The Framework for Collaboration provides a guide to form new multi-disciplinary and cross sector teams working on an ARACY objective.

BACKGROUND

The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) was established by leading child and youth-focused organisations to bring about a significant improvement in the health and wellbeing of Australia’s children and young people. It has developed a work agenda for identifying and tackling important and complex problems that have resisted solutions and where collaborative effort is the key to success.

ARACY recognises:
- Collaborating is a complex and resource consuming activity which requires sound risk management.
- No one model of collaboration will fit the needs of each team. Effective collaboration may take different forms for different purposes and each collaborative team must develop a model of operation to suit its purpose.
- Collaboration is inspirational. It develops from relationships of trust, mutual respect and negotiated reciprocity.
- While it is people who collaborate, high level organisational commitment to collaborate, is an essential starting point.
- Understanding the complexities of collaboration and applying the key elements involved in collaboration increases the likelihood of achieving shared goals and outcomes.

Collaboration

In the context of the ARACY mission, collaboration is seen as the key to identifying and tackling important and complex problems that have resisted solutions. On the basis of both experience and intuition, it is assumed that these key problems can best be addressed by sharing strategic thinking, research design and findings, and practical insights arising from program delivery and review. This process should generate innovation, fresh research, and better targeted programs or interventions that will have optimal impact on the key problems.
The scope of collaboration for this discussion has three main dimensions:
- across a variety of organisational forms;
- across many relevant knowledge domains and disciplines; and
- across the triangle of stakeholders in program delivery, research, and policy development.

All three dimensions are relevant for the governance and successful performance of the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. ARACY is itself a mix of diverse member organisations and individuals.

Collaboration is a critical principle for integrating a highly diverse membership into a productive and energising ARACY that can demonstrate the mutual benefits of this approach. In particular, the fundamental principle that the ARACY will harness the energies of practitioners, researchers and policy managers, requires that internal governance and project management practices must embody sound collaborative arrangements. The organisations and individuals who are the membership of the ARACY bring together a wide spread of knowledge bases, anchored in many institutional settings, professional norms and disciplinary frameworks. Turning this background from a challenge (fragmentation) to a strength (synergy) is the task of collaboration.

For the purpose of this framework, collaboration is seen as a continuum of effort from the informal processes of cooperation at one end, to the more formal processes of collaboration at the other.

**Collaborative Teams**
The ARACY multidisciplinary cross sector teams will be drawn together from across:
- Organizational forms
- Relevant knowledge domains and disciplines
- Pentagon of stakeholders (Exhibit 1).

Each team will work on a specific ARACY work program objective and once the objective is achieved the team will be dissolved. The work of the teams will be branded an ARACY activity and all outputs will reside with ARCY who will make them publicly and freely available in keeping with its mission.

Teams will operate with an investment from the collaborating organisations and external funding. ARACY will provide seed funding and on-going administrative and management support including helping each team to develop a business plan for on-going funding.
Team composition will be determined through a transparent process in keeping with the values of ARACY to be open in its decision making and its commitment to:

- attracting expertise of the highest level (national and international)
- from a range of sectors (eg education, law, health, social sciences) and disciplines
- giving equal voice to researchers, policymakers and service providers
- building collaboration and minimizing the waste of competition
- mentoring and capacity building.

An ARACY advisory committee (AAC) will oversee the establishment of the teams and their work program. Each team will establish a project advisory group to oversee the work of the team including use of funds and ensure outcomes.

**ARACY FRAMEWORK**

The Framework provides a phased approach (Exhibit 2) to building an environment for collaboration, including:

- Development of an ARACY work agenda
- Development of an Advisory Committee to oversee the process of collaboration
- Development of project briefs for each agenda priority
- Establishment of teams and secure funding
- Delivery on each sub project
- Project evaluation.

It places the benefits and challenges associated with collaboration (Exhibit 3) and the value add of ARACY (Exhibit 4).

The Framework identifies responsibilities of the AAC, Project Advisory Groups and the ARACY National Office (Exhibit 5).

The Framework poses 9 key elements of effective collaboration with the expectation that each team will work out the ways of putting these elements together to best suit the project to be completed (Exhibit 6). The Framework offers a series of questions to guide team members in this task.

1. *leadership*: create a vision, purpose, and sense of importance and urgency in relation to a well defined major issue; define attainable objectives; liaise with media and external stakeholders to promote the issue and proposed solutions/strategies; bring potential partners to the table; attract new investors; seek to ‘de-politicise’ issues that could polarise supporters; take responsibility for up skilling others;
2. **team composition**: it is essential that teams are formed through a transparent process, with high levels of expertise, drawing on a range of sectors and disciplines, and providing effective input by researchers, policymakers and service providers; team members to participate in appropriate induction; avoid concept that team members ‘represent’ other organisations; consider secondments between stakeholders; consider team facilitation for complex tasks; address status differences; are there possible roles for younger researchers/participants?

3. **clear roles & responsibilities**: identify and define the obligations, expectations and motivations of the project contributors; clarify decision-making processes; establish sound business plan and project management framework; ongoing accountability and reporting requirements to be agreed; intellectual property issues to be identified and clarified; allow for some adaptation and flexibility over time;

4. **resourcing and funding**: clear financial commitments; obtain firm costings and timeframes; timely provision of funds and/or other resources; clarify possible sources of competition for funds; diversify sources of funds for projects over time;

5. **inclusive communication within the team**: open flows of information, opportunities for robust debate, lateral thinking and problem-solving; mentoring and mutual learning need to be encouraged; identify and discuss institutional or disciplinary ‘baggage’ brought by team members; seek to develop a common language on goals and processes;

6. **efficient organisational support**: ensure that administrative and IT support systems will be sufficient and reliable for a diverse group of participants; address any different perspectives of ‘home’ institutions;

7. **trust and mutual respect**: different types of contributions are valued and different viewpoints respected, without a need for group unanimity; opportunities for debate are provided; resolution of conflict is facilitated where warranted; professional ethics are observed; taking pride and pleasure in successes;

8. **external liaison** with sponsors and stakeholders: role of advisory or reference groups; ongoing regular feedback and involvement is essential to maintain sense of importance and sense of progress;

9. **review and evaluation**: involve project team, stakeholders and wider networks as appropriate in reviewing progress and adapting project management to fit revised requirements; has new knowledge been generated, and by what process?; identify the benefits and widely disseminate the learning’s arising from the collaborative approach in each project.
Exhibit 1

ARACY NEEDS TO BRING TOGETHER FIVE GROUPS

1. Success Factors / Challenges

Exhibit 2

POSSIBLE PHASES FOR ALLIANCE PROJECTS

1. Identify key priorities for collaboration
2. Research Agenda ARACY National Office

Pre-project

1. Identify key players
   - Organizations
   - People
2. Recruit the team
   - Hold team meetings to build relationships
   - Agree terms of engagement
3. Develop implementable sub-project briefs
   - Pilot studies
   - Representation from all parts of the 'pentagon'
4. Secure funding for Phase 3 sub-projects – series of requests for each question

Pre-phase
SUMMARY OF KEY SUCCESS FACTORS AND CHALLENGES

Key Success Factors

1. Defining terms of wearing the Alliance badge
   - And determining which Alliance members’ activities will be branded ARACY

2. Clearly defining ARACY’s added value to its constituents
   - Different models for different projects
   - Different value add at different stages of project lifecycle
   - Common feature is that ARACY should spur new collaborations / novel initiatives
   - Needs to be a value proposition for all constituents incl. practitioners

3. Developing a clear model of how ARACY will fund initiatives
   - Seed funding vs. later stages

4. Getting ‘runs on the board’ this year

Challenges

1. Aligning Alliance members’ organisations (negotiating with them)
   - eg. universities want to direct their faculties’ time and funding
   - eg. donors of practitioner organisations often want funds to be directed to the front line not research

2. Determining how ARACY will choose teams
   - Tender vs. headhunting vs. self-forming

3. ‘Harvesting’ alliance members’ activity
   - Input to clearinghouse

4. Creating collaborative models for a very diverse set of potential collaborators

Exhibit 4

ARACY’S VALUE ADD

1. Bringing together the best across all areas
   - Recruiting the willing, especially their organisations
   - Consensus workshops
   - Balancing the views of all constituents

2. Endorsing priority projects to gain larger funding (the ‘extra zero’)

3. Providing a package of assistance to projects, eg. infrastructure

4. Harvesting knowledge

5. Providing recognition for those who collaborate effectively

ARACY to be ‘an alliance of the willing’
Roles and Responsibilities

1. AAC to be responsible for Phase 1 and setting up Phase 1

2. National Office to develop budget and agree funding for each Project Advisory Group
   • Including secretariat support

3. Project Advisory Group from previous phase decides:
   • Terms of reference for phase
   • Team for the phase
   • How team is recruited
   • Changes (if any) to the Project Advisory Group in the phase (note that the intention is for the Project Advisory Group to change as little as possible)

4. Project Advisory Group oversees project during the phase
   • Use of funds
   • Ensuring outcomes

Exhibit 6
To be developed.