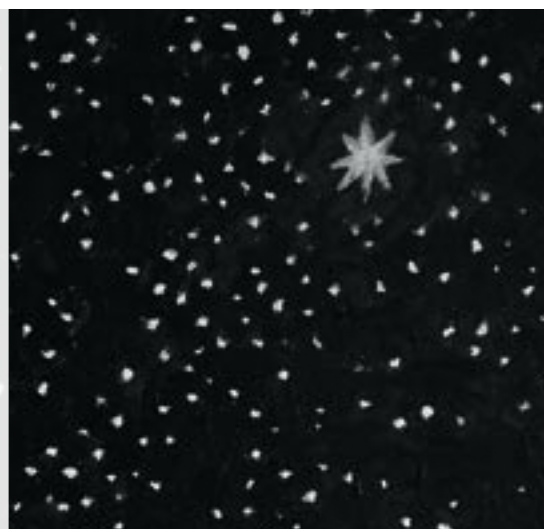


**Partners come together based on their own interests and assets, which usually ensures that the 'right' partners are at the table.**



The model also helps to preserve the partners' organisational autonomy. Groups only engage in issues that align with their interests.

These benefits flow from three major elements within the constellation model:

#### **Lightweight Governance**

A constellation-based partnership is created in response to a need or opportunity, or a magnetic attractor. When a group of people recognise a magnetic attractor, much can be gained from forming a partnership to respond to the need or opportunity at hand.

For Canadian Partnership, the magnetic attractor was the need to raise awareness (and mobilise responsive action) of the impact of toxic elements on children's health. In particular, the group wanted decision makers, service providers and caregivers to understand the pressing need to address both well-known (leaded jewellery and products) and emerging (Bisphenol A in plastic baby's bottles) threats. Although organisations were trying to work on these issues individually, they were competing with each other for scarce resources. Their uncoordinated actions resulted in confusion and limited impact.

Once a group forms around a magnetic attractor, it needs to quickly form a stewardship group whose purpose is to serve the group's broader collective vision. In small partnerships, this group can comprise representatives from each partner organisation. In larger partnerships and networks, it may comprise trusted members of the broader group who voluntarily step forward. These people are stewards of the community interest and the work that is being undertaken is

in relation to the magnetic attractor; they are not representative of their organisation's interests. But each organisation can pursue its interests through individual constellations.

The stewardship sets strategic direction, monitors the partnership's overall health and aligns constellations with the partnership's purpose. It first asks: how and why should the group work together? The answers are then fed into a set of plans. The group then typically turns its energy to the practical matter of supporting constellations: looking for opportunities; assessing the current assets; and listening to ideas.

Canadian Partnership's stewards, called the 'coordinating committee', created three key documents: guiding principles, a governance terms of reference and a strategic plan.

The guiding principles<sup>2</sup> lay out the partners' assumptions including the agreement that "... all children and adults have the right to a healthy environment free from potential hazards to their environmental health and safety." While this may seem like a motherhood statement, it defined both the magnetic attractor (hazards) and who the partners should be (organisations dealing with children, health or the environment).

The governance terms of reference<sup>3</sup> focus on how the partners will work together; the rule is 'as little process as possible'. They stipulate that the day-to-day coordination of the partnership must reside outside the partners (a key constellation model principle) and provide guidelines for decision-making, money flows, secretariat services, conflict resolution and adding new partners. Unlike most non-profit organisation