

# NSF Engines' Partnership Agreement Plan<sup>1</sup>

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The NSF Engines' Partnership Agreement Plan is guided by rubrics. Established at the start of a program, rubrics should foster discussions that inform the design and content of strategic documents, establish expectations for outcomes, and guide progress.

The rubric is comprised of three components:

- Topics: Conceptual areas of the program or project essential to its successful development and implementation.
- Criteria: Characteristics or descriptors inherent in a topic.
- Stage of Development: Steps along a continuum to fully achieve a criterion.

The Partnership Agreement Plan rubric is provided in Section C of this document.

## A. Partnership Agreement Plan Rubric Content

The rubric for the Partnership Agreement Plan (Section C) is designed to be used as a tool for Engines crafting their Partnership Agreement Plan deliverable. Engines will follow an iterative path of planning, drafting plans, approving them, evaluating the implementation of their plans, and planning again to make necessary adjustments. The stages of development thus begin in drafting the plan (preliminary stage), continue with finalizing and approving the plan (intermediate stage), and then implementing the plan (operational stage). The next round of planning needs the experience of implementation. The most advanced stage of development in this rubric (established) is when the Engine

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assesses how the plan was implemented and if it determines that changes are needed, amends the plan. An Engine reaches this stage of the rubric when their plans have been implemented for a sufficiently long period of time to test the given criteria. It is suggested that this length of time be at least three months. As the new period begins, the Engine will draft amendments to the original plans, thus returning to the preliminary stage of this rubric and from there on, the planning stages start again.

The Partnership Agreement Plan Rubric contains several criteria nested within the two topic areas:

- Strategy for Partnership(s)
  - Objective(s) of Partnership(s): Details the Engine’s overall objective(s) for formal<sup>2</sup> and informal<sup>3</sup> partnership(s) and why these partnership(s) are important to achieving the Engine’s goals.
  - Cross-sector partnership analysis: Identifies potential cross-sector partnership(s)<sup>4</sup> in the Engine’s region of service and how the Engine plans to engage those partnership(s) that are designated as high priority. This analysis will provide information on current and future cross-sector partnership(s). This information may have been included as part of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis. If so, information verbatim is acceptable.
  - Outreach Plan: Describes how the Engine will initiate contact and develop a stakeholder relationship with formal and informal partner(s). This criterion will detail how, when, and where the communication(s) will take place.
  - Partnership Termination Contingency Plan: Details how the Engine will handle a planned or abrupt termination in formal and informal partnership(s).
- Partnership Document
  - Template Partnership Agreement(s): A draft partnership agreement for all future formal partnership(s). As partnership agreements are legal documents, the Engine may choose to engage a law firm to help draft this agreement. Engines may opt to have different templates for different

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<sup>2</sup> A formal partner is a partner organization that has a signed NSF Engines partnership agreement.

<sup>3</sup> An informal partner is a partner organization that does not have a signed NSF Engines partnership agreement.

<sup>4</sup> Cross-sector partnerships are partnerships in different sectors, including academia, government, and industry.

partnerships (e.g., research, workforce, communication). The template will be provided with the plan, but not all partnership agreements will be included in the deliverable.

The Open Response Rubric is an optional rubric that is provided as a free space for an Engine to provide additional topics or criteria that are not captured in the Partnership Agreement Plan Rubric. The completion of this rubric is not mandatory.

## **B. Instructions to Complete the Partnership Agreement Plan Rubric**

To complete the deliverable, Engines should submit two documents to NSF: the written Partnership Agreement Plan that will include a section for each of the criteria on the rubric (Section C) and the Self-Assessment Index (Appendix A) that will detail the Engine’s self-rating for each criterion listed on the rubric. Engines should list the section title or number of the deliverable that provides context for their self-rating. Details of each criterion are provided in Section A of this document. If an Engine would like to share something that does not adhere to the provided criteria, the Open Response Template at the end of the rubric provides space for them to do so.

- **Content for the Partnership Agreement Plan Rubric.** Any information germane to the current formal and informal partnership(s) of the Engine—for example, partnership(s) listed in the proposal, any documentation used to develop partnership(s), all documents and reports related to partnership(s), and any other information deemed relevant—should be used to respond to the rubrics. Use of information verbatim from prior documents is acceptable to keep administrative burden as low as possible. Information on informal partnerships can also be included.
- **Framework for assessing each criterion.** Each criterion in the rubric should be examined through the lens of the criterion description in Section A. of this document. Each criterion in the “Strategy for Partnership(s)” topic should be applied to the Engine’s Partnership Agreement *Plan* and not to individual partnership(s) or Partnership *Agreement(s)*. Engines may choose to have individual Template Partnership Agreement(s) per partnership (listed under the topic “Partnership document(s)”).
- **Determining the Stage of Development.** The selection of the stage of Partnership Agreement Plan development assumes prior degrees have been completed. At this early stage of Engine development, there is great variability in the progress to establish the Engine. Many of the criteria are anticipated to be at the preliminary, possibly the intermediate, stage of development, and future analyses will show advancement over time. For criteria that are not applicable to an Engine, the “No Evidence” column should be indicated.

- **Documents constituting the NSF deliverable.** The deliverable for the Partnership Agreement Plan will consist of a document containing the written plan and an index that indicates the location of the main text and relevant information detailed in other criteria that support the self-assessment (Appendix A).
- **Submission Process.** Upload content to your NSF Engine’s SharePoint site within the following folder path: “Award Oversight – Programmatic à Strategic and Implementation Plan à Drafts of Component Plans à Governance and Management Plan”. Email the cognizant and second Program Directors for your NSF Engine after uploading the documents
- **Questions about the Partnership Agreement Plan Rubric.** STPI will hold a webinar to introduce this rubric to Engines and will participate in NSF office hours to resolve further doubts. Award recipients should direct Engine-specific questions to their cognizant and second Program Directors. If you want to meet with STPI outside of the earlier noted webinar or office hours, please organize this through your cognizant and second Program Directors.

### C. Partnership Agreement Plan Rubric

Topic	Criteria	Stage of Partnership Agreement Plan Development				
		0. No Evidence	1. Preliminary	2. Intermediate	3. Operational	4. Established
<b>Strategy for Partnership(s)</b>	Objective(s) of partnership(s)	No Evidence	Identified elements of partnership objective(s)	Outline of partnership objective(s)	Operational version of partnership objective(s)	Evidence of partnership objective adaptability and longevity
	Cross-Sector Partnership Analysis	No evidence	Identified relevant cross-sector partnership(s)	Outline of cross-sector partnership(s) analysis	Operational version of cross-sector partnership(s) analysis	Evidence of adaptability and longevity in cross-sector partnership(s) analysis
	Partnership Outreach Plan	No evidence	Identified elements of outreach plan	Outline of outreach plan	Operational version of outreach plan	Evidence of outreach plan adaptability and longevity
	Partnership Termination Contingency Plan	No evidence	Identified elements of partnership termination contingency plan	Outline of partnership termination contingency plan	Operational version of partnership termination contingency plan	Evidence of partnership termination contingency plan adaptability and longevity
<b>Partnership Document(s)*</b>	Template Partnership Agreement(s)	No evidence	Identified elements of partnership agreement(s)	Outline of partnership agreement(s)	Operational version of partnership agreement(s)	Evidence of partnership agreement(s) adaptability and longevity

\*May be iterated per partnership at the Engine's discretion

**(Optional) Other Criteria Relevant to Engine**

Engines have the option to propose additional criteria that are relevant to their Engine but not included in the rubrics above. While it is anticipated that a criterion would be accompanied by the rationale and description for its inclusion, an enumeration of the stages of development is welcome, but not required.

**Example Format**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Reasoning</b>

## **Example Outline for the Partnership Agreement Component Plan**

The following is an example outline for organizing this section of the Strategic and Implementation Plan using the “Topic” headers in the above rubric as sections and the “Criteria” headers as subsections. NSF Engine teams are NOT required to use this outline.

### **I. Strategy for Partnerships**

[NSF Engines is likely to have an overall partnerships strategy as well as strategies for partnerships addressing different programmatic core functions of the Engine (e.g. R&D, Translation, Workforce Development) and/or different sectors within the ecosystem.]

- A. Objective of Partnership(s)
- B. Cross-sector Partnerships Analysis
- C. Partnership Outreach Plan
- D. Partnership Termination Contingency Plan

### **II. Template Partnership Agreements**

[Add a subsection for each template that corresponds to the partnership categories used in section I]

## Appendix A. Self-Assessment Index

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Topic	Criteria	Engine self-assessment*	Explanation of self-assessment**
<b>Strategy for Partnership(s)</b>	Objective(s) of partnership(s)		
	Cross-Sector Partnership Analysis		
	Partnership Outreach Plan		
	Partnership Termination Contingency Plan		
<b>Partnership Document(s)</b>	Template Partnership Agreement(s)		
<b>Other Criteria Relevant to Engine</b>			
<b>Topic</b>	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Reasoning</b>	

\* Engines should indicate their self-assessment of the Stage of Development achieved in the deliverable.

\*\* Engines should refer to the text in their Partnership Agreement Plan and note the page of the excerpt. Engines may also use any other document(s) that support their self-assessment.



## **Appendix B. Literature Review**

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### **What Makes a Good Partnership within an Innovation Ecosystem**

As suggested by Schütz, Heidingsfelder, and Schraudner (2019), regional innovation ecosystems can use the Quadruple Helix Model to understand the complex composition and interactions of government, society, academia, and industry. The Quadruple Helix model suggests that the four pillars of an innovation ecosystem (i.e., government, society, academia, and industry) interact in a multi-layered, dynamic, and bidirectional manner (Schütz, Heidingsfelder, and Schraudner 2019). Schütz, Heidingsfelder, and Schraudner (2019) suggest that incorporating societal stakeholders and individual laypersons can have a positive impact in research and innovation and “lead to more welcome, sustainable, solutions.” Cooperation and collaboration among innovation ecosystem actors, including societal actors, can strengthen research innovation systems and enable effective evaluation paradigms (Schütz, Heidingsfelder, and Schraudner 2019). Similarly, Schuima and Carlucci (2018) suggest effective technology transfer such as patenting, and employment and entrepreneurship growth can strengthen innovation partnerships.

### **Background on Partnership Agreements**

A partnership agreement is a legal document that involves two or more business partners that share all assets, profits, and liabilities of a business (Peek 2023). While partnership agreements may vary between industries, most have the name of the partnership, contributions of partner(s), and percentage of ownership; division of profits, losses, and draws; authority of partner(s); and term or termination of partnership, if applicable (Peek 2023; Cornell University n.d.). Partnership agreements also detail the nature of business or purpose for the partnership and typical day to day operations that are expected by the partner(s) (Small Business Development Center Hosted by Long Beach Community College District n.d.).

There are three main types of corporate partnerships:

1. General partnerships
  - Partners jointly manage and control the business
2. Limited partnerships
  - Limits the legal liability of some partners involved

- Contributors can invest without legal liability
3. Limited liability partnerships
- Similar to limited partnerships, except limited liability partnerships grant partners protection from the wrongful acts of other partners (i.e., negligence, misbehavior, unprofessional conduct; Lip n.d.)

### **Importance of Partnership Agreements in Innovation Ecosystems**

Partnerships in regional innovation ecosystems are a bridge between interested and capable regional actors to drive innovation around a particular area (Pidorycheva et al. 2020). They add value through diverse perspectives that help transcend silos and institutional barriers (Reichert 2019). Cross-sector partnerships, or collaborations across similar and diverse actors for the purpose of applying business principles to solve social problems, allow for strong integration across organizations, institutions, social networks, and knowledge sources (Dzhengiz and Patala 2023).

Partnerships directly contribute to many characteristics of a healthy innovation ecosystem, as described by Dzhengiz and Patala (2023): Strong bonds with research and educational institutions, frequent interactions between different actors and spaces for these interactions to take place, fair distribution of value capture, a balance between competition and cooperation, interdependence and complementarities between ecosystem actors, and shared vision. Effective collaboration and resource and capability sharing can accelerate regional impact of an innovation ecosystem by allowing different actors within the innovation process to “capitalize their unique strengths through resource sharing” (Guzman et al. 2023).

The existence of partnerships within a regional innovation ecosystem is not sufficient to make the ecosystem successful (Guzman et al. 2023). Stakeholders must be engaged and committed to an innovation ecosystem to help facilitate cultural and behavioral changes that are necessary for an innovation ecosystem to thrive (Guzman et al. 2023). Stakeholders must also be able to contribute to the holistic assessment of an innovation ecosystem, which requires resource sharing and collaboration (Guzman et al. 2023). A partnership agreement can solidify stakeholder contributions, actions, expectations, and liability—which can contribute to a successful stakeholder-partnership relationship (Peek 2023).

### **Example Rubric Criteria**

According to the draft NSF Engines Programmatic Terms and Conditions, core partners of an NSF Engine should:

- Support the vision and strategic plans across the core functions of the NSF Engine via a formalized partnership agreement;
- Provide resources to support the NSF Engine award activities;
- Agree on a common process framework to develop and support the NSF Engine award activities;
- Have employees actively engaged in key activities of the Engine award;
- Agree on intellectual property (IP) policies; and
- Define an approach for establishing and overseeing appropriate security, including research security and cybersecurity safeguards.

Examples of partnership agreements include:

- Cornell University: [Sample Partnership Agreement](#)
- Los Angeles Regional Small Business Development Center: [Partnership Agreement Example](#)
- State Bar of Georgia: [Partnership Agreement Checklist](#)
- [DOD and SBA Partnership Agreement](#)
- European Institute of Innovation and Technology and Knowledge Innovation Community: [EIT KIC Partnership Agreement](#)

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