Building successful partnerships to promote physical activity among older people

Victorian
Active Ageing
Partnership

Background

Providers of physical activity programs for older people, together with researchers and evaluators in this area of practice, have highlighted the multiple benefits to be gained from the formation of partnerships between program deliverers and other organisations and groups supporting older people. These benefits extend across the continuum of partner relationships, including:

- Networking – to exchange and disseminate information about programs;
- Coordination – to expand the diversity and coverage of programs, and align advocacy efforts;
- Cooperation – sharing resources and expertise, such as leaders, venues, transport, venues;
- Collaboration – to offer new programs, with shared goals, resources, and mutual responsibilities.

Purpose and methods for developing this resource

The Victorian Active Ageing Partnership has developed this resource to offer guidance to providers of physical activity programs for older people about the steps that can be taken, and arrangements put in place, to create strong and effective partnerships with other organisations and groups. The methods used to gather the practice insights presented here were: a review of peer-reviewed and grey literature concerning the attributes of successful partnerships, particularly in the areas of physical activity, leisure and recreation, health promotion, and human services provision; consultation with 18 providers of different types to rate the importance of various success factors (e.g. community health, U3As, neighbourhood houses, sports), and; collection of partnership examples from a selection of program providers.

Attributes of successful partnerships

Success factors were identified in the areas of partnership *conditions and capacities*, *management*, *relationships* and *sustainability*, as shown below. Based on provider feedback these have been assigned ratings of importance as follows:

| ■ Critical | ■ Very high | ■ High | ☐ Moderate |

Conditions and capacities for partnership

Endorsement by managers	Activities supported by managers in partner organisations, with representatives able to make decisions in a timely way
Recognised need for partnership	Presence of clear need, and an understanding that organisations can achieve more together than they can individually
Mutual understanding	Mutual understanding between partners of their respective goals, policies, internal decision-making processes, skills and resources
Adequate resources	Includes human, financial, administrative and technological resources to enable joint work by partners
Partner skills and capacities	May include skills, time, energy, connections with the community and other services, and reputation
Compatible values between partners	Similar priorities in regard to health promotion and approaches to working with program participants
Supportive context for action	Partnership encouraged by government policy, opportunity to obtain resources, and/or receptive community environment
Diversity of partners	Partners bring different knowledge, skills, connections, and/or cultural competencies
Experience with priority groups	Track record in providing programs for the population sub-groups of interest
Previous collaboration	Established relationships and shared knowledge arising from previous relationship between partners

Management of partnership

Implementation plan	Plans for action which are clear, realistic, have timeframes and assigned responsibilities
Shared vision/goal/ objectives	Clear purpose that is shared, achievable, and relevant to the core business of each partner
Defined roles and responsibilities	Expectations concerning partner contributions are explicit and realistic
Monitoring and reporting progress	Implementation of agreed plans, and actions taken by partners, is recorded and fed back in a timely way
Memoranda of understanding	Written agreement that may include goals and objectives, roles and responsibilities, and operational processes for partnership
Evaluating impacts	Jointly agreed indicators of impact, methods for measuring these, and reporting achievements
Operational systems and structures	Support to enable communication, meetings, recording of decisions, and follow-up on agreed actions

Relationships between partners

Commitment and ownership	Efforts to be prepared, informed, engage in discussion, respect processes and decisions, and belief in value of partnership
Effective leadership	Convenor or facilitator who is knowledgeable, respected, enthusiastic, inclusive, fair, draws on partner capacities
Communication, information sharing	Clear, open and frequent communication between partners, with clear processes to enable this
Trusting and respectful relations	Open dialogue, mutual understanding and absence of hidden agendas
Inclusive, transparent decision-making	All partners have input into decision-making, with principles and processes in place to support this
Involvement of community	Opportunities for community members to have input into planning, implementation, and/or evaluation
Conflict resolution process	Agreed principles and methods for resolving any conflicts that arise

Partnership sustainability

Flexibility for partners and plans	Allowance for modification to roles and responsibilities, partnership procedures and leadership, plans and strategies
Mutual benefits and rewards	Range of benefits which justify the time, effort and resources that partners contribute
Skill development, technical support	Sharing of expertise between partners, drawing on external skills, evidence and best practice resources
Institutionalised in partner business	Actions of partners, and/or the processes entailed in working together, become part of their core business
Review and adaptation of partnership	Periodic review of partnership functioning, including decision-making and planning, need for new partners and/or skill sets
Consistency of staff	Low turnover of staff that would disrupt decision-making and actions of partners
Promotion and visibility of partnership	Presence and accomplishments of partnership are reported to community and/or other stakeholders