

# Programme Partnership Policy

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# 1. Executive summary

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Sightsavers' policy on partnership outlines the principles and approaches that the organisation has agreed are fundamental to Sightsavers' programme partnerships.

The policy lays out the seven core principles that underpin the spirit and values of partnership and that should be used to guide all programme partnerships. The policy aims to provide a common understanding of Sightsavers' approach to partnership in order to promote consistency and coherence in our work with partners.

The policy also provides an overview of Sightsavers' approach to partner Due Diligence assessments and a summary of Sightsavers' partnership framework and minimum standards for partnership, to inform and guide our partnerships in practice.

Where this policy makes reference to partnership principles, partnership approach and partnership framework, it refers to Sightsavers' **programme partnerships**.

## Document history

April 2007	Policy originally approved by trustees. It built on and incorporated parts of Sightsavers' earlier Partnership Development Framework (1999), which it replaced.
Dec 2015	<p>Policy reviewed and updated, incorporating revised partnership principles and the newly drafted partnership framework and accompanying due diligence tool.</p> <p><b>Summary of changes made to policy:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inserted Executive Summary.</li><li>• Reviewed and updated partnership principles with core team that included country directors from four countries:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Removed two principles: "interdependence" and "consistency"</li><li>• Added two new principles - "integrity" and "equity"</li><li>• Refined the definitions of partnership principles to improve clarity and remove ambiguity.</li></ul></li><li>• Inserted reference to new partner due diligence tool (launched in June 2015).</li><li>• Replaced the five-stage 'partnerships in practice' section with an appended summary of the new partnership framework (developed in March 2015).</li><li>• Appended Sightsavers' minimum standards for partnership/</li></ul>

## Change control

- Development and review of the Partnership Policy is the responsibility of the Director of Finance and Performance.
- Approval and sign-off of the Partnership Policy is the responsibility of Council. Any substantial changes to the policy require approval and sign off.
- The Partnership Framework and its associated tools (see Appendix 2) are under regular review, and any changes made must be in line with the overall Partnership Policy.

## 2. Sightsavers' partnership policy: scope and purpose

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Sightsavers' policy on partnership outlines the principles and approaches that are fundamental to our programme partnerships. It aims to provide a common understanding of Sightsavers' approach and to promote consistency and coherence in our work.

The focus of this policy is Sightsavers' relationships with **programme partner** organisations. Our programme partners include government ministries and departments, national and international non-government organisations (NGOs), disabled and blind peoples' organisations (DPOs or BPOs), local community organisations and private sector companies. The policy applies to:

- project-level **and** strategic-level programme partnerships, which may or may not involve the provision of funding;
- one-to-one programme partnerships **and** more complex programme relationships such as alliances, coalitions and consortia of partner organisations.

The policy does not apply to relationships with corporate partners, donors, international networks or private contractors. However, its principles may still provide useful guidance for managing these types of relationship.

The policy is relevant to all Sightsavers staff whose work has a connection to our programmes or to our programme partners. It should provide staff with guidance, direction and a framework for negotiations when entering into a programme partnership. It should be shared openly with all programme partners from the outset of a relationship.

## 3. Partnership: definition and purpose

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**Sightsavers defines partnership as a mutually beneficial and interactive relationship between two or more organisations, which is undertaken for a specific programmatic purpose and which works towards a shared goal of positive and sustainable programme impact.**

Sightsavers considers partnerships to be of fundamental importance in the way we work towards achieving our mission. The ultimate purpose of working in partnership is to increase the positive effects for our intended beneficiaries. The benefits include:

- Partnership enables us to utilise the considerable experience, knowledge and contacts of local organisations already on the ground.
- Partnership allows us to deliver sustainable services via existing organisations and service providers (our partners) and to thereby strengthen the overall system, rather than setting up parallel services that would cease to be viable once our funding expired.

- Partnership allows us to combine our resources and expertise with our partners', meaning that we can work more effectively – and achieve more – than we would if working individually.
- Partnership facilitates capacity building and sustainability; by supporting partner organisations to develop their skills and capacities through our projects, we can enable them to become stronger, more independent entities, which are able to work independently after Sightsavers' funding ceases.

## 4. Partnership principles

Sightsavers aims to develop relationships based on trust and respect, and will be guided by the following principles in its programme partnerships:

### 4.1 Shared goals and compatible values

**Our partners' goals should align with ours and provide a clearly defined added value to achieving our mission to eliminate avoidable blindness and promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities. Our partners' vision, values and ways of working should be compatible with ours.**

A shared commitment towards achieving agreed goals is essential for working together. However, this does not mean that **all** organisational goals must be shared. Sightsavers seeks a level of compatibility but accepts that there may be some areas of difference in organisational goals or policies. As long as these do not represent a conflict of interest for the project or for the relationship, Sightsavers and partner organisations can agree to differ.

Core organisational values are less visible and easy to identify than programmatic goals but they are equally important because of the way they influence how organisations work. Sightsavers recognises that compatible values are key to developing strong working relationships that will hold together even when facing difficulties.

### 4.2 Mutual accountability

**Sightsavers and our partners should be accountable to each other and also to other stakeholders (including donors and beneficiaries) for the partnership's actions, its use of resources, and the delivery of the intended outputs, outcomes and impact of the programme.**

The mutual rights and obligations between Sightsavers, partner organisations and the programme beneficiaries must be established and formally agreed at the outset of a relationship. Although accountability processes traditionally focus on funding and financial controls, Sightsavers also acknowledges the need to value and to be accountable for the use of other resources such as information, contacts, skills, experience, local knowledge, materials and equipment.

Some projects will be subject to formal contracts (usually large, complex projects funded from institutional bodies such as DfID, Irish Aid, USAID). In these instances Sightsavers is responsible for ensuring that all donor contractual obligations are properly reflected in the project funding agreement (PFA) or an alternative legally binding contract with each programme partner.

Within the partnership:

- All parties are responsible for providing the agreed inputs, as outlined in the Project Funding Agreement (PFA) or other legally binding contract. Inputs could include financial contributions, technical support, provision of equipment or staff, or access to training.
- All parties are responsible for delivering the outputs and activities ascribed to them and as agreed between them in the project paperwork; specifically the project proposal, logframe and implementation plan.
- All parties are responsible for ensuring that expenditure falls within acceptable parameters of variance from the agreed project budget.
- All parties are responsible for assessing the potential risks to project delivery and must work together to monitor and manage them on an ongoing basis.
- All parties must ensure they are aware of the project's funding source(s) and the obligations and reporting requirements thereof.
- All parties must maintain appropriate accounting standards and record keeping, in accordance with legal and contractual obligations.

Externally there will also be other accountabilities that will need to be complied with:

- Sightsavers is accountable, primarily through its Board of Trustees, to its individual supporters and donors and to the UK Charity Commission and to our intended beneficiaries.
- Our partner organisations' accountabilities will be different and may include their members, government, and other funding agencies. Ultimately they too should be accountable to their intended beneficiaries and/or the communities they represent.

### 4.3 Ownership

**Ownership of the programme and its outcomes should be shared among all partners. Partners should take appropriate management responsibility for the programme and consider that it belongs to them.**

Programme ownership by partner organisations and/or the communities involved is an essential ingredient for motivation and for the sustainability of key activities in the long-term.

#### 4.4 Openness and understanding

**The partnership should foster an open and participatory dialogue, with an emphasis on consultation and sharing of information from the earliest stages of the partnership. Partners should be able to discuss their concerns openly and without fear that it may affect the flow of funding.**

Sightsavers believes that openness and honesty are essential in a working relationship in order to develop understanding and to build trust over time. If and when challenges occur, partners should adopt a positive approach to problem solving, focused on understanding what went wrong and how they can work together to get things back on track, rather than attributing blame.

Sightsavers believes that all members in a partnership need to:

- take the necessary time and effort to get to know and understand other partners;
- share information and opinions on matters of joint interest;
- be transparent on financial matters;
- have the right to speak out;
- respect each other's opinions;
- treat difficulties as shared problems and discuss them constructively;
- agree conflict resolution mechanisms at the outset;
- be willing to be flexible and adapt to each other.

#### 4.5 Joint learning and mutual support

**The partnership must be committed to learning from its actions, its successes and its mistakes. Sightsavers and partner organisations should provide the necessary time, space and environment to facilitate formal and informal learning, and to ensure that all parties act upon lessons learned.**

Sightsavers recognises that learning is a crucial element in any successful partnership and that all partner organisations need to work together to create a mutually beneficial learning environment, and take the time to reflect on their own practices, share their experiences openly, and act upon any learnings that emerge.

Sightsavers is committed to strengthening learning practices and to supporting a structured approach to learning that provides opportunities for reflection, joint learning reviews and that facilitates learning processes between our partner organisations.

Through learning together, and through changing our actions and behaviour as a result of lessons learned, we can improve relationships with and between partner organisations and improve the positive impact on the lives of our beneficiaries.

## 4.6 Respect

**All partners have a right to be at the table, and must have mutual respect for all other members of the partnership, irrespective of the size or power of any individual partner. The partnership should not be dominated by any one organisation and all partners should expect to be treated fairly.**

Sightsavers and partner organisations must respect each other's mandates, obligations, principles and independence. Partners should be aware of the power dynamic within the relationship (for example, with regards to control of resources), but must work to ensure this does not become a form of control. Partners need to have confidence that the partnership will not be dominated by any one organisation, and that everyone's voice will be heard.

A strong relationship requires that partners should be recognised for **all** of their contributions; not simply those that are measurable in terms of cash value or public profile.

## 4.7 Integrity

**Sightsavers and partners should conduct all business and professional matters of the partnership and programme with honesty, truthfulness and sincerity, while remaining fair and ethical in the most difficult situations.**

Both Sightsavers and its partners have an ethical obligation to each other to accomplish their tasks with integrity and in a responsible and appropriate manner.

Sightsavers has a set of minimum standards for partnership (see Appendix 1) and will not enter into partnership with organisations that cannot meet them. The list of 12 criteria decrees that Sightsavers will not work with, for example, organisations linked to terrorism or with a history of fraudulent or illegal activity.

# 5. Sightsavers' approach to partnership

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**5.1 Working with partners:** Sightsavers works with partners (not through them).

Working with partners means:

- collaborating to achieve shared goals;
- contributing more than just financial inputs;
- valuing and respecting partner approaches, opinions and creativity; and
- supporting capacity development and working towards sustainability.

**5.2 Wider collaboration:** Sightsavers is committed to developing relationships where partner organisations can collaborate beyond the immediate work of the

programme, both formally and informally. This might include cooperating on advocacy activities or working together to build or strengthen alliances and networks.

**5.3 Due diligence:** Sightsavers is committed to ensuring that we choose the right partners to work with and that we understand every partner organisation's strengths and weaknesses and the implications thereof for programme design and management.

Before entering into a formal partnership, Sightsavers carries out a Due Diligence exercise with each potential partner, to assess the organisation's structure and governance, key capacities and reputation. This is to ensure that we have a full and complete picture of the organisations that we transfer funds to, and to enable us to tailor-design projects that the partnership can implement and deliver successfully.

If the Due Diligence exercise reveals weaknesses in a partner organisation, this does not necessarily mean that Sightsavers shouldn't work with them (although this may very occasionally be the case). Rather, it provides a forum to review and discuss the potential implications for the project and how we should respond to them. For example:

- Does Sightsavers need to offer additional support to the partner, and if so, how should this be provided?
- Should Sightsavers put in place extra controls or closer monitoring processes, to safeguard project delivery?
- Is it necessary/appropriate for Sightsavers to support the partner with capacity building, and if so, what are the priority areas and why?

**5.4 Organisational development:** Sightsavers is committed to supporting the capacity-building of individual partner organisations and also of networks, consortia and coalitions where appropriate. This will be directed by the findings of the Due Diligence exercise (see above), and will be influenced by the following factors:

- **Type of partner organisation:** Sightsavers-supported capacity building is usually more appropriate for smaller organisations such as BPOs/DPOs, community organisations, civil society groups, and small national/local NGO partners.
- **Project complexity:** partners involved in large, complex projects or programmes require particularly high levels of capacity in order to deliver the project successfully, and could therefore be more likely to require capacity building than partners involved in smaller, more straightforward projects.
- **Receptiveness of partner:** the partner organisation must be willing to collaborate with Sightsavers to address the identified capacity gaps, in order for a capacity building plan to be successfully drawn up and implemented.

Sightsavers-supported capacity building could take the form of:

- full or partial funding for formal external training, ie workshops, courses or dedicated support from external consultants or technical specialists;
- Sightsavers-led training, mentoring or consulting activities; and/or
- facilitating contact between partner organisations and others and encouraging collaboration to promote synergies, skills transfer and mutual learning.

**5.5 Tailored approach:** Sightsavers negotiates appropriate ways of working with each partner organisation, and forms of support to suit the individual circumstances.

**5.6 Sustainable outcomes and impact:** Sightsavers seeks to achieve sustainable project outcomes and impact. Sightsavers works with partners to develop strategies for lasting change, whereby partners are enabled to take over the provision or mobilisation of resources necessary to continue key project activities when Sightsavers' funding ceases at the end of the project lifespan. This exit planning is incorporated into all projects from the outset and is clearly articulated in the project documentation.

## 6. Appendices

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### Appendix 1: Sightsavers' minimum standards for partnership

In order to enter a programme partnership, Sightsavers should be satisfied that **NONE** of the following criteria apply to the organisation under consideration. These criteria are reviewed in the first stage of Sightsavers' due diligence assessment, which takes place with all potential project partners during the project conceptualisation process.

If any of these criteria apply, Sightsavers will normally not enter into partnership with the organisation in question. In exceptional circumstances however, the project design team can apply for the decision to be reconsidered, provided that they can explain and justify the situation to senior management, and demonstrate that the issue is not serious enough to pose an unworkable risk to Sightsavers and to the planned project.

**Partnership minimum standards: NONE of the following statements should apply to the organisation under consideration for partnership.**

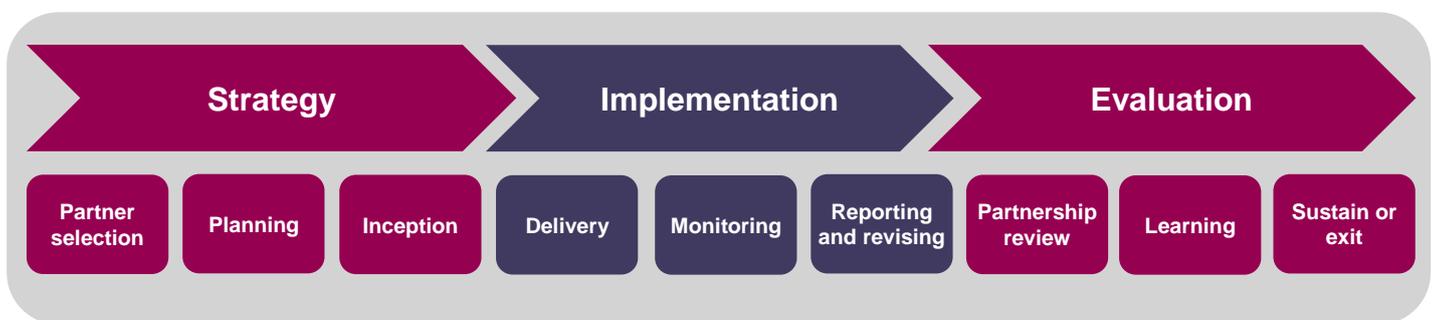
- The organisation's mission and values are in conflict with Sightsavers' own.
- The organisation intentionally discriminates against people on the grounds of religion, politics, race, tribe, caste, age, disability, gender, ill-health, sexual orientation etc.
- The organisation is found involved in exposing beneficiaries, including women, children and other marginalised groups, to any form of abuse and exploitation.
- Funding the partner would cause conflict or have legal implications for any other existing partnerships or relationships, including with donors.
- The organisation is suspected of furthering its aims through violence or terrorist activities and/or has some connections with terrorist groups.
- The organisation implicitly or explicitly hopes to use its work with Sightsavers for converting programme stakeholders to any kind of political or religious belief.
- The organisation is not appropriately registered as a legal entity under various acts of the local laws.
- The organisation has not complied with the laws under which it was formed.
- The organisation and/or its executives have been found involved in fraudulent or illegal activities as per credible sources.
- The organisation is bankrupt, being wound up, under administration by the courts, entering arrangement with creditors, has suspended business activities or is the subject of legal proceedings.
- The organisation has been convicted of an offence concerning professional conduct in the last two years.
- The organisation has been blacklisted by government, regulatory, monitoring, or another oversight body.

## Appendix 2: Partnerships in practice: partnership framework

Sightsavers has developed a framework for partnership that mirrors and aligns with the project lifecycle. This framework puts a formal structure around partnership activity, helping to ensure that appropriate implementing partners are selected, that the project is properly planned and implemented, that performance is monitored, and that regular reviews take place to make decisions about the future of the project and the partnership.

The framework structure is shown below. Detailed guidelines exist for each phase, outlining the key activities that should take place and best practice examples of how to approach them. A series of tools support each phase of the framework.

### Sightsavers' Partnership Framework



A summary of the key activities that Sightsavers considers essential for each phase is as follows. The full set of guidance notes and information about the supporting tools can be found within the Partnership Framework itself (available separately).

### Partnership strategy

**a) Partner selection:** Potential partners are identified and selected, ensuring that they meet the basic minimum standards outlined in Sightsavers' Due Diligence tool. The purpose and goals of the partnership are established, and Sightsavers and partner organisations develop a basic understanding of each other.

If Sightsavers and partner organisation(s) agree that it would be mutually beneficial to work together over a long period of time, a Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) can be drawn up, if desired. The MoU agrees an overall goal and vision for the partnership and how it might develop over a defined period of time. It outlines a strategy for working together and examples of the type of collaboration or projects that might be embarked upon. An MoU does **not** contain any project-specific details such as planned activities, outputs, funding details or timetables. These are drawn up in individual project funding agreements (PFAs) as required, later in the partnership process.

**b) Planning:** Sightsavers and partner organisation(s) discuss and identify common programme interests. A due diligence exercise is carried out to assess the partner organisation's structure, key capacities and reputation, so that Sightsavers has a full and complete picture of the organisation(s) that funds will be transferred to, and to enable a project to be tailor-designed that the partnership can implement and deliver successfully.

Project planning documentation is drawn up jointly by Sightsavers and the partner, to include a proposal, log frame and budget. Project outputs and other performance indicators are agreed. Capacity building plans are drawn up if appropriate/necessary.

**c) Inception:** The project contract (the Project Funding Agreement or PFA) is drawn up and signed, outlining the specific deliverables and funding arrangements of the project. An implementation plan is produced to detail the timeframes and responsibilities for all activities. Monitoring and reporting expectations are agreed, and the project is launched.

## Partnership implementation

**a) Delivery:** Sightsavers and partner organisations carry out the planned programme of work, in line with the project implementation plan. Sightsavers provides support for any planned partner capacity building.

**b) Monitoring:** The project's activities, finances, risks and performance measures are tracked and monitored, along with the health and functioning of the partnership itself. Any shortfalls or challenges are reviewed and discussed by all partners, with a view to getting things back on track.

**c) Reporting and revising:** Data collected from monitoring activities is consolidated into regular reports to communicate performance. Sightsavers and partner organisations agree and implement any necessary adjustments in response to learnings or changing circumstances.

## Partnership evaluation

**a) Partnership review:** Informal reviews of the partnership will have been taking place throughout the relationship (as outlined above), but a more formal review should take place as the project comes to the end of its life cycle. Sightsavers and the partners should ensure that both the project and partnership are evaluated to document their respective successes, challenges and learnings.

**b) Learning:** Sightsavers and the partners should work jointly to capture the learnings and experiences of the partnership and disseminate the findings so they can be used to inform decision-making about the project, and to feed into wider debate on programme policy and partnership approaches within Sightsavers.

**c) Sustain or exit:** An informed decision is made about the project and the partnership's future, based upon data from the partnership review, learnings, project evaluation, project performance statistics and the ongoing strategic priorities of Sightsavers and the partners. A decision will be made either to:

- Continue the project partnership by identifying a new goal and objectives to renew the project into a phase of operations, or to establish a new project;
- End the project partnership and move instead into a new era of strategic partnership, for example collaborating on advocacy or policy-related activities; or
- Exit the partnership altogether, for example if a new phase of the project is not viable or appropriate, and if the partners do not wish to collaborate on other matters.

Partnerships may occasionally end unexpectedly if it becomes clear that the project is seriously failing, if inappropriate behaviour is identified, if financial support is unexpectedly withdrawn or if unforeseen circumstances deem the project to be no longer necessary. In this event, Sightsavers and partners should work together to minimise any negative effects to beneficiaries and other parties.

Sightsavers ensures that an exit strategy is put in place during project conceptualisation, which guides the process of ending the partnership. It sets out how programme activities and outcomes can be sustained and ensures the future independence of partner organisations. It also ensures that all parties in the relationship have realistic expectations from the outset for how the partnership may evolve, transform or end and are fully prepared for the ultimate phasing out of the relationship.



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Registered charity numbers 207544 and SC038110

