Good practices in consortia development (04/2024)

This document builds on the experiences (within and outside CBM) from the Business Development and the Institutional Donor team on consortia development and setup. This document focuses on:

1. How is consortium lead identified and consortium formed?

- Standing: familiarity and track record of compliance and results with the donor, visibility within related coordination & decision-making forum, ability to verbalize/broadcast unique selling points (USPs)
- Eligibility, including donor's faith in/familiarity with financial systems where most of funds are transferred downstream
- Ability to provide technical guidance to partners and/or ability to implement
- USP, complementary value and unique project idea - What unique ideas come to the table when organizations come together? With different focus areas and strength, it's important to identify the complementary and the innovation or uniqueness in it.
- Alignments to strategic focus of the organization and belief in the same course.
- Donor preference based previous experience, thematic expertise and alignment.

2. How is consortium partnership formalized?

- Mapping competitors and potential partners, and identification of partner(s)
- Communications and conversations with multiple partners for a potential upcoming project
- Signing of Non-disclosure Agreement (NDA) (CBM has a template for NDA)
- Initial meetings to brainstorm areas of focus for each partner where partners discuss areas of interest supported by areas of expertise. It is important to identify the role of each organization in the consortium covering management role (Lead or sub), technical role (scope of work) and budget (tentative distribution of resources to deliver the activities)
- Due Diligence conducted to ascertain legal alignment and risk management.
- Depending on the stage of the call and scope of work a pre teaming or a teaming agreement is signed (CBM has the templates for the teaming agreement) – the agreement typically first comes from the Consortia Lead.
- For longer and strategic collaboration beyond one single project, Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) could be signed between two organizations.

3. What makes a consortium successful?
• The tone of the relationship is set by the proposal coordinator, normally provided by the consortia lead as they often have the most to gain, who will facilitate direction between the lead and all subs, negotiating thematic, geographic and budget constraints. • A kick-off workshop at the start of design ensuring all members of proposal team understand and are well suited to their roles and agree that the Proposal Development Plan is realistic • Regular follow-up meeting. • After Action Review (AAR) that include partners can also help to resolve tensions, improve feeling of collaboration/respect and prepare for receiving donor decision on proposal whether accepted or rejected • Clear, specific and transparent communications with and among all partners. Equitable role distributions among partners – both for project development and delivery. • Mutual agreement signed followed through. • Open conversations from the design workshop including roles and resource allocation for the lead and Sub, including staffing. • Continuous capacity building for partners, for example if CBM is strong on disability inclusion or safeguarding then resources have to be allocated for the same, and this applies even for local partners sub-granted in the process. • Mutual appraisal among partners • Joint reviews and reflections • Continuous check-in meetings, coordination in proposal development including assigning roles (the lead should not be burdened for all the development work, some components should be assigned to the sub partners based on their strength) • A kick-off workshop at the start of implementation that involves partner staff involved in the design but with focus on onboarding partner staff responsible for implementation will bridge divided helping newcomers understand/accept decisions/agreements between orgs. Likewise, periodic check-ins during implementation.
4. Challenges
• Allocation of scope of work is unclear across partners • Uneven work package distribution • Absence of budget envelope negotiation stage: Challenges in defining role, budget, and Co-funding & Indirect cost shares. • Poor coordination from the prime, and no adherence to proposal timelines (i.e. procrastination since roles and duties are not clearly defined) • Absence of clear guidelines for relationship is a precursor for mistrust because partners have no established rules of engagement • Securing acceptance from senior management may not be easy or even possible. • Little in-country experience of consortia • CBMs limited involvement in different platforms that link partners providing opportunities to work together such as cluster working groups (national or regional platforms). As a result, partners have no or little information about CBM. • Tight timeframe to complete several elements of consortia setup and proposal development when some of them are inter-dependent.

5. Key considerations & requirements
• Start early on to build the consortium. Getting the right people on board is a lengthy and challenging process. You should start 2-3 months before submission. Remember that there is often a lot of competition from rival consortia who might hijack your perfect partners. Also, you want to have the consortium finalized well before the submission deadline. • Early identification of opportunities, which is possible with active engagement of donors. It gives time to carefully plan and engage with partners. • **Identification of partners with complementary advantage**: early identification and assessment (due diligence) of partners that complement what CBM is doing, gives further reach (geographical) and impact to CBM. • **Due diligence:** It is important to undertake the necessary checks on prospective consortium members to ensure complementarity and avoid reputational conflicts going forward. • **Excellence:** A strong consortium brings together the brightest minds in the various key disciplines. Therefore, identify the true key opinion leaders within your area of interest. • **Complementarity:** Each partner should have a unique role and bring in a special, required expertise and/or technology. Make sure you have a clear idea of what kind of roles and expertise's you need to deliver the work and avoid redundancy. • **Interdisciplinarity:** To tackle outstanding challenges, you need a collaboration that brings together diverse viewpoints and knowledge. To do so, you need to go beyond a single discipline. Setting up a consortium that combines partners from various disciplines is thus essential. • **Balance**: Think about aspects like geographical spread of the partners and balance between profit and non-profit partners. Pay attention also to the gender balance of the key personnel involved. • **Visibility**: CBM must get involved/access different platforms that will enable CBM to be recognized by what the organization has been doing. Sometimes active involvement in clusters are pre-requests from donors. • **Formalising partnership asap**: formalise partnership through MOU/NDA/Teaming agreement signatures.
6. Learnings
• **Start as early as possible**. If you are starting from the scratch, it is important to begin at least five months before the proposal submission deadline. If the topic of proposal is familiar and have previously worked with partners who are keen on joining, then building the consortium might take significantly less time. • The first step in building a consortium is to **identify potential partners**. Start by looking at organizations whom you have worked with previously and have good experiences with. • It is important to have **the right partners with the appropriate expertise**. One of the most common mistakes people make when building a consortium is attempting to cover too much geographically while lacking partners with key expertise that is necessary for achieving the expected outcomes of your proposal. It's better to have a more limited geographic scope with partners who can deliver. Another mistake is having either too few or too many partners. • Once you have identified potential partners and the appropriate expertise, it's time to **recruit and consolidate your consortium.** Develop a Concept Note that you are happy to share with potential partners that covers the primary goals of the call, the expected outcomes and how you want to achieve these. Write an introductory email to your potential partners and remember first impressions matter so do your best to pitch your cause well. Introduce yourself, your organization, the call, your concept for the call, why you had them particularly in mind, and most importantly why they should be choosing you.

- After you have established the core team, start building the rest of the consortium, bringing in any required expertise that is missing. At this stage you can have the liberty to look for or consider other potential members for future partnerships.
- **Remain focused on the scope of the call topic**. Treat the call text as your holy text and always refer to it when a partner proposes any change in the proposal. It's essential to keep partners engaged at this stage. If you are the coordinator, don't be afraid to take charge and show leadership when decisions need to be made. Coordinating a consortium is somewhere between dictatorship and democracy that changes dynamically on a day-to-day basis.
- Building consortia is increasingly becoming a requirement for most donors to maximize impact and achieve value for money.
- **Be active member** of different platforms, such as cluster working groups through collaborating with others in conducting and sharing assessments, also show our unique attributes to partners/donors so CBM is positions as preferred partners by others
- **Transition from project focused to organization-capacity-development focused** this will reduce our partner’s dependency on CBM, allowing them to graduate/seek funds elsewhere too reducing burden on our unrestricted funds

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