PARTNERSHIP
AUDIT
TOOL

Creating change
through partnerships

Supporting and sustaining genuine
inter-agency partnerships in service delivery
for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
children and families

SNAICC

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1 INTRODUCTION

This audit tool has been created to support inter-agency partnerships in child and family service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. This publication provides a framework and tools for measuring progress towards achieving genuine partnership goals.

Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families requires a commitment to genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations.

Partnerships can have multiple benefits including:

- building cultural competence in services that are appropriate for and acceptable to the community

- community development and building capacity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations and

- supporting non-Indigenous organisations and professionals to understand and respond to the needs and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

While partnerships have long been recognised as important for the development of effective and culturally-competent services, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have had negative experiences of tokenistic relationships labelled as partnerships.

This audit tool is designed to push further than simply measuring partnerships and ticking boxes for partnership review.

This has led to a level of mistrust that governments and mainstream services may use partnerships to 'tick boxes' of cultural competence and community engagement, without engaging with the deeper commitment to sustainable relationships and local community empowerment.

Tokenistic involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people doesn't lead to better services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Tokenism can, in fact, hold up progress, as the appearance of a partnership masks a deeper mistrust, maintains power imbalance and fails to promote reconciliation. Achieving better outcomes requires a shared commitment to building deeper, respectful and more genuine relationships.

This audit tool is designed to push further than simply measuring partnerships and ticking boxes for partnership review. It explores the deeper commitment to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to improve long-term outcomes for children and families and how this can be realised in practice. It is a conversation starting and relationship building tool that can help you to identify the strengths and weaknesses of your partnerships and work through them together.

2 WHAT IS THE PARTNERSHIP AUDIT TOOL AND WHY USE IT?

The partnership audit tool is designed to help you and your partner/s assess and discuss your progress towards developing and sustaining a genuine partnership. It also assists to identify gaps in the partnership development journey and come up with strategies to address them.

An audit tool is less detailed and complex than a full partnership evaluation. This allows it to be used on a more regular basis to 'check-in' on progress and any gaps. It enables ongoing review to ensure a partnership is on track and considers additional activities and support where needed.

Using the tool supports relationship development by providing a simple way to open-up conversation between you and your partner about any issues in the relationship.

The audit tool reflects the research on good practice in partnerships for service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Regular use of the tool will also generate valuable progress information to feed into broader evaluation of partnerships, or of programs delivered in partnership.

The audit tool reflects the research on good practice in partnerships for service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. In doing so, it specifically helps to ensure that your partnership in on track to respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, their families and their communities.

3 **HOW** TO USE THIS TOOL

Below are suggested stages in completing the audit and ideas for how to go about it. It may be a good idea to use an independent facilitator to support you through the process and make sure everyone's perspective is heard and included.

STAGE 1	**Discuss and reflect on the principles that underpin your partnership**
	Start by checking-in about why you are partnering and what's important to you in the way you go about it. The framework and principles provided in Section 4 can help to start and inform the discussion. You may also want to check-in with your partnership vision statement if you already have one.

Refer to pages 6-7

STAGE 2	**Map your partnership in the context of the community**
	Complete the mapping exercise to reflect on where your partnership sits in the context of other relationships and stakeholders involved in supporting families. Reflect on how the partnership contributes to meeting child and family needs in the community.

Refer to pages 8-9

STAGE 3	**Complete the partnership progress questionnaire**
	The questionnaire in Section 6 gives you the opportunity to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of your partnership and to help in identifying where it's at and the things that may need to change to strengthen the partnership and to achieve its goals. It can be completed individually or together, with joint discussion of the results afterwards.

Refer to pages 11-17

STAGE 4	**Compile and discuss the results of the questionnaire**
	Add up the scores from the questionnaire and place the results into the tools provided in Section 7. A number of questions are included to guide your discussion of the results. If you complete the questionnaire separately as organisations or individuals, it will be important to discuss any differences in the results and the reasons you are viewing aspects of the partnership differently.

Refer to pages 18-19

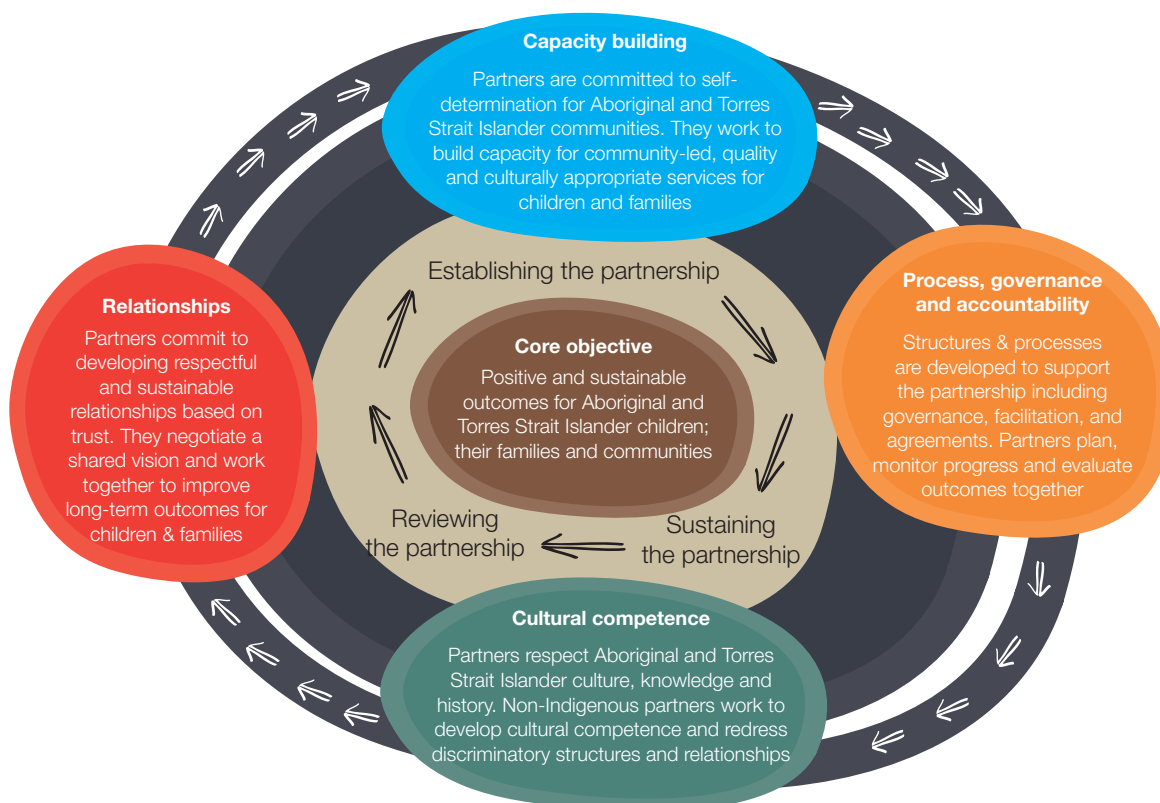| STAGE 5	**Plan the way forward for responding to the audit outcomes**
	This is a critical stage to ensure that plans are made and action is taken to address issues and priorities identified in the audit. Use the tables provided in Section 8 to list the key partnership strengths and challenges identified. Talk through priority actions and assign responsibility and timeframes for completing them.

Refer to pages 21-23

4 WHAT IS THIS PARTNERSHIP ALL ABOUT?

Before you start reviewing your partnership work, take time to check-in on why your partnership exists and the broader vision for what you want to achieve together.

If you have developed a vision statement, this is a good time to pull it out and make sure it still matches with what you want to do. The information in this section is provided to help guide your discussion on the principles that underpin genuine partnership work, and for you to reflect on whether they match with the reason you are partnering and what you want to do.

The framework represented in the diagram below provides the basis for the audit tool.

The framework represented in the diagram below provides the basis for the audit tool. It draws on the evidence of what is important for genuine partnerships in service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. The outer circles describe the four key domains that inform all the processes that take place in the inner-circle with the aim to achieve the core objective at the centre of the diagram.

Capacity building
Partners are committed to self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. They work to build capacity for community-led, quality and culturally appropriate services for children and families

Relationships
Partners commit to developing respectful and sustainable relationships based on trust. They negotiate a shared vision and work together to improve long-term outcomes for children & families

Establishing the partnership

Core objective
Positive and sustainable outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children; their families and communities

Reviewing the partnership

Sustaining the partnership

Process, governance and accountability
Structures & processes are developed to support the partnership including governance, facilitation, and agreements. Partners plan, monitor progress and evaluate outcomes together

Cultural competence
Partners respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, knowledge and history. Non-Indigenous partners work to develop cultural competence and redress discriminatory structures and relationships

FOR DISCUSSION:

• Does the framework reflect the way we want to work together?

• If not, why not, and what are the differences to keep in mind as we move through the audit?

The framework is based on eight inter-related principles that form the building blocks of successful partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and mainstream service providers (SNAICC 2012). These principles are:

Commitment to long-term sustainable relationships based on trust	Significant time spent building relationships between staff, organisations and communities. Partners commit to ongoing relationship, not only an activity or project.
Respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history	Commitment to build cultural understanding, to consult and listen to the local community, and to value Indigenous knowledge and professionalism.
Commitment to self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples	Empowering Indigenous communities to lead response to child and family needs. Building Indigenous community, organisation and workforce capacity.
Aim to improve long-term well-being for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities	Identifying and sharing respective strengths in supporting children and families. Partnership resources viewed as community resources and shared for the benefit of children and families.
Shared responsibility and accountability for shared objectives and activities	Negotiated and shared vision is developed. Partners jointly develop indicators of success and work together to monitor and evaluate progress.
Valuing process elements as integral to support and enable partnership	Agreements clarify commitments, roles and accountability. Time and resources allocated to joint planning, review, and partnership development.
Redressing unequal or discriminatory relationships, structures and outcomes	Recognising that Indigenous disadvantage reflects both historical and continuing discrimination, and working to correct resulting power and resource imbalances.
Working differently with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families	Developing cultural competence in service delivery. Recognising that mainstream approaches are often not the best way to engage and support Indigenous families.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Do these reflect the principles that are important in our partnership?
- Are there other important principles we should keep in mind as we move through the audit?

5 WHAT IS THE PARTNERSHIP AND WHERE DOES IT SIT IN THE CONTEXT OF OUR COMMUNITY?

The opposite page provides space for sharing the story of your partnership and mapping it out in the context of your community.

This exercise is about understanding where your partnership sits in the context of other relationships and the different stakeholders involved in supporting children and families.

Completing this activity with your partner provides an opportunity to share and reflect on the history of your partnership as it has developed in the community. Try completing the diagram individually then sharing your different understandings of the partnership with each other. Those people who have had ongoing involvement could share their reflections on relationships that have changed and developed over time.

This exercise is about understanding where your partnership sits in the context of other relationships and the different stakeholders involved in supporting children and families.

This is an important time to discuss whether your partnership is contributing to a service system that responds in an effective and integrated way to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in the community. Are there opportunities to strengthen partnerships with other stakeholders to improve the way service providers coordinate around the needs of children and families?

Feel free to draw the diagram anyway that you think best fits your partnership.

Here's an example to get you started:

Partnership Map (Example)
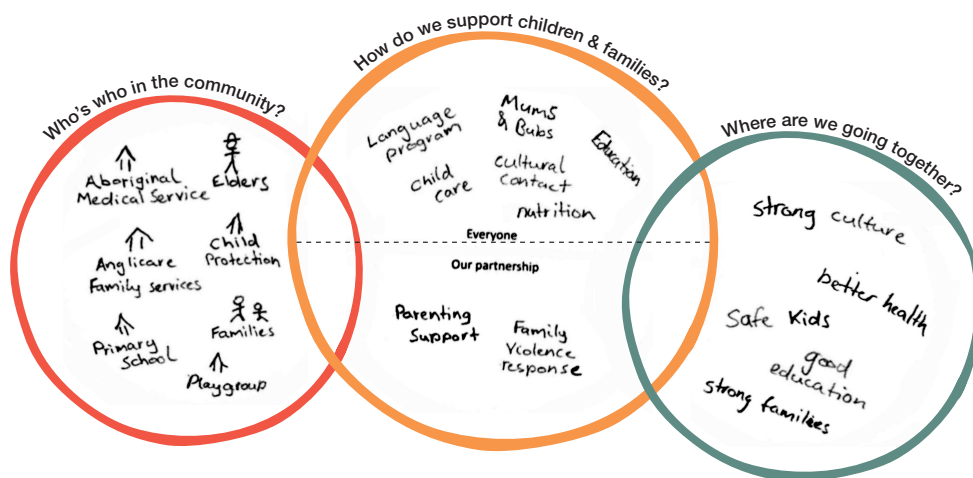
You may like to use arrows or lines to show relationships between different people, organisations, supports and outcomes. It's up to you how you'd like to describe your partnership and where it sits in the community.

PARTNERSHIP MAP: WORKING TOGETHER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Where are we going together?

How do we support children & families?

Who's who in the community?

Everyone

Our partnership
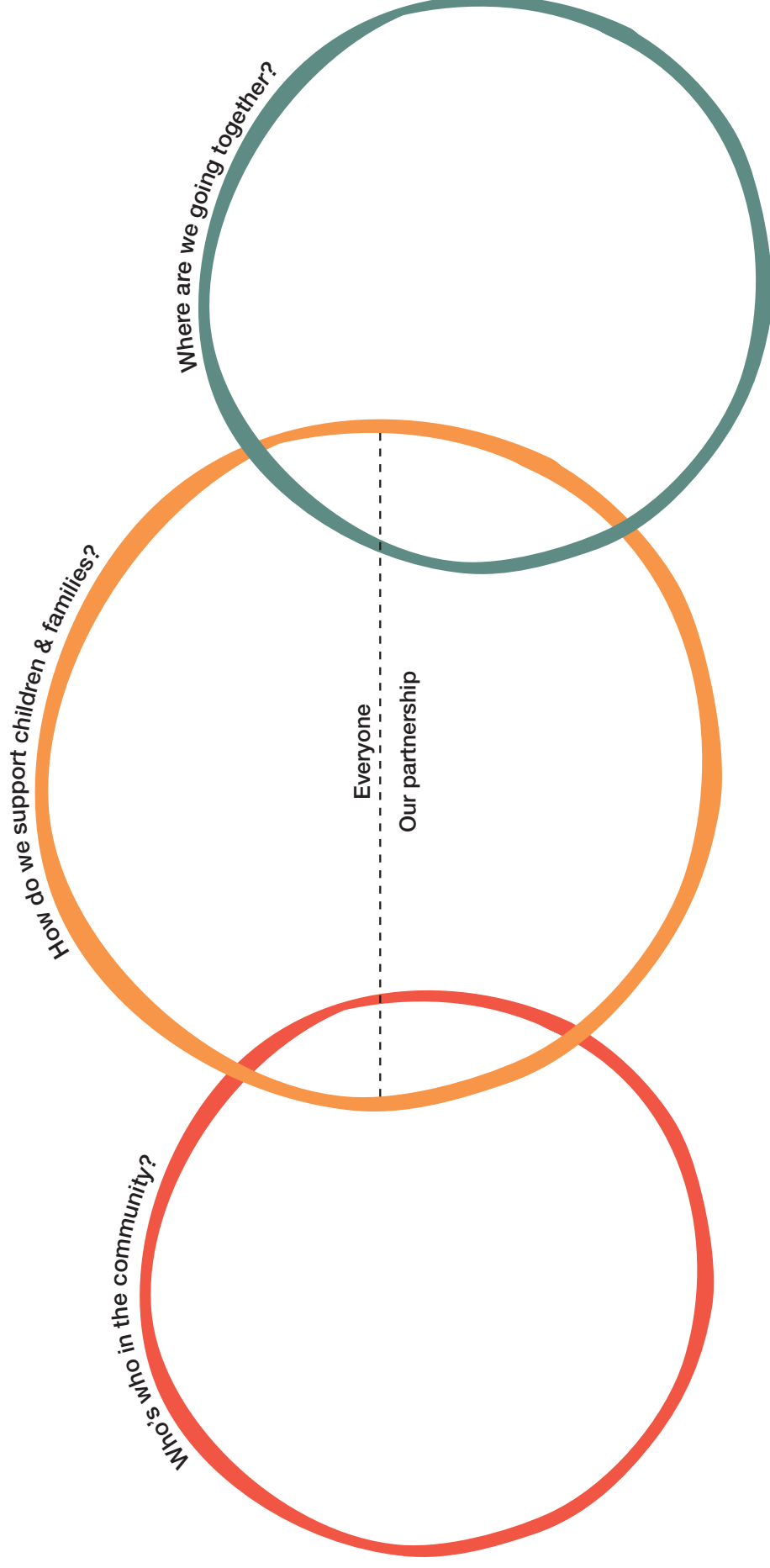
FOR DISCUSSION:

- How have relationships changed over time? Could we work better together?
- What are the opportunities for more connected work? What other supports do our children and families need?

Creating change through partnerships

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6

A
QUESTIONNAIRE

6 DON'T JUST TICK THE BOXES: A QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire gives you the opportunity to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of your partnership to help in identifying where it's at, and the things that may need to change to strengthen the partnership and to achieve its goals.

This shouldn't be used only as a quantitative measurement tool by which partners put a final score on how the partnership is going and 'tick the box' for partnership review. The questionnaire will only be of value if it is used as a discussion, relationship-building, and planning tool by partners together. Reviewing your partnership will only work where the review is integrated into the processes that support the ongoing development of your partnership.

Some ways to complete the questionnaire:

1. Each organisation involved in the partnership completes the questionnaire separately. After that, both/all organisations come together to share and discuss results.

2. Individuals complete the questionnaire anonymously and an independent person collates the results for discussion.

3. Partners sit down and answer the questions together.

Keep in mind that while doing the questionnaire together could support openness and transparency, it may also

The questionnaire will only be of value if it is used as a discussion, relationship-building, and planning tool by partners together.

reinforce power imbalance. It could result in people not answering what they truly believe to maintain relations, or to satisfy management.

It might be worthwhile having an independent facilitator to support this process, if resources within the partnership allow for that.

After you've finished the questionnaire there are a couple of tools on pages 18-19 that will help you to interpret the results in different ways and discuss them as a partnership.

The following tables ask you to rate your response on a scale from 0 to 4. The numbers in the right-hand column indicate the partnership domain/s that the question relates most strongly to as follows:

1. Relationships
2. Capacity building
3. Cultural competence
4. Process, governance and accountability

You don't need to worry too much about these while you're answering the questions. They will be important when you are looking at the results.

PHASE 1: ESTABLISHING THE PARTNERSHIP

	Rating					Partnership domain/s
	0 strongly disagree	**1** disagree	**2** not sure	**3** agree	**4** strongly agree	
Partners actively seek and support each other to learn about and understand local Indigenous culture	0	1	2	3	4	1 3
Partners have spent time getting to know each other and the local Indigenous community	0	1	2	3	4	1 3
Non-Indigenous partners value cultural knowledge and experience of Indigenous partners in supporting Indigenous families	0	1	2	3	4	1 3
Partners consult the local Indigenous community and shape partnership work around community identified needs and priorities	0	1	2	3	4	2 3
Indigenous partners have expressed their priorities and shared their knowledge of what is needed to support their community	0	1	2	3	4	2 3
Partners have named, shared and agreed on their vision for the partnership	0	1	2	3	4	1 4
The vision for the partnership aims to improve outcomes for Indigenous children, families and communities	0	1	2	3	4	2 3
Someone is driving partnership processes in each organisation, and there is buy-in at all levels from board, management and staff	0	1	2	3	4	1 4
Partners have identified opportunities for building local Indigenous organisational, workforce and community capacity	0	1	2	3	4	2 3
The partnership has been formalised through an agreement	0	1	2	3	4	1 4
Partnership agreements (formal or informal) reflect a strong relationship and a fair negotiation	0	1	2	3	4	1 4
Partners demonstrate long-term commitment to support the Indigenous community (not only project or time-limited commitment)	0	1	2	3	4	1 2
Partners collaborate with other organisations to increase integration of supports for children and families	0	1	2	3	4	1 2
TOTAL						___/52

What have been our key **strengths** in establishing the partnership?

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What have been our key **challenges** in establishing the partnership?

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PHASE 2: SUSTAINING THE PARTNERSHIP

	Rating					Partnership domain/s
	0 strongly disagree	**1** disagree	**2** not sure	**3** agree	**4** strongly agree	
Adequate time and resources are allocated to support and sustain the partnership relationship	0	1	2	3	4	④
Each partner has incorporated partnership agreements and processes within their internal policies and procedures	0	1	2	3	4	④
Joint planning processes allow for engagement between staff to plan and enact partnership priorities	0	1	2	3	4	① ④
Partners negotiate and seek agreement on decisions made and have established effective dispute resolution procedures that are fair	0	1	2	3	4	① ④
The partnership provides culturally safe and appropriate support to Indigenous children and families	0	1	2	3	4	② ③
Partners regularly consult the local Indigenous community and reflect community identified needs and priorities in their work	0	1	2	3	4	③ ④
The partnership is building local Indigenous organisational, workforce, and community capacity	0	1	2	3	4	② ③
Staffing arrangements are optimally shared or collaborative to support partnership goals	0	1	2	3	4	① ④
Resources are shared or transferred between partners to support partnership goals	0	1	2	3	4	② ④
Indigenous partners have a leading role to support cultural competence development within the partnership	0	1	2	3	4	② ③
Non-Indigenous partners are increasing their cultural competence to support Indigenous families	0	1	2	3	4	② ③
Non-Indigenous partners don't compete with Indigenous partners for funding for services for Indigenous children and families	0	1	2	3	4	① ②
Non-Indigenous partners commit to transfer service management to the Indigenous community in line with capacity growth	0	1	2	3	4	② ③
TOTAL						___/52

What are our key **strengths** in sustaining the partnership?

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What are our key **challenges** in sustaining the partnership?

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PHASE 3: REVIEWING THE PARTNERSHIP

	Rating					Partnership domain/s
	0 strongly disagree	1 disagree	2 not sure	3 agree	4 strongly agree	
Regular audits/reviews are conducted to monitor partnership progress and identify issues	0	1	2	3	4	4
Partnership agreements establish a process for regular shared reviews of the partnership	0	1	2	3	4	4
Each partner participates in the design monitoring and reviewing processes	0	1	2	3	4	1 2
Partners negotiate and agree on measures of success for the partnership work	0	1	2	3	4	1 4
Partners collaborate to report together on the outcomes of partnership work	0	1	2	3	4	1 4
A broader program evaluation of the partnership work and relationship occurs or is scheduled to occur regularly (at least every 3 years)	0	1	2	3	4	1 4
Evaluation of the work done in partnership includes a specific focus on issues in the partnership relationship	0	1	2	3	4	1
Evaluation of partnership work focuses on outcomes for Indigenous children, families and communities	0	1	2	3	4	2 3
Indigenous partners have leading roles to measure and interpret outcomes for Indigenous children, families and communities	0	1	2	3	4	2 3
Evaluation reports reflect progress towards meeting shared and individual objectives of all partners	0	1	2	3	4	4
Design of evaluation and review incorporates Indigenous ways of evaluating programs, informed by Indigenous partners	0	1	2	3	4	3 4
The partnership supports capacity for Indigenous partners to use non-Indigenous evaluation and data collection methods where necessary	0	1	2	3	4	2 3
The Indigenous community has an opportunity to participate in and inform evaluation processes	0	1	2	3	4	2 3
TOTAL						___/52

What are our key **strengths** in reviewing the partnership?

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What are our key **challenges** in reviewing the partnership?

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7 **WHERE** ARE WE AT?

The following tools provide some different ways to view and understand the results of the questionnaire. Partnerships are complex and the final scores can't tell the whole story.

A low result for capacity building could simply reflect that capacity of both partners is already high, so capacity building isn't a focus. A low score for process, governance and accountability could sometimes occur in a high trust relationship where everything is working well without the need for establishing more formal processes.

These tools are intended to start and inform your conversations together,

This will give you the opportunity to identify priority areas to address and strengthen.

so you can develop a better understanding of what is happening in the partnership and why.

This will give you the opportunity to identify priority areas to address and strengthen.

Take the totals from each table and insert them in the diagram below, then add them together to get the total for the whole questionnaire and place it in the centre.

Establishing
the partnership
___/52

TOTAL

_____

Reviewing
the partnership
___/52

Sustaining
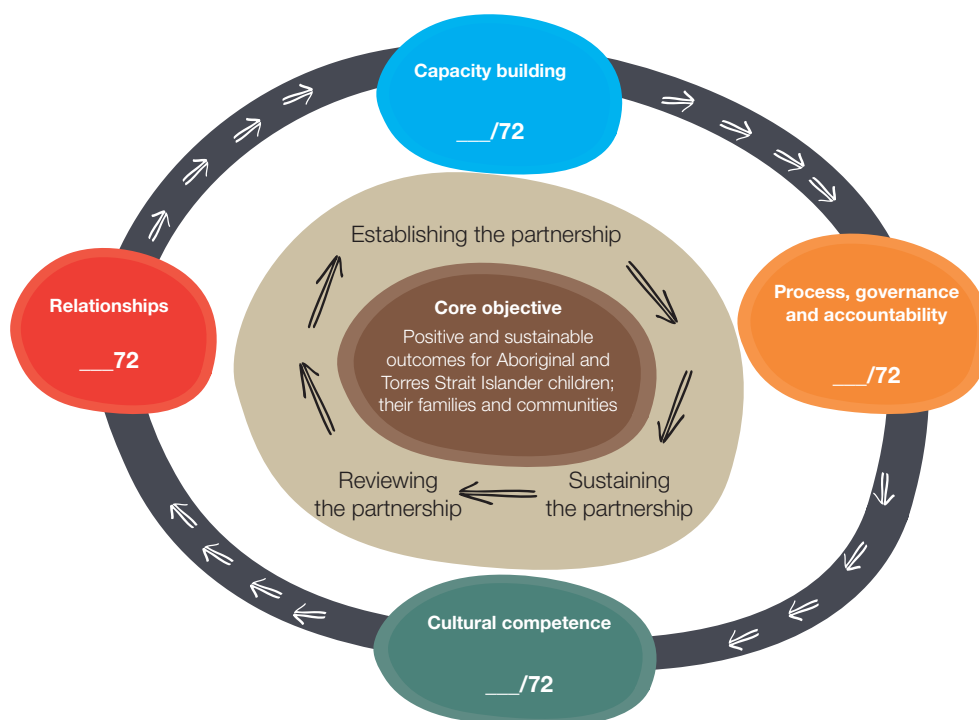the partnership
___/52
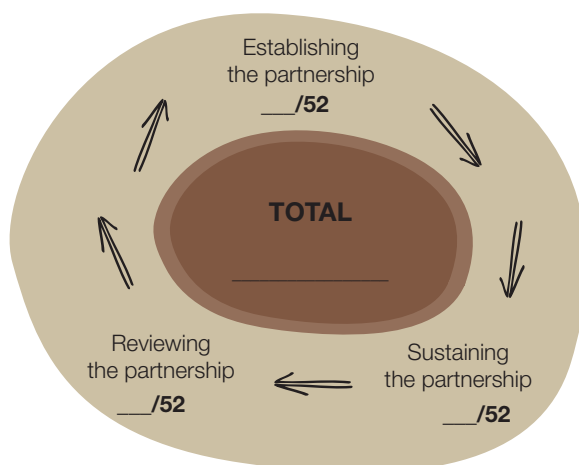
FOR DISCUSSION:

- What phase of partnership development are we most focussed on at the moment?
- Is there a particular phase that we need to put more energy into now or in the near future?
- Are there parts of the partnership development process that have been missed, skipped or not planned for? Is this impacting the effectiveness of the partnership?
- Has anything changed or developed since our last review?

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES
IN KEY PARTNERSHIP DOMAINS

To get an idea how the partnership is travelling in each of the key partnership domains, add up your totals and place them in the diagram below.

To work out your total you need to add up the scores for every question that has that partnership domain beside it in the questionnaire.

To work out your total you need to add up the scores for every question that has that partnership domain beside it in the questionnaire.

Capacity building

___/72

Process, governance and accountability

___/72

Relationships

___72

Establishing the partnership

Core objective
Positive and sustainable outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children; their families and communities

Reviewing the partnership

Sustaining the partnership

Cultural competence

___/72

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Do the scores reflect the strengths and weaknesses of the partnership or are there other reasons why they are high or low?
- How do our strengths and weaknesses in one domain affect our performance in others?
- What areas do we need to put most energy into now and in the near future?
- Are there plans in place to build our partnership in weaker domains? Is there more we need to do?
- Has anything changed or developed since our last review?

8 PLANNING THE WAY FORWARD

Successful implementation of the audit outcomes will depend on how well they can be integrated into the ongoing work of your staff, organisation and partnership.

It's important to plan for how partnership strengths can be maintained and built on, as well as what can be done to address issues and challenges.

The following pages provide planning tables that can be completed together by partners to determine the priority issues and actions to focus on over the next period.

It will be important that these priorities are integrated into the planning processes and workplans of each organisation and their staff, after the audit is complete.

It includes space for assigning responsibility and timeframes for the completion of agreed work. It will be important that these priorities are integrated into the planning processes and workplans of each organisation and their staff, after the audit is complete.

BUILDING ON PARTNERSHIP STRENGTHS
OUR SHARED COMMITMENT TO DEVELOPING THE PARTNERSHIP

Key partnership strengths identified	Priority actions to maintain and build on strengths	Who's responsible?	When will it be done?
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			

ADDRESSING PARTNERSHIP CHALLENGES
OUR SHARED COMMITMENT TO DEVELOPING THE PARTNERSHIP

Key partnership challenges identified	Priority actions to address challenges	Who's responsible?	When will it be done?
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			