

Top Tips for Partnership Working

From the Culture and Commerce Taskforce projects, ten project and partnership managers met to share their experience and learning. Here's what they said and their recommended top tips for effective working across the culture, commercial and civic sectors.

"There have been lots of moment of joy throughout the project. We brought together a mix of people with hugely different agendas and they all came together to develop inspiring and impactful ideas about what we can deliver and what creativity delivers."

TAZIE TAYSOM
COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR, ARTIQ

Recommended Top Tips for developing and managing partnerships across the cultural, commercial and civic sectors

- 1. Be realistic** about the timescale required to develop a project from scratch. Even small-scale pilot projects can take 6-9 months to set up and longer time-frames are needed especially if financial resources are limited.
- 2.** Put effort into establishing a **clear brief** at the start. Set clear and realistic expectations on commitments and time and resources in the beginning.
- 3.** In the initial stages, find a **broad range of perspectives** to challenge and stimulate innovative ideas. **Digital collaboration tools** are helpful to get a broad input and initiate co-design principles whilst ensuring everyone can contribute at pace and in an efficient way.
- 4. Invest in understanding** the decision-making process for each partner, their priorities/motivations/constraints. This will provide useful signposts along the way.
- 5.** Ensure there is a **lead partner** at the start who can drive the project, commit financial resources and leverage contributions from others. Agree budgets and **financial commitments** from partners as early as possible and build the funding pool first then develop the project that's affordable. Work with what you have!
- 6.** Use multiple types of **communication methods** to communicate the benefits of partnering/supporting creativity. A **theory of change** is a useful tool to use to provide understanding and a framework to work within.
- 7. Start small** then test, learn and scale.
- 8.** Have **equal representation** of sectors so that one doesn't dominate or unduly influence the others and be willing to work in another way to match a partner's methods. As the project progresses identify key partners – **smaller groups** of the most energised tend to work more effectively.
- 9.** Frame the effective process of working across sectors an **outcome in itself** – don't rush to deliver.
- 10.** Be prepared to jettison prescriptive and structured thinking occasionally and reveal new ways of doing things – some great new ideas can emerge late in the day so be **flexible and adaptable**.
- 11.** Work **intensively** to maintain momentum but only for a short period and maintain regular check-ins.
- 12.** A project manager/logistics role is key to success of these programmes. The **brokerage/translation** role is critical in collaborative change projects.

Realising the benefits

Observing how the different Taskforce projects developed, it became clear that closer collaboration across the cultural, commercial and civic sectors could make a **substantial impact** with the right mix and combination of partners.

"The different types of thinking, experience and skills that come together are able to act as a catalyst which means the sum produced has a far greater impact if the partners were to do the same thing independently."

PROFESSOR DR ANNE BAMFORD
STRATEGIC EDUCATION AND SKILLS DIRECTOR,
CITY OF LONDON CORPORATION

Many of the partners we worked with were **ready and willing** to make a commitment to try and test new models and ways of working.

"Many of the partners I have engaged with have been less concerned with research and evidence and more about making things happen – taking a leap of faith and getting on with it. Of course we need a robust case for why we are taking action, but it is refreshing to know that many corporates also have a fundamental belief that there is something in culture and commerce working together that they wish to explore. It is this inspiration and the leap of faith that we should capitalise on."

ELIZABETH MISCHLER,
PROJECT MANAGER CREATIVE SKILLS EXCHANGE

"When you engage young people as creatives themselves the commitment you can get from them will be amazing."

NATASHA HANEKEL-SPICE
PROJECT MANAGER CREATIVE SKILLS

It was recognised that **COVID had provided a 'moment in time'** that meant partners were aligned in their goals, willing to take a risk and work in different ways.

"Covid has meant that there is a moment where everyone is on the same page to make this contribution work... The mutual benefit has been wide ranging on both sides and Covid has given us the opportunity to run at a bigger canvas and harness this opportunity."

DAVID BYRNE
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, NEW DIORAMA THEATRE

"Digital Boost was created out of the coronavirus and recognising that people need to get digital fast and needed to change the way that they are working very quickly. Our entire premise was built on how do we connect the commerce and private sector with people who need that support."

KAREN LICURSE
DIGITAL BOOST

Exploring the different **possibilities for commercial contributions** and what they can support has been key to securing resources. Some business were hit hard by the pandemic and it would never have been feasible for them to be a huge monetary contributor but other possibilities for support range from providing facilities and space, marketing or services.

Challenges and obstacles

Developing trusted relationships requires **significant time**, no more so when working with, and weaving together a mix of multiple partners across sectors. New partnerships need to find and establish partners, gather and share information, secure financial contributions and develop new delivery models.

"This is essentially about place and urban ecologies. It poses a challenge about what the business model looks like for place-based interventions and requires everyone to be collaborative to create the real change that is needed in a place."

SIAN BIRD
PROJECT MANAGER, ENHANCING THE CITY

Securing financial contributions has been a challenge. The investment, resources and commitment that were needed were difficult to find. This is not just about budgets but underlines the perception of the value of creativity and culture and how the arts and creativity should be paid for.

"I think that when we are working in the cultural sector there is a tendency to presume the benefits of creativity and art are completely understood and completely communicated, but actually there are many nuances to why art in a repurposed space or a workshop delivered to young people can be beneficial to a wider society."

TAZIE TAYSOM
COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR, ARTIQ

Managing and aligning expectations of partners proved a challenge for project managers. The cultural and commercial sectors have different ways of working, use different language and operate across different planning time frames. The expectations of what could be delivered, the commitment required from across the partnership and the benefits were sometimes mis-aligned or misunderstood and meant that projects needed to be re-set or recalibrated.

"These partnerships are unique in that there are many different expectations, operational models and approaches because the organisations and individuals work in very different sectors, in very different ways. Understanding this, finding how to best 'meet' each other, having the patience to build trust and find opportunity, coupled with the agility (and capacity) to harness momentum and make something happen when everything does align – this is a challenge in these types of partnerships."

ELIZABETH MISCHLER
PROJECT MANAGER, CREATIVE EXCHANGE