

Effective solutions to working in partnership

Part 1 – Taking practical steps to partnership

Working in partnership is...

“a process in which two or more organisations or groups work together to achieve a common goal, and do so in such a way that they achieve more effective outcomes than by working separately.”¹

Introduction

Partnership working has increased significantly in the advice sector over the last few years. Spurred on by Government policies intent on improving public service delivery and encouraged and demanded by funders seeking to streamline the way they fund advice.

Why set up a partnership?

Partnerships are set up for different reasons. It may be to:

- Capitalise on a funding opportunity or government policy initiative
- Meet a funders criteria
- Fill a gap in service delivery that one organisation cannot do alone
- Develop a network of existing providers
- Coordinate a collective response to a policy issue.

As with all strategic decisions, an organisation will need to consult with its staff, management committee, users, stakeholders and review the reasons for considering a partnership, to weigh up the benefits and the risks. Further considerations may include:

- How will service users benefit?
- Is the partnership’s goal consistent with your organisations aims?
- Could the outcome you are seeking be achieved in another way?

‘Because the funder demands it’ will resonate with many advice providers. This may be valid as a contributory factor but should not be the primary reason for establishing a partnership.

Certainly, emphasis on partnership working has coincided with changes to how the advice sector is funded – moving away from grant funding to commissioning – seen by some observers as a direct consequence of the Governments promotion of partnership working and funders have responded²: Commissioning suits partnership working where funding is most likely to be awarded on a regional rather than local level. The Big Lottery Fund (BLF) believes that joint working is the best way to improve legal advice services and make effective use of resources³.

¹ New Opportunities Fund: Sourcebook (www.nof.org.uk)

² Advice in the future ©NCVO 2007

³ Big Lottery Fund advice plus round 2: FAQ (www.biglottery.org.uk)

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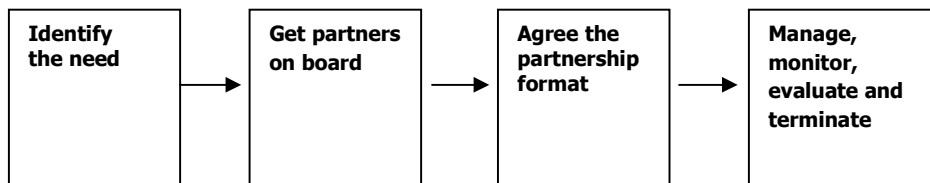
However, successful partnership work relies on much more than simply reacting to what the funder wants. It requires a commitment to work together and learn from each other - creating opportunities that would not otherwise happen.

The following steps are based on the practical tools and guidance section within the Prince's Trust research on partnerships⁴. This briefing looks at each stage and offers key points to consider, drawing on published research⁵ and the experiences and learning arising from advice sector partnerships in practice.

Steps to developing a partnership

The Princes Trust study on partnership working identifies 4 key phases to building and maintaining partnerships:

- Preparation
- Decision making and planning
- Implementation
- Review and learning



1. Preparation

1.1 Identifying the need for your partnership

Like any project or organisation, a successful partnership should have a defined purpose. This purpose will be directly related to a need identified by an agency, several agencies working together, or perhaps a funder. The critical point in the partnership cycle will be that the need or issue will have been developed before the partnership is established and work commences.

The purpose or need will drive the partnership forward, create a context upon which partners will work together, for how long and define the criteria upon which potential partners are chosen.

How you identify that there is a need to address will depend on the nature of your work and where you operate. A decision to develop a partnership may be in response to a funding requirement; this in itself is not unsustainable but partners must share a common desire to want to work together based upon an identified need. This may be to increase access to services or to develop a new service that builds on current models of delivery.

⁴The Princes Trust – Making partnerships work (start a chain reaction)

⁵Reproduced and adapted from Princes Trust

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A key consideration must be whether a partnership is the most effective and appropriate way to address a need.

1.2 Methods of identifying need

- Map existing provision in the area in which you plan to operate.
- Review published research and consultation produced by the Local Strategic
- Partnership, local authorities or research bodies such as the Legal Services
- Coordinate research and analysis with agencies that you work with
- Jointly undertake a needs analysis through a local advice forum or Local Strategic
- Partnership
- Evaluate how a partnership will fit with local advice strategies, especially in new areas. Will it add value or duplicate existing work? If so, there may not be a need for a new partnership.

2. Decision making & planning

2.1 Identifying potential partners

The need identified, and ultimately what the partnership will address, will impact on who is on the partnership and how they are chosen e.g.:

Example of identified need:

London Councils (LC) identified the need is to promote the take up of direct payments and benefits entitlements for people with disabilities and carers. LC stipulated that it would not consider bids where applicants did not operate in less than three boroughs and would award the highest scores to organisations with a relatively even spread of benefit per borough area.

Potential partners:

Potential partners might be prioritised using the following criteria: what type of benefits advice they give, in what boroughs they operate, whether they have been funded by that particular funder before, what added value a partner can bring to the partnership bid – e.g. training or specialist level legal support to other partners?

Partners should be chosen for their skills and experience as well as how these could benefit the partnership. Identify where there are gaps in expertise and experience and then draw up a list of agencies best matched to fill those gaps. Research potential partners through local advice forums and existing partnerships in your chosen field or area. You may also approach a second tier network to assist in your search. Then ask the following:

- What can a potential partner contribute in terms of skills and experience e.g. policy influence, skills in negotiating contracts, managing a diverse financial portfolio or capacity building?
- What benefits can each partner expect in return?
- What roles would partners be expected to fulfil on a partnership e.g. coordination, management or networking. Who is best matched to fulfil such responsibilities?
- What existing relationships do you have with other organisations? Could they contribute towards achieving the need you have identified?

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2.2 Example criteria for choosing a partner

Geographical range:

The partnership may need to work across a geographical area that cannot be met by one agency. A potential partner may provide a service in an area that you do not and enable you to extend access to your service. Record below where your potential partners deliver services:

E.g.: We work in X but need to deliver in Y and Z. Potential partner –
YZ Housing Rights?

Quality of service:

Do potential partners hold the Quality Mark or another quality assurance standard? This may be a funders criteria but it also indicates that all partners are working to a recognised level and standard of service. Record below what level of accreditation you hold.

E.g.: We hold the Quality Mark with case work in welfare benefits.
Potential partners need to have the Quality Mark at General Help level with case work in housing and employment. Also need one partner with the Specialist Quality Mark.

Financial track record:

Depending on the purpose of the partnership – you may be applying for a substantial grant or bidding for a contract – some of the partners should have experience of managing large grants, negotiating contracts, or managing a diverse range of income. A partner with a history of financial mismanagement may affect a partnership's sustainability and reputation.

State your partnership suggestions here

Delivering and managing services:

Funders place much emphasis on creating innovative projects but a potential partner should have a track record of managing sustainable services.

State your partnership suggestions here

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Existing partnership:

Is a potential partner already in a partnership? If so, it may not be possible to join another partnership, especially if bidding for the same pot of funding. However, it may be possible to join that partnership if its objectives are the same as your own.

State your partnership suggestions here

Although not every partner may contribute the same level of resources such as time, staff and space to deliver a service – a successful partnership relies on a basic level of commitment to achieve the agreed goal. Look at what each partner could 'bring to the table' and how that could benefit the partnership.

State your partnership suggestions here

Added Value:

Potential partners may be able to add value to existing services e.g. where they want to work more closely in partnership to improve services. Note down the services you currently provide and what a partnership needs to succeed. Could a potential partner bring language skills or transport, such as a mini bus, into the partnership?

Reputation:

Does the potential partner have a good reputation within the community and amongst advice providers? Does it attend the local advice forum or sit on a steering group?

State your partnership suggestions here

2.3 How to work together

Once partners have been identified, the next stage will be to decide what the partnership will do and how it will work together. There are a number of factors that will impact on the form a partnership will take:

- What each partner can contribute⁶ and commit to the partnership
- The level of financial support agreed amongst partners and applied to funding bids.
- Whether it will deliver services

⁶Prince's Trust

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Partnerships can deliver services as well as perform a non delivery role such as a campaigning, lobbying or strategic role.

- If the partnership will deliver services, consider whether it will be build on existing models of delivery to achieve closer integration of services.
- The type and format of the partnership must be agreed before partners can negotiate what each will commit and agree roles and responsibilities.

2.4 Measuring contribution

A scoping document can clarify each partner's position and possible contribution to a partnership and/or project. This may include:

- Basic details of the organisation including:
 - Name of organisation and contact details including a named individual for the signing of legal documentation where necessary.
 - Contact details.
 - When established.
 - Charity registration details
 - Name of Chair
- Background of organisation and nature of organisation. E.g. does it have a mission statement?
- Main objectives of the organisation
- Details of services provided as well as where the organisation operates and demographic groups worked with. Check if the organisation holds a quality assurance standard such as the Community Legal Service (CLS) Quality Mark
- Staffing levels including the numbers of staff and volunteers giving advice and if the organisation has any OISC or LSC accredited advisers
- Overall funding details e.g. who the organisation is funded by

2.5 Getting commitment

Committing to work with other organisations towards achieving an agreed goal requires careful consideration with the backing of your management committee and staff. You will need to weigh up the benefits and risks and whether the partnerships agenda is in tune with your own organisation's mission.

Commitment will involve allocating sufficient time to attend meetings and resources to effectively undertake work and achieve the outputs, intended outcomes, as well as shared learning within the Partnership.

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Below is a sample form⁷ outlining a partner's commitment to the partnership based on what they can contribute.

- **Name of potential Partner Organisation**
- **Contact person/ Date**
- **Contact address, telephone and email**
- **Activity or Service description** [what the potential partner organisation expects to deliver within the partnership; it could be an extension or replication of work the organisation does elsewhere or the development of new work as a result of this new relationship]
- **Activity or service space requirements** [the physical space needed to conduct the activity of the organisation's work; desk space, room size and condition, ancillary needs like kitchen or toilets, etc]
- **Activity or service storage requirements** [the physical space needed between activity or service delivery to support the activity or service delivery at time of operation; a large cupboard, a store room, etc]
- **Activity or service time requirements** [the time needed to run the activity or service directly and the time needed by any staff in any of the physical space identified above]
- **Organisation funding contribution** [funding the joining organisation is giving along with the activity or service delivery; rent, staff, donations in-kind, etc]
- **Commitment from Centre or Project** [what the new or existing project or centre will provide for the joining organisation when the partnership is real; the defined space and storage specified above, any other services – management, marketing, etc – which the new or existing project or centre expects to provide]

⁷ © our partnership.org.uk

3. Implementation

3.1 Formalising the partnership

Kate Aldous, from the Collaborative Working Team (CWT) at NCVO said:

"We recommend being open with your potential partner, and setting out a written agreement before committing. The process of putting it together can help identify potential problems and misunderstandings. The finished product can give clarity and focus to your work, help you to review your partnership, and of course is useful if you decide to go your separate ways. It certainly contributes to a happy and successful relationship!"

CWT research found that approximately eight out of ten partnerships do not sign a written agreement detailing how they will work together. However, every partnership should have a written agreement in place. A written agreement can be referred to when:

- Reviewing the progress of the partnership and the contributions of individual partners
- Managing any disputes between partners

Agreements should be drawn up by all partners, providing an opportunity to address concerns and agree roles and responsibilities, as well as how the partnership will be monitored, how partners will communicate, manage any disputes and what will happen when/ if the partnership comes to an end.

3.2 Developing a partnership agreement

An agreement can be legally binding as well as non-legally binding. Legal advice should always be sought if there is any doubt as to the most appropriate agreement to adopt.

Types of agreements

Memorandum of understanding

A non legally binding agreement that outlines a bilateral agreement between partners. It indicates a common line of action rather than a legal commitment.

Terms of reference (ToR)

A ToR will include the purpose and structure of a partnership, the basis upon which decisions are made, the limitations of service and specify how the work will be delivered. It will include information on who is involved, who will do what and when.

Service Level Agreement (SLA) used in contracts and commissioning

SLAs can be legally binding. This type of agreement may be applied where a partnership or a partner is contracted to deliver a service on behalf of another e.g. between a Local Authority housing department and a housing association.

Agreements will be developed to suit the purpose of the partnership. They may include all or some of the following elements:

- Aims and objectives of the partnership
- Governance and management details including areas of responsibility
- How the work of the partnership will be delivered and by whom
- Roles and responsibilities of the partners
- How often the partners will meet including attendance and representation guidelines
- Who will facilitate meetings and manage communication in between meetings
- What each partner will contribute in terms of resources and staffing commitments required to deliver services
- Performance management measures and measures to deal with underperformance
- How the partnership will manage IT systems and data sharing
- Financial contributions
- Commitment to confidentiality, data protection and dealing with conflict of interest
- Managing complaints, disputes and grievances
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Terminating the partnership

3.3 Managing the partnership

A successful partnership will have a clear purpose based on an identified need. An agreement will set out who the partners are and what they will contribute to the partnership. The Princes Trust identify that 'the majority of failed projects {seen during this study} have been due to lack of clarity at the beginning, lack of robust agreements and unsuitable collaborations'.

How the partnership is managed will also contribute to the success of a partnership. An agreement may set everything out on paper but effective management controls will ensure the agreement is exercised in practice.

Partnership management may focus on three areas:

- Organisation
- Financial
- Project

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3.3.1 Organisational management

Having a named person with overall responsibility to:

- Assume responsibility for representing the partnership, externally with policy makers, regulators and the wider voluntary sector.
- Act as a 'Quality Champion' to ensure that partners work to agreed standards of service delivery and monitor quality provision within the partnership, e.g. BLF
- require specialist partners to undertake peer reviews.
- Negotiate how staff employed to deliver services on behalf of the partnership will be managed e.g. will one partner have responsibility for staff or will this be managed by individual agencies?
- Monitor how individual agencies will report to the partnership and address how data will be shared and systems coordinated. The partnership may decide to adopt a case management system or referrals database for all partners.
- Oversee personnel systems for the recruitment, induction, training, supervision and appraisal of staff.
- Ensure that it has procedures and processes in place to ensure that progress is monitored, and outputs and milestones are met.
- Mediate in the event of disputes between any of the partners or organise independent mediation in the event that consensus cannot be reached in order to ensure communication between partners.
- Work with partners who have difficulties meeting targets – risk management
- Initiate mechanisms to terminate funding for a partner that is not performing as per requirement.

3.3.2 Financial management

Every partnership should include a named individual with financial skills and experience of financial management and reporting. A funder may also require that a partnership has financial policies and procedures in place detailing:

- How income will be distributed amongst partners should it receive funding.
- How income will be distributed amongst partners in the event of partial funding, e.g. how reduced funding might be distributed amongst members.
- How will partners' expenditure be tracked? Partners may agree to adopt a uniform cost centre or decide to coordinate existing cost centres (workability may depend on the number of partners).
- Methods of reporting – who will prepare financial reports and how often?
- What will financial reporting comprise of e.g. financial performance against budgeting.

3.3.3 Project management

If a partnership develops several projects it may be practical to consider who will lead on key areas of decision making and project development. The partnership may decide to implement delivery plans for each sub partnership and areas of activity with statistics reviewed periodically for each partner on client numbers, demographics and borough to ensure that outputs and outcomes are being reached.

4. Review and Learning

4.1 Monitoring and evaluating your partnership

Monitoring work undertaken by a partnership will identify progress towards achieving its objectives as well as areas for improvement. Progress can be measured against targets or criteria set by a funder. Monitoring data and statistics can then contribute to an evaluation of the impact of the work undertaken. Monitoring requirements should also include provision for reviewing the partnership agreement itself. This will ensure that any issues are addressed periodically. A well managed partnership will contribute to the ongoing commitment of partners.

The partnership's activities may be monitored against an implementation plan. An initial task of the partnership may be to construct and make arrangements for implementation of a monitoring and evaluation system.

Monitoring may consist of:

- statistics
- Attendance lists of workshops
- Attendance list of training courses
- Attendance/number of meetings

Depending on the nature and size of the partnership, staff working for the partnership may draw up work plans developed within the scope of the partnership to ensure they are measurable and time limited.

Further indicators may include feedback information received at the end of work to measure the outcomes of the partnership, and how far work has progressed. E.g. An independent evaluation of the overall project will be conducted midway through year 2 to establish the effectiveness of the project and to identify future recommendations for development of this work. This evaluation will identify and make recommendations for future sustainability.

4.2 Exit strategy

A partnership may decide to disband having achieved all it set out to do. It may decide to evolve into a charity or a community Interest Company so that it can bid for future contracts as a legal body.

Whatever the reasons for ending the partnership, provision should be made in a partnership agreement. The agreement should detail how long the partnership is expected to run as this will assist partners to gauge the level of commitment required to contribute to the partnership for its duration.

There will be occasions where the objectives of the partnership are not fulfilled and partners will need to review the reasons for this and whether the partnership format needs to change or cease work.

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The Princes Trust⁸ offers additional reasons for leaving a partnership:

- Breach of contract or agreement
- Lack of funding or insolvency
- Either party unable to comply with minimum standards
- A partner brings the partnership into disrepute
- Either party unable to meet targets
- There is no evidence of demand for the partnership

⁸ ©The Princes Trust – making partnerships work

This briefing was produced by the London Team's Sustainable Advice Project, and is sponsored by City Bridge Trust.

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RESOURCES & SUPPORT

Reference Sources

The Prince's Trust: Making Partnerships work (Start a chain reaction)

A study of partnership working in the Prince's Trust and a practical guide to building and maintaining effective partnerships. <http://www.princestrust.org.uk/Main%20Site%20v2/downloads/MPWreport.pdf> © The Prince's Trust

2005.

Big Lottery Fund Advice Plus Round 2: Frequently Asked Questions. Guidance in relation to BLF's advice plus funding stream can be found at:

http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/prog_advice_plus

Working in partnership: a sourcebook

This sourcebook was developed to encourage organisation and groups to work in partnership and to help them to do so effectively. It is intended as a practical source of ideas and suggestions for both new and existing partnerships.

http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/er_eval_working_in_partnership_sourcebook_uk.pdf (81 pages)

The Partnering Toolbook - Written by: Ros Tennyson, Partnership Specialist and Director of Learning Programmes, International Business Leaders Forum (2003) The Partnering Toolbook builds on the experience of those who have been at the forefront of innovative partnerships and offers a concise overview of the essential elements that make for effective partnering. This publication is in three parts:

- Part 1 is a short book that describes the generic partnering process from inception to conclusion.
- Part 2 is in the form of 'stand alone' tools to enable practitioners to develop effective partnerships.
- Part 3 includes more information about GAIN, the issues around food fortification and case studies selected to be locally appropriate for each of the different language versions.

Institutionalising Partnerships: Lessons from the Front Line,

Ros Tennyson. Published: International Business Leaders Forum, 2003

The Guiding Hand: Brokering Partnerships for Sustainable Development,

Ros Tennyson and Luke Wilde. Published: United Nations Office of Public Information, 2000

Adventures in Strategy: Briefing 5: Compete or Collaborate

This briefing explores the issues to consider when deciding whether to compete or collaborate with other organisations in your field. It was developed from the content from a series of 'hothouse seminars' held jointly during 2005-2007 by the Performance Hub and NCVO Third Sector Foresight. A range of third sector practitioners and experts attended each seminar, drawing on their own first-hand experiences to offer insights and practical advice. (December 2007, NCVO) Published by the

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Performance Hub. The Performance Hub works to help third sector organisations achieve more. To find out more, visit their website:

www.performancehub.org.uk/thinkahead

Should you collaborate? Key questions Joint Working Agreements

(London, NCVO's Collaborative Working Unit, 2005)

Pepin J Sharing without merging: A Review of Collaborative Working and sharing Back Office Support in the Voluntary and Community Sector

(London, bassac, 2005)

Copeman C and Griffith M Looking out: how to make sense of your organisation's environment (London, Performance Hub, 2007)

For further details, please visit www.performancehub.org.uk/publications

The UK Voluntary Sector Almanac 2007 – publisher NCVO £25

<http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/publications/publication.asp?id=5160>

Advice in the future – Scenarios and issues for the future of the advice sector 2007. Publisher The Performance Hub

<http://www.performancehub.org.uk>

Website Sources

www.ourpartnership.org.uk - Documents and links to information which give guidance on best practice for partnership working between the voluntary and public sectors in a variety of contexts. There are five sections:

- Setting up a partnership provides information on setting up a partnership and includes pieces on structure, partnership agreement examples and the partnership management process.
- During the partnership has papers discussing the issues likely to arise during the life of a partnership.
- The Partnership Lifecycle is a self-contained section that takes you right through the process of forming, running and closing a partnership.
- External resources lead to other websites or to documents written by a wide range of other organisations including the Urban Forum, the Charity Commission and the Health development agency.
- Partnership Training offers a list of resources and individuals that offer training in partnership working.

Local Partnerships InfoBank

The Local Partnerships InfoBank is a developing resource that contains a wide range of information on local partnerships involving the voluntary sector. It is created by NAVCA's Improving Local Partnerships Team.

For more information see [Local area agreements](#) or see:

<http://www.navca.org.uk/localvs/infobank/>

NCVO Collaborative Working Team - www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/collaborativeworkingunit/

The Performance Hub - Research into collaborative and partnership working:

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www.performancehub.org.uk

Charity Commission

www.charitycommission.gov.uk

Office For National Statistics

www.statistics.gov.uk

The Partnership Declaration - <http://thepartnershipdeclaration.org/>

The Partnership Declaration urges a substantial shift in thinking, practice and policy frameworks based on the realities of implementing partnerships on the ground.

Support Sources

Charity Commission - www.charity-commission.gov.uk/index.asp

A Fruitful partnership, effective partnership working: November 1998,

Audit Commission report: www.audit-commission.gov.uk/Products/NATIONALREPORT/A190CA25-7A7E-47D1-BCAB-373A86B709C0/A%20Fruitful%20Partnership.pdf (56 pages)

This publication has useful information on topics like getting started, operating efficiently and reviewing success. The paper follows the main stages in the lifecycle of a partnership, spelling out the likely problems and some ways of overcoming them. It covers:

- deciding to go into partnership
- getting started
- operating efficiently and effectively
- reviewing the partnership's success and
- what partnerships can expect to achieve.

Each section ends with a set of key questions which are drawn together in the centre of the paper in a pull-out checklist.

Improving Local Partnerships programme (NAVCA): funded by the UK Workforce Hub to explore skills and development needs of people engaged in Local Strategic partnerships

IDEA Partnership Improvement Programme: funded through Capacitybuilders and office of Third Sector. Aims to work with top 50 authority areas by 2009 to promote cross sectoral working with senior local authority and voluntary bodies.

NCVO Collaborative Working Team - www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/collaborativeworkingunit/

They offer FREE good [practice information and advice](#) to help voluntary and community organisations make decisions about whether and how to work collaboratively.