

Many BAB-funded projects involve organisations working in partnership with each other. Sometimes this is a formal partnership lasting for the whole project duration, while at other times it is a more informal style of collaboration focused on one particular part of the project.

Here we present the learning from across our projects about successful ways of working in partnership.

Deciding to work in partnership

- Before you enter into a partnership reflect on why you want to work in this way. What added value are you looking for from the other partners? How will this benefit older people's loneliness and isolation? Are you doing this simply because it was recommended by a funder? Be honest with yourself about your reasons for working in partnership and what you hope to achieve.
- Enter a partnership with an open mind and the knowledge that the other partners will have their own ideas, aims, funders and outcomes requirements. For the partnership to be successful, you will need to ensure all agendas are met.
- Keep authenticity in mind when choosing who to partner with. Some flexibility is needed in order to meet the needs of all parties, however don't lose sight of your own organisation's mission and values.
- If you are a small organisation entering into a partnership with a larger organisation, don't feel that you bring less to the table simply because you don't have the same amount of turnover or the same number of staff. Your organisation might have more local knowledge or a deeper understanding of the issue at hand.
- Have a face-to-face meeting as early in the process as possible in order to discuss why you want to work in partnership as well as the factors below.

Setting up the partnership

- Keep a record of communications from the very beginning. It can be useful to have an agreement about what each partner said they would do, so that all parties can be held accountable.

- Agree the delivery model between all the relevant stakeholders at the outside of the project with no major changes except where it is an enhancement to project work. All organisations in the partnership should understand the delivery model and the remit of each partner.
- Align the policies and procedures of each organisation in the partnership. Some organisations might have particular legislation which applies to them and the implications of this for the other organisations in the partnership need to be considered.
- Ensure there is a common understanding of terminology in order to avoid confusion and delays between organisations.
- It can work well to have a multidisciplinary steering group consisting of a number of different professionals involved in the project. All organisations within the partnership should be represented in this steering group. You may also want to include other relevant professionals such as those from whom you would expect a large number of referrals. This helps the project to run smoothly and facilitates good communication.
- When deciding timescales and planning activities, try to foresee whether there will be any periods where activities will need to be paused for any reason. For example some organisations close during holiday periods.
- It can also be useful to develop shared photo/video consent forms in advance. Make sure these cover everything all partners need and are clear about which partners will be able to use these photos afterwards and for what purposes.

During the partnership

- Communication and honesty are both key to a successful partnership. It can take time to build strong and trusting relationships, but regular transparent communication between organisations can really help to achieve this. It can be useful to agree communication methods in advance (e.g. email, phone, face-to-face meetings etc.) and to be honest with each other when there are communication difficulties.
- Every organisation within the partnership needs to actively engage with the project and take responsibility for its success. If your organisation has said it will assist with a certain part of the project, it is important that you do so in a way that is genuine and not tokenistic.
- Make sure the focus is always kept on the older person, not the different organisations working within the partnership.
- Harness everyone's ideas within the partnership, including those from volunteers and steering group members for example. Everyone should be encouraged to contribute their ideas and come up with creative solutions, not just the staff.
- Continue to reflect on how the partnership can be improved and streamlined in order to improve outcomes.

Spotlight: working with schools, colleges and universities

If you are delivering activities, these will need to fit around term dates and exams. Educational establishments also have a variety of other pressures, meaning that it is important to be as flexible as possible when working within these environments.

It can also be useful to connect these activities to topics covered within the national curriculum. This brings added value for the school or college and encourages a positive working relationship.

Try to develop contingency activities (e.g. extra back-up learning materials) which can be used if necessary to fill in gaps or cover for illness. This reduces the need to rely on the teacher to improvise at short notice, which can damage a partnership.

When young children are involved in the project, strong facilitation and a clear focus is key to activities being a success.