



Believing in the region

Effective Partnership Working with Faith Communities: learning the lessons



Regional Action West Midlands

supporting the voluntary and community sector in the West Midlands





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Introduction

Background

The government's devolution and double devolution agenda includes the development of partnership working around the many and varied initiatives for regeneration, neighbourhood renewal, lifelong learning, social cohesion, widening participation and skills training. There are many groups, agencies and funding streams engaging creatively with this agenda.

This work has been developed from a collective interest of faith communities, Government Office for the West Midlands, Regional Action West Midlands, St Peter's Saltley Trust and NEAFE (Faiths in FE Forum) in the regeneration and development agenda of delivering public services. It complements other work in the region that explores the role of faith communities and their contribution to civil society, and their potential as service providers and partners at regional and local levels.

The work particularly focuses on partnerships and the role that faith communities and the Further Education sector, separately and together, are being invited to play. However, this work does have implications for other sectors wishing to engage with faith communities and for that reason provides a useful guide.

This work concentrates on the particular, and practical experience of faith communities within the infrastructure of learning especially Further Education:

- a. Because of the churches' concern, through its sponsorship of an AoC FE Beacon Award, to promote lifelong learning for sustainable development.
- b. To enquire whether a faith community brings anything of distinctive value to a partnership and to explore any implications.

By including findings, collective insights into best practice and pitfalls, this work will help leaders of faith communities, statutory bodies, including learning providers and funding agencies to identify the key factors for effective partnership working and develop partnership practice as a result.

Experiential learning, the sharing of practice, the exchange of knowledge and information, the effective use of resources are all tools in developing sustainable partnerships. This work will contribute to the understanding and practice of effective partnership working across multiple groups and agencies on the assumption that, when all

is said and done, 'partnership' has meaning, that it has recognisable characteristics, processes and boundaries. Partnership is marked by a distinctive set of relationships, which, as a process, has a particular and significant part to play in the development of a democratic society.

Learning the lessons

If there is a business case for partnerships, it is based on a knowledge that partnerships, collaboration, joining with others is not new despite the hype and current drive from Government.

Much of the recent literature on partnership defines the process as a tool, as a means to an end. The call is **"work together to achieve something"**. The assumption is that partnership working, joined-up activity, will be both more efficient and effective. The positive and negative experiences of partnership (practitioners) that have contributed to this work cast doubt on this assumption. It is only partly true.

Efficiency has been defined as **'doing the job right'**. **Effectiveness** on the other hand as **'doing the right job'**. So how do members of the public, private or voluntary and community sector bodies consider what is the right job in terms of partnership working. What is it that you look for in terms of:

- Working through the meaning and implications of effective partnership working;
- Setting out what you bring, can offer, can accept and are limited or constrained by in partnership working;
- Identifying the challenges posed to you and your organisation;
- Assessing your organisation's strengths, weaknesses and resource requirements;
- Considering the most appropriate structural arrangements for partnership working in light of the new context of Local Area Agreements.

It seems that we need a shift in the way we think about and participate in partnerships. Partnership is not a means; it is an end in itself – a vital part of functioning relationships in a democratic society and, for this to be the case, certain core things must hold in terms of:

- Initial formation and sustainability
- Attitudes, personal and organisational.
- Risk, uncertainty and power.
- Protocols and accountability.

This work is organised around eight key areas designed to address and challenge your perspective around:

1. Regeneration and development agenda – getting to grips with the agenda and what implications it could have for your organisation
2. Development theories – what added value can theories bring to the understanding and practice of partnership and managing 'change in a valued direction'.
3. Experiences of partnerships – perspectives and comments on partnerships
4. Understanding the practice of partnership – is partnership right for you and your organisation
5. Leadership development
6. Partnerships 'fit for purpose'
7. Partnership development in the new context of Local Area Agreements – positioning and locating yourself and your organisation
8. Study and research.



Government interest in partnership

TOOL 1

Identify what your organisation or group – with its own particular traditions – is doing specifically that ties in with the Government’s development agenda, i.e. what are you buying into and why?

BUILDING COHESIVE COMMUNITIES includes work in education, health, the labour market, housing, policing, criminal justice, and the immigration service, all of which are underpinned by the values of the Strategic Framework for Community Development: participation; equality; learning; cooperation; social and environmental justice.

All government documents affirm the role and potential of faith communities, the voluntary/community sector generally, and statutory bodies, in developing the strategy for regeneration and development of sustainable and effective communities.

To achieve the stated aims and goals faith communities, and other members of the voluntary and community sector, are being invited and encouraged to form partnerships with each other and with statutory bodies, including learning providers, to further develop overall capacity. Capacity is defined as the necessary attitudes, understandings, skills, infrastructure and processes for effective partnership working.

To develop regeneration and social cohesion the Home Office, for example, sees the building of partnership with, and leadership in, groups and organisations as part of the work to:

- Improve the life chances of all, especially those suffering disadvantage.
- Promote a sense of common belonging, celebrating community identity, cultural diversity and achievement.
- Encourage interfaith dialogue and understanding.
- Improve opportunity and strengthen society.
- Build cohesive communities and participation in civil society.

A cohesive community is defined, amongst other things, as one where:

- There is a common vision, and sense of belonging and security within a national framework.
- Diversity is appreciated and valued.

The Learning and Skills Council, for example, has stated that it aims to: “Establish a principle of partnership and mutual benefit in all relationships between the Voluntary and Community Sector and the LSC, acknowledging that the two bodies share many objectives for the provision of better learning and skills-orientated services to more and different people”.

The government’s overall interest in partnership has been listed as follows:

- Partnership working leads to increased **social capital**, **community cohesion**, and community focused activities;
- Makes for more **successful community planning** processes;
- Promotes the **concept of an enabling, rather than a providing** state, which is part of the modernising agenda of central government;



- Recognises that many problems have multiple causes and so need an **integrated approach** to begin to resolve them;
- Is a response to the demands of communities and others to be **involved in government policy**;
- **Community knowledge** is seen as an important resource that can be drawn upon;
- **Improves democracy**, by encouraging people to become active citizens;
- Leads to **greater transparency** in decision-making;
- Is based on a belief that only by the **involvement of local people** can deprived neighbourhoods be turned around and helped to thrive;
- Means that the services provided are more likely to **meet the needs** of local communities;
- Is one of the main ways through which the central government aims to **deliver its policy programmes at local level**;
- Is a way of finding **new and innovative ways of working** with the public, private and voluntary/community sector;
- There are **benefits from widening collaboration**, including attracting additional funding, mutual advantages and resources;
- Is a way for local government officers to be able to ensure that **important things happen**;
- Is a way of **co-ordinating the many different agencies** at local level;
- **Pools resources and expertise** leads to better value for money, more effective working.

Participation & development: Three theories

TOOL 2

Development has been defined as 'change in a valued direction.' What added value can each of these theories bring to the understanding and practice of partnership? What, if anything, is challenged?

PARTNERSHIP THEORIES

Many studies make a contribution to the concept of partnership. We have chosen three of them:

1. Democratic Theory

Effective partnerships are themselves democratic tools for social, economic and political development.

2. Attachment Theory

Individuals need a base – a place and space – which provides opportunity to develop a set of secure relationships such that a sense of interdependence and independence can be developed and acted upon.

Human and Social Capital Theory

When knowledge, understanding and skills of individuals combine to create trust in group or network relationships.

1. Building participation in civil society: Democratic Theory

One of the strongest arguments for the construction of effective partnerships amongst members of a democratic community comes from the work of **Amartya Sen**. His book '**Development as Freedom**' places the construction of effective partnerships in the wider development and democratic agenda.

For Sen, effective partnerships are themselves democratic tools for social, economic and political development in their own right. His thinking is informed by:

"...a belief in the ability of different people from different cultures to share many common values and to agree on some common commitments."

The means and ends of development include political and civil rights, including the liberty to participate in public discussion and scrutiny. Development has the intent of removing poverty, tyranny, poor economic opportunity, social deprivation, intolerance and repression in order that freedoms can be enhanced.



SOCIETY OPERATES ON SOME BASIC PRESUMPTION OF TRUST. This requires openness and tolerance.

It is best to see human rights as a set of ethical claims e.g. the right to respect, the value of toleration of the diverse beliefs, commitments and actions of different people, the equality of tolerance (what is offered to one is offered to all), truth telling, the value of mutual understanding.

“Freedoms are not only the ends of development - they are also among its means. One of the strongest arguments in favour of political freedom lies in the opportunity it gives citizens to discuss, debate and select values, and to choose priorities. Individuals need not be seen as passive recipients of the benefits of cunning development programmes.”

“Freedom is concerned with the processes of decision making as well as the opportunities to achieve valued outcomes.”

In democratic theory there is need to pay attention to the registering and proposing of doubts, resulting in the debate being about the inequality of power. This said it is necessary to re-examine the balance of power in the role and running of different institutions and the power they exercise over each other. He states:

“Effective partnership, therefore, presupposes the opportunity for the voicing of doubts in open debate so that any inequalities of power can be unearthed and remedied.”

What we might call **necessary enabling attitudes** for the exercise of political liberty and social powers, indeed for partnerships, include the ability to:

- Learn from elsewhere and from others;
- Listen to the voices of dissent in society;
- Recognise diversity within different cultures;
- Develop and use trust and promises;
- Have confidence in the other party's ethics: “a sense of justice is among the concerns that can move people and often does. The basic ideas of justice are not alien to social beings - who worry about their own interests, but are also able to think about family, neighbours, fellow citizens and the wider world”.

Institutions, based on interpersonal relationships, operate on a basis of shared understandings, making and sustaining trust, complementary values, assurance, sympathy, and generosity (which involves a commitment to make sacrifices).

2. Promoting a sense of security and belonging: Attachment Theory

Attachment Theory was first formulated by John Bowlby in the 1960s. It has undergone critical review and extension by educationalists and psychologists in the years since. In summary, attachment theory holds that an individual needs a base - a place and space - which provides

ON THE BASIS OF DEMOCRATIC THEORY, ATTACHMENT THEORY AND HUMAN AND SOCIAL CAPITAL, it could be argued that an effective and socially rich partnership would have these features:

The members of a partnership must take time to establish a set of relationships so that working together can be experienced as a secure base. This base must uphold their separate identities whilst enabling them to identify and experience interdependence, boundary crossing, expressions of doubt, areas of shared risk and equal empowerment. The set of relationships will be marked by openness, respect, tolerance and generosity. Because partnership is a development tool, the set of relationships will include commitment to a shared vision for the future and a willingness to link to wider networks and structures in order to influence change and make a difference.

opportunity to develop a set of secure relationships such that a sense of interdependence and independence can be developed and acted upon.

It suggests that experience of this secure base is a necessity from infancy through the whole of adulthood, and is of key significance in the process of taking risk, crossing boundaries, opening horizons and establishing productive interpersonal, intercultural or interfaith relationships.

3. Improving life chances and relationships:

Human and Social Capital Theory

Human Capital refers to the knowledge, understandings, and skills of individuals as contributors to, and investors in, the cultural, relational, political and economic life of a society. The significance of **key individuals** in developing and sustaining partnerships is a constant theme throughout the literature.

Social Capital has been defined as:

“Shared understandings, levels of trust, associational memberships and informal networks of human relationships that facilitate social exchange, social order and underpin social institutions.”

Social capital emerges when individuals invest time and trust into interpersonal, inter-group, and network relationships. The experience of such relationships become formative and of value in the construction of personal identity, a sense of shared purpose and a code of ethical and moral standards.

Proponents of Social Capital Theory identify three types. Gilchrist has described them thus:

- **Bonding:** Based on enduring, multi-faceted relationships between similar people with strong mutual commitments, for example amongst friends and family. With reference to faith communities the designation “similar” could overlook their internal diverse character, whether those communities be Christian, Moslem, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish, or Ba’hai. Each and every faith group is a complex mixture of bonding and bridging capital in itself and as such has the experience and potential to engage in partnership in a fruitful and enriching way.
- **Bridging:** Formed from the connections between people who have less in common, but have overlapping interests, for example between neighbours or different groups within a community.
- **Linking:** Derived from the links between people or organisations beyond peer boundaries, cutting across status and similarity and enabling people to exert influence and reach resources outside their normal circles.



It has been argued that socially rich people are those who invest in relationships that bond, bridge, and link, who have the capacity to relate within, across and beyond.

This is very easily said, and hardly new or earth shattering. But perhaps it needs to be said again, taken very seriously, and acted upon if partnership is to mean anything and be a valuable development tool at local, regional and national level.

Practical experience from faith communities and the FE sector

TOOL 3

Read through the comments and judgments on the pages which follow and then ask what resonates with your experience. Identify any areas where you might beg to differ.

The desk research

Over recent years a number of regional surveys and consultations have been conducted by church agencies and Faiths Forums to ascertain and identify current faith community activity related to regeneration, renewal, social cohesion, skills training and lifelong learning. Studies in the North East, East Anglia, the North West, West Midlands, London and nationally by the Churches Commission on Mission, have revealed and documented hundreds of small and large scale initiatives.

The literature is both descriptive and evaluative and gives indication both of perceived good practice and of serious constraints. Many faith community based initiatives are described or describe themselves as partnerships. The previous study of the literature on 'partnership' suggests that many of them may be better described as examples of collaborative or associational working. Others are looser insofar as they are autonomous, often small scale, projects funded from a variety of sources. And yet others are plant for the delivery of services or programmes funded and staffed by external bodies.

Most, if not all, voluntary and community groups, including faith communities, would share with the Home Office its affirmation of the values of the Strategic Framework for Community Development - social and environmental justice, participation, equality, learning and co-operation. Collectively the sector has thousands of years working practice in the field. So, as the Joseph Rowntree research has noted:

“We should not be too ready to attribute singular virtues to faith communities. Other community and voluntary organisations have powerful motivations, strong ethical foundations and long histories of service in particular localities and neighbourhoods.”

However, the literature and fieldwork does suggest that there are perhaps two aspects of faith community activity that have a distinctiveness. One concerns prayer and worship and the other sustained and sustainable rootedness. The detail, and its relationship to best practice amongst multiple groups and agencies, can be found on page 12.



PRAYER & WORSHIP

The religious buildings of faith communities do not primarily exist as community centres, they act as a focus and focus of prayer and worship of God. They are centres for personal and corporate expressions of faith in ways that make them a particular kind of 'secure base'.

A religious building is not 'a space', it is a storied place. It holds and celebrates a story which has past, present and future reference points. It is a site of memory, identity and hope which gives rise to a distinctive set of beliefs and behaviours, which are sustained and developed through prayer, worship and the provision of opportunity for education, training, spiritual guidance and voluntary social and community action. Faith community members are invited, on a daily or weekly basis, to reflect on and renew their faith in and commitment to neighbourliness and social action. Harris has described faith communities as "special case voluntary associations". She makes particular mention of the role and authority of religious leaders as distinctive features of faith organisations.

Rootedness - Living among and alongside

The pervasiveness of religious institutions and their buildings, historically and geographically, provides them with a sense of local presence and belonging. There are for instance over 120 mosques in Birmingham. Faith community members and leaders are part of the local community. They can have socio-economic, cultural and political insight and analysis based on day to day experience of life in that locality. This is a capacity and resource which can be invaluable because of its breadth and depth.

Faith communities have an investment in and commitment to the development of the quality of life and relationships in a locality based on their beliefs and values. Work within local communities, and within faith communities themselves, for health, well-being, and social

and environmental justice is experienced as participation in a purpose which believers would define as God's, or as fundamental to the real universal nature of things. To this extent it gives a meaning to involvement which goes beyond this or that specific personal or corporate action however large or small. For the most part it is perceived as a process which unfolds, is unpredictable and can be surprising. Bald evaluation of 'success' or 'failure' on the basis of a limited number of measurable outcomes in a given period of time can seem, therefore, somewhat perverse and fore-closing.

In combination the two characteristics outlined above give a singular dimension to faith community involvement with a local community. This is not to say that other groups, institutions and agencies do not have a commitment to and involvement with local communities which is significant, vital and life-giving. They do. But faith communities can bring a particular story and voice to those partnership ventures which use the community development model because of their identification and solidarity with local communities. Faith community outlook on partnership is shared by many others in the public and voluntary and community sectors. It is an outlook which expects and values unpredictability, flexibility and open outcomes, allows for the making of mistakes and learning from them and, with reference to volunteering in particular, regrets the difficulties and constraints imposed by target-setting, preset outcome agendas and the rigid monitoring processes of external agencies. In light of the evidence available this outlook might be seen as "aspects of best practice across multiple groups and agencies". The richness and value of this approach has much to offer to the thinking and planning of policy makers and their agents.

Whatever the pattern of relationships of faith community partnership working, two characteristics of voluntary and community sector experience emerge. One is positive, the other negative:

- Strong affirmation of and desire for effective partnership working, as characterised earlier on the basis of Democratic, Attachment, and Human and Social Capital Theory.
- “There is now a substantial body of research which underlines the tensions between the aims, organisation and practice stemming from the UK government and those of voluntary and community organisations... Many faith communities have welcomed engagement and many have become very active in official programmes.

“However, they resent an instrumental enlistment into a preset agenda... Short term initiatives bounded by strong managerial oversight, contrast strongly with much of the work done by faith communities with their reluctance to fix tangible targets, their acceptance of long timescales and the slow process of building relationship. Furthermore, there is suspicion that the Government uses ‘Faith’ as code for ‘ethnic’ or ‘race’.

“These are matters of substantive concern because they herald a decline of trust, loyalty and commitment, and of themselves can be a constraint on regeneration, civic renewal, participation and cohesion.”

Joseph Rowntree Foundation

The fieldwork

A small piece of qualitative research was carried out, mainly in the West Midlands, to check out whether some current faith community and FE sector experience of partnership bore any correspondence to the experiences and comments detailed in the literature sources. Using a semi structured interview technique 16 key individuals from faith communities and senior management teams in FE Colleges were invited to speak about their experiences of working in partnership in general, and with the major funders of the government’s development agenda.

The prompt questions of the interview were designed to enquire into what they thought were the essential factors for effective partnership, any constraints they had encountered, any doubts they harboured and any recommendations they might like to suggest. Participants’ positive and negative comments and reflections have been grouped under five headings:

- Partnership – an overview;
- Formation and sustainability;
- Attitudes and values;
- Risk, uncertainty and power;
- Protocols and accountability.

Detail of these responses now follows. Confidentiality has been agreed so the comments are not attributed.



Partnership - an overview

Best practice

- “Effective partnerships are based either on (a) identified need, or (b) on an opportunity for development (associated with available funding). The stronger of the two is that based on identified need, leaders need to identify very clearly why the partnership is there - both for themselves, and for the participants in the partnership.”
- “The first mechanism is that key individuals in separate organisations get together. They start to create an environment whereby partnership can happen. There has to be a trigger - an expectation or recognition of opportunity that partnership will be mutually beneficial. So there is recognition of a similar ethos and attitude, some shared beliefs and values, and there has to be trust.”
- “In one partnership we have opportunity to voice concerns and to be heard. It’s an adult – adult relationship and we drive the vision together. Nobody is just there for themselves, we are working together for the common good. The people on the Board are active and honest.”
- “The effective approach is pragmatic – help people to understand the policy context so they can exploit it for their own community. Give them tools to build their confidence, try to fan a flame in people and encourage them to look at the bigger context. The important thing is to get the balance right between the inspiration and the practical.”
- “In partnership everyone must give and take. We can’t work to a personal, private agenda, we genuinely seek to bring a broad community perspective in.”
- “The imperatives for partnership working include the capacity to see the bigger picture, rather than obsession with mechanics; flexibility; commitment to what the partnership is trying to achieve.”
- “Ask not what the partnership can do for you, ask rather what you can do for the partnership. Partnerships only work where there’s a fair deal.”
- “Collaborative leaders have to be able to live with messiness – partnerships can’t be comfortable. There is no answer – the key is how to live with ambiguity.”

Pitfalls and barriers

- “The whole culture of partnership needs to change. There’s no level of trust, people don’t want to shoulder blame. It’s the mentality of the leaders that has to change. They have to ask ‘what’s needed out there’ and recruit visionaries. Partnerships have to be built on seeing and creating the bigger context for the bigger vision to make a difference.”
- “There needs to be a clear recognition of what faith communities have to contribute. For a long time faith groups were not recognised by RAWM. Even now, there is only superficial recognition of the role of faith communities in the local community. Advantage West

Midlands is too far removed from the scene – but at least, as it gains understanding, it can send powerful signals. The government’s establishment of Faith Regen UK is beginning to do good things - but has a long way to go. LSC brands faith communities in a stereotypical way. We need a fresh approach for co-envisioning. People who are becoming cynical have to find new ways of doing things.”

- “The main barrier to partnership is constant changes to government policy, there’s no consistency – e.g. current emphasis on competition, value for money, contestability. This makes it very difficult to enter into honest dialogue with colleagues – people feel insecure. This problem is never addressed by government.”
- “Over-riding partnership – different organisations, but common framework – meet regularly, and produce joint papers – but nobody committed to it – nobody prepared to give and take. Minimum effect – no change to society.”
- “Some funders don’t understand partnership – their background is contractual, they give out money to advance an agenda. For instance, some LSC staff have no educational background – their language is still all about contracts and providers. They can’t overcome their history.”
- “One well-known definition of partnerships is – ‘pursuit of funding... mutual loathing.’”

Formation and sustainability

Best practice

- “We don’t have a problem working together, because although we know that we’ll be looking after our own individual interests too, we understand where we’re coming from.”
- “I think one of the key things is to have a huge amount of self awareness and to be empathetic. So I’ve done a lot of work on learning to listen - to clarify and build up understanding - seeking to ensure a genuinely shared discussion.”
- “Partners need to find a common language, an accepted language; be able to cross differences, holding off on tensions, but working together with pain and struggle. Faith groups need to find a secular language to talk with funders.”
- “We think that a diagram might illustrate what a partnership should be. The partnership operates in the shaded area. It is a real joining together of vision, values, skills and activities for a particular purpose. It is an incorporation that has to be made to happen firstly at key leader level and then at middle management. It probably needs to be ‘nursed’ by specific partnership ‘officers’.”
- “Work together in conversation to identify where each is coming from and the motivations that have energised people to become involved – i.e. tell your story.”



- “Leaders need to know the universe is good so that they can weather anything. You have to be clear about your motives - why you’re doing it.”
- “The strongest drive to work in partnership with faith communities is that they share with Further Education a belief that people’s lives can be improved.”
- “People need to be more aware of other organisations – along the lines of emotional intelligence. What is the other organisation about? How can I understand how it works? What’s that CEO about? It’s vital to understand something about the nature of power and influence.”
- “The important thing is that each needs to learn and appreciate each other’s culture. The current debate around multi-culturalism is very relevant – until recently, in UK we’ve stressed celebrating diversity, but now the balance seems to be shifting to value the larger national community identity.”
- “One important thing FE needs to do is to engage in challenging conversations with faith communities – to recognise their perceptions of Further Education as predatory and arbitrary. Further Education needs to engage and explain its constraints.”
- “A recent TES Symposium examined “What leadership and management need to look like in future”. We can simply focus on the technicalities, or consider values and beliefs. You need to understand where those values and beliefs are not in line, or where your own are erroneous – so that you can move on. You need to be able to understand the various roles different partners play.”
- “Partnerships work best when trust – building and the nurturing process is continuous and permanent.”
- “Partners need to know where they’re each coming from, and the constraints they’re working with (e.g. prayer times aren’t suitable times for partnership meetings!), and their values and beliefs.”
- “The Centre for Excellence in Leadership could be encouraged to run courses for LSC managers, where good College Principals and Senior Management Teams can share their vision.”

Pitfalls and barriers

- “This project has had to be done with no consultation, which has put a real strain on the partnership. We’ve picked up information from the papers to members, and have had no proper opportunity to discuss the kinds of contribution we can make. So, we have a choice: either we tag along, or we pull out. You must have trust if partnership is to be real.”
- “But the key is how to position oneself as an organisation, so that policy makers can’t abuse you. I’ve had some very touchy experiences on that front - agencies who use you quite cynically for their own policy ends. The way I deal with it is to say – You’re attacking my values set – and I’m not prepared to sell out.”
- “The agenda of some local churches is too self interested and parochial.”

- “A real constraint in all this is if one ‘partner’ is bigger than the other. There is a tendency then to miss out the vital conversation between key individuals. The task gets delegated to middle management who have to keep referring back and can’t respond immediately.”
- “One church based programme was ‘a nightmare’. The funding was a mess. The application was sent off in June and the money due in September. It actually came in February. There was no local ownership of the work. One aspect of the work was a Drop-In Shop which, given the location, attracted vulnerable people and the numbers were unpredictable. The official requirements for numbers and tracking were totally unrealistic. I decided to focus on asylum seekers and refugees so I went to ASPIRE for money. The bid went in on time, but it was decided that there was not a broad enough spectrum of bidders so all applications were sent back. Voluntary organisations cannot chase money in this way.”
- “Main agencies need to recognise the investment of time that it takes to get partnerships to work. You can’t leave things simply to minutes of meetings. Frequently, faith communities depend on just one person – if they disappear, the partnership loses all contact with that organisation and its history. Partners need to understand each other’s agendas.”
- “It worries me that we seem able to trace some of our root issues to the divisiveness of faiths. The danger is that all religions seem to be closed – they all think they have the unique way.”

Attitudes and values

Best practice

- “I think the key factors in our effective partnerships are:
 - » giving time to build relationships between participating groups;
 - » each partner being willing to invest time in sustaining the new in an inclusive way with trust and mutual respect;
 - » doing what you say you will do.”
- “It’s no good rushing straight into a project. Trust and understanding take time. Synergy has to be built between partners, recognising the gaps in their separate capacities. This is what we are currently trying to do as we build up a partnership. Going to meetings costs us money, because it’s time out of actually earning. But if the partnership is going to work its essential.”
- “Partnership works better where there is willingness to learn and training for:
 - » faith literacy, understanding faith communities, by government and Local Authorities;
 - » some kind of quality standard for faith communities engaging with localities/neighbourhoods/ partners/ colleges;



- » increased self awareness of one's own motivations and finding a language to express them to others;
- » theological backup for motivations and work in hand;
- » training in 'acting with integrity', e.g. when to be explicit; avoidance of arrogant moralising; treating others with respect and with equality."
- "In short, the whole project is structured around and is an experience of intimacy, so it's not just a learning programme, it's a building of relationships and a future – I suppose that's what education should be."
- "I think that the bedrock of our partnership now consists of:
 - » Each of us is motivated in faith to respect persons and their faith. We have built up trust and feel safe enough to talk about our differences. It's interfaith in action – like a choir singing.
 - » The mission statement is owned by everyone. It's like a creed, it motivates individuals and the group.
 - » Everyone knows it is a long haul and is committed to that.
 - » It is open and flexible, people do not feel constrained. We can be creative, outcomes are not fixed, prearranged. We give time the time to see what it does to things.
 - » Volunteers are trained and supported. We are a team together.
 - » Co-ordination and leadership are absolutely essential. The partnership project would fall apart without this role being filled."
- "You must have trust if partnership is to be real. Whilst it's true that the public sector can be risk averse and bureaucratic, its benefits are in its long term commitment."
- "One of the best partnerships we are currently linking in would be the partnership with our builders – we have mutual respect. We have shared vision in terms of outcome and have clearly developed protocols."

Pitfalls and barriers

- "A major issue is the speed at which partnerships are expected to get under way - no time to build trust. All may agree to sign up something, but it's only sticking plaster – it only holds for so long."
- "One partner came to us to look good for their funding purposes. We work separately, just coming together for monitoring. They do not listen to our needs, there's no understanding of the financial costs to us. And there's a lot of hiddenness. I think we are abused for our good service."
- "There can also be a danger when individuals are larger than the organisation they represent. At partnership meetings, you need to be clear how far the person is representing their own personal experience and enthusiasm, or that of their organisation. There is an important potential difference between the religious leadership, and those who attend partnership meetings (the enthusiasts for the project). This leads to problems of long-term commitment."
- "A partnership that doesn't work is one that is on paper only. A Management Group must be actively working together and

there must be some evidence of this. Toes in the water won't work. Funders do not test out the reality of partnership claims at local level. Also the rapid call for applications by funding streams positively encourages the development of pseudo partnerships. They cannot be built in three weeks."

- "There are too many things that people can't say in this society – fear of accusations of racism means we can't talk about things – thus, we can't do anything about them. There is silence about the things that matter."

Risk, uncertainty and power

- "There aren't enough resources – partnerships mask the fact that we are all competing for scarce resources."
- "The issue is fundamentally about power – hanging onto resources, and securing credit for policy. There's a difference between the social commitment, and personal ambition."
- "Guidelines are overtight and pedantic, especially about outputs."
- "Compact needs to engage with businesses and charities so they can know, buy into and critique the government agenda. You can reduce risk in effective partnership through clear guidelines about what each partner is expected to do and support is essential. Honesty is really important".
- "Partners need to understand power structures, and what goes on. How organisations function. But how could you realistically help people to appreciate that? The Jericho Project is well-led and professional – this is rarely the case with faith communities. Faith communities don't have the necessary skills. Those that get contracts therefore tend to be the large groups – very few contracts are awarded to small faith communities."
- "We have the experience and capacity to access funds from EQUAL, ENGAGE, ADJUST, ASPIRE, A GENDER – but we have been bitten on the nose applying for funding. For example, we use our own time to try to lever money by submitting project proposals. From work to date and in hand we evidence a need and put forward a proposal. The funding body then puts our proposal out to tender and some other group catches sight of it, tenders and gets the money. This situation is not partnership conducive. It simply sets up competition and rivalry amongst people working on the ground."
- "The 'Change Up' strategy seems well and truly already stitched up by the Infrastructure Consortium. Partnership becomes a problem. So, is it partnership at any cost? Where do I draw the line? When, where, how do I compromise?"
- "Too often funding bodies who claim to be working in partnership just drop in to monitor or audit because the necessary conversations haven't happened. And there is no shared risk – the real partners are left vulnerable to external forces, often over which they have no control. And note: LSPs are not partnerships at all. They simply comprise the gathering together of competitive groups."



- “The payment system is messy and they try to tell us what to do. There’s no openness, no discussion, decision making is closed to us”.
- “But, also, the LA structures are changing – there’s little sign these days of the mayor, etc. whereas before we used to see half the Council in the Education Committee. Moreover, compared with five years ago, LAs are now asked by LSC how they’re spending the money, and are penalised if they’re dealing with it flexibly, or outside the remit.”
- “People often encourage others into partnership for the wrong reasons, e.g. some Local Strategic Partnership Officers of the Local Authority can try to bully other members who are ignorant of the wider issues that underlie the matters under discussion.”
- “Also, people must have political awareness, an understanding of where power lies – how it’s used and exercised. They need to be clear about other partners’ perceptions - what is shaping their views. They also need to understand the power of saying “No”.”

Protocols and accountability

- “They are clear about what they want to get from you and supportive in meetings. We benefit and they benefit. They are investing in us, they look to see what they can get for us from their resources.”
- “They talk about where we want to go, help us look at what we’ve got – they give us opportunity and we want to repay them, so we have a commitment to their targets and quality needs.”
- “Only establish links with those you can be with for the long term because then all partners can plan effectively. There needs to be a clear contract with very clear statements about expectations. What is non-negotiable must be clear. Partnerships must have a long term purpose.”
- “Working with the Council of Faiths is the best strategic option. People speak about them with a kind of respect.”
- “Usually there is a lead – or core – agency grouping. Its members need to make very clear what is possible, and what is not possible. This helps immensely.”
- “You have to deal with inequalities locally and build up networks across boundaries locally. You can’t force people to make links if they don’t want to. We need to create spaces to encourage bonding/bridging to take place.”
- “The key individuals in faith communities need to be available, and this is essential, to act as translators / ambassadors / mediators to the committees and boards of the faith groups. Otherwise the actual work can be marginalised or misunderstood and the workers with it.”

Socially rich partnerships

TOOL 4

In light of the nature, tradition, values and purpose of your organisation or group, clarify and specify your mission, goals, motivations, expectations, limits, strengths and weaknesses.

“It has been argued that socially rich people are those who invest in relationships that bond, bridge and link, who have the capacity to relate within, across and beyond.”

On the basis of the ideas and comments in earlier sections of this toolkit it is possible to argue that **effective** partnerships (doing the right job) are those that are socially rich. What might a socially rich partnership look like? Does your organisation have the capacity, or potential, to work as a member of such a partnership?

Tool 4 asks you to reflect on and analyse:

- Where are you coming from and going to?
- What motivates you?
- What can you bring to the table and offer?
- What limits do you have to work within?
- How generous can you be, what sacrifices can you make?
- What do you expect as good working practice and relationships?
- What needs to be there to make it work long term?
- What are your organisation’s strengths, weaknesses and resource requirements with regard to the practice of ‘socially rich partnerships?’ What particular challenges do you face?



Leadership development

TOOL 5

In terms of your leadership role in your organisation and the partnership, identify where you get your energy from, who supports you and to whom you are accountable.

- **Are you satisfied with the arrangements?**
- **How might they be bettered?**
- **What actions can you and others take?**

Leadership development

The importance of key individuals, leaders, in the formation and sustainability of partnerships is a key feature of the literature and fieldwork. The identification, support and accountability of people given leadership responsibility is of the utmost importance. Faith Leaders and leaders from faith communities are often two different things. Whilst many share the characteristics of leaders outlined below, we should also be aware that they are often different. Faith leaders can be focused on managing the message or guardians of the faith rather than leaders using the definition below. Some religious groups have a strict leadership hierarchy which they need to follow in order to make decisions.

Identification

Leadership emerges from among people in the organisation who are trustworthy, enthusiastic and passionate, who want to make a difference, and are committed to their vision of how things could be improved. A RAWM publication **'Leadership in Focus'** has identified the top five leadership characteristics as:

- **Setting the example** – by being human, prepared to learn, having a positive mind set, being courageous, being disciplined and being open to being helped.
- **Believing in and trusting staff** – by treating people fairly, giving recognition to and valuing people, caring for the well-being of staff, and by being supportive.
- **Being visionary** – giving direction, committed to the organisation and the vision.
- **Creating change** – being willing to take reasonable risk, and finding creative solutions as well as being innovative.
- **Clear communicator** – listens well, gets the message across well, and is excellent at influencing.

Support

A leader cannot be considered in isolation. She or he can only achieve their vision with the active support of others in the organisation. They may set the tone and example, and may be the one to initiate the changes in the organisation, but cannot do it without engaging those who will be affected by the changes. Similarly, it is very unlikely that any one leader will have all the attributes required for excellent leadership. It is vital, therefore, that the leader has around them a leadership team, who have complementary strengths, and that between them they utilise their strengths to achieve different aspects of the vision.



Accountability

Leaders and key individuals need to be available, and this is essential, to inspire, to influence and to act as translators, ambassadors, mediators to the committees and boards of their own organisation, and similarly from them to the partnership. Otherwise the actual work can be marginalised and the workers with it.

Partnerships fit for purpose

TOOL 6

Take one example of a partnership that you are, or might be, engaged in:

- What kind of partnership is it?
- Is it currently 'fit for purpose'?
- What are its strengths and weaknesses?
- What would help it become more effective?

Partnerships come in various shapes, sizes and types. To be effective they need to be 'fit for purpose' with regard to:

- Terms of reference;
- Membership;
- Alliances;
- Channels of communication;
- Protocols;
- Accountability arrangements;
- Governance and management.

Take, for instance, three types of partnership, each of which has different 'fit for purpose' requirements:

Managing Resources

EXAMPLE: *The Downham and Roundham Community Partnership, which is responsible for managing the £12.5M 'Working Together For Change' SRB5 scheme and delivering Neighbourhood Renewal in the area. The partnership is a plc and registered charity. The Board has 17 members made up of 10 elected local residents, plus Council and local organisation representatives, plus advisers on disability, race and sustainability.*

Delivering a Task

EXAMPLE: *The Jewellery Quarter Initiative which has the task of creating a business district and visitor destination set in a safe but bubbling village atmosphere conducive to small creative businesses with a supply of appropriate, affordable accommodation and customised business support. The partnership comprises 9 organisations including, amongst others, the City Council, a University, Community Web, the Regional Development Agency, and Groundwork.*

Lobbying for Effective Change

EXAMPLE: *The Legworth Cycle Forum comprises representatives from local and national cycle groups, pedestrian groups, the City Council transport, environmental and planning officers, and the police. The purpose of the partnership is to develop future cycling policies and plans.*



Structural arrangements in the context of Local Area Agreements

TOOL 7

Ask how your organisation or group could best locate itself for effective engagement in the new context.

- **Are there any implications for your current system of relationships and activities?**
- **How does power and influence in the new context seem to be distributed, what tensions might there be, and what could be done to ensure a just distribution?**

The roll-out of Local Area Agreements is a major and significant shift in the structural arrangements for realisation of the government's development agenda. Mulgan has commented:

“The time is ripe for ‘double devolution’ – not only passing power downwards from Whitehall to local towns, cities, and counties, but also from town halls to neighbourhood democracy... it is now possible to imagine how the long drift to centralisation could be reversed.”

Detail of the significance of Local Area Agreements may be given as:

- Local Area Agreements set out the priorities for a local area agreed between central government and a local area - the Local Authority and Local Strategic Partnership and other key partners at the local level.
- Achieving this new relationship will require a significant shift in the way central and local government relate to each other and to other local partners.
- The arrangements that the area has in place, through the Local Strategic Partnership, for the identification and delivery of shared objectives and targets are crucial.
- Powerful community and political leadership locally will be essential to identify and promote the priorities in each locality.
- Local Strategic Partnerships have been defined as ‘networks of networks’ with the task of identifying common priorities in line with the Public Service Agreements of central government. These priorities will get major LAA funding. ‘Specialist’ issues will have to compete for the remnant financial resources.

Hence, incorporation into the LAA process, either through membership of a Local Strategic Partnership or through receiving funding, will require an organisation or group to be a “community of place/geography” and not a “community of interest” since the beneficent focus in terms of devolved power and development is a specific locality. The proposals may not be without tensions.



A concluding checklist

TOOL 8

Examine the checklist as it stands, make any changes or additions as you think fit, and construct a checklist for yourself – one you can live and work with.

In the constantly changing field of partnership formation and development it is vitally important for an organisation to know what it is being invited into and by what kind of potential partner.

On the basis of our study and field research, we have constructed a set of characteristics – attitudes, perspectives, processes and structures – that need to be checked out, and developed as necessary, in order to ensure that partnership working is as effective and socially rich as possible. This checklist is a guide rather than a recipe. It shows key elements to look for and to think about developing but equally does not predict the outcome. Indeed even partnership with all these attributes can fail, whereas ones with few of these attributes can succeed. It is more likely to succeed however if these attributes are there.

Collectively this set of characteristics is fundamental for any organisation or group, large or small, wishing to work in partnership with others. They define the cultural norms, expectations and practices of an organisation in the context of partnership working. They mark what is commonly called the 'ethos' or 'spirit' of a place and are evidenced in behaviours – personal, professional and structural.

The set comprises the following framework:

Characteristic attitudes

- **The organisation or group:**
 - » Has the motivation and ability to contribute something of value;
 - » Is committed to the sustainability of the work;
 - » Is trustworthy, truthful and reliable;
 - » Is willing to take the risks;
 - » Has the capacity to be flexible, compromise and negotiate;
 - » Understands projects as access points, stepping stones on a journey, not exercises in crisis management;
 - » Has faith in the ability of people to change and contribute to change;
 - » Has the capacity to be patient, in for the long haul, and have hope.

Necessary perspectives

- **The organisation or group is willing to hear and understand:**
 - » The motivations v the beliefs, values, stances and practices – of groups, agencies and departments involved in the partnership – in general and in particular local contexts.



- »
- **To understand and analyse:**
 - » Systems of project governance and management, power structures in operation, and ways and means of promoting equality in relationships.

Essential processes

- **The organisation or group will ensure:-**
 - » The identification of key individuals in partner organisations/groups at regional and/or local level.
- **That time is given to:-**
 - » The establishment of open and respectful conversations between key partner representatives to identify and develop a workable common vision and set of values for strategic development purposes;
 - » The construction of, and mutual commitment to, objectives and targets for a project or piece of work, ensuring that risks and power are equally shared and that no partner is left vulnerable and unsupported;
 - » The clarification of roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability, including mutual identification of areas needing negotiation flexibility and compromise, and those which are non-negotiable;
 - » Conflict – change most often happens when there is conflict. Conflict should be addressed and explored rather than pushed under the carpet and ignored. Disagreement and conflict are key parts of developing meaningful partnership.

Supportive structures

- **The organisation or group will establish:-**
 - » An effective support and development structure for people given leadership responsibilities;
 - » A wide field of relationships, working in a partnership way, at local, regional or national level, for example with:
 - a. A local interfaith Council;
 - b. A district Tenants' Association;
 - c. A national consultative group;
 - » The appointment of specialist partnership officers able to provide briefing papers, build up, support and advise networks, and inform government and policy makers as appropriate;
 - » Membership of or strong lines of communication and relationship with, a Local Strategic Partnership.

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