

Building effective and sustainable partnerships between the voluntary and statutory sector

Learning from the Health Equalities programme



Innovation Unit is the [Learning and Support Partner](#) for [The National Lottery Community Fund's Health Equalities programme](#). The [12 grantees](#) are all working to develop effective and sustainable partnerships between the voluntary and community sector and the statutory sector (including the NHS and local authorities) to improve health and wellbeing, reduce health inequalities and empower communities in their local areas.

As a learning partner, we're exploring the conditions, methods and approaches that enable cross-sector partnerships to flourish, and the extent to which these support the translation of ambitions to impact. We've collated six of the emerging insights below.

What enables effective and sustainable partnerships to improve health equity?

1. Co-design with communities and health partners

At the heart of achieving health equity is addressing what matters to the people you serve - and this can't be done without meaningfully listening to communities and involving them, as well as a diverse range of place-based partners, in developing the solutions.

What can help?

- **Understanding your place**
Map out the collective data, knowledge and insight about your place and identify where you have gaps and need to seek additional input and data.
 - **Map stakeholders**
Identify whose knowledge, insight and networks is crucial to meeting your goals, and pay close attention to who is often missing in these processes.
 - **Work together to identify a bold challenge**
What challenge can only be solved by working together?
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2. Steering the way

A strong steering group, with clear membership, remit and roles, can be a powerful tool to enable and embed change, and build sustainable ways of working that far outlast the initial project.

What can help?

- **Get the right people in the room**
Use your stakeholder mapping to identify who can really help the partnership to thrive in your local system.
- **Start small**
Starting with a smaller group can often be more manageable, build strong relationships and enable focus.

- **Develop a steering group charter**

Collectively define the role, expectations and how decisions are made within the group.

- **Regular temperature checks**

Regularly check-in with the steering group about the direction of travel, whether they feel they are adding value, and if you are collectively focused in the right way.

3. Dedicated leadership and co-ordination

Giving everyone in the partnership an equal seat at the table is essential - but someone needs to ensure everyone gets to the table first. Don't underestimate the role of a strong leader who can make things happen.

What can help?

- **Create a dedicated role**

Consider how you can pool resources to fund a role that can co-ordinate and lead the work.

- **Develop a clear role description**

Identify the main objective for this role and how they will enable partners to reach their goals. Are you looking for a networker? A project manager? An innovator?

- **Enable their leadership**

Consider how partners and the steering group will support this leader.

4. Test small

Setting the foundation for a solid and effective partnership takes time - and the best way to build trust and test your plans is to start small.

What can help?

- **Focus on building the personal relationships between partners**

Spend time together in person, get to know each other and what's going on for them, and focus on your why.

- **Test new ways of working**

Develop hyper-local projects with clear and measurable outcomes, to learn from what goes well as well as what doesn't.

- **Create new routines and rhythms of learning**

Regularly take time to collectively reflect on impact, progress, and process. Explore both what you are learning about the work itself as well as what you are learning about the process of working in partnership.

- **Explore Quality Improvement approaches**

If you have health and care partners involved in your work, you might be able to access some Quality Improvement support, which could help your team focus on small tests of change, data gathering, and regular learning cycles.

5. Review and revisit

Building a regular rhythm of reviewing your focus, activity and structures not only will help you to rapidly respond to emerging learning to improve your work, but also build a culture of honesty, trust and communication amongst partners and re-energise activity.

What can help?

- **Ground everything in your 'why'**

Help to guide your decision making by framing all partnership meetings in your collective purpose statement.

- **Revisit the assumptions that shaped your work**

Theory of Changes are living documents that are strengthened by regularly reviewing and incorporating your emerging learning and insights.

- **Regularly review governance structures**

Establish check points with the steering group to confirm that the structure provides mutual value, and that members feel empowered to share their honest feedback.

- **Capture the story of change**

Record and share the story of how and why your partnership has evolved over time to help you to reflect on your learnings, identify enabling ways of working, and support others to learn.

6. Tell your story

Sharing your story as you go not only helps to build momentum within your partnership, but also supports others to see the benefits of the work, and can galvanise more resources and support to the programme.

What can help?

- **Come together to get on paper your ‘Theory of Change’**
Defining the impact you’d like to have, what will help you get there, and how you’ll know if you’re making progress in the right direction
- **Share your learnings**
Share when things go wrong as well as when they go right.
- **Explore the different communications channels that will help you reach your key audience**
Consider who you are trying to influence and the best methods to reach them. Can you set up a social media presence, have regular events, or write a newsletter?
- **Find creative ways to gather feedback and impact data as you go**
Real stories of impact bring to life numbers on a page.



Read more at: <https://www.innovationunit.org/projects/health-equalities/>