



Making a difference together?

Planning, monitoring and evaluating
voluntary and community sector
collaborative working

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THE LANGUAGE IN THIS GUIDE

Collaboration

Collaboration involves two or more voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) working together to achieve shared aims. The collaboration may be short or long-term, and involve formal or informal arrangements. We also use the terms ‘collaborative working’ or ‘working together’.

VCOs also enter into cross-sector collaborations with public bodies or businesses. This guide has not been written with such collaborations in mind, although much of the guidance here can be applied to them. There are specific issues arising from collaboration between VCOs and statutory organisations and VCOs collaborating with private sector partners.

Partnership

‘Partnership’ can be used as a catch-all term without any particular reference to its structure or arrangements. For simplicity’s sake, ‘partnership’ covers ‘consortium’, ‘alliance’, and ‘network’, unless there is a reason to specifically name a type of partnership. It does not refer to a merged organisation, which is outside the scope of this guide.

Similarly the term ‘partners’ refers to those organisations that work together.

Outcomes

Outcomes are the changes, benefits or other effects that happen as a result of an organisation’s activities. Adopting an ‘outcomes approach’ means planning and managing your collaboration so as to bring about particular changes for your organisation and your partners – and then finding out what outcomes, intended and unintended, you are actually achieving.

This guide outlines a process that will help you align your desired outcomes with your organisation’s mission or broad strategic goals, so that achieving your outcomes for collaboration contributes to the overall achievement of your mission and strategy.

Outcomes that are achieved in the short-term but link to or lead to a final longer-term outcome, are called intermediate outcomes.

Indicators

Performance indicators are signs or clues that will help you assess the progress and success of the project. We will mainly be concerned with two types of performance indicator:

- **Output indicators** help you to assess the amount of work that you do and to show progress towards meeting your objectives.
- **Outcome indicators** help you to assess the changes that take place as a result of your project, and show progress towards meeting your aims.¹

¹ For more guidance on indicators, please see *Keeping on Track: A guide to setting and using indicators* (Parkinson and Wadia, 2008)

Voluntary and community sector organisations

In this guide we refer to voluntary and community organisations (VCOs), to include voluntary organisations, community organisations, social enterprises and other not-for-profit organisations. The term is abbreviated to VCO in this guide.

Monitoring

Monitoring is the collection of information that will help you answer questions about your organisation, collaboration or joint project. It is important that this information is collected in a planned, organised and routine way.

You can use the information you gather to report on your project and to help you evaluate.

Evaluation

Evaluation means using monitoring and other information you collect to judge the performance of an organisation or project – in this guide, the performance of a partnership or joint project. Evaluation is also about using the information to make changes and improvements.

Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation is when an organisation uses its own people and their skills to carry out evaluation. Monitoring and evaluation is built into the everyday activities of the project so that it becomes part of what you do.

Acronyms

bassac	British Association of Settlements and Social Action Centres
CES	Charities Evaluation Services
ENDiF	East Newchester Drugs in Families
GNDA	Greater Newchester Drugs Alliance
ICT	Information and communication technology
OTS	Office of the Third Sector (until May 2010)
OCS	Office for Civil Society (from May 2010)
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
VCO	Voluntary and community organisation

INTRODUCTION

Working together with other VCOs has become a normal feature of life in our sector. Sometimes it has grown out of day-to-day contacts between ‘neighbouring’ organisations, and sometimes from the vision and leadership of key individuals. Sometimes funders and commissioners have required it, sometimes they have not looked favourably on it.

Some collaborations have endured and gone on to achieve great things, but others have fallen apart and proved disappointing.

VCOs have therefore been making their own assessment about how beneficial collaborative working has been, but there has been no systematic framework for setting up collaborations so that they can be evaluated more coherently. This guide aims to fill that gap. The key questions are:

- Could working in collaboration with another VCO make a difference for your organisation, your cause or your beneficiaries?
- Once you are linked up with other VCOs, how can you tell if collaborative working really is making a difference?

This guide covers the steps and issues you need to consider when developing an effective evaluation framework for your collaborative project, and will help answer these questions.

Who is this guide for?

For managers and leaders of VCOs

We have written this guide for all managers and leaders in voluntary and community organisations. Primarily it will be of interest to chief executives and senior managers, but trustees and non-executive directors may also want to understand more about getting the most out of collaboration.

For large and small VCOs

We make no major distinction between the collaboration challenges facing large organisations and those facing small – even very small – organisations. The questions are the same even if resource levels to run monitoring systems are lower.

For your organisation and the partnership as a whole

The guide starts by approaching collaborative working from your own organisation’s perspective so that you will be able to measure outcomes against your own success criteria. Then there are sections looking at how the partners together set up the right framework to evaluate their collective achievements.

PREPARE

ENGAGE

PLAN TOGETHER

MONITOR

EVALUATE

APPENDICES

For experienced evaluators

If you already have an established approach to monitoring and evaluation, you will be familiar with many of the terms and processes referred to in this guide. Your evaluation of collaborative working could be just about supplementing or fine-tuning what you already do, in order to provide new information to evaluate the difference collaboration makes.

You may want to influence your partner organisation(s) to adopt or share your good practice, and to be open to learning from them about how they evaluate their work.

However experienced you are in using the tools of monitoring and evaluation, you will want to answer different questions when you are engaged in collaborative working – and this guide will help you identify them.

For beginners in evaluation

If monitoring and evaluation is relatively new to you, [Appendix 1](#) gives a brief explanation of some of the stages in the process, and points you to resources that can give you a more extensive understanding. Our approach follows that of Charities Evaluation Services (CES), which has been used successfully for many years. Its publications expand on the text in this guide, and are referred to throughout, as well as in the reference section at the end.

What is collaboration?

A number of sources have categorised collaboration into types. bassac’s collaboration programme website² is one such source, as is the Office for the Third Sector publication: *Working in a Consortium - A guide for third sector organisations involved in public service delivery* (Roberts and Marshall, 2008). The table below combines material from both sources to provide an overview of the main functions or purposes of collaboration.

The main functions of collaboration

Source	Type of collaboration	Brief description
bassac	Networking	Sharing information and contacts
	Shared staff resources	Includes secondments and fitting part-time roles together to make a full-time job
	Shared accommodation	Renting space together, or providing space for other VCOs to provide cost savings and other benefits such as shared ICT and reception
	Joint service delivery	Joint undertaking to deliver publicly commissioned services
	Joint fundraising	Approaching funders together or gathering funding for a joint project

² www.bassac.org.uk/our-programmes/collaboration/types-of-collaboration

	Influencing and campaigning	Pooling contacts and resources to change public policy
	Joint business planning	Coming together to look at strategic planning and the opportunities to work together where possible, while guarding the individual nature of each organisation
bassac, OTS	Mergers	Two VCOs become one – this includes takeovers
OTS	Scaling up	Joining together to make a bigger offer and usually to bid for funding to expand
	Sheltering	Joining together in the face of unwelcome changes in the environment – or under pressure from funders and commissioners
	Sub-contracting	One VCO engages another to deliver part of a service or to outsource business functions

Another way to classify collaborations is by their arrangements or structures. They include:

- formal partnerships underpinned by detailed agreements with a relatively long timescale, for example to deliver joint services
- loose and flexible alliances, for example to campaign on issues of shared concern
- commercial arrangements to reduce costs by sharing people or co-purchasing resources
- the creation of a new organisation or vehicle to achieve shared goals
- mergers or takeovers.

The only arrangements that we do not cover in this guide are mergers or takeovers. The two parties to a merger will no doubt take steps to assess what they each want to achieve by merging, but once the new organisation has been created, monitoring and evaluation becomes a ‘normal’ internal matter. For guidance on mergers see, for example, *Collaborative Working and Mergers: An introduction (CC34)* (Charity Commission, 2009).

This guide does recognise that the prospect of merging with another VCO may be one of the opportunities or threats you include when looking at the possible outcomes of collaborative working.

Why evaluate collaborative working?

For learning and development

Monitoring and evaluating your collaborative working will help you assess how well you are doing and help you do it better. Managers, staff and trustees want to know what is happening and what difference the collaborative working is making. Your partner organisation(s) will also want to answer these questions.

Evaluation can:

- provide real-time feedback on the performance of the partnership as a whole or its activities
- inform the review of priorities and allocation of resources
- assess the value added by collaborative working
- review whether your aims have been realised
- provide lessons for the future to change existing collaborations and set up new ones, or indeed avoid them.

For sharing and accountability – to show others that your collaboration is effective

An evaluation that has been well set up and is based on sound information will enable you to communicate and demonstrate achievements to funders, stakeholders and local communities.

They may want to hold you to account so they know whether the collaboration has delivered on what it promised. In addition to the normal questions of money well spent and achievement of outputs and outcomes, key stakeholders will want to know:

- Were the additional risks of a jointly delivered service successfully managed?
- Did the additional potential benefits bear fruit?

On top of accounting for funds and achievements, you are likely to want to communicate things you have learned to a number of different audiences. Potential funders or commissioning bodies may want to know about the added benefits of joint services, or your increased understanding of user needs because of your additional new contacts and sources of information. The public will want to know about the good use you have made of their donations. Established supporters may want reassurance that collaboration has not eroded your profile or that you are still committed to the cause. Whatever the message or audience, communicating on the basis of a sound evaluation will carry more weight.

How can this guide help you?

We know that not all collaborative working will be or has been equally successful. There are hazards as well as opportunities involved. This publication aims to help you plan the measurement of positive and negative outcomes and reach your own conclusions on the likely or actual benefits of collaboration.

It doesn't try to be exhaustive, but intends to aid your thinking, both when preparing and planning for collaboration, and when actually participating in an alliance, partnership or other collaborative venture.

We take you through the stages and provide tools and frameworks for easy use. Many of the tools require little or no introduction, such as a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis. We use real life case examples in the main text and in [Appendix 2](#) to illustrate why organisations chose to collaborate and issues that faced them.

A fictional case study - the Greater Newchester Drugs Alliance (GNDA) and its potential partners – is used to illustrate stages in the process of planning and setting up a monitoring and evaluation framework.

MONITORING AND EVALUATING YOUR COLLABORATIVE VENTURE

This five-stage sequence is ideal for you if you are looking at your first experience with collaboration or if you are considering a brand new collaborative venture. You can start with section one, [PREPARE](#), and follow it through.

However, we know that many of you are already working collaboratively, so how does the sequence work for you?

In the first instance, it may be easier to browse through the guide quickly to familiarise yourself with the different sections and what they cover. You can then pick out sections of interest in whichever order appeals to you. To get you started, here are a few suggestions for organisations already part of any sort of collaborative venture:

- What if you are working collaboratively but are no longer quite sure why or what you were hoping to get out of it? Revisit the [PREPARE](#) section to rediscover your motivation.
- What if another VCO approaches you and suggests working together? Ask for time to go through the [PREPARE](#) section before progressing far into [ENGAGE](#) and [PLAN TOGETHER](#). Time is always tight, but doing the preparatory work pays off later.
- What if you are working collaboratively but monitoring and evaluation is patchy or simply not telling you what you want to know? Go to the [PLAN TOGETHER](#) section, and set up a more effective monitoring and evaluation framework.
- What if you are working collaboratively but things have changed? Perhaps some partners have left, or new ones joined, the environment has changed or your business plan has worked better or worse than expected. You may need to go right back to the [PREPARE](#) section to take stock of your future involvement, or at least work through the [ENGAGE](#) section with your partners to renew the terms of engagement and reset the aims and objectives.

A note on evaluating the process of setting up and operating the collaboration

Although we are focusing in this guide on the outcomes of collaboration, you should note that this is likely to be affected by how you and your partners are working together, in both the set-up and operational phases. So it may be useful or even necessary to monitor these processes in order to understand why and how your collaboration is achieving, or failing to achieve, its intended outcomes.

SECTION 1: PREPARE

The **PREPARE** stage in planning takes place ‘behind closed doors’ with you, your board, and your managers, without any outside representatives. Later on you will need to go through similar processes with your partners, as discussed in the **ENGAGE** and **PLAN TOGETHER** sections.

Trustees must act prudently in the interests of their charity. In practice this means that the benefits of collaborative working should be clearly established at the outset.

Collaborative Working and Mergers: An introduction (Charity Commission, 2009)

1.1 Why do VCOs collaborate?

By talking to a number of organisations that have worked together with others, bassac has found that collaboration is worthwhile in a number of circumstances and to achieve a number of ends.³ Building on bassac’s analysis, in the table below we suggest some challenges and possible responses that might lead you to consider collaborative working.

Reasons for collaboration

Challenges	Response	Case example
<p>You lose some contracts or some grants and are perceived as less attractive to funders or commissioners.</p> <p>A bigger VCO or business comes onto the scene and competes against you and other existing organisations.</p> <p>You see an opportunity to bid to deliver a service but it looks as though bigger bids will stand a better chance.</p> <p>A public body says ‘consortium bids only need apply’.</p> <p>Cuts in public funding are on the cards for you and other VCOs in your area or sector and core costs are rising.</p> <p>Your bids and/or funding applications are failing.</p> <p>Rising costs and cuts in funding are threatening. You want to maintain services at their current levels and working collaboratively will enable you to do so.</p>	Survive	<p>Crisis and Off the Streets</p> <p>Crisis, the charity for single homeless people, planned to merge with Off the Streets and Into Work.</p> <p>The director of policy and external affairs at Crisis said Off the Streets were seeking prospective merger partners and had approached Crisis.</p> <p>‘They couldn’t get good funding for their projects, the climate out there is very unstable, and it’s difficult to cover core costs.’⁴</p> <p>Although collaboration led to merger in this instance, it is possible to collaborate and remain independent.</p>

³ <http://www.bassac.org.uk/our-programmes/collaboration/why-collaborate>

⁴ *Civil Society Finance* 9 March 2010 www.civilsociety.co.uk



Challenges	Response	Case example
<p>Something needs doing in your community, but you can't do it on your own or it is slightly outside your core service to date.</p> <p>More people could benefit from your service, but you do not have the capacity to respond.</p> <p>Your beneficiary group has other needs that your existing service is not meeting.</p> <p>You offer a broad generic service to your user group and want to add in more specialist elements.</p> <p>Your beneficiaries are being served by a number of VCOs, each meeting a limited aspect of their needs, so closer coordination would be better for those service users.</p>	<p>Grow to meet more need</p>	<p>REACH</p> <p>The REACH report (REACH, 2009) suggested that Black and Minority Ethnic organisations try collaborative working because many of them face the following two challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • changing from being seen as representatives of their communities to being seen as an organisation that delivers services beyond their own communities • competing with larger voluntary organisations to get funding.
<p>Increasing community or user group involvement is an objective for you and a number of other voluntary and community organisations.</p> <p>You aim to get listened to by a public body, such as your local authority, but your voice is just one among many.</p> <p>Your campaign goals involve a large-scale change in public attitudes or government policy and you seek national media and political influence.</p>	<p>Get your voice heard</p>	<p>End Child Poverty Coalition</p> <p>Originally established by a few national bodies, the End Child Poverty Coalition is a campaign alliance with over 150 organisations in membership, including childcare charities, trades unions, and trusts. It has successfully organised events and mobilised the public and organisations to keep child poverty high on the agenda for all political parties. Representatives of leading members steer the Coalition through a board.</p>
<p>Cost control is becoming more important.</p> <p>You need new or larger office accommodation but commercial premises are too expensive.</p> <p>You need a specialist (such as finance or human resources manager) but can't afford to employ them full-time.</p> <p>Other organisations can deliver some of your functions more efficiently and/or at lower cost.</p>	<p>Work more efficiently</p>	<p>The Ark Centre</p> <p>The Ark Centre in Enfield, North London is a hub for VCOs working in the early years, youth and social care sector. It solved some pressing accommodation problems for a number of organisations in 2007, and they together offer a wide range of services for local children, young people and families. The collaboration has also enabled emergent organisations working with migrant communities to establish themselves well.</p>

As the case examples show, the four main motives overlap. In some situations the reasons for collaboration may develop over time. Sharing accommodation to control costs, for example, may lead to new shared strategies to survive or compete. Campaigning together may lead to joint services, or to proceed with caution next time. Much depends on the quality of the experience and the outcomes achieved.

Collaboration: a good decision for many reasons

The Hull Women's Network

In 2004, a group of five women's centres – Bransholme Women's Centre, Preston Road Women's Centre, Hull Women's Centre, West Hull Women's Centre and North Hull Women's Centre - and SAFE women's self-defence training company came together to form the Hull Women's Network (HWN). The new infrastructure organisation, a not-for-profit company, was created to make each organisation stronger through the partnership.

Outcomes were summarised as:

- improving service delivery
- engaging service users
- a brighter long term future.

The centre contract coordinator at Preston Road Women's Centre is clear about the many benefits of working together:

The network has made a huge difference to both our own experiences as individual women's centres and to the lives of the women of Hull. It has enabled us to offer richer services, improve our resources and learn from each other.

Source: bassac website, September 2008, <http://www.bassac.org.uk/our-programmes/collaboration/resources>

1.2 Know yourself

Before embarking on a collaborative project, it is important to be clear about what your own organisation wants to achieve, to prevent you from drifting off mission.

The CES Planning Triangle shows graphically how an overall aim can be broken down into specific aims, which in turn are delivered by achieving objectives. Its purpose is to focus on the necessary alignment between objectives and aims and mission. An example of a worked triangle is shown in the illustration below.

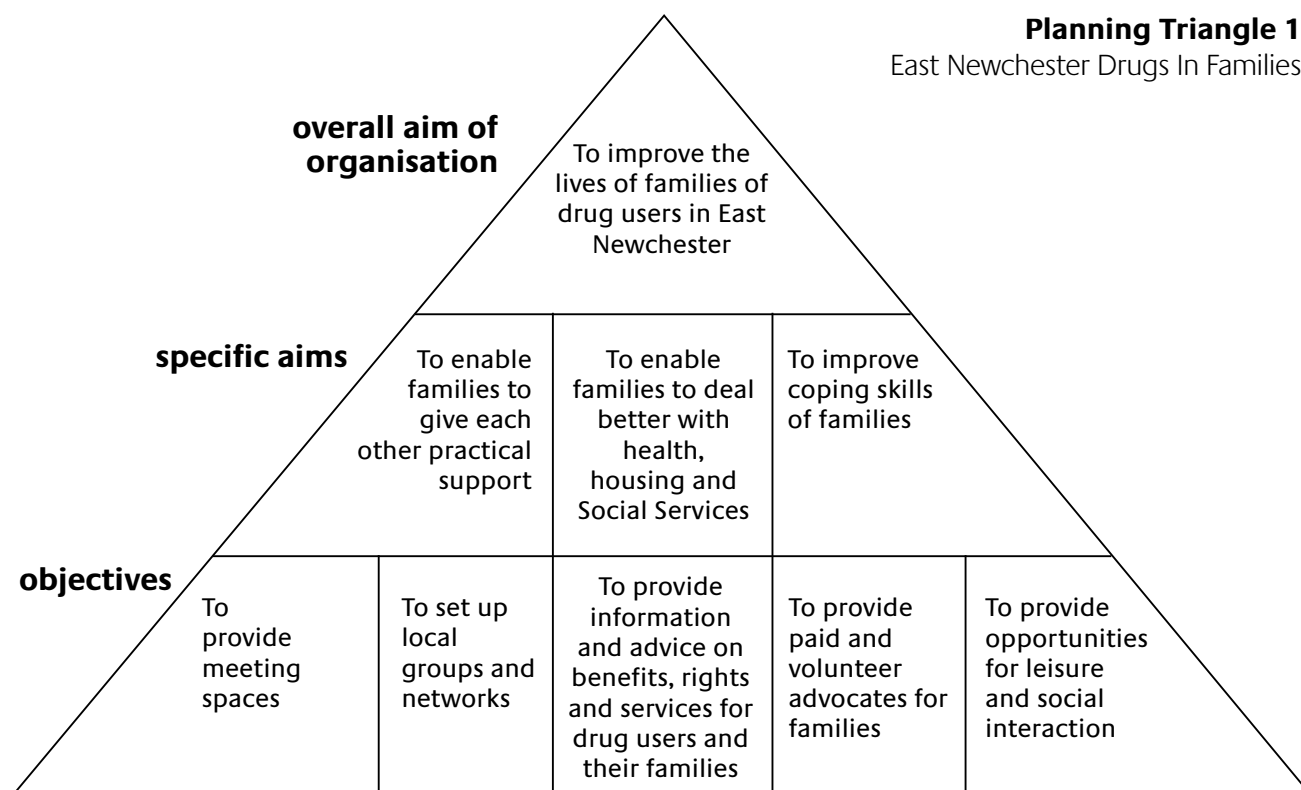
Illustration: Clarifying organisational aims and objectives

Greater Newchester Drugs Alliance (GNDA) consists of a number of third sector organisations that work in the drugs field in the Greater Newchester area. Some organisations directly support the users, while others address the needs of drug users’ families and friends. Some work closely with statutory services, others work in specific neighbourhoods or with specific ethnic groups. The Alliance grew from an earlier networking forum. It draws in resources to support frontline organisations and brings together groups of its members to bid for publicly commissioned services.

Discussion started between GNDA and two local organisations, East Newchester Drugs in Families (ENDiF) and Volford Needle Exchange, on developing collaboration to increase their overall effectiveness.

It was important for all organisations to be clear about their own specific aims and objectives before considering how they could meet these more effectively through collaboration. ENDiF staff worked together to do this using the CES Planning Triangle. The triangle shows how their objectives fed into their aims, and their aims into the overall mission of the charity.

Planning Triangle 1
East Newchester Drugs In Families



For more information on how to construct a planning triangle for your own organisation, see [Appendix 1](#).

1.3 Agree your reasons for possible collaboration

Your reasons for engaging with other VCOs may be a combination of those outlined in the table on [page 9](#) or might be completely unique to your organisation and your situation. Reading through the grid again:

- Make a note of which of the scenarios fit most with your situation.
- Write down your main reasons for collaborating using any of the four headings, or any combination of them. Use your own words to better express your situation and your motivation.

At this stage you are expressing in broad terms why you might want to collaborate. This is just the start of the process of setting clear aims and objectives, which will make it easier to monitor progress. Without clear aims, you will not be able to tell what difference collaborative working is making or has made.



Illustration: Knowing why you might collaborate

GNDAs asked ENDiF and Volford Needle Exchange to think about why they wanted to work collaboratively with the Alliance and its members, and to prepare for membership of the Alliance by working through the grid of challenges and responses (shown on [page 9](#)). Their responses to the grid are shown side by side, but they completed the form separately.

Motive for working together	East Newchester Drugs in Families	Volford Needle Exchange
Survive	Adult Services policy has changed and some funding is likely to be cut.	Too small to bid for contracts.
Grow to meet more need	No service like ours in the rest of Greater Newchester.	Other needle exchanges have closed down.
Get your voice heard	Housing agencies are threatening evictions and we can't get in the door to advocate for our families.	Some GPs won't work with us.
Work more efficiently	Need to cut costs in case we lose funding. Lease on our office expires in 18 months.	We're all volunteers.
Other		Our committee keeps losing members.
Summary statement	We think our service is really good and could really make a difference across the whole of Greater Newchester but we need help to get up to the next level. A mixture of survive, meeting more need, and we definitely want families' voices heard.	We're at full stretch and still feel very shaky – help! We want to survive.

Clearly these two organisations could not offer each other much if just the two of them worked together. But in a broader alliance, they might find support which would enable them in turn to make a bigger contribution. If you were the Alliance would you admit them both? The Alliance had to consider its capacity to support these two organisations, because the essence of the Alliance is collaboration – it is not just a loose network of members.

1.4 Know what you have to offer

Now that you have a sense of your motivation for working together with other VCOs, you can think your situation through and anticipate some of the challenges that engaging with other VCOs might present you.

One of the first stages in deciding whether to work collaboratively is to know the strengths and weaknesses of your organisation. A SWOT exercise is the most common way of conducting this type of self-assessment.

If you are looking at entering into a long-term, high profile, joint service delivery collaboration, this exercise needs to be carried out in a very thorough manner. You will need to draw on the viewpoints of many people: staff, volunteers, trustees, and most importantly, your service users. For example, if you know exactly why your service users or members value what you offer, you will need to push hard to make sure the joint service continues to offer that element. After all, your reputation with your user group is at stake. If you are not confident in your ability to make an assessment of your strengths, you could commission an independent report.

For a looser, more short-term alliance, for example to conduct a campaign, the self-analysis may not need to be quite as rigorous. Nonetheless, a realistic idea of what you bring to the partnership will be important, as will a prudent assessment of the potential risks to your profile.

The SWOT exercise can also look at issues such as your readiness to work together or your leadership capacity. Knowing how quickly and how deeply you could work in collaboration will enable you to set realistic and achievable aims and objectives.

If you are hoping to establish an honest working collaboration with your potential partner(s), built around mutual confidence, it's a good idea to share the results of your SWOT exercise with them - or at least most of it. You will certainly want to see the results of theirs!



Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>What are the strengths you would bring to collaboration? Why would a potential partner be attracted to work with you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your achievements and expertise. • Your previous experience of working collaboratively. • Your profile. • Your staff and/or volunteers. • Your links to service users. • The quality of your service. • Your size and capacity. • Your staff and management readiness to work together with another VCO. 	<p>What is weak about your readiness to collaborate? What might turn your potential partners off?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding and finance problems. • Staff turnover or recruitment issues. • Poor/limited reputation. • Little experience of working collaboratively. • Limited size and lack of capacity. • Untested leadership.
Opportunities	Threats
<p>What are the additional opportunities collaboration might bring?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New markets or localities. • Save money. • Play in a bigger league. • Bigger or different profile, re-branding. • New funding opportunities or new business. • Preparation for merger or takeover. • Outcomes and impact – for the cause, service users, your members or the community. <p>See also ‘Why do VCOs collaborate?’ on page 9.</p>	<p>What risks do you run by collaborating?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of profile – no longer distinct. • Tarnished by the reputation of others. • Swallowed up. • Service quality deteriorates. • Loss of existing or future funding or business. • Diversion from other priorities. • Mission drift. • Merger or takeover.

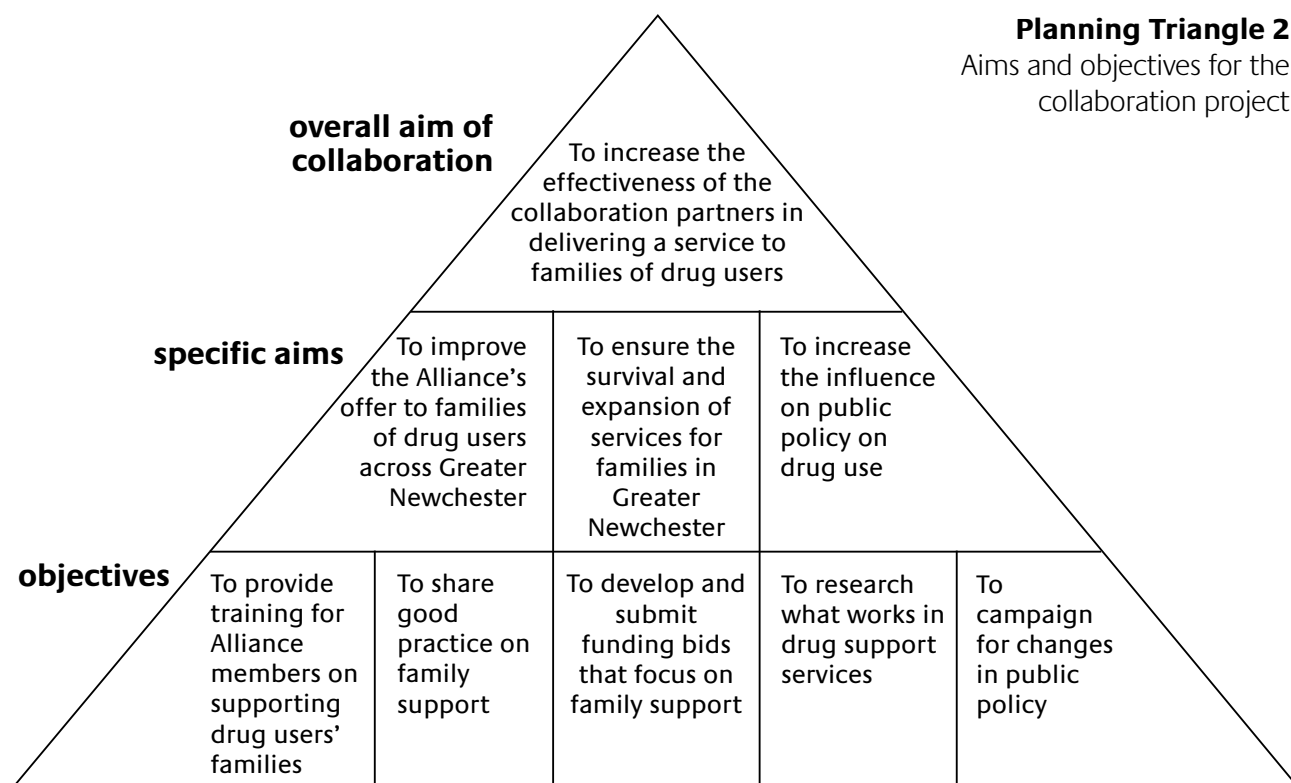
1.5 Potential risks and benefits to your organisation

Once you have worked through the SWOT exercise, you will be clearer about why you want to work collaboratively, what limits you might set, and what risks you would want to mitigate. It is a good idea to sit down with planning triangles for both organisations intending to collaborate and create a third triangle for the collaborative project, clarifying its aims and objectives. It is important to be clear how these aims and objectives will contribute to your strategic focus and not create mission drift.

Illustration: Setting aims and objectives for collaboration

GNDA and ENDiF established that their overall aim was to increase the effectiveness of each partner in delivering services to families of drug users. Aims and objectives were then developed that linked to this overall aim. This is shown in Planning Triangle 2 below. ENDiF was then able to check that the collaboration aims and objectives were geared towards strengthening its own services and achieving better outcomes; these related to families gaining increased support and better coping skills, and being better able to deal with public services.

Planning Triangle 2
Aims and objectives for the collaboration project



What to do about threats and risks at this stage

Your SWOT exercise will have thrown up some threats, risks or concerns about working with other organisations. When you start to **ENGAGE** with potential partners, you will want to assess whether they can help you meet those concerns or whether they carry a real threat for you. This may affect your choice of partners. You will certainly want to be able to discuss your concerns with your potential partners and you may need to do some straight talking with them.

Opportunity costs: the risks of not collaborating

It is worthwhile at this point considering not only the risks of working collaboratively, but also of standing still.

- What if you hold out while others are seeking strength in joint ventures?
- What if you turn down funding or commissioning opportunities because you fear working closely with potential partners?
- What will the extra costs of joining be if you wait and see if a partnership set up by others is successful? (Think about the UK policy towards the Common Market/European Union from the 1950s onwards as an example!)

Then again – perhaps you could achieve some of the benefits of collaboration on your own?

Whatever the size and complexity of the proposed arrangement, trustees should assess the risks involved to ensure that these have been sufficiently addressed.

Collaborative Working and Mergers: An introduction (CC34) (Charity Commission, 2009).

What if collaboration never gets airborne?

One risk that is difficult to manage is the risk that engaging with other VCOs about a potential collaboration may lead to nothing, even after some considerable investment of time and therefore money. It can take many months to explore possibilities, only for plans to be rejected by funders, partners' boards, or even your own board.

The only answer to this challenge is to develop a staged approach with milestones. Working with a small working group, for example the chief executive and one or two trustees or two managers plus a trustee, might be a good way to oversee the early stages and take decisions about going ahead or calling a halt. The collaboration lead would have to make the business case to this small group in the first instance.

A relieved chief executive commented

After 7 months of discussions and work, the boards of both organisations last night recommended the joint service venture to their membership. What a relief! Had they decided against, I would have spent most of this year and a good deal of money on a project that didn't materialise. This is the risk with collaboration and mergers - you can get a long way down the road but end up where you started.

There is more on the monitoring and evaluation of risks in section 3, [page 27](#).

SECTION 2: ENGAGE

2.1 Who to collaborate with

This guide can't help you choose a partner or decide who exactly to collaborate with. You will probably know who the likely candidates are already. Instead we offer you a short list of questions to help point you in the right direction and keep you focused on the outcomes you are seeking.

- Who else might have the same goals or strategy as you?
- Who else might be under the same pressures?
- Who provides services that complement what you offer?
- Who has got something you want?
- What if competitors became allies or allies become competitors?

Having made some initial contact with potential partners, probably informal at first, set up some meetings to explore the pros and cons of working together. At this stage try to keep it hypothetical, and look at a number of options. Don't jump to conclusions even if it all looks very promising.

Don't just collaborate with like-minded VCOs!

Seeking to build a 'partnership of the unexpected' directly challenges the 'well they would say that wouldn't they' perception.

The Good Campaigns Guide, NCVO 2005.



2.2 First agendas with potential partners

SWOT if we worked together?

Armed with the knowledge of your own strengths and weaknesses, we recommend that you now carry out a joint SWOT with your potential partners. You would, for example, want to table some of the hopes and concerns you identified earlier, and ask your potential partners to do likewise.

In this exercise, some issues will be the same as the SWOT you carried out focusing on your own organisation, but you are now also identifying the shared strengths, the joint opportunities, and the weaknesses and risks of working together.

You might look at:

- convergence of interests
- complementary strengths or expertise
- your combined profile
- combined links to community or service users
- your joint size and capacity
- what you could learn from each other
- economies (of scale)
- possible longer-term closer collaboration, even merger
- shared problems
- different cultures or systems
- previous competition or tensions between you
- opinions of key stakeholders on the collaboration
- loss of existing or future funding or business
- new funding or business opportunities.



Illustration: Assessing the shared risks and benefits of collaboration

Representatives of the Alliance met with East Newchester Drugs in Families (ENDiF). They discussed the possibility that the Alliance’s coordinator would help ENDiF put bids to a number of commissioners in the sub-region. ENDiF would support other members of the Alliance who had contact with families of drugs users to improve their support – perhaps through training of workers and volunteers. Sharing office space with other Alliance members might be possible in the future.

They worked through a joint SWOT exercise and this is the result.

Table: If we worked together

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>What would be our joint strengths if we collaborated?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add a tried and tested new service to the Alliance – ENDiF can help existing members support families better. • Complementary strengths and expertise. • Combined links to families, drug users and communities. • We will be able to speak on behalf of families as well as drug users. • Supporting drug users and families together will be more effective. 	<p>What weaknesses would collaboration expose individually or as a partnership?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-term funding problems for ENDiF. • Will take a big input of support to get ENDiF operational across the sub-region. • ENDiF had a disagreement with another member of the Alliance. • Policy is shifting away from support for families because of cuts. • Different expectations of partners.
Opportunities	Threats
<p>What are the additional opportunities collaboration might bring us?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ENDiF could bid for a number of service contracts across Greater Newchester. • Combine office bases and save money. • Bigger influence on public agencies and housing bodies. • Add family support to our next funding round. 	<p>What risks would we jointly or individually run by collaborating?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alliance takes on too much and other priorities lose out. • ENDiF fail to make good links within the Alliance. • Loss of existing funding.



Making the decision in principle to proceed towards collaborative working based on outcomes and objectives

You are close to making a decision to proceed with the collaboration. On balance do the opportunities outweigh the threats? Can the threats be managed? How can you build on strengths and address weaknesses?

Let us assume that the participants in the discussion can recommend to their decision-makers that the proposal to work collaboratively should receive a green light.

Our main point here is that organisations should take the decision to collaborate based only on the explicit aims and objectives which partners in the collaboration believe can be achieved.

Once an in principle decision to collaborate has been taken by the parties a whole raft of issues needs to be explored so that decisions can be taken. These include:

1. Legal and financial issues, for example:
 - trustee liabilities
 - transfer of funds
 - type of partnership agreement (such as a Memorandum of Understanding, or contract).
2. Communication and confidentiality in relation to staff and other stakeholders.
3. Timetable.

These issues are important but not the subject of this guide. They will normally be explored in parallel to the process of building more agreement on shared aims and objectives, which is our focus here.

2.3 Establishing standards and systems to work together effectively and build confidence

You and your partners are getting clearer now about what you believe collaborative working should deliver for you, your organisations and your users or members, and how you will achieve those outcomes.

At this stage in the process, there is real value in talking through how you will work together in order to build mutual confidence and establish a good working relationship.

- What is our vision for the collaboration?
- Which partner will do what?
- What do we expect of each other?
- What are our shared values?
- What is the level of communication and performance that is desired?
- How will we hold each other to account?
- What milestones can we set?
- When will we review progress and achievements?

The box below shows some advice about the process of forming a partnership.

The Department of Communities and Local Government says:

- The different systems and cultures of organisations can be a barrier to working together as a successful consortium. Spend time understanding the other organisations' practices.
- Agree roles and responsibilities early on in the process and develop ways to review these roles and responsibilities as the consortium develops.
- Create agreements that clearly set out decision-making processes for the organisations involved. In particular, agree who can decide what and when, as well as defining how decisions will be communicated.
- Agree how the consortium's finances will be managed. The largest or most established organisation may be best to take on this role.
- Do a credit check on all of the organisations that would join the consortium to make sure that their business and financial arrangements are sound.

(REACH, *Information for Black and Minority Ethnic Voluntary and Community Organisations*, 2009)

bassac says:

Taking time to create a culture of partnership is a key to successful collaboration. It helps to resolve many of the issues that can later make collaborative working difficult, allows you to work out what roles partners will take and what formal legal form the consortium will adopt.⁵

People talk about the need for 'trust' in partnerships, as though it were a personal relationship. Over time, trust may indeed build up, but in the short and medium term it's more about understanding each other and about mutual respect based on standards of professional behaviour that you can test.

Cluster Manager (South), bassac

We now turn to planning your collaboration, which you will need to do around your joint aims, objectives and more detailed performance indicators.

⁵ <http://www.bassac.org.uk/our-programmes/collaboration/collaborate-for-commissioning/models-for-collaborative-working>

SECTION 3: PLAN TOGETHER

3.1 Setting clear shared aims and objectives

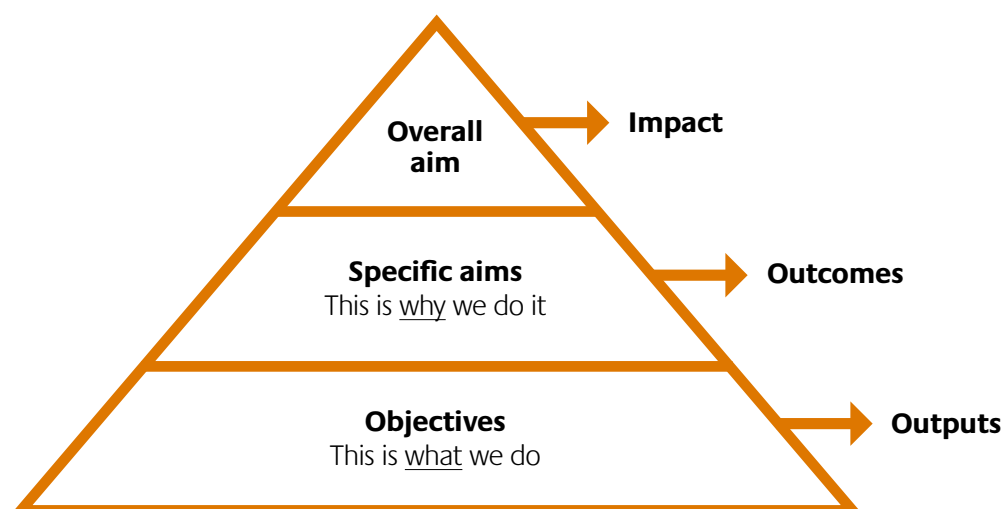
Having taken an in principle decision to proceed, you are now clear about why you and your partners want to work collaboratively, as well as getting some sense of the hazards you would want to avoid. A set of aims and objectives is emerging linked to the overall purpose of the collaboration and the related strategy. The importance of this is illustrated in the case example below.

Setting realistic goals for collaboration

Staff in a healthy living collaborative venture realised that it had outlived its usefulness when they re-examined its aims. They realised that in relation to the amount of time being put in by each partner, it was not likely to deliver the ‘added value’ that they had hoped for. The main issue was that its original plans were simply too ambitious for the majority of partners, who were very small organisations with limited resources. A large grant from a trust had enabled them to employ a coordinator who had supported them in their ambitions, but when the funding finished and couldn’t be replaced, a ‘reality check’ enabled them to assess the situation differently. Members of the partnership are now making different – and positive – alliances with each other based on more achievable aims.

Cluster Manager (South), bassac

You and your partner or partners can set out your shared aims and objectives in the same way as before, using the CES Planning Triangle.



3.2 Prioritising the outcomes and objectives you want to monitor

A word of caution – partnership working often generates a range of aspirations and aims. If that creates a high number of objectives and you set out to monitor indicators in relation to them all, this will consume a lot of time and money. And in the end the evaluation might be weakened, not strengthened, by the mass of information and the breadth of focus.

If there is a long list of aims and objectives, it is advisable for the VCOs working together to rank them in order of priority.

- What positive outcomes would convince you the collaboration had been worth it?
- What negative results would undermine the whole value of working together?

Another way to structure the evaluation is to ask:

- Who are the most important audiences and stakeholders?
- What are the key questions at the outset and over time?

As part of your evaluation, you may want to include a focus on the service quality of joint services or on specific organisational outcomes. You may also consider monitoring the process of setting up and operating the collaboration.

The important point here is that you can choose the outcomes that you want to focus the bulk of your monitoring and evaluation effort towards. Later you can select the relevant indicators and the evidence you collect.

Making sure that data collection is manageable

CES underlines the importance of integrating monitoring into daily work and making it meaningful:

It is important to strike a balance between the need to demonstrate achievement convincingly and the need to keep information gathering as simple and unobtrusive as possible. Many VCOs have concerns about the amount of work and time involved.

Statutory sources recognise that reporting mechanisms need to be proportionate and not impose undue burdens. This is important since gathering outcomes information can be a substantial undertaking, especially if measurements are expected. The challenge is to implement outcomes thinking while ensuring that data collection is not too cumbersome and that it becomes a main focus for planning, management and evaluation rather than just another layer of funding requirements.

Using an Outcomes Approach in the Voluntary and Community Sector (CES 2006), p 7.

Thinking through not only what you want from collaboration, but also any possible practical difficulties, will help you to focus your monitoring and evaluation and provide information that will allow you to learn and make adjustments. The case study below illustrates the importance of anticipating possible negative results as well as positive ones.

Anticipating possible problems

The Rainbow is a resource centre and office base for VCOs working in the disability sector. The local authority encouraged them to move in, but while it solved some pressing accommodation problems, the limitations of the space in the building have caused tensions between the resident organisations.

Setting up the Rainbow was not a scientific process. Those organisations with the most pressing accommodation needs just moved in.

Rainbow Coordinator

The Rainbow is run by a management team consisting of representatives of each of the organisations in the building. The local authority has been keen to have a say in how the centre develops and what its policies are, and this pressure has damaged the working relationship between the agencies and the local authority.

Service charges for the building have been set at a level that is unaffordable for the organisations in the centre and, in their view, there has been no regard to 'offset' in terms of the value of the work of the organisations against the cost of the centre.

However there have been real benefits. Disabled people in the area have received a better service and the two emergent organisations working with migrant communities have established themselves and expanded very effectively.

Lessons learned

Collaboration solves some problems but can create others; working together needs time, attention and leadership. Being together in a local authority building increases influence in some ways but threatens independence in others. The VCOs should have anticipated some of the problems.

Real life has overtaken our hopes for the new joint venture in the Rainbow. The on-going pressures make it hard to get a balanced view on the benefits or lack of them. We need to analyse the information we have better and work out exactly what working out of this centre is worth to us. We've got some tough negotiations coming up with the council and we have to know what our bottom line is.

Rainbow Coordinator

3.3 Managing the monitoring and evaluation of collaboration

Most collaborative ventures form a steering group or working group to oversee the development and operational phase. For the purposes of this guide we will assume that one of that steering group's functions is to set up the monitoring and evaluation and to receive information and analysis at agreed points in time.

In the set-up phase, representatives on the steering group with special responsibility for the monitoring and evaluation should do the following:

- Establish a monitoring and evaluation work plan with a timeline and milestones.
- Make sure managers, staff and volunteers feel a sense of ownership by consulting with them on the aims and outcomes for collaboration; and later for the indicators and methods of information gathering.
- Let funders and other key organisations know how you are planning to evaluate any joint activity they are supporting. This will help build relationships and mean that they are more likely to understand and accept any evaluation report.
- Use the evaluation to encourage a process of reflection about activities and the changes they bring about.
- Recognise the pressures of daily activities while monitoring and evaluating.
- Be receptive to other people’s ideas and responses while remaining independent and focused on the collaboration aims.
- Keep in mind the evaluation aim of learning.

3.4 What to do about threats and risks at this stage

When you carry out your ‘if we worked together’ SWOT exercise it will inevitably throw up some threats or concerns (see the example on [page 21](#)). Even if the concerns are outweighed by likely benefits, you will need to follow up the exercise by developing a risk management plan together with your potential partner. Some of the risks identified will influence your choice of indicators and priorities for monitoring, as you will want to keep your eye on them.

Options for managing risk

1. Create a risk register and report regularly on it

Many VCOs use the following grid to categorise risk

		Severity of impact	
		Low	High
Likelihood of occurrence	Low	I	II
	High	III	IV

Once the risks have been categorised, you will want to state your plans for mitigating those risks, and then report on what mitigating actions you have taken, plus any updates or indicators.

If you already have a risk management system in place, the collaboration risks can simply be added to it. As the risks are shared as well as impacting on individual organisations, there needs to be regular reporting on risks at partnership meetings.



More about risk management

Risk management is a big subject with its own universe of methodology and publications. Some approaches to risk look at the phenomenon more broadly than just at possible negative occurrences. For example, risk is defined in ISO 31000 as ‘the effect of uncertainty on objectives’, whether positive or negative.

Risks can be grouped into the following categories:

- Avoidance (eliminate, withdraw from or not become involved).
- Reduction (optimise – mitigate).
- Sharing (transfer – outsource or insure).
- Retention (accept and budget).

2. ‘Due diligence’ and similar investigations

The closer the collaboration, the greater the impact of negative developments. For a potential merger, organisations need to provide full disclosure and carry out ‘due diligence’ investigations. A collaboration sealed by a detailed agreement should also involve a measure of investigation by the partners of each other. This may involve frank discussions around the steering group table. The agreement itself should address risks by planning for damaging contingencies linked to potential legal, financial, reputational and operational liabilities.

3. Give some focus in your monitoring and evaluation framework to possible negative outcomes

- **Focus your monitoring on concerns as well as hopes**

If, for example, the threat you fear is that collaboration might lower your service quality or dilute the positive feedback from your users or members, this can be monitored in the same way as an improvement in quality. Establish a baseline for service quality or user feedback and collect comparable information on a regular basis so that you can monitor trends.

If the risk is financial, you may need to adjust your financial management system to reveal any worrying trends as early as possible.

- **Manage priorities - monitor time and resources allocation**

If, for example, you fear that the collaborative working might divert managers and staff away from existing priorities, you can monitor the amount of time they devote to the new joint venture against agreed targets.

Start with yourself and monitor what proportion of your time you give to existing commitments and how much to the new joint venture. If you are going to bring a new initiative such as collaborative working into your business plan, you will need to delegate some tasks or stop doing some things.

- **Build external perspectives into your evaluation**

If, for example, you believe there is a risk that other organisations, especially existing funders, will change their opinion of you in a negative direction, then your monitoring and evaluation plan should include annual or biennial surveys that ask specific questions about your reputation or profile.

SECTION 4: MONITOR

4.1 Planning the monitoring process

This stage sees you and your partners building on the agreed aims and objectives to establish a systematic way to find out if the collaboration is making the difference you intend, and avoiding any potential hazards.

The collaboration steering group we set up in Section 3 – **PLAN TOGETHER** - needs to take five steps at this point:

1. Agree desired outcomes and outputs.
2. Select performance indicators.
3. Agree sources of evidence.
4. Draw up a monitoring plan, including allocating roles and tasks to run the systems of evidence collection.
5. Resolve differences in approach.

4.2 Agreeing outcomes and outputs

Once you have identified your aims and objectives it will be easier to identify your desired outcomes and planned outputs. Each of your specific aims can be broken down into outcomes, representing a significant change.

Illustration: Greater Newchester Drugs Alliance

With aims and objectives set for the GNDA collaboration with ENDiF (see Planning Triangle 2 on [page 17](#)), both organisations were ready to make their planned outcomes and outputs clear. One of their aims was to improve the Alliance's offer to families of drug users across Greater Newchester. The outputs would be training workshops delivered by ENDiF to other Alliance members. Planned outcomes included increased knowledge and understanding of issues for families and an improved quality of support to families of drug users.

A second aim was focused on the survival and expansion of support services to families of drug users. The planned outcomes were raised awareness by policy makers and commissioners of the importance of support for families, increased income for ENDiF's drug services and increased service provision by ENDiF.

A note on intermediate outcomes

In the early stages of collaboration you may only be able to measure intermediate outcomes. These are the more immediate outcomes, often smaller changes along the way before the final desired outcome can be achieved. For example, you may gather the views of service users or training delegates about how they feel after a service or training programme. Changes in their lives or their working practice are longer-term outcomes. These take time to be revealed and require different evaluation methods that may be quite complex, and can be hard for smaller organisations to measure economically.

A note on impact

If you achieve the changes you seek through working together, you will hope to see them feeding through to change the lives of the user group or community in a tangible way. For example, if you grow through collaboration to meet more need, your combined service could be more impactful. Because the chains of cause and effect are so long, and so many other factors may affect the lives of your service users, assessing impact is very difficult. However, even attempting to grapple with questions of impact can lead to valuable insights into the effectiveness of VCOs and strategies such as collaboration.

To try to capture impact the Alliance and ENDiF would need to follow the families who had received the 'new improved' family support service, and see if the better quality support had brought increased benefits.

4.3 Selecting performance indicators and sources of evidence

You may be able to identify a host of possible performance indicators and sources of evidence, but then you need to make a selection of those which offer best 'value for money'.

You could ask each other: for a given amount of monitoring effort (and cost), which indicators and sources of evidence will enable us to draw the most telling conclusions about the difference our collaboration has made?

It can be useful to think ahead to the point at which you will be evaluating your collaborative effort, for example, after the first year. What sort of thing would you want to be able to say and what evidence would you need to do that?

Based on the desired outcomes and outputs, which flow from your collaboration triangle (see section 1.5), you are now ready to identify performance indicators for success, and for dealing with risks and threats.

Performance indicators help you assess the progress and success of the collaboration project. The four types of performance indicator we are concerned with here are:

1. Input indicators relate to the resources you put into a project, such as staff time. It may be important to monitor these in order to assess the costs and benefits of collaboration.

2. Output indicators help you to assess the work generated by the project and to show progress towards meeting your objectives. These are usually quantitative: numbers and percentages to show activity and levels of participation, for example. The quality of outputs can also count as an output indicator.

3. Outcome indicators help you to assess the changes that take place as a result of your collaborative project, and show progress towards meeting your aims. Evaluating outcomes can involve collecting hard statistics relating to change, but also very often involves the collection of people's views and perspectives by interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, observation, or less structured discussions. You may be able to monitor outcome indicators regularly. However, useful outcome information can also be obtained through one-off data collection.

4. Impact indicators demonstrate longer-term change relating to the overall aim or mission of the collaboration.

For more advice on selecting indicators, please refer to *Keeping on Track: a guide to setting and using indicators* (Parkinson and Wadia, 2008).

4.4 Drawing up a monitoring plan

The next step is to pull together your discussions on aims, objectives, outcomes, outputs and inputs, their indicators and sources of evidence into a monitoring plan.

The plan could start by stating the principles for the evaluation approach that have emerged in discussion, such as:

- how to combine existing information gathering systems with proposed new ones
- how to involve service users in the evaluation
- how to seek their support and if necessary their permission
- whether and how findings will be made public
- how to ensure monitoring and evaluation is realistic and sustainable.

The plan should then go on to:

- itemise the most important aims, objectives, outcomes, outputs and inputs, and their indicators
- set priorities for collecting and analysing appropriate evidence
- designate clearly which people have the responsibility of collecting the information and reporting it
- specify the frequency of reports.

To ICT or not to ICT?

ICT (information and communication technology) is now widespread across the voluntary and community sector but databases and spreadsheets are probably still less common applications than Word documents, websites and email. They tend to remain within specialist sections of the organisation, such as finance or membership.

Setting up the collaboration can be an opportunity to upgrade ICT systems in order to develop shared electronic monitoring systems. More developed systems can be a spur to innovation and an opportunity to skill up staff and volunteers. ICT offers much for monitoring and evaluation, such as ease of analysis and reporting, although it won't always eliminate the need for paper-based records.

However, investment in new ICT infrastructure – hardware and software – plus ongoing technical support takes time and resources. It is an important decision to take – at the right time. Each partner may be at a different stage and the steering group may be well advised to take a step-by-step approach, using careful cost-benefit analysis.

For further guidance, see *Using ICT to Improve your Monitoring and Evaluation* (Davey, Parkinson and Wadia, 2008)



Illustration: A framework for monitoring and evaluating collaboration

With their plans in place, GNDA drew up a framework for collecting evidence for the evaluation of their new collaboration with East Newchester Drugs in Families (ENDiF). The framework set out the aims and objectives of the collaboration project (shown in Planning Triangle 2 on [page 17](#)) and their related outcomes, outputs and indicators. A section of the framework is shown below.

Collaborative working aims	Outcomes	Outcome indicators	Data collection
<p>To improve the Alliance’s offer to families of drug users across Greater Newchester</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased knowledge and understanding of issues by Alliance members’ frontline workers. • Improved quality of support to families by Alliance members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent of improved knowledge and understanding of Alliance members. • Type of support provided. • Types of changes to support practice. • Number of family support contacts by Alliance members. • Families’ satisfaction rates with support services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six-month follow up questionnaire to delegates by ENDiF training manager. • Annual questionnaire to Alliance members’ managers by ENDiF training manager. • Alliance member records on contacts. • Annual (sample) survey of users’ families supported by Alliance members coordinated by ENDiF training manager.

PREPARE

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APPENDICES

Collaborative working aims	Outcomes	Outcome indicators	Data collection
To ensure the survival and expansion of services for families in Greater Newchester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased income for drug services by ENDiF. • Increased service provision by ENDiF. • Policy makers and commissioners are more aware of the importance of support for families of drug users. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ££ value of funding with families focus. • Extent of ENDiF family caseload • Numbers of ENDiF staff. • Numbers of ENDiF volunteers. • Level of importance attached to family support by policy makers and commissioners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ENDiF Director quarterly finance and activity reports. • Quarterly progress report by Alliance coordinator. • Biennial survey of policy makers and funders - independent commissioned by Alliance.
Collaborative objectives	Outputs	Output indicators	Data collection
To provide training for Alliance members on supporting drug users' families (through ENDiF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training workshops. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbers of training workshops. • Numbers and profile of delegates. • Profile of delegates. • Delegates' satisfaction rates with training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ENDiF training manager inputs data monthly into Excel sheet. • Satisfaction data collected through end of training feedback.
To develop and submit funding bids that focus on family support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding bids. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of bids and ££ value. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarterly progress report by Alliance Co-ordinator.

4.5 Resolving differences in approach

There are a number of issues you need to explore when setting up monitoring systems within a collaboration project.

VCOs are familiar with the challenge of different funders' monitoring requirements. Collaboration can multiply the difficulties: a plurality of monitoring systems trying to satisfy several stakeholders.

Some of the challenges to evaluating together are outlined below.

- Some organisations embrace monitoring and evaluation and see it as an important part of everything they do. Others see it as a burden and resist it. Management may not build the necessary discipline. Is there enough of a shared culture?
- Monitoring and evaluation is not an exact science and different organisations use different definitions of aims and objectives, outcomes and outputs. Is there enough convergence between concepts and definitions?
- Different partners may use different paper-based and computer systems. Are the different systems compatible?
- Partners may be at different stages in their use of ICT. Is now the right time to upgrade? How do you decide whose system to adopt?
- Some monitoring data is sensitive, for example individuals' records or commercial data. What are the ground rules for sharing and publishing information?

Differences can cause tensions and undermine the shared systematic approach, but there can be costs as well as benefits in creating the perfect system with matching software and reformed practices.

Collaboration will benefit from a monitoring plan that includes:

- A review of current monitoring and evaluation practice by the partners. Identify good practice that can be shared across the partnership, any conflicts relating to information or software, and any gaps or new requirements.
- Agreement on standards for information, its collection and presentation.
- A phased plan for strengthening monitoring by adding new procedures, forms, or questionnaires, or by modifying systems and sharing good practice to make information as compatible as possible. Experience shows that it is best to adopt a staged approach, taking simple practical steps at first to build confidence and developing more convergent systems over time.

SECTION 5: EVALUATE

Your evaluation is more likely to succeed if:

- monitoring and evaluation plans are realistic
- both evaluation and the (collaboration) project have good management support
- staff and volunteers understand and value monitoring and evaluation tasks
- enough time is set aside for monitoring and evaluation activities
- evaluation is built into planning cycles, job descriptions and budgets.

Practical Monitoring and Evaluation: A guide for voluntary organisations (Ellis, 2009)

Evaluation means using monitoring and other information to judge the performance of an organisation or project; in this case, the performance of a partnership or a joint project or service. You are now at the stage of completing the monitoring and evaluation cycle, by analysis, interpretation and reporting.

This guide emphasises in particular those aspects of the evaluation stage which are features of working in collaboration. For more information about the evaluation stage generally, please refer to *Practical Monitoring and Evaluation* (Ellis, 2009).

Your joint monitoring systems, which have been generating information, are called on in an evaluation to deliver answers to the questions you and your partners have posed. You are now in a position to make sense of the information you have collected and to make a judgement about the value of working together.

You owe it to yourself and all the people who have carefully completed monitoring forms, or who have entered data on the system, to use this information well. As partners in the collaboration you will hold each other to account for the quality of the analysis as well as the quality of information.

If you have followed the framework set out by this guide, you will be able to make informed judgements not only about outputs and activities, but on your outcomes – how well you are achieving your aims.

All the aspects of the evaluation stage require attention both in your individual organisations and as a partnership together. For illustrative purposes, we are assuming here that you are working towards a meeting of the steering group with evaluation as a major item on the agenda.

5.1 Analysing information

Take time to consider what the information is telling you. Analysis requires you to look into the detail of the information, and to make efforts to ensure it is as complete as possible. You will want to check that information has been correctly and consistently entered onto the system or forms in use. This is especially important where different organisations have generated information.

Starting with the information your own organisation has generated, try to get a clear picture of what it is telling you before the joint steering group meeting. You will want to look at trends, averages or percentages where measures lend themselves to that type of analysis. Performance against any targets is another important aspect of analysis.

You will need to be able to present your analysis to your partners and answer questions. Graphs and charts are a valuable aid for this. Where case examples or comments from stakeholders form a part of the information, you will want to agree how to present that to each other. Some information can be aggregated (such as levels of satisfaction with a service or activity) while direct quotes can enliven the analysis and illuminate more complex points.

Ideally you and your partners will share the information and analysis in advance of the steering group meeting as it is very difficult to focus on the detail in the middle of a discussion. Sharing in advance will ensure that the information and analysis of each partner receives thorough examination. Over time, as systems bed down and people become more familiar with what they are looking at, this may be less important, but initially it is essential.

When you examine information from partners, as with your own information, you are looking for:

- consistency
- completeness
- comparisons, such as trends over time, or in relation to partners or sector benchmarks.

When you are looking at each other's information and analysis, it is much simpler if similar information is collected and presented in the same way. You can then move forward to interpreting the findings more quickly and with greater confidence that you are comparing apples with apples, rather than apples with pears.

This is where your monitoring plan pays off. Making information comparable is essential, even if it is not identical. An initial investment of time and effort to bring monitoring practice together and make monitoring systems compatible will pay off handsomely now, when you are analysing the information.

5.2 Interpreting findings

Drawing meaning from the information is not always straightforward. You need to keep an open mind when you look behind the data as you may be surprised by what you find. There could be more than one explanation for the evidence and you need to keep questioning it, especially when monitoring systems are new.

Try to put your theory of change and the assumptions you made to the back of your mind while you take in the evidence. (There is more discussion on 'theory of change' on [page 43](#).) You may believe

that certain information reveals that what you have done has brought about the changes you seek or mitigated the risks you want to avoid. But, for the time being at least, you need to play the ‘good scientist’ and allow for a range of explanations.

If, as recommended in the analysis section above, you have analysed the information on your own before meeting partners for a progress review, you will be in a good position to start to interpret what the information means. Preparation for the joint meeting is therefore very important.

Interpreting the findings is part of the process that works well through discussion. Different interpretations can be aired and a range of meanings can be explored. Through discussion, one narrative (the story of cause and effect and meaning) can start to gain consensus, or there may be different and competing explanations for what has happened. It will be important to distinguish between what has been achieved as the result of the collaboration, and what would have happened anyway.

This discussion needs good chairing or at least excellent working relationships between partners. If agreement comes too easily, perhaps there is a need to shake things up a bit. If disagreement is too noisy, there will be a need to identify common ground and perhaps carry the different possible meanings forward to see how things develop. This could mean asking more questions and gathering different information.

Remember also to reflect on how your monitoring and evaluation framework has worked. Think about how you might do it differently next time.

The evidence you provide should make a convincing argument, rather than offer proof, about the effectiveness of your collaboration.

Best practice suggests that you should not look for proof of changes but seek to build the evidence that could reasonably be used to assert a connection between your activities and subsequent (social and political) change.

In most cases you don't need to conduct a forensic autopsy. If it quacks and has feathers, it's probably a duck!

(Kingham and Coe, 2005)

5.3 Reporting the results

How you share and use the results of your monitoring and evaluation is very important. It is important to remember at this point that the main purposes of monitoring and evaluation are:

1. Learning and development
2. Sharing and accountability - to show others that your collaboration is effective.

The information generated, the analysis and the interpretations should be viewed as confidential initially. Publicising a report or sharing the evaluation findings in other ways requires full agreement among the partners about what can and cannot be communicated, both internally within the partnership and externally.

Lessons learned and findings should be communicated to the relevant people so they can make any necessary adjustments or decisions. Reporting the findings and conclusions should take place within individual organisations and across the partnership, ideally to trustees, directors, managers and workers.

Reporting your results outside the partnership needs careful thought and planning, whether it is to fulfil requirements of stakeholders or to communicate achievements (or challenges) more broadly.

5.4 Communicating your achievements

The steering group's evaluation meeting should seek agreement on:

- the main purpose of communication
- any text requiring joint agreement
- confidential issues that must remain within the partnership
- who is to tell what
- a timetable for dissemination
- who will lead on different strands of communication
- any clearances needed – for example from people reflected in case studies.

There will be a range of different people interested in the findings of the evaluation, such as your users, trustees, staff and donors. Communicating with all these audiences effectively will require a variety of approaches.

As well as a written report, think creatively about other ways of sharing your results. Here are some ideas:

- annual reports
- training events
- conferences
- meetings
- videos
- newspaper articles
- radio interviews
- your website
- newsletters.



Illustration: Learning from monitoring and evaluation

After six months of collaboration between Greater Newchester Drugs Alliance (GNDA) and East Newchester Drugs in Families (ENDiF), the Alliance steering group received a report which gave data about ENDiF courses, summary financial information for ENDiF, and trends in their activity from a baseline at the start of the collaboration.

The discussion focused on internal learning at this stage. Although the numbers of training workshops since month four had been at the target level of two per month, the numbers attending were not satisfactory. Most delegates were frontline volunteers, who had little say when it came to changing services to support families better.

These results were believed to be because of poor marketing and poor choice of venues and times for the workshops. The ENDiF training manager took away a number of actions. It was too soon to see any changes in practice by people who had attended the workshops, so a draft questionnaire for future use was tabled for comments.

No new funding bids had been completed yet, but one was at an advanced stage for submission. A schedule of potential funding streams and commissioners had been drawn up with a timeline, and the operations group would get quarterly updates in future. ENDiF had secured a reprieve on the threatened funding cuts, based on their new involvement with the Alliance, and their current income was reported as stable. Performance against budget showed no cause for immediate concerns.

A draft plan to gather information from other Alliance members about their current work with families of drug users was tabled and discussed.

Closing thoughts

Collaboration is no longer a rare occurrence in the voluntary and community sector. There are many case studies available from which to draw inspiration and learn lessons (including some we've provided in [Appendix 2](#)). Asking around among colleagues is likely to yield a rich return of anecdotes, endorsements and warnings. Remember to ask them, not only what difference collaboration made for them, but also what they learnt.

It would be disingenuous to offer up empty hopes that your collaboration has been or will be totally successful and that all your aims and objectives will be achieved. We would expect your analysis to be more rigorous than that!

Online resources and case studies can be found at www.bassac.org.uk/collaborationbenefits.

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REACH (2009) *Information for Black and Minority Ethnic Voluntary and Community Organisations*, Communities and Local Government, London

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Roberts, R and Marshall, J (ed) (2008) *Working in a Consortium: A guide for third sector organisations involved in public service delivery*, Office of the Third Sector, Cabinet Office, London

Available free at www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/107235/consortium%20guide%20final.pdf

Online resources

bassac has a wealth of information on collaboration available at www.bassac.org.uk/our-programmes/collaboration/

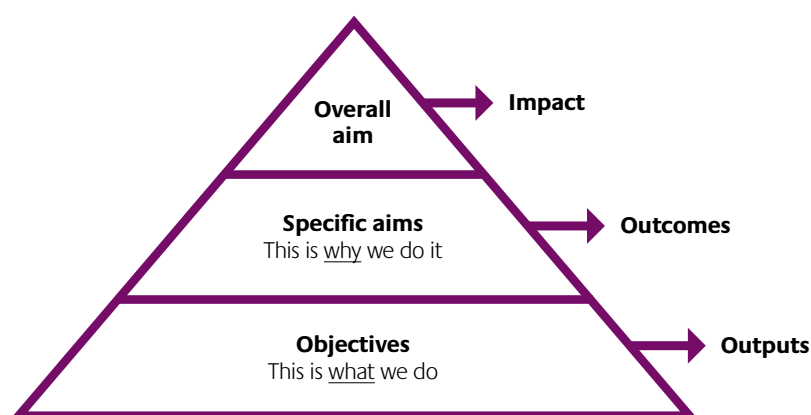
The CES website provides information and resources on monitoring and evaluation, outcomes and outcomes monitoring tools at www.ces-vol.org.uk

APPENDIX 1: MONITORING AND EVALUATING YOUR PROJECT

Using the CES Planning Triangle for yourself

The CES Planning Triangle shows graphically how overall aims can be broken down into specific aims, which in turn are delivered by achieving objectives. Its purpose is to focus on the necessary alignment between objectives and aims and mission.

If you have never carried out this exercise, we suggest that you draw up a similar triangle for your own organisation or project.



Describing your project

The triangle will help you set out clearly your aims and objectives and show how these develop out of your overall aim or mission. Aims and objectives are linked in the following way:

Aims are the benefits or changes you are trying to achieve.

Objectives are the methods or activities by which you plan to achieve your aims. Each aim will have one or more objective.

Keep the number of aims and objectives limited and make them as focused as you can.

Aims tend to start with words that indicate a change:	Objectives tend to start with words that indicate activity:
to increase to enable to reduce to expand to develop to improve	to organise to conduct to provide to distribute to produce to set up

Once you have described your project in clear statements of aims and objectives, you can then set out your intended outcomes and outputs.

PREPARE

ENGAGE

PLAN TOGETHER

MONITOR

EVALUATE

APPENDICES

Setting out your planned outcomes and outputs

The next step is to look at your aims and set out clearly the outcomes that relate to each aim. Then look at your objectives, and detail the planned outputs that relate to them.

Outcomes are the changes, benefits, learning or other effects that happen as a result of your work. They can be wanted or unwanted, expected or unexpected.

Outputs are all the products and services you deliver as part of your work.

Identifying indicators

In order to assess whether you are meeting your planned outputs and outcomes you will need to identify indicators against each of them. Indicators are well-defined pieces of information that you can observe or measure.

For more information on setting a framework for your monitoring and evaluation, please refer to the following CES publications:

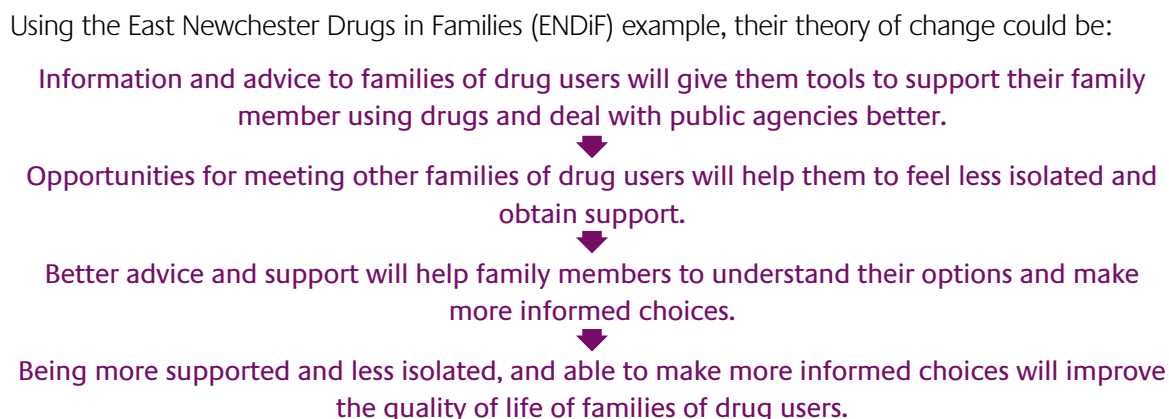
- *First Steps in Monitoring and Evaluation* (Bishop, 2002)
- *Practical Monitoring and Evaluation: A guide for voluntary organisations* (Ellis, 2009)
- *Keeping on Track: A guide to setting and using indicators* (Parkinson and Wadia, 2008)
- Look at CES’ website for worked examples of planning triangles, outcomes, outputs and indicators for different organisations at www.ces-vol.org.uk/index.cfm?pg=310

Some approaches to monitoring and evaluation

You may be interested to consider two other ways of thinking about monitoring and evaluation.

Theory-based evaluation

Theory-based evaluation aims to identify the theory that underlies a social programme about what makes it work. It can be used to decide what must be done to achieve aims and the key intermediate outcomes that will lead to ultimate long-term outcomes. The theory is called a ‘theory of change’. Monitoring and evaluation will keep track of whether the theory was right and expected outcomes are being achieved, or whether you need to change what you do.



This theory does not specify whether the outcome involves the family member helping the drug user to come off drugs and stay clean, for example, or separating from that family member in a way that causes the least distress.

Making a good case – a narrative approach

There may be a number of reasons to explain why things have changed for individuals or organisations, and it may be difficult to attribute outcomes to specific activities. There are evaluation approaches that aim to provide a ‘scientific’ method of demonstrating the effects of a project (or an initiative or way of working) by rigorously comparing its results against an equivalent situation that does not receive the initiative.

It would be difficult to apply such a ‘scientific’ method to your evaluation of collaboration. You should aim to build a convincing narrative of how activities lead to changes, backed up by an adequate mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence. Wherever possible you should compare the outputs and outcomes of your collaboration against a baseline of your results before collaboration and to make a good case for the association between your outcomes and your new way of working.

Review your organisation’s monitoring and evaluation practice

This guide is intended to be accessible for people at all levels of understanding, but if you are relatively new to monitoring and evaluation, you may benefit from reviewing what your organisation does before entering the slightly more complex arena of evaluating collaborative working.

Here are some useful questions to ask in order to review and build on your current practice:

- What information are you collecting about your service or activity that helps you know, for example, how many people you serve? Who are those people exactly? What do they think of your service? How do they benefit from it?
- How often do you assess or evaluate that information to tell you how well you are doing?
- What questions do you need answers to, in order to know how well you achieve your aims and objectives?
- What are the expectations of your funders, or members, or other stakeholders? Who do you tell about your findings?
- How well, on balance, would you say you carry out monitoring and evaluation?
- What stops you from collecting information more systematically or from analysing the information you collect?
- What could you practically and sustainably do to improve your monitoring and evaluation?

You, or other key people in your organisation, may need to increase your understanding of monitoring and evaluation in general. CES provides a range of training and support programmes. Courses are also available in many locations through support organisations such as councils for voluntary service or other national support providers.

APPENDIX 2: CASE STUDIES

Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) have helped us compile some real-life case studies about collaborations between VCOs. The case studies describe the project and the collaboration process, and reflect on what has been learnt.

CASE STUDY

1. inShape Healthy Living Network



History and Motivations

inShape was a collaboration between seven Hackney organisations of varied size and focus that all wanted to promote the health and well-being of local elders. The project was funded through the Big Lottery Healthy Living Centre programme.

The idea for the network, which began in 2004, emerged from discussions between local groups that had taken place over a number of years. The local Primary Care Trust (PCT) also supported a 'joined-up' approach to service provision because it wanted to contract with one, rather than many different organisations.

The seven partner organisations of inShape were: Age Concern Hackney; Asian Women's Advisory Service; Hoxton Health Group; Mobile Repair Service; The Sharp End; The Stroke Project; Wayside Community Centre.

Their vision was:

To work collaboratively for the health and wellbeing of Hackney elders by offering the highest quality local, affordable and accessible services and activities.

The network would provide a single point of contact for elders so that they could access a range of services more easily.

Main work of the collaboration

inShape employed a project coordinator, an outreach worker and a fundraising officer. Between them they were responsible for assessing local needs, referring beneficiaries to appropriate services, and supporting the seven partner organisations to deliver the outputs and outcomes they were committed to. This capacity building support was particularly useful for some of the smaller partners who found it hard to attend lots of meetings and needed help to meet the monitoring and reporting requirements of the Big Lottery Fund. inShape worked very hard on marketing; booklets about the service were produced and the inShape logo was widely recognised.

Outcomes and benefits

The main intended outcome of inShape was the creation of a single gateway to a range of services for elders and for organisations wishing to refer an elderly person on to those services. For elderly people and also for organisations wishing to refer an elderly person, this meant:

- easier access to information about what's out there
- a single number to call to find out about inShape partner services
- increased outreach services (49 venues in total across Hackney)
- better joined-up services.

For its seven partners, inShape had some unintended outcomes because 'each agency got money to offer activities that they wouldn't have been able to run otherwise'. The capacity building support that partners received also enhanced their future sustainability.

The future

InShape has now disbanded for two main reasons: lack of funding and the current economic climate meant that 'the partners didn't want to worry about the needs of the other organisations... they only wanted to worry about their own'. However, some of the organisations are still in close contact as delivery partners for other funding streams.

Lessons learned

One interviewee said: 'without the project coordinator I suspect the outcomes wouldn't have been achieved.' Having paid staff meant that there was always someone keeping track of the outcomes of the collaboration and they were able to support the individual organisations if and when things became difficult. The 'mixing pot' of organisations also added value to the collaboration because it meant that the beneficiaries did not miss out on a range of services simply by accessing inShape first.

CASE STUDY

2. Community Asset Transfer Service (CATS)

Community Asset Transfer Service (CATS) is a consortium of nine organisations. Their consortium members wish to provide advice and support to voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations that own or manage an asset or are working towards this. The consortium is currently waiting for a funding decision which, if successful, will enable them to provide the service to organisations in Wirral.

History and motivations

Following Wirral Council's Strategic Asset Review in 2008, several community buildings and cultural centres, including libraries, looked set to close. Lack of consultation with the local community on the issue provoked public anger and coverage in the press.

Wirral CVS decided to make community assets the focus of their 2009 annual conference, to explain to VCS organisations what the Strategic Asset Review could mean should they decide to get involved in managing a building. At the conference, it became clear that organisations were fearful of the changes and needed more help and technical advice about asset transfer.

Wirral CVS joined forces with another Wirral-based organisation, Comtechsa (Community Technical Architects), and together they sought more partners who might be interested in joining a consortium to meet the needs of VCS organisations that own or manage assets. A consortium of nine organisations was established and became known as CATS – Community Asset Transfer Service.

Funding and membership

The first priority was to secure funding for the new service. The local authority tendered for an asset transfer support service: a panel of people to help organisations write business plans. But the CATS partners wanted to provide a much broader service and so they decided to look for funding elsewhere.

With nine organisations involved in the consortium, it was hard to get everyone together and time consuming getting decisions approved by partners who missed meetings. For this reason, three organisations took on the decision-making responsibilities for CATS – Comtechsa, Wirral CVS and VCA Wirral – while the remaining six organisations are now involved in an advisory capacity.

CATS are currently awaiting a decision on an application to the Big Lottery Fund.

Consortium aims and objectives

CATS are still in the process of seeking funding therefore they are not yet delivering a service. If

successful however they hope to:

- support organisations both during and after asset transfer
- enable organisations to adjust to the changes that owning and/or managing an asset can bring about
- help organisations to think about a range of issues related to asset ownership and management including sustainability, revenue generation and procurement
- facilitate peer learning between organisations that own or manage an asset.

Lessons learned

CATS is driven by a shared vision: 'If you've got the same aim and vision you'll get there'. The consortium brings together Comtechsa's technical expertise with the local knowledge of Wirral CVS and VAC Wirral, making the consortium 'stronger as a team... it's about the sum of the parts'. By working in collaboration, the organisations involved could bid for a service that they would not be able to deliver alone.

CASE STUDY

3. Sustainable Partnership Action Network (SPAN)



History and motivation

SPAN is a partnership of community organisations in Warwick District, which aims to improve the quality of lives and reduce social exclusion through the delivery of services and projects across the partner organisations. Current members of the partnership are Action 21, Bath Place Community Venture, Brunswick Healthy Living Centre, The Gap and the SYDNI Centre.

SPAN originated from the success of joint funding projects on healthy eating initiatives through Warwick District Council and innovative food projects through the Food Standards Agency. The partnership was formalised when SPAN secured funding from Lloyds TSB and a part-time manager was appointed.

Main activities

The partnership has focused on researching and developing several areas of activity including supporting volunteers; healthy eating and well-being initiatives such as locally produced food and allotments; and sustaining and developing SPAN's capacity to deliver these activities.

Challenges

The partnership began as an informal collaboration between particular individuals in the organisations who wanted to work together. Originally, organisations could move in and out of the partnership, but, slowly, the relationships have become more formal. Funding from Lloyds TSB Foundation's Collaboration Programme influenced a more formalised arrangement, in which governance procedures were put in place and are evolving as the partnership develops.

Programme aims

The main aims of the programme were:

- To improve access to appropriate programmes for locally disadvantaged people.
- To increase the range of community initiatives led by local people.
- To improve the sustainability and effectiveness of SPAN partners.

After funding had been secured from Lloyds TSB, the partners reviewed and clarified their intended outcomes using a facilitator from bassac's Sharing Without Merging Programme.

The partners set out the intended aims and objectives of their work using the CES Planning Triangle, placing the overall aim of a programme at the top, specific aims in the middle and the whole range

of planned activities at the bottom. This visual representation can aid evaluation and discussion of progress against these. See [page 12](#) for an example of a worked planning triangle.

Lessons

SPAN partners have identified some factors for successful collaboration:

- Develop a shared vision or purpose to focus the partnership on what it's trying to achieve.
- Be realistic about timescales and what can be achieved; manage people's expectations.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities for each of the partners.
- Agree who should take the 'strategic lead' for the partnership.
- Build trust and channels for open communication.
- Make sure you have strong leadership.
- Keep revisiting and be mindful of the shared vision and the continuous challenges of collaboration.
- Check each partner's commitment to working together towards shared aims.
- Demonstrate the 'added value' of the collaboration; this may be different for each partner involved.

CASE STUDY

4. The Performance Hub

**performance hub**

The Performance Hub was a national programme to provide the voluntary and community sector (VCS) with guidance, training and support on performance improvement; and to create a more supportive external environment for VCS performance improvement. A partnership of three organisations was formed to deliver the programme, which ran from 2005 to 2008; they were Charities Evaluation Service (CES), National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) and National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA). Since 2008, CES and NCVO have continued to offer performance management and improvement support to the VCS but no longer do this jointly.

History and motivations

The Performance Hub built on earlier work within the VCS around quality standards and on government thinking about building VCS capacity to deliver public services. CES and NCVO had a history of working together in this field, and had been jointly involved in the Quality Standards Task Force.

By entering into the partnership, CES hoped to maintain a position as lead provider of VCS support around quality, monitoring and evaluation. NCVO brought expertise in strategic planning and influencing policy, while NAVCA could help extend the partners' knowledge of local VCS infrastructure.

This was a large programme comprising several separate projects, each one led by a dedicated officer in one of the partner organisations. Management of the programme was provided by CES and NCVO through a management board led by an independent chair. A wider partners group made it possible for other interested organisations to advise on the programme. NAVCA was responsible for fewer projects and so did not take a management role in the programme.

Challenges

An initial disagreement between NCVO and CES over who would be the accountable body for the programme was resolved through a series of meetings between the organisations. The appointment of project managers in both CES and NCVO ensured that each organisation led its own projects. The appointment of a management board provided executive oversight and a forum to resolve differences. There were many open discussions along the way, with partners having lots of different ideas and often having to compromise. The partners found that by setting out clear plans focused on beneficiaries, they could reach consensus based on the best outcomes for beneficiaries.

Main activities

The Performance Hub delivered an England-wide training programme, resources and publications around performance improvement. These were disseminated through a quarterly newsletter, email bulletin and other web-based activities. The programme also worked with funders on proportionate monitoring.

Programme aims

The intended outcomes of the programme were:

- to increase VCOs' understanding of and ability to use performance improvement approaches
- to enable infrastructure services to provide better support for VCOs in performance improvement approaches
- to increase the relevance and effectiveness of VCOs' knowledge base about performance improvement
- to create a more supportive external environment around performance improvement for VCOs.

An independent evaluation commissioned by the partnership suggests that the programme was highly successful in delivering its planned outputs, and that where outcomes could be assessed, they matched the planned outcomes for the programme. Assessing the impact of some programme activities, such as influencing the external environment, proved difficult as it can be hard to attribute changes to any one intervention.

Lessons

A number of lessons were learned. These included:

- It is well worth spending time at the beginning of the programme working out the aims and objectives, as these will help partners stay focused on the programme during times of disagreement.
- Put in place clear programme management arrangements at the very start; these will be essential for resolving any disagreements as they arise during the programme. A Memorandum of Understanding between the partners may be useful.
- Work hard at maintaining good communication between all partners.



