



The Top Ten Partnership Killers!

1. For ever and ever...

The problem: A partnership that lives on beyond its purpose will either wither slowly creating dissatisfaction among those who stick to the bitter end, or create an excuse for people to leave the office for useless meetings!

The solution: For project-based partnerships and those based on limited funding agree an exit strategy – know when the job is done and what you might leave in place. End the partnership with a party and thank everyone for their input. See six plans you will need to move a partnership from discussion to action

2. One-upmanship

The problem: Competition between organisations can be a good driver, but too much and it will lead to blame, self-righteousness and a trench mentality.

The solution: Ensure you spend time early on team building and developing a sense of shared purpose – build relationships between organisations to blur the boundaries.

3. Right place, wrong people

The problem: A partnership will be powerless if representatives from constituent bodies constantly have to go back to their parent organisations for decisions.

The solution: Make sure the people put on your partnership have sufficient authority to decide much of the business at the meetings – NB they don't have to be at a certain (or similar) level within the organisation but they do need delegated authority. See A checklist for delegating tasks to specific partners.

4. Pulling rank

The problem: Higher paid or higher graded officers pulling rank around the table will silence others who have just as much to give.

The solution: If you have the right people from organisations, all with delegated authority, the principle of 'equality around the table' should be agreed and adhered to – and written into your terms of reference.

5. Mission creep

The problem: Often a partnership where people are working well will come up with hundreds of other ideas that can be tackled beyond the partnerships original brief. This will bog you down.

The solution: Agree a clear vision and underpin this with a clear focus on 5-6 priorities. Allow some flexibility for 1-2 priorities to change over time as things develop and don't be afraid to junk activity that isn't working in order to free up time for new ideas.

6. Only here for the cash

The problem: Many organisations will be attracted to a partnership by money – like bees to the honey pot. This motivation alone can kill a partnership through representatives unwilling to volunteer for shared activities for instance.

The solution: Set out clear shared common ground from the start (try the ‘common ground’ workshop) and focus on your shared priorities and outcomes (see mission creep above).

7. Target? What Target?

The problem: Many partnerships will come together around a good idea but fail to set real targets around the shared vision. Starting vague will mean you’ll never know what you’ve achieved.

The solution: Set clear targets to support your shared priorities and chart your progress – agree a simple but shared performance management system that everyone signs up to so you’re all speaking the same language. (See Performance management)

8. Death by drudgery

The problem: Endless business meetings that no-one wants to attend will result in – guess what? – no-one attending!

Tailor your sessions to need – how often do you really need to monitor your activity?

The solution: Rather than business meetings would a workshop or brainstorm be a better use of time? Keep business meetings short and focused on what you need to do – not endless report-backs from people who are basically saying “my project is better than yours”. Build in time to celebrate success.

9. We know what’s best for you

The problem: Many partnerships are based in consultation but fail to continually engage. Building your workplan on historical information is not enough – those meant to benefit may not want what you are offering!

The solution: Establish your partnership based on a solid foundation of genuine consultation and ensure that you have built in activities that continually engage your client group. (see Customer focus and community engagement)

10. Strictly on a need-to-know basis....

The problem: Lack of communication between partners and beneficiaries will breed suspicion and resentment and will fuel personal agendas.

The solution: Set up good processes to network and share information. Evidence shows that the more you inform, the more satisfied people will be (see Customer focus and community engagement).