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Better at working together

INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

PART III: SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL AND PRINCIPLES FOR COLLABORATION

Oct 2007

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working together for children and young people with high and complex needs



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Citation: High and Complex Needs Unit. 2007. *Better at Working Together: Interagency Collaboration: Part III, Self-Assessment Tool and Principles for Collaboration*. Wellington: High and Complex Needs Unit.

Published in Oct 2007
by the HCN Unit
c/- Child, Youth and Family
PO Box 2620
Wellington

ISBN 978-0-478-29332-6

This document is available on the High and Complex Needs Unit website
<http://www.hcn.govt.nz>

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FOREWORD

This self-assessment tool is Part III of a suite of interagency collaboration resources, developed by the High and Complex Needs (HCN) Unit in New Zealand for frontline staff and managers. It is based on the Partnership Assessment Tool, developed by the Nuffield Institute at the University of Leeds and the Strategic Partnering Taskforce in the UK Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.¹ The HCN Unit has gained permission to use the tool and it has been piloted in New Zealand.

The HCN Unit is keen to contribute to the developing practice of collaboration across the government sector. While the concept of interagency working is widely promoted and accepted, it is hard to find practical advice about how to set up, and maintain, successful interagency processes and services. We hope the assessment tool, along with Part II of the *'Better at Working Together'* resources – Advice on Good Practice, will help to fill this gap.

There are two points I would ask readers to note – firstly, we do not have the whole answer on interagency ways of working, and see the self-assessment tool as a resource to help you assess your progress. Secondly, the tool is not a scientific instrument. It does no more than provide a snapshot of an interagency project, based on the perceptions of the people involved. Everyone will use the language slightly differently and will put greater or lesser emphasis on different aspects of the process. That is why, in the end, the discussion within the group about its own process is the most important part of the whole exercise.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'C' with a horizontal line extending to the right and ending in a small arrowhead.

Cynthia Tarrant

Manager – HCN Unit

¹ *Assessing Strategic Partnership – The Partnership Assessment Tool*, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, London, 2003.

INTRODUCTION

THE SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL . . .

Sections 1 and 2 of this document comprise the self-assessment tool and principles for collaboration. The Strategic Partnering Taskforce at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in the United Kingdom commissioned the Nuffield Institute for Health to develop this tool. It draws on an extensive programme of research carried out by the Nuffield Institute and also on practical experience with other tools.

The purpose of the self-assessment tool is to provide groups with a simple, fast and cost-effective way of assessing the effectiveness of interagency collaboration. It enables a rapid appraisal (a quick 'health check') that identifies strengths and problem areas. This allows the agencies involved in a collaborative process to respond in a way that is appropriate to the seriousness and urgency of any problems. For those just setting up a collaborative process, the tool provides a checklist of what to ensure and what to avoid. It has been designed explicitly as a developmental tool, and not as a means of monitoring local performance.

The self-assessment exercise is based on individual members of the group identifying and sharing their views about the collaboration. It therefore highlights the areas of consensus and conflict to be explored, and creates an opportunity for group members to discuss their responses to the issues they have identified.

The results of the self-assessment exercise can be produced graphically, with accompanying text. They offer a common language for group members to discuss both the opportunities for developing effective means of working and the perceived barriers to this happening.

. . . AND HOW IT CAN HELP

The self-assessment tool:

- provides material (rapid collaboration profile sheets) to conduct an assessment of the current effectiveness of your interagency process
- with repeated use, allows you to track changes in the collaborative process over time
- when used at different organisational levels, highlights a range, and possible diversity, of perspectives
- provides a common framework (and vocabulary) for agencies and members of groups to develop a jointly owned approach to tackling barriers to effective collaboration

- can help newly formed groups to explore the views and aspirations of those embarking on a new venture. It provides a developmental framework for establishing a healthy and effective collaboration by, among other things, highlighting what to avoid
- can help established collaborations to take stock on a routine basis of how effective their interagency process is – that is, it provides an opportunity for a periodic review or ‘health check’
- can help interagency groups that are experiencing difficulties to systematically identify the areas of conflict (and consensus) and to develop an action plan for improved interagency working. In such instances, the value of the tool is diagnostic.

The self-assessment tool will not, on its own, tell you how all the problems associated with interagency working should be addressed.

The tool can be used to assess collaborative working at different levels, for example, with the HCN interagency management groups and with the frontline staff who are involved in interagency teams (those who need to make collaboration work for a particular child or young person). Repetition of the exercise at different levels within the agencies provides the opportunity to compare views and to target action where it is most needed. Also, if groups repeat the exercise over time, it allows them to chart their progress in addressing problems and achieving their goals. Because the principles that the tool is based on are generic, the tool can be used in a wide range of contexts.

THE SIX PRINCIPLES FOR COLLABORATION . . .

PRINCIPLE 1 – Recognise and accept the need for collaboration.

PRINCIPLE 2 – Be clear and realistic about the purpose.

PRINCIPLE 3 – Ensure commitment and ownership.

PRINCIPLE 4 – Develop and maintain trust.

PRINCIPLE 5 – Create clear and robust arrangements to support collaboration.

PRINCIPLE 6 – Monitor, measure and learn.

The self-assessment tool is based on the above six principles, which research and fieldwork have shown to be the building blocks for successful collaboration. The tool

ascertains from the people involved the degree to which they feel that these building blocks are in place. Section 2, from page 25, provides a commentary on the principles and elements in the self-assessment tool, to help explain the thinking behind the statements in the tool that users are asked to respond to.

... AND PUTTING THEM INTO PRACTICE

Part II of the *'Better at Working Together'* Interagency Collaboration Resources includes the practical advice gleaned from workshops and consultation held over the last 18 months, as well as from the literature review (which forms Part I of the collaboration resources) and the interagency teams involved with particular children and young people. We have made this advice as specific and practical as possible, keeping in mind the needs of frontline staff and busy managers at all levels. Part II also includes links to resources and other useful material, as well as quotes that share the experiences of a variety of people working in the High and Complex Needs area who are also involved with interagency collaboration.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

The appendix includes a feedback form, because we would like to hear from you on how the self-assessment tool and the advice on good practice are being used, along with any suggestions about improvements that we could make or additional material we could include in the document in the future.

The HCN Unit will continue to develop resources to support interagency working in light of feedback. These resources will be made available online at: <http://www.hcn.govt.nz>

1 THE SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

INTRODUCTION: USING THE TOOL

The diagram below summarises the process that a group should follow when it is carrying out a self-assessment and agreeing on an action plan for improving the collaborative process. This is followed by comments on the preparation and the steps involved in the self-assessment exercise. Rapid collaboration profile sheets are provided, for each of the six principles, for group members to complete to help them identify areas of consensus and conflict, see pages 13 –18.

STAGE 1: PREPARATION

- Agree on the purpose of the assessment exercise
- Agree on individual contributions
- Decide on how the exercise will be facilitated
- Decide on how it will be actioned

STAGE 2: UNDERTAKING THE SELF-ASSESSMENT

- Circulate background material
- Arrange a meeting to:
 - familiarise group members with material
 - get members to complete rapid appraisal sheets

STAGE 3: ANALYSIS AND FEEDBACK

- Analyse individual responses
- Arrange a feedback meeting to:
 - share, discuss and interpret findings
 - agree on next steps

STAGE 4: ACTION PLANNING

| A | B | C |
|---|---|---|
| Assessment suggests the collaboration is working well. The group needs to consider how often it should build in a regular review. | Assessment suggests the collaboration is working well in some parts, but there are concerns about others. The group needs to decide on how to address these areas of concern. | Assessment highlights significant areas of concern that require urgent attention and a detailed plan of action. The group needs to decide on how to address these areas of concern. |

STAGE 1: PREPARATION

Reasons for undertaking the self-assessment exercise

There needs to be agreement among the group members about the reasons for using the self-assessment tool, if it is to be employed to best effect. Experience with the original Partnership Assessment Tool showed that having this initial discussion was often an important step in individual members becoming more honest in their views about the workings of the interagency group. The group's self-assessment may be:

- a prospective exercise, where it is just starting an interagency process – in other words, 'helping it to get ready to collaborate'
- one of the regular 'health checks' that are part of its own review process
- intended to explore and identify problems, or to confirm apparent success
- a retrospective exercise for renewing or revising its interagency arrangements.

Whatever the purpose, it is important that everyone involved has the chance to discuss the reasons for: using the self-assessment tool, what they expect to achieve by doing so, and what will be done following the analysis of the findings in terms of feedback, discussion and action planning.

When to use the tool?

We would encourage use of the tool at the start of the group's work together. Although the group will have plenty of other things to think about, we know that the self-assessment process will help it to make a good collaborative start. This is a better approach than using the tool a few months into the process, when the group is running into difficulties. (See Part II, appendix 2 for information on the life-cycle of groups.)

Members' contributions, ground rules

As well as agreeing on its purpose, it is important for the group to discuss individual members' contributions to the assessment process – whether setting-up and hosting, facilitating, analysing findings or action planning – and for members to reach agreement about the collaborative process.

One of the essential issues that the group should discuss is confidentiality. The group will need to agree on what information from the self-assessment process it is happy to share with others and what is to remain confidential to the participants. If the group decides to keep information from the self-assessment in order to compare it with later results, members need to agree on how they will keep that baseline information.

Another important preliminary step is for the group to decide on what the conclusion of the process will be, in terms of feedback, discussion and action planning. Those participating need to be assured that the investment of their time in undertaking the self-assessment is worthwhile, and that frank and honest responses are encouraged.

A facilitator

Facilitation of the self-assessment process is important. Experience suggests that independent, although not necessarily external, facilitation is helpful in managing the process and encouraging openness. Sometimes, and especially where the process is expected to be difficult or sensitive, it may be better to use an external facilitator. In these circumstances, the facilitator might need to talk to individual members before the group meets. This will help the facilitator to understand the issues and to guide the discussion.

Context – the organisations that group members are working for

Finally, a vital part of the collaborative preparation process is that those involved are aware of the wider policy and organisational context within which their collaboration is to operate. For instance, a group that has been set up as a local response to service needs may have a different history and motivation than one set up as part of a national strategy or directive. Also, participants may need to be reminded that they are acting as representatives of their organisations, rather than individually.

STAGE 2: UNDERTAKING THE SELF-ASSESSMENT

Group members will need to become familiar with the self-assessment material in advance. Although members can read the material and carry out the exercise individually if they prefer, or if it is difficult to bring people together, it has proved to be more effective to work through the exercise as a group.

Group members are asked to consider a series of statements (listed under each of the six principles for collaboration) about the interagency group that is the subject of the assessment, and to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each of the statements by ticking the appropriate boxes in the rapid collaboration profiles. It is important that members also consider what lies behind the statements before responding. An explanation of each of the statements is set out under each principle in Section 2, The Collaboration Principles, from page 25. Members may wish to make additional comments or observations, and the 'Notes' column in each rapid collaboration profile sheet allows for this.

After responding to the self-assessment statements for each of the six principles, group members score their responses as follows:

| | |
|---------------------------|----------|
| Strongly agree: | 4 |
| Agree: | 3 |
| Disagree: | 2 |
| Strongly disagree: | 1 |

Some groups might feel that it is inappropriate to score their responses in this way. Even if this is the case, it is still worthwhile for a group to undertake the self-assessment and to have a discussion about members' views. The discussion is more important than the scoring.

Once the following rapid collaboration profile sheets have been completed for each of the six principles, the group should move on to Stage 3 and Stage 4 of the self-assessment tool, which covers the analysis of findings and feedback, and action planning (pages 19 and 23).

RAPID COLLABORATION PROFILE SHEETS

PRINCIPLE 1: Recognise and accept the need for collaboration

| To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the interagency work that is the subject of this self-assessment exercise? | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree | Notes |
|--|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|--------------|
| A. The agencies (or group members) have worked collaboratively in the past and have had significant success as a result | | | | | |
| B. The factors associated with successful interagency working are known and understood | | | | | |
| C. The principal barriers to successful collaborative working are known and understood | | | | | |
| D. The voluntary or required basis of each group member's involvement in the collaborative process is recognised and understood | | | | | |
| E. There is a clear understanding of the interdependence of members in achieving some of their goals | | | | | |
| F. Members understand the areas where they can achieve their agency's goals by working independently | | | | | |
| Scores | | | | | Total |

Scoring key: Strongly agree 4; Agree 3; Disagree 2; Strongly disagree 1

PRINCIPLE 2: Be clear and realistic about the purpose

| To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the interagency work that is the subject of this self-assessment exercise? | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree | Notes |
|--|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|--------------|
| A. Our group has a clear vision, shared values and agreed principles | | | | | |
| B. We have clearly defined joint aims and objectives | | | | | |
| C. These joint aims and objectives are realistic | | | | | |
| D. The collaboration has clearly defined service outcomes | | | | | |
| E. The reason that each agency/ member is engaged in the collaboration is understood and accepted | | | | | |
| F. We have identified areas where we are most likely to succeed | | | | | |
| Scores | | | | | Total |

Scoring key: Strongly agree 4; Agree 3; Disagree 2; Strongly disagree 1

PRINCIPLE 3: Ensure commitment and ownership

| To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the collaboration that is the subject of this self-assessment exercise? | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree | Notes |
|---|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|--------------|
| A. There is a clear commitment to collaborative working from the most senior levels of each of the participating agencies (eg, chief executives) | | | | | |
| B. There is widespread ownership of the collaboration across all the agencies, and within them (ie, the agencies as a whole, managers responsible for this interagency project, our peers) | | | | | |
| C. Commitment to collaborative working is sufficiently robust to withstand most threats to its working | | | | | |
| D. The collaboration recognises and encourages networking skills | | | | | |
| E. The success of the collaboration does not depend solely on the individuals with these skills: networking is becoming a common skill and an established behaviour | | | | | |
| F. Not working collaboratively is discouraged | | | | | |
| Scores | | | | | Total |

Scoring key: Strongly agree 4; Agree 3; Disagree 2; Strongly disagree 1

PRINCIPLE 4: Develop and maintain trust

| To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the collaboration that is the subject of this self-assessment exercise? | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree | Notes |
|--|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|--------------|
| A. The way the collaboration is structured recognises and values the contribution of each agency/ member | | | | | |
| B. The way the group’s work is conducted appropriately recognises each member’s contribution | | | | | |
| C. Benefits and risks are fairly distributed among all members | | | | | |
| D. There is sufficient trust within the group to survive any mistrust that arises elsewhere | | | | | |
| E. Levels of trust within the group are high enough to encourage risk taking | | | | | |
| F. The collaboration has succeeded in having the right people in the right place at the right time to promote collaborative working | | | | | |
| Scores | | | | | Total |

Scoring key: Strongly agree 4; Agree 3; Disagree 2; Strongly disagree 1

PRINCIPLE 5: Create clear and robust arrangements to support collaboration

| To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the collaboration that is the subject of this self-assessment exercise? | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree | Notes |
|---|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|--------------|
| A. It is clear what financial resources each agency brings to the collaboration | | | | | |
| B. The resources, other than financial (eg, administrative support), that each agency/ member brings to the collaboration are understood and appreciated | | | | | |
| C. The areas of responsibility for each agency/member are clear and understood | | | | | |
| D. There are clear lines of accountability for the performance of the collaboration as a whole | | | | | |
| E. Operational arrangements are simple, time-limited and task-oriented | | | | | |
| F. The collaboration's principal focus is on process, outcomes and innovation | | | | | |
| Scores | | | | | Total |

Scoring key: Strongly agree 4; Agree 3; Disagree 2; Strongly disagree 1

PRINCIPLE 6: Monitor, measure and learn

| To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the collaboration that is the subject of this self-assessment exercise? | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree | Notes |
|---|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|--------------|
| A. The collaboration has clear success criteria for the services and the collaboration | | | | | |
| B. We monitor and review how successfully service aims and objectives are being met | | | | | |
| C. We monitor and review how effective the collaboration is | | | | | |
| D. We ensure that the findings from any monitoring and review are shared widely among participating agencies | | | | | |
| E. Successes are well communicated outside of the group | | | | | |
| F. We have clear arrangements for reconsidering and revising aims, objectives and working arrangements in the light of review findings | | | | | |
| Scores | | | | | Total |

Scoring key: Strongly agree 4; Agree 3; Disagree 2; Strongly disagree 1

STAGE 3: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS AND FEEDBACK

The next step in the self-assessment process is the analysis of these responses and the generation of a profile of the collaboration. Each member of the group will have completed a scoring sheet for the six self-assessment principles. Members will have indicated, for each of the principles, their level of agreement with the six statements that relate to the individual principles. The individual scores for each principle can then be totalled to give an aggregate score for each person (within the range 36–144). Each person’s scores should be transferred to the ‘Scores dartboard’ page 21 by shading the appropriate segment for each of the six principles (use a separate dartboard for each person).

Understanding the results: in outline

In simple terms, you can interpret the results as follows:

| PRINCIPLE | 19 – 24 | 13 – 18 | 7 – 12 | 6 or less |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| PRINCIPLE 1: Recognise and accept the need for collaboration | Very high recognition and acceptance of the need for collaboration | The need for collaboration is recognised and accepted | Recognition and acceptance of the need for collaboration is limited | Recognition and acceptance of the need for collaboration is minimal |
| PRINCIPLE 2: Be clear and realistic about the purpose | The purpose of the collaboration is very clear and realistic | There is some degree of purpose and realism to the collaboration | Only limited clarity and realism of purpose exists | The collaboration lacks any clarity or sense of purpose |
| PRINCIPLE 3: Ensure commitment and ownership | The collaboration is characterised by strong commitment and wide ownership | There is some degree of commitment to, and ownership of, the collaboration | Only limited commitment and ownership can be identified | There is little or no commitment to, or ownership of, the collaborative process |
| PRINCIPLE 4: Develop and maintain trust | There is well developed trust among agencies/group members | There is some degree of trust amongst agencies/group members | Trust amongst agencies/group members is poorly developed | There is little or no trust among agencies/group members |
| PRINCIPLE 5: Create clear and robust working arrangements to support collaboration | Working arrangements are very clear and robust | Working arrangements are reasonably clear and robust | Working arrangements are insufficiently clear and robust | Working arrangements are poor. |

| PRINCIPLE | 19 – 24 | 13 – 18 | 7 – 12 | 6 or less |
|--|--|--|--|---|
| PRINCIPLE 6: Monitor, measure and learn | The group monitors, measures and learns from its performance very well | The group monitors, measures and learns from its performance reasonably well | The group monitors, measures and learns from its performance poorly in some respects | The group monitors, measures and learns from its performance poorly in most respects, or not at all |

| AGGREGATE SCORES | 109 – 144 | 73 – 108 | 37 – 72 | 36 or less |
|-------------------------|--|--|---|---|
| | The group is working well in all, or most, aspects and further detailed work on the group process is unnecessary | The group is working well overall, but some aspects may need further exploration and attention | The group may be working well in some aspects, but these are outweighed by areas that require remedial action | The group is working badly enough in all aspects for detailed remedial work to be essential |

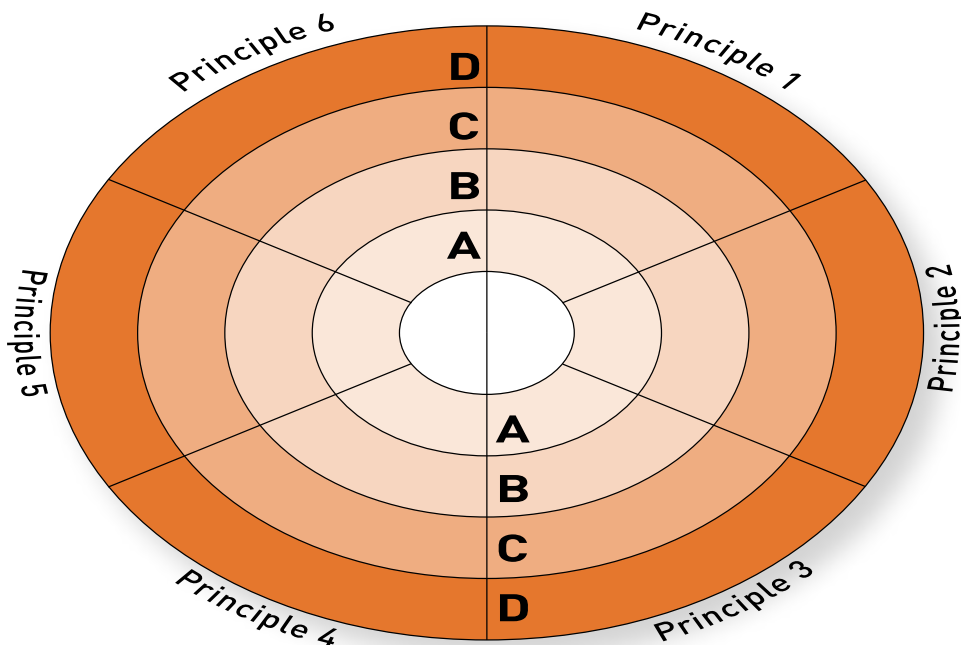
SCORES: RAPID PARTNERSHIP PROFILES

Note: higher scores are closer to the centre.

| KEY | |
|--------------|---|
| PRINCIPLE 1: | Recognise and accept the need for collaboration |
| PRINCIPLE 2: | Be clear and realistic about the purpose |
| PRINCIPLE 3: | Ensure commitment and ownership |
| PRINCIPLE 4: | Develop and maintain trust |
| PRINCIPLE 5: | Create clear and robust arrangements to support collaboration |
| PRINCIPLE 6: | Monitor, measure and learn |

Put total score for each principle in appropriate segment below and shade in that segment

A 19-24 B 13-18 C 7-12 D 6



AGGREGATE PROFILE SCORE =
(Total of all six principles)

Date:

Understanding the results – detailed analysis, feedback and discussion

Group members may choose to share their individual assessments within the group, and to examine areas of common or differing views about the strengths and weaknesses of the collaboration. When this sharing occurs, it becomes readily apparent where there is broad agreement or disagreement among group members. The depth to which the responses need to be explored – and the way in which they are explored – depends largely on how well the group is working together, the degree of consensus, the nature of the findings, and the significance attached to the findings by the group. So, if everyone agrees that the collaboration is reasonably healthy across all six principles, there will be little need for action planning beyond the group agreeing when and how to conduct the next 'health check'.

If members have assessed some aspects of the collaboration process as being 'unhealthy', further detailed examination will be required. Depending on the sensitivity of the issues and the size of the group, this examination may best be done in a facilitated workshop. In some cases – for example, over differences of opinion about the degree of trust and mistrust – it may be necessary for the facilitator to conduct interviews separately and confidentially with group members. It is in the detailed feedback and analysis sessions that group members can look behind their scoring and explore comments about individual elements.

The essence of this feedback and analysis is for the group to gain a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the collaboration and, if necessary, to plan remedial action. What this self-assessment tool does is reveal, simply and quickly, the areas on which the group needs to concentrate.

STAGE 4: DISCUSSION AND ACTION PLANNING

Once the analysis of findings and feedback is complete, the results can then be shared and discussed with the group in a workshop. This gives members the chance to look in further detail at their assessments and particular judgements about individual statements. Action planning can be undertaken by the group at this stage, to identify and agree on any changes of approach that may be required.

The main aim of the self-assessment tool is to help the group measure its success at collaborative working. It cannot offer detailed prescriptions for addressing the problems identified in any particular group. The way in which weaknesses or problems are tackled – or how strengths are reinforced and replicated – depends on the members of the group and local circumstances.

Whatever the findings, the assessment process must be seen to conclude with a plan for action. If we take three broad alternative scenarios we can see what this plan might look like.

- If the findings show a general consensus about the strength and ‘health’ of collaborative working, all that may be required is for the group to agree on how and when to undertake the next assessment. This could be a repeat exercise with the same individuals, or it could entail an assessment at a different level in the contributing agencies. There might also be an agreement that no further assessment needs to take place unless there are important changes within the group or in relation to its task. Even if the collaboration is successful, it is worth agreeing to have regular health checks.
- Where problems or weaknesses are identified, the action planning would focus on these areas. Where there is little sensitivity about the issues raised – whether individual or organisational – further detailed analysis of what underlies the assessment findings could be conducted internally and informally. Where there is increased sensitivity, external facilitation may be preferable.
- Where the assessment highlights significant areas of concern, action planning would need to embrace extensive, and possibly urgent, remedial action. This may involve a thorough re-examination of the collaboration process – its aims and objectives, structures, processes and working practices. If the problems are serious enough, it may require that the group be dissolved and the collaboration re-formed.

Once again, the benefits of using the self-assessment tool ought to be that there is a clear indication gained of the nature and scale of any problems, of where action is needed most and of where it is required urgently. Although the self-assessment tool is one that is primarily diagnostic, the collaboration principles and their constituent elements provide a general prescription of how collaborative working can be

strengthened. It is for those involved in particular collaboration processes to apply these general principles to their local circumstances.

The following table provides a template to help groups formulate an action plan for improving their collaborative process.

SELF ASSESSMENT TOOL: ACTION PLAN FOR IMPROVED COLLABORATION

| | | | | |
|--------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| By when | | | | |
| Responsibility | | | | |
| How measured | | | | |
| Expected outcome | | | | |
| Proposed action | | | | |
| Principle/element | | | | |

2 THE COLLABORATION PRINCIPLES

INTRODUCTION

This section expands on the six collaborative principles and elements that are used in the self-assessment tool. It should help group members who are using the self-assessment tool to understand what the statements in the tool are intended to explore.

The comments about the principles and elements also reinforce the advice on good practice, from Part II of *'The Better at Working Together'* resources, and should be read in conjunction with this advice.

PRINCIPLE 1: **RECOGNISE AND ACCEPT THE NEED FOR COLLABORATION**

This principle is concerned with two main factors: the shared history of collaboration and the extent to which the agencies recognise the need to work together. These elements are obviously related. A strong local history of working together would reflect an understanding of the need to work in this way. If there is a limited history of collaboration, and little appreciation of the extent to which agencies depend on one another, it is very unlikely that genuine collaboration will develop.

ELEMENT A: Identify the principal achievements of the interagency group

The record of successful collaboration between the agencies is crucial in determining the scale and pace of future activities. Success breeds success. This does not mean that agencies with a limited history of working together cannot reach the levels attained by those with more experience, but, to begin to do so, they must have a mutual awareness of what has been achieved jointly. Agencies with substantial joint achievements will also need to be confident that there has been a clear benefit from these achievements, and that they are worthy of further development. Therefore, what you would be considering here is what has been achieved already through collaboration.

ELEMENT B: Identify the factors associated with successful interagency work

Much of the self-assessment tool asks you to identify in detail the factors associated with collaboration. Here, we want you to reflect on why the achievements you have identified have been possible. It is likely that you will have named specific local conditions or individuals, but you may also wish to name factors beyond the locality, such as the requirements of your agency's national office. You may return to examine the importance of some of these later, but you should consider here whether the factors that have contributed most significantly to earlier successes are known and understood by the group.

ELEMENT C: Identify the principal barriers to interagency work

Collaboration is rarely straightforward. Sometimes the barriers to achieving it are too great, and even where a measure of success is achieved, barriers may remain. In order to move forward in a sustainable relationship, it is important to be clear what these barriers are, so that steps can be taken to reduce them. As with the principal factors for success, these barriers could be external to the locality, or internal. Several types of barrier can be distinguished: structural, procedural, financial, professional and cultural, as well as issues of status and legitimacy. Other parts of the self-assessment tool will return to these areas in further depth, but, for now, you should simply consider whether the main barriers to collaboration are known and understood by the group.

ELEMENT D: Acknowledge whether the collaboration is one that is voluntary or one where agencies/group members are required to participate

It is important that members of the group understand the policy context within which the collaboration is taking place or is proposed. There needs to be clear recognition by the group of the pressure on individual partners. In particular, members need to acknowledge that, while some will be entering the collaboration voluntarily, others may be required to do so. It is vital to the success of the collaboration that such degrees of pressure – whether local or national – are recognised and understood.

ELEMENT E: Acknowledge the extent of the interdependence of each agency/group member to achieve some of their goals

Potential members of an interagency group need to have an appreciation of their interdependence, without which collaborative problem-solving makes no sense. If there is no interdependence in the group, there is no need to work together. If there is some interdependence, but this is not acknowledged or recognised, further understanding needs to be acquired before any additional collaborative development can take place.

ELEMENT F: Acknowledge the areas in which you are not dependent upon others to achieve your goals

Not all of an organisation's activities require a contribution from other agencies. Organisations will have core business that they expect to undertake without reference to others. They would also expect others to acknowledge their legitimacy to operate in a certain field of activity and to define appropriate practice in this area. If agencies are not clear about this, there is a risk of partners overstepping the limits of the collaborative work.

PRINCIPLE 2: BE CLEAR AND REALISTIC ABOUT THE PURPOSE

This stage of the assessment assumes that there is a consensus among the agencies and members of the group on the desirability and importance of working together. This second principle is concerned with two areas of 'scoping'. The first area considers whether the agencies have sufficient common ground to work together, in terms of a broad set of shared understandings, as well as specific aims and objectives. The second area relates to ensuring that the aims and objectives of the collaboration are realistic.

ELEMENT A: Ensure that the collaboration is built on shared vision, shared values and agreed principles

Most approaches to interagency working take it for granted that a statement of shared vision, based on jointly held values, is a precondition for success. There is scope for deciding whether this statement needs to be in place at the outset, or if it can be developed as the work proceeds. It has been regular practice for several years to identify the values and principles upon which service developments are based. Although these values and principles are often couched in general terms, they indicate the common ground on which the agencies base their long-term relationships. It may be that, at the start of the collaborative process, a broad vision would be more likely to generate movement than a detailed blueprint. Where there are clear differences of perspective, these will need to be resolved if the collaboration is to develop and flourish.

ELEMENT B: Define clear joint aims and objectives

Once there is sufficient consensus over values and principles, the parties need to define specific group aims and objectives. Although, initially, some ambiguity may help to generate commitment where clarity may be too threatening, these aims need to be clear enough for all the members to be confident of their meaning. Goals that lack clarity will diminish enthusiasm and commitment. The group, by working together on this task, will fulfil several purposes: to provide a focus around which agencies can cohere; to help clarify boundaries and commitments; to define clearly the scale and scope of joint work; and to provide a framework for regulating joint arrangements.

ELEMENT C: Ensure joint aims and objectives are realistic

Unrealistic aims and objectives will soon diminish enthusiasm. The notion of collaborative capacity is relevant here, and refers to the level of activity that a collaborative project can sustain without any of the agencies losing commitment. This is related not only to tangible resources (such as staff and funding) but also to more abstract concepts such as status or autonomy. The demands placed on a

group can both exceed and fall short of its capacity. An underestimate can mean that a committed collaborative effort is confined to marginal tasks, while an overestimate can lead to unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved and when.

ELEMENT D: Ensure that the collaboration has clearly defined service outcomes

Project aims and objectives have traditionally been expressed in terms of service inputs or outputs. It is important that the aims and objectives of working collaboratively are also expressed as outcomes for service recipients. The group needs to be clear about how it intends the collaborative approach to lead to the desired outcomes.

ELEMENT E: Ensure that the reasons for engaging in the collaboration are understood and accepted by agencies/groups members

It is vital to the success of collaborative working that group members/agencies understand and accept why each is involved. While this involvement may be an acknowledgement of a shared interest and collective purpose, it may also be because of pressure to participate. Whatever the reason, collaborations flounder if they are based on misunderstandings about motivations and purposes.

ELEMENT F: Focus the collaborative effort on areas of likely success

Collaboration is likely to be fragile in its early stages, if only because it may imply a threat to existing practices and boundaries. Interagency ventures should be alert to threats to their progress, and acknowledge that change will not come quickly or simply. In view of the long-term task, it is useful to look for 'quick wins' and 'small wins' and to relate these 'small wins' to 'big wins'. A big win is a major gain that may reflect the scale of the task or the scope of planning activity, but may also be one accomplished in the face of substantial opposition. A small win, on the other hand, rarely involves substantial risk, but can be informed by a sense of strategic direction that can add up to a big win over time through a series of 'small wins'. This is the notion of 'think big and act small'.

PRINCIPLE 3: ENSURE COMMITMENT AND OWNERSHIP

There is no guarantee that the collaboration achieved within the group will grow or sustain itself, so the understandings and agreements that the group has developed through the first two collaborative principles will need to be supported and reinforced. Principle 3 is concerned with ensuring that across the agencies involved, there is not only a widespread commitment to the collaboration process, but there is one from a sufficiently senior level within the organisations.

ELEMENT A: Ensure appropriate seniority of commitment

Agency commitment to collaboration is more likely to be sustained where senior managers within the organisations involved make an individual commitment to the venture. Without this, it is possible that the efforts of the enthusiasts in middle- and lower-level positions will become marginalised and the collaboration perceived as being unrelated to the 'real' business of each agency. Ideally, this senior-level commitment will reflect, or develop into, personal connections between key decision makers, thereby helping to cement a culture of trust.

ELEMENT B: Secure widespread ownership within and outside the agencies involved

Widespread ownership within the agencies involved is just as significant as senior-level commitment. A well-developed strategy on collaboration will count for little unless there are links between macro and micro levels of activity. In particular, operational staff can often 'make or break' shared arrangements, in that they have considerable contact with other agencies and often enjoy discretionary powers and significant day-to-day autonomy. Interagency work implies a willingness to share, and even give up, exclusive claims to specialised knowledge and authority, and to develop joint procedures.

ELEMENT C: Ensure sufficient consistency of commitment

Each agency's commitment needs to be consistent, because this is part of building sustainable and lasting relationships. Where there is an inconsistent attitude towards collaboration, such as agencies unilaterally changing agreements or reducing their involvement, the consequences can be considerable. In the short term, specific collaboration will be at risk but, importantly, the collaborative approach will be seen as of limited use if it attracts only partial or sporadic commitment.

ELEMENT D: Recognise and encourage individuals who have networking skills

There is widespread evidence of the importance of involving individuals who are skilled at developing inter-personal networks across agencies. Such 'networkers' bring competency-based as well as social and interpersonal skills to the process. Apart from an aptitude for working across organisational, professional and service boundaries, these networkers:

- are seen as having sufficient legitimacy to assume the networking role
- are perceived as being unbiased and able to manage multiple points of view
- have a sense of the critical issues and the first steps that need to be taken to address those issues
- have the 'political' skills that encourage others to take risks.

ELEMENT E: Ensure that collaborative working is not dependent for success solely upon these individuals

Problems can arise if collaborative working becomes too reliant on the networking skills of such individuals. These problems become most apparent when these networkers leave the group. It is important to find ways to sustain the relationships developed by these individuals and to build on their cross-boundary working so that, increasingly, it becomes a shared skill and an established organisational behaviour.

ELEMENT F: Reward collaborative working and discourage not working in this way

Not all organisations engage willingly in collaborative working, and it may be necessary to find ways of encouraging reluctant agencies into collaborative work. Members of the group and their agencies need to see that there are incentives for collaborative working and disincentives for not working in this way.

PRINCIPLE 4: DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN TRUST

This is the most self-evident and elusive of the principles that underpin successful collaboration. Although joint working is possible where there is little trust among those involved, the development and maintenance of trust is the basis for the closest, most enduring and successful collaborations. At whatever level – organisational, professional, individual – the more trust there is, the better the chances are for healthy collaboration. Needless to say, the history of working jointly is, in many areas, characterised by disputes about roles, or claims to exclusive professional competence, or defensiveness about resources, all of which inhibit the development of trust. What each of the six collaborative principles spell out is the need to develop openness in the pursuit of collective interests. Trust is, of course, hard to win and easy to lose.

ELEMENT A: Ensure the contribution of each agency/group member is equally recognised and valued

Evidence shows that collaboration works best when the contribution of each member is recognised and valued. Some members will bring more of some resources than others to the collaborative process, while other's resources are not always readily quantifiable. Voluntary organisations, for example, may bring information (about service need or successful service provision), experience and expertise, or legitimacy, by representing particular groups. Equal treatment prevents the group having senior and junior partners or a 'core group'. If some members feel marginalised or excluded, this will lead to suspicion, erosion of trust and a lessening of their commitment to the process.

ELEMENT B: Ensure fairness in the conduct of the collaboration process

Fairness in this context means creating the opportunity for each party to contribute as much as they wish and in a way that is appropriate. It means the avoidance of one or two members always setting the agenda or defining the language, or hosting and chairing meetings at times and places to suit themselves, or dictating agendas, priorities and timeframes. Some of this is inevitable where individual members have specific legal responsibilities or control of particular resources, but this should not rule out fairness to all partners.

ELEMENT C: Ensure that the benefits and risks of the collaborative effort are fairly distributed

Although each member/agency 'signs up' to collective aims and objectives, they may also aim to secure some benefits for themselves. These should be transparent (see Principle 2 above), as should the benefits that accrue to individual partners from collective efforts. Fairness means sharing such benefits – those accruing to one member or agency should not be disproportionate, nor at the expense of another.

However, collaboration cannot be uniformly about 'win-win' solutions for all. The health of any collaboration can be measured in terms of the 'sacrifice' that each member or agency is prepared to make for the collective good. The acknowledgement and acceptance of such altruism helps to build trust and cement the collaborative partnership.

ELEMENT D: Ensure the collaboration can sustain a sufficient level of trust to survive external problems that create mistrust elsewhere

However enthusiastic and committed the members of the group are, there will be occasions when that commitment is threatened by external problems, that is, things not directly associated with the business of the collaboration but that affect individual members' contributions to it. Simple rules of openness and honesty apply. "We are as committed as ever to the goals of the collaboration but, for now, we will have to re-direct our time, effort and resources to dealing with our current 'local' difficulty."

ELEMENT E: Ensure that the level of trust within the group is high enough to encourage risk taking

One of the truest measures of successful collaboration is that there is sufficient trust among the group for members to take considered risks by flexibly applying rules to ensure good outcomes. These can include financial risks – with one agency, for example, being willing to undergo some immediate 'loss' for the sake of a longer-term collective gain. It also involves agencies 'bending' their operating rules and exclusion criteria for the good of the collaborative effort.

ELEMENT F: Ensure that the right people are in the right place at the right time

This is one of the consistent messages to come from studies of collaborative working. There is evidence both of the destructive effect on collaborative working of the wrong people being in the wrong place, and of the importance to collaboration of 'champions' working in the collective interest. To have the right people involved is a matter of careful selection, the exercise of peer pressure and good performance management. It is also, of course, partly a question of luck. Groups often have to 'make do' with the people around the table.

PRINCIPLE 5: CREATE CLEAR AND ROBUST ARRANGEMENTS TO SUPPORT COLLABORATION

This principle relates to ensuring that the collaborative work is not laden with bureaucratic processes. Evidence shows that unduly complex structures and processes may reflect defensiveness of group members and the lack of trust. Excess bureaucracy leads to frustration among members and saps their enthusiasm and commitment. This is compounded when collaborative working is seen as being peripheral to the core business of the group.

Collaborative working arrangements should, therefore, be as lean as possible, with time-limited and task-oriented joint structures. Two other essential requirements for collaborative working are that:

- the group has a primary focus on processes and outcomes rather than structures and inputs
- there is clarity about the areas of responsibility and lines of accountability of each member.

ELEMENT A: Be clear about the financial resources that each agency brings to the collaboration

Collaboration often breaks down because participating agencies do not understand what financial resources others are bringing to the process. Group clarity over these financial resources is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, there may be uncertainty about how much each agency devotes to a specific field of activity. Secondly, agencies often set limits on the use of funding by their representative on the group. Finally, there needs to be an understanding of the stability of each member's financial contribution, and an appreciation that the group may have to cope with reductions in previously agreed funding levels. In some respects, this mirrors the principles of clarity of purpose and expectation – not just of what people or organisations expect to get from the collaboration, but what they can contribute to it financially.

ELEMENT B: Acknowledge the non-financial resources that each agency brings to the collaborative process

Resources comprise more than contributions of funding. They include tangible things, such as staff time, facilities and support services but can also include knowledge, experience, power and legitimacy. Community groups for example, may have few tangible resources, but their involvement can give local legitimacy to a collaborative project. Appreciation, not just awareness, of the contribution of each agency or member to a collaborative process, is an important part of securing continued commitment and willingness of agencies and members to invest resources and take risks.

ELEMENT C: Distinguish individual and collective responsibilities, and ensure they are clear and understood

Significant difficulties can arise when a group begins to implement a jointly agreed plan if it is not clear about the responsibilities of individual members. Each agency or member needs to be clear about – and accept – the divisions of responsibility, whether for areas of funding, staffing or service delivery. Without clear delineation of responsibility there is potential for confusion and mistrust. Members need to be able to show that they are doing their fair share and, also show their parent organisation that they have not committed too much in the way of their time and resources.

ELEMENT D: Ensure clear lines of accountability for the performance of the collaboration

The group need to know how each member is accountable to their own organisation for the collaborative work and to the process overall. There also needs to be clear accountability for the performance of the collaboration as a whole – across all the members and agencies.

ELEMENT E: Develop operational arrangements that are simple, time-limited and task-oriented

Unduly complex or restrictive working arrangements may reflect low levels of trust between agencies or members. Operational arrangements should, instead, emphasise urgency and a sharp focus. Otherwise a sense of drift develops, sapping members' enthusiasm and commitment. This concentration of effort is required as the risks from a lack of focus are inherently increased when several agencies are involved and collaborative working often fits around the day-to-day work of members.

ELEMENT F: Ensure the prime focus is on processes, outcomes and innovation

Collaborative working must focus on processes and outcomes, rather than on structure and inputs. This management principle is particularly important in collaborative working where the initial energy of the group can be diverted into creating structures that reflect relative resource strength or perceived status rather than focusing on the purpose of the collaboration and on desired outcomes.

PRINCIPLE 6: MONITOR, MEASURE AND LEARN

This principle refers to the reflective component of collaborative working. A review function is an integral part of any planning and management process. But it is an even more important part of interagency working where there may be doubts about the merits of collaboration. Monitoring, measuring and learning are therefore essential elements in assessing the performance of a collaborative project and help to cement group/agency commitment and trust.

ELEMENT A: Agree on the criteria for success

Success criteria need to be agreed on and made explicit within the group, both for the service aims and objectives, and for the collaboration process itself. Members may agree that, although the service aims and objectives have not been achieved, there have been significant benefits gained for the agencies – for example, there is an improved understanding between the agencies, along with improved levels of trust, and a collaborative process has been established. Conversely, service aims and objectives may be successfully achieved but at a cost to the collaborative process.

ELEMENT B: Develop arrangements for monitoring and reviewing how well the service aims and objectives of the collaboration are being met

There is often scepticism among group members and parent agencies about whether the benefits of collaboration outweigh the costs to individual agencies. It is important, therefore, to monitor the extent to which agreed aims and objectives are being met – and, where necessary, to revise those aims. This process is not just a straightforward closing of the management and planning cycle, it is an important element of continuous feedback and organisational learning.

ELEMENT C: Develop arrangements for monitoring and reviewing how effectively the interagency group itself is working

This monitoring and review function is different in its focus. Here, the aim is to examine how well the interagency group itself is working, rather than whether the service aims and objectives are being achieved. Even if the service aims and objectives are being met, it will be important to reflect on how much of this is because of a healthy and smoothly functioning group, or whether they are being achieved only at some cost to individual members – which in the longer term may be unsustainable.

ELEMENT D: Ensure that the findings of any monitoring and review are shared widely among the agencies involved

Evidence shows that collaborative processes often exist on the periphery of agencies, as atypical initiatives. However, the lessons learned from such joint working – whether they are of success or failure – are seldom systematically fed back to the organisations. The messages are not disseminated to other services and regions, and the lessons are seldom used to inform other collaborative projects.

ELEMENT E: Celebrate and publicise success and address continuing barriers

This is closely allied to the previous element and highlights the need to counter the traditional scepticism about joint working. Publicising local success can be a response to the argument that collaborative working is inherently problematic and often too difficult. It is a way of demonstrating that the barriers can be overcome. It is also a way of identifying what is needed to address the barriers that remain and of underlining that the lessons can frequently be generalised.

ELEMENT F: Reconsider/revise the aims, objectives and arrangements for interagency collaboration

Although described here as the logical ‘last step’ in this review/self-assessment cycle, this element could equally be seen as the starting point. Reconsideration need not lead to revision or refinement of aims, objectives or arrangements but it provides the opportunity for recognising, for example, previous over-ambition or lack of ambition, lack of commitment or structures and processes that marginalise, rather than involve, partners appropriately.

FEEDBACK FORM

fax

The Manager
HCN Unit
Fax (04) 915-5677

FEEDBACK FORM – SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL AND ADVICE ON GOOD PRACTICE FOR COLLABORATION

The HCN Unit has developed these resources to support interagency working by frontline staff and managers. Because the tools are new, we would like to hear feedback from people who have used them so that we can continue to develop them. We are also keen to hear about other resources that people have found useful so that we can make these widely available. Please provide comments about:

1. THE SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL.

(For example, comments about the areas the tool explores, any clarifications needed for the instructions or the statements you are asked to respond to.)

2. YOUR GROUP'S DISCUSSION ABOUT ITS COLLABORATIVE PROCESS.

(For example, did the tool help the group to identify aspects of the collaborative process that need attention, and to agree on a plan of action?)

3. SYSTEMIC ISSUES RELATED TO INTERAGENCY WORKING THAT THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS HAS HIGHLIGHTED.

4. WHETHER YOU PLAN TO USE THE SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL IN FUTURE.

(For example, with the same group, and other collaborative processes in your area; at regular intervals; or at agreed points in the process.)

5. OTHER MATERIAL OR SUPPORT THAT WOULD HELP YOUR GROUP WITH SELF-ASSESSMENT AND ACTION PLANNING

6. ANY OTHER COMMENTS

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