

Participate: Strategic Planning

Partnership Working

Partnership working is a potentially powerful tool for tackling difficult policy and operational problems that different organisations working in similar areas face. It can also be a productive way of maximising scarce resources. In the public sector, partnership working is also increasingly a condition of access to sources of funding and the only structure for delivery of key work such as local Children's Plans.

Libraries that work with youth organisations can gain increased access to new target audiences. Youth organisations can support library workforce development through youth work training and provide accreditation for your youth participation programme.

Through our work on HeadSpace and regional Fulfilling their Potential programmes, we have identified partnership working as a critical success factor when involving young people. Effective partnership working can be intensive but the benefits easily outweigh the costs. Local youth partners may include:

- Local authority youth services and other Children's Trust colleagues
- Connexions
- Schools and colleges
- Youth Offending Team
- Looked After Team
- Pupil Referral Unit
- Local V, CSV or other volunteering charities

HeadSpace and Fulfilling their Potential projects have worked in partnership with local organisations in a number of ways including:

- to help them reach more young people (e.g. through schools and young people)
- to involve young people in staff recruitment (through participation workers)
- to train staff in youth work values and skills (through youth services)
- to run joint sessions and services (e.g. enhanced opening hours for young people's positive activities, staffed by youth workers and library staff together)

The sections below describe issues to consider when developing new partnerships and offer practical suggestions for establishing and sustaining partnership working.

1. What is partnership?

Partnership is a voluntary collaboration between two or more organisations that agree to work co-operatively to achieve clearly identified goals. It usually involves:

- shared responsibility for management and delivery of an area of work
- joint investment of resources (e.g. time, money, expertise, information)
- mutual benefits

Although information sharing and negotiation between organisations are an essential part of partnership working, if this is the only activity you share with another agency it cannot be considered a true partnership.

2. The benefits of libraries working in partnerships with the youth sector

Working in partnership with the youth sector can bring a wide range of benefits for libraries and for young people, including:

Greater Impact:

- increased offer for all young people
- increased reach to socially excluded young people
- greater joint capacity to reach and deliver beyond the capabilities of any one partner
- increased momentum

More Resources:

- access to a wider range of funding sources
- strengthened negotiating power

New and Better Ways:

- innovative approaches developed through shared experience
- new perspectives and challenging views within the partnership
- improved intelligence about needs and opportunities

Better advocacy:

- Partners articulate concerns faced by young people and communicate outcomes

Spread Risks:

- complementary strengths, resources, perspectives
- greater flexibility within a team

Reduce/ Share Costs:

- pool resources
- share costs of common functions (e.g. in promoting and delivering services)
- share staff, expertise, buildings, skills

3. Different models of partnership

Think about the nature of the partnerships you already have in place with youth services. How might you change those relationships? There are a number of different types of partnerships.

Co-operative partnerships

Partners may share information and recognise one another's existence. However, there is no joint planning and resources are kept separate.

Co-ordinated partnerships

Partners will do some planning together and may focus on a specific project. There will be some sharing of roles and responsibilities and some shared resources and risk taking.

Collaborative partnership

Partners commit themselves to longer-term projects and make organisational changes so that there is a higher degree of shared leadership, control, resources and risk taking.

Each of these models has value and will be appropriate for different circumstances or stages of your developmental work; however the greater the commitment on both sides, the more effective partnership working is likely to be.

Your partnership with youth agencies can be:

Library led: with libraries developing projects with young people and youth organisations providing information, skills, training or accreditation

Youth-work led: with youth workers leading projects and library staff providing resources

Jointly-led: with the two services creating a team that works jointly to plan, deliver and evaluate the project.

Each of the partnership models can be effective in certain circumstances; however having both librarians and youth workers working face to face on the project enables

the perspectives and resources of both services to be brought to bear and quicker decision-making about programme developments and resolution of problems.

Adapted from The Reading Kit 3
Rob & Bronwen Hunter 2004

4. Characteristics of effective partnerships

In developing new partnerships - and in taking stock of existing partnerships - it is helpful to think through the main elements which you need to get right. Many factors can knock partnerships off course. Some of the barriers to be aware of are:

- a) Partnerships which are all talk and not action
- b) Lack of shared vision and values
- c) Unclear targets
- d) Partnership and bureaucracy overload
- e) Culture clashes
- f) Time pressures
- g) Lack of authority
- h) Funding issues

a) All talk no action

Partnerships should not just be a talking shop, they need to be able to take joint action and manage key delivery linked to each partners' mainstream activities and budgets.

This means:

- deciding who will provide the resources needed to achieve activities
- clarity over roles and responsibilities
- Processes for decision making which fit well with timetables for each partners' planning processes

What can help:

- Dedicated staff or representatives on the partnership group who can take responsibility for ensuring that decisions are turned into action
- Taking time to develop a partnership agreement and shared partnership project plan

b) Lack of shared vision and values

It is overwhelmingly accepted that for a partnership, or partnership working, to be effective, there has to be a clear purpose. The way you work, and the relationships you develop will be strongly influenced by the partnership's purpose. By 'purpose' we mean:

- the overall direction of the partnership – What is it there to do? What are its goals?
- the values of the partnership – What do partners believe in? What binds them together?

This means:

- Spending time getting to know the individuals and organisations you'll be working with
- Establishing clear targets

What can help:

- Taking part in joint training and/or planning meeting
- Working together to create a partnership agreement

c) Lack of clear targets

Partnerships often come together around a good idea but fail to set real targets around the shared vision. Not being able to measure the success of the partnership means you won't be able to evidence achievement, and can lead to lack of support and engagement in the partnership's future.

This means:

Setting clear targets to support your shared purpose

What can help:

- Having processes for charting your progress – agree a simple but shared outcomes that will reflect the success of the partnership

d) Partnership and bureaucracy overload

Partnership overload is a key reason for partnerships failing, particularly where agencies are involved in large numbers of partnerships or are required to attend a great many meetings.

This means:

Tailoring your interactions with partners to need – think about how often do you really need to meet? Rather than business meetings would a workshop or brainstorm be a better use of time?

What can help:

Keeping business meetings short and focused on what you need to do – not endless report-backs from people. Building in time to celebrate success.

- Agreeing a clear vision and underpinning this with a clear focus on 5-6 priorities. Allow flexibility for one or two priorities to change over time as things develop and don't be afraid to junk activity that isn't working in order to free up time for new ideas.

e) Culture clashes

When different organisations work together it can be difficult to adapt to each other's style of working. Partner expectations may differ, leading to conflict when attempting to establish priorities and goals

This means:

You need to take time to understand the culture of the partner organisation and to listen to their concerns

What can help:

- Having joint training events with partners and workers drawn from different occupational/professional backgrounds to explore styles of working and discuss potential issues.
- Shared training, short-term secondments and visits to partner agencies help people to understand each other better.
- Avoiding jargon and work to develop a shared language
- Use the Library Offer to help you articulate how libraries contribute to youth provision and outcomes.

f) Time pressures

Partnership working generally takes longer to produce results than expected. For example, it takes time to develop trust which can slow down decision-making and use additional resources.

This means:

- Building in time to develop the partnership before embarking on joint activities

What can help:

- Establishing an agreed timeline
- Making sure that structures are in place to facilitate quick decision-making

g) Lack of authority

It is important that all staff involved in partnership working have the necessary authority to take decisions. Lack of authority slows up decision making and frustrates progress.

This means:

Making sure the people put on your partnership have sufficient authority to decide on the business at the meetings

What can help:

Delegated authorities and pre-meetings with more senior staff to identify likely sticking points.

h) Funding issues

There is a danger that some organisations get involved in partnership simply to access funding or to meet statutory requirements. Many organisations will be attracted to a partnership by money. This motivation alone can kill a partnership.

This means:

Setting out clear shared common ground from the start and agreeing on shared priorities and outcomes.

What can help:

Developing a partnership agreement

For more on successful partnerships see the final page of this document for Characteristics of Effective Partnership.

5. Forging partnerships: Partnership agreements

Your partnership may take time to establish and require a number of meetings, visits and training sessions. While it isn't always possible to have an equal partnership in terms of allocated time and resources, it is important that all partners feel that their contributions have equal value and that efforts are made to maximise the potential of each partner's input. For instance, reducing bureaucracy and barriers will make it easier for smaller partners to get involved.

Begin by clarifying what each partner is bringing and hopes to gain, considering for each partner:

- Their role/ contribution to the partnership
- What drives their interest and commitment
- Concerns and constrains
- How important the partnership is to them
- What benefits will they gain from their involvement
- Costs and risks of this involvement for them

Don't just rely on your own perceptions: find out more from partners and stakeholders themselves.

Think about what the analysis says concerning partners:

- Are partner roles and contributions clear?
- Can you increase partner commitment to the partnership, by strengthening what's in it for them, or reducing their concerns (the costs or risks that might be involved)?
- If the partnership appears to be marginal to the interests of the partner organisation, what can make it more central?

Partnership Agreements can make a great difference in helping to build robust relationships and smooth partnership working. Documenting what you intend to achieve and how you are going to manage and resource the partnership which can help ensure productive outcomes and avoid conflicts or confusion. See Appendix 2 for an outline partnership agreement template.

6. Conclusion

As the sections above suggest, there is no one model of partnership. What is clear however is that without a genuine and sustainable partnership with youth organisations, your Participate work is less likely to achieve sustainable outcomes for young people. Experience from HeadSpace and Fulfilling their Potential demonstrates the power of partnership working with youth providers to support, inspire and drive innovative participation work with young people.

Appendix 1

Characteristics of effective partnerships

Characteristics of effective partnerships include the following:

- Equality / complementary
- Communication
- Negotiation
- Appropriate partner
- Clear about roles
- Responsibilities
- Shared objectives
- Knowing what each wants to get out of partnerships
- Regular updates between partners
- Trust
- Frank and honest
- Dealing with disagreement
- Not having too many partners
- Has to be owned by whole organisation / group – for continuity
- Understanding of each others work and respect for it
- Avoid jargon
- Everyone able to contribute
- Understanding the needs of the partners
- Clear focus – outset ‘why beneficial to work together’
- Teamwork – help each other i.e. funding
- Partners are working towards similar / same aim
- Neutral meeting place / venue
- Don’t have separate agendas
- Return to objectives – where up to with them
- Sub-groups – provide feedback regularly
- clear, shared objectives;
- a realistic plan and timetable for reaching these objectives;
- commitment from the partners to take the partnership’s work into account within their mainstream activities;
- a clear framework of responsibilities and accountability;
- a high level of trust between partners; and
- realistic ways of measuring the partnership’s achievements.

Appendix 2

Developing your partnership agreement

When developing a partnership agreement, build some of the following issues into your Agreement.

1 Aims & Objectives

- What is the purpose of the partnership?
- What added value will it achieve? - i.e., through shared working
- How shall we determine success?

2 Strategy & Activities

- How will the partners realise these goals?

3 Membership & Decision Making

- What should be the basis for membership of the partnership?
- How will decisions be taken within the partnership?

4 Management & Operation of the Partnership

- What are the main issues to address and how will we handle them?
- What principles or ground rules should govern the partnership?
- How will partner responsibilities be divided up/ shared?
- How and when will performance be reviewed?

5 Resources

How will we resource the partnership?

6 Conflict Avoidance/ Dispute Resolution

- How will we deal with disputes?

7 Information

- What information will we need to share?