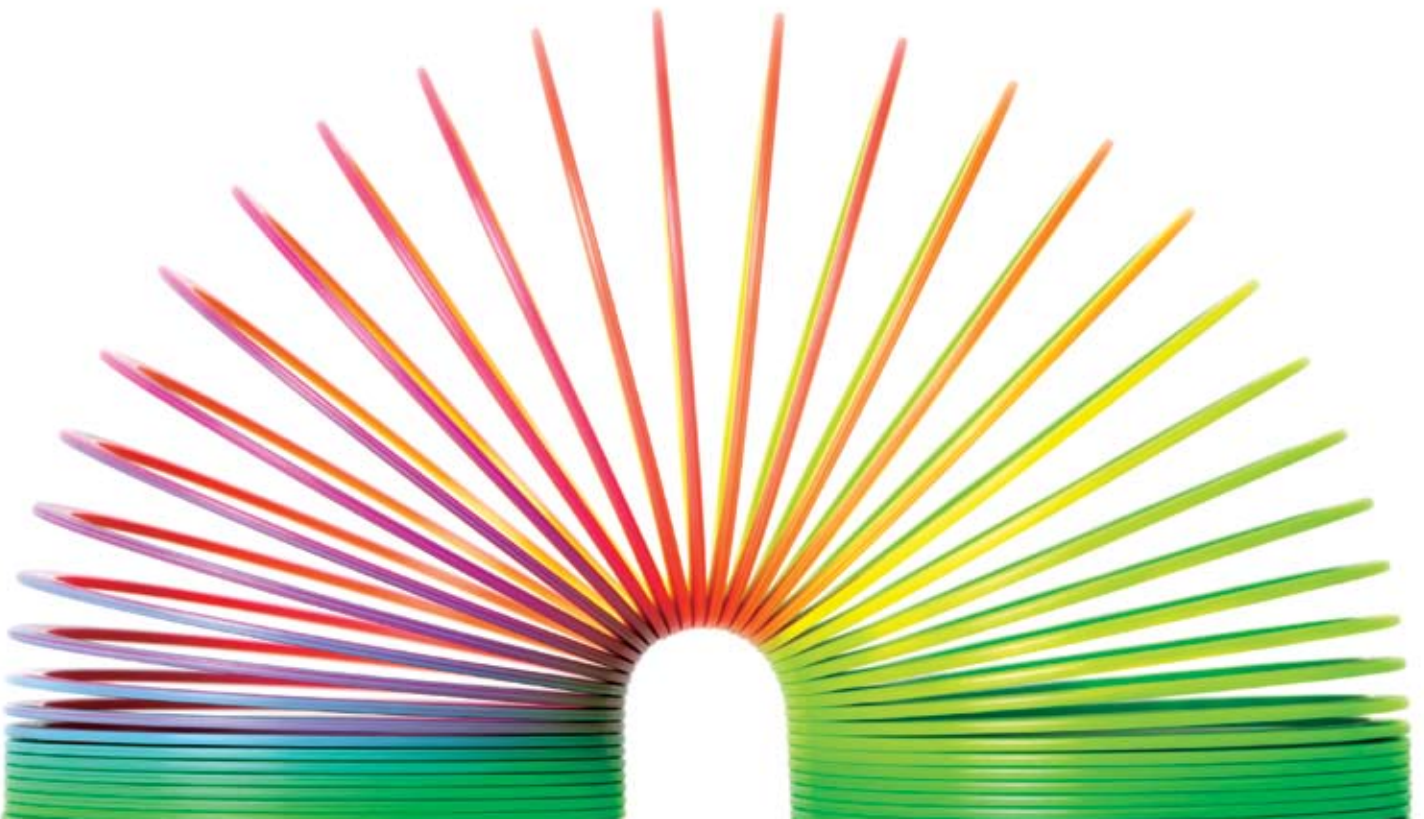


Working together to deliver public services – real life stories



In April 2009, NCVO's Public Service Delivery Network and Collaborative Working Team organised two events in response to the fact that public service delivery is now one of the key drivers for collaboration between voluntary and community organisations. The events encouraged discussion between service commissioners, voluntary sector providers and infrastructure organisations about collaborative public service delivery.

To complement the learning from the events, the following case studies were compiled to highlight different approaches that voluntary and community organisations and other providers have used jointly to deliver public services.

LEEDS COMMUNITY DRUGS SERVICES

Leeds Community Drugs Services (LCDS) is a consortium of three community development charities and a GP practice, using a lead body model. Members have come together to provide city-wide services that encompass medical, therapeutic and social support elements. Despite staff restructuring challenges, LCDS has benefited the people of Leeds by improving the quality of drugs services. Consortium members have also benefited from building mutual trust.

BACKGROUND OF THE COLLABORATION

Until recently there were five Community Drugs Teams spread across Leeds. In autumn 2008 Safer Leeds awarded the contract for a new city-wide service to a consortium called Leeds Community Drugs Services.

The consortium partners consist of three community development charities and a GP practice:

- Developing Initiatives Supporting Communities (DISC), a voluntary organisation which local services for drug users in the criminal justice system.
- St Anne's Community Services, a voluntary organisation which provides services for people in northern England who are homeless and have problems related to substance misuse, mental health or a learning disability.
- BARCA-Leeds, a voluntary organisation which runs local programmes for children, young people and families including drug, mental health and employment services.
- St Martins, an award-winning GP practice with a long history of delivering specialist drug and alcohol services.

The partners saw an opportunity to implement their vision of drug treatment in Leeds as a stepping-stone to social inclusion. Their approach merges a traditional medical model of treatment with therapeutic and social support models and local community resources. They aim to support service users to move from treatment to other support services such as housing, education and training to work towards lasting and positive life changes.



STRUCTURE OF THE COLLABORATION

The partners in Leeds Community Drugs Services created a shared written agreement. DISC is legally the lead contractor and sub-contracts to partners. However, the consortium is run as a genuine partnership, with decisions reached through discussion and consensus. In practice, all partners are equally accountable for meeting collective goals.

The aim was to create a consortium big enough to bid for tenders and small enough to build trusting relationships, play to each organisation's strengths and share funding and resources equitably. Part of the model for the Leeds Community Drugs Services is based on BARCA-Leeds's successful model for north-west Leeds, which had high engagement and retention rates.

SUPPORT FOR THE COLLABORATION

There was no specific support for this coalition, but as part of another partnership DISC was able to get to know other charities at 'speed-dating' networking events arranged by Lancashire County Council, which were designed to support the development of further partnerships.

BENEFITS AND SUCCESSES OF COLLABORATION

Benefits and success stories highlighted by individual consortium members include:

- The consortium has been able to help people help themselves and transform lives.
- Members focus on service users and get ideas off the ground quickly.
- Partners are willing to listen, learn and share best practice.
- There is a shared commitment to making the coalition work, and shared attitude to problem solving.
- Working collaboratively has increased friendship, respect and trust between coalition members.

CHALLENGES PRESENTED BY COLLABORATION

- One hurdle was the initial delay in handover of the project from the primary care trust (PCT).
- The need to restructure five staff teams into three, and to transfer staff from the PCT, was difficult. Some staff had to adapt to new teams, premises, systems and organisational culture while continuing to provide a service.
- Service users may not have received sufficient information about changes to services.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED FROM COLLABORATION

- Discuss partnerships at a strategic level, work up different models and look at how they fit into your business plan.
- Hold consultation meetings with partners, develop a shared vision and identify roles before putting pen to paper on the tender.
- Aim for contracts where commissioners give the voluntary sector enough time (a minimum of six weeks) to decide whether to bid and to develop partnerships.
- Consider contracts where commissioners investigate exactly what they get for their money rather than prioritising cost.
- Look for organisations who share your culture and values, otherwise it's difficult to resolve issues and to survive in the long term.
- Lead partner should be prepared to provide guarantor status for other partners.

HARROW VOLUNTARY & COMMUNITY SECTOR CONSORTIUM

Harrow Voluntary & Community Sector Consortium is a group of diverse organisations that have come together to bid for contracts in the London Borough of Harrow. They have had mixed success in bidding for contracts, but members have gained from being part of the consortium. Using a lead body model, the consortium has associate as well as full members, enabling small community groups to have some involvement.

BACKGROUND OF THE COLLABORATION

Harrow Voluntary & Community Sector Consortium consists of a number of voluntary and community sector organisations working in the London Borough of Harrow. The membership is quite mixed, containing large and small groups that cover a wide range of services.

The consortium was created as part of the ChangeUp programme to increase capacity in the voluntary and community sector. The main motivation for members joining the coalition is the opportunity to bid collectively for funding.



Collaboration and public service delivery case studies

Harrow Voluntary & Community Sector Consortium

STRUCTURE OF THE COLLABORATION

The consortium uses a lead organisation model. The lead agency is Harrow Association of Voluntary Services (HAVS), the local council for voluntary service.

The consortium partners are developing a written joint working agreement. Decisions are made by reaching consensus on issues at meetings. The consortium has an agreed voting process that can be used if consensus can't be reached, but this hasn't yet been required.

Some small community organisations have been excluded from Harrow Voluntary & Community Sector Consortium because they aren't able to meet the consortium's membership criteria (such as providing a recent financial statement). The consortium has introduced associate membership to include these organisations, but this has created some tensions.

CHALLENGES PRESENTED BY COLLABORATION

- Commissioning training was done extremely quickly due to tight funding turnaround times.
- Attendance at meetings is low, but higher attendance would make meetings less manageable.
- It takes time to get things done. For example, discussions relating to a joint working agreement have lasted several months.
- The available funding is distributed in small instalments within very tight timescales. It could be put to better use if the consortium was given longer to plan and spend the money.
- The consortium has been unsuccessful in a few funding bids.

SUPPORT FOR THE COLLABORATION

The collaboration received support in the form of funding from Capacitybuilders, and advice on a funding application from NCVO. It accessed training through the London Voluntary Service Council and Skills and Knowledge for Local Development (SKiLD).

KEY LESSONS LEARNED FROM COLLABORATION

- You'll never keep everyone happy!
- Working with individuals who have different priorities can be challenging.
- Where possible, use other people's documents and adapt them to suit your needs, but you may still have to create a lot of things from scratch.
- A lead organisation selecting and commissioning member groups for services could be the cause of ill feeling among members of a consortium.

BENEFITS AND SUCCESSES OF COLLABORATION

Some of the initial benefits realised by the Harrow Voluntary & Community Sector Consortium include:

- More trust and understanding between consortium members.
- Members have become better informed about areas outside their own specialities, such as direct payments.
- Consortium members have achieved shared knowledge and contacts, for example on health and safety issues.
- The consortium has commissioned some of its members to provide training, with positive results.

YOUNG LANCASHIRE (YOUTH OFFER) CONSORTIUM

The Young Lancashire (Youth Offer) Consortium consists of 29 diverse organisations working together on a clearly defined basis. Under a lead body, the consortium delivers a significant amount of Lancashire's youth services. Collaborative working has been beneficial for service users, consortium members and local commissioners alike. However, members acknowledge that collaborative working is time-consuming and are frustrated that some local procurement processes are tailored for bids from single organisations.

BACKGROUND OF THE COLLABORATION

The Young Lancashire (Youth Offer) Consortium is a collaboration among voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS) youth groups that was formed in December 2007. The consortium was established in response to a new county council funding programme designed to support the Local Youth Offer (part of the government's ten-year strategy for youth).

When they became aware of the changes in county council funding, the local infrastructure organisation Young Lancashire communicated the benefits of collaborative working and collective bidding to organisations in the sector.

The Young Lancashire (Youth Offer) Consortium consists of 29 voluntary sector front-line delivery groups. Partners range from small, community-based groups and specialist providers to national bodies and large voluntary sector organisations. Some members had previously secured council funding, whereas for others this funding programme presented a new opportunity.



STRUCTURE OF THE COLLABORATION

Consortium members chose to adopt a lead body model, with Young Lancashire acting as the lead organisation. Young Lancashire has written the consortium's bids, with the support and agreement of its partners. The consortium has successfully secured the majority of the county council's youth funding allocation for 2008/09 and 2009/10.

Consortium members have all signed a Statement of Intent, agreed to a set of values and signed a contract outlining the outputs they agree to achieve. Young Lancashire has provided a guidance document on definitions and monitoring arrangements. The consortium holds quarterly partners' meetings to review progress and discuss important matters.

CHALLENGES PRESENTED BY COLLABORATION

- Delays in paperwork from the county council, contracts, monitoring forms and the audit process caused significant initial problems.
- Bid application forms were not 'consortium friendly', and were more suited to bids from individual organisations.
- The development work to meet partners and secure agreements is not funded and so has been loss-led by Young Lancashire.
- The annual bidding round is labour-intensive and reduces service delivery time.
- Bidding timescales are tight for a consortium.
- Funding from the Young People's Service for the voluntary sector is not yet aligned with other funding from the county council, although both are part of the Children and Young People's Directorate.

SUPPORT FOR THE COLLABORATION

Young Lancashire has been successful in securing VCFS Central Gateway funding from the county council to support strategic work across the sector. Since 2006, officers in the county young people's service have encouraged the formation of a single infrastructure body for local voluntary youth organisations. County council officers made it clear that they would prefer a collective bid that involved smaller groups, rather than 40 separate applications..

KEY LESSONS LEARNED FROM COLLABORATION

- Partnerships take a lot more time to manage than anticipated.
- The benefits of collaboration are worth the effort.
- Members have learnt a lot about how front-line groups of different sizes operate.
- IT systems need to be good and continually improved to reduce time and make monitoring more effective and efficient.
- The consortium could have asked for clear information about monitoring, the audit process and contract wording in advance.
- The consortium could have conducted a more thorough risk assessment process to clearly identify pitfalls and gains.

BENEFITS AND SUCCESSES OF COLLABORATION

Consortium members have identified a number of positive factors relating to collaborative working, which benefit service users, consortium members and the county council:

- The consortium has a strong voice and member organisations have gained more recognition in the local area.
- Collaborative working has increased strategic relevance of the work undertaken.
- There have been increases in service provision, and the quality and number of beneficiaries.
- Providing more diverse activities has led to higher beneficiary retention rates.
- Partners are building relationships and sharing best practice.
- Members have embraced challenges and opportunities, they and their staff are very committed.
- Collaborative bids and service delivery are perceived to have reduced the county council's risks and workload.

NORTHUMBERLAND HIDDEN HARM SERVICE CONSORTIUM

Northumberland Hidden Harm Service Consortium is a collaboration between several statutory agencies, a voluntary sector organisation and a private business with a shared interest in supporting vulnerable families in Northumberland. The voluntary organisation, ESCAPE Family Support, acts as the lead agency. While the consortium has not yet delivered any services, the process of developing a joint tender has been instructive, and constructive.

BACKGROUND OF THE COLLABORATION

In late 2008, the Northumberland Families and Children's Trust advertised an invitation to tender for a Hidden Harm Service for Northumberland, to improve outcomes for vulnerable families.

A number of local organisations, led by the voluntary organisation ESCAPE Family Support, discussed this opportunity to work together to deliver a much-needed service across the county. They formed a multi-sector collaboration, Northumberland Hidden Harm Service Consortium.

The consortium consists of:

- ESCAPE Family Support, a voluntary sector organisation working with drug and alcohol users and their families in Northumberland.
- Addiction Service Northumberland, a statutory organisation which is part of the Northumberland, Tyne and Wear Mental Health Trust.
- Young Carers Service, a county council agency in Northumberland.
- Teenage Pregnancy Service, part of the statutory Northumberland Care Trust.
- Trojan Training and Research, a private consultancy firm.

Chase 24, a domestic and violence abuse service linked to Victim Support was initially part of the consortium. Unfortunately they could not proceed as they were unable to access technical specifications to complete the pre-qualification questionnaire (PQQ) by the submission deadline.



STRUCTURE OF THE COLLABORATION

The consortium has adopted a lead body model. ESCAPE was nominated as the lead agency, because the voluntary organisation was perceived to be the most flexible in responding to the changing environment as Northumberland Council became a unitary authority.

There is no formalised written agreement for the collaboration – all agreements were verbal during the development phase. Decisions were made by consensus and by adopting the best approach for the service that the partnership wished to deliver. There was active buy-in to the ethos of the collaboration and hardly any conflict about the aims of the group.

The consortium planned to develop a memorandum of understanding once the outcome of its initial tender was known. It didn't win that tender, but members are keen to collaborate further to develop new work in Northumberland, and will continue to meet.

CHALLENGES PRESENTED BY COLLABORATION

- The external pressure of tender deadlines meant the partnership had to work quickly and accept that they could not plan every detail of how they would work together.
- Keeping up with 'day' jobs is tricky during the tendering process.

SUPPORT FOR THE COLLABORATION

External organisations and other individuals were extremely supportive of the plans to collaborate and of the consortium as a delivery mechanism, but the collaboration has not had any support in terms of development funding.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED FROM COLLABORATION

- Respect each other's specialisms and be prepared to move your position.
- Communicate effectively and in a timely fashion so no one feels out of the loop.
- Respond quickly to requests.
- Respect each other's 'day' jobs – partners can't always act immediately
- Laugh a lot – it helps!

BENEFITS AND SUCCESSES OF COLLABORATION

- Existing working relationships enabled consortium members to be open and honest with each other, in the knowledge that they all wanted to achieve the same aim.
- Developing the tender by committee could have been very challenging, but partners were gentle and prompt in their criticism, enabling the lead agency to act quickly.
- Regular member meetings worked well, and not trying to do too much at once helped avoid burnout.
- Members have shared the workload by taking bite-sized portions of the tender to discuss and map out.
- Consortium members have been accepting of other partners' specialisms.

NORFOLK LINK

The Norfolk Local Involvement Network (LINk) is run by a consortium of voluntary agencies based in the county, along with a local university. All partners have a strong belief in the value of the consortium and experience of working together, which have both facilitated the transition to becoming a consortium. Voluntary Norfolk, a CVS, acts as lead and accountable body for the consortium and a Memorandum of Association specifies the terms of the collaboration.

BACKGROUND OF THE COLLABORATION

This collaboration came together to act as host consortium for the Norfolk Local Involvement Network (LINk). Voluntary Norfolk, a large council for voluntary service, hosted the Patient and Public Involvement Forums (PPIF) that preceded the development of LINks. The organisation also acted as interim host while plans were made for the permanent LINk were put in place.

Voluntary Norfolk later decided to bid for the Norfolk LINk contract, and was keen to collaborate with organisations working with older people and disabled people, and a partner that could offer high quality research

The Norfolk LINk partnership consists of:

- Voluntary Norfolk, a voluntary sector infrastructure organisation.
- Age Concern Norfolk, a voluntary sector organisation.
- West Norfolk Voluntary & Community Action, a neighbouring council for voluntary service (ensuring full county coverage).
- The Norfolk Coalition of Disabled People.
- The University of East Anglia, which has a world class reputation for research and was keen to build on its community engagement.

Voluntary Norfolk had previously worked with all of the consortium members, and all partners knew each other well. All of the partners have extensive networks and established reputations that benefit the LINk through information-sharing and engaging local people. Each organisation could also see the direct benefit of the LINk to their own beneficiaries. The partners shared a strong belief that combining their experience, reputation, contacts and knowledge added significant value to the bid and would support the LINk in Norfolk more effectively than any single agency.

STRUCTURE OF THE COLLABORATION

Voluntary Norfolk is the lead and accountable body, but the partners have all signed a Memorandum of Understanding that sets out the roles and relationships within the Norfolk LINk host consortium. This agreement was checked by solicitors and finalised through discussion with all partners. The consortium is not a legal entity in its own right.

The Memorandum of Association had to cover the varied roles and responsibilities of each partner body to reflect their different circumstances.

Although most of the staff for the Norfolk LINk host team are based at Voluntary Norfolk, one member of staff is employed by Age Concern Norfolk and one employed by the Norfolk Coalition of Disabled People because of the nature of their roles. These partners considered seconding staff from Voluntary Norfolk, but decided to employ staff directly.

CHALLENGES PRESENTED BY COLLABORATION

So far, the consortium has experienced very few setbacks. The only minor challenge has been working out the relationships and lines of accountability for staff members based outside Voluntary Norfolk and away from the rest of the team. Workloads had to be carefully determined and agreed by all parties.

The University of East Anglia and West Norfolk Voluntary & Community Action have no immediate or ongoing financial benefit from their involvement in Norfolk LINk, but both will be commissioned by the consortium to undertake pieces of paid-for work.

Decisions are made in consultation with all partners. Voluntary Norfolk drafted the bid, which was then amended and agreed by all partners. To save time and resources, partners confer wherever possible via email, only coming together face-to-face when really necessary.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED FROM COLLABORATION

- Existing trust and familiarity between partners help the process to be implemented more smoothly and swiftly.
- Involving partners from the outset and ensuring that they were part of every decision mean that everyone feels ownership of a consortium.
- All partners believing in the end product and in their ability collectively to deliver it better than any single agency is key to success.

BENEFITS AND SUCCESSES OF COLLABORATION

- Partners shared a belief that, collectively, they could offer a support service to the LINk which would ensure its success and benefit those they serve.
- Partners who were not in line to receive ongoing financial benefit from their involvement chose to play an active role because they could see the 'big picture'.
- Voluntary Norfolk's experience as host to the PPIF and the interim LINk may have encouraged partners to become involved as the venture had a good chance of success.
- All partners had previously worked together, so mutual trust and understanding were already established.

This case study forms part of NCVO's Public Service Delivery Network's work to develop tools and resources for the improvement of procurement and commissioning relationships between the voluntary and community sector and the statutory sector.

For further information about the work of the Public Service Delivery Network visit www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/psdnetwork or call the Sustainable Funding Project on 020 7520 2411

The Sustainable Funding Project is an NCVO initiative working in partnership with the Big Lottery Fund and Charity Bank.

The project is the sector's premier provider of tools and resources encouraging and enabling voluntary and community organisations to develop and implement a sustainable funding strategy.

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