



Funding Collaborations: A Blueprint

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1 Funding Collaborations: An Introduction

In a nutshell

What is this tool and who is it for?

Recommendations and a practical model for funders to adopt and adapt when considering how best to fund and support collaborations.

Why is it needed?

The additional capacity and resource it takes to collaborate well needs extra input from funders: application processes that facilitate and encourage collaboration and extra funding for the time required to work in partnership.

What can it achieve?

Funders have the power to shift the dial - by supporting collaborations effectively, you can help to achieve stronger, more equitable, more impactful collaborations across the social change sector.



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, Take Note-supported project



What does this blueprint aim to achieve?

This tool presents funders with an invitation to review your application processes and your overall support for partnership projects. It encourages you to consider the ways in which you could empower organisations to collaborate as effectively as possible.

By promoting best collaborative practice from the very start - when partners are designing their project and compiling their grant application - funders can enable truly joined up work during the crucial set-up phase that lays strong foundations for the whole partnership.

By encouraging organisations to consider how much capacity each partner will require to undertake the partnership itself (as well as to deliver the project) - and by funding this time properly - funders can promote a fundamental shift in fair support of partnerships, enabling organisations to deliver their projects together as effectively and impactfully as possible.

Background

Since 2019, Take Note has worked to design, develop and deliver packages of support that offer funding and additional strategic input that encourages and enables unlikely allies to join forces and collaborate to deliver ambitious, innovative and impactful creative projects with communities. To date - and with thanks to our funding partners Footwork and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation - we have awarded five innovative cross-sector partnerships projects a total of £138,000, reaching 25 organisations ranging from grassroots arts charities to international human rights organisations, supporting them to work with over 600 direct beneficiaries in communities across the UK.

A core part of our offer has been to develop a grant application process that is designed explicitly to promote collaboration when partners come together to develop their project and to write the application. This new process aims to address and overcome the challenges that can be faced in fundraising for a project as a group - for both applicants and assessors.

The preparation of traditional grant applications can be a relatively solitary experience: usually prepared, written and submitted by one organisation. The problem with this from a collaboration perspective is that it puts all the pressure on one organisation (or even one individual) - thereby creating an imbalance of work and power right from the beginning of a project. In addition, the assessment of applications for partnership work that have been written by just one organisation does not give the funder a sense of group dynamic or collective motivation for working together, especially when only one voice from the group is represented.

At Take Note, we therefore wanted to design a process that cultivated a culture of shared responsibility and commitment from everyone involved right from the start. And that gave us, as the people making decisions about funding, a clearer picture of the group and its dynamic.

This blueprint outlines the application process we developed and the principles that sit behind it. We hope it will serve as a useful tool for funders who are looking at ways to adapt their own grant-making processes or develop their ways of supporting collaboration.

2 Funding Collaborations: Why and How

Why support collaboration?

The power of collaboration

Take Note's approach to funding and supporting collaboration is born from the understanding that collective action can have a tangible impact on the multiple, profound challenges being faced across our societies – inequality, discrimination, mental health crises, the climate crisis. When many minds come together, joined-up solutions to these challenges – from grassroots projects to global initiatives – are essential in enabling us to make substantial, real-world change.

Research has evidenced how working in collaboration helps organisations tackle social issues and supports communities to develop and thrive. 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.



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!

Meadow Arts, Take Note applicant

The challenges of collaboration

However, there is an opportunity for collaboration to be more impactfully supported by funders.

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 necessarily support a collaborative approach. Organisations also struggle to find funding for the time it takes to collaborate effectively, and 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

The need: supporting collaboration

Take Note's action research provides evidence of the demand for stronger support for collaboration.

For our most recent grant opportunity, Partner Up, there was 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. We received overwhelmingly positive feedback from applicants and successful grantees on the joint offers of funding specifically for collaboration and of wider strategic support, and multiple reports of the unique and valued nature of this offer.

How can funders best support collaboration?

Recommendations

Based on Take Note's action research, we have compiled a set of recommendations for funders to consider adopting for your own partnership grant-making processes.

Funding for collaborations



Fund the time it takes to collaborate well and be prepared to allocate additional core funding to strengthen and nurture the partnership.

Encourage organisations to allocate additional funding for their time spent specifically on the partnership, all the way from early stage project development and design, through working together to plan, deliver and evaluate the project, to coming together to check in on the effectiveness of the partnership itself and navigate any challenges arising.



Interrogate budgets and make sure each partner is being funded fairly for their input into the project - this tells you a lot about the partnership dynamic.



Recognise that partnership working is not necessarily more 'efficient' or 'cost effective' than individual organisation delivery (but has many other benefits!).



Consider the mechanisms of your grant giving across the partnership group - whether you will award the grant allocation directly to each organisation involved or make the payment in full to one organisation who will then allocate it accordingly.

Collaborative application design



Create ways for the workload to be shared at the grant application stage in order to encourage each member of the group to contribute. This has important longer-term implications in relation to partnership equity, power balance and group dynamic.



Create opportunities for the group to come together during the application process in ways that are meaningful and that actively contribute towards better project design and planning.



Create ways for the individual voices across the group to be included. This will help to give you a sense of partners' individual motivation for taking part in the project, how this contributes to their own organisational aims and what their role will be in the partnership.

Take this further

Consider funding the time it takes to write the grant application itself (particularly from the second stage onwards) - this is something every social change organisation Take Note works with has said would be invaluable. This is especially important if you are asking for collaborative bid writing, as it takes longer to write an application in partnership than alone.



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.

Trelya, Take Note grantee

Golden Principles



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.

First Light Festival, Take Note grantee

If you are only able to apply a few of these recommendations to your grant-giving model, our top three would be:

1

Fund partners' time to collaborate well and be prepared to resource the additional time they spend together throughout the project that specifically nurtures and develops the partnership itself.

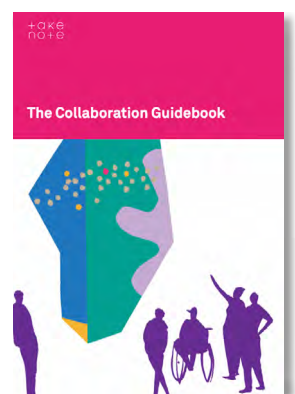
2

Create opportunities for the group to come together during the application process, actively supporting the partners to collectively develop their plans for the project in a way that maximises its potential success and impact.

3

Integrate a way for every partner to have a voice in the application in order to understand their individual commitment to the project and motivation for getting involved.

We also recommend sharing Take Note's free [Collaboration Guidebook](#) with your grantees - full of useful tools and resources to enhance their partnership projects.



3 Funding Collaborations: A Model



The application process made us think more deeply about what each partner was being asked to do, what their level of commitment to the project would be and how the funding would fairly compensate them for their contribution. It made it feel like there would be a more equal dynamic between us all given we would all be receiving funding for taking part.

Trelya, Take Note grantee

Through an iterative process, at Take Note we have designed a grant application model that encourages partners to proactively work together from the start to design their project and write their funding proposal.

We offer this collaborative grant application model for funders to use or adapt to suit your own current application priorities and structures. We understand that not all aspects of this model will be relevant, but we hope that understanding the detail will be valuable in selecting which elements to utilise in your own approach.

Grant application process

This is made up of two stages:

- 1) Expression of Interest
- 2) Collaborative Impact Mapping & Partner Reflections

Stage 1: Expression of Interest (EOI)

The partners respond to three question areas covering the following topics:

- **The Project:** What is the idea for your arts partnership project? Which communities is your project working with? Why is this project needed?
- **The Partnership:** Who are the partners? What role will each partner take and what expertise do they bring?
- **The Impact:** How do you hope this project will have a positive impact on individuals and / or communities? How will working together as a group of partners help you maximise your project's impact?



It was such an interesting and useful process to develop our Impact Map as part of the second stage and I really do feel that more funders should consider these different approaches to how second stage applications are shaped and formed – we as a partnership found this process incredibly beneficial.

Creativity Works, Take Note applicant

Stage 1 Criteria

The Project:

25% of overall score

- Level of innovation of project idea
- The extent to which the project engages the community in creative activity
- To what extent the project has been designed to be inclusive and accessible to all its participants
- To what extent the artistic output demonstrates ambition and potential to inspire and engage its public audience

The Impact:

25% of overall score

- To what extent the proposal articulates clear positive social, personal and/or community outcomes for the project
- To what extent the collaborative aspect of the project will have a positive impact on the outcomes for community members
- What potential the work has to inspire and connect the people taking part

The Partnership:

50% of overall score

- The strength and diversity of the partnerships
- To what extent the collaborative aspect of the project will have a positive impact on its design, delivery and impact

Why do we do it like this?

We understand that in the first stage of a grant application, before having any indication of potential success, organisations have restricted capacity to put into each grant application they write. The EOI is therefore divided into clearly defined sections to enable a group to split the writing between different partners if appropriate, and to ensure there is specific reflection on the partnership.

The EOI assessment is weighted to allocate 50% of the score to the partnership section. By asking explicitly about how and why the partners are collaborating, we gain from the start more of an understanding than many traditional grant application processes about the strengths and potential challenges of the partnership.

Stage 2: Collaborative Impact Map and Partner Reflections

Each group works together to prepare and submit a collaboratively developed Impact Map (also known as a Theory of Change or logic model) for the planned project using a template and framework developed by Take Note. A step-by-step guide to creating an Impact Map collaboratively can be found in Take Note's [Collaboration Guidebook](#).

The Stage 2 application process is designed to bring all partners together to spend time co-developing their idea and ultimate vision for the project. Crucially, this exercise includes the partners jointly considering their shared aspirations for the work, agreeing the intended shared outcomes for participants, being clear on why they are each taking part in the project and clarifying their roles.

Each organisation is then asked to provide an individual reflection on the process of co-creating the Impact Map with a particular focus on:

- the extent to which the process of co-creating the Impact Map with other members of the group was constructive, collaborative and strategically aligned
- any challenges that arose and where each partner thought improvements in the collaborative process could be made



“The completion of the Impact Map has enabled us to build a firm foundation on which we can continue to engage with one another in an open, transparent way clear that we have a shared mission and vision for our project together.”

AGE UK North East Somerset, Take Note applicant

Stage 2 Criteria

Collaborative Impact Map:

- the extent to which there is a logical flow and causal links between each section of the Impact Map
- the extent to which the outcomes as articulated would deliver significant and long-lasting impact for participants
- the extent to which the outcomes are realistic and SMART
- the extent to which the Impact Map articulates wider impact on the public/ other communities beyond the core beneficiary group

Partner Reflections:

- the extent to which every partner's input felt valued and recognised
- the extent to which all partners felt that there was shared alignment and agreement around the vision / mission / outcomes for the project
- the extent to which there is an ability to reflect on challenges and suggest where improvements can be made in their work together as a group



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 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 is distributed.

Bath City Football Club, Take Note applicant

Why do we do it like this?

By ensuring partners collaborate to create their Impact Map, we help them to clarify their shared vision and values together which will in turn lead to a stronger partnership project. The process of collaborating at this stage also enables partners to begin gaining an understanding of the strengths and potential challenges of their partnership and group dynamic.

By asking partners to each write an individual reflection about their experience of collaborating to create the impact map, funders gain a greater insight into the individual partners, their roles and motivations to take part in this project. And by encouraging individual reflection in this way, partners are more likely to bring this mindset to the partnership itself, which in turn creates an environment of openness, communication and mutual trust for the longer term.

An Enhanced Offer:

Strategic Support Package for Collaborations



Take Note's approach ensured we had mutual buy-in as a group, total understanding of the project's aims and outcomes, and were all equally invested in it, which brought huge benefits. Through Take Note's additional strategic support there was a framework created to hold us as three organisations, and I have never experienced that to such an extent before.

Suffolk Artlink, Take Note grantee

Our approach at Take Note is to couple funding with a wraparound package of strategic support. This package is intended to maximise the impact of the partnership project, empower the partners to work more effectively as a group and enable partners to more successfully overcome partnership challenges. Questions on intended engagement with the strategic support package and how it could benefit each partnership group were included as part of the grant application process.

We understand that funders offer varying levels of additional input for grantees beyond the financial support they provide. We present this model of additional strategic support to funders to consider what elements could be appropriately adapted and offered to your grantees to maximise the impact of their project.



The package was helpful in enabling us to focus on our collective as a partnership and consider what a partnership actually is in this context and how we could get the most out of it.

Trelya, Take Note grantee

The Take Note package takes the form of:

- A set of tools and resources ([The Collaboration Guidebook](#)) to support and strengthen the partnership and project including collaborative project design, delivery and evaluation.
- Facilitated partnership ‘Huddles’ that bring all the partners together at key moments throughout the project in a workshop setting. Led by Take Note, these Huddles focus 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.

→ See Take Note’s [Huddles tool](#) for more information

A note on collaborative reporting

As with our collaborative application process, we recommend considering how partners are all able to feed into the evaluation of their project and into the reporting you require. The final Wrap-Up Huddle in the Take Note Strategic Support Package outlines a process by which the group can come together to plan their report and divide responsibilities before it is written and submitted.



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.

Fuel Theatre, Take Note grantee

Why do we do it like this?

Take Note grantees have reported that our strategic support empowered them to work more effectively as a group and increase their understanding of best partnership practice. They also fed back that the longer-term impact of the package increased partners' collective experience and confidence to undertake partnership working in the future.



88% of partners reported that Take Note's package significantly supported in maximising the impact of the project



88% of partners reported that Take Note's package significantly helped partners work more effectively as a group

Partners reported that Take Note's package:

- Created a safer, more supportive and more equitable culture between members of the group
- Enabled more open and supportive communication
- Achieved greater clarity around roles and responsibilities across the group
- Maximised the impact of each partner's contribution
- Enhanced each group's focus on the project's common goal and shared commitment to the project

For more detail on Take Note's evidence of impact, see the [Partner Up Impact Report](#) and [Take Note Connect Impact Report with New Philanthropy Capital](#).



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.

Nottingham Children, Young People & Families Project, Take Note grantee



Find out more

[The Collaboration Guidebook](#)

A free guidebook from Take Note for you to share with your grantees, designed as a step-by-step guide for individual innovators, social change organisations and community projects to devise, plan, deliver and evaluate a successful collaborative project.

[Collective Impact Lab](#)

More in-depth insight into the work that sits behind this blueprint - Take Note's action research projects through which we support and evaluate partnership innovation and collaborative best practice and which have informed the design of our funding collaborations model. See the [Partner Up Impact Report](#) for our most recent evidence of the model's effectiveness.

[Partnership Portfolio](#)

Discover more about the partners we work with. 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.



The approach from Take Note of developing the partnership over time and supporting that development throughout the project was a very different and positive experience - to have mutual buy-in, total understanding of the project's aims and outcomes, and to all be equally invested in it brought huge benefits and was a great learning experience.

Gloucester Cathedral, Take Note grantee



Take Note is generously supported by Footwork and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

With thanks to our collaborative trailblazers: Amnesty International | Barton Street Neighbourhood Policing Team | Bed-Stuy Veterans | Community Action Suffolk | First Light Festival | Friendship Cafe Gloucester | Fuel Theatre | GARAS (Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers) | Gloucester Cathedral | Gloucestershire Carers Hub | Gloucester Culture Trust | Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust | GUST | Inclusion Gloucestershire | Kirkley Pantry | Look Again Photography | Metropolitan Arts Centre (MAC) Belfast | Nottingham CAMHS Mental Health Support Team | Nottingham Children, Young People and Families Project | Prospects Youth Support Team | Suffolk Artlink | The Music Works | The Venture Gloucester | Trelya | We The Conspirators | Your Next Move



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