**Healthy Partnerships Self – Assessment Tool**

In year 3 of the longitudinal evaluation of the MEAM Approach, our independent evaluator, Cordis Bright, carried out thematic research into MEAM Approach partnerships. The research aimed to provide a clearer understanding of the partnership structures in local areas and produced a list of 11 key features and 5 key challenges for effective MEAM Approach partnerships.

Partnerships are encouraged to use the thematic report to consider the strengths and weaknesses of their partnership structures and identify areas for development. This tool aims to guide and support your conversations. We encourage you to seek a range of views from across the partnership including strategic, operational and lived experience.

We encourage area leads to speak to their MEAM Partnership Manager for further advice and support and to refer to the [full report](http://meam.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/MEAM-Year-3-partnerships-thematic-report-FINAL.pdf) for further information and examples of good practice.

**Key features of effective MEAM Approach partnerships**

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| **Key feature** | **Importance (\*see the thematic partnerships report for examples of good practice)** | **What is our partnership doing well?** | **Next steps for improvement** |
| **Shared understanding of multiple disadvantage.** | * Leads to a more coordinated response across services * A more positive experience of support for clients * This is particularly important to build in the early stages of the partnership as partners become familiar with the concepts and develop a shared understanding “organically"through their involvement and attendance at partnership meetings. |  | *Steps should be specific and focused with actions for specific members of the partnership and timescales.* |
| **Strong strategic leadership.** | * Leads can use their influence to bring others on board and to further embed local work using the MEAM Approach. * While operational work is central to the effectiveness of partnerships, strategic-led drive is vital to become sustainable and to embed systemic change. |  |  |
| **Strategic cross-sector buy-in.** | * Enables the engagement of a wide range of partners. * Raises the profile of multiple disadvantage and the extent to which it is a priority issue in a local area. * Increases the likelihood that system blockages can be dealt with effectively at a strategic level. |  |  |
| **Representation and consistent attendance from a wide range of partners.** | * Enables a stronger multi-agency approach with insight into systemic issues across all sectors. * Enables agile and coordinated responses to offers of support. * Creates a shared sense of responsibility and ownership amongst partners, both for the MEAM Approach work overall and for support for specific clients. * Builds a greater shared understanding of the roles and remits of attendees, leading to morecollaborative and swift action planning, as well as fostering stronger relationships between partners. |  |  |
| **Meaningful involvement of experts by experience.** | * Brings the valued insight of lived experience to operational discussions regarding flexible offers of support * Adds lived experience insight to strategic discussions about systemic change * Empowers people to contribute their lived experience to influence the systems that are there to support them |  |  |
| **Appropriate level of seniority and authority among partners.** | * Ensures that partners can make decisions and commit to actions on behalf of their organisations, meaning that partnerships are more likely to be able to influence local policy, strategy and commissioning. * Operationally, partnerships are more able to deliver flexibility and make changes to processes, pathways and support. |  |  |
| **Strong relationships between individuals in the partnership.** | * Especially important at the development stage but also in relation to the ongoing delivery of the MEAM Approach work. Often there are only one or two regular representatives from each partner organisation who attend the meetings. Any coordination between organisations therefore relies quite considerably on these individual relationships. |  |  |
| **A spirit of constructive challenge.** | * Generates greater flexibility of support, resulting in better support and outcomes for clients, as well as a more transparent and honest approach to partnership working. * There are many factors that influence partners’ willingness and ability to challenge, including the multiple disadvantage coordinators’ host organisation and strength of interpersonal relationships. |  |  |
| **A learning culture that supports continuous improvement.** | * Promotes attitudes and behaviours that allow partnerships to reflect and remain focused on improvement or on maintaining progress. * Ensures that partners do not “rest on their laurels” when they have experienced early successes and helps to maintain motivation and engagement. * Partnerships with this culture are also receptive to learning and incorporating good practice from other local areas in the MEAM Approach network. |  |  |
| **Close connection between strategic and operational groups.** | * Clear and consistent communication channels and feedback loops between operational and strategic groups lead to less siloed working practices and more efficient pathways for escalation of cases. * Strategic and commissioning decisions being made with more insight into frontline issues. * Operational staff have a greater sense of the strategic context for their work, and more confidence that challenges are being addressed at a strategic level. |  |  |
| **Operational groups addressing system issues.** | * Strong operational groups broaden their focus from case management to include discussions around system issue * This insight into systems issues facing operational practitioners is valuable and can be shared with strategic groups for discussion. * The focus on systemic issues at an operational level can also lead to greater connectivity between different levels of the partnership. |  |  |

**Key challenges for effective MEAM Approach partnerships**

Alongside identifying key features for effective MEAM Approach partnerships, the thematic research also found evidence of five common challenges in setting up partnerships and ensuring they continue to run effectively.

These challenges are found frequently across the network, but they are not experienced by all local areas. Local areas will likely find that some of the identified challenges resonate with their local experience, while others feel less applicable.

Partnerships that can pre-empt or resolve these challenges are more likely to be sustainable and effective.

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| **Key challenge** | **Importance** | **What is our partnership doing well?** | **Steps for improvement** |
| **Difficulty engaging specific partner organisations.** | * Partnerships that lack sufficient engagement from all relevant partners results in less efficient partnership meetings. Problems arising include updates and information having to be sought outside of the meeting, limited expertise on issues related to specific sectors (such as mental health), and potential gaps in providing holistic support offers as a result. * This is also likely to lead to a lower level of flexibility for clients from non-partner organisations and reduces opportunities for system-wide discussion of changes which might be needed. |  |  |
| **Limited capacity of senior stakeholders.** | * This can result in inconsistent attendance, weaker inter-agency relationships and a more limited sense of shared responsibility and motivation to effect change. * Reduces the partnership’s ability to plan and deliver work, which negatively affects the partnership’s ability to implement improved coordination, systems flex or systems change. |  |  |
| **‘Winding down’ of the strategic group.** | * The absence of, or limited engagement of, a strategic group reduces the potential for a local area to flex or change local systems and working practices. * It creates challenges for the sustainability of the partnerships, and may limit the work to responding to individual cases rather than proactively tackling wider systemic issues. |  |  |
| **Expertise/ motivation held in individuals not systems.** | * Expertise and momentum behind the MEAM Approach may be reduced if certain committed individuals leave their roles. * In some cases, this may even lead to retrenchment into previous ways of working. * Where flexibility lies mainly with individuals, this can actually prevent flexible approaches from being adopted and embedded across the system such as in policies, procedures or working cultures, as individual level flexibility masks a wider systemic problem. |  |  |
| **Turnover of frontline staff.** | * Poses a challenge to the maintenance of key aspects of partnerships, such as strong inter-personal relationships, consistent working practices and flexible support pathways. * Makes it more difficult to ensure that the MEAMApproach values and learning are maintained by the partnership. |  |  |
| **Other area specific challenges you have identified as a partnership?** |  |  |  |

**Next steps?**

How do you plan to manage and report on the next steps you have identified as a partnership?

Can you prioritise a small number of actions to take forward at the start?

Do you have the necessary strategic governance to support long-term systemic change? Please discuss your ongoing actions with your Partnerships Manager who can assist with a number of next steps identified from your healthy partnerships audit.

**Notes on next steps:**