

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Collaborative working can be as simple as sharing a few resources. At the other end of the spectrum are more integrated arrangements that, depending on the size and complexity of the organisations involved, may require professional advice.

Before developing any type of 'partnership' first assess your motivation: Why do you want, or need to collaborate? What are the main drivers?

What are collaborations and partnerships?

A partnership is a systematic and official approach to collaboration, usually formalised by a contract or legal agreement (such as a Partnership Deed, Heads of Agreement or Terms of Engagement). Very formal or defined partnership working might mean creating a joint venture (such as a trading subsidiary or a Joint Venture that is owned by many organisations). Partnership working is commonly used to build scale and rapid capacity building (without internal expansion) when delivering public services e.g. through contracted services or procurement frameworks for Local Authorities. It involves sharing responsibilities, risks and rewards with your partners and is therefore a more formal way to collaborate.

Collaboration is a flexible option which can take many forms. It can last for the duration of an event or a project, or even lead to a long term partnership. Collaborative working can start from very simple informal ideas, such as borrowing or lending resources. At the other end of the spectrum are more integrated arrangements that, depending on the size and complexity of the organisations involved, may require professional advice. These arrangements can relate to any aspect of a organisation's activities including administration, fundraising, campaigning and service delivery and can result in cost savings and better services for those the charity seeks to help. In some cases, collaboration can lead to merger, that is come together to form one organisation.

Collaborations and partnerships are not for everyone – it has to be an option that works for you. However, if the collaborative process is planned well, you can potentially deliver more effective and comprehensive services, access more opportunities and reduce your cost of delivery.

Why collaborate?

An increasing number of organisations are using or considering collaboration and partnership. This is because it can be difficult to access grants or funding for projects alone, but also because of increased pressure to achieve value for money and efficiency which can be done by sharing resources.

The first thing you should do is to think about **why** you would collaborate. Is it that you want to collaborate or that you need to? Thinking about what your objectives are will ensure that your enterprise can engage in purposeful, focused and useful

collaboration. You should also be able to determine what a successful collaboration looks like for you.

Identify or define the reasons why you want to collaborate or why you should consider this option. What does your organisation want to achieve in the short, medium and long-term through collaboration and partnership? Here are a few examples:

Collaboration will help us:

- Survive financially or sustain the enterprise another way
- Increasing our capacity to deliver on existing or future projects
- Augment our chances of getting a contract
- Secure funding
- Access new opportunities or new markets
- Reach more potential beneficiaries (e.g. geographically)
- Access new resources/contacts/information/expertise and skills
- Work with like minded organisations
- Improve our social/environmental impact

How does it work?

Collaborations and partnerships can take many forms and have different degrees of involvement and durations.

For example, you may link up with another group to organise a one-off event. It could involve carrying out joint fundraising to get money to run the event, and joint marketing to ensure you have a great turnout and generate beneficial Public Relations as a result. Or you may share resources by allowing another organisation to access your building to run training sessions, which in turns enables you to meet your own outputs and attract new customers to your café.

Mutually beneficial collaborations also tend to share influence and campaigning by promoting each other's activities and initiatives through networks and contacts. More complex examples of collaboration can include sharing office space, resources and even staff members. Alternatively, you may work with another organisation on a joint bid for a fixed term contract, for which you would share the delivery if successful. This type of collaboration should include a service level agreement or some form of formal legal agreement. In these cases you are presenting yourself to the funder as a partnership. Normally there would be an accountable body or lead partner, although this is not always the case.

There are many ways to make a collaboration process work for you.

The different forms of partnership/consortia working

- **Defined by length of engagement:** Are the two organisations willing to collaborate on the same timeline?
 - **Link:** For one project like festival, discrete event.
 - **Alliance:** Short-term, perhaps delivery of a programme of events or a fixed-term contract

- Partnership / Merger: Systematic approach to the process of collaboration. This might include: shared resources, collective marketing/awareness raising action, shared risk and reward
- **Defined by the structure:** According to the Charity Commission website, there are three common structures
 - **The 'group structure'**, a formal association of separate organisations. Group structures are a distinct form of working together, enabling charities to fulfil common purposes over a wide area, or deliver a complex range of related services to their beneficiaries. The arrangement is formalised for example by a contract, service level agreement or memorandum of understanding
 - **The 'affiliated or federal structure'** where a parent body offers support, strategic and central services to its members or affiliated bodies
 - **The 'coalition structure'** where a group of charities works together for a common purpose 'partnership of equals'. The agreement may be only a temporary collaboration with a certain aim in mind, or it could be established on a more formal basis with a new association being set up

The different models in consortia working:

- **Lead Contractor:** One organisation takes lead (maybe because of size and capacity, unrestricted reserves, expertise etc). Consortium members adopt & sign up to general over-arching Agreement. The Agreement is sometimes supplemented by detailed sub-contracts detailing terms, benefits + contribution to the delivery of the contract. It usually works best with 2 - 4 members
- **Steering Group:** Similar to Lead Contractor with contractual agreement between consortium members but it is led by a joint steering group with members from different organisations, 1 of which takes role of Lead Contractor for tending & contracting purposes. It works best with 3 or more members
- **Separate legal entity:** If there are a significant number of consortium members, it might be appropriate to consider setting up a jointly-controlled company as a separate entity (e.g. a CIC). Some procurers may require this
- **Prime Contractor:** A well established model involves a large organisation taking on a large contract (e.g. single contract for purchasing all services for vulnerable people pan London) and then sub-contracting elements to its supply chain. The more you go down the supply chain, the more organisations tend to be specialised. Smaller suppliers generally contract with larger suppliers higher up the supply chain, not with Prime Contractor

How will your stakeholders be affected?

How will collaboration and partnership affect or impact on your customers, beneficiaries and other stakeholders? You need to think about how each of your relevant stakeholder groups will react and what's in it for them too. Here are some examples:

Collaboration will:

- Improve the quality or standards of your products or services
- Raise awareness about your social enterprise
- Improve access to your products and services (e.g. geographically)
- Improve access to finance, contacts and opportunities

- Meet customer, funding or commissioning requirements (e.g. a market failure)
- Reduce costs and increase value for money

Bear in mind that there are not just benefits to collaboration: think about whether there are potential negative impacts on some of your stakeholders. Consider the political aspects of collaboration and by working alongside some organisations you may alienate others (because they are competitors or have different values, or aims etc.). You will need to weigh those factors against your own strategic priorities when making a decision to collaborate.

What will it mean for your team and trustees?

Perhaps some of the most important stakeholders are your team members, colleagues and board of directors. You need to carefully consider what the implications of working in partnership are on each of these groups. Also ensure that you get the relevant people engaged in discussions around planning and managing the collaboration process. Try to answer key questions such as:

- Who in your team will be involved?
- Who will lead on the collaboration process?
- Whether your team members/colleagues are prepared to collaborate (i.e. has there been buy-in or engagement around the decision)
- Whether your team understands the implications on their time and their roles
- Whether the benefits for the organisation / customers / beneficiaries clearly communicated
- Whether you have the capacity to address any issues that may arise from this collaboration within your team

Remember, your Board must be clear about the benefits AND potential pitfalls: If things go wrong, they carry the liability! Ultimately, the final decision and responsibility for the partnership agreements rests with the trustees

How will you work together?

This is a crucial stage during which you should critically consider the collaboration opportunity in order to minimise risks and increase chances of success. You should ask questions to yourself, your team and perhaps involve other stakeholders in order to know more about the potential partner organisation. Questions can include:

- Are your ethical values and objectives compatible?
- Have you agreed on what you want to achieve (i.e. are your objectives aligned)?
- Who is doing what (i.e. is it clear what each party is providing and getting back from the collaboration process)?
- What resources will be required and how much will it cost (financial, management time, other)?
- What are the risks involved in terms of confidentiality, intellectual property, goodwill to your brand, conflicts etc.?
- What are the timescales involved?
- How do you withdraw from the agreement? Do you have an exit plan?

As a checklist to essential partnership considerations, you might ask yourself a few questions before signing any collaborative working agreements (Source : www.improvingsupport.org.uk)

- **Visions and objectives:** What are you trying to achieve with the collaboration? Is there a risk of mission drift? Are the objectives fully understood and shared with the partner organisation?
- **Agreements, structures and legalities:** Is the collaborative working arrangements permitted in your organisation's governing documents? What are the legal implications of the collaboration? Who is liable if things go wrong? Who/which organisation is responsible for delivery for a contract or to a funder? How will conflict of interest be managed? Are there any intellectual property implications?
- **Money and risk:** Have all the risks been assessed and are the trustees satisfied that measures are in place to address them? Are the right ground rules and working arrangements in place to manage the risk and ensure both parties have the same expectations? Can you afford the initial costs for setting up and managing the arrangements? Are there VAT implications?
- **People and relationships:** Are there staff issues that need to be considered? For instance have you considered TUPE Regulations [Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment)]? Which organisation will be the employer? Are the organisational cultures compatible? Will collaboration affect your other stakeholders or relationships?

How will you ensure that the process is working?

Successful collaborations are not always a smooth process - they need to be planned, managed and reviewed in order to remain effective. This doesn't have to be complex and lengthy, especially if you have clarified the previous questions. The key is to communicate regularly and be prepared to address issues critically as they arise. If one of the parties is not contributing as it should, this must be addressed transparently and monitored to ensure that problems or misunderstanding don't affect your ability to work together.

Planning regular review meetings and talking to each other are probably the best ways of maintaining effective working. If some objectives or targets change, make sure these are clearly communicated and agreed in writing. You must also ensure that you update your plans so that you and your team are using the correct and updated information when it comes to reviewing and evaluating the project/process.

What monitoring, reporting and review systems might you put in place? Depending on the type of partnership you choose, you should define the governance model of the partnership accordingly.

- At least:
 - Agree on a single common tool/mechanism to monitor and review performance
 - Appoint a partnership project manager or dedicated resource to manage the process
- In case of partnerships leading to merger joint or common board meetings / common board members and governance should be considered
- What you should evaluate (after setting specific objectives)?
 - Making financial savings
 - Developing new services

- Reaching more people
- Raising the organisation's profile
- Achieving more influence

Make sure to have an exit strategy!

What will you do if things don't go according to plan?

- In a dispute where does the authority lie?
- Who decide whether to continue with the arrangement or not?
- To whom are staff and volunteers accountable?
- What should be the exit strategy?
- Define it and state it clearly in the partnership agreement
- Define the purpose / reasons for breaking the agreement

Advantages and potential side effects & risks of partnership working

ADVANTAGES	POTENTIAL SIDE EFFECTS & RISKS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can respond to new opportunities & larger contracts • Extend current activities • Spread risk • Deliver in other geographical areas • Extend current activities to include new ones or different client groups • Learn & gain experience in fields you wouldn't otherwise have access to 	<p>Side effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bureaucracy - Takes time to establish • Often involves more costs • Often requires more resource intensive management • May have cash flow difficulties down the supply chain • Friction if different organisational cultures/ethos • The 'people factor' <p>Risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in the quality or standards of your products or services • Confuse people as to what you are about • Dilute your ethical values • Reduce your focus and make you move away from your goals • Reduce your ability to make your own decisions • Funders not approving • If the partnership fails, risk that own organisation is 'tainted by association'



An effective partnership should not:

- Dilute your organisation's existing culture or ethos
- Affect the quality of the services you provide

Finding organisations to collaborate with ...

If you have identified the need to work in collaboration or partnership but haven't yet identified organisations you could work with there are a number of options:

- Look around you. Some potential partners can be found within your customers, your suppliers and even your competitors
- Communicate your needs – if others don't know what you are looking for they will not be able to help! Advertise it on your website or through your newsletter or other social networking sites. www.fundingcentral.org.uk also provides a facility to advertise for collaborators or partners
- Take of advantage of social enterprise networks, local CVS and other membership or umbrella organisations – use their newsletters, events and contacts to find a suitable partner
- Do your research and approach potential candidates with your ideas
- Speak to funders, commissioners and public sector organisations that you are interested in approaching. They often have processes in place to enable and facilitate collaborative working

Final word - Look out for...

The five questions you should answer before thinking about collaboration:

- What type of partnership model would you put into place?
- What monitoring, reporting and review systems might you put in place?
- How would it affect your organisation existing processes?
- What sort of risks will be involved and how will these be managed?
- What will you do if things don't go according to plan?

Not every organisation is good at collaboration. Some enterprises have very specific cultures or work ethics that make it difficultly to work in partnership. Try to work with organisations that share your values and your standards otherwise you will end up compensating for their weaknesses.

Be prepared to end a collaboration process if it is not meeting your objectives or is straining your staff and resources. This may mean setting clear exit options in a contract or in a formal agreement.

If you cannot create a win-win situation and you cannot terminate your agreement it is likely that the partnership will spoil your working relationships and demoralise your team.

Keep in mind the potential intellectual property and the confidentiality issues around some aspects of your work. Be very clear about what resources you will share for the duration of the project and what remains your enterprise's property during and after the project's lifespan.

Further information

>> *bassac is now part of Locality after merging with the DTA.*

Bassac - this membership body for key community organisations has a number of great resources on collaboration and partnerships. They have also developed a range of self-help and capacity building guides to enable organisations to tender for and deliver public services.

www.bassac.org.uk

National Council for Voluntary Services

www.ncvo-vol.org.uk

Third Sector Foresight

www.3s4.org.uk/drivers/collaborative-working

Funding Central

www.fundingcentral.org.uk

ACEVO

www.acevo.org.uk

Futurebuilders England

www.futurebuilders.org.uk