



# Cultural commissioning models

## National framework model

## What is it

In a national model one or more organisations provide centralised capacity to manage and/or resource activity. For example, in the case of the **Reading Well** programme, it is managed and coordinated centrally by The Reading Agency, but delivered locally by public library services working in partnership with health providers and others.

## How does it work?

The model depends on the establishment of good relationships between the national coordination and locally delivery partners, and of clearly understood distinct roles. It is most successful when activity is undertaken at the appropriate level, that is when those things that it makes sense to do just once are done centrally, and those that depend on local knowledge, contacts or face-to-face delivery are done locally.

In the case of Reading Well, the national lead partner, The Reading Agency, manages the scheme and leads on development at a national level, brokering partnerships with, for example, the Royal Colleges of Nursing, Psychology and others, as well as with publishers. Funding for this is nationally secured, as part of the charity's core funding. Local delivery bodies, primarily in this case local library authorities, need to fund their own elements of the work which they can do either directly or, increasingly, through local commissions.

Local delivery bodies also develop their own partnerships to support the programme, e.g. with GPs, local authority health managers, social care and local charities.

## Who are the commissioners?

In a national framework commissioning can operate at both levels. The national coordinating body can seek commissions to run the programme, possibly from

national government or more likely from other national bodies. Meanwhile local delivery organisations can be commissioned to provide the scheme for the benefit of local residents. Again using the example of Reading Well, local library services are being commissioned to provide the scheme and funded for the purchase of books and other materials. There are few if any examples however of commissioners funding the full cost of the programme at local level, i.e. including staff costs.

A good example of the latter is in Devon, where Devon Libraries are commissioned by Devon Public Health to resource the Book on Prescription scheme, providing a full set of books in all 57 local libraries and mobile and prison libraries. The Assistant Director of Public Health decided to fund the scheme for several reasons:

- The quality assurance offered by the national framework;
- The book themes are in line with local JSNA [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment] priorities; and
- Within a large, predominantly rural area, a partnership with libraries is an excellent way of reaching people in all areas and from all socio-economic groups

## How is the service contract organised?

The service contract will depend on who is being commissioned and by whom. If there is a national level commissioner the contract will be between them and the national coordinating body, who will then establish separate framework agreements with all participating local deliverers. At local level contracts are negotiated individually and may vary from one delivery body to another.

## How is the service evaluated?

The scale of a national programme makes it easier to develop an evidence base to demonstrate the value while supporting the gathering of local evidence. By coordinating that gathering of evidence the central body can ensure that it is consistent so that comparisons

can be made between different areas as well as building the separate bits of evidence into a coherent national picture. The aim must be to have evidence of local value to satisfy commissioners and support approaches to partners and for further commissions while also creating a significant body of evidence which will enable the programme to be further developed through new commissions, new funding streams and new partnerships.

In Devon, Public Health conducted data analysis after the first year of the scheme, using the data collected by the library service showing book loans by postcode. This analysis demonstrated:

- That the people Public Health hoped to reach are reading the books – there have been higher rates of book loans in towns with a higher than average incidence of mental health problems;
- That people from all socio-economic groups are reading the books; and
- This (together with the national evaluation) confirmed the value of the scheme for Devon Public Health

## Building sustaining working relations

As with all elements of this model, success depends on replicating good practice at both national and local levels, and nowhere is this more true than in the establishment of good working relationships between commissioner and deliverer, and between partners. The national coordinator has a key role to play in this. They must establish strong partnerships at national level to inform programme development, and with their local level delivery partners, while also supporting the latter to develop and sustain their own relationships.

According to The Reading Agency, their strategic partnership approach has been crucial to the success of the work [of Reading Well] as it provides quality endorsement and national recognition.

## Scalability

By its very nature a national framework is scalable. Schemes often start with a national body piloting an initiative with relatively few local delivery partners

and then expanding to a wider group before going properly national. Developing evidence of success is crucial to the ability to scale up, as some partners will wait to see this before committing, while others will need the evidence to build a case for local commissioning.

Such incremental growth has been demonstrated to work well, enabling each organisation to join the framework when they feel ready to do so. In the case of Reading Well the commissioning profile of the scheme has grown along with participation. When the programme started in 2013 roughly 25% of libraries were working with public health and other bodies to fund or part fund; today it is about 80%.

One of the benefits of a national framework is the obvious economies of scale in working nationally – not reinventing the wheel, producing shared materials etc.

## Potential challenges

The challenges include:

- the high levels of time and commitment needed from partners;
- the equally high commitment to manage the complex web of relationships;
- developing methodologies that work and are practical for all; and
- ensuring consistent gathering of evidence

## Top tips

- Develop the strategic partnerships that will give the programme national recognition and profile;
- Ensure that the programme feels local at the point of delivery and is locally relevant;
- Include an element of co-production, working closely with partners and end users to shape the scheme, and build local learning into the on-going national development of the programme; and
- Develop an evidence base to demonstrate the value, and support the gathering of local evidence as part of this

## Examples

- **Reading Well, The Reading Agency** – Reading Well, delivered in public libraries consists of two strands: Reading Well Books on Prescription and Reading Well Mood-boosting Books. Reading Well Books on Prescription helps people to understand and manage their health and wellbeing using self-help reading; and
- **The Reader** – has developed relationships with commissioners and secured commissioners in several locations across the country

The Cultural Commissioning Programme, funded by Arts Council England, works with arts and cultural organisations to help them better engage in public sector commissioning, with public service commissioners to help them understand the potential of arts and culture to deliver their outcomes, and also with policy makers and stakeholders nationally. The first phase of the programme (July 13 – June 16) was delivered by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), in partnership with New Philanthropy Capital and New Economics Foundation. A second phase (July 16 – Dec 17) is delivered by NCVO.