
1. Background

1.1 A new focus for central-local government work and relationships

There are now many good examples of successful collaboration between local and central government agencies throughout the country. A progressive strengthening of relationships over the last decade has led to many new kinds of interagency work. For example, new shared work programmes and projects, new communications processes, development of best practice guidelines, joint planning processes and new protocols for sharing information, research and data.

The Local Government Act 2002 outlines a new vision and approach for local government. Promoting social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of communities are now key roles for local government. So is the task of working with a range of local stakeholders and communities to identify community outcomes for each locality. This legislation has become a catalyst for “joined up” thinking and action between local government, central government and communities.

Processes to identify Community Outcomes have now taken place in varying forms across the country. In some areas, participation by central government agencies has been strong, with some local and central agencies co-funding community engagement and planning processes. In other areas there has been less involvement of central government in local outcome setting.

Now that community outcomes have been identified for each local authority area, the next opportunity is finding new ways to join up, or partner, to achieve the visions set by local communities. As a result, multi-agency partnering agreements will become even more common and it is likely there will be more bilateral agreements between councils and government departments.

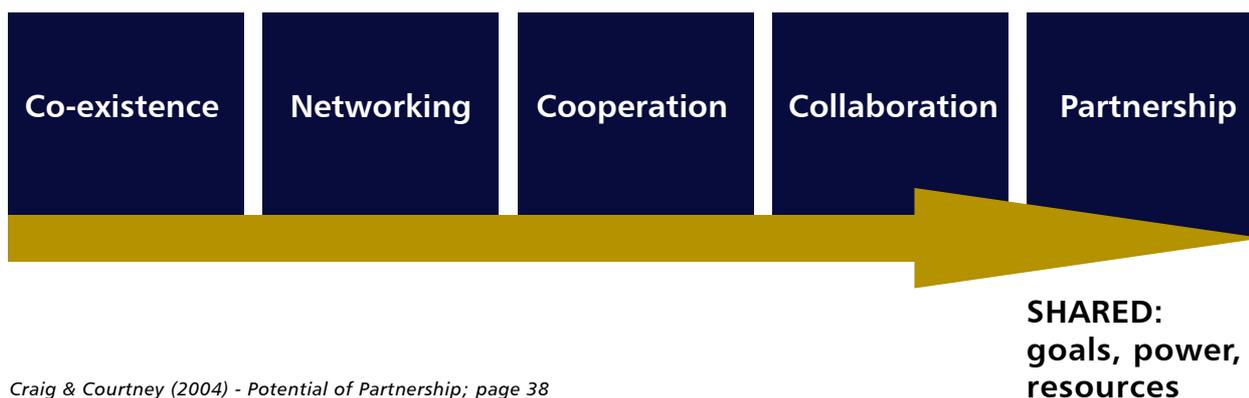
1.2 About partnering

Over the last few years, interagency partnering approaches have become increasingly common in Aotearoa/New Zealand eg: Family Start, Healthy Housing, Auckland Sustainable Cities Programme.

Partnering is best thought of as working across a broad spectrum of arrangements. Increasing levels of interaction and commitment are required the further along the continuum you are ¹ (see below). The partnership box in the diagram isn't nirvana. You can work in more than one continuum box at a time and aspire or move to a different box over time. What matters is knowing where you are on the continuum and what kind of working relationship best suits your purpose for coming together. It's also important to understand that working in a partnering way takes more time, requires more resourcing, is more complex and has a greater element of risk.

¹ For a description of key elements in each box of the partnering continuum, see appendix 1.

Partnering continuum



Craig & Courtney (2004) - Potential of Partnership; page 38

With the rise of collaborative working, there is an increasing acknowledgement that new kinds of agreements are needed. These agreements need to better reflect partnering intents, shared outcomes and visions and more relational and negotiated ways of working. Traditional top down contracts, in which one agency, working to a legal/risk based model, specifies outputs, allocates funds, stands back and later judges if standards and performance criteria have been met or not – do not sit easily in this new “partnering” world. More relational, or people based agreement frameworks, are required to support new collaborative arrangements² emerging around the country.

1.3 Gains from working in a partnering way

There are many tangible benefits from local and central agencies partnering together. Many of the issues facing local communities are complex, inter-related and unlikely to be solved by either central or local government working alone. This was also a key conclusion from the State Services Commission’s Review of the Centre which found that: “greater collaboration among government agencies and better integrated service delivery was an essential way to address complex social problems and achieve better outcomes for citizens”³. The same will be true for achieving community outcomes.

Other practical gains from local and central government partnering include⁴:

- sharing of information and knowledge⁵
- sharing resources at political, strategic, technical and operational levels
- increased organisational capacity through working closely with other organisations eg. knowledge transfer understood in terms of others’ processes, thinking, systems, planning, history, ways of working etc.
- alignment of planning processes between central and local government agencies, which can identify areas of common interest or potential joint projects
- tailoring services to local needs and more coordinated delivery of services
- cost sharing of projects and processes

² Note this paper does not attempt to review existing government policy audit/accountability/legislative frameworks in terms of technical constraints to developing/implementing more relationally based agreements. Some discussion on this will likely be included as part of the evaluation process for the Managing for Outcomes pilot project.

³ Quoted in “Mosaics – Key Findings and Good Practice Guide for Regional Coordination and Service Delivery”; Ministry of Social Development 2003; page 2

⁴ Includes examples from : The Cooperate Report www.childrenscentre.org.uk

⁵ While the Privacy Act does mean there are limits to some kinds of data that can be safely and legally shared, there are still large amounts of information that can be safely shared for mutual gain.

- developing new indicators, performance measures, and processes for monitoring local wellbeing outcomes
- added credibility, mana and profile of government agencies within communities
- access to additional networks, connections and funding
- speeding up the policy feedback loop ie: the implications of government policy in terms of impacts and outcomes at the local level.

1.4 Paper and people – key ingredients for partnership working

Underpinning all successful partnering arrangements are the actual relationships between people. Partnering is about people and how they work – their people skills, their enthusiasm, and their ability to harness energy, resources and action from others is what really makes the critical difference. The principles of trust, respect, and honest and open communication are recognised as “must haves” for effective partnering. One of the risks, however, to this type of relationship building is staff turnover.

Equally important is having written documentation to cement the foundations for what is to be done together and how. Although a written agreement is not an end in itself, it acts as a constant reminder about shared vision and goals, and lays out tasks and processes to keep the partners focused and on track.