



STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK · ASPC-SF-001

A Framework for Durable Strategic Partnership

Proposed standards for cooperation among institutions with distinct responsibilities and shared interests.

ASPC STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

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Executive summary

Strategic partnerships become durable when their purpose is defined, their institutions are capable, and their commitments can be translated into responsible action.

International relationships often begin with a shared concern or immediate opportunity. Their long-term value, however, depends upon the structures created after the initial agreement. Partners must understand one another's authority, limitations, decision processes, and expectations. They must also distinguish broad expressions of support from commitments that an institution has the legal, financial, and operational capacity to fulfill.

This framework proposes six conditions for durable partnership: a clear public purpose; legitimate institutional ownership; credible capability; reciprocal value; transparent implementation; and periodic review. These conditions are intended to help institutions determine whether cooperation is appropriate before public expectations exceed practical capacity.

Partnership should be treated as a disciplined institutional practice, not a ceremonial description of goodwill.

The framework also proposes a development cycle beginning with definition and assessment, followed by structured consultation, option development, authorization, implementation, and review. At every stage, participating institutions should preserve accurate records, identify responsible decision-makers, and communicate the limits of any agreement.

1. Strategic context

American and international institutions increasingly operate in an environment shaped by economic interdependence, rapid technological change, pressure on public administration, and public skepticism toward arrangements whose purpose is not clearly explained. These conditions make cooperation necessary while also making poorly structured cooperation more costly.

A durable partnership must therefore do more than align interests at a single moment. It must create a reliable method for participants to exchange information, make decisions, manage disagreement, and adjust activity when circumstances change. It should strengthen accountable institutions rather than route responsibility around them.

Why partnerships fail

- Objectives remain broad while operational responsibilities are never assigned.
- Participants lack authority to commit their institutions.
- Public announcements precede technical assessment and authorization.
- Measures emphasize activity rather than institutional or public value.
- Financial, legal, or political risks are transferred without agreement.
- No process exists for review, correction, or responsible conclusion.

Relevance to American interests

Partnerships that support capable institutions, lawful commerce, responsible investment, and peaceful management of change can improve the environment in which American institutions and enterprises operate. Their value should be assessed through identifiable outcomes rather than symbolic alignment alone.

2. Conditions for durable partnership

Defined purpose

A specific institutional or public need is stated in terms participants can evaluate.

Legitimate ownership

Each institution identifies who has authority and who remains accountable.

Credible capability

Participants possess or can responsibly obtain the skills, systems, and resources required.

Reciprocal value

Benefits and responsibilities are understood by all participating institutions.

Transparent implementation

Decisions, resources, safeguards, and progress can be appropriately documented.

Periodic review

The partnership can adapt, pause, or conclude based on evidence.

Local leadership and sovereignty

External support should not displace legitimate local responsibility. Sustainable cooperation strengthens the capacity of appropriate institutions to perform their own functions. Partnership design should account for local law, administrative practice, political context, and the knowledge of affected communities.

Proportionality

The complexity of governance should correspond to the scale and risk of the work. A limited research exchange may require a short written charter. A multi-year economic initiative may require formal authorization, financial controls, external evaluation, and defined procedures for handling disputes.

3. Partnership development cycle

01 Define

State the problem, intended public value, participating interests, and reasons cooperation may be preferable to separate action.

02 Assess

Evaluate authority, institutional capacity, affected stakeholders, risk, resources, and existing initiatives.

03 Consult

Test assumptions with relevant institutions, practitioners, and communities before selecting an approach.

04 Develop and authorize

Compare options, assign responsibility, document safeguards, and obtain the approvals required by each institution.

05 Implement and review

Begin at an appropriate scale, monitor agreed measures, disclose material changes, and conduct scheduled review.

4. Institutional safeguards

Safeguards protect both the purpose of cooperation and the decision autonomy of participating institutions. They should be established before resources are committed or public expectations are created.

Safeguard	Purpose	Minimum practice
Authority	Prevent commitments beyond institutional power.	Written confirmation of responsible decision-makers.
Conflict management	Protect judgment and public confidence.	Disclosure and recusal procedures where appropriate.
Information integrity	Support accurate decisions and communication.	Source standards, document control, and correction process.
Financial stewardship	Protect resources and lawful use.	Budget ownership, procurement controls, and reporting.
Public representation	Avoid misleading claims of status or endorsement.	Approved language describing authority and affiliation.
Exit and continuity	Allow responsible transition or conclusion.	Termination, records, and continuity provisions.

No participant should use a partnership to imply governmental authority, endorsement, or access that it does not possess.

5. Measures and review

Measures should distinguish outputs from outcomes. Meetings, publications, and agreements may demonstrate activity, but they do not by themselves establish institutional or public value.

Proposed measure categories

- **Institutional capacity:** systems, skills, and responsibilities strengthened.
- **Economic value:** responsible investment, employment, supplier participation, or transaction efficiency.
- **Relationship quality:** continuity, reliability, and the ability to manage disagreement.
- **Public integrity:** transparency, lawful conduct, and responsible use of resources.
- **Durability:** benefits maintained after initial external support or leadership transition.

Review questions

Is the original purpose still relevant? Are responsible institutions performing their assigned roles? Have material risks changed? Are measures showing value beyond activity? Do affected stakeholders understand the work? Should the partnership continue, change, narrow, or conclude?

Reviews should be scheduled at authorization and conducted by people able to evaluate both technical performance and institutional legitimacy.

6. Proposed recommendations

1 Begin with institutional mapping

Identify existing authority, responsibility, capability, and relationships before creating new structures.

2 Publish a plain-language purpose

Explain what the partnership will address, what it will not do, and how success will be assessed.

3 Separate consultation from commitment

Participation in dialogue should not be represented as endorsement or authorization.

4 Start at a responsible scale

Pilot activity where evidence is limited and expand only when capability and value are demonstrated.

5 Plan for transition

Define how knowledge, records, responsibilities, and benefits will continue or conclude.

Implementation considerations

Institutions applying this framework should adapt it to their legal authority, operating environment, and level of risk. The framework is not a substitute for legal review, public authorization, financial controls, security assessment, or engagement with affected communities.

Initial documentation

- Statement of purpose and boundaries
- Institutional and stakeholder map
- Authority and responsibility schedule
- Risk and safeguard register
- Resource and implementation plan
- Measures, review dates, and reporting arrangements

Communication

Public communication should be accurate about the status of the work. Proposed activity should be described as proposed. Consultation should not be described as partnership. Partnership should not be presented as governmental endorsement unless that endorsement has been formally and lawfully provided.

Use by ASPC

ASPC may use the framework as a planning aid for evaluating proposed dialogues and initiatives. Any future application should identify deviations, unresolved issues, and the institutional authority under which participants act.

Conclusion

Durable partnership is created through clarity, capability, responsibility, and review.

Shared interests can create an opening for cooperation, but institutional practice determines whether that opening produces lasting value. The standards proposed in this framework are intended to help participants move carefully from interest to action while preserving accountability and public confidence.

Selected references

1. U.S. Government Accountability Office, leading practices concerning interagency collaboration and results-oriented management.
2. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, principles concerning public integrity and effective institutions.
3. World Bank, institutional capability and governance research.
4. U.S. Web Design System, trust, accessibility, and public communication principles.

References identify the evidence and established practices used in this framework. Citation does not imply endorsement by any referenced institution.

What federal evidence says about collaboration

Durable cooperation is a management discipline with identifiable operating practices.

GAO's 2023 government-wide review identifies eight leading practices for interagency collaboration: bridge organizational cultures; include relevant participants; leverage resources and information; sustain leadership; clarify roles and responsibilities; maintain written guidance and agreements; define common outcomes; and ensure accountability.

GAO's review combined prior federal audit work, peer-reviewed literature, interviews with agency officials and specialists, and analysis of fiscal years 2018–2022 reports. That makes the framework useful as a tested diagnostic, while not proving that every practice will work identically in every international setting.

ASPC application

- Require a written charter naming the outcome, participants, authority, resources, decision rights, and review cadence.
- Record how nonfederal and affected stakeholders influenced design, not only whether they attended.
- Assign institutional and individual accountability for deliverables.
- Revisit the agreement when leadership, risk, or operating conditions materially change.

Analytical distinction: GAO's findings concern U.S. interagency collaboration. ASPC applies them by analogy to international institutional partnerships; that application is ASPC analysis, not a GAO recommendation or endorsement.

Ownership must be operational

MCC describes country ownership as partner governments leading priority selection through consultation, establishing accountable local implementation teams, and using data, transparent budgets, results reporting, and external impact evaluation. Its five-year compact structure is intended to make funding predictable enough for planning and reform.

Federal oversight shows why ownership cannot be inferred from where money is spent. GAO found that monitoring plans it reviewed for government-to-government assistance rarely directly assessed capacity, ownership, or sustainability. A separate review found federal monitoring and evaluation guidance covered most, but not all, leading practices.

Minimum evidence package

Claim	Evidence required
Local ownership	Decision rights, consultation record, domestic accountability, and implementation responsibility.
Capacity strengthened	Baseline, functional measure, responsible institution, and post-support test.
Results achieved	Verified output and outcome data tied to the stated objective.
Benefits sustained	Operating owner, recurrent finance, maintenance, and ex-post review.

These are proposed ASPC documentation requirements derived from the evidence. They are not U.S. Government standards.

Primary U.S. Government sources

GAO-23-105520 · Government Performance Management

May 24, 2023 · Federal audit and synthesis

[Report page and accessible PDF →](#)

GAO-19-466 · Foreign Assistance Monitoring and Evaluation

July 31, 2019 · Review of OMB guidelines and six agencies

[Report, methodology, and recommendation status →](#)

GAO-15-377 · Government-to-Government Funding

March 26, 2015 · Mission-document review and fieldwork; historical context

[Report and implemented recommendations →](#)

Millennium Challenge Corporation · Country Ownership

Agency explanation · Operational model and transparency practices

[Official MCC resource →](#)

Source register reviewed August 21, 2026. Agency descriptions explain agency practice and are not external proof of impact. GAO findings retain the scope and period stated in each report.



America Strategic Partnership Council

A U.S.-based strategic initiative advancing strategic cooperation,
institutional stability, and economic opportunity.

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