



Networking and Collaboration Handbook

COMMUNITY SERVICES - Networking and Collaboration Handbook



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Identify networking and collaboration needs and opportunities

Benefits of networking and collaboration:

Although many community sector organisations compete with other organisations for access to government and private funds, collaboration between organisations can provide important benefits to organisations and their clients or constituents.

Working with other organisations, either through informal networks or more formal partnerships can provide:

- Greater efficiency and less duplicated effort. For example, a consortia approach to a competitive funding round can deliver integrated service models, achieve broader geographic coverage or reduced costs;
- Access to additional resources or lower costs through sharing resources such as office space, administration or other aspects of an organisation's operation;
- Improved service coordination across agencies, with better pathways or referral systems for service users;
- A holistic approach to meeting client needs, with better and more efficient access to the range of services required, improved quality and consistency of service and greater responsiveness to needs;
- Organisational knowledge and improved service system capability;
- Greater innovation and flexibility to respond to changing, emerging or more complex client needs and changing operations and operational environments;
- Access to up-to-date information, new ideas and strategic thinking;
- Improved capacity to demonstrate best practice;
- Political and lobbying strength;
- Increased capacity to successfully submit tenders or expressions of interest and to deliver projects; and
- Additional expertise, support or legal protection for small, new, or struggling organisations.

Over time, the combined benefits of collaboration create new opportunities for partnering with others to build strong, safe, healthy and vital communities and a sustainable future together.



Principles of networking and collaboration

Evidence-based assessment of successful collaboration highlights six partnership principles:

1. Recognise and accept the need for partnership;
2. Develop clarity and realism of purpose;
3. Ensure commitment and ownership;
4. Develop and maintain trust;
5. Create clear and robust partnership arrangements; and
6. Monitor, measure and learn.

The development of a shared vision and values between collaborating organisations, has been highlighted as crucial to successful collaboration.

A successful collaboration or partnership also needs to be approached systematically. Without clear goals and careful planning, collaborating organisations risk misunderstandings, disagreements or other problems arising.

Systematic planning for collaborative ventures involves:

- Assessment of the likely benefits to the organisation and the venture's impact on its services or activities, the attributes and suitability of potential partner/s, and the venture's potential risks.
- Alignment of goals and values. There needs to be a basic agreement about the purpose of the collaboration, what the organisations will try to achieve together, mutual expectations and the principles or values by which the partners will operate. The principles need to include agreements to operate with transparency and openness in dealings with one another.
- Negotiation of details. The agreement between organisations needs to detail partners' specific roles and responsibilities, practical issues such as time frames and financial arrangements, and any other terms and conditions of the agreement, such as confidentiality and intellectual property.
- Documentation. The agreement between the partners needs to be documented, either in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or, where there are resource or legal implications, in a formal agreement or contract.



Different types of networks and collaboration

There are various models of collaboration agencies may pursue including:

- Interagency meetings; Organisational, Formal/informal
- Community of practice; Individual
- Co-location;
- Other resource-sharing arrangements; Virtual
- Co-operative;
- Auspicing;
- Consortia / partnerships;
- Mergers and amalgamations.

Interagency networks and groups

Interagency networks and groups have in the past been mostly informal collaborations usually between organisations and agencies working in a similar area of service delivery such as disability, mental health, youth or aged cared. This approach is very effective where there is management support, time allocation and strong leadership/role modelling.

Due to the increasing time and human resource issues for service providers today there has been a move to a more structured approach for Interagencies with groups developing agreed Terms of Reference that clearly define the role of the group and the outcomes expected from the time allocated.

Interagency Advantages

- A critical mass can be developed to support advocacy and to hold sector events and activities.
- Information can easily be shared across a number of services.
- The groups can act as informal learning circles and Communities of Practice.
- Regular interaction builds trust and reciprocity.
- Formal collaborations may arise from connections made during networking.



Interagency Disadvantages

- Services suffering from work overload may struggle to find the time for informal collaborative approaches. Empirically, evidence indicates that this is particularly true where there are no clearly stated outcomes for the organisation or client.
- Competitive tendering may inhibit collaboration between local services.

Interagency Case study: Fraser Coast Commitment to Youth Network

Fraser Coast Commitment to Youth is a collaborative effort by local youth services to develop skills and capacities of young people to cope with demands of the modern market place. It provides a clear focus of energy and a common framework for action and a collective means of delivering life skills and active citizenship of young people in the Fraser Coast Region.

The vision of the Fraser Coast Commitment to Youth is to increase the wellbeing of all young people on the Fraser Coast by addressing young people's social and recreational needs, raising awareness of a young person's cultural needs and to be flexible in the delivery of education and training, to ensure a smooth transition to adulthood.

The collaborative group has agreed to use their combined resources and skills to achieve the following outcomes:

- Explore options for funding to have schools establish vegetable gardens, where students learn to grow food, how to prepare and enjoy healthy food options.
- Through poster competition or some other effective advertising and promotional activity, get the message out to young people about the existing services that are there to support them such as 'Hard Yakka'-Wandiny, Kids Helpline, Headspace on-line with professional advice and help.
- Members of the network initiated a program of youth mentoring, by youth.
- Explore the possibility and what would be required to get medical services in the Fraser Coast Region to deal with teenage pregnancy.



Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice are groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. They become in effect Learning Networks focussed on improving outcomes for service users by:

- Sharing what they are learning in their day to day experiences
- Developing new approaches to more holistic support for service users
- Sharing resources and information
- Providing support and encouragement for network members.

The basic principles that underpin Communities of Practice are:

- Learning is social and comes from the things we do every day;
- Knowledge and activity are strongly connected;
- Growth is nurtured and promoted.

Communities of Practice Advantages

- Connect people through their passion.
- Connect people outside their 'silos'.
- Enable issues to be dealt with holistically.
- Ensure input of everyone involved is valued.
- Provide opportunity for flexibility and creativity (that is service pathways).
- Support adaptability to change.
- Build trust and reciprocity.
- Enables the ongoing reflection, negotiation and learning to balance the tensions essential in seeking solutions to complex social problems.

Communities of Practice Disadvantages

- Require commitment and a real interest in learning from each other for them to work effectively.
- Require people willing to acknowledge that service delivery can be improved using existing resources.



Communities of Practice Case study - Rockhampton Mental Health Interagency Community of Practice

The Rockhampton Interagency Community of Practice Group provides an environment where people learn by applying the approaches discussed during scenario sessions and build on the relationships and connections made during the meetings. The approach has received very positive feedback from workers who are time poor and need to see outcomes achieved for time spent at meetings. Meetings are held monthly and the original one and a half hours has been extended to two hours to allow more time for scenario discussion.

The idea for a local whole of mental health sector network was originally proposed and endorsed at the Rockhampton Mental Health Action Day held on August the 25 August 2009. The idea was translated into action through a working mentoring partnership between the Queensland Alliance Sector Development Worker and the Business Development Officer (Disability and Mental Health) from Centacare, Catholic Diocese of Rockhampton under the oversight of the Rockhampton Mental Health Action Coordination Group.

Several meetings were held between the Queensland Alliance and Centacare Workers to develop a meeting framework that would effectively support learning, collaboration and improved outcomes for clients. It was agreed that the “Community of Practice” (CoP) approach provided a sound structure that would support adaption to meet local needs.

Etienne Wegner, one of the founders of “Communities of Practice” notes:

“Communities of Practice are groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly”

The Rockhampton group incorporates the principals that:

- Learning is social and comes from the things we do every day.
- Knowledge and activity are strongly connected.
- Growth of the individual and the sector needs to be nurtured and promoted.

An open meeting participants agreed to support a Terms of Reference (TOR) that endorsed Centacare to host and facilitate for a period of 12 months the Rockhampton Mental Health Interagency Community of Practice.

This collaboration has now been running for more that 12 months. In 2010 it took out a Workforce Council Award for “Encouraging a learning culture within the workforce” and feedback notes demonstrated outcomes for clients.



Co-location

Organisations sharing expensive infrastructure. **Co-location models** of collaboration may be called “Service Hubs”, “Multi-Tenanted Service Centres”, “Service Clusters” and “one-stop-shops” and take a variety of forms. A variety of collaboration models are well suited to also incorporate co-location into their approach. These include: co-governance, amalgamation, co-operatives and the lead agency model.

- Co-governance – a sub-committee based on an agreed number of representatives from each partnering agency provides the management and governance structure under the strategic oversight of one of the organisations acting as the auspicing body.
- Amalgamation - partnering organisations merge to form a new entity which is made of an agreed number of representatives from the agencies involved.
- The co-operative model – a legally register non-trading co-operative, managed by a board consisting of members from each individual incorporated association involved in the collaboration.
- The lead agency model – the building lease is taken by a large organisation that then manages the premises with assistance from the management committees of the small organisations involved.

Co-location Advantages

- Provide a one-stop-shop for service users and the community.
- Enable organisations to minimise the budget allocation to premises.
- Enable facilities such as training rooms to be shared.
- Make it practical to share expensive resources such as data projectors.
- Reduce worker isolation and may increase security.
- Enable services to afford better accommodation.
- Enhance capacity to improve referral and provide a more holistic service delivery.



Co-location Disadvantages

- Lead agency carries high risk – lease/premises.
- Very specific and clearly documented rules/protocols needed to address risk and define boundaries.
- Risk of power imbalances.
- If a service participating in the co-location closes, it can be difficult to find a replacement, particularly in rural communities.
- Cost of building outfitting may be higher than expected.
- Co-location in itself may not improve service delivery.
- Locating suitable buildings can be difficult in many rural and regional communities.
- Legal advice is recommended if you are thinking about being involved in a co-location.

Co-location Case study - Mackay Women's Centre - Amalgamated co-location

The Mackay Women's Centre is an incorporated, non-government, community-based organisation, managed by a local committee elected annually from the membership. It services the city of Mackay and the surrounding region.

The Centre is the result of the amalgamation of two existing women specific services – the Mackay Women's Health and Information Centre Inc. and Pregnancy Help Mackay Inc. The Domestic Violence Resource Service is located within the new Centre as a co-tenant, and the Centre also works closely with a number of other local services and organisations to improve access to counselling, resources and practical assistance for women requiring support.

The women of Mackay are now able to access services from the newly refurbished, purpose-built facility located at 418 Shakespeare Street. The restructured organisation delivers a wide range of integrated services, with the ultimate future vision for the Centre to be a 'one stop shop' for women, offering various services across the areas of education and physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

The Mackay Women's Centre is a welcoming place where women can receive services that provide emotional, practical and general support, crisis responses, advocacy, information and referral across a broad area of health and wellbeing issues. The service also provides assistance to establish, facilitate and accommodate support groups for women. For further information see the Mackay Women's Centre website.



Co-operatives

Although they are legally recognised entities, co-operatives have a different type of structure to companies, trusts, incorporated associations and other similar organisations. This is defined by a set of principles which shapes their character. The International Cooperative Alliance definition of co-operatives is:

“... an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through jointly owned democratically controlled enterprise.”

The principles that define co-operatives include: self-help, self responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. Co-operative members agree to operate ethically bound by the values of openness, social responsibility and caring for others. There are more than 2,000 co-operatives in Australia and around 180 in Queensland, however only a relatively small number are based in the Community Sector.

Many organisations who choose to use the co-operative model to support their collaboration, do so because it offers a “flat” structure of governance with all members seen as equals and because of the approach's intrinsic values and principles.

Co-operative Advantages

- Model incorporates intrinsic values and principles.
- “Flat” governance structure.
- Organisations can maintain autonomy.
- Relationships can be strengthened.
- Joint funding can be trialled.

Co-operative Disadvantages

- Time required to establish well.
- May be human resource intensive in early stages.
- Cost benefit may take time to show.
- Relationships need effort to maintain.
- One agency has to take the lead and responsibility for ensuring sound governance and risk management.
- Some funding bodies do not initially acknowledge Cooperatives as a legal governance structure.



Co-operative Case study - Sunshine Coast Community Co-operative

The Neighbourhood Centres Collective (Caloundra Community Centre Inc, Hinterland Community Development Association of Caloundra Inc, Maroochy Neighbourhood Centre Inc, and Nambour Community Centre Inc) Building Links project has developed a model for enhancing collaboration on the Sunshine Coast. At the centre of the model is the formation of a co-operative. The Co-op provides the infrastructure for the participating organisations to collaborate to enhance and improve their services to their respective communities. It is not a “super-structure” that will swallow up each entity, but rather an enabling structure that respects the uniqueness of each organisation and builds collective and individual capacity to respond more effectively to the needs in each of the communities served by the partners. The project has provided the partners with the opportunity to build on their existing collaborative efforts and grab the initiative to improve and enhance this collaboration in a pro-active manner.

The co-operative model for the new entity was chosen for its congruency with the ethos of collaboration. Much has been written and spoken about collaboration but it is essential that the structures adequate to hold the collaborative energy are put in place. The most effective way to enhance collaboration is to provide a structure that fits the work at hand. This structuring of the work is essential to concentrate energy and provide a focal point for action. Forming a cooperative that includes four community associations (and others in the future) is an innovative and unique achievement on the Sunshine Coast.



Consortia / Partnerships

Two or more organisations agree to formally documenting an agreement about the role of each agency without merging and creating a new legal entity. Joint funding can be applied for without the individual agencies losing their autonomy.

Consortia / Partnerships Advantages

- Organisations can maintain autonomy. This can be of particular advantage where small outreach services of large or state-wide organisations wish to partner with other local services to share resources and improve outcomes for clients through a more holistic approach to service delivery.
- Relationships can be strengthened.
- Joint funding can be trialled.

Consortia / Partnerships Disadvantages

- Relationships need effort to maintain.
- One agency has to take the lead and responsibility for ensuring sound governance and risk management.





Consortia / Partnerships Case studies

The Blue Mountains Consortium (BMC)

The Blue Mountains Consortium consisting of nine partnering services initially formed in response to:

- A NSW Department of Community Services tender process requirement to collaborate/integrate to deliver services in new Brighter Futures program (no single agency could secure funds)
- A new policy direction within local council with regard to service system integration.

This new model of service delivery presented challenges because the Blue Mountains LGA is geographically spread across 110kms and includes 27 towns and villages. Blue Mountains Consortium views itself and operates as a separate entity that is separate to the implementation of any particular project

The Stronger Families Alliance (SFA)

Represents all the interfaces that Blue Mountain's families with young children have, directly or non-directly, with government, community and business organisations. It was formed because no single agency could respond to increasingly complex needs of families and local level response was needed to develop comprehensive, integrated service systems.

The conveners are: Blue Mountains City Council, NSW Department Human Services, Community Services, MCRN (Advocacy Peak). There are 17 additional members from a diverse range of organisations, and all members have decision making powers.



Mergers and Amalgamations

Organisations working in similar area of the sector join together to become a single larger organisation, merging their governance and administration tasks.

Mergers and Amalgamations Advantages

- Human resource efficiencies.
- Spreading cost of premises.
- May enable services to be spread over a wider geographic area.
- Resource efficiencies.

Mergers and Amalgamations Disadvantages

- Legal advice is recommended if you are establishing a new group.
- Loss of identity and autonomy.
- Time and resource intensive.
- Potential for clash of organisational values and cultures.
- Clients may not be as well supported by the new entity – less personal.
- Time required to develop and consolidate the new entity.
- Efficiencies do not happen overnight and initially the process may place high time and resource demand on the collaborating services.



Mergers and Amalgamations Case study - Community Solutions

Community Solutions commenced in July 2009 as the result of the merger of four separate entities: two highly-respected community service organisations, a specialist community asset development entity and a foundation for social investment initiatives. These were:

- Community Solutions Inc;
- Community Employment Options Inc;
- Community Assets Australia Ltd;
- Community Capital Foundation Ltd;

The group is able to leverage its unique multi-faceted platform comprising service delivery, asset development and social investment to make a difference in the communities and regions in which it operates. This multi-faceted approach is also ideal for leveraging its partnerships with the government, corporate and philanthropic communities.

With 260 staff operating from 18 office sites from the Sunshine Coast to Townsville, the group's focus is working with individuals, families and communities within regional Queensland, Australia.

The Community Solutions Group has become a highly-successful and effective organisation that specialises in the development and delivery of innovative and sustainable projects and services. These programs and services are primarily provided to individuals who are significantly disadvantaged and require direct relief and support.

With a highly professional management team and committed and skilled staff, the Community Solutions Group provides the ideal vehicle for government departments, local councils and businesses to work with communities to create sustainable benefits for individuals and target groups.



Evaluate the ways in which individual and organisation performance may be improved through collaboration

Evidence indicates that community organisations collaborate to:

Create or modify service delivery – Example:

- A new shared service.
- Enhanced or united client service activities.
- Combined specialist and generalist service delivery.
- Combined parts of the service delivery continuum, for example prevention, early intervention and support services.
- New approaches to working with clients, for example add outreach to existing centre-based work.

Maximise resources – Example:

- Co-location of service outlets.
- Shared infrastructure such as shared vehicles or information technology.
- Shared business processes such as payroll, bookkeeping.
- Shared functions such as service reception and administration support.
- Shared data, information, ideas or strategy through a research or evaluation collaboration.
- Shared training and professional development activities.

Develop policy at organisational or community levels – Example:

- Collaborative policy development and advocacy through a peak body.

Develop systems and change through changed relationships between organisations – Example:

- Integrated cross-agency referral systems and seamless client pathways.
- Legal auspice arrangement between a large and small agency or newly funded program.
- Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or agreement between agencies to reduce duplication through clear definition of roles and responsibilities to meet holistic client needs.

Develop social and community – Example:

- Local committee that plans and coordinates agency participation in community awareness week activities.





Identify and prioritise organisation and individual needs

Organisations may network and collaborate for a number of reasons, such as:

- Developing agreed procedures for how the organisations will relate to each another in conducting their separate services or activities, for example, referral protocols;
- Forming partnerships or consortia to undertake a one-off activity, project or other joint venture, for example, a joint tender;
- Forming partnerships for a longer-term activity or series of projects, for example, a joint venture to set up an ongoing service operated by two organisations;
- To agree to share resources or expertise, for example, co-location of office premises;
- To agree for one organisation to provide temporary auspice (legal governance) to another organisation.

Identify gaps in networks and collaborative practice and identify required action to fill the gap

Organisational self-assessment

To assess the potential for collaboration, an organisation must review and reflect on its management and operations as well as conduct a thorough assessment of the benefits and risks of any proposed collaborative venture.

Before collaborating with other organisations, an organisation must have a clear picture of its capacity and a documented and formally endorsed statement of its priorities and aims. This is usually presented in a business plan format which details the organisation's vision, purpose, services, human and financial resources and time frames for achieving outcomes.

The business planning process should also provide an analysis of the organisation's key assets, such as databases, technology, systems, people, and funding, and of its operating environment, internal processes and external relationships. This enables the organisation to see where it might overlap with other services, identify any gaps in its capacity to meet client needs, and how improved links and collaboration with others might assist.

Where an organisation has already developed a business plan, it is important to review this in the context of a proposed collaborative venture, and to check that:

- The proposed venture fits within the aims and business of the organisation, and
- The organisation has the resources and capability to take on the venture.



Once an organisation has developed or reviewed its business plan, or used some other method to assess its capacity, it can then assess the potential of any proposed collaboration. A business case for collaboration can provide a useful framework for this process.

Develop collaboration strategies

Gather and review information about relevant services, organisations and key people

Collaboration assessment: the business case

Preparing a business case is a way of thoroughly examining the specific details of a proposed collaborative structure or venture, assessing whether the proposal is viable, and enabling the organisation to make an informed decision about whether to proceed.

Preparing a business case involves assessing:

- How well the project or venture will fit with the purpose of the organisation;
- How likely it is to be successful and achieve its objectives;
- The costs and benefits of the proposed venture;
- The risks and likely impact of the project or venture on the organisation;
- The partner/s and the likely partnership benefits;
- Fit with the organisation's purpose. It is critical that there is a strong alignment between the organisation's aims, the potential partner/s' objectives, the project outcomes and client benefits to be achieved through the collaboration.

Likelihood of success

Assessment needs to be done in conjunction with the assessments of costs, benefits and risks. It needs to be informed by the input of key stakeholders, people with specific expertise relevant to the project, organisations that have attempted similar projects or ventures and background research on relevant areas.



Costs and benefits

This will include:

- Details of project costs, including human, capital, recurrent financial, risk and legal costs;
- Estimates of project benefits, such as service improvements, client benefits, operational efficiencies, increased competitiveness and market share, improved reputation and community engagement, reduced governance and compliance risk.

Risk assessment

It is essential to make a detailed and critical evaluation of the potential risks associated with a proposed collaborative activity before negotiating any agreements with other organisations. Time, money and energy spent in assessing the likelihood and impact of potential risks of a project can make the difference between an innovative and successful project and an expensive failure.

Partners

It is also important to assess the attributes and suitability of potential partners as part of assessing the potential benefits of a collaborative venture. Suitable partners will be ones that demonstrate:

- Aspirations for their organisation and for the collaborative venture that are compatible with your organisation's;
- Organisational cultures that are complementary to your organisation's;
- Complementary services, activities, client groups and client outcomes;
- Something to contribute and something valuable to gain from the collaboration;
- Capacity for a similar level of investment to make the collaboration work; and
- Transparent processes that will form a basis for reciprocal trust and accountability.

Ongoing commitment to the partnership is also necessary to ensure the benefits outweigh the costs and that collaborative effort delivers improved outcomes for clients.



Pro-actively initiate relationships with other inter and intra sectoral professionals and organisations

Collaborative initiatives can be easy to begin and hard to sustain.

Effective inter-agency relationships are a critical element of sustainable collaborative initiatives. They need to be set up and supported by systematic and early planning, clear documentation and ongoing review processes.

For effective relationships to be developed, there needs to be alignment of organisations' goals and values, and a basic agreement about:

- The purpose of the collaboration and what the organisations will try to achieve together;
- Mutual expectations about outcomes and processes;
- The principles or values by which the partners will operate. These principles need to include agreements to operate with transparency and openness in dealings with one another.

Lessons from formal collaborative initiatives indicate that the following are needed to sustain effective collaborative relationships:

- A strong commitment to shared strategic goals and a truly shared, achievable purpose;
- Leadership at relevant levels to set the vision, direction, principles and a culture of collaboration;
- A strong commitment from partner agencies to developing effective and sustainable working relationships based on transparency, openness, a commitment to problem solving and building trust;
- Clear parameters for the collaboration and identified roles and responsibilities of the collaborating partners;
- An investment of time and resources in relevant management and governance processes;
- Regular and meaningful communication and timely and appropriate access to information for partner agencies;
- Agreed processes for problem solving, non-adversarial dispute resolution and partnership termination;
- Flexibility to respond to change and to be innovative, while maintaining focus on the initiative's main objective;
- Recognition of the commitment and capacity of those involved;
- Requirement to develop as a bottom-up as well as a top-down process;
- Feedback from relevant stakeholders, including clients where relevant;
- Regular review as goals and partnership arrangements may need to change over time.



Investment in the collaborative relationship is essential to avoid the common problems of collaboration failure, which can include:

- Uneven workload distribution;
- Inadequate planning;
- Lack of enthusiasm;
- Conflict due to differing values;
- Unrealistic expectations.

Define and document the type and level of collaboration, and negotiate with the relevant people

Formal arrangements between organisations should be documented, and the documentation's type, extent and complexity will depend on the type of relationship being formed and the purpose of the collaboration. The most-common forms of documentation are:

- Protocols - documented inter-agency procedures;
- Memoranda of understanding (MOU) - a broad agreement, usually documenting principles and general guidelines for a partnership or consortia;
- Agreements - more specific agreements, usually with some legal enforceability, that document the details of a partnership or consortia;
- Contracts - used when there will be significant consequences for participating organisations if partners do not keep to the agreement, or where complex issues are involved, such as when some joint ventures or amalgamations occur.





Legal and ethical considerations - developing interagency protocols and service agreements

Partnership or inter-agency agreements are documents that record the agreed terms and conditions of collaboration between separate agencies and/or sectors. The term 'agreement' is sometimes used interchangeably with guidelines and Memoranda of Understanding (MOU). There can be both legally binding and non-legally binding agreements. MOUs are non-legally binding agreements. A formal contract is legally binding.

Inter-agency agreements or protocols can serve a number of purposes:

- Clarifying roles and responsibilities;
- Maintaining consistency of inter-agency relationships and practices;
- Explicitly stating what agencies and/or sectors have committed to;
- Providing a basis for negotiation of responses to a situation or resolution of differences between agency approaches; and/or
- Providing an agreed process for resolving inter-agency differences.

Reasons for developing service protocols and agreements

The reasons for developing service agreements and protocols are many and varied. Sometimes it is in response to issues that are having adverse effects on partners. Other times it will be to embark on a new initiative or take action on a common goal.

Agreements are most typically developed to:

- Outline strategic priorities and planned commitments;
- Provide guidance around allocation of resources;
- Clarify roles and responsibilities;
- Signify a commitment to part of a process such as an integrated service system;
- Respond to new legislation or other compliance requirements; or
- Establish the principles and agreements for co-location.



Protocols are most typically developed to:

- Better co-ordinate local service delivery;
- Share information about service users across organisational and professional boundaries;
- Obtain priority access to services for clients in crisis or where high-risk circumstances exist;
- Outline specific management and service arrangements for co-location; or
- Manage case management and coordination responsibilities for clients with multiple and complex needs where several agencies are involved. (Case management protocols cover the roles and responsibilities of the various agencies in client eligibility, access and referral processes, preliminary and ongoing assessment, delivery of care and support, ongoing care and support and exit planning.)





Steps for developing protocols

There are some generic steps which can assist in developing inter-agency service agreements and protocols.

1. Identify the need for and purpose for establishing a protocol.
2. Check if there are existing protocols that are relevant or could be adapted and used.
3. Identify who should be involved (government, non-government, and community players).
4. Contact potential inter-agency participants and gain preliminary support for the proposal.
5. Organise an initial inter-agency meeting to discuss:
 - why a protocol is needed;
 - issues the protocol is trying to address;
 - purpose of the protocol;
 - who is involved;
 - issues or barriers to protocol development.
7. Establish a shared commitment to working together to develop the protocol.
8. Develop a process such a working group with cross-agency representation to develop the protocol.
9. Develop the draft protocol document for circulation and feedback.
10. Finalise the protocol and distribute.
11. Develop a working/steering group to oversee and support the process of implementation of the protocol including briefings and training to staff, staged implementation processes, mechanism for early detection of any problems, any additional resources/other supports required.
12. Implement the protocol.
13. Establish a mechanism for regular monitoring and review the protocol.
14. Revise the protocol accordingly.



What is an MOU?

A memorandum of understanding or MOU is a documented agreement that sets out how a partnership arrangement will operate. It enables all parties to the collaborative activity see that they are agreeing to the same thing and provides a solid reference to go back to should disagreements arise. It must be remembered that MOUs are non-legally binding documents however they provide necessary structure to the collaborative process and help ensure no unreal expectations arise.

A simple MOU may be used where there is a low level of complexity associated with the collaborative arrangement. For example: where two organisations decide to work collaboratively, adhering to an agreed set of principles, to achieve a common objective such as improved, culturally appropriate service delivery.

However complex and or long-term collaborations require substantial documented corroboration to clearly outline roles and responsibilities and offset risks to partnering organisations. In these circumstances it is best to support the MOU with a briefing note that outlines the history of and reasons for the collaboration and a documented partnership agreement including a risk management plan. This is of particular importance where the services agreeing to the collaboration are not the legal entities of their organisations: for example, when local services agreed to partner but must have final sign off from their parent organisation.

Use the Potential Collaboration Check List (APPENDIX B) to assess the level of risk to your organisation arising from the proposed collaboration. The more categories and potential risks that apply in your circumstances the more substantial your documentation needs to be.





Elements of an MOU

Even a simple MOU should contain several basic elements. These include:

- The names of the collaborating partners.
- The objective of the collaboration
- The principles that will establish the practice framework.
- The things that the parties have reached agreement on. This can be a few dot points in the MOU itself, or a reference to a Partnership Agreement that outlines:
 - The role of each party
 - Responsibilities of each party
 - Tasks to be undertaken by each party
 - Quality and performance monitoring or performance management
 - Agreed protocols or policies and procedures
 - Risk management
 - Rights and safeguards (such as intellectual property, confidentiality, privacy)
 - Resource use arrangements
 - Reporting and accountability
- The duration of the MOU.
- A dispute resolution process.
- The role of the MOU – noting that the document is non-legally binding but provides the principles that underpin the collaboration and outlines the timeframe and the areas of commitment.
- Signatures of Collaboration partners and signatures of witnesses.



Work collaboratively

Plan and implement integrated projects and service delivery

The decision by any organisation to undertake a new collaborative activity is a signal of the start of change. The complexity and the timeframe of the collaborative activity itself, will indicate the extent of the change management process required to effectively support the new way of working. All organisational stakeholders of the collaboration need to feel a strong sense of ownership and as valued and supported by the new collaboration as they were by the single entity.

Processes for managing change

Understanding and promoting the reasons for and benefits of the change

It is natural for people to resist change, yet the capacity to change and evolve is an essential element of any successful organisation, service or collaboration. It is therefore extremely important to get the process right and to clearly communicate the reasons for, and the benefits of the collaboration, to all the collaborations stakeholders and the broader community. It is not the biggest organisations that survive it is the most adaptable.

Establishing culture and values at the beginning of the process

All partners need to agree and adhere to, a set of values that set the standard for how partners will work together. These values need to be practiced within individual organisational partners, within the collaboration and whenever staff interact with service users and the broader community.

Within individual organisational partners the most effective way of supporting and encouraging the new way of work is to be a “learning organisation”. This approach promotes a culture of continuous improvement that is comfortable with both radical and gradual change, so long as that change is in the best interest of the organisation and its stakeholders. Reviewing and improving becomes standard practice.

Develop a change process

Individual partner organisations need to work through the change process within their own entities as well as when they are developing and implementing new collaborative approaches.





Begin with the end in mind

If the drivers of the collaboration do not know where they started or where they are going, it is hard to decide on the right track. Benchmark where your organisation is now – from various perspectives. Ask where do we want to be – begin with the end in mind. Know the gap between the present and what you hope the collaboration will achieve. Identify the changes needed to close the gap. Be clear in what the collaboration is trying to achieve – where practical use objective measures. Be able to explain those goals to others clearly and succinctly. Remember staff and stakeholders must be comfortable with the change if it is to work. Keep goals few in number and unambiguous.

Be realistic

To plan and manage change well, you need to be realistic and understand the difficulty of the change and who it will affect. Then identify, quantify and organise the various stages of the change. Ask how will this affect those involved? Everything that may change needs to be documented. Changes in individual responsibility must be clear. Effective communication with everyone in the organisation is essential. Where practical break the change down into small steps. Undertake a critical path analysis and know in what order changes need to occur and the time required to implement each stage. Continually restate the benefits of the change.

Engage others

Effective change strategies must allow for the variety of attitudes and needs of those engaged in the change process. Identify those most important to implementing the change and ensure that they are included in the process. Consult as much as practical however be very clear where there is a capacity for people to influence the change and where things will be mandated (legislation; protocols agreed at board level; changes in service agreements.) Make getting your people policies/protocols right a top priority. Use training as a way to engage people in the change process. Hold frequent informal and formal meetings to communicate the change. Manage people's expectations carefully. Include everybody in planning at least one phase of the change and give people some autonomy and flexibility. Encourage and support stakeholders as the changes progress.

Manage the timeframe

Drivers of the collaboration process must have long term goals while simultaneously planning small operational changes that may only take days or weeks to eventuate. To make change more palatable introduce it in phases where practical. Continuous lasting change is an accumulation of all the smaller changes that occur. Look for short term solutions that solve problems quickly. Establish a timeframe for changes and stick to it. Stay future focused, and always keep the desired end goals in mind.



Have a documented action plan

Develop an Action Plan in a variety of forms to allow for people's learning styles. For example: an action plan document; a PowerPoint presentation; a flow chart; a Gantt chart. Keep involving all those directly impacted by the change around the practicality of the proposed changes and their time frames. If circumstances change, be willing to change the plan.

Manage risks

Formal risk management plans are essential for any complex collaboration however it also helps to consider the "smaller" problems that may arise.





Liase with staff from relevant organisations on a formal and informal basis

Strong personal relationships across organisational boundaries based on inter-personal and inter-organisational trust and confidence are recognised as keys to collaboration success. While it is widely acknowledged that trust is a, if not **the**, critical feature of successful and sustained collaborative relationships, less is known about how to build and sustain trust across collaborating organisations.

The development of trust depends on the professional and personal knowledge, skills and attributes of the individuals involved and the attributes and behaviours of participating organisations. The key individual and organisational factors identified for the development of trust between organisations are:

- Business sense and functional competence, for example parties have the skills and resources to do the job;
- Integrity, for example commitment and good faith demonstrated in making and implementing agreements;
- Interpersonal competence;
- Open and honest communication;
- Consistency of behaviour;
- Loyalty;
- Availability;
- Discretion;
- Accessibility;
- Judgment, for example accurate appreciation of partner capacities;
- Collaborative rather than hierarchical relations, genuine power sharing, shared decision making and leadership, and consensus building;
- Predictability, for example realistic and balanced expectations of partner contributions.

The efforts of organisational partners and their representatives to develop trust and good communication will provide a strong foundation for sustaining effective collaborative relationships.

It is also important that partner agencies' expectations of the relationship be documented in the same way that agreed tasks and outcomes are documented.



Represent the organisation

Promote a positive image of the organisation at available opportunities

It is very important that you represent your organisation in a positive way at all times. This is particularly important for collaborative relationships: you want other organisations to see your organisation as trustworthy and worthwhile collaborating with.

The first thing you can do in order to represent your organisation in a positive way is to be professional. If your organisation has a uniform, wear it correctly at all times when representing your organisation. You should also follow any organisational procedures on addressing people, distributing information, answering the telephone, etc.

It is important that you realise when you represent your organisation that you are representing the whole organisation. The way that one person acts will reflect on the entire organisation. Others will take notice and form judgments on the image you present. This includes taking notice of your attitude, appearance, facial expressions, the way you address people, tone of voice, courtesy toward others and your overall level of professionalism.

It can help if you:

- Are sincere;
- Are helpful;
- Use the person's name or title if you know it;
- Avoid sarcasm and flippancy;
- Maintain a calm and measured presence at all times;
- Answer phone calls, emails, letters, etc promptly;
- Make sure all equipment is in a clean and serviceable condition;
- Be helpful when asked questions;
- Thank any people who may assist you.



Communicate issues, policies and practices of the organisation in appropriate formats

Managing inter-agency differences

When implementing agreements and protocols it is inevitable that tensions will occasionally arise. This can be due to:

- A lack of clarity about roles;
- Professional and organisational philosophies;
- Different expectations about priorities and ways of working;
- Perceived power differences between partners;
- Communication failures; and
- Varying degrees of commitment to the agreement or protocol.

The early recognition of problems and a shared commitment across agencies to deal with the problem are keys to resolving differences. Solving issues within the inter-agency group is the preferred approach. Only in extreme circumstances would the assistance of external mediators be sought.

What may go wrong and prevention strategies

Communication: key staff are unable or unwilling to communicate effectively with other employees.

- Develop and implement an organisational communication plan, using emails, team/staff meetings and workshops.
- Mentor people to improve communication skills.

Finance: predicted cost savings from the collaboration are smaller than expected.

- Have a contingency plan to further reduce costs in other ways if necessary.
- Identify the reasons that the expected savings did not occur and see if these can be remedied.

Implementation: People pay lip service to the collaboration but continue to do what they have always done.

- Ensure that there are very clearly documented protocols and schedules of delegation to support the new collaborative approaches.



Commitment: feedback and people's behaviour indicate that interest in the collaboration is waning.

- Bring people together to talk about the reasons for their lack of enthusiasm, revisit the benefits of the collaboration and revise plans and strategies if necessary.

Delays: The collaboration process falls behind its scheduled timeframe.

- Manage all the things within your control: identify reasons for the delays and problem solve ways around them. Where the delay is outside your control, (for example: funding is delayed or necessary premises aren't ready on time) ensure that everyone is aware of the reasons for the delay and reminded of the organisational commitment to the process.

Training: available training for required new skill sets is not available locally.

- Mentor with your own organisation.
- Second people to different organisations to build skills.
- Send key people away for training and have them instruct other staff on their return.
- Look for technologies that can support skills development: online learning; video conferencing.

Timescale: Boards and funding bodies are impatient for results Look for "low hanging fruit": simple projects that will demonstrate the capacity of collaboration partners to work together.

- Start with coordinated and simple collaborative activities (events, training days and resource sharing) to develop trust and momentum and then move to more complex collaborations and case management.

Troubleshooting: complex and unexpected problems arise that may disrupt the whole collaborative and change processes.

- Build on the organisational learning culture that identifies problems as another challenge to be solved.
- Set up special working groups to focus on these issues if necessary.



Active internal organisational resistance: when experiencing change people go through a range of emotional reactions from passivity and denial, to anger and depression and finally to acceptance.

- Be on the watch for hidden resistance: when it is in the open you can deal with it.
- Always be open about potential negative effects of the collaboration.
- Recognise that emotion is not answered by reason but depends upon appropriate emotional reassurance.
- Do not confuse criticism with resistance, as the criticism may be valid.
- Identify collaboration champions that will help you “sell” the benefits of the collaboration and respond to the critics and traditionalists.

Things don't go according to plan: life is full of surprises.

- Test your plans where practical.
- Start collaborative activities on a small scale to build trust.
- Have regular meetings with relevant people to ensure that things are on track.
- Analyse problems and look for ways around them.
- Revisit contingency plans.



Implement confidentiality measures that protect client, organisation and network

Referrals and confidentiality: Respecting and ensuring confidentiality and privacy of client information is a critical principle of the community services industry. As well as maintaining confidentiality within the agency, it is essential to ensure that client privacy is protected when liaising with external agencies.

Services should ensure with all referrals, that appropriate and accurate information is provided. The only information that needs to be shared is basic contact details for the client, the reason for the referral, the extent and nature of your involvement with the client and your role in the future.

This means sticking to facts and keeping your opinion and any judgemental comments to a minimum. Let the worker meet the client and form his or her own relationship without influencing the worker's perception by your own experience or opinion.

Always remember, that under Freedom of Information legislation, clients are within their rights to request to see their client file. Any written correspondence in relation to the client is kept in this file. So, if you have written a referral letter for a client that you would not want them to see, think about why. Have you stated something that is making a judgement on the client (such as 'the client is unmotivated')? Have you referred to some aspect of your involvement with the client that you have not discussed with the client (such as 'the client didn't get on with other clients while in our service')? It is much more appropriate to share the client's perception of their difficulties with other workers, than your own opinion (which could be deemed biased).

The golden rule is, wherever possible, work in close partnership with your client, initiate the referral together and agree on what information needs to be shared.

However, another important consideration in sharing information is not withholding information that the service should know, if they are to fulfil their duty of care to the client and other clients within the service. For instance, if your client has a violent background (they may have been charged by Police), and you are referring them to an accommodation service, then the service has a right to know that information. This is for the safety of other clients in the service. Similarly, if your client has a mental illness, the service may need to know so they can ensure the client receives adequate care and access to a specialist service if required.

Client permission must be gained (preferably in writing) before sharing information. It is a good idea to discuss with the client what you are going to talk about with the other agency. Also, be sure that the client understands the policy and criteria of the service to which they are being referred.



Maintain and enhance networks and collaborative partnerships

Maintain networks and other work relationships to provide identifiable benefits for clients and the organisation

It is important to maintain and improve your networks and collaborative partnerships to ensure the expected benefits (for clients and the organisation) are being achieved.

Has the network and/or collaborative partnership achieved:

- Greater efficiency and less duplicated effort;
- Access to additional resources or lower costs through sharing resources such as office space, administration or other aspects of an organisation's operation;
- Improved service coordination across agencies, with better pathways or referral systems for service users;
- A holistic approach to meeting client needs, with better and more efficient access to the range of services required, improved quality and consistency of service and greater responsiveness to needs;
- Organisational knowledge and improved service system capability;
- Greater innovation and flexibility to respond to changing, emerging or more complex client needs and changing operations and operational environments;
- Access to up-to-date information, new ideas and strategic thinking;
- Improved capacity to demonstrate best practice;
- Political and lobbying strength;
- Increased capacity to successfully submit tenders or expressions of interest and to deliver projects; and
- Additional expertise, support or legal protection for small, new, or struggling organisations.

If none of the expected benefits are being met, you need to assess what changes you can make to improve your networks and collaborative partnerships.



Monitor, improve and maintain networks and collaborative partnerships

Monitoring progress

Identify key performance indicators for the effectiveness of your new collaborative approaches.

- Does service user feedback indicate satisfaction with work undertaken collaboratively?
- Are staff happy?
- Have the new collaborative approaches improved the way the service is delivered?
- How does the funding body view the implementation of the collaboration?

Continually check where the collaboration is going, its target group and what it hopes to achieve in a changing environment.

- Review the goals of the collaboration: are they being achieved?
- Does everyone still support this approach?
- What else needs to be achieved?

Ensure that revised objectives are communicated to everyone.

Maintaining momentum

Continue to acknowledge and support people who are proactively drive the change.

Encourage training and mentoring that builds skills and increases capacity to effectively support the new way of doing things.

Keep on developing your own skill sets and capacity and ability to connect and communicate with others.

Continue to clearly articulate the culture of continuous improvement and the benefits of collaboration. If people really support the change they will become its champions.

Celebrate success.



APPENDIX A: Assessment tool for collaboration viability

Assessment tool for collaboration viability

Shared Vision						
We do not have a shared vision			We have a shared vision and clearly understood vision			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Goals and Objectives						
Members do not understand goals and objectives			Members understand and agree on goals and objectives			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Responsibilities and Roles						
Roles and responsibilities of members are not clear			Members are clear about their roles			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Decision Making Procedures						
We do not have effective decision making procedures			We have effective decision making procedures			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Changing Membership						
We do not have procedures for changing members			We have procedures for changing members			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Conflict Management						
Conflict keeps us from doing anything			We are able to successfully manage conflict			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Leadership						
Leadership is not shared and inadequate			Leadership is effective and shared when appropriate			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Plans						
We do not follow work plans			Plans are well developed and followed			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Relationship / Trust						
People don't trust each other			Members trust each other			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Internal Communication						
Members do not communicate well			Members communicate well with each other			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
External Communication						
We do not communicate well externally			Our external communication is open and timely			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Evaluation						
We never evaluate our performance			We have built evaluation into all our activities			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Evaluating Collaborativse University of Wisconsin – Cooperative Extension, 1998



APPENDIX B: Potential Collaboration Risk Checklist

Category	Potential Risk
Values and Organisational Philosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incompatibility of values causes disagreement increasing over time • Differing approaches to service delivery • Differing commitment to the collaboration • Fear of take-over
Legal Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners not meeting legislative compliance standards • Potential for action or inaction by one partner may have legal implications for the collaboration or the other partner
Financial Matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not knowing real financial position of partner • Difficulty combining different financial systems • Unexpected costs or drain on resources • Disruption in payment of accounts and wages • Partner loses funding • Changes to the economy • Rapid changes in community population – particularly rural and remote • Things take extra time and time means money
IT and communication systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing internet providers, server systems etc. • Changing well known phone numbers, email addresses
Clients/ staff safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workplace Health and Safety • Confidentiality & privacy • Harassment and abuse
Performance of partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not meeting expectations or agreements • quality of work
Collaborative Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choosing the right partner • Change of managers or key personnel from partnering organisations • Difference of opinion between staff from the different services • Disagreement between the Managers involved in the Collaboration • Discord around roles & responsibilities • Communication breakdown between partners • Communication breakdown between local Managers and their Parent Group



Category	Potential Risk
Management and accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of leadership • Poor governance • Unclear documentation about the collaboration processes • Unclear lines of delegation and authority • Lose sight of direction and purpose • Power is more important than outcomes • Confused lines of management • Reporting between partners/reporting to parent body • Collusion • Decision making takes longer as there are more people to involve • Gatekeeping • Conflict of interest
Services and activities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantity of service • Quality of service • Access to service
Resource allocation and priorities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priorities forced to change • Resources redirected
Impact on staff:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workload • Job roles – including staff wanting to “own” particular service users • Priority & focus of activity • Ability to align conditions & wages – need for redundancies • Required culture change – shift from organizational autonomy to collective process or new power relationships • Unmet expectations
Impact on service users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints from service users • Group think around client management • Agreed process around case management and referral • Unmet expectations
Impact on management:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of coordination & management time • Expertise required
Premises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding an appropriate building • Capacity to service debt or ability to meet lease commitments • Cost associated with maintenance
Marketing and Public Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of well recognised “name”