

PRACTITIONER TOOLKIT

Strategic Partnerships for Institutional Change

A self-directed working guide for applying the WiL CoP partnership framework to your own context.





How To Use This Toolkit

This toolkit is a companion to the WiL CoP conceptual framework on strategic partnerships. It is designed for use by an organizational team. Find a time where you can sit as a team to work through each section in order. By the end, you will have a clear picture of your current partnership portfolio, the gaps, you will have identified your leverage point and a draft plan for one strategic partnership you want to build or deepen.

You do not need to complete the whole toolkit in one sitting. Each section stands alone and can be returned to as your thinking develops.

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- **SECTION 1** - Mapping Your Current Partnerships
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1. Mapping Your Current Partnerships

Most organisations have more partnerships than they realise, and fewer strategic ones than they need. This section asks you to take stock of what you currently have across all four types of partnerships in the framework.

Being honest here matters more than being flattering. A partnership that exists primarily for visibility or goodwill is still worth recording, but marking it accurately will help you see what is genuinely driving change and what is not.

Exercise 1: Partnership Audit



Let us begin with an assessment of your current partnership portfolio.

For each of the four types of partnership types below, mark whether you have these types of partnerships and rate its strength on a scale of 1 (early stage or weak) to 5 (well-established and driving real change).

Partnership type	Active		Strength				
	✓	✗	1	2	3	4	5
1. Partnerships with leaders Senior and influential leaders who can champion and embed women's leadership as a strategic priority.							
2. Partnerships for Incentives, Policy, Accountability & Cultural Shift Regulators, policymakers, funders, and institutional actors who can shape incentives, policies, and accountability for women's leadership.							
3. Partnerships for Cultural & Narrative Shifts & Collective Power Media, civil society, networks, and influencers who can shift norms, amplify collective voice, and strengthen the visibility and legitimacy of women's leadership							
4. Partnerships to Build Capacity and Garner Resources Universities, training providers, technical experts who can strengthen skills, systems, and funders who can provide resources for women's leadership.							

1. Looking at this audit, which type of partnership is your portfolio most concentrated in?

2. Which types are entirely absent or very weak and does that feel like a gap or a deliberate choice?

3. Which of your partnerships are primarily transactional (activity or visibility-focused) rather than strategic?

2. Finding Your Leverage Point

Not all gaps in your partnership portfolio carry the same urgency. This section helps you move from the audit and diagnosis to a more deliberate question. Given your specific institutional context, your sector, and the institutional component you are trying to shift, where is the single highest-leverage place

to build a new or deeper partnership right now?

Work through each group of partnerships below. Use the prompts to think honestly about what your current partnerships in that group are, and are not, achieving.



Exercise 2: Leverage Point Identification

GROUP A: Partnership with leaders

Who in your institution or target institution holds the authority to change the formal rules? Do you have a relationship with them? What would it take to engage them?

Your current power & influence partnerships and what they are and are not achieving

The highest-leverage new partnership in this Group would be with...

GROUP B: Partnerships for Incentives, Policy, Accountability & Cultural Shift

Who has the power to reward, require, and reinforce change by reforming policies, regulations, and institutional frameworks? Who can hold institutions and leaders accountable for results with respect to women's leadership? Who can develop or strengthen data systems on women's leadership to track progress and expose gaps? Do you have relationships with these people?

Your current systems & infrastructure partnerships and what they are and are not achieving

The highest-leverage new partnership in this Group would be with...

GROUP C: Partnerships for Cultural & Narrative Shifts & Collective Power

Are you working alone on a problem that requires collective legitimacy? Who else in your field is working on the same institutional component, and are you learning from each other or duplicating effort? Who can help change the unwritten rules about who leads and how leadership is valued? Who has the influence to challenge deeply embedded gender norms, stereotypes, and assumptions?

Your current collective action partnerships and what they are and are not achieving

The highest-leverage new partnership in this Group would be with...

GROUP D: Partnerships to Build Capacity and Garner Resources

Who can equip the institution and its people with the skills, tools, and resources to act? Who has the skills to embed learning, mentoring, and adaptive practice into institutions? Who can provide or enable the mobilisation of financial, technical, and human resources sustainably?

Your current capacity building or fundraising partnerships, and what they are and are not achieving

The highest-leverage new partnership in this Group would be with...

1. Having reviewed all four Groups, where is your single highest-leverage opportunity right now, and why?

2. What difficult or unconventional partnership, with an actor not yet persuaded, would most accelerate change in your context? What makes it difficult, and what would it take to pursue it anyway?

3. Which group of partnership does your current portfolio most neglect, and is that because it is genuinely less important in your context, or because it is harder to build?

3. Designing A Strategic Partnership

This section brings everything together into a one-page planning canvas for a specific partnership you want to build or deepen. Use the leverage point you identified in Section 2 as your starting point.

A strategic partnership is not designed around a good relationship or shared values; it is de-

signed around desired changes of a specific institutional component and the actors who hold authority over it. Fill in the canvas below with as much precision as you can. Vague answers here usually signal that the partnership design needs more thought before it is worth pursuing.



Exercise 3: Partnership Planning Canvas

1. Name this partnership (working title)

2. What is the specific institutional Component?

3. Who holds authority over this Component?

4. Which partnership type(s) does this engage?

5. Why is this partner essential, not just sympathetic?

6. What do we want to achieve together? (shared outcome)

7. What does each partner contribute uniquely?

8. What does success look like at 6 months?

9. What does success look like at 2 years?

10. What is the first concrete step to initiate or deepen this partnership, and by when?

11. What could derail this partnership, and how will you mitigate it?

12. Is this partnership designed to shift the institution, or to strengthen your organisation's work within it as it currently stands? If the latter, is that enough?

A Note On Next Steps

This toolkit is a starting point, not a finished plan. We recommend revisiting your audit and canvas every six months as your context evolves, new actors enter the picture, and your understanding of the Component deepens. If you are a member of the WiL CoP, consider sharing your canvas with a peer organisation in the network, the most useful stress-test of a partnership design is often a colleague asking “why that actor, and not this one?”





www.busara-africa.com



P.O. Box 3964, Cantoments Accra



+233 (0) 256-937-687
+233 (0) 264-488-381



22 Park Lane, Mayfair Gardens,
East Airport, Accra