

Working with a partner

Benefits of working with a partner

Working with a cultural or community partner can be invaluable when running public engagement initiatives. Partners can bring creative ideas, expertise and experiences to the project and can offer insights and access to non-specialist audiences.

There are lots of different types of partners, from large charities to community action groups, museums to local societies. This inevitably means that partnerships themselves can take lots of different shapes, with each group involved bringing different resources and perspectives to a project.



Finding the right partner

As with any relationship, finding the right partner can take time. Think carefully about what you want a partner to bring to the initiative and what you might give to them. Once you have identified these needs look for partners that match them. You can start to look for the right partner by:

- speaking with your public engagement team or other colleagues about existing relationships;
- thinking about local groups and organisations. Not only will this make it easier to meet with them, but you might also have shared interests and understandings if you come from the same area;
- considering your existing connections – is there an organisation you visit regularly, a community centre you use or a museum whose archive you've worked with?

Try to get out to speak to people in person. It's also fine to have informal chats with potential partners without instantly promising that you want to collaborate with them on a project.

What do you both want from the partnership?

Your partnership needs to be mutually beneficial, so be honest about what you wish to get out of the process and allow your partner space to do the same. Be clear about what you can expect from each other and what you will each bring to the table. If the project will be valuable for both parties it significantly increases the chances that everyone will be committed to making it a success.

Don't simply assume potential collaborators will want to take part because you've had a great idea, instead think about the needs of their organisation/group. What are they trying to achieve? Who do they want to engage with? What are their strategic goals? Take a look at the 'honesty policy' at the end of this document for some possible talking points.

Co-production

It is often important to collaborate with your partners throughout the entire process so that the event is to some extent co-produced. Otherwise, you risk missing out on valuable insights, or worse, creating an event your partners are not comfortable with. To do so, make sure:

- All partners are involved from the beginning and can shape the event (e.g. suggesting formats, speakers).
- Listen to their advice about working with your intended audience and don't be offended if they suggest alternatives to your ideas.
- Appreciate each other's expertise. Get an understanding of what you can all bring to the project.
- Establish roles and responsibilities in both preparing and delivering the event, being honest about how much each partner can commit.

You should write down a simple agreement (MoU) that you can both sign off, along with a list of each partner's responsibilities and a timeline with key milestones. Update this timeline throughout the process, checking in with each other if a deadline cannot be met or an aspect of the event needs to be changed.

Top tips: working together

- **Stay in regular contact:** check that all partners continue to be happy with how things are going and notify each other of any changes that might impact the project.
- **Check everyone is happy before pressing print:** ask your partner how they would like to be referenced on promotional material, if they have logos to include and check they are happy with the comms messaging.
- **If having multiple partners:** check they are all happy to work together and establish if they will be equal partners with clear responsibilities.
- **Know when to part ways:** working together will be stressful, but it should also be enjoyable. If this isn't the case, try to restore balance and even explore if both parties wish to continue the partnership.



Collaborating beyond an event

It is important that a partnership does not end the moment your public engagement event is over. Time has been invested in the collaboration and partners can feel a little used if all contact suddenly stops. It is often a good idea to gradually build relationships with partners. Start off with a manageable event and if it is a positive experience you can develop the project from there.

There are a lot of long term benefits to fostering relationships and building on initial collaborations (e.g. developing your research, providing new audiences for each other). Think about potential legacy outputs that could come from your public engagement event or future ventures that you could work on together. If you start out small-scale, maybe you can reproduce what you have done on a larger platform or commit to doing a mini-series together. If both parties are keen to continue working together then your first event is only the beginning.

The honesty policy

Make sure at the beginning of the process you are having open and honest conversations with each other. You need to establish what you both want to get out of the project, what your concerns are and how your different organisations work. Not only will this save time further down the line, but it can also prevent misunderstandings from developing. Take a look below at some of the questions you should ask each other. Make sure you add questions that are specific to your project.

