

# Collaborative bids and partnership working

## What is collaborative working?

The Charity Commission describes collaborative working as ‘Joint working by two or more organisations (community and voluntary) in order to better fulfil their purposes, while remaining as separate organisations.’

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 that organisations who are working together, regardless of the form, are working in partnership. See also the factsheet on ‘**How to benefit from collaborative working**’.

## 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 the Big Lottery. 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 that service is formally defined in writing.
- **Contract** – an agreement enforceable by law.

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## Why a collaborative bid?

The following reasons increase the chances of success 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. Here are some reasons why you might want to bid collaboratively:

- 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

## 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 that the collaboration will not work or that 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. survival?
- **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?

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## Key Words

**Beneficiaries** – the people the organisation aims to support

**Collaborative advantage** – the benefits achieved by working together

**Collaboration or partnership working** – two or more organisations working together with a shared aim

**Commissioning** – securing the services that address the needs of the service user. This then requires a tendering or procurement process

**Compact (The)** – an agreement between Government and the voluntary and community sector in England

**Memorandum of understanding (MOU)** – an agreement between two or more parties indicating an intended common line of action

**Strategic vision** – a set of ideals and priorities, a picture of the future, a sense of what makes the company special and unique

- **Who** proposed the idea, is there a conflict of interest?
- **What** about your trustees and Chief Executive, 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 that 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.

A key 'partnership' to consider is the **Compact and public law**, which is a long-term agreement aimed at improving partnership working between government and the voluntary and community sector.

There are other types of partnership and collaboration that are closely linked to this factsheet. For instance, groups of organisations sometimes establish a consortium to bid for contracts or joint pieces of work, such as the **Greater Manchester Health and Well-being Consortium**. Another form of partnership is to form 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**

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## Further links:

- The National Council for Voluntary Organisations – [www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/advice-support/collaborative-working/publications](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/advice-support/collaborative-working/publications)
- Bassac – Useful information on collaboration including case studies of different types and template documents - [www.bassac.org.uk/our-programmes/collaboration](http://www.bassac.org.uk/our-programmes/collaboration)
- The Charity Commission – [www.charity-commission.gov.uk](http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk)
- For information on the compact and public law visit - [www.navca.org.uk/services/learningopps/evs](http://www.navca.org.uk/services/learningopps/evs) or [www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/compactadvocacy](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/compactadvocacy)
- For any further information, guidance and support, please visit [www.vaoldham.org.uk](http://www.vaoldham.org.uk) or the Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation (GMVCO) – [www.gmcvo.org.uk](http://www.gmcvo.org.uk)

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