

## Working together

### First Steps

Read this guide if you want to learn how to:

- Identify partners to build a network
- Establish good partnership working
- Develop effective structures for a partnership



## Identifying partners to build a network

### Why do you want to develop a network?

The first thing to consider when developing a network is why you want to develop one. Working in partnership can be great for widening your contacts, developing new ideas, drawing on new skills and expertise, pooling resources and increasing your capacity. If you know why you want to develop a network, this should help you decide who to contact to form it.

### Who can help you connect with others?

There are a number of community organisations who can help you connect with other community groups, local charities and potential volunteers, including your local Council for Voluntary Services (CVS), Community Foundation or volunteer centre.

The National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) has a directory of its CVS members: <http://data.navca.org.uk/members/directory>

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations similarly has a directory of its CVS members: <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/about-us/join-ncvo/our-members>

Your local council should also have a list of services offered on their website, which you can use to contact relevant officers, or you could connect with officers through your local elected representative (Councillor).

Attending as many community events as possible will also help you build up knowledge of people working and volunteering in your local area. You could also go directly to your potential partner, be it a local school, doctors' surgery, local authority office or university, to try to make contact with the right people.

## Why might your potential partners be interested in a partnership?

When meeting with potential partners, you need to discuss what the benefits are for them of being on the partnership as well as why you want them on board. They should also be able to tell you why they might be interested in being involved. This should help you choose the best partners to work with. Selecting partners whose interests don't conflict with your own interests or the interests of other members of the partnership will also avoid conflict later on.

## Establishing good partnership working

### What is the purpose of your partnership?

Clearly establishing the aims (what you want to achieve) and objectives (your steps towards your aims) for the partnership should build the foundations of a successful partnership. Good teams work well together when they have good plans in place. These aims and objectives may be different to those of any project the partnership is delivering.

### What do you want your partners to do?

Once you have established your aims and objectives, work out deadlines for the key milestones (significant stages) and a clear timetable of who will be working towards these milestones and when. You need to clearly establish roles and responsibilities within your partnership right at the start. If you can get this in writing, then partners will be clear on what is expected of them and it may save challenges later on.

### What are the shared values of your partnership?

At the outset of your partnership, have a discussion about what you think makes a good partner. Use this to form a shared set of values and rules for the partnership that will form the basis of your work together. Write these up and have people agree them by email or by signing a printed version.

Important values may include:

- treating all partners equally;
- giving all partners time to speak and listening to all opinions expressed; and
- being clear about decisions made and how they have been reached.

### How can you avoid conflict?

Take time to build relationships with your partners and get to know them as this will make working together easier. Allow open communication of any feelings of dissatisfaction so that tensions are dealt with before they escalate.

## Developing effective structures for a partnership

### What happens if things go wrong?

Agreeing a dispute resolution process right at the start of your partnership setting out the steps you will take to resolve disagreements should help address any issues further down the line. It is also good to have a written agreement between partners concerning commitments of time, people and anything else so everyone knows what is expected of them and issues are avoided in the future. This should also help you address any changes in staff during the time of the partnership.

### How will you communicate within the partnership?

Communication is the key to effective team working: it builds relationships within the partnership, addresses problems before they start and makes people feel included.

The best way to establish good communication is to ensure regular contact is built into your partnership. Alongside meetings, this could include weekly or monthly phone calls, emails or text messages. Find out people's preferred means of communication and use that to maintain contact. The most important point is to make people aware of any developments and changes in the partnership and its aims.

Good communication also goes two ways. If partners have particular concerns, time pressures, or will be out of contact for any period, then make sure there is a mechanism in place for them to inform the rest of the partnership and for their responsibilities to be covered.

### How will you monitor progress?

You will need to continually monitor your progress against your aims and objectives, keeping partners informed of progress and making any necessary changes to your plans. Setting realistic goals and deadlines, and knowing which of these you can be flexible with, are important for your project to run smoothly and your milestones to be met. You should also consider alternative options should your first idea not work out as planned

### How do you keep partners motivated?

Acknowledge that your project may not always be your partners' priority, but if you know why your partners are involved, then it will enable you to better motivate your partnership to achieve its goals. Respecting your partners' needs and ambitions, as well as respecting different styles of working, will help your team work better. Don't forget to thank people for their time and contributions.

Most importantly, remember to have a good time! Partnerships don't have to be about formal meetings or lengthy discussions. You can meet over coffee or on a walk around your area. You could also discuss issues over social media or using a short survey. If people enjoy working in partnership, they are more likely to remain committed to it.

## Helpful information

You can access more information and advice on connecting with others on Just Act as part of the [10 Steps](#).