



1. Introduction

This guide outlines some of the approaches to working in partnership that have worked well for projects funded through the Big Lottery Fund's (BIG) Research Grants programme. The guide is designed to provide helpful advice for projects and their research partners based on findings from the evaluation of the Research Grants programme. Other guides in this series highlight good practice in relation to user involvement in research and approaches to dissemination.

Setting up a research partnership can be one of the most important decisions that you will make. The majority of research grants funded by the Big Lottery Fund involved third sector organisations working in partnership with research institutions and this approach has generally worked well.

2. The benefits of working in partnership

Many third sector organisations have established effective partnerships with research organisations to deliver their project. If your organisation has never conducted research before, or research is not its main function, then forming a partnership with a research organisation can offer the following benefits:

- ▶ **Build capacity** – Many Research Grants projects have shared knowledge and skills between the third sector organisation and their research partner. Research organisations have been able to offer third sector organisations expertise in particular research methods and help to develop their skills which can be used after the research has come to an end.
- ▶ **Enhance research credibility** – For many third sector organisations, establishing a partnership with a research organisation is a means of obtaining legitimacy by ensuring that the research is conducted rigorously. It can also help to raise the profile of the research when disseminating findings.

▶ **Facilitate access to expert advice and networks**

–Third sector organisations have benefited from being able to access pre-existing networks for dissemination, expertise from specialists and advice about professional academic research practices such as ethical approval. Some third sector organisations are unable to draw on this expertise routinely within their own organisation.

The evaluation of the Research Grants programme found that working in partnership can benefit both the third sector and research organisation, particularly in terms of capacity building and facilitating access to expert advice and networks. Third sector organisations can provide valuable information about the needs, perspectives and experiences of beneficiaries and service users. In turn, research partners can benefit from access to third sector organisations networks and contacts which can help to enhance the impact of the research.

Case study

A project found that it was lacking the academic research resources that were necessary to deliver the proposed research successfully.

The project formed a partnership with a local university which was able to offer the necessary intellectual and practical resources to support the delivery of the research.

In return the university was able to gain access to a wide network of individuals from hard-to-reach rural areas through the Third Sector Organisation.

3. Points to consider when establishing a research partnership

Be clear about roles and responsibilities of partners at the outset

Forming a strong partnership is an important factor for the success of a research project. Clarity about partnership arrangements can help projects to maintain a sense of direction. At the outset of any engagement with a research partner you should agree your organisations' respective roles and responsibilities and set appropriate expectations. Typically, the third sector organisations take the lead in terms of accountability for the delivery of the project, whereas the research partner is usually responsible for the design and delivery of the methodology for the research. The evaluation of the Research Grants programme found that projects work best where this distinction is clearly understood and there is a clear agreement about how these two areas relate to one other.

Develop a formal partnership agreement

Roles and responsibilities should be formalised in a partnership agreement between the third sector organisation and the research partner. The presence of strong governance arrangements, clear roles and responsibilities, and a formal written statement of understanding, should all combine to establish the conditions for an effective partnership. It will also be helpful in the unlikely event that something goes wrong with the partnership.

The evaluation of the Research Grants programme found that although the process of establishing governance arrangements might seem onerous, most projects recognise that setting clear parameters builds a strong foundation for the partnerships success. Momenta, who are delivering the programme on behalf of BIG, have developed guidance on partnership agreements. For more information, please visit www.bigresearchprogramme.org.uk.

Communicate any issues with the partnership to Momenta

If problems occur within your partnership, it is important to let Momenta know as soon as possible. They may have experience of a similar problem and should be able to help you facilitate a solution.

4. Where can I find out more?

For further guidance on identifying and working with a research partner, please visit the Research Programme website at: www.bigresearchprogramme.org.uk