

Event report

FUNDING PARTNERSHIPS AND CONSORTIA: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES FOR THE FUNDERS

Learning from Funders

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HOSTED BY BUZZACOTT LLP

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VENUE

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Faced by a choice between a consortium of small specialist providers and a single 'one size fits all' provider, what are the benefits and challenges for the funder who picks the consortium? This meeting heard from 4 different case studies and allowed for discussion as to the frequent mistakes and problems as well as positive experiences and hints for funders in funding partnerships.

KEY LEARNING POINTS FROM THE MEETING:

- Allow for a long lead in time.
- The partners should be able to trust an effective lead who can guide in an efficient manner. The importance of second tier support shouldn't be underestimated.
- Establish effective relationships with clear lines of responsibility.
- Maintain and monitor the partner relationships as a priority, e.g. external facilitators can be useful.
- Be aware of the benefits to the partners outside of this specific tender.
- The robustness of the consortium needs to be tested to see if the relationships are fit for purpose.

These learning points are expanded upon within this report and detailed fully at the end.

The attendees were welcomed by the host, **Stephen Hart, Buzzacott LLP**. **David Warner, London Funders**, Chair, introduced the discussion by emphasizing the varying perspectives in the room. David outlined the opportunity for people to be open and honest about their experiences to encourage for discussion and learning.

“The trust and confidence in the lead partner is essential”

Pan-London Violence Against Women & Girls Consortium

The recently established Pan London [Violence Against Women and Girls \(VAWG\) Consortium](#) has a current membership of 22 organisations. This collaboration is funded by London Councils and facilitated by Women's Resource Centre (WRC).

Janet McDermott, Aya Project, Imkaan and Women's Aid Capacity Building Partnership, outlined the context of Aya's involvement with the consortium, as a partnership project between Women's Aid and Imkaan, 2 members of the consortium. The tender has 6 strands of work, with each strand having a lead partner and Aya project provided capacity support for 2 of these leads. Janet emphasized the positive start that this consortium experienced by having a long lead in time, which provided an opportunity to build solid relationships. The good relationships between the partners, in addition to the trust and confidence in the lead partner, is essential. Janet provided a document to explain [Aya's role](#) and also to outline [steps involved in collaborative working](#).

Natalie Gyte, Women's Resource Centre (WRC), outlined WRC's involvement in facilitating this consortium and their view of the collaboration as a feminist response to competitive tendering. As an umbrella body for women's charities, WRC believed strongly in the idea that they should reflect their members, which is something that you cannot have in a generic organisation. Natalie emphasized that there are many different models of consortia, but that in this case WRC facilitated the development of the consortium including organising the administration and leading the 2nd tier strand whilst delivering services to women's organisations. Additionally, there has occasionally been some internal conflict between organisations in the partnership and so, although many members have been confident that WRC would act in their interests, they have occasionally felt it useful to contract external neutral facilitators. This process of managing the 'behind the scenes' organisation has been very difficult, but Natalie stressed how WRC have adapted and learnt from the process.

Joanne Watson, London Councils, focusing on the funder perspective, discussed the time consuming monitoring process undertaken at application stage, in assessing the lead partners, overheads and the grant to turnover ratio. London Councils also outlined the value they have found in involving the local authorities in assessing applications to create a 360 degree process. Additionally, having written risk assessments and agreements has been useful in showing clear responsibilities.

The specialist nature of the consortium was regarded favourably in the discussion as, being very client focused, this provides a future for small survivor led organisations and that this opportunity allowed them to open up to the bigger picture. London Councils also noted how the boroughs were satisfied with a specialist element instead of general, as funding cuts have restricted the funding in this area so it's an opportunity to encourage their involvement and also create better joined up working. Although funding a consortium was not the initial plan of London Councils, the need for it has evolved due to the grants budget and the need to deliver 'pan London'. This variety of organisations has been a positive factor, but also a challenge, as such small organisations can sometimes struggle to attend meetings and require a lot of time for support, leading to costs in the 2nd tier support service which WRC noted could be difficult to cover under the funding.

“written risk assessments and agreements have been useful in showing clear responsibilities”

The Mayor's Mentoring Fund

John Griffiths, Rocket Science, gave an introduction to the Mayor's Mentoring Fund, which was established in response to the 2011 summer riots. The [Mayor's Mentoring Programme \(MMP\)](#) is designed to deliver 12 month mentoring relationships to black boys aged 10-16 who are at risk of offending, or of falling out of education or training, to give them some positive role models and support outside of formal education. The focus is not on securing education or employment outcomes per se, but on the boys' broader social development. Initially, following an open tender, the delivery of MMP was awarded to one large agency in east London, but when this didn't seem to work, the GLA decided to redesign the programme and devolve its delivery to a number of local partners across 7 target boroughs,

managed on behalf of the Authority by an intermediary managing agent. Rocket Science acts as the managing agent for the fund, organising the process, the administration and the funding.

John provided [slides](#) as a reference, from which he picked out some main learning points and some of the challenges encountered:

- There was a very good initial expression of interest in becoming Local Delivery Partners for the MMP, but only 17 full bids were submitted. John noted that this was a warning sign about the market. This, in combination with the first approach being unsuccessful, signals that probably should have been explored further.
- The expectations of the devolved delivery model were very high. The redesigned MMP was intended to be very locally based, closely connected to the black community; it had an expected 12 month outcome from mentoring vulnerable young people on a ratio of no more than 1 (mentor):3 (mentees) and it had a payment by results model. These factors could have influenced organisations in deciding not to bid.
- This is a high priority programme for the Mayor which attracts a lot of attention.

John outlined 3 delivery models that have been encountered within the partnerships:

1. Direct delivery. This delivery model required very strong partner relationships in order to fulfil the MMP criteria. There needed to be positive relationships with housing associations, youth centres, schools, local businesses and other local organisations. As each mentor needs to have rigorous checking and clearance, there are high expectations.
2. Managing agent. For example with Croydon Mentoring Consortium and Hackney CVS where lead organisations act as the prime contact that bring on board a lot of other providers as suppliers/sub-contractors. Despite early concerns, HCVS's has actually been one of the most successful models, by splitting the work and contracts into manageable chunks.
3. Partnership approach. This has a split delivery where 2 or more orgs come together to form a partnership each operating in a different geographical area and/or with different schools.

There are many learning points to be taken from these experiences and the group discussed some of the common problems that are faced when funding partnerships or a consortium, including ensuring there is a sufficient lead in time to develop the relationships, the key role of the lead partner and the need for funders to have robust ways of assessing the viability and strength of the proposed partnerships or consortia prior to contracting or awarding a grant. These will be outlined further at the end of this report.

“...ensuring there is a sufficient lead in time to develop the relationships”

Fear and Fashion

Following the release of the research report '[Fear and Fashion: The use of knives and other weapons by young people](#)' (Lemos&Crane, commissioned by The City Bridge Trust), five independent grant-making trusts formed a partnership in order to pool financial and intellectual resources. The City Bridge Trust, The Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, John Lyon's Charity, Trust for London and The Wates Foundation planned to develop and fund a collaborative programme named '[Fear and Fashion](#)' as a practical response to the issues raised in the report. Initially the ambition was to fund local partnerships to design and deliver approaches to tackling knife crime, but when no suitable partnerships came forward, it was replaced by discrete project-based initiatives.

Ciaran Rafferty, The City Bridge Trust, outlined the value in retrospective analysis of their experiences and acknowledged that the programme was slow to begin with and there were not enough plans or operational agreements to formalise the roles or organise meetings in advance. Although there was a positive side to the organisations all combining funds and being equal partners, having no lead agency did create difficulties. On the positive side, they recognised from the start that organising a programme such as this would be a cost to both time and resources, and Ciaran outlined the advantage of working as a group of funders:

- Maximum spending power
- Enable you to overcome individual or geographical restrictions
- Information sharing
- To get people in a room together to discuss one topic

The Hounslow Hate Crime Support Service

This project is funded by the London Borough of Hounslow and delivered through a partnership of organisations, which are outlined on this [handout](#). When this support service was established, the decision was made to commission the services to be managed by Ealing CVS. A [flow chart](#) maps the clients' journey through the service.

Áine Hayes, London Borough of Hounslow, outlined the variety of the size and structure of organisations within the consortia and the benefit that this brings in sharing information and good practice. It is critical that the lead organisation has the capacity to lead the partnership, and Ealing CVS is very effective in this way, efficient with a non-threatening approach which has helped the consortium to deliver. The relationships between partner organisations were flagged up as having an enormous impact, requiring strong communication with clear plans of responsibility and constant monitoring. Áine emphasized the benefits of sharing knowledge, experience, systems and good practice for all consortium members and in particular the benefits for smaller organisations.

This was followed by general group discussed the importance of these relationships and whether this can be measured when assessing the

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robustness of a partnership. Additionally, the importance of the 2nd tier support was noted and the requirement for training in this area to support the partnerships.

Common points from discussion

Several points came out of the discussion as widely agreed factors to consider in building a successful partnership:

Long lead in time

Allowing for a long dialogue in advance is important; don't underestimate the time it takes to get a partnership to delivery point! This is important to start to build the relationship and work on common values and different responsibilities.

An effective lead partner

The lead partner is not necessarily the largest organisation, but the one with the capacity for completing the extra work. The key to a successful partnership was widely agreed to be the trust in the lead partner who can guide in an efficient manner. The application process can be helpful in collecting information about the lead partner in order to gauge how you will work together.

Establishing, maintaining and monitoring the relationships

When you have a wide variety of organisations, the support offered is important, as some may be very small and find it difficult to attend meetings etc. Strong communication is key, as is a clear plan of responsibility. Where organisations have different priorities or viewpoints, a neutral external facilitator can be very useful. It is possible that relationships will not last until the end of the programme and they should be monitored throughout the process.

It's hard to control which organisations are in the partnerships when the applications come in, it is difficult and time consuming to alter these. It is also difficult if a partner comes in late or alternatively if an organisation leaves last minute. A fear of this can prevent positive relationships so written agreements help to build trust. Formal signed contracts that detail the deliverables and payments, in combination with risk assessments are important to prevent potential breakdowns in communication.

Benefits to partners outside of the tender

The partnerships can create better joined up working and regular meetings and communications can bring unexpected benefits to the organisations, and there should be an aim to draw on this for a bigger service. A potential benefit would be of communication to share good practice and cross referral can be useful to collect and share data.

Test the robustness of the consortia

This is a challenge to be considered and reflected on, with no clear solutions at this stage. Even the rigorous checking at application stage may not necessarily be fit for purpose, and something else may be required such as a

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two stage process. This could give the opportunity to open frank dialogue about practicalities and to assess how strong the relationships are, or some kind of community activity to test the applicant from a number of stakeholders. The key contact in the organisation can be essential for the relationship and this is difficult to measure, but important to consider when looking at the robustness of the consortia.

In conclusion, following general conversation over experiences and challenges in this area, David thanked the attendees for their contributions. If it would be useful, we could review these partnerships in 18 months to assess any further learnings or developments.

Participants

Lola Akindoyin	London Borough of Hackney
Lucy Ashall	Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Winston Castello	London Borough of Lewisham
Lisa Charalambous	London Borough of Camden
John Griffiths	Rocket Science (Presenter)
Natalie Gyte	Women's Resource Centre (Presenter)
Jess Haddon	Mind
Áine Hayes	London Borough of Hounslow
Marsha Henry	London Councils
Janet McDermott	Aya Project, Imkaan and Women's Aid Capacity Building Partnership (Presenter)
Maxine Quintyne-Kolaru	London Councils
Ciaran Rafferty	The City Bridge Trust (Presenter)
Rachael Takens-Milne	Trust for London
Austin Taylor Laybourn	Trust for London
Joanne Watson	London Councils

In attendance

Becky Green	London Funders
David Warner	London Funders (Chair)

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