

Partnerships and Networks

What is Equal?

The Equal Programme is a European Social Fund (ESF) initiative which operates across all of the European Union. The Programme aims to develop and test new ways of challenging discrimination and inequalities in the labour market, both for those in work and for those seeking work.

Equal has acted as a learning platform, developing innovative ways of tackling existing labour market problems. It has presented evidence based outcomes which could be adopted by policy makers and delivery agents at local, regional, national and European levels.

The partnership approach in Equal is based around a model of Development Partnerships (DPs), consisting of organisations with common interests and different expertise, working collaboratively to deliver shared aims and objectives.

www.equal.ecotec.co.uk

www.equal-works.com

www.esf.gov.uk



The Community Strategic Guidelines 2007 – 2013 stress the importance that strong stakeholder partnerships will continue to have during the next programming period. The guidelines state that:

“It is important for key stakeholders at national, regional and local levels to rally behind the reform agenda so that resources are genuinely concentrated on the growth and jobs agenda and put in place the necessary partnership networks to this effect.”

Key Messages

Structuring the partnership to empower others
a clear planning process should be used to support a partnership to take strategic decisions and to deliver practical elements of the work programme. Clearly setting roles and responsibilities from the outset of a partnership helps to ensure that activities are developed effectively.

Bringing the right partners together – Under Equal, DPs were encouraged to bring together a range of public, private and voluntary sector partners to perform complementary tasks to increase effectiveness of their actions. Ideal partners included decision makers; local stakeholders who can deliver the services required. Honesty with regards to what outcomes are expected needs to be tied into partners' expectations so that they can be synthesised. Also, to set this direction, involving beneficiaries in the management and development of the partnership and the project is vital: the voice of the beneficiary must be heard.

Equal has provided an excellent opportunity for voluntary and community organisations to come together. For many DPs, the opportunity to work with smaller organisations meant that there was a richness and complexity to the partnership and it was noted that “Intermediary organisations are not

just deliverers but intelligent generators of solutions”.

Sharing results, success and good practice is the “glue of a partnership”. Facilitating the sharing of knowledge and best practice within a partnership is the key to active participation of all members and also encourages satisfaction in the process, along with better delivery. Resources and systems for sharing good practice should be well managed and structured – for example through the use of online discussion portals, support to attend meetings and so on.

Maintaining the involvement of partners is a major challenge of partnerships, particularly large ones as it is important to sustain their interest and involvement over a period of time. The challenge for Equal DPs was to ensure that partners were fully engaged throughout.

Good communication between partners and funding bodies is essential if the partnership is to utilise the benefits of partnership working effectively. Also, in order to mainstream well, it is vital to keep the partnership informed about policy developments.

Case Study

A shared direction is vital for effective delivery. All partners need to work together to address the same issue and problem through joint interventions in order to gain effective outcomes. The SIED DP, led by the London Borough of Islington, illustrates how a partnership between the voluntary, statutory and private sector can work together to increase the services of community organizations to include support to enterprise development.

Core to the partnership has been building the capacity of community organisations to deliver and sustain business advice services and to enable the business advisers employed by the community organisations to achieve a professional qualification.

In order to ensure that the model is sustained, the partnership founded a new independent voluntary organization, Association of Community Based Business Advice (ACBBA), which is owned by its members. This comprises 26 voluntary organisations that operate at a grass roots level, delivering business advice to communities who have experienced social exclusion.

The best way to make Equal “live” in the future is to take parts of the programme forward to other funding streams. Partnership working should be one of the key aspects taken forward: it is important to see an exit strategy as an evolution of a partnership rather than the end of one. This short video reveals the Jive DP’s exit strategy:

www.jivepartners.org.uk/podcasts/2809.wmv