

Taking the lead partner role in a collaboration: Barton Hill Settlement

Barton Hill Settlement promotes community development, providing services and facilities to the communities of Barton Hill and surrounding areas of East Bristol. In collaborating for commissioning with smaller community organisations, the Settlement tends to take the lead partner role.

Barton Hill Settlement's relationship with smaller organisations involves:

1. Help, advice and support regarding set-up, and grants and commissioning
2. When tendering with other organisations, Barton Hill will take a lead partner role, subcontracting to smaller organisations; this includes spotting opportunities and drawing others together to take advantage of the opportunity together
3. As a community anchor, it sees its role as taking some of the strain on behalf of smaller organisations
4. Working with individuals rather than groups as one way of building capacity at the grassroots.

Taking on this leadership role has the following strengths:

- It can cement the specialisation of smaller, more local, organisations, allowing them to focus on what they are good at
- Brokerage – can act as a buffer and take some generic roles such as reporting and liaison
- Gives real access to vulnerable people through small groups – ie can be a conduit of services and information to those in local communities who larger organisations cannot provide for effectively
- Provides an “ear to the ground”. Small organisations “pop up like mushrooms” and may disappear again – this flexibility is a strength not a weakness – there is no necessary benefit of a linear development from small to large organisation
- Provides very local knowledge, and acceptance or credibility within local communities, having implications for penetration and safety
- Has built the leadership capacity of Barton Hill Settlement

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But it also has the following weaknesses:

- It has the potential to change the dynamics of relationships: when a larger organisation gets involved in smaller organisations' management and performance issues
- It is not necessarily the case that larger organisations have more capacity than smaller ones and it is a strain to take the lead role all the time.

Suggestions

Barton Hill's experience suggests, as Joanna Holmes points out, that the commissioning and procurement process would be more beneficial if "the statutory sector were to let go of outcomes – to forget predetermining outcomes" and have more trust in the delivery. She also makes it clear that it is crucial for the community organisation to communicate: "If the larger anchor organisations organise results and information systematically, the local authority will listen."

www.bartonhillsettlement.org.uk