

# THIRD SECTOR LEEDS:

## CONSORTIUM WORKING RESEARCH

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is a complex network of partnerships in Leeds' third sector, from loosely-defined groups of organisations that work together, to long-standing formalised consortia. Although this work encompasses the views of a relatively small sample of organisations and commissioners, there were some clear and useful indicators for what makes a consortium work according to commissioners, providers and infrastructure organisations.

The learning in this report is underpinned by structured conversations with Senior Leaders working in consortium arrangements about the factors that underpin success. We define a consortium as a formal partnership of organisations that co-delivers contracts and/or is able to bid for contracts.

Successful consortia generally had the following things in common:

## Before Bidding

- Often grew out of the shared aims and interests developed through the ecosystem' of less formal networks and collaborations across the city
- Were clear on their vision, values and motivations as an organisation
- Strong commitment from senior decision makers in their organisation
- Were able to have honest conversations with partner organisations about their own strengths and limitations, as well as what they wanted to achieve – for example, delivering support in a different locality, or extending activities to include different communities
- Were proactive in seeking partners based on:
  - Organisations they know work in the same locality or with the same groups of people
  - Knowledge of the current provision, and any gaps, overlaps or 'bottlenecks' which may require specific knowledge or expertise
  - Their own limitations as an organisation, for example a lack of experience working with particular communities
- Commitment from commissioners to engage with them as a consortium

- Often, the role of trusted intermediary (such as an infrastructure organisation) was key at this stage, and throughout, to support the development of strong relationships

## **During bidding**

- Agreed roles and responsibilities early, as well as the mechanisms to review these as the consortium develops – for example, if a partner leaves the consortium
- Were transparent about financial arrangements and how funding was split
- Where one organisation is ‘leading’ the consortium, were clear about the levels of investment (particularly of time at this stage) and trust needed, and therefore the risk involved
- Built in support for smaller organisations, for example through flexible reporting methods and the need for ‘generous leadership’

## **Running a service**

- Spent time developing the consortium and establishing a shared culture – this often happened prior to service delivery, but was always necessary and could take between 6 – 9 months, including:
  - Becoming familiar with partner organisations’ operating processes and organisational culture
  - Ensuring consistency for teams, for example through matrix management, agreed pay scales for similar job roles etc
  - Sharing resources such as a physical space, skill sharing and training
  - Developing a shared identity or recognisable brand
- Developed trusting relationships with commissioners through frequent, open and honest discussions, often with the support of infrastructure organisations
- Kept a focus on the community benefit of delivering support through a consortium

## Key risks

The key risks arising from working in a consortium, highlighted by the organisations we consulted with were:

- There is a cost to developing a consortium that you usually would not incur if you were to bid for a contract as an individual organisation, which is not covered by funding core costs
- Working with different sized organisations with varying capacity for investment (cash or human resources)
- Difficulties developing shared processes that work for a wide range of consortium partners, particularly around reporting and information sharing
- Having a single point of access or contact means that staff and volunteers need to maintain detailed knowledge about services that partner organisations offer
- Cash flow difficulties – delays in payment to a ‘lead’ partner may result in cash flow difficulties for all consortium partners
- Additional costs and risk often falling to the ‘lead’ partner to absorb

# BACKGROUND

The strength of the third sector in Leeds is built on a wide range of networks, from loosely-defined groups of organisations that work together, to long-standing formalised consortia. Forming a consortium is the practice of entering into an agreement with partner organisations to deliver a service together.

Third Sector Commissioning, Collaboration and Partnership Group builds on Leeds' strong history of collaboration and partnership working to maintain and further develop the strength of joined up working between the 3rd sector and the public sector in Leeds, particularly as it relates to commissioning and joining up our service delivery in the city. As such the group provides important discussion space for undertaking joint work and to address emerging priorities.

This document reports the findings of research into the views and experiences of third sector organisations working in consortia. Key themes from the research include,

- what organisations felt worked well
- what they would do differently,
- identifying good practices and opportunities for improvement

Views from a range of commissioners across the local authority and health organisations, and from third sector infrastructure support organisations, are also included. The purpose of this paper is to inform future commissioning and consortium delivery in the third sector.

## Context

Nationally, the Third Sector is recognised for its willingness and ability to work effectively in partnership. According to [Third Sector Trends in England and Wales 2022: relationships, influencing and collaboration:](#)

- 73 per cent of TSOs are currently engaged in ‘informal relationships’ with other voluntary organisations and groups and another 9 per cent would like to work this way.
- 65 per cent of organisations work closely but only semi-formally with other TSOs. Complementary working is an option 11 per cent of organisations are considering.
- A third of TSOs work in formal partnership arrangements (34%) and another fifth are interested in doing so. Almost half (47%) of the sector is disinterested in formal partnership working.

Locally, there is a broad recognition of the need for continued and strengthened connection between the Public and Third Sector partners, and enhanced relationships between different parts of the whole system as part of the [Best City Plan](#). The Leeds system has also seen Leeds City Council, NHS commissioners and other funders including Leeds Community Foundation and the National Lottery Community Fund working together as part of the Leeds Health and Wellbeing Strategy (HWS) currently undergoing a refresh, strengthening our approach to tackling health inequalities. The vision to improve the health of the poorest the fastest and the ambition to be the best city for health and wellbeing will remain can be found [here](#).

The [NHS Long Term Plan](#) describes how essential increased local partnership working through Integrated Care Systems that involve the Third Sector, the NHS and Local Authorities in provision of health services and prevention of avoidable disease. In West Yorkshire, these developments are taking shape at pace. [The West Yorkshire level Integrated Care Board](#) (ICB) has taken on the accountability of the former Leeds Clinical Commissioning Group. The Development and implementation of the Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) will in essence be a local alliance for Leeds as a ‘place’ and the Population Care Boards and Care delivery Board structures are establishing partnership and decision-making processes to support the ways in which within the ICB NHS, social care, third sector providers, NHS and Local Authority commissioners will work together to improve population health outcomes through collaboration, not competition. Forum Central leads on the this area for the Third Sector in Leeds.

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## The advantages of consortium working

The community benefits of developing a consortium include ease of access for people seeking support – the purpose of consortium is often to develop a single point of contact/access, enable existing pathways to be integrated and to make support easier for people to access.

Consortium arrangements may enable efficient delivery and services whilst enabling individual organisations to maintain their independence and the unique identity of the services. For commissioners, seeking to work with a third sector which is well-coordinated, and with organisations offering joined up services, consortium arrangements can be attractive as they enable disparate funding to be aggregated into more consistent packages of work. This drive to let larger contracts may be increasing in response to tightening public sector resource.

Working in a consortium can bring the following benefits:

- Smaller organisations that have specific expertise, but lack the capacity or infrastructure to provide support at scale, are not excluded from bidding
- Smaller organisations can benefit from the support and learning from larger organisations
- Larger organisations that lack specific knowledge, experience or links into different communities can benefit from smaller organisations' niche expertise
- A consortium can include a range of experience from different organisations, which can be a more effective model than signposting to different organisations

- Individual organisations are able to retain their independence and distinctive culture and strengths
- Formalising existing partnership working can provide opportunities for the development of organisational structures and governance, accountability and transparency, and the development of shared processes that reduce duplication.

## Consortium structures

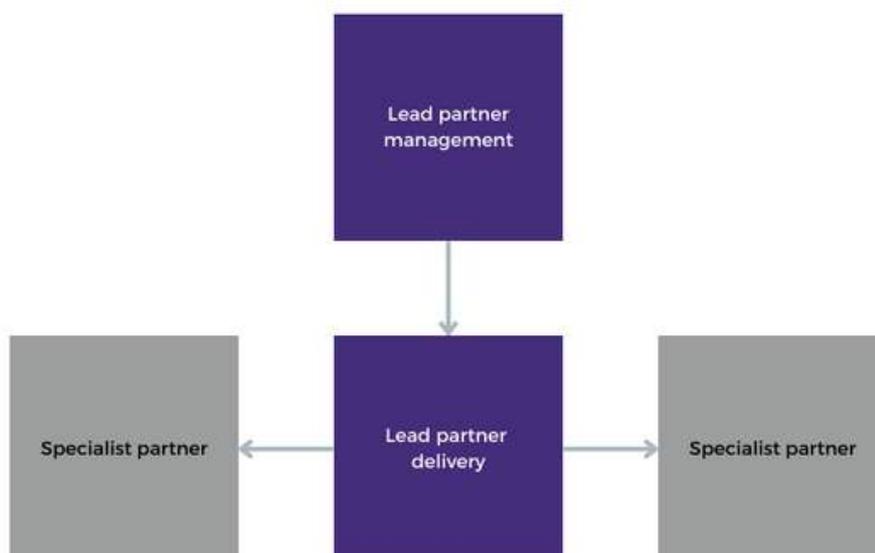
For the purposes of this report we have defined a consortium as a group of organisations that enter a formal partnership with the purpose of co-delivering a service.

There are three main structures for consortia:

- Lead Partner/Minor Partner(s) (sometimes subcontractors)

This form of partnership is probably the most common.

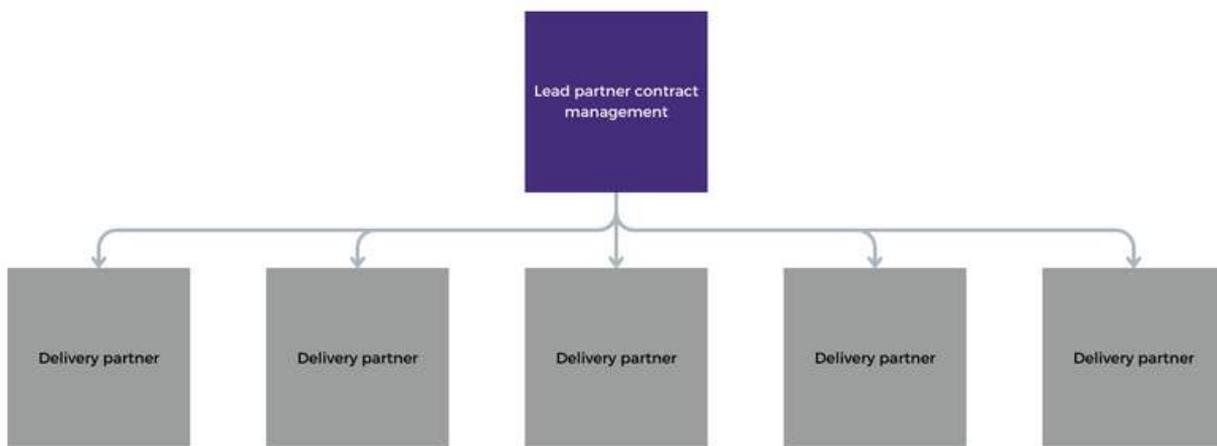
This structure involves a lead partner who provides internal project/contract management functions for the consortium whilst also delivering a portion of the service delivery. Other parts of the service delivery are delivered by Minor Partners who bring particular skills, specialism or locality focus to the contract.



- Umbrella' or 'shell'

This form of partnership is sometimes used to enable a group of organisations to bid for and deliver contracts that they would not be able to access as separate organisations.

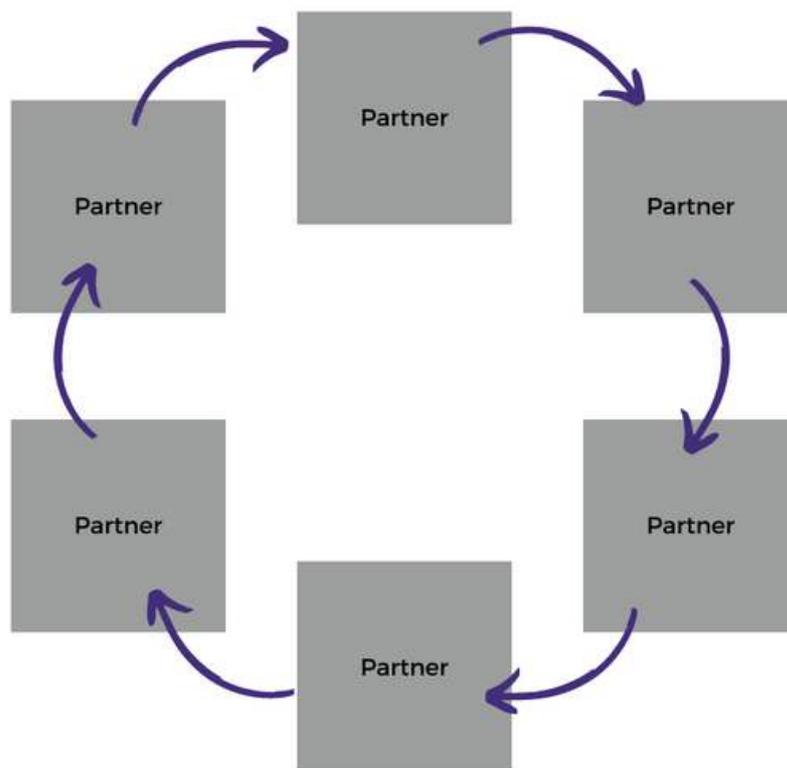
In this structure an organisation takes on partnership/contract management (and potentially back office or ancillary support roles) while other partners take responsibility for delivery



- Partnership of equals

This is probably the least common consortium form.

This structure involves a group of organisations who share both partnership/contract management responsibilities and service delivery elements with no one organisation being in the lead.



Of course formal partnership/consortium arrangements are only a relatively small part of the ways in which third sector organisations collaborate and co-deliver. There are many examples of collaboration and partnership, networking, generous leadership and mutual aid i.e. shared resources, and facilities across the Sector. Some key organisations in the city share resources and expertise around capacity building for example VAL, Forum Central, and Leeds Involving People. Others share physical space e.g. the Orion Partnership or knowledge such as language and translation services. This happens through both formal networks of organisations (e.g. Our Future Leeds, or Women’s Lives Leeds) as well as more organically, for example (e.g. Leeds where organisations signpost one another’s services or create opportunities based on demand Community Foundation’s Healthy Holidays). Sharing of resources and expertise has been especially evident throughout the COVID-19 pandemic

## The power and benefits of networks and collaboration

Where organisations have built a track record of collaboration this can lead in time to developing shared projects and lay the groundwork for future formal consortia. As such the development of these relationships is critical to developing an inter-dependent 'ecosystem' of organisations.

Forum Central developed [State of the Sector](#) research in 2020 which found that across the sector, Third Sector Organisations are collaborating in practical ways to create multiple, mutual benefits for beneficiaries and for the Sector as a whole. This is currently being refreshed in partnership with Voluntary Action Leeds.

Collaborations and partnership approaches form where organisations have mutual interests. This generates added value where community organisations are embedded in their communities but connected across localities, beneficiary groups and ambitions. Some collaborations help the third sector organisations themselves, whilst others improve the services they can provide to communities or individuals that they support.

Notable examples of formal and informal collaborations include:

**The Leeds Food Aid Network** is bringing together food provision services in the City to address food poverty, insecurity and resilience. These include drop-ins, soup kitchens, outreaches, foodbanks, cafes, and social enterprises redirecting food waste. Leeds FAN has been an integral part of Leeds City Council's Covid emergency food response.

**Leeds Community Anchor Network** (LCAN) is a network that formed initially as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with third sector organisations building partnerships with other local organisations to provide a wider package of support to local citizens. These organisations were called Community Care Hubs and aimed to work in a citizen-led way, involving local people in the design and delivery of services. Following a pilot project, some of these organisations have formed a

movement which aims to continue and build on the citizen-led activities and partnerships from before and during the pandemic.

Larger organisations network with other organisations across a range of issues and provides support to smaller organisations e.g. Age UK has formed collaborations with a network of organisations in Leeds under the **Enhance** programme and is also part of Linking Leeds, the Advonet consortium and the Leeds Oak Alliance.

The **Leeds Solidarity Network** is a group of organisations working with communities experiencing marginalisation and extreme inequality who have come together to work in solidarity. The organisations comprise Leeds GATE, BASIS Yorkshire, LASSN and Yorkshire MESMAC work with Gypsies and Travellers, Sex Workers, Asylum Seekers and Refugees, communities affected by HIV and LGBTQ+ communities. Leeds Solidarity Network have secured Kings Fund resources and support to work on what “commissioning from the margins” looks like, to create a model that could work for a range of marginalised groups. The paradigm shift to support this could help to move from traditional ‘commissioner and provider’ structures towards mutual relationships between our local authority, NHS and voluntary and community sector.

It is important to highlight that a formal consortium is not always the right structure for a third sector or cross-sector partnership, and may not always be the best way for a third sector organisation to meet the needs of their communities.

## **The role of infrastructure support organisations**

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# METHODOLOGY

## Who did we speak to?

To gather the information required for this research, one-to-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals from different third sector organisations across multiple consortia.

In total, 10 different organisations were involved in our consultation process, selected to be a representative spread of organisations across six separate third sector consortiums in Leeds.

The individual organisations in the different consortiums were involved with various communities through their regular work, which they identified as follows:

Primary communities supported:

Young People and Care Leavers	22%
Black, Asian and culturally diverse communities	11%
Carers	11%
Homeless/No Fixed Abode	11%
People facing high levels of deprivation	11%
People with Drug or Alcohol Addictions	11%
People with long term conditions	11%
Women (including Maternity)	11%

Additional communities supported:

People with mental health issues	89%
People facing high levels of deprivation	78%
Single Parents/Carers	78%
Black, Asian and culturally diverse communities	67%
Men	67%
People with long term conditions	56%
Young People and Care Leavers	56%
Women (including Maternity)	56%
Homeless/No Fixed Abode	56%
People from the LGBT+ community	56%
Older People	56%
Prison leavers/Ex-offenders	44%
Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Migrant Communities	44%
People with Experience of Domestic Violence and Abuse	44%
People with Drug or Alcohol Addictions	44%
Sex Workers	44%
People with Physical and Sensory Impairments	33%
People with a learning disability and/or Autism	33%
People with mobility issues	22%
Gypsies and Travellers	11%

The above data was gathered by sharing a short survey with participants in the research, allowing them to select both their primary community and their communities of interest. This meant that we could gauge what each organisation's main focuses were and gain a sense of how broadly spread these were across the consortiums.

## What did we ask/how did we ask it?

Our engagement process with the organisations/consortiums outlined above involved separate one-to-one interviews with each organisation.

These semi-structured interviews comprised set questions asked during a 30-minute interview. However, there was also space to deviate or ask separate follow-up questions to extract other important pieces of information that arose when

speaking to participants.

The questions that we asked participants during the interviews were as follows:

### **FORMING:**

- How were you approached to form a consortium?
- What conditions are important in forming consortium?
- What works in forming consortium?
- What were the main challenges in forming your partnership?

### **CONTRACTING:**

- What was your experience of the commissioning process (pre application?)
- What was your experience of the application process?
- What support did your consortium need during the commissioning and application processes?

**LIFE OF THE CONTRACT:**

- What has worked well during the delivery period?
- What were the main challenges during the delivery period?
- What was your experience managing relationships with partners and commissioners?

# WHAT WORKS IN FORMING A CONSORTIUM

## Being clear about organisations' separate strengths, values and motivations

Organisations in separate consortia spoke about the importance of both establishing what each organisation's main strengths were that would add value to the consortium, whilst also establishing limitations and boundaries.

This was valuable as it allowed the consortia to demonstrate how all partners would work with one another during the life of the consortium and also build clarity on the expectations of each partner once the contract was successful.

***“We got each element of the model exactly right for our strengths as a partnership, but also demonstrating how that could work together as a whole model.”***

***“One of the good things that we did was to identify what the red lines are for various organisations, so that discussion was very useful.”***

***“I laid out what I believe our skills are, but also where we're not as strong and which organizations I felt would add to our strength.”***

***“You definitely have to trust each other and respect each other's differences because they're the reason why you've actually come together. Because together, those differences make a better offer for communities. If everyone was around the table exactly the same, there would be little point in the consortia.”***

## Being clear about organisations' separate strengths, values and motivations

Organisations throughout all consortiums agreed that initial transparency when forming their partnerships was a key part of making sure that contracts worked for all partners in a consortium. This included honest conversations about what organisations' different priorities were.

***“I just think frank and open conversations need to happen to begin with”***

***“I think that once you overcame the challenge of everyone laying down what they wanted and being honest, then it became a lot easier to identify who was good at what and how it could work.”***

***“I think it helped that we had the right level of decision makers at the table – chief execs and directors. I think that helped us all be transparent, there’s that psychological safety in knowing we’re not all putting in different bids, we all know everything.”***

***“Having a legally binding agreement in place [is important] which all partners need to agree and the CEO/Boards need to sign up to”***

## Deciding on the scope of a consortium

Organisations described challenges in deciding who they did and did not want to partner with to form a consortium. A common approach was to identify gaps in what organisations currently provided, and to who, and to approach organisations who could bring specialism to these areas.

***“[An organisation] weren't involved in the conversations initially, but we felt that that they were based in an area that we'd not necessarily got covered as well as we wanted to. So we went and approached [leader of organisation] and sort of laid out what we saw as a vision, and that worked with what they already wanted to do.”***

***“Starting with [...] the organisations that were that were rooted in the initial conversations and then looking outside of that to where the where we could fill the gaps with organisations we felt were aligned to our values and to skills that we were lacking.”***

Some organisations felt they needed to limit who could join a consortium in order to keep things manageable.

***“There was a lot of discussion about where to draw the line. People were saying ‘I want to be part of that.’ We said we would limit it in the first phase, see what we learnt, and then we always said we would open it up in the longer term to others.”***

***“We can't just opt them in [an organisation who had not been part of the original consortium or commissioning process] because that then detracts from what the bid is all about.”***

One organisation expressed regret that a group chose not to join their consortium.

***“I feel like we lost out on an opportunity with a really good organisation that would have strengthened our bid. [The organisation] would have been really good in our consortium, but they went for the other one which is a real shame – that [contract] isn't going to change for the next five years.”***

Smaller organisations with specialisms talked about being approached by several different consortium and having to prioritise the one that fit best with their organisation's priorities.

***“When you’re a small organization, you can't be part of everything that everybody wants you to be part of [...] you’ve got to say, what organisation are you? We’re this sort of organisation, and that’s how you decide”***

## **Sharing a locality or a community you support**

Organisations agreed that a consortium had to be based on what partners had in common, which was generally an area that they operated in or a particular group of people they existed to support (or sometimes both).

***“We were all supporting the same group of people, and they would usually need to speak to more than one of us [organisations]. What we wanted to do was say: speak to one of us and you can access all of us.”***

***“Ultimately we're all working with kids in the same part of Leeds anyway, so it just makes sense.”***

***“We all work in a relatively similar area but we all have different strengths and we’re able to call on those strengths.”***

### **Key learning:**

1. All partners need to be transparent
2. Leaders need to be committed, and have the confidence to be honest about their strengths, limitations and motivations
3. All participants need to recognise each others drivers and establish practices that enable them to manage tensions around the fact that not all potential partners can necessarily join every project

# WHAT WORKS IN THE CONSORTIUM CONTRACTING PROCESS?

## Agreeing role and responsibilities early, but staying flexible

Organisations in different consortiums talked about the need to establish agreed roles and responsibilities early on in the process, before submitting a bid. These roles often changed as the partnership developed, but having mechanisms in place to regularly review roles and responsibilities were important for several partnership as they started delivering a service.

***“We initially started in one direction with [an organisation] leading the bid, but then we all recognised that they're probably not at that level at the minute.”***

***“Annual due-diligence checks are important so that any issues can be picked up early [...] this covers conflict resolution, where responsibility sits, what happens if a partner leaves the consortium and the need to inform the lead partner ASAP if a partner gets into financial difficulty.”***

***“With a good partnership you're able to kind of redistribute stuff to keep things going or adapt and make stuff happen”***

***“Fundamentally having the right people with a clear identity of what they're going to bring for that service and everybody feeling ultimately comfortable with that”***

***“It became very clear that the structure that we put in wasn't quite working, but it took a real battle to actually get us as a consortium to actually reconsider the structure and we got there in the end, but that took some fighting...I do think some frank and open conversations need to happen to begin with.”***

## Recognition that partnership delivery does not necessarily mean less cost

Several organisations described the difficulty of splitting the allocated funding for delivery across several partners. Some organisations referred to needing more funding allocated towards management costs due to delivering as a consortium.

***“I suppose if I was to change anything about the commissioning side of things, I would say that [...] the commissioners dictate what we are allowed to put in for a management [cost].”***

***“Just because you've got a consortium delivering doesn't mean that your costs are less, especially if you've got four organisations. So actually, we are a low-cost option, but that doesn't mean we're a cheap option.”***

***“Certainly, my experience is that that we get told what we can put in and it certainly doesn't cover our core costs.”***

***“If you deliver as a consortium, you get your management slightly trimmed [...] So that's the bit of change, you know, realistic management fees from Commissioners.”***

***“The thing I didn't like about it was that it was a race to the bottom in relation to your funding [...] we could score 85%, they might score 71%. But if they're saying they can deliver for less money than we can, then they'll get the bid.”***

## The role of the 'lead' partner

Some organisations we spoke to were the 'lead' partner in their consortium, and talked about the additional risk involved in this and the importance of being trusted by partner organisations. Other organisations talked about the benefits of working with a bigger, more experienced organisation as the lead.

***“For them [lead partner] to create partnerships with organisations that were with less experienced and less established [...] quite a lot wanted to partner up with a bigger organisation that we know a lot of the local authority have got a lot of faith in [...] we know they’ve got a lot of experience and there’s a lot of credibility there”***

***“If you’re a sole provider you have a face to face conversation once a quarter with your Commissioner at your grant funder to explain the successes, but you’re slightly one step removed in a consortium, if you’re not the lead”***

***“Financial transparency is critical, all partners need to know that things are split fairly.”***

***“We all take a lead in different funding bids. So for example [X organisation] takes a lead in [x project], [y organisations] takes a lead in [y project] [...] it wasn’t just for the sake of the money, we had to be able to trust and believe in each other”***

## **Having time to collaboratively write a bid**

Some organisations described the part of the commissioning process where the consortium needed to write their bid as ‘rushed,’ although most said this was their experience of any bid-writing process.

***“It was the usual scrabble and madness! Very quick, very last minute, full of restrictions. It helped that we had already worked it through, so it was easier to pull it together.”***

***“They [commissioners] spent so long defining what it was going to look like that then we had to rush through the final sort of hurdle of getting the application in.”***

***“I think there is increased requirements from the Commissioner, so this time around we’ve got to sign up to the social values portal. I understand the value of that, but in itself it’s time consuming, so it enables you to do less by imposing more. They do listen, they do understand, but I suppose they are governed by their own due diligence as well”***

### Key learning:

1. Have mechanisms in place to clearly define roles and responsibilities, and review these regularly
2. Have honest conversations about capacity and scale
3. All partners to be aware that additional costs may need to be factored into consortium delivery
4. Agree who will 'lead' in different circumstances
5. Create structures that enable financial transparency and clarity about reporting lines.

## Investing time into establishing a partnership before starting delivery

Organisations from different consortium described contrasting experiences of different approaches to forming partnerships.

Those who described approaches where partners had invested time in developing relationships and a shared understanding of the values, aims and working arrangements of the partnership generally had a more positive experience during delivery.

***“That year was a year of difficult conversations. But we knew that in doing that the foundations were laid for a very strong consortium.”***

***“[The consortium] it took a year really to settle it down into something like working and then for it to start delivering at anything like the level that the Commissioners expected.”***

***“I'd say it took at least 12 to 18 months for everything to embed. In terms of Team Synergy, Partnership, Synergy, external expectation.”***

One consortium worked with an organisational development consultant to help them to develop their partnership.

***“We were all in agreement that we could do something, we weren't really clear at that point exactly what it was or how we would do it. So we did work with a consultant for a few sessions to help churn ideas around.”***

# WHAT WORKS DURING THE DELIVERY OF THE CONTRACT?

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***“An OD [organisational development] consultant from LCH [Leeds Community Hospital Trust] worked with us for a while, and that helped to agree out values and behaviours. We did things like work out memorandums of understanding, agreements on finance and who would hold the money, making sure everything was watertight. Then when everything stopped during COVID and we re-grouped afterwards, you really felt how useful that all was, having that shared understanding.”***

***“We spent lots of time team building and working out a strategy [...] [Chief Officer] had put this thinking in place before we all even looked at funding.”  
“That year was a year of difficult conversations. But we knew that in doing that the foundations were laid for a very strong consortium.”***

## **Sharing staff, premises, and resources**

Several organisations described sharing resources, and how this helped them to deliver a better service. Some shared premises and found that having staff from different organisations working alongside each other in the same physical space helped to share knowledge and skills, feel more like one team and facilitate better referrals between services.

***“When we made sure that we always had staff from at least two of the different organisations on shift at the same time, and it really grew and improved the referrals.”***

***“That was all new for us to work through – how we made sure that staff still identified with their organisation, but we’re working in a consistent and quality way across the consortium and that that’s probably one of the most difficult things.”***

***“[Staff] walk through a [...] hub and they’re surrounded by colleagues that are their team and their colleagues, regardless of which organisation they work for, everyone’s got the [...] branding”***

***“We use a matrix management process to try to ensure that delivery is consistent across the partnership”***

***“It feels like a team rather than just a bunch of separate organisations [...] I come into work and sometimes I’ve got two or three [partner organisation] staff sitting at our desks working away, and it’s just the norm”***

Some organisations felt that it was challenging, even when sharing resources, for staff to feel there was consistency across the consortium.

***“I think it was quite difficult for staff from each of the organisations to step away from their main host organisation and feel that they could adequately represent some of the other partner organisations [...] we then had a lot of issues about confidentiality.”***

***“It can cause issues when different salaries are paid for the same job roles depending on which partner is employing the person (resulting in staff moving from one organisations to another to do the same role or staff complaints and issues in terms of staff moral when they realise this).”***

***“Not only did lot of people change employer they also started the new service where everyone worked together in hubs, which was very different way of working. People [...] were used to identifying with an employer rather than a service name”***

## **Flexibility with monitoring and reporting requirements**

There was agreement across organisations that reporting needed to be done in a way that utilised organisations’ existing mechanisms, was flexible and appropriate to the service being offered.

***“There were just unrealistic expectations of small organisations. [...] It [the reporting system] was based on casework with [...] specialists, but if you're coming to a choir or you're somebody running a gardening group [...] people do not want to fill in five pieces of paperwork [...] before you can even come to the group. In the end, we just said it doesn't work for us.” – provider***

Commissioners also agreed that reporting requirements should be carefully considered. One commissioner suggested that data should only be requested for the following reasons:

1. ***“We have a national or statutory requirement to report***
2. ***The information is relevant to see whether outcomes (agreed by the relevant LHCP Partnership Board) are being achieved or improved. We should not impose requirements on providers that are not consistent with achieving the objectives set out by the Leeds Health & Care Partnership of which we are all part.***
3. ***The information is relevant to decide whether the service provided is value for money.”***

### **Key learning:**

1. Invest in cross-organisational 'team building'
2. Recognise and work with cross-organisational working practices - consider the value of co-location and co-working
3. Partners to collectively agree appropriate and flexible reporting mechanisms (match reporting to scale)

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Of the key themes outlined, there were some clear recommendations for consortium working for both commissioners, and organisations wishing to join a consortium.

Recommendations for commissioners are as follows:

## **Factor in 6 – 12 months before for consortium development**

When a partnership is forming due to a mutual interest, community benefit or unmet need that has been identified, partner organisations need time to develop together. All the organisations that we spoke to talked about the period of time prior to delivering a service, and often prior to bidding for funding, where it had been necessary to dedicate some time to focus on developing the consortium as a structure. Those who did not take this time subsequently found it more difficult to progress as a successful consortium and achieve their aims.

## **Consider factoring in additional costs for consortium delivery**

Although there are clearly some cost-saving effects from delivering a service in partnership, several organisations stressed the need for consortium to not be considered a 'low cost' option. Due to this, some organisations felt pressured to accept funding that did not cover their core costs in order to be a part of the consortium.

## **Ensure that monitoring and reporting requirements are as flexible as possible**

Reporting should be flexible, appropriate to the service being offered and where possible, accepted in formats that utilise organisations' existing mechanisms. This is particularly important for consortium including larger and smaller organisations working in partnership, as overly detailed or rigid reporting requirements can disadvantage smaller organisations and ultimately make it difficult for them to work as part of a consortium.

Recommendations for organisations are as follows:

Be prepared to have honest and open conversations

All the organisations we spoke to spoke about the importance of honesty during their initial conversations between potential partners. This was important in establishing each partners' priorities, developing a feeling of psychological safety and trust, and in acknowledging the areas of competition still existing between

organisations. Some organisations also felt it was important to have senior decision-makers involved in these conversations.

### **Share resources and invest in each other**

Several organisations talked about the value of sharing a premises or staff, and how this facilitated better partnership working. Organisations also talked about the importance of investing in shared resources, for example training staff, having an information-sharing agreement, providing shared uniforms etc.

## **FURTHER RESOURCES**

[The stages of consortium development \(NCVO\)](#)

[Joint working agreements \(NCVO\)](#)

[Working in a consortium: A guide for third sector organisations involved in public service delivery \(Cabinet Office for Third Sector, 2008\)](#)

[The role of Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise \(VCSE\) organisations in public procurement - GOV.UK](#)

[How health and care systems can work better with VCSE partners | NHS](#)

[Confederation](#)

[State of the Sector 2020 Report\)](#)