

# Partnering Process Survey Report 2016



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# Partnering Process Survey Report

## Introduction

Partnering is a process of collaborative teamwork that allows groups to achieve measurable results through agreements and productive working relationships. For over 20 years, ADOT's partnering program has helped teams achieve their goals by promoting open and honest communication, developing team goals, and providing a way to measure them. Successful partnerships are built on a pledge by all team members to stand by and hold true to a set of four common principles: Communication, Commitment, Cooperation and Continuous Improvement.

Partnering workshops provide a formal structure for project teams to establish a mission, develop common goals, and commit to evaluating their ability to work together. During the workshops, members begin to develop relationships, identify issues, and formulate solutions to challenges that could potentially impede the project.

The ADOT Partnering Office manages the partnering functions, and provides facilitation services for all construction projects. Partnering staff monitors partnerships throughout the life of the project, provides support for the Partnering Evaluation Program (PEP) and retains all partnering documents related to the project.

The objective of the July 2015 survey was to determine if the changes to the workshop and process improvements that were implemented following the 2013 survey had a positive impact on participants.

The 2015 survey was distributed to ADOT staff and stakeholders who:

- received the 2013 survey.
- attended a partnering workshop in the past year.
- typically attend a workshop.
- are members of the Associated General Contractors Arizona Chapter (AGC).
- are members of the Arizona Consulting Engineers Council (ACEC).

The survey was emailed to over 1,700 individuals and resulted in 400 responses, a 24 percent response rate. Typical response rates for an electronic survey are 15 to 20 percent.

The data was collected in the form of an electronic survey of questions that related to:

- the individual's affiliation with ADOT.
- how close the individuals work with ADOT leadership in the Partnering process.
- how many Partnering workshops the individual has attended.
- perception of the overall workshop.
- the awareness of areas such as training, leadership, issue resolution and the Partnering Evaluation Program.
- processes related to issue escalation and the Partnering Evaluation Program.
- roles and responsibilities of Partnering Champions.

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The 2015 survey added four new questions relating to workshop improvements and the Partnering workshop report:

- Do you think Partnering Workshops have improved during the past two years?
- Which of the following workshop activities do you feel have improved?
- How often do you read the Partnering workshop report sent by the facilitator?
- Which sections in the Partnering workshop report are most valuable to you?

A glossary of terms used in the report can be found on pages 9 and 10.

## Increase in Positive Survey Results Since 2013

Contractor and Engineering survey participation increased by 25 percent.

Individuals who assisted the Senior Resident Engineer/Resident Engineer with the planning of the Partnering workshop showed an increase of 10.5 percent.

Partnering workshop participation by appropriate project members increased by 7 percent.

The effectiveness of the Issue Resolution process in resolving issues in a timely manner increased by 6.2 percent.

When asked if Partnering workshops improved over the last two years 23.4 percent of respondents indicated very much improved, 42.6 percent indicated moderately improved, 20.5 percent indicated slightly improved and 13.5 percent indicated they saw no improvement.

One of the questions added to the 2015 survey asked how often you read the Partnering workshop report: 38.5 percent indicated always, 29.9 percent most of the time, 27.6 percent occasionally and 4 percent never read the report.

When asked to indicate the most valuable section of the Partnering workshop report, 76 percent indicated the Issues and Action Plans, 56.6 percent the Attendee List, 52.1 percent the Issue Escalation Ladder, 31.9 percent the Workshop Overview, 17.7 percent the Team Charter and 2.8 percent found no value in the report.

Changes to other questions were insignificant.

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## Survey Themes

There were significant themes of interest and concerns captured in the comments. The themes have been summarized in the following categories: communication, Partnering Evaluation Program (PEP), team charter, training and leadership support. The themes of the comments are reflected in the following remarks:

### Communication

The Partnering 101 manual is a good reference tool to have when I need it.

I have been at ADOT before Partnering. The relationship between ADOT and the contractors improved greatly after Partnering.

If both parties have a cooperative attitude, partnering helps. However having a partnering workshop does not instill a cooperative attitude, if one or both parties have a selfish agenda.

I believe there should be partnering meetings throughout the job.

The steps to communication we came up with at the partnering workshop helped keep us on track and give us the ability to know what steps to take in issue resolution.

Project Partnering meetings are a great tool for every project. It provides the opportunity to meet all the stakeholders and address their concerns and understand their individual objectives. At a very minimum partnering serves as a vehicle for starting the project on a positive. The key to the success of any project starts with communication. The Partnering process opens the lines of communication and is a fantastic process.

Partnering allows all parties involved to discuss potential issues and ways of dealing with them before the project starts. This saves time and money for the project.

It is imperative that the Project Team attend the Partnering workshops. It sets the tone for the project.

I think it would be beneficial if all contractors on the project sent at least one person to the partnering. The prime is always there of course but a lot of information could potentially get lost in translation to lower tier contractors.

Sometimes the ADOT Champion is a high level position on the project (TES, S9). As the project gets in full motion, they become highly busy and have to fill in for inspectors and REs. This causes their plate to be full. This causes priorities to shift. If the project is fully staffed, then yes, Partnering is well shared between all members and promoted well.

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## Partnering Evaluation Program (PEP)

What I have observed; the PEP forms are forced on people to fill out and if a negative comment is written nothing is affected.

I usually do not see the PEP form summaries. We are typically a sub consultant and are not overly involved in the construction phase of the project.

I have been a Partnering Champion for years, but it is like pulling teeth to get the contractor, subcontractors and even our own people, including the REs, to fill out the PEP form. If someone can't fill out a PEP form when they are asked to, then they don't respect the value of partnering.

I think some people are intimidated to put things in writing...

PEP is a lagging indicator, partnering at the job level identifies and brings forth issues. Looking back, the PEP is useful in identifying potential patterns that might develop over several months.

PEP is effective provided the issues are actually shared and only if the low and high numbers are backed up with a comment on why.

The monthly PEP evaluation keeps the goals in the forefront so they are not forgotten. I feel most project people strive to do quality workmanship to provide a superior finished product that everyone can put their name on and be proud of.

There needs to be better detailed instruction on exactly how to fill out a PEP form at every partnering workshop.

## Team Charter

The Team charter allows everyone to know from the start of any project, what is expected from each other. It also sets the table for who is doing what on your project so you know who you send or receive information from when you need it.

I don't think the execution of a charter establishes the commitment since nonconformance is not likely to have tangible (i.e., legal or financial) adverse impacts on the nonconforming individual. It does represent something other team members can point to later and say, hey, you signed this. But the most effective means of enforcing commitment to partnering is still interpersonal peer pressure. To the extent that a Charter is a component of that, it has value, but on its own, it is not very impactful.

I think no one is held accountable to the Team Charter. I never see it after the Partnering meeting. Perhaps it should be posted and briefly mentioned at the weekly meetings as a reminder of how we promised to interact.

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The development of the Team Charter should not be boiler plated or pre-conceived language. Each team and each project is different with specific project requirements. Getting the team to come up with their own language is the best way to instill that concept that we are in fact a team that needs to share and work together during the course of the project.

It is much too generic now. More effort should go into project specific charters.

## Training

The online Introduction to Partnering Course is effective for new people who have not partnered on an ADOT project. It provides a good overview.

## Leadership Support

Partnering is the best program ADOT has ever implemented. I am a firm believer in the partnering process.

Partnering can only lead to a positive outcome for any project.

The individuals assigned to the project and their willingness to act in a manner that supports the project and the other stakeholders is the variable item. It all depends on the people assigned and their attitude and ego as to whether they go through the motions or actually engage in the process and way of thinking.

If the issues can be resolved through the escalation process at the field level the skills are being developed and used. Once an issue is at the DE level or State engineers level the escalation process breaks down. It appears this is a result of a hardline position taken by the State engineer's office. I have not seen state engineer attend a partnering, sign a charter or agree to the escalation process in years.

In my experience the issue escalation process is a strong incentive for those involved to avoid the stigma of being an impediment to progress. Consequently people at the lowest level bend over backwards to resolve issues, so that if something gets escalated, they are sure all would agree it needed to be. There have been, on a few occasions, serious issues that reached upper levels because they were not easily resolved, and these are instances where the pace of construction exceeds the escalation process so that while the issue escalation proceeds, the matter itself grows in severity.

The Issue Escalation process is effective in resolving issues in a timely manner only at the Field level. The DE level is controlled by the State Engineers office and issue resolution breaks down at that point.

The Issue Escalation process is effective in resolving issues in a timely manner at the Resident Engineer's level, after that it is very difficult to schedule any escalation date and time, it could take months.

The pre-workshop planning conference call has been very useful in preparing for the workshop.

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In general there seems to be a genuine effort and participation in keeping the process “new” and avoiding complacency.

Partnering has not improved in any area. As usual the agency believes that a check the box approach is the answer to everything and they have negatively affected partnering with this approach. A lot of work went into developing a partnering process over the last 20+ years and it is not improving at this time.

Indeed partnering is beginning to fail and will continue to do so until the agency puts the effort into reviving it.

Effectiveness of the partnering meetings have substantially decreased to the point of what is discussed at the actual partnering meeting can be handled in the pre-workshop conference call. Issues are talked about at the pre-workshop conference calls. Then at the meeting not all are informed of what was discussed. Most of the time required documents from the contractors is not presented to ADOT as required. Issues are never resolved and always saved for later; not addressed at the partnering where all parties should be available to resolve issues.

Partnering meetings have gotten shorter which is better and I think increases participation.

There is still room for much improvement in the workshop.

The Partnering Preconstruction meeting is really the focus for specific project issues. Sometimes the members in attendance are confused as to when to bring up project issues. Most project issues need to be addressed by pulling out project plans and specifications and partnering workshops do not have the time to do this. Subcontractors are then left feeling when do they get a chance to talk about their items of work. A large Partnering group does not always give them the time to discuss because it only relates to them not the entire group.

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## What's Next?

Since the survey the Partnering Office has made the following process changes:

- During the Workshop Kickoff Conference Call, partnering facilitators include more discussion about the content and attendees of the workshop. They also encourage project leaders to establish the expectations for partnering and lead discussions relating to goal setting and the importance of using the Partnering Evaluation Program (PEP).
- The Partnering Administrator and Project Manager attend ADOT Resident Engineer and Office Manager meetings to share information that will improve workshops. Recent topics focused on comments from the survey such as:
  - Making sure the space is adequate for the number of attendees.
  - Having refreshments available.
  - Using the information from the Workshop Kickoff Conference Call to plan the workshop logistics including who will be invited.
  - Providing time on the agenda for project members to meet and talk.
- The “Partnering in the Precon” process was implemented at the beginning of 2016. This modified workshop is appropriate for minimally complex projects meeting specific criteria when ADOT and the contractor have worked together in the past and have a good relationship.
- Partnering Office staff meets monthly and to discuss ways to encourage participation, vary the workshops, provide reminders about the purpose of partnering and encourage effective use of PEP. We have also reviewed comments and suggestions from the survey and will be continually working on ways to make improvements.

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## Summary

Thank you to those who took the time to participate in the survey. Your comments are very valuable and will be used to help improve the partnering process.

I encourage anyone who has suggestions to contact me by email at [bopie@azdot.gov](mailto:bopie@azdot.gov) or by phone at **602.712.7399**. The facilitators and I welcome discussions about partnering and ways to improve the process and workshops.



Sincerely,

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## Glossary

This glossary has been provided to clarify terms that are technical, uncommon, or specific to the Arizona Department of Transportation, Partnering and the construction industry.

**ADOT** – Arizona Department of Transportation

**ACEC** – Arizona Consulting Engineers Council

**AGC** – Associated General Contractors of America

**Champion** – A partnership member who promotes partnering and PEP for the team during the project

**Communication** – The exchange of thoughts, opinions, messages, or information, using speech, signals, writing, or behavior

**Contractor/Owner** – Person(s) in leadership position(s) for the company

**Contractor Project Manager** – Contractor staff who provides leadership for the construction project

**District Engineer, DE** – ADOT staff member who holds the leadership position in an ADOT District

**Engineering Consultants** – Members of the private sector that provide engineering services to ADOT

**Escalation** – Forwarding the issue to the next level of management or leadership for resolution

**Evaluation** – Process by which all stakeholders ensure that the partnering plan is proceeding as intended and that all stakeholders are abiding by agreements and helping to meet project goals

**Facilitation** – Serves the needs of any group that is meeting with a common purpose, whether it be making a decision, solving a problem, or simply exchanging ideas and information

**Goals/Objectives** - Desired outcomes specific to the nature of the project that are identified by all those involved

**Issue** - A situation or condition that either (1) currently or potentially has negative consequences for the program/project or (2) needs clarification to ensure correct understanding of action to be taken

**Issue Resolution Process** – A process that consists of identifying and resolving issues, action planning, and follow-up agreements

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**Partnering** – A process of collaborative teamwork to achieve measurable results through agreements and productive working relationships

**Partnering Office** – ADOT staff that provide the foundation on which successful partnerships are created and sustained within ADOT and between ADOT and its partners

**Partnership** – A relationship among individuals or groups that is characterized by mutual cooperation and responsibility toward the achievement of a specified goal

**PEP** – Partnering Evaluation Program – The ADOT evaluation program used to measure the progress of a team

**Prime Contractor** – A contractor having a direct contract for an entire project; the contractor may in turn assign portions of the work to subcontractors

**Resident Engineer, RE** – ADOT staff member who provides leadership for the construction project team

**Team Charter** – A document defining the common mission, goals, guidelines and key agreements of the partnership team members

**Workshop** – A meeting held prior to the start of the construction project emphasizing interaction and exchange of information among participants

**Workshop Kickoff Team** – The ADOT DE, ADOT RE, Contractor Owner, Contractor PM, ADOT Partnering Project Manager and an ADOT Partnering Facilitator This team will determine all logistics for the Partnering Workshop.