



PARTNERSHIP TOOLKIT

Helping Environmental Not for Profit
Organizations Partner with Organizations
Serving Diverse Youth





WELCOME FROM NATURE CANADA AND THE SUSTAINABILITY NETWORK

W elcome to our Partnerships Toolkit, a collaboration between Nature Canada and the Sustainability Network.

This toolkit is designed to help environmental not for profit organizations (ENGOS) partner with organizations who serve diverse youth, to deliver collaborative outdoor programs.

Our journey began with the 2021 Nature Canada report, [Race and Nature in the City: Engaging Youth of Colour in Nature-Based Activities](#), which outlined over 20 recommendations across 5 areas for ENGOS to make their outdoor programs more accessible and relevant to youth of colour.

The ENGO community found the report very valuable – but they weren't quite sure how to implement the recommendations, or where to start.

In 2021, Nature Canada and the Sustainability Network collaborated to find out where ENGOS needed the most help to implement the report recommendations, and what type of program could best support them. Via an online survey and focus groups, we identified the main ENGO barriers and had fulsome discussions about what program elements (such as toolkits, webinars, peer mentorship networks) would provide the greatest support.

Our research revealed that forming partnerships with non-ENGOS who already serve diverse youth was a keystone recommendation that would enable them to implement all other report recommendations. However, ENGOS had concerns about how to form these partnerships. What groups should be approached? What kind of partnership is best? How can ENGOS ensure that partnerships are mutually respectful?

Featuring a slow partnerships approach, this toolkit supports environmental organizations to pause before jumping into partnerships. You will find resources that facilitate a relationship-centred partnership approach, grounded in empathy, respect and a willingness to both learn and teach.



HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit is designed for environmental not for profit organizations in Canada, who want to partner with organizations that serve diverse youth to collaborate on outdoor programs.

If your organization has never formed such partnerships before, we encourage you to use this entire toolkit in the order that it is presented. You will find tools and resources to support you from the beginning stages of considering why you want to form such a partnership, to how to form and maintain such a partnership, hold your first partnered project, and evaluate the partnership to see how you may best move forward.

If your organization already has such partnerships in place, you may wish to focus on the toolkit modules that are specific to your needs. However, we do encourage you to review the toolkit from start to finish. Worksheets build upon each other, and the process may help you evaluate your current partnership-related processes and outcomes.

This toolkit includes practical supports such as discussion worksheets, best practices resources, self-assessment tools and templates to help you move from concept to action.

A word on Discussion Worksheets: it's hard to find the time to step back, and have those larger organizational discussions. For each discussion worksheet we suggest that you:

- Download the document.
- Gather all relevant staff for a 20-30-minute meeting.
- Assign one person to facilitate the meeting, and another to take notes.
- Share the meeting notes with all attendees in a timely fashion, and other staff if appropriate.

To complement these practical tools, we are pleased to include Partnership Success Stories from your ENGO peers across Canada, and short videos outlining their lessons learned. These will give you a sense of their entire partnership journey. We suggest that you either convene staff to watch these videos together, or send them out in advance so staff can watch on their own schedule. Discuss as a group, then capture the discussion in the video worksheets.

No matter where your organization is on your journey to better engage diverse youth in your outdoor programs, there is something in this toolkit for you!



CONTRIBUTORS

We are grateful for the support and knowledge-sharing of the following contributors.

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- Adam Heffey - Board Chair of the CTS Youth Society
- Anika Riopel - (Sustainable Transportation Coordinator) and Simone Mutabazi (Community Cycling Activation Coordinator) of the Ecology Action Centre



GETTING GROUNDED: COLONIAL CONSERVATION IN CANADA

Historically, Canada's environmental conservation movement has been largely made up of white settlers working from colonial mindsets that effectively exclude Indigenous and racialized voices. A more inclusive conservation movement is on the horizon, with efforts across the country to support Indigenous-led Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs), respect and integrate Indigenous traditional knowledges and knowings, the land back movement, redress environmental racism and injustice, and better engage diverse communities in conservation. However, current decolonization efforts must be supported by learning about the past. We encourage you to explore the history of your own organization, to learn how colonial mindsets may be deeply embedded in your organization's ethos, and directly or indirectly impact your work.

Part of decolonization is taking the time to seek out, listen to and empathize with BIPOC and youth perspectives. Here are a few resources to get you started, sharing perspectives and issues from BIPOC-led and youth-led environmental organizations. This is by no means an exhaustive list.

- [Conservation for Reconciliation Partnership](#)
- [IPCA Knowledge Basket](#)
- [ISAAK OLAM Foundation](#)
- [Reconciling Ways of Knowing](#)
- [Canadian Coalition for Environmental and Climate Justice](#)
- [Black Environmentalists Alliance](#)



GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Here we provide definitions of a few terms used in the toolkit. Language changes frequently, and many terms exist to refer to the same group of people. We encourage you to use the terms that you feel are most appropriate for your organization and the communities that you serve.

BIPOC = Black, Indigenous and People of Colour. Where the term POC used to be the standard, adding BI at the start of the acronym acknowledges that Black and Indigenous people are more impacted by systemic racism than other groups. Some choose to use IBPOC to further prioritize Indigenous communities.

Racialized: This term refers broadly to non-white individuals. The Canadian Race Relations Foundation defines racialization as “the process through which groups come to be socially constructed as races, based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, language, economics, religion, culture, politics, etc.” Some people use this term interchangeably with BIPOC, but many Indigenous individuals do not identify with this term.

Indigenous: This umbrella term refers broadly to the original peoples of what we now call Canada, and specifically includes First Nations, Inuit and Métis people. These are extremely diverse groups, and every effort should be made to specific groups, such as Cree, Anishnabek, etc.

2SLGBTQIA+: 2 Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, Asexual. Where the term LGBT used to be the standard, this more inclusive term refers broadly to non-heterosexual individuals. There are various terms that include or omit some of these letters, or have them in a different order.

Here are a few resources to get you started. This is by no means an exhaustive list.

- [Canadian Race Relations Foundation Glossary of Terms](#)
- [Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity Queer Vocabulary](#)
- [Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion Glossary of Terms](#)
- [Indigenous Peoples and Cultures \(Government of Canada\)](#)

PARTNERSHIP SUCCESS STORIES

Ready to dive into the toolkit? We encourage you to start by reading these Partnership Success Stories. Contributed by your peers from environmental organizations across Canada, these stories provide key details of partnership success, and outline best practices.

We suggest asking relevant staff to read these stories in advance, then gather in-person or virtually to engage in group discussion. Which stories most resonated with staff, and why? What did they learn from these stories, and how might that knowledge be applied to your specific organizational context? Did anyone have an aha moment that changed their perspective?

Access the following Partnership Success Stories [here](#):

- CPAWS Southern Alberta & Foothills Community Immigration Services
- Ecology Action Centre & Immigration Services Association of Nova Scotia
- Pacific Parklands Foundation, CTS Youth Society & Metro Vancouver Parks

Throughout this toolkit you will also find videos from each organization, discussing best practices related to a specific partnership issue.



MODULE 1: EXPLORE AND DEFINE YOUR PARTNERSHIP ‘WHY’

Access Module 1 Resources [Here](#)

“We heard about a fantastic grant! But it’s due next week, and we need to partner with an organization that does X. Who should we contact?”. Sound familiar? For many environmental organizations, the driver behind forming partnerships is a grant opportunity. But cold-calling an organization that you’ve never dealt with, to form a partnership and collaborate on a successful grant application that serves both organizations – that simply can’t be done quickly.

Nor should it be. Rushing into a partnership solely to get those funding dollars is short-sighted, and can have negative consequences for both organizations.

In this module, we encourage you to gather with your colleagues and take a step back. The next two discussion worksheets will help you explore your organization’s history of forming partnerships with groups that serve diverse youth, discuss why you want to form such partnerships now, and identify how your current partnership goals relate to organizational goals and objectives.

Step 1: Organizational Partnership History (Discussion Worksheet)

- [Download this worksheet here.](#)
- Invite staff that have a long history with the organization. Even if those staff don’t currently work in a relevant program area, they may have valuable institutional memory.
- Invite all levels of staff to get the full historical picture. Senior leadership may have a different understanding of how past partnerships have gone, when compared to on the ground program staff.

Step 2: Finding Your Current Partnership Why (Discussion Worksheet)

- [Download this worksheet here.](#)
- Set this meeting at least one week after your organizational partnership history meeting, to give the concepts discussed time to sink in.
- Invite staff from all departments – even ones you may not think are relevant. You never know which staff may be considering better engaging youth of colour in their own departments.

Now you understand where your organization has been, where you are now, and how the goals of forming partnerships with groups that serve youth of colour relate to your organizational goals and strategies.

Before you move on to Module 2, make sure to:

- Create a folder to keep all documents related to these partnership discussions in one place.
- Clearly label each document – you will refer to them throughout this toolkit.
- Share both completed worksheets with relevant staff.
- Invite staff to reflect upon those discussions individually.
- Empower staff to initiate meetings as needed, to share project, program or partnership ideas that arise as a result of these discussions and reflections.



MODULE 2: IDENTIFY WHAT VALUE YOU BRING TO PARTNERSHIPS

Access Module 2 Resources [Here](#)

In the rush to find the best partner organizations, it's easy to forget that partnership assessment goes both ways. As your organization is figuring out what potential partners can bring to the table, you must ask yourself the same question. Because when you approach a potential partner, they will certainly be assessing this for themselves.

Trying to form a partnership without a solid idea of what your organization can offer, is a one-sided approach. And if you come to the table empty-handed, what message does that send to potential partners?

In this module, we encourage you to take a deep dive into what your organization can bring to partnerships with non-environmental organizations that serve diverse youth. The next video and checklist will help you assess exactly what your organization has to offer potential partners.

Step 3: Why Partner and What is Your Partnership Value-Add? (Video & Worksheet)

- [Access the video and download the worksheet here.](#)
- Gather staff to watch this video together.
- After viewing, do a go-around to ask staff what they learned from the video and capture the information in the worksheet.

Step 4: Identify What Value You Can Bring to Partnerships (Checklist)

- [Download this checklist here.](#)
- Distribute your completed Finding Your Partnership Why Worksheet from Module 1 to staff that will attend the meeting, to get the ideas flowing in advance.
- Invite staff that have a long history with the organization. Even if those staff don't currently work in a relevant program area, they may have valuable institutional memory.

Now you understand what capabilities, resources and relationships your organization can bring to the partnership table.

Before you move on to Module 3, make sure to:

- Share the completed checklist with relevant staff.
- Invite staff to reflect upon the discussions individually.
- Empower staff to add to the checklist, as new ideas and capabilities arise.



MODULE 3: ASSESS ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERSHIP READINESS

Access Module 3 Resources [Here](#)

Organizations can be so keen to jump into partnerships, that they don't stop to ask a key question: is it the right time? Even the most ideal partnership match can quickly go wrong if the timing isn't right. In other words – doing the right thing at the wrong time, becomes the wrong thing.

To develop authentic, respectful partnerships takes time. And before you dive in, you need to make sure that your organization is truly ready to take the next step. Otherwise, you may find your hard-won relationships and project plans under-resourced or under-funded, which will not set up your partnership (or your organization) for success.

The following discussion worksheet, video and self-assessment tool will help you explore what kind of partnerships you could potentially engage in, the value of 'slow partnerships', and whether now is the right time to get started.

Step 5: What Kind of Partnerships are Possible (Discussion Worksheet)

- [Download this worksheet here.](#)
- Distribute your completed Organizational Partnership History Worksheet from Module 1 to staff that will attend the meeting, to get the ideas flowing in advance.
- Invite staff that have a long history with the organization. Even if those staff don't currently work in a relevant program area, they may have valuable information about past partnerships.

Step 6: The Value of Slow Partnerships (Video & Worksheet)

- [Access the video and download the worksheet here.](#)
- Gather staff to watch this video together.
- After viewing, do a go-around to ask staff what they learned from the video and capture the information in the worksheet.

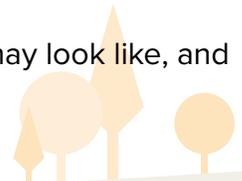
Step 7: Is This the Right Time to Partner? (Organizational Self-Assessment Tool)

- [Access this self-assessment tool here.](#)
- Gather staff from different levels of the organization, and ensure that staff who participated in completing the What Kinds of Partnerships are Possible? Worksheet are present.

Now you understand what types of partnerships are possible and desirable for your organization, why the 'slow partnerships' approach is valuable, and have a better sense of whether now is the right time to move forward.

Before you move on to Module 4, make sure to:

- Share the completed worksheets and self-assessment result with relevant staff.
- Invite staff to reflect upon the discussions individually.
- Empower staff to continue discussion of what a 'slow partnership' approach may look like, and when (if it's not now) may be the best time to proceed.



MODULE 4: FIND THE BEST POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Access Module 4 Resources [Here](#)

If you're looking for lists of potential partner organizations broken down by province, you won't find it in this toolkit. That's because finding the right partner isn't just about doing a quick Google search and sending a template email.

As you've seen in Modules 1-3, it first involves a frank assessment of your own organization's resources and priorities. With that knowledge in hand, it's now time to explore what existing opportunities may exist, and what your partnership future may hold.

The following video, best practices resource, worksheet and spreadsheet template will help you assess and leverage existing partnerships and find the most compatible new partner organizations.

Step 8: Finding the Best Partners (Video & Worksheet)

- [Access the video and download the worksheet here.](#)
- Gather staff to watch this video together.
- After viewing, do a go-around to ask staff what they learned from the video and capture the information in the worksheet.

Step 9: How to Find Potential Partner Organizations (Best Practices Resource) & Partnership Tracksheet (Spreadsheet Template)

- [Download the best practices resource and spreadsheet template here.](#)
- Researching potential partners should not be rushed. The time you spend now to properly assess potential partner organizations will be well worth it later on.
- We suggest dividing up partner research amongst a few staff if possible. If not, ensure the person has proper time to complete the process.

Now you understand how to get creative and leverage existing organizational and individual relationships, and find new potential partners whose goals have some alignment with yours. Best of all – now you have a running list of potential organizations to draw upon. We encourage you to take your time with this step, and develop a list of well-researched partners.

Before you move onto Module 5, make sure to:

- Distribute the Partnership Track Sheet spreadsheet one more time to staff, Board and volunteers, to ensure that all ideas are captured. Keep this as a running list that can be added to or revised, as new partnership opportunities come up, and potential partnerships move to confirmed ones.
- Consult senior leadership about your list, and which organizations you may approach. There may be past organizational history or optics issues that other staff are not aware of. Or, perhaps they have connections with some of these organizations.
- Reach out to trust partners from networks or collaboratives (if you have them) to see if they have potential partner contacts they can introduce you to.



MODULE 5: CO-CREATE AND CO-MANAGE YOUR PARTNERSHIP

Access Module 5 Resources [Here](#)

What happens after you get a few potential partner organizations down on your Partnership Track Sheet to approach? That depends on your organization. You may need to discuss with other departments, or get approval from senior leadership before approaching these organizations.

Use your Partnership Track Sheet to share why you think these organizations are appropriate to build new partnerships with, by sharing the alignment of mission, vision and goals, and any relevant programs they may already have underway.

Once you get all the necessary approvals, you're ready to start discussions with potential partner organizations. The following templates and best practice resources will help you co-create and co-manage your new partnership, while clearly communicating resources, timelines, tasks and project deliverables.

Step 10: Collaboration Menu (Template)

- [Access this template here.](#)
- Pull up your completed Identify What Value You Bring to Partnerships Worksheet (Module 2) and What Kinds of Partnerships are Possible Worksheet (Module 3).
- If the organization is one that you are already partnered with (but you are not the lead staff member who handles that partnership), make sure to loop that staff member in, to help you prepare this template. Their existing relationship knowledge will be invaluable.
- You can use this completed template to prepare for your first meeting with a potential partner.

After having your first meeting, both you and your potential partner organization may run the results by your colleagues. There may be a period of back-and-forth communications and meetings as potential projects are proposed and approved, and resources assessed by both organizations. Don't rush this step, and be mindful of resource limitations of the other organization. If you don't hear back from them in a timely fashion, follow-up gently and respectfully. Patience and empathy are your best allies in this work.

While you are finalizing the partnership project details, check out these two videos from the Ecology Action Centre.

Step 11: How to Engage with Resource-Limited Organizations Video & How to Engage with Heavily

- [Researched Communities Video \(Videos & Worksheets\)](#)
- Access the videos and download the worksheets here.
- Gather staff to watch these videos together.
- After viewing, do a go-around to ask staff what they learned from the videos and capture the information in these worksheets.



Once your partnership project details are finalized, the project won't run itself. Be proactive, and set up a basic work plan at the start of the project so that everyone knows who is doing what, and has a clear understanding of what is expected of them, and their organization.

Step 12: Partnership Work Plan (Best Practices Resource)

- [Access the best practices resource here](#)
- Checklist: setting your partnership communication plan: who are the main contacts at each organization? How will you meet and how often? Schedules for shared meeting facilitation and note-taking, how will you share information (Google Drive? Slack? One Drive?).

While a partnership work plan will help both organizations share updates and track progress, there may be a legal requirement (from either organization) for a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This is incredibly important if there is shared funding, or an expectation of resources contributed from both sides. Such documents act as a contract between two organizations, including details such as the anticipated project start and end date, responsibilities of each organization and any shared expense costs or income split arrangements. Make sure to check with senior leadership to see if your organization already has a template MOU that you can use, or consult your partner organization.

Before you move onto Module 6, make sure to:

- Co-create a draft work plan, and ensure that both organizations are comfortable with the tasks, deadlines, budgets, deliverables, reporting, and overall project plan.
- Find out if an MOU is legally required by either organization before proceeding.

MODULE 6: EVALUATE YOUR PARTNERSHIP

Access Module 6 Resources [Here](#)

Congratulations on completing your partnered project! But when the first project is done – what happens next? Now is the time to evaluate both the project itself, and how the two organizations worked together overall.

When it comes to evaluating the project, your partner is the best organization to check-in with the youth who participated. We have not provided a template for what questions they should ask the youth they serve, because those should come from the partner organization. They likely have their own evaluation survey content.

However, you can suggest that they add a couple of questions that will help you determine how well your organization engaged the youth. Discuss this internally within your own organization first, then check-in with your partner to see if adding these questions to their project evaluation is possible. If not, don't push it. They know their audience, and how best to engage them.



The following template will help you evaluate the partnership internally, to help decide whether you should pursue further partnerships with this organization.

Step 13: Partnership Evaluation (Self-Assessment Tool)

- [Download the tool here.](#)
- Ask all staff who were part of the partnered project to participate.
- Now you understand how to evaluate new partnerships, and what factors to take into account.

Before you move onto Module 7, make sure to:

- Share this completed tool with relevant colleagues and senior leadership.
- Engage them in discussions to share your partnership experience, and collectively determine whether you will pursue further partnerships with the organization.

MODULE 7: DEEPEN PARTNERSHIP ENGAGEMENT

Access Module 7 Resources [Here](#)

Now you have two important decisions to make. First, should you partner with this organization again? The Partnership Evaluation in Module 6 should help you figure that out.

If this is the first time your two organizations have partnered, don't dismiss future partnerships too quickly. Sometimes, a frank, respectful discussion between the two organizations is enough to sort out what may have gone wrong, and what steps can be taken in the future to avoid those difficulties. If your partner organization simply didn't have the resources, funds or capacity to carry out their part of the project as planned, perhaps your organization could offer additional resources in the future. If the timelines were too tight, perhaps project planning could start earlier the next time.

The key is to respectfully listen to your partner's feedback. It's certainly possible that the partner won't want to work with you again - and that's OK. This conversation should be about learning, not blaming or shaming.

Second – if you do decide to partner again, what should that partnership look like? The answer is for both organizations to decide together. If your partner organizations sent out project evaluations to the youth who participated, ask if they are willing to share those with you. When the evaluations are in, that's the perfect time to set up an evaluation meeting.

What should you discuss? Here's how to prep:

- Bring your completed Partnership Evaluation from the previous module to the meeting, and share your organization's thoughts about what went well, what challenges arose and why, and what could be done in the future to avoid those difficulties. Be mindful of being respectful when sharing your thoughts on what the partner organization could have done to avoid certain challenges.



- Before sharing your ideas for future partnerships, ask for their ideas first. Their project evaluations and anecdotal feedback from youth may contain new project ideas you could partner on, or their staff may have new ideas.
- If they have no immediate suggestions, pull up your previously completed Collaboration Menu template, and see if that sparks any ideas.
- Listen carefully to any resource, funding or staffing limitations they may have. Ensure that if they are ready to move forward with another partnership, that it is the right time for them to do so. Depending on the type of partnership proposed, you may wish to reassess your own organizational partnership readiness for this new project as well.

Before setting up that meeting, check out these two videos from CPAWS Southern Alberta and the CTS Youth Society.

Step 14: Deepening One-Off Partnerships & How Youth of Colour Benefit from Partnered Programs (Videos & Worksheets)

- [Access the videos and download the worksheets here.](#)
- Gather staff to watch these videos together.
- After viewing, do a go-around to ask staff what they learned from the videos and capture the information in the worksheet.



BUILD A YOUTH COUNCIL TO FACILITATE PARTNERSHIPS

What is Youth Council content doing in a partnership toolkit? Many environmental organizations have formed Youth Councils to better engage youth in their programs, and support them as climate action leaders. Along the way, they have discovered that a strong Youth Council is an engaged Youth Council. Set up with the right intention, framework and resources, Youth Councils can empower youth to go out and form their own partnerships, thus also benefiting the environmental organization under which the Youth Council sits.

Although it is not within the scope of this toolkit to provide worksheets and resources to plan, build and maintain a Youth Council, we did sit down with the Toronto Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) to get their best Youth Council practices, and learn how its formation led to further partnerships, initiated by the youth themselves.

Access the Youth Council Success Story and the following three videos with TRCA staff and Youth Council members [here](#):

Video 1: Getting Organizational Buy In for the Youth Council

Video 2: The Benefits of Extending the Executive Term from One Year

Video 3: Current Council Status and Partnership Development

We want to take this opportunity to bring it back to the youth. Youth of colour have traditionally been excluded from the environmental movement in Canada. But, thanks to organizations like the ones featured in this toolkit, Canada's environmental movement is becoming more equitable, inclusive and diverse.

We hope that this toolkit has provided your organization with the knowledge, skills, tools and resources to engage with other organizations, and form authentic partnerships with groups that serve diverse youth.

