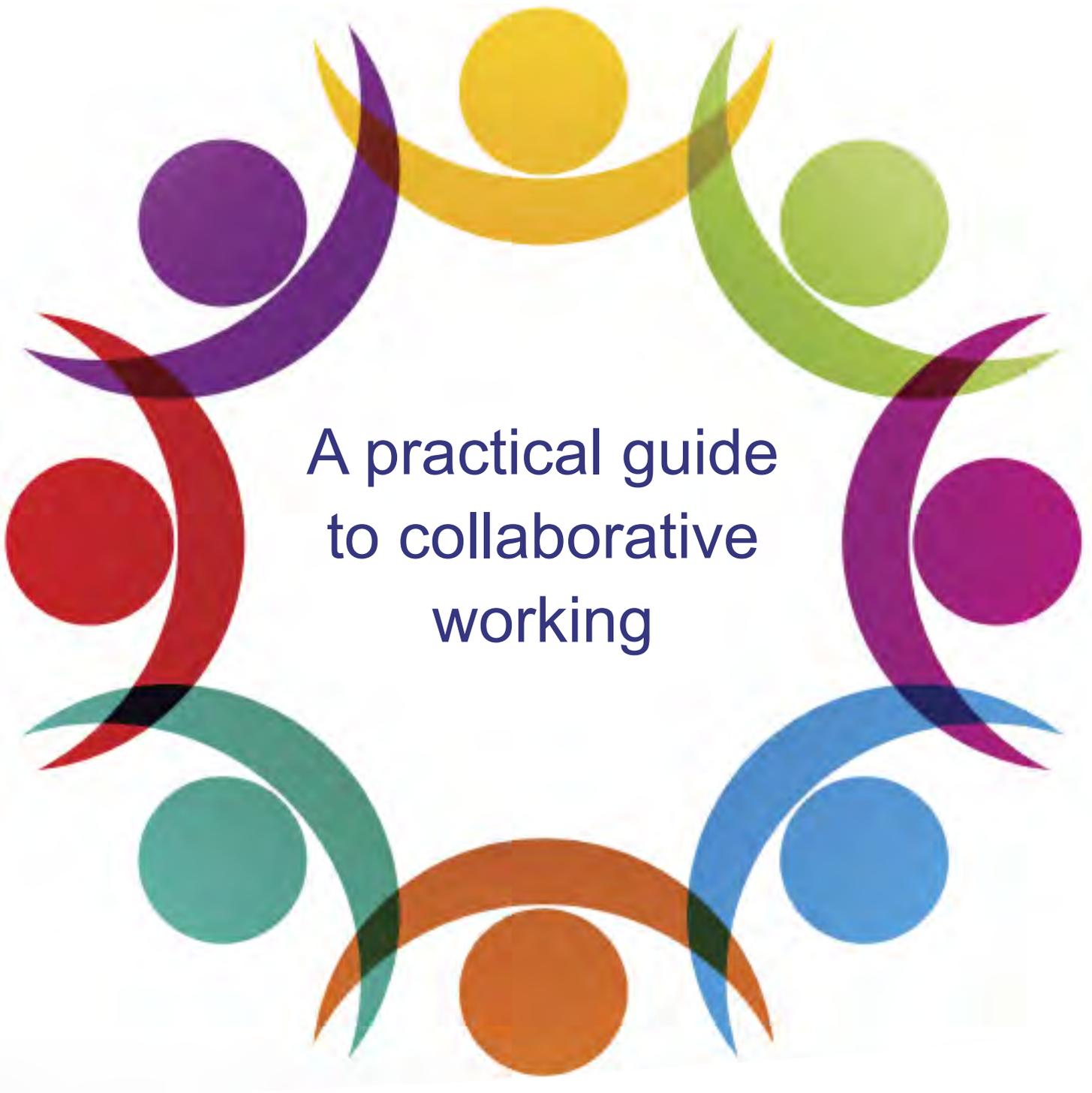




CollaborationNI

working together, stronger together



A practical guide to collaborative working



Contents

	<i>Page No</i>
Introduction	1
What is collaboration	2
Collaboration – key social and economic drivers	3
Collaborative working – a typology	5
Key learning	12
Considering a merger	14
The merger process	16
Evidence of collaborative working in the voluntary and community sector	19
Support for organisations considering merger	21
Case Studies	23
- Abbeyfield UK (NI) Ltd	23
- Alpha Housing	27
- The Bytes Project	31
- Cara-Friend	34
- An Cultúrlann	37
- PIPS Newry and Mourne	39
- Will to Give	41
- Walled City Community Partnership	44
- AutismNI and Mencap	48

Introduction

In today's ever changing financial landscape, the topic of collaboration has become more and more prominent within research literature. It would be almost impossible to encapsulate all the findings in one document. This practical guide has been designed to assist organisations involved in or considering collaboration, by providing a synopsis of the key issues that can influence collaborative working.

The guide examines some of the main drivers behind collaborative working, defines what constitutes collaborative working and highlights the various forms of collaboration. It is supported by research and statistics on collaborative working within the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland. It also assesses the benefits and risks associated with collaboration.

The document looks at the importance of organisations becoming innovative and creative through collaborative working and it examines the role of collaboration and mergers in the current economic environment. In addition, it directs organisations to sources of support. It is hoped that this guide will provide both practical and timely advice to a broad range of organisations. To ensure that local best practice is made available to organisations considering collaboration, the document also contains nine collaboration and merger case studies from Northern Ireland.

- Abbeyfield UK (NI) Ltd
- Alpha Housing
- The Bytes Project
- Cara-Friend
- Cultúrlann
- PIPS Newry and Mourne
- Will to Give
- Walled City Community Partnership
- Autism NI and Mencap

As well as illustrating the main drivers / rationale behind these mergers and collaborations, the case studies highlight the progression of each organisation through the merger / collaboration process. Finally, the challenges and opportunities arising from the process are presented, along with advice from some of the key players involved. The review of the literature and case studies has highlighted the fact that there is no single generic model available which, if followed, leads to success. Local conditions, both geographic and economic, as well as the key players involved, tend to predominate and as a consequence each model reflects these specific conditions.

What is collaboration?

Definitions

There is no single agreed definition of ‘collaboration’. This reflects the fact that collaboration ranges from the very informal, right through to collaborations and mergers that are much more codified, structured and formalised. Organisations can work together in a range of ways. They may engage with other organisations as informal contract partners, work collaboratively to deliver a service within the framework of a formal service level agreement, or move towards a full merger.

The broad nature of collaboration is well encapsulated by the following definitions:

“Collaborative working occurs when two or more organisations work jointly to enable a greater overall output than if they pursued the activity alone.”

BASSAC¹

“Collaborative working describes joint working by two or more organisations in order to better fulfil their purposes, while remaining as separate organisations.”

Charity Commission²

Collaboration can be seen as any form of working relationship between two or more organisations, no matter how formal or codified the arrangement may be³. Through collaborative and cooperative arrangements, and networks, organisations may work with one or two others or may belong to a wider consortium. This can last for an unspecified length of time, for a specified period, or may develop into a permanent relationship. Organisations can work collaboratively in order to meet a wide range of aims and for a variety of purposes, but what all these options have in common is that they involve an exchange that is mutually advantageous and that ultimately benefits service users.

At the most formal end of the collaboration spectrum sits ‘merger’. NCVO defines a merger as the process whereby two or more organisations formally combine to form one organisation, though as they make clear, the “term merger has no precise legal definition and is used to cover a number of different processes. Some mergers may also be referred to as takeovers”.⁴

Merger is used to describe the transfer or combination of assets (and liabilities) of two or more separately registered charities, resulting in some or all of the parties restructuring or dissolving. In such cases, either a new charity is formed or one charity assumes control of another. The Charity Commission, England notes that in the case of mergers, “charities need to have compatible objects, whereas for collaboration a charity needs to be satisfied that collaborating furthers its objects, that the resources devoted are reasonable in relation to the extent to which the objects are furthered, and that any benefit to others is incidental.”⁵

¹ Bassac, ‘Sharing without merging’, 2005

² Charity Commission, ‘Choosing to Collaborate: Helping You Succeed’, 2009, http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/Charity_requirements_guidance/Your_charitys_activities/Working_with_others/colltoolkit.aspx

³ NCVO, ‘Should you collaborate?’, 2010

http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/sites/default/files/ShouldYouCollab_Jan10.pdf

⁴ NCVO, ‘Merger – A model of collaborative working’, 2006

⁵ <http://www.sel.org.uk/uploads/Charities-Commission-Oct09.pdf>

Collaboration – key social and economic drivers

The impact of the economic downturn

To date, many studies focused on collaboration in the voluntary and community sector suggest that collaborative relationships are formed as a managerial response to turbulent conditions in an organisation's environment. There can be little doubt that in the last few years, particularly as the impact of the credit crunch became more apparent in late 2007, resources facilitating the development of collaborative working have increased. In March 2009, ThirdSector magazine reported that growing numbers of charities were seeking advice on mergers and collaborations as a result of the recession, with enquiries from voluntary groups on issues surrounding collaborative working having increased by 50% in the previous three months⁶. Mike Caudrey, a partner at management consultancy firm BlueSpark Consulting, noted that:

In 2011, a NICVA paper reported on the impact of the recession on the community and voluntary sector. Eleven case studies were presented to illustrate how the sector had proactively responded to the prevailing financial pressures in early 2010⁸. Ten of the chosen organisations indicated that they were actively pursuing collaborative / joint working approaches with other organisations, and they now considered the collaborative approach to be a key aspect of organisational development. Two organisations were actively involved in considering mergers and one of these organisations was at an advanced stage in the merger process. More recently in its Viewfinder Survey, NICVA reported that 84% of member respondents work in collaboration with other organisations⁹.

“The recession is definitely a factor in this rapidly increasing interest in mergers. Heads of charities who might not previously have considered working in partnership with other voluntary groups now face a situation in which mergers have become a viable option for getting through the difficult times”⁷.

The wide range of available research and web-based resources on collaboration and mergers is also an indication of the level of interest in this area. For example, NAVCA has developed an online resource¹⁰ designed to provide practical support for organisations considering a merger; the NICVA Recession ToolKit¹¹ provides guidance on risk management including advice on mergers and collaboration; and the NAVCA Recession Support website¹² provides advice and guidance on a range of recession related issues including mergers and collaboration.

While interest in collaborative working has increased as a result of the recession and continued economic downturn, it is important to note that collaborative working does not only occur when there is economic turbulence (see PIPS Newry and Mourne case

6 <http://thirdsector.co.uk/news/Article/888441/merger-collaboration-recession-kicks-in/>

7 <http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/news/Article/888441/merger-collaboration-recession-kicks-in/>

8 NICVA, *Impact and Reaction of the Voluntary and Community Sector to the Recession in Northern Ireland (NI)*, 2010

<http://www.nicva.org/news/impact-recession-case-studies-voluntary-and-community-sector>

9 NICVA, 'Viewfinder 10' Survey, October 2011. The survey was circulated to 930 NICVA member organisations and there was a 38% response rate.

<http://www.nicva.org/sites/default/files/Viewfinder%2010%20report%20-%20Final2.pdf>

10 <http://www.navca.org.uk/localvs/llo/mergerresources/>

11 <http://www.nicva.org/services/nicvas-recession-toolkit>

12 <http://www.navca.org.uk/localvs/recession/>

study). Collaborative working has historically been a fundamental part of the working practices of the voluntary and community sector continually, with collaboration taking many forms. Within Northern Ireland, CollaborationNI has published on its website examples illustrating how local organisations have worked together (www.collaborationni.org). Many of these collaborative ventures were not formed as the result of the current economic crisis, but rather led by the recognition of what can be achieved by working together (see Walled City Community Partnership¹³).

NCVO¹⁴, for example, has suggested that a number of factors led to the growing interest in collaboration, including:

- An increased government emphasis on the voluntary sector's role in public service delivery
- A drive within the sector to improve its effectiveness
- A need for more efficient use of resources
- The reported public perception that there are too many charities.

The changing social and policy context

It is important to be mindful of the changing social and policy context when considering the growing interest in the area of collaborative working. Over the last 20 years, the UK voluntary and community sector has assumed a growing service delivery role in a number of sectors and this has raised issues around intensifying demands on the sector and the need to build collaborative alliances (both formal and informal). The policy emphasis has been on cross-sector, 'joined-up' working to address social issues, all of which was characteristic of New Labour's 'Third Way' agenda and policy discourse.

In March 2005 the Northern Ireland Assembly published *Positive Steps*, a co-ordinated response to the report of the Taskforce on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector in Northern Ireland, which promised to facilitate the involvement of the voluntary and community sector in service delivery (see Cara-Friend, Walled City Community Partnership case studies) and to promote a seven to ten year approach to programmes, concentrating on outcomes. *Positive Steps* outlined the need for the voluntary and community sector to modernise and adjust to ensure efficiency and effectiveness.

"Where appropriate, voluntary and community organisations must explore options for greater collaboration. This does not necessarily mean full mergers, but could involve sharing of resources including premises and back office services or shared governance structures."¹⁵

¹³ CollaborationNI <http://www.collaborationni.org/case-studies>

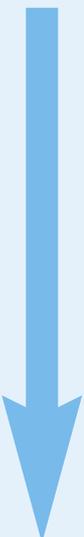
¹⁴ NCVO, 'Collaborative Working: Partnership between voluntary organisations', 2007 http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/uploadedFiles/NCVO/What_we_do/Collaborative_Working_Unit/Information_and_advice/What_is_collaborative_working_PDF.pdf

¹⁵ *Positive Steps*, 2005 http://www.edact.org/pub_docs/Positive_Steps.pdf

In the UK in 2009, the Cabinet Office introduced a Modernisation Fund (£16.5 million) to encourage collaboration and mergers and to ensure that viable voluntary and community organisations would be more resilient and efficient in the recession.

Collaborative working – a typology

Organisations in the voluntary and community sector work together in a variety of ways, from informal arrangements through to full mergers. They can work collaboratively over a fixed period of time or be permanent. NICVA has built upon previous work in this area to produce a continuum which helps to characterise and identify the various working forms; the key aspects and benefits. In doing so it has based the continuum on a spectrum produced by WEA in its *'Creating Collaborative Advantage: Research Report'* (2004) and BASSAC's report *'Sharing without merging: A review of collaborative working and sharing back office support in the voluntary and community sector'* (January 2005). The 'types' and 'aspects and benefits' set out below do not constitute an exhaustive list.

Spectrum		Types	Key aspects and benefits
	Service Level Agreement	Collaboration between two or more organisations to access a public sector service level agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When two or more voluntary organisations collaborate to access a service level agreement it can assist organisations to access services which an organisation would find difficult to do on its own. • Share risk of delivering services. • Can reduce duplication of services. • Can provide organisations with some financial sustainability of their services. • Security of funding can provide leverage when applying for other funding. • It enables relationships to be developed and this can assist with the future development of the service.
	Resource sharing	Idea sharing Joint research and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It can be the pooling of intangibles such as knowledge and experience. • Joint research and development projects bring a breadth of skills, more resources and differing perspectives to a project. • Through the project, skills will be transferred and developed.

Spectrum		Types	Key aspects and benefits
	Resource sharing	Joint training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many voluntary and community sector organisations have similar training requirements and the use of joint training can provide cost efficiencies.
		Sharing a building or office space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost efficiencies can be achieved. • It can create an environment which supports peer learning.
		Functional operational sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources that can be shared can range from a receptionist, telecoms and a photocopier through to merging some support functions such as human resources, finance, I and workers such as community development workers and fundraising workers. • Cost efficiencies can be achieved. • Expertise can be shared. • There can be a positive public relations message, as donors and supporters can see that an organisation uses its resources efficiently.
		Buying groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When involved in a buying group there is a demand for an increase volume of products, which enables the supplier to reduce the overall price. • Involvement in a buying group can allow organisations to learn more about the procurement process.

Spectrum		Types	Key aspects and benefits
 Informal	Interest Groups	Fundraising groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If handled carefully, the sharing of skills and resources can open up more opportunities. • Co-ordinated fundraising could assist donors to understand the role of respective organisations. • It is important to agree the structure of the fundraising group so that commitment and trust can be achieved. • It is important that there is agreement on how revenue generated will be distributed.
	Working Together	Various forms of working arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working together can take many different forms, from individuals in different organisations coming together to explore potential for future work, a wider strategic plan for an area, to delivering a one off programme, such as a festival. • There is often no formalised structure, no specific agreed outcomes. It is a mutually beneficial arrangement (often ad hoc) that two or more organisations enter into.

IVAR¹⁶ has also produced a ‘collaboration spectrum’ outlining the steps between informal and formal.

Table 2 Levels of Collaboration

Level of Collaboration	Definition
Informal alliance	An arrangement that is essentially informal based on good relationships and understandings that may be written but are non-contractual.
Contract based alliance	A relationship that is underpinned by a contract between the parties that sets out the objectives, respective roles and cost-sharing and charging arrangements.
Joint venture	The parties establish a legal entity, which they jointly own and control, for the purpose of undertaking specified functions.
Group structure	One example of a group structure is when parties agree to become controlled by a holding entity, which owns or controls the parties (subsidiaries preserve their original identity).
Merger	The parties merge on whatever basis is agreed. This either creates a new entity (where there is relative equality between the joining parties) or enlarges an existing entity. The latter is more properly referred to as a takeover.

IVAR’s research indicated that in collaborative activities in the informal collaboration category, organisations do not make an ongoing commitment to the partnering arrangements, and decision-making power over key management functions remains with the individual organisations. By contrast, in formal collaborative working relationships, participating organisations establish an ongoing relationship through shared, transferred or combined services, resources or programmes (see Cultúrlann case study). To date, in the voluntary and community sector, informal collaborative activities such as information sharing and client referral have become common whereas intensive collaborations are less common.

¹⁶ IVAR, ‘Thinking about merger’, 2011 <http://www.ivar.org.uk/subscribe-our-newsletter/past-issues/march-2011-thinking-about-collaboration>

Key learning

When considering collaboration

From a review of the available literature, it is clear that a key feature of successful collaboration is ensuring that the basics are right at the earliest stages. This review has highlighted the fact that there is no single generic or 'transferable' model available which, if followed, leads to success. Rather, specific local conditions and local factors tend to predominate. However, there are a number of key factors that should be considered.

Key elements to consider include:

- Working collaboratively must help the organisations involved to achieve something that they couldn't do, that they couldn't do as efficiently or couldn't achieve as quickly if they were to do it alone (see Autism NI and Mencap case study).
- The parties have a shared purpose or vision for the work (see Cultúrlann case study).
- There is an open and transparent process that will assist in building trust.
- Strong leadership to drive the process forward (see Will to Give case study).
- A contingency plan if key individuals leave.
- Time is invested to ensure the right people are involved in the process (see Will to Give case study).
- Sound policies and procedures should be in place in each of the organisations.
- Commitment to collaboration is essential.
- Healthy relationships are critical to collaborative working.

A range of key questions was posed by NCVO¹⁷ covering the planning and implementation stages and the various approaches to collaboration:

- What are you hoping to achieve by collaborating with another organisation? (see Autism NI and Mencap case study).
- Are you sure that collaborative working is the best way to achieve this aim?
- Who proposed the idea? Do they have a vested interest?
- Do your Trustees and Chief Executive support the idea? (see The Bytes Project case study).
- Does it fit within your organisation's charitable objectives as stated in your governing document?
- Do your plans for collaborative working fit your strategic vision, values and current priorities?

Benefits

Having established that a collaborative approach suits the partner organisations, it is then important to highlight what the benefits of collaborative working are likely to be. NICVA, in 2009¹⁸, identified a range of benefits accruing from collaborative working and mergers, including:

- An improved or wider range of services for the beneficiaries
- Financial savings and a better use of resources

¹⁷ NCVO, 'Should you collaborate? Key questions', 2005 <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/advice-support/collaborative-working/information-and-tools/shouldyoucollaborate>

¹⁸ NICVA, 'Collaboration and Merger Newsletter', 2009 <http://www.nicva.org/sites/default/files/Collaboration%20and%20Merger%20Newsletter%20final.pdf>

-
- Knowledge and information sharing
 - Sharing of risks in new projects
 - Stronger, united voice and better co-ordination of activities.

In addition, NCVO¹⁹ also identified some other benefits:

- Shared skills and expertise between staff and trustees
- More efficient use of resources
- Reduced duplication of effort (see Cara-Friend, Autism NI and Mencap case studies)
- Donors able to support a range of causes
- Improved publicity opportunities
- Access to a wider pool of contacts and supporters
- New or enhanced fundraising capacity
- Public confidence about reduced duplication or competition
- Opportunities regarding income generation, eg new fundraising strategies
- Better geographical coverage²⁰.

Barriers and concerns which can impact on collaborative working²¹

Research has clearly established the benefits that can be derived from collaborative working. However with any programme involving change there are challenges. IVAR has identified a number of challenges to implementing collaborative working in practice²².

- Dealing with difference (between partner organisations)
- Protecting organisational identity and niche
- Balancing individual and collective interests
- Developing appropriate leadership
- Developing appropriate governance structures (see Cultúrlann case study)
- Securing resources and organisational capacity for the collaboration
- Developing a shared understanding of the purpose of the collaboration.

Potential challenges:²³

- Managing relationships between partners
- Partners investing disproportionate time or resources
- Lack of clarity about distribution of profits, assets or intellectual property
- Reputational threats to brand, values or supporters
- Fear of losing supporters
- Different expectations of partners
- Different levels of commitment
- Diversion away from core activities
- Unequal or unmanaged distribution of risk²⁴.

¹⁹ NCVO, 'Collaborative working to generate income: A model of collaborative working', 2008 <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/advice-support/collaborative-working-models/cw-to-generate-income>

²⁰ NCVO, 'Collaborative Working: Partnership between voluntary organisations', 2007 http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/uploadedFiles/NCVO/What_we_do/Collaborative_Working_Unit/Information_and_advice/What_is_collaborative_working_PDF.pdf

²¹ NCVO, 'Collaborative working to generate income: A model of collaborative working', 2008 <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/advice-support/collaborative-working-models/cw-to-generate-income>

²² IVAR, 'Thinking about collaboration', 2011 <http://www.ivar.org.uk/subscribe-our-newsletter/past-issues/march-2011-thinking-about-collaboration>

²³ NCVO, 'Collaborative working to generate income: A model of collaborative working', 2008 <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/advice-support/collaborative-working-models/cw-to-generate-income>

²⁴ NCVO, 'Collaborative Working: Partnership between voluntary organisations', 2007

Considering a merger

Rationale

A merger is the most formal type of collaboration. It can be viewed like a marriage, and like a marriage the decision to enter into a merger should never be taken lightly. The key driver for any decision to undertake a merger needs to be the potential improvements in outcomes for beneficiaries. There can be a number of drivers for an organisation to consider a merger. NCVO²⁵ identified a range of internal and external drivers.

Internal drivers:

- The desire to provide more or better services to beneficiaries
- The need to increase efficiency through better use of resources (see Abbeyfield UK (NI) and Walled City Community Partnership case studies)
- Preventing duplication of services (see Cara-Friend case study)
- Financial difficulties
- Raising public profile or boosting income
- Loss of key staff or trustees
- 'Survival' and 'Rescue' – an organisation in jeopardy merges with another with similar objectives so that its service continues.

External drivers:

- Pressure from funders to reduce duplication
- Government encouragement
- Competition with similar organisations
- Stakeholder opinion
- Public perception of an overcrowded voluntary sector.

IVAR has described a merger as 'one of the most challenging steps a voluntary organisation can make, aside perhaps from formation or closure. It can create tensions as well as excitement, be the cause of much debate and lead to permanent and irreversible change'²⁶. In practice, it is often a combination of factors that has a bearing on the decision to begin a merger process.

IVAR's research identified the following seven major reasons why voluntary organisations consider merger:

- The vulnerability of smallness
- Financial pressures
- Governance problems
- Influencing the external environment
- Meeting users' needs more effectively
- Broadening the organisation's offer
- Having a history of collaboration.

²⁵ NCVO, 'Merger, A model for collaborative working', 2006 <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/advice-support/collaborative-working/models/merger>

²⁶ IVAR, 'Thinking about merger', 2011 <http://www.ivar.org.uk/publications/reports-and-publications/thinking-about-merger>

In a report on mergers by Social Finance²⁷, research drew out a number of key findings:

Table 3 Mergers: Drivers and obstacles

Drivers for merger (ranked) ²⁸	Obstacles to merger (ranked)
Provision of wider, more consistent service	Contingent liabilities or other issues identified through due diligence
Increased campaigning influence	Poor internal communication
Better geographical reach	Other demands on key personal time
Increased capacity to fundraise	Poor external communication
Access to contacts	Complexity of the process
Reduced overheads	Legal issues
History of successful collaboration	Individual ego/personality
Government/Local Authority encouragement	Governance differences
Prevent duplication of service	Lack of cultural fit
Rescue merger	Lack of clarity over relationship
Public perception	Cost constraints
Access to Trustees	Funder opposition
Pressure from funders	Incompatible objects

²⁷ Social Finance, 'Charity mergers: Tackling the issues in practice', 2009 <http://www.socialfinance.org.uk/resources/social-finance/charity-mergers>

²⁸ Drivers were ranked according to case study responses in the research programme undertaken for the report.

The merger process

Key phases identified by Social Finance in the merger process include the 'exploration phase' - where an organisation focuses on understanding its current position and considers whether merger is a viable option. This is followed by the 'initial feasibility phase' – where an organisation addresses the practicalities involved in initiating the process with a partner and undertakes initial discussions. This begins the 'detailed appraisal and execution phase' – where the merger partners work together to negotiate the terms of the merger, before beginning the 'integration process'.

Finally, the 'post deal phase' is undertaken in which the newly merged organisation continues the integration process and establishes itself for the future.

• Planning the process

Best practice suggests that the merger process should be led by good communicators who can articulate a clear vision for the new merged organisation. A merger passes through various stages that can best be led by change managers, professional advisors or facilitators.

• Who leads?

NCVO suggests that it is useful to create a steering group with, at least, the chairs of merging organisations, one trustee from each organisation and each organisation's chief executive. An implementation group of staff can act on decisions taken by the steering group (see Alpha Housing case study).

• Timescale and budget

A target date for the merger should be agreed clearly, as the process itself can be time consuming. Key factors include:

- How much time will be required from staff?
- Could you employ temporary staff to maintain the pace of ongoing work?
- How much consultant help will be required?
- Which stages will require professional input?

Alongside the key stages in any collaborative endeavour there is a range of both technical and non-technical issues which needs to be kept under review. Technical aspects include assessing the role (if any) for the regulator to play, due diligence and the Transfer of Undertakings Regulations. Non-technical aspects include keeping staff informed and involving all relevant stakeholders.

Post-merger considerations

The creation of the new legal merger is not the end point of the merger process and good practice indicates that the steering group that oversees the process continues to function in the post-merger environment, addressing the range of issues which inevitably will arise. Issues include addressing the need to build a new organisational culture, new working practices and ongoing legal and financial issues for the new organisation.

The focus at this stage will be on:-

- Building beneficiary / stakeholder confidence in the new organisation
- Integrating policies, procedures and systems
- Embedding working style and culture
- Delivering service improvements / cost savings
- Addressing issues that arise in the transitional phase

Mergers - reasons for failure

On mergers in general, rather than within the voluntary and community sector, the reported failure rate for mergers is very high, with estimates starting at 50% and over. In 2007 research produced by the Hay Group²⁹ highlighted that about 97% of mergers by UK companies fail to completely fulfil their strategic objectives. According to the research, the culture shock caused by bringing together two organisations is the biggest reason for failure. The UK's record was cited as among the worst in Europe where the overall failure rate was lower at 91%. The report found that about 28% of business leaders who had been involved said that the deal had failed to create 'significant new value'.

Edinburgh Business School³⁰ suggests that when measuring the success / failure of mergers it is important to focus on the long term, as most appear to fail in terms of short-term financial value creation. Many mergers in effect appear to fail because of poor implementation.

Typical reasons for merger failure include:

- An inability to agree terms
- The target being too large relative to the acquirer
- A failure to realise all identified potential synergies
- An inability to implement change
- Shortcomings in the implementation and integration processes
- Conflicting cultures
- A weak central core in the target.

The Charity Commission's research³¹ suggests that a merger will probably fail if either the vision or outcome of the merger is not fully defined, or is not the guiding principle for proceeding.

Reasons given by survey respondents for a merger not being successful included:

- A slow decision making process
- Loss of focus
- Parties with separate aims
- Beneficiaries who did not respond well to the changes the merger brought
- Different working cultures of the charities involved
- Lack of unity among trustees in driving the merger forward.

²⁹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/7104298.stm>

³⁰ Edinburgh Business School, 2008, <https://studentservices.ebsglobal.net/student-service/open/synopsis/pdfs/h17mq-mq-a2-2-2008.pdf>

³¹ Charity Commission, 'Collaborative Working and Mergers', 2003 <http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/Library/guidance/rs4text.pdf>

Charities also reported that merger is more likely to fail due to issues relating to management of the brand, operations and service provision, rather than because of issues relating to assets, accountancy and legal matters. A review of the relevant literature indicates a range of issues relating to failed mergers including:³²

- Lack of communication
- Lack of direct involvement by Human Resources
- Lack of training
- Loss of key people and talented employees
- Loss of customers
- Corporate culture clash
- Power politics
- Inadequate planning.

Siegenthaler³³ suggests there are 10 main reasons why mergers fail.

- **Ignorance** - Preparation work needs to be undertaken for several months before day one of the 'official' merger.
- **No common vision** - In the absence of a clear statement of what the merged company will stand for, there is no point of the convergence on the horizon and the organisations will never blend.
- **Nasty surprises resulting from poor due diligence.**
- **Team resourcing** - Resource requirements are very often underestimated.
- **Poor governance** - Lack of clarity as to who decides what, and no clear issue resolution process.
- **Poor communication** - Messages too frequently lack relevance to their audience and often hover at the strategic level when what employees want to know is why the organisation is merging.
- **Poor programme management** - Insufficiently detailed implementation plans.
- **Lack of courage** - Delaying some of the tough decisions that are required to integrate two organisations.
- **Weak leadership.**
- **Lost baby with bathwater** - Companies contemplating a merger or acquisition too often omit to pinpoint what particular attributes make the other party attractive. Culture cannot be bought – it needs to be embraced.

³² 'Why Do Mergers Fail? What Can Be Done to Improve their Chances of Success?' Salame, R, 2006
<http://www.peoplemix.com/documents/articles/Why%20Do%20Mergers%20Fail.pdf>

³³ Siegenthaler, P, 2010 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/businessclub/7924100/Ten-reasons-mergers-and-acquisitions-fail.html>

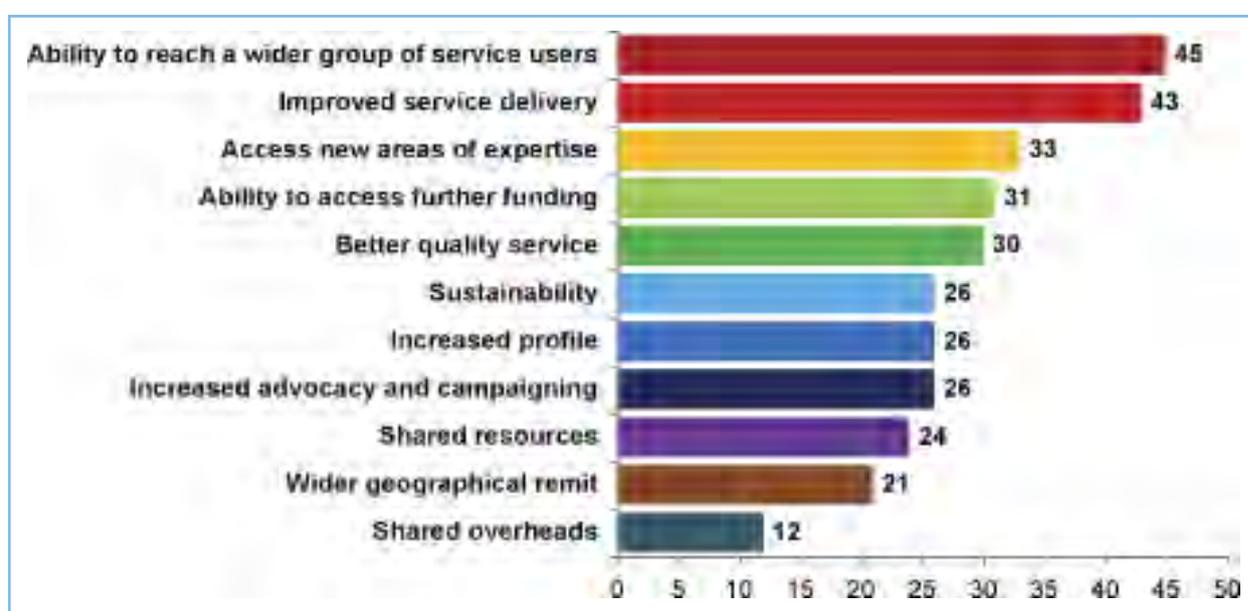
Evidence of collaborative working in the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland

In recent years there has been much interest in collaborative working in Northern Ireland, especially as the economic downturn continues to bite, with more and more charities viewing collaboration or even merger as an increasingly attractive option. This new climate has required organisations to pursue innovative and creative ways to carry out their activities, remain on a sound financial footing and, in some cases, survive³⁴. With a decrease in investment income, lack of uplifts in some funding streams and cuts to public funding, organisations have had to evaluate their future sustainability.

Collaborative working practices have been a theme of NICVA research over a number of years. In *State of the Sector VI*³⁵, 62.9% stated that they anticipated working in collaboration with other organisations in the forthcoming 12 months. Also recently, *Viewfinder 10*³⁶ reported that 84% of respondents indicated that they work in collaboration with other organisations. Of those who are already working collaboratively, 77% aim to increase their current levels of collaboration, whilst 46% of organisations that are not currently working collaboratively, aim to do so over the coming year. The survey also found that there is a generally positive attitude towards collaborative working within the sector, with only 6% of respondents of the view that a focus on collaboration will have a negative effect.

This research also examined the main reasons why organisations work in collaboration.

Figure 1: Main reasons for working in collaboration (%)



(Multiple response question)

From Figure 1 it is clear that the main factors motivating respondents to work collaboratively are to increase the ability to reach a wider group of service users (45%) and to improve service delivery (43%). Around a third of respondents indicated that key

³⁴ 'Charity mergers the USA away', 2009, <http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/news/Article/927521/charity-mergers-usa-way>

³⁵ NICVA, 2011 (unpublished)

³⁶ NICVA, 2011

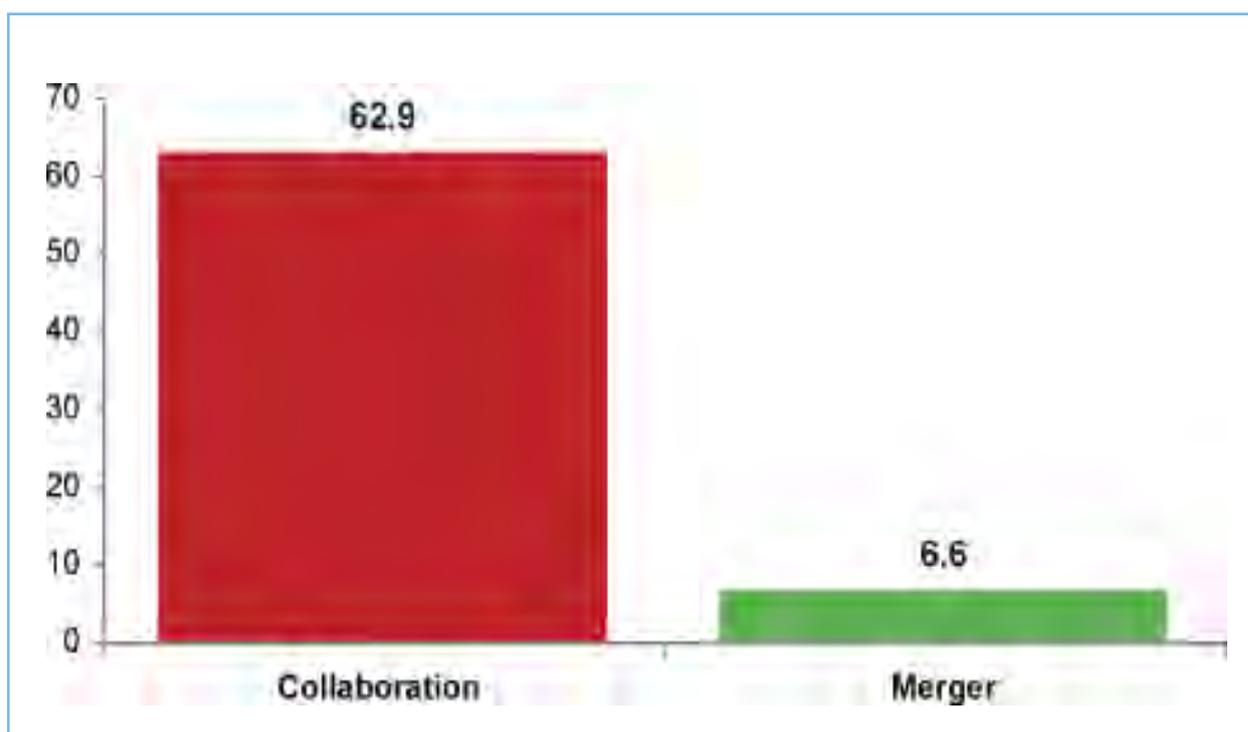
factors included access to new areas of expertise (33%), increased ability to access further funding (31%) and providing a better quality service (30%). Interestingly sustainability (26%), increased advocacy and campaigning (26%), sharing resources (24%) and sharing overheads (12%), all of which might be seen as responses to difficult economic times, are amongst the least reported reasons for collaboration.

As part of *Viewfinder 10*, organisations were asked to consider the potential impact of collaboration on the sector over the next five years. Respondents were again very positive in their assessment with 86% indicating that the impact would be either positive or very positive.

Organisations were also asked to identify the types of collaborative working they will take forward in the next 12 months. For almost half respondents (45%), the main type of collaborative work planned in the next year is networking, effectively building on the already existing formal and informal networks that have been evident in the voluntary and community sector for many years. Over a third (33%) are planning joint fundraising or joint funding applications, which suggests a more formal collaborative approach than networking. While 31% of respondents intend to share training and best practice with partner organisations in the same period. Sharing staff, resources or premises is being considered by around a fifth of responding organisations, whilst sharing back office services is under consideration by one in ten.

A merger, the most formal type of collaboration, is being considered by 12 organisations (3%). *State of the Sector VI* also asked organisations if they anticipate merging with another organisation in the next 12 months. Of responding organisations 6.6% stated that they anticipate a merger between themselves and another organisation.

Figure 2: Collaborating and merging in the next 12 months (%)



Support for organisations that are considering collaborative working

There is no 'one size fits all' approach to supporting organisations that are in the process of collaborative working or considering it. As part of *Viewfinder 10*, organisations were asked what support they would benefit from in relation to collaborative working.

Table 4: Are there any areas of collaborative working support that you or your organisation would benefit from in the next six months?

Types of support	Count	%
Career guidance for senior staff affected by change	81	23
Support through the legal process	74	21
One-to-one support for key staff and leaders	71	20
Facilitated discussions	73	20
Mentoring from individuals with experience of collaboration and mergers	70	20
Tailored training for senior staff and board members on collaborative working	71	20
One-day workshop on the practicalities of collaborative working	63	18
Networking with other organisations	59	17
Toolkits and advice	62	17

(Multiple response question)

Career guidance for senior staff affected by change (23%) and support through the legal process (21%) were the most popular types of support that organisations thought would be most beneficial. Overall there was a fairly consistent view from around a fifth of respondents that each of the types of support outlined would be beneficial.

Lessons learned

- Clarify why you should collaborate
- Identify clearly what is to be achieved by collaboration
- Assess the potential risks and barriers
- Choose the appropriate model and level of collaboration from across the broad spectrum which ranges from informal alliances up to a merger
- Plan the process in a transparent manner
- Ensure sufficient time is set aside (see Alpha Housing case study)
- Ensure the process is driven by strong leadership (see The Bytes Project and Walled City Community Partnership case studies)
- Seek specialist advice to facilitate the various stages of the process.

Case studies

The next section of the report will outline seven different case studies currently involved in collaborative working in Northern Ireland. The purpose of this section of the report is to trace why organisations have got involved in collaborative working, what the benefits and challenges of this way of working have been and also to distil any wider learning.

1 Abbeyfield UK (NI) Ltd: A merger story

Abbeyfield UK (NI) Ltd is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to making the lives of older people easier and more fulfilling. Abbeyfield helps people to live independently by providing a range of services, all of which are linked to the local community. Abbeyfield UK (NI) Ltd has 19 supported sheltered houses located throughout the region.

Services

Abbeyfield UK (NI) Ltd offers rented accommodation in supported sheltered houses across Northern Ireland. At the centre of every Abbeyfield house is a professional house manager who is employed to provide support to residents, including preparation of meals, ensuring that the house is comfortable, clean and safe, and encouraging residents to join activities and to be part of the local community.

Reasons for merger

Before the merger in 2003 there were 16 separate societies operating under the Abbeyfield brand providing similar services. All the organisations had the same basic ethos and guiding principles. However, not all organisations were operating at full capacity and it was decided that, by merging, these organisations could run more effectively.

Another reason for the merger was that most of the societies in Northern Ireland had a strong volunteer base and were volunteer run. These volunteers were responsible for all the management and administration including completing Supporting People administration, human resources, health and safety including environmental health and the fire safety of the premises. It was the responsibility of volunteers to directly undertake these essential tasks, and it was decided that this should be reviewed.

Process

Prior to any discussion of a merger some of the Abbeyfield societies were working together with regards to joint training for both staff and volunteers. The Chief Executive of Abbeyfield UK (NI) Ltd believes that the communication established through the joint training assisted in the speed of the merger.

“I organised most of the training, and this helped with the merger since staff already knew who I was”,

Geraldine Gilpin, Chief Executive, Abbeyfield UK (NI) Ltd.

The Chief Executive of Abbeyfield, based in Greenisland (Geraldine Gilpin), started the merger process by having a discussion with representatives from the other Abbeyfield



Geraldine Gilpin, Chief Executive, Abbeyfield UK (NI) Ltd.

societies across Northern Ireland. Geraldine drew together a detailed proposal of what a merger would look like. It outlined that there would not be a central office in Belfast and that administrative centres would be established within service areas. Once the proposal was discussed she then sent out an expression of interest form. All societies returned their expression of interest form, with 14 in favour of the merger. Once it was agreed to merge, the Chief Executive contacted the Department for Social Development and explained the changes that were about to take place. The Chief Executive then drew up a transfer agreement which all merging societies completed. Each merging society made its accounts available and signed over their assets.

“We did a transfer agreement and it was very simple, about two pages. It meant that the people we were dealing with weren’t faced with this huge legal document. It was a simple system”, Geraldine Gilpin, Chief Executive, Abbeyfield UK (NI) Ltd.

Once completed the Abbeyfield society, leading on the merger, took over control of the merging societies and renamed its organisation Abbeyfield UK (NI) Ltd.

The next stage in the process was the establishment of new posts. Before the merger, some societies had an administrator. These administrators became area managers once the merger took place and some new posts were created. The Chief Executive also established a five year plan which examined the different rates of funding each society received and the different charges made to residents for rent and support. The Chief Executive contacted the main funders and gradually over the five year period charges were standardised, the number of variations reduced, and the same rate of funding negotiated across all supported accommodation schemes.

The Chief Executive also worked with the Centre for Housing and Support (CHS) and found its framework very useful in ensuring that all the policies were in place. Once the merger took place new contracts of employment were established for six months and then staff were TUPE’d over to the new organisation³⁷.

Challenges

The Chief Executive of Abbeyfield (UK) NI Ltd highlighted a number of issues which she found challenging as a result of the merger. One was that on occasion there were difficult conversations with some of the volunteers who ran the old societies.

“There is always an element of negativity; we had some very difficult conversations with volunteers,” Geraldine Gilpin, Chief Executive, Abbeyfield UK (NI) Ltd.

In addition the Chief Executive felt that standardising the service, whilst at the same time making sure that the residents didn’t notice a difference in the service, was a further challenge.

“We ensured that they were fully informed and it didn’t impact on them at all,” Geraldine Gilpin, Chief Executive, Abbeyfield UK (NI) Ltd.

³⁷ The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE) protects employees' terms and conditions of employment when a business is transferred from one owner to another. Employees of the previous owner when the business changes hands automatically become employees of the new employer on the same terms and conditions. <http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1655>

Collecting information was also challenging. The Chief Executive found it difficult to access information on staff prior to the merger and, when submitted, the information was sometimes inaccurate.

“People would just come back to me and say, ‘we have only two members of staff’ when actually they had four members of staff, two members of staff were cleaners and they hadn’t classed them as staff,”

Geraldine Gilpin, Chief Executive, Abbeyfield UK (NI) Ltd.

Another challenge was that some of the volunteers who managed their own Abbeyfield society had a feeling of ‘giving up’ some of their own homes and they felt that they had no control over the societies that they had managed.

Positives

The time between initial discussion and merger was seven months. The Chief Executive believes that this short turnaround time meant that the merger process was conducted in a very effective and efficient manner.

“The initial meetings were in February and we were merged by October. It was a very quick merger,” Geraldine Gilpin, Chief Executive, Abbeyfield UK (NI) Ltd.

As many of the merging societies had no senior members of staff and were mostly volunteer run there was no issue with regard to reallocating or appointing of staff.

“As there was no one jockeying for position, that made life a lot easier for us,”

Geraldine Gilpin, Chief Executive, Abbeyfield UK (NI) Ltd.

The establishing of new positions also worked well. The Chief Executive found that creating new posts gave a fresh start for staff and more buy in.

“The administrators became area managers. I would suggest to people that they create new posts, it gives a fresh start, so that people aren’t thinking ‘oh that’s not what I do, this is what I do’, it’s also exciting too. We made sure that they were involved right from the start so they didn’t feel threatened by this,”

Geraldine Gilpin, Chief Executive, Abbeyfield UK (NI) Ltd

Advice

Geraldine Gilpin from Abbeyfield UK (NI) Ltd said that her advice with regard to a merger is to *“just get on with it – endless pontificating doesn’t achieve anything.”*



Geraldine Gilpin, Chief Executive, Abbeyfield UK (NI) Ltd

2 Alpha Housing: A merger story

Alpha Housing (Northern Ireland) Ltd was established on 1 July 2009 through the merger of Abode and Presbyterian Housing Associations. Alpha has a combined stock of 946 homes, mostly for older people. It also has a small number of general needs homes. The Association has schemes in Ballycastle, Ballymena, Ballymoney, Belfast, Bangor, Carrickfergus, Comber, Crumlin, Dunmurry, Killyleagh, Maghera, Moira, Millisle, Newtownabbey, Portadown, Portstewart, Richhill and Newry.

Reasons for merger

Abode Housing Association was a relatively small housing association and had been looking for a partner organisation to consider collaborative working. The Chief Executive of Abode, May Green, identified Presbyterian Housing Associations (PHA) as a potential organisation to work with and informally approached PHA to assess its willingness to scope the possibility of formal collaborative working; potentially a merger. An informal meeting took place between May Green and the then Chief Executive of PHA, John Tinman. Once it was established that PHA was interested in working with Abode, the management committees of both organisations discussed what options should be considered. These individuals recognised that the two organisations had a similar ethos and worked with the same service users, and from this decided that a merger was a viable option.

“Due to the similarities of the organisations the decision to merge almost came together as a natural process,” Billy Graham, Chief Executive, Alpha Housing Association.

“It started off very informally and gradually got more and more formalised,” Billy Graham, Chief Executive, Alpha Housing Association.



Billy Graham, Chief Executive, Alpha Housing with former Minister for Social Development, Margaret Ritchie MLA

Process

Once the decision was made to merge, the two Boards set up a sub group called the merger committee. Some members of this group had managed mergers in their private business lives. It was during this period that PHA recruited its new Chief Executive, Billy Graham, following the retirement of John Tinman on health grounds. The new Chief Executive of PHA took the lead in the merger partly because the Chief Executive of Abode wanted to take early retirement and, therefore, Billy Graham was to be the Chief Executive of the new housing association.

The merger process took nearly three years from initial discussion to the establishment of Alpha Housing. The Chief Executive of PHA invested much time in the merger process working closely with the merger committee. The Boards of both organisations were very active and meetings took place at regular intervals. Detailed due diligence was undertaken by management and staff in both organisations covering the condition of the stock, financial issues, staffing, policies and procedures. Towards the end of the process external auditors were brought in to ensure that nothing had been missed.

Previous to the move from Abode and PHA to Alpha Housing the two management committees established a shadow Board. In April 2009 the shadow Board was formalised and the management committee of the two organisations started running in shadow mode, clearing policies and getting ready for the launch of the new organisation. In total there are fifteen members on the new Board of Alpha. These members are drawn from both organisations. Two of the committee members from Abode were considering standing down and took the opportunity to go at the point of the merger. This left a balance of 15 individuals from both organisations which gave a full complement to the new Board. The two management Boards were happy with the process of establishing the new Board and worked very harmoniously and closely together to ensure that the transfer from each organisation to Alpha went smoothly.



“Each party went into the merger knowing all the strengths and the weaknesses of both organisations,”

Billy Graham, Chief Executive,
Alpha Housing.

“From the point of establishing the new organisation we no longer talked about the two organisations, unless we had to draw a distinction; we see it as just Alpha,” Billy Graham, Chief Executive, Alpha Housing.

During the merger process both Chief Executives of Abode and PHA met with and informed stakeholders and funders of the merger process and the intended outcome. The Chief Executive of PHA (now Alpha) was in continuous contact with the Department for Social Development (DSD) with regard to the legalities of setting up and registering a new housing association and winding down two others.

“The Department were actually very helpful; they had a couple of meetings with me to go through the whole process,” Billy Graham, Chief Executive, Alpha Housing.

Initially Alpha Housing was due to come into effect on 1 April 2009. However, it wasn't set up until 1 July 2009. The consequence of this was that PHA had to seek permission from the Industrial and Provident Society to extend its financial year until the end of June.

The meetings of the two Boards and the merger committee continued until the organisations were at the stage where they could apply for registration of Alpha Housing through DSD and the Industrial and Provident Society. Once registered and established the new organisation put a lot of effort into rebranding itself. With regard to the name, a lot of care was taken to ensure that it didn't represent a takeover by one organisation. Both names are represented.

“As well as representing both organisations, Alpha also means “first”, and we want to be recognised as the first in the area of housing for older people. The name has worked out well,”

Billy Graham, Chief Executive,
Alpha Housing.

Challenges

As a consequence of having a long lead in time (over three years) and very active Board involvement, the merger between Abode and Presbyterian Housing Associations went relatively smoothly.

“I can't put my finger on anything that didn't go well, maybe that's because we took so much time over it. It was all so very carefully done and I give all the credit to the Board for that, they didn't leave any stone unturned,”

Billy Graham, Chief Executive, Alpha Housing.

One issue that will take time to resolve is that of the different terms and conditions of the staff from the two former Associations.

“These issues were identified during the due diligence process so there were no surprises. They will not be resolved overnight. For example staff TUPE'd across are on different scales, work different hours, some staff have a private health scheme and some have different pension arrangements,”

Billy Graham, Chief Executive, Alpha Housing.

Since the merger, efforts have been made to bring all the stock up to the same standard and to have a forward programme where all schemes receive attention at standardised intervals.

What went well?

The Boards of Abode and PHA worked very well together. All process and jobs in relation to the merger were distributed equally among the two Boards.

“From day one the Board has operated as a single entity. They made every effort to ensure that we had a true merger and not a take-over. The chairman of PHA was unanimously voted as Chair of the new Board with no dispute. We didn’t rush into anything, which gave us time to get records, policies and procedures together and start fresh from the 1 July 2009,”

Billy Graham, Chief Executive, Alpha Housing.

Advice

Billy Graham of Alpha said that for a merger to work it is important that the organisations share a similar ethos. A recent review of the process by the Board confirmed that the merger had been right for both organisations. The decision to merge had been taken for the right reasons and at the right time. Careful preparation meant that no surprises had emerged during or after the process. The Board agreed that strong leadership by a Board with previous merger experience had been crucial to the success of the project.

“Chose your partner carefully, share a similar ethos, and have a strong Board leading and supporting, bringing in all their experience and expertise. I found that invaluable,” Billy Graham, Chief Executive, Alpha Housing.



Billy Graham (far left) with former Minister for Social Development, Margaret Ritchie MLA (centre)

3 The Bytes Project: working in collaboration

Set up in June 1993, the Bytes project is a unique initiative that offers free, unlimited access to information technology, in a non-pressurised environment, to young people. Aged 16 to 25, these young people will have left full time education, are not participating in further education, training or employment and are felt to be at risk in the community. The name of the project was changed to The Bytes Project in 1996 in recognition of expansion outside of Belfast; the Derry Bytes centre opened in 1997.

Today there are six centres in Greater Belfast, Short Strand Community Centre, Tullycarnet Resource Centre, Sally Gardens Community Centre in Poleglass, Townsend Outreach Centre in Shankill, Rathcoole Youth Club, Strand Foyer in Derry and Belfast Foyer, with additional outreach centres in Coleraine, Lisburn, Lurgan and Bangor. The project now attracts funding from a variety of sources, including the Department of Education (DE) and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), and exists as an independent company limited by guarantee, with charitable status.

“The young people we work with would be involved in conflict issues in interface areas or their own communities and they have very challenging behaviour. We needed training to deal with conflict resolution and Tides Training has expertise in this area,”

Laura Couser, Chief Executive, Bytes Project.

The collaboration project

The Bytes Project and Tides Training have worked together for over four years. The working relationship between the two organisations began when the Chief Executive of the Bytes Project contacted the Chief Executive of Tides Training as a result of identifying a staff training need.

A member of staff at the Bytes Project had attended a training programme facilitated by Tides Training and brought back information on available training. The Chief Executive of the

Bytes Project reviewed the training list and felt that some of it was relevant to their training needs but that the training needed to be more practical in nature. She met with the Chief Executive of Tides Training to discuss the possibility of altering the mediation training programme they offer so that it would give staff the skills to mediate conversations with young people.

Process

The two Chief Executives met several times to discuss the vision of the programme and to design the training package. Initially the Chief Executive of the Bytes Project envisaged a short training programme but what was developed was a series of training building blocks for both staff and some service user representatives in developing mediation skills suitable for people with different abilities and a train the trainers programme. Both Chief Executives ensured that their shared ethos was core when developing this training. Each organisation had expertise in different areas and worked together to include their expertise in the design of the training. To ensure that the training was appropriate Bytes staff undertook the training first and altered it to suit the needs of their services users. Once staff undertook the training they worked in pairs to develop new material which they rolled out to service users.

“We never offer young people training that staff had not undertaken. Staff undertook it first and then worked in pairs to develop new material,”

Laura Couser, Chief Executive, Bytes Project.

Through the process of designing and evaluating the training both organisations recognised that they had started a partnership and created a new relationship.

“Through this partnership we had developed new material. There was commonality in that we both want to do our utmost to help these young people,”

Laura Couser, Chief Executive, Bytes Project.

“Evaluation and recognition was a core part of our relationship,”

Laura Couser, Chief Executive, Bytes Project.

One of the advantages of the partnership for Tides Training was that until that point it had never worked with young people so it was a learning experience for the staff. Youth had previously not been a priority for the organisation but through the partnership it became one of its strategic priorities. Another advantage for both organisations was that on occasion they have shared staff.

“If we have a particular community relations need in a community, we would support the other organisation with each other’s staff team,”

Laura Couser, Chief Executive, Bytes Project.

In addition they have put in joint funding applications and have had some success with regard to mediation and conflict projects.

What went well?

The success of this partnership can be seen by its duration and the development of it outside the creation of a training programme. Both Chief Executives monitored and evaluated the partnership and have found new ways of working together to the benefit of both organisations.

“This partnership is continuing today, that shows how successful it is,”

Laura Couser, Chief Executive, Bytes Project.

“Both organisations feel strongly about providing appropriate intervention and providing engaging opportunities to prevent anti-social behaviour which often acts as a gateway to a criminal record and subsequent barrier to employment,”

Mary Montague, Chief Executive,
Tides Training.

The Chief Executive of the Bytes Project believes that there is honesty to the relationship which has been vital in establishing and maintaining it.

“There is an honesty between us. We are very clear about what works and what doesn’t. There is an understanding that works well for us,”

Laura Couser, Chief Executive, Bytes Project.

Advice

Laura Couser believes that both organisations are clear about what can and should be achieved by the partnership and that the best interests of service users are vital.



(from left to right) Colin Jackson presents training award to Mary Montague, Chief Executive of Tides Training and Laura Couser, Chief Executive, Bytes Project

4 Cara-Friend: Sharing services

Cara-Friend is an organisation dedicated to supporting, empowering, educating, and offering friendship to everyone in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community, and to advocating on their behalf as well as working with all relevant public authorities on policy decisions. It offers telephone helplines, counselling, advice, safe social space, personal development and peer support through the Gay Helpline, Lesbian Line, and Gay and Lesbian Youth Northern Ireland.

The organisation provides five services:

Gay and Lesbian Youth Northern Ireland: GLYNI is a regional youth service for 14 to 25 year olds providing safe, alcohol and drug free, social space in venues across Northern Ireland. It also provides training and support in areas such as coming out, mental, sexual and physical health; legal information and advocacy on the rights of LGBT people; information on the LGBT social scene and community support groups, self-development and peer support training etc.

Gay Helpline: This is a listening ear and information service, which allows individuals to share their concerns and seek information on a wide range of issues from coming out; mental, sexual and physical health; legal information on the rights of LGBT people; and information on the LGBT social scene and community support groups.

Lesbian Line: This is a listening ear and information service for lesbian and bisexual women, which allows individuals to share their concerns and seek information on a wide range of issues from coming out; mental, sexual and physical health; legal information on the rights of LGBT people; and information on the LGBT social scene and community support groups.

Family Ties: The aim of this project is to provide practical advice, guidance and support to parents who are perhaps coming to terms with the fact that their child is LGBT and need support for their own issues around this, or for parents who perhaps suspect themselves that their child is LGBT and do not know what to do.

Education in Schools Project: The project provides LGBT awareness training to school pupils, teachers, governors and parents and provides resource materials, curriculum guides and classroom lessons, as well as lobbying the relevant public authorities on curriculum matters and Section 75 equality duties and works closely with the Minister for Education.

Collaboration project 1: shared premises

In 2009 the Director of Cara-Friend realised that the building in which the organisation was located did not fully meet the needs of disabled service users. As a result the Director spoke to colleagues in the LGBT sector and, along with the Directors of The Rainbow Project and Lesbian Advocacy Services Initiative (LASI), identified the Memorial Building in Waring Street, Belfast, as a suitable new location.

“Three organisations moved to this building in 2009, a huge success,”

Steve Williamson, Director, Cara-Friend.

One of the positive outcomes of the organisations sharing premises was that they reviewed their administration and services and stopped duplication. It became apparent that the previous arrangement of operating from different buildings had led to a situation where each organisation was not fully aware of the services and support the others provided.

“We stopped duplicating; we examined what areas we worked in and decided if we could co-operate in some, and be open that we were competing in some. If we couldn’t co-operate we would try to see who was best placed to provide a service,” Steve Williamson, Director, Cara-Friend.

This has developed further. The Directors of Cara-Friend, The Rainbow Project (TRP) and LASI now meet on a monthly basis to discuss services and opportunities. In the past month the management boards of Cara-Friend and The Rainbow Project have also met as both organisations are currently planning their next three year strategies and are interested in how they can link into their strategy and business plans.

Collaboration project 2: Family Ties project

Family Ties is a joint project undertaken by Cara-Friend and The Rainbow Project. This project was established because young people were reporting to Cara-Friend GLYNI that they didn’t feel supported by their parents.

“Young people were saying to us that they felt supported here but when they went home they didn’t feel supported by their parents,”

Steve Williamson, Director, Cara-Friend.

The two main reasons that young people felt this were either their parents could not accept their sexual orientation or their parents accepted their sexual orientation but worried about the consequences of this for their child. Both organisations felt that there was a gap in services with regard to supporting parents on how to support their child. As a result the Family Ties parents support service was launched in April 2008 when Cara-Friend and The Rainbow Project launched a guide for parents who have lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender children. The guide was officially launched at an event opened by the Deputy Lord Mayor of Belfast, and with keynote speakers including the Human Rights Chief Commissioner and senior representatives from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). This booklet has been financed and published in co-operation with the Eastern Health and Social Services Board and the Southern Health and Social Services Board. A peer support service for parents now meets monthly.

Collaboration project 3: Education in Schools project

Through working with young people, Cara-Friend discovered that many of them are being bullied in school as a result of their sexual orientation.

“Some are getting bullied both mentally and physically on a daily basis,”

Steve Williamson, Director, Cara-Friend.

Cara-Friend had conducted research into bullying in schools of young LGBT people and realised that there was a gap in services in this area, and that teachers needed training and resources.

The Director of Cara-Friend realised the potential of working with TRP to establish a service to address this issue. Both had their areas of expertise, Cara-Friend has experience in working with young people and The Rainbow Project (TRP) has more experience in lobbying.

“We thought how do we get these two strengths together to make a focused campaign in schools?” Steve Williamson, Director, Cara-Friend.

“Parents, pupils, teachers, tutors are all singing its praises, the LGBT sector; even the Minister for Education (John O’Dowd) is singing its praises,”
Steve Williamson, Director, Cara-Friend.

Collaboration project 4: Mental health support proposal for lesbian and bisexual women

One of Cara-Friend’s projects is to provide counselling for women through Lesbian Line, as this is not provided anywhere else in Northern Ireland. Cara-Friend has no direct funding for this service and has to allocate unrestricted funding to support it. The Director of the organisation realised the potential of working with LASI in regard to developing this support service and contacted the Director of LASI to see if they could work in partnership with this aim.

“Our organisation is about service delivery, theirs was about advocacy and policy. We perhaps used to look at each other as competition but by working together we have the strength and joint expertise to apply for proper funding for this essential service,” Steve Williamson, Director, Cara-Friend.

Cara-Friend and LASI are the only two organisations in Northern Ireland working in this area. Instead of competing for funding they have jointly put in a bid to a major government agency to fund a part-time counsellor and part-time mental health development officer for lesbian and bisexual women. The organisations are waiting on a response from the agency but are optimistic that such a partnership service will be well received. Regardless of the success or failure of this bid, the two organisations have established a successful partnership whereby they will explore areas of joint working.

What went well?

The Director of Cara-Friend stated that the main thing that went well was the decision to share premises. It prevented the duplication of services, opened up the opportunity to work in partnership and to address gaps in services, leading to the successful ongoing delivery of the Family Ties project, the Education in Schools project, the new mental health support proposal for lesbian and bisexual women and to the current situation where all three organisations can work together whenever possible and use their respective strengths to support each other where it’s not possible.

5 An Cultúrlann: Sharing premises

A landmark building on the West Belfast skyline for over a century, An Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich is at the centre of Belfast's Irish language community. Set up in 1991 in the former Broadway Presbyterian Church, it is named in honour of Roibeard McAdam, a Presbyterian businessman who pioneered the revival of the Irish language in nineteenth century Belfast, and Tomás Ó Fiaich, a stalwart of the Irish language in the twentieth century.

An Cultúrlann promotes the arts and the Irish language, together with events catering for all age groups and interest groups. It holds music and drama events, talks and workshops, films and exhibitions. Its events are accessible to all levels of Irish speakers with a simultaneous translation system available for all-Irish performances.

Collaborative working

An Cultúrlann opened primarily because there was a need for a secondary Irish language school in Belfast and this was identified as a good site. During this time there was an acknowledgement of a need for different services to support the Irish language community. This led to the establishment of An Cultúrlann as an arts centre. As the popularity of the centre grew, different Irish language organisations including Pobal, Aisling Ghéar, Aisling Ghéar films and Raidió Fáilte became attracted to the centre and applied to set up premises there. The then management committee of An Cultúrlann decided these organisations fitted the criteria of the centre, ensuring that they were not religious or political in nature but that their visions were similar to that of An Cultúrlann in their support of Irish language and culture. Within a short time a café and a book shop were opened. Today the three storey culture and arts centre contains a 130-seat restaurant, a 110-seat theatre/conference space, the Gerard Dillon Gallery where regular exhibitions take place, a book/gift shop catering for Irish language and Irish interest. It is also the site of an official tourist information point, which among its many services offers help in arranging accommodation in Belfast.

The working relationships between the different Irish language organisations in An Cultúrlann developed organically. Each has a strong desire to further develop and support Irish language, art and culture and in their effort to do so started working together to promote the centre and the services it provides. The running costs of the centre are also shared. Although each organisation in An Cultúrlann had its own individual governance, there was a representative from each organisation on the management committee of An Cultúrlann. Now, however, An Cultúrlann has become a company limited by guarantee and its governance is not solely made up of individuals from organisations within the building. Since then a tenants group has been established so that representatives can discuss issues which fall outside the remit of the management committee.

“There was no strategic plan or process to work in collaboration with other organisations, our relationship with our tenants and the sharing of certain resources grew organically,” Eimear Ní Mhathúna, Director, An Cultúrlann.

“Our common goal was to promote Irish culture in Belfast however this has led to organisations that reside in An Cultúrlann to share other resources as well,”

Eimear Ní Mhathúna, Director, An Cultúrlann.

Currently the building is under renovation and most organisations have moved out until renovation work is completed. Some have grown in recent years and have taken the decision to relocate to other areas within the Gaelic Quarter however the majority of organisations are intending to move back into the centre once it has been re-launched in September 2011. Once this occurs a new centralised telephone service will be installed with each organisation contributing to the cost and maintenance of this.

The Director hopes that once all tenants are back that there will be even more opportunity to work in collaboration.

What went well?

Each of the organisations that are located in An Cultúrlann share a common ethos of contributing to the Irish community. The relationship between the staff at An Cultúrlann and the other organisations has always been positive and communication between all individuals has been good.

“We are trying to work closer together in marketing, we already do quite a bit at the minute but once everyone moves back in, there will be a more strategic approach to pooling resources,”

Eimear Ní Mhathúna, Director,
An Cultúrlann.

6 PIPS Newry and Mourne: Embracing a culture of collaborative working

PIPS Newry and Mourne offer the community a targeted response to suicide and self-harm and is the leading suicide prevention charity in the area. The organisation offers a range of services including bereavement support, counselling and crisis intervention. One of its main functions is the provision of suicide prevention training for the community through approved and accredited programmes and workshops (both ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) Safe Talk Prevention training and Preventing Suicide in your community, OCN accredited Level 2). The organisation also has a Drop-In and Protect Life Resource Centre to provide information, to encourage people to seek help, advice and support, to create greater awareness and to reduce the stigma associated with suicide and self-harm.

PIPS Newry and Mourne is represented on the Northern Ireland Suicide Prevention Strategy - Protect Life (A Shared Vision) Implementation Body and a number of subgroups that feed into the Northern Ireland Suicide Prevention Strategy, including the Protect Life Implementation Group for the Southern Health and Social Care Trust.

Reasons for collaborative working

The organisation believes that it is essential to work in partnership to help individuals and families that are affected by suicide. Staff believed that while the organisation offers important services, it cannot provide all the help and support needed by service users. Staff also believed that in this uncertain economic environment, partnership working is the only way forward and the voluntary and community sector must look at innovative ways to work in partnership more.

“We work in partnership with a wide range of organisations. Collaborative and partnership working is the only way forward,”

Seamus McCabe, Protect Life Community Development Worker.

Process

In 2010 the manager of PIPS Newry and Mourne took the decision to approach a number of organisations that could provide additional support to its clients. The manager contacted organisations identifying PIPS Newry and Mourne, its services and what he hoped to achieve as a result of working collaboratively with these organisations.

“We identified ourselves to the organisations that we wanted to work in collaboration with,”

Protect Life Community Development Worker, Pips Newry and Mourne.

Organisations which PIPS Newry and Mourne have established a joint working relationship with include Lifeline, Care In Crisis, Nexus, Opportunity Youth, Life Spring and Protect Life. In addition to these organisations both Relate and the Parent Advice Centre approached the development worker at PIPS Newry and Mourne and indicated their interest to work in partnership. The organisation has now established a service level agreement with Life Springs, Relate and the Parent Advice Centre. Staff from each of these organisations work on a weekly basis in PIPS Newry and Mourne premises with its service users. In exchange for this, these organisations make a contribution to

the running costs of the building. In addition Care in Crisis work with PIPS to deliver a 12 week counselling session in the Newry area.

There is no service level agreement in place with Lifeline, however PIPS Newry and Mourne values the relationship it has with Lifeline and believes that working with the organisation is to the benefit of its services users. The relationship with Nexus differs in that no formal working arrangement was established, however in exchange for working within the PIPS premise Nexus offers PIPS staff and volunteers four training workshops a year, which is also offered in the community. A Lifeline counsellor also works in the PIPS Newry and Mourne premises one day a week. The manager feels that working in partnership with these organisations provides a more holistic service for service users.

“These relationships work really well. Our clients are getting access to other support they need in an environment they feel comfortable,”

Protect Life Community Development Worker, PIPS Newry and Mourne.

The organisation hopes to continue to attract new groups to work in partnership and through these relationships to provide service users with the support they need in exchange for training for staff or contribution to running costs.

As well as working in partnership with other organisations in its head office, PIPS Newry and Mourne works closely with other organisations across the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area and provides training to these organisations and to the community in partnership with them.

The development worker at PIPS contacted six organisations to establish this partnership group, including the South Armagh Women and Family Health Initiative, Forkhill Women’s Group, Dromintee and Jonesborough community centre, Rural Health Partnership and South Armagh Child Consortium. The group meets on a bi-monthly basis to share information and discuss issues such as the cuts in funding, fundraising and partnership working. These organisations also share funding allocated by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust. As well as meeting these organisations PIPS Newry and Mourne links with them to provide its services in rural communities.

“We know who the gatekeepers are in the area, we provide the service and they provide the location and service users,”

Protect Life Community Development Worker, PIPS Newry and Mourne.

Although this relationship has been successful for all parties, the development worker for PIPS Newry and Mourne does not know if these organisations will be able to survive the current cuts in public funding. Many of them are funded by slippage money from the Trust and when that stops it will be challenging for these organisations to secure funding.

As well as working with these organisations, the staff at PIPS Newry and Mourne circulate information they receive through NICVA membership to these organisations.

“It’s vital to share information with these organisations, we need to work together to reach communities across the Newry and Mourne area.”

Protect Life Community Development Worker, Pips Newry and Mourne.

7 Will to Give: Fundraising collaboration

Will to Give is a not-for-profit organisation founded in January 2011, operating in Northern Ireland. Will to Give is a membership organisation and currently has 19 members and a further six charities interested in joining the organisation. The vision of this new charity is that one day everyone in Northern Ireland will make a gift to charity in their will. The organisation promotes legacy giving to the general public, will-making professionals and the charity sector.

Reasons for creation

In March 2008 the Institute of Fundraising NI hosted a Lunchtime Bites session in NICVA on legacy giving. At the end of the event two local fundraisers, Siofra Healey and Teresa Morris approached Neil Irwin, Fundraising Advice Manager at NICVA, saying there was a need for joined up working in this area. They proposed that charities in Northern Ireland needed to look more strategically at this fundraising method.

NICVA organised a meeting to discuss legacy promotion in Northern Ireland and a steering group was formed to meet with representatives of the legacy promotion initiatives already established for the whole of the UK and the Republic of Ireland; namely Remember a Charity and Legacy Promotion Ireland. A decision was taken that these national initiatives did not fully meet the needs of regional and local charities in Northern Ireland. The expense of membership was also prohibitive.

The collaboration project

The Northern Ireland Legacy Promotion Group, as it was first called, considered setting up a new organisation, but instead choose to function against terms of reference for its early development. As the group developed and plans became more certain the need to manage and apply for funding became more of a driving force for forming a new organisation. Initially the group explored a number of options including one charity being a lead partner on funding applications; however, this was not considered viable as some of the charities were applying to these funds themselves. It was decided that the creation of a new organisation was the best option, and Will to Give was formed. Neil Irwin, secretary of Will to Give, stated that although it took three years to get to this stage, he believes that it took this time to go through different options and processes before deciding that a new organisation was the best approach.



"If we had said initially - come and make a new organisation - I'm not sure if as many organisations would have gone for it",

Neil Irwin, Will to Give.

Process

The Legacy Promotion Group was led by Neil Irwin who was responsible for organising meetings and contacting stakeholders. Terms of reference were created and 21 organisations signed up to the group. At this stage these organisations paid £50 by way of commitment. This was not a constituted group, however, it became clear that to drive the initiative forward there needed to be more funding and groups needed to commit more money to it. The promotion group knew recognition of

the initiative was important so it decided to become an independent organisation. The new organisation became constituted, received charitable status and was formalised in January 2011. Within the constitution it was stipulated that the 19 founding members would have more of a say in any decision-making process than any new organisations for two years, so that the initial drive and investment of the founding members would not be lost.

A lot of time was invested in organising and facilitating meetings, trying to get organisations involved and reaching out to potential organisations. It took the establishment of the chairperson, Colm Ferguson to drive this forward. Neil Irwin believes that there were no illusions on the time commitment needed to get the organisation established. He believes that the three year process from initial meeting with interested individuals to the establishment of the organisation was not surprising, however, he does feel that it could have been completed sooner had all the representatives of stakeholder organisations remained constant and attended the key meetings. The regular, if unavoidable, change of representatives on the groups certainly slowed down the decision-making processes.

Will to Give is managed by a voluntary committee of individuals nominated from the member charities. Individuals from the member charities then put themselves forward or are nominated for committee positions and elections held. Edward Cooke from NICVA's Governance and Charity Advice Unit drafted the organisation's constitution and took committee members through it at each important step. Following the establishment of the organisation, the Chair created three different sub-committees, Governance and Membership; Marketing and Promotion and Funding and Finance.

NICVA continues to provide secretariat and development support to Will to Give. This role as secretariat is reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Challenges

The main challenge for this collaboration was time. It took three years from the first meeting to the formal establishment of the new organisation. This was the result of organisations getting involved at different stages. It took the appointment of a chairperson to fully drive forward this process. Neil Irwin stated:

“You can only go the speed that organisations are willing to go at. You can try and speed it up but it takes more resources from all involved. A lot of meetings took place over the three years, however, it took the establishment of a chair to drive the initiative forward and to get other charities involved.”

What went well?

The founding organisations involved in this process are well known charities in Northern Ireland and regional offices of UK charities. They were committed to the objectives of Will to Give and invested significant time in Will to Give. They knew that the creation of this organisation and its aim to promote legacy giving is not only beneficial for their own organisation but for the whole voluntary and community sector. Each individual could visualise the end product which kept motivation high. It was widely acknowledged that working together was in everyone's interest. Each charity knew that more could be

achieved by working with each other than they could achieve on their own. Although all the organisations had very different missions and visions, they had the common goal of wanting to promote legacy fundraising which became the foundation of their working relationship.

One of the main benefits of this organisation is that donors can support a range of causes. What also has worked well is that by working together Will to Give organisations have enhanced their fundraising capacity. Smaller organisations do not have the same capacity as larger organisations but will be able to advertise and promote legacy giving with respect to their organisation through Will to Give. It gives them the opportunity to be creative about income generation.

“All the charities have a stronger voice by working together on this initiative”,

Neil Irwin, Will to Give.

Another benefit was that some organisations came with no idea about legacies but by being involved in Will to Give they learned about legacy giving from other more experienced fundraisers in this field.

Advice

Neil Irwin of NICVA stated that timing can be an issue and that it is important to get all parties involved in the collaboration process as early as possible.



“Try and get more involvement and more actions agreed earlier in the process. Press organisations to sign up and get their commitment to it,”

Neil Irwin, Will to Give/NICVA.

8 Walled City Community Partnership

The Walled City Community Partnership is a partnership between 11 organisations in Derry/Londonderry with similar services and ethos. The organisations involved are:

- Community Development Learning initiative (CDLi)
- Derry Healthy Cities
- Extern
- Holywell Consultancy
- Holywell Trust
- North West Community Network
- Peace and Reconciliation Group
- REACH Across
- The Junction
- Towards Understanding & Healing
- Yes! Publications

Reasons for collaborating

There are several reasons why this partnership was developed. Firstly, there was natural linkage between three organisations (The Junction, Peace and Reconciliation Group (PRG) and Holywell Trust). One of the basic principles of these organisations is the idea of collaboration and cooperation. Each organisation strives to work with other organisations to improve services on a continued basis. Another reason for the formation of the Walled City Community Partnership was to ensure survival of these three initial organisations.

“The conversations started over the continued need for survival.”

Eamonn Deane, Director, Holywell Trust.

These organisations were in receipt of core funding from the Community Relations Council (CRC) and at the time there was a recognition that organisations funded under CRC needed to work more closely together. In addition, these organisations virtually had the same address. Initial conversations took place between the organisations and focused on how core funding could become secured long-term for a single entity. As a result the Junction and Holywell Trust merged their Community Relations Council core funded activities and PRG are actively considering how they might do likewise.

The collaboration process

The partnership began in 2005 when the Holywell Trust, Junction and the Peace and Reconciliation Group had a conversation about their core funder, Community Relations Council (CRC). Following on from these conversations the Director of Holywell Trust, Eamonn Deane, contacted CRC and discussed the future of community development work in relation to the budget available for this work. As part of its services the Holywell Trust runs weekly lunchtime events and invited other organisations and businesses to attend and present at them.

Eleven organisations became engaged in discussing how they might begin to share resources, ideas and contacts so that they could be more effective. This led to discussions on sharing premises. At that time the Department for Social Development (DSD) established a new funding stream - the Modernisation Fund - and called for applications. The partnership, now named the Walled City Community Partnership, was already working along the lines the Fund was hoping to encourage. It was decided to put an application in to DSD for the Modernisation Fund with Holywell Trust as the lead partner. The application was for resources to conduct a feasibility study in January 2006 for formal partnership working in the area of community relations. The application was rejected, but the partnership agreed to explore the concept fully.

“We saw the similarities of services and what we could learn from each other and realised that there was an opportunity for us to work together.”

Eamonn Deane, Director,
Holywell Trust

“We didn’t understand where we went wrong with the application however we were informed of a second round and given some advice to focus on the partnership of the 11 organisations.”

Eamonn Deane, Director, Holywell Trust.

Before making a second application to the Modernisation Fund in 2007, members of the partnership developed much greater understanding and insight into the work of each of the organisations. Representatives from each organisation went on a residential and examined a number of areas in which they could work together. Initially the organisations were going to use an external facilitator but decided they could facilitate the residential themselves. The residential was very informal but was structured and an agenda was agreed in advance. During it, each partner organisation agreed to work towards the following:

- Develop an innovative collaborative culture. New models of working together.
- Commit to partnership working. Explore amalgamations/other possible arrangements.
- To jointly manage our new resource.
- Share facilities including administration and finance.
- To record our process as an innovative model.
- To work towards the development of the Diverse City within the Walls through the partnership.
- To spread the Walled City Community Partnership model to other communities.

The organisations focused on ongoing partnership development and regular meetings were held after the residential. During these meetings a decision was made to re-apply to the Modernisation Fund. The feasibility study undertaken by the partner organisations informed the second application in 2007 to the Modernisation Fund alongside applications to the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) under the Community Based Economic and Social Regeneration Programme and Peace III Shared Public Spaces

Programme. In 2008-2009 IFI and DSD agreed to take the project to economic appraisal stage whilst Peace III rejected the partners' proposal.

After the completion of the economic appraisal the IFI was the first funding body to commit, agreeing to award £1.8million in legacy funding for the refurbishment/rebuild of the two buildings at 10-14 Bishop Street on condition that the Modernisation Fund commit to substantially grant aiding the purchase of the buildings from the Inner City Trust. This was eventually achieved in 2010 with DSD awarding the organisation £1.4million. In 2010 Walled City Community Partnership purchased the premises on Bishop Street and appointed a design and build team. A management committee was elected for the new organisation. On 11 March 2010 Margaret Ritchie MLA, the then Minister for Social Development, officially handed over the keys of the project to the Chairman of the transition management committee, Holywell Trust's Willie O'Donnell. The renovation work on the new premises will be completed in 2013.

Challenges

Members of the partnership found the economic appraisal process to be very long.

Another challenge is in relation to the new premises. There are several regulations on the listed building and this has led to challenges in relation to a layout which is suitable for the partnership and what is deemed acceptable in way of altering the building. This is an ongoing problem, the consequence of which is that the building will not be ready.

"If we take the wall down the building will be deemed as demolished even though the outer walls will not be affected,"

Eamonn Deane, Director, Holywell Trust.

"We were appraised twice and it took an elected representative to assist in moving the process along. Each appraisal reviewed the same things, not a great use of time or resources and it was very stressful for the partnership."

Eamonn Deane, Director,
Holywell Trust

In addition there is an archaeological survey being carried out on the building which is delaying the renovation work resulting in the partner organisations staying longer in premises which are full to capacity.

"We have 65 full-time employees and 35 part-time so we now have 100 people involved in the partnership. We look forward to moving to the renovated building which will meet our needs and have more space,"

Eamonn Deane, Director, Holywell Trust.

What went well

The members have found that their funders have been straightforward and very supportive.

“Funders have been very clear and direct with us in relation to what they will fund, what is negotiable and their views on the partnership working,”

Eamonn Deane, Director, Holywell Trust.

Eamonn Deane also stated that one of the things that went well for the partnership is that all the members knew each other in advance which meant that time wasn't needed for individuals to get acquainted resulting in the partnership being established with relative ease.

“Gossip can be destructive and can impact greatly on relationships. It is not always justified and it can be hard to manage at a local level,”

Eamonn Deane, Director,
Holywell Trust.

“We all knew each other, we didn't have to learn about each other which saved time,”

Eamonn Deane, Director, Holywell Trust.

Advice

Some advice from Eamonn is not to listen to gossip about other organisations that you are potentially thinking of going into partnership with.

Also Eamonn says that it is important to enjoy the process.

“There are always issues but the process can be enjoyable, especially designing the building,”

Eamonn Deane, Director, Holywell Trust.

9 Collaborative working between Autism NI and Mencap Autism NI

Autism NI is a parent led partnership organisation formed to promote positive collaboration between parents, professionals and individuals with autism to address the need for appropriate services. This partnership ethos extends to the charity's promotion of a multi-disciplinary, cross agency response to issues such as assessment, diagnosis and early intervention. The charity's mission to support parents and individuals with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder is core to its work and is based on individualised assessed need. The charity is committed to promoting best practice, accessible to all irrespective of family circumstances.

Mencap

In Northern Ireland, Mencap works alongside and represents the interests of people with a learning disability and their families. The organisation delivers a wide range of practical support services, transforming the lives of children, young people, men and women with a learning disability and their families. It helps people with a learning disability to speak out about the things that are important to them and enhance the skills and capacity of its local membership network. The organisation also challenges attitudes and assumptions about learning disability and involves people from different backgrounds and communities in its work.

The collaboration project

The partnership started as a conversation between the Southern Education and Library Board and Mencap. Both soon realised the potential of the provision of summer schemes for two different age groups of children and young people with learning disabilities (with an IQ of above 70) who had been finding it difficult to engage in school or local activities.

“There was provision of summer schemes with children and young people with learning disabilities, but not with IQs over 70. The aim of this partnership was to increase provision to include children and young people which fell outside the current provision,” Arlene Cassidy, Chief Executive, Autism NI.

Arlene continued;

“When it got to the presentation stage with the Big Lottery all the other partners were keen for us to be involved at that stage to represent the Autism spectrum of children and young people.”

Mencap was involved from the very early stage of the project prior to a bid for a development grant from the Big Lottery. On its final application the bid was successful and Autism NI had input at this stage. The funding totalled £997,788 and was awarded for five years.

In total there are three partners working together on this project, Mencap, the Southern Education and Library Board and Autism NI. The role of the Education and Library Board is to negotiate partnerships with local schools that provide premises and facilities

for the summer schemes to run, and to ensure schools make referrals to run them. While Autism NI plays an important role in this partnership, they are not involved in the delivery of the project.

As well as providing expertise on autism, Autism NI provided resources for the partnership meetings.

This is only one of the many outcomes achieved through this partnership. In 2010/11 the organisations worked with three schools, however this year they have increased their provision to six schools.

“We don’t have the infrastructure to deliver these summer schemes only for working on the concept of them. We brought expertise to the table to help them develop the project,”

Paula Hanratt, Director Family Support, Autism NI.

“The first three schools that we started with have continued this year with the summer schemes. We aim to increase this to nine next year,”

Paula Hanratt, Director Family Support, Autism NI.

Process

The establishment of the summer schemes took 18 months from the initial conversations which took place at a fundraiser. Monthly meetings are held and facilitated by Autism NI. In the initial stages there was a huge amount of emails, phone calls and shared paperwork. Two members of the senior management team in Autism NI worked on the initial stages, contributing to the proposal and budgets for funding.

“There was a massive amount of work at the start. Very time consuming. At this stage it is not as frantic, it has settled into a rhythm,”

Paula Hanratt, Director Family Support, Autism NI.

As part of the development grant, Mencap recruited a project co-ordinator and administrator to oversee the delivery of the project. During the initial meetings, the design of the summer schemes, the target audience and the allocation of funding was discussed. Once the schemes were established meetings were held to review the success of the schemes and how they could be further developed. The role of each organisation was discussed and it was established that part of the role of Autism NI is to increase the awareness of the project.

What went well?

The relationship between Mencap and Autism NI worked really well.

“We have been involved in partnership working before with other organisations, but we couldn’t always adjust to the cultural differences between us, therefore a decision was taken to not to pursue a partnership approach. This didn’t happen with Mencap. Both organisations adapted to the cultural differences of each other’s organisation,”

Arlene Cassidy, Chief Executive, Autism NI.

Autism NI believes that one strong element of the partnership is that the organisations do not work together for purely financial reasons.

“We worked together to provide a service which was lacking, not to chase funding,” Paula Hanratt, Director Family Support, Autism NI.

“We were not funding driven, quite often this adds pressure to a relationship but not on this occasion,” Paula Hanratt, Director Family Support, Autism NI.

Challenges

One challenge for Autism NI was that Mencap’s focus was on individuals with learning disabilities, while Autism NI focused on individuals with autism.

Advice

The two organisations had a long lead in time which they felt was beneficial to building their relationship.

“We had a good lead in time which was great with regard to developing relationships. I would recommend this,”

Paula Hanratt, Director Family Support, Autism NI.



“Mencap’s world is learning disability, while our world is much broader, so the understanding in terms of who the project was targeting took some work. Mencap had to become more conscious of our service users and we of theirs,”

Paula Hanratt, Director Family Support, Autism NI

CollaborationNI

The CollaborationNI team has been established to support and encourage partnership working across the voluntary and community sector. The team provides free practical support and resources across the whole spectrum of collaborative working to voluntary and community sector organisations.

The programme is all about **collaboration of the willing**. Organisations can opt in and opt out of CollaborationNI whenever they choose. CollaborationNI provides a range of tailored support to voluntary and community organisation interested in the area of collaborative working.

Support available includes:

- Bespoke advice and training
- Expert Facilitation
- Coaching
- Mentoring
- Study Visits
- Executive Career Guidance Counselling
- Legal Guidance

For more information on CollaborationNI, and the support available, contact Leeann Kelly, Programme Co-ordinator at leeann.kelly@nicva.org or phone: **028 9087 7777**



CollaborationNI

working together, stronger together

To find out more about CollaborationNI contact

Leeann Kelly

Programme Co-ordinator,

CollaborationNI,

NICVA

61 Duncairn Gardens, Belfast BT15 2GB

Email leeann.kelly@nicva.org

Tel 028 9087 7777

Web www.collaborationni.org

Follow us on twitter@Collab_NI

