

Table 5.1 Summary of effective multi-agency practice strategies

Effective multi-agency practice strategies

Working relationships

Clarifying roles and responsibilities

- Take time initially to clarify roles and responsibilities of all parties
- Each worker should have a clear role and sense of contribution
- Recognize and value differences, value diversity
- Joint training can help to clarify roles, and shared learning in groups can reduce stereotypes
- Provide time to allow professionals to reflect on their new professional identities
- Reduce 'turf issues' by pre-planning and highlighting the positive outcomes of collaboration and disseminating those from other service collaborations
- Ensure parity in the perceived seniority of representatives from different organizations
- Foster respect for specialist expertise combined with a willingness to explore and celebrate professional diversity
- Boundary crossing can lead to a renegotiation of professional practice

Securing commitment at all levels

- Multi-agency work requires commitment at both strategic and operational levels
- Foster personal commitment rather than professionals being directed to work in a multi-agency way
- Ensure that the professional involved can see the benefits of multi-agency work as this secures greater commitment and stops it from floundering
- Provide opportunities for sharing goals and visions, establishing trust and mutual responsibility as this helps secure commitment
- Creating opportunities for decision-making and effectively chairing meetings encourage attendance
- Ensure that part-time, peripheral or seconded staff feel included
- Consult with professionals and clients from the beginning to secure commitment
- A strong history of collaboration raises levels of commitment
- Commitment should be underpinned by resources
- Leadership modelling commitment heightens commitment levels

Engendering trust and mutual respect

- Development of close working relationships aids honesty and encourages open discussions of problems
- Sharing skills and expertise develops trust, as does a willingness to be honest regarding knowledge gaps
- Shared visions and equal resource distribution develop trust

Fostering understanding between agencies

- Joint training and forums can help to foster understanding between agencies
- Recognition of the unique roles of individuals and utilization of all skills
- Work shadowing schemes can enhance understanding
- Key players should be given time together to foster mutual understanding and informed dialogue

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Table 5.1 (Continued)

Effective multi-agency practice strategies

- Accessible, practical guides to working with different sectors
- Appointing a leader with 'cultural intelligence' who can identify the different cultures and construct an appropriate response
- Provide opportunities to cross-boundaries, to examine current practice for each agency and to rethink the multi-agency philosophy
- Give the culture of partnership and collaboration high priority
- Basing strategic level staff in a reluctant department can raise the profile of multi-agency working
- Take time to learn and understand each agency's mission, priorities and technical language
- Staff secondments into partner agencies or presentations from different agencies at the start of collaboration can help to break down barriers

Multi-agency processes

Ensuring effective communication and information sharing

- Create transparent lines of communication with clear protocols
- Increased contact through meetings, working groups or training etc., results in greater inclination to seek further communication
- Create frequent opportunities for communication, discussion and debate
- Face-to-face meetings and a mix of formal and informal modes of communication
- Develop personal connections to promote working relationships and informal links
- Co-location of services where possible
- Provide accessible, written updates, particularly at early stages of multi-agency partnerships
- Have a proactive approach to communication and embed into working practices
- Formalize processes for information sharing and establish clear protocols
- Provide joint training to facilitate information sharing and the exchange of good practice
- Ensure that all representatives understand all terms or acronyms and provide definitions of the most common terms
- Explore any differences in terminology as a group and consider any different understandings
- Key players in multi-agency groups might benefit from more time together to foster informed dialogue
- Team activities and service development should allow for creation of a shared language

Developing a shared purpose

- Develop a shared vision to define the scope and purpose of the partnership and use this as a reference point
 - The shared vision should be inspirational and based on jointly held values
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Table 5.1 (Continued)

Effective multi-agency practice strategies

**Effective planning
and organization**

- Develop a shared understanding
- Have a clear justification for partnership and demonstrate value for money
- Develop clarity of roles and responsibilities (role demarcation)
- Ensure targets and objectives are relevant and shared across agencies
- Clearly articulate goals and outcomes
- Develop guidelines to show how services are co-ordinated
- Provide joint training or staff development
- Set up a steering group to identify problems, key issues and different cultures
- Conduct a needs analysis to create a picture of existing provision and boundaries of provision
- Consult service users on needs, issues and priorities in a way that empowers them and is sustainable
- Use well designed consultations, good instruments and strategies etc.
- Develop shared protocols and written commitment to inter-professional working that are reviewed regularly
- Develop a clearly defined and well documented structure/model to explain multi-agency operation and make this available to service users
- Set up systems and structures to support joint working, such as service level agreements, co-ordinating bodies and multi-professional groups
- Understand and cater for distinctive working conditions and the aims and objectives of different sectors
- Disseminate good practice
- Provide joint training to develop common ways of working
- Use task groups to transform strategic plans into operational action
- Adopt pro-collaboration policies and inform front-line staff
- Select representation purposefully, ensuring equal representation
- Balance the need to involve all organizations with the need to deliver partnership objectives efficiently and involve all relevant agencies early
- Use a checklist of all agencies involved with the client group
- Ensure representation of service users where relevant
- Deliver any new functions through existing partnerships wherever possible
- Assess the variability of members' history of collaboration when bringing a multi-agency group together
- Provide training to those inexperienced in multi-agency work
- Where there are few inherited linkages, proactive networking at strategic levels could counterbalance this

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Table 5.1 (Continued)

| Effective multi-agency practice strategies | |
|--|---|
| Resources for multi-agency work | |
| Securing adequate and sustained funding | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pooled budgets or joint funding• Identify and use alternative sources of funding• Avoid asking individuals to be involved in multi-agency work without additional funding, i.e. while still being held accountable for their full workload• Ensure stability of funding and distribute resources equally across agencies• Produce and agree clearly written agreements for funding arrangements• Recognition by senior managers of the importance of shared resources and the need to act as champions for funding arrangements at strategic/operational levels• Ensure dedicated resources to keep everyone engaged• Resources should be available to support management and administration |
| Ensuring continuity of staffing | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support leaders and delegate responsibility to alleviate problems with staff turnover• Consider capacity issues to ensure continuity of representation over time• Facilitation through co-location, a joint location or a change in location |
| Ensuring adequate time | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build in time for planning, developing and implementing arrangements• Sufficient groundwork on team building and developing trust• Create time for reflecting on new professional identities• Have a project start up phase for planning and development |
| Management and governance | |
| Ensuring effective leadership | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Senior positions have more clout than junior staff in management roles• Leaders require shared vision and tenacity to drive the agenda as well as full commitment, strong entrepreneurial skills and networking• Partnerships need sustained input from leadership and leaders need time and resources for their role• Reorganize work to ensure that managers can get time to get involved• Leaders should consult with and provide support for front-line staff, as well as addressing service conditions and staff welfare• Provide support networks for leaders and some delegation of other staff to relieve pressures• Leaders should model commitment to maximize collaboration |
| Establishing appropriate governance systems | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Processes/structures of accountability need to be appropriate to the type of partnership and make sense to front-line workers |

Table 5.1 (Continued)

Effective multi-agency practice strategies

- Have clear roles and responsibility for the accountable body
 - Give accountability to external stakeholders and be accountable to service users
 - Consistency of governance structures with the vision and approach the partnership is taking, and facilitate efficient and effective decision-making
- Establishing performance management systems**
- Clear aims and objectives and joint performance indicators
 - Performance management systems that reflect the complexity of partnership working, capture a range of activity and have a clear focus on outcomes
 - Have joint review and evaluation procedures (e.g. team away days)
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Source: Atkinson et al., 2007: 80–4 reproduced with permission from NFER and CfBT (2007)

Task 5.1: Group practical task – multi-agency working: good practice outcomes

- Read the ten statements below about the outcomes resulting from multi-agency integrated working.
 - Discuss the statements with other members in your group.
 - Reach a consensus in your group about which **one** statement you are going to discard.
 - Rank the remaining nine statements in order of priority.
 - Read the statements again, looking for similarities and differences.
 - Select **five** of the statements that all the group agree are the most important, and arrange in order of priority.
1. Every Child Matters outcomes improve for children/young people.
 2. More effective ways of working occur.
 3. The educational setting/children's centre gets a good reputation locally for its multi-agency working.
 4. Practitioners from different services can think creatively and be innovative.
 5. Positive change is acknowledged, celebrated and publicized.
 6. Multi-agency team working leads to greater job satisfaction.
 7. A way of doing something is improved.
 8. Clients experience greater satisfaction as a result of receiving the multi-agency integrated services support and intervention.
 9. Cross-agency tensions and conflicts are reduced.
 10. Joint ownership and responsibility for decision-making occurs.

Table 5.2a Template for sharing good practice in multi-agency working

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|---|--|
| Name of the organization | |
| Multi-agency activity | |
| Target group | |
| Aims of the activity | |
| Expected outcomes | |
| Actual outcomes | |
| ECM outcome(s) met | |
| Brief description of the activity (What did you do? How did you do it?) | |
| Other agencies and services involved | |
| Resources needed | |
| Cost of activity (Money and time) | |
| What would you change or do differently next time? | |

Source: Author's own



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Table 5.2b Multi-agency good practice template

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|---|
| THE APPROACH What is the overall aim of the project/multi-agency work? |
| How does the project/work link with the Every Child Matters outcomes? |
| How was the multi-agency work undertaken in practice? |
| What were/are the main challenges? |
| IN PRACTICE Potential/actual impact of the work/project? |
| What were the outcomes of the multi-agency work/project? |
| CONCLUSIONS |
| NEXT STEPS Do you intend to continue and/or develop this work further? |
| Can you summarize how this piece of multi-agency work may assist other children's centres/extended schools? |

Source: adapted from Together for Children (TFC) case study framework proforma VI (2007)



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