

# **Organisational structures for collaboration**

An outline of the different  
organisational structures that can  
support collaborative activity

An MMM Guide



## Organisational structures for collaboration

**“In the long history of animal kind (and human kind, too) those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed.”**

**Charles Darwin**

Whilst few collaborations fit neatly into simple categories, and people need to build what works best for their own situations, the organisational structures that support collaborative activity tend to sit somewhere on a broad spectrum<sup>1</sup>, ranging from the fully integrated (when collaborators merge their operations) to the purely ad hoc (when individuals choose to work together).

This short document uses descriptions of the six groups of arts and cultural organisations that participated in MMM’s 2008-2010 Collaborative Working Pilots<sup>2</sup> as well as others involved in such collaborations to illustrate each type.

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<sup>1</sup> The spectrum used here has been adapted from the Lodestar Center for Philanthropy & Nonprofit Innovation ‘Models of Collaboration: Nonprofit organisations working together’.  
[http://www.asu.edu/copp/nonprofit/conf/coll\\_models\\_report\\_FINALDRAFT.pdf](http://www.asu.edu/copp/nonprofit/conf/coll_models_report_FINALDRAFT.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The Collaborative Working Pilots was one of a series of strands that formed MMM’s fourth cycle of work which ran from 2008-2010

### **Model 1: Fully Integrated Merger**

This collaboration occurs when two (or more) arts and cultural organisations (Arcos) combine their operations and missions into a single organisation. The merger is usually achieved when one organisation merges with another, thereby preserving the corporate status and charitable exemption of one of the partners. However, sometimes the two partners choose to incorporate as a totally new, merged organisation.

### **Example of a Fully Integrated Merger: Triumph Gallery and Yakut Gallery, (Russia)**

Two of Moscow's leading contemporary art galleries announced a merger in 2008 to help Russian artists emerge both domestically and internationally. Triumph Gallery, a top seller of international artists in Russia, and Yakut Gallery, which played a pioneering role in discovering promising Russian artists in the 1990s, said the new entity would keep the name Triumph and occupy that gallery's 19th-century mansion in central Moscow. Russia's economy has grown for nine consecutive years, and a new class of wealthy Russians is eager to purchase luxury items and fine art. While contemporary art was previously shunned by a society weaned on Soviet repression of innovation, its popularity has risen since the first Moscow Biennale in 2005. 'This marriage is based on both love and self-interest,' said Alexander Yakut, owner of the Yakut Gallery. 'We share the same ideas about art, but Yakut offers unrivalled experience and understanding of the Russian art scene, while Triumph offers a strong financial base and international contacts.'<sup>3</sup>

### **Model 2: Partially-Integrated Merger**

An alternative to a full merger is a combination of organisations that does not result in the total loss of brand for the collaborators: a partially integrated merger. Two or more Alco's might be formally merged in a partial integration, but the individual characters of the merged organisations are maintained in some way. Rather than being a 'merger that doesn't quite take', the partially integrated merger model is consciously chosen to pursue strategic advantages inherent in each of the collaborators.

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<sup>3</sup> This case story was taken from this online article:  
<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601088&sid=aCWu1Efr4qXw&refer=muse>

## **Example of a Partially-Integrated Merger: Trinity College of Music and Alban, (England)**

Despite the obvious synergy between the study of music and the study of dance, British conservatoires have, until recently, been a strictly either/or choice. But the merger of Trinity College of Music in Greenwich with its Deptford neighbour, the contemporary dance school Alban, has created Britain's first dedicated conservatoire for both music and dance. Trinity Alban Conservatoire of Music and Dance will be joining an established international sector, which counts among its number the Juilliard School in New York, the Cole National in Paris and the Royal Conservatory of the Hague in the Netherlands.

On the face of it, there couldn't be two more different organisations. Trinity, founded in 1872, sits amid the stately splendour of the 17th-century King Charles Court at the Old Royal Naval College. Five minutes down the road, sandwiched between the old factories and warehouses of Deptford Creek, is Alban, named after Rudolf Alban, the Hungarian choreographer who arrived in the UK in 1938 as a refugee from the Nazis. Alban occupies a landmark new building, winner of the Stirling Architecture Prize in 2003, which seems to reflect the fluid, flexible shapes of its student body. Yet, as Executive Director Derek Avis points out, when you look beyond the contrasting architectural styles, the two organisations are actually very similar. Both, for example, see themselves as training students for employment in a "portfolio career" (it is hard to earn a living by performance alone). In addition, both organisations consider themselves to be innovators, and both are dedicated to working closely with the local community.

Perhaps most importantly for the success of their link-up, both schools appreciate that there's more to making a merger work than organisational charts and head counts. "I've spent a lot of time working with multi-arts conservatoires around the world and it's not enough to have those art forms in co-existence," says Anthony Bowne, Principal. "You really need to understand each other's cultures and work at the synergies."

### **Model 3: Joint Programme Office**

Imagine two or more complementary organisations that separately maintain their various programme offices. A merger may not fit their needs, but an overlap in some programmes or services may provide the opportunity for collaboration. A joint programme office requires no new programmes or organisational structures. Rather, two or more organisations combine on one or more programmes for the purpose of strengthening the efforts of all the organisations involved.

### **Example of a Joint Programme Office: The Sponsors Club (England)**

Members of the North East business community with the aim of developing, supporting and fostering mutually beneficial commercial and creative partnerships between the North East business and cultural communities set up the Sponsors Club for Arts & Business in 1991. The underlying belief was that the benefits of such partnerships made economic and social sense not only to the participants but also the communities in which they operated. Although part of the national Arts & Business network, it is funded and supported by its members who represent a range of businesses in the region, together with Universities, the Community Foundation, Arts Council of England, North East and One Northeast. It operates the A&B programmers in its region, but at the heart of the organization is a first time sponsorship incentive scheme, funded by business membership fees, which is unique to the North East.

### **Model 4: Joint Partnership with Affiliated Programming**

The development of shared projects by multiple non-profits is perhaps the most common type of joint partnership. In this case either two or more organisations join their operations for programming or delivery of services resulting in a co-ordination of services that is clear to both the organisations involved and their clients. Their complementary strengths enable the development of new and/or greatly enhanced services.

### **Examples of Joint Partnership with Affiliated Programming: MMM pilots - National Performing Arts Companies and The Literature Forum for Scotland, (Scotland); and Exchange and Newcastle Gateshead Cultural Venues (England)**

Scotland's five National Performing Arts Companies – Scottish Ballet, Scottish Opera, National Theatre of Scotland, Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Scottish Chamber Orchestra – are focusing on the development of a shared web presence to enable a major step change in public engagement opportunities, focusing initially on social media and ancillary content, such as interviews, talks, and behind the scenes videos. Simon Woods, Chief Executive of The Royal Scottish National Orchestra said at the start: “Learning how to work well together across a whole range of disciplines and organizational structures will be one of the hallmarks of successful arts businesses in the 21st Century. At a time of economic uncertainty, deploying collaborative solutions to joint challenges and opportunities is a pre-requisite for survival.”

The Literature Forum for Scotland, which includes the Association for Scottish Literary Studies, Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland (CILIPS), The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), Edinburgh International Book Festival, Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature, The Gaelic Books Council, Itchy Coo, Monica Mohr, National Association for Literature Development (NALD), National Library of Scotland, Playwrights' Studio Scotland, Publishing Scotland, Scots Language Centre, Scottish Book Trust, Scottish Language Dictionaries, Scottish Society of Playwrights, Scottish PEN, Scottish Poetry Library, Scottish Storytelling Forum, Society of Authors in Scotland and the University of Glasgow are focusing on the task of delivering a new strategic vision for Literature in Scotland, exploring a more radical framework for the development, delivery and sustainability of the vision and its planned outcomes. Douglas Gifford, Chairman of the Literature Forum, said: “Transition is a major theme in the arts and cultural world in Scotland just now, and the Forum has seized the timely opportunity offered by the MMM programme to evolve and transform not only its own collaborative practices but its capacity to work with other partners. As a result we expect to be able to respond powerfully and effectively in the service of Literature to the opportunities offered by the changes around us.”

Exchange, which is made up of BalletLorent, The Empty Space, Name and Northern Stage, is rationalising and re-imagining access to and use of rehearsal and

development space for emerging work in the performing arts in the region. Caroline Routh, Co-founder of The Empty Space, said: “Even with the transformation of the cultural infrastructure in the North East region, access to research and development space appropriate for supporting a range of emerging work in the performing and digital arts sector remains limited. In order to encourage optimum health in our arts and cultural ecology the full lifecycle of creative processes needs to be nourished from the grass roots up. Each member of our group is intimately connected to supporting the early stages of creativity and our MMM collaborative pilot will deliver not only a better understanding of those lifecycle needs but a series of nationally relevant strategic responses to the physical space requirements of our target group.”

NewcastleGateshead Cultural Venues (NGCV) is driven by the commitment, leadership and encouragement of a group of ten Chief Executives who have established a strong network of staff expert groups each sharing a common protocol for developing a wide variety of research and other projects. All the groups continuously build relationships and awareness between the professionals, their venues and the cultural offer. They are creative hubs and catalysts within the NGCV network and help build skills and competencies as well as a sense of common purpose, and seek to overcome the challenges of collaborating across ten diverse partner organisations. They are supported by an online social network, which enables them to communicate and access information and support between meetings, and by an external project manager. A robust evidence base is evolving which demonstrates the combined economic, social and cultural impact of the ten organisations, as well as providing key baselines to inform actions and track progress in each area of collaboration. There have been four key areas of collaborative work:

- ‘Back office’ collaboration around shared services involves extensive sharing of expertise and intelligence to examine key costs, services and contracts. This is being used to negotiate better deals and services, to refine and improve policies, to take a joint approach to energy management and efficiency, to collaborate on training provision and to draw in expertise to benefit NGCV as a whole in the areas of human resources, facilities and finance.
- Public Engagement action research has resulted in a fundamental shift in thinking and the development of a range of test activities for personalised approaches to improve the opportunities for people to engage more deeply

with the venues and across cultural forms. The approaches can be scaled up if they prove effective.

- Digital collaboration is enabling all venues to increase their knowledge base and share risk around digital investment. Using action research, groups are testing activities, which can help improve their online effectiveness and communications. This includes mobile technology, web optimisation, social networking, themed events and recommendation engines.
- Discussions around maximising the benefits of NGCV physical assets and diversification of income streams have resulted in the development of strategic documents and a joint approach to engaging, working and negotiating with key stakeholders from the public, private and voluntary sector, locally, regionally and nationally.

New working practices emerged following the end of the pilot, as the collaboration around creative programming, learning and participation and development functions evolved into the core work of the venues.

In a joint statement issued in May 2010, the ten Chief Executives said of their collaboration, “We explore ways to become more efficient, more cost-effective, better informed about each other and the external landscape in which we operate, better placed to use our shared resources, better able to measure and demonstrate our collective value and better placed to engage with audiences and new technologies. This in turn makes us a more credible voice in representing the case for continued investment in culture (to gain maximum value from all the investment of the past decade), a more powerful partner and customer, and better able to weather economic and other challenges and changes.”

### **Model 5: Joint Partnership for Issue Advocacy**

Organisations sometimes share the need to speak with one voice so that their collective message can be heard amid noise or powerful counter-interests. A joint partnership model is well suited for such joint interests, but the short-term or periodic nature of issue-based advocacy may not require a new, permanent organisation. Instead, collaborators lend leadership and staff to joint committees as needed, which allows them to move, communicate and mobilise in unison.

## **Example of Joint Partnership for Issue Advocacy: Era21, (UK) and MMM pilot - Newcastle Gateshead Cultural Venues (England)**

Era21 is a cross industry network of unions and trade bodies that have united to promote the interests of the cultural sector, help build resilience amongst its memberships and speak out on behalf of the arts in times of crisis. The group is made up of the Independent Theatre Council, National Campaign for the Arts, Theatrical Management Association, Dance UK, Equity, BECTU, Musicians' Union, Association of British Orchestras, Museums Association, Opera and Music Theatre Forum, Audiences UK, The Theatres Trust, Artsadmin and the Visual Arts and Galleries Associations.

The idea for Era21 was formed following the controversial Arts Council England spending review in 2008, which had highlighted “a failure of leadership” in the sector, and the industry’s “obsession” with the actions of the funding body. Charlotte Jones, Chief Executive of ITC and Convenor of ERA21 explaining the groups purpose said: The arts are a hugely powerful force socially, politically and economically. Working together more closely in these increasingly uncertain times can only benefit our collective memberships who combined make up the majority of the UK’s professional arts and cultural sector.” Jones sees Era21’s role as improving advocacy and leadership within the industry: “to deepen debate and strengthen the confidence of the sector and its engagement to the wider world”.

It is a network that provides a forum for organisations with both similar and opposing views to discuss issues impacting the arts, and attend debates with representatives from other industries to consider wider social problems. It is a group that is mobilised at times of crisis. NCA director Louise de Winter said that the group was looking to increase recognition of the wider arts sector: “The fact that we all represent memberships means that each of our organisations has a very strong validity and should be taken account of. “We are all our own bodies and we all do our own thing. This is an opportunity for us to share and come together, and where we can act in coordination, we will.” Equity’s Assistant General Secretary for theatre and variety, Stephen Spence, hopes that Era21 will give organisations a better

understanding of each other's work: "I'm not saying industrial negotiations are going to be made easier, or suddenly resolved, but they help us better explain what we are trying to do."

NewcastleGateshead Cultural Venues' ten Chief Executives agreed upon strategic shared aims, as well as the key objectives of the MMM pilot project at an early stage in their formalised partnership, and both were shared widely. This was an important step in their deeper collaboration and has helped them to make use of their collective voice to promote their vision of maximising the economic and artistic potential of the cultural sector in the North East. Taking a strategic approach, NGCV is able to develop joint responses, submissions and be proactive in providing input into cultural, social and economic debate and policy and decision making at all levels.

Their shared aims are:

- To offer world-class cultural experiences and to sustain the rich cultural fabric of the region
- To develop audiences and encourage participation in culture in the North East
- To attract visitors, artists and producers to come to the North East
- To ensure the strength of culture in Newcastle Gateshead is recognised in the national and international conversation
- To support innovation and nurture the next generation of cultural producers
- To contribute to the social and economic well-being of the North East
- To pursue training and educational opportunities to ensure ongoing expertise and leadership in the sector
- To protect the current and future physical assets of each of the cultural forms
- To develop sustainable organisational and financial models across the membership of the consortium
- To share good practice and opportunities with the wider cultural sector
- To collaborate in the realisation of international partnerships.

Formalising their collaboration in this way, and agreeing approaches to specific issues and opportunities, enables individual Chief Executives to represent NGCV as a whole in strategic discussions and debate.

They nominate representatives both on behalf of NGVC and the sector, to boards such as the Newcastle Gateshead Cultural Advisory Board and festival boards. They also share learning and ideas across peer groups and art forms, including museums, regionally, nationally and internationally.

Their ability to influence and engage effectively with policy makers, politicians and funders is improved, as these and other key stakeholders find it easier to interface with NGCV Chief Executives as a strategic group, rather than have views or input from 10 separate organisations.

### **Model 6: Joint Partnership with the Birth of a New Formal Organisation**

One of the more well known models for joint partnership is where two or more organisations determine that their joint activities are best implemented by forming a separate, independent organisation. The creation of such an organisation reflects both a maturity of purpose and a recognition by the entrepreneurial parent organisations that their long-term needs as a group are better served outside the scope of their existing organisations and/or that a new structure offers the freedom that is sometimes necessary for new joint enterprises to flourish.

### **Example of Joint Partnership with the Birth of a New Formal Organisation: MMM pilot - Festivals Edinburgh (Scotland)**

Festivals Edinburgh works on behalf of the twelve Edinburgh Festivals: Bank of Scotland Imagine Festival, Edinburgh Art Festival, Edinburgh Festival Fringe, Edinburgh International Book Festival, Edinburgh International Festival, Edinburgh International Film Festival, Edinburgh Jazz and Blues Festival, Edinburgh International Science Festival, Edinburgh Mela, Edinburgh's Hogmanay, Edinburgh Military Tattoo and the Scottish International Storytelling Festival. It is working strategically in six core areas in order to develop the global competitive edge of Edinburgh's Festivals.

Faith Liddell, Director of Festivals Edinburgh, said: "Edinburgh is the world's greatest Festival City. The means of maintaining and strengthening that identity over the coming years lies in making the whole of the Festival ecology greater than the

sum of its unique parts. Our collaborative journey has only just begun but already it is reaping significant rewards across all our areas of current mutual interest; marketing, technology, fundraising and partnership, programming, environmental issues and professional development. We're learning and growing as individual organisations and as a group and we look forward to sharing our story and giving others courage through MMM."

### **Model 7: Joint Administrative Office and Back Office Operations:**

In a joint administrative office, efficiencies are achieved through shared administrative office and personnel, including financial and human resources management and information technology. Another approach is to contract administrative functions to a separate organisation whose sole job is to provide 'back office' support for other organisations.

### **Example of Joint Administrative Office and Back Office Operations: MMM pilots - AV Festival, Northern Lights Film Festival and Tyneside Cinema (England)**

AV Festival, Northern Lights Film Festival and Tyneside Cinema are devising ways of sharing a range of back-office functions and developing a more collaborative approach to programming and public engagement. Rebecca Shatwell, Director of AV Festival, said: "This unique grouping of Newcastle-based film and media arts organisations, all leaders in their respective fields are poised to enter new phases of growth. Enhancing our shared back office functions around volunteers, fundraising and finance, and expanding this collaborative way of working to artistic programming and public engagement, seems a natural evolution of our collective mission."

### **Model 8: Confederation**

One well-known model of confederation is the United States, with individual states operating separately from, yet integrally part of, a federal whole. Similarly, an umbrella organisation exists because of the constituent parts, to which it provides services, co-ordination and other support. Among disparate similar entities, confederations can build co-ordination out of chaos and fragmentation. Cases differ in terms of how much control rests with the umbrella organisation. In some cases, the umbrella organisation tightly controls resources and information. In other cases, the umbrella organisation clearly answers to its members.

## **Example of a Confederation: Audiences UK (England)**

The National Audience Development Network Ltd was created in 1997. Its members were the growing number of individually managed and governed audience development agencies in UK, organisations that specialise in understanding how to engage and develop audiences for arts and cultural activities. The agencies had previously informally shared learning and good practice, but the establishment of this new company enabled them to deliver appropriate specific work together (see Model 6 above).

For 13 years the organisation traded as 'Network'. In 2010, it re-launched as 'Audiences UK' with a new business model and plan. Over time the membership had evolved to the point where there was almost universal geographic coverage of the UK. In addition, new opportunities were arising that required a national presence. 'Network' had always operated with minimal central resource. In 2009 the organization was successful in raising significant funds to operate in a more 'federal' manner to deliver the following priorities:

- **Shape the Debate.** Draw on the wealth of intelligence generated by the regional agencies, to establish Network as a strong, authoritative voice on audiences and cultural engagement, influencing policy-makers within each national government, government sponsored public bodies and NGOs.
- **Develop Skills.** Provide professional development for audience development and public engagement specialists within a Quality Assurance Framework, with a particular focus on leadership.
- **Deliver Nationally.** Build on national initiatives such as Audience Data UK and A Night Less Ordinary, by exploiting Network's ability to put together regional teams of experts to deliver on national projects.
- **Strengthen the Organization.** Establish a clear brand position, and a robust business model, with a balanced portfolio of services, events and advocacy work.
- **Enable the Agencies.** Champion the work of the individual regional agencies at a national level, and use the Network business model to support their sustainability.

Whilst control currently still rests with the member organisations, the funding has facilitated the appointment of a Chief Executive for Audiences UK to provide national leadership and there is acknowledgement within the membership that governance arrangements will have to evolve to allow for this new ‘federal’ approach to deliver its potential.

### **Model 9: Creative Adhocracies**

Collaboration between two or more individuals who choose to work together to accomplish a shared goal is perhaps the most familiar model of collaboration anywhere, no less so in the arts and cultural sector, with collaborations of this kind amongst individual artists being the most commonly recognised version. However, there is a growing trend for other individuals working in the sector - not artists – to come together in what are being described as ‘creative adhocracies’. As the name implies, these are loose, highly organic, flexible organisational forms that often bring individuals motivated by super ordinate goals together in order to progress a specific project.

### **Example of a Creative Adhocracy: Mission, Models Money (UK)**

Mission, Models, Money ‘s (MMM) vision is to transform the way the arts use their resources to support the creation and experience of great art. Initiated in 2004, it existed as a project, hosted legally and financially first by the Jerwood Charitable Foundation and for a short period of time by the International Futures Forum until it was legally constituted as a company limited by guarantee without share capital in 2008. With a small core team of two directors initially, rising to 4 and a larger group of associates, MMM regularly draws in intellectual capital and administrative resource from a much wider multi-generational talent pool, accessed through its multiple memberships of different networks and organisations.

Fluidity, flexibility and adaptiveness are the core competencies required from the Directors and Associates as design and delivery teams are ‘flocked’ on a project-by-project basis. MMM works in cycles raising the resources for each cycle in turn. Whilst overarching themes are designed for each cycle, the final programme focus is more finely tailored in response to issues emerging on the frontline of creative practice in the UK at the time of delivery. With all contracts let on a freelance basis, MMM’s organising systems are designed to be dynamic and organic in order to

maintain maximum creativity and inventiveness, and quickly folded down if funding fails to materialise.

The model of the creative adhocracy was originally advocated by Henry Mintzberg<sup>4</sup> in the 1980s. His studies showed that individuals involved in creative adhocracies generally display high levels of flexibility, pragmatism and opportunism, have multiple skills and play multiple roles drawing on a broader network of allies and collaborators to work on strategies that are often highly visionary and 'emergent'. The concept of emergence is central to MMM's ethos. Organisational behaviourist Margaret Wheatley explains it thus: "...change always happens through emergence. Large-scale changes that have great impact do not originate in plans or strategies from on high. Instead, they begin as small, local actions. While they remain separate and apart, they have no influence beyond their locale. However, if they become connected, exchanging information and learning, their separate efforts can suddenly emerge as very powerful changes, able to influence a large system. This sudden appearance, known as an emergent phenomenon, always brings new levels of capacity."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Mintzberg, H. (1989) *Mintzberg on Management*, New York, The Free Press

<sup>5</sup> Wheatley, M. and Frieze, D. (2006) *How Large-Scale Change Really Happens - Working With Emergence* (<http://www.margaretwheatley.com/articles/largescalechange.html>)