



*Working together
for healthy communities*

Report and Recommendations

from the

“Working in Partnership” workshop

25 August 2011

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Acknowledgements

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This report was written by Valerie Kay, ISEPICH Health Promotion Coordinator, with assistance from Nerida Joss, Lecturer, Department of Health Social Science, Monash University.

Executive Summary

On 25 August 2011, the Inner South East Partnership in Community and Health (ISEPICH) held a workshop "Working in Partnership in Health Promotion". There were 30 participants in the workshop, of whom ten had previously participated in ISEPICH working groups. The workshop was facilitated by Nerida Joss, a lecturer in the Department of Health Social Science at Monash University, who is completing a PhD on the drivers of collaborative practice.

Evaluation showed that all participants felt the workshop had increased their individual skills in relation to working in partnership. They also felt that the workshop had identified several policy and system changes that could help to reduce barriers and strengthen enablers of effective partnership work.

Participants developed a number of key recommendations which are shown below.

Key recommendations:

ISEPICH

Develop a resource of "map" of ISEPICH member agencies, showing what the organisations do and identifying opportunities to partner with other organisations, and identifying relevant contacts in the organisation (The workshop facilitator highlighted this as a key strategy).

Provide case studies of effective partnership work to ISEPICH and member agencies. Ensure they are provided to relevant managers. Include cost/benefit analysis utilising a broad understanding of benefits (in line with the social model of health)

Ask/challenge non-participating member organisations about their commitment

Ensure accountable partnership administration eg post minutes on the ISEPICH website, show timelines for key actions

Improve opportunities for virtual communication eg blogging, e-groups

Organisations

Member agencies to have a senior manager with key role or portfolio in communication (to and from the PCP) for capacity building

Include partnership work in position descriptions, work plans and performance indicators

Individuals

Working groups and committees to utilise the resources identified in the workshop, the Belbin Tool and Strengths Based activity, to identify and develop their skills and strengthen current practice. For example, all working group members could identify three key strengths that they bring to the group and share this information with other members, as basis for discussion.

Next steps

These recommendations will be presented to the ISEPICH Executive Committee and Health Promotion Steering Committee and circulated to all member agencies. This report is intended as a resource to stimulate discussion and action. Feedback from interested people is welcome and may be sent to Val Kay, ISEPICH Health Promotion Coordinator, at vkay@portphillip.vic.gov.au.

Introduction

In 2011 ISEPICH received an \$8000 funding grant from the Department of Health (DH) Southern Metropolitan Regional Office for capacity building in health promotion.

Some of this funding was allocated for capacity building in working in partnership in health promotion. The proposed activities were:

1. to provide a workshop, facilitated by an expert in the field, for people working in health promotion partnerships and working groups; and
2. following the workshop, to provide feedback to managers in ISEPICH member agencies on the organisational support needed in order for partnerships to work effectively, as identified by participants in the workshop

This contributed to an existing objective in the ISEPICH Integrated Health Promotion Plan:

- In 2010-11, to increase workforce capacity through increased skills and knowledge in health promotion and increased organisational support for health promotion.

Evidence of need

A need for capacity building in working in partnership had previously been identified through a needs assessment conducted by the DH Regional Health Promotion Officer in 2008-09.

The need was also identified within ISEPICH working groups, whose members often varied widely in their ability to work effectively in partnership. Small groups at the ISEPICH Health Promotion forum in 2010 also identified that 'building capacity to work in partnership' was a specific way that ISEPICH could support health promotion. They also identified 'changing perceptions and enhancing skills re HP within organizations' (with a particular focus on management level). This is reflected in the follow up to the workshop, because it has been identified that for partnerships to work effectively organizational support is important.

The workshop

The workshop was held on 25 August 2011 and facilitated by Nerida Joss, who is a lecturer from the Department of Health Social Science at Monash University. Nerida is currently completing a PhD on the workforce drivers for collaborative practice in health promotion.

There were thirty participants in the workshop, comprising 26 workers from 11 ISEPICH member agencies and three other agencies, three community members and a student on placement. Ten participants had previously participated in ISEPICH working groups.

In the first part of the workshop, Nerida gave a presentation on evidence arising from her research. Some key points from the presentation included that partnerships are a "buzz word" in health promotion, yet can be challenging. There is a sound rationale for partnerships, because health problems are "interconnected and often multi-sectoral in nature", and an interconnected approach to them is valuable. In practice, however, partnerships are "complex and organic" in nature and "rarely behave the same way". Both the context of the partnership, and the "competencies" of individual participants are significant in determining the effectiveness of partnerships. Competencies include "technical, knowledge and interpersonal skills", all of which are important.¹

Participants then brainstormed the challenges of working in partnership, which were recorded on the whiteboard. Nerida then introduced two resources:

¹ N Joss "Working in partnership in Health Promotion" Presentation to the ISEPICH Capacity Building Workshop, 25 August 2011, St Kilda.

- the Belbin Inventory, a self-assessment measure of participants' skills and attitudes towards team work;
- the Strengths Activity, a self-assessment measure of participants' technical and knowledge skills in health promotion.

Participants used the resources to assess their skills and then discussed the results in small groups and in a plenary session.

In the second part of the workshop, participants explored the organisational and policy barriers for collaborative work, which can involve working with staff from other organisations and also working across program areas in the same organisation. Participants then took part in solution generation, identifying actions within current policy and systems which could enhance collaborative practice. Small groups wrote their ideas up on butcher paper and key points were recorded on the whiteboard.

Evaluation results showed that all participants believed the workshop had increased their knowledge about their own partnership skills (75% very much, 25% somewhat). They also felt it had increased their ability to recognise the skills of others, although not as strongly (46% very much; 46% somewhat; 8% maybe a little). Additionally, they believed their learning from the workshop would contribute to improvements in their practice (63% very much; 38% somewhat)².

Participants also felt that the workshop had identified key barriers and enablers of partnership work (77% very much; 18% somewhat; 15% maybe a little). They also agreed that the workshop had identified policy and system changes that could help to reduce barriers and strengthen enablers, although they were not as strongly positive about this (33% very much; 54% somewhat; 13% maybe a little).

Full evaluation results are attached as Appendix 1

Appendix 2 includes notes from the workshop. The following section provides a summary and recommendations for actions to increase the effectiveness of partnership work.

Key challenges of working in partnership

Collaborative practice is complex and context specific. The experiences and challenges of working in partnership can be different for partners dependant on the organisation they represent and their own skill set. There are several key themes that arose from the workshop discussion:

- **Function and role of ISEPICH:** Some agencies or managers may identify ISEPICH with the auspice agency (City of Port Phillip) rather than seeing it as a partnership of diverse agencies;
- **Type of partnership:** On funded projects, a key challenge may be the difference between the expectations of the steering group, who may have high expectations about what can be achieved with the funding, and those of the people who have to do the work, such as project staff. For working groups that don't have specific funding for projects or project staff, the differing levels of commitment and skill that partners bring to the table is the key challenge, because the partners themselves have to do the work in order to achieve any outcomes;
- **Staff turnover:** Changes in membership, due to staff turnover or internal reorganisation within agencies, is a significant challenge for all partnerships. Lack of communication within and between agencies also creates difficulties.
- **Authorisation:** Members of working groups may not have clear guidelines or authorisation from their agencies and therefore may lack the power to make decisions or take action.
- **Perceived value of partnership/PCP:** A lack of commitment by agencies can create problems. Some agencies can see the PCP as a 'small' program area (because it receives relatively small amounts of funding compared with agencies' overall budgets) rather than seeing the opportunities it offers as a partnership. Agency commitment in these circumstances may be token;
- **Articulation of achievements:** Working in partnership can still involve issues around competitiveness and who takes credit for achievements. This may also be related to internal

² Figures add up to more than 100% due to rounding

agency culture, for example whether it encourages self-promotion (for the agency itself or individuals working within the agency) or a culture in which the work of teams and partners is recognised. Large agencies may also have 'risk-averse' cultures, which can have a negative impact on partnerships because they may be reluctant to work with other organisations that have different approaches or priorities. In particular participants felt that large organisations can be averse to creative ideas;

- **Conflict and negotiation:** Within groups, interpersonal conflict and issues of power are important. Working with the community can also be challenging, both in terms of how to involve the broader community, and in terms of staff members and community members working together in working groups;
- **Member expectations:** Every organisation has a unique vision and organisational strategy, which guides their business approach. Member agency representatives will therefore come to the partnership table with different expectations about the collaborative process.

Organisational and policy support needed for partnerships to work effectively

Communication

Participants identified that in order for partnerships to work effectively, there is a need for effective communication and support within and between the organisations represented in the partnership. Specifically this involves communication and support from relevant managers within the organisation, and between managers, both within organisations (communication and support across program areas or levels of management) and between organisations (communication between managers in different organisations at the relevant levels and consistency in the support and authorisation that is given to working group members by managers from different organisations).

In order to achieve this, participants suggested that management needs to think "bottom up" and to consider the benefits of actions for the whole community or population. The needs of a community or population can be met most effectively by organisations in the area working effectively together rather than by any individual organisation. If managers think in terms of the benefits to the whole community, they will also be enabled to think about how their staff members can work most effectively with staff from other agencies.

Transparency in communication processes within and between organisations is important: a key need is for organisations to understand what each other does.

Organisational Support

Participants expressed that agency representatives should be supported by their agency as an "ambassador". They need to understand the scope of their role and be mentored and supported within their organisations, so that they have autonomy to act: a 'mandate to partner'. Mentoring and support is particularly important when there are staff changes so that representatives change, to avoid the "revolving door" of constantly changing representatives who can't contribute effectively to the partnership because they don't have the necessary knowledge and background about what the partnership aims to do and how much authority they have to act as a partner.

Participation

Participants asserted strongly that partnerships will work best when both organisations and individual representatives approach the partnership with genuine good will and embrace being at the partnership table, rather than provide token attendance.

Valuing partnership work within an organisation

On the other hand, participants also acknowledged that particularly because partnership work can be time consuming and resource intensive, there is a corresponding need to demonstrate the value of partnership work to senior managers. Accountability is important. In large organisations, there may also be a specific need to demonstrate the value of flexibility and creative ideas.

Solution generation: identifying key actions to build organisational capacity to partner

Key recommendations

Workshop participants identified the following actions that could be taken to strengthen effective partnership work. Actions are grouped as those that may be taken by the ISEPICH partnership, by individual member agencies and other organisations, and by participants in working groups

ISEPICH

Develop a resource of “map” of ISEPICH member agencies, showing what the organisations do and identifying opportunities to partner with other organisations, and identifying relevant contacts in the organisation (The workshop facilitator highlighted this as a key strategy).

Provide case studies of effective partnership work to ISEPICH and member agencies. Ensure they are provided to relevant managers. Include cost/benefit analysis utilising a broad understanding of benefits (in line with the social model of health)

Ask/challenge non-participating member organisations about their commitment

Ensure accountable partnership administration eg post minutes on the ISEPICH website, show timelines for key actions

Improve opportunities for virtual communication eg blogging, e-groups

Organisations

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Next steps

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Appendix 1 Evaluation results

The aims of this workshop were:

2. to strengthen the individual capacity of participants to work effectively in partnership through increasing their knowledge and skills
3. to identify barriers and enablers of partnership work in order to support ongoing improvements in policy and systems in ISEPICH

There were thirty participants in the workshop, including 27 workers and three community members. Only ten participants had participated in ISEPICH working groups. Twenty four participants completed evaluation forms.

SECTION 1 INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY

1. Did the workshop increase your knowledge about your own partnership skills?

Very much 18 (75%) Somewhat 6 (25%) Maybe a little 0 No 0

2. Did the workshop increase your ability to recognise the skills of others?

Very much 11 (46%) Somewhat 11 (46%) Maybe a little 2 (8%) No 0

3. Do you think your learning from this workshop will contribute to improvements in your practice?

Very much 15 (63%) Somewhat 9 (38%) Maybe a little 0 No 0

No comments on this section

SECTION 2 POLICY AND PRACTICE

4. Did the workshop identify key barriers and enablers of partnership work?

Very much 17 (77%) Somewhat 4 (18%) Maybe a little 1 (5%) No 0 (2 no response)

5. Did the workshop identify policy and system changes that could help to reduce barriers and strengthen enablers?

Very much 8 (33%) Somewhat 13 (54%) Maybe a little 3 (13%) No 0

Any comments

Some examples of partnerships at a grassroots level may have been useful for some people attending

Recommendations for policy and practice improvement arising from this workshop will be presented to the ISEPICH Executive Committee and member agencies.

Would you be available to participate in follow up evaluation to assess any future improvements in policy and systems? Yes 8 No 2 (14 no response) (4 gave contact details)

Do you have any other comments on the workshop (eg on facilitation, venue or catering etc)

- Facilitator was great
- Always difficult to keep a vocal member of the group from dominating – not easy. Maybe mix up tables for group work.
- Venue a bit noisy at times. Great food!
- Thanks.
- Parking – shifting car 3x @ 7-10 mins at a time was disruptive for me and meant little time for networking or relaxing.
- Parking was a nightmare! Signs to the venue would be useful. Nerida – brilliant facilitation – very well knowledgeable and information learnings (?) was most useful.

- Timing early on – but then good with Barb timekeeping! Venue noisy.
- Fantastically run. Catering was spot on, thank you.
- Excellent facilitation by Nerida.
- Workshop well focused. Possibly untapped expertise in audience. Perhaps more work – less academic – orientation would have produced higher overall quality (more [illegible] to Bellbin scale etc). Good networking opportunity.
- Great facilitator, bad venue (very noisy).
- Nerida was a great facilitator and very patient! Great food/catering. Venue a little chilly.
- The chance to get together with representatives from agencies was terrific – workshopping 'partnership' together was great!

Appendix 2 Notes from the workshop

Whiteboard

Challenges of working in partnership:

- Steering group broad expectations/creative – people who have to do the tasks/expectation
- Power shifts within group. Role of steering group and representatives.
- Mixed private/non-profit – different expectations
- Changing representatives – lack of continuity (staff turnover, arrangement changes)
- Personality types
- Disturbed flow of information – management - staff
- Decision making power not with the group – staff don't have power
- Agency commitment (or lack of) – PCP seen as “small” with limited funding - Identified with auspice agency
- Competitive attitudes (agency culture)
- Who (which organisation) gets credit?
- Community participation – broad community – working with community members
- Working groups – funded projects are more structured
- May be more difficult in non-funded groups, working groups/partnerships
- Different kinds/levels of participation
- Link between PCP working groups and agencies – building connection - Info sharing/communication
- Communication between agencies/identify opportunities for partnerships
- Being inclusive – challenging (PCP identified with auspice agency)
- Partnerships – can get more resources/funding (partnership maps)

Organisational and policy support needed for partnerships to work effectively:

- Organisational/management communication and support
 - think bottom up - consider benefits to the whole community /population
- Demonstrating value to senior management – partnership work
- Transparency in communication processes
- Understand what each other does – mapping (*project for ISEPICH)
- Agency representative supported by their agency as an “ambassador” – understands the scope of their role – mentored and supported
- Mandate to partner - organisations and individual representatives need good will – embrace being at the partnership table, rather than token attendance
- Value of partnership work
 - Large organisations can be risk averse to creative ideas
- Accountability
- Non-participation by organisations/revolving door of representatives
- Autonomy of representatives

Solution generation – Strategies to increase organisational and management support:

- Case studies of effective partnership work - given to management. Cost benefits (broad understanding of benefit)
- Map/resource (facilitator highlights as a key strategy) – showing what organisations do – opportunities to partner (organisational opportunities to partner) - contacts
- Senior person with key role or portfolio in communication (to and from the PCP) for capacity building
- Including partnership work in position descriptions, workplans and performance indicators
- Asking non-participating organisations about their commitment
- Partnership administration – posting minutes on the ISEPICH website – timelines
- Blogging opportunities

Detailed notes from small groups

What organisational and policy support will help you work in partnership?

Group 1:

- Willing participants – being engaged and contributing – making organisations accountable
- Everyone having clear goals/objectives/responsibilities
 - o having a facilitator – coordinated approach
 - o having a leader
- Outcome driven
 - o progress to date – keeping everyone updated – knowing timelines
- People taking responsibility and being active
 - o Mechanisms in place to support small organisations who can't attend (eg neighbourhood house)
- Guidelines and policies set in place by organisations/clear structure
- Management support/representation/supervision
- Effective mechanisms of being able to report back

Group 2:

- Recognition of value at senior management level and support to put in time and effort
- Transparency regarding information – clear communication processes within agencies (how information is fed back)
- Participation is as a representative/ambassador for your agency
- Workers need support to develop systems for sharing communication with broader organisation
- ISEPICH – potential to have all minutes available on-line/increasing use of social media
- Tension around participation but having little authority to make decisions

Group 3:

- Make own decision as to who to partner with (more power) – autonomy
- Organisation – management commits support
 - o Think bottom up
 - o Benefits the whole community
- Time allocation
- Risk aversion – commitment
- Demonstrating the value to senior management – partnership work
- Benefits of advocacy
- Understand what each organisation does – mapping

Solution generation

- Opportunity for blogging and sharing ideas
- Holistic view – identify background of person/perspectives
- Brief reports from conferences
- Case benefits of effective partnership work – cost benefits – to management
 - o Map/resource
 - o What they do opportunity to partner
 - Organisational opportunity to partner
 - o Contact
- Senior person with key role (portfolio) in communication for capacity building
- Including partnership work in workload and KPIs
- Asking non-participating organisations about their commitment
- Past minutes from all meetings on website

Group 4:

- Organisational
 - o Management support for working in partnership/commitment
 - Thinking outside their own agency
 - Thinking of community
- PCP
 - o We need to understand what each other (organisations) does

- What do the organisations do
- Information sharing
- Contacts
- Case studies
- Solution generation – key strategies
 - Resource/map
 - What they do
 - Projects/opportunities for partnerships
 - Contacts