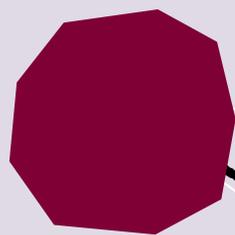




Leading successful partnerships

Principles and best practice to support health and care leaders to set up effective partnerships



Q is led by the Health Foundation and supported by partners across the UK and Ireland

This guide provides advice and insight to help improve your team's organisational relationships and help you set up effective working partnerships that support improvement in health and care.

It draws on research and practical experience from Q and the Innovation Unit, and highlights the need for shared vision, values, goals, roles, and responsibilities. This guide will be particularly useful for senior leaders partnering with organisations to collaborate and solve health and care challenges and support the uptake of innovation and improvement.

With thanks to



What we mean by partnerships

For the purposes of this guide, a partnership is a relationship between two or more organisations working together to achieve a shared vision and goal. It includes joint ownership and shared responsibility for the success of the work. Partnerships, in contrast to other organisational relationships, are underpinned by equity of contribution from partners. This can come from a mixture of sources, such as sharing resources, decision-making responsibilities, and risk bearing.

How we developed this guide

Q's approach to partnership working is grounded in both academic research and our experience of forming partnerships at regional and national levels. Our partnerships enable us to support a diverse and growing community of over 4,500 members committed to improving health and care across the UK and Ireland.

In 2019, Q commissioned the Innovation Unit to explore the literature on effective partnership working in health and care, and to interview six leaders from different organisations about their experiences. We are grateful to all the interviewees for giving their time and know-how to help us produce this guide.

Interviewees

Charlotte Augst

Former Chief Executive of National Voices, former Project Director for Richmond Group of Charities

Nav Chana

Chair of National Association of Primary Care

Samantha Jones

Interim Permanent Secretary and COO at No.10 Downing Street (interviewed in a former role as CEO and President of Operose Health)

Melissa Maguinness

Director of Service Transformation at NHS Bolton CCG

Vicki Sellick

Chief Partnership Officer at Nesta

Rebecca Simmons

Chief Operations Officer of Riverlane, former Deputy Director at THIS Institute



About Q

Together, to improve health and care.

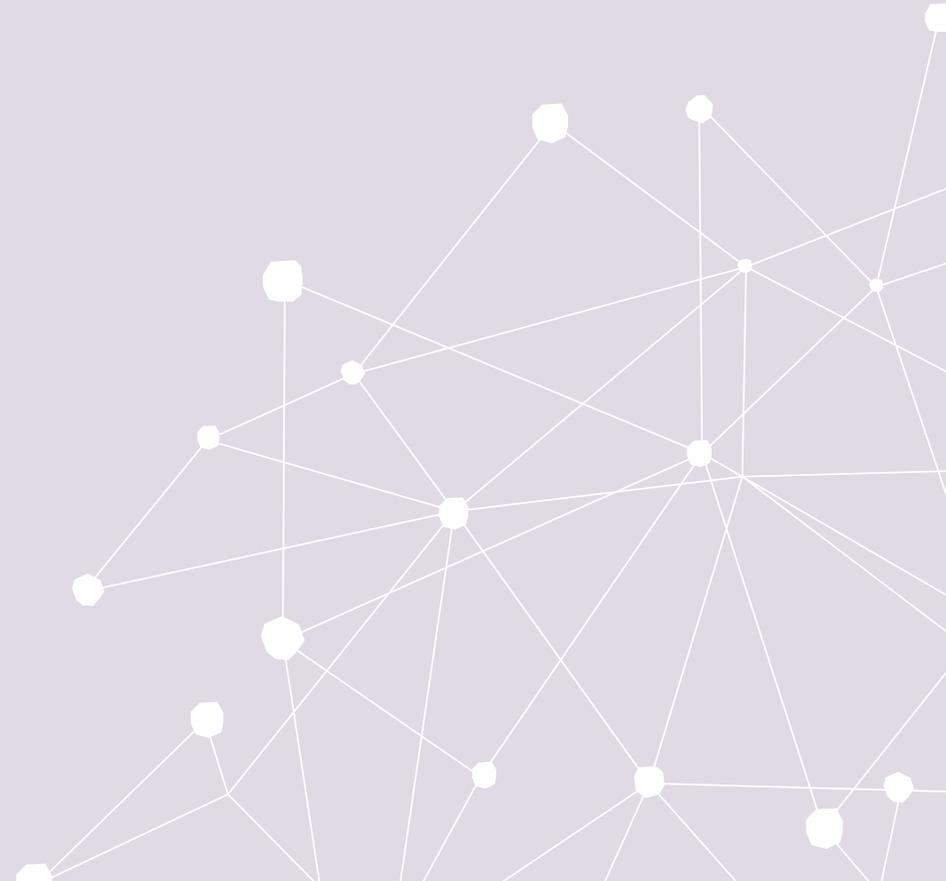
We are a community of thousands of people across the UK and Ireland, collaborating to improve the safety and quality of health and care. We share our knowledge and support each other to tackle challenges. Together, we make faster progress to change health and care for the better.

Through networking and events, topic-focused groups and collaborative funding programmes, we support members to develop and deliver their day-to-day work. We bring people together through the Q Lab network to learn about specific topics, uncover new insights and develop and test ideas. Our insight and resources are available for anyone to learn, share and support each other. Q provides a flexible way to boost the resilience, capacity and impact of people working throughout health and care where it's needed most.

Q is delivered by the Health Foundation and supported and co-funded by partners across the UK and Ireland.

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Foreword: building on what works

When faced with complex or long-term goals, organisations increasingly recognise that they cannot reach them alone, and that they need other organisations to share responsibility and ownership to get there.

Many of us are looking to partnership working as the solution. From the formalisation of Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) to Primary Care Networks in England, from Health Boards in Scotland and Wales to Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland, partnerships are central to how we aim to deliver health and care across the UK, and how we improve and innovate as we do so. Beyond these large-scale partnerships, many more exist at all levels of the health and care system. The membership and formal rules governing some of these partnerships may be set. But within these parameters, or in other cases, we can still choose who we work with and how.

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Libby Keck
Head of Design and
Collaboration for Q,
The Health Foundation

Prior to the start of a new partnership, there may be a substantial amount of discussion, resource and paperwork. In all of this, it is easy to lose sight of the active choices regarding the mode of relationship that is required, and what the core ingredients are to make partnerships work well in practice.

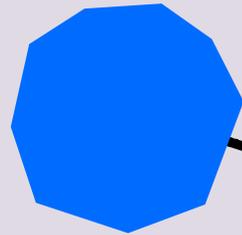
Investing time in the early setup is the fastest way to ensure success. This concise guide brings us back to the essentials, with principles and a practical checklist drawn from cross-sector evidence and interviews with experienced leaders in health and care.

The resource has been developed and honed over the last three years as we have continued to develop our approach to partnership working in Q. This includes question prompts that you can use and share in your teams to set your partnerships on a track for success.

There is no denying that partnership working takes time and effort. Our work has shown that effective partnerships need commitment from leaders who set the tone and approach that enables organisations to work effectively together.

Making partnerships work: it's about people, not just organisations

How does it feel to work with other organisations? Our interviews with senior leaders were honest about the challenges and offered insight into how leaders can overcome them.



Short-term pain, long-term gain

While partnerships can feel harder than working on your own, if your partnership is well conceived then the benefits will make it worth it. Partnerships involve an up-front investment of time, effort and buy-in. Interviewees described how setbacks should be expected, for example the common reality of organisational barriers that got in the way of realising a partnership's vision and values.

Given partnership working can be challenging, interviewees stressed the importance of being resilient, maintaining momentum and keeping a focus on the benefits you want to realise. One interviewee described partnerships as 'a bit like dating someone you shouldn't – very attractive and compelling in theory, but hard work and sometimes seemingly without reward'.

Another interviewee shared how 'actually getting started, building capacity, resource and shared understanding of what to do' was hardest. But the long-term gain for health and care came from this hard work up front.





The value of soft skills and creating a positive culture

Interviewees consistently emphasised the importance of ‘soft’ skills for successful partnership working. As one leader put it ‘soft skills are really the harder things to do.’ Another leader said ‘you need someone who is really good at making friends with people – putting some team spirit in.’

The importance of creating a positive culture, being aware of power differentials and creating shared values were echoed in many of the interviews. These qualities were developed in a variety of ways, including structured processes to co-produce the vision, values and goals of partnerships with a variety of stakeholders.



Enabling leadership with a focus on accountability

Several interviews discussed the role of leaders in creating an enabling environment to overcome barriers in reaching a partnership’s vision. Interviewees highlighted the role of generous, respectful leadership to set the tone. One interviewee spoke about coaching people rather than contracting them, and another discussed empowering people to act in the partnership. As one interviewee said ‘partnerships are about [moving] away from hierarchies and into asking “have we got the right people involved?”’ The leadership style that is needed implies a transfer of power from autocratic decision-making to seeking to elicit the full potential of all involved.

Across the board, interviewees described the need for leaders to constantly go back and re-affirm the set up of the partnership with each other, holding each other to account against the values and rules of the partnership.



The principles of successful partnerships

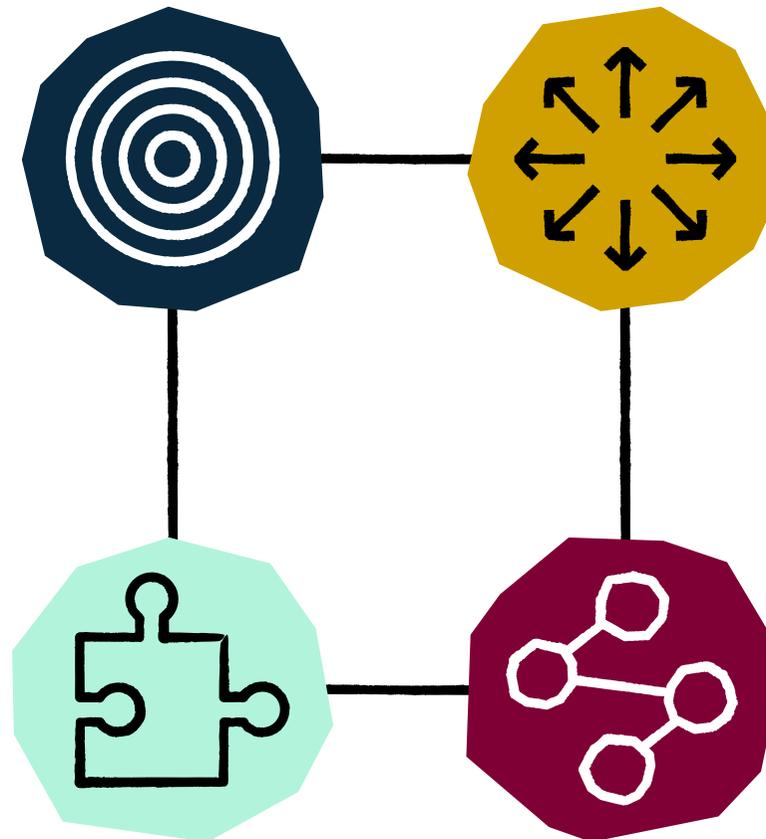
Our work has highlighted there are consistent elements that underpin a successful partnership. Considering and working towards these principles will enhance your partnership.

Clear and common goals

- Creating and developing a clear shared vision is critical. Different understandings can threaten the relationship.¹ Partnerships should focus on the intended outcomes.²
- It requires strong leadership to hold this common vision.³ Even when a memorandum of understanding has been set, or ground rules have been laid – it is crucial to recheck and retest the shared understanding of the purpose and aims, and to cultivate the emotional intelligence to manage this.⁴

Adequate resourcing

- Partnerships require sufficient staff capacity and a range of resources. They will be greatly enhanced by continuity of staff.
- Parties should pool budgets, if possible, to reduce power imbalances.⁵



Transparent and equitable power distribution

- The transparent distribution of power within partnerships is arguably the most important factor in shaping success.²
- Effective, equitable partners must share risk and reward.³ Attention should be given to understanding power differentials, valuing the different expertise and contribution from partners.
- Roles and responsibilities must be understood, outlining which areas of work are collaborative and which are individual.²

Positive culture and strong relationships

- Investing in relationships is more important than structures and bureaucratic processes. As organisational processes can be an unnecessary diversion to effective partnerships, judgement is needed to navigate them.⁶
- A positive culture should include a focus on accountability, respect for each other's expertise, embedded joint working or teamwork, and empathy throughout.⁷
- It can be helpful to develop a set of ground rules for the partnership, to help govern the partnership and keep it 'honest'.³

Partnership working in practice



Dominique Bird

Dominique is Head of Capacity & Capability at Improvement Cymru. She has worked closely with Q since its inception and was instrumental in setting up Q Lab Cymru in 2019, a partnership between Q and Improvement Cymru.

"Bringing senior leaders onboard was crucial in ensuring they were involved in establishing the strong relationships."



John Boulton

John is Director of NHS Quality Improvement and Patient Safety/ Director of Improvement Cymru at Public Health Wales. He has worked closely with Q since its inception and was instrumental in setting up Q Lab Cymru in 2019.

"Understanding local context is very important. The way in which the Q Lab functions in London vs Wales is very different, so having a very honest, open relationship meant that some of these challenges could be highlighted and resolved."



Breid O'Brien

Breid is Director of Innovation and Digital Health at NHS England. Breid has been involved in setting up many partnerships including some with Q. For example, the Q Lab UK partnership exploring patient and staff trust in technology-enabled remote monitoring.

"This partnership feels like a really open and true partnership. I feel both parties are being very honest with each other and hence have open conversations and people won't get offended as they understand where you are coming from. It feels like people are open to challenge and to be challenged, it is much more mutual."



Vicki Sellick

Vicky is Chief Partnership Officer at Nesta. She has built partnerships that scale good ideas across the UK and her research interview for us informed this guide.

"Questions about the 'must haves' and 'no go zones' need to be discussed from the offset alongside discussions about what each organisation counts as success and understanding who is the judge of that."



Charlotte Augst

Charlotte was formerly the CEO of National Voices. She has significant experience of coordinating national coalitions and facilitating partnership working and her research interview for us informed this guide.

"Everyone has a day job, you can't run a partnership in the margins of people's days."

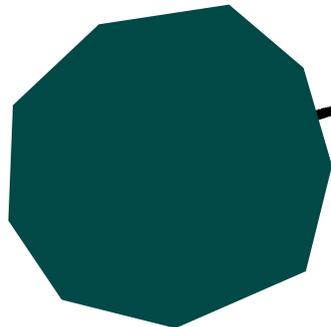
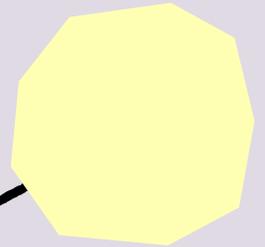
Practical guidance for developing successful partnerships

The checklist

On the following pages we've created a partnership checklist, to provide you and your team with practical support when establishing partnerships. We've suggested questions to explore with your team and your proposed partners, recommending when these could take place.

This guide focusses primarily on setting up new partnerships, given the importance of getting this right. Within some statutory partnerships the member organisations and other requirements may be decided already. However, many of these prompts may still be relevant, for example if you are establishing partnerships around specific pieces of work within the overall relationship.

The answers can be kept live and referred to throughout your partnership cycle, as you and your team transition from setup to delivery and through to evaluation.



Considering a partnership

Clear and common goals

Developing a clear shared vision for the partnership that can guide your work together.



- What is our vision and mission for this piece of work?
- Do we need the input of others to achieve our mission?
- Is a partnership the best way of working with others?
- Would another relationship (e.g. commissioner/ provider or funder/ recipient) meet our needs?

Approaching partner/s

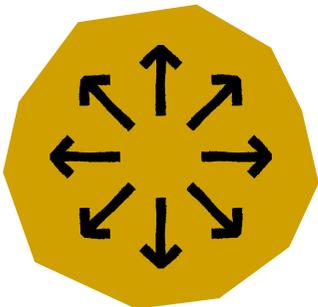
- What is the nature of our goals? Are they aligned?
- Will achieving this goal be more effective together?
- Is there enough mutual benefit to work together?
- Do we agree on the way to tackle the problem?
- Where does this work fit in the larger changes that we seek to effect?

Establishing partnerships

- What objectives and outcomes do we want to achieve?
- What is our theory about how change will occur? What are we going to do to achieve this?
- How will we pay attention to and revisit our shared vision, when the work begins and as the context we are operating in evolves?

Transparent and equitable power distribution

Developing a deep understanding and respect for what each party is bringing.



- What is the added benefit of working with others?
- What power are we willing to give away, to get the benefits of working with others?

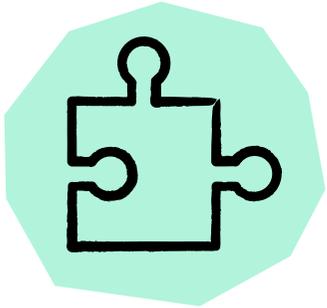
- Do we need to take joint ownership and responsibility for the problem?
- Will a partnership relationship best elicit success?

- How can we create equity in our working relationship? What is the role of leaders in the partnership to facilitate this?
- What barriers will there be to creating equity? How can we overcome them?
- What are the differences in the power that we both hold?
- How will we make decisions?

Considering a partnership

Adequate resourcing

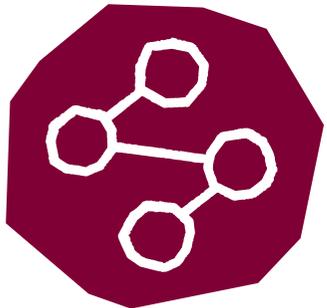
Ensuring sufficient staff and resources are allocated to allow the partnership to succeed.



- What type of partnership do we want to establish? Would our partnership relate to a standalone project, a wider problem we want to address, or a shared ideology or stance we share?
- How much complexity and uncertainty is at play? How will this impact a partnership?
- Can we provide the additional resources that will be needed to establish and run the partnership?
- What internal contracting and governance processes are we going to need to follow?

Positive culture and strong relationships

Developing a positive working relationship founded on trust and respect, with shared ownership.



- What are we looking for in a potential partner and why?

Approaching partner/s

- How committed are we to reaching this goal?
- Is there sufficient buy-in from both organisations?
- What processes will we need to follow to establish and govern our partnership?

- Do potential partners share our values?
- In what ways are we alike and different?
- Are we prepared to be transparent with each other?

Establishing partnerships

- What do we both need to contribute to achieve our goal?
- What capacity will we need to fulfil the required roles and responsibilities?
- Do we both have this capacity?

- How will we make it safe for people to be open and provide constructive challenge?
- Are we prepared to create joint vision and values and hold each other to account against these?
- How will we ensure shared ownership and hold each other to account?

How Q can support you and your teams

This guide provides insights and tools to help you set up the foundations for effective partnerships. Keep an eye on the Q website where we publish resources, blogs and tools on this topic and others.

There are many more ways in which Q can support you and your teams to meet your goals. The community of over 4,500 members is a source of expertise and energy to create service redesign solutions and test and learn across systems, with many Q members building practical collaboration skills to make partnerships a success.

To find out more about how you or your team can become a part of this growing community and make use of the free and accessible resources available to all, visit the Q community website q.health.org.uk and follow us on Twitter [@theQCommunity](https://twitter.com/theQCommunity).

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