
“Strengthening Communities through Local Partnerships” Research Project

Key Messages for Central Government

October 2005



Background to the Research Project

The FoRST funded Strengthening Communities through Local Partnerships Research Project ran from 2002-4 and focused on the range, scope and effectiveness of local social sector partnerships between central government and other bodies such as local government, iwi/Maori organisations and community/voluntary sector groups.

Partnering and collaboration are key components of Government's social development approach, as expressed in "Opportunity for All New Zealanders" which emphasises:

- achieving and sustaining improved wellbeing outcomes for all New Zealanders
- reducing disadvantage and promoting equality of opportunity
- inter-sectoral approaches and 'joined up' strategies and interventions across government
- more community involvement in policy, planning and services
- more alignment between central government, local authorities, the private sector, community and voluntary sector and iwi and other Maori authorities.

A coordinated and interagency partnership approach is also reflected in the new State Sector Development Goals, especially:

- Goal 4: Coordinated State Agencies
- Goal 5: Accessible State Services

At a sector level, collaborative approaches are also now prominent in many national and regional strategies eg. national health and disability strategies, Healthy Housing, and Let's Beat Diabetes etc

PARTNERSHIP PHASE 1: 1996-2005

Reflections on Government Partnering Performance to Date and What Needs to Happen Next

Both social development and collaboration approaches have been welcomed across the broader health and social sectors in Aotearoa/New Zealand. This "first phase" of partnership working has brought success at a number of levels. Key changes to central government working noted to date include:

- increased central government visibility and engagement at local/regional levels
- more resourcing for collaborative initiatives and examples of joint funding
- significant positive changes to government culture and ways of working
- increased community identity and experimentation with more bottom up empowerment and locally based projects
- real gains, especially in employment related partnering
- changes to the Public Finance Act

From the LPG research, it is clear that considerable gains have been made over the last 10 years and we support the ongoing implementation of partnering approaches across government. People still believe partnering can make a difference. However it's also clear there's a long way to go if partnerships are to make substantive differences to wellbeing and other outcomes. In order to consolidate initial gains, it is important to reflect on learnings from this first phase of partnership working and make some fundamental

changes as we move into Partnership: PHASE 2. Some current identified barriers to central government collaboration identified through our research include:

- ongoing emphasis on departmental goals (and processes/systems) rather than shared wellbeing outcomes and processes to support these
- aversion to risk and experimentation, fear of failure and political “bad news”
- rigid focus on old style accountability and reporting as the only means to minimise risk
- lack of statutory mandate and/or chief executive driven obligation to participate/engage locally
- uneven flexibility across agencies and middle level managers to act/make decisions/dedicate resources/participate at the local/regional level
- inadequate resourcing
- ongoing non-alignment of resources, functions and mandates within decentralization processes, including “unfunded mandates” being put onto local government via the community outcomes process and upcoming implementation of local “interagency” action plans.

Overall there have been some social development gains from a partnering approach, but fewer than might have been expected in key wellbeing related areas, including mental health, health, children and young people, child poverty, localised deprivation etc.

PARTNERSHIP PHASE 2: 2005 on.....

Making Partnership Working More Efficient and Sustainable

What follows below are a range of ideas generated from the “Strengthening Communities through Local Partnerships Research Project” that we believe will enhance the ongoing implementation of Government’s social development goals and enhance the effectiveness of collaborative initiatives and effort already underway. We look forward to ongoing national dialogue on the suggested mechanisms, processes and funding ideas below which we believe will enhance partnering practices, both centrally and locally, and contribute to increased social wellbeing outcomes for all.

1.0 Building a More Enabling Framework

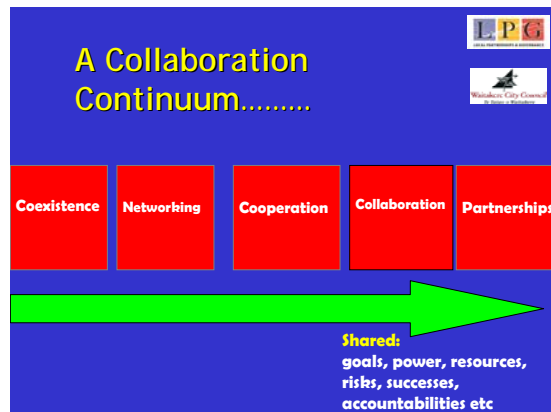
The LPG research points to further work that needs to be undertaken to strengthen the next phase of interagency working in New Zealand both now and into the future (eg. Opportunity for All New Zealanders 2, Mosaics 2, SCAF 2 etc).

Interagency work streams should be established, focusing on:

1.1 A Strategic Partnering Framework for Government including:

- Defining a **core set of government values/principles** for ways of partnership working eg. What are the learnings from the Sustainable Cities process that can be applied/reviewed more broadly across government/inform other intersector processes?
- Mechanisms to **strengthen imperatives** (and incentives!) for central government engagement and work programmes at the local level¹. As part of this, key areas where partnerships can develop, and where they will make a significant difference should be highlighted.
- Consideration of **different types of relationships** and when/how they should be used by Government (eg. use of the partnering continuum below). This will enable government agencies to be clearer about the types of relationships they enter into and their implications.

¹ Given the costs of wholesale central government engagement at the local level, a strategic/selective approach to partnering is recommended.



- Understanding the very real **conflict** between central government roles of **funder** and **partner** and taking steps to both acknowledge and minimise these tensions
- Understanding and promoting the use of **relational contracting** as opposed to traditional top-down service contracts.
- Understanding **Maori perspectives** on partnering and how these can:
 - be better funded and supported by government
 - better inform mainstream approaches to relationship building and collaboration

1.2 *A More Enabling Decentralisation and Devolution Framework, including:*

- Given the LGA 2002 and the many local “community outcomes processes” across the country, **what should be done at which level** ??? eg. which functions/processes are best delivered at the local, sub-regional, regional, and national level and what roles/responsibilities/resources etc these shifts would entail. **Note:** we are not advocating a comprehensive reallocation of everything – more an exploration of current possibilities and constraints so that these are able to be better and more proactively managed into the future.
- **Review current alignments of function, mandate and resources** which underpin current decentralisation activity and identify ways to enhance these and begin to create more devolved funding arrangements. It may be more manageable/ useful to review this at a sector level so that the learnings can be immediately applied – we would suggest priority sectors should be housing or child health.
- Identify ways to promote a **more coordinated and systematic approach to decentralisation** across government departments and government outcome areas. For example, consider realignment of boundaries and mandatory coordination of some budget and planning cycles in certain areas eg. LTCCP/DHB.

2. Enhancing Planning Alignments

As Part of SSC: Goal 4 – Coordinated State Agencies Work Programme, immediate priority should be given to:

- Including **commitments** to collaboration, partnering and developing strategic brokering within **Statements of Intent** between **all Cabinet Ministers and Departmental Chief Executives**, in Strategic/Business Plans of Departments, and in relevant staff job descriptions and performance reviews
- Providing **stronger incentives** and requirements to openly and publicly link strategic planning between agencies
- **Removing** current legislative **non-alignment** of strategic planning timeframes between DHBs and TLAs

3. Recognising the new “Strategic Brokerage” Function

Successful collaboration hinges upon a new kind of skillset - people who are strategic, passionate about people, creative, flexible and opportunity seeking by nature. They're also tactical **and** practical and astute at bringing people and organisations together to work in new and meaningful ways. We call them “strategic brokers” and they will become even more key in this next partnering phase. For Government, this means:

- Recognising and resourcing **‘strategic’ broker function** across Government and increasing skills/capacity in existing agency staff through mentoring/training programmes etc (dovetail into SSC: Goal 2 – Excellent State Services)
- Creating **“central government brokers”**: senior officials able to represent a number of departments at the local level and able to make decisions/harness resources for local action as required. For example: someone who is locally/sub-regionally focused and working on behalf of MSD, DIA, Education.

4. Increased Resourcing to Strengthen Results from Joined Up Action:

The reality is, funding for collaboration remains on the fringe and has yet to have a significant impact on core Vote Funding. This needs to change as we move into PHASE 2. Our suggestions for priority action include;

- Paralleling regional funding attached to the Growth and Innovation Framework, attached to “Opportunity for all New Zealanders”, create of a **national community outcomes fund** (\$3-5m p.a.) to resource a selected number of innovative collaborative health and social wellbeing projects that emanate from local/regional community outcomes processes.
- Prioritise implementation of processes and systems to better enable **joint funding, monitoring, reporting**, etc across government
- Increase **funding for community sector participation** in local collaborative initiatives eg. Social service agreements to include funding for networking/participation **as well as** provision of direct services.
- Incorporate into **baseline Vote: Funding**, coordination resourcing for **agreed strategic structures/forums** at local/regional levels
- Identify **collaboration costs into baseline funding** of core government agencies eg. staff time, discretionary project funding, cars/phones etc.

5. Addressing Social Inequalities and Local Wellbeing Outcomes through new “whole of government/community” pilots;

Combine international best practice and evidence base (eg. Sure Start UK) and national learnings from recent NZ place based coordination initiatives (eg. SCAF, Sustainable Communities, Family Start, Strengthening Families etc) to develop **new pilots** focused on **addressing local social inequalities and social development outcomes** (services, infrastructure, cohesion, participation, access, identity etc).

These new “joined up community and government” locality pilots should be focused in larger urban areas and work at the neighbourhood/suburb level aiming to;

- improve the type, availability and coordination of local social services and infrastructure
- involve local communities/consumers in services planning and decision making
- influence the basic determinants of wellbeing eg. income levels

- improve local social, economic, environmental and cultural sustainability outcomes

Such a project would:

- rely on high level of leadership and collaboration between a large range of government, council and community organisations – as well as the chosen “local community”
- potentially involve a fundamental realignment/redirection of resources at the local level
- need to build on existing services, networks, energy, local capacity and projects/programmes already underway
- actively integrate and promote sustainable social development and sustainable urban form

6. *Develop the National Evidence Base Around Partnership And Collaboration Including:*

It's important we continue to learn from the leaders and build our own local evidence base and “how to/why to” knowledge. This means more longer term funding for impact/outcome evaluation should be included in all new significant government social sector investment.

For More Information Please Contact:

Megan Courtney
836 8000 ext 8407
Megan.courtney@waitakere.govt.nz

David Craig
University of Auckland
8368000 ext 88657
da.craig@auckland.ac.nz

For other research project material view: www.lpg.org.nz