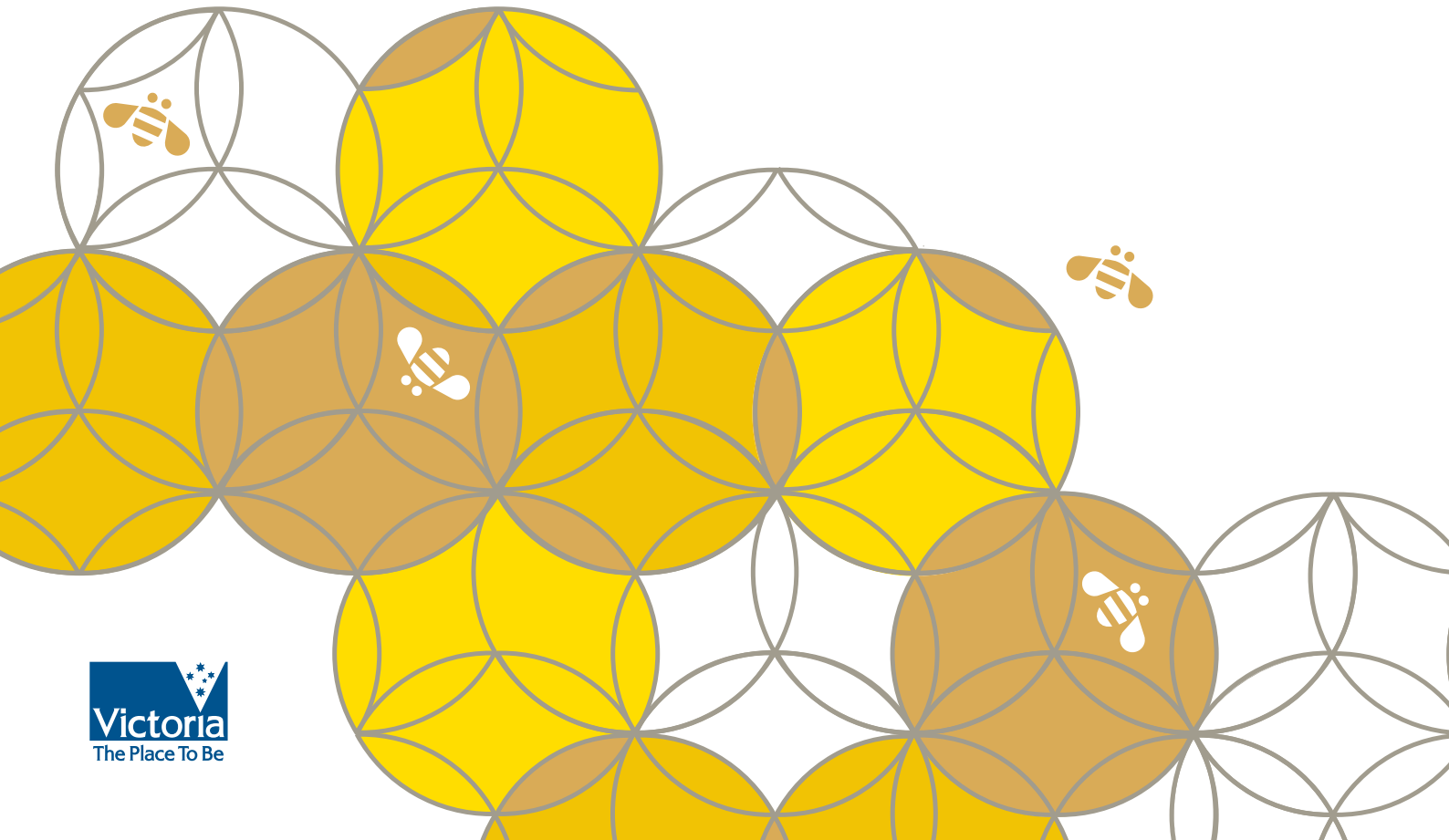




sharing strengths

How community organisations can work together
to access information and support services





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The Victorian Government recognises the significant contribution that not-for-profit organisations make to life in Victoria, through a diverse range of activities from community services and social welfare to education, arts, sport and recreational activities. To better support Victoria's vital community organisations, the Government has established the Office for the Community Sector (OCS), which sits within the Department of Planning and Community Development. The OCS is working to implement the *Victorian Government's Action Plan: Strengthening Community Organisations*, a \$13.87 million Victorian Government plan to ensure the long-term sustainability of the not-for-profit (NFP) community sector. Expanding and improving community organisations' access to information and support services is a key component of the Action Plan.



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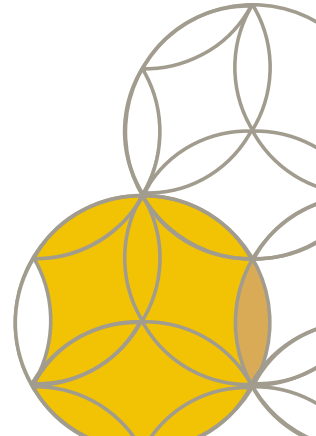


Introduction

▶ 04

This guide looks at some of the ways community organisations can work together to access support and information services. Working together is an important dynamic for organisations to understand. The future demand on resources will make it even more important to work together in an efficient and effective manner that avoids duplication and draws upon mutual strengths.

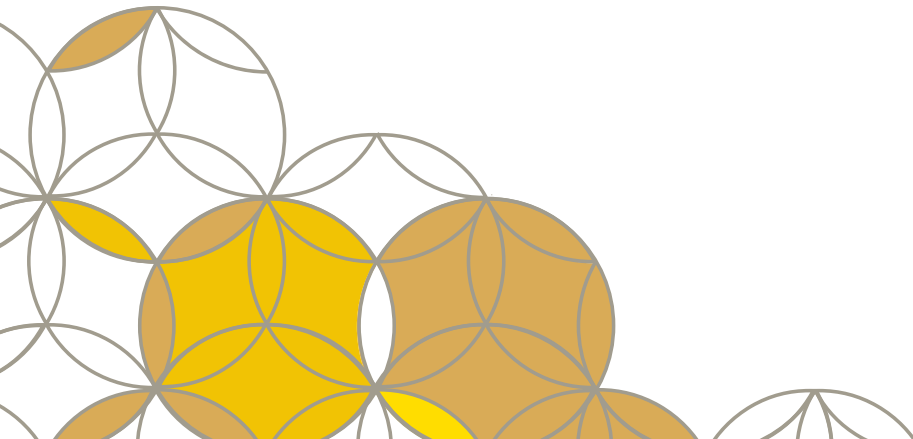
The findings in this guide are based on focus group research in two Victorian Government regions – Gippsland and North-West Metropolitan Melbourne. This guide contains a series of case studies as examples of organisations working together in the two regions. This guide is not representative of all the ways organisations can work together, and there are many more examples beyond the two regions. The case studies demonstrate that working together can be more efficient regardless of the sector of interest or the size of the organisation, without necessarily incurring major draws on time, costs and resources.





The research for this good practice guide found that community organisations can access information and support services more efficiently when they work together. Information and support services cover a wide range of topics that include human resources, management, governance, information technology, legal compliance, and business development. In analysing a series of successful case studies, this guide is intended to offer potential models to help community organisations collaborate to improve their access to information and support.

Thank you to all the organisations that participated in the focus group research, the organisations that gave permission to be profiled in the case studies, and the members of the Reference Group that oversaw this project.



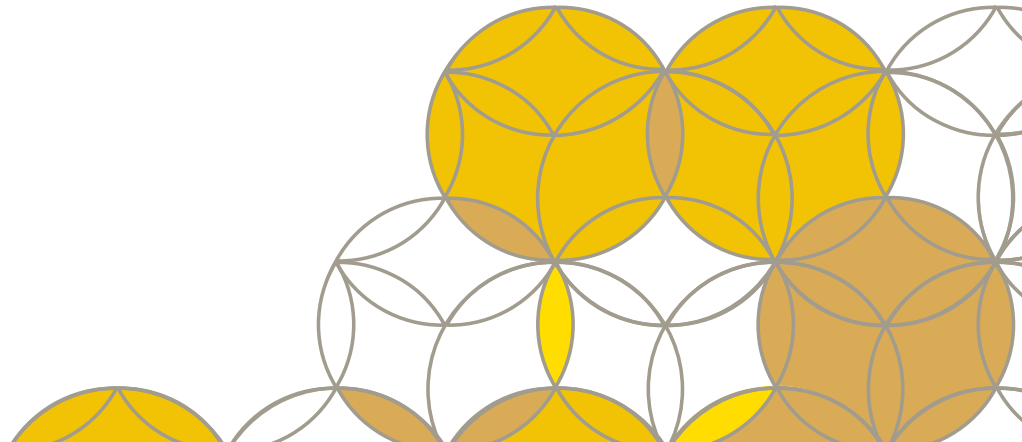


What is this guide?

▶ 06

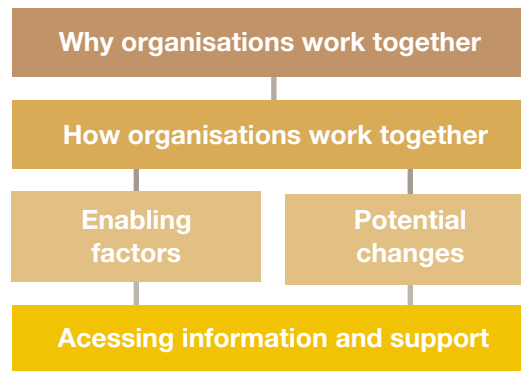
This guide is designed to support organisations to make considered decisions about identifying and sustaining relationships that support the development and functioning of their organisations.

This guide does not focus on collaboration between organisations related to joint delivery of client services.





This guide covers the following aspects of relationships between organisations:



The case studies in this guide that illustrate the key findings are:

- Aborigines Advancement League and Kildonan UnitingCare
- Back-of-house services benchmarking (consortium of agencies)
- Phillip Island Nature Parks and Zoos Victoria
- Footscray Community Arts Centre and the Arts Centre, Melbourne
- Renovating community halls in South Gippsland.





Why organisations work together

▶ 08

There is a wide range of reasons why organisations might work together to access information and support services. Different motives can dictate the nature, duration and formality of the relationships between organisations. Motives for working together can range from simple one-off issues to complex ones that evolve over the long term.

Some of the reasons why organisations might choose to work together are illustrated below. These motives are not mutually exclusive as organisations may work together for a range of reasons.

The table to the right explores the different ways that organisations can work together to access information and support services, and the characteristics and benefits of each type of relationship.





Motives for working together	Example	Case study example
Operational requirements	Two organisations wanting to improve the efficiency and scope of their HR services and professional development capability form a working partnership	<i>Back-of-house services benchmarking</i> <i>Footscray Community Arts Centre and the Arts Centre, Melbourne</i>
Seeking funding	Small community organisations putting together a joint funding application	<i>Renovating community halls in South Gippsland</i>
Economies of scale	A group of organisations hires a consultant to provide advice on a commonly shared IT issue	<i>Renovating community halls in South Gippsland</i>
Mutual gaps in capacity	Two organisations that have strengths in different areas rotate employees to share knowledge	<i>Aborigines Advancement League and Kildonan UnitingCare</i>
External facilitation	A government agency jointly funding two similar organisations brings them together to share policies	<i>Phillip Island Nature Parks and Zoos Victoria</i>
Strategic positioning	Organisations identify their own strengths and weaknesses and plan to work with another organisation to complement their current position for future growth.	<i>Footscray Community Arts Centre and the Arts Centre, Melbourne</i>
Access to networks and new markets	A small organisation entering a new market draws upon the contacts of its larger partner to conduct research on the feasibility and demand for its new service	<i>Footscray Community Arts Centre and the Arts Centre, Melbourne</i>

Case Study

Aborigines Advancement League and Kildonan UnitingCare

Two long-established community organisations work together to build capacity around financial counselling, energy auditing, and indigenous engagement.

▶ 10

Kildonan UnitingCare is one of Australia's oldest community organisations dating back to 1881. Kildonan offers a range of community services that help children, young people, families and those facing hardship or disadvantage. The Aborigines Advancement League was established in 1957 and is the oldest Indigenous organisation in Australia. The League creates and manages programs which improve the social, economic and cultural circumstances of Aboriginal people.

In 2008 senior managers from the League and Kildonan met at a Department of Human Services facilitated network event. After several informal discussions, both organisations agreed to explore ways in which they could work together. The League and Kildonan spent the next year identifying possible areas of collaboration and building personal relationships and trust between the senior management.

In 2009 a staff member from Kildonan was placed at the League on a part-time basis to work with their staff to develop competencies and skills in energy auditing. Kildonan's financial counselling team also outreach to the League and provide individual appointments to clients to discuss issues related to utility bills, fines, debts and budgeting.

The level of enthusiasm about the partnership within Kildonan has been high, and a selection panel was required to identify the most suitable personnel to be placed at the League out of the pool of interested staff members.





The partnership between Kildonan and the Aborigines Advancement League has been one of equals, and both organisations have benefited from working together. The Kildonan staff placed at the League have greatly increased their knowledge of the issues facing indigenous families experiencing financial hardship. The ongoing partnership between the senior management in both organisations has also influenced how Kildonan design and manage their engagement with Indigenous communities.

The partnership between Kildonan and the League has been funded by Origin Energy. Kildonan receives a large portion of its funding from the corporate sector, and its partnership with Origin has evolved organically over the past ten years. Kildonan's senior management view their partnerships with the corporate sector as business to business relationships of mutual benefit.

Partners like Origin Energy have been very strict in setting and monitoring Key Performance Indicators, but they have also given Kildonan a great deal of freedom and long term flexibility in how they manage projects like the partnership with the League.

Funding for the placement of both Kildonan's Energy Worker and Financial Counsellor at the League will expire at the end of June 2010. The League and Kildonan are looking for long-term funding to employ a full time staff member at the League to perform energy audits for their clients. In the future the League and Kildonan are hoping to be able to establish a position for a trainee Financial Counsellor.

More information

www.kildonan.unitingcare.org.au

Aborigines Advancement League

Email: Aalinc@infoxchange.net.au



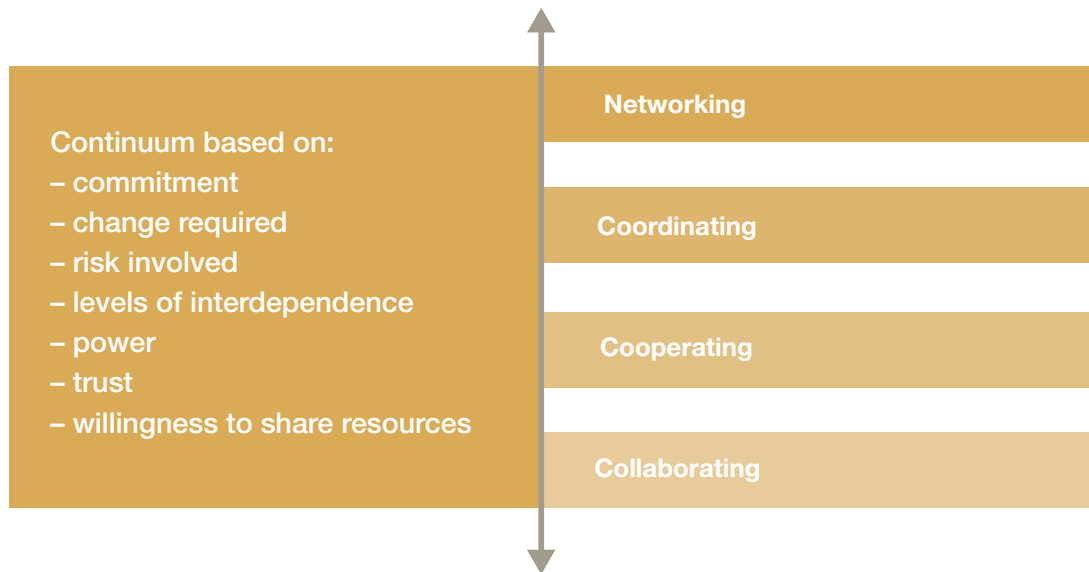
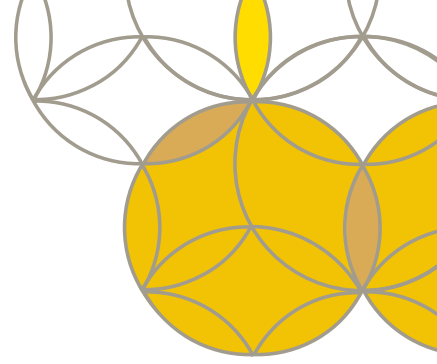
How organisations work together

▶ 12

There are many ways that organisations can work together to support each other.

Relationships typically move up and down a continuum based on a number of factors: the degree of commitment; the nature of changes required; associated risks; the levels of interdependence; relative levels of power and trust; and the willingness of all parties to share resources.





Adapted from: Himmelman A 2001, 'On coalitions and the transformation of power relations: Collaborative betterment and collaborative empowerment', American Journal of Community Psychology, vol. 29, no. 2.





Type of relationship	Characteristics	Benefits	Examples	Case study example
Networking	<p>Sharing of information</p> <p>Low effort and commitment</p> <p>Little or no risk</p>	<p>Heightens awareness of other parties' needs and capabilities</p> <p>Opportunity to reciprocally promote partner organisations and programs</p>	<p>Sharing information on funding or capacity building opportunities</p>	<p><i>Phillip Island Nature Parks and Zoos Victoria</i></p> <p><i>Footscray Community Arts Centre and the Arts Centre, Melbourne</i></p>
Coordinating	<p>More formal understanding</p> <p>Medium effort and commitment</p>	<p>Increases access to locations and resources</p> <p>Improves specific knowledge and expertise</p> <p>Pooling of resources and effort</p>	<p>Sharing corporate policies and procedures with similar organisations in same region</p> <p>Collectively advocating on issues of shared concern</p> <p>Applying for joint funding for separate projects</p>	<p><i>Renovating community halls in South Gippsland</i></p>





Type of relationship	Characteristics	Benefits	Examples	Case study example
Cooperating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Longer term Requires significant amounts of time High levels of trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mutual increase in organisational capacity Increases range of services available to community in a central location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Larger and smaller organisations drawing on their respective strengths support each other's organisational objectives Clustering of similar services in one central location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Footscray Community Arts Centre and the Arts Centre, Melbourne</i> <i>Aborigines Advancement League and Kildonan UnitingCare</i>
Collaborating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long-term Formal agreements Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) Shared control over programs and activities Pooling of resources and governance arrangements High risks and reward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimises infrastructure costs of providing programs and services Ongoing access to knowledge and support Operational economies of scale 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sharing of 'back-office' resources and support staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Back-of-house services benchmarking (consortium of agencies)</i>



Case Study

Back-of-house services benchmarking


A consortium of large and medium NFPs are collecting and sharing benchmarking data on back-of-house services.

▶ 16

Not-for-profit (NFP) organisations have historically found it difficult to make meaningful comparisons about the performance of their organisation relative to their peers. In contrast to the private sector, the NFP sector lacks meaningful internal or industry benchmarks against which costs and quality can be accurately measured and improved. This makes it difficult for NFP organisations to determine where to focus their energy and resources when they want to improve the administrative and support services.

In early 2009 a group of 13 medium and large sized community service organisations in Victoria came together to discuss the formation of a benchmarking consortium. The consortium, which is led by MacKillop Family Services, commissioned a feasibility study by an external consulting group. The study concluded the formal collection and sharing of benchmarking data had the potential to improve the efficiency of back-of-house services by 2%. This equates to savings of approximately \$600,000 per annum across the thirteen members of the consortium over a period of three years.

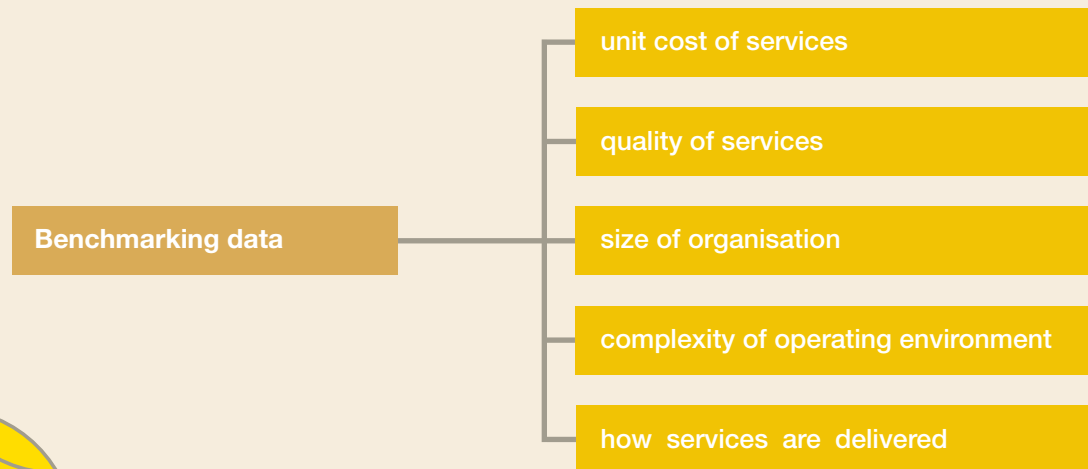
In mid-2010, 12 to 14 organisations agreed to commence a three year benchmarking project. The project will collect data and calculate benchmarks on an annual basis. The project is expected to provide meaningful comparative data on the information in the table to the right.





The benchmarking project has the potential to improve the performance of the sector as a whole by identifying good practice, examples of performance improvement, and inviting other organisations to participate in the benchmarking activity in the later stages of the project.

A public version of the benchmarking project will be available at the end of the first year. Improvements to measurement frameworks and an increased discipline in data collection and monitoring will also assist the sector in their discussions with government and other funders about their performance and future capabilities.





Enabling factors

Community organisations in Gippsland and Melbourne's North-West identified a number of factors that allow organisations to work successfully together to access information and support services.

▶ 18

Enabling factor	Lessons learned	Case study example
Common interests and goals are critical	Common values and goals allow organisations in a partnership to converse in a similar language and move in the same direction over time.	<i>Renovating community halls in South Gippsland</i>
Right person championing the relationship, at the right time	The catalyst to start a positive working relationship is often driven by someone in the organisation with an idea and energy to communicate the idea and garner the support within the potential partners	<i>Aborigines Advancement League and Kildonan UnitingCare</i>
Allow time to establish trust and respect	A relationship of peers founded on mutual respect is more likely to survive. Trust and respect can be established through regular and open communication, and being clear about the motives behind your partnership. If at any point this trust or respect is broken, it may be time to end the partnership.	<i>Aborigines Advancement League and Kildonan UnitingCare</i>
Partnerships evolve organically through personal relationships	Successful partnerships where organisations share information and support each other evolve from personal relationships that have time to develop organically. Personal relationships cannot be forced.	<i>Aborigines Advancement League and Kildonan UnitingCare</i>
Formal agreements are helpful	Collaboration is more likely to be sustainable when it occurs in the context of a formal agreement. A formal and transparent agreement will make it easier to resolve potential conflicts or queries. Formal agreements may become less relevant over time though as a relationship develops.	<i>Back-of-house services benchmarking (consortium of agencies)</i>



Enabling factor	Lessons learned	Case study example
Expand knowledge of other agencies by sharing skills, ideas and approaches	Successful partnerships occur when partners have something to offer each other that complements or expands the other organisation's skills, capacities and activities.	<i>Phillip Island Nature Parks and Zoos Victoria</i>
Recognise mutual strengths and gaps	When similar organisations partner together, there is a risk that they may share mutual blind spots about their own knowledge and capabilities. At the start of any partnership, it is important for each organisation to undertake a frank self assessment and compare the results with their prospective partners. This may identify particular areas in both organisations that need to be developed.	<i>Aborigines Advancement League and Kildonan UnitingCare</i> <i>Footscray Community Arts Centre and the Arts Centre, Melbourne</i>
Be bold in who you partner with and do not underestimate your value	If you are a looking for support from a larger organisation, it pays to aim high and seek out organisations that you admire and feel can offer value. It is also important not to underestimate the value you bring to any partnership as a smaller organisation. For example, smaller organisations may have stronger community networks or greater flexibility in how they design and implement programs. If you feel at any point like you are going cap in hand to a larger organisation for assistance, it is time to walk away from that partnership.	<i>Footscray Community Arts Centre and the Arts Centre, Melbourne</i>

Case Study

Footscray Community Arts Centre and the Arts Centre, Melbourne

These arts organisations develop joint audience programs and mutual capacity around local community engagement and managing their businesses.

▶ 20

The Footscray Community Arts Centre (FCAC) is a vibrant hub for artists and communities in Melbourne's culturally and linguistically diverse inner-west that was founded in 1974. FCAC has 11.2 full time staff.

In 2007, the former Artistic Director of FCAC approached the Arts Centre, Melbourne about the two institutions formally collaborating together. The initial partnership discussions focussed on developing joint programming and audience development initiatives, and opportunities for some of the leading national and international artists associated with the Arts Centre, Melbourne's program to undertake formal residencies at FCAC.

Following negotiations, the partnership between FCAC and the Arts Centre, Melbourne was formally established through an MOU. The MOU was based on research into the acclaimed affiliation between P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center and The Museum of Modern Art in New York.

In addition to informal boardroom meetings twice a year between FCAC and the Arts Centre, Melbourne, staff from the two organisations also provide each other with operational support on an ongoing basis.





The Art Centre's Program Manager, Community and Contemporary Cultures participates in FCAC's annual strategic planning workshops, and Arts Centre, Melbourne staff regularly join interview selection panels at FCAC. The Arts Centre, Melbourne also provides access to its bank of corporate knowledge. For example, during a recent period of major renovation at FCAC, the Arts Centre, Melbourne shared a number of policies and procedures related to major building projects.

Like many large and established arts organisations, the Arts Centre, Melbourne has worked hard in recent years to diversify its patronage and strengthen its relationships with local community groups.

The partnership with FCAC has helped the Arts Centre, Melbourne to reach these goals by providing access to its wide network of long-standing links with local community groups. Staff at FCAC have also worked with the Arts Centre, Melbourne to develop and embed community engagement models and practices into its ongoing planning, artistic outcomes and organisational culture.

The relationship between FCAC and the Arts Centre, Melbourne is one of equals, and both organisations have benefitted from the two way exchange of ideas and information in an open and flexible way. The current Director and CEO of FCAC, Jennifer Barry, describes the relationship as a "supportive friendship that is based on mutual respect".

More Information

www.theartscentre.com.au/

www.footscrayarts.com/





Case Study

Phillip Island Nature Parks and Zoos Victoria

Senior staff from Phillip Island Nature Parks and Zoos Victoria meet regularly and share information related to the management of their organisations.

▶ 22

The Phillip Island Nature Parks is the home of Australia's most popular natural wildlife attraction – the Penguin Parade, which receives over one million visitors each year. The Nature Parks also contain the Koala Conservation Centre, Churchill Island Heritage Farm and the Nobbies Centre.

The not-for-profit Nature Parks was established by the Victorian Government in 1996. Its team of 550 full time staff and volunteers work across its ecotourism, research, education and environment programs. Over the last 14 years Phillip Island Nature Parks has developed a range of partnerships with government authorities such as Bass Coast Shire Council, Tourism Victoria and Aboriginal Affairs Victoria.

In 2009, Phillip Island Nature Parks began an alliance with Zoos Victoria, which runs Melbourne Zoo, Healesville Sanctuary, and Werribee Open Range Zoo. The two organisations share a common goal in conservation and wildlife protection, and both report to the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

The first meeting between the CEOs and executive management teams of Phillip Island Nature Parks and Zoos Victoria explored common areas across how they managed and developed their businesses. The alliance between the two organisations is currently informal in nature, and the senior managers meet on an as needs basis.



On a day to day basis, there is regular telephone and email contact between the staff in both organisations. For example, the IT team at Zoos Victoria has shared policies and templates related to IT security and disaster recovery with Phillip Island Nature Parks. The marketing managers also converse regularly to discuss their marketing plans and share tourist visitation data.

The alliance between Phillip Island Nature Parks and Zoos Victoria is one of equals and mutual respect. Both parties hope that the alliance will gradually evolve beyond senior management to allow regular communication between all levels of their staff.

More information

www.penguins.org.au

www.zoo.org.au



Potential challenges

When two or more organisations work together there are always challenges and problems that must be overcome to sustain the health of their relationship. The table below explores some of these challenges and suggests some of the ways they can be managed and overcome.

▶ 24

Potential challenge	How to manage them
Open ended commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Get all parties to articulate what they are hoping to achieve by working together– Try to attach timeframes to specific objectives and define outputs that are measurable– Determine specific dates at which the relationship will be reviewed.
Differing expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Take your time getting to know the other parties before entering into anything formal
Unclear motives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Clarify goals and expectations at regular intervals
Conflicting interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Consider developing a formal written MOU or contract.
Deciding to proceed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Identify the resources required to proceed– Consider the opportunity cost of proceeding or not proceeding– Undertake a risk analysis





Potential challenge	How to manage them
Loss of identity	<p>When small organisations collaborate with larger ones there is a risk that the approach and culture of the smaller one may be overwhelmed.</p> <p>If you are a small organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Understand your own strengths and be very clear about what you bring to the relationship– Be clear about what aspects of your organisation you wish to maintain autonomy over <p>If you are a large organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Be clear about your objectives and work hard to identify and allay any fears the smaller party may have– Always treat the smaller party with respect.
Change of key personnel	<p>If your relationship is based solely on contact between a few senior personnel, it may be vulnerable when these people leave the organisation. You can mitigate this risk by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Developing a formal agreement to add longer term certainty– Encouraging regular interactions between more junior staff. Regular communication
Distance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Make regular use of email and telephone contact– Have a very clear agenda for the times when you do meet face to face– Seek out training or networking opportunities at the same time.



Case Study

Renovating community halls in South Gippsland


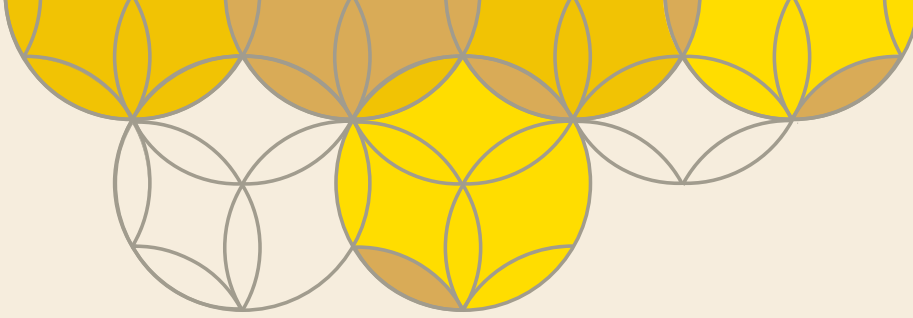
Five community halls worked together to apply for joint funding to assess the condition of their buildings.

▶ 26

South Gippsland is home to a large number of community halls scattered across small towns within the shire. Many of these halls are old and run-down and do not meet rising community expectations about the quality and accessibility of public facilities. The majority of halls in the region are community owned and operated. The committees that run these halls have historically found it very difficult to get funding for maintenance, redevelopment, and repairs of their halls, as they lack the time and capacity to write grant applications.

In early 2009 the Community Strengthening Initiative team within the South Gippsland Shire Council approached a number of community halls in small towns in the Eastern Corner Inlet District about working together to apply for joint funding. Working together would allow the halls to access a much wider pool of funding, rather than competing against each other for very small grants.

At the first meeting with the Council, the community representatives were very suspicious. They initially thought that the Council was intending to rationalise the number of community halls, or to coerce them into a joining a federation. After a number of subsequent meetings, the community hall representatives gradually warmed to the prospect of working together.



In April 2009, a group of five community halls applied to the Council Community Grants Program for \$10,000 to conduct a planning development study. The Council provided assistance during the application process by conducting a grant writing workshop. The joint application was made under the auspices of Toora Hall which oversaw the management and reporting requirements of the grant.

The funding from the Council was used to conduct an assessment of the individual development needs of each hall. The final report from the consultant in October 2009 identified the top three most critical projects. These projects ranged from the replacement of an asbestos roof and the installation of disabled access toilets.

In early 2010, three of the five community halls started the process of submitting a joint application for capital works funding for these three projects to the Department of Planning and Community Development and Regional Development Victoria.

As the relationship between the five community halls has evolved, they have started sharing information and resources – such as chairs and tables. The development of these new partnerships was aided considerably by the full time local presence of a council community facilitator. As the joint funding application was developed, this facilitator was able to allay the concerns and anxieties of community hall representatives through very regular face to face communication.

More information

http://www.southgippsland.vic.gov.au/Page/Page.asp?Page_Id=94&p=1



Useful resources

The following resources may provide useful guidance and tools if you are considering working with another organisation to access information and support services.

▶ 28

Partnership Practice Guides (2007)

Victorian Council of Social Service

<http://www.vcross.org.au/what-we-do/community-sector/human-services.htm>

These guides provide information, tools and resources that examine the three stages of partnering: preparing to partner; commencing the partnership; and, sustaining the partnership.



Working in Partnership – Practical advice for running effective partnerships (2008)

Department of Planning and Community Development

www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/partnerships

This guide provides a wide range of tools and templates for developing partnerships related to community development. The tools in this guide are categorised into the following groups: people; partners; purpose; process; and performance.



The Partnerships Analysis Tool – For Partners in Health Promotion (2004)

*Victorian Health Promotion Foundation
(VicHealth)*

[http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/en/
Resource-Centre/Publications-and-
Resources/Mental-health-promotion/
Partnerships-Analysis-Tool.aspx](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/en/Resource-Centre/Publications-and-Resources/Mental-health-promotion/Partnerships-Analysis-Tool.aspx)

This guide provides a tool for organisations entering into or working with a partnership to assess, monitor and maximise its ongoing effectiveness.

Working with other organisations

PILCH

[http://www.pilch.org.au/
workingwithothers](http://www.pilch.org.au/workingwithothers)

A useful overview of the legal issues to consider when working with other organisations that looks in detail at Auspicing Agreements, Memoranda of Understanding and Joint Venture Agreements.





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