



## What are the barriers to Effective Partnership Working?

Research has shown that there are a number of reasons why some partnerships have not been successful, they include:

- Previous failed attempts.
- Different organisational cultures.
- Varying expectations of partners.
- Lack of senior commitment.
- Poor information exchange within and outside the partnership.
- Conflict between addressing local and national priorities.

### What Makes a Successful Partnership?

There are a number of features, which are typical of a successful partnership, including the following:

- Commitment at senior level.
- Balance of responsibility between partners.
- Identifying the necessary skill mix.
- Understanding of organisational cultures.
- Clear shared vision and goals.
- Achievable outcomes.
- Regular evaluation.

### Hints and Tips: The Top Ten Partnership Killers!

#### 1. For ever and ever...

**The problem:** A partnership that lives on beyond its purpose will either wither slowly creating dissatisfaction among those who stick to the bitter end, or create an excuse for people to leave the office for useless meetings!

**A solution:** For project-based partnerships and those based on limited funding agree an exit strategy – know when the job is done and what you might leave in place. End the partnership with an event (or party) and thank everyone for their input.

#### 2. One-upmanship

**The problem:** Competition between organisations can be a good driver, but too

much and it will lead to blame, self-righteousness and a trench mentality.

**A solution:** Ensure you spend time early on team building and developing a sense of shared purpose – build relationships between organisations to blur the boundaries.

### 3. Right place, wrong people

**The problem:** A partnership will be powerless if representatives from constituent bodies constantly have to go back to their parent organisations for decisions.

**A solution:** Make sure the people put on your partnership have sufficient authority to decide much of the business at the meetings – NB they don't have to be at a certain (or similar) level within the organisation but they do need delegated authority.

### 4. Pulling rank

**The problem:** Higher paid or higher graded officers pulling rank around the table will silence others who have just as much to give.

**A solution:** If you have the right people from organisations, all with delegated authority, the principle of 'equality around the table' should be agreed and adhered to – and written into your terms of reference.

### 5. Mission creep

**The problem:** Often a partnership where people are working well will come up with hundreds of other ideas that can be tackled beyond the partnerships original brief. This will bog you down.

**A solution:** Agree a clear vision and underpin this with a clear focus on 5-6 priorities. Allow some flexibility for 1-2 priorities to change over time as things develop and don't be afraid to junk activity that isn't working in order to free up time for new ideas.

### 6. Only here for the cash

**The problem:** Many organisations will be attracted to a partnership by money – like bees to the honey pot. This motivation alone can kill a partnership through representatives unwilling to volunteer for shared activities for instance.

**A solution:** Set out clear shared common ground from the start (try A 'common ground' workshop) and focus on your shared priorities and outcomes (see mission creep above).

### 7. Target? What Target?

**The problem:** Many partnerships will come together around a good idea but fail to set real targets around the shared vision. Starting vague will mean you'll never know what you've achieved.

**A solution:** Set clear targets to support your shared priorities and chart your progress – agree a simple but shared performance management system that everyone signs up to so you're all speaking the same language. (See Performance management)

### **8. Death by drudgery**

**The problem:** Endless business meetings that no-one wants to attend will result in – guess what? – no-one attending!

**A solution:** Tailor your sessions to need – how often do you really need to monitor your activity? Rather than business meetings would a workshop or brainstorm be a better use of time? Keep business meetings short and focused on what you need to do – not endless report-backs from people who are basically saying “my project is better than yours”. Build in time to celebrate success.

### **9. We know what's best for you**

**The problem:** Many partnerships are based in consultation but fail to continually engage. Building on historical information or existing provision is not enough – those meant to benefit may not want what you are offering!

**A solution:** Establish your partnership based on a solid foundation of genuine consultation and ensure that you have built in activities that continually engage your customers or client group.

### **10. Strictly on a need-to-know basis....**

**The problem:** Lack of communication between partners and beneficiaries will breed suspicion and resentment and will fuel personal agendas.

**A solution:** Set up good processes to network and share information. Evidence shows that the more you inform, the more satisfied people will be.