

Partner Up Impact Report



“Wow, what an incredible journey Partner Up has enabled us to take. We've made new allies, pushed our creativity further than we thought possible and enabled our young people to grow their creative aspirations in a way that previously seemed beyond their reach.

Bruk Up Stigma, Partner Up project

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What is Partner Up?

Partner Up shines a light on the power of collaboration and its ability to increase impact and drive social change more effectively.

Partner Up is an innovative package of funding and support, designed to enable social change organisations to join forces on ambitious community projects.

Led by Take Note, a pioneer in methods of collaboration, it was developed in partnership with funder Footwork and their online initiative Collaborative Change.

In 2021-2022, Partner Up supported two creative partnerships between unlikely allies, both of which have had a considerable impact within - and far beyond - the places where they took place.



Who is this report for?

The lessons from Partner Up are important to all those working - or considering working - in partnership to deliver collaborative projects: social change organisations, funders, researchers, advocacy organisations and networks.

This report is particularly relevant when using the [Take Note Collaboration Guidebook](#) or our companion tool, [Funding Collaborations: A Blueprint](#). The findings underpin these two resources, by providing evidence of the real-world impact of our research. And they form the basis of our recommendations on how to undertake collaborations and support them most effectively.

Who is behind this report?

This report has been produced by Take Note, the lead organisation of Partner Up.

Take Note is a sector support initiative that advocates for collaborative best practice, sparking and supporting extraordinary collaborations between unlikely allies working in communities. Since 2019, Take Note has been developing a partnership approach that better enables community innovators and organisations to deliver joined-up, long-lasting social impact through working together, sharing tools, ideas and learning.

To date, Take Note's work has been funded by Footwork and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation as part of their shared interest in strengthening community partnership working.

www.wetakenote.org

Part 1:

The Partner Up Projects

Partner Up's support for innovative social change partnerships was awarded to two projects - **Bruk Up Stigma** and **Fly The Flag** - each receiving one of two £30,000 grants, generously made possible by Footwork. Both projects represented bold alliances between arts, humanitarian and community support organisations using performance, dance and film to bring about social change in pioneering ways, connecting grassroots organisations with partners operating at national and international levels.

The two projects were chosen from an application pool of 128 cross-disciplinary collaborations, representing a remarkable 432 organisations across 136 UK and 14 international locations and a wide range of partnerships across different artforms and communities.





Bruk Up Stigma

Bruk Up Stigma was an international cross-sector partnership between local mental health services and arts charities for young people in Nottingham and West Cornwall. The project brought together young people across urban and rural locations, and used spoken word, urban music and underrepresented dance forms such as Bruk Up - a hybrid of Jamaican dancehall and Brooklyn Street dance - to help them to make new connections, build confidence and break down stigma around mental health amongst a wider young audience. 36 young people took part in this project, 80% of whom had existing mental health issues with the other 20% having been identified as high risk.

Bruk Up Stigma co-created a [powerful film](#) with the young people involved alongside the associate artists and film-makers We The Conspirators, screened at Tate St Ives and a variety of other venues. The project increased the confidence and emotional wellbeing of the young people, heightened their motivation to use creativity to improve their mental health, improved their ability to articulate and communicate their experiences of mental health, and enabled them to build stronger relationships and networks with their peers.



The project was a life changing opportunity and an innovative one at that! Before this I didn't believe something of such large impact was possible. Especially amongst peers who don't have a platform or resource to express themselves; this provided the chance and made the impossible possible.

Fly The Flag

Fly The Flag was a UK-wide collaborative project co-produced by Fuel, The MAC in Belfast, National Theatre of Scotland, National Theatre Wales, and the National Theatre. It aimed to raise awareness about human rights among young people across the four nations, using the arts as a tool and vehicle to unlock change. Partner Up's grant specifically supported the partnership in Northern Ireland and the collaboration at a local level between Amnesty International, the MAC and Fuel plus YEAH (Youth Education Health Advice). Fly The Flag Belfast engaged a core group of young women from low socio-economic backgrounds aged 14-21, including asylum seekers temporarily living in a hotel.

A culminating [documentary film](#) (and audio-described version) was screened at the National Theatre and captured the engagement process and young peoples' response to their Right to Protest. The geographical reach of the partnership led the young people to feel more connected with other regions, as well as reporting increased confidence and wellbeing, pride in what they had created together and understanding of positive and balanced ways to assemble and protest.



My daughter survived the journey of death, passing through many traumas, withdrawing into herself, not smiling, and not leaving her bed all day. Through Fly The Flag she had an opportunity to express her views, and ask about justice, equality, and freedom. The energy of life exploded within her, she became more lively and happy, and she saw a space of hope through this project, which brought together the people of her generation to explore the future of humanity.

Part 2:

Why Partner Up?

Partner Up supported projects like Bruk Up Stigma and Fly The Flag through a pioneering model that was designed to harness the power of collaboration for social change. It was created from a belief that collective action can have a tangible effect on the multiple, profound challenges being faced across our societies – inequality, discrimination, mental health crises, the climate crisis. When organisations work together towards a shared goal, it increases their reach, ambition and innovation, while reducing competition and duplication, enabling greater positive social impact.

Collaboration: the challenges

However, there is a gap in effective support for collaboration from funders, and a need for more resources for social change organisations to maximise their collaborative impact.

For a partnership to be successful, it requires substantial time and resource. This can put significant pressure on capacity, especially for smaller, grassroots organisations. While funders often request partnership working in their grant-giving criteria, traditional application processes do not support a collaborative approach. There is rarely additional financial support from funders to help each organisation involved manage the partnership project or spend time together as a group to plan, deliver and evaluate the work collectively. Moreover, when organisations are able to come together in this way, they aren't necessarily able to optimise their time together efficiently and effectively in a way that will maximise the project's success and impact for the people involved.



Achieve equitable sharing of workload



Balance shared project aims with individual organisation aims and goals



Manage different levels of experience within the group



Manage a range of capacity within the group



Ensure regular communication between the group



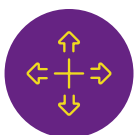
Identify and access new and unlikely allies

Collaboration: the solution

Partner Up was designed to address this gap.

Its unique model offered a more collaborative and accessible grant application process, enabling organisations to lay foundations for a strong partnership from the very start of the project. It also provided pioneering wraparound strategic support to develop best practice in partnership working, not only maximising the impact of the projects but also enhancing partnership expertise in each organisation for the long term.

Through our [Take Note Collaboration Guidebook](#) and our [Funding Collaborations: A Blueprint](#), we have packaged up the Partner Up model and our learnings for the wider social change sector, offering all aspiring collaborators and partnership funders the opportunity to engage with and implement this new way of working together.



Extend networks



Diversify reach



Enhance innovation



Amplify ambition



Enable efficiencies



Boost morale



Share knowledge



Unlock funding



Mitigate risk



Catalyse systemic change

Part 3:

The Partner Up package

The core elements of the Partner Up model consisted of:

1) Funding granted by Footwork via the bespoke Partner Up fundraising application process

- £30K partnership project grants (£60K in total)
- A collaboration-focused fundraising application process

2) Additional strategic partnership support package

- A set of tools and resources to support and strengthen the partnership and project including collaborative project design, delivery and evaluation.
- Facilitated partnership ‘Huddles’ that brought all the partners together at key moments throughout the project in a workshop setting. Led by Take Note, these Huddles focused on agreeing ways of working together, co-designing and planning the project and creating a safe and supportive space in which to reflect on any challenges or issues arising.



Partner Up aims

For the two projects taking part in Partner Up - Bruk Up and Fly The Flag - the package of support aimed to:

- maximise the impact of the partnership projects on their communities
- empower the partners to work more effectively as a group and increase their understanding of best partnership practice
- enable partners to overcome partnership challenges

In the **longer term** for these groups, we intended this support to:

- enhance, strengthen and sustain the impact of the project on communities beyond the initial project delivery
- increase the partners' collective expertise and confidence to undertake partnership working in the future

For the **wider social change sector**, Partner Up aimed to:

- raise awareness of the impact of collaboration
- increase understanding of the conditions required for partnership working to be successful
- offer tools and resources - built through the findings from Partner Up - that the sector can use to support their collaborative activities

Part 4:

The Impact of Partner Up

Partner Up's unique combination of funding and strategic support provided a holistic offer that enabled the successful delivery of these aims. Feedback on Partner Up from participating organisations across the two projects was overwhelmingly positive, with demonstrable and evidenced impact for both sets of partners in relation to the enhanced quality of the work delivered for communities and the extent to which they were able to work more effectively together.



1) 88% of partners reported that Partner Up significantly supported in maximising the impact of the project

Partner Up achieved its aim of bringing together unlikely allies across the social change sector to catalyse ambitious projects that create tangible change in their communities. The two Partner Up projects had a positive impact on the people they worked with and the partnerships achieved greater reach and diversity of beneficiaries than the organisations would have achieved alone.

During evaluation in the Wrap-Up Huddles, it was noted by the participating organisations that working in partnership:



Enhanced innovation and sparked new ways of working

Partners reflected that in relatively culturally or physically isolated parts of the country, the creative pool can feel under-resourced and ideas generation is therefore more stunted. Partners reflected that it was invigorating to utilise the collaboration to connect more artists with communities and to connect participants with a wider range of creative perspectives to generate new thinking and spark new work.



Amplified ambition and encouraged partners to be bolder in the work they undertake with their communities

Partners felt that the experience of working with other organisations challenged them to be braver about the type of work and the level of ambition they bring to their communities in the future. The collective support and encouragement from the other partners reminded them that it is ok to take risks, to think big and to introduce new artforms that are not so familiar.



Diversified reach

The partnerships brought together people from different communities and with different expertise to work together in ways they wouldn't have previously.



'Partnering Up' and collaborating with others allowed us to bring in new ideas, spark new work ... and challenged us to be braver about what we bring to families and young people.

2) 88% of partners reported Partner Up significantly helped them work more effectively as a group

The package of support - in particular the collaboration-focused grant application process and the additional strategic input from Take Note - was successful in helping organisations develop key partnership skills and collaborative approaches that they could then take forward with confidence into future projects.

The Partner Up grant application process

Unlike traditional applications, the Partner Up grant application process was designed with collaboration and partnership working in mind. We wanted to understand from applicants' responses:

- the shared ambitions, aims and objectives for the project across the whole group
- the group dynamic and its potential strengths and challenges
- from each individual organisation - what their motivations were for taking part in this project and how they planned to contribute.

Full details of the Partner Up funding application process can be found in our tool [Funding Collaborations: A Blueprint](#).



I really do feel that more funders should consider these different approaches to how applications are shaped and formed – we as a partnership found this process incredibly beneficial.

Evaluation of the grant application process demonstrated that it successfully:

- encouraged unlikely allies to connect and develop innovative new projects
- strengthened the culture of collaboration from the project's inception onwards
- clarified the shared aims and intentions across the partnership group
- gave applicants skills (collaborative creation of an Impact Map) that would have a legacy beyond the project
- provided a collaborative process reported by many partners to be unique to their experience of fundraising



In the charity sector we are often asked to work in partnership, and it is assumed that we will just get on with it, which is why these partnerships break down. Having the time at the application stage to clarify roles and explore what each of us wanted to achieve was a good way of making sure that we were all clear on the aims and objectives of the project before the funding was distributed. I have seen many well-intentioned groups break down because people did not share the same values and were not clear on what they were trying to achieve.

Partner Up Strategic Support

The additional strategic support - in particular the series of Take Note-facilitated Huddles - was designed to help organisations develop key partnership skills and collaborative approaches that they could then take forward with confidence into future projects.



We learnt how important it is to take time to think about expectations, understanding of ideas and different ways of working and cultures... The support package gave us foundational skills to use for large-scale future partnership projects.

Partners noted that this strategic support delivered a range of specific outcomes, all of which contributed to the overall aim to empower them to work more effectively as a group and increase their understanding of best partnership practice. In particular it:



Created a safer, more supportive and more equitable culture between members of the group

“I felt that everyone realised how important it was to be honest and open about the process and product throughout the project.”



Enabled more open and supportive communication

“It was so important to take time to think about expectations, understanding of ideas and different ways of working and cultures.”



Achieved greater clarity around roles and responsibilities across the group

“We had to always bring our focus back to what we were trying to achieve - different partners had different priorities that ran alongside this project’s intended outcomes - the approach helped us maintain focus.”



Maximised the impact of each partner’s contribution

“Obviously different partners had different roles and were involved in different stages of the project - the package helped us to try and ensure everyone was given the opportunity to maximise use of their skills.”



Enhanced each group’s focus on the project’s common goal and shared commitment to the project

“The support package enabled us to rise above our limited perspectives and build something together and connect through a common vision that kept the driving force of the project alive. We were coming together for a common cause.”

3) 50% of partners reported Partner Up significantly helped partners overcome partnership challenges

In both groups, most partnership challenges faced were relatively minor; some partners therefore didn’t feel they encountered substantial partnership challenges. A number of partners commented that the positive impact of the Partner Up package on their work together was a factor in helping to preempt partnership challenges before they arose.



Challenges were apparent and we all had to be open to change and possibility, as holding on to our individual ways of working would render the project inefficient.

Part 5:

Longer-Term Impact

1) Community Impact

For the communities taking part, we intended that the stronger partnerships formed by the delivery organisations would help sustain and extend the work beyond the initial project delivery itself. Partner Up achieved this aim: for both projects, the work will continue and evolve for its beneficiaries through 2023 and beyond.

Bruk Up Stigma

The impact of the project will continue to be sustained through 2023 and beyond via the ongoing screenings of the Bruk Up film plus a new project 'Push for Positivity'. This initiative is a mental health and music group that has been set up by the young people themselves following their engagement with Bruk Up. All participants in this group have lived experience of mental health conditions ranging from anxiety to psychosis. In addition to artistic support, this vulnerable group of young people will continue to engage with and receive support from the mental health support organisations involved in the original Bruk Up project. Through the Push for Positivity project the young people will create an EP about their experiences which will be distributed online and used to address stigma, dispel myths about mental health and promote support for young people from their communities.

Fly the Flag

As an outcome of the project, this group now regularly visits the MAC and remains connected to each other - previously none of the beneficiaries had visited arts organisations like the MAC before this project. As a result of Fly The Flag, the MAC and YEAH Project are exploring ways of working together again in the future. This proposed partnership will include Fly The Flag 2023 with a joint funding application submitted to the Northern Ireland Executive Office Good Relations fund.



The collaboration between arts practitioners, venues and human rights campaigners - alongside the young people themselves - will, we have no doubt, have lasting positive impact long beyond the lifetime of the project.

2) Organisational Impact

Partner Up aimed to increase partners' collective experience and confidence to undertake partnership working in the future. Partners reflected on a number of tools, techniques and approaches that they plan to take forward into future partnership projects. This included: reflecting on the time and capacity a partnership requires and building more time for this into the planning stages; developing a more collective and collaborative approach to evaluation; creating a culture of open dialogue and ideas generation; and applying learning from Partner Up in other organisational work beyond the collaboration itself.



Planning

“The package of support was particularly useful in the planning stages. On reflection, in the future, I would build more planning time and partner planning hours into the application so we could make more use of the planning tool and be clear on our roles and responsibilities.”



Open communication

“Going forward I’m intending to go into each project with an open mind. I aim to speak ideas out loud to include everyone’s opinion.”



Reflective evaluation

“The Wrap-Up Huddle has been a brilliant resource and one I wish all funders offered. It set the basis for our activity report, and allowed group reflection in a neutral context. We will surely suggest keeping a similar set up for what concerns collaborative project wrap up.”



Applicability beyond collaboration

“I found the monitoring and evaluation approach used by Partner Up useful and I’d like to apply this methodology to other areas of my work.”

3) Impact for the wider sector

Longer term, and as part of the wider legacy of Partner Up, Take Note will continue to champion the power of collaboration, using the evidence of impact from Partner Up to make the case for this way of working. As a result of Partner Up, we have also created a new tool [Funding Collaborations: A Blueprint](#) that aims to help funders apply these findings to their own priorities and processes. This tool sits alongside the [Take Note Collaboration Guidebook](#) for social change organisations. Both resources are now available as open source materials on the Take Note website and are being shared widely by partner organisations across the UK.

In addition to the Take Note tools, we have compiled the following practical recommendations in Section 6 of this report, based on the Partner Up findings. These recommendations are relevant to funders interested in supporting partnerships as effectively as possible and to social change organisations undertaking collaboration. All the recommendations can easily be adapted and embedded in existing ways of working, and are simple methods for enhancing collaboration across the social change sector for now and for the long term.



Part 6:

Recommendations for funders

Collaboration funding is needed

- Key finding: There is substantial interest across the social change sector in funding for collaborative working. Partner Up's funding specifically for collaboratively-delivered projects is an innovative offer, particularly in how it foregrounds collaboration in every aspect of the project - from application through planning, delivery, evaluation and legacy.
- Key recommendation: **Offer specific funding for collaborations.** Within your organisational funding aims, consider whether there are projects where delivery in partnership would substantially enhance the achievement of those aims and whether you can structure funding opportunities with collaboration in mind.

“We knew you were bound to generate a huge volume of applications. It was an interesting concept -partnering up - and not one I have come across before in 25 years of fundraising!”

Collaborative application processes strengthen partnerships

- Key finding: Partner Up's foregrounding of collaboration in the design of its grant application process was considered unique in the social change sector. It transformed the application experience for applicants to make it more collaborative, more focused and strategic. It also had a legacy beyond the application process itself: it helped partners to establish a shared vision and develop collective outcomes for the project; it encouraged the group to embed good collaborative practice from the start; and it supported everyone involved to develop new skills to take forward to future collaborative projects.
- Key recommendation: **Consider whether your current application process facilitates collaboration and encourages organisations to apply with others.** Assess whether there are ways you can streamline the process for collaboration, integrating questions or activities that encourage the group to come together to co-create and co-design the project collectively and ensure there are opportunities for individual partners' voices to be heard.

“I really do feel that more funders should consider these different approaches to how applications are shaped and formed – we as a partnership found this process incredibly beneficial.”

Fund the time it takes to collaborate well

- Key finding: Collaboration takes additional time and capacity for partners to do it well. Organisations found it valuable to allocate budget to each partner fairly based on the resource they were putting into the project, and to include in this allocation the time each partner would spend on the partnership itself.
- Key recommendation: **Encourage your grantees to estimate and fairly fund the additional time they will spend on the partnership.** Request that applicants incorporate in their project budget a funding request for this time.

“This core cost funding for ‘partnership development time’ turned out to be crucial. It was not something I had considered previously but of course it takes time and resource from each organisation involved - especially if you want to do it well. Factoring this time into the use of our grant has been a game-changer and I’m going to think about how to make sure this time is paid for in future applications for projects like this that we submit.”

Take this further

Funding Collaborations: A Blueprint

We’ve created a practical guide that includes recommendations and grant application model for funders to adopt and adapt when considering how best to fund and support collaboration processes.

[Download here](#)

Part 7:

Recommendations for social change organisations

Clarify your 'why'

- Key finding: Driving towards a shared vision for the project strengthens the impact of the project and enhances partners' commitment and motivation.
- Key recommendation: **Articulate what you collectively want your partnership and project to achieve and why you each believe it is needed.** You can do this by completing a Collaborative Impact Map together to outline your shared vision and outcomes. Consider also how the group's collective ambition feeds into each partner's own organisational objectives. Ideally, do this during the formation of your project plan and as you develop funding applications - it will significantly strengthen your case for support.

Setup is key

- Key finding: Taking time to set up the project at the start - and involving all partners in this process - is key to building solid foundations for the partnership. Partners found that planning the partnership and the project as a group helped to maximise the project's impact and success. This included plotting out each partner's roles and responsibilities, agreeing communication modes, addressing from the start any potentially challenging power dynamics and creating the positive culture of the group.
- Key recommendation: **Allocate additional time and capacity at the start of a project to set up the partnership well.** Completing a [partnership agreement](#) that everyone contributes to and signs is a crucial step in creating a culture of shared accountability, clarity and commitment from all involved.

Give the partnership as much love as the project

- Key finding: Allocating as much time and resource to the partnership as the project is key to the project's ultimate success. The Partner Up Huddles offered an effective structure through which to achieve this. They also helped to create safe spaces for open, equitable communication about the successes and challenges of the partnership and to find solutions.
- Key recommendations:

Include partnership time in your project budget. Consider how much time each partner will spend on project planning, partnership development and evaluation as well as their time to help deliver the project itself. Make sure this time is being covered by your funding request.

Build in time at the start to talk about how you want to approach your work together and your shared values, to create an environment of communication and mutual trust. Reflect on the collaboration and its successes and challenges as well as on the process and impact of the project itself. Identify what learning you will take forward to future collaboration. Think carefully about how partnership meetings are run, and by whom (including considering having an external or more objective third-party facilitator involved in partnership management).

Take this further

Collaboration Guidebook

To put these recommendations into practice, Take Note's Collaboration Guidebook takes organisations through a partnership project from start to finish, supporting partners at each step on the collaboration journey with practical tools and approaches.

[Download here](#)

A note on the authors

The people behind Take Note are social entrepreneurs Marianna Hay, Emily Webb and Stuart Burns. Between us we have over 25 years of experience leading small arts organisations and delivering cross-sector collaborative arts-for-social-impact projects. Take Note is born from our first hand experience of the extraordinary impact and artistic possibility of collaboration, as well as the real and significant challenges that arise when working with others. And our experimental approach, backed up by extensive research and sector consultation, is all about innovating to find the best ways to tackle these challenges collectively.





→ Find out more:

[The Collaboration Guidebook](#)

This free guidebook from Take Note is designed as a step-by-step guide for individual innovators, community projects or brand new initiatives to devise, plan, deliver and evaluate a successful collaborative project.

[Collective Impact Lab](#)

Take Note's Collective Impact Lab brings together a series of action research projects through which we support and evaluate partnership innovation and collaborative best practice, including more information on the 2022 Partner Up projects.

[Partnership Portfolio](#)

Take Note partners with organisations, networks, funders and social change initiatives to share and disseminate our methodology and tools, with the aim of embedding a culture of collaborative best practice more widely across the sector.

[Footwork](#)

Footwork supports local social innovators to turn their bold ideas into lasting positive change for people and places. They provide these local social innovators with the funding, support and connections needed to get their project off the ground, or scale it to increase its impact, with the ultimate aim to influence how places should be shaped in the future.

Partner Up was generously supported by Footwork Trust with strategic and development input from Collaborative Change. We are hugely grateful to everyone that applied to Partner Up, the Partner Up judging panel and to our winning project groups:

Trelya | Bed-Stuy Veterans | Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Nottingham
We the Conspirators | Fuel | The MAC Belfast | Amnesty International

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