“This framework provides a powerful North Star that the Public Lands Alliance will engage to illuminate and inform its program work in the seasons ahead.”

BEST PRACTICES
Establishing a Partnership Model for America’s Public Lands
Considering Framework

“In this time of flat budgets and increasing federal debt, partnerships will be the mechanism by which we are able to take our responsibilities to protect resources, provide outstanding visitor experiences, and care of our workforce to the next level.” – Jeff Mow, Superintendent, Glacier National Park

Why This Matters

Public land management agencies and their nonprofit partners nationwide have learned and refined best practices for working together. This framework distills recognized partnership best practices from friends groups, cooperating associations, advocacy organizations and others. Our hope is that sharing these common practices for successful partnerships will inspire new successes.

A task force of agency and nonprofit representatives helped us identify and shape best practices in five strategic areas, along with specific actions for achievement. Not all actions will be appropriate for each partnership, some apply to specific types of nonprofit organizations at specific stages of growth; others may be more universal. Our hope is to inspire collaborative action and creativity.

With support from the Public Lands Alliance, these best practices will complement land management agencies and their partners to improve their specific policies and communities.

These tenets help the Alliance constructively organize service to nonprofit members and agency partners to improve public lands partnerships. They demonstrate the value of effective partnerships and encourage aspiration to high standards within the PLA network.

A. Develop a Shared Vision, Driven by Mission

1. The land management agency and the nonprofit organization actions are mission-based, complementary, and focused toward a common vision.

Possible Actions:

Partners conduct annual high level strategic planning workshops, resulting in leveraged, integrated priorities for annual work plans.

- Partners identify best use of partner resources to achieve shared missions based on applicable guidelines.
- Partners develop long range three to five year plans to ensure best use and integration of assets.
- Partners establish integrated project teams with partner and agency representation for signature campaigns and larger projects.

2. Partners clearly understand mutual benefits and consider opportunities based on potential short and long-term impacts. Potential risks are weighed against potential positive outcomes.

Possible Actions:

- Conduct an annual assessment as part of the strategic planning process.
- Offer monthly Partner brown bag lunches to encourage cross-collaboration among partners.
- Identify and affirm mutual benefits annually as part of the planning process.
3. Nonprofit and agency leaders understand forces that affect, or could affect, the partnership’s success.

**Possible Actions:**
- The nonprofit and agency partner regularly gather and share information about visitors, other stakeholders, and relevant internal and external data.
- Partners collaborate on external communications and shared messaging when appropriate.

**B. Value Integration and Communication**

1. Partners participate in shared strategic and operational planning. Agency and nonprofit partners engage early to jointly plan high-impact activities.

**Possible Actions:**
- Partners are invited to participate in routine senior management meetings (agency and nonprofit).
- Integrated Project teams drive key initiatives and emerging strategies/projects (i.e. Education, Interpretation Plans, Development Plans, Retail, etc.).
- Liaisons are identified for both the agency and the nonprofit to ease collaboration and communication.
- The Partnership is managed through the superintendent or director’s office.
- Establish co-location of offices if feasible.

2. Partners are comfortable exerting influence without demanding control. The work of the partnership is carried out at all levels of each partnering organization.

**Possible Actions:**
- Establish peer to peer connectivity within partnership, from finance to concession, funding, leadership, planning, etc. as relevant.
- Establish regular orientation workshops between partner and agency staff.

3. Partners demonstrate mutual respect and trust at all operational levels. Information is shared regularly in a helpful manner.

**Possible Actions:**
- Establish an annual award for exemplary partnership collaboration (agency and nonprofit staff members).
- Schedule regular gatherings to build relationships and generate collaborative ideas.
C. Good Relationships and Fair Process Drive Partnership Tools

1. Agreements between the land management agency and the nonprofit organization are current and relevant. Partners comply with the agreement terms.

   **Possible Actions:**
   - Collaborate on annual work plan, conduct quarterly review of plan to benchmarks.
   - Conduct annual assessment of plan’s progress (include board participation at some level).
   - Include board and agency staff in annual strategic planning process.
   - Invite board leadership to meetings to help orient volunteer members, and bridge organizational cultures.
   - Annual planning and action plan are based on agency’s guiding documents, and nonprofit’s mission and vision.

2. Partners are accountable for agreed-upon tasks and outcomes. Expectations are clear, understood, realistic, and appropriately resourced.

   **Possible Actions:**
   - Partners conduct quarterly and annual joint reviews of work plans and make adjustments as needed.
   - Partners celebrate success throughout the year.

3. Partners create and agree upon process for dealing with disagreements in a timely, constructive manner.

   **Possible Actions:**
   - Agendize as part of regular meeting schedule.

D. Share and Celebrate Successes

1. Partners frequently and consistently seek opportunities to publicly acknowledge each other for their contribution and/or role in programs, projects or operations.

   **Possible Actions:**
   - Leadership lunches that acknowledge collaboration success, reaffirms partnership.
   - Establish an awards program that recognizes excellence in your site’s partnerships.

   **External:**
   - Annual Communication Plan developed/implemented by partners.
   - Joint press releases that highlight partnership success across season.
   - Partnership is featured across media platforms (agency and nonprofit).

“Through this work, we are striving to share and sustain best partnership practices across agencies and the nonprofit landscape to have greater impact and inspire new thinking.”

– Jeff Reinbold, Assistant Director, Partnerships and Civic Engagement, National Park Service
What’s Next:

As we help to facilitate partnership best practice consensus across public lands agencies and partners, our framework will provide a powerful north star that the Public Lands Alliance will use in the following ways:

- Orient multi-agency education and training programs.
- Development, curation, and sharing of translatable case studies, model planning, policy, agreement templates, and other tools reflecting input from land management agencies, nonprofit organizations, and other stakeholders.
- Identify opportunities and challenges in law and policy across agencies to fully leverage our public and nonprofit resources to more effectively protect and sustain America’s public land heritage for generations to come.

The framework presented is aspirational, and translatable to partnerships of all shapes and sizes. The strategies and action steps will be refined and populated as a working document – by our partners in the weeks and months ahead – as they share their experiences to our collective landscape. In this way, we begin to scale our best practices across the network, elevating our partnership to more effectively achieve our missions and our legislative purposes.

“The National Park Service Centennial effort was a recent example of how public lands are increasingly relying on partnerships to complete work within our parks and to reach beyond their boundaries to inspire longterm stewardship. This is the new way of doing business. These tenets provide a starting point for discussion so public lands partnerships can thrive.”

– Christina Hausman, Executive Director, Voyageurs National Park Association
“Our employees welcome opportunities to share and learn from best practices of successful public-private partnerships. Others’ experiences can prevent learning the hard way about what doesn’t work and inspires fresh innovations.”

– Trevor Needham, BLM Partnership Program Lead