Commissioning and community organisations

The power of collaboration

Along with national and local government, public sector bodies have begun to place more emphasis on the community sector in their service delivery plans. The sector has strong links to the local community, members’ performance is tried and trusted and they provide a bridge to communities and groups that are outside the mainstream.

Collaboration adds a powerful dimension. By working between community organisations, the community sector can create public sector savings, increase the likelihood that services respond to local needs and be the driving force for strengthened and empowered communities.

bassac’s work on collaboration and commissioning

Collaboration Benefits: A partnership between bassac, Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), Community Foundation Network (CFN), and the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR).

Funded by Capacitybuilders it aims to:
- Facilitate collaboration throughout the third sector and with the public and private sectors.
- Identify new and innovative models of collaboration.
- Develop a comprehensive online resource bank to support collaboration.
- Provide training and support to build collaborative working skills.

Collaborate for Commissioning: Practical guidance and support for community organisations to work with each other and take part in the commissioning process.

Funded through the LGID National Programme Set Third Sector Commissioning.

Kindle Partnership: A community sector partnership, it has published a report highlighting community organisations become ‘commissioning ready’ by formally engaging the local authorities’ commitments to children and young people.

Collaborating to enhance commissioning

This can happen in a number of ways:

Sustainability and improvement Partnership working between community organisations and across sectors to offer funders a strong, skilled resource.

Sharing knowledge Collaborating with larger national partners promotes the skills and knowledge of community organisations.

Loud voice Collaboration is a powerful way to improve community involvement when local groups work well with their local authority the likelihood that services respond to local needs.

Efficient working Collaboration can mean organisations reduce overheads and make resources go further, offering commissioners better value for money.

Collaboration is an increasingly important approach between commissioners and the community sector, working effectively together to plan, design and deliver responsive services with local people, often in areas of multiple deprivation.

The role of advocacy in designing public services

We are calling for open and constructive dialogue around this.

Along with national and local government, the power of collaboration is increasingly important in a climate of severe public sector cuts on the one hand and Big Society aspirations into specific and practical reality. The Commissioning White Paper and community right to challenge proposals will be vital here.

And so are measures announced in the comprehensive spending review to free local government from existing resource allocation bureaucracy.

Traditional strengths of the sector in service delivery include:
- Flexibility, innovation and skills in operating on tight budgets
- Outcome-focused results
- Unrivalled knowledge of opportunities and challenges in communities and the services they offer public commissioners these advantages, strengthened by a critical mass to drive transformational investment in communities.

Learning the lessons

Historically, small community organisations have found it difficult to compete in the commissioning environment. Giving it all alone is increasingly not an option. In the right circumstances, collaboration certainly can be. But working together can also be complex and requires a range of skills and resources to be in place. bassac’s experience shows that to reap the full benefit, many community organisations need help to collaborate effectively.

Collaboration between community organisations as part of a radically refocused public sector commissioning regime can be a vital plank in turning broad Big Society aspirations into specific and practical reality. The Commissioning White Paper and community right to challenge proposals will be vital here. And so are measures announced in the comprehensive spending review to free local government from existing resource allocation bureaucracy.

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What bassac members say about commissioning processes.

That can help commissioners to collaborate and develop tendering processes that fit issues facing community organisations will need to acknowledge the specific to work in collaboration, commissioners encourage more community organisations up to respond to.

That community organisations are not geared of community organisations, and bureaucracy that fail to consider the consortia-building needs contracting potential, overly tight timescales of community organisation partnerships.

Common problems identified commissioning processes to revealed that 57 per cent “There was a lack of knowledge and experience of working with the third sector”

“Good commissioning is where it is clear what is being sought or purchased, information that it is a professional commissioning process rather than a sales pitch.

Our 2010 member survey feedback, together with an understanding of people who are partnership and collaboration is being sought or purchased, information that it is a professional commissioning process rather than a sales pitch.

Case Study: London Borough of Camden - Designing commissioning for mental health services

Camden Council is working with Voluntary Action Camden to run an outcomes-based approach to commissioning and monitoring processes (OBC&M) for a Project entitled Third Sector Delivery in Camden. The project outset not by piloting an approach that put information for users of the heart of the strategic planning process, rather than in a monitoring of key performance indicators. Camden's Mental Health Day Care Services based its OBC&M on a model of change that shaped the feedback and outcomes of the changes that occurred from input to activity right through to core to the value added to the individual and community. The success of the approach has been Individual and community. The success of the approach has been

Outcome-based monitoring systems can provide:

- Evidence of effectiveness and outcomes
- Evidence of how interventions affect change and deliver value
- A clear understanding of what is working

National and local partners work together

Developed with ACEVO to explore how national voluntary organisations can work in partnership with community organisations to bid for and deliver commissioned services.

Community brokerage: How community anchors can build with or broker commissioning arrangements for frontline organisations that understand the specific issues facing community organisations and develop tendering processes that fit a partnership model.

bassac has identified a number of models that can help commissioners to collaborate with the sector to design effective commissioning processes.

Public bodies giving weight to the views of community organisation partnerships when drawing up new commissioning arrangements

Public service contracts should formally recognise the true non-monetary value that community organisations bring by applying their local knowledge to create solutions for people who cannot access mainstream services.

The commissioning process must support community organisations working in partnership and collaboration

Community organisations working in partnership operate in a different way to private sector companies when bidding for contracts. It is imperative that these differences are taken into account. There must be realistic timescales and contract management information required that is proportionate to the size and capacity of the organisations involved. Partnership working should dictate the commissioning process – not the other way round.

Community sector staff need access to training, advice and support on collaboration to bid for tenders to ensure they are not left out of the commissioning process. We want to see commissioners build on the findings of the LDG National Programme for Third Sector Commissioning to enhance the possibility of community contracting.

How can we improve the collaborative bidding process?

bassac’s strategic ‘lack’ of public sector commissioning processes is that they build genuinely democratic commissioning processes that unlock the confident, innovative and enterprising spirit of ordinary citizens.

Sustained and consistent third sector-friendly procurement and commissioning strategies and processes have been identified resources to help this happen.

A support package for local commissioners and the sector to create a more locally-responsive design for public services:

- The Kindle Partnership: www.commissioningsupport.org.uk/groups/commissioning_and_the_community_sector/default.aspx
- Support to local commissioners: www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/661774
- The National Programme for Third Sector Commissioning has eight key principles of good commissioning derived from nationwide good practice:
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