

The art *of* partnering



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This Cultural Enquiry into partnerships, in collaboration with the BBC, was directed by **Jane Ellison**, the BBC's Head of Creative Partnerships and former Commissioning Editor of General Factual Programmes for Radio 4. Jane Ellison was seconded to King's to lead this project and is the author of this report with additional research by Dr Susie Christensen and Dr James Doeser and support from Stella Toonen. The report was edited by Dr Trudi Darby.

Cover image: **Tree of Codes**

A contemporary ballet, premiered at **Manchester International Festival**, July 2015

Wayne McGregor Director and choreographer

Olafur Eliasson Visual concept

Jamie xx Composer

Company Wayne McGregor
and **Paris Opera Ballet**

Inspired by *Tree of Codes* by
Jonathan Safran Foer

Image by **Ravi Deepres**

Executive summary

The subsidised cultural sector is historically steeped in collaboration and has seen an increasingly formalised approach over the last 70 years, with recommendations to partner featuring in sector-wide reviews over decades. For UK cultural organisations of all sizes, multiple partnerships are now a fact of life.

The term ‘partnership’ is widely used. For organisations that responded to our questionnaire the word has true meaning and value as a commitment to bridge boundaries in a principled and effective way, but there is a lack of coherence in how it is used and what is understood by it. The sector does not have its own definition or set models. ‘Partnership’ we found to be an umbrella term, encompassing a wide range of collaborations at national, regional and local level. We were struck by the power of identity and community in a place in forging an ethos of common purpose. These relationships can be categorised as goal-oriented for a particular project, resource-based or network-based. This Enquiry presents a new taxonomy of relationships that tries to capture their ecology, based on the evidence gathered from practitioners; we set out this taxonomy in Section 3.

Many of the participants in our research welcomed the looseness of definition of ‘partnership’, allowing creative thinking and flexibility to form appropriate partnerships, but for others the lack of a shared understanding of its dynamics reduced partnership to ‘just window dressing’. We found great commitment to successful partnering, with most organisations reporting positively that they had benefited from the partnership they described. This was tempered by some weariness of partnerships experienced as unequal, chaotic, insensitive or inefficient.

Yet partnership was described as a necessity that is critical for survival; hence the importance of making sure that it delivers as a worthwhile concept that can live up to expectations. Still, partnership cannot be the solution to all the sector’s problems.

At a time when policy makers are emphasising partnership to maximise the use of resources, to find new money and develop new ideas, we found ambivalence about using it just to access funding and suspicion of partnerships that were imposed rather than being allowed to develop organically, especially when this is perceived as a tool only to save money.

We also found difficulty in identifying appropriate ways of evaluating value for money, with concern that too narrow a focus on monetary benefits will lose the value added benefits of partnership that are less easy to quantify. That is because, in the questionnaire responses, partnership was often inspired by other motivations, such as artistic impact, social impact or impact on the audience. Sharing resources, expertise and capacity enabled organisations to think differently and more ambitiously about their goals. We noted, though, that partnership ambitions were less evident for digital capacity.

Nevertheless, partnership was often described – perhaps idealistically – as being about long-term efficiency, new ideas and new ways of working, with organisations collaborating to create a bigger cake rather than competing to get a smaller slice of a smaller cake.

The importance of the human dimension – building relationships, working practices and communication – was frequently cited as being most significant in determining success in how to partner. This suggests that brokering partnerships is evolving as a new role, with leadership attributes that need embedding within organisations.

Methodology

A questionnaire was distributed to cultural organisations across the UK, with 80 per cent of examples from outside of London. As part of the questionnaire, 94 respondents detailed one partnership with an outcome in 2014 that was typical of the kind of partnering they undertook. We also held follow-up interviews with 35 respondents across the UK, and based on these interviews we have constructed 10 snapshot case studies. We then held roundtable discussions in England with invited discussants in Newcastle, Derby and Brighton. Details of the questionnaire, case studies and round tables are available at kcl.ac.uk/culture. To put this research in context, we commissioned a history of partnership in the publicly funded cultural sector, which can be found on page 32.

Foreword



Deborah Bull
Director, Culture

Across King's College London, partnerships with artists and cultural organisations offer distinctive opportunities to academics and students while adding value and delivering benefits across the cultural sector. These partnerships support King's in its mission to deliver world-class education and research that drives innovation, creates impact and engages beyond the university's walls. Given the importance of partnership to the university, it seemed appropriate that partnerships should be the focus of our third Cultural Enquiry.

Our programme of Cultural Enquiries was established in 2013 to provide a neutral space in which the cultural sector can address shared questions, opportunities and challenges, as well as access to the academic analysis that can inform debate.

Our first Enquiry, into the value of culture within major events, asked how the UK might best harness the legacy of London's hugely successful Cultural Olympiad. The Enquiry led to an international conference bringing together representatives from London 2012, Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020, as well as the establishment of a Major Events Consortium (see kcl.ac.uk/cultural/consortium).

Our second Enquiry examined 70 years of government policy designed to increase arts engagement by children and young people. The resulting report provided key recommendations to ensure the lessons of the past are taken into account by policy makers in the future (see kcl.ac.uk/cultural/culturalenquiries).

This most recent Enquiry was inspired by what appears to be a growing focus on partnership in and across the cultural sector, as policy makers emphasise the importance of partnership in maximising the value of ever-scarcer resources and organisations are turning to partnership to realise ideas and connect with new audiences. We were keen to understand how and when this 'drive to partner' came about and to explore what cultural organisations mean when they talk about partnership.

In fact, as we discovered, partnership and the concept of collaboration are nothing new: the first appointment of an Arts Council staff role dedicated to partnership came in 1949 and the first use of the word in the Arts Council archives seems to occur in the 1951 Annual Report. Despite this long history of working in partnership, our Enquiry reveals that there is a lack of coherence across the cultural sector in what the term means and how it is used.

In drawing together views from some 94 organisations across the UK, as well as detailed interviews and roundtable discussions in Newcastle, Derby and Brighton, this Enquiry represents perhaps the most comprehensive overview of partnership in the arts and cultural sector. The robust data it has generated will provide arts practitioners with an overview of the many shapes partnership can take. It will also act as a reference point for other organisations in the sector seeking to create and evaluate their own partnerships, by providing examples of successful experiments as well as contradictions within the practice of the concept.

With its renewed focus on partnership – as emphasised by Tony Hall in his foreword and in his keynote speech on the future of the BBC in September 2015 – I'm delighted to have collaborated with the BBC on this Cultural Enquiry. I'm grateful to Tony Hall for his leadership of the collaboration, to Tony Ageh (Controller, Archive Development) for supporting the idea at the outset and of course to Jane Ellison, the Enquiry's director. Now the BBC's Head of Creative Partnerships, Jane's vast experience of working in partnership with the cultural sector inspired me to undertake this Enquiry and her leadership, tenacity and knowledge have given the project its life. My thanks are also due to Professor David Guest of the Department of Management at King's College London, the Enquiry's academic lead, and to Dr Susie Christensen, Dr James Doerer and Stella Toonen in King's College London's Culture directorate, each of whom made significant and important contributions. Finally, I was delighted that Dr Trudi Darby, a longstanding staff member at King's – recently awarded Fellowship of the College – agreed to edit the report.

At King's, we recognise that big and complex questions like these are unlikely to have straightforward answers. This report, like preceding Enquiries, should be seen for what it is: a contribution to the debate and an attempt to generate a deeper understanding of the nature, practice and complexities that make partnering, at its best, an art.

With its rich insights and thoughtful considerations, I very much hope that the findings of this Cultural Enquiry into partnership will support the UK's rich portfolio of cultural organisations – including the BBC – in working together towards even greater achievements in the future.



Tony Hall
Director-General, BBC

We live in one of the most creative and advanced information societies in the world. This country's incredible talent and cultural institutions have been vital to that success. Their creativity is supported by a unique network of organisations nurturing and sustaining the sector. The BBC is just one of those organisations.

Deborah Bull launched this Cultural Enquiry last autumn to explore how partnerships underpin the ambitions of the cultural sector in imagining bigger and better projects, bringing in broader audiences and supporting new ways of working. I am delighted that the BBC has joined with King's College London to complete this work.

It has been a great opportunity to better understand what is meant by partnership and to reflect on how it works in practice from the responses and contributions of some 170 people around the UK. I'm grateful to everyone who's contributed. Without their generosity and openness, the picture of so many different relationships included under the term partnership could not have been drawn. What also stands out for me is the honesty in describing some of the challenges.

The commitment to bridging boundaries and achieving more together that shines out from this Enquiry is one that I share.

True partnership is demanding, but it also brings great rewards. I've seen first-hand the difference we can make when we work together, at the Royal Opera House, as Chair of the Cultural Olympiad in 2012, but also in the two years I've been running the BBC. We are just at the beginning of what is a fundamental change of approach to create an open BBC – working much closer with others for the good of the nation. My aspiration is for the BBC to be Britain's creative partner – a platform for Britain's institutions of ideas, our museums, theatres, libraries and festivals.

The question for the BBC and the wider sector is how we collaborate better to make the most of all our resources for the benefit of all. For the BBC this will mean bringing unique value to our partnerships and learning how to work in new collaborative ways.

This report is a contribution to that process. I hope it will inform our commitment to ensuring that Britain continues to be a creative world leader, making every part of the country a better place to live.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Tony Hall". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

1

Introduction and context



It is not a magic formula, not a totem, not a password to success

Sir John Tusa

Why investigate the *publicly funded* cultural institutions?

In 2014 Alan Davey, then Chief Executive of Arts Council England (ACE), introduced *This England: how Arts Council England uses its investment to shape a national cultural ecology*, saying:



We're living in an era of exceptional cultural richness. Over the past decade or so, the brilliance of a generation of artists, supported by sustained public investment, has created the conditions for a thriving cultural sector that rewards creative ambition, enriches the lives of the public, and promotes the democratic values of our nation.

He went on to describe the whole arts and cultural ecology as:



... the living, evolving network of artists, cultural organisations and venues cooperating in many fruitful partnerships, artistic, structural and financial. The metaphor of an ecology, of a living, balanced environment, expresses how nothing happens within this system without its impact being felt widely. So it's vital we develop it with respect and care.¹

It is those 'fruitful partnerships' that this Enquiry has set out to examine. How do they work? What do they contribute to the 'ecology'? What aims do they support? How do they fit together? How do those who partner within this evolving ecology describe success?

The Advisory Panel

A number of advisers from around the UK were invited to guide and comment on the work of the Enquiry, with Professor David Guest of the Department of Management at King's College London as the lead academic adviser. The reflections of the Panel are a significant commentary threaded through the report. The Panel emphasised that in order to examine the effectiveness of partnership in enabling publicly funded cultural institutions to achieve their strategic objectives, we would need to:

- understand with greater precision what is meant by the term 'partnership';
- identify good practice, given a dearth of models for developing new approaches; and
- explore the breadth and potential of partnerships.

How widespread is partnership in our sample of the cultural sector?

We sent the questionnaire to a wide-ranging sample, which produced robust, qualitative evidence for exploring activity described as 'partnership'. From the responses of 186 organisations, more than half of the sample (56 per cent) said that they had been involved in six or more partnerships in 2014; 37 per cent were involved in more than 10. Only 2.6 per cent said that they were not involved in any partnerships at all. The data suggest that for many organisations of different sizes across the country multiple partnerships are a fact of life.

i
97%
of respondents
thought their
partnership
was a success

What is partnership?

A literature review undertaken by Dr Susie Christensen revealed that there was very little academic research into what partnership means specifically for arts and culture. The academic literature on partnership is rooted in the experience of other sectors, including social sciences, health, local government, NGOs, international development, business and management and the labour market.

For this reason, we also commissioned a report charting the evolution of partnership in arts and culture. Dr James Doeser's account *The drive to partner* is published with this Enquiry. It concludes that:



Overall, the story of the last 70 years has been an increasingly formalised approach to partnership in the cultural sector. This reflects an increasing complexity, diversity and scale of the sector itself, as well as an emergent policy consensus that has adopted concepts and theories from the corporate world. The notion of partnership is now ubiquitous in the cultural sector. But so too is the recommendation to partner more. Consistently, throughout the decades, from the 1970s onwards, the recommendation to partner has featured in sector-wide reviews, suggesting that 'partnership' rhetoric is outpacing the reality [...]. All of this is driven by a desire to be rational – to recognise that the objectives of broad national policy can only be achieved with the coordination of fragmented and dispersed resources. It seems that while there are complexity and scarce resources there will be the need for partnership. Neither of those processes look like slowing down, and partnership will continue to be part of the policy toolkit for the foreseeable future.²

This Cultural Enquiry into the role of partnership is set against a background of declining public funding for arts and culture, leading the most recent reports to emphasise partnerships as structural and financial forms of cooperation that will:

- secure additional funding, unlock further savings and deliver value, efficiency, cost saving or revenue raising;
- enrich regional and local cultural identity; and/or
- provide ways in which national cultural organisations can fulfil their national remit, extending reach and putting expertise at the service of more local organisations.

Defining partnership

In conducting this research, we found a perhaps surprising lack of coherence in how the term ‘partnership’ is used and what different people and organisations understand the term to mean or require. The concept of collaboration is one with which the cultural sector has natural empathy. Given the diverse nature of the sector, perhaps it is not surprising that it has not articulated a definition of partnership of its own. Yet the word is used abundantly, as Sir John Tusa, Managing Director of the Barbican Arts Centre 1995–2007 and author of *Pain in the Arts*³, pointed out to us in an interview:



It is not a magic formula, not a totem, not a password to success [...] Nor is it a formula, a pre-ordained kit of actions, guidelines for behaviour to be taken off some management shelf and then applied by numbers until the hoped-for result – ‘partnership’ – appears. Nor is it any act of cooperation, however mundane or routine, at any level of activity between two organisations. It is more than ‘working together’ when or if it seems practical or convenient. Too often, a claim of ‘partnership’ between two organisations is conferred on any piece of routine cooperation to confer a veil of respectability or seriousness on a perfectly matter-of-fact relationship.

At three round tables, held in Newcastle, Brighton and Derby, some participants also implied that the impact and value of partnership was undermined by confusion as to what it is and what it is not. One argued that the lack of a shared understanding of its dynamics reduces partnership to, ‘just window dressing [...] a nice label to make it sound more equal’. Partnership was widely associated with an ethos implying equality which was not always shared by all partners. In one case, an organisation was funded by a national body, but the relationship was so unequal and hierarchical that, although the funder regarded it as ‘partnership’, to the organisation it felt like a service agreement.



33%
of partnerships
in our sample
involved
organisations
outside the
cultural sector

The Advisory Panel included Ros Tennyson, Founder and Development Director (Strategy) at the Partnership Brokers Association⁴, who has long experience of international, cross-sector partnerships. Her work brought to our attention the considerable amount of documentation in the form of guidebooks, tools, frameworks and practitioner-generated case studies that has been developed systematically since the early 1990s—now widely available and of some influence worldwide.⁵ While this material is related to sustainable development and has evolved from experience in places other than the UK, we believe that it provides a good starting point for our Enquiry by grounding it in established theory and practice.

Those involved in sustainable development also report a lack of clarity about what defines a partnership. The Partnering Initiative⁶ and the Partnership Brokers Association, considered to be at the forefront of this work, have suggested using a simple definition as a starting point:

Partnership is an ongoing working relationship where risks and benefits are shared.

They suggest that this means a commitment to mutuality, in the form of:

- contributions, albeit of different types, from all those involved;
- co-creation/co-ownership of the partnership’s activities; and
- shared risk, responsibility and accountability.

In addition to defining the term ‘partnership’, there has been growing recognition from entities operating, for example, in the humanitarian sector, that there are some core partnering principles lying at the heart of successful partnerships. These are⁷:

equity—because it builds genuine respect for the added value each party brings;
transparency—because it engenders trust between partners and leads to greater willingness to innovate and take risks; and
mutual benefit—because it leads to deeper engagement and a greater likelihood of sustainability.



The notion of partnership is now ubiquitous in the cultural sector

James Doerer

Christina Schmalenbach, Humanitarian Capacity Development Co-ordinator at Oxfam, explained how more systematic approaches to partnering are already having an effect on the sector:



In our sector, we are experiencing something interesting. Funders are increasingly funding networks, consortia, coalitions, rather than individual entities. The driver for those agencies to collaborate may have been initially to access funding but they are now finding that collaboration is far more effective in the long run and will achieve a greater impact than individual agencies working separately. This is true, I have no doubt about it.

An additional element we have used as a framework for some aspects of our Enquiry is the consideration of partnership as a *project for a goal*, on the one hand, and partnering as a *process* on the other.



In the 20+ years that I have been involved in partnership issues, I have had three ‘aha’ moments that have helped me to navigate partnership complexities with more confidence. The first was that partnering is about ‘bridging’ not ‘blurring’ boundaries. The second was the fact that we need to focus not just on the ‘why’ and the ‘what’ of partnership [...] but also, crucially, on the ‘how’. The third was that effective partnering requires investment and recognition of new skill sets and competences—it is not simply ‘business as usual’ with a new name.⁸

Ros Tennyson
Partnership Brokers Association,
Advisory Panel member

2 Why partner: aims of partnership

In answering our questionnaire, 94 respondents detailed one partnership in 2014 that was typical of the kind of partnership that they entered into.

Sixty-seven per cent of respondents had initiated the partnership described and 97 per cent of partnerships were reported as successful, suggesting the sample is predicated on partnerships that are deemed to have worked.

In summary we found that:

- for 88 per cent of respondents, one of the aims of the partnership was to engage broader audiences;
- for 84 per cent, the partnership resulted in a project or output in 2014;
- for 83 per cent, the partnership enhanced value for money; and
- for 97 per cent, the partnership enhanced the work of their organisation.

But when asked whether the partnership was evaluated, only 57 per cent said that it had been, while 38 per cent said it had not. In some cases the evaluation was still ongoing at the time of answering. This raises questions as to how success is being defined and measured, and we return to this point in the section on reviewing and revising.

Engaging broader audiences

There were three main ways of finding and attracting new audiences:

- increasing awareness within specific target audience groups;
- reaching audiences that would not normally go to arts/cultural events; and
- focusing on widening participation.

Many respondents were able to describe how working with partners supported these objectives:

Projects and programmes

The information from our respondents has provided us with more detailed insight into the outputs delivered in partnerships. We have indicated where our case studies reflect these findings. A list and brief description of the [snapshot case studies](#) is available online.

The words ‘project’ and ‘programme’ were both used by respondents, sometimes interchangeably. A project could be a performance, event, exhibition, work of art, production, festival, report, community activity, education initiative, schools liaison or teaching initiative. A programme was often a number of successive projects or connected projects but generally within a time frame. The project partnerships generally involved two, three or four partners and were often time-limited by funding. Value for money was rarely stated as a primary motivation to partner.

For examples of projects between two partners, see the case studies for: [Folkestone Quarterhouse / Folkestone Fringe](#) and for [Hardwick Hall](#), and for one with multiple partners, see [Teach Through Music](#).

About one third (35 per cent) of the partnerships involved working with organisations outside the cultural sector, for example in higher education, health or the prison service. For an example of a partnership of this type, see the case study for [Freedom to Create in Scotland](#).

National events such as the Centenary of the First World War can galvanise partnership projects and programmes. Five of the responses to our questionnaire described partnerships as part of the First World War Centenary programme, which prompted us to look at how a national organisation like Imperial War Museums took on its leadership role for this significant event, linking up over 3,000 organisations nationally, locally and internationally.



67%

of respondents
had initiated
the partnership
described

97%

of partnerships
enhanced the work of
their organisation



Based on our evaluation, benefits for members included: having a focal point that brings networks together; enabling them to team up and avoid duplication of effort; unifying the sector; facilitating the delivery of a coherent Centenary programme and enhancing the visibility of the commemoration (Market Link Insights, 2014).

Gina Koutsika

Head of National & International Learning
& Engagement, Imperial War Museums

See the case study for [Imperial War Museums' Centenary Partnership](#).

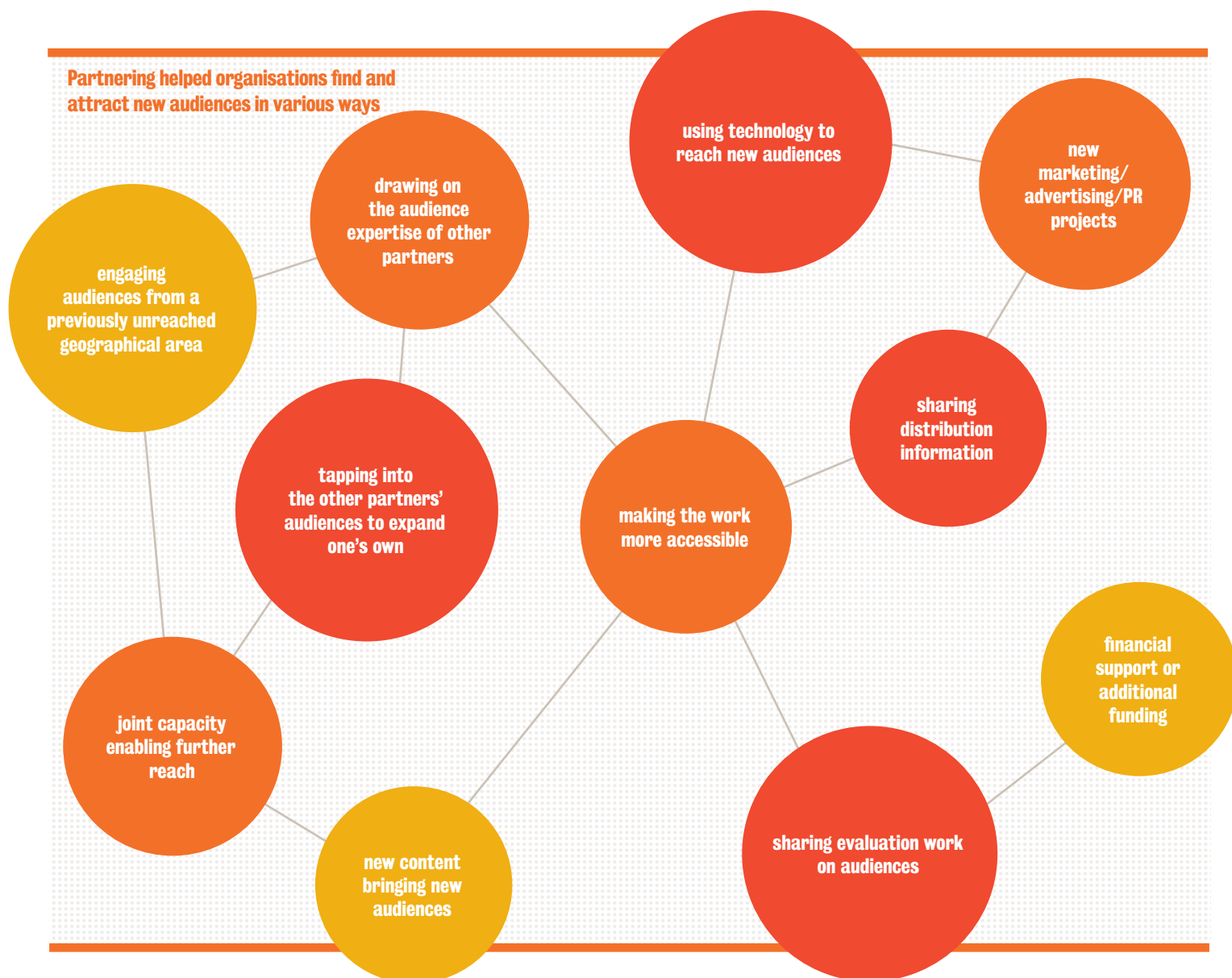


This co-operative approach is something individuals and organisations are keen to explore further to share resources and to learn from each other as well as develop and deliver projects together

Leonie Bell

Creative Scotland

Partnering helped organisations find and attract new audiences in various ways



A collective cultural and economic voice

Many partnerships were designated in geographical terms. This was often reflected in the name of the partnership, such as [Wales: Showing our Metal](#). Dr James Doeser's history of partnership, reproduced in full at the end of this document, highlights just how often partnerships spring from a regional context. Paula Murray, Assistant Chief Executive at Brighton & Hove City Council, emphasised 'place' as being a powerful driver.



One of the things that culture and cultural partners can do better than others is to express some of the things about place that we are all experiencing [...] Place is also the common ground between cultural partners and other sectorial partners or individuals. [An] ambition around place, or concern for place and a desire to improve, brings all sorts of partners and individuals around the table.

This sentiment was strongly shared across the UK. Clifford Harkness, Head of Collections Management at National Museums Northern Ireland, told us why creating a collective cultural and economic voice was such a powerful factor in the ethos of partnership.



Those who get together to form partnerships need to invest in a level of physical, intellectual and emotional energy. A sense of identity or community adds to the mix but perhaps most of all, a sense of place gives focus to an ethos of common purpose in a partnership.

Leonie Bell, Director of Arts and Engagement, Creative Scotland and an Advisory Panel member, observed:



Scotland's scale and geographic spread and range means that working together is often natural and occurs almost automatically and that this cooperative approach is something individuals and organisations are keen to explore further to share resources and to learn from each other as well as develop and deliver projects together.

i
memberships of

6

or more were
most common,
with 'more than

30

organisations and
individuals' and
'approximately

40

businesses'
reported

From our roundtable discussions in England, we have been able briefly to sketch out some other challenges that lie behind forging a collective voice. The shape and structure of often overlapping local authorities play a significant part in determining what the 'civic contract' should be, as does local history. In Newcastle upon Tyne and Gateshead, for example, the reorganisation of local authorities in 1986 still affects the region today. For Brighton in the south-east, the need for definition against London is strong, raising questions about the identity of 'Greater Brighton' as a brand for the whole region. In Derby, the cultural voice needs articulating in a city identified with a manufacturer like the iconic Rolls Royce.

The vocabulary used to describe relationships built around place was varied:

collaboration, consortium, network, hub, cultural hub, federation, venue-based cultural producers, groups of museums working together, regional alliance, umbrella, meeting.

The majority of these kinds of relationships included larger numbers of partners, generally six or more members. They had a mixture of objectives for raising profile, funds or promoting arts and culture in their locality. [CW8](#) is a case study focused on the large venues in Warwickshire. In other instances, the membership of these partnerships was significant and well into double figures: memberships of 'more than 20 organisations', 'around 30 organisations and individuals' and 'approximately 40 businesses' were reported.

Higher education partnerships

Across the research, the growing involvement of universities as partners in the cultural sector was discernible and often welcome. Our case study of a partnership with a Higher Education Institution (HEI) is [Wales: Showing our Metal](#). It aims to catalogue, preserve and make more accessible important archives about the Welsh steel industry. Swansea University is working closely with local government to secure the funding to safeguard the archive.

But HEIs were also found to be complex, large organisations which could be difficult for the smaller cultural organisations to navigate.



Universities are complex and we can do some innovative work with areas of that, but getting buy-in at the right level takes years—we have been working for 10 years to develop a three-year partnership with the university.

Round table participant



One of the things that culture and cultural partners can do better than others is to express some of the things about place that we are all experiencing

Paula Murray
Brighton & Hove City Council

Particularly when there were several HEIs in the region, the cultural sector may have to broker between differing priorities and ideologies, a finding which supports recent work by Roberta Comunian, Abigail Gilmore and Silvie Jacobi.⁹

The relationship with the higher education sector can go further. When Derby Playhouse was faced with bankruptcy, it was taken over by the University of Derby and, with funding from ACE and the university, given a new mission as Derby Theatre: a 'Learning Theatre' combining commercial programming with the teaching for a degree in theatre arts. The university's motivation was to satisfy its own strategic objectives for outreach—to show benefit to the community, city and county as well as offering more practical educational options for its students. For the theatre, the purchase was, 'a great idea' that increased local respect for the university by keeping going an amenity that was important to the community.

Sector alliances

Partnerships within the same field of the cultural sector, for example between all the museums in one area, were frequently easier to bring about. They were often between like-minded organisations. These partnerships were seen as bringing benefits: reducing costs, coping with a lack of sustainable funding, producing exhibitions and generally benefiting the partners and their audiences. The [Cornwall Museums Partnership](#) case study demonstrates particularly well how partnership can benefit organisations dealing with similar problems.

Value for money through procurement

A small number of partnerships in the sample were mainly focused on joint procurement, with value for money explicitly a main motivator. We saw this in the case study on the [Shared Partnership in the East](#) (SPINE), which began as a procurement-led project although it generated other benefits as well.

National organisations and partnership

Twenty-five per cent of the partnerships described to us were led by a national institution and some, such as the BBC/British Library collaboration on 'Gothic', were between national organisations. Across the UK, national institutions were named by respondents as partners although they had not themselves filled out the questionnaire. We heard positive comments about the role of national institutions at the round tables; one participant had found their partnerships 'pleasant and efficient', while the opportunity to boost staff confidence and improve connections had been valued. As one respondent noted, 'It is an opportunity to promote our regional perspective with a national partner'. The [Victoria and Albert Museum's Photography Curators' Training Programme](#) is a case study of how the V&A and The Art Fund worked together to share skills with regional organisations.

Others were less enthusiastic, with some contributors finding their national partner to be inflexible and insensitive to local participation. One said:



The national organisation has a lot of power, they can say 'you're doing it our way or the highway'. It's all about having conversations, though, because local advice can help increase footfall and raise the profile of the national organisation too.

3 Partnership: towards a taxonomy

It has become clear that 'partnership' is an umbrella term that shelters all manner of initiatives at national, regional and local level. When asked to give the name and short description of a typical partnership, respondents spoke of:

For many organisations 'partnership' evidently has true meaning and value, but it is not a single model. Rather, it is an attitude—a commitment to bridging boundaries in a principled and effective way or, as one respondent put it, 'an evolving collaboration'.

The word 'partnership' is used loosely and we considered whether, as some of our Advisory Panel have suggested, it should in fact be restricted in its use to relationships that have discernible outcomes but, as Professor David Guest remarked,



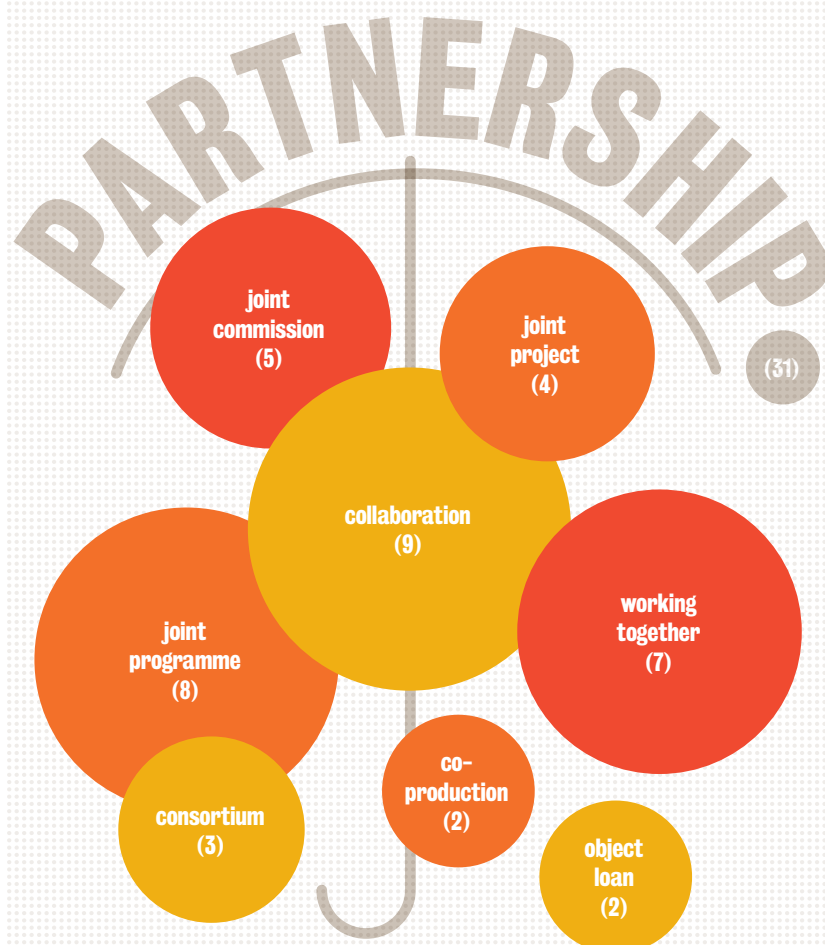
... we need to accept it and look at the different aspects within the term. We need to work with it because the people we talk about work with it. These relationships could be re-classified: some are goal-oriented and are there for a certain project and for a limited time. Others are network-based and more flexible and then there are the resource-based ones for people who get together to work better and more effectively. Some incorporate all three.

A taxonomy has emerged from the aims, motivations and descriptions that were reported in our sample. It is one of the major findings of this Enquiry. Given the range of relationships designated as 'partnerships', we have avoided the use of the word in the taxonomy grid.

The term 'strategic partnership' is often used in the cultural sector but we have not included it, as any one of the relationships in the taxonomy above could be described as 'strategic', in that it enables an organisation over time to position itself or change, according to its stated aims.

Cultural organisations will often work in a combination of different types of 'partnership' in order to achieve different strategic objectives across their business. These relationships, woven together, create the web through which delivery is thought to be achieved. This spawns the ecology that, in turn, is increasingly called upon to sustain the cultural sector and to which levels of decision making are being devolved.

Vocabulary used to describe partnership



Terms used just once were: joined forces, flexible partnership, regional alliance, shared delivery, sharing, joined up, worked closely, regular meeting, relationship, initiative, creative adventure, federation, contracting, contributing, taking part

Taxonomy of relationships

Type of relationship		Characteristics
Project / programme delivery	goal-oriented	set up by two organisations to deliver jointly a one-off project or programme
Multi-stakeholder project / programme delivery	goal-oriented	several organisations join together to deliver a one-off project or programme
Operational / resource building	resource-based	focused on each organisation providing the other(s) with ongoing resource/capacity
Procurement	resource-based	focused on value for money and the delivery of a particular system or operational/technical/back office requirement that is specified and often contracted by the partners, either jointly or individually
Local, regional or national hub	delivery mechanisms are set in motion but networking also takes place	local/regional/city hubs bringing together cultural organisations on a geographical basis; membership may be restricted; often include high-level executive representation
Multi-stakeholder intra-sector	deliver projects or programmes and share capacity	similar organisations with shared objectives joining together to deliver shared aims and programmes, often motivated by regional need to support skills, opportunities and training within the sector
Multi-stakeholder extra-sector	goal-oriented and resource-based	organisations from the cultural sector joining up with organisations outside the cultural sector, for example in health or higher education
Networking umbrella	network-based	a loose group of organisations working together that can also be a local hub to make contacts, share information and discuss shared aims; usually geographically organized with a flexible and often large membership
National moments/ major events	networks that lead to project or programme delivery	projects galvanized by events of national significance such as commemorations, giving rise to networking and funding opportunities
National-organisation led	goal-oriented, with some networking for national initiatives and sharing capacity	an agreement between a national and a regional/local organisation(s) in which the aims of both are met, often in a way that supports regional or local needs, with the engagement of a national organisation playing an enabling role in the sector
Donor/funder	goal-oriented	including a donor or funder to deliver an outcome that the donor is substantially funding
Funding	goal-oriented	consortia getting together for the purpose of bidding for funding
We give below four types of partnership which were not reported in our questionnaire but we believe to be relevant.		
International		arrangement with overseas organisations to deliver global or domestic aims
Internal		relationship between different internal divisions/branches/sections of one organisation
Commercial		agreement between a cultural sector and commercial organisation where the driver is commercial
Sponsorship		request (or contractual obligation) by sponsors to be credited as partners

Digital capacity

Given that digital opportunities in the arts and cultural sector is an area of priority for ACE, and that Nesta has recently published its *Digital Cultural Survey 2014*¹⁰, our questionnaire had two queries aimed at establishing how far partnership was supporting the digital ambitions of respondents. From responses to the first, we learned that there was some use of digital technology to achieve new outcomes:

Use of digital to achieve new outcomes



We noted there was reference to support from Nesta or a university in the pilots and prototypes mentioned in the survey, suggesting the potential importance of some public funding.

Otherwise, the focus was on using the digital medium as a means of capturing, recording and storing work, creating online educational resources or marketing. In many cases, analogue technology could have delivered the same end, albeit more clumsily and slowly: the purpose of the usage was not itself 'digital'. YouTube and social media were widely used for distribution and marketing. Some respondents had also created apps, but there was little inherent innovation in the use of digital technology. This is not a criticism, but an observation which we believe is an important indicator for policy makers.

We then asked more broadly about involvement in any other partnership with a mainly digital outcome. Only 41 per cent said that they were involved in this way. The findings raise questions as to why there is a lower level of delivery from partnership in this area. Three factors are possibly in play here:

- lack of capability within the sector;
- lack of sustained focus from funding bodies on digital capability as a key criterion of funding; and
- lack of relationships with major digital platforms.

Chris Michaels, Head of Digital at the British Museum, commented:



It demonstrates to me, very simply, that although the sector 'does' digital, it's generally light and I'm not sure many involved would be able to fully value its benefits. You could hypothesise very easily that if it weren't that YouTube, Facebook etc are (on the surface) free to use, many of the responders would likely have done nothing. A more rounded sense of the value proposition for social media and digital in the life of national, regional and local arts organisations clearly needs to emerge, and does not seem to be doing so organically from within the sector's own partnership activities.

Tim Plyming, Director of Digital Arts and Media at Nesta, reinforced the importance of the 'digital' question.



The way that audiences are consuming content is changing rapidly and effective digital partnerships are going to be vital in ensuring the continued strength of the arts and culture sector. The results of this survey make a powerful case for a concerted effort to help arts and culture organisations who are wanting to make the most of the digital opportunity get ahead through partnership.

5 Partnership and funding

Gaining access to funding or opportunities to bid for funding was repeatedly reported as a motivation for partnership in the questionnaire and case studies:

Partnering to gain access to funding

responding to a brief that none of us would have felt able to meet on our own

to gain funding from the Arts Council

to get ACE NPO funding

our ACE-funded role as a Major Partner Museum

In conversation we also found resistance to the idea that partnership should be used primarily as a way of accessing funds. This was deemed to be 'high risk' because organisations needed to undertake due diligence, not 'jumping into partnership too quickly' or just 'jumping on the money', which could have unhappy consequences.



We received a pot of money to lure us, but now it's an unstructured and inefficient thing that frustrates people about the process.



The temptation at the moment is to go for commercial deals that bring in more money.

Round table participants

There was, however, recognition that different sources of funding did have to be found and innovative ways of thinking have indeed been sparked where there was thought to be little financial alternative:



Local government and other public funding is going to dwindle, so we're working on ways to find new funding and we expect that others will jump in.

Round table participant

Despite this caution the findings suggest that funders have in practice had a positive impact.

When reflecting on the Glasgow 2014 Cultural Programme partnership between Glasgow Life, the Glasgow 2014 Organising Committee and Creative Scotland, Leonie Bell, Director of Arts and Engagement, Creative Scotland said:



This partnership extended not only our understanding of each others' organisations, it also stretched and conflated what our normal organisational roles are, for example Creative Scotland acted as the major funder for a programme that we shared the responsibility for developing, we also tried to work much more strategically together as partners. We developed a very honest working relationship and it worked because each organisation checked and challenged each other. We had to understand that our role evolved and adapted as the programme entered the production and delivery phase.

We found cases where initiatives run by funders were the springboard for a partnership project, and also where a project or programme that was independently started would not have happened if it had not been responding to a funding brief. In the case of the [Teach Through Music](#) project the partnership came about through a funding opportunity. The funding was intended to improve teaching standards in London schools, and both funder and participants felt that the best result would be achieved through partnership. Having a range of organisations strengthened the funding bid and widened the scope of the programme that could be delivered.

We noted that both funders and national organisations had the potential to be catalysts in bringing together new partners. For the [V&A's Photography Curators' Training Programme](#) the impetus was from having the V&A and The Art Fund both represented at a meeting at which there was a speaker from Nottingham City Museums.

At [Hardwick Hall](#), a partnership with Meadow Arts emerged in response to a new funding stream from ACE which led to new ways of working for both partners.

6 Enhanced value for money

We found that the relationship between partnership and value for money was ambiguous and, as noted in Section 2 above, only 57 per cent of respondents to the questionnaire had evaluated their partnership at the time of answering. How did they define, and evaluate, value for money?

There was a strong conviction that the most successful partnerships, of whatever type, were inspired by motivations other than value for money. There was widespread rejection of saving money as the sole impetus to partnership, with a greater focus on efficiency than savings. A small number, such as CW8, were clear that value for money was not an objective. Nevertheless, 83 per cent of the questionnaire respondents said that their partnership did enhance value for money. Some responses are assuming or inferring enhanced value for money without being able to quantify it.

From the written comments on enhanced value for money, it is clear that respondents had differing priorities and definitions:

- better/more efficient use of resources
- in-kind support
- combining resources
- contribution from commercial or other partners
- future savings hoped for/planned for
- cost savings especially back office/procurement
- implied savings, eg bigger audience
- extra activities/audience with same (pooled) resources at no extra cost
- non-savings comments, eg improved quality.

Enhanced value for money plays a significant role in partnerships in our sample, then, though there are many ways in which it is interpreted and measured. In some cases, enhanced value for money was identified as efficiency savings and quantified cost reductions, such as back office and procurement, while in other cases it was an indirect saving from in-kind sharing, pooling and the belief that more was being achieved with the resources available. Enhanced value was seen as identifying potential future savings and also translated into improved quality, such as a better audience experience, and the range and professionalism of the work. Cost reduction, efficiencies, added value and increased revenues are all different aspects of the financial benefits attributed to partnership, even if they cannot always be measured.

These also reflect the fact that multiple stakeholders are expecting the relationship to produce different outcomes and different measures of success, as is illustrated by three of our case studies: [SPINE](#), [Freedom to Create](#) and [Teach Through Music](#).

For Professor David Guest, the questionnaire outcomes raised issues about just how far partnership could be identified as a way of enhancing value for money:



Despite the great majority claiming enhanced value for money, a number of the claims are unlikely to stand up to critical scrutiny. This is therefore an area where those seeking further funding or needing to convince potentially sceptical stakeholders may need to give greater attention. It may also be unwise in some cases to identify value for money as a criterion for success.

Concerns about the cost of partnerships emerged from the interviews and round tables, and one case study found that the partnership had actually increased its expenditure. One cost reported several times was the need to fund the project managers, brokers or coordinators. Paradoxically, taking time for engagement and relationship building – highlighted as essential to scoping successful partnerships in our discussion of ‘Scoping and building’ in Section 8 – could also make them vulnerable.



The driver always is that ‘something should happen’ and ‘we should be there’, which often means I need to drive something really quickly with people I’ve never met before. It can be hard and there might be previous relations with these people that drivers of the partnership don’t know about. There can be competitors as well and it can be difficult to negotiate hierarchies of power.



What do you do when one key person doesn’t come into the conversation (for instance a city or county council)?



... by the time you reach a decision, your partners have changed or might not even exist anymore.



Local elections can change the whole funding environment and many years of development can be gone. It can be disastrous for certain projects.



So I can see my future involving managing a very wide array of different relationships with different partners for different purposes, and it all being very complicated actually. And it's time-consuming, very time-consuming.

Round table participants

The Advisory Panel saw these tensions as being significant. Value for money was instinctively felt to be an important strategic aim of partnership, yet the evidence that we have seen suggests that this is not, in fact, an assumption that can be made. Graham Devlin, an Advisory Panel member with considerable experience of partnerships explains:



In the current economic climate – with the highly prioritised need to do ‘more with less’ – value for money will be an important driver. Partnerships are time-consuming (and possibly costly) and organisations need to be sure the benefits outweigh the costs. They are unlikely to be – by themselves – the answer to all the challenges facing organisations.

Graham Devlin

Chair, Tipping Point and former
Acting Chief Executive, ACE

Some Panel members also proposed that the network of partner relationships might, in some places, lead to entrenching the existence of current organisations, thus impeding a restructuring which might be more radical and efficient. This idea was, however, firmly rejected at the round tables.



You need a diversity of voices [...] If growth is the goal of the partnership, you need to keep it diverse. Partnership and learning costs more, not less. I'm enhancing work through partnership, not replacing it.



The idea that everyone should merge is nonsense, the fact that their organisations are different is important, the partnership works because they are each running organisations which are different to others. People run their own organisations differently and this adds to the richness: productive richness about the difference.

Round table participants

A consistent theme in the research was that too narrow a focus on the monetary benefits of partnerships could result in ‘soft’ outcomes being lost in the analysis as they could be more difficult on which to place a value.

83%
of respondents
said that their
partnership
enhanced
value for
money



Culture is different: a museum visit can help someone find a passion and turn them into a Nobel Prize winner, but that's an intangible, completely indirect outcome. Not having culture, we'd be the poorer for it.



You need clear goals of course, because you need to justify that you're still producing value for money, but they can be different. They can be soft outcomes, benefits for the city for instance, rather than straight commercial goals. Benefits are much more indirect often.

Round table participants

This is, perhaps, the fundamental tension. Partnership may be seen strategically by policy makers and funders such as local authorities as a way of achieving value for money, but in our sample of practitioners, partnership was most often viewed as a way of coming together for other purposes, notably to grow the sector, not to cut it.



Organisations working together may have been competing for the same money but working together means that they can ‘create a bigger cake’ rather than get a smaller slice of a smaller cake.

Round table participant

Partnership is seen as being about long-term efficiency, not short-term savings, but with diminishing public funding there is scepticism as to whether the ‘cake’ really can get bigger.



What's driving the agenda at the moment is how to make more use of our resources when public funding decreases.



In the short term we've grown the cake, because the cutting of the cake has meant we have become a more efficient organisation.



It's not going to happen with three-year funding agreements from governments or the Arts Council.

Round table participants

In reality, we found that organisations are often partnering less on a strict value for money basis than an enhanced outcome basis. This is not to suggest that no efficiencies are made.



Despite my earlier comments about the need to interrogate the cost-benefit of partnership working, I am convinced that – in the vast majority of cases – it can have a beneficial impact on organisations by exposing them to new ideas, ways of working and the need to accommodate other points of view and practice.

Graham Devlin

7 How to partner: the process of partnering

So far, the questionnaire's evidence indicates that practitioners feel working in partnership has enabled them to achieve their strategic aims.

Respondents were asked the most important factor in determining the level of success of their partnership. The answers make clear that, as one respondent put it, 'it's about a confluence of factors rather than just one'. For some respondents, achieving the goals of the partnership was the main determinant of success. Many others highlighted factors that were more descriptive of the *process* of how to partner.

These are the factors we concentrate on in this section and the findings are accompanied by some suggested **Things to Think About** which have evolved from discussions with the Advisory Panel.

Ninety-seven per cent of respondents deemed the partnership they described in the questionnaire as a success. It should be noted that two-thirds of the detailed cases were reported by organisations that initiated the partnership described.

The questionnaire therefore paints a picture of circumstances in which practitioners feel that partnership working has enabled them to achieve their strategic aims. It might be described as the type of partnership that respondents feel they know how to make work. We found the main determinants of success in the process of partnering to be:

- shared vision/shared values leading to clear shared goals
- mutual benefits; benefits for all parties; a sense of fairness
- engagement of all parties in the partnership; buy-in/stability/commitment from the top
- structure and organisation of the partnership
- need for a project manager, or someone taking the lead
- human relationships within the partnership
- communication
- trust
- producing unexpected outcomes
- lead to future projects/future long-term collaboration.

Transparency

The questionnaire's responses put a high value on shared values and common purpose, an emphasis that was also evident in the follow-up interviews and case studies. Several participants stated that partnerships should not be formed between organisations that did not share values or have a similar ethos.

We suggest, then, that as we posited in Section 2, equity, mutual benefit and transparency are indeed the touchstones of partnership in the cultural sector.

Our respondents, however, did not articulate the concept of 'transparency'¹¹ as a way of engendering trust.

Things to think about:

1 Transparency

Equity, mutual benefit and transparency are the touchstones of partnership. Transparency is the key to building trust successfully; and trust should not be a precondition, but an outcome. Transparency is a tool for building trust when a partnership is started before trust exists.

The practice of partnering

We found considerable common ground on how to partner at the outset, with 95 per cent reporting that they agreed joint objectives. There was, however, less agreement over a formal model of documentation, with only 70 per cent reporting they had a written agreement and fewer still, 57 per cent, reporting that they conducted an evaluation.

We have grouped the reasons cited for success in the process of partnership into 13 main categories. The number of times each factor was listed is given in brackets. These factors highlight the importance of the human dimension in making partnerships work.



95%

of partners agreed joint objectives

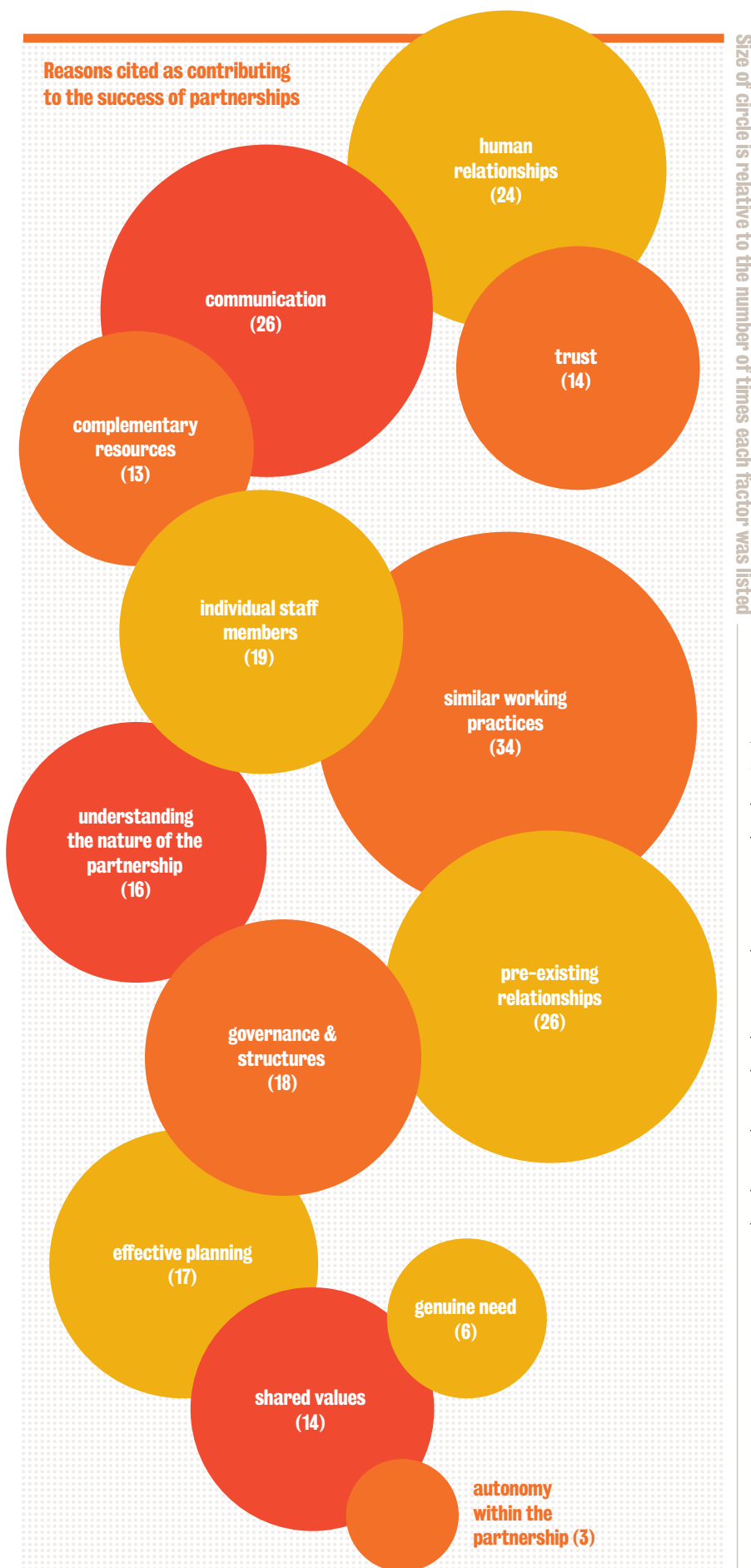
70%

had a written agreement

57%

conducted an evaluation

Reasons cited as contributing to the success of partnerships



A small number of respondents also cited some factors that make the process of partnering a challenge. These were:

- failure to engage all partners in decision making;
- responsibility for success of partnership being left to those who are too senior /busy to be able to dedicate a proper amount of time to it (contrasted with too junior to be able to make a decision);
- difficulties in staffing leading to one organisation's feeling that it was forced to take on a work load to which it had not agreed and thus overworking its staff;
- unclear communication of responsibilities;
- different understandings of appropriate quality and standard;
- partnership occurring when a 'bought in' service may have been more appropriate;
- decisions not being made in a timely fashion; and
- incoherence of external communications (eg with artists).

Things to think about:

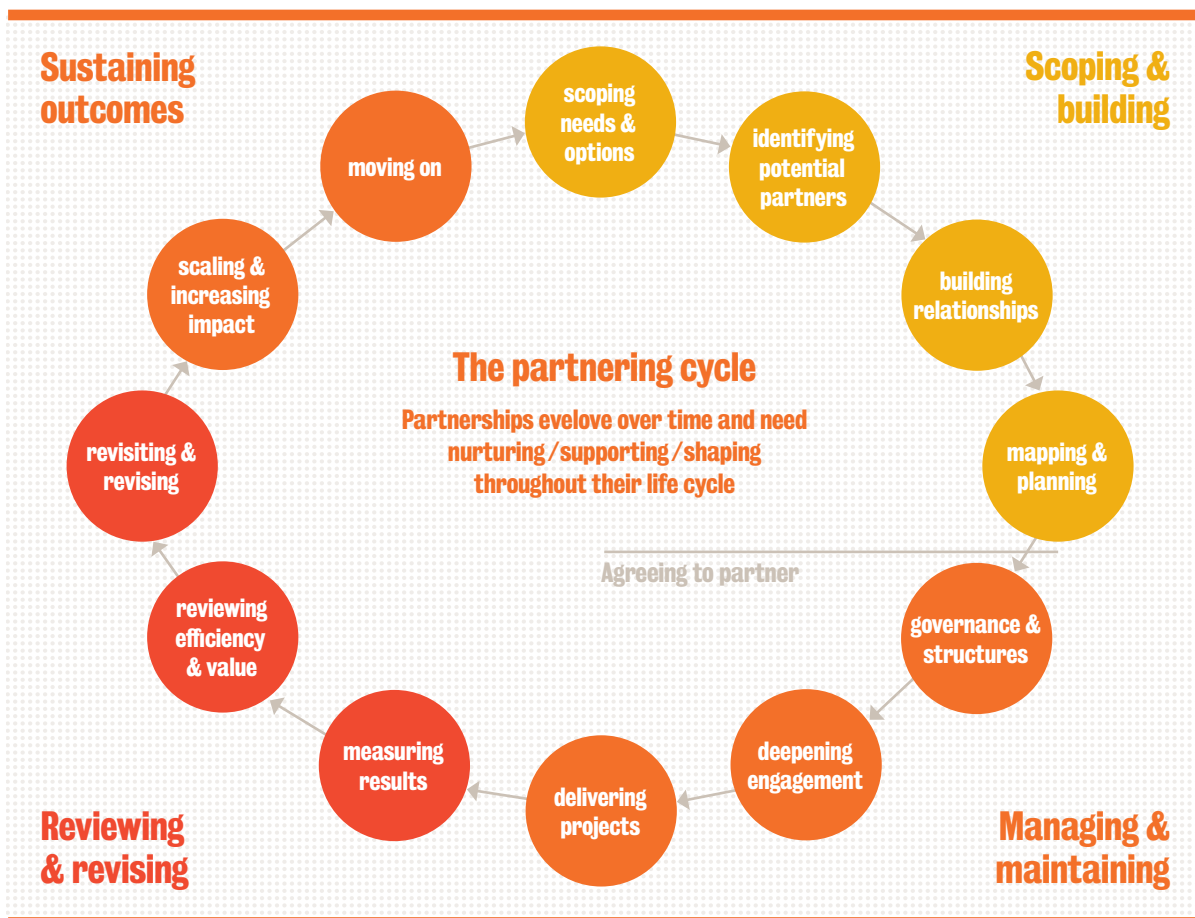
2 Partnering practice

For practitioners, attitudes and processes are important determinants of success for partnership to flourish. They include working practices, organisational culture and communications, building on pre-existing relationships between organisations, with a focus on the human relationships that enable collaboration to deepen towards a common purpose supported by agreed objectives.

8

The partnering cycle

The Partnership Brokers Association has devised a theoretical model that breaks down the process of partnering. We were interested in how this model works in the cultural sector and in the final part of our report have mapped our sample against it.



Adapted from
Tennyson, R.,
The Partnering
Toolbook
(2005) published
by GAIN and
the International
Business
Leaders Forum

Scoping and building

Contributors to one round table explained that many outcomes of partnerships are not set out at the beginning but emerge from networking opportunities:



There are 'soft' partnerships that generally want to work together and more specific ones that come together for a specific project. These soft partnerships have potential and good relationships, but haven't delivered anything yet ...



They are like 'courting' where you are just building relationships.

The term 'courting' captured the imagination as a way of describing the connections deemed essential for crystallising the opportunities to set up a project. The importance of networks was stressed throughout our research:



There are plenty of networking opportunities in our meetings and events. We help each other to find the right people to connect with.

NewcastleGateshead Cultural Venues' (NGCV) partnership was distinguished by having 'an absolutely shared objective to share connections'. Participants urged us to recognise that finding the right relationships and the right people was not just a matter of pressing buttons, but was a complex and sometimes time-consuming task that took place before a partnership was formalised. Many agreed that relationships also needed testing and that it was important not to rush into a partnership until the relationship had been proved to work.



It often becomes very formal suddenly when you go from brainstorming partnership to turning something into an actual project or application.

If courting was encouraged, shotgun weddings were not; we found considerable scepticism of ‘enforced partnership’. There was a strong opinion that partnerships should emerge organically from an idea.



It doesn’t work when Arts Council or another [funder] tries to impose partnerships somewhere. These things come about naturally and shouldn’t be overthought. Sometimes there is real resonance, sometimes there isn’t, it can’t be forced.



Forced partnerships are in some way or another about saving money.

This last point captures a pervasive defensiveness about enforced partnership: that it was being used as a tool for saving money. The testimony below, recorded at a round table before the chancellor of the exchequer’s budget statement on 8 July 2015, reflects widespread rejection of the idea that partnership should be no more than a vehicle for making savings and implementing cuts.



Cuts should not be your motivation, there should be a bigger motivation for the local area and the people, drivers should be the region and cultural excellence.



Saving money should not be a primary factor—it should be about creating impact, and a by-product may be that you can do things more effectively. It’s not about saving money, it’s about sharing resources.



Of course it’s about saving money and that can be one of the outcomes, but it is a fatal door through which to go in.

Things to think about:

3 Enforced partnerships

A shared objective to share connections frees up knowledge, expertise and funding within networks to deliver partnerships. But can they be enforced?

From relationships to multi-stakeholder partnership

Starting a partnership is complex, especially where there are particular challenges in bringing together multiple stakeholders. One interviewee noted that when there was a diverse array of sizes and opinions among partners, it was almost impossible to get things done, or else only the most minimal of activity took place.

In Coventry and Warwickshire [CW8](#) is a regional alliance of eight major attractions. This case study suggested that partnerships needed focus and did not work when too many organisations were involved. It was important to set a criterion for joining—in this case, buildings-based. It was felt to be particularly important that the partnership consisted only of organisations of similar types and within a certain geographical area. It was also decided that representatives from the organisations forming the partnership must hold senior positions.

For the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, the smallest partner in CW8 and with no public funding, the value of the group included being able to benefit from the wider knowledge base and expertise of larger institutions:



... as a small organisation, it is quite difficult to have the same amount of information at our fingertips as some of the bigger organisations. We just don’t have the sophisticated systems to be able to produce lots of data about our audience engagement profiles or be able to link our information or analyse our information in the context of other people’s information.

Dr Diana Owen

Director, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

Although the challenge of bringing together large and small organisations emerged as a theme in interviews and round tables, it was not volunteered in the questionnaire as one of the most significant factors in the success or otherwise of a partnership. Fifty-two per cent of respondents in our sample said that they were describing a partnership with at least one organisation bigger than their own, 36 per cent with one smaller. The majority of partnerships (71 per cent) were with several organisations of different sizes. Capacity, however, did emerge in discussions as a salient point. Smaller organisations found that their lack of resources could make it difficult to contribute in the same way as bigger players, and this led to fears that the larger organisations would dominate.



When capacity between two partners isn’t matched, that can cause real problems. You can still have great relationships, but we just can’t keep up with our bigger partners, though we’re very willing. When that is mismatched, everything unravels. You need to take a very different approach to find solutions.



With bigger organisations you need to have multiple relationships within the organisations, because the top layers are too busy and the lower ones cannot make the decisions. Large organisations are often quite problematic because of that. Smaller ones, or just specific departments of universities, are often more efficient.



71%

of partnerships were
with organisations
of different sizes



... the relationship between the CEOs was really close, but [...] the organisations were different (of different sizes too) and the big one couldn't be as flexible as it needed to be. It would have been better if it had been a smaller project or a smaller partner.

Round table participants

Other partnerships had a different model. For example, the [Cornwall Museums Partnership](#) has six museums on the board, but a wider, more flexible membership in Cornwall located across a large area. It was incorporated as a new charity at the start of 2015. Smaller museums often have no paid staff but are run by volunteers; this can further compound the issue of size in operating the museums. Despite the formalisation of the partnership into a charitable incorporated organisation, interviewees still described it as a reasonably informal and flexible partnership:



It's always been reasonably informal as a partnership and as different projects have come and gone, it's fluxed with its membership. We always call it an ad hoc [partnership] because we have no lead partner and just as projects or events or things are relevant, people and partners come and go.

Ellie Collier
Programme Manager,
Cornwall Museums Partnership

Distance and communication also present considerable challenges, which is in part why a structure different from CW8's has emerged, with every museum in Cornwall being able to participate.

NGCV is a more mature partnership, which started in 2009 with multiple criteria for membership which included having a building:



... NGCV decided upon the venue-based criterion, as the partners are all responsible for significant public cultural buildings and originally created education and community programmes. Partners made an early commitment to work collaboratively and set ambitious aims for the partnership relating to developing audiences, sustaining and developing the cultural fabric in the region, nurturing talent and innovation and supporting skills, as well as developing more sustainable organisations.

Declan Baharini
Partnership Co-ordinator,
NewcastleGateshead Cultural Venues

For Anthony Sargent, then Director of Sage Gateshead, the trust that has since developed is the key to the dynamism of the partnership in 2015:



The NGCV partners have become people you naturally relate [with in order] to share experiences or to seek advice and new ideas. After working increasingly closely together for ten years we've reached a new level, and the range of things we can achieve through this partnership has grown tenfold. Instead of simply wondering if we can get electricity cheaper, now we wonder about true innovation and call each other to brainstorm new ideas.

But partnerships need to maintain a balance between the comfort of working with similar, like-minded organisations, and driving innovation through having more diverse structures. This was highlighted by [Teach Through Music's](#) Philip Flood, Director at Sound Connections.



I think by bringing different minds into the room, by bringing different voices into it, I think it does push innovation. It is about being external and thinking beyond your own organisation, and partnership working is one of the key drivers behind that.

Anthony Sargent concurred:



We've found it has helped us to have partners that are in different art forms, on different scales, and are run differently to keep diversity in the partnership and maximise the learning possible between us.

Things to think about:

4 Multi-stakeholder partnerships

There is no one model for developing criteria for the structure of multi-stakeholder relationships. The balance between engagement, motivation, size and range of organisations is important, especially to foster innovation.

Managing and maintaining

Sharing skills, expertise and resources

As networks and relationships formalise, and structures are put into place, engagement deepens between the partners to focus on a specific goal. That deepening engagement allows more detailed resource arrangements to be mapped and plans drawn up to underpin the partner relationships:

- sharing expertise
- sharing interests
- sharing /maximising resources
- finding new ways to work together more effectively
- improving efficiency/reducing costs / increasing revenue.



87%

of partners could clearly detail the contribution made by each partner

88%

of partnerships did not involve an external broker

The emphasis on sharing expertise and resources running through the data illustrates how projects or programmes can often create new capacity. Resources are deployed in different configurations, with different skills frequently cited as the bedrock of those arrangements. The Folkestone Quarterhouse /Folkestone Fringe case study illustrates how essential resources can be shared between two smaller organisations to generate extra capacity.

Written documentation

Written protocols and agreements were generally thought to be the most reliable way of making sure that all partners understood the high-level goals and also agreed to the detail. Seventy per cent of questionnaire respondents told us that there was a formal written agreement for their partnership, while 26 per cent did not have written documentation. Those who used formal documents gave us some indication of the kind of agreement reached, such as memorandum of understanding, letter of agreement, partnership agreement, contract or collaboration agreement. We did not find any significant correlation between the type of documentation and the type of partnership described.

A resource map

The sharing of resources, expertise and capacity is intrinsic to the 'how' of partnering, as well as being a driver to do so; it enables organisations to think differently and more ambitiously about goals they might wish to pursue. This is perhaps why so many organisations see partnership as a survival strategy that can become an end in itself. Transparency comes into play around the contribution each partner makes and how the contributions will be agreed, honoured and delivered. This is a significant factor in determining the success of a partnership.

We asked respondents to describe in detail the contribution made by each partner. We found that 87 per cent of respondents could clearly do so, and 54 per cent of respondents told us exactly who had done what. Ninety-four partnerships gave us enough detail to enable us to create a 'resource map', a concept that we have borrowed from The Partnering Initiative.¹²





‘Partnership’ is often used as a generalised term that covers a wide range of relationships. This data can help us understand, for the first time, the true variety of the benefits that can accrue—and should help organisations themselves to understand (and quantify) what they can aim for in a joint endeavour.

Graham Devlin

The partnership between [Hardwick Hall](#) and Meadow Arts suggests that a 50:50 division of the workload might not be the most effective way of working if it does not play to the strengths of the organisations involved. The particular programme of which this exhibition was part required that partners should divide the workload equally across all elements of the curation and delivery.



I think, rather than attempting to split the project in a 50:50 way, which is how the partners were asked to approach it, it would be better to break up the different project areas in terms of skill.

Rebecca Farkas

Marketing and Engagement Manager, Meadow Arts

The [SPINE](#) case study shows how capacity is being built on a sustained basis by libraries working closely together. By sharing back office functions, the partners have been able to increase expertise in various parts of the service for all. Although SPINE began by sharing technology, interviewees felt that this was only the starting point.



There are opportunities that come with sharing the catalogue, with lending, with potentially procurement.

Jennifer Holland

Head of Libraries, Norfolk County Council

After the partnership had begun, Suffolk Libraries switched to a different governance model, a transition requiring a significant amount of time and focus at the expense of SPINE, which led to lost momentum for the partnership as a whole.

The responses to our questions have, however, shown that partnership can be seen as a significant mechanism for dispersing funding, maximising the use of resources, enhancing skills and sharing expertise. Partnership in practice is often a tool which is delivering more with less. Partnership enables cultural organisations to stretch the resources they have further, support more activity and find new capacity.

25%
of reported
partnerships were
led by a national
institution

Things to think about:

5 Capacity

Understanding and quantifying the resources, skills and expertise that partners bring to the table enables more ambitious goals to be reached with greater clarity as to who will contribute what.

Changes in resources, skills or governance for one partner can have impacts on the whole ecology. How do organisations quantify this? Do they take into account the wider perspective regionally, nationally or locally when making changes?

The role of individuals

Throughout the round tables and interviews, there were references to the various important roles played by individuals in managing partnership. They were described as ‘enablers, people who connect people and take that chance, so partnerships can come into being’. For Alison Wheeler, General Manager at Suffolk Libraries, leadership within the partner organisations also mattered:



One thing that has really made it work is leadership in that [my partners] and myself are very committed to it and that leadership, if you like, sets the tone. Through that influence, there’s an expectation that our colleagues will work together on a number of things [...] We did not allow some of the barriers that often come up in these situations to suppress it. If there isn’t that real commitment from the top, then it’s easy to bring something like that down by saying ‘oh that’s too difficult to agree’. It isn’t actually.

We found repeated references to the need for coordinators and project managers in order to make things happen, and for someone empowered to make decisions to enable the partnership to move forwards; further, the collaborating organisations must have shared trust in the creative lead.

For Christine May, Head of Community and Cultural Services at Cambridgeshire County Council, the challenge in keeping a partnership on track was to navigate the different, and sometimes conflicting, professional boundaries in a way that did not compromise the whole relationship:



It’s more difficult when you have got all the partners around the table and on the one hand you are trying to create and maintain a long-term positive relationship so you don’t want to scupper that. You are trying to be challenging in a constructive way. Sometimes I think it would be better if there was an independent facilitator who could do that challenging on all our behalf but we tend to all sit around the table.

Another respondent described the pressures on individuals from conflicting priorities. It could be hard for the organisation that was employing the partnership coordinator, and bearing the cost, to remember that all the other partners also had claims on the employee's time. A large element of the coordinator's role was brokering agreements across the partnership, a task that was highly dependent on individuals. This reliance on individuals was also seen as a risk because, the respondent asked, what would happen to the partnership if someone were to leave? This question is a good one, to which both the Advisory Panel and some of our respondents have referred.

There is a new role already evolving here, generally within organisations rather than independent of them. Brokering partnerships may be less developed in the cultural sector than elsewhere, but it is emerging as a requirement with a new skill set. In the questionnaire, we asked whether external brokers were used to set up the relationship, and only 10 per cent of respondents said that they had used an external agent. The Advisory Panel felt this was an important area for further consideration by the cultural sector.



We are witnessing a shift in the culture of leadership. Today's cultural leaders need to have the ability to build and sustain alliances and partnerships, to be connected and collaborative across and beyond the cultural sector. Bringing people together is a specific leadership skill which organisations should value, nurture and support.

Sue Hoyle

Director, Clore Leadership Programme

Things to think about:

6 The broker

Partnership brokering is a role that needs professionalising. The skill set for the cultural sector should be more clearly identified and nurtured within organisations or as an external network of experienced practitioners.

Reviewing and revising

Evaluation

Evaluating the outcomes and the benefits of partnership is essential. It is striking that although more than half of our sample had not conducted an evaluation of the partnership, 97 per cent declared the partnership a success, 90 per cent said it had outcomes that would not have occurred if the partners had not worked together and 97 per cent said that the partnership had enhanced the work they were doing. The case studies have been of particular value here in highlighting just how diverse approaches to evaluation can be, from informal conversations to formal external evaluation, as the case studies for [CW8, Folkestone Quarterhouse/Folkestone Fringe](#), [Teach Through Music](#) and the [First World War Centenary](#) show.

The need for partnerships to demonstrate that they were effective was not in doubt among our participants.



We had to show the funders we were meeting their targets.



Proposal that was successful in being selected as a pilot for the ACE Cultural commission project [...] able to tell a single narrative of change that made it easier for commissioners to engage with the diversity of local art and cultural orgs.

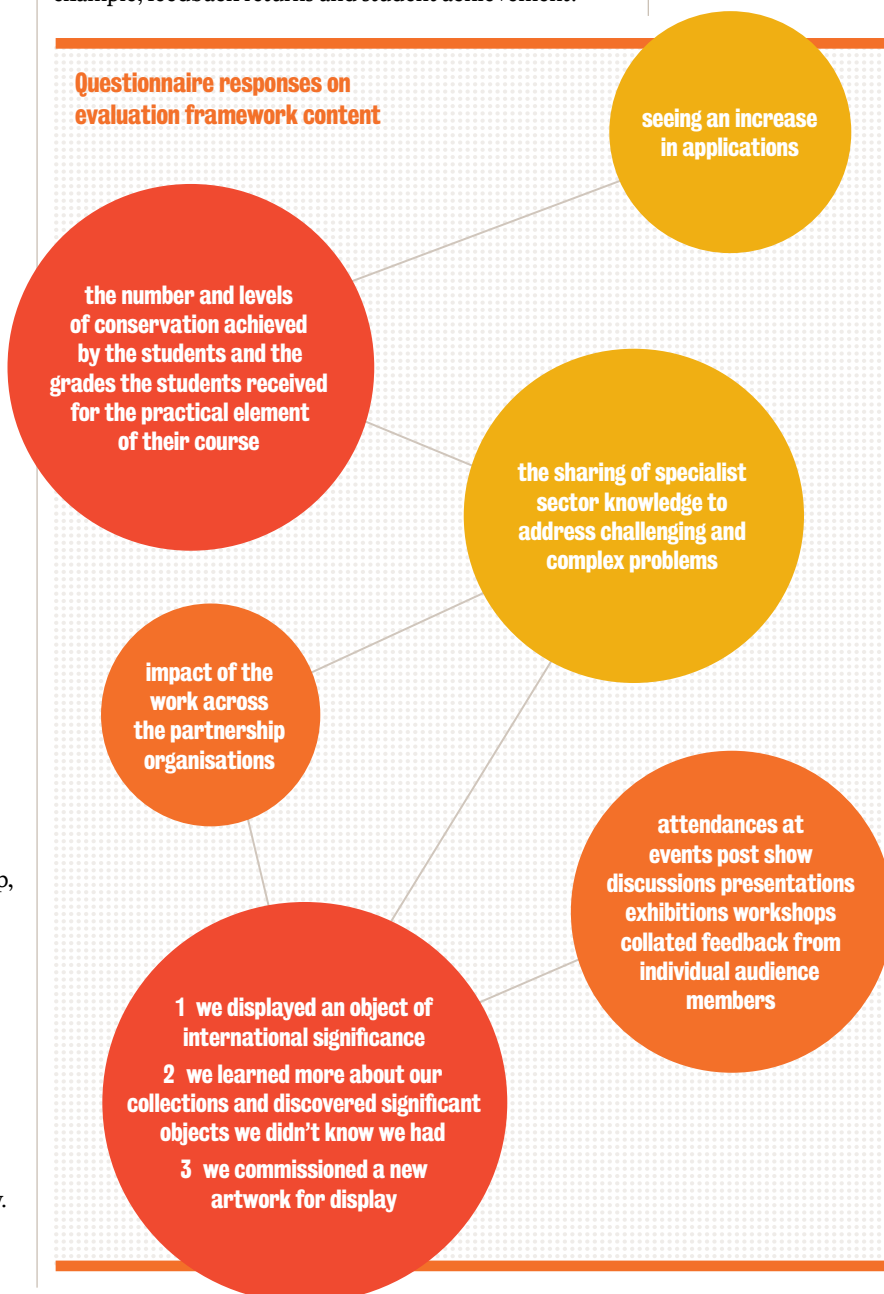


We secured a board member for the [Local Enterprise Partnership] and a televised visit from the Chair of the Arts Council to one of our meetings.

Questionnaire respondents

For partnerships that were focused around a measurable goal, such as audience attendance, it could be relatively easy to find an evaluation framework, including, for example, feedback returns and student achievement:

Questionnaire responses on evaluation framework content



Quantifying the ‘softer benefits’ remained a bigger challenge. This was where many respondents saw the true additional value of partnership, yet were least able to give evidence of those benefits. Our sample suggests that there is no set method of evaluation for the sector and often no requirement even to conduct one.



Evaluation is often considered too difficult and gets neglected or reduced to highly subjective judgements and this risk was apparent in many of the responses. Ideally, evaluation should be an ongoing activity; indeed, it is helpful if it is built into any agreement, otherwise it gets tagged on to the end of a project or partnership when interest and energy levels have dropped. Good evaluation is difficult but will ideally take account of resources/inputs, processes/relationships and learning, subjective reactions and experiences of stakeholders, and achievement of goals and value (sometimes value for money).

Professor David Guest

Advisory Panel member Clifford Harkness, however, felt that simplifying evaluation could be a good thing, and that sometimes it was enough to know that partners felt that they had worked better and learned some lessons:



Evaluation reports often seem framed in the language and spirit of judgement and things that can be measured. However, relationships between people are at the core of partnerships, they can bring energy and an improved sense of worth and value. This is harder to measure but matters to those working in partnership.

Things to think about:

7 Evaluation

Evaluation should be an ongoing activity considered from the outset, to take account of resources, processes, relationships and learning.

Evaluation beyond the cultural sector

Organisations partnering beyond the cultural sector are likely to find that they are asked for rigorous, evidence-based evaluation. The [Freedom to Create in Scotland](#) project to bring the arts to prisons placed particular emphasis on evaluation. The Scottish Prison Service explained that this was because they believed that the arts were worthwhile and ‘impactful’ and so they were always keen to work more frequently with arts organisations. To make their case to do this, they needed to be assured of the worth of this kind of work and also be able to prove it to others. In terms of Freedom to Create specifically, the whole approach to the partnership emerged from:



... the specific recommendations through an evaluation that we did with the criminologists about finding a way to embed that work within a partnership approach.

Kevin Harrison

Director, Artlink Central

Damian Hebron is Director of London Arts in Health Forum, an organisation that brings together the arts and health. He has an overview of cultural institutions partnering with the health sector to support the delivery of services, with a focus on wellbeing. Often the cultural organisation will be the smaller partner. He notes that:



... health commissioners want quantifiable cost effective outcomes. Traditional arts organisations tend not to be equipped to deal with that. There are very different models of relationships in arts and health and there is a need to broker those relationships as the work is so different.

Sustaining outcomes

Much of this section has reflected on the process of building relationships that develop into partnerships. But how long should they last?

Respondents to our questionnaire saw longevity as a measure of success, with 85 per cent saying that they still had plans to work together. ‘Sustaining long lasting and productive relationships’ and working together again were widely assumed to be the best outcomes of a partnership. The final step in the Partnering Cycle, ‘moving on’, did not feature in the responses that we analysed. There was little sense of actively working on an exit strategy as a mark of success, perhaps because the funding timeframe often determined the length of a project.

The Advisory Panel was interested in this desire for longevity in partnerships, and it is a topic that we raised in follow up interviews. Ellie Collier, Programme Manager at Cornwall Museums Partnership, thought that:



If it’s delivering something, then great, but then there is no point in keeping it on if it is not doing that. Or if you haven’t got plans to develop it somehow. It might be delivering something completely different than it was intended to and that’s fine but if it is just existing for its own sake then there is no point. But at the moment I would say even if we stopped delivering, the skill sharing was so important that it would be a reason in itself to keep the partnership going.

There is a significant difference between a partnership that is set up to be the vehicle for long-term sustained service provision and a partnership that is focused on a more limited time frame, as Christina Schmalenbach of Oxfam explained:



90%

of respondents said the outcomes of their partnership would not have occurred if they had not worked together

85%

have plans to work with their partners again



Evaluation is often considered too difficult and gets neglected or reduced to highly subjective judgements

Professor David Guest
King's College London



Relationships between people are at the core of partnerships

Clifford Harkness
National Museums Northern Ireland



If the objective is to increase the NGO sector's ability to deliver humanitarian aid, then maybe that partnership can go on for 20, 30 years while hurricanes attack the Philippines for example. If the objective of the partnership is to help develop one organisation with the help of another, then it should be possible to identify an end point at which stage it would be possible to say 'job done' or 'we have achieved this objective and now we can do different things'.

Paula Murray, Assistant Chief Executive at Brighton & Hove City Council, recognised that partners would often be uncomfortable about putting an end to the relationship, but also felt that moving on from a partnership should not be seen as a failure:



There is the need to consider an exit strategy if we can turn that to being seen as a sign of success or a sign of mature partnership – rather than a sign of failure. It is human nature to want to start things and not to finish them off – it is also much easier to invite people to be part of something than to ask them to leave. It is easier to extend something than cut it short – so we should consider all this in the setting up of partnerships. I think there is also a value in setting up something on a time limited or task focussed basis that means you can raise energy levels and perhaps get some partners involved who might not/could not join up for a more open ended commitment.

Our last comment on this topic goes to Advisory Panel member Professor David Guest:



Assuming a partnership exists to bring mutual benefits to the stakeholders, then it is sensible to continue the partnership as long as those benefits are accruing and could less easily be achieved without partnership. However, as the taxonomy [...] indicates, many of the partnerships are goal-oriented. When goals are achieved or if they are not—a review of the case for ending the partnership is appropriate. There is sometimes a danger that the partnership process can become an end in itself. I have seen cases where the main goals have been achieved but participants have enjoyed the process so much that they look for new goals to justify continuing. Partnership then becomes an indulgence. It is therefore sensible to build into partnerships a formal review process that includes the possibility of exit and termination.

Things to think about: 8 Exit strategy

Some of the most effective partnerships come together for a certain time for a certain reason and then end. People can get comfortable even though a partnership has achieved its aims. How do you exit a partnership and celebrate its achievements?

Conclusion

This Cultural Enquiry has examined the experiences of publicly funded organisations in the cultural sector who have been engaged in partnerships of a variety of descriptions. We have found that partners have derived much benefit from them, although there has been no clear consensus on what constitutes a 'partnership', something the sector might want to address.

There is no doubt that participants in this research felt that partnerships had enabled them to reach broader audiences and that the quality of their work had been enhanced. Whether or not they were in a position to assess 'value for money' in financial terms is a moot point: the culture of evaluation was found to be disparate amongst many of the organisations with whom we discussed it and, some might argue, it is the wrong question to ask of a sector that sees success in intangible benefits. A suitable proxy for the standard 'value for money' marker remains to be found.

Further work is also needed to understand the sector's relationship with digital technology. Are there barriers to its use, and if so, what can be done to remove them? Is it an unsuitable medium for the arts and culture? Or is it so much a part of the landscape that our respondents simply did not feel the need to report it?

Looking at the findings as a whole, we have identified these topics as 'things to think about':

Things to think about

2 Partnering practice

For practitioners, attitudes and processes are important determinants of success for partnership to flourish. They include working practices, organisational culture and communications, building on pre-existing relationships between organisations, with a focus on the human relationships that enable collaboration to deepen towards a common purpose supported by agreed objectives.

1 Transparency

Equity, mutual benefit and transparency are the touchstones of partnership. Transparency is the key to building trust successfully; and trust should not be a precondition, but an outcome. Transparency is a tool for building trust when a partnership is started before trust exists.

4 Multi-stakeholder partnerships

There is no one model for developing criteria for the structure of multi-stakeholder relationships. The balance between engagement, motivation, size and range of organisations is important, especially to foster innovation.

3 Enforced partnerships

A shared objective to share connections frees up knowledge, expertise and funding within networks to deliver partnerships. But can they be enforced?

5 Capacity

Understanding and quantifying the resources, skills and expertise that partners bring to the table enables more ambitious goals to be reached with greater clarity as to who will contribute what.

6 The broker

Partnership brokering is a role that needs professionalising. The skill set for the cultural sector should be more clearly identified and nurtured within organisations or as an external network of experienced practitioners.

8 Exit strategy

Some of the most effective partnerships come together for a certain time for a certain reason and then end. People can get comfortable even though a partnership has achieved its aims. How do you exit a partnership and celebrate its achievements?

7 Evaluation

Evaluation should be an ongoing activity considered from the outset, to take account of resources, processes, relationships and learning.

Our taxonomy may assist partners in working out what they are trying to do, and the resource map will show what they will need to contribute in order to make it happen.

It is clear that partnership will continue to be a significant form of working in the cultural sector, and we hope that the word of this Enquiry will help to smooth the path of future partnerships.

We conclude by quoting again from our interview with Sir John Tusa, whose comment encapsulates the spirit of the results of this Enquiry:



True partnership is radical, possibly revolutionary, difficult and testing as it should be. The rewards of transformation, of innovation, can be real and significant. But they must be hard fought and will be hard earned.

Acknowledgements

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Faith Blakemore Nottingham City Council

Geoffrey Bowden Brighton Hove Council

Sarah Brigham Derby Theatre

Tony Butler Derby Museums

Peter Chivers My Future City

Donna Close Brighton University

Celia Davies Photoworks

Ian Elwick Werkshop

Frank Gray Brighton University

Bill Griffiths Tyne and Wear Museums

Alison Gwynn Seven Stories

Richard Hodges Derby University

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Endnotes

- 1 Alan Davey, 'Introduction: Preserving and creating a national culture ecology' in *This England: how Arts Council England uses its investment to shape a national cultural ecology*, (London: Arts Council England, 2014), 4-7.
- 2 James Doeser, *The drive to partner*, p37 of this report.
- 3 John Tusa, *Pain in the Arts* (London: IB Tauris, 2014); see esp. 14-15.
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- 10 <http://artsdigitalrind.org.uk/features/digitalculture2014>
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The drive to partner

In analysing the current practice of partnership, we became intrigued to understand why and when the ‘drive to partner’ came about. Below, **Dr James Doeser** (Research Associate, Culture, King’s College London) explores the archives to investigate the history of partnership in the publicly funded cultural sector.

- 1 Introduction
- 2 (Re-)Building an infrastructure: 1945–65
- 3 Working better together: 1966–90
- 4 The obligation to partner: 1991–2000
- 5 Partnership abounds: 2001–15
- 6 Conclusion
- 7 References

* We have used ‘Arts Council’ to refer to an organisation that has had minor variations to its name over time.

1 Introduction

Identifying partnership

The following is an attempt to chart the history of partnership in the subsidised cultural sector. This report defines partnership as ‘an ongoing working relationship where risks and benefits are shared’, a wide-ranging definition which is applicable to many activities. As the Cultural Enquiry’s main report explains in Section 1, there has been little attempt to define what partnership means in the context of the cultural sector. This brief history was therefore commissioned to put in context the current drive to partner.

The search for a ‘partnerships Adam and Eve’ is going to prove futile. It is likely that ‘partnerships’ were in existence ever since there was more than one entity operating in the world. However, there remains an intuitive sense that (in the UK cultural sector at least) there has been an ever-increasing impetus to partner, and that this warrants illumination and analysis. This impetus has come from government as well as organically from within the cultural sector, therefore rather than encompass every possible mention (and permutation) of ‘partnership’ throughout time, this chapter focuses specifically on those instances that are directly relevant to the development of cultural policy in the last 70 years. The main agency through which this cultural policy was developed was the Arts Council,* therefore Arts Council material comprises the bulk of material referenced in this story.

Four phases of partnerships policy

In surveying the last 70 years of UK cultural policy, there are four general phases that deploy the concept of partnership. These might be described as:

- (Re-)Building an infrastructure: 1945–65
- Working better together: 1966–90
- The obligation partner: 1991–2001
- Partnership abounds: 2002–15

Each of these phases is described in turn, in particular in relation to how ‘partnership’ forms an element of the cultural policy of each phase.

2 (Re-)Building an infrastructure: 1945–65

A post-war Arts Council

The standard place to start any chronology of cultural policy is John Maynard Keynes’ landmark speech setting out his vision for the Arts Council: its Policy and Hopes (Keynes 1945). The speech itself provides a clear reminder that ‘partnership’ is built in to the DNA of the cultural sector, and has been since the beginning of what we might now call ‘the cultural sector’.

Keynes instinctively saw the embryonic Arts Council as codependent on the BBC. They would work together to produce and share. ‘I believe that the work of the BBC and the Arts Council can react backwards and forwards on one another to the great advantage of both’ (Keynes 1945, 3). In (re-)building the post-war infrastructure across the length and breadth of the country, Keynes was clear that ‘it is not our intention to act on our own where we can avoid it. We want to collaborate with local authorities and to encourage local institutions and societies and local enterprises to take the lead’ (Keynes 1945, 3). This did not need elaborate policy directives; it was the obvious and rational thing to do.

Once it was up and running, the Arts Council’s Royal Charter (granted in 1946) had three core objects, part of which was to ‘advise and co-operate with Our Government Departments, local and other bodies’ (REF 1946).

A developing arts sector and Arts Council

The earliest Annual Reports of the Arts Council are littered with references to partnerships, cooperations and collaborations, some ad hoc and experimental, others more strategic and high-level. A few examples include a joint committee of the British Council and Arts Council to work out how to work together (ACGB 1947, 6); an experimental collaboration of three theatres in South Yorkshire to create a small repertory circuit (ACGB 1947, 25); and a collaboration of five repertory companies in the south-west in a ‘loose form of association’ with the Bristol company acting as an ‘elder brother’ (ACGB 1948, 16).

The first appointment to a staff position dedicated to partnership working happened at the end of the decade: ‘Mrs. Freda McLean, who took up her duties on April 1st, 1949, and became responsible for the increasing programme of collaboration with Local Authorities’ concentrating ‘on new regional experiments, particularly those sponsored by Local Authorities, and to this end to co-operate closely with Regional Directors and with arts clubs, arts centres, and similar bodies in all parts of the country’ (ACGB 1949, 5).

The first appearance of the word ‘partnerships’, seems to occur in the 1951 Arts Council Annual Report, specifically in the preface by Chair Sir Ernest Pooley: ‘It has been my privilege to visit many of the Arts Festivals, large and small, promoted by partnerships between local bodies and the Arts Council, and I have found the experience an exhilarating one’ (ACGB 1951, 3).

Partners in patronage

By the mid-1960s the arts sector in the UK had become so complex that central policy makers were increasingly concerned with ensuring there was minimal duplication and their money was being spent efficiently and effectively.

In the 1960 Annual Report, Arts Council Chair WE Williams set out a plea for cooperative action: ‘Is it possible for the benefactors of the arts – the Arts Council, Local Authorities, the TV companies, the Trusts, and Industry – to devise between them a more rational, continuous and secure basis of assistance? Diversity of patronage is highly desirable, for patronage works best when it has many springs of initiative. Nevertheless, the present system of free-trade patronage reveals a certain lack of liaison and unified purpose. Untidiness has long been a cherished virtue in our national habit of benevolence, and its merits are familiar to legislators and historians’ (ACGB 1960, 14).

A year later, the 1961 Annual Report was entitled *Partners in Patronage*, and was predominantly about the work of local authorities which were stepping up to provide money for buildings and activity to support the arts in Britain (ACGB 1961).

Policy without explicit partnership

In the UK government’s first ever first Arts Policy (*A Policy for the Arts: The First Steps*, 1965) Arts Minister Jennie Lee noted that an ‘encouraging trend’ was ‘the growing recognition of the importance of strengthening contacts between regional and civic art associations in different parts of the country’ (HMSO 1965, 5). And although there is no explicit partnerships policy, it is clear in the description of the arts sector of the time that the government was essentially dependent on the various elements (private, local, voluntary, London, broadcasters, etc) working in better coordination to bring art and culture to people around the country.

The 1965 policy makes mention of ‘Regional schemes of co-operation through Area Councils’ that were beginning to get underway, which ‘enable the smaller museums in an area to call on the larger for advice and help’ (HMSO 1965, 7). Curiously, this foreshadows the sorts of partnering schemes that the National Museum Directors’ Council and others have in place today.

3 Working better together: 1966–90

Arts Centres

The establishment of Arts Centres in regional cities through the late 1960s and 1970s created an infrastructure that engendered a collaborative (or at least collided) approach to programming and audience development across and between different art forms.

Regional Arts Associations

A crucial development in the story of partnership was the establishment of Regional Arts Associations (RAAs). They are described in an Arts Council report as ‘a systematic partnership between the Arts Council of Great Britain and a large group of local authorities, designed to develop and maintain artistic activity and appreciation throughout a whole region’ (Willatt 1971, 15). The same report goes on to explain the clear benefits derived from an infrastructure supporting partnership working: ‘It is beyond all doubt that regional collaboration is better than small scale local enterprise supported with small grants from the Arts Council in London’ (Willatt 1971, 16).

The RAAs are increasingly important through the 1970s as agents of partnership themselves (independently from the Arts Council), and they used their funding to foster such partnerships. For example: ‘The financial basis for the Regional Arts Associations has always been seen as one of an approximately equal partnership between the Arts Council on the one hand, and local authorities and other regional sources on the other’ (ACGB 1974, 28). Four years later the rhetoric persists: ‘We are anxious to develop a much closer three-way partnership between ourselves, the Regional Arts Associations and the local authorities’ (Arts Council 1978, 10).

Ambition over reality

In his landmark 1974 review of the work of the Arts Council, *Support for the arts in England and Wales*, Lord Redcliffe-Maud was critical about the disparity between the pronounced appetite and evidenced willingness for partnership between the Arts Council, RAAs and local authorities. He detected a lack of trust and a lack of proper cooperation. His report recommended that the RAAs and the Arts Council ‘convert their existing partnership into much more of a reality than it has yet become. It is time for a new concordat, [...] worked out between the Council and each RAA in recognition of the differences between RAAs resulting from peculiarities of history, geography and arts provision in the various regions’ (Redcliffe-Maud 1974, 37). In general, a call for better collaboration, coordination and joined-up working was a running theme in the Redcliffe-Maud report.

The relationship between the RAAs and the Arts Council proved to be persistently problematic. When taking stock of the regional arts situation in the preface to *Glory of the Garden* (ACGB 1984) Sir William Rees-Mogg (then Arts Council Chair) noted that ideal conditions for success amongst the RAAs were ‘need, local authority partnership, private partnership, above all talent’ (ACGB 1984, v). The priorities in *Glory of the Garden* (1984) given to touring and redistribution of activity throughout the nation (rather than being concentrated in London) necessitated a better-networked and collaborative arts sector. This ‘collaboration’ (as it was primarily termed) was necessary since it was only through a network of individual institutions that the Arts Council was able to achieve its ambition to get new art to as wide a number of people as possible.

Broader changes in public administration

In the 1980s the public sector in the UK was increasingly under the influence of theories and practices borrowed from (or inspired by) business and the corporate world. The subsidised cultural sector was no exception. Two particularly important theories were Public Value (which placed ‘a renewed emphasis on the important role public managers can play in maintaining an organisation’s legitimacy in the eyes of the public’ [Blaug et al. 2006, 6]) and New Public Management (which encouraged ‘public managers to pursue targets rather than to orient them towards the changing nature of political legitimacy, or to seek public authorisation for activities or initiatives’ [Blaug et al. 2006, 6]).

Arts sector incorporated

The influence of Public Value and New Public Management led to a proliferation of management jargon in the grey literature of the 1980s, with more and more parts of the arts sector espousing a desire to work in partnership.

The 1988 Arts Council Annual Report abounds with references to partnership and partnerships (before, the language is more ambiguous: collaboration, cooperation, co-production). For example: ‘This was a partnership year for Touring: several original, trend-setting associations were formed for new productions which would not otherwise have happened’ (ACGB 1988, 20). And elsewhere in the report: ‘1987 was the year when the Marketing and Resources department began to fulfill our promise as promoter of enterprise, partnership and efficiency in the arts’ (ACGB 1988, 24).



The earliest Annual Reports of the Arts Council are littered with mentions of partnerships, cooperations and collaborations

4 The obligation to partner: 1991–2000

In the 1990s the term partnership began to be more precisely defined in academic literature, particularly in the context of work on health and social care. For example, partnership is defined as: ‘power being shared equally with all partners’ (Cadbury 1993, 11) and ‘mutually enabling interdependent interaction with shared intentions’ (Fowler 1997, 117). There was, however, very little, if any, work to define partnership specifically for the arts and cultural sector.

The National Lottery

The introduction of funding from the National Lottery in 1994 changed the sector completely. Not only did it herald a substantial injection of cash, but the centrality of ‘partnerships’ as a criteria by which this funding was distributed by the Arts Council and Heritage Lottery Fund set in train a new way of working.

For example, the Arts Council stated that: ‘applications for grants must show that significant “partnership funding” has been offered by other funders; the proportion of partnership funding in applications to date, averaging 60%, is higher than expected’ (ACE 1995, 8). As a direct result of the Lottery, the term ‘partnership’ crops up more frequently in Arts Council Annual Reports from the mid-1990s onwards, in Arts Council and Heritage Lottery Fund schemes and in the way the work of the cultural sector is described.

Corporate sponsorship and partnership

The use of ‘partnership’ after the introduction of the Lottery was so infectious that corporate support for touring was often discussed through the rubric of partnership as well. For example: ‘Among the year’s most significant developments was the launch of the Barclays Stage Partners scheme. This initiative, jointly funded by the [Touring] department and Barclays Bank plc, will provide £c2.5m over three years. It aims to encourage collaborations between arts organisations to produce and tour high quality work for the benefit of regional theatre, and their audiences’ (ACE 1996, 36).

New Labour and joined-up government

Through the 1990s partnership increasingly became part of political discourse. When the New Labour government came to power in 1997 it established a Partnership Fund to stimulate a diverse range of partnership activities and initiatives. Partnership was ‘a central element in the policy of the Labour government across several areas of activity’ (Guest & Peccei 2001, 208). The Labour Manifesto of 1997 mentions and encourages partnership numerous times, in contexts across the board from industrial relations to social care. In this manifesto there is a particular emphasis on public-private partnerships. There was a turn towards ‘joined-up government’ policies to create partnerships to attempt to solve social issues.

In essence, partnerships became a political imperative of the late 1990s: ‘We are emerging from a period when competition was promoted as the effective means of achieving social outcomes. Now partnership is the political imperative – between private and public sectors, across public sectors, between professionals and lay people, and with citizens generally. Many people welcome the shift in policy. They are the Government’s aspirations for partnership working, yet it sometimes feels like the triumph of hope over experience’ (Pratt et al. 1999, 99).



Will the cultural sector choose to come together in a place to look at how to operate more effectively and sustainably or wait to compete with each other for shrinking grant funding?

Sir John Tusa

5 Partnership abounds: 2001–15

The use of partnership in all areas of public policy was becoming commonplace across throughout the middle years of the 1997–2010 Labour government. In 2001 Professor David Guest and Professor Ricardo Peccei wrote (somewhat sceptically) that, ‘partnership, it seems, is an idea whose time has come. Indeed at the turn of the millennium, it is one of the British Labour government’s big ideas, constantly paraded as a good thing. It is an idea with which almost anyone can agree, without having any clear idea of what they are agreeing about. Perhaps because of this, the term is widely applied, so we hear much about public-private partnerships and about partnerships between the government and the people’ (Guest & Peccei 2001, 207).

Despite being en vogue, the term continued to elude precise definition. In 2008, Niels Åkerstrøm wrote, ‘in the last decade academic literature [has begun] to question the wide-ranging and sometime vague use of the word partnership: Partnerships are much praised, but often without great accuracy regarding their actual content’ (Åkerstrøm, 2008, 1).

Creative Partnerships

An important milestone in this period was the establishment of Creative Partnerships in 2001. ‘A flagship policy for the Arts Council and jointly funded by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), it brought together creative professionals (artists, makers, architects, designers) with children and teachers to encourage creativity within schools’ (Doeser 2015, 16). Part of the legacy of Creative Partnerships has been a recognition that the sector requires ‘connective tissue’ and in the case of creative education, this was provided by Creative Partnerships. ‘Many of the policies coming from DCMS and the Arts Council in recent years (Bridge Organisations and Music Education Hubs, for instance) have been attempts to replicate the linking role that Creative Partnerships provided’ (Doeser 2015, 17).

By the early 2000s the rhetoric of ‘partnership’ had become ‘the *sine qua non* of New Labour’s approach to governance in health, social care and regeneration’ (Ranade & Hudson 2003, 32). Culture was no exception, with enormous amounts of money going into the arts sector to fund capital projects and audience development. For example, high-profile (and now very familiar) projects funded through the Lottery with partnership funding in 2001–2 included the transformation of Baltic in Gateshead into an art gallery, and the major refurbishments of the Birmingham Hippodrome and Manchester’s Royal Exchange (ACE 2002).

Policy Action Team 10 and DCMS

Looking more widely across central government, the Prime Minister’s Policy Action Team 10 (PAT 10) reported to the Social Exclusion Unit that arts, sport and cultural and recreational activity could contribute to neighbourhood renewal and make a real difference to health, crime, employment and education in deprived communities (Cabinet Office 1999). In response, the DCMS Report on Social Inclusion published in February 2001 (DCMS, 2001) had an entire section on partnership, which explained how partnership should be deployed to achieve many of the ambitions of the original PAT 10 report. There are sections on partnership with Local Government, Regions and Europe, Other Departments, Communities, the Lottery and Industry and Commerce. One particular result of PAT 10’s recommendations to local government was that DCMS founded Regional Cultural Consortia in each of the English regions outside London. These obliged local authorities to come up with local cultural strategies.

Partnership or death

In his 2012 review of cultural education in England, Darren Henley complained that the cultural sector was not properly coordinated in its approach to cultural education (Henley 2012). This was particularly true for the handful of Lottery distributors working in the sector. In response the Cultural Education Partnership Group was established, to ensure their ‘priorities for cultural education cohere so that they are more than “the sum of their parts”’ and that they ‘collaborate to use [their] resources to maximise the number of high quality cultural education opportunities for children and young people, both in and out of school’ⁱ.

Reflecting on the pronouncements of the 2010–2015 coalition government, arts sector veteran Sir John Tusa wrote that their intention of ‘finding ways of doing more with less, particularly by collaborating more deeply’ would be hard to achieve ‘as it will force material change and challenge organisational sovereignty’. In short and put bluntly, he asked: ‘Will the cultural sector choose to come together in a place to look at how to operate more effectively and sustainably or wait to compete with each other for shrinking grant funding?’ (Tusa 2014, 14).

Partnership in 2015

The 2015 report by the Warwick Commission on the future of cultural value, *Enhancing Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth* (2015), uses ecological metaphors ‘to capture the connections between the publicly funded and commercial successes of the Cultural and Creative Industries. We use it to connect our creative and cultural success to the shared national cultural identity and foundations that continue to produce world-class talent. The creativity and cultural vibrancy within our shared UK identity also nurtures brilliance in design, engineering and enterprise more generally’ (Warwick Commission 2015, 21). Many of the Warwick Commission’s recommendations (on a wide range of issues) suggest partnership working as a way forward.

The Warwick Commission also stressed the importance of cultural organisations doing ‘a better job at coming together locally to share resources, devise partnerships that will unlock financial savings and generate income benefits, and join forces in making their case’ (Warwick Commission 2015, 16).

The point echoes a recommendation of the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee report *The Work of Arts Council England* (2014): ‘The Arts Council should redouble its efforts at brokering cultural partnerships involving business, local authorities, local enterprise partnerships, universities and international organisations, particularly within the EU, which might provide additional funding sources’ (CMS Committee 2014, p4).

6 Conclusion

Overall, the story of the last 70 years has been an increasingly formalised approach to partnership in the cultural sector. This reflects an increasing complexity, diversity and scale of the sector itself, as well as an emergent policy consensus that has adopted concepts and theories from the corporate world. The notion of partnership is now ubiquitous in the cultural sector. But so too is the recommendation to partner more. Consistently, throughout the decades, from the 1970s onwards, the recommendation to partner has featured in sector-wide reviews, suggesting that ‘partnership’ rhetoric is outpacing the reality.

In conclusion we can see a number of recurring themes that are driving partnership policy in the subsidised cultural sector. These pertain to the following factors:

- maximising the impact of modest investment;
- developing interesting and innovative cultural products; and
- reaching wider audiences.

All of this is driven by a desire to be rational – to recognise that the objectives of broad national policy can only be achieved with the coordination of fragmented and dispersed resources. It seems that while there are complexity and scarce resources there will be the need for partnership. Neither of those processes look like slowing down, and partnership will continue to be part of the policy toolkit for the foreseeable future.

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Endnote

- i <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/our-priorities-2011-15/children-and-young-people/cultural-education-partnership-group/>

