

# Collaborative Working: Partnership between voluntary organisations

## What is collaborative working?

Collaborative working within the voluntary and community sector – also known as joint or partnership working – includes a spectrum of ways that two or more organisations can work together. Options range from informal networks and alliances, through joint delivery of projects to full merger. Collaborative working can last for a fixed length of time or can form a permanent arrangement.

Collaborative working can involve risk. To minimise this risk, time should be given to planning collaboration and to identifying and addressing issues.

## Wider context

**Interest in collaborative working between voluntary organisations has been growing over the last few years. The factors that have led to this include:**

- An increased government emphasis on the voluntary sector's role in public service delivery
- A drive within the sector to improve its effectiveness
- A need for more efficient use of resources
- Reported public perception that there are too many charities

## Types of collaborative working

**Structures for collaborative working include:**

- Separate organisations maintain their independence, but work jointly on some activities or functions
- Organisations with resources or expertise offer assistance to other organisations, eg. a large national organisation working with a small local group
- A new organisation to do joint work on some activities or functions
- A group structure where a 'parent' organisation governs a group of 'subsidiary' organisations

- Merger to form a new organisation working as one body on all activities

**Collaborative working can be used to:**

- Carry out charitable activities, eg. service delivery, campaigning, policy work
- Share premises or back office functions, eg. payroll, purchasing, fundraising
- Improve strategic efficiency

## Potential benefits and costs of collaboration

**Collaborative working is not right for every organisation in every case. Carefully identifying and addressing issues of concern helps establish if it is the right way forward.**

**Benefits include:**

- Improved or wider range of services for beneficiaries
- Financial savings and better use of resources
- Knowledge and information sharing
- Sharing the risk in new projects
- Stronger, united voice
- Better co-ordination of organisations' activities

## Risks include:

- Outcomes do not justify the time and resources invested
- Loss of flexibility in working practices
- Loss of autonomy
- Cultural mismatch between organisations
- Mission drift
- Damage to organisation if collaboration is unsuccessful

## The Collaborative Working Unit at NCVO

**The Unit was established in response to a need for a central source of advice and information about collaborative working and merger.**

### The Unit aims to:

- Raise awareness of the opportunities collaboration provides
- Enable the sector to make informed decisions as to whether and how to work collaboratively
- Improve collaborative practice
- Develop the collaboration agenda

### The Unit provides:

- Advice and support
- Models and case studies of different types of collaboration

- Good practice tools and guidance material
- Training and events
- Referral to specialist advisers and other sources of support

## Who is the Collaborative Working Unit for?

The Unit supports any voluntary or community organisation, but particularly directs its services to:

- Managers/CEOs of voluntary organisations
- Trustees of voluntary organisations
- Infrastructure bodies, eg. Councils for Voluntary Service, regional networks

## Find out more

The Collaborative Working Unit works with an independent Advisory Group of senior people from key partner agencies and voluntary organisations engaged in collaborative working.

### For more information, please contact:

**Email** [collaborate@ncvo-vol.org.uk](mailto:collaborate@ncvo-vol.org.uk)

**Tel** 020 7520 2440

**Website** [www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/collaborate](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/collaborate)

The Unit was set up in 2004 with the support of the Baring Foundation, the City Bridge Trust and the Lloyds TSB Foundation. The Unit is continuing with the support of the City Bridge Trust, the Dulverton Trust, the Lloyds TSB Foundation, the Sylvia Adams Charitable Trust, and the Tudor Trust.



the  
Tudor trust



THE DULVERTON TRUST

**Collaborative Working Unit**  
NCVO, Regent's Wharf, 8 All Saints Street, London N1 9RL

March 2007