Tools for success: doing the right things and doing them right

9. Networks

Centre for Charity Effectiveness
Enhancing performance, developing talent

About this guide

Understanding the links between what you do and the work of others is an essential aspect of improving your overall effectiveness. This guide will help you identify and develop relationships with other groups and organisations who are doing the same or similar work.

Effective networking provides assurance to yourselves and to funders that what you are doing is not duplicating what already exists; it also allows you to learn from others, share your expertise and experience, as well as raise the profile of your work. This guide covers two main areas: identifying and mapping key players and developing networks and raising your profile.

How to identify and map key players

A 'key player' analysis is a vital first step in mapping out who else is influential in the area in which you operate. This analysis is a tool for considering groups and individuals who are not part of your organisation, but who do similar work or who have an interest in the area in which you work – for example, organisations working with the same beneficiaries, funders, government departments, regulatory bodies or umbrella bodies.
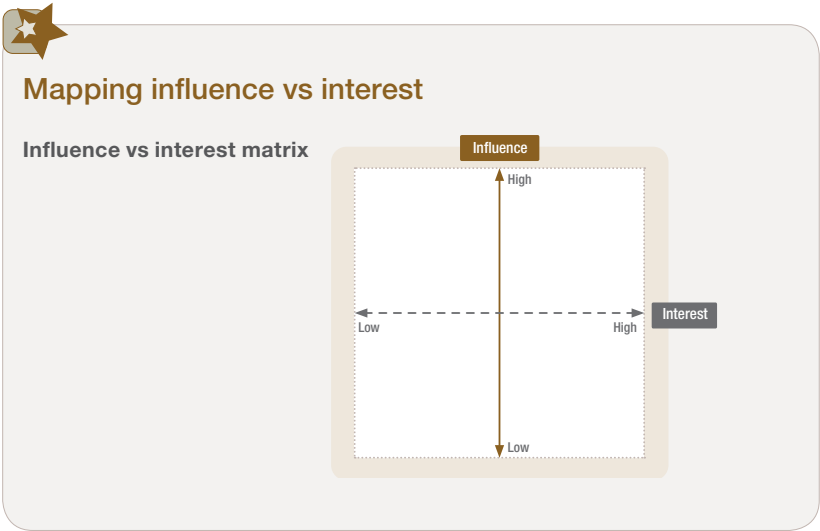
Analysing key players

Draw up a table (see below) and list all the organisations or groups external to your charity which could be perceived as key players.

For each key player categorise their interest and influence in relation to your organisation according to High, Medium, Low (H, M, L). Also note their expectations, needs and their attitude to your performance.

Name of key player	Degree of interest in us (H, M, L)	Degree of Influence over us (H, M, L)	Key player expectations and needs	Attitude to our performance

You can then use the 'Influence vs. interest matrix' on the next page, with the contents of the table above to map each stakeholder's interest in and influence over your organisation.

This will give you an overview of who else is operating in your area of work and how interested in or influential they may be with regard to your work. You can use this to map the territory of your organisation.

Mapping influence vs interest

Influence vs interest matrix

Influence

High

Interest

Low   High

Low

To undertake a key player analysis (Copeman et al, 2004), it is helpful to work with a group of people from your organisation (see the **direction guide** for some of the stakeholders you might involve).

Mapping the territory

Mapping the territory involves identifying the areas where you overlap and the areas where you are distinctly different from others. You can do this by firstly listing all the key players and considering their services, their beneficiaries, their values and approach. You should include your own organisation in this listing. You can then draw some comparisons between what you and others do.

The table on p.5 is a framework for this.

Framework for mapping territory

	Their services	Their beneficiaries	Their values and approach	Similarities and difference with us
Other players				

	Our services	Our beneficiaries	Our values and approach	How are we similar to other players and how are we different
Us				

You can map territory on a graph choosing two key aspects of service for the axes and mapping other players accordingly (see below).

The example below shows how two charities working in the field of information and support for carers might overlap in terms of providing advice and information for local carers. However, the mapping also shows that they are distinctly different, one providing a national service and the other providing emotional support.

Example of using a graph to map territory
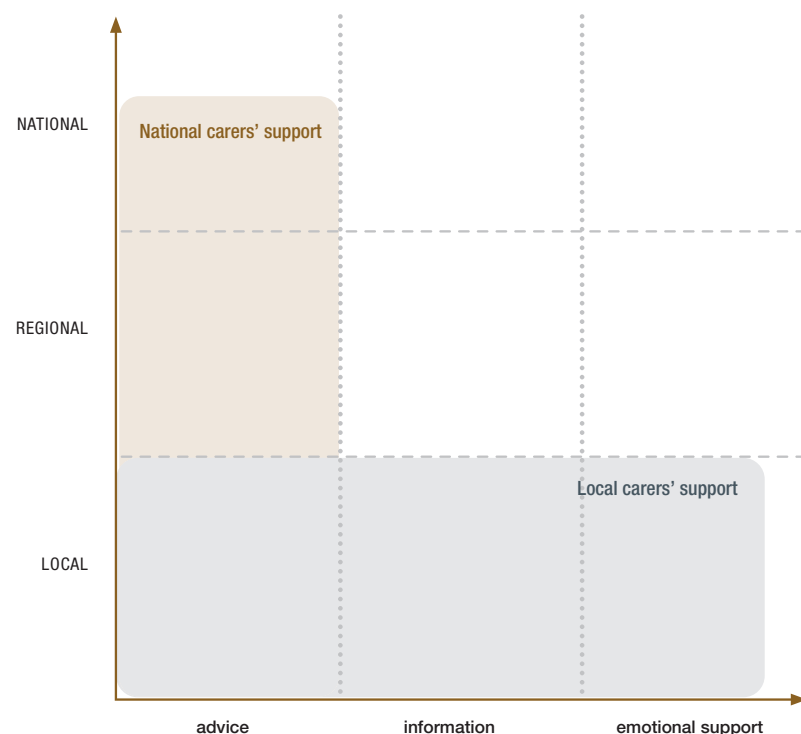
Compete, collaborate or complement?

As you map what you and others do, you may find overlaps in terms of the services you both provide and you will need to decide how to manage this.

In deciding how to manage overlaps consider:
- Which approach will best achieve your mission?
- Which approach will make best use of resources?
- Which approach will have the greatest impact for your beneficiaries?

Compete

If you believe you provide a better service than others, you may decide to directly compete with them for resources, beneficiaries and support. If you pursue this approach, be clear about what it is that you provide which is unique and distinctive and how this benefits your service users.

Collaborate

You may believe that you can provide the best service by working together with other groups or organisations, for example by holding joint public events, sharing administrative support, collaborating on a campaign or sharing staff training. Before entering into a collaboration, agree the role of the individual organisations. This might include who will be responsible for paying any bills resulting from the collaboration, who will be the key point of contact for enquiries and how any rewards resulting from the arrangement will be distributed.

There is a range of guidance on collaborative working available from NCVO's Collaborative Working Unit.
See www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/collaborativeworking

Complement

Alternatively, you may decide that developing different but complementary approaches might be appropriate. For example, in the field of homelessness, Centrepoint provides accommodation-based services for homeless young people, whilst Shelter provides advice, support and campaigns on housing issues but does not provide accommodation. Both organisations are working in the same field of homelessness, but offering complementary services.

How to develop informal networks

Informal networks are important for keeping abreast of developments in your area of work. Invest time in making contact with key players in your field.

Developing your network

1. Invite feedback on your services

☐ Feedback from key players on how well you are doing is always useful. Use interviews, questionnaires or telephone discussions to make contact and find out how others perceive your services and where you might learn from what they are doing.

2. Set up visits

☐ Invite key players to visit your organisation to meet staff and volunteers and to see how you operate. Consider holding an 'open session' where people can informally drop in and talk to staff and see how your service works.

3. Attend relevant conferences and seminars

☐ Keep an eye out for relevant events. If possible obtain a guest list in advance and identify two or three people with whom to make contact. Enjoy the food and discussion but stay focused on your purpose.

4. Join networking groups

☐ There are many relevant networking groups for the voluntary sector; they may focus on a region (e.g. County Durham), specific area of interest (e.g. homelessness) or function (e.g. finance). See signposts on p.10 for more information.

5. Subscribe to trade press

☐ Read the magazines and newsletters which are relevant to your work and get involved by writing letters or contributing articles on issues you feel passionate about.

6. Set up an umbrella group or network

☐ If, having developed relationships with key players, you find you do want to maintain the links, consider setting up your own umbrella group or network.

Providing evidence of your achievements

As you develop your understanding of the key players and build networks, keep records of discussions and any agreements or e-mails. Develop a database with up-to-date information on other organisations. This will be particularly important if staff, volunteers and trustees change and you need to induct new people. It will also be important if you are applying or looking to use PQASSO or other quality assurance systems.

Signposts

Publications

Adirondack S (2006) *Just about managing* (London: LVSC)

Copeman C, Bruce I, Forrest A, Lesirge R, Palmer P, Patel A (2004) *Tools for tomorrow* (London: Cass Business School/NCVO)

Websites

Volresource. This website includes free briefings, guidance and information on all aspects of charity management: www.volresource.org.uk

The Collaborative Working Unit at NCVO has very useful guidance on collaborative working: www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/collaborativeworkingunit

Courses and networks

The Centre for Charity Effectiveness run training in many aspects of management including networking: www.cass.city.ac.uk/cce/courses/shortcourses

Local CVSs often provide sound short courses on different aspects of running an organisation. Your local CVS may also know about local networks. To find your local CVS go to: www.navca.org.uk

There is a variety of voluntary sector networks; NCVO facilitate a wide range which is listed at: www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/index.asp?id=1102&terms=networks

Links to PQASSO

PQASSO is the practical quality assurance system for small organisations designed by Charities Evaluation Services. Independent data suggest PQASSO is by far the most widely-used quality system in the voluntary and community sector (VCS). For more information, see www.ces-vol.org.uk

Following this guide will take you to the first stage of PQASSO; helping you to meet several of the requirements of PQASSO area 10 (Networking and partnership) in the second edition, and PQASSO area 10 (Working with others) in the third edition of the standard.

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