THE JOSEPH ROWNTREE CHARITABLE TRUST

Joseph Rowntree

PROMISE OR PITFALL?

How foundations collaborate and develop partnerships

Juliet Prager

"It's such a joy to work with different ensembles and create a collaboration. Rehearsing and building a performance is very interesting for me."

Cecilia Bartoli, opera singer

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design: dg3.co.uk

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1 Introduction

This paper is the result of work undertaken during a period of sabbatical leave in 2010.

The project was prompted in part by my involvement in a partnership between foundations, the European Programme on Integration and Migration (EPIM). The experience of working with colleagues from other foundations taught me a great deal about the benefits of collaboration, but also about the difficulties.

As my organisation – the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust – found itself invited to participate in an increasing number and array of partnerships, my colleagues and I realised we needed to understand more about those challenges and benefits.

2 Methodology

2.1 Literature

I spent time collecting and reading relevant material. The literature is reviewed in a separate section, and there is a bibliography at the back of this report.

2.2 Interviews

I interviewed seven senior members of staff of UK charitable foundations about their understanding of collaboration. I sought interviews with people who had engaged with different sorts of partnership – large and small; short-term and longer projects; local, national and international; and partnerships with other foundations and with other sectors. I also interviewed all eleven JRCT Trustees.

The interviews were semi-structured and conducted either in person or by telephone, and each lasted about an hour. I invited interviewees to talk with me about a successful partnership they had been involved in, exploring how it was set up, how it operated, what made it successful and what the challenges had been, benefits and evaluation. I also asked how the interviewee and their organisation generally identify potential partners; what would deter them from collaboration; and for general messages they might have for other foundations thinking about working in partnership.

2.3 Survey

I conducted an online survey, asking people working with foundations to share their experience of partnerships. Invitations to participate were circulated by the Association of Charitable Foundations.

Sixty-one people responded. Respondents were self-selected, and not all respondents answered all the questions. For these reasons, the data cannot be used to draw conclusions about the broad level of interest or experience of partnerships amongst foundations.

Of those who gave contact details, 37 were from foundations (3 trustees, 21 directors and 13 programme staff) and three were employed by foundation partnerships.

The survey was organised through SurveyMonkey.com. I asked 19 questions in mixed format, focusing on:

- Information about the respondent's organisation, its general approach to partnerships and whether it had engaged in partnerships.
- Examples of existing partnerships and how I could find out more.
- Perceived benefits and challenges of partnership.
- Perceptions of what makes a successful partnership, and how collaborative working impacts on a foundation's activities.

- Suggestions for further reading.
- Contact information.

Most of the respondents (55) came from 'primarily grant-making' organisations, or make grants as well as being an operating organisation, or are 'open to different approaches'. Only one was a primarily operating foundation.

2.4 Other data sources

I attended two foundation conferences (the European Foundation Centre conference and the International Human Rights Grantmakers Forum) and attended two workshops focusing on partnership. In addition I met and talked with six people from four US organisations (three foundations and one collaborative platform) with extensive experience of partnerships.

I have also continued active involvement in two foundation collaborations: the European Programme on Integration and Migration and Changing Minds, and have been able to draw on material emerging from those initiatives.

During the sabbatical period I ran a blog, sharing some of what I was learning (as well as personal news and reflections) and invited reflections and suggestions from readers.

2.5 Advisory Group

A small advisory group helped me plan the work programme. The members were Carol Mack (Association of Charitable Foundations), Nancy Kelley (Joseph Rowntree Foundation), Gilly Green (Comic Relief) and Emily Miles (JRCT Trustee, and a civil servant).

3 Definitions and parameters

3.1 Charitable trusts and foundations

In this paper the terms 'trust' and 'foundation' are used interchangeably.

There are an estimated 8,800 independent charitable trusts and foundations in the UK (Goodey, 2006). Other than being registered and operating within the charity legislative framework, they are hugely diverse – in size, age, areas of interest and styles of working. According to the Association of Charitable Foundations, most are primarily grant-making organisations, and most do not engage in operational activities, although:

> *… some are exploring other ways of addressing the economic, social and enviornmental challenges of the 21st century.*[1]

What characterises most of these organisations is that they have a relatively high degree of independence, relying wholly or partly on endowed funds, although even this is not universal.

Nevertheless, many trusts and foundations see themselves as part of a sector. Over 300 belong to the UK Association of Charitable Foundations; some also belong to regional groupings; and some are linked, through their membership of the European Foundation Centre, to similar organisations in the rest of Europe. These groups provide opportunities for sharing information and knowledge, and can be a platform for developing practical collaboration.

3.2 Partnership and collaboration

In practice, the terms 'collaboration' and 'partnership' are not used consistently or precisely:

> *'Collaboration has become the new buzz word! People use it to describe any time they get together for a purpose beyond normal duties or interests.'*[2]

> *'Partnership is a term which has come to be used very loosely to refer to almost any kind of a relationship between individuals or groups.'*[3]

Indeed, the terms 'partnership and 'collaboration' are often used interchangeably. NCVO's Collaborative Working Unit defines collaborative working as 'partnership between two or more voluntary organisations'.[4]

However, most writers concerned with foundations agree that 'collaboration' refers to a broad range of shared activities, with 'partnership' denoting a more particular relationship established to promote common goals[5]:

> *Collaboration is defined broadly to mean 'working together', and covers the full spectrum of relationships between foundations. Partnership refers to a specific form of collaboration characterised by formal relationships that involve investment of money or other tangible resources.*[6]

That said, there are so many possible types of collaboration and partnership that even this definition cannot be precise:

> *'… the language of 'partnership' often masks a complex reality, which is that relationships take many different forms, and that these vary widely in terms of the ways in which power, interests, substance and so on are organized.'*[7]

In conducting interviews, I found it useful to define 'partnership' as: intentional practical collaboration, between two or more organisations, for an agreed purpose.

Throughout this report I generally use the word 'collaboration', except to avoid over-repetition, or when quoting others.

4 Literature

4.1 Analysis and reflection

There is very little published material that explores and critically examines foundation collaboration. There are some published descriptions of collaborative initiatives. This documentation, along with other available material, tends to promote collaboration; there is little critical analysis. Hughes emphasises this:

> *One difficulty in assessing collaborations is that they are typically viewed in a favourable light. … published reports about collaborations tend to focus on the benefits and neglect the downsides.*[8]

Starting in the 1990s, some work analysing collaboration between grantees was supported by foundations. A 'Review Of Research Literature On Factors Influencing Successful Collaboration'[9] draws largely on academic and NGO experience. Commissioned by the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, it is rooted in the foundation sector but is targeted at organisations from different sectors.

Since the turn of the century foundations have begun to consider their own collaborative efforts more consciously. Hamilton's 'Moving Ideas and Money: Issues and Opportunities in Funder Funding Collaboration'[10] was prepared in advance of a meeting of foundations and drew on 31 telephone interviews. In the paper, Hamilton develops a typology for a wide range of funder collaboratives, before exploring four aspects of collaboration (origin, structure, elements in success, and outcomes). However, he emphasises the limitations of his typology, because 'the collaborative vehicles described are so varied in origin and form'. He doesn't consider these types of collaboration as a continuum, but suggests they 'might best be described as occupying distinctive niches within a larger ecology of philanthropic approaches and tools'.[11]

> *Philanthropies Working Together: myths and realities'*[12] *(builds on Hamilton's work, exploring the reasons foundations collaborate; and describing the conditions for successful collaboration and the roles foundations play in joint initiatives. Usefully, he also acknowledges and names some of the downsides to collaboration.*

'Collaborative Philanthropies'[13] is based on Elwood M. Hopkins' experience working with the Los Angeles Urban Funders. It explores what he sees as an emerging trend, and enthusiastically makes the case for foundations to collaborate. For Hopkins, collaboration is imperative in developing a professional philanthropic sector. Hopkins explains that, in relation to Hamilton's paper, his own book:

> *…is less concerned with operational and organisational distinctions and more concerned with the new behaviors that all funder collaboratives make possible, regardless of their form. And it is focused on the benefits that collaborative participants gain.'*[14]

Although trusts and foundations have particular characteristics, there are some relevant insights from the wider voluntary sector. For example, in 2010 the Institute for Voluntary Action Re-

search (IVAR) published an overview of collaboration in the voluntary sector[15]. The previous year The Intelligent Funding Forum published a study of cross-sector collaboration[16].

> *'Managing Development: Understanding Inter-organisational Relationships'[17] analyses and describes collaboration. The editors set out three characteristics of inter-organisational relationships: competition, co-ordination and co-operation are seen as key characteristics of, respectively, the market, public, and civil society sectors.*

4.2 Practical guides

There are a number of practical guides intended to support inter-organisational collaboration. The Amherst H Wilder Foundation, after publishing a review of Research Literature, commissioned a 'collaboration Handbook'[18]. The Partnering Toolbook[19] and 'Working Relationships for the 21st Century'[20] are two useful cross-sector publications.

NCVO's Collaborative Working Group's guide 'Should you collaborate? Key Questions'[21], published to assist voluntary organisations, was funded by three UK trusts.

The Partnership Toolbox, published by the World Wildlife Fund[22] and The partnership analysis tool, published by Victoria Health, Australia[23], are two other useful resources.

The only 'how-to-do-it' guide written specifically for trusts and foundations is (US-based) GrantCraft's recently-published guide, 'Funder Collaboratives: why and how funders work together'[24].

4.3 Case studies

Increasingly, foundations are publishing reports of collaborative initiatives. London Funders, for example, publishes reports of meetings; the Network of European Foundations publishes some evaluation reports; and other examples are given in the section on case studies. The reports provide useful case studies, describing membership, activities outcomes and impact. However, unsurprisingly, most are uncritical, describing the 'public' successful face of the project rather than reflecting on difficulties or challenges faced by the partners, individually or collectively.

5 What is happening now?

From the survey and interview data, and material available on foundations' websites, I learned that UK foundations are currently engaged in at least 100 different current or recent collaborative enterprises.

So clearly there is considerable interest in the issue. This is confirmed by the fact that, during 2010, there were sessions on the topic at foundation meetings, including the European Foundation Centre AGA in June, the International Human Rights Grantmakers Forum in July, and a meeting held earlier in 2010 of the Woburn Place Collaborative.

Sixty-one people responded to my survey, in itself suggesting a relatively high interest in the topic. Most respondents had engaged in some form of collaboration, or would be interested in doing so. The majority (49 respondents) had already been involved in a partnership: 23 were 'very keen' and the other 26 engage when the opportunity is right. Nine respondents had not engaged in any partnerships, but seven of those indicated their foundations would be open to the possibility.

Foundations aren't simply interested in the theory of collaboration: they are actively seeking opportunities to initiate and develop partnerships. Forty-three survey respondents described their foundation's role in specific partnerships. More than half (24) had 'generated the idea' and 'recruited partners'; even more (34) oversaw the process. 26 were involved in developing the action plan. Seven (not including respondents employed by collaborative initiatives) had, themselves, implemented a project.

5.1 Forms of collaboration

There was a strong sense from both the survey and interview data that every partnership is different. Each has to be developed in a way that works for the people and the situation involved.

That said, from the examples given it was possible to identify three broad types of collaboration. Each type has a variety of sub-sets. The different forms are not exclusive – one partnership might involve two or more.

The forms described here aren't presented as a spectrum or a continuum, with simple forms leading to more complex forms of collaborating. Many collaborative initiatives emerge from information-sharing groups or platforms – but such groups are not essential for collaboration. Partnerships can emerge in different ways, and might overlap with each other, or run concurrently.

5.2 Networking and knowledge-sharing

There are both formal and informal opportunities for foundations to meet together and learn from each other or with each other. They may share general or detailed information about their field of work, grant applicants and grantees. This can involve jointly commissioned research.

There are several developing collaborative platforms available to UK foundations. Some networks, such as the Association of Charitable Foundations[25] in the UK, or the European Foundation Centre[26], enable foundation representatives to meet each other and discuss common concerns: this can provide opportunities for developing collaborative work. Other networks, such as the Network of European Foundations for Innovative Cooperation[27] and to an extent Ariadne[28] and the Woburn Place Collaborative[29], were established to encourage collaborative projects and to help foundations implement partnerships.

5.3 Partnerships to improve foundations' efficiency and effectiveness

Foundations can work together to cut costs and improve operational effectiveness in a range of ways.

- **Merge funding programmes**
  Two or more foundations, with similar funding programmes, can share operational resources.
- **Re-granting**
  One donor can distribute funds on behalf of another.
- **Grantmaking for fundraising**
  An initial investment can help lever additional resources.
- **Co-funding**
  Adopting a joint framework to inform their grant-making programmes (grant decisions remain the responsibility of each partner). This is also known as 'strategically aligned grantmaking' or basket funding.

5.4 Partnerships to improve programmes

- **Co-ordination**
  Foundations can work together to convene and work alongside NGOs, often focusing on a particular issue.
- **Capacity-building**
  Foundations can work together to build grantees' capacity, with some sort of 'More than Money' initiative, particularly where they share grantees.
- **Pooled funding**
  Foundations pay into a joint fund, and make grants decisions together. It's not necessary for each organisation to contribute an equal amount. There are different ways for decisions to be made, but in most examples representatives of participating foundations join a new grants committee; and pooled funds are administered by one of the foundations or by a third party.
- **Commissioning**
  One or more grant-makers may commission other organisation(s) to undertake a piece of work on their behalf.

- **Co-creation**
  Having identified gaps in a field of work, foundations may take steps to fill that gap, by creating a project or new organisation.

5.5 Joint Advocacy or Campaigning

Foundations may work together with others to advocate to policy-makers, or pursue a public campaign.

The survey structure did not enable me to draw conclusions about the most common types of partnership. Fifty respondents answered the question about what type of partnership their organisation had been involved in. Of those, 31 had engaged in co-funding; 26 in pooled funding; 26 in joint allocation of funding or other resources to another organisation; and 17 in other types. The latter included joint advocacy and analysis; research, events, shared learning; operational projects; convening grantees; fundraising; and sharing knowledge about grantees.

6 Case studies

6.1 Networking and knowledge-sharing

Networking forum

The Association of Charitable Foundations

The Association of Charitable Foundations (ACF) is the UK-wide support organisation for grant-making trusts and foundations of all types. It helps foundations to share information and knowledge with each other through its annual conferences, regular newsletters, professional development training, good practice guides and Issue-based Networks. The focus for any collaborative initiative undertaken within ACF relates to the governance and management of independent charitable foundations (for example, engaging with government on charity legislation).

www.acf.org.uk

From networking to knowledge sharing

London Funders is a membership organisation for private and statutory donors who support London's voluntary and community sector (VCS). The group began meeting informally in 1996 and became a registered charity in 2005. There are 90 members, who pay fees ranging between £500 and £2,200 depending on the amount donated in London. London Funders employs two staff, who circulate a bulletin, organise quarterly meetings, policy briefings and other joint events, and help members work together in small groups on specific issues. Information about meetings and projects, including short reports, are publicly available on the London Funders website:

http://londonfunders.org.uk

Over a series of meetings, members of **ACF's Asylum, Refugee and Migration Network** found themselves discussing the problem of negative public attitudes to asylum. Five foundations (The Barrow Cadbury Trust, Trust for London, the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund, Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust) pooled funds to commission research on what is known about attitudes to asylum, and the extent to which future work on changing or improving attitudes in this area can learn from campaign work undertaken in relation to other issues or groups towards which the public holds negative or prejudicial attitudes. The report – *Understanding and changing public attitudes: A review of existing evidence from public information and communications campaigns* by Heaven Crawley – was shared with other foundations and with NGOs, and can be downloaded from several of the foundations' websites.

www.phf.org.uk/page.asp?id=762

www.theworkcontinues.org/document.asp?id=1529

Jointly commissioned research

Both the **Nationwide Foundation** and the **Abbey Charitable Trust** (now the Santander Foundation) work closely with their founding companies. Those companies provide the income that enables the foundations to fund charities; but they also encourage their employees to volunteer for charities.

In 2007 the two foundations joined forces with each other and with Voluntary England, commissioning research into how well charities and businesses work together. The findings were published in a booklet, *Developing Understanding Around Non-Financial Support*. The report described case studies and made recommendations to help both businesses and charities create stronger partnerships.

6.2 Partnerships to improve foundations' efficiency and effectiveness

Common application process

Independent donors in East Yorkshire created a common application form for individuals seeking support. Completed forms were gathered and brought to joint meetings, which took place every few weeks. At the joint meeting, the trusts decided which of them, if any, would be prepared to offer a grant.

Merged funding programme

Joint International Development Grants Programme

http://www.baringfoundation.org.uk/program.htm

The **John Ellerman Foundation** and **Baring Foundation** have a joint overseas grants programme. The partnership emerged from discussions between trustees, who saw the benefits of scaling up and saving costs by working together. The joint programme seeks to help refugees and displaced peoples in sub-Saharan Africa. The Baring Foundation provides the 'public face' for the programme, advertising it, receiving and processing applications and liaising with grantees (although for technical reasons each foundation pays the grantees separately). Grant decisions are taken by a joint board. Joint field trips have helped the staff from both foundations get to know each other and develop a strong working relationship.

Re-granting

Channelling funds via another organisation

The **Rochester Bridge Trust** funded another grant-making trust to administer a scholarship scheme on its behalf, while it used its own contacts and influence to raise the profile of the other trust and attract other donors.

Distributing funds on behalf of another organisation

The **Ealing and Brentford Consolidated Charity** operates Ealing's Grassroots Grants Programme on behalf of the Office of the Third Sector and Community Development Foundation. Between 2008 and 2010 it distributed more than quarter of a million pounds to local voluntary and community groups. Through partnership work the Charity extended its reach and supported a lot more groups than it otherwise would have with just our own programme

www.e-bcc.org.uk/grants/gg_home.html

In 2010 the **Community Foundation for Wiltshire and Swindon** distributed £300,000 for the Office of the Third Sector to Swindon to alleviate the impact of the recession on individuals. The Foundation designed the scheme, publicised the funding, dealt with applications and allocated funds.

www.e-bcc.org.uk/grants/gg_home.html

Grantmaking to fundraise

The Big Give

Through the 2010 Challenge, The **Reed Foundation** contributed £1m to add to £2.5 million from other foundations, with the aim of levering £20m from other donors.

TheBigGive.org.uk

Co-funding

The **One Foundation** and the **Atlantic Philanthropies** are the two largest independent funders in Ireland. Their partnership extends to investing in many of the same organisations. They do so by funding on the basis of the same business plan (or 'investment documents) and in many cases staff work together to help organisations develop those plans.

6.3 Partnerships to improve programmes

Co-ordination

Inspiring Scotland was set up by Andrew Muirhead after seeing examples of venture philanthropy in Australia. Inspiring Scotland brings together a range of investors – individuals, Government, trusts and foundations, businesses and charities. It has created three co-ordinated funding programmes, aimed at improving the lives of children and young people. The organisation fundraises and selects grantees. Grants – or investments – are made over 5–10 years, during which time Inspiring Scotland offers sustained development support.

Pooled funding

European Programme on Integration and Migration

The European Programme on Integration and Migration (EPIM) is a pooled grantmaking fund. As well as making grants, it has a strategic capacity-building programme. All grantees are required to participate in thematic workshops. This enables them to develop skills in key areas (such as advocacy, working with the media, evaluation) and it also creates opportunities for building strategic partnerships. Grantees have also been able to apply jointly for additional funding, for capacity building: so far, they have organised joint learning initiatives on power analysis, peer review, media policies, and fundraising.

www.epim.info

Capacity-building

Power Analysis

Between 2008 and 2010, the Carnegie UK Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation developed a programme to explore the link between analysing power and achieving social change. The aim was to understand and demonstrate how those with least power in society could actively engage and exercise power in decision-making processes.

The Carnegie UK Trust designed a practical programme to help organisations and their communities achieve social change. The project offered a small group of voluntary and community groups a tailored programme through which they explored power dynamics. Understanding their own and others' power enabled them to revise and focus their work programmes.

The Carnegie UK Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation worked together to fund and record this action research. The programme is described in a joint report, Power and Making Change Happen by Raji Hunjan & Soumountha Keophilavong.

www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/2010/power-and-making-change-happen

Co-creation

Schools Learning Network

The Schools Learning Network (SLN) was established in 2007 at the request of the Department of Children, Schools and Families and the Pears Foundation. It was promoted following successful work, over several years, linking schools and promoting community cohesion in Bradford and Tower Hamlets. SLN is a social enterprise with the skills and experience to support, establish and operate successful community cohesion work. It is now also funded by the British Council, and has a wide range of supporting partners.

www.schoolslinkingnetwork.org.uk

6.4 Joint Advocacy or Campaigning

Corston Independent Funders' Coalition

Corston is an alliance of 21 grant-making charitable trusts and foundations, collectively investing millions of pounds in supporting charities working with offenders, with years of experience of work in the criminal justice system.

In 2007, a review of women in the criminal justice system, led by Baroness Corston, made the case for a completely new approach to women's offending. Its recommendations drew on charities' work, much of which had been funded by charitable trusts. By 2008 foundations became concerned that the recommendations were being quietly shelved, and joined together to form the Corston Coalition.

The Coalition aims to get ongoing political support and sustainable funding for the full implementation of the Corston recommendations. The Coalition's strength lies in the ability of the group of funders to advocate with a single voice, using a different set of tools, convening power, insider status, overview of the sector gained from decades of funding experience, than those available to other campaigners.

The Corston Independent Funders' Coalition employs a full time Advocate to put forward the voice of funders.

www.corstoncoalition.org.uk

7 Why do foundations collaborate (and what puts them off)?

This section explores the reasons that foundations are interested in collaborative working, and also some of the perceived barriers.

It is important that foundations consider carefully why they should collaborate. One survey respondent advised, bluntly:

> *Only get involved if there is a clear synergy which you could not achieve separately, and if you can set up efficient mechanisms which won't make it harder for the beneficiaries you want to support. If, however, you conclude there is no reason for your foundation to continue to exist independently, vote to wind up and merge with another charity. Don't go for a partnership as a half-way house.*[30]

The survey and interview data suggest different factors that influence the likelihood of foundations engaging in partnerships. Any one of these can spark collaboration, but if two or more factors are present collaboration is more likely. The factors can be grouped into three general sets:

- The external environment.
- The foundation's culture.
- Individual trustees or staff.

7.1 Environmental culture and external drivers

The drive for organisations to work together may be underpinned by general societal trends: increased competition alongside growing interest in participatory approaches[31], the imperative to cut costs[32] and new ways of engaging with each other:

> … *like it or not, we live in a network society.*[33]

Certainly in the UK the last ten years have seen a growth in interest in collaboration and partnership within government, and notably in its attitude to the voluntary sector. The Treasury's Cross Cutting Review and the Cabinet Office Strategy Unit's Review of Charities were both published in 2002: both promoted the idea of collaborative working between voluntary organisations. The trend continued with CapacityBuilders' ChangeUp strategy published in 2007 and the Cabinet Office's Modernisation Fund, launched in 2009. The Coalition government is sustaining this through its 'Big Society' commitment.

The same dynamic is evident in the foundation sector. In recent years, there has been an increasing level of discussion within foundation membership bodies, with conference sessions and meetings designed to encourage as well as inform foundations about the benefits of collaboration. As Leat puts it:

> *Collaboration and co-funding between foundations has seen strong and consistent development.*[34]

Pfitzer and Stamp suggest that amongst foundations there is a general sense that increasingly bold ambitions cannot be met by any one organisation on its own, and therefore resources have to be pooled[35].

Gibson suggests there is a generational shift, and that foundations may be working together more because 'younger people in philanthropy seem to be more interested in collaboration'[36].

The possibilities opened up by technological development, policy changes, economic developments, climate change and resource scarcity can act as drivers for working together[37]. Some foundations see collaboration as a useful way of filling an intellectual, institutional or functional void[38]. Crises such as humanitarian disasters can also prompt collaboration[39].

For some organisations, collaboration is an obligation imposed by donors[40]. The different dynamics surrounding such collaboration need to be borne in mind, particularly when collaborations include fund-raising foundations or partnerships with grantees that are initiated by donors.

7.2 The foundation's organisational culture

An organisation's culture and internal dynamics can draw it towards or lead it away from collaboration. Cairns *et al* suggest that some organisations are predisposed to collaboration: *'for some organisations, collaboration is an embedded value, something entered into … because of an underlying belief in the merit and power of collective action'*. They add that organisations are more likely to develop collaborations if they *'are able to reflect on the shifting nature of the boundaries between themselves and their environments'*[41].

Robinson *et al*[42] suggest there are four general perspectives on why inter-organisation relationships matter:

- Evangelism: collaboration is a good thing in itself.
- Pragmatism: we live in a more complex world and organisations are increasingly interdependent.
- Market imperatives: inter-organisational arrangements are key to efficiency and competitiveness (co-operation for competitiveness).
- Synergy: each organisation can better achieve its objectives by working with others (the sum is greater than the parts).

All four perspectives exist, often overlapping, in the foundation sector. Much of the literature is essentially 'evangelistic', although writers often draw on different perspectives to make the case for collaboration.

Such writers might give underlying beliefs as reasons for collaborating: for example, suggesting that it's good to foster risk-taking[43] or there is 'strength in numbers'[44].

Trustees and staff may have particular views or experiences, which encourage or discourage joint working. A member of a medical research foundation reflected that his board members are more competitive than collaborative – they:

> *… want to be the first to win the race' – reputation is important as is potential income from patents. Such foundations are reluctant to go 'deeper' in collaboration – they are working for the benefit of the foundation, not for the greater good – this is deep in the business model, and particularly problematic for foundations with strong private sector links.'*[45]

Just as an organisation's culture can encourage engagement in partnerships, it can also be a barrier. Within some foundations there is a 'belief that we should not fund ourselves', and a 'fear' of this way of using funds[46]. Or, senior staff may be cautious:

> *… because of the risks, many experienced foundation staff counsel caution in embarking on collaborative efforts.*[47]

The survey suggested that some foundations have a fundamentally individualistic culture. 17% would not join partnerships because 'we can be more effective on our own'; 21% because 'we have particular values that might be diluted by working with others'; and 25% because 'we want to stick to our core mission'. (It is worth noting that a larger number of respondents considered each of these factors as possibly true, but would not be put off by them; and an even larger number of respondents did not see these factors at play in their experienced of partnerships.)

Once a foundation has been involved in a partnership it is likely to engage in new partnerships[48].

Individual perspectives and organisational culture must have an impact; but it's not clear whether foundation colleagues encourage or discourage each other to collaborate outside of the organisation. Speakers at conference workshops I attended referred to the difficulty of persuading trustees to join partnerships, and also said that staff members can be resistant. In contrast, survey respondents did not think resistance from board or staff members is a significant barrier or concern.

7.3 Individual leadership

Inter-foundation collaboration often develops from existing personal contacts between board or staff members[49]; or can be driven by an individual[50]. For individuals, the impetus may come from the personal satisfaction gained from working with others, or the possibility of making a substantial change or difference[51].

Most survey respondents (89% of those who answered the question) believe that liking and respecting the people involved are either essential or helpful in deciding whether to join a partnership.

As one interviewee put it:

> *'If someone's sparky, creative, committed, you expose yourself to more of their company – and great ideas happen.'*[52]

8 Benefits and drawbacks

"Every collaboration helps you grow."

Brian Eno, musician

This section focuses on both the practical benefits and the drawbacks.

Benefits can be grouped under three headings. For foundations, collaboration can help to:

1. **Improve general efficiency and effectiveness.**
2. **Develop an effective programme of work.**
3. **Extend contacts, improve access and support advocacy.**

8.1 Improving general organisational efficiency and effectiveness

The wish to improve efficiency is expressed in different ways: as doing more with less[53], pooling funding, time, skills and/or knowledge[54], avoiding duplication[55], decreasing risk[56], and increasing sustainability[57].

Organisation efficiency can be improved by helping to reduce costs[58], providing opportunities for learning[59], or even changing an organisation's approach to the way it works[60]. Collaboration can be a response to insufficient organisational capacity[61] or develop from a desire for organisational growth and development[62].

For Hopkins, collaboration is essential in order to professionalise the foundation sector:

> *Only an organised philanthropic field can possibly hope to interact in a significant way with the organised fields of business and government.*[63]

There are also acknowledged drawbacks:

> *… most observers acknowledge privately that collaboration can require more staff time, slow down activities, reduce flexibility, be difficult to manage, and dilute the clarity of purpose for an initiative.*[64]

8.1.a Saving costs or spending more?

The literature describes a number of ways that foundations can use collaboration to save costs.

They can share staff [65], or administration costs:

> *… aligned or pooled funding saves donors the administrative costs of soliciting individual grant applications and conducing due diligence…*[66]

The Baring Foundation and John Ellerman Foundation operate a joint Overseas programme: most of the administration is undertaken by the Baring Foundation, allowing the John Ellerman Foundation to focus its resources elsewhere.

Foundations can also work together to avoid duplication of their own or grantees' work, or to strengthen the capacity of grantees[67].

However, although partnership is seen as saving money, it is also understood to be expensive:

> *Collaboration often takes more time, staff effort, and organisational support than expected.*[68]

For survey respondents, the two most significant reasons for not collaborating are the financial and time costs: 'partnership working takes too much time' and 'partnership working costs too much'. Considering financial cost, they advised:

> *Be aware of hidden costs.*[69]
>
> *…without care, there can be huge transaction costs…*[70]
>
> *[collaboration is] expensive but the impact is often more than working on your own.*[71]

In relation to the time needed for partnership working:

> *It takes longer to work in partnership and can be very time consuming.*[72]
>
> *Be prepared for the time-consuming nature of partnerships.*[73]
>
> *It takes more time than you think because communication is necessary each step of the way. … It is worth it but it does take time.*[74]
>
> *Time spent at the beginning of the process … will reap benefits in the long run.*[75]

In turn, colleagues in the 'home' foundation, including trustees, can find this frustrating, wondering why those involved in partnerships are paying less attention to core tasks.

8.1.b Collaboration for learning

One of the major acknowledged benefits of collaboration is the opportunity it offers for learning[76]. Of the 50 survey respondents who answered the question about factors influencing decisions to join a partnership, 91% saw it as an opportunity to learn.

> *… trusts are very small and therefore have limited experience and knowledge. partnerships can challenge and develop your work*[77].

Survey respondents were asked whether they or their foundation do anything differently as a result of being involved in partnerships. Of the 30 who completed the question, five answered, bluntly, 'no'. As one respondent wrote:

> *Not really – we see them as opportunities that come along from time to time for a group of funders to do more working together than they could do alone, but the rest of the time we get on with our usual work.*[78]

Nearly half of the responses (14) referred specifically to improving the way they engage with or manage partnerships. Most respondents had learned by doing, although just over half (16) were aware of resources that help foundations learn about collaborative working.

Several respondents gave practical examples of ways that their foundation's own operations had changed as a result of partnership working:

- Day-to-day grantmaking is more informed,
- Using data to refine grantmaking strategy or inform programme reviews,
- Shift from reactive grantmaking to strategic grantmaking,
- Changed some finance procedures,
- Began to convene grantees,
- Adopted different evaluation tools,
- Greater focus on external communications,
- More engaged with government,

One respondent reflected that change is more or less likely depending on how the partnership is perceived internally:

> *In those areas where we have had a good experience of partnerships we have questioned our own values and procedures. In the areas where we have had a bad experience it has made us nervous of exposing ourselves to risk and less open.*[79]

The people I interviewed struggled to give clear examples of things they do differently as a result of their engagement with partnerships. Where the partnership involved research intended to inform internal policy, this generally had some impact. Otherwise, learning seemed to be very generalised, and largely limited to the individuals engaging directly with the partnership.

8.1.c Staff development

There are acknowledged benefits for staff: partnerships 'require individuals to find out what skills are needed and then to get them'; and individuals can find team working more fulfilling and invigorating[80].

Partnership work can feel more 'hands-on' to foundation staff then their usual role – and this may or may not be welcomed. One interviewee explained how she enjoyed using technical skills she had developed in previous jobs but wasn't utilising in her work with a foundation.

However, during an informal conversation one foundation colleague told me that having to be so hands-on means he spends a disproportionate amount of time working with one collaborative initiative, compared with the time he spends on 40 other grants[81].

8.2 Developing a more effective programme

In relation to programme-related work, collaboration is seen as helping to maximise impact[82], increase scale[83] increase creativity[84], frame comprehensive solutions[85], develop sustainable strategies[86], and enable partners to share challenges and work together on solutions[87]. It can also help to engage with other organisations that are better able to implement plans[88].

For some, collaboration is the only option to ensure effectiveness:

> *Large-scale initiatives and neighbourhood collaboratives require an efficient capital market where resources have few restrictions and flow readily to where they are needed.*[89]

According to the survey, making an existing grants programme more effective is a strong reason to collaborate. 96% of survey respondents would join a partnership because they 'want a more strategic approach to the problem'. A similar percentage felt they would be more likely to get results working with others (55% see this as an essential factor and 41% as helpful – total 96%). 78% would engage because 'the problem needs more money than we can provide alone' – and for 60% this was an essential factor.

8.2.a New opportunities

Collaborating with others is seen as useful either to explore potential new territory[90], or to help enter a new funding area[91].

8.2.b Common interests

Foundations may work together to advance fields of activity, support a particular strategy or approach, improve the circumstances of a group of people, or work together in a geographical area[92]. Foundations that have common applicants may also work together[93]. The Corston Coalition[94] is a good example of foundations joining together to pursue common interests.

At the same time, 80% of respondents to my survey reported that their foundations would become involved in partnerships at least in part 'to persuade other donors to fund the issues we are concerned about'. The need to bring in more money to address a problem was also important to the majority. If this is the case, it suggests a need to spend time and energy developing a shared sense of common interests.

8.2.c Increasing scale and efficiency

In the foundation sector there is a keen interest in increasing impact, and for many this implies scale:

> *A growing number of foundations are not content to run small programs… rather they are increasingly setting out bold ambitions to have a meaningful impact… Collaboration is essential in order to assemble sufficient assets, expertise and influence…*[95]

As noted above, for survey respondents the main reasons for engaging in partnership were to increase available resources, and to secure better results.

The main drawback is loss of control[96]. One interviewee, involved in a pooled funding arrangement, admitted the partnership sometimes made grants that his foundation would not have made if it worked alone[97].

That said, none of the interviewees considered partnership working to require too much compromise. One person pointed out that a partnership had worked partly because the partner did not see compromise as 'a dirty word', and often started joint meetings by reminding everyone that compromise was part of the process:

> *… it's just grown up, isn't it? Seeing something from the other person's point of view.*[98]

8.2.d Increasing effectiveness and impact

Certainly a collaborative initiative can do more than any one foundation can do alone (for example, distribute more funding, fund more organisations, organise more events and publish more reports). 'Evangelistic' collaborators claim that long-term collaboration has the potential to

achieve greater impact[99]; but at present there is insufficient data to substantiate the claim. I have not found a cost-benefit analysis of any foundation collaboration.

As discussed elsewhere, this may be because foundations are not publishing critical evaluations of collaboration. That does not mean they aren't learning internally:

> *We have a very positive evaluation of partnership work and we are very enthusiastic with it*[100].

The interviews suggested that foundations' programmes can be strengthened by bringing together organisations and individuals with different perspectives, skills and contacts. For example, one interviewee values working with venture philanthropists who expect a strong evaluation and dissemination strategy: this encourages him to publish performance reports, and review the work programme regularly[101].

For one foundation director, an unexpected benefit was having another organisation question, in a 'gentle way', how his foundation did things: 'external challenge is always good'.

There are conflicting views about whether and how collaboration increases or decreases creativity and risk-taking. For some, collaborative teams are less likely to take risks[102]. Some see partnerships as an opportunity to are an opportunity to share the risk with others[103] but for others collaboration brings increased reputational risk[104]. On one hand, 'working in collaboration is more creative'[105]; but on the other, partnerships can become bogged down:

> *Mundane issues like placement of logos, inconsistent reporting requirements, or perceived credit for jointly funding projects can cause problems.*[106]

8.3 Extending contacts, improving access and supporting advocacy

Collaboration can 'establish peer networks'[107] and lead to more collaboration[108]. For these and other commentators this is a positive thing in itself, with the potential to strengthen the work of the participant foundation as well as the partnership.

Cynthia Ryan, principal of the Schooner Foundation, explains that partnerships are important to her because it enables the foundation to be a player, not just a funder:

> *The process is part of added value … we want to be part of a movement, not just co-financing.*[109]

Fifty survey respondents answered the question about what factors are important when considering whether to join a partnership. 91% want to work with other organisations that have a good reputation. 79% would join a partnership because they need better contacts (although this was only 'essential' for 9%, but 'helpful' for 70%; and it was irrelevant for 21%). One survey respondent wrote that their foundation collaborated because:

> *… others can undertake lobbying/ advocacy roles that we can't … better access to target group of beneficiaries.*[110]

Partnerships can also improve access, by engaging with relevant stakeholders, or enabling participants to draw on a more 'rooted' perspective[111].

For some, working with others is in itself an important advocacy tool – it can increase a foundation's visibility[112], facilitate 'increased policy influence'[113] or enable foundations to 'double your influence'[114].

> *Donor collaboratives can have clout, gaining the attention of an entire community, including service providers, policymakers and community leaders. The publicity that comes with announcement of a donor collaboration can, in itself, draw attention to neglected issues, organizations or geographic regions, and even contribute to shaping policy agendas.*[115]

The Corston Independent Funders' Coalition[116] is a group of 21 charitable trusts, foundations and individual philanthropists. It was established specifically as an advocacy umbrella:

> *We were set up to sustain a shift from imprisonment to community sentencing for vulnerable women offenders, through advocacy, funding and critical partnership with charities and government.*[117]

For one member of the Corston Coalition, the partnership offers a wide range of benefits from access to other foundations and government. It is an iterative process, which has:

> *… enabled a high level of contact and dialogue between funders and the government, particularly the Ministry of Justice and National Offender Management Service. The raising of the profile of independent funders led to members of the Coalition joining the panels allocating £15.6m from the Ministry of Justice to charities working with women offenders. The discussions have also resulted in a joint funding exercise, with the Ministry of Justice and some members of the Coalition each contributing £1m to the Women's Diversionary Fund. This close working, where objectives coincide, is particularly useful for members of the Coalition in helping raise the awareness of civil servants of the role of independent charitable funding. Greater mutual understanding helps protect funders' investments in innovative criminal justice charities, the success of which might be undermined were government policy to change abruptly.*[118]

However, the role of independent foundations in relation to advocacy is contested. Members of the European Programme on Integration and Migration (EPIM)[119] represent foundations with very different perceptions of whether foundations should advocate directly or not. Agreeing an advocacy strategy was one of the most difficult tasks for EPIM; it was achieved only with the help of an external facilitator, and the agreed solution did not satisfy all members. (In this case, the decision was that advocacy relating to public policy should rest with grantees, while the collaboration would simply provide grantees with a brand, and publicise the collaboration to other foundations.)

9 What makes a successful partnership?

This section covers the elements of a successful partnership, set out in six sections:

1 **Who?** – engaging the right partners

2 **What?** – Clear objectives and an action plan

3 **How?** – approaches and processes that facilitate collaboration

4 **Governance** – a structure that is appropriate for the partnership

5 **Resources** – adequate to support the plan

6 **Evaluation** – to facilitate learning

9.1 Who? – Engaging the right partners

"Musicals are plays, but the last collaborator is your audience, so you've got to wait 'til the last collaborator comes in before you can complete the collaboration."

Stephen Sondheim, composer

9.1.a Finding partners

Some foundations enjoy working within an enabling environment from which collaboration can emerge. According to a European Foundation Centre (EFC) report, building such an environment *'involves providing opportunities, information and 'safe spaces' in order to promote the value of collaboration and enable foundations to identify and explore opportunities to work together'*[120]. This can be particularly helpful to foundations actively seeking to collaborate with others (see below).

That said, successful collaboration can happen outside of such networks. Two interviewees described cold-calling organisations they hadn't previously worked with. In one case, the person concerned asked well-informed contacts for suggestions[121]. Another interviewee simply identified the most likely candidates and rang them up: although some were not interested or able to engage, one became an active partner[122].

9.1.b Who to collaborate with?

However collaborators involved come together, the team needs to be balanced, with 'an appropriate cross-section of members'[123]. A speaker at a foundation meeting suggested including:

> *foundations with knowledge/track record on the issue… foundations deeply rooted in the region… foundations with good access where it matters.*[124]

An aligned approach to the specific collaboration is important. Partners should have 'congruent mission, values and operating principles'[125]. Survey respondents advised:

> *Shared values is all important.*[126]

> *… alignment of values is of particular and fundamental importance…*[127]

That said, it is not necessary for partners to have the same broad perspective, or that they bring the same skills. A survey respondent wrote:

> *Work with people who can appropriately challenge you and open up your thinking to new ideas.*[128]

It is possible to share common goals but not necessarily share organisational goals or fundamental values. Partners should have common organisational interests[129], and be 'internally committed and aligned[130]. Indeed, one interviewee didn't see the point of collaborating with other organisations that bring the same skills and perspective[131].

Another interviewee's foundation had collaborated with government: although each contributed £5million, money wasn't the main motivation:

> *We could have found the funding elsewhere, but wanted government as a funder so they couldn't refute the findings…*[132]

A survey respondent advised:

> *'Work with people who can appropriately challenge you and open up your thinking to new ideas'.*[133]

An interviewee reflected that they had a good ongoing collaboration with another partner even though:

> *… we increasingly see ourselves as a progressive foundation in tone and style – they describe themselves as a conservative foundation…*[134]

Whether partners come in with different or shared values, it is important for each partner to determine what their own goals are for the collaboration. Survey respondents advised:

> *Be clear on what you hope to get out of the partnership.*[135]

> *Agree the parameters and boundaries (might be different for each partner).*[136]

Also, personal relationships matter. One survey respondent emphasised:

> *You have to know and like who you are thinking of partnering with.*[137]

The Partnering Toolbook includes a 'partner assessment form' with questions to ask of any potential partner to ensure there is a good fit for the partnership.[138]

9.1.c Partnerships with other foundations

Unsurprisingly, are generally happy to collaborate with other trusts and foundations. Of 52 survey respondents who answered a question about which sorts of organisation they partner with, nearly all either have been partners, or would consider partnership with, other grant-making trusts; and 46 had partnered, or would, with other independent foundations. None would rule it out.

9.1.d Partnership with the public sector

According to the survey and interviews, where foundations have established partnerships with the public sector, they have been successful. However, the survey data suggested that there is slightly more hesitation amongst foundations about partnering with the public sector than with other sectors (of 52 respondents, only 22 had; 17 would consider it, and 4 would never do so).

An exploration of cross-sector relationships between foundations and government suggests that the benefits and challenges are largely the same as for any partnership[139].

One interviewee described a partnership with government, which was characterised by a positive and productive close relationship throughout much of the project[140]. Two periods had been particularly difficult. First, participants had to learn and understand each other's approach – for example, the foundation was keen to involve voluntary sector stakeholders, which was unusual for civil servants. Taking time to explain, listen, engage and learn helped. Later in the process there was tension when government partners also became the target of advocacy efforts.

9.1.e Partnerships with the voluntary sector

According to the survey data, most foundations would be comfortable partnering with voluntary sector/NGOs, although a minority would not (28 respondents have been partners of NGOs; 18 would consider it; 2 would never do so).

Some grant-making foundations encourage or even require voluntary sector grantees to work in partnership, either with them or with other organisations. One survey respondent suggested that this can be productive, but should be approached carefully:

> *Invite joint bids. Don't force people to work together – it won't be appreciated. Cover people's costs if you expect them to meet and work in partnership.*

Cynthia Ryan of the Schooner Fund points out that if funders collaborate with NGO partners they should take on the responsibility for fundraising for the alliance, so that grantees don't have to choose between resourcing their own organisation and resourcing the partnership[141].

In most cases, foundations are grant-makers and voluntary sector organisations are grant-seekers. This brings a different dimension to collaboration. Some foundations discount collaboration with the voluntary sector for this reason – one interviewee said:

> *… the funder/funded relationship isn't really a partnership. Often we dress up something as what it's not.*[142]

By contrast, another interviewee describes all grantees as partners. This person admitted this is not always how grantees see the relationship, but believes it is possible, if grantees 'get it' and 'stand their ground and recognise their independence' – with 'robust, adult conversation'.[143]

Another interviewee described collaborating with grantees. In this case the foundation initiated a joint project, which had worked in the end because everybody recognised and respected different roles. 'A lot of it is attitude.'[144]

9.1.f Partnership with the private sector

Nearly one third of survey respondents (17) had partnered with the private sector, and 19 more would consider doing so. Only two would never partner with the private sector (the same number as would not partner with the voluntary sector).

Some foundations perceive relationships with the private sector as counter-cultural[145]. This is in spite of the fact that the private sector is the source of many foundations' endowments, and individuals working in the private sector often serve on their boards.

9.1.g Membership characteristics

Success relies on the characteristics of the collaborating organisations, and the people who represent the partners.

Collaboration is helped by honesty mutual respect, understanding and trust between partners[146]; it may be helpful to actively promote and demonstrate these characteristics[147]. It is important that members see collaboration as in their own self-interest – but they must also be institutionally willing to negotiate with each other and accommodate each other's point of view, and compromise if necessary[148].

As noted above, collaboration is more likely if organisations have a history of collaboration and co-operation. It can also help to have low staff turnover[149].

One foundation director suggested that his foundation joined a collaborative project because its board members 'enjoy taking risks' and are 'forward-thinking, enterprising decision-makers'[150].

In turn, the way organisations approach partnership influences their ability to respond flexibly to changing expectations and needs:

> *It seems that those organisations that appear to derive most benefit and least discomfort from joint working see collaboration as a process, rather than as a unique event.*[151]

According to survey respondents, partners who are open and take a flexible approach can help build creative collaboration:

- Try it. Do it…[152]
- Be open to the possibilities.[153]
- … partnerships can challenge and develop your work.[154]
- … you need to be flexible enough to react to changing circumstances.[155]
- Leaving your ego at the door![156]
- Do it! You will learn immense amounts.[157]

Trustees

Collaboration between organisations relies on board support[158]. (Indeed, 'Genuine experiements with collaborative practice need the support of those at the highest level possible'[159]). For foundations, this means securing the commitment of trustees:

> *It is essential to get the buy-in [of the board].*[160]

> *Be certain your Board has a clear notion of the engagement the partnership will demand and that the timeframe is clearly explained.*[161]

Some foundations actively involve the board. One survey respondent wrote:

> *Trustees need to meet partner Trustees early on.*[162]

However, some find it difficult to secure trustees' support:

> *… it's hard to sell a pooled fund – it's not always as tactile for trustees. It helps if trustees are participating and intensely engaged.*[163]

> *… on some issues, it is collaboration to leverage stronger results which is more meaningful. But this can be hard for trustees to grasp.*[164]

Staff

In the same way, it can be important to secure and sustain the engagement of the participating foundation's staff. This is particularly important given the time that is needed for collaboration. Preparation and groundwork is essential, so that senior staff are well informed at the point of commitment; but so is ongoing education about the advantages, as the partnership progresses[165].

Survey respondents advised on the importance of ensuring that foundation representatives are backed by their organisation:

> *Consider carefully from which level of your organisation staff come from that are involved in the partnership and that they have sufficient authority and resources to participate.*[166]

> *It is essential to … establish some freedom of action (executive delegation) for your staff. Involvement in a partnership will be stymied if foundations have to continually refer back to a board on minor as well as major decisions.*[167]

9.2 Processes that support collaboration

"You never know when you read a script how it's going to turn out because so much depends on the collaboration between people. If I'd been in some of the movies I turned down, maybe they wouldn't have been a success."

Molly Ringwald, actress

Collaborative initiatives require particular consideration:

> *… collaborative management requires detailed attention to be given to the intricacies and paradoxes of bringing different organisations and individuals together.*[168]

All members should have a stake not only in the outcome but also in the partnership process[169]. Good collaboration is characterised by a sprit of openness and honesty about foundation interests and decision-making authority[170]; ways of fostering good-quality relationships and building ownership as a group[171]; and members listening carefully, asking open questions and agreeing to disagree when necessary[172].

While price is the control mechanism in the market, and authority in a bureaucratic organisation, trust is the mechanism through which co-operative relationships are controlled[173].

When survey respondents were asked to offer advice to other foundations considering engaging in a partnership, they repeatedly referred to the importance of paying attention to and allowing time for processes that support collaboration:

> *Building rapport between the representatives of each foundation is key – trust and understanding of one another's motivations is vital when you hit a rough patch!*[174]
>
> *It would be a good exercise to work through… and to allow plenty of time for doing so, involving the people who need to be involved.*[175]
>
> *Make sure you discuss the partnership agreement, expectations and roles at the beginning thoroughly, as this will avoid wasting time later.*[176]
>
> *Time spent at the beginning of the process to ensure mutual respect will reap benefits in the long run. This might involve clarifying objectives, ensuring that all participants are willing to express their perspectives without being dismissed, and ironing out any misunderstandings.*[177]

As well as paying attention to the internal mechanisms of a joint project, those involved need to understand that collaboration can encourage or even force members to question and change the way they do things.

> *Joint working relationships, whether collaborations or partnerships, require exceptions in foundation routines.*[178]

9.2.a Skills for collaboration

Good collaboration requires particular skills. Partners may bring these, but they can also be learned; and it helps if partners are open to developing skills through joint work. They should have listening skills, facilitation skills, conflict management skills and emotional competence[179]. They will need to negotiate difficulties, coach or capacity-build other partners, be able to take the initiative, build institutional engagement, and understand evaluation[180].

9.2.b Stages

Two recent report/toolkits set out stages in the partnering process[181]. Both are circular, and combine the tasks required to create and build a team with project management. A simplified adaptation is suggested in the 'findings' section of this report.

The interview data suggests that, in practice, the process is not always linear: the different stages often overlap with each other. An idea may emerge after the people have met; or the availability of resources may influence the idea. Although it may be right to review the partnership at a particular point, it can also be informed by ongoing (formative) evaluation.

9.2.c Leadership

Without some form of leadership, collaboration is likely to flounder.

> *Most collaborations originate and are dependent upon the interest, relationships and commitment of a particular program officer or a small group of program officers …*

> *wherever there is passion, capacity and leadership… that is where the Network may find its best opportunities for moving its agenda forward.'*[182]

Although a joint project might be initiated by one person, good collaboration requires different leadership roles: a champion; donor(s), a manager, a facilitator, and a promoter[183].

9.2.d Joint learning

Three interviewees spoke about strong bonds that had grown through joint site visits – in these cases involving trips overseas. This shared experience of the work helped to cement and sustain collaboration.

9.2.e Good communication

Communication is a key element of a successful collaboration[184]. Both formal and informal communication must be 'open and frequent'[185]. Even the way people communicate can help to build successful collaboration[186].

Again, this requires time and attention. As one survey respondent put it:

> *When you are working internally within your own Foundation you can more easily move forward. When working in partnership you can only get so far until you have to stop to communicate with external partners in order to get 'next steps' agreed/signed off. It is worth it but it does take time.*[187]

9.2.f Power

Bheki Moyo of Trust Africa emphasises the importance of dealing with power relations: 'collaboration is not one-way'[188].

A widely-held view is that all collaborators should have an 'equal voice'[189]. Although this is sometimes questioned, in practice the principle seems to be adopted within many foundation partnerships. As one grantmaker put it:

> *We were definitely not equal partners in terms of resources, but 'one organisation, one vote' underscored our appreciation of the benefits of shared learning… we were happy to share the decision-making power and, in essence, were demonstrating a commitment to partnership.*[190]

In the same vein, a survey respondent advised:

> *Remember that not everyone has to be involved at the same level – some organisations may be able to commit more time/money than others, but any involvement should be welcomed.*

The people I interviewed held a wide range of views about how power dynamics influence collaboration. For some, the fact that most foundations have money makes it difficult to collaborate equally with grant-seeking organisations:

> *We've got real power, we've got money.*
>
> *There has to be a balance of power – most of the time, between funders and funded, there's an imbalance.*[191]

Others saw power, in the form of money, as relevant but not necessarily dominant:

> *… you've got partnerships that are unequal if money determines power … [but] money doesn't win out all the time.*[192]

One interviewee thought that grantees hold more power than funders:

> *[the power] is all on their side isn't it? … if they are not competent we are left holding nothing.*[193]

9.3 Clear objectives and an action plan

The purpose and methods of the collaboration should to be clear and, as far as possible, 'owned' by all participants[194].

In response to a question about what makes a successful partnership, all survey respondents thought that having clear objectives was seen as either essential or helpful. Asked what advice they could offer other foundations considering engaging in a partnership, survey respondents repeatedly referred to the need for clear objectives:

> *Clarity, Clarity, Clarity.*[195]
>
> *Clarity of goals.*[196]
>
> *Be absolutely clear about what you want to achieve and agree this beforehand.*[197]
>
> *Have a clear common objective, that is detailed and well articulated (so there is no room for misunderstanding of the purpose of the partnership).*[198]
>
> *Be clear in your objectives, but flexible in the route that you take to achieve your objectives.*[199]

Importantly, having clear goals for the collaboration does not mean that each participant needs the same goals for their engagement. As one survey respondent noted:

Partners can get involved for different reasons and expectations[200].

9.3.a Plan of action

As mentioned above, collaborators may have different reasons for engaging, but they must share a common understanding of the work being done, So, they need to agree a plan of action, including methods and strategies to be used, the scope and size of the collaboration. One survey respondent, describing a grant-related collaboration, advised:

> *Set out definite criteria, advertise widely and have presentations from shortlisted submissions to meet the individuals involved.*[201]

The Partnering Toolbook sets out a sample action planning framework, emphasising that while each partner will contribute something different, each must be involved in the process, and should consider the implications of the plan for their own organisation[202].

9.3.b Project boundaries

Clear timescales are important in some cases. Indeed, some practitioners take the view that it is critical to have time-bound objectives[203]. Franz-Karl Pruller of the Erste Stiftung suggests that a time limit 'helps provide perspective, avoids being overwhelmed'; and Astrid Bonfield of the

Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund (a limited-life foundation) agrees, suggesting that 'time-limited projects have more energy'[204].

The length of a partnership depends on the work being done. Some, such as a shared publication, are relatively brief. Others are longer: Inspiring Scotland's 14:19 Fund is set to run over 7–10 years.

Others are not time-limited. Boundaries can be determined by the imperative to either complete a project, or to sustain the work. For example, the Baring Foundation and John Ellerman Foundation make grants jointly to South Africa: the arrangement is reviewed from time to time, but is not time-limited[205]. In some cases, changing membership prompts review and renewal.

9.4 Working with other members

Collaboration is successful when things go well and members work well together. This is not always guaranteed:

> *For collaboratives, the challenge is about managing member differences and discovering productive new synergies.*[206]

Difficulties are often institutional. Collaborators are likely to discover differences between their organisation's values or systems[207] – these can be addressed at the early stages, before firm commitments are made. Some organisations may prove to be incompatible. In other cases, some level of compromise may be needed:

> *Joint working relationships can require exceptions in foundation routines, distract staff with passing fads with little true relevance to a foundation's work, and expose foundation practices to a wider array of critics.*[208]

Some initiatives suffer from a lack of understanding of what collaborative working is; or from participants confusing collaboration with consensus[209]. To avoid this, all stakeholders can be encouraged to participate and make their commitment overt; to be open and honest; and to learn as they go along. Openness and honesty helps to foster 'a single, known reality' – in most cases, this is only possible if collaborators spend time together.

Barriers to success include foundations' use of vague language, which leads to lack of clarity; or lack of realism: 'Collaboration often takes more time, staff effort, and organisational support than expected'[210].

On an individual level, there may be personality clashes and disagreement[211]. Partners can behave aggressively or defensively; it may be helpful for everyone involved to develop skills for working with conflict[212]. One survey respondent advised:

> *Leaving your ego at the door! You are just one of a group working together equally.*[213]

Perhaps as a way of avoiding tensions, one survey respondent suggested it is helpful for the collaboration to have an independent chair.

Challenges like these are probably inevitable, but aren't necessarily detrimental:

> *Challenges provide opportunities for deepening the commitment to collaboration. They can be the stimulus for meeting each other more fully; being more open; enabling all participants to extend their awareness; increasing their interpersonal skills; gaining confidence in the process.*[214]

9.5 Governance

Good general and financial management, clear governance, and shared understandings of best practice are important. Difficulties can be avoided with sound preparation and clear agreements[215]. One survey respondent wrote:

> *The terms of reference of your partnership need to be formally agreed and signed up to but also need to be flexible enough to react to changing circumstances.*[216]

There may be different perceptions of risk amongst members: if so, it can help to spend more time preparing, including assessing and planning for risk. It's also important to have the correct tools or technology to do the job well[217].

Whatever mechanisms are established, they need to service the aims of the partnership. Ground rules for handling business and resolving problems should be established early on[218]. At the same time, there should be flexibility, so that partners can modify the rules; and mutuality, with rules that are both equitable and beneficial[219] and all partners must share ownership of the governance structure[220].

9.5.a What structure?

There is no one structure for a foundation partnership: its shape depends entirely on – and should be determined by – the nature and needs of each partnership. Hamilton points out a collaboration structure could be formal or informal; large or small; comprise only funders, or be cross-sectoral. There may be different sorts of co-ordination, staffing and ownership; and different fiscal arrangements.

9.5.b Formal agreement

Although it isn't always necessary to have a formal written agreement, many partners find it helpful. Astrid Bonfield suggests Memoranda of Understanding are essential, 'particularly in relation to not getting money back, with a break clause – and they should include measurements of success'[221].

One survey respondent wrote:

> *Although we hardly referred to it again, the fact that we had a formal agreement and the trustees and staff of each partner foundation were formally mandated by their own Board and by the partner Board … provided helpful legitimacy and clarity from the start.*

The Partnering Toolbook offers a Sample Partnering Agreement.

9.6 Resources

Partnerships require dedicated resources:

> *For anything beyond the simplest discussion forum, dedicated project management resources are essential.*[222]

The most obvious contribution foundations bring to a partnership is money. However, as Hughes points out they also bring information and knowledge; reputation; staff and board members; and a particular culture. Another important resource, referred to above, is leadership [223].

A survey respondent advised:

> *Agree on what resources each partner can contribute to a partnership – it is ok if there is not an equal contribution.*[224]

9.6.a Maintenance and support

A common view is that collaboratives require dedicated staff[225]: they should 'consider the benefits of using an intermediary or other staff to oversee the collaborative'[226]. Astrid Bonfield of the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund shares this view[227]:

> *no foundation has the time or resource, internally, to deliver necessary outcomes.*

Employing staff has other implications, as one survey respondent noted:

> *If you employ someone to co-ordinate make sure they are happy to represent the members. Provide clear targets and possibly consider external supervision or HR.*[228]

Most survey respondents saw having good administration and high-calibre project managers as important. In practice, many collaborative initiatives are serviced by one or more of the partners.

For partnerships involving a significant amount of detailed operational work, it may be helpful to develop 'layered decision-making'[229]. Day-to-day decisions – especially within larger partnerships – should be taken by individuals or small groups, with only major decisions coming to all the partners as a whole group[230].

9.6.b Allocate enough time

As noted above, anyone with experience of collaboration emphasises tat it takes up time[231]:

> *'Whether your objective in co-operating is strategic or tactical, this investment in terms of time remains key to successful relationships, and cannot be half-hearted.'*[232]

Survey respondents confirmed that partnership is, in itself, time-consuming. Of the 33 survey respondents who work with European foundations and answered the question, six said that, in their experience, partnership working does not take too much time; but five said it would put them off, and 22 agreed it may take too much time but it wouldn't put them off. Respondents cautioned:

> *Be prepared for the time-consuming nature of partnerships.*[233]
>
> *Beware of the time that can be involved.*[234]
>
> *It takes longer to work in partnership and can be very time consuming.*[235]
>
> *It takes more time than you think.*[236]

The demands on foundation time can be alleviated by employing dedicated staff[237] or taking steps to ensure that demands are minimised and distinctive competence maximised[238]. This is particularly important if a partnership is to succeed:

> *Whether your objective in co-operating is strategic or tactical, this investment in terms of time remains key to successful relationships, and cannot be half-hearted.*[239]

Several interviewees also stressed the length of time it takes to develop and work through a partnership: it can take months or years to move from having an idea to implementing a project.

9.7 Evaluation

Two survey respondents emphasised the importance of a good evaluation process:

> *Ensure that definition of what would be a successful project is defined at the outset and agreed by the partners.*[240]

> *Evaluate the learnings after a partnership project; discuss what worked and what did not work.*[241]

During a workshop at the 2010 EFC AGA, speakers emphasised this view. Astrid Bonfield of the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund, believes:

> *Evaluation is critical – it should be proper and well-funded – need to tell the story, and the story of the process not only the outcomes, because otherwise you will forget.*[242]

Franz-Karl Pruller, ERSTE Stiftung, believes that evaluation:

> *… is especially important to ensure honesty – to avoid the 'danger of talking yourselves into success.*[243]

The European Programme on Integration and Migration (EPIM) has adopted a 'strategic learning' ongoing evaluation approach initiated by Atlantic Philanthropies. This enables the foundation members to reflect on the collaboration, and make adaptations during the process, rather than waiting until the end to evaluate it.

Grantcraft's practical guide to collaboration offers a 'How Are We Doing?' collaborative assessment tool[244].

9.7.a Sharing the learning

Increasingly, collaborations between foundations are being documented and distributed both internally and externally. For example, Inspiring Scotland publishes six-monthly performance reports. Reports written by EPIM's external evaluators are made available to participating foundations and also published via the EPIM website.

10 Findings and recommendations

10.1 Foundations are collaborating

There is evidence of a lot of interest amongst foundations in collaboration. I learned of at least 100 examples of collaboration. The Association of Charitable Foundations (ACF) and European Foundation Centre (EFC) and Ariadne are providing opportunities to discuss collaboration, and helping those who are collaborating to share what they are learning. New platforms are emerging, including the Network of European Foundations and Woburn Place Collaborative.

10.2 Understanding of the nature of foundation collaboration is still developing

To a large extent, foundations engaged in collaboration are making it up as they go along. The people involved contribute a wide range of skills and experience, but in a general way. They rarely draw on expert knowledge that exists, and as a result some projects take longer to develop, and problems arise that might otherwise have been foreseen.

There are some useful tools available, although the most relevant – Grantcraft's 'Funder Collaboratives: why and how funders work together' – uses only case studies from the USA.

There is also little critical analysis. Although foundations are increasingly publishing descriptions of collaborative initiatives, they rarely reflect openly on the downsides or difficulties. Members of foundations talk of positive evaluation, but generally do not publicise such material. There is little hard evidence that collaboration works.

Foundations have different reasons for collaborating. Some are exploring new ways of working in a critical way; others seem content to collaborate because they believe it is good (or avoid collaboration because they believe it is not good). The lack of strategic analyisis may not matter in the short-term – foundations are well-placed to initiate, explore and test ideas – but a more informed and thoughtful approach would make sense if foundations want to build on, and share, what they are learning.

There certainly seems to be some interest in this. Some interviewees and survey respondents indicated interest in really understanding the value of collaboration – for example:

> *The operating assumption is always that funders should collaborate more – is that really borne out by experience?*[245]

10.3 Suggestions for improving foundation collaboration

I suggest collaborative initiatives between foundations have more chance of success if those involved could:

- Have ways of assessing whether to collaborate.
- Understand the processes involved in building and sustaining collaboration.
- Find ways of sharing what they learn.

10.3.a Realistic assessment

Although there are many potential benefits to partnership working, there are also drawbacks. The financial and time costs can be particularly heavy. Foundations need to be aware of this, and not expect their resources to spread too thinly.

Some foundations collaborate because they think it's a good thing. Others avoid collaboration because they distrust it. A more useful and realistic approach could be developed, if foundations in the UK were to look critically at what actually works and what doesn't, talk openly about what they learn internally and externally, and are prepared to be challenged.

10.3.b To collaborate or not to collaborate?

Foundations should consider collaboration if some of these factors exist, or are dominant:

a **The foundation internal culture and values include:**

- A basic belief that collaboration is good.
- Enjoyment of risk-taking.
- Willingness to learn and adopt new ways of working.
- Previous positive experience of collaboration.
- Good internal communications, so the experience and learning is shared with colleagues.
- A belief that foundations should steer the agenda.
- A pluralist approach to change.

b **The board and chief executive are supportive, and willing:**

- To give up control of some grant-making.
- To trust the people who will do the work.
- To allocate time and resources to the collaboration.

c **The people will form a good team:**

Those who represent the foundation in the collaborative enterprise are good at working in teams (they are good leaders, can listen and facilitate and negotiate, can manage conflict and are emotionally mature)

The partners (individuals but also their organisations) are people that like and trust each other

d **The opportunity:**

- Needs more money than an individual foundation can allocate.
- Would benefit from the joint advocacy efforts of several foundations.
- Would benefit from a model of support that the foundation cannot easily provide.
- Can be linked with some identifiable impacts or outcomes.
- Enables genuine sharing of costs.

Foundations should *avoid* collaboration if some of these factors exist, or are more dominant:

a **The foundation internal culture and values include:**

- Intent to maximise direct grant funding and minimise administrative or 'grants-plus' costs.
- A model of change which is not shared by others.
- A belief that grantees (and not foundations) should steer the agenda.
- An individualistic approach.
- Reliance on competition.
- A wish to be a leader in the field and gain sole credit for innovation.

b **The board and chief executive:**

- Consider direct grant-making to be core to the foundation's purpose.
- Are unwilling to compromise.
- Are comfortable about undertaking advocacy as a foundation, whether or not others participate.

c **The people who might be involved:**

- Lack the necessary skills to work in teams.
- Promote their own agenda above the needs of the collaboration.
- Find it difficult to engage with organisations with different values.
- Are too busy with existing work programmes to allocate time to collaboration.

d **The opportunity:**

- Is not relevant to the foundation's existing programmes of work.
- Is not timely.

10.3.c Understanding collaborative processes

The processes involved in creating and developing collaboration between foundations are similar to general team building and project development. Yet, although many tools have been developed to help these processes, trusts and foundations are generally not using them. Although several UK foundations are aware of the GrantCraft publication, many are not.

Each partnership is unique; but there is now considerable evidence about what can work. I hope that a 'how-to-do-it' guide for UK trusts and foundations can be produced, outlining the basic elements of positive partnerships between foundations.

10.3.d Share the learning

There is huge benefit from sharing what is being learned from partnerships – both positive and negative. This should be done not only through meetings and discussions, but published reviews and evaluations.

Although foundations are beginning to publish reports of collaborative initiatives, they need to find ways of communicating what went wrong as well as what worked.

The survey and interview data suggest that, internally, foundations can learn from collaboration. However, many foundations do not consciously or bring learning back to their own organisations. This may happen when foundations aren't fully engaged with collaborative initiatives. In some cases, foundations collaborate because they believe it to be a good thing, rather than because the work is aligned to their existing work programmes. And, lessons won't be brought home if directors or other senior staff are insufficiently informed about the project, or if the people who are most directly involved lack either the time or status to do this.

10.4 Finally

Talking to foundation colleagues and reading their report, I've learned a lot about the promise of collaboration – the opportunities for scaling up and improving effectiveness, for learning and for developing new approaches. I've also learned about the pitfalls – time, cost, diversion, and – in some cases –tears. Collaboration can be worthwhile, but it's still a developing art, and each partnership is different. We need to learn from what others are learning, keep our eyes open, as we explore this intriguing landscape.

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Grantcraft
www.grantcraft.org

Managing a Funders' Collective video and companion guide
www.grantcraft.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.viewPage&pageID=616

European Foundation Centre
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Appendix

Suggested collaboration cycle

Notes

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