

Partnership Resource for Community Arts

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Introduction

PURPOSE OF THE PARTNERSHIP RESOURCE

The purpose of this Resource is to provide assistance to Community Arts organisations undertaking projects in conjunction with one or more project partners. While it is well documented that partnerships provide multiple benefits, it is also frequently reported that 'partnerships can be difficult'. This resource aims to address some of the challenges of working in partnerships, as well as highlighting the benefits.

BACKGROUND

About VicHealth

Promoting health is a powerful, cost effective and efficient way to maintain a healthier community. Everybody has a right to good health and the quality of life it brings.

The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, or VicHealth, forms partnerships with different groups to make health a central component of our daily lives. Its activity is geared to promoting good health, safety and preventing ill health. Essentially, VicHealth works with others to build healthy foundations for the future.

It does this by working for all Victorians, through partnerships at all levels of government and in different sectors and by creating innovative programs based on research and evaluation. This, in turn, helps others who can influence good health. Working with others also creates a broader base from which to draw solutions.

VicHealth's position as a member of the International Network of Health Promotion Foundations gives it access to national and global health interests, strengthening its ability to promote and advocate good health.

What is VicHealth's perspective?

VicHealth has identified mental health promotion as a continuing priority with activity directed towards three key factors influencing mental health and wellbeing - social inclusion, discrimination and violence and access to economic resources. As many of the drivers of mental health lie outside the health system, one of VicHealth's strategic objectives is to consolidate mental health promotion activity across sectors. The rationale for this includes:

- Engaging a wider resource base to promote mental health so that a wider range of organisation integrate mental health promotion into their day to day activity.
- Decision-making tends to be poorly integrated across sectors and government departments. Planning for good mental health will require improved communication, coordination and integration across sectors.
- Engagement in addressing the determinants of mental health across sectors increases the likelihood that activity will also contribute to addressing other health and social problems, such as alcohol and drug use and community violence.
- The stigma associated with the term 'mental health' and the fact that it is often confused with mental illness can be barriers to engaging other sectors in mental health promotion. There is a need to develop a common language (focusing on health and wellbeing rather than illness) and to identify opportunities to work together to achieve common goals.

Supporting partnerships across and within sectors through funding programs such as the Community Arts Participation scheme is one of VicHealth's key strategies for achieving these objectives.

What is the link between art and mental health?

Our work with arts organisations is informed by an emerging evidence base which indicates that:

- Engagement in activity which facilitates meaningful contact for people from diverse cultural backgrounds reduces ignorance pertaining to cultural diversity and discriminatory beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. If constructed appropriately, participation in arts projects provides a vehicle for this contact (VicHealth Evidence review 2004).
- Through involvement in creative activity participants have been shown to develop supportive social networks and report increased feelings of wellbeing (Jermyn 2001, Matarasso 1997).
- Community arts projects can enhance the skills of participants, improving their ability to function at broader political, social and environmental levels. (Creative Connections: promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing through Community Arts Participation, VicHealth, 2003).
- Young people's involvement in creative activity can result in improved academic achievement, school retention rates and levels of self-esteem and reduced drug and alcohol consumption and juvenile offending (Heath & Soep, 1998, University of Pennsylvania 2001, Harrison, 2003).
- Community based arts activity can make considerable contribution to community health, development and renewal (Williams 1997).
- Communities with high rates of participation by individuals in community activities have better health outcomes than those with low levels of civic engagement (Marmot 1999).
- Cultural celebrations and events can promote community co-operation, bring new talents to communities, promote awareness of community issues, develop talents in a community, reduce community isolation and promote economic development. All of these outcomes are clearly linked to individual and community health (Globalism Institute 2004).

What is the policy context underlying partnerships?

Growing Victoria Together is the Victorian Government's vision to 2010 and beyond. Through the goals, measures and outcomes outlined in this policy, it clearly articulates the need for organisations to work together, in order to develop local solutions to local problems and expand the reach of services. This philosophy is reinforced in *A Fairer Victoria* and the funding structure of many Victorian government programs which encourage partnerships and reflect the philosophy that there are greater benefits for communities when organisations work together. Increasingly, government departments and organizations supporting development of project activity are encouraging, and sometimes requiring that these activities are undertaken by organisations working in partnership.

WHO IS THIS RESOURCE FOR?

This resource is targeted primarily at personnel involved in development and implementation of Community Arts projects. While the resource has this specific community arts focus, many of the lessons and insights could be applied to partnership projects taking place in other sectors.

How was it developed?

Effective Change was engaged by VicHealth to evaluate the Community Arts Participation Scheme. The evaluation focused primarily on investigating the partnership issue, primarily through a series of case studies. Through that process, the need for a particular resource to support arts organisations to work more effectively in partnerships was identified.

In 2001, Dr John McLeod worked with VicHealth to develop the *Partnership Analysis Tool*. This tool, available on the VicHealth website, has been used by many organizations to assess and strengthen their work with others. This current resource incorporates elements of the partnership tool as a means to progress work in this area.

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- Australian Centre for the Moving Image
- The Brunswick Women's Theatre
- Next Wave Festival
- Platform Youth Theatre Inc
- Roomers Magazine Centre
- St Laurence Community Service Club Wild
- Terang Resources Inc
- The Courthouse Project Inc
- Westside Circus
- Susan Ball, Senior Project Officer, VicHealth
- Lyn Walker, Director, Mental Health and Wellbeing Unit, VicHealth
- Dr John McLeod, Author, VicHealth Partnership Analysis Tool

What are partnerships and why are they important?

What are partnerships?

Partnership is a 'broad term used to describe working with other organisations.'¹ VicHealth recognises that most 'partnerships move up and down a continuum which shows progression based on degree of commitment, change required, risk involved, levels of interdependence, power, trust and a willingness to share turf.'² The VicHealth Partnership Analysis Tool, based on international research, describes the characteristics of varying types of partnership, from networking, at its loosest form, to collaborating, which requires the 'highest levels of trust, considerable amounts of time and extensive sharing of turf.'³

What are community arts partnerships?

Community arts projects typically have a broad notion of partnerships. This is an important and distinguishing characteristic between these and other partnerships in the community sector. Community arts projects identify a further four groups as critical partners:

- **Community Organisations Involved**

Community arts partnerships may involve any mix of organisations, but typically include an arts based organisation partnering with another community based organisation to work on a joint project. Strong partnerships require a clear rationale for working together. Common reasons will include working with another organisation that provides access to participants, or to a particular target group. Often, partnerships are formed through common interests or to complement each other. Generally the role of the organisations will dictate a logical division of labour – e.g. the youth organisation is responsible for matters to do with the young participants, and the arts organisation has responsibility for the arts work.

- **Community Artists**

Community arts projects require the involvement of artists. Community artists, while sometimes employed by arts or other organisations, more typically work as self-employed, independent contractors. In this context, the relationship between the artist and the project partners becomes a partnership within a partnership. Management of this relationship is different to the management of organisation-to-organisation relationships. It requires that the responsibility for managing the community artist is clearly defined, to avoid the risk of the artist being managed by all the project partners.

- **Participants**

While participants do not have a formal role as a project partner, the community development and community arts philosophies underpinning community arts projects perceive participants as active partners in the creative development process.

- **Community**

Community arts projects are fundamentally grounded in working with '*community*' – whether that be the broad community or a specific target group. Community arts projects aim to 'give voice' to community participants and ensure that community talents, views and issues are respectfully and authentically represented. The '*community*' therefore becomes a partner to the project.

¹ VicHealth *Partnership Analysis Tool*, 2004

² *ibid*, p.1

³ *ibid*, p.2

Why are partnerships important?

Partnerships can provide a range of important benefits for project participants, the organisations involved and for the community more generally.

The benefits for participants can include:

- Linkages and pathways to new community organisations and services. This can be particularly important if the project helps link a participant to a service organisation, such as young people in need being linked into counselling, health or alcohol and other drugs services or a woman experiencing family violence being linked to a family violence service.
- Greater sense of community connection and a greater understanding of available community supports and services.
- Practical support to participate in the project, such as a free transport service to attend rehearsals or workshops.
- Access to wider range of project resources.
- Achieving higher standards of quality than could be achieved through the resources of a single organisation.

In the short term, for organisations, the benefits can include:

- a sense of shared ownership
- sharing of project management responsibilities, duty of care and risk management
- expansion of the project's skill base, enhancing responsiveness, learning and creativity
- access to more resources, including staff and staff skills, as well as physical resources, such as infrastructure, transport, office space, equipment, and arts venues
- enhanced credibility gained through the association of a project partner with solid reputation
- expanded networks, referral base and potential audience, with greater reach into the community
- exposure to mental health promotion theories and the development of understandings of how appropriate strategies could be applied within that organisation

In the longer term, benefits for organisations can include:

- integration of sound mental health promotion strategies across the work of the organisation
- exposure to other sectors, organisations, approaches to work and/or approaches to working with particular target groups
- creation of sustainable relationships at a deeper level

For the community, the benefits can include greater cohesion of services and activities at the local level, 'joined up' services and development of sustainable local networks.

Lessons and experiences from the field

The wide range of partnership experiences investigated for this resource provide some useful insights into partnerships. A selection of these lessons and experiences are presented in this section of the resource. Some provide experience from the perspective of a particular partnership, others draw together common elements experienced. Where relevant, handy 'tips' and discussion starters are included.

IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

If one single lesson can be extracted from the experiences of the various partnerships, it is that personal relationships are at the crux of all partnerships. If the personal relationships are managed well, the project is in the best position to meet or exceed its aims and objectives. On the other hand, if personal relationships are causing friction, it is likely the project will struggle to do well. Even if the project aims are achieved, the experience of working in a fractious partnership can deter people from entering into similar partnerships in the future. And, just as VicHealth's aim is for partnerships to emerge with enduring networks and relationships that extend beyond the life of the project, negative experiences can spill over to have long lasting impacts on relationships between individuals and organisations. This, in turn, runs counter to the broad aims of encouraging organisations to work together for the benefit of local communities.

SPEAKING THE SAME LANGUAGE

Each sector has its own language. As much as we all hate it, most of us use shorthand expressions.

When evaluating community arts activity supported by VicHealth community arts partners reported occasional difficulties understanding other partners. Acronyms can be easily explained, but what of the terms we use? Particularly challenging are those we use in everyday language, but which can actually have an acquired, and sometimes, quite specific meaning when used in the context of a particular sector.

Words and terms such as 'community development', 'process', 'trust', 'integrity' and 'holistic' are used across sectors, sometimes with different shades of meaning.

Other difficult terms and expressions are those which are quite specific to a sector, or even an organisation.

TIP: Avoid the use of jargon or unfamiliar terms. Ensure that as soon as the project commences, partners can *check* what is meant by a particular word or term. Does everyone have the same understanding? If not, is it more productive to find another set of words, which everyone understands and uses in the same way?

Discussion starter:

With your partners, discuss what you understand by the terms:

- 'mental health' and
- 'mental health promotion'.

Are you all 'speaking the same language'? Do you all know and understand current definitions of mental health and mental health promotion? As a partnership, develop definitions of mental health and mental health promotion which work for everyone and make sense in the context of your project.

Unless the whole community works together, we won't keep young people in rural towns.
Cream of the Country, Project Partner

The twin pressures of an exodus of young people, combined with a skill shortage in the local dairy industry were the genesis for the *Cream of the Country* project, based in rural Victoria. Local young people were more likely to consider farm work as a stop gap measure, while training, education, careers and opportunities were seen to lie only in the city. To address these concerns, the project aimed to promote the diversity of career and lifestyle opportunities available in the area to young people from the region and from the city.

The project brought together partners from education, training, local government, community health, local business, as well as key stakeholders such as the Victorian Farmers' Federation and the United Dairy Farmers. Through this collective of interests, the opportunities ranging from the food industry to technology, agribusiness and farm management, as well as the advantages of country life were presented through the recording of real life stories, presented in large poster formats which could be exhibited in various settings, such as agricultural shows or schools.

While the project tackled the issue of rural decline, it demonstrated that when dealing with a common goal, unlikely partnerships can form around a community of interest.

POWER DYNAMICS

While community arts partnerships don't necessarily think in terms of 'power', power relationships inevitably exist when a group of people and organisations come together. Power within the partnership may derive from position (such as lead agency); size of the organisation; age; reputation or from knowledge and expertise. It can set up challenges – how can representatives from an organisation with a multi-million dollar budget deal equally with someone who doesn't even have a home base and works from their car and mobile phone? How can you work on equal footing if your project partner is also your landlord?

Power does not necessarily have to be seen in a negative sense and in fact, the best way to consider power within a community arts project is to think about the power gained through working together. The most effective way to ensure that power relationships are not skewed within the partnership is to encourage trust within the group. Ensure that a memorandum of understanding and protocols within the group are in place and provide balance for all parties. Ensuring that you have an effective Steering Committee or management group responsible for joint decision-making reduces the chance of power being wielded inappropriately by one or more partners in the group.

Three of the youth-focussed case study organisations – Courthouse Youth Arts Centre, Platform Youth Theatre and Westside Circus - see training young leaders as one of their key aims. They have found involving young people on management and project steering committees as an excellent way to develop management and leadership skills. Participation in these committees exposes young people to committee processes and allows them to participate in the process of decision-making and become attuned to the role of good governance. The organisations are each aware of avoiding ‘tokenism’ and ensuring that these young people are well-briefed and supported in their role and that they are given an equal voice at the table. They ensure that the committee is supportive of their participation. The organisations find that by being able to observe and participate, the young people develop a much deeper understanding of the roles and needs of the range of stakeholders. They develop negotiation and communication skills which can be transferred to any other aspect of their life, and as active participants ensure that the organisations stay true to the needs of the key target group – young people.

THE IMPACT OF INDIVIDUALS – CHAMPIONS AND AMBASSADORS

While managing and controlling for the issues discussed in this resource provide you with the best opportunity to undertake a successful project, you cannot underestimate the impact of key individuals. A common feature of successful community arts projects is the ‘champion’ – someone who is passionate, skilled, committed to driving the process and not deterred by problems. Unfortunately, these people cannot be manufactured! Partnerships will not always have the benefit of the single outstanding individual. However, if a project member is likely to be a champion, it is to the benefit of the project to harness this energy.

Another version of the champion is the ‘ambassador’ – someone who may not be directly involved in the project, but is linked to the project through the organisation. An ambassador is usually in senior role, and able to use their position to promote the work of the project. The greatest public advocates of community arts projects often start out unconvinced about community arts and the benefits of the work.

The Next Wave Festival involved a number of projects in metropolitan and rural areas, all realising their public outcomes as part of the Next Wave Festival. The projects worked over long timelines, so ‘outcomes’ were not apparent in the initial stages. One of the projects based in Moe aligned itself with a neighbourhood renewal project and focussed on the artistic redevelopment of the Wirraway Street Underpass, the ‘front door’ to Moe Heights. As the outcomes became apparent – both in terms of the physical space and the renewal of the neighbourhood, council staff, in particular the Community Development worker and Councillors became the greatest advocates of the project.

Another project set in Knox, in metropolitan Melbourne was based around a large suburban shopping centre. In the initial stages, there was some ambivalence from the shopping centre management about becoming involved. When the project organisers needed a venue, they approached the shopping centre managers for support. Through a process of negotiation and by allowing the managers to become acquainted with the project and the people – participants and artists, over time they saw the value of being involved. The group was provided with access to a shopfront. Management became committed to the project, realising that there were both commercial and community benefits, thus generating an unlikely, but genuine partnership.

SUSTAINING WORK THROUGH MENTORS

Many community arts projects focus energy on developing mentors in order to sustain the work of the project. Westside Circus, for example, has developed circus trainers who can train participants in future projects. Roomers has trained writing mentors, who can encourage, support and develop new authors and artists. Brunswick Women's Theatre train facilitators, so that they can work with multiple organisations simultaneously and then bring the various strands together at a festival.

Focussing on developing mentors through an initial project provides a solid platform for future work. It reduces reliance on individuals within the project team, enlarges the capacity of the organisation, and allows for development and progression of the creative work. It also provides an extended role for participants who want to continue working with the arts organisation, often with real leadership challenges. It extends the reach of the organisation and consolidates the benefits that flow to the community. It can provide greater certainty for the arts organisation by enhancing their capacity.

TIP: Developing mentors can be a great way to provide a new challenge for participants and increase the resource base of the organisation. Participants require support and training to take the next step to being a mentor. They will require continued support as mentor. They can be a great resource, but there is a fine line to traverse between offering a further challenge and exploiting volunteers. Care and consideration should be taken into the selection of mentors, ensuring that they will be able to step up to the role, and once, there that they are appropriately trained to provide support and advice to participants.

REMEMBER WHY YOU DO THIS!

Community arts partnerships can require an enormous investment of energy, emotion and intellect. They inevitably involve dealing with numerous people and organisations, while working to deadlines. They involve risk and taking chances. Reminding yourself 'why you doing this' is often the best way to sustain the necessary energy. The fact that everyone can 'have a go' enables arts projects to reach everyone, from disengaged young people to migrant women who do not speak English, to people with disabilities. The opportunity to develop, extend and explore skills, to form relationships and feel a part of something are often the ingredients that keep people engaged, like the volunteer Circus trainers at Westside Circus or participants at Platform Youth Theatre. For participants, involvement in the project can be health promoting and life transforming. The arts allows stories to be told, that are unique to individuals, regions and groups in the community. The arts can 'humanise' us, the arts can unite us. And once an appreciation and any mix of skills is assimilated, it cannot be taken away. As the Roomers' participant observed after her photographic work was stolen, while heartbroken, "The main thing is, I know in my heart I can do it."

Roomers does things that services could never do...it combines an accessible arts, recreation and community development approach and it makes the voices of a very marginalised and isolated group central to the process...

Project Partner, Roomers

The Roomers Magazine Outreach project produces the Roomers magazine three times a year, by residents or former residents of rooming houses, private hotels and Supported Residential Services for residents, in the City of Port Phillip.

This project partnership spans a range of stakeholders, from the residents to a Neighbourhood Learning Centre to the local council, housing, welfare and advocacy services, as well as local community interest groups. Now in its seventh year, the 'glue' that holds the partnership together is the span of its achievements, integrating the arts, advocacy, health information provision, education and training.

The rooming house population of around 2,500 in the St Kilda area is generally characterised by disadvantage and disengagement. Many have disabilities, especially psychiatric disabilities, drug and alcohol issues and a range of other social and economic problems. They can attest to VicHealth's belief that mental health and well-being is intrinsically influenced by social inclusion (or exclusion), discrimination and violence and access to economic resources. The harshness of life in a rooming house cannot be underestimated. Residences generally do not even have a communal kitchen and bathrooms are shared. Residents will sometimes sit in their rooms all day and not have any human contact. The population of the rooming house may be constantly changing. Co-residents may have a range of difficult behaviours, including violence or aggression brought on by a psychiatric illness or other issue. Yet in the context of this, Roomers has tapped into the positives in the community – tenderness, honesty, compassion and humour. (Editions have titles such as 'There goes the neighbourhood' or 'The Lifestyle edition'). Working with local artists who provide mentoring in their respective crafts, participants develop written or visual material for the magazine, which is edited and produced to professional standards. On an individual level, Roomers provides contributors with multiple opportunities from providing an outlet for creative expression to the chance to discover latent abilities or develop existing skills to working in a group and developing new friendships. Most importantly the publication allows the voice of residents to be heard in the community and contributes on a profound level to connecting members of the local community.

Over recent years, the significance and quality of Roomers' magazine has been acknowledged through invitations to spoken word performances at various festivals, including the Melbourne Writers' Festival and the Fringe Festival. They have also participated in photographic exhibitions. Interest in the Roomers' model of working with the community has come from inner city Melbourne and interstate.

The accrued benefits to individuals and the community extend far beyond the domain of writing and is what sustains this highly committed group of project partners. Together the partners achieve outcomes not possible through the work of any individual organisation.

Steps to creating and maintaining effective partnerships

Step 1 – SETTING UP THE PARTNERSHIP

The initial discussions held by organisations intending to work together actually signal the process of setting up a partnership. When this occurs ensure that there are in-principle agreements on:

- The aim of the project
- How the partners will work with the community, and whether you are targeting a specific group in the community
- The public outcome of the project
- The roles and responsibilities of each of the respective partners
- The resources that each organisation or partner will contribute
- How funding will be distributed across the parties. Ensure that funding applications adequately cover the management costs of the project, including staff time to participate in Steering Committee meetings
- How the project will be managed

Step 2 – FORMING THE PARTNERSHIP

The partnership needs to be supported by an agreement of how it will operate. Most organisations opt for a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which can be drawn up by the partnership organisations. An MOU for a community arts project needs to specify:

- The specific project and its aims
- The parties involved
- Roles and responsibilities of each party
- Boundaries and expectations
- Decision-making processes
- Insurances and public liability
- Risk management strategy
- Involvement of artists (e.g. how they will be employed; supervised etc)
- Recruitment of participants and/or volunteers
- Project management structure (e.g. Steering Committee; how information will be shared; meeting timelines)
- Conflict resolution process
- Project acquittal

Memoranda of Understanding can be extended to include other matters, such as the partnership's specific values; marketing or 'representing' the project in public forums or monitoring and evaluation strategy for the project.

It is also recommended that a Steering Committee or some partnership group is established when forming the partnership. This allows for efficient communication, fair representation and shared decision-making. When the Steering Committee is established, responsibilities need to be allocated for organising meetings, minute taking and distribution. In some cases, a Steering Committee may not be required – for example, the project may be quite small in terms of the numbers of partners and/or its scope, or the Steering Committee structure may simply be too formal an approach for the group. If this is the case, the partnership still needs to address the ways for sharing information and making decisions that are appropriate for the project and allowing partners to deal with contingencies.

Step 3 – MANAGING THE PARTNERSHIP

With time and energy invested in setting up and forming the partnership, in theory the management of the partnership should follow the path set out for it at its inception. In practice, we know that issues can arise, particularly for untested partnerships. Experienced partners can also face issues. Most frequent issues to anticipate are:

- Personal or organisational conflicts
- Turnover of staff which will be more keenly felt if the staff member leaving was in a key role, or a particularly effective 'champion' of the project
- Difficulties within the project, such as difficulty in recruiting participants; participants dropping out; problems with the creative process; logistical problems, such as not having access to a venue, or lack of transport etc.

In most cases, dealing with these issues is best achieved by:

- *Anticipating that the project will face some challenges* and agreeing, as a partnership, on processes to deal with those. It is far preferable to develop a conflict resolution process before any conflict arises.
- *Frequent and open communication between the project partners.* Ensure that all project partners are receiving the same communication! If partners receive different messages, there is potential for creating discomfort and concern unnecessarily.
- *Regular monitoring of the project.* If partners are clear about where the project should be at each stage, it is easier to spot potential problems and address the issues before they develop into major problems.
- *Limiting reliance on specific individuals as far as possible.* Again, frequent and open communication will assist this process. Members of the team can move on for any number of reasons, and if that occurs, it is important that suitable skills can be found within the partnership in the short term, and suitable replacements can be made in the longer term.

- *Keeping managers of the respective partnership organisations involved* and in touch with the project. It is imperative that individual members of the partnership are responsible for keeping their managers (or Committees of Management) informed about the progress of the project and the commitments being made on behalf of the organisation. Having senior managers on-side is invaluable in any number of scenarios – helping promote the project to the community or other organisations; committing additional resources if required; linking the partners with other organisations; promoting the project to other parts of the organisation. This is usually more straightforward for smaller organisations, but can be difficult in large organisations, such as councils or large Community Health Centres.
- *Dealing with issues sooner rather than later.* There is no need to expect that the project will face major issues, but most projects face some minor challenges. It is important to identify these and deal with them before they escalate. It is also important to bear in mind the responsibilities held, as a partnership, to the participants, to the community and to the respective organisations. Conflicts can be exacerbated if there are differing perceptions about the problem and its implications. Again, open communication can help, but this is usually difficult if the partners are in conflict. Talk to your funding agencies, they have a major stake in the project outcomes and how risks are managed. They will also have another perspective on the problem and can recommend strategies and resources. Keep meeting as a committee to talk the issue through. If the problem is moving to serious ground and solutions are not forthcoming, it may be useful to bring in an independent mediator. A skilled and independent mediator can assist in identifying issues and solutions while minimising the emotion. In extreme cases if all indications are that the problems will not be resolved, it may be necessary to wind up the project.
- *Sharing the workload according to commitments and resources.* It is important to make sure that the workload is equitably distributed. This does not mean all parties are required to do the same amount of work, but that as far as possible original agreements are maintained. If there is an increase in the workload, for example, in the immediate lead up to the public performance or exhibition, this should not be left to one person or organisation, but should be tackled as a partnership.
- *Dealing with unanticipated changes.* Projects can sometimes face change that is outside the control of the partnership. For example:
 - Strategic priorities of one of the partners may change which in turn changes the commitments they had made to the project.
 - Organisations may receive other project funds.
 - Government or organisational policies may change.
 - There may be significant changes within the local community.

The implications of unanticipated change are best discussed within the Steering Committee and widening the discussion if necessary through the network of Steering Committee members. Depending on the nature of the change, it may also be important to keep VicHealth informed.

Step 4 – ENDING THE PARTNERSHIP

While effort is often invested in establishing partnerships, they can sometimes end more 'with whimper than a bang'. As the rationale for partnerships centres around developing linkages and connections between organisations for the benefits of communities, it is worth taking time to reflect on, and celebrate the achievements of the partnership. Through this reflection, the specific talents, resources and added value of each partner can be highlighted. At the end of the partnership, it is also worth discussing whether partners would be interested in working together on other projects, and if so, considering how this would occur. As considerable effort is required to develop a partnership, it is worth building on that investment for the future. It is also important that on-going relationships are not seen as being dependent on project funding. It is intended that partnership projects result in expanded networks for all involved. It may be appropriate to consider ways to maintain networks and relationships after the completion of the project.

What are the challenges and how do we deal with them?

Just like any range of human interactions, partnerships can be rewarding or frustrating. They can grow and develop with a minimum of fuss or take an inordinate amount of time. Despite the obvious parallels between organisational partnerships and personal relationships, a fundamental difference between the two is that organisational partnerships can be planned and managed.

There is no need to expect that partnerships will be difficult – there is no inherent reason that this will be the case. However, some challenges are consistently reported by those participating in partnerships. This section of the resource discusses frequently reported challenges experienced in community arts partnerships and provides some guidance on suitable strategies to best manage the challenges.

Managing the Partnership

In reality, partnerships start before the project, when the project concept is being prepared. In some cases, partnership organisations have clearly thought through how the partnership will operate. More commonly though, negotiations occur on the run, leaving the detail to be filled in, if and when, resources become available to implement activities conceived. Organisations need to make a judgement call on the level of negotiation and detail that goes into development of a funding submission. Community arts organisations are often preparing multiple submissions to various funding sources and therefore need to be strategic about the amount of time invested in each one.

However, at the funding submission stage there should be:

- a nominated lead agency to manage the project;
- a project plan which includes key milestones and timelines;
- agreement about the roles and responsibilities of all organisations to be involved in the project, and
- agreement about the distribution of project funds.

When the project funds have been secured, it is imperative all project partners agree on the approach to the partnership. The lead agency should gather everyone together for an initial meeting. At that time, all project partners should reach clear agreement on:

- the task
- the roles and responsibilities of each organisation / partner *within the partnership* and their roles and responsibilities *within their respective organisations*
- expectations of each organisation / partner
- transparent financial management processes
- a project management structure and process
- contingencies that can be anticipated and how should they be planned for
- a strategy for managing risk – remembering that responsibilities for benefits as well as risks should be shared.

Strategies to enhance Project Management include the following:

1. *Establish a Steering Committee to manage the project.* The level of formality of this group depends on factors such as the number of partners, the amount of project funding, the number of participants and the project timelines. There may also be core partners, and some minor partners, such as those only involved in a discrete component of the project. The group should meet as a whole at the outset, and then agree on the best way to involve everyone. Minor partners, for example, may only need to attend the occasional meeting, but receive all the minutes for their information.

Situations to avoid:

- The project manager reporting separately to multiple partnership organisations.
 - Lack of coordination of day to day decisions.
 - So many members on the project Steering Committee that meetings are unwieldy.
 - Smaller organisations feeling shut out of the decision-making process.
2. *Develop a Memorandum of Understanding.* Again, this document can be fairly informal if appropriate, but should outline the project goals and outcomes; the parties to the agreement; decision-making process; the roles and responsibilities of each organisation, and each of their representatives – this should include outlining responsibility for passing information up and down the line; how the Steering Committee will operate (e.g. minute-taking; meetings; recording agreements) and a process for resolving conflict. Memoranda of Understanding can also outline the values or principles of the group, which can also be helpful if facing difficult decisions during the project. The Memorandum of Understanding should be signed and dated by all parties.
 3. *Documentation.* While documenting important agreements and decisions is time-consuming, it is invaluable, particularly if problems are encountered down the track. Regularly documenting project progress and Steering Committee agreements also helps in the monitoring project progress and communicating efficiently with all partners.
 4. *Monitor and evaluate the project outcomes.* Monitoring and evaluation can also be undertaken at various levels of formality, but at a minimum all parties should be involved in regularly assessing whether the project is on track, and if it is not, then should jointly take responsibility in addressing concerns before they escalate.
 5. *Provide support to the Project Manager.* The project management structure will require a nominated Project Manager (typically based at the lead agency) responsible for day to day management of the project. The partnership needs to clearly articulate who the Project Manager reports to, and how.

The Field Experience

Community-based organisations often pride themselves on their informal and friendly way of working with the community. Formalising relationships and documentation go somewhat against the grain. Of course, any organisation reliant on public funding appreciates the need for and importance of transparent records, however it still presents challenges to small, under-resourced organisations. Many community arts organisations consistently report that keeping records and servicing a Steering Committee was a challenge and a drain on resources.

Another commonly experienced challenge is that of changing individual members. This can affect the dynamics of the partnership group and can change the dynamics between the organisations. For example when:

- the project artist is offered a full-time position elsewhere
- staff members were re-assigned to other projects / work
- staff members resign or leave the organisation for various reasons

Personnel changes can create a real challenge for projects if it reveals, for example, that the project was very much driven by an individual, or that senior managers were not fully aware of the commitments being made on behalf of the organisation. The understandings of the artistic vision can change. It is easier to instil a level of trust in the artistic vision with people who have been involved all along the creative journey. When membership changes at critical moments in the creative process, new members may not feel the same level of commitment or excitement as those they are replacing. If this creates scepticism or ambivalence, these negative messages may be inadvertently communicated to others.

Ways to minimise the impact of personnel changes include:

- ensuring that senior managers of organisations are well informed about the project and the commitments their organisation has made to it
- having a strong Steering Committee in place to share the workload
- good publicity about the project and being able to sell the project, within partnership organisations as much as to the external community
- clear statements about roles, responsibilities and expectations of the project partners

Managing Time and Relationships

A well-functioning partnership requires effective relationships between individuals and efficient information flows. To achieve both, a significant investment of time needs to be invested. Organisations new to the experience of partnership are frequently surprised at the amount of time required to participate in the partnership. It takes time to:

- establish sociable and productive working relationships across all the members of the group;
- establish an agreed management structure for the partnership, such as a Steering Committee;
- meet and discuss issues in a group;
- collect and distribute information across the group;
- consult with the collective networks of the partners and promote the project to these networks;
- consult internally with the individual management teams, and
- make decisions as a group.

If the amount of time required to participate in the partnership grossly exceeds the amount of time available, there can be implications for some or all members of the partnership. It can place pressures on the project and the participants. It can place pressures on other work or services of the partnership organisations. Rushing project timelines or unreasonably increasing pressure can seriously compromise the quality of the project, and this in turn can have implications for future funding opportunities or the reputation and standing of an organisation.

The nature of the relationships across group members is also critical to the success of the project. Difficulties in partnership relationships can arise from a clash of organisational cultures or value systems. It is worth spending time with partners discussing what values the partners hold in common and how they would like to see these values reflected in the way the project is conducted. These are likely to be matters around how participants are involved and treated within the project; how community members are involved in the project or how project partners share the workload and work together. For example, large organisations such as local councils will be used to working using formalised processes whereas community based organisations may have a more organic approach. Differing philosophical approaches can often underpin relationship challenges – for example, differences between youth-centred practice versus family-centred practice, or a medical model of health versus a social model of health. Often these differences may be subtle or imperceptible to others outside the specific field of practice. For the purposes of the project, the focus needs to be centred on developing an agreed and suitable model for the specified timelines.

Strategies to address time and relationship issues include the following:

1. *Make realistic estimations of the time* (and commensurate costs) required to participate in a partnership. If your organisation is new to partnering, do some research through your networks to find out what is a reasonable estimation of time for the particular project.
2. *Foster good relationships* between the people involved in the partnership. The quality of the personal relationships within the group has a huge bearing on how the project runs. To achieve this people need to have the opportunity to get to know each other. Allow time for some ‘chat and gossip’ at meetings (within limits!). Good food often helps – try and have a working lunch or celebratory drinks when you achieve a particular milestone.
3. *Documentation*.
4. *Establish systems to get information flowing efficiently* around the group. Most organisations and individuals have access to a computer and email these days. Have a standard template for taking minutes, recording decisions, actions and responsibilities. Distribute the minutes electronically to all members of the group, so that any non-attendees are kept in the loop. Refer back to the minutes at each new meeting and move on from there. If a key individual doesn’t attend a meeting, it’s worth taking the time to follow up with a telephone call. Maintaining a clear record of actions and responsibilities provides a good record for the individual partnership organisations, and also assists staff within those organisations to keep their managers informed about the progress of the project.
5. *Stay task-focussed*. Partnerships need to find a balance between developing productive and friendly relationships and achieving their project goals. Maintain focus on the project goals, and avoid time-wasting or getting side-tracked.

Managing Disagreements or Conflict

While community arts projects are typically fun to be involved in, there are no guarantees of this. One of the lessons from projects that have stumbled or foundered is the need for a dispute resolution process. Project partners do not want to commence a project with a negative point of view, but having a dispute resolution process agreed upon from the onset can avoid complications if disputes do arise. Working to a pre-defined dispute resolution process means that this does not have to be negotiated along with the actual dispute. If it's not needed, then it doesn't need to be activated.

Copyright and Intellectual Property

Copyright or intellectual property issues may not be relevant for many community arts projects. However, it is an area of potential conflict. Projects that result in a permanent record – such as video, photographs or a written piece clearly include the possibility of reproducing this material and that should not take place without seeking and receiving the appropriate permissions. Within partnerships, the challenges can lie in determining who actually 'owns' copyright or intellectual property. In general terms, intellectual property is owned by the generator of the idea, but again it's possible that there could be arguments around who (individual or group) generated the idea.

It is worth considering the ramifications of these areas prior to the project and if necessary, negotiating and clarifying who would retain ownership and who copyright would be assigned to.

Resources

The VicHealth website (www.vichealth.vic.gov.au) is regularly updated with the latest research reports and relevant publications. The following resources can be downloaded from VicHealth's website:

- *Partnership Analysis Tool*, developed by Dr John McLeod
- *Evaluating Community Arts and Community Wellbeing: An Evaluation Guide for Community Arts Practitioners* (2002)
- *Creative Connections: Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing through Community Arts Participation*

There are a multitude of community arts resources available on the web.

Some of the key websites to visit include:

www.ourcommunity.com.au

www.artsvic.vic.gov.au

www.culturaldevelopment.net

www.ozco.gov.au

www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au

www.fuel4arts.com.au

www.artshub.com.au

www.verve.org.au

www.dvc.vic.gov.au