



Maokwo, MiFriendly Cities at the Rising Global Peace Forum

INNOVATIONS IN PROJECT STRUCTURE: A MULTI-PARTNER, REGIONAL APPROACH

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This project is co-financed by the European
Regional Development Fund through the
Urban Innovative Action's initiative



Large scale, multi-partner projects have the power of drawing in a range of services to a region, and of creating a well-rounded and joined up 'offer' for a funder, a locality, and for the individual beneficiary. However, managing such a partnership can be challenging, as organisations work differently and have different aims.

MiFriendly Cities (MiFC) adopted an innovative structure to deliver the project from the outset, bringing together a partnership of 11 organisations including three city councils, six NGOs, a university and a commercial partner, spanning a large geographical West Midlands region. Together, they delivered over 30 different activities and programmes [1].

The MiFriendly Cities partnership was awarded £3.7m of co-funding by the EU's Urban Innovative Actions fund (part of the European Regional Development Fund) to explore how to make Coventry, Birmingham and Wolverhampton more 'migrant-friendly'. The project began in March 2018, and will last for 3 and a half years, running until May 2021.

A migrant-friendly city is one where the voices, skills and passion of refugees and migrants flourish, so that all branches of the community are fully invested in its future, and the social and economic fabric of the region is strengthened. This project was focused on supporting grassroots activity and on the delivery of specialist services to facilitate migrant integration - across health, citizenship, employment, and language skills, and also included the funding of 30 social enterprise and innovation projects.

This paper explores the benefits and challenges of working in a large multi-partner structure; takes a look at key recommendations that have emerged from the MiFriendly Cities project experience; and offers a detailed case study about the project.

[1] Partners included: Coventry City Council (CCC) (project lead); Birmingham City Council (BCC); City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC); Coventry University (CU); Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre (CRMC); Coventry University Social Enterprise (CUSE); Refugee and Migrant Centre (Birmingham and Wolverhampton) (RMC); Migrant Voice (MV); MigrationWork CIC (MW); Central England Law Centre (CELC); and Interserve (a commercial facilities-management company and employer).



Key benefits of a large partnership with a diverse range of organisations

- A multi-partner project with a variety of activities and touch points for participants enables participants to build relationships with a range of organisations across a region or city.
- Participants benefit from accessing a wide range of services, and thereby being supported in a holistic way from different angles.
- The gap between 'grassroots' groups and decision makers can be narrowed, through creating opportunities for grassroots and community groups, NGOs and city councils to work together to achieve common aims.
- Understanding, connections and a collaborative spirit can be developed between city councils, third sector organisations and the private sector.
- This can lead to new ways of working
- And to wider project reach

What enables effective partnership working?

Effective administration and governance

A strong and formalised governance structure and processes is important to manage the complexity of partners, activities and finance. This should include regular meetings at various levels and between different thematic areas, and should also be reviewed, and adapted and changed if need be, based on conversations with the partners.

Fostering inter-partnership working on joint activities and events

Partnerships work at their best when partners have the opportunity to work closely together and learn from each other. This enables projects to benefit from a diverse set of skills and perspectives, which improves the creativity and ensures buy-in from a range of actors on key activities.

- **Events** help demonstrate that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. They provide opportunities for partners to work closely together to create content, distribute event invitations, and provide event support. This creates moments for sharing of new ideas, thoughts and contacts between a range of organisations and partners.
- **Away days and team building activities** bring people together, gain different perspectives on the project, and refocus partners on shared priorities. Large partnerships can mean that not everyone knows each other, and building good relationships leads to more effective communication and collaboration. Informal opportunities for interaction aid this.
- **Regular (monthly) work package calls** with a cross-partner list of attendees create high levels of collaboration and shared learning among partners.
- **Fast responses** to partnership communication in times of crisis enables the partnership to operate and respond effectively. The MiFriendly Cities project experienced this in relation to COVID-19, where effective response to requests for information were key to negotiating a project extension.

Theory of Change

Evaluation is difficult for large projects, with multiple strands of work, a range of aims and a diverse array of partners. A Theory of Change can be a useful tool for mapping the relationship between activities and outcomes, and for ordering evaluation efforts and data collection. During the MiFriendly Cities project, this was developed midway by Coventry University in consultation with partners, and helped foster consolidation for the remainder of the project.

It's Our Right Project Damayanthi Muthukumarana





Communications

Communications are a vital part of an effective project.

- Creating and implementing a coherent brand, look and feel quickly across all materials ensures that a credible and consistent presence is recognised by participants and other organisations.
- Social media channels help inform the public as well as partners and stakeholders about the project and its activities.

Specific communications ideas from MiFriendly Cities:

- From drip to pulse: to help focus limited resources, our project adopted a 'mini campaign' approach to activity, focused on key milestones or events, such as Refugee Week, Black History month, or the Final Event. This enabled us to create more impact over fewer activities and galvanise the partnership to get involved at specific times in the year.
 - A Communications Working Group met weekly, pulling together resource from across the partnership to focus on activity and communications opportunities.
 - A simple but effective 'Internal Project Update email' went out monthly to 50+ partners, sharing key governance, reporting, milestones and budget information, and providing a platform for partners to share key updates and to seek support from each other. This helped to foster joint ownership and input and ensured everyone was 'on the same page'.
 - A quarterly stakeholder 'eNewsletter' benefitted from the broad contact list of diverse partners, with distribution across 1000s of potential readers and hundreds of NGOs, public sector bodies and individuals. It enabled us to share successes and publish positive stories about participants and programmes.
 - The project shared positive stories about activities and participants via the MiFC website and social media channels, in particular highlighting key 'change-makers' within the project. Story-telling, especially about our participants, provided a powerful tool to engage audiences and the media, and to galvanise the partnership, as well as providing a platform for our participants to tell their story.
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Examples from MiFriendly Cities project

There were significant uplifts in engagement, confidence and influence of participants when they attended more than one activity, met with different partners, and attended a variety of project events and workshops. These individuals are emerging as project ‘change-makers’, seizing opportunity and sharing their experiences. Examples include:

- Victor Iringere – originally a project participant, went on to become an employee of partner CRMC, running the CCC Health Champions and leading ESOL and ESP delivery and the Hope House project build. Victor has also shared his story for the project website and social media, led workshops focusing on the work of Health Champions from the project, and has featured in local and regional press coverage.
- Mary Thomas is project lead for Padendere Community Sewing Group, a sewing group for isolated individuals in Wolverhampton grant funded by MiFC. She also attended Health Champions training and took part in Media Lab training by Migrant Voice, and has been a leader in the establishment of the Network of Migrant Innovators – of which she is now Director. After developing her project delivery and leadership skills through these various avenues, she was later commissioned along with two other social innovators to run a Share my Language project for the City of Wolverhampton Council.
- Loraine Masiya Mponela was a social innovator, leading a project called Right2aHome, and setting up the UK’s first migrant led project housing destitute migrants. She also was part of Migrant Voice’s Media Lab and Newsroom initiatives, and was featured extensively in the media throughout the duration of the project.

As the project grew, this collaboration increasingly involved project participants themselves, who led on key aspects of the project delivery and brought their knowledge, skills and experience to the fore. For example:

- Maokwo, led by social innovator Laura Nyahuye, curated and launched the online exhibition ‘My City’ which was launched at our final event. Laura had also previously presented at our Interim Event and also met with the Project Meeting to share her thoughts on collaboration. Through her leadership, different creative voices from across the three cities were brought together to contribute to the show.
 - Social Innovator Ake Achi of ‘Migrants at Work’ collaborated with Central England Law Centre to deliver employment rights sessions; with CRMC and RMC to support with individual cases; and with Coventry University to develop training for employers around employing migrants.
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Participant engagement

By working closely with grassroots projects, collaboration can ‘grow’ between local communities and partners.

- Participants will benefit from interaction and support from each other, and this can be supported through allowing time at events for small group discussions, breaks, and group working.
- The emergence of community leaders and change-makers can be fostered through demonstrating trust in them; through fostering and encouraging peer support; and through financial investment.
- Some participants may need support from the project in removing barriers to integration, that stand in the way of their success: such as supporting them to open a bank account. This could come through advice, information, training and mentoring, or other forms of one-to-one support.
- Community leaders and ‘change-makers’ will have a significant impact on the project, and might support it through social media posts, PR opportunities and coverage, as well as by supporting other individuals on courses and in their networks. This resource should be valued!
- Participants may well be the best person for new opportunities that emerge within the project – such as job opportunities or one-off tasks that need specialist engagement. For example, the MiFriendly Cities project recruited Victor Iringere, a former participant, and engaged Laura Nyahuye to deliver the exhibition.
- The Social Innovation strand of the MiFriendly Cities project invested in developing a Network of participants, called NOMI (Network of Migrant Innovators). This sustaining peer support structure was a way to ensure that participant engagement and support for one another lives on beyond the lifetime of the project.



MiFriendly Cities at the Rising Global Peace Forum

Challenges to effective partnership working: lessons from MiFriendly Cities project

- A rigorous reporting and project meeting structure can be time consuming and repetitive for partners, who might have limited resource and time. This could detract from the project's ability to effectively deliver support and services to migrants. Reviewing and streamlining the processes where possible could help, and using online meetings instead of in-person can help to save on travel time.
 - Work packages can become siloed, driven by tightly defined deliverables that define programme ownership, and budget and time constraints for partners. This can be an obstacle for cross partnership working. Identifying areas for potential cross fertilisation and dependencies in the bid documents could foster greater collaboration, or allocating specific resource for 'connecting' and joining up.
 - It is important to align ideas between partners around key themes of the project. For instance, in MiFriendly Cities, partners had different ideas of what 'migrant integration' meant, and work was needed to develop a project wide 'culture', and to invest in shared understanding and common goals. This was explored through meetings and through partnership workshops in the first year of the project and at the interim away day.
 - Paying grassroots and un-constituted organisations can be difficult for large institutions to do. This can cause delays and damage relationships. Ideally, flexible and creative funding programmes should be administered by organisations who are able to be agile and responsive, and not beholden to the same bureaucratic pressures as other larger institutions.
 - Different work-place practices, communication styles and administrative processes can cause delays, confusion and challenges in effective delivery. Understanding each other's workplace contexts from the outset could help foster greater understanding. For example, in MiFriendly Cities, the three city councils all had different departmental structures which meant that processes differed. Shared understanding of these differences and the impact on day to day working aids the partnership to work together to find solutions.
 - Different partners will have different resources, and some partners may struggle to engage and contribute to joint work as much as they would like to. Furthermore, as the project continues, it may be that the allocated resource for certain partners does not match the needs of the project or of participants. Again, conversations, openness, and reviewing where change is possible could support this challenge somewhat.
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Summary

The establishment of a partnership of 11 organisations has increased the resilience of the project, enabling it to absorb unplanned changes in organisations and personnel, and adapt to the challenges of the pandemic. Multiple partners have provided more diversity of thinking and experience, making cross partner and cross project activity like events, and content for communications, richer and more varied. And these different perspectives have led to new ideas and the creation of new tools and resources.

Critically, the breadth of the project has also given opportunities for participants to benefit from multiple touchpoints and activities, broadening their own skills and increasing their confidence to become active protagonists.

But with this collaboration comes the need for greater investment in internal communications and activities to bring the partnership together, along with the need for effective consultation with partners to gain support, ideas and buy-in. Too much administrative burden can dampen passion for the project, and if there is too little, then important learning and controls can be lost. It's a fine balance.



Appendix

1. Governance - Delivery structure:

The bid broke down the project into 9 work packages, with a Work Package lead working across Partners to coordinate the delivery of activities. Each Work Package was required to hold a monthly meeting to manage the delivery of their activities, coordinate resources and share progress with partners, as well as report at the monthly Project Meeting.

WP1 Project preparation	WP6 Active Citizenship
WP2 Project Management	WP7 Citizen Social Scientists
WP3 Communications	WP8 Social Innovation Infrastructure
WP4 Employment	WP9 Closure and knowledge transfer
WP5 Social Enterprise and Innovation	

Governance - Reporting

Partner Performance Management 1 to 1s	Held every two months with the CCC
Milestone Review report to UIA	Compiled twice a year by the overall Project lead (CCC)
Quality Register/KPIs	Internal measurements of outputs Monthly to overall Project lead (CCC)
Annual Progress Reviews	Annual submission by each partner and Work Package to CCC, who then compiled a project APR to the UIA
WP Lead reports	Compiled monthly by WP leads and used in the monthly Project Meeting
Budget and finance management	Finances were managed via Partner 121s with CCC, and two core documents: - a document that listed all partner and category budgets. Updated by partners in preparation for 121 meetings. - Budget summary of receivables and distribution of budget and outstanding amounts – used internally by CCC.

2. Governance - Meetings and forums:

<i>Progress reporting and ad hoc issues</i> UIA meetings	<p>UIA meetings were held on an ad hoc basis between CCC and the UIA.</p>
<i>Oversight, strategy and impact</i> The Steering Group	<p>Meeting every 6 months, attended by senior Partners, typically Directors of organisations and senior council officials. Originally this group was formed to provide senior strategic oversight for the project and to look at ways to influence policy. It was decided mid-project that the steering forum become a series of three engagement events aimed at bringing partners, participants, stakeholders and policy makers together to discuss key themes.</p>
<i>Project decision making</i> Project Committee	<p>Meeting quarterly and Chaired by Coventry City Council, this was attended by senior Project leaders and Directors of organisations. The committee reviewed project performance KPIs, finance and budgets, reporting and structural issues impacting delivery, and took decisions on budget reallocations and changes to the application document.</p>
<i>Project Delivery</i> Project Meeting	<p>Meeting monthly, Chaired by Coventry City Council and attended by project delivery and Work Package leads. This meeting reviewed KPIs, shared issues and challenges, and discussed delivery performance, project challenges and successes.</p>
<i>Project management</i> CCC internal project meeting	<p>Internally, CCC used a project update document that covered all project outputs, deliverables and finance details. They met twice a month to discuss the project and plan for governance forums and meetings.</p>
Informal working groups	<p>These were organised by Work Package leads and partners. For example, the Communications Working Group met weekly to progress Work Package 3, and included representatives from the 3 city councils, Migrant Voice, and CRMC's Legacy Officer for the project.</p>
Team Away Days	<p>An initial away day was held at the start of the project, led by MigrationWork CIC. The Partnership held an interim away day in September 2019, which proved to be a useful intervention in the project – bringing together 30 people face to face in Coventry. The project is also planning two Evaluation half day away days towards the end of the project.</p>

3. The project in numbers:

West Midlands:

- 2.8m people
- 1000's of migrants and refugees in the region
- 3 city councils
- One combined authority (WMCA)

Project Team:

- 3 city councils (BCC, CCC, CWC)
- 6 NGOs
- One academic institution – Coventry Uni
- One corporate partner

We've delivered...

6,000+ health messages
 253 legal rights checks, advice and signposting
 4 Know your rights guides in 9 Community languages
 394 Share my Language community activities
 106+ home makeovers
 12+ repair cafes
 1,000+ of up-cycled furniture items
 114 apprenticeships and job opportunities
 639 English language classes
 Citizenship rights presentations to 500+ schools
 3 Stakeholder forums with 100s of attendees
 Briefing papers shared across Europe
 1,000s of tweets and posts
 A new online art exhibition

We've reached...

500+ participants
 10,000+ people
 1,000s of migrants
 100s of community service providers
 Councils and authorities across UK and Europe
 Regional funders
 50 regional and national journalists
 100s of NGOs and charities
 1,000s of local residents
 250+ employers

We've built...

A new shared community space
 Relationships between 11 Partner organisations
 Greater understanding of migrant issues
 A 'Network' of social innovation projects and leaders
 Resilience and support structures
 Connections between cities
 A Chapel of Many 'chair sculpture'
 New furniture from old
 A reputation - finalist in the Innovation in Politics Awards 2020

We've supported...

32 social projects with seed funding and advice
 36+ language inspired workshops
 The RISING Global Peace Forum
 Coventry Welcomes City Festival
 The fight against Covid 19 with PPE, child-care support and community activities

We've trained....

61 Health Champions
 80 Citizen Social Scientists
 162 Citizen journalists
 78 with DIY skills and qualifications
 131 with digital qualifications
 40+ social entrepreneurs
 100+ maker and 3D modelling skills

This paper was written by [MigrationWork CIC](#), one of eleven project partners involved in the MiFriendly Cities project. MigrationWork lead on the project communications; authored two series' of briefing papers about innovative approaches; ran three international Sounding Board discussions; delivered the Social Innovation programme, training and supporting 16 migrant-led social innovation projects in the region; and developed the [Network of Migrant Innovators](#).

To find out more about [MiFriendly Cities](#), see our [resources](#) and [social media](#)

A Game of Home, Social Innovation

