Building Strategic Alliances and Collaborative Partnerships – The Northern Ireland Experience

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Today we will…

• Consider the collaboration spectrum and the wide range of different types of collaborations that there are

• Explore why some partnerships and strategic alliances succeed and go on to make a real impact – and why some fail!

• The seven ingredients to successful collaborative working
My Background - CollaborationNI

- Legal Adviser CollaborationNI 2011 - 2017
- NICVA, CO3, Stellar Leadership, Building Change Trust
- Supported over 125 collaborations between voluntary, community, social enterprise and statutory organisations
- Forming alliances, building consortia, supporting mergers
- Act as independent ‘honest broker’
- Collaboration of the willing for purpose
# The Collaboration Spectrum

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LOW IMPACT ON ORGANISATION HIGH
Alliances

• Together For You
• Rare Diseases Partnership
• The Long-Term Conditions Alliance
• The Healthy Living Centres Alliance
• Greysteel Community Partnership
• Northern Ireland Alcohol and Drugs Alliance
• Newry Mourne and Down Strategic Stakeholder Alliance
Consortia

- Aspire Community Partnership
- Advice Sector Consortium
- Human Rights Partnership
- Women’s Sector Consortium
- North Fermanagh Valley Partnership
- North West Advice Partnership
Mergers

- Fermanagh Community Transport
- Top of the Hill & Hillcrest House
- CDM Community Transport
- Early Years & Orana Family Centre
- Northern Ireland Theatre Association & Ulster Association of Youth Drama
- Newtownabbey & Antrim Citizens Advice
Seven Ingredients of Successful Partnership Working
1. Buy-In

- Have all the partners bought into the project?
- Funder-driven collaborations
- Anger, suspicion & resistance to change
- Need to feel listened to
- Find a way through the woods
- What is in it for me?
- What is in it for my beneficiaries?
2. Agreed Vision

• What is your partnership trying to achieve?
• Strategic interests to work together in partnership – or response to a crisis
• Fear and anxiety – is there a secret agenda?
• Is there a shared goal?
• What precisely is the problem that collaboration is the answer to?
• Paint a picture of what this new future will look like
• Is everyone bought into achieving it?
“If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up the men to gather the wood, divide the work and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea”

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry
3. Find the Right Partner

- Dating! Spend time and money and energy getting to know each other – but still might not work out!
- Work with people you actually like!
- Needs to be a good cultural fit
- Are all the key organisations are in the room?
- For a merger, it is even more important that you find the right partner
- If it’s not working, walk away!
4. Trust

- Tricky issue of trust
- Openness & transparency
- Reliability
- The ‘principle of no surprises’
- Trust takes time to develop
- But can be lost in a moment!
5. Leadership

- Organisations do not collaborate – people do
- Collaborative leader – takes advice, empathetic, communicates, negotiates, seeks consensus
- Invests in the long-term relationship
- Avoids the temptation to win short-term, short-sighted victories
6. Negotiation

• Deal with the difficult issues early
• Politeness is the enemy of collaboration
• Listen – and understand the other person’s perspective
• Focus on what is in it for you – or what is in it for your beneficiaries
• Give yourself space to negotiate
• Consider your red lines
• Find a win-win
• You will need to be resilient – and patient
• Be creative – be innovative – be solution focussed!
17 Camels

- Eldest son – inherits half
- Middle son – inherits one third
- Youngest son – inherits one-ninth
7. Agree a Good Process

- Establish a steering group
- Bring in independent support – an independent honest broker
- Put good governance around your new partnership
- Written agreement
Your plan & reality …
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