



# Guidelines for Engagement:

Constructing healthy and long lasting bird conservation partnerships

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## Introduction

This document outlines our collective vision for engaging in effective and equitable partnerships. We suggest these engagement guidelines for bird conservation partnerships to help minimize challenges, maximize effective collaborations, and ensure healthy and long lasting bird conservation partnerships. The recommendations herein were offered by participants of the Partners in Flight Conservation Business Plan Workshop held in Guadalajara, Mexico in April 2016; the workshop was hosted, sponsored, and organized by Universidad de Guadalajara, Pronatura Sur, Paso Pacifico, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Western Hemisphere Migratory Species Initiative, Klamath Bird Observatory, American Bird Conservancy, and the Organization of American States.

This document offers suggestions for collaborations that are formed to effectively accomplish the Partners in Flight mission of keeping common birds common and helping species at risk through voluntary partnerships. Partnerships, alliances, and other types of collaboration are proven to be the most effective, long lasting, and successful way to conduct bird conservation and research at different scales. Therefore, partnerships should be valued, promoted, and supported. Effective collaborations are built on the premise that:

- Working together we are stronger,
- It will take all of us, and
- We share in the work and in the credit of our accomplishments.

Each partner receives appropriate credit and recognition. Within this framework the partnership should be recognized as greater than the sum of its parts and thus acknowledged equally with, if not paramount to, the individual partners.

## A collaborative framework for effective partnerships

- Partners in Flight collaborations are based on the voluntary contribution of work and sharing of ideas, data, skills, expertise, and other benefits.
- Joint collaborations bring benefits to all partners through increased fundraising opportunities, reduced duplication of effort, more efficient use of resources, greater publicity and recognition, better geographical coverage, and most importantly, more benefits for birds and their habitats.
- Collaborations empower all participants, especially the smaller grass-roots institutions, to achieve success.
- Collaborations offer networking opportunities and result in effective alliances.
- Inclusive partnerships open a wider set of opportunities for unknown and unpredictable bird conservation conditions of the future.
- Reciprocal learning and shared collaborative experiences strengthen the work of each partner.



- Successful and healthy partnerships maximize collaboration, reducing competition among collaborators.
- Partner expectations and roles are clearly articulated when collaborations start, and are revisited throughout the engagement.

## **Suggested Guidelines for Engagement**

### ***Building Collaboration***

- When a collaboration is started, it is assumed that it is based shared objectives, trust, and good will among each partner. However, potential conflicts and challenges should be discussed to ensure all partner issues are identified and addressed transparently.
- The profiles of partners that can be part of the collaboration, as well as the procedures for forming and maintaining a collaboration are clearly stated.
- All collaborating partners explicitly articulate their objectives and agendas and state what they want to get out of the collaboration, including achievements as well as in-kind and economic benefits.
- Explicit expectations of partners who are providing expertise, ideas, data, knowledge, project sites, networking opportunities, and funding are communicated.
- Effective collaborations recognize, support, and are inclusive of the partners who are invested and do work locally.
- The partners' roles of and benefits responsibilities, and the duration and needs of reassessing each partner's role as the project and its context evolves are clearly outlined.

### ***Developing Products, Sharing Credit, and Capacity Building***

- Develop collective products transparently; clearly identify how products are stored, accessed, published, and shared.
- Specify ownership of existing intellectual property, including traditional ecological knowledge; specify how this information is shared and how collective intellectual property that results from the collaboration is apportioned.
- Decide and oversee how products, such as scientific manuscripts, and outcomes generated as a result of or based on the collaboration's collective efforts are used by the partners.
- Specify guidelines about partners' rights and/or privileges to use results of a collaboration.
- Recognize and provide credit for each participant's contributions whenever possible.
- Be particularly aware and give credit to all deserving parties in press releases, articles, and publications.
- Develop processes for storing and accessing results and products generated by the collaboration.



- Whenever possible, identify how the collaboration can contribute to strengthening collaborator capacities and assets, especially for partners who have capacity needs including specific skillsets, relevant data, products libraries, etc.; terms for such capacity building and/or transfer should be defined and agreed upon.

### ***Treatment of Finances***

- As early as possible in the development of a collaboration, clarify how any earned income and assets are shared and how accountability and financial risk are addressed; this is one of the most critical first steps in the partnership building process.
- Develop transparent budgets that outline distribution of funds obtained for the collaboration and specify expected overhead costs.
- Balance the use of existing operational capacities of larger NGOs and institutions with meeting capacity needs of smaller partnering organizations.
- Seek agreement regarding how the collaboration and/or individual partners seek funding together or individually.
- Identify funds needed to cover the overhead of participating groups, collaboration and project management costs, and costs of leading and coordinating the group and its work.

### ***Agreements and Leadership***

- A leadership team or steering committee can be convened with representation that accounts for each partner; this committee can carefully monitor and evaluate the work of the collaboration as well as its own work.
- A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is an instrument that can be used to outline and administer specific agreements that facilitate and guide effective collaboration.
- Details of an MOU are agreed to in writing by collaborating partners; when establishing a collaborative MOU consider including the following elements:
  - Articulate a collaboration's terms and objectives as well as related responsibilities for partners.
  - Identify how partners can be added or withdrawn from the collaboration; such as writing formal letters for adding or withdrawing partners.
  - Specify provisions that offer safeguards for partners and for the collaboration as a whole as well as provision for resolving disputes.
  - Design an organizational chart illustrating the roles and relationships among partnering institutions and individuals participating in the collaboration.
  - Decision making processes and structures specify which type of decisions require full input from all collaboration partners, decisions that can be made by a smaller leadership body, and/or decisions that are the prerogative of any given partner.
  - Agreement mechanisms should incorporate terms and conditions as agreed to by each signatory to the agreement.



## Collaboration Challenges

Potential challenges that may emerge in collaborations include perceptions of partner exploitation, use of intellectual property without adequate creditor or authorship, unequitable allocation of resources, exclusion from follow-up stages of projects, and other inequities among collaborators. Such perceptions impede effective and efficient achievement of stated conservation objectives. It is important to recognize the challenges that can hinder effective collaboration. The following guidelines can help prevent those behaviors and misunderstandings, increasing the likelihood of successful partnerships.

- Strive to be efficient and strategic in the distribution and use of funds; funds are scarce and there is not sufficient funding for the management, monitoring, research, and communications needed to achieve all bird conservation objectives.
- Encourage a decentralized approach to collaborations across countries and/or organizations. There are different levels of centralization that can negatively affect the speed at which a wide diversity of bird conservation projects can be developed.
- Set up clear rules and agreements about distribution of any profits, assets, or intellectual property.
- Promote a proportional investment of time or resources among partners, as well as proportional reception of benefits, according to each partner's capacity and willingness to take on responsibilities.
- Take into consideration that both organizational and national cultures (e.g., values, working practices, hierarchies, etc.) might differ among partners; from the onset, communicate to seek agreements about how to best navigate cultural differences/assumptions.
- Large NGOs and/or central governments have the ability to generate funding and funding opportunities from governments, foundations, and philanthropists. These resources and opportunities should be shared across all contributing partners, large or small, with established agreements on how to balance the distribution of resources to ensure that smaller but capable NGOs are not excluded.
- Promote democratic, equitable, and fair sharing of resources (without regards to political borders) in obtaining and managing bird conservation funds.
- Promote a greater diversity and balance of NGOs, universities, and government agencies ensuring that adequate funding is secured so key partners can fully participate in the partnership and the bird conservation efforts.
- Larger countries, NGOs, organizations, and/or governments agencies use shared work, ideas, data, products respectfully and responsibly to ensure that smaller NGOs aren't excluded when obtaining money, generating publications, or realizing other opportunities.
- Adequately share funds, authorships, and credit.
- Cultivate trusting partnerships among all collaborators to ensure there is necessary follow-up for the sustained success of the bird conservation community as a whole.



- Illustrate an organizational chart for the collaborative project and for the partners responsible for implementing the project that identifies those that will both participate and benefit directly and indirectly.

## **Conclusion**

Effective and long lasting partnerships, alliances, and other types of collaboration are essential to achieving success in full annual cycle and multi-scaled bird conservation. By intentionally and effectively overcoming the challenges that impede effective collaboration we can ensure healthy bird conservation partnerships maintain focus on meeting the conservation challenges at hand. The guidelines listed herein offer a framework for proactively attending to and maintaining thriving collaborations that will be central to achieving Partners in Flight's mission of keeping common birds common and helping species at risk through voluntary partnerships.

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