

Differences of opinion and conflicts within a Big Local partnership

Differences of opinion are usually a good thing - they can challenge thinking and offer different perspectives. But when someone responds inappropriately, strong differences of opinion can lead to tension and conflict, resulting in silence, avoidance or anger. The situation can become serious if people's behaviour becomes disrespectful and hurtful.

This document is to help Big Local partnerships think about how to respond to differences of opinion and conflicts within the partnership (see the separate section below for conflicts between members of the partnership). We expect all partnerships to create their own rules and procedures - having an agreed way to respond helps both to reduce or avoid conflict and to find a solution and resolution.

What we expect from Big Local partnerships

We do not always expect you to agree with one another. But, when there are differences, we do expect that you:

- work together
- listen to different opinions
- keep to the rules and processes you have agreed locally
- behave in line with Big Local's values and ethos
- are open and transparent.

Differences between members of the partnership

These are best handled between the partnership and your Big Local rep who acts on behalf of Local Trust. Refer to your signed memorandum of understanding and any partnership agreement or code of conduct you have in place. It is important to set the ground rules early on so that everyone knows what to expect and is treated equally and fairly.

If there are issues about the performance of the locally trusted organisation, staff, or organisations they fund, these are best picked up by the locally trusted organisation through its policies and procedures for managing and supporting staff, or through the relevant grant, service agreement or contract.

Differences within the partnership – it's okay to disagree

It is important to remember that as a group of individuals you do not have to agree all of the time. Having disagreements and challenging each other is a sign of a healthy and functioning group. At partnership meetings you will often agree or reach a compromise and do great things. But if there are lots of negative statements during a meeting, people are likely to leave feeling

disheartened. Meetings that celebrate what has been achieved together usually leave people feeling energised.

To help be more positive you could:

- start a meeting with a round of appreciations
- appoint someone to keep an eye on the group and notice any opportunities to celebrate
- end your meetings with a reflection on how the meeting went, starting with what you enjoyed about the meeting and adding anything to improve for next time.

Differences within the partnership – when it's not acceptable

In some cases it might be obvious if someone has behaved badly and is out of line. Often, though, things are less clear, and in every partnership it will be important to have an agreed code of conduct to guide you. This might include statements to sign up to, such as:

- I will declare any conflict of interest or of loyalty, or any circumstance that might be viewed by others as such, as soon as it arises.
- I will not personally gain materially or financially from my role as a member, nor will I permit others to do so as a result of my actions or negligence.
- Everything the partnership does will be able to stand the test of scrutiny by the public, charity regulators, community members, stakeholders, funders and the courts.
- Integrity, respect and honesty will be the hallmarks of all conduct when dealing with others within the partnership and equally when dealing with individuals and institutions outside it.

You need to agree how you will respond to any breaches of your code of conduct, for example:

1. Outside of the meeting, a nominated person, such as the chair of the Big Local partnership or worker, speaks with the person about what they did, when they did it, how it made the other person feel and why it was inappropriate. It's important to stick to the facts. You might ask why the person behaved like that. You should ask them not to do it again and tell them that they will receive a warning the next time they do it.
2. If the person behaves inappropriately again, a nominated person, such as the chair of the Big Local partnership, the worker or Big Local rep, should follow the same process as above, but this time give them a written warning. This states that if they behave inappropriately again they will be removed from the Big Local partnership.
3. If it happens a third time, the person should be sent a letter, informing them that they have been removed from the Big Local partnership and the reasons why.

Either as part of your code of conduct, or in addition to, it is important as a group to clearly set out and agree on what behaviour is not acceptable, for example:

- insults and name-calling
- swearing, offensive language and gestures
- inappropriate jokes

- behaviour that ridicules or undermines someone or something
- inappropriate or unnecessary physical contact
- physical assault or threats of physical assault
- intimidating, coercive or threatening actions and behaviour
- unwelcome sexual advances
- isolation, non-cooperation or deliberate exclusion
- inappropriate comments about a person's appearance
- intrusive questions or comment, and malicious gossip, about a person's private life
- offensive images and literature
- pestering, spying or stalking.

If the behaviour becomes threatening or intimidating, the person feeling threatened or intimidated may decide to take it up with a relevant authority, such as the police.

Reviewing your Big Local partnership

We know that membership of your partnership will change over time, as new people join and others step back. So, once we have endorsed your partnership, we ask your Big Local rep to submit updated information about it between September and December each year. This is to make sure we know who is on the Big Local partnership; that it continues to meet our criteria and follow its own rules; and whether your structure and ways of working are a good fit for your Big Local area.

For more information about reviewing your Big Local partnership and the support available to you, please see our guidance on [Big Local partnerships](#).

This document will be developed over time with input from the people using this material.

If you have thoughts on how this document can be made more useful for you, particularly if you live in one of the Big Local areas, please let us know.

Local Trust

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If you need this document in other formats or a community language please get in touch with Local Trust and we will help you.

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