

Formalising Cultural Education Partnership agreements and plans

What does 'formalisation' mean?

Formalisation means enshrining partnership agreements into formal agreements and business plans. Formalisation needs to be on a basis of necessity and should aim to be flexible and agile rather than permanent.

Why do CEPs need to formalise?

CEPs need to formalise what they are doing and why for two main reasons:

1. Partner clarity

Partners require clarity on their involvement in, contribution to, and responsibility for the CEP, and how it relates to other partners, using Terms of Reference or a Memorandum of Understanding. They will also need clarity on what the CEP is going to do and how, using a Business Plan.

2. External clarity

External communications, applications for funds and other external channels are likely to require formalised agreement on strategy using a Business Plan.

In some cases CEP partners may decide to become legal entities.

Whilst often essential, this formalisation, and the consensus and decision-making it requires, can take considerable time and effort, so formalisation needs to be undertaken as appropriate.

Formalisation for funding-readiness

Finding funding, and fundraising, is central to the work of many CEPs:

- The aspiration for CEPs is to form partnerships, with the intrinsic benefits partnerships can have, but also for those partnerships to be able to raise funds to deliver their work, increasing provision of opportunities for children and young people.
- CEPs need funding to run themselves, at a bare minimum covering the time and costs of servicing meetings (although in many cases this is covered in-kind).
- The aim for CEPs to be capable of raising, operating and managing funds, in most cases, means that CEPs have to balance the relative neutrality of facilitating a network for network members, with the need to arrive at clear decisions, consensus and strategy.
- In most cases, to be eligible for funds, CEPs have to formalise that consensus in a signed contract (e.g. Terms of Reference and Business Plan) between partners.

“ You mostly need to get the focus, vision and aspiration right first – and the Terms of Reference or Partnership Agreement second, or you spend ages negotiating without knowing what for.

“ You need to have a partnership agreement before having a funding agreement with a lead partner, otherwise there is a risk that lead partner will take over.

Challenges for formalisation

Formalisation requires commitment to a consensus:

- Partners may struggle to agree on a CEP's focus and strategy with sufficient clarity for a Business Plan.
- Partners may find it difficult (for various reasons) to commit in writing to pledging resources or action.
- Formalisation may require, or appear to require, that the CEP focus, structure, strategy, leadership and hosting be fixed.

“ CEPs do not need to become legal entities in their own right and so there may be different ways of formalising, on an ad hoc and needs basis.

When and how to formalise

Formalise when there is a clear need

The main reason for a CEP to formalise tends to be fundraising readiness. But a CEP can achieve a great deal without funding, or at least without funding for delivery activity, particularly in how it can build synergies across the partnership and mobilise others.

Only formalise when it's required

Formalisation, and the consensus it requires, can take a great deal of time and effort, which, when very

protracted, can damage the good will and motivation that feed a CEP. So CEPs should only formalise what they need to, when they need to.

Formalise flexibly

CEPs do not need to become legal entities in their own right and so there may be different ways of formalising, on an ad hoc and needs-based basis. For example, Brighton and Hove CEP have a central business plan and strategy but only have formal agreements on a per-project basis/per-funding-agreement basis. Funding agreements can potentially be with different CEP partners as appropriate.

CEP Business Plans

Characteristics of strong CEP Business Plans include:

- **Clarity:** the plan is written in a clear, succinct style, saying no more than is required;
- **Understanding of needs/purpose:** the plan is based on an understanding of what it needs to contain, and why the CEP needs to exist, and states these needs/purposes;
- **Context:** the plan describes the context in which the CEP was set up and operates;
- **Focus:** the plan clearly outlines where the CEP is directing its activity and how it arrived at these decisions (e.g. needs analysis and consultation); the focus is precise, and not generic;
- **Objectives:** the plan has clear and specific objectives related to its focuses;
- **Galvanising:** the focus and objectives are clear and realistic but also inspiring/aspirational – to galvanise the partnership;
- **Values:** many plans have a strong emphasis on values, and are clear on how the CEP will operate on those values;
- **Resources:** the plan includes the resources that the CEP has itself, including the resources partners can bring to the CEP, and the resources the CEP has or hopes to raise or leverage;
- **Strategy:** the plan gives a clear account of how, using its resources, the CEP will work towards achieving the stated objectives in pursuance of its aims/focuses;
- **Partner activity:** as part of that strategy, the plan says which partners will do what, when, with what, and clearly explains how those actions will come together in the CEP;
- **SMART targets/KPIs:** the strategy gives clear indication of how success will be measured, with indicators and, in many cases, targets which are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound.

Characteristics of strong CEP Partnership Agreements

- **Clarity:** the agreement is written in a clear, succinct style, saying no more than is required;
- **Understanding of needs/purpose:** the agreement is based on an understanding of what it needs to contain, and why it needs to exist, and states these needs/purposes;
- **Context:** the agreement describes the context in which the CEP was set up and operates;
- **Focus:** the agreement clearly outlines the purpose of the CEP and where the CEP is directing its activity, and how it arrived at this decision;
- **Structure:** the agreement outlines the CEP's structure, including communications and lines of responsibility between elements in this structure;
- **Relationships:** the agreement may outline detail of how the CEP is related to other bodies, such as host networks or other associations in the locality;
- **Significant stakeholders:** the roles and responsibilities, including limitations, of significant stakeholders, such as chairs and lead partners, are clearly defined;
- **All stakeholders:** the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, including limitations, are clearly defined;
- **Horizons:** the agreement may outline its scope, any time limits, how partners may withdraw or enter etc.

“ A strong CEP Partnership Agreement clearly outlines the purpose of the CEP, where the CEP is directing its activity, and how it made these decisions.

About this work

The content for this resource has been drawn from a longer developmental evaluation that was commissioned by Artsworld and undertaken by Ben Sandbrook/World Pencil in 2019 to identify what happens, and what works, in setting up and running a Cultural Education Partnership (CEP) in the South East. The research has been undertaken through data and written materials analysis, 26 semi-structured interviews with Artsworld and CEP representatives, and an online survey completed by 30 CEP representatives.



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