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SUSTAINING TECHNICAL AND ANALYTIC RESOURCES

Sustaining Technical and Analytic Resources

Partnership Assessment Toolkit Companion Document

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Sustaining Technical and Analytic Resources (STAR) is a project of the Public Health Institute implemented in partnership with Johns Hopkins University, the Consortium of Universities for Global Health, and University of California at San Francisco.

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Acronym List

AP	Academic Partnerships (STAR's)
BMCF	Bergen Model of Collaborative Functioning
CAT	Capacity Assessment Toolkit
CLA	Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting
CUGH	Consortium of Universities for Global Health
LMIC	Low- and Middle- Income Countries
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
PAT	Partnership Assessment Toolkit
QI	Quality Improvement
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-oriented
STAR	Sustaining Technical and Analytic Resources
U.S.	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	U.S. Government

Introduction

The Sustaining Technical and Analytic Resources (STAR) project, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), aims to promote mutually beneficial and equitable academic partnerships in the United States (U.S.) and low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). STAR's focus on academic partnerships stems from USAID's understanding that academic partnerships are vital to enhancing research and education in the global health field. Further, incorporating academic institutions into the Agency's work would align with USAID's goals and objectives.

By determining what makes for sustainable academic partnerships, i.e., the tools and processes to strengthen and support them, STAR aims to induce change within the global health development community by improving the quality and quantity of academic partnerships. One mechanism in achieving this goal is to better understand how to assess the strengths and weaknesses of an academic partnership, which led to the STAR Academic Partnerships (AP) team's development of a Partnership Assessment Toolkit (PAT) and this companion document, which explains the theory behind it.

Strategic, well-functioning partnerships provide an opportunity for partners to pool resources and expertise, strengthen capacity, and work together to advance a mutually agreed upon scope of work or plan—achieving more together than alone. However, creating and maintaining such partnerships, especially in the context of the complex global health landscape, is not an easy task, takes time, and requires a well-thought-out approach, support, and continual re-evaluation.

The PAT is designed to guide institutions through a self-assessment to score and analyze the strengths and challenges within their partnership, followed by a joint discussion. Research shows that periodic self-assessment of a partnership and its dynamics contributes to stronger partnerships.[1] While academic institutions are the primary end-user, the tool was developed with a broader reach in mind and can be utilized by any type of partnering organization, even outside the global health field. The AP team envisioned the PAT would be an iterative guide to learn from and evaluate partnerships, beginning with STAR's Collaboration Laboratory experiments (pairing of two academic institutions), in the project's efforts to identify and promote best practices for partnerships.

The PAT contains a questionnaire with numerous statements that correspond to key components for a well-functioning, equitable partnership. These statements, along with rating criteria that could be used to score a partnership's strength and impact, were synthesized from findings from STAR's Comprehensive Review of Academic Partnerships, which formed a baseline of STAR's overall understanding about what works well and challenges encountered in different types of formalized academic partnerships.

In addition, other applicable information was included in the toolkit based on feedback and PAT piloting efforts by members of the Consortium of Universities for Global Health's (CUGH's) STAR Committee, who were assembled to provide their expertise to STAR's AP work. These members, the majority of whom are affiliated with academic institutions from around the world, also contributed to the review that examined partnership literature over the past 10 years. The

[1] Granner, M. L., & Sharpe, P. A. (2004). Evaluating community coalition characteristics and functioning: a summary of measurement tools. *Health Education Research*, 19(5), 514-532. DOI: 10.1093/her/cyg056

PAT's statements were organized using the Bergen Model of Collaborative Functioning (BMCF),[2] an analytical framework. A description of this model is included later in the report, along with a list of other resources consulted, which is in the references section.

Following the questionnaire, the PAT contains a discussion guide for partners and a template for creating an action plan to address issues identified during the assessment process. The "pause and reflect" moment for partners, which is encouraged by using this tool, is also aligned with USAID's Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) approach that the Agency uses to improve program effectiveness.

Development of the Partnership Assessment Tool

In order to create this toolkit, the AP team incorporated findings from its Comprehensive Review of Academic Partnerships, examined existing partnership assessment tools, and studied collaborative frameworks, ultimately choosing to use the BMCF for this tool. Once developed, the team sought multiple rounds of feedback from a diverse set of academics, many of whom are engaged in existing global health partnerships.

Comprehensive Review of Academic Partnerships

During the initial phase of the project, STAR's AP team performed a comprehensive review of literature to better understand four key elements:

1. Why academic partnerships are created
2. Three-to-five measurable criteria that can be used to score/rate a partnership's impact and strength
3. Key ingredients for what works well
4. What has not worked well

The review focused on formal academic partnerships involving two parties, including partnerships between academic institutions and non-governmental organizations, the private and public sectors, professional associations, and other academic institutions, both in the U.S. and in LMICs.

Key ingredients cited for a successful partnership included:

- Creating a comprehensive Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)
- Possessing a solid governance structure
- Having shared goals
- Establishing clear and effective communication
- Forming a robust monitoring and evaluation plan

The review also identified fundamental challenges in creating and sustaining partnerships, such as competing agendas, funding obstacles, communication barriers, and power inequities. In order to avoid many of these difficulties, the review concluded there was strong evidence pointing to ways to address and/or rectify these issues during the formative stages of a collaboration. These findings were incorporated into the PAT, with multiple statements included

[2] Corbin, J., & Mittelmark, M. (2008). Partnership lessons from the Global Programme for Health Promotion Effectiveness: a case study. *Health Promotion International*, 23(4), 365–371. DOI: 10.1093/heapro/dan029

that directly point to these components that are needed for successful partnerships, as well as statements to gauge and identify common partnership challenges.

The criteria that surfaced in the literature on rating a partnership was also integrated into the PAT's questionnaire to measure the "health" of the relationship. The review highlighted the importance of continual monitoring of a partnership and recalibrating, when necessary, so the discussion guide was included for this reason. The toolkit was designed to reflect the importance of open communication and trust by encouraging partners to examine potential areas in need of improvement, two key conclusions from the review research. The real utility of the PAT is not just taking the self-assessment via the questionnaire, but the discussion between partners that may lead to change, thus creating stronger, healthier relationships.

Overview of the Bergen Model of Collaborative Functioning

The assessment statements in the questionnaire sections of the PAT were organized using the BMCF system components (see Figure 1 below). This model is commonly used in case studies of collaborative functioning.[3] STAR plans to incorporate it into several of its AP activities, thus ensuring that a consistent, empirical framework is used to document the project's activities and analyses.

The analytical framework identifies three main processes that occur in any collaborative functioning system: inputs, throughputs (also known as the collaboration context), and outputs. As such, the questionnaire within the PAT is divided into three sections that correspond to the three processes:

Part I, Partnership Foundations, corresponds to the input components. Inputs are the resources that partners contribute toward the partnership:

1. The mission (i.e., the goals and objectives of the partnership)
2. Partner resources (e.g., skills, connections, time commitment)
3. Financial resources (e.g., funding and equipment)

Sharing a mission and mutual goals is important for partners and was also identified in STAR's review of academic partnerships as a common ingredient needed for a successful partnership; thus, assessing this component was weaved into the PAT. Identifying all types of resources available to the partnership is key to ensuring transparency and for addressing any resource needs early-on in the collaboration. Once identified, setting expectations for how resources will be shared equitably between partners is also important, and is a factor that will contribute toward a partnership's success and can be evaluated using the PAT.

Part II, Partnership Functioning, corresponds to the throughput components or collaborative context:

1. Leadership
2. Communication
3. Roles/Structures
4. Input Interaction

The collaborative context describes how the inputs (identified in Part I), along with leadership, communication, and roles/structures interact with each other to positively or negatively reinforce partnership functioning for its production and maintenance tasks. Production tasks

[3] Matenga et al., 2019

are the objectives and activities of the partnership, while maintenance tasks refer to the administrative activities needed to sustain the collaboration.

Part III, Partnership Outputs, corresponds to the output component of the model. There are three possible results:

1. Synergistic
2. Antagonistic
3. Additive

The final component of the Bergen Model are the outputs, which are categorized into synergistic, antagonistic, and additive results. Synergistic results occur when the benefits of the partnership outweigh its costs. Antagonistic results are the opposite, when the costs of the collaboration outweigh the benefits. Lastly, additive results occur when the benefits and costs of the partnerships are equal.

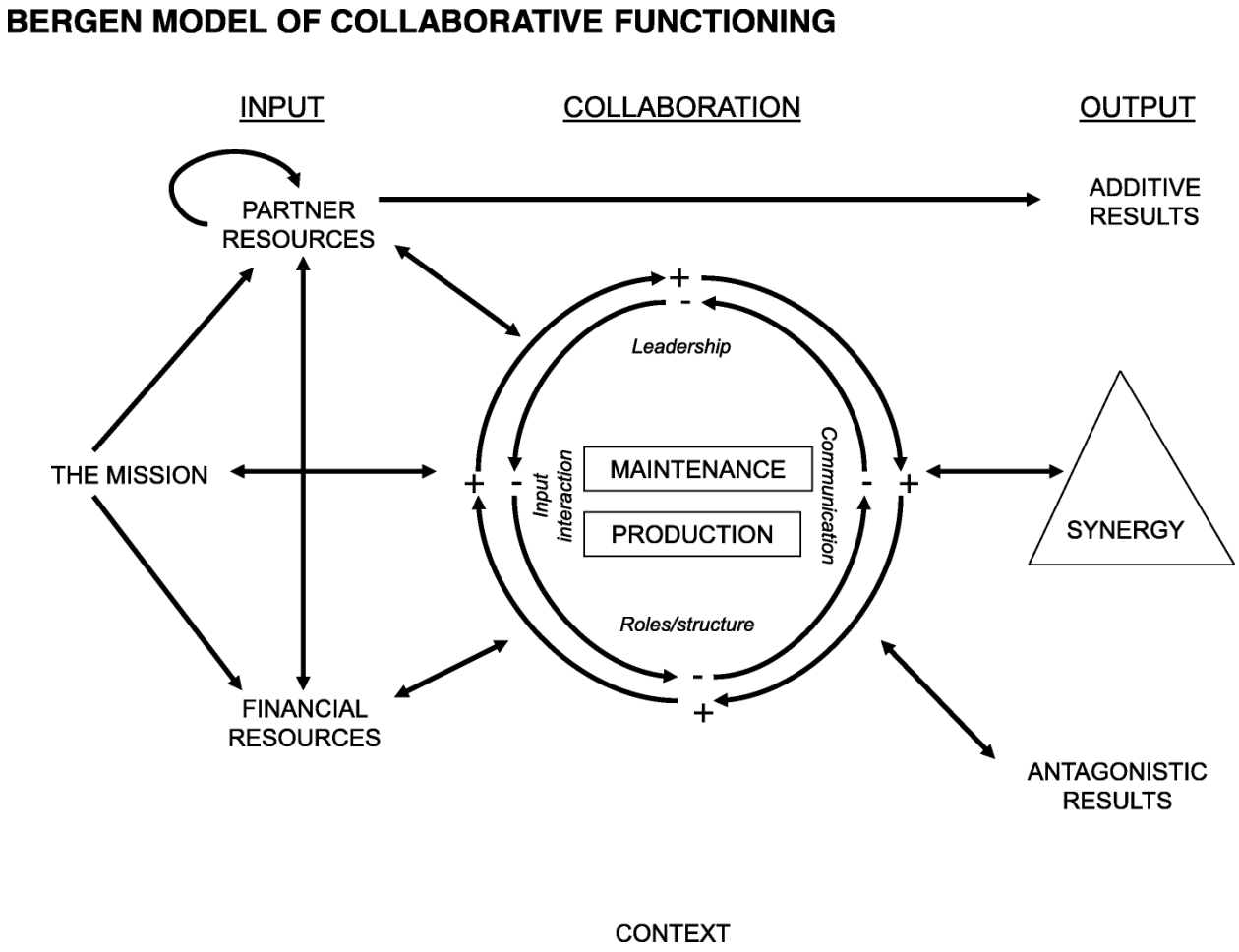

Figure 1: Bergen Model of Collaborative Functioning

Incorporating USAID's Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting Approach

Figure 2: Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting Framework

In 2012, USAID introduced CLA in order to help the Agency and its partners address development challenges through increased coordination and efficiency. The CLA framework is a set of practices established to assist organizations working in development to become more effective learning organizations, thus becoming more effective in the field. The framework guides organizations in being intentional and deliberate in how they plan, collaborate, learn, and apply what they have learned.[4] The STAR project is committed to applying the CLA model to its work, including the PAT.

In USAID's words, CLA:

- "Reduces duplication through coordinating efforts and sharing knowledge with other development actors
- Improves the effectiveness of USAID's development programs by grounding them in evidence and proven or promising practices
- Enables adaptive course corrections during implementation to shorten the path to achieving goals and improve overall effectiveness
- Facilitates country-led development and local investment in development initiatives."[5]

By incorporating CLA elements into this resource, PAT users directly engage in the "Pause & Reflect," "M&E for Learning," and "External Collaboration" components. By using the tool, pausing and reflecting regularly helps partnerships identify what is working well and what may need to be adapted. The Action Plan template provides a space to document how learning from the assessment will be used to improve collaboration, therefore building in monitoring and

[4] USAID Office of Learning, Evaluation and Research (LER). (2017). Collaborating, Learning, And Adapting (CLA) An Analysis of What CLA Looks Like in Development Programming. Retrieved July 9, 2019, from https://www.globalcommunities.org/publications/2017-USAID-CLA.pdf
[5] United States Agency for International Development. (n.d.). Fact Sheet: Collaborating, Learning and Adapting at USAID. Retrieved July 08, 2019, from https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/110117_usaid_fact_sheets_final.pdf

evaluation mechanisms. Lastly, the tool, which includes a section for reflecting on the partnership's outcomes and whether they are synergistic, also encourages both parties of the partnership to think critically and collaborate only when it is in their strategic interests. Separately, the tool allows the AP team to familiarize the academic community with concepts and approaches important to USAID, such as CLA, which can also benefit institutions directly.

STAR Committee's Feedback

The STAR project leveraged CUGH's network of global health academic institutions in order to use their technical expertise to develop this tool. At the beginning of project year one, CUGH formed a STAR Committee–comprised primarily of academics who also serve on CUGH's committees and subcommittees–to contribute to several activities, including the development of the PAT. The STAR Committee members represent a variety of institutions from around the world and have varying technical, research, and regional experience, including many who are currently directly engaged in the types of partnerships that STAR seeks to better understand.

AP staff drafted an initial version of the PAT based on research and findings of the review, and CUGH assembled a working group, pulling from members of the STAR Committee, to further refine the toolkit. Over a period of one month, the working group revised the content, scoring, and ease of use of the tool. Following revisions, an updated version was presented to the entire STAR Committee for their feedback and to begin piloting with existing partners between April and May 2019. Based on this input, substantial changes were made to the toolkit, including the rewording of statements; the division of the questionnaire into three parts, corresponding to the BMCF model; and the addition of the Action Plan template.

STAR Project's Use of the PAT

STAR created the PAT with a broader scope in mind, including utility outside of the project, but it will initially be utilized formally in STAR's Collaboration Laboratory experiments as a monitoring and evaluation mechanism. The Collaboration Laboratory is STAR's grant-supported, strategic approach to facilitating knowledge-sharing experiments as up to four laboratory pairings, either U.S.-LMIC or LMIC-LMIC academic institutions, partner together over a 12-month period to achieve a specific goal. The AP team will document the successes, challenges, and lessons learned from the partnerships.

Using the PAT at the baseline, mid-line, and end-line of each experiment, the AP team will capture partnership assessment data (quantitative) and its related discussion data (qualitative). This data will help the partners themselves to assess the partnership at various developmental stages, but it will also guide AP facilitation efforts as the team will have a better understanding of the health of the experimenters' partnerships and pinpoint areas in need of extra support.

Depending on the feedback received during the experiments, the AP team envisions that there is likely to be an opportunity to refine and adjust the PAT in future project years. In addition, STAR intends to share this resource widely, especially within the global health community, as part of the AP team's strategy to support mutually beneficial partnerships. Please contact STAR's AP team at academicpartnerships@ghstar.org if you have any feedback on this toolkit.

Applicability to Different Types of Partnership Arrangements

The AP team's primary focus is on academic partnerships, but the PAT may be used by other organizations involved in partnership work. The BMCF–the underlying framework used for the PAT–applies to multiple types of collaborations. Although the literature used to inform this tool

was narrow in its scope, many of the key ingredients for successful partnerships identified in that review, such as the importance of mutual trust, a shared vision, and sufficient resources, apply to other types of partnerships as well.

The MOU template that is available for download in the toolkit is also designed to be easily adaptable to non-academic institutions. Lastly, the Action Plan template, which is inspired by the Quality Improvement (QI) process, is also available for download as a Word template so that it can be modified, as needed. QI is a systematic approach to analyzing performance and implementing performance improvement efforts. Though many QI models exist, at its core, the QI framework consists of: (1) identifying the area for improvement; (2) understanding the problem; (3) developing and implementing a solution to the problem; and (4) measuring and monitoring the area for improvement.[6]

Consistent with USAID's CLA approach, users are encouraged to adapt this toolkit and its materials to fit their needs and context.

Conclusion

STAR is harnessing the power of academic institutions to make the latest knowledge about global health more understandable and accessible, so geography, resources, and organizational capacity do not impede efforts to build great programs. STAR recognizes the multiple benefits of academic partnerships, including as a mechanism for strengthening capacity, which are important linkages to enhancing global health research and education for the betterment of the development community at large. STAR also recognizes the many challenges of creating and maintaining such collaborations. By using this toolkit, the aim is for users to feel empowered to bring to light issues within their partnerships and resolve them in a respectful and mutually beneficial manner.

[6] Quality Assurance Project. (2002, January). Quality Improvement in Healthcare - Core Course [Participant Manual]. USAID Assist Project.

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