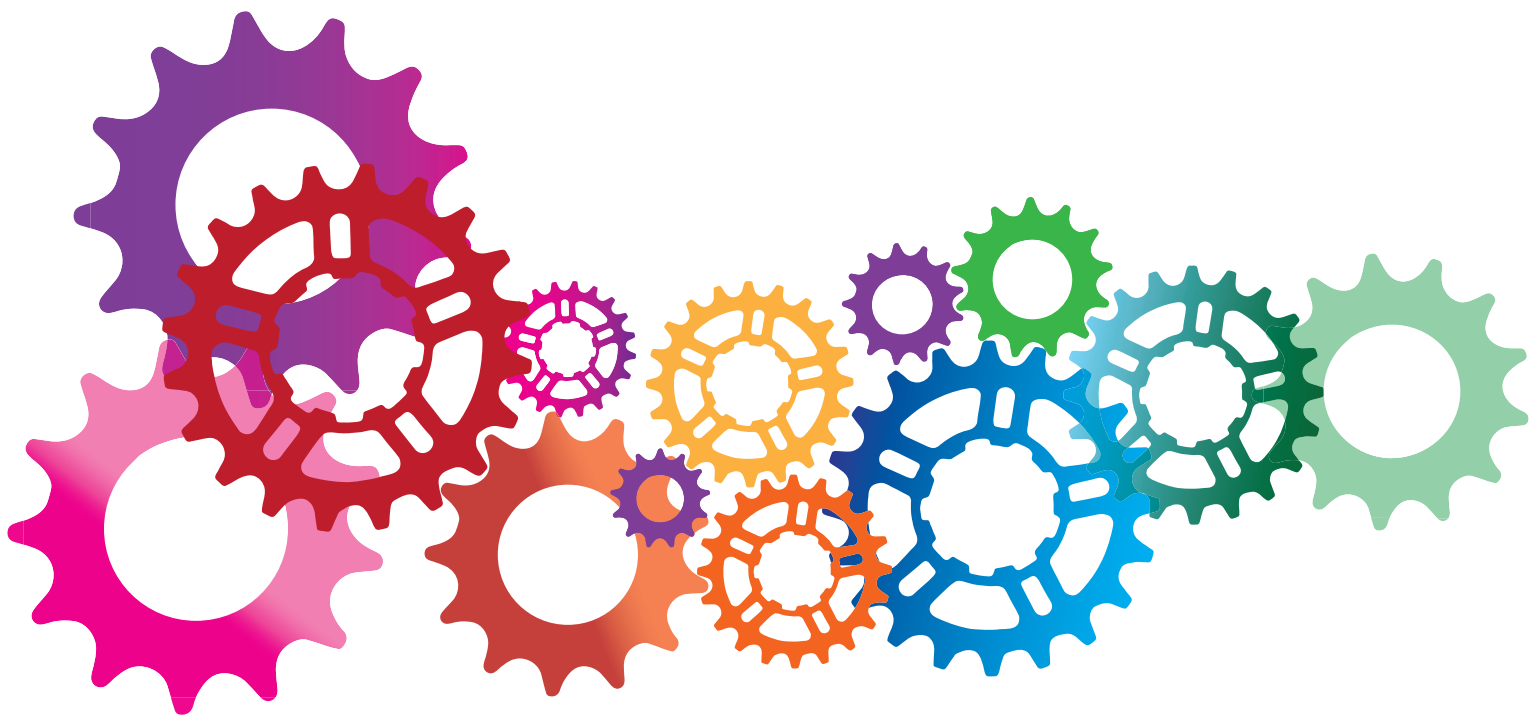


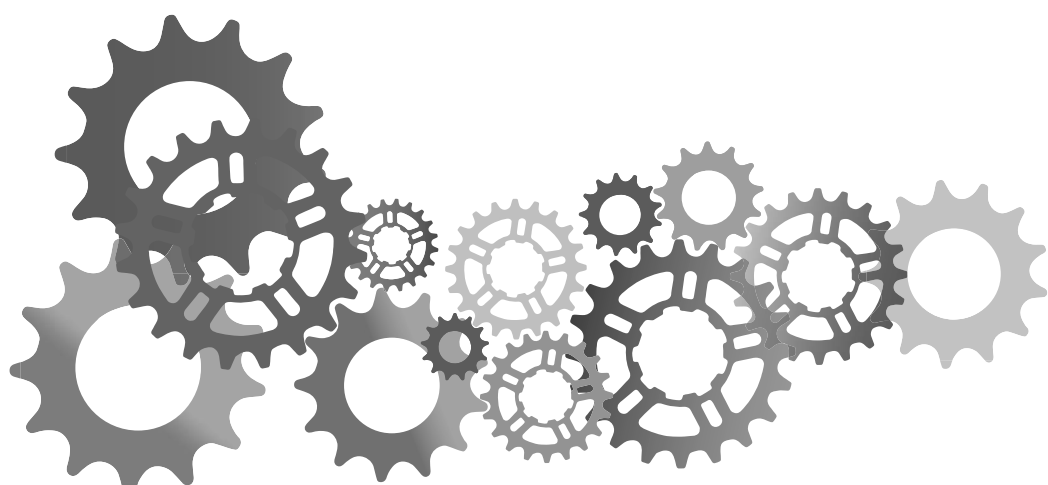
Collaborative Working

Alan Lawrie and Jan Mellor



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DIRECTORY OF SOCIAL CHANGE

‘This practical guide will be of real benefit to trustees and managers considering working more closely with others to achieve their objectives. The step-by-step approaches will ensure that the difficult questions are asked while the gentle reminders around charity law, TUPE and other legal matters are there but in their correct place, i.e. not as the overriding issues. The case studies provide positive messages while highlighting some of the pitfalls and will be of assistance to the reader. This book can never give all of the answers to collaborative working at any level but will take away much of the mystery, helping the reader understand better this complex but current issue.

‘Charities are always under pressure to merge, often from those who see merger as the solution to commercial inefficiency without understanding the different drivers. This book will help those in charities understand the steps they can take, short of a full merger, to achieve efficiency in service delivery and beneficiary support through many different types of collaboration. Get it on the bookshelf and use it when you need it!’

**Nigel Scott, Course Director,
London South Bank University**

‘Whether a veteran seeking to improve practice, or relatively new to collaborative working, this concise, comprehensive toolkit and guide has something to offer both practitioner and decision maker on the subject. I found it invaluable for challenging organisational motivations and received wisdom, as well as exploring risks, hazards and potential outcomes of the complex landscape of collaborative practice including full organisational mergers. It provides organisations with a route map to navigate the potential pitfalls and reap the benefits of joint working, ensuring they understand how to tailor good practice to their own evolving needs. I can’t recommend it enough.’

**Lainya Offside-Keivani, Chief Executive,
Abbey Community Association, Westminster**

‘When is a book really useful? When it comes along when you really need it. I like this book particularly because, as Acting Chair of a youth project locally, I am faced with the withdrawal of County Council funding at the end of March as they ‘reconfigure’ (or cut as we call it).

‘I already had been looking at the merits of working with others so the fact that this book contains not only many examples of working together practices (alliances, joint bidding, shared services, consortia, mergers and so on) but also exercises designed to help settle upon answers which meet one’s needs, makes it invaluable.

‘This is a thorough and well-argued book designed to help thinking processes – there is a lot of detail, there are case studies (including the option ‘not to’ at the end of the day) and there are no pat answers. *Collaborative Working* is a valuable and helpful contribution at a time when all of us need to be thinking about how we best serve those for whom our organisations exist rather than serving our organisations for their own sakes.’

**Jan Cosgrove, National Secretary,
Fair Play for Children**

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About the authors

Jan Mellor is a knowledgeable and enthusiastic advocate of the not-for-profit sector and is passionate in her belief that good management is what makes the difference between organisations that deliver and those that don't.

Jan now works for a national charity and has worked in the not-for-profit sector in many capacities: as a project worker for a young people's project, the Director of a medium-sized national voluntary organisation, and a management trainer and consultant. Her main interests are in governance, organisational change and management development.

She is co-author of *The Complete Guide to Surviving Contracts* (2008).

Alan Lawrie has worked as a full-time independent consultant for 20 years and specialises in strategy, business planning, and commissioning and organisational development.

Before moving into consultancy Alan worked as a development worker, trainer and manager in the voluntary sector and then moved into management roles in the public sector.

He is the author of *Managing Quality of Service* (1984 and 1995), *Developing Your Organisation* (2000), *The Complete Guide to Business and Strategic Planning* (1988, 1994 and 2007), *Managing Contracts: A Resources Pack* (1988 and 1994), *The Complete Guide to Creating and Managing New Projects* (1999, 2002 and 2010) and co-author of *The Complete Guide to Surviving Contracts* (2008).

Jan and Alan have helped several organisations to explore ways of collaborating and worked with them to develop successful formats for collaboration.



About the Directory of Social Change

The Directory of Social Change (DSC) has a vision of an independent voluntary sector at the heart of social change. The activities of independent charities, voluntary organisations and community groups are fundamental to achieve social change. We exist to help these organisations and the people who support them to achieve their goals.

We do this by:

- providing practical tools that organisations and activists need, including online and printed publications, training courses, and conferences on a huge range of topics;
- acting as a ‘concerned citizen’ in public policy debates, often on behalf of smaller charities, voluntary organisations and community groups;
- leading campaigns and stimulating debate on key policy issues that affect those groups;
- carrying out research and providing information to influence policymakers.

DSC is the leading provider of information and training for the voluntary sector and publishes an extensive range of guides and handbooks covering subjects such as fundraising, management, communication, finance and law. We have a range of subscription-based websites containing a wealth of information on funding from trusts, companies and government sources. We run more than 300 training courses each year, including bespoke in-house training provided at the client’s location. DSC conferences, many of which run on an annual basis, include the Charity Management Conference, the Charity Accountants’ Conference and the Charity Law Conference. DSC’s major annual event is Charityfair, which provides low-cost training on a wide variety of subjects.

For details of all our activities, and to order publications and book courses, go to www.dsc.org.uk, call 08450 777707 or email publications@dsc.org.uk.



Foreword

This is a welcome and timely book. Welcome because it hands the reader a route map to negotiate the complicated junctions and unlit avenues of collaboration. Timely because it I know of no organisation at this time that isn't currently exploring one form of collaboration or another.

But is it any good? I am relieved, as the writer of the foreword, to be able to say that the book is better than good. It is an excellent resource that anyone in the voluntary sector would find useful – from the big national charity CEO right through to the secretary of a neighbourhood group. What the writers Alan Lawrie and Jan Mellor have done for all of us here is to provide a proper intellectual framework for exploring collaboration in its various forms. This is a first and we owe them thanks.

But their biggest achievement has not simply been to explain the various approaches to collaboration. It has been to give us the practical tools we need to take our own organisations' thinking to the next level. What you're getting here, as part and parcel of the book, is a set of superb guides for topics that can be used in workshops and self-checklists on what you need to be thinking about at any given stage on your collaboration journey.

So what is the book really saying? The core message here is that collaboration isn't just about mergers or takeovers. It can also be about a range of other things: consortia, joint ventures, alliances, group structure, informal alliances, sub-contracting and partnerships.

When I had finished the book I thought a lot about what it meant for me. My conclusion was that it underlined the important of three things: people, process and purpose. Collaboration is, first and foremost, about people and dissolves when people can't trust each other or see their interests to be in conflict. Secondly, for collaboration to work, you need a strong process – like scaffolding round a building while the work takes place. Thirdly, and most importantly, you need purpose. The most powerful collaborations featured in the book occur when the outcomes captivate and galvanize everyone involved. Where one plus one equals 64, it has to be worth it.

What really sets this particular book apart is its ability to help the reader work out which collaboration tool is right for them. Like many of you, I am a grizzled veteran of the voluntary sector scene. I have led a big merger. I have also been both midwife and executioner of a number of consortia and partnerships. I hold no illusions.

But what I like about Alan and Jan's work is that they don't either. This isn't in any way airy-fairy or idealistic about collaboration. Reality shines through from the authors and in the voices of real people who are doing it the ground. This is a deeply realistic book for grown-ups, and I like that.

To conclude, this book is probably the best thing that can be read on this topic at this time. If you're in the voluntary sector, you can do a lot worse than invest two hours of your life to read it now, cover to cover. So turn off that phone, put the kettle on – and enjoy.

Craig Dearden-Phillips, Managing Director and founder of Stepping Out



Introduction

Collaboration should be an obvious and good idea for voluntary organisations. Getting organisations with similar aims and ethos to combine together in the interests of their beneficiaries or communities should be both logical and an opportunity to do something creative. However, collaboration is often perceived to be a threat where people fear that their organisation is being taken over or that it is losing its identity and original relevance.

Increasingly, collaboration (or more to the point, mergers) is promoted as a quick way of making savings. We need to challenge any fast rush to collaboration as a great cure-all. Our view is that collaboration is a longer-term strategy which, if done well, can create real value and difference.

Our objective was to pull together the practical experience of voluntary organisations that have experimented with different ways of collaborating from partnerships to joint agreements to mergers. In researching the book four factors were striking:

1. It is very easy to get lost in the technical detail of collaboration (designing structures, coping with constitutions and staff transfers) and to miss the important point: will collaboration make us more effective at delivering our mission?
2. Often the biggest obstacle to collaborative working is people's entrenched attitudes and reluctance to change. All too often we came across instances of rivalry, irrelevant competition of people unable or unwilling to see the bigger picture or how organisations working together can deliver more for their beneficiaries. Collaborating with others can pull us out of our comfort zone and challenge our complacency.
3. Collaboration is not a quick fix. The process needs time and careful planning to yield a return. Don't do it unless you are willing to put time into it.
4. The key factor in making it work is developing a culture that is open, being willing to learn from others and being able to move forward.

We would like to thank all of the organisations that agreed to share their experiences of what worked and did not work and we hope that this book will help to build strong and independent voluntary organisations.

Alan Lawrie and Jan Mellor

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the following people and organisations for their permission to use case studies featuring their organisations.

Annie French (Leeds Advocacy Consortium), Prue Yeoman and Andy Brown (Manchester Citizens Advice Bureau – One Stop Shop), Mandy Forrest (Sheffield Well-Being Consortium), Alison Gibbon and Rachel Howley (Liverpool Specialist Advice Services), Dai Powell (Hackney Community Transport) and Karen Bowen (Cumbria CVS).



Chapter one

Why collaborate?

Sooner or later in the life of a voluntary organisation, the issue of how to work with similar organisations crops up. It becomes harder to explain the differences between what you do and what someone else does. Organisations with similar or even identical aims start competing for funds, resources and profile.

At one level, everyone can sign up to the idea of working in partnership. Working together sounds like a logical and sensible proposal. However, the nature of the discussion can change when somebody, often a funder, starts mooted the idea that there are too many organisations all doing the same things, and asks, would it not be better (or cheaper) if they all merged?

Over the last ten years, public policy towards the voluntary sector has pushed the idea of collaboration, by either including voluntary organisations in partnerships or encouraging organisations to work together.

This book sets out practical guidance on how small to medium-sized voluntary organisations can find effective ways of collaborating and working together in the interest of their users and communities. It is not just about mergers. Mergers are one way in which collaborative working can happen. There are several other ways of cooperating that can bring about benefits which are less final than a merger. The book aims to take an objective look at how voluntary organisations can develop ways of working together, based on practical experience drawn from throughout the UK.

This chapter starts with a quick exercise to identify what sort of attitudes towards collaborative working exist within your organisation, and explores what can motivate an interest in collaboration. It then looks at different models and formats for collaborative working, suggesting how trustees and managers can promote a positive process which leads to better services and outcomes for a voluntary organisation's users and community.



Exercise: isolation, rivalry or collaboration

Which ones do you recognise?

Attitude:	<i>Isolation</i>	<i>Rivalry</i>	<i>Collaboration</i>
<i>Description</i>	Stress is placed on what makes the organisation different from others.	The organisation wants to establish or maintain a leading position in its market.	Committed and open to work with others to achieve its mission.
<i>Style</i>	Emphasis on being a niche player, a specialist organisation and on protecting the organisation's 'territory.'	Focus on winning and being competitive. Often keen to grow and expand.	Flexible. Open and willing to invest in building relationships.
<i>Organisational mantra</i>	'We are different.' 'That wouldn't work here.' 'We are unique.'	'It's a jungle out there.' 'We compete to survive.'	'2 + 2 can make 5.' 'It is about win-win solutions.'
<i>Management focus</i>	Strong organisational culture. Sometimes very defensive to external developments.	Ensuring that the organisation is competitive, businesslike and able to win.	Outward-going. Keen to explore possibilities and open to change.
<i>Risk factors</i>	Danger of being inward-looking and over-defensive so it loses out on potential opportunities.	Losing the competition for funding. Being short-term. Focused on targets.	Spending a lot of time trying to build collaboration that does not lead anywhere.

What drives collaboration?

The need for voluntary organisations to work together can come from a variety of motives and driving forces. Some are what we have called ‘push’ factors where the need and commitment to work together is instigated from within the organisation. Collaboration is seen as a good thing that will help the organisation be stronger and enable it to meet its mission. Others are ‘pull’ factors. Pull factors happen when the organisation is pulled into working collaboratively by external factors and demands.

Common push factors

Finding better ways of delivering your aims

By collaborating, an organisation might find more effective ways of meeting its needs and objectives. This is often referred to as synergy. In organisational terms, synergy is when two or more things come together to produce a result not independently obtainable. So, for example, two organisations with different skills and expertise might be able to unite and deliver a result greater than their individual efforts because they have been successful at combining their resources.

Avoiding destructive competition

Cooperating on a formal basis stops destructive competition. Organisations work against each other’s and users’ interests by competing against one another on the basis of who can do it cheapest rather than who can deliver the best outcomes. Working together could stop this sort of destructive competition.

Sharing expertise and specialism

By teaming up, organisations may find ways of sharing expertise and specialisms. Collaboration might lead to the exchange of skills and learning between organisations.

Overcoming isolation

The process of working together might enable organisations to think more strategically, see opportunities and be less narrow or isolated.

Creating better service design and delivery

Collaborative working may be an opportunity to improve how services are designed and organised. It might lead to more accessible services for users, better coordination of services and ending some of the boundaries that might have grown over time.

Giving new focus

Working together may give the organisations a new focus, stronger identity and higher profile. Collaboration can be a positive way of relaunching or restarting an organisation.

Becoming a bigger and stronger player

By joining forces, organisations may be more competitive and win bigger contracts. It may make organisations more attractive to commissioners and funders, as they will have moved onto a bigger scale and developed a more resilient management infrastructure.

Collaborative Working

Collaborative working should be an obvious and good idea for voluntary organisations. Yet the reality is that collaboration is often seen as a threat, where people fear that their organisation is being taken over or that it is losing its identity and original relevance. However, it needn't be that way.

This comprehensive guide shows how voluntary organisations can find effective and creative ways of collaborating and working together. From alliances and joint agreements to group structures and mergers, this book shows how your organisation can create a positive process which leads to better services and outcomes for your beneficiaries and community.

It includes information on:

- Why collaboration is worthwhile
- Collaborative working processes
- Alliances and networks
- Joint working
- Lead-partner and subcontracting models
- Consortia and joint ventures
- Mergers
- Making collaborative initiatives work

Based on real experience and with case examples throughout, this title is essential reading for chief executives, managers and charity professionals who want to consider new working methods and take advantage of creative opportunities.

'This well-argued and helpful book has come along at a time when all of us need to be thinking about how we best serve those for whom our organisations exist, rather than serving our organisations for their own sakes. With case studies, exercises designed to help you find solutions, no pat answers and the right amount of detail, this book is invaluable.'

Jan Cosgrove, National Secretary, Fair Play for Children

'An invaluable toolkit and guide for practitioners and decision makers navigating the potential pitfalls and benefits of collaborative working. I can't recommend it enough.'

Lainya Offside-Keivani, Chief Executive, Abbey Community Association, Westminster



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