of your plan of action. Please see Appendix B for an example of an action plan that includes project objectives, related actions, time lines, partners responsible, cost of activity, and measurable outcomes.

Determining roles and responsibilities

When negotiating roles and responsibilities for partnership members, remember that flexibility is going to be an important part of developing this program. A full third of the community agencies interviewed in 1995 said that their actual role in the family literacy partnership was different from their planned role. As the program is developed and delivered, roles will change and evolve in ways that are impossible to predict.

Activities will vary from one partnership to the next, and therefore roles and responsibilities will vary as well. Responsibilities may include everything from proposal writing to providing child care. Determining roles and responsibilities should be the result of shared decision making among all committee members.

When determining roles and responsibilities, consider what strengths, expertise, experience, and availability each member can bring to the project. Are there existing staff in the literacy program whose positions will be affected by the new partnership? How will their work be integrated into the partnership, and what expectations are there for their role?

Some examples of the roles community agencies have played in the family literacy programs we visited in 1995 are

- providing participants directly or by referral
- providing space for program
- providing time within another program for family literacy component
- sitting on an advisory board
- helping with fundraising
- volunteering for specific tasks (cataloguing books, stuffing reading dolls, assembling book bags)
- providing books and library memberships to the program
- conducting an audit for the literacy organization
- partnering with literacy agency to hold parent workshops at the elementary school
- planning the family literacy program
- leading workshop on child development for family literacy program
- distributing information on family literacy
- conducting the evaluation
- providing funds and staff for recruitment

Partnership Agreements
When defining roles and responsibilities, consider whether a partnership agreement is necessary and/or appropriate for your group. There are different opinions regarding the value of partnership agreements; some individuals and agencies see them as essential to obtaining commitment and developing clearly defined irresponsibilities. Others see them as unnecessary and even counter-productive.

In their study of significant turning points in Even Start programs in Ohio, Rasinski and Padak (1994) quote the state coordinator as recommending the use of formal agreements:

> Develop with cooperating agencies firm, written agreements outlining exactly what each agency will contribute and receive from the overall Even Start project. Too often, program planners collect general letters of support and then find themselves trying to specify working relationships at the same time they are trying to hire staff, recruit, order equipment, and so on. Save time and effort by getting specific agreements first (16).

The Partnership Resource Kit (1995) describes a partnership agreement as a vehicle you would use to formalize you and your partners' commitment to the relationship. Such an agreement must be "clear, concise, straightforward, and unambiguous" (19). The agreement must ensure that

- the terms of reference, objectives, procedures, roles, authorities and timelines are clear, detailed enough to guide the process, written in clear language, and available to all stakeholders
- any administrative questions are addressed in relation to financial records, reporting, etc.
- mechanisms are in place to detect early signs of problems, and that corrective measures are identified
- expected services are identified
- eligibility criteria are identified
- financial, human resource, communication/information management, and accountability needs and commitments are established
- evaluation requirements, performance measures, and reporting arrangements are established
- flexibility is built into the agreement to allow it to be adapted to changing external/internal circumstances (24)

How you prepare your partnership agreement depends on what types of information you need to have included. For example, do you need to specify the amount of funding that will be allocated to each partner? Are there details regarding ownership of property, such as office equipment or sets of books, or insurance requirements that should be included? How the partnership will be monitored and evaluated should be addressed in the agreement. Provisions for changing or terminating the partnership if necessary should be included as well (adapted from Partnership Resource Kit, 25).

There are different types of partnership agreements that you can use or adapt. For a sample agreement, see Appendix C.

When we interviewed family literacy coordinators in 1995, four out of five of them said they did not use partnership agreements in their work with community agencies, although two of them thought it would be a good idea at some point, to clarify roles and responsibilities. Of those who didn't use a partnership agreement, most said they felt it was too formal and might appear too inflexible and demanding. They felt it might "scare potential partners away," and they might lose opportunities, particularly in smaller communities where there is a limited base of partners. The exceptions to this were during fundraising and on joint funding and grant applications.

Keeping partners informed

Keeping partners informed is an essential aspect of building and maintaining a partnership. Communication is a factor that is emphasized several times in this manual, both as a barrier and challenge, and as a key factor for success. When there is effective communication, partners all know the progress of the program, what problems have been identified, and what is being done to solve them. When there isn't proper communication, not only are partners uninformed, but there can be suspicion about the other partners, and the feeling that their participation is not valued.

One of the first things to do for the new partnership is to establish a means of notifying all members of upcoming meetings and events, as well as distributing minutes of meetings, especially to partners who were not in attendance.

The number of meetings, location, and time should be a decision made by the group, not just the facilitator or lead agency. In addition, the length of the meetings should be a group decision; several community partners and literacy practitioners emphasized the need for short, productive meetings, given their busy schedules and other commitments.

Keeping partners up-to-date does not always need to be done through scheduled meetings. Although face-to-face contact is reported to be the most effective means of staying in touch, telephone contact just to "touch base" is an important part of keeping a partnership dynamic. In addition, one coordinator described the importance of interacting with her partners on other levels, such as going to the friendship centre for lunch on soup and bannock day. The partners may not even discuss the family literacy project during such visits, but the contact is important and the opportunity is there for discussion if either partner feels it's necessary.

Problem solving

How do we solve the inevitable problems that arise when people and agencies work together? It's impossible to predict at the outset all the situations, changes, and challenges that will take place as the partnership and the program evolve. What is important is to have an agreed-upon problem solving strategy in place before things come up. One possibility your committee might consider is to schedule time for discussion and problem solving into your meeting agendas; formally recognizing the need to address problems will encourage people to voice any concerns they have and have them discussed objectively.

When we asked family literacy practitioners and their partners how they solved problems, they gave the following suggestions:

- be flexible and willing to adapt to changes
- don't take things personally
- be diplomatic in how you present the problem. Don't point fingers, but present it as the group's problem, and the group will find a solution
- keep communication lines open
- be prepared to learn from your mistakes, and to admit them to your partners
- never let a problem sit for long. Call a meeting right away to discuss it.
- keep goals and priorities very clear, so they can determine how decisions are made
- keep people informed of any changes
- hold people to what they said they were going to do, and don't be afraid to dissolve the partnership if they don't, and move on

Renegotiating

There may come a time when one or more members feels the need to renegotiate the partnership. Renegotiation is a logical step when people want to continue the partnership, but:

- one or more of the partners can not or can no longer carry out their responsibilities (because of staff changes, unrealistic commitments made in terms of time or resources, restructuring in their agency, etc.)
- a dispute arises that cannot be resolved within the current arrangement
- there is an opportunity to expand the original project
- there is an opportunity to add new members to the partnership (Partnership Resource Kit)

Renegotiating involves bringing the partners back to the table, and repeating the process of determining roles and responsibilities within the context of the need to renegotiate.

Evaluation methods

Evaluation is a key component of building and maintaining a partnership. The purposes for evaluating the partnership and the means by which evaluation will be conducted should be one of the first things addressed,

discussed, and developed by your advisory committee. Make sure that adequate records are kept and data is collected so that progress and achievements can be measured.

Evaluation allows members of the partnership to "step back from the ongoing demands of the relationship and look at the bigger picture" (Partnership Resource Kit, 27). It allows us to see what our successes have been, and also where things could be improved. Just as importantly, it identifies why the partnership was or was not effective.

Evaluating the partnership should be done in such a way that it

- improves the quality of decision making
- strengthens the partnership's ability to make a case for continued support from the organizations and their clients (and external support as well)
- stimulates the development of clear policies and practices in the partnership
- justifies in concrete terms the trust of all members of the partnership (Partnership Resource Kit, 27)

Overall, evaluating the partnership will assess whether the objectives, needs, and expectations of the partnership as a whole and of individual members have been met. You will look at the achievement of short-term and long-term goals. As Kadel and Routh (1993) point out, it is important for seeking financial and political support to determine whether the partnership resulted in saving money over traditional methods of providing services. Other types of value added by the partnership should be included as well, such as raising the awareness of literacy issues in community agencies.

Remember that evaluation helps us identify both successes and areas for improvement. These successes must be recognized, celebrated and publicized. Evaluation can mark the milestones and achievements of the partnership, and members need to be congratulated for their accomplishments. Commitment is like an automobile; it can't run forever without refuelling. Not only will it help to sustain or renew members' enthusiasm, but publicizing the successes of the partnership will help to sustain community support and gain credibility for the program. Other programs may also find inspiration to try a partnership approach to family literacy.

The specific tool you develop for evaluating the partnership will depend on the objectives your group has set. For an example of an evaluation tool for family literacy partnerships, please see Appendix D.

The committee will also take responsibility for developing and guiding evaluation strategies for the program itself. This information is not included in the scope of this manual. Please see the *Practical Guide to Family Literacy* (Skage 1995) or other resources for this information. (FLAG is currently conducting research on evaluation methods for family literacy programs.)

Planning for improvement
The results of the evaluation will provide the necessary information for your partnership to discuss and decide how to make changes and improvements to "how they do things." This may mean making revisions to current practices and activities, or it may mean a fundamental redesign of the partnership. Having evaluation and the follow-up planning sessions built into the structure of the partnership will help people anticipate and accept the process, and may help to reduce the risk of resistance to change.

Chapter VI
Barriers to Building Partnerships

In this chapter we examine possible problems that may arise as you enter into partnerships with other agencies. "Forewarned is forearmed," as the saying goes, and being aware of the possible pitfalls may go a long way toward avoiding them.
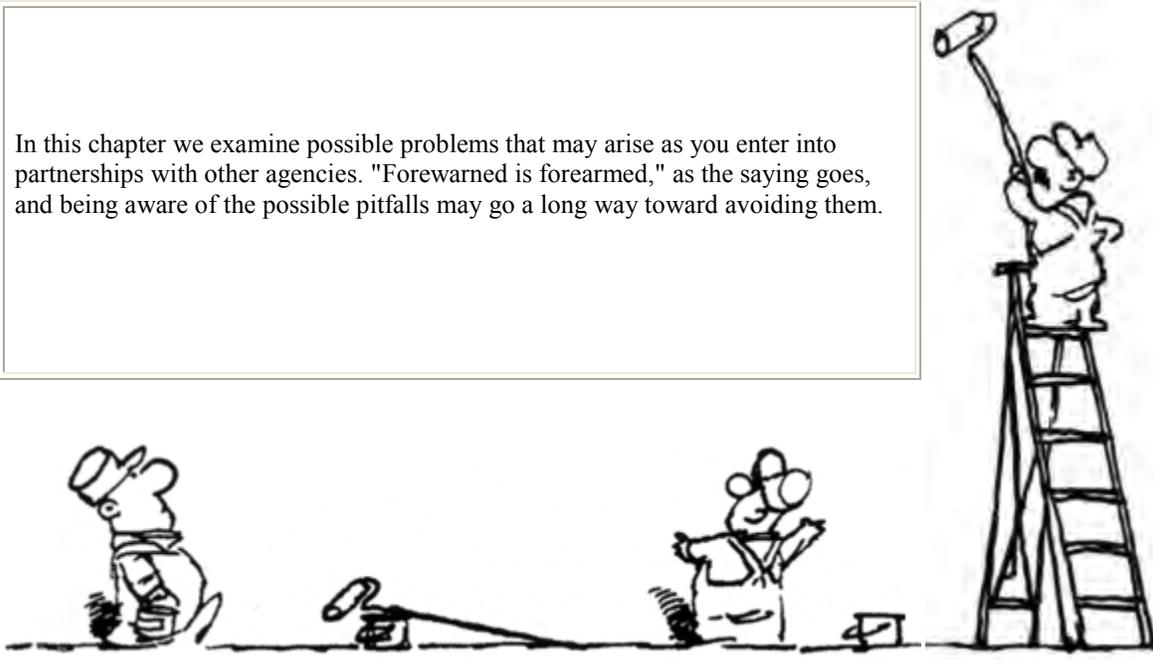
VI. Barriers to Building Partnerships

When we interviewed family literacy practitioners and their partners in the fall of 1995, we asked them what worked in building community partnerships, and what didn't. When asked what the barriers and challenges were to developing strong links with other agencies, many people had the same answers. Lack of time and poor communication were among the most frequently cited problems. Research into community collaborations confirms our experiences here in Alberta.

The following section identifies common problems encountered in developing partnerships, and barriers that you should be aware of as you develop relationships with other agencies.

These descriptions of barriers to collaborations are based on FLAG's 1995 interviews. Only additional sources will be cited.

"Turf" issues and self-interest

Turf issues can be a significant barrier to developing partnerships. You may encounter resistance, defensiveness, or suspicion when you approach a potential partner. Agency staff may feel the proposed partnership implies that they are not doing their job properly, or that the partnership will reduce the need for their services.

Turf issues may be due to a need for autonomy, perceived competition for limited funding, job uncertainty, or a lack of knowledge about the services other agencies offer (Irwin 1994, Kadel and Routh 1993, Mawhinney 1993).

One community agency explained territorial problems as "agencies wanting to protect their accomplishments, or being afraid that someone will take over their role."

Shortage of time and resources

This is a very common problem in developing effective, long-lasting partnerships. Staff are often already over-extended and sometimes underpaid. Adding more responsibilities and activities in the way of a partnership may be viewed as simply too much. If an agency does not have money in the budget to pay for extra staff time, or to make time available for contributing to a partnership, it may not be given very high priority.

The process of choosing appropriate partners, developing an agreement on the project goals and design, and preparing funding proposals and applications is time consuming (Seamen et al 1992). Once the group is functioning, the extra time required to reach recommendations and make decisions in a diverse group as opposed to in a single agency can be seen as an obstacle or deterrent (Bradford 1993).

A number of agency staff, literacy organizations, and community partners alike complained that expectations are often that their time and commitment to developing new partnerships and planning programs will be voluntary or simply added to their other duties.

The allocation of funds within a partnership can also present problems. Particularly in cases where the funding is less than the amount requested, partners may feel that their share of the grant is unfair or inadequate (Seamen et al 1992).

> Membership in a coalition… risks the conclusion by some members of the community or by funding agencies that more than one organization or agency may have a legitimate claim to financial or other support for literacy education.
> Irwin 1994: 3

Communication problems

In a partnership, as in any other kind of relationship, people have to communicate frequently, clearly, and regularly. Problems can arise when the goals of the proposed program aren't clearly communicated, or when individual or agency expectations or needs are misunderstood. Not keeping community partners informed of progress or changes during the project can also be a barrier to a successful partnership.

Communication problems do not just occur between agencies, however. There can be problems within agencies as well, when the level of involvement in the partnership and the agency's role is not clearly communicated between staff, or to new employees. One family literacy program in Alberta experienced difficulties when a new staff member was not adequately informed of what his agency's role was in working with the family literacy program. When developing the curriculum for his program, he did not realize that the family literacy program was supposed to be included as one component.

Conflicting concepts of collaboration

Not only do partners need to communicate, they have to also be speaking the same language. Does Susan from agency X understand a partnership to mean the same thing as Mark from agency Y? Do they both see the roles and responsibilities in the same way? Do they both have the same understanding of what kind of a commitment is required? If there isn't a common understanding of what it means to work in partnership, difficulties may develop and conflict may result.

Stakeholder non-participation

A serious barrier to building community partnerships is when key stakeholders cannot or will not participate. This can be related to a number of these other barriers, such as turf issues, lack of time and resources, differences in socialization -- problems that can not only cause developing partnerships to founder, but can prevent partnerships from being built between agencies.

This program is not a priority, although they say it is. I've been very frustrated to come in and find a carpet rolled up and dumped across my desk. I finally had to say, "This is my work area, and I know you have to work here, but I have my space and you have to respect it.

family literacy coordinator
FLAG interviews 1995

Sometimes a lack of stakeholder participation is due to not enough public awareness about family literacy. It is still a relatively new approach to literacy development, and not a lot of people are familiar with the concept. This can perhaps explain in part the perceived "lack of support from the community" that was described as a barrier by one community agency worker in our 1995 interviews.

A specific and very significant type of stakeholder non-participation is when parents from your proposed target/client group are not members of your partnership. Parents are an obvious stakeholder, and yet research shows that they are among the most difficult partners to recruit. As Unger and Jones (in Translating Research into Practice 1993) point out, the "ideology of encouraging parental involvement… does not easily translate into the reality of more parents participating and parents and professionals having more positive and collaborative relationships…. This is particularly true of urban, low-income, single-parent families with biologically vulnerable and 'at-risk' children (242). "

Often parental non-involvement is because there are no avenues in place for including parents in the partnership and program planning processes (Friedman and Glass in Translating Research into Practice 1993). There are also chronic stressors that prevent many parents who would benefit from family literacy programs from participating in a partnership building process (Unger and Jones). Even if parents can be recruited into the partnership process, there are frequently feelings of inadequacy and withdrawal from meaningful participation (Atmore 1993).

Lack of flexibility

Lack of flexibility was cited as a challenge to maintaining partnerships and working together. Given the busy schedules and heavy workloads that most partners deal with, a lack of flexibility can be a serious problem. It has implications for scheduling meetings, meeting timelines, and generally getting along.

Family literacy signifies a different approach to literacy development and supporting families. People are often intimidated by change, and are reluctant to try new things.

Accountability problems

Accountability can also be a challenge to building partnerships. Who is the partnership accountable to? Who are the individual agencies accountable to? Who is staff accountable to?

There are different purposes to evaluation, and different methods of being accountable. Agencies and partners may have very different indicators of success, and different concepts of meeting goals. For example, many family literacy practitioners realize that when a program is first starting out, having a class of three people constitutes a success, and that those three people will be the program's best advocates. To other agencies, however, such a small class size may not be deemed sufficient reason to invest time and resources. Partners providing financial support may have criteria that requires a minimum number of participants.

Evaluation poses challenges for partnerships and programs as well. While recognizing the importance of accountability, if we are required to use standardized or quantitative evaluation methods, we run the risk of losing the opportunity for unique, community-based implementation. Similarly, evaluation data required by one agency, or the monitoring and reporting system used by another, may not be appropriate or relevant for the collaborative project.

Differences in socialization and operation

Professions and institutions have different "cultures" and different socialization processes. When there isn't a common background shared by partners in a family literacy project -- the same education, experience, professional training, or agency structure -- partners may disagree on what constitutes "at risk," or on the best form of intervention. They may have very different approaches to decision making, lack team work skills, or disagree on how the partnership should be structured. They may also have very different performance expectations. If there are both case-oriented services and program-oriented services involved in the partnership, they may have distinctly different priorities and viewpoints. (Fargason 1994, Mitchell and Scott 1993)

Some agencies may have a child- or adult-focused approach to service delivery, and may find it difficult to adopt a family-centred approach (Boavida and Borges 1994).

Some community partners observed that they had experienced the attitude that professionals are the only ones with knowledge, or that it was hard to convince other professionals that we need to work together. Others said that they sometimes perceived the attitude that only teachers can provide a learning experience.

Institutional barriers

Institutional barriers to partnerships can include viewing family literacy as not fitting in an agency's mandate (which often has serious implications for funding), requiring excessive evidence and support for involvement, and having numerous levels of authorization required for decision making.

Change and uncertainty

Change and uncertainly can negatively affect both agencies and individuals . When an agency is in the midst of change or reorganization, it can be difficult to obtain commitment to a partnership, or to involve that agency in planning and program development. If individuals are uncertain of whether their positions are going to continue, or if contracts are going to be renewed, they may not place a great deal of importance on an external partnership, or may be reluctant to take on tasks and responsibilities.

Unrealistic expectations

Partnerships can falter if members have unrealistic expectations for what people will contribute and what the partnership and/or program will accomplish.

Geographic challenges

Many "communities" are actually very large. People or agencies may have rural municipalities, regions, or other large geographic areas as their jurisdictions. The sheer distance can make it difficult to form and maintain a partnership, in terms of making it to meetings, having sufficient face-to-face contact, sharing responsibilities, and ensuring adequate communication.

One literacy practitioner we interviewed expressed concern about not having enough contact with her partners. She was responsible for a very widespread area, and many of the people she was collaborating with were in small towns at the opposite side of the region from where she lived and worked. Situations like this can be particularly challenging in the winter, when the weather and bad roads make travelling risky.

Difficulty in predicting client needs

Many programs in our communities are based on client-identified needs. When groups in those programs change, the needs identified may change as well. If the needs of the new group do not include family literacy, or parenting, then commitment to the family literacy partnership may be suspended or withdrawn. For example, the parents in an Adult Basic Education class identified a need for information on how to prepare their children for school. Those needs were the basis of a partnership between the ABE program and the local Homespun program, and Homespun was introduced as one component of the class. In between program cycles, however, it is difficult, if not impossible, for the instructor to make a commitment to working with the Homespun program because she has not yet met her new students.

Ineffective meetings

Several of the community partners that we interviewed stated that ineffective meetings can posed significant challenges to community partnerships. Meetings without goals or a good facilitator, taking too much time on paperwork and planning, and people not contributing to or not attending meetings were cited as deterrents to participation.

I sometimes feel that, as one of three and a half nurses on the reserve, I'm a very precious resource, you know? Getting time to nurse is sometimes very tricky!

nurse in charge
FLAG interviews 1995

Chapter VII
Key Characteristics of Successful Partnerships

The last chapter of the manual looks at the elements that make up the success stories -- the actions, behaviors, and factors involved in building a strong, effective partnership. From proper planning to trust and respect, these characteristics can be seen as beacons to guide us as we go about the business of working together to support the families in our programs and our communities.
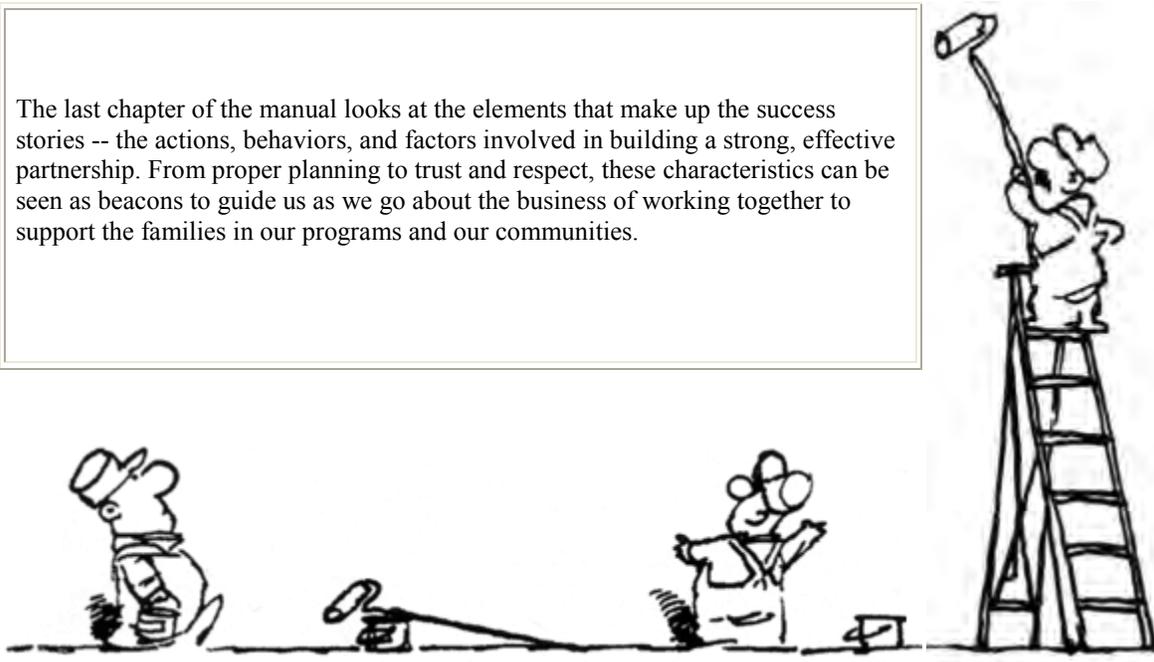
VII. Key Characteristics of Successful Partnerships

These key factors for successful partnerships have been compiled from the literature on family literacy and related fields, as well as from interviews conducted with five family literacy coordinators in Alberta, and their eighteen community partners.

As information from the 1995 interviews forms the basis of all of these points on key characteristics, they will not be referred to repetitively; only additional sources will be included.

Communication

Communication between partners needs to be frequent, on-going, and honest. In the initial stages of developing a partnership, members need to be very forthright about their needs, what they can contribute to the partnership, and what their expectations are. Goals and objectives need to be specific and clearly communicated (Nurss and Rawlston 1994).

Shared or common language is critical to the success of collaboration and partnership (Boavida and Borges 1994, Fargason 1994, Mitchell and Scott 1993). How we understand and interpret language has a very significant impact on how we interact with each other. Members of the partnership must ensure they have a common understanding of key terms and concepts, such as "at risk," "early intervention," and "cooperation."

Clearly communicating responsibilities and perceived roles is critical from the outset to avoiding misunderstandings and eventual frustration and loss of commitment. Members must have a common understanding of both individual and joint responsibilities.

Both partners are equally involved, with no partner taking a dominant role; coming from a different role and perspective, each appreciated the role and perspective of the other; each was willing to contribute time and to "bracket their respective egos" (3); "both parties must seriously and mutually reflect on how the collaborative nature of the project will be accomplished" (13).

Hannay and Stevens in Hord 1986

As the partnership progresses and the program is delivered, partners need to be kept informed of progress and changes in the program. Communication needs to be a priority between agencies as well as within agencies. Many coordinators stressed the importance of face-to-face contact whenever possible.

Publicizing and communicating successes within the partnership and within the community is seen as a high priority in sustaining a partnership, keeping people motivated, and drawing new partners into the group (Mawhinney 1993, Seamen 1992).

Kunesh and Farley point out the need to establish communication and decision making processes that recognize disagreement among members as part of partnership building, and to establish ways to deal with conflict constructively.

Adequate resources

Both the literature and people in the field identify adequate resources as essential — "time and money" was a common response from literacy coordinators when asked what was needed for a successful partnership. Adequate time is needed for coordinators and community agency staff to meet and carry out responsibilities, as opposed to relying on volunteer or personal time. A designated coordinator to lead the partnership and to coordinate the family literacy project was seen by many as a key factor.

> The collaborative planning process used in this program took a lot of time and energy to develop and implement. However, the resulting instruction and learning made it worthwhile. The collaboration made it possible to address the needs and value the strengths of each student in the process. It strengthened the goals and methods of the teachers' classroom activities because all were working in concert.
>
> Nurss and Rawlston 1994:4

Resources obviously also includes funding. One literacy coordinator who is interested in finding community partners to help plan a family literacy program asked if all this work developing a partnership happens before or after obtaining funding. Ideally, there would be paid staff time to identify, contact, and bring partners to the table. In reality, many coordinators find that because of their strong commitment to developing a collaborative family literacy program, they are often laying much of the groundwork in their own time.

> Another aspect of having adequate resources in place for the partnership and program development is having agreement between partners on how the resources and funding will be pursued and used.

Irwin 1994

Adequate resources also include the necessary materials and information to support the partnership and develop the program. The bibliography of this manual contains some excellent references to materials on developing and sustaining partnerships.

Partnerships can also allow for the sharing of resources through pooling expertise, facilities, and equipment.

Proper planning

As indicated earlier in this manual, planning begins with identifying a geographic region for service responsibility, not only to identify needs within that community, but potential partners and resources as well. Planning also includes conducting a subsequent systematic needs assessment, or using previous studies that include relevant information (Family Literacy in Illinois).

Involving key stakeholders in all stages of partnership and program development, including planning, is another necessary step in a successful partnership to support family literacy. One coordinator described this as "community-wide" planning, not only to ensure all relevant needs are being included, but also to raise public awareness and support for the project.

Having reasonable expectations of what partners can contribute and what the partnership can achieve is another aspect of effective planning. If plans for the project exceed the resources available, goals and objectives will not be met and partners may not remain committed to the project.

A rather contentious aspect of planning the partnership is whether or not to use a partnership agreement. (See Chapter V.) Rasinski and Padak (1994) recommend developing firm, written agreements with cooperating agencies during the planning stage that outline exactly what each member will contribute and receive from the overall project. The Canadian Heritage document Partnership Resource Kit (1995) also provides convincing arguments for the use of written agreements. Not all coordinators believe that such a formal approach is necessary or even productive, however.

Proper planning would also include issues like supervision of staff hired, program evaluation, and coordination (Boavida and Borges 1994, Mitchell and Scott 1993).

Shared values and goals

Family literacy practitioners and their community partners both agreed that shared values and goals are essential to successfully working together. There must be a set of core values established, based on the values of the community and its residents (Mawhinney 1993 and Cairney 1994).

There must also be a commitment by all members to the collective goals of the partnership.

> Successful efforts at systemic reform to overcome the failures created by fragmented services must adopt a holistic vision that emphasizes building nurturing communities…. (However) there are 'deeper structural failures to confront' when attempting to provide more effective services…. These failings, in turn, stem from a normative problem: the loss of the idea that 'a significant social policy aim is embodied in the notion of community, of a social infrastructure that embodies stability and security and shared values.'

Mawhinney 1993: 44

Participation by key stakeholders

By involving key stakeholders in the partnership, you can ensure that decisions and activities receive widespread support and recognition (Kunesh and Farley).

Perhaps there needs to be a distinction made between token participation and real participation. Agency members may attend partnership meetings for many reasons (being delegated by a superior, because collaborating with other agencies is required, because they said they would), but this doesn't ensure that they will contribute in a valuable way to the process. Cairney (1994) points out that participation does not necessarily mean partnership. Again, there needs to be a commitment to the process of collaborating; as Irwin explains (1994: 10), there must be the belief that the "return" on coalition and participation far outweigh the "cost" of involvement in a partnership. This belief and commitment must be present in all levels of member agencies, and in particular at the administrative or senior management level (Kunesh and Farley, Seamen 1992, Bradford 1993).

There should also be significant, active roles for all partners. Jeffers and Olebe (1994: 7) recommend active roles for not just the service agencies but also for the government agencies and businesses that support the project. This way they will "see the problems first-hand, develop a stake in the solution, and deliver more support toward its resolution."

Parents are a particularly important stakeholder whose participation is essential. Research in community-based programming tells us that the potential clients of a program are in the best position to identify needs the program should address, and what the best means of delivering the program are. Recruiting parents/families into the partnership may be challenging, but the resulting feelings of ownership and contribution will go a long way towards ensuring that the program developed will be appropriate and effective (Cairney 1994, Atmore 1993, Russo and Lindle 1993, Rasinski and Padak 1994, Friedman & Glass in Translating Research into Practice 1993). Having community agencies help you approach and gain input from their clients, as discussed in Chapter IV, is one means of gaining access to those stakeholders.

… there are differences between teams that actively nurture family involvement and teams that lack avenues for inclusion of parents and a clinical model for building on family strengths and priorities. Teams that nurture parent involvement expressed optimism about, and satisfaction with, the effectiveness of the interventions being planned, the quality of relationships between collaborating parties, and the collaboration process itself. Teams with no avenues for including parents expressed discouragement and demoralization regarding their ability to help highly stressed children and families.

Friedman and Glass in Translating Research
into Practice 1993: 239

Leadership

Although researchers and community partners emphasize the need for shared responsibility and equality, they also identify a need for one strong lead partner to coordinate and steer the partnership. Especially in the beginning stages of discussing the potential partnership and the proposed project, agency representatives will likely look to the literacy coordinator who called them together for leadership. The person(s) who assumes this responsibility may change as the partnership develops and evolves.

As mentioned above in the need for adequate resources, having a designated coordinator will ensure that there is time available to provide this leadership. Whether this is possible or not, the skills and abilities of the person taking on the coordinator's position are very important. A proven capacity for building strong interpersonal relationships and a high level of initiative are among the qualities required in a coordinator (Russo and Lindle 1993); as many people point out, partnerships take place between people, not agencies.

Flexibility

The need for flexibility is strongly emphasized as a key factor in successful partnerships. Flexibility is required in terms of scheduling meetings, adjusting roles and responsibilities, being willing to adapt to changes in planning and implementation, and accepting differences in philosophy, management style, and ability to contribute to the project.

As an example, even "teachers" can have very different frames of reference. Teachers of adults and secondary school students are typically trained in English with an emphasis on language skills, and tend to be subject matter-oriented (Nurss and Rawlston 1994). Teachers of young children tend to be child-oriented and plan concrete, hands-on activities. Their focus is on appropriate activities as opposed to specific language and literacy skills. In a family literacy partnership that includes both parent- and child-focused components, both groups need to adjust their thinking to accommodate the other group's approach.

One means of encouraging flexibility and understanding of each other's needs is through common inter-disciplinary training to support building a partnership. Mitchell and Scott (1993: 77) describe how inter-agency collaboration can succeed only if three issues are properly addressed. Profession norms are developed to help staff move beyond application of their expertise, focusing attention on the broader character of their clients' needs. Inter-disciplinary norms of professional cooperation are developed to help guide consultation and decision making among different types of professionals. Institutional norms are developed to guide both inter-agency case management and organizational resource allocation. Many types of formalized training, in-services, and information sharing sessions can benefit and support the partnership, provided they are open to all members, including parents.

Trust and respect

Finally, trust and respect are cited as essential to building strong and sustainable partnerships. Respect for others as equals, acknowledging others' areas of expertise, respecting differences between members, and accepting others' judgment are fundamental to building solid relationships between members. Each organization must realize that the vested interests of other members are as valid as its own (Irwin 1994).

Respect is not only essential between members of the partnership, but between the members of the partnership and the people it is meant to serve as well. Atmore (1993) speaks of "respectful intervention"-- of being sensitive to the culture, norms, and values of people in the community.

Worksheets

The following pages contain worksheets to guide you through some of the exercises outlined in earlier chapters.
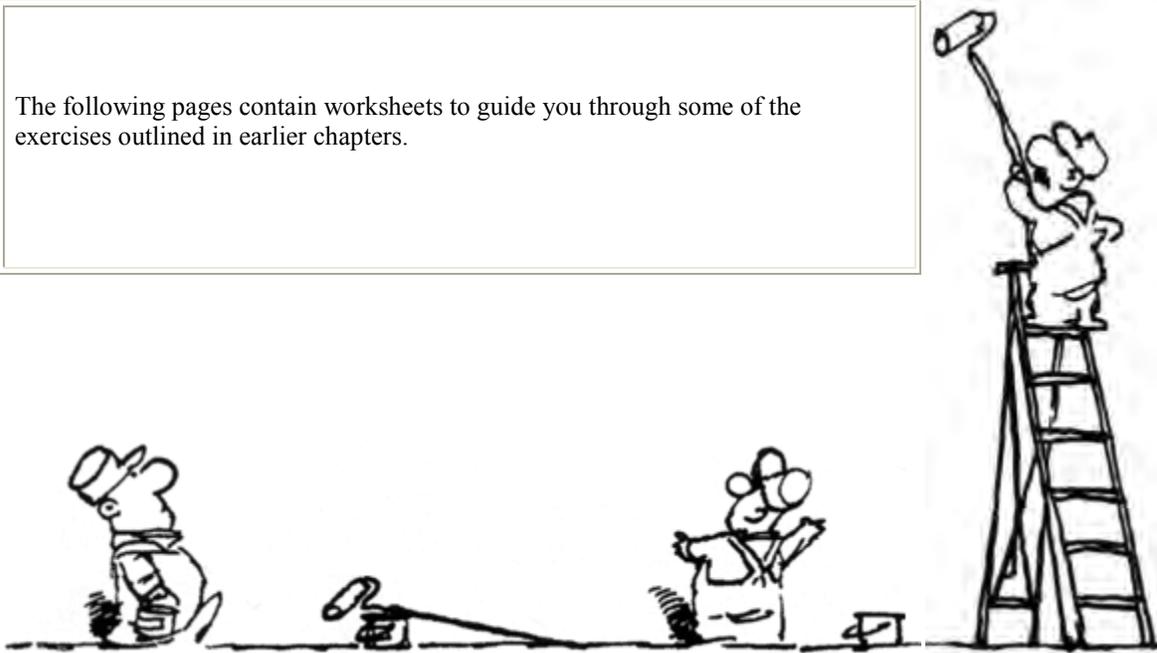
Worksheet A   A Identifying Community Needs

The purpose of this exercise is to collect your thoughts and general impressions of the needs in your community that relate to family literacy. Before you can do that, you need to take a few moments to define your community, so as to set some parameters for your family literacy partnership. Your community might be easily defined, such as a specific town or city, or a neighborhood in a city. Or it might be a county or rural municipality. It might even be a region of the province. Where do you deliver services to? Write down a working definition of your community.

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The next step is to think about what the needs are in your community that could be addressed by a family literacy program. What led you to consider a family literacy program as a possible program? Do you have any particular client group in mind? Did information from a survey or needs assessment tell you there was a need?

First think about general needs, such as a need for greater awareness of the important role parents play in their children's literacy development. What about the importance of family reading, or the need to get parents more involved in their children's education? Jot down some general needs you're aware of in your community.

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Do you know of any specific needs in your community relating to family literacy? Do your adult students want activities or strategies they can use at home to support their children's literacy development? Is there a parenting program that wants to include family literacy as one component? Write down any specific needs you're aware of.

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Now that you have taken a preliminary look at the needs in your community, you should think about what services already exist in your community that could meet these needs. We'll systematically identify resources and agencies later; thinking about the services you're already aware of will help to avoid duplication and lay the groundwork for identifying potential partners. (For example, if there is already a drop-in story time for moms and tots at the local library, there is little point in developing a similar program.) Take a few moments to note any existing services that relate to the needs you've identified.

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Worksheet B   Identifying Needs and Resources in Your Agency

What are your agency's needs and motivations for seeking partners? Take a few moments to reflect on and answer the following questions: (adapted from Isserlis et al, 1994b)

What do you hope to gain from a partnership that you can't accomplish or provide internally?

- Do you hope to gain financial or in-kind support? What would that consist of?
- Do you hope to access expertise in other disciplines (child care, adult education, health care)? If so, what kind of expertise?
- Do you want to receive or make referrals to other agencies?
- Do you need the support of key decision makers or stakeholders in the community?
- What other reasons do you have for seeking partners?
- What value would be added to the proposed project by involving partners?

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What do you have to offer potential partners?

- Do you have expertise or resources that would be useful to other agencies or organizations?
- Are you trying to reach the same clients or potential clients?
- Would they like to be recognized for supporting families?
- What value or benefit can you offer them?

_____

_____

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Worksheet C   Mapping the Community

You'll need a large piece of paper (flip chart paper works well), blue, red, and black markers, a local telephone book, a local newspaper, and a community services directory (if available) for this exercise.

1. Draw the borders of your community on the piece of paper.
2. Identify the agencies, schools, community groups, contract services, etc. that interact with families on a regular basis. Use your own knowledge of your community and whatever resources are available. For example, many telephone books have a "Community Services" section. Also check newspaper stories for references to agencies and groups, or check the "Upcoming Events" column. Add any existing services that you identified in Worksheet A. Plot these groups on your map in red.
3. Next, identify organizations or services that could possibly meet the agency needs you identified in Worksheet B. Plot these on your map in blue.
4. Consider the type of family literacy program that you think might be appropriate for your community. Who are your potential clients? Who do you want to participate in the program? Where in this map of your community are you likely to find them? (Drop-in centres, Adult Basic Education classes, doctors' offices, etc.) Mark these on your map in black.
5. Using the local phone book, find and list the telephone numbers to match the groups you've identified in the previous steps. If possible, list key names to contact within each group.

This exercise was described in a session delivered by Dr. Ruth Nickse at the Roots of Literacy Symposium in Brooks in 1992, and was later adapted by Kathy Day of Pincher Creek.

Appendices

We've prepared some sample documents for you to use as guides during your partnership development. You'll also find the Works Cited section of the manual here, along with other recommended resources on partnerships and collaborative services.
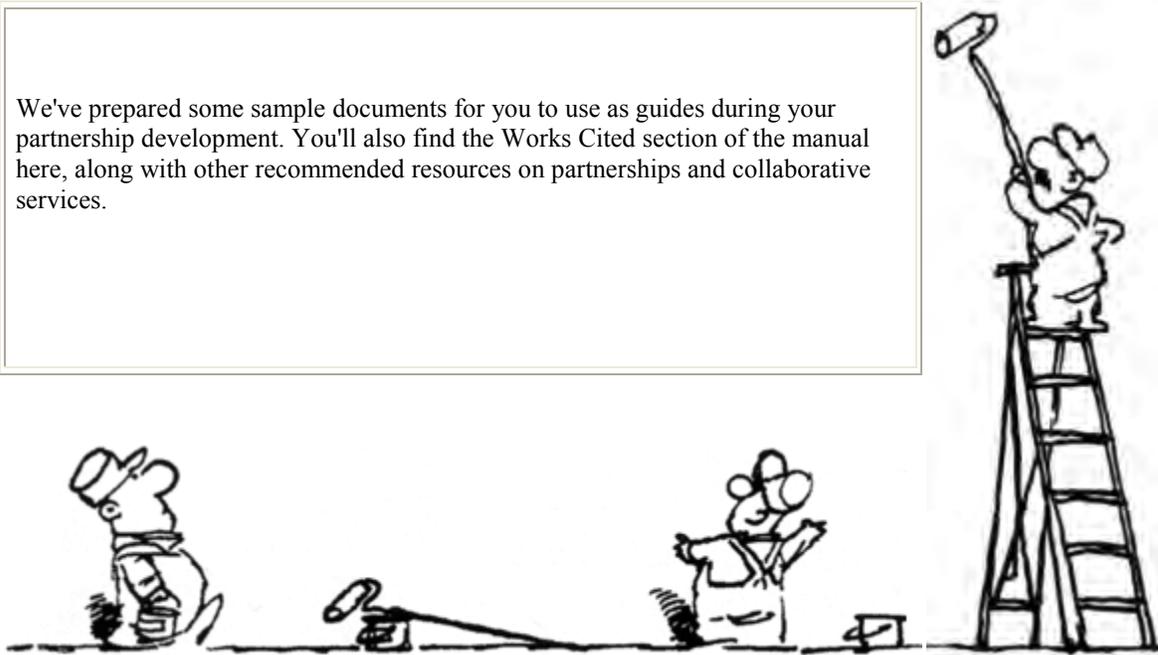
Appendix A   Sample Information Sheet for Potential Partners

What is family literacy?

Family literacy is a relatively new approach to literacy development. The goal is to prevent the cycle of intergenerational problems of low literacy, by building on the strengths of the family and their existing uses of literacy.

Family literacy programs are based on the research that has been conducted over the past forty years on emergent literacy development, which shows that a child's literacy development begins at birth, and that the parents/caregivers are the child's first and most important teacher. For example, children who are raised in homes where literacy activities regularly take place, and where they are read to frequently and have access to reading and writing materials, develop greater facility with literacy activities than children who do not have the same opportunities (International Reading Association).

Why is family literacy important here?

We believe that a family literacy program is needed here in our community. Statistics Canada figures from 1989 show that nearly one in every three Canadians has difficulty with everyday reading tasks. Other findings from the study show that parents' education levels is a significant factor in Albertans' literacy levels. When you consider that our local volunteer tutor bank currently has twenty-five people on its waiting list, and that the adult basic education program turned away over sixty people this semester, it becomes apparent that those statistics do not just apply "out there" somewhere, but that they describe people right here at home. And what about their children? Will they finish high school? Will we see them entering the ABE program in twenty or thirty years time? All parents want what is best for their children, but often lack the skills, awareness, or confidence they need to support their child's development. Being involved in a family literacy program can assist them in that role.

Working in partnership

Family literacy is not just about reading and writing. It is about developing stronger relationships between parents and their children. It is about getting parents involved in their children's education. It is about building stronger families and healthier communities. We know now that the issues and challenges families face are multifaceted and complex, and we also know that we need to work together to address those issues. Your agency has expertise and insights that we need to plan and develop a family literacy project for our community. By working in partnership, we can reach those families that most need the support, and help each other deliver more effective, efficient services at the same time.

Possible program type

We have been researching different types of family literacy programs. Based on our understanding of the needs in our community, and the services that exist already, one model in particular seems appropriate and realistic. (Description of program.) For more information, please call the Anytown Community Organization at 000-0000.

Appendix B   Sample Action Plan

SAMPLE PLAN OF ACTION*

NAME: _____   DATE: _____

GOALS:

PROJECT OBJECTIVE	RELATED ACTIONS	TIME LINE	SERVICE PROVIDER/ PARTNER	COST	MEASURABLE OUTCOMES
1. Choosing a facility	• identifying appropriate locations • identifying cost • identifying advantages and disadvantages of each location • determining availability • reaching consensus among committee	Sept. 1 - 30	literacy council, library	n/a	1. space will be available to program delivery and administration
2.					

* Adapted from Flores et al 1993

(vertical text, left margin) Appendix B   Sample Plan of Action

Appendix C   Sample Partnership Agreement

PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

between <u>Community Literacy Organization</u> and <u>Agency A</u>
Date: March 1, 1996

Re: <u>Anytown's 1996-97 Family Literacy Project</u>

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTNERS

<u>Community Literacy Organization</u> and <u>Agency A</u> agree to the following roles and responsibilities regarding the management of the Anytown's 1996-97 Family Literacy Project.

<u>Community Literacy Organization</u> agrees to:

- provide training for the project facilitator, materials and other college services as required
- provide office furniture for the project
- advertise for the project facilitator
- liaise between the national funding agency and Agency A
- work with the project facilitator to develop the program model and to write the final project reports
- assist with the purchasing of books and materials

<u>Agency A</u> agrees to:

- provide photocopy and fax services to the project
- provide secretarial and administrative support to the project facilitator
- provide office space and classroom space for the project
- recruit participants into the project
- manage project funds and prepare the interim and final financial reports

A joint committee of the <u>Community Literacy Organization</u> and <u>Agency A</u> will:

- interview and hire a facilitator for the project
- supervise the quality and conduct of the project
- act as a steering committee for the project
- evaluate the project
- complete and file the necessary reports
-

An administration fee of $2000.00 per project partner will be charged to the project.

The following activities will be shared by the two groups in exchange for the $4000.00 administration fee:

- hiring of the project facilitator
- accounting
- filing of interim reports
- expertise contributed through the steering committee
- access to resources and expertise of both organizations
- meeting space

_____ _____

John Doe, Executive Director
Community Literacy Organization

Jane Smith, Executive Director
Agency A

Appendix D   Sample Evaluation Tool

Appendix D EVALUATION OF THE PARTNERSHIP TO
SUPPORT ANYTOWN'S 1996-97 FAMILY LITERACY
PROJECT

Achievement of Objectives

	Yes	No	Somewhat	Reasons why
1. Was (Objective 1) met?				
2. Was (Objective 2) met?				
3. Was (Objective 3) met?				
4. Was (Objective 4) met?				
5. Was (Objective 5) met?				

Benefits for Partnership Members

1. Has the partnership resulted in cost savings for its members?
2. Has the partnership facilitated access to the families it was intended to serve?
3. Has the partnership resulted in increased access to services for the families it was intended to serve?
4. Has the partnership increased awareness among member agencies of each other's services and mandates?

Partnership Process

1. Was communication between partners clear and effective?
2. Were roles and responsibilities clearly understood?
3. Were meetings productive and worthwhile?
4. Were there difficulties that impaired the partnership process in the beginning?
5. Were those difficulties addressed and alleviated?
6. Did all partners fulfil their responsibilities and obligations?
7. In what ways has the partnership succeeded?
8. In what ways does the partnership need to be improved?

Appendix E   Works Cited and Recommended Resources

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