

---

## 2. *Why put pen to paper, and what difference does it make?*

The process of writing things down allows participating agencies to come to a shared understanding of some or all of the following:

- why you're working together and what you hope to achieve both now and into the future
- what's been agreed to date
- what will happen next -visions, actions etc.
- how you will work -principles/values, roles/responsibilities, governance processes, structures, communications etc.
- how things will be funded -financial and non financial resources
- how/when you will know if you're succeeding -performance monitoring, review
- what will happen if problems arise?

The agreement lays the foundation for the partnering experience that follows. Where relationships between people or organisations don't already exist, the process of drafting the agreement is even more critical. The agreement becomes a platform around which people can get to know each other, establish relationships, find out how each agency or organisation works, and what it believes in, and what it's trying to do. Similarly an agreement can become a broad framework for relational monitoring ie. are partners living by the principles inherent within the agreement?

An agreement is also useful in the context of constant change within central and local government. Two of the greatest risks to partnering are staff turnover and political change. The latter is something that officials have no control over. Given that local and central government elections happen in different years, policy, strategic priorities and funding can potentially change at any time. This is a source of great frustration to community partners especially as they expect continuity in approaches once relationships have been formed.

However, staff turnover is something that officials can mitigate against. The reality is that representatives at the partnering table will change over time. Having a written agreement increases the chances of all representatives, both current and future, continuing to work in certain ways to achieve certain things. In effect a partnering agreement is a tool that:

- commits people and organisations in terms of participation, process and actions
- commits resourcing and support, either on a fixed term or ongoing basis (often subject to performance).

Many involved in partnering have emphasised the importance of the written document when things get tricky. Partnering does involve risk and things frequently can and do go wrong. Many people have commented that in times of trouble, going back to the vision and spirit of the original document has been critical, reminding people of the higher level purposes that brought them and their organisations together.

Completing a partnering agreement is also something that can be celebrated. Often it marks the first step along the journey. Although the document itself may be small, the fact of its completion is often monumental. While it may appear that some agreements may be nothing more than symbolic, they can have a major catalytic and empowering impact, becoming a key tool from which further joint action can be leveraged.

The signing of agreements which involve heads of organisations is also useful. Not only does this enable leaders to demonstrate their support of, or add their blessing or mana to partnerships, but it can also help build high level ownership and create fantastic opportunities to showcase new ways of working. Photo opportunities from signings attract media profile and attention and provide a vehicle for communicating to other agencies or community stakeholders that something new and important is or about to happen. This process can also act as an incentive for other organisations to get involved or to replicate a partnering process or idea that has been progressed elsewhere.

The process of putting pen to paper and writing things down also enables the many different types of partnering arrangements and experiences around the country to be more easily shared with others on an ongoing basis. This way we will learn more quickly from each other and be more able to promote and share local “Kiwi” best practice.