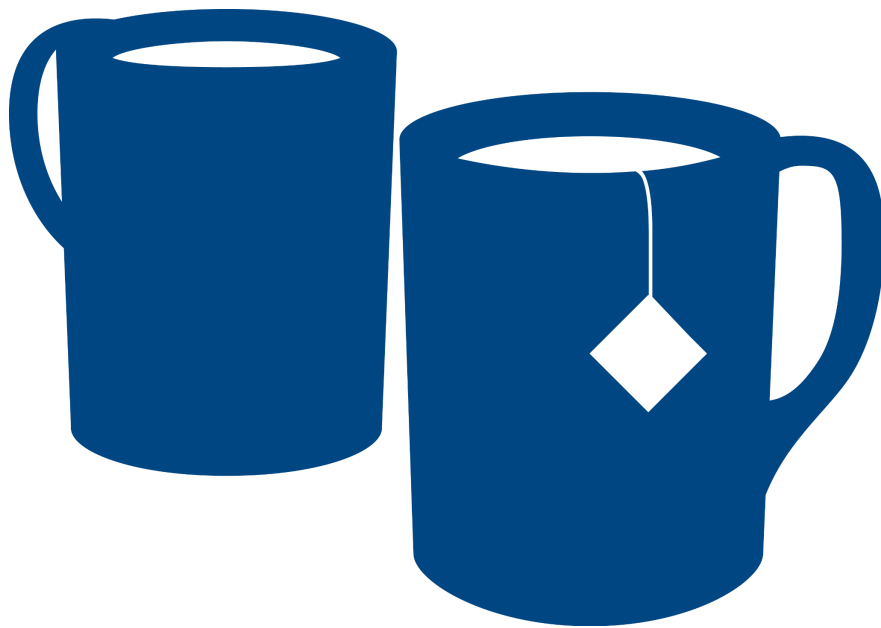


# Building Partnerships

Best practice in developing  
effective partnerships



**This guide was originally produced  
by Southwark Citizens Advice**

This session pack has been produced for the consumer education section by the financial capability and consumer education team.

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# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
Brief introduction to the best practice guide	
<b>Tips for approaching potential campaign partners</b>	<b>4</b>
Why work in partnership?	4
Case Study	4
<b>What can go wrong in a working partnership?</b>	<b>7</b>
Reasons why a partnership may go wrong	7
What to do when a partnership goes wrong	8
<b>Analysing your stakeholders</b>	<b>10</b>
Innovating approach to campaigning	11
Review	11
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>12</b>

# Introduction

This guide was originally produced by Southwark Citizens Advice to share good practice and to encourage other local Citizens Advice (LCA) offices to campaign in partnership.

There will be shared interests in helping clients between local Citizens Advice offices and those in local government, the private sector or other local charities. This guide aims to help LCA offices and also other local community groups or educational establishments that haven't campaigned in partnership before. It will help to work out where to begin, tips on approaching potential campaign partners, a guide to stakeholder mapping, and a look at innovative ways to campaign. This guide will introduce you to a number of concepts and ideas to support you in your campaign work and show how easy it is to campaign in partnership.

# Tips for approaching potential campaign partners

There are many instances when it may be desirable, beneficial or necessary to work in partnership with other organisations, groups or individuals. Partnership working can help develop ideas, allow you to share knowledge and skills, increase capacity, provide expertise, and let you reach targets or new audiences.

Some examples of partnership working include:

- **Campaigning in Partnership** – Working with other organisations to jointly deliver a campaign, for example, working with Housing departments in your local council to strengthen consumer rights for private renters.
- **External events** – Working with others to put on external-facing events. For example, working with your local Trading Standards department during Scams Awareness Month to provide workshops or awareness-raising events for the public or other groups.
- **Partnership Research** – Working with other organisations to share resources when conducting research. For example, working with other local debt charities to identify key issues for local residents and financial capability resources available in the local area.

## Tips

Think about who? why? and when? you are contacting people or other organisations.

- **Who?** Before approaching potential campaign partners, think about any of your existing partners that may already be working with them. It may be easier to approach them through someone you already know.
- **Why?** Consider the common ground you share with other organisations, agencies, or individuals, and use this to approach them.
- **When?** Research what campaigns are planned locally and nationally throughout the year and how long you will need to plan for events. Also, research what other events are going on locally that you can be involved in.

There can be many benefits to networking with people at events or meetings. You can meet people from many different areas that may be able to support your campaigning work in the future.

Look at what potential partners are doing – you may find an ‘in’ with potential partners through things they have already produced or are working on, even if it isn’t necessarily relevant to your current issue.

It is important to be clear about the partnership's aim and what people's roles will be.

**Do you need a partnership agreement?** This is a good idea if you are applying for funding. The agreement should cover a commitment to share information about any funding bids relevant to the partnership and clarify roles and areas of responsibility.

There is nothing wrong with competition. Several partners might be applying for the same funding at some point, but if information is shared, duplication can be avoided.

Don't wait for a funding or campaign opportunity before contacting people. Think long term about the aims and priorities of your organisation.

## **Why work in partnership?**

Working in partnership can be beneficial for several reasons, allowing organisations to achieve things they would not easily be able to do by themselves.

## **Share expertise, experience, and essential insights**

The partners you choose to work with may have different expertise or experience than you and your organisation. This can help provide essential insights into unfamiliar areas or processes. Your partners may also be able to share knowledge with you regarding the topic you are working on.

## **Case Study**

Citizens Advice Southwark led on a financial capability project called Money Savvy Southwark and worked with Southwark Law Centre and a number of other local advice organisations. Each of the partners had a different experience or expertise that could share insights into unfamiliar areas. For example, the Law Centre provided legal expertise on various issues relating to managing money, whilst the LCA helped with regard to the benefits that come from being part of a large, national organisation. Other partners could reach particular audiences, whereas others provided particular resources. This allowed the partnership

advantages that an individual organisation wouldn't have alone, as it has a wider reach and access to more resources.

### **Increase productivity, efficiency and capacity**

Working in partnership can allow an organisation to increase capacity, productivity and efficiency by allowing the workload to be spread out amongst those best suited to the task. Having partners with different expertise allows you to work more efficiently as those who are best placed to deal with something can handle it, which can increase productivity.

### **Reach a wider/new audience**

Partnership working may allow your organisation to reach a wider audience as you will be able to use the existing clients, customers or contacts of both the partner organisations and your own. Your partners may have contacts you would not be able to reach otherwise or may not have considered as an audience. For example, the Money Savvy Southwark partners (mentioned in the case study) connected different sections of the community, allowing the project to target a wider range of people, such as new council tenants, those in temporary accommodation, and young people.

### **Partners can provide new ideas, highlight different issues and potential problems/solutions and can help with creativity.**

The different experiences and expertise that your partners have had can allow them to provide you with new ideas and ways of looking at problems. This can result in innovative ways to approach these problems, finding new solutions and creative ways of doing so.

### **Share resources and responsibility**

When working in partnership, the different partner organisations can take on different aspects of the work, sharing responsibility for the end product. This also allows partners to have access to resources they wouldn't have had otherwise.

## **New opportunities**

Working in partnership can open up new opportunities for the organisations involved, such as having access to new resources or meeting and working with new politicians and influencers, which will give you a greater voice on behalf of your clients and other consumers.

## **Working in partnership can provide benefits of scale**

Large organisations can benefit from the expertise of smaller organisations, while small organisations can benefit from the reach, profile and capacity of large organisations.



# What can go wrong in a working partnership?

We hope that committing to projects, and agreeing to processes set, will foster good working relationships. There will, unfortunately, be occasions when problems occur.

## Reasons why a partnership may go wrong

While working in a partnership can have many advantages, there is always the chance something could go wrong. However, there are often things that can be done to help if this happens. In order to know how best to act when a partnership goes wrong, it is necessary to figure out what exactly has happened. Some common things that can make partnership working difficult include:

### Disagreements

Partners can have disagreements on many different points. This may be caused by a number of factors, such as differences in working style or changing priorities. For example, partners can disagree about how to do something or which aspect of the partnership's goals is most important.

### Misunderstandings

There is much that can be misunderstood when working in partnership. For example, partners can misunderstand each other, the nature of the partnership, or the aims and goals of the partnership.

### Mistakes

Again, these can vary from inconsequential to more significant. For example, if one partner puts out a press release about a project without the agreement of the other partner.

## **Lack of adequate communication**

Partnerships work best when all involved know how best to communicate with each other and feel able to do so. Deciding to cancel meetings at short notice or using software not accessible to all partners can inhibit the process of the project and the strength of the working partnership.

## **Poor evaluation mechanisms**

This is important for knowing how well the partnership is going. Not being able to evaluate your work can lead to staleness or goals not being achieved.

## **What to do when things go wrong**

If the partnership does not work out as hoped, there are a number of things that can be done to resolve differences.

### **Review how you communicate**

Good partnerships rely on good communication, and any breakdown can be problematic. Good communication can help resolve disagreements and misunderstandings. It may be necessary to look again at how the partners communicate with each other. In particular, reviewing channels for feedback, who is responsible for communicating what, and schedules of meetings. With these things reviewed, clarified and agreed upon, the partnership may be able to move forward. Ensure all partners can access the software you want to use, if all partners can't use it, try to find something else suitable.

### **Review responsibilities**

It may be the case that each partner has different responsibilities in the relationship. If it feels that the workload is unbalanced or that one partner has insufficient resources, it could be necessary to look again at the allocated responsibilities. Who is doing what? Are they the best person or organisation for the job? An honest discussion of these questions can help resolve issues of responsibility. It is also important to feel able to raise any issues if it seems like a

partner is struggling or if the resources are no longer available to allow a partner to continue as they were.

## **Review goals**

Misunderstandings and disagreements are just two of the issues that can arise with regard to the goals of a partnership. As the partnership develops, goals can change along with it, meaning that it may be necessary to look again at what was decided at the beginning. The goals of the partnership need to be beneficial to all partners, as well as measurable and realistic.

## **Look at your partnership agreement, review it.**

If you signed a partnership agreement (or memorandum of understanding) before going into partnership, look over the document again. Is there something in particular that needs to be clarified? It may be that the agreement needs to be revised. It may be a good idea to check the purpose of the partnership and what is expected in terms of resources, responsibilities, the conditions of the partnership and the guidelines for decision making?

## **End the partnership and move on**

Sometimes it will be best to end the partnership. This may be due to a mismatch of values, changes within an organisation that mean they can no longer commit to the relationship, or that none of the previous steps has helped. It is important to remain cooperative and polite when ending a partnership early, trying to overcome any animosity or resentment. There will be a number of loose ends that need to be tied up, such as resources or funds, and both partners must properly manage the end. It is also important to review the partnership to find out what went wrong to learn from the partnership and avoid the mistakes made in any future partnership working.

# Analysing your stakeholders

This section of the guide will help you identify the key local decision-makers and other influencers that will be able to assist you in your campaigning work. Knowing your stakeholders will allow you to build partnerships with the people best suited to your campaign aims and can also be beneficial when securing resources and support for your office.

## Make a list

The first step is to list all the key stakeholders, working groups, and networks that have influence over or interest in your work or your clients—for example, local councillors, local MPs, Trading Standards, and local authority officers.

## Map the stakeholders

Next, you should map the stakeholders according to their influence and interest. Look at their influence and interest in the clients and the clients' needs. Consider how engaged they are with your office and how much contact you have. Think about whether they are a key decision-maker over local services or practices or whether they have influence over those decision-makers.

## Identify the key stakeholders

Pinpoint the most influential stakeholders and consider your current relationship with them. If it is not currently strong, make this a priority.

## Look at the strength of your relationships

Consider your relationships with all the identified stakeholders and label them as strong, medium, or weak.

## Look at how to improve your relationships

There are a number of things to consider here:

- What are the motivations and interests of the stakeholders? Local authority officers need to meet council priorities, MPs like to be engaging with their constituents.

- What are the main issues you want to influence and how can you best show evidence from your clients on these issues?
- Could a stakeholder with a high interest in your office attend a meeting or event?
- Could you meet a stakeholder with a low degree of interest at another event? How will you maintain contact?
- How can you prioritise time and resources for the more influential stakeholders?

## **Innovative approach to campaigning**

Depending on the funding and resources you have available, consider how you can use theatre groups, social media, community groups and events to get your project objectives across. It may be worth contacting other local Citizens Advice offices or local authorities to find what innovative ways of working they use or have trialled. Most organisations will have a communications team so take the time to speak to them and find out what resources may be available to help your project.

## **Review**

As mentioned earlier, it is important to have a robust evaluation process to measure what has worked well and also what problems you may have encountered along the way. This will help improve or enhance future partnership relationships either as a continuation with the existing partners or to demonstrate to new, potential working partnerships.

It is also important to highlight your successes to your senior management, partner's management and your service users to demonstrate your commitment to delivering good projects.

# Bibliography

McGregor, Jenny. (2016) Original project report Building Partnerships, Citizens Advice Southwark.

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