

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Approved

Meeting of the 2017/2018 Bureau
Yerevan (Armenia), 10-11 October 2017

Item III (f) of the Provisional
Agenda

**STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS IN OFFICIAL STATISTICS -
PROPOSED WORK PLAN**

**Prepared by Canada, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Eurostat, Mexico and
the Secretariat**

The paper presents a work plan for further work on strategic partnerships. The Bureau reviewed and approved the plans for further work in this area.

I. BACKGROUND

1. A concept note on further work on strategic partnerships was discussed at the CES Bureau meeting in February 2017. It was noted that setting up partnerships is an important strategic issue for National Statistical Offices (NSOs). There is a need for a forum to discuss the related topics, such as the governance, leadership and associated risks of partnerships; data use, re-use, access and ownership, etc. The proposal for further work included undertaking a survey to take stock of the legal and other issues related to strategic partnerships in official statistics, and organizing a seminar on this topic, focusing on selected partnership types.

2. The Bureau supported the proposal for further work, and asked the small group co-led by Canada and the United Kingdom (Mexico, the Netherlands, Eurostat and UNECE) to develop a work plan for the October 2017 meeting of the Bureau.

II. CURRENT STATUS

3. The group has had very effective **monthly conference calls** to advance this work. Sub-groups have been set up to progress on different aspects of the work. The types of partnerships being explored are partnerships with policy makers as well as partnerships with data and service providers (supplier/recipient partnerships, open innovation/strategic partnerships, and co-creation partnerships).

4. A **collaboration site** has been set up on UNECE wiki to gather and document best practices from working group members. Ultimately, the site will refer not only to the work of this group, but also provide links to other relevant documents and groups who are doing complementary activities.

5. A **literature review** is being conducted including papers referred to the group by the Bureau as well as various group members. The different factors and approaches taken when

creating partnerships of the various types as well as the objectives of the partnerships and potential gains are being documented.

6. Simultaneously, **individual consultations** are being conducted with the working group members to gather and document specific lessons learned, best practices, and main challenges in building and maintaining the various types of strategic partnerships.

7. The group also intends to canvass statistical offices through **a survey** to identify the main challenges in strategic partnerships that NSOs want to see examined, from both the strategic perspective as well as the operational perspective. **A draft questionnaire has been prepared and is included as Annex to this note for review and comments.**

III. PROPOSED WORK PLAN

8. **A questionnaire is planned to be sent to heads of NSOs as well as heads of operations at the end of October** to gather input on topics and areas of focus for a **2-day high-level seminar to be held in mid-April in Geneva.**

9. The objective of the Seminar is to bring together those who have built successful partnerships and those who are seeking advice and inspiration in building them, to share experiences, gather the best practices and lessons learned.

10. The Seminar will be structured to include plenary and break-out discussions in order to provide networking opportunities, stimulate conversation and knowledge sharing. The aim is to ensure the Seminar is relevant to NSO senior management as well as operational branches.

11. The first day of the Seminar will focus on topics of interest within the NSO community. On the second day of the Seminar, participants from the private sector, academia, and civil society will be invited to attend to further stimulate discussion.

12. **Potential outcomes of the Seminar** could include:

- a) Updating the existing examples on the collaboration site with the lessons learned from the seminar.
- b) A document or publication with guidelines and best practices supported by specific examples.
- c) Promotion of lessons learned through webinars and/or interactive discussion sessions.

The group is seeking feedback on which of these outcomes the Bureau recommends pursuing.

13. It is proposed that the outcome of the Seminar be discussed at the October 2018 CES Bureau meeting and decisions on next steps for the group be determined.

Annex

UNECE Group on Strategic Partnerships

Draft questionnaire for comment

Drafting note for CES Bureau members

This survey is circulated as a draft for comment on the content of the questions. The survey is in two parts: one for the attention of senior management level, for example Chief Statisticians, and one for senior administration level, for example Chiefs of Staff or Head of Secretariat.

For ease of review the text boxes for responses to the questions have not been included at this stage. Suggestions for the formatting are welcome; however this version does not reflect the final formatting.

Explanatory note for survey recipients:

In the current context of increasing expectations of NSIs, strategic partnerships have gained importance as a way to meet these expectations. The UNECE Strategic Partnerships Group aims to facilitate such partnership work by sharing best practice in this field.

The Group is currently at a fact finding stage, aiming to discover which type of partnership is deemed to be most important and to identify which specific issue within partnership work deserves further attention, and where gaps in knowledge lie.

This survey is intended to inspire reflections on partnership work in NSIs, in order to pull out common themes. Please feel free to deviate from the suggested answer format, and make full use of the free text box at the end to include any other information or responses that have not been specifically addressed.

If this survey is successful, analysis of the responses help shape the content and agenda of a two day seminar, so that the seminar addresses current and real concerns of NSIs engaging in partnership work.

Senior management level questions

Identifying priority partnership types

The Concept Paper of February 2017 sets out different types of partnership. This set of questions addresses which is the most important type of partnership and why.

- Please use the free text boxes to note the level of importance of each partnership type to your NSI, and what challenges each partnership brings

Partnership type	Level of importance to NSI work and why	Points of difficulty experienced by this type of partnership
Policy maker partnership (working with policy makers to discuss new demands)		<i>Maintaining a public image of neutrality</i>
Supplier/recipient partnership (suppliers could be any provider, including respondents to data requests)		
Open innovation/strategic partnership (working with a partner who is not and will not be an end user)		
Co-creation partnerships (working with an end user)		

Identifying common challenges

Considering past experiences of partnership work, have any of the areas below been challenging and if so why and how?

- *Please use the free text box for responses and provide as much detail as you can*
- *The suggested examples below are to prompt reflection only*
- *Please feel free to add any areas that are not listed below*

Identifying potential partners

For example through open competition, direct contact, recommendation from mutual contacts

Managing expectations of the partnership

For example managing overly optimistic expectations of outcomes or encouraging a faster pace of work.

Managing policy red lines

For example maintaining relationships in a politicised context, or building relationships in a context of disparate policy priorities

Confidentiality and difficulties in data sharing

For example where there are inequalities in data security procedures or where data is particularly sensitive

Handling expertise asymmetry

For example where the NSI has more experience of large scale projects, or where a private sector partner has superior knowledge of emerging technology

Maintaining momentum

For example when projects have been long running and lose focus, or in a context of reduced budget or when other work takes priority

Involvement of ‘mutual friend’ bodies/organisations

For example to provide secretariat support, as a silent partner, or as an active partner providing oversight.

Public and private sector partnerships

For example funding or resource disparity (for example with start ups or with multinational corporations) maintaining public neutrality, data security, or independence

Working with the IT industry

For example managing different working cultures (i.e. formal versus informal), deciding on means of communication, maintaining data security

Which areas have been the most challenging for your organisation?

- *Please use the free text box to list two or three from the above named areas*

Lessons learned

What valuable lessons has your organisation learned that might be of use to other NSIs when planning and executing partnership work?

- *Please use the free text box for responses and provide as much detail as you can*

Senior administration level questions

Examples of productive relationship

From the perspective of administration or secretarial support, please provide an example or examples of a productive relationship, detailing the points that you feel contributed to its success.

- *Please use the free text box for your response and provide as much detail as you can*

Administrative support arrangements

What are your administrative arrangements for supporting partnership work?

- i) Business or specialist areas have dedicated support teams which are can be detailed to a partnership project
 - ii) There is a central secretariat team supporting the senior leadership who support partnership work for senior level statisticians
 - iii) There is no formal mechanism for support, it is decided on an ad hoc basis
 - iv) There is a heavy reliance on overtime or working extra hours if partnership projects demand administrative resource
 - v) Support staff receive training for partnership work
- *Please use the free text box and provide as much detail as you can, the bullet points above each question are intended as inspiration only for a freely worded response*

Challenge areas of partnership work

From your experience providing administrative support for partnership projects, please consider the challenges that have arisen in relation to each of the below. The questions have been arranged into chronological order.

- *Please use the free text box below each question, the bullet points below each question are intended as inspiration only for freely worded responses*

Identifying strategic partners

Means of identifying partners

- i) Via open competition or advertising
- ii) Via direct contact
- iii) Via recommendation from mutual contacts
- iv) Via pre-existing relationship
- v) Via response to an open competition or advertising
- vi) Via chance encounter (i.e. at UNSC or a academic event)

Public and Private sector partnerships

- i) Funding or resource disparity
- ii) Maintaining public neutrality
- iii) Data security
- iv) Independence

Monitoring partnerships

Involving neutral 'mutual friend' bodies as a third partner (i.e. UNECE)

- i) Meeting facilities and secretariat were unsatisfactory
- ii) Too formal an arrangement
- iii) Difficulties for operational reasons i.e. adds an extra time zone
- iv) Complication of information sharing

Partnership project management

- i) Secretariat messages or guidance are not adhered to
- ii) Lack of knowledge/expertise is a barrier to monitoring specialist projects and engaging with experts
- iii) Traditional secretariat structures are too rigid for dynamic partnership work

Forum for meetings

- i) Teleconferences are difficult to chair as people speak at the same time
- ii) Video conferences are poor quality
- iii) Online messaging boards i.e. Yammer, Slack or a Wiki are unfamiliar
- iv) Face to face meetings are costly

Closing stages

Concluding partnership projects

- i) Partnerships concluded due to breakdown
- ii) Productive partnerships ended due to funding issues

Lessons learned

- i) Planning resource for supporting partnership work
- ii) Setting a realistic timetable for deliverables
- iii) Means of communication (including across time zones and international boundaries)