

# Journey of a Group: Collaborative Bids and Partnership Work

## Overview

In recent years, interest in collaborative working – also known as joint or partnership working – has been growing. This factsheet introduces collaborative bids and partnership working.

It explains how collaboration can range from informal agreements to formal partnerships. Collaborative bids allow multiple organisations to work together to secure funding and deliver services, increasing the chances of success by sharing resources, risks, and expertise. Before pursuing a collaborative bid, however, there are many things to consider.

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## What is collaborative working?

The Charity Commission describes collaborative working as 'joint working by two or more organisations (community and voluntary) in order to fulfil their purposes, whilst remaining as separate organisations. This may relate to any aspect of the activity, including administration, fundraising, raising public profiles, resource sharing and streamlining of costs and service delivery.'

The spectrum of collaboration between organisations can range from an **informal agreement** (such as borrowing equipment or networks that share information) to a **legally binding agreement** (such as consortium tendering for service delivery, joint fundraising events, pooling staff). The collaboration can be short or long term. You could say organisations that

are working together, regardless of the form, are working in partnership.

### Collaborative bids

Collaborative bids are where two or more organisations work together to secure funds and deliver a project or service. This collaboration will usually be of a formal type and is likely to have a written agreement. The bid might be for a local public sector grant or for Lottery funding. It can also be to provide a service through a commissioning and tendering process.

There will usually be a written agreement or contract between the funder and the partners in the collaboration and this will be determined by the funder. Partners sometimes want a written agreement between themselves. Written agreements can come in a number of formats depending on the formality required. Some common examples include:

- **Memorandum of understanding (MOU):** an agreement between two or more parties indicating a shared aim or common line of action. It is most often used in cases where parties do not want a legally enforceable commitment or cannot create a legally enforceable agreement.
- **Service level agreement (SLA):** part of a service contract where the level of the service is formally defined in writing.
- **Contract:** an agreement enforceable by law.

### Why a collaborative bid?

A collaborative bid may increase the chances of success more than if the bid was pursued by one organisation alone. Funders often look for what is called 'collaborative advantage', which simply means the benefits achieved by working together.

Some other reasons why you might want to bid collaboratively include:

- The bid is too big for one organisation to manage
- To reduce costs or share risks
- To improve service delivery
- To share good practice, information and specialist skills
- To target new groups or access a wider geographical area
- To increase the profile, capacity and reach
- Because the funder requires a partnership

### **What form can collaboration take?**

Here are some examples of different types of collaboration:

- Separate organisations come together for a particular bid or project but remain independent
- One organisation can assist another – it may be some form of specialist help
- A completely new organisation is set up for a specific purpose in addition to existing entities
- One organisation takes a 'lead' and others agree on what part they are willing/able to play. There are occasions where the 'lead' organisation can act as a management agency only and sub-contract out the service delivery to other organisations

### **What about the risks?**

There is always a risk the collaboration will not work, or it will not do what was intended. You should have a clear strategy in order to meet your outcomes and try and manage any risks by identifying them as early as possible, because if the partnership is unsuccessful, it could damage your identity, brand and reputation.

## To collaborate on a bid or not?

Things to question and think about:

- **Why** are you thinking about the collaborative bid, e.g. reduce costs?
- **Who** will you partner with – what do you know about them and what do they know about you?
- **What** do you hope to achieve by collaborating in a bid?
- **Who** proposed the idea, is there a conflict of interest?
- **What** about your trustees and chief officer, are they supportive of the idea?
- **How** does it fit within your organisation's charitable objects as stated in your governing document and how does it fit with your strategic vision, values and priorities?

Another thing to ask is: does your **governing document** allow you to collaborate? If it does not, you need to make sure that there is an amendment clause in your governing document which refers to collaborative working. There are also legal issues involved (such as contract law), so seek professional legal advice.

## Remember your trustees

Your trustees have a duty to look after the best interests of your organisation and its beneficiaries. Any major changes to how you work will require agreement from your charity trustees. They will make the final decision and have ultimate responsibility for the collaborative working arrangements. They are responsible for the use of funds, any legal issues and should take professional advice when needed. Trustees need to be involved from the start and constantly informed.

## What else do I need to know about partnerships?

The term 'partnership' has come to have many meanings for the voluntary and community sector – from working together as 'partners' within the sector on a project or bid, to statutory partnerships created by Government that have voluntary and community representatives.

Another form of partnership is a merger, where organisations will come together to form a new entity in order to deliver services, such as Help the Aged and Age Concern, which merged to become Age UK.

In summary, collaborative working allows organisations to achieve shared goals while maintaining their independence, with partnerships ranging from informal agreements to formal contracts. Collaborative bids offer advantages such as shared resources, reduced costs, and improved service delivery but require careful consideration of risks and legal implications. Ultimately, successful collaboration depends on clear agreements, strong partnerships, and active involvement from trustees to ensure alignment with organisational values and objectives.

### Further links:

- The NCVO: [Collaboration](#)
- The Charity Commission: [Collaborative Working \(CC34\)](#)
- The Charity Commission: [Work with other charities](#)

**This factsheet is for guidance only. For any further information, guidance and support, please contact Bolton CVS on: 01204 546010 or e-mail: [info@boltoncvs.org.uk](mailto:info@boltoncvs.org.uk)**