Managing joint projects

Introduction

This guidance is designed for use in conjunction with the related items: Partnership: introduction to collaborative working; Networking: foundations for partnership; Partnership: developing collaborative working; What type of partnership? And Partnerships: checklist.

This item applies mainly to joint projects and especially to those with a lead partner (see the What type of partnership, although it may also be relevant where a consortium has been established but some aspects of service delivery are delegated to individual member organisations.

A joint project can only be run effectively if key areas have been addressed, defined and documented during the planning stage (see Partnership: developing collaborative working and go to Agree a project plan). In particular the plan should address the issues set out in this guidance item.

CAB principles

The CAB service has four key principles:

- Free
- Confidential
- Independent
- Impartial.

It is important that neither the confidentiality policy nor the other principles are breached through involvement in a joint project. There will however be situations where special arrangements may need to be made.

For example: A bureau might work with a local hospital to provide advice to patients on a secure psychiatric ward. The hospital authorities might say that clients must not be alone with an adviser, with the result that interviews would be possible only in the presence of a hospital staff member. Clearly this would mean compromising clients' confidentiality. Bureau staff would need to be satisfied that clients really needed to be accompanied, understood the limitations on confidentiality and were always given the opportunity not to proceed with the interview.

It is important in such cases for bureaux to explore their partner's position thoroughly, take advice via the Bureaux Direct helpdesk and not simply accept compromise because of a partner's custom and practice.

Aims and objectives

The aims of a joint project can also be described as the impact or outcome that the partners are seeking to achieve. The objectives will be more specific and will be underpinned as far as possible by measurable performance indicators.

For example: A bureau and Job Centre Plus might work together to improve the chances of unemployed people finding work, by developing their knowledge, skills and confidence. This will be done through training and volunteer placements for unemployed people. See the table below.

Aim	Objectives	Performance indicator(s)
Equip unemployed people to enter or re-enter the workplace	Increase the number of unemployed people who volunteer	15 x unemployed people become volunteers in one year
As above	Train unemployed volunteers in advice and computing skills	10 X unemployed people complete adviser training in year one 5 X unemployed people learn basic computer skills

Partners need to agree, not only on the aims, objectives and performance indicators, but also that they understand them in the same way. So, in this example, they need to agree on who counts as unemployed and what is involved in basic computer skills.

Service provision

As with any project, joint projects should include a written description of the service to be delivered, including

- nature and extent
- methods
- frequency and times
- location
- who is involved.

In particular, the description should show how the partners work together.

For example: A joint project between a bureau and Age Concern to provide benefit advice to older people may define the provision of its services as follows:

Nature & extent	Advice on eligible benefits including the completion of applications and the submission of review requests
Methods/location/staffing	1. CAB outreach sessions at day centre, booked via Age Concern staff 2. Home visits by CAB advisers, on referral from Age Concern staff
Frequency and times	1. Weekly, Tuesday, 10.00 – 12.00 2. Monday, Thursday & Friday within working hours by arrangement

In this kind of project it is usually helpful to establish a referral protocol, which sets out the procedure in writing and is agreed by both partner organisations. In this example it would need to address how Age Concern staff would contact CAB staff to arrange home visits, how to deal with non-benefit enquiries, possibly travel arrangements etc.

It is important to ensure that all partners are agreed on the social policy aspects of a joint project and that social policy tasks are clearly identified and allocated.

Timescale

Partners must agree on the timescale for setting up a joint project and for ongoing implementation. The plan should include “milestones” or target dates for starting or completing particular activities.

Roles and responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of organisations participating in a joint project can be set out in two broad categories:

- Lead
- Support

An illustration of how roles can be broken down into lead and support responsibilities is illustrated below:

Role	Lead	Support
Service delivery	Overall co-ordination Strategic planning (subject to project board)	Rotas Day-to-day supervision
Funding and administration	Budget management Liaison with funders Insurance	Bill payment Financial statistics collection and collation

		Equipment maintenance
Human resources	Employment Line management Training strategy	Day-to-day supervision Payroll administration Training courses and materials
Monitoring	Overall quality control Report production Evaluation	Casework checks Local statistics
Publicity	Media contact	Materials production Materials distribution

This should be taken as an illustration, not a rigid blueprint. Lead roles are generally assigned to the bureau or organisation managing the project with the support role(s) being assigned to the other parties. Sometimes some aspects of lead roles are shared among partner organisations. For example, if one of the other partners in a group of bureaux was especially strong on social policy work, it might take the lead responsibility for that aspect of the project. Note that a lead partner may also carry out some of the support activities for its part of a joint project.

Employing staff

In a joint project it is essential to be clear who employs each paid staff member. Lack of clarity could lead to major problems in the event of disciplinary or grievance procedures, dismissal or redundancy. The responsibility must also be clear in individual contracts of employment.

Where there is a lead partner, that organisation will often employ all the project staff. Other arrangements are possible but are likely to lead to increased complexity.

Problems can arise where staff members have multiple roles. A situation may also arise where a member of staff works part-time for a project and part-time for an individual partner. In this situation it is important to have clear boundaries between different areas of work.

Volunteers are not employees, but be clear which organisation a volunteer is involved in and who s/he is accountable to.

Finding the best arrangements for employing staff may be an important factor in deciding what type of partnership to adopt (see What type of partnership?). Sometimes staff may be transferred from one partner organisation to another or to a new body; in this case you should seek guidance on TUPE.

Management and staff structure

There should be a written description of the management and staff structure. It should

- show the different posts and reporting lines
- indicate broadly the roles and responsibilities of each post
- differentiate between paid staff and volunteers.

Individual roles, responsibilities and reporting arrangements should be set out more fully in the job descriptions.

It is likely that there will be a project manager with overall responsibility for ensuring the delivery of the project, liasing with funders and reporting to the project board. Normally the lead partner, where there is one, will employ the project manager. Day-to-day management of specific aspects of a joint project may be delegated to other partners' staff.

Generally the project manager will report to a project board. The division of responsibility and decision-making powers between the project manager and the project board should be clearly stated. See Partnership: developing collaborative working for more detailed information about project boards.

The location, day-to-day management and payroll administration of an employee may not always lie with the employing body, but may be delegated to another partner. This kind of arrangement can work well if there is trust and good communication between partners, but remember that the more complex the arrangements, the more detailed the documentation will need to be.

The diagram does not show employment arrangements, which might vary. The lead bureau might employ all the project staff but locate some in different bureaux. From an employment point of view, this would have the advantage of simplicity.

However, the individual bureaux might employ the supervisors and/or caseworkers. This might be almost unavoidable, for example, where supervisors and caseworkers spent only part of their time on the project. Another option would be for all caseworkers to be employed by the lead bureau and line-managed by the project manager, with supervisors having only a day-to-day support and supervision role.

Whatever the arrangement, responsibility for any formal employment procedures such as discipline and grievance would need to be made very clear in contracts of employment. Agreements between the lead bureau and partners would also need to detail roles and responsibilities clearly.

Financial management

The project's finances should be managed by the lead organisation in such a way as to ensure that costs are apportioned correctly and that individual partners are not out of pocket or making an artificial gain.

For example: A bureau and Connexions are working in partnership to provide advice and volunteering opportunities to young people.

Connexions has secured funding and is acting as lead partner. An officer from Connexions is the project manager and services are provided from bureau premises, where volunteers are trained and supervised. The bureau is also responsible for producing publicity material. Funding is apportioned to meet budgeted costs as follows:

Cost centre	Connexions	Bureau
Management	£11,000	
Supervision		£3,000
Training		£ 4,000
Volunteer expenses		£ 1,500
Telephone	£250	£ 1,750
Stationery	£150	£ 750
Print	£250	£ 3,250
Premises	£450	£ 2,150
Total	**£12,100**	**£16,400**

As with any financial management process, reports showing expenditure against budget etc. should be produced, monitored on a regular basis and made available to the partner organisations as well as the project board and funders as required.

A separate project bank account will not normally be necessary for smaller projects, providing that accurate records are maintained. The way in which the particular funding stream is dealt with will need to be shown in the annual accounts.

Care should be taken that all aspects of the project's operation are adequately covered by insurance, and in particular that any existing policies taken out by partners, parent or umbrella organisations (including Citizens Advice) are valid for the project.

N.B. Bureaux entering into VAT-able contracts on a joint-working basis need to be aware that the VAT issues can become very complex in these circumstances, and they should take professional advice

Communication

Communication is essential to the success of a joint project. The plan should show communication activities and who is responsible for them, including

- communication between partners
- communication within partner organisations, to ensure that all personnel are kept up-to-date with the work of the project
- external communication – with funders, users and other stakeholders.

Where appropriate, communications should be recorded to ensure that there are no misunderstandings at a later date.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are used to determine objectively whether a project achieves its objectives and whether it does so efficiently. They should cover both the process of setting up the project and its subsequent operation.

Different organisations may have different approaches to monitoring and evaluation. All partners need to agree on how this is to be done, including timescales and responsibility for producing reports. Clear objectives, performance indicators and service delivery details will make this much easier.

Looking ahead – maintaining or ending partnerships

It should be clear whether the project has a “task-and-finish” role with a fixed duration, or will run for a fixed period with the possibility of renewal, or is open-ended. It is important to have an exit/replacement strategy from the outset to enable the project to continue or to manage an orderly winding up.

Even if a partnership is not time-limited and appears to continue working well for many years, it is sensible to make provision for reviewing it periodically to ensure that it remains the best way to achieve the purpose for which it was set up.

A partnership may come to an end for various reasons. Its specific purpose may have been achieved. Occasionally it may have proved ineffective, or funding may come to an end. One partner organisation may change its focus, so that a close relationship is no longer compatible with Citizens Advice service aims and principles. At the planning stage, discuss with your partners what factors might cause the partnership to end, and ensure that your agreement contains a procedure for managing this.