

**Voluntary
Action
Islington**

**A Guide to
Networking
&
Partnerships
for Small
Charities**

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1. Introduction

Partnerships and networking are powerful tools for small charities. In an increasingly complex and competitive sector, working together can help organisations achieve far more than they could alone.

Whether you are teaming up with another local group, collaborating with a public body, or forming a relationship with a large national charity or private company, partnerships offer real opportunities. These include reaching new audiences, sharing resources, gaining new skills, and strengthening the support you offer your community.

However, successful partnerships don't happen by accident. They require planning, communication, and shared values. When done well, they lead to more sustainable services, increased funding opportunities, and stronger community outcomes.

This guide has been created to help small charities and community organisations:

1. Understand what different types of partnerships look like
2. Learn how to build and manage partnerships effectively
3. Identify potential challenges and how to overcome them
4. Explore real-life examples of partnership
5. Access practical tools and templates

No matter how small your organisation is, you bring something valuable to any partnership. Your knowledge of your community, your passion, and your trusted relationships make you a vital contributor. This guide is designed to support you in making the most of partnership working while protecting your independence, values, and purpose.

2. Why Partnerships Matter

Benefits of partnership working:

- Broader reach into communities
- Shared resources (funding, staff, venues)
- Joint applications for funding
- New ideas and skills
- Reduced duplication of services
- Increased visibility and influence

Quote:

"Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much." [Helen Keller](#)

3. Types of Partnerships.

- Informal collaboration e.g. mutual referrals or co-hosting events
- Joint delivery - running a programme together
- Strategic partnerships - long term alliances with shared goals
- Funded partnerships - formal agreements to deliver funded services
- Consortia - several organisations working together for bids or services

4. Common Challenges

- Unequal power dynamics
- Confusion over roles
- Poor communication
- Differing values or working styles
- Unclear funding or decision making structures

Tips to avoid challenges:

- Set clear expectations
- Communicate openly and regularly
- Agree roles in writing
- Build trust gradually
- Evaluate the partnership regularly

5. Working with Larger Organisations

Things to consider:

- Are roles and responsibilities clearly agreed?
- Is the partnership equal and respectful?
- Will your organisation's needs and values be respected?
- Are decisions decided equally?
- Is your contribution properly funded or recognised?

Small charities bring:

- Deep community connections
- Local trust and knowledge
- Grassroots flexibility

6. Partnering with Private Companies

Corporate partnerships may involve:

- Skilled volunteering (e.g. marketing, finance help)
- Donations (cash, office space, goods)
- Joint campaigns or events
- Employee fundraising

Questions to ask:

- What are they expecting in return?

- Are your missions and values aligned?
- Is it a short term or long term offer?
- Who is your contact and how will you communicate?

7. Key Questions Before Partnering

- What are our shared goals?
- What does each party bring?
- How will we make decisions?
- Who leads what?
- How will funding be managed?
- What happens when the partnership ends?
- How will we handle disagreements?

8. Case Studies of Successful Partnerships

BIG Alliance – Islington Giving, Macquarie Group, and Voluntary Action Islington

What the partnership looks like:

A three way partnership connecting corporate volunteers with local charities in Islington. Volunteers from companies like Macquarie support small charities with mentoring, trustee roles, and skills-based help.

How both parties benefit:

- Businesses meet Corporate Social Responsibility goals and develop staff skills.
- Charities receive high quality pro bono support.
- VAI coordinates and strengthens local networks.

What we can learn:

- Partnerships don't always mean funding - skills matter too.
- Use local intermediaries to help match with appropriate partners.
- Be clear about your needs and ask for support confidently.

Shelter and SIFA Fireside – Homelessness Support in Birmingham

What the partnership looks like:

Shelter (national) and SIFA Fireside (local) co-deliver services like outreach, housing advice, and support to rough sleepers.

How both parties benefit:

- Shelter gets real-time local impact and insight.
- SIFA gains legal support, visibility, and funding access.
- People at risk of homelessness receive more complete help.

What we can learn:

- Local and national can work together respectfully.
- Define each role clearly to avoid duplication.
- Build trust by recognising each other's strengths.

9. Partnership Agreement Template

Date: _____

Partner 1: _____

Partner 2: _____

Purpose of the Partnership:
[Brief description of shared aim]

Key Responsibilities:

Partner 1 will: _____

Partner 2 will: _____

Funding Arrangements:

Funded by: _____

What are the funding arrangements _____

Meetings/Communication:

Frequency: _____

Main contacts: _____

Review Date: _____

Signed:

Partner 1: _____

Partner 2: _____

10. Resources and Further Reading

- NCVO – Working in Partnership
<https://www.ncvo.org.uk/practical-support/infrastructure/working-in-partnership>
- Charity Digital – Successful Charity/Business Partnerships
<https://charitydigital.org.uk/topics/topics/inspiring-charity-and-business-partnerships-11017>

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