



13 COLLABORATIVE WORKING

This information sheet is designed as an introduction on working in partnership with other local groups or organisations that may have similar values or aims as your own. Many groups shy away from partnership working for a number of reasons, these range from simply feeling that they may be competing for similar funding pots / clients or a risk that they will 'give away' their groups ideas. These reasons are valid but can be easily overcome with some benefits to enhancing your service.

Examples of different ways to work collaboratively

There can be many different ways to enter in to a collaboration and here are a just a few;

- **Formal partnership:** for a specific project or piece of work. Often this will involve applying for funding jointly with one partner taking the lead and agreed terms of reference with specific roles for each group in the project.
- **Informal links:** where a crossover is recognised such as both working in the same area, but doing slightly different work with each partner promoting or sign posting to each other's work.
- **Joint working:** both partners exploring how they can support each other to deliver outcomes using their skills and expertise.

When not to collaborate:

- Because it is a requirement of funding, 'tokenistic' partnerships quickly fail and can damage relationships with the wider sector.
- With a group that does not share your values. Consider the ethics and reputation of your partner.
- It will be more trouble to do so than if you delivered on your own. For example, if you can meet your outcomes better and more effectively on your own.
- If you cannot agree on terms and conditions of the collaboration.

Reasons to collaborate

- Share good ideas: as well as giving away a few of your own, you are likely to gain a few back!
- Discuss challenges: learn how another group has dealt with common problems.
- Validation, adding strength to your cause: show a potential funder / client / audience that other groups think like you.
- Share resources and skills: you may be great at writing, but another group could be full of creative ideas.
- Marketing: each group will automatically double their visibility through friends, family and users.
- Funders like it: increasingly, funders like to see that you are making links and working in partnership with others for all of the reasons above.

Did you know



The key to a good partnership is good advance planning and agreements. Ask all the questions at the beginning of the process and iron out any difficulties. The partnership will then be free to move forward and deliver positive outcomes.

Further Reading

<https://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2014/feb/11/how-collaborate-as-small-charity>

<https://www.ncvo.org.uk/practical-support/information/collaboration>





Case Study: Edinburgh Play Ranger Collaborative

Through a local forum it was discovered that three members were applying to the same fund to deliver a Play Ranger service in their area. Rather than apply individually, the groups met to submit a joint bid for the funding.

During the meeting each partner discussed what they felt they could bring to the process. One group, who had more administration capacity, agreed to be the lead partner and took on the task of pulling together the application. Another had delivered such a service before and agreed to provide reports and evidence on the benefits of the service and the other had the skills and knowledge to develop the budgets.

With each using their strengths, the bid was successful. Whilst waiting on the start of the fund, the groups met to formalise the arrangements and each partner agreed and signed as to what their role would be. Monthly meetings were set for the duration of the fund and joint outcomes, indicators and methods were developed to ensure consistency. At each meeting going forward and once delivery had commenced, the staff shared their experiences.

It was quickly established that each project faced similar challenges and partners were able to take advice from those who had solved the issue before. In addition, ideas on a whole range of matters were shared: best waterproofs, flyer design, and an agreed logo or brand. When it came to reporting, the lead partner was easily able to analyse and collate data provided by the partners as all were using the same formats. Staffing was an issue at one point and partners were able to utilise staff from the other projects to cover. A joint event was held at the three locations throughout the city and each partner contributed staff, resources and time for each of the events. This was a huge success due to the number of play rangers present.

When the funding ended, each partner continued their services in different ways. However, they still meet to share challenges and successes. Another service moved into the city and has been invited to take part in future meetings.

In the above case study and in all potential partnership working, it will be important to establish some terms and conditions for all to agree on. This should lay out clearly what is expected of each partner. This agreement can be your first task and is also an excellent way for everyone to get to know each other's strengths, characters and general way of working which will be vital for good future relationships going forward.



Smart Play Network Members Support

Member you have access to telephone and email support. For more information about the topics covered in this guidance sheet, or any other queries you may have about your project, please contact us using: 0131 554 2620 or admin@smartplaynetwork.org