

Partnerships: checklist

Introduction

This checklist is designed for use in conjunction with Partnership: introduction to collaborative working; Networking: foundations for partnership; Partnership: developing collaborative working; What type of partnership?, and Managing joint projects.

These questions can be addressed whether the initiative for collaborative working is coming from your bureau, another bureau, Citizens Advice, a potential external partner or a third party such as a funder.

Different parts of the checklist will apply to different stages of setting up a joint project. However, it is advisable to go through the whole checklist at some point prior to entering into any formal agreement for joint service delivery.

Exploring partnerships

Purpose of the partnership

- What are the reasons for considering a partnership?
- Is it just about accessing funding? (If so, think very hard before proceeding)
- How will service users benefit?
- Is there a better way to achieve the objectives?
- Is the proposal consistent with the bureau's business and development plan?
- Are all partners agreed on the aims and objectives?
- Is there agreement on the social policy aims of the partnership?
- Has there been a proper needs assessment for the project?
- If not, is there an agreed basis for a needs assessment?
- Has there been a cost-benefit analysis of the proposal?

Identifying partners: basic information

- What are the aims and objectives of the other organisation(s)?
- Who are their client groups?
- What do they do (advice, advocacy, social policy, education and training, research etc.)?
- What is their geographical area of operation? Is it compatible with the bureau's?

Partner suitability

- Do they have the necessary legal powers/autonomy to enter into an agreement?
- Can they sign up to CAB principles (and can you sign up to theirs)?
- Will they give sufficient priority to ensuring the success of the joint project?
- Is there a track record of good relations or previous joint working between your organisations?
- Are their staffing, financial and service delivery circumstances healthy and stable?

Other partners?

- What other stakeholders are there? Could they have a role?
- How will service users be involved?
- Who will be responsible for representing wider community interests?
- What will be the impact of the joint project on your relationships with other organisations?

Procedural requirements

- At what point do you need trustee board approval?
- Do you need agreement or support from Citizens Advice?
- Do you need legal advice?
- Do you need Charity Commission approval?
- Do you need to incorporate or amend your constitution/memorandum and articles?
- Do you need to apply for Citizens Advice membership for a new organisation?

Negotiating and planning

Building relationships

- Do the participating organisations have respect for each other?
- Is there understanding of each other's goals, structures, expectations and organisational cultures?
- Is there common terminology (e.g. terms like "advice", "advocacy", "outcome" - and "partnership!")?
- Are there mechanisms for mutual/joint learning and staff development?

Formal agreement

- Is there clear documentation that sets out the inter-organisational relationships and responsibilities: terms of reference, memorandum and articles of association, contracts, SLAs, plans, protocols or procedures? (There is likely to be a combination of these, especially for a major project and/or several partners)
- Are the principles of the Citizens Advice service clearly safeguarded?

- Is there a clear equality and diversity statement?
- Is each organisation clearly signed up to the partnership in writing?
- What is the procedure for making changes to the agreement?
- Is there an agreed, written and workable complaints procedure?
- Is there an agreed written and workable procedure for resolving disputes within the partnership?
- Is there an agreed procedure for use in the event that a partner, for whatever reason, fails to deliver their part of a project?
- Is there a procedure for ending the agreement?
- Have you taken appropriate legal/other professional advice on the documentation?

Governance

- What are the structures for governance and management?
- Who is on the partnership board and what is its role?
- How often will it meet?
- Who services the partnership board?
- What are the formal mechanisms for making major decisions (unanimity, majority vote etc.)?
- How far will decisions need to be endorsed by the individual partner organisations?
- Who ensures that decisions are communicated to the project management?
- Have you defined the role of any other body (advisory group, user group etc.)?

Project plan

- Is there a clear, agreed description of the project?
- What type of service is to be delivered (e.g. information, advice, training, awareness-raising etc.)?
- Who is it to be delivered to, where and when?
- How is it to be delivered – e.g. face-to-face, telephone, email, web etc.?
- Who actually delivers the service?
- What is the level of service to be provided?
- What provision does the project make for social policy work?
- Are operational arrangements clearly understood (e.g. referral/consultancy etc.)?
- Are there adequate health and safety procedures?
- Is there an agreed replacement/exit strategy?

Types of partnership

- What interim procedures, if any, will be required prior to the establishment of a formal partnership?
- Do you need to set up a separate body to run the project?
- Is the proposed structure appropriate to the project?
- Is it clear what organisations are in the partnership?

- If a third party (e.g. funder) has laid down requirements for collaboration, are they achievable?
- What are the role and responsibilities of each participating organisation?
- Who is accountable for
 - Resource provision (funding, staff, premises etc.)
 - Service delivery
 - Staff employment and management
 - Dealing with funders
 - Financial administration and accounting
 - Internal communication
 - External communication/publicity
 - Representing user/community interests
 - Establishing a policy position and making public statements?
- Is there a lead partner?
- Is there a reasonable balance of power/responsibility/resources between partners?

Managing joint projects

Operational management

- Who is responsible for strategic and day-to-day management of the project?
- Are the roles and responsibilities of each participating organisation and individual clear?
- Is there an organisation chart?
- Who in each partner organisation is responsible for ensuring delivery of the project?
- Are those individuals able to speak for their organisation and report back to it effectively?
- What are the other internal communication/information exchange arrangements?

Social policy, monitoring and evaluation

- How will effectiveness be measured? How will the project be monitored and evaluated?
- Have all partners agreed the targets and indicators?
- Is there a clear procedure for reviewing the operation of the project?
- What quality and organisational audit arrangements will apply?
- How will agreement be reached on policy positions and public statements of policy?

Resources and financial management

- Has the project been fully costed?
- Is there a clear and agreed apportionment of costs between the partners?
- Who is responsible for representing the partnership in funding negotiations?

- Is it clear who is responsible for rent and other premises matters?
- Who is responsible for technical development and maintenance (e.g. computer systems, a website)?
- Who is responsible for dealing with external suppliers/sub-contractors?
- Is the project liable for VAT?
- Are there clear and documented financial procedures, including budgeting, invoicing, payments, bookkeeping, accounting etc.?
- What are the financial auditing arrangements?

Staffing

- Are the employers of all project staff clearly identified?
- Are there documented procedures for recruitment and selection, discipline and grievance, redundancy?
- Do all project staff have a clear job description?
- Where staff have dual roles (e.g. where someone is working for both an individual bureau and a consortium), are the boundaries between those roles clearly demarcated?
- To whom does each member of the project staff report? (Be especially clear in the case of people with dual roles)
- What are the arrangements for support and supervision, appraisal etc.?

External communication

- What are the arrangements for user consultation?
- What are the arrangements for wider and community involvement?
- What are the arrangements for feedback to stakeholders?
- Who is responsible for dealing with media enquiries?
- What other arrangements are there for publicity?