

# COLLABORATING IN A NEW WAY

**An important aspect of Kairos is our commitment to kingdom-minded collaboration. To encourage such collaboration and partnership, we have developed a framework, several resources, and a way of working collaboratively.**

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# INTRO: A NEW WAY OF COLLABORATING

In order to build on the “[new way of learning](#)” we have embraced within Kairos, we believe a “new way of collaborating” is required. In this white paper, we will be looking at the practices, values, and purposes of collaboration in the context of Kairos as well as the various ways organizations are choosing to collaborate within Kairos. It may also be helpful to review our writing on [platform thinking](#) within theological education and on a “[new way of communicating](#).” In our experience the common ways of approaching learning, organizational systems, and communication within institutions engaged in theological education, tend to have a deformational (rather than formational) impact on each of us as individuals and on the community as a whole. [Back to top](#).

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## 1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-9: COLLABORATING IN A NEW WAY

Let’s explore this new way of being by discussing the principles outlined for us in 1 Corinthians 3:1-9. In this passage, Paul points out that a large problem in the Corinthian church was inharmony. Cliques were forming under the teaching of Paul’s name (and not under the teaching of Apollos, another missionary to the Corinthian church). Paul noted that while they have different roles not a single one of them is more valuable than the other.

“You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, ‘I follow Paul,’ and another, ‘I follow Apollos,’ are you not mere human beings? What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task.”

Paul does not have a problem with his brother Apollos, rather he is troubled that Christians could be so distinctly different to the point of being in competition with one another.

In Kairos, we don’t see our peers or other organizations as competitors. We see them as collaborators. We strive to create a culture that values working alongside others and seeing the ways that we can each enhance our ability to serve the individuals God places in our care.

Paul continues to say, “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. 7 So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8 The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor.

9 For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building."

The Kairos Project and its partners do not exist to simply award academic degrees; we exist to steward followers of Jesus who flourish in their vocations. We give God the praise and glory for what He is doing in and through Kairos.

We collaborate with schools, ministries, churches, denominations, and like-minded organizations to meet with students where they are and join them on a journey of discipleship. When we see our peers as "co-workers in God's service" and not as competitors, true transformation and growth can take place not only in the lives of students but also within our organizations. [Back to top.](#)

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## FOUNDATIONS AND PRACTICES OF COLLABORATION: THE INTEGRATIVE SYSTEM

Our experience in theological education over the years has taught us that collaborating with organizations outside the walls of any given school can be difficult often because collaboration within the walls of the school itself can be hard. Because schools, and seminaries in particular, tend to be modeled after a modern academic and hierarchical structure, collaboration within institutions can be stymied by siloed thinking and internal competition for resources and control.

To address this challenge, in about 2008 Greg Henson, not yet serving at Sioux Falls Seminary, began experimenting with something he called the "enterprise model." This approach to organizational development began as a way of thinking about institutional integration. It was born out of the need for seminaries to move past cross-functional employees or roles because this practice separates the various functions of the institution. In late 2013, the team at Sioux Falls Seminary, now with Henson as its leader, began working through these ideas and what they mean in practice. Finally, in about 2015 David Williams, President of Taylor Seminary, began working with Sioux Falls trying to capture the concept of this "Integrative System" in a succinct set of principles.

Over time, this line of thinking has formed into a much deeper, more holistic, and values-driven approach to integrated organizational development. We believe it is one of the most important changes that must occur within organizations in order to be truly collaborative within or without their walls. Within this approach to organizational development, when all employees become knowledgeable about all aspects of the organization's work, they are able to think and act integratively. Such an integrative system requires institutions to break down the silos within their organizations in order for work to be done efficiently and effectively and without competition for resources and control.

The enterprise model can be defined as “An integrated way of being that requires the ever-deepening embodiment of institutional values in service of mission.” It is not simply a way of thinking about organizational development but rather a set of values and practices that creates an organizational culture and governance structure that empowers organizations to be more fully aligned with mission and strategy and, therefore, more able to engage in collaboration. Here are a few guiding principles of the model.

First, the enterprise model recognizes, even assumes, that the current systems in place are often dis-integrated. That is to say that meeting structures, communication practices, decision-making processes, and assumptions about the role and purpose of staff/faculty/board members are not integrated with each other in a common organizational system. Rather, the assumption is that organizations tend toward silo-thinking, inefficient systems, protectionist practices, and dis-integration.

As a result, the enterprise model invites the entire community within an organization to begin identifying areas of dis-integration. Every voice in the community is lifted to a point where the concerns of the entire system are heard and valued equally. It is through this empowerment of voices that dis-integration is brought to light. In most cases, institutional practices have been formed by years of dis-integration. Therefore, the work of integration can take time and must be done in an ongoing and unending change process.

At all times, the community must be reminded of the institution’s espoused values, mission, and strategic direction. Over time, as strong consensus is built around these items, the culture within the organization moves toward trust-based collaboration. This trust-based collaborative governance system leans into the ongoing and iterative nature of organizational development and change. It embraces values-driven decision-making and brings the concerns from across the entire institution to bear on day-to-day tasks.

In this way, the enterprise model can be very disruptive to a more traditional model of organizational development: one in which only certain voices are empowered in particular decisions. The elevation of concerns and voices that are often not heard or listened to in decision-making can be perceived as diminishing the concerns and voices of those most often heard or listened to in a traditional organizational model. This can be unsettling at the beginning of the change process. It is also disruptive because once the trust-based collaborative culture and governance structure has been created, the traditional processes for including voices become antiquated and harmful. New processes for including voices must be developed, and these new processes will, in turn, liberate the institution from the bondage of silo-thinking and protectionist practices.

Finally, the commitment to an ever-deepening embodiment of institutional values, mission, and strategy leads to a learning posture wherein the institution is continually becoming aware of the ways that its practices are not formed around the institution’s values, mission, and strategy. This learning process can be confusing, difficult, even painful, so members of the organizational community undergoing this change process can expect all of the attending responses. Clarity comes by doing. As the organization lives into the enterprise model, it will become more comfortable with this way of being. In fact, it may simply be better to refer to the

“enterprise model” as the “integrative system.”

As an integrative system, everyone begins to experience what it is like to “let things go,” thereby creating a system in which partners are empowered to steward followers of Jesus who flourish in their vocations. Janet Stauffer, Dean of Students at Evangelical Seminary, recently referred to this as a kind of “spiritual discipline of letting things go.” It is a daily opportunity to seek the leading of the Spirit as we discern what God has in store for each of us as individuals and for the collective Kairos community. By leaning into integrative practices within the organizational system, we let go of power and invite broad collaboration as co-workers in the vineyard.

In doing so, we become part of a global network of theological education that functions as a platform for (rather than the source of) a participant’s journey of discipleship. Instead of trying to build or control every aspect of one’s journey, we partner with churches, nonprofits, ministry training organizations, and other kingdom-minded ministries to create an integrated system of theological education in which all components enhance the others.

Yes, that means we might ‘lose’ money that might have otherwise come our way. Yes, that means that participants in this journey might be exposed to something outside of our traditional approach to a given theological discipline. Yes, that means that other organizations might take advantage of this approach and seek to exploit it for their own benefit. Yes, that is what we think it looks like to give away power and control. Yes, giving away power and control is part of what it means to be a follower of Christ. [Back to top.](#)

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## FOUNDATIONS AND PRACTICES OF COLLABORATION: SHARED VALUES

If an organization is not designed to practice holistic integration (i.e., if it isn’t collaborating well inside its own walls), it will struggle to work with anyone outside of its walls. Let’s continue to look at the foundations and practices of collaboration by highlighting the shared practices that undergird all of our work within Kairos. These practices also shape our collaboration with every partner organization. Stating it another way, all members of the Kairos community (i.e., students, partners, mentors, faculty, staff, board members, etc.) are invited to engage in these practices as they participate in the work God is doing in and through Kairos. We have found these practices to be mutually reinforcing and helpful in the spiritual discipline of “letting things go.”

Kairos recognizes that faithful values and practices must reinforce each other. We are committed to living out our values in a dynamic way as we fulfill our mission under the leading of God's Spirit—actively balancing values that may, at times, compete. The following values and practices inform our work on a daily basis, and members of this community support and affirm these values and engage in them as practices.

**Presence** - People and relationships are at the core of everything we do. In order to serve people well, we must first be present with them. As a result, we must place relationships above roles or hierarchy. We are present with one another as peers or sojourners.

**Faithfulness** - All members of the Kairos community must place trust in God, be rooted in prayer, and participate in the kingdom mission. We must remain faithful to biblical teaching, the long wisdom of orthodox Christian faith, and the rich heritage of God's work in and through the Body of Christ.

**Affordability** - For theological education and integrated counseling to remain affordable, we must build and maintain nimble, low-cost, and high-quality operations without sacrificing relationality.

**Accessibility** - Extending programs and services to those God entrusts to our care, regardless of where God has placed them or called them to serve, enables us to meet people where they are. We value a range of offerings, from high-level academic study to certificate-level education and from long-term therapy to one-time conversations that bring healing and hope.

**Relevance** - The context of the student and/or the client is valued immensely. We recognize the impact that context has on how to structure pathways of development for students and clients.

**Partnerships and Collaboration** - We work together with other followers of Jesus because kingdom partnership and collaboration are essential aspects of Christian community. Competition has no place in the Kingdom of God. Members of this community do not worry about maintaining a competitive advantage or institutional growth at the expense of relationships. By collaborating and sharing the resources God has entrusted to us with others, we extend the reach and impact of our work. Rather than creating "walled-off" systems that we control, we create a collaborative control-sharing environment that wisely stewards God's resources.

**Outcome-Based Education** - Placing our focus on outcomes and outcome assessment creates more naturally-integrative and experiential learning experiences for students. This allows us to focus on curating resources, facilitating learning, and becoming experts at outcome assessment. This means that the educational journey is measured by movement toward stated outcomes rather than by the accumulation of earned credits. While partner organizations may use the credit hour for a variety of purposes, we are committed to creating ways to reduce the power of the credit hour in measuring and documenting learning.

**Technology** - Technology is an important tool in the development of people and in the operational structures of institutions. Members of the community are always looking for ways to enhance and optimize processes and experiences through the use of technology. An efficient, reliable, and adaptive technological system enables us to serve people well and be present with them.

**Innovation and Change** - We embrace and encourage continual change, innovation, and the desire to experiment. We recognize the need for continued innovation and each of us has the opportunity to learn from one another along the way. This focus enables the community to be nimble and find new ways to adapt to the needs of students and clients, changes in our culture, and the ever-changing landscape of theological education. As a result, we engage in an ongoing process of continuous improvement which requires ongoing change, development, and assessment. This means all of us should expect change to take place.

**Unity, Diversity, and Inclusion** - Unity in the context of diversity is not sameness. We are not striving to develop a superficially “diverse” community where everyone actually thinks or acts the same way. Rather, we are welcoming the mosaic beauty of the body of Christ. We practice inclusion because it raises voices that have long been diminished and recognizes that unity is found in the bond of Christ rather than in our abstracted theology or policies. Theology is important. Following Jesus is important. The unshakeable truth of God’s Word is essential. The Gospel is to be proclaimed in Jerusalem, Judea, and the ends of the earth. We practice inclusion because the Spirit uses it to open our eyes, hearts, and minds to what God is doing in our midst and through the body of Christ around the world—and in our neighborhoods.

**Transparency** - In order to work together, we must be willing to openly share information with one another. What one learns is shared freely. We desire to maintain open and ongoing dialogue. Transparency across the entire community is valued and upheld through open communication and an emphasis on relationships.

**Stewardship** - Everything we have belongs to God, and it is our job to steward it faithfully. We strive to optimize the gifts, resources, and people that God has entrusted to us and move forward together under the direction of the Spirit.

**The Local Church** - Theological education flows from the local church rather than being something handed down to it. Instead of creating a bridge between the academy and the church, Kairos seeks to integrate the two in new and life-giving ways so that both are edified in the process.

**Organic Discipleship** - Discipleship is not something that happens strictly in a linear fashion, meaning theological education must find ways to embrace the inherently organic nature of discipleship. At its core, theological education is an intense journey of discipleship and must be equally organic. We seek to walk alongside followers of Jesus as we discern the leading of the Spirit together.

**Hospitality** - All who are part of Kairos practice a posture of humility. While one may hold particular theological views and may seek to work within particular contexts or people groups (which is very important), all members of the community practice theological and communal hospitality while encouraging those they serve to do the same. [Back to top](#).

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## FOUNDATIONS AND PRACTICES OF COLLABORATION: PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK

Collaboration is, and always has been, an important aspect of theological education.

Over the years, it has taken several different forms, and each generation is tasked with developing new and effective models of collaboration that invite students, the church, and all the various stakeholders within a system of theological education to collectively participate in the mission of God. As we steward followers of Jesus who flourish in their vocations, it is important to collaborate with others. We have reflected on Paul's words in 1 Corinthians about being coworkers in the vineyard, described the importance of integrative systems, and outlined the shared practices that form our collaborative work with others.

As the Kairos community engages in the work of partnership and collaboration, the focus is not on us, what we "own," or who we are. The focus is on working with others to make known the Kingdom of God. In fact, we do not seek partners out of necessity for growth. Rather, we seek to discern and follow the Holy Spirit and respond to the opportunities for partnership that appear along the way. In doing so, we discover others who have a shared heart for God's work and Kingdom.

Throughout the past several years, we have endeavored to write a framework for how partnerships could be envisioned within Kairos. Over the past 18 months, we have given even more attention to such a framework because of the number of new and exciting doors God has opened. The result of this work is a partnership framework that 1) helps the Kairos community think through how it discerns and implements collaborative initiatives or partnerships and 2) provides a continuum of partnership possibilities.

Today, we will outline the questions that the Kairos community considers as it discerns the best pathway when presented with opportunities for partnership and collaboration. We will also provide a brief overview of the various types of partnerships within the framework.

## **DISCERNING QUESTIONS**

When considering potential partnerships, we engage in the process of discernment by asking the following questions:

### **How do we discern mutual alignment in mission and direction?**

In any potential partnership, we begin with a shared question: how does this partnership align with the mission and strategic direction of both Kairos and the potential partner? This is not about one side evaluating the other. It's not about determining whether a partner is "good enough" to work with Kairos. Rather, it's about mutual discernment—together asking, "Where is God already at work among us, and how might we be invited to join that work together?"

We speak of "strategic direction" rather than "strategic plan" because we are not trying to manage outcomes or predict the future. We are listening—together—for the Spirit's leading. In these conversations, we explore how the callings of our communities resonate, overlap, or even challenge one another in fruitful ways. We refer to these as questions of strategic alignment, and we approach them with open hands and attentive hearts.

### **How do we confirm our readiness to collaborate?**

When there is resonance in mission and direction, we then consider the practical realities of collaboration. Here, the question becomes: Do we have the shared capacity to walk together well? Can we support one another faithfully and responsibly?

This isn't about fitting a partner into our systems, but rather working together to understand what is needed and whether we are equipped to meet those needs—relationally, operationally, financially, and structurally. We call these questions of systems alignment. At their heart, they are about honoring one another through thoughtful planning and shared clarity, so that the partnership can be a blessing rather than a burden.

### **How will we nurture and steward this partnership?**

Finally, we reflect on what it means to sustain a partnership over time. Partnerships are not one-time decisions; they are living relationships. So we ask: How will we walk together in ways that are intentional, formative, and fruitful?

This is not simply about oversight or reporting—it's about stewardship. We want to ensure that partnerships begin well, are supported meaningfully, and are shaped by ongoing learning. We refer to these as questions of stewardship alignment. In asking them, we are reminded that all of this belongs to God. We are stewards—not owners—of the relationships, resources, and responsibilities entrusted to us.

## A CONTINUUM OF POSSIBILITIES

The questions listed above help the Kairos community discern where God might be leading in terms of partnership and collaboration. As Kairos has grown and taken shape, we have learned that partnerships with other kingdom-minded ministries exist on a continuum. On one end of the continuum a partnership becomes more like a union and on the other end it is a commitment to sharing resources, processes, or personnel. Below is a brief description of the three primary categories on that continuum.

**Legacy** - Legacy Partners are unique among the various forms of collaboration with Kairos. Like a school within a university or a brand within a larger company, a Legacy Partner becomes part of Kairos and no longer functions as a separate legal entity. All assets, governance, operations, programs, etc., are stewarded by Kairos, who is committed to honoring the heritage, unique identity, and stakeholders of each Legacy Partner.

**Contextualization** - Contextualization Partners Legacy Partners are unique among the various forms of collaboration with Kairos. Like a school within a university or a brand within a larger company, a Legacy Partner becomes part of Kairos and no longer functions as a separate legal entity. All assets, governance, operations, programs, etc., are managed by Kairos, who is committed to maintaining the heritage, unique identity, and stakeholders of each Legacy Partner. Each partner customizes its engagement, leveraging the Kairos Project to fulfill its mission. This level of partnership preserves autonomy while embracing collaboration, creating innovative pathways that serve both students and the organizations themselves.

**Operational** - Finally, Operational Partners are related to many of the back-office functions of education. In some cases, this means sharing costs with another organization or working together to provide a service to students. In other cases, it means finding ways to reduce costs by sharing services or software packages.

With a framework that 1) helps the Kairos community think through how it discerns and implements collaborative initiatives or partnerships and 2) provides a continuum of partnership possibilities, Kairos is able to faithfully respond to the opportunities God provides. Next, we will take a closer look at each of these partnership categories by enhancing the description, providing a few examples, and outlining how each type of partnership is identified, developed, implemented and supported. [Back to top](#).

## APPENDIX A: LEGACY PARTNERSHIPS

Here are a few examples and an outline of how Legacy Partnerships are identified, developed, implemented, and supported.

### Identification

As Kairos engages in its work of stewarding followers of Jesus who flourish in their vocations, we pay close attention to schools that seem to share a common commitment to affordable, accessible, relevant, and faithful theological education. Rather than actively pursuing new Legacy Partnerships, Kairos responds to opportunities and conversations that occur naturally in the course of our work. In doing so, we have learned that the primary characteristic of a potential legacy partner is a deep commitment to theological education as, first and foremost, a journey of discipleship.

Often, Legacy Partnerships are developed around a shared desire to develop a collaborative, innovative, and fresh expression of theological education. While there may be a desire to reduce costs, leverage new opportunities for programs, or create scalable operational models, it is important to note that successful legacy partners will see collaboration with Kairos as the best way to accelerate their mission fulfillment and broaden missional scope as they step boldly into a new future.

In this new future, a legacy partner's identity and heritage will be maintained and honored within a university-like structure wherein each partner is a unique brand ("dba") within Kairos. While honoring the past, Kairos and its legacy partners are also embracing a future wherein students from around the world can access a wider array of expertise, theological traditions, and unique learning experiences – all while adhering to our shared desire to provide a system of theological education that is affordable, accessible, relevant, and faithful.

Once a school identifies itself as a potential legacy partner or responds positively to such an invitation from Kairos, the conversation moves into the development stage.

### Development

The partnership development stage is best characterized as one of mutual discernment. Conversations that take place during this stage present opportunities for Kairos and a potential legacy partner to talk more deeply

about shared mission and vision, programs, staffing, operational practices, financial arrangements, and governance.

The primary goal of this stage is to discern whether or not a Legacy Partnership is the next best step. If the potential legacy partner and Kairos both discern that such a partnership is indeed the next best step, a joint venture agreement is crafted. The agreement functions as a legal document outlining the high-level aspects of the implementation process. If it is mutually discerned that a Legacy Partnership is not the next best step, the conversation then begins to focus on other types of collaboration and partnership (e.g., Contextualization and Operating).

If a joint venture agreement is written, it will define the timeline for full integration as a legacy partner (i.e., when governance, accreditation, assets, operations, programs, etc. will formally change). More importantly, the joint venture agreement functions as a formal commitment to shared mission by outlining the missional rationale for the Legacy Partnership. In our experience, if shared mission is not the driving force behind a Legacy Partnership, other types of collaboration should be pursued instead.

With the successful completion of a joint venture agreement, we move into the Implementation stage.

## **Implementation**

The implementation process happens in three phases:

1) Planning and Communication – In order for the full integration of a legacy partner to go smoothly, the process is outlined in a high-level transition plan that addresses programs, enrollment processes, fundraising, budgetary management, staffing, student services, and more. It is in this stage that the partnership is shared more broadly through an intentional communication plan.

2) Integration and Development – The final phase is where everything outlined in phase 2 is actually accomplished. As such, this phase can take place over many months or even years depending on the needs and context of a given legacy partner. It is during this phase that the teach-out transition agreement is completed through a modified teach-out agreement. Ultimately, this stage is one of ongoing iteration and improvement as the legacy partnership is fully implemented. Inevitably, we learn things along the way that help to make it better. This leads us to the final stage of the process.

3) Accreditation, Governance, and Legal Entity – In this phase, the responsibility for governance and executive-level administration of a legacy partner transitions to Kairos. How this works may vary based on a particular context, but the legacy partner releases its accreditation and dissolves its legal entity. Upon completion of required actions related to these steps, the legacy partner becomes a part of Kairos University.

## Support

Kairos is focused on the fact that theological education is something that must happen in community because discipleship is a communal endeavor. The community in which it happens, therefore, has a profound formational impact on everyone who participates in Kairos. As a result, Kairos covenants with each legacy partner to honor its history, heritage, and identity. The stakeholders, local communities of faith, students, faculty, and administrators of each legacy partner have faithfully pursued their respective missions, and Kairos is committed to honoring that work.

As a result, the support stage of legacy partnership is one that is ongoing. Even after programs, staffing, governance, communication and all of the day-to-day operations are part of Kairos, honoring legacy partners does not end. Because Kairos has pledged to maintain the history, heritage, identity, and brand of each legacy partner, even though new students are enrolled as Kairos students, they are encouraged to maintain a connection to the historic brand of the legacy partner.

As a community of Jesus followers, Kairos is focused on creating a global network of theological education that is affordable, accessible, relevant, and faithful. Legacy Partnerships create a strong network that can support and leaven this global network. [Back to top.](#)

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# APPENDIX B: CONTEXTUALIZATION PARTNERSHIPS

Kairos partners with organizations that share a commitment to affordable, accessible, relevant, and faithful theological education. Contextualization partnerships provide a flexible framework for collaboration, allowing partners to engage in various ways that align with their mission and vision. These partnerships are designed to integrate with the Kairos network while allowing each partner to maintain its unique identity, governance, and institutional authority.

## Identification

The identification of potential contextualization partners occurs organically as Kairos engages in its work of stewarding followers of Jesus. Rather than actively seeking new partnerships, Kairos responds to opportunities and conversations that arise naturally. A potential partner demonstrates a deep commitment to theological education as a journey of discipleship and typically has existing programs or initiatives aimed at equipping students for ministry and leadership.

Organizations that enter into a contextualization partnership with Kairos often do so because they:

1. Seek to provide pathways for theological education in a context where accreditation has been historically inaccessible, unaffordable, or disconnected from local needs.
2. Have robust theological education programs of their own but want to leverage the resources, technology, and educational infrastructure of Kairos.
3. Wish to create opportunities for competency-based degrees, certificates, or training programs without the financial and administrative burdens associated with launching new initiatives independently.

By partnering with Kairos, these organizations can extend their impact, gain access to new resources, and collaborate within a global network of theological education.

## Development

Once a potential partner is identified, both parties enter a stage of mutual discernment. During this phase, Kairos and the partner engage in conversations to explore the goals, needs, and structure of the partnership. The focus is on creating a partnership that strengthens the mission of the partner while integrating effectively with the broader Kairos ecosystem.

Through this process, both parties develop a partnership overview document that outlines key aspects of collaboration. This document serves as a guiding framework to ensure clarity and alignment in the next steps.

## Implementation

The implementation process takes place in three phases:

1. **Process and Personnel Alignment** – A key aspect of implementation is ensuring that student-related processes, educational resources, and administrative structures are aligned. To facilitate this, the partner designates a liaison who serves as the primary connection between the partner and Kairos. The liaison is trained and supported by Kairos, functioning as an extension of the network to ensure smooth operations and collaboration.
2. **Planning and Communication** – Effective communication is essential for a successful partnership. In this phase, both parties work together to develop clear messaging for internal and external audiences. The goal is to articulate how the partnership functions, what students can expect, and how the collaboration supports the mission of both organizations.
3. **Integration and Development** – This phase involves the ongoing implementation of the partnership, ensuring that all aspects of the collaboration function smoothly. Depending on the needs and goals of the partner, this phase may take months or years. Continuous evaluation and refinement ensure that the partnership remains effective and beneficial for all involved.

## Support

Theological education is deeply rooted in community, and Kairos is committed to ongoing support for its partners. Even after the partnership is fully operational, collaboration continues through regular communication, shared resources, and mutual encouragement.

Kairos views each contextualization partner as a vital part of a global network that is transforming theological education. By working together, we create learning environments that are affordable, accessible, relevant, and faithful, equipping students to flourish in their vocations and ministry contexts.

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## APPENDIX C: OPERATING PARTNERSHIPS

The final category in the partnership framework is Operating Partnerships, and that is our current focus. It is important to note that this type of partnership is unique in that it has a greater potential to touch multiple aspects of our mission. In addition to being one of the largest and most diverse systems of accredited competency-based theological education in North America, Kairos is also home to a multi-faceted clinical mental health system that meets people where they are and offers them hope.

Operating partners may be related to “back-office” functions of the organization or to a resource that is shared. In some cases, it means sharing costs with another organization or working together to provide a service. In other cases, it means finding ways to reduce costs by sharing services or software packages. Operating partners are an important aspect of making theological education and integrated counseling truly affordable because they reduce the cost to serve those God places in our care.

Now we will share a few examples of Operating Partnerships and outline how such operating partners are identified, developed, implemented and supported.

### Identification

If you have been following along as we have shared about each type of partnership, you may find this next sentence to be redundant! Operating partners are identified through the day-to-day work that occurs within Kairos. As staff, mentors, therapists, faculty, and other partners engage in their work, we pay close attention to other organizations that seem to share a common commitment to developing affordable, accessible, relevant, and faithful systems of theological education and integrated counseling. Rather than actively pursuing new operating partners, Kairos responds to opportunities and conversations that occur naturally in the course of our work.

In practice, this means an operating partner is often already engaged in the work of theological education and/or integrated counseling. In most cases, operating partners choose to collaborate with Kairos because they are:

- 1) Interested in sharing costs related to some type of resource (e.g., facilities, software, technology);
- 2) Open to sharing personnel (e.g., staff, faculty, therapists, etc.);
- 3) Looking to launch a new initiative that requires multiple participating organizations (e.g., creating a joint initiative to address student debt through a grant, conducting research);

4) Hoping to share processes (e.g., student/client billing, student registration, mentor training).

Whatever the reason, an operating partner sees Kairos as a “co-worker in the vineyard” and believes working with Kairos will help it pursue its mission and serve a wider array of people in the process.

Once an organization identifies itself as a potential operating partner or responds positively to such an invitation from Kairos, the conversation moves into the development stage.

## **Development**

During the development stage, the potential partner enters into a process of mutual discernment with Kairos. It is in this stage that we work together to consider the specific aspects of the partnership (e.g., personnel, resources, initiatives, etc.). As we learn more about what is possible and discern what God might be inviting us to do together, we outline this information in a partnership overview document. Such a document is not a formal agreement or anything like that. Rather, it outlines the high-level aspects of the implementation process so that others who were not part of the conversation can understand and engage in the implementation process.

When the partnership overview document has been completed, we move into the implementation stage of the process.

## **Implementation**

The implementation process happens in two phases:

1) Formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and/or Legal Arrangements (if necessary) – Using the partnership overview document as the guide, this phase focuses on wrapping up the details related to the partnership. Because Operating Partnerships are often related to some particular business process, cost center, or revenue stream, it is common for an MOU or a formal legal document to be required. In the spirit of open-handed and transparent collaboration, we hope to limit the use of such documents. However, when it is necessary, we are sure to complete this step before moving forward.

2) Process and Personnel Alignment – Using the partnership overview document (or MOU or legal document) as the guide, this phase also focuses on wrapping up the operational details related to the partnership. In particular, the appropriate Kairos and operating partner staff are connected to enable efficient and effective communication. In most cases, this means identifying a liaison – someone within Kairos that serves as the primary point of communication with the operating partner and vice versa.

3) Communication – Once everything is outlined and fully understood, we move to the communication phase. By this point, there has most likely been a good amount of communication already happening. The communication in this phase is focused on any internal and/or external communication that still needs to occur in order to help a wider audience understand and/or engage with the result of the partnership (e.g., helping students know how to access a shared library or register for shared courses).

## **Support**

As with all partnerships, the support stage is ongoing. Even after all the processes, communication and day-to-day operations are fully operational, the work of supporting operating partners does not end. We are always looking for ways to enhance operating partnerships and want to make sure such partnerships continue to work well for all involved. [Back to top](#).

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## APPENDIX D: PARTNER TOOLKIT

We aim to serve as a connector between students and the best practices of their current or desired vocations, learning experiences that leverage the best content and expertise with eager participants, learning experience creators and their sojourners, and/or vocational contexts and their needs.

The concept of a platform comes from the world of software development. If you are reading this article, you are using a number of technology platforms to do so. If you take any time to investigate platforms and how they work, you will most likely stumble upon the phrases “Application Programming Interface (API)” and “Software Development Kit (SDK).” You may also bump into the term “Knowledge Base” which can be used to describe the various “platform resources” available to people.

Within Kairos, these terms correspond to our “Program Interface,” “Program Development Kit,” and “Story Center.”

Most modern software platforms have something that falls into each of these categories. The same is true for Kairos, and we refer to the group of them as “Partner Resources.” Our partner toolkit is designed to help you learn more about how Kairos works and how you can interact with or leverage Kairos as you pursue the work to which God has called you.

### Platform Resources

In the context of Kairos, the best way to understand the concept of “platform resources” is to think of them as things that are available to all partners. Often, partners will choose to collaborate with Kairos because of the opportunity to leverage the platform resources that exist.

Here is a list of the various resources available as part of the Kairos platform.

**Accreditation** - The platform carries the burden of specialized, institutional, and programmatic accreditation. Partners that are working on the platform can have access to Kairos' accredited and/or approved programs recognized by accreditors including the:

- Commission on Accreditation of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS)

- Higher Learning Commission (HLC)
- Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE)
- University Senate of the United Methodist Church

**Digital** - The platform utilizes a next-generation software and is a co-owner of the world's largest digital theological library. Partners can choose to leverage the following resources in various ways:

- Learning Management System – Partners have the option of utilizing the platform's next-generation learning management system (LMS), named Pathwright, to build and offer world-class distributed or in-person learning.
- Payment Processing – Kairos uses Stripe to process payments around the world. Partners can leverage this resource in conjunction with using the LMS (and the platform interface and program development kit described below)
- Digital Theological Library (DTL) – The DTL is the world's largest digital theological library. Contextualization and legacy partners have full access to the DTL as do approved faculty mentors associated with a contextualization partner.

**Learning Experiences** - One of the greatest aspects of the platform is the vast array of learning experiences available to students. All learning experiences (i.e., courses) that utilize the shared learning management system are available to all partners. In addition, partners share courses outside of the platform through appropriate Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs). Through this network, for example, students in Texas can interact with professors in Canada and faculty in South Dakota can teach people in Dubai. The learning experience library available through the platform provides a unique resource that partners can use to expand the number and variety of courses available to learners without increasing their costs.

**Personnel and Expertise** - Within Kairos there are faculty, staff, and therapists throughout North America and around the world that are available to walk alongside partners as they partner with or utilize the platform. In some cases, there are ways to share faculty and staff in order to reduce costs or expand offerings.

**Back Office Functions** - Finally, contextualization, legacy, and operating partners have the opportunity to leverage the top-notch back office functions of the platform. Student registration, admissions, student/client billing, and more are all resources that exist within the platform. [Back to top.](#)

## Program Interface

In the world of software development, an API (application programming interface) is the means by which two software programs can talk to each other. It's how Google Flights provides information on all of the flights from a bunch of different airlines or how you can book a hotel through Hotels.com without ever interacting with the hotel itself. For any of this to work, the two software programs have to agree on a standardized set of

information and/or practices that can be shared between them. At its core, an API defines how two software programs associate with each other.

**In Kairos, our “API” defines how partner programs and/or services associate with the degree programs offered by Kairos.** It is the set of processes and/or aspects of a student’s journey that must be true for any partnership through which students can pursue an accredited degree at Kairos; they are the “set of information and/or practices” that all partners must utilize in order for a partnership to function at any degree program level. We refer to this simply as the Program Interface.

Here are the aspects of our Program Interface:

**Subscription Pricing** - All programs use subscription pricing. Partners may use something other than subscription pricing for their own work, but they must interface with the programs in Kairos via subscription pricing. In most cases, students simply pay a monthly subscription for tuition. In some cases, the partner collects fees from students in a non-subscription format and then pays Kairos via subscription on behalf of the students.

**Approved Faculty Mentors** - Each student must work with a faculty mentor who has been approved by Kairos as an Affiliate Faculty member and has completed training and onboarding. In most cases, partners use faculty mentors who already exist within the Kairos network. In some cases, partners identify potential qualified faculty mentors from within their own networks/organizations/communities who are then referred to Kairos to be vetted for an Affiliate Faculty position..

**Team-Based Mentoring** - In addition to working with a qualified faculty mentor, each student must have a mentor team. In most cases, this team includes a vocational mentor and a personal mentor. This team is built as part of the student’s journey through Starting Well.

**Unified Admissions Process** - All entering students must meet the admissions standards for the program in which they are enrolling. To be considered for enrollment, a completed application for admission and all requested admissions materials are required.

**Starting and Continuing Well Experiences** - In order to help students gracefully begin and end their programs, Kairos created Starting Well and Continuing Well (they are the first and last outcomes completed in nearly every program). Each student in an applicable program must complete these two outcomes. In some circumstances, contextualization partners may adapt these processes using the Program Development Kit outlined below.

**Enrollment Status Management** - Kairos University's leave of absence procedures guide the management of enrollment status for students. Students may need to pause their studies based on various circumstances. The

process for how to manage these changes is shared across the Kairos platform.

**Aligned Program Outcomes** - Each partner will align learning resources to the current degree program outcomes for a given degree. Kairos allows for flexibility regarding learning experiences, pace of learning, and contextually-appropriate activities and assignments. This flexibility comes from having common outcomes shared across the entire platform.

**Master Assessment Review** - The master assessment review process is the means by which each student demonstrates proficiency within a given program outcome and the way in which the mentor team documents and confirms completion.

**Partner Liaison** - In order to ensure clear and consistent communication, each partner must identify the person with whom Kairos will interact. It is this person who will relate to and communicate with the Kairos team and vice versa. [Back to top](#).

## Program Development Kit

**A software development kit, or SDK, is a set of tools, instructions, or program components that software developers can use to build applications that work on a platform.** For example, Apple has an SDK that helps app developers build applications that work on the iPhone. Zoom has an SDK that helps developers build applications that leverage Zoom's video conferencing platform. Good SDKs save time and energy because they keep developers from having to build everything from scratch. They also standardize the development process so that applications can work in different contexts (e.g., on iOS or Android, on a phone or a computer, in an application or on a website, inside of other applications, etc.)

**In Kairos, our SDK defines how partners can build specialized programs or learning experiences that take advantage of the tools, resources, and diversity that exist on the Kairos platform.** It provides opportunities for contextualization partners to customize the experience students will have or to launch new competency-based initiatives without having to start from scratch. By leveraging these tools, partners can offer affordable, accessible, relevant, and faithful journeys of theological education that are tailored for their mission and audience.

We refer to this collection of tools and resources as the Program Development Kit. Here are the aspects of it:

**Program Interface** - The program interface outlined above is the first, and most important tool, for any partner. In order for any learning resources to work and function within the high-quality standards of accreditation within Kairos, every aspect of the resources interface must be in place.

**Development Path** - Each program outcome has a corresponding development path. It contains the outcome title and description, an integrated statement of Christian maturity that serves as the primary tool for developing a learning path and assessing progress, and the areas of focus related to content, character, and craft. Finally, it provides a development process, which is a series of steps that the student and mentor team will use to walk through the outcome together. These paths must be utilized. Portions of these paths can be adapted to be contextually-appropriate for various contexts, traditions, or specializations.

**Standard Path** - One of the ways that students can develop proficiency within an outcome is by moving through a standard path. Standard Paths, developed by core faculty in Kairos, contain a collection of targets that can be followed as is, adapted and contextualized, or used simply as a reference. Each outcome in a program has a standard path. Partners can work with Kairos faculty to adapt standard paths that are contextually-appropriate for various contexts, traditions, or specializations.

**Learning Experience Library** - Kairos provides many opportunities for learning. Some are developed by core faculty within the network and others by partner organizations. Whether seeking scheduled and/or self-paced opportunities, development and/or standard paths for a particular outcome, or ideas for adapting assignments, the Kairos learning experience library provides a searchable online database to showcase available offerings and possibilities for learning. This library is housed on Pathwright and is accessible to all students and mentors in Kairos. Partners can build customized learning experiences that are housed in the library thereby taking advantage of the world-class software and/or building custom collections of experiences using material that already exists by adding a few additional elements. Such experiences are then available to Kairos students to seamlessly integrate them with their degree programs. They are also available to everyone in the network thereby fostering a global community of learning that practices partnership and collaboration.

**Design Templates** - To help partners create learning experiences and/or adapt things like development and standard paths, we have a set of design templates that outline the standards to be followed while building such things. Design templates are one example of a resource path.

**Resource Paths** - A resource path helps people learn more about various aspects of Kairos such as the Digital Theological Library, design templates, tools for mentors, and so on.

**Faculty Mentor Pathway** - All faculty mentors must complete the faculty mentor pathway. The pathway functions as the formal approval and vetting process for faculty as well as the onboarding and orientation process.

**Mentor Toolbox** - As Kairos grows and more partners join the movement, the resources available to students, mentors, and partners continues to expand. The mentor toolbox provides the most up-to-date information for people serving as mentors within Kairos.

**Kairos Guides** - Sometimes, the most helpful thing is simply a conversation with another person! Partner organizations are paired with a Kairos guide who can answer questions or point them toward resources as they lean into any type of partnership within Kairos. [Back to top.](#)

## Story Center

In the world of software platforms, a “Knowledge Base” is a collection of content and/or user forums where people who use the platform can go to find more information about how things work on the platform. As Kairos has grown over the years, we have found it very helpful to have a collection of stories, articles, blog posts, and white papers that describe what Kairos is and how it functions.

Over the next few years, we plan to build hubs for students, mentors, and partners where they can go to find information and resources that will be particularly helpful for them.

[Here is a list of white papers](#) that we believe are most helpful in understanding the “why” and “how” of Kairos.

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## Discernment & Integration Steps

Broadly speaking, the partnership process has two primary stages: Discernment and Integration. Obviously, these steps (and their subpoints) may be adapted based on each particular partnership conversation. In our experience, however, the points below tend to provide a good picture of what the process entails.

### Discernment:

#### Legacy

After affirming that there is a potential strategic alignment, we begin the operational and stewardship alignment process. That process includes the following aspects:

1. Financial review of audits
2. Review of SIR from ATS and conversation with ATS staff (or equivalent information for a non-ATS seminary or non-educational institution)
3. Review of academic programs/services
4. Review of enrollment/sales trends
5. Review of governance practices
6. Deeper review of missional and theological compatibility

7. After gathering data, we begin to have conversations with
  - a. members of the KU board that might have specific experience with, knowledge of, or interaction with the potential legacy partner to gather questions, thoughts, and insights
  - b. the executive team of KU
  - c. selected members of the wider Kairos staff and faculty based on their potential connections to the potential legacy partner
  - d. members of the board, staff, and faculty of the potential legacy partner
8. After initial conversations, we shared high-level references to the potential partnership via Kairos Notes and invite members of the community to reach out for deeper engagement if they are interested.
9. If these conversations go well, we begin to help the leadership of the potential legacy partner understand the important aspects of change that will be experienced when/if the partner were to join Kairos. We do this to be as transparent as possible.
10. Concurrently with steps 7, 8, and 9, we begin developing scenarios for potential joint venture agreements, teach-out plans, petitions, board member engagement, and stakeholder communication.

### **Contextualization/Operating**

1. We begin to talk with people that might be impacted by this particular partnership. For example, we will talk with the specific faculty, staff, or partners that might be most connected to a new partner.
2. This step is where we begin talking more in-depth about the details of the partnership. Using the values framework and key aspects of the platform, we work with the partner to clarify how a partnership could work.
3. If the university and the potential partner have mutually discerned a partnership should be formed, we begin the launch phase of the partnership.

## **Integration**

Once we have, in conversation with the potential partner, determined how and if the partner will participate in Kairos, we begin the integration process. Once again, this process varies based upon the type of partnership.

### **Legacy**

1. Finalize the draft of a joint venture agreement for approval by the board of the legacy partner and of Kairos University.
2. Review accreditation timelines and, if necessary, begin to draft required accreditation petitions.
  - a. NOTE: Where possible, we use previously written versions of documents to serve as templates.
3. Following board approval to enter into a joint venture (by both the partner and KU), we begin the process of transitioning a legacy partner. That has six aspects:
  - a. Determine a regular meeting schedule wherein staff/faculty of KU and staff/faculty of the partner meet to develop plans for the transition.
  - b. Determine the point in time at which new students of the legacy partner will transfer to programs accredited by the Kairos.

- c. Determine the particular way in which classic programs (and students in those programs) at the partner school will be handled according to the teach-out agreement.
- d. Determine the timing for a transition of institutional data management in light of joint venture and teach-out agreements (e.g., student data, financial data, bookkeeping, etc.)
- e. Determine the particular means by which this transition will be communicated to the stakeholders of the partner school.
- f. Determine the timing for the final board actions and meetings for the current board of the new legacy partner. It is in these meetings that the board of the new legacy partner will:
  - i. vote to dissolve the legacy partner's legal entity by the date noted in the joint venture agreement
  - ii. resign as board members
  - iii. appoint the KU board members as their replacements
  - iv. appoint the CEO of Kairos as the CEO of the new legacy partner.
4. Upon approval of external regulators/accreditors, the addition of a new legacy partner is made public. Where possible we use previously written templates to serve in the creation of this communication.

### **Contextualization/Operating**

1. Create a partnership overview that outlines the various aspects of the partnership so that each partner has clarity. In this process we obtain/share things like logos, graphics, brand guidelines, etc.
2. After briefly documenting the partnership, the next step is to begin a beta test or pilot group (or process) for the partnership.
3. With a beta test or pilot group in place, we begin integrating feedback into the ongoing development of the partnership. In this step, we utilize feedback from the beta test or pilot group in order to improve the next iteration. This process is ongoing and unending which is why step three often coincides with step 4.
4. Actively promote the partnership by sharing information about it on our blog and including the partner in our list of partners

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