

A Model for Cooperation between Government Ministries

Executive Summary

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Authors:

Michal Fink, Senior Director, Strategy & Policy Planning Department, the Ministry of Industry, Trade & Labor
Aviva Raz Shechter, Deputy Director-General, Middle East & Peace Process Division, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Adva Eshel Rabinovitz, Head of the Department for Developing the Negev, the Ministry of the Development of the Negev and the Galilee

Orna Simhon, Northern District Director, the Ministry of Education

Yoav Morag-Faktor, Director of the Negev Region, the Ministry of Agriculture & Rural Development

Inon Elroy, Vice Director General, the Ministry of Industry, Trade & Labor

Michal Goldenshtain, Director of the Senior Division of Municipal Management, the Ministry of Interior

Ruth Rotstein, Director of the Department of Nursing Accreditation & Registration, the Ministry of Health

Written by participants of the 21st cycle of the Civil Service Commission's and the JDC Institute for Leadership and Governance's Program for Senior Civil Servants

Project guidance and management: Merav Horev and Inbar Almagor

A Model for Cooperation between Government Ministries

The following is an executive summary of the document: “A Model for Cooperation between Government Ministries” written in September 2013 by participants of the 21st cycle of the Program for Senior Civil Servants.¹

Cooperation between ministries is when at least two separate government ministries form a relationship based on mutual understanding of a common goal, while creating public value by working together instead of separately, thus making for efficient use of resources and division of responsibility.

Arguments supporting coordination between ministries and leading combined programs: the problems a country deals with are complex ones, and therefore addressing these problems requires a combined approach; coordination can create a size advantage – a move by several ministries is more powerful and efficient; fragmentation and overlap between programs can be avoided by coordination at the point where the service is provided.

Conversely, the inadequate application of many collaborations has led many to be skeptical of their benefit. The main concern regards the difficulties in working together in a complex system. Every agency wants to maintain their autonomy and independence, it is difficult to synchronize and coordinate organizational routine and procedures, creating a significant barrier in the way of coordination, and each body involved in the cooperation process has its own set of goals and applied pressures, which interfere with the process.

The structure of cooperative ventures varies and can be one of the following: a dominant actor and several supporting actors, a supporting actor motivating dominant actors, two dominant actors, or symmetric actors in a group. In each of these situations, cooperation may be created through mutual understanding and common goals, joint activity, combination of assets and the ability to create public value by working together rather than separately.

Cooperation can exist in **different phases of government operations**: The planning and decision-making phase, the organizational and preparatory phase, and the service and outcome stage.

Cooperation can be based on **various operating mechanisms**: Steering committees with authority to determine policy control and deviation from policy without central management, a central management body with actual management authority, and an obstacle committee with retroactive authority to solve problems. Each one acts without a central mechanism, as each ministry does what they are required to do, and the program is run by one ministry while pooling resources from several ministries.

There are four **identifiable main phases in a cooperative venture** – the initiative and creation phase, the planning and forming phase, the application and maintenance phase, and the assessment and renewal stage. In each stage, there are various questions and issues that should be dealt with. The combination of all of these together creates the total venture, building a successful partnership that leads to results.

Proper planning and management of partnerships between ministries begins in the phases before decisions are made. In fact, the more we invest in the earlier stages of building a partnership, the greater the chances the partnership will lead to achieving the desired results and influence with the target audience.

1. The full document (in Hebrew) can be found at: http://www.theinstitute.org.il/files/pictures/articles/shitofiyapaola_madrach.pdf

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The project proposes a model consisting of 15 “points for thought” which must all be addressed in the initiative phase of the process, its planning, its application in the field, and its formative assessment:

1. **Which partnership is needed?** Partnerships can exist in various phases of designing and implementing policy. In order to match expectations, it is important to define the place where cooperation is needed, and the type and characteristics of the desired partnership.
2. **Is collaboration worthwhile?** Partnerships should not be created at any cost. A successful partnership depends on the value for each side being larger than the time and costs involved in the partnership.
3. **Who is involved in the process?** In almost every area that government ministries work in, there are overlaps with other public bodies. One must distinguish between three types of partners, and assess their importance: Those with interests, knowledge, and authority. A possible way to choose partners is by creating a “minimal systematic whole”.
4. **Trust building mechanisms:** Every ministry has a unique perspective and the sum total is the desired outcome. In order to create trust, it is necessary to build communication and create a common language. Interpersonal knowledge, creating a “common experience”, and building a routine of activity, are all important factors within the framework of an agreed upon set of values. Creating a continuous governmental cooperation infrastructure for creating partnerships is of supreme importance for creating trust in the system.
5. **Procedural arrangement of the partnership:** A framework of minimal commitments must be created to which all sides must commit, and which maintains the uniqueness of each party. In each phase (planning, implementation and evaluation), several key issues must be examined regarding the authority to make decisions and lead the entire process, the schedule, who should be involved, and how. This will ensure that the meetings will create value for the participants and the decision makers.
6. **Structural arrangement of the partnership:** The structure of the partnership has a major impact on its ability to bring about the desired results. It is crucial to determine which is the proper structure that will enable joint ownership by several different government ministries, without infringing on their authority. There are several types of structures identified: a creative partnership – joint ownership and mutual creation, a reactive partnership – coordinating activities and sharing information, a limited partnership – a partnership based mainly on budgetary cooperation, a partnership without decisions – a partnership based on identical interests.
7. **Budgetary arrangement of the partnership:** Setting the budget is one of the greater challenges in creating a partnership, and one that has crucial influence over its success. Therefore, it is important that this be done in the initial steps of the process. A decision allowing for additional budget (whatever the amount is) will provide the organizers with an “easier life” in harnessing potential partners. Formulating the budgetary layout can only be done by following the structural arrangement of the partnership, and it is critically important to define a multi-year budget that matches the life cycle of the partnership. Among the various management options, it appears that appointing an inter-ministry committee allows for maximal use of the budget by the ministries, alongside supervision by the committee.
8. **Agreement over results:** At the center of the collaboration, there should be a significant value that each of the ministries has a truly valuable reason to promote. Results will suggest the direction in which activity should develop, and the basis for measuring effectiveness, efficiency and motivation. Determining these can be complex due to the differences in professional language, and different

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office cultures and work procedures. Goal-focused intervention is powerful in bringing agencies together and driving the community and professional effort towards change.

9. **Coordination of expectations:** The partnership's success is determined by each side knowing in advance what it is expected to contribute to the process, and what it will receive in return. The area of operation and individual areas of responsibility must be determined, emphasizing the mutual dependence in completing tasks. Determining work procedures ahead of time, including work order, reporting schedule, gathering of work committees, transfer of budgets and the like, will increase the partnership's success.
10. **How is ego managed?** Instead of assuming that there is no ego, and that everyone is working out of professional considerations, the opposite should be assumed. The uniqueness of the actors should be emphasized, seeing ego as a professional value that brings the ministry to the table. In order to create significant inter-ministry work it is important to first recognize the territory of each office, making room for its professional history, and learning its appropriate ways of handling things. Only an organization that feels respected for what it is bringing to the table will be ready to prepare a joint plan.
11. **How is conflict resolved?** The solution to conflicts lies in building a mechanism for reaching decisions as a part of the partnership's structure. The base condition for dealing with conflict is to boil it down to its basics and agree with all partners as to what the conflict is. Before reaching a decision, the dialogue and discourse must be fully exhausted, allowing the full measure of transparency and integrity. When bringing the conflict to a decision, every alternative will be presented and discussed, and will be given equal consideration before the decision maker, while the approving level has the responsibility of reaching a verdict on the discussed issue. Another possibility is a vote based on the relative size of each party in the shared committee.
12. **How is information made transparent?** Information has much value, both in creating integrative planning, as well as in the ability to control and evaluate the plan. A fixed system for transferring information must be set up which will allow both constant learning, and the formulation of new plans of action, as well as synchronization between all the active units. Responsibility for transferring the information lies in the hands of the person leading the process, as well as with each participant. Dates and frequency will be determined as needed. It should be agreed ahead of time, and between all partners, how the information should be transferred, collated and saved.
13. **Procedural and professional leadership:** It is recommended that in the initial planning stage, a lead committee be appointed, with authority and responsibility over the process and its results. There are two types of leaderships: Professional, executed by the professional authority most relevant to the central topic of the discussion, and procedural, done by an individual or group with methodological expertise in managing combined processes, seen as being devoid of personal interests. At the head should be appointed a specific figure who is committed to the common goals. In addition, it is recommended that the integration of policy planning bodies be regulated in the various ministries by a permanent team of methodological experts in managing combined processes.
14. **Staff and field relations:** The field elements, usually the districts, are the operative arm of the government ministries, and are entrusted with the execution of decisions. It is important that incorporating the field be done from the initial stages of formulating the idea, gathering the data, locating the problems and obstacles, and providing solutions to the problem. This process will lead to the improvement of the plan, as well as harnessing the commitment of the field elements to the mission and its execution. Executing decisions demands full coordination between the staff and the field, as well as with elements from the outside and with service receivers. Delegation of

authority to the field elements is required in order to express the abilities, creativity and flexibility in implementing decisions.

- 15. Supervision, evaluation and renewal:** Setting supervisory and evaluation mechanisms is significant to the implementation of every plan. Supervision is usually carried out by a fixed mechanism anchored in the government activity, depending, among other things, on achieving the fixed goals and outcome indices. Evaluation, on the other hand, is less fixed in government work procedures, and objectively measures the output and result indices. In inter-ministry programs it is recommended that a fixed and conclusive process of measurement and evaluation be defined, which will professionally accompany the project and will assist in reaching the right data-based decisions, preferably by an external and objective appraising body. In accordance with the conclusive evaluation, a decision can be reached with regard to learning the application of the program and the need to renew and change it.

This project is the fruit of a work group project of senior staff participating in the officials' program of the Civil Service Commission and the JDC Institute for Leadership and Governance. It is a summary of an in-depth process done by the team, including professional literature, colleague meetings, round tables, government partnership case studies, and team discussions.

The guide is an initial document, and will take shape with continued use, and with the summarization of the experiences of others in government service who will use this guide.

We are pleased that we had the privilege to deal with this significant issue of government and policy, contributing to the discussion and to government partnerships in the future.