



Good Practice Briefing

Working in Partnership: An introductory guide



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Introduction

Sharing Our Strengths

WRC and Women and Girls' Network (WGN) have been funded by London Councils to deliver a four-year project, Sharing Our Strengths, aimed at providing second tier support to London's violence against women and children sector through the sharing of knowledge, skills and good practice and the facilitation of networking and partnerships. The project will run from February 2009 to March 2013.

This support is primarily available free of charge to organisations funded under the London Councils specifications which cover violence against women and children (38, 42, 43, 59, 60, the combined 61 and 63, 62, 65, 69, 70 and 72).

What support does the project provide?

The support comes in a number of forms:

1. Accredited training for frontline workers
2. Professional exchange seminars
3. Good practice briefings and template policies
4. Training and 1-1 support on monitoring and evaluation and infrastructure issues
5. Monthly email newsletter - email IsabelM@wrc.org.uk to subscribe
6. 6-monthly discussion and networking meetings for funded organisations
7. Membership of WRC's online women's sector network

For more information, please see www.wrc.org.uk/sharingourstrengths

Good practice briefings

The purpose of the good practice briefings is to provide VAWG organisations with information to help them become more sustainable and contribute with making their work more effective.

Understanding partnerships

You will probably have heard banded around in the sector the term collaboration and partnership working. This focus in partnerships has been driven a lot by recent government policy moves.

Collaboration defines a broad spectrum of ways organisations can work together from informal networking to a full blown merger where two organisations may come together and lose separate identities and create a new synthesised one (there are other sorts of mergers e.g. when one org swallows up the identity of the other etc)

Definition of collaboration

Any situation in which people are working across organisational boundaries towards some positive end

We find the term 'collaboration' quite jargonistic and prefer to just speak of organisations working together.

A partnership is a type of collaboration. It normally has some formal arrangements such as agreed terms of reference or a partnership agreement which is often (although not always) legally binding. You will often find this kind of arrangement when for example organisations have come together to tender for a contract with a statutory service, are delivering a project jointly together or have come together to share back office functions.

At the Women's Resource Centre (WRC), we believe that one of the ways women's organisations will be able to survive the changes in the current funding environment is to start forming more formalised working arrangements with other sister organisations and also cross sectorily, that is, with statutory bodies and potentially more generic organisations.

The way we define a partnership is:

Definition of Partnership

A process in which two or more organisations agree to work together to achieve a common goal, or a set of compatible goals, and do so in a way that they achieve more effective outcomes than by working separately. They share resources and responsibilities and agree to work together in a co-operative and mutually supportive way.

Partnerships are about sharing resources, experience and skills to achieve outcomes that benefit partner organisations and the communities they serve. It takes time and planning to ensure that the contribution of each organisation is both effective and realistic within the limits of available resources. Whatever the trigger for forming a short or longer term arrangement, it is essential to establish the right form of partnership for the right reason.

We advise women's organisations to start considering strategically why, how and with whom they might want to form working relationships. The current trend for a large number of grant and tenders is to rely on organisations applying as partnerships. For this reason, the sooner you approach other organisations, the sooner you can start building trust and good working relations so you are in a much better position to form a strong partnership and apply for funds when the opportunity arises.

You don't need to go into formal partnership arrangements initially. The first step is to identify other organisations you would like to work with more closely and start building links, as trust is a fundamental success factor in any partnership.

The first step towards working effectively with others is to be clear about your organisations priorities and what it is trying to achieve. This will often be set out in a business plan or a strategic plan. If you are clear about your priorities and objectives it makes it easier to see whether working with others would be helpful to achieve them.

EXAMPLE

For example one of WRC's strategic objectives is to increase the national reach of the organisation. In order to do this, it will need to partner with other women's organisations around the country as it does not have as much presence in the regions as it would like; and will need organisations who are based in the region to help us. For instance, in 2010, WRC worked collaboratively with the National Equalities Partnership and the North East Women's Network to run a women's focussed conference in the North East.

Questions to ask yourself:

- What are your organisations objectives in the short, medium and long term?
- Could you work with other organisations to ensure you achieve them more effectively?
- What can your organisation do that others cannot or choose not to do?
- What do you have that others don't have?
- What can others do that your organisation cannot or choose not to do?
- What do others have that you don't have?

You will have areas of expertise and other organisations will have other areas of expertise; in order for you to achieve your objectives, it may be more efficient to work together with other organisations rather than trying to do it all yourself.

Mapping existing relationships against priority objectives

In order to understand why you might want to partner, it can be useful to map existing relationship against priority objectives to identify the gaps that exist for you in achieving your objectives and opportunities for working with others to start building relations with them. For example, in order to expand a counselling service in Wandsworth:

What you need from others	Organisation	Type of relationship
Contacts with potential users	Women's Centre Wandsworth	Partner
Publicity routes	CVS Wandsworth	Close contact
Venue	CVS Wandsworth	
Funding for particular borough		
Information of level of need in the borough	Women's Centre Wandsworth	Partner
Information about existing services	CVS Wandsworth	

It is difficult to resist calls to cooperate when you are being encouraged to work in partnership for the sake of the community. However, many organisations are now reporting that, with an increasing number of partnerships in their areas, they could easily spend all their working hours at partnership meetings.

It is ultimately up to you to decide whether or not it is appropriate to join or initiate a partnership, and if so, which one. It will depend on the purpose of your organisation, your users/clients and their needs, the levels of resourcing available to you and the competing demands on your time and energy.

Whether 'falling' into the partnership or planning it more strategically, you need to ask yourself some initial questions in order to decide whether to partner or not:

INITIAL KEY QUESTIONS

- What do you hope to achieve by partnering with another organisation?
- Are you sure that partnership working is the best way to achieve this aim?
- Who proposed the idea? Do they have a vested interest?
- Do your Trustees and Chief Executive support the idea?
- Does it fit within your organisation's charitable objects as stated in your governing document?
- Do your plans for partnership working fit your strategic vision, values and current priorities?
- Will collaborative working 'add value' to your organisation's work which justifies the time, effort and money invested in the collaboration?

Once you have asked the above questions there are also more things to consider.

Partnerships cost time, resources and commitment. You need to carry out your own 'cost-benefit analysis' to decide whether to invest in a particular partnership. In other words, you must weigh up the 'inputs' required (such as time, attention, and resources) and compare these against the likely 'outputs' (in terms of advancement of your agenda, your influence over policy, more funding for you and your user/clients, and so on).

There are four sets of issues that you need to consider when considering forming partnerships.

Benefits: what will your organisation (or project) get out of the relationship? What can you offer that will provide benefits to others? Will the arrangement provide some 'added value' that is not otherwise available?

Costs: What are the 'transaction costs' of the process of working with others? What is the time commitment required? Are there any financial costs?

Risks: Will working with others present new risks? Will it reduce existing risks?

These issues need to be weighed against each other in relation to the particular opportunity that you are faced with. Partnership working is not always appropriate in every situation. Even when it is appropriate, there are different ways that organisations can be involved.

Trustees have the duty to act prudently, and therefore consider all options to minimise risk. This could include looking at establishing new legal entities for a project, as a way of ring fencing risk and protecting the assets and activities of their organisation.

Partnerships aren't about altruism or charitable giving; they work best when all partners put something in, and get something back in return for their investment. Partnerships are about promoting mutual benefit for organisations involved. This is not about money changing hands, but about achieving better results for the users and clients of all the partner organisations.

So whatever you want to get out of the partnership, it is helpful to think about what you have to offer the partners in return.

You need to think in advance about what you contribute to the partnership. You have many strengths and assets which could be very valuable to the other partners and the partnership as a whole.

The 'who'

It is important to consider who and how different organisations should or could be involved in a partnership at different stages.

Partners often get involved in a range of **planned** and **unplanned ways**:

- **Partners** are **invited** to join a core group
- Those who **turn up to initial meetings** become core members
- Partners **demand** to be **involved**
- Partners may be **courted** by influential figures to gain their involvement

However at some point in their development, partnerships need to formally review their composition to ensure the right partners are involved in an appropriate way. If key organisations are missing, achieving your objectives may be much harder.

If you are in a position where an opportunity has arisen to form a partnership you may need to decide, with others, who should be part of that partnership.

There are no hard and fast rules on who should be involved but it is useful to consider why they should be involved. There are three broad roles that organisations can play in a partnership.

Roles of organisations

Key decision makers – organisations centrally involved in decision making about strategies and spending.

Consultees – organisations that need consulting for their advice or views but don't need to centrally be involved in decision making.

Informed parties – other observers and interested organisations who should be kept informed but are unlikely to have strong views about decisions to be made.

Organisations may change roles over time as the partnership and the project evolves. The challenge is to decide which organisations should be encouraged or invited to play the different roles.

It would be important at this point to consider the key stakeholders of the potential partnership. Once you know who they are, then you can work out how and when they should be engaged with and in what capacity.

EXAMPLE

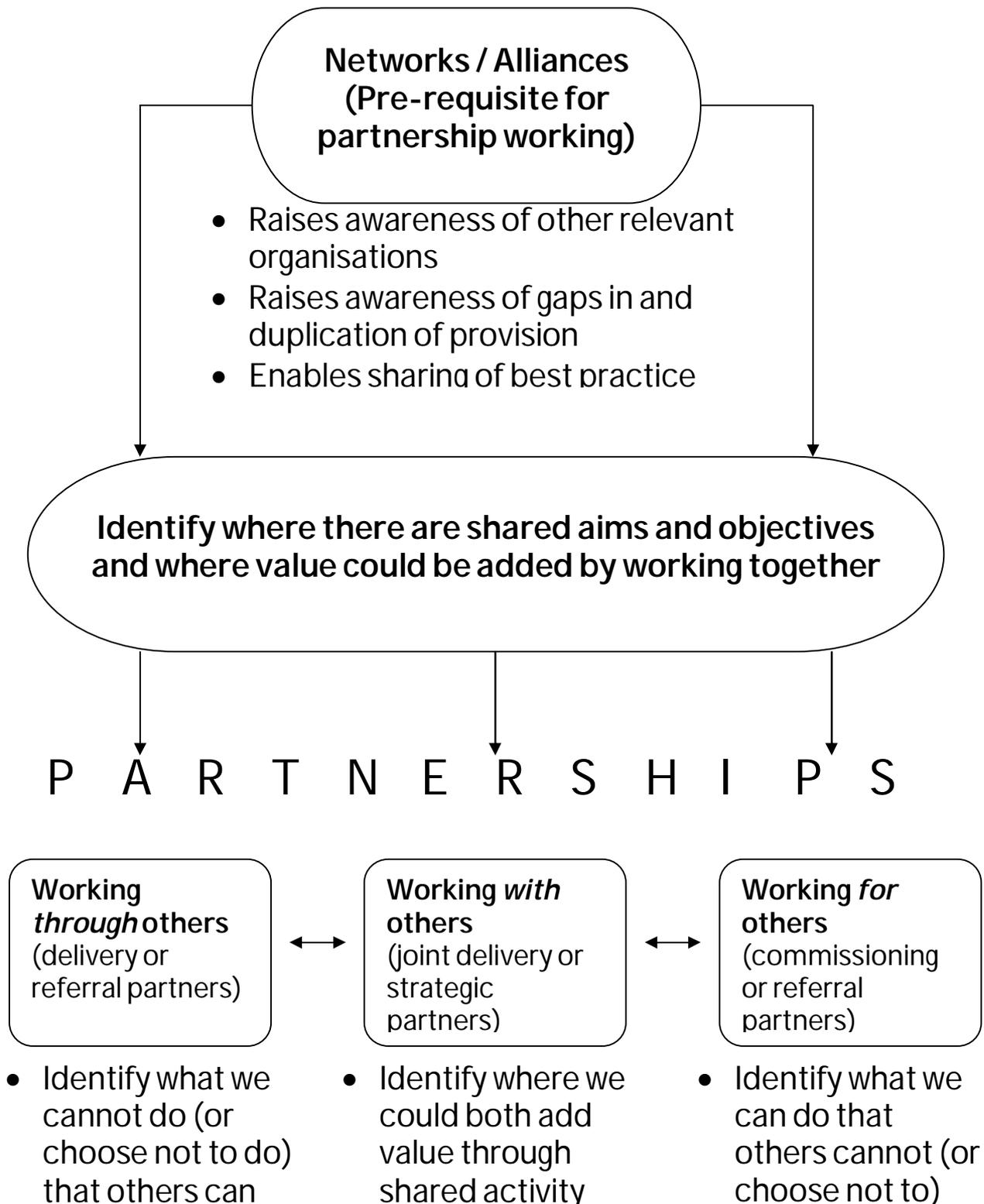
WHEC, the Women's Health and Equality Consortium (formed by Rape Crisis, Positively Women, YWCA, Maternity Action and Forward) are the steering group who have ultimate *decision making power*. The organisations that make up the steering group are varied to include the different health issues impacting on women and cover different parts of the country to a certain extent. There is a wider network which would act as the *consultees* and the women's sector as a whole will be the *informed*.

The 'how'

There are **different ways of working with organisations** and you might want to consider in what way you want to work with certain organisations.

The Prince's Trust ('Making Partnerships Work') have summarised the main ways when delivery is involved:

Different ways of working model



When delivery is not involved there are several other types of partnerships which have been identified:

- Strategic partnerships: working *with* others – where a protocol sets out how two or more organisations plan to work together at a strategic level
- Referral partnerships: working *for* or *through* others – where some form of strategic agreement and process exists between two organisations to refer beneficiaries to or from one organisation to another

Critical Success Factors of Partnerships

- Clear structure/leadership
- Relationships
- Quality
- Transparency
- Shared skills/resources
- Added value for all
- Shared purpose
- Trust
- Respect
- Honesty
- Complementary?
- Personal relationships
- Compromise?
- Commitment/making effort
- Having worked together over some time
- Will to succeed
- Being proactive

Establishing good working relationships

In approaching other groups and organisations during the early stages to establish working relationships, there are three helpful tips:

- **Be clear about what you want** from the other organisation - and make sure you communicate this succinctly
- **Speak to the right people** – They should be someone whose remit or job covers the area or issue you are interested in and who has some influence or seniority

in the organisation. Face to face meetings can help to emphasise your seriousness and build trust. An informal approach is better at first

- **Try to understand what they want** – have an understanding of the constraints and priorities of the other organisation. Are you able to offer them some benefits or opportunities? Partnerships should be win – win situations.

In developing longer term relationships there are three further factors to bear in mind. These are consistently cited by existing partnerships as 'lessons learnt':

- **Partnerships are about people** – the most effective partnerships are often those that consist of committed and hard working people who communicate and work well with each other. Nowhere is this more important than in the first stages of partnership development. Make sure newcomers are properly introduced and briefed about the partnership and who they will be working with
- **Trust and respect** – If the core partners do not regard each other as 'equals' or as reliable partner, it may be very difficult to work together. This is why we talked earlier about identifying potential partners well in advance. Finding opportunities to work with them informally at first
- **Building relationships takes time.** Organisations can have different working cultures and so initial contact can sometimes produce a bumpy ride at first. Some friction is almost inevitable.

The **early and ongoing involvement of senior managers** from all organisations is **crucial to a successful partnership**. You need someone that can make decisions on behalf of the organisation and whose responsibilities overlap those of the partnership.

The most important point to remember is that successful partnerships are based on people and relationships. If you do nothing else just start considering who would you want to know better and how you could do that.

Potential Challenges to Partnership Working

Partnerships are never an easy ride. It is important to go in with your eyes open and to be realistic about the amount of time, energy and commitment that needs to be invested to make it a success.

There will always be challenges, like in any relationship, but it is helpful to identify in advance the challenges and risk that might emerge, so you can start to consider ways to mitigate them.

Potential Challenges to be aware of:

- Managing relationships between partners

- Partners investing disproportionate time or resources
- Lack of clarity about distribution of funds, profits, assets or intellectual property
- Reputational threats to brand, values and supporters
- Fear of losing supporters
- Different expectations for partners
- Different levels of commitment
- Diversion away from core activity
- Unequal or unmanaged distribution of risk
- Lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities – what is expected by partners
- Power difference - unequal distribution of decision making power and benefits, for example larger more powerful players versus smaller ones
- Different organisational cultures
- Real decisions made outside meetings
- Competition for leadership
- Lack of appropriate structures/protocols to guide people's behaviour

It is important to ascertain what each partner's roles and responsibilities are within these different components.

Decision making component

The executive, decision-making component of the partnership, could be placed on the board, management committee or steering group. It **makes the final decisions** but is unlikely to be involved in day to day management of the projects or activities.

The roles and responsibilities could include:

- Agreeing vision, aims and objectives of the partnership
- Agreeing constitutions/memorandum of association or similar
- Agreeing structure and means of operation
- Formulating policies and strategies
- Giving final approval for expenditure on activities
- Providing oversight and steering for the day to day management function
- Ensuring that management, monitoring and financial systems are in place and fit for purpose (particularly regarding audit and accountability)
- Reviewing progress

Management component

This could be a single person or organisation or team of people or organisations who are **responsible for implementing and managing the partnership's activities from day to day** (including a secretariat role for the administration of meetings and events). The roles and responsibilities of this component could include:

- Day to day management or co-ordination of projects and activities
- Contracting with delivery organisations and providers
- Operating financial systems and maintaining records

- Monitoring activities
- Line management of partnership staff
- Undertaking research and compiling reports to the board/decision making group

Consultation/advisory component

These could include committees, sub committees, involvement/citizen's panels and so on, whose **role it is to think, advise and offer feedback to the partnership**. This can be a useful way to consider issues in more depth with a more diverse group of interested parties. However, it is important to consider the role and status of the group(s); what the reporting mechanisms are; the information to which they are party from the partnership, and what resources they may require to operate efficiently.

Lead partners

In many partnerships a lead partner has been identified at the outset; either because they were the organisation which convened the partnership, or because they are the recipient of the funding, or because they are a recognised stakeholder in the sector.

For some partners, having a lead partner may appear in conflict with the notion of an "equal relationship". However, it is possible to reconcile democratic decision making with having a lead partner as long as all participants have clear roles and responsibilities. The lead partners can assume a number of roles including:

- **Convenor of meetings**
- **Home** of the partnership **secretariat**
- **External liaison** with policy makers, funders, press and community and client groups
- **Accountable body** (in terms of financial accountability)
- **Champion** of the partnership

The lead partner does not have to be from the public sector. Additionally, the organisation who acts as lead partner could change during the lifetime of the partnership; indeed the role of the lead partner should be reviewed by the partnership from time to time.

Agreeing how you will operate and resources required

Developing a **partnership strategy** is a useful next step to **detail the vision, values, objectives, deliverables and outcomes, as well as the contribution of each organisation**. You will then need to agree **how the partnership will operate**, its shape and how it will be managed.

The information at this stage will add more substance to the partnership strategy, and the **continued involvement of senior managers** from all partner organisations remains crucial. The **key questions that need to be addressed** in this phase are:

- What is the governance structure and decision making processes?
- What is the process for managing risks and issues?
- What is the process of managing changes to the partnership?
- What are the main areas of work that need to be undertaken to establish the partnership?
- Who will be responsible for each area of work?
- How will performance be measured and communicated?
- How will the partnership be funded?

Formalising the agreement

There are many different templates for partnership agreements. We have some examples on the WRC website in the Resources Section:

http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2011/w/whecpartnershipagreement.pdf

http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2011/a/addendum_to_whec_partnership_agreement.pdf

http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2011/t/terms_of_reference.pdf

http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2011/w/1_whec_meetings_protocol.pdf

Other Resources

- Website offering and advertising potential partnership work
www.easttenders.com
- Collaborative Working Newsletter [susan.beckett@ncvo-vol.org.uk]
- Making A difference together?
<http://locality.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/making-a-difference-together.pdf>
- Benefiting everyone: Commissioning, community organisations and collaboration
<http://locality.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Benefiting-everyone-commissioning-community-organisations-a.pdf>