Getting started on collaboration – a toolkit

Effective collaboration is crucial to all organisations if they want to survive in an increasingly competitive funding environment. But it is also vital if you are going to provide your clients with the best range of services.

Collaborating with other providers demonstrates that an organisation has a good knowledge of what else is being offered and how it fits within that wider picture. It also shows that an organisation has the skills and capacity necessary to work effectively with others. These two things not only mean that better services can be provided for user groups, they can also help to give funders confidence in an organisation. Collaboration can also be very cost effective for an organisation, and can help to improve quality.

Collaboration is challenging – it can be much easier and simpler to work alone. One of the biggest challenges comes in working with organisations that have different 'cultures' and ways of doing things. To avoid some of the pitfalls, it's vital to get to know your partner organisations and to understand where the common ground and differences are. This can help to reduce the potential for tension and conflict. It's also very important to think through and discuss how any differences will be resolved.

This toolkit is designed to help you to get the most out of collaborating with other organisations. It takes you through the steps that are essential in helping you identify why you want to collaborate, which organisations you want to work with and why.

There are a number of checklists to help you tease out the details of your collaborative venture. Each is designed to be customised to suit the kinds of services that you provide/want to provide and reasons that you want to collaborate. The checklists are intended to be used by all the partners in a collaborative relationship – to provide a common format for identifying what each partner 'brings to the table' as well as to identify critical issues and help with project planning.

Please add to/amend each checklist as appropriate. Just remember that when you are asking a partner to complete a checklist as well, you will need to make sure that they are reasonably 'consistent' so that you can compare notes. The toolkit also includes a checklist for developing a collaborative tender and an example partnership agreement.

Step 1: Working principles

There is a set of underpinning principles that should be carefully thought about before embarking on a collaborative relationship.

- Collaboration is a **voluntary** option. No organisation would be expected to consider collaboration as an option unless they feel it is in their – and, of course, their service users' – interests. Collaboration needs to be self-driven. It will not work as an **imposed** solution.

- A **range of collaborative options** is needed. For example, you may want to barter or buy a particular service from another organisation because you know that your organisation is weak in that area – say payroll or outreach, and barter or sell some of your services that you know are really excellent. Or you may want to collaborate so that you can provide a wider range of services to your clients.

  Every aspect of the way in which the collaboration works **needs to be open**, for example, how management costs are calculated or what the rationale is for choosing partners.

- Collaboration should be driven by a desire to **improve quality and service provision**. Organisations want to work collaboratively with others who are recognised as excellent in carrying out particular functions.

- Where the collaboration is driven by formal contract arrangement, the contract-holder should be **responsible for the quality assurance of all parts of delivery**.

- Organisations should have **the authority to stop** working collaboratively with an organisation that fails to meet quality standards and achieve targets set out in agreements.

Step 2: Initial checklist

This checklist asks a series of questions to help get an overview of why you want to collaborate and some of the issues involved. At this stage, just jot down the outline points – more detail will be involved as you work through the stages that follow.

Key question	Outline response
What is the primary purpose of the collaboration? Eg: immediate funding opportunity, to improve or widen services for users, to position the organisation	
How does the collaboration meet your organisation's strategic objectives? eg: positioning the organisation, developing services in line with business plan etc.	
What is the particular function or service that you want? Eg: an accountable body, a service that is complementary to yours, additional capacity on the same service, expertise, informal networking for information etc.	
Do you have any partners in mind? Who are they? **If not, what type of organisation are you looking for** ie: what attributes does it need to have?	
What capacity and skills does your organisation have to manage a collaborative arrangement? Will you need to increase either?	
At this initial stage, what potential risks have you identified for the planned collaboration? Eg: not finding the right partner, not having enough capacity to manage the relationship, making the wrong strategic move etc.	

Step 3: Give – get list

Once you've got an overview of why you want to collaborate and some of the key issues. The next step is to draw up a more detailed list of what you have to give in this collaborative arrangement and what you need to get in order to make it worthwhile.

Add as many rows as you need.

Give	Get

Step 4: Common ground and differences

Once you've got a clearer idea of what you can give and what you want to get, it's then very helpful to tease out with partners what you have in common and what is different. This will help all partners to identify where work might need to be done to make the collaboration effective. For example, you may need to align your client confidentiality codes of practice or quality systems, some organisations may require Criminal Record Bureau checks and others may not. Once all partners are aware of any differences it is much easier to find a way of dealing with them – and even benefiting from them. The checklist that follows is intended to be completed jointly – preferably with all those involved in the collaboration together.

It covers the formal areas of an organisation's operation, but also includes other less tangible areas such as 'working practices' and 'language'. This is designed to get you thinking about communication – which is all important for effective collaboration. If organisations don't understand the ethos, working practices and terms used by each other, things can go wrong. It's especially important where organisations from different 'sectors' are working together, but even those in the same sector can be quite different in terms of culture.

You can put brief details of the lead organisation's arrangements in the first column and then just highlight differences on the other organisations' columns. Then critical differences i.e. those that must be addressed for successful collaboration should be flagged up in the end column.

Area of operation	**Lead organisation**	**Organisation 2**	**Organisation 3**	**Organisation 4**	**Critical differences**
Governance & legal basis					
Management					
Monitoring					
Finance & audit					
Quality standards & processes					
Health & safety					
Equality & diversity					
Client policies					
'working practices'					
'language'					
Service delivery times					
Premises					

Checklist for developing a collaborative tender

Taking the specification and other requirements set out in the tender documentation, the following table should be used by all potential partners to identify what the proposal will contain the key roles that each partner will play. The element headings are intended as suggestions – to be tailored according to the type of tender being considered. However, those that are in bold represent the key areas that are likely to be common to any tender (although the language might differ).

Element of management/delivery	Description of what the consortium is proposing in line with the tender specification	Which partner(s) can offer this element (you may want to ask for a track record)	What part of this offer is already resourced? (this may be nothing)	What funding needs to be included in the bid (and for what part of the offer)
Lead contract and finance management (accountable body)				
Partnership management				
Monitoring and record keeping (of service delivery)				
Payroll				
Quality assurance (internal and external)				
Partnership liaison				
Front line service delivery **(breakdown into specific elements eg:**				
Publicity/promotion				
recruitment/outreach				
assessment				
referral				

interventions				
Mentoring/support				
Evaluation				
Premises				
Equipment				
Advisory role eg: through steering group etc.				

Once partners have had the opportunity to contribute to this table, any specific gaps can be identified and additional organisations can be approached with very specific requests. This process means that discussions about potential collaboration can be more focused – with a clear understanding of what the consortium needs and what each partner can bring to the table. It can also begin to form the basis for partnership agreements that provide more detail on the particular role and, where appropriate, targets, allocated to each partner.

Partnership Agreement Guidelines

Each partnership agreement is different and will depend on the partners that are involved and the purpose of the partnership.

These guidelines are designed to help you think about what should be in your agreement. They are not a definitive list of clauses and you should adapt this agreement to suit your partnership needs.

Partnerships that are brought together in situations where money is involved (e.g. to deliver a funded project) need to have more formalised arrangements than partnerships where money is not involved. Where an external funder is involved the agreement should consider what the funding body expects and specific requirements should be mirrored in your agreement.

Section	Drafting notes
1. Details of partners	This section should list names and addresses of all partners covered by the agreement
2. Context	Brief outline of the purpose of the partnership e.g. to deliver a project, to share ICT support. Be specific but concise.
3. Period covered	Use one of the 2 suggested sentences to explain how long the partnership is expected to continue
4. Relationships	
4.1 Principles	It is good to have a statement of principles outlining the values within which your partnership will operate. These can be used if there are difficulties or conflicts. You may wish to add or amend the statement we have attached.
4.2 Structure	Explain what your partnership structure is • Do you have sub groups • Is there a separate management group • What decision making powers do these groups have • Who will chair the partnership and is chair selected? How frequently
4.3 Membership	Clarify who are the members and whether or not new members will be admitted. This depend on the purpose of the partnership e.g. if it is to deliver a funded project, you may wish to bring a new partner in if another partner is not delivering or if a new specialism is needed. If you decide that new members may be allowed to join you need to state how this happens e.g. does the lead partner or accountable body decide, is it by majority vote, does everyone have to agree.

4.4 Communications	In this section outline the following: • how often you will meet e.g. weekly, month, quarterly • who will take notes of the meetings • whether there will be any other reports between meetings and who will compile and send these out
4.5 Making decisions	In this section outline how decisions will be made. If there is an accountable body will they have any additional voting rights
4.5 Resolving problems	Resolving conflicts and disputes quickly, transparently and fairly will depend on the type of partnership you have. It is always preferable to sort out problems informally between the parties concerned in the first instance. Where this is not possible it may be necessary to bring in a third party – this could be the another member of the partnership who has not been involved in the dispute, the accountable body, the funding body or an independent body. Your partnership agreement should clearly set out what it will do. Some examples have been given in the template. If you think there are likely to be many difficult or contentious issues, which can be the case at the start of a partnership, it may be better to have a more formal dispute resolution procedure e.g. modelled on a grievance procedure.
5. Membership roles and responsibilities	This section is very important and should specify exactly what each partner is expected to do. The roles and responsibilities will vary depending on the partnership but you need to think very carefully about all the different aspects and what needs to be done in relation to them. Generally you should set out • Attendance at partnership meetings & sub groups • Specific roles e.g. chairing, sending out agenda, taking notes etc Then you should think about the specific purpose e.g. if it is a funded project you should specify the responsibility of each partner in relation to • Outputs and outcomes • Recruiting beneficiaries • Marketing • Quality standards • Collecting evidence for monitoring purposes • Producing reports • Sub contracting – is this allowed • Insurance requirements • Health and safety • Data protection • Equal opportunities • Payments This is not a definitive list but a guide to help you think through the range of roles and

	responsibilities that each partner must be aware of and that must be written down
6. Finances	Explain how the finances will work • How is money shared out? • How are payments made • What happens if there are overpayment Make sure this section reflects funding body expectations
7. Terminating the agreement	The agreement should set out how a partner can terminate their membership. If it is a voluntary partnership then withdrawal should be fairly straightforward. However if the partnership has been set up to deliver a funded project than you need to consider what expectations the funding body has. The agreement should also set put what happens if a partner is in breach of the agreement. It may be useful to set out what would constitute serious breach.

Name of Partnership ________________________

1. Details of partners

This agreement is made between

Partner 1 – name and address
Partner 2 – name and address
Partner 3 – and so on……………….

2. Context

This partnership is set up to *briefly set out purpose of partnership.*

3. Period covered

The agreement will be from *insert start date* to *insert end date (if there is one)* unless extended by mutual agreement or terminated in accordance with section 6

OR

This agreement will start on *insert start date* and will continue indefinitely or until terminated by mutual consent or in accordance with section 6

4. Relationships

4.1 Principles of partnership

All members are expected to agree to our principles of partnership. These are set out at Annex A.

4.2 Structure

The partnership consists of the whole partnership group *plus the following sub groups*. The partnership group will be chaired by *insert partner who will chair.* The chair will be elected annually by the partnership.

4.3 Membership

The partnership consists of the individuals/organisations listed above under *details of partners*. The lead partner is *insert name.* New members may be brought into the partnership *explain how*

4.4 Communications

The partnership will meet *give frequency*. A draft agenda for meetings will be sent out a week in advance and each partner should let the chair know whether or not they have additional items. Notes of meetings will be sent out *state how soon after* the meeting by *insert who is responsible.* Outside of these meetings we will communicate by email. *Explain if there are to be any reports sent between meetings and by whom.*

4.5 Decision making

The main partnership group will make decisions. Where possible we will try to achieve a consensus. If we do vote on any issue the decision will be carried by a majority vote.

4.6 Resolving problems

Where there is a conflict, dispute of difference within the partnership, in the first place we will try to resolve the matter through senior managers of the parties concerned. If there is still no resolution then we will involve a third party. *This will be another member of the partnership / the accountable body / the funding body / an independent body.*

5. Membership roles and responsibilities

5.1 Range of services

Each partner will deliver the services as set out in Annex B

5.2 Attendance at partnership meetings & sub groups

All partners are expected to attend partnership meetings and where possible send the same representative each time to ensure continuity. If a partner is unable to attend then the onus is on them to find out what was discussed and agreed at the meeting.

5.3 Quality standards

The partnership will adopt the following quality standards and all partners are expected to comply with these

5.4 Sub contracting (if relevant)

State whether or not sub contracting is allowed

5.5 Insurance requirements

Each partner is responsible for maintaining relevant insurance policies including public liability, employer's liability and professional indemnity

5.6 Health and safety

Each partner is responsible for the health and safety of their staff, volunteers and beneficiaries (where relevant) in accordance with their health and safety policy and should have suitable risk assessment systems.

5.7 Data protection

All partners should comply with the requirements of the data protection act

5.8 Equal opportunities

All partners must have a written equal opportunities policy that outlines the arrangements that are in place to ensure staff, volunteers and beneficiaries are treated fairly and protected from bullying and harassment.

6 Financial arrangements

6.1 Details of funding

Explain how much money the partnership has and where it comes from

6.2 Payments and claims

*Explain the process for making claims and payments (*if applicable). *This could mirror what the funder expects*

6.3 Overpayments

Explain what will happen if too much is paid in error

7 Terminating this agreement

7.1 Giving notice

A member of the partnership may terminate their membership by *explain how*

7.2 Breach of agreement

If there is a breach of this partnership agreement the lead partner will endeavour to resolve the matter swiftly and in writing. The partner in breach may have their membership suspended during this time in which case they will not be able to act on behalf of the partnership. If the breach cannot be rectified, the member may be asked to leave.

Annex A

Partnership Guiding Principles

As a partnership we agree individually and collectively to adopt the following guiding principles which we believe will improve our services.

Openness and transparency

We will adopt the principles of openness and transparency in all aspects of its operation and communication. This means that we will share information in a timely and accurate manner; that we will raise issues and problems as soon as possible and work creatively and constructively to find a resolution and that we will raise questions and queries promptly and share knowledge and expertise.

Sharing good and best practice

We recognise that each of us has something to give to the partnership and that equally we have something to get from it. We will share learning through identifying good and best practice. Each partner will be encouraged to adopt best practice that they see elsewhere and to share examples widely within the partnership for the benefit of everyone.

Commitment to high standards and continuous quality improvement

We are committed to delivering high quality services and will work to ensure continuous quality improvement of our service provision. This means that we will set and expect high standards which we will monitor. We will support each other to develop our collective standards and where appropriate we will set challenging but realistic quality improvement targets. We will welcome external inspection as an opportunity to verify our internal quality assurance and quality improvement standards.

Operate sound business practices

We start off from the premise that we are all successful organisations with a need to generate income and receive fair financial recompense for our contributions. We will work hard to ensure that partnership resources are distributed fairly and reflect the input that we each make. We will be efficient in how the partnership operates. For example we will use technology where we can, we will supplement face to face meetings with on-line communication and we will keep paperwork and bureaucracy to a minimum.

Commitment to flexibility

As a new partnership we acknowledge that we have much to learn from each other and that there may be times when things do not go according to plan or to expectation. We will therefore be flexible in terms of how we operate and be prepared to make changes, often at short notice. We will also demonstrate our commitment to flexibility in terms of our relationships with each other and will endeavour to learn about the different constraints placed on each of our organisations and how these affect how we operate.

Individual Partner Responsibilities

Partner:
Detail the outputs and outcomes of that partner
Detail any specific roles that they have that are different to the other partners

It is a good idea to give each partner a copy of all of these pages so that everyone is clear what each other is doing