



Self-Assessment Tool

Are you ready to collaborate?

high

trees



How to use this tool

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**Know yourself,
your organisation
and your
priorities**

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- High Trees Partner

This tool is designed to support any voluntary and community sector organisation thinking of entering a new partnership. It is designed to be used internally for organisations to reflect on their readiness and approach to collaboration and provides an opportunity to think about whether collaborative working is right for your organisation at this time.

Part One assesses three areas of organisational competency and capacity. For each area, there are three possible levels. Choose the statement that best represents the current position of your organisation. Add notes to say how you came to that conclusion.

Part Two enables a reflection of your current attitudes towards partnership. For each area, there are two options. Choose the statement that best represents your current attitude towards partnership. Add notes to say how you came to that conclusion.

Part Three provides a space for your organisation to write specific actions, based on your reflections using the self-assessment tool.

Who should complete this self-assessment?

This assessment should be completed by staff who have good strategic oversight of your organisation, for example a senior leader or senior leadership team.



Part One:
Competencies & Capacity

A: Current organisation structure and processes – is your organisation at the right stage to enter a partnership?

Vision & mission



Why this matters for strong partnerships

It is important that you are already clear about the vision and mission for your organisation before you enter a partnership. It should be possible to identify how working in partnership will enhance your existing work and contribute towards your overall vision for change.

The Charity Commission states that 'Trustees should be able to show that the collaboration furthers their charity's objects. Legally, if the charities can justify the collaboration as furthering their own objects, there is scope for collaborative working'¹

Level One	Level Two	Level Three	How we came to this judgement (organisational notes)
<input type="checkbox"/> We do not have a clear mission and vision for our organisation or our delivery does not really reflect our mission and vision.	<input type="checkbox"/> We have a clear mission and vision, but it might need updating/ revising.	<input type="checkbox"/> The vision and mission for our organisation is up to date and in line with our current delivery.	

What action can we take to strengthen our position in this area?

If your organisational mission and values are not clear, or out of date, we recommend that trustees and senior leaders meet to discuss:

- The change that you want to see as a result of your organisation's work and develop a corresponding vision statement.
- How your organisation will achieve that change and develop a corresponding mission statement.

¹Collaborative working and mergers: an introduction, Charity Commission

A: Current organisation structure and processes – is your organisation at the right stage to enter a partnership?

Clear business / organisational strategy



Why this matters for strong partnerships

It is important that you understand how any partnership fits into your existing organisational strategy and the change you are trying to achieve as an organisation. The internal rationale for your organisation being part of the partnership should be clear.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three	How we came to this judgement (organisational notes)
<input type="checkbox"/> Unclear business model or organisational strategy / no strategy in place.	<input type="checkbox"/> Out-of-date organisational strategy or business model that needs updating.	<input type="checkbox"/> Clear, up-to-date organisational strategy in place. Clear business model in place. Partnership funding is a clear fit with organisational strategy.	

What action can we take to strengthen our position in this area?

If you have no strategy in place or an old strategy that needs updating, a balanced scorecard exercise can be a good place to start. This workshop activity enables discussion on your business model, the financial and social return you wish to see in the next few years and how your organisation needs to develop to accommodate any growth.

- **How to create a business strategy activity**

A: Current organisation structure and processes – is your organisation at the right stage to enter a partnership?

Current organisational funding



Why this matters for strong partnerships

Whilst partnerships can be an important source of new funding for your organisation, you should consider your existing funding situation and the extent to which your organisation could be a financial risk to the other organisations in the partnership. If your funding situation is insecure, you may struggle to deliver on your partnership commitments.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three	How we came to this judgement (organisational notes)
<input type="checkbox"/> Funding for existing services is very insecure. Month to month we are not sure if we will have enough funding to deliver our existing services. We rely heavily on one- or two-income strands.	<input type="checkbox"/> Some funding is secure, and we have several different income strands.	<input type="checkbox"/> Funding for existing services is secure and we have multiple income strands. We have good organisational reserves.	

What action can we take to strengthen our position in this area?

If your financial situation is currently very insecure, this may not be the best time for you to enter a new partnership. You should review your existing income strands and explore the possibility of developing new sources of income/ diversifying your income portfolio.

You could also review your reserves policy to ensure that you are building sufficient reserves.

A: Current organisation structure and processes – is your organisation at the right stage to enter a partnership?

Financial processes and controls in place



Why this matters for strong partnerships

Entering a partnership can have several implications for your organisation's finances and it is important to consider whether you can take on the financial risk of entering a new partnership. You also need to consider if you will meet the due diligence requirements that may be required by partners and funders and whether you will be able to track and report accurately on your expenditure. If you do not have robust financial processes and processes in place, your organisation may pose a financial risk to the other organisations in the partnership.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three	How we came to this judgement (organisational notes)
<input type="checkbox"/> No financial processes or checks and balances in place.	<input type="checkbox"/> Some processes are in place, but work is needed.	<input type="checkbox"/> Robust financial processes and controls are in place. We would easily meet the standards required by due diligence checks and can report accurately on our spending as needed.	

What action can we take to strengthen our position in this area?

If you do not currently have robust financial processes in place, you may wish to review these before entering a new partnership. Guidance is available from numerous sources such as:

- **Internal financial control for charities**
- **Managing charity finances**

A: Current organisation structure and processes – is your organisation at the right stage to enter a partnership?

Governance



Why this matters for strong partnerships

To meet the due diligence expectations of a partnership, you may need to provide:

- Evidence of value and expiry date of relevant insurance and indemnity cover.
- Evidence of your organisation's legal status.
- Evidence of charitable status (if applicable).
- Evidence that all reporting is up to date and that the appropriate paperwork has been filed with Companies House and/or The Charity Commission.

You may also need to confirm that your organisation is compliant with the law and regulations and that an effective leadership team is in place.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three	How we came to this judgement (organisational notes)
<input type="checkbox"/> Informal governance/ no clear decision- making structures/ terms of reference. Not constituted.	<input type="checkbox"/> Constituted organisation. Governance procedures in place but in need of reviewing/updating.	<input type="checkbox"/> Constituted organisation. Robust governance procedures. Regular trustee/director meetings to review financial information and service performance. Clear roles and responsibilities around leadership. Compliant with the law and current regulations.	

What action can we take to strengthen our position in this area?

Recommended practice for good governance is available in the **Charity Governance Code**.

A: Current organisation structure and processes – is your organisation at the right stage to enter a partnership?

Key policies and procedures in place



Why this matters for strong partnerships

Policies are essential for good practice and delivering services to an appropriate standard. It is important to consider whether your organisation will be able to meet the due diligence standards of the partnership and potential funders. Key policies include:

- Health and Safety policy.
- Safeguarding policy for children and young people and/or vulnerable adults.
- Privacy Policy incl. Data Protection and GDPR.
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.
- Risk Management.
- Finance – including a financial procedures manual and a reserves policy.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three	How we came to this judgement (organisational notes)
<input type="checkbox"/> No policies in place.	<input type="checkbox"/> Some policies are in place but not all/ some policies in need of updating. Procedures outlined in policies are not fully implemented.	<input type="checkbox"/> All key policies in place and up to date (reviewed on a regular basis). Procedures outlined in each policy are all fully implemented and embedded in day-to-day delivery (for example for Safeguarding: DBS checks are all up to date, regular training is in place, all staff and all volunteers are clear on the reporting process if a safeguarding concern is raised).	

What action can we take to strengthen our position in this area?

If you do not currently have these policies in place, you may wish to conduct a policy review and to develop policies in line with best practice. Once developed, policies should be reviewed once a year.

- **NCVO guidance on charity policies**

A: Current organisation structure and processes – is your organisation at the right stage to enter a partnership?

HR policies and procedures



Why this matters for strong partnerships

If you employ staff, you will need to ensure you are compliant with employment law. You will need to have policies and procedures in place around:

- Employment Terms and Conditions.
- Annual leave/ Medical Leave.
- Sickness.
- Maternity, Paternity & Adoption Leave.
- Parental Leave.
- Payroll, Income Tax and National Insurance.
- Pensions.

- Safeguarding and Disclosure and Barring Certificate(s).
- Staff Training.
- Health and Safety of employees.
- Disciplinarys, Grievance and Complaints.
- Data Protection/ GDPR and ownership of information.
- Discrimination and Harassment.
- Whistleblowers.

This list is not exhaustive and we recommend you consider and research what additional policies you may need.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three	How we came to this judgement (organisational notes)
<input type="checkbox"/> No policies in place.	<input type="checkbox"/> Some HR policies are in place but not all/ some policies in need of updating. Procedures outlined in policies are not fully implemented.	<input type="checkbox"/> We have robust processes in place for recruiting and managing staff. Procedures outlined in each policy are all fully implemented and embedded in day-to-day delivery.	

What action can we take to strengthen our position in this area?

Further guidance is available from:

- **Government guidance on how to employ paid workers**
- **Practical guidance from NCVO on employment practices**
- **ACAS - advice on workplace rights, rules and best practice**
- **HSE – information about Health and Safety at work**

B: Understanding your impact and how you meet community needs

Clarity over existing service offer and beneficiaries



Why this matters for strong partnerships

Organisations need to understand their current service offer and who they currently work with before entering a partnership. Understanding who your existing beneficiaries are will make it easier to assess the additional benefit you may be able to have through partnership working and will mean that you are able to articulate your 'offer' to the partnership, and the value you would bring.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three	How we came to this judgement (organisational notes)
<input type="checkbox"/> We are not clear about who our beneficiaries are, and we do not collect any demographic data.	<input type="checkbox"/> We have some idea of our beneficiaries (we collect basic demographic data) but data collection could be improved (there are considerable gaps in data collection or data has not been analysed).	<input type="checkbox"/> We can clearly state who our beneficiaries are and how our services meet their needs. We regularly review detailed demographic details about our service users to understand who we are and are not reaching.	

What action can we take to strengthen our position in this area?

If you do not currently have a good idea of your targets audience and the individuals you are reaching through your services and activities, you may wish to undertake a review of the demographic data you collect across your organisation.

B: Understanding your impact and how you meet community needs

Understanding of community need



Why this matters for strong partnerships

Understanding community need is essential to be able to assess whether partnership working is needed. It is only by regularly reviewing the needs of people and communities that you will be able to understand what action your organisation needs to take, and whether that could be enhanced by collaborative working.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three	How we came to this judgement (organisational notes)
<input type="checkbox"/> We do not have any understanding of community need. We do not currently consult with community members or beneficiaries to establish need.	<input type="checkbox"/> We have some understanding of community need but could know more. We are not clear on the gaps in provision and where we do not currently meet community need.	<input type="checkbox"/> We have a very good understanding of how our service offer meets community needs and where there are gaps. We regularly consult with local community members and review our services.	

What action can we take to strengthen our position in this area?

If you currently have very little understanding of the need in your community, you can improve this by undertaking a community mapping exercise or needs analysis. You may wish to structure this around themes such as health, education, employment etc.

Mapping community need can include data from a variety of sources such as:

- People's own views of their lives and what they need (collected through surveys, focus groups or creative methods).
- Statistical information - this could be sourced from: the local authority e.g. **Lambeth** or **Southwark**, **The London Data Store**, **Office for National Statistics**, **Trust for London**.
- The knowledge of other local organisations.

Undertaking regular consultations with community members to understand local priorities and areas of unmet need and building mechanisms for service user voice within your organisation will enable you to assess need on an ongoing basis.

B: Understanding your impact and how you meet community needs

Understanding of current impact and gaps



Why this matters for strong partnerships

Understanding your current impact and where there are gaps is important for you to be able to articulate how working in partnership can better meet the needs of your charity and beneficiaries, and whether collaborative working will further your charitable purposes.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three	How we came to this judgement (organisational notes)
<input type="checkbox"/> We currently collect minimal impact data and do not have a clear and robust understanding of the change we facilitate for those we work with (e.g., impact is mainly collected through anecdotal evidence/ case studies).	<input type="checkbox"/> We measure outputs and outcomes of projects and have some understanding of the change we create for those we work with.	<input type="checkbox"/> We have a robust impact management framework in place. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A theory of change of how our activity should lead to positive change for those we work with. • Details of the specific outcomes and outputs we are working towards and targets where appropriate. • Robust and appropriate data collection methods. We understand who we reach in the community and what change we facilitate for them. We understand where there are gaps in our impact.	

What action can we take to strengthen our position in this area?

To strengthen your work in this area, you may wish to:

- Develop a theory of change to map the change you want to see and how your service activities seek to achieve that change.
- Develop indicators to measure change.
- Review outcomes against service objective to assess whether positive change is being achieved and who it is being achieved for.

C: Leadership and Staff capacity to support collaborative working

Capacity of leaders



Why this matters for strong partnerships

Leadership buy-in is essential for partnerships to thrive and to become established within each partner organisation. A lack of leadership time can lead to partnership failure.

The leadership team needs to consider internally who will be responsible for the partnership and attend meetings, lead on reporting etc. They also need to consider whether they can commit for the life of the partnership.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three	How we came to this judgement (organisational notes)
<input type="checkbox"/> No capacity to engage with partnership activities (already struggling with existing workload).	<input type="checkbox"/> Limited/ some capacity to engage.	<input type="checkbox"/> Good capacity to engage if well-structured and planned.	

What action can we take to strengthen our position in this area?

If leaders do not have capacity, consider whether this is the right time for your organisation to enter a new partnership. Clarify the time commitment that would be needed with partners. Examine the potential benefit to the organisation that could be gained from being part of the partnership and whether this warrants a re-organisation of organisational priorities (with less time being spent on other activities to allow attention to be given to partnership activities).

Whilst every partnership is different, in the early stages of the Building Young Brixton partnership, leaders from each partnership organisation typically gave 4 days a month to enable the partnership to get off the ground. For the lead partner, the commitment was around 2 days a week in the early days of the partnership.

C: Leadership and Staff capacity to support collaborative working

Trustee support



Why this matters for strong partnerships

Charity trustees have a legal obligation to ensure that their charity is carrying out its purposes for public benefit and that charity resources are managed responsibly. As such, it is important that trustees are in support of their charity's involvement in partnership working as this could potentially have a direct impact on how resources within the charity are used and how its activities achieve public benefit.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three	How we came to this judgement (organisational notes)
<input data-bbox="91 651 136 699" type="checkbox"/> Trustees are not supportive of partnership working or unaware of potential partnerships.	<input data-bbox="443 651 488 699" type="checkbox"/> Trustees have some questions/ doubts but are potentially supportive.	<input data-bbox="795 651 840 699" type="checkbox"/> Trustees are supportive of partnership working.	

What action can we take to strengthen our position in this area?

The leadership team should meet with trustees to understand any doubts or concerns and to discuss any plans to enter new partnerships. Developing new partnerships or collaborative arrangements should be in line with the overall strategic plan for the organisation.

C: Leadership and Staff capacity to support collaborative working

Capacity of managers



Why this matters for strong partnerships

Managers play an essential role in linking the strategic vision of the partnership with on-the-ground delivery. If they do not have capacity to engage with partnership activity, this could have a considerable impact on the success of the partnership and programme delivery.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three	How we came to this judgement (organisational notes)
<input type="checkbox"/> All managers are already at full capacity and would struggle to engage in any partnership activity.	<input type="checkbox"/> Some managers have capacity, others at full capacity.	<input type="checkbox"/> All managers have some capacity to engage with the partnership or capacity could be created.	

What action can we take to strengthen our position in this area?

If manager capacity is limited, it is worth considering whether a strategic partnership would be more appropriate. This could focus on sharing knowledge and practice between leadership teams, rather than joint delivery of activities or services.

It is also worth considering how organisational priorities could be re-organised to increase managerial capacity or whether additional staffing would need to be brought in at a managerial level to support the work of the partnership.

Whilst every partnership is different, managers at High Trees have typically given 3 days a month of their time to support the work of the Place for All Partnership. This has included attending Manager and Practitioner meetings, designing and delivering partnership activities and time spent on reporting.

C: Leadership and Staff capacity to support collaborative working

Capacity of delivery staff



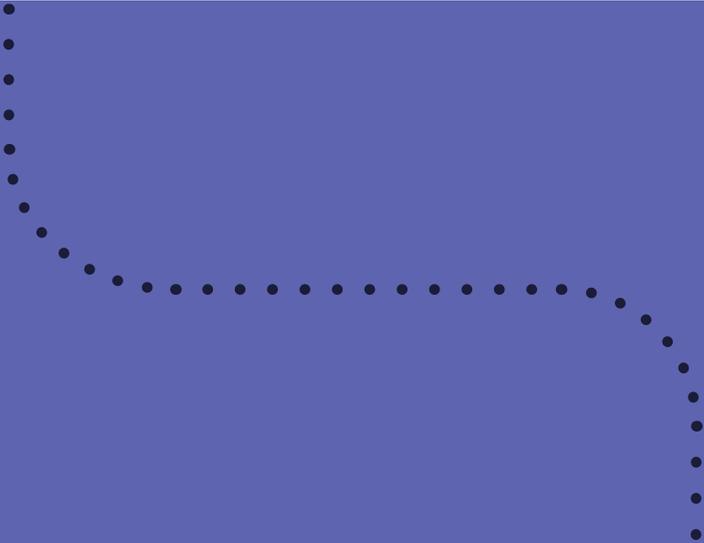
Why this matters for strong partnerships

Delivery staff may need to spend time on a variety of activities as a result of partnership activities. It is important to consider whether the existing staff team will be able to absorb this or whether additional staff members will be needed. Staff time could be spent on joint events and training, delivery of services, attending share and learn events and making referrals to partner organisations.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three	How we came to this judgement (organisational notes)
<input type="checkbox"/> Staff are already very stretched and struggle to deliver existing services or high level of staff vacancies.	<input type="checkbox"/> Delivery staff have some limited capacity to engage with partnership activity.	<input type="checkbox"/> Delivery staff have the capacity to engage if well-structured and planned well in advance, or additional capacity could be created.	

What action can we take to strengthen our position in this area?

If there is no existing staff capacity, consider what additional staffing could be needed and the funding implications. If there is no desire to expand the staff team, consider whether a strategic partnership would be more appropriate, with less involvement from delivery staff.



Part Two:
Attitudes and Values



	Why this matters for strong partnerships	Emerging	In place	How we came to this judgement (organisational notes)
Openness	For partnership to be successful, organisations must be open to sharing resources, service users, examples of best practice and common challenges.	<input type="checkbox"/> We have some concerns about sharing our resources and losing service users to partners.	<input type="checkbox"/> We are willing to share funding, resources and practice, open to different ways of doing things and prepared to try something new (and possibly fail).	
Collaboration	Effective partnership working requires a recognition that community members may require support and services beyond those which your organisation can provide. If you are not willing to refer individuals to different organisations or promote the services of other organisations, this may undermine the work of the partnership.	<input type="checkbox"/> We prefer to meet all the needs of our service users ourselves.	<input type="checkbox"/> We recognise areas of unmet need in our community. We appreciate that we can't meet all the needs of our service users and are happy to refer users so that they receive the support they need.	
Trust	Strong collaborations are underpinned by trust. This requires individual partners to be open about aspects of their work and where they may be facing current challenges. A lack of openness can lead to tensions, and potentially partnership breakdown.	<input type="checkbox"/> We have concerns about sharing our current practice with other organisations or any areas in which we are experiencing challenges.	<input type="checkbox"/> We are willing to be open and honest about current practice and challenges.	



	Why this matters for strong partnerships	Emerging	In place	How we came to this judgement (organisational notes)
Respect	Partnerships often bring organisations together which have different working practices and diverse organisational cultures. Being open to this difference and respecting the strengths and weaknesses of different organisations is an important element of partnership working.	<input type="checkbox"/> We have concerns about working with organisations who work differently to ourselves.	<input type="checkbox"/> We are open to the needs and practices of other organisations and understand that this might require us to work differently.	
Responsibility	Working in partnership is likely to bring additional responsibility for delivering on shared objectives. Responsibility needs to be shared by partners to avoid and unequal and unfair burden on others.	<input type="checkbox"/> We do not wish to take on any additional responsibility.	<input type="checkbox"/> We are happy to take on the shared responsibility of the partnership and shared delivery.	
Comfortable reporting to a lead partner (if applicable) 	Partnerships often involve regular reporting to a lead partner on aspects of your delivery and finances. You may also have to provide organisational information for due diligence purposes.	<input type="checkbox"/> We have concerns about reporting to a lead partner and responding to their requests for information and reporting data.	<input type="checkbox"/> We would be comfortable reporting to a lead partner if required.	

Part Three:
Next Steps





What actions will you take to respond to the development areas you have identified?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.



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