

Choosing the best way to work together:

from **networking**
to **partnership**

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We talk a lot about health justice partnership (HJP), but when services decide to work together, they don't always leap straight to partnership. There are a range of ways services might choose to collaborate, with the most common being networking, cooperation, coordination and partnership.¹

Each way of working together requires a different level of investment, and no single method is inherently better than the others. In fact, when we asked existing HJPs in a 2022 survey which way of working they primarily used, cooperation was reported by the largest proportion of HJPs (39%), followed by collaboration/partnership (31%), coordination (17%) and networking (14%).

When you're considering how you want to work with other organisations, it's important to consider which method is most appropriate for your context, depending on the challenges or opportunities you face. In deciding which method is right for your context, consider your goals and the complexity of the challenge/s you face. Generally, the deeper-rooted, more complex and widespread the challenge is, the more extensive the engagement will need to be.

1. Our labels and understanding of these engagement methods is informed by Arthur Himmelman's collaboration spectrum, the Tamarack Institute's Collaboration Spectrum Tool, as well as Health Justice Australia's own practice evidence from supporting the scoping and building of health justice partnerships across Australia. For simplicity, collaboration as an engagement method in itself has been subsumed by the term 'partnership.'

Building a working relationship between community services

In an outer metropolitan community, a local hospital is working to address the impact of family and domestic violence (FDV) through their Maternity Outpatients Clinic. In the same community, a legal service is providing free legal assistance to women and children at risk of or experiencing FDV. The two services have an existing relationship and are finding they have shared clients. They believe a more joined up approach between their services may benefit shared clients so they organise a meeting to discuss how they could work better together.

While both services seek to address the impact of FDV, they acknowledge that doing so in isolation won't address the deep-rooted and wide-spread impact of family violence. In the interests of working with the resources they currently have, they set a goal to improve information sharing between their teams by coming together fortnightly (networking). They also talk about how this might be a first step on a path to deeper engagement, and agree to review how they're working together and what their relationship is achieving in six months' time.

This example highlights how it can be helpful to break a challenge into a few parts, especially if you do not have the resources and capacity to address the challenge as a whole straight away. It also highlights how working in one way can enable services to be better-placed to consider other ways of working together in the future.

Getting started: Identify your challenge or goal

The challenge is the thing happening in your community or context that you'd like to change by working with others. Your goal will relate to the change you want to see made in the challenge, as a result of working with others.

If your goal or challenge is not yet clear, consider referencing Health Justice Australia's [*Building blocks for health justice partnership development*](#) resource for guidance. The *Building blocks* resource will also be useful once you've determined which way of working is most appropriate for your goals and context, as a tool to help you troubleshoot different stages of developing and implementing your efforts together.

Identify how you'll work together

If, by reading the information below, you can clearly identify how you'd like to work together – that's great! If you'd like a little more guidance, here are two options you can use to explore the different ways of working together, depending on what suits your needs.

Option 1: Which way of working is most closely aligned with your goal?

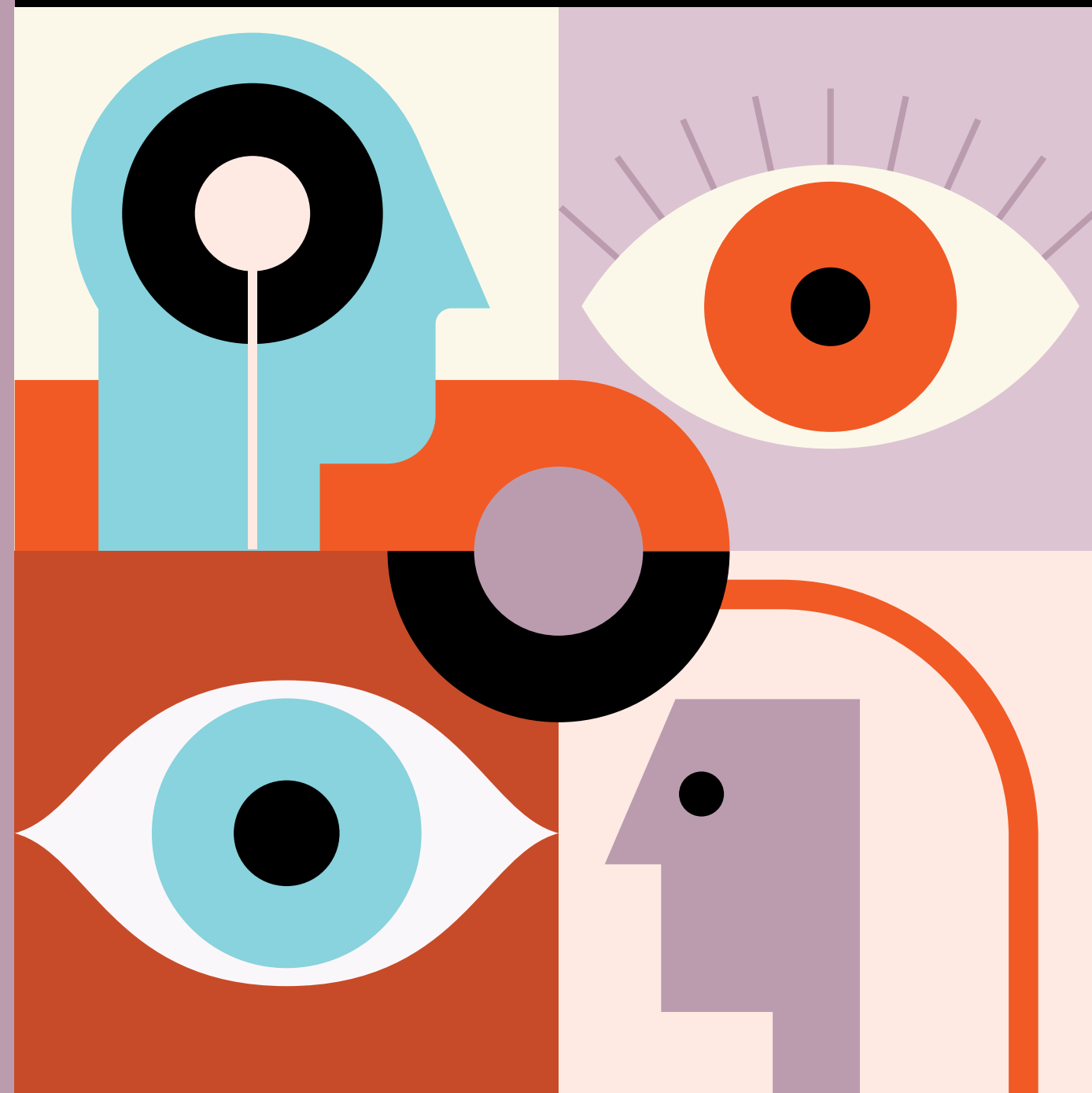
Start with the examples listed below and determine what your goal or challenge most closely aligns with. From there, you can identify which way of working to try, what "input" you need to consider to be effective, and what you might expect if you invest in what's needed to be effective.

Option 2: Which outputs are most closely aligned with your goal?

Start at the "outputs" row in the table below and determine what effects align with your goals or what you think is needed in your context. From there, you can identify which way of working might be worth trying and what "input" to consider to be effective.

Note there is still a spectrum within each of these ways of working, and not all elements need to be "ticked".

Ways of working together



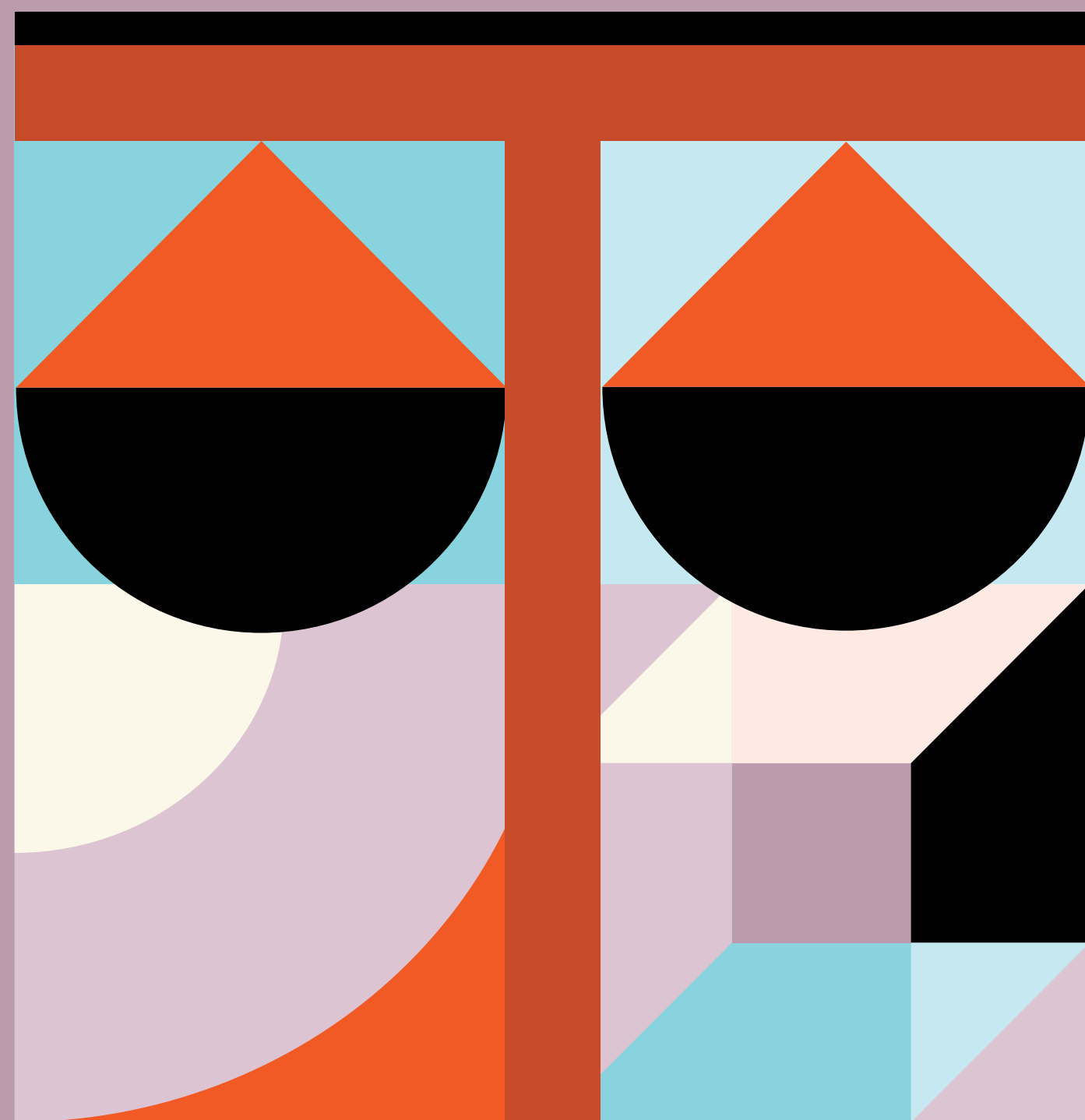
Networking:

Networking is an activity that involves exchanging information for mutual benefit. It requires dialogue but is relatively low commitment (for example, you can choose whether you do anything with the information you collect through networking) and comes with very few risks.

If your challenge or goal sounds like: “I want to feel connected to and share information with services in my region working to similar ends” or “I’m not sure what referral options I have...”

Then you might benefit from: Networking, for example through scoping and joining an interagency network.

Ways of working together



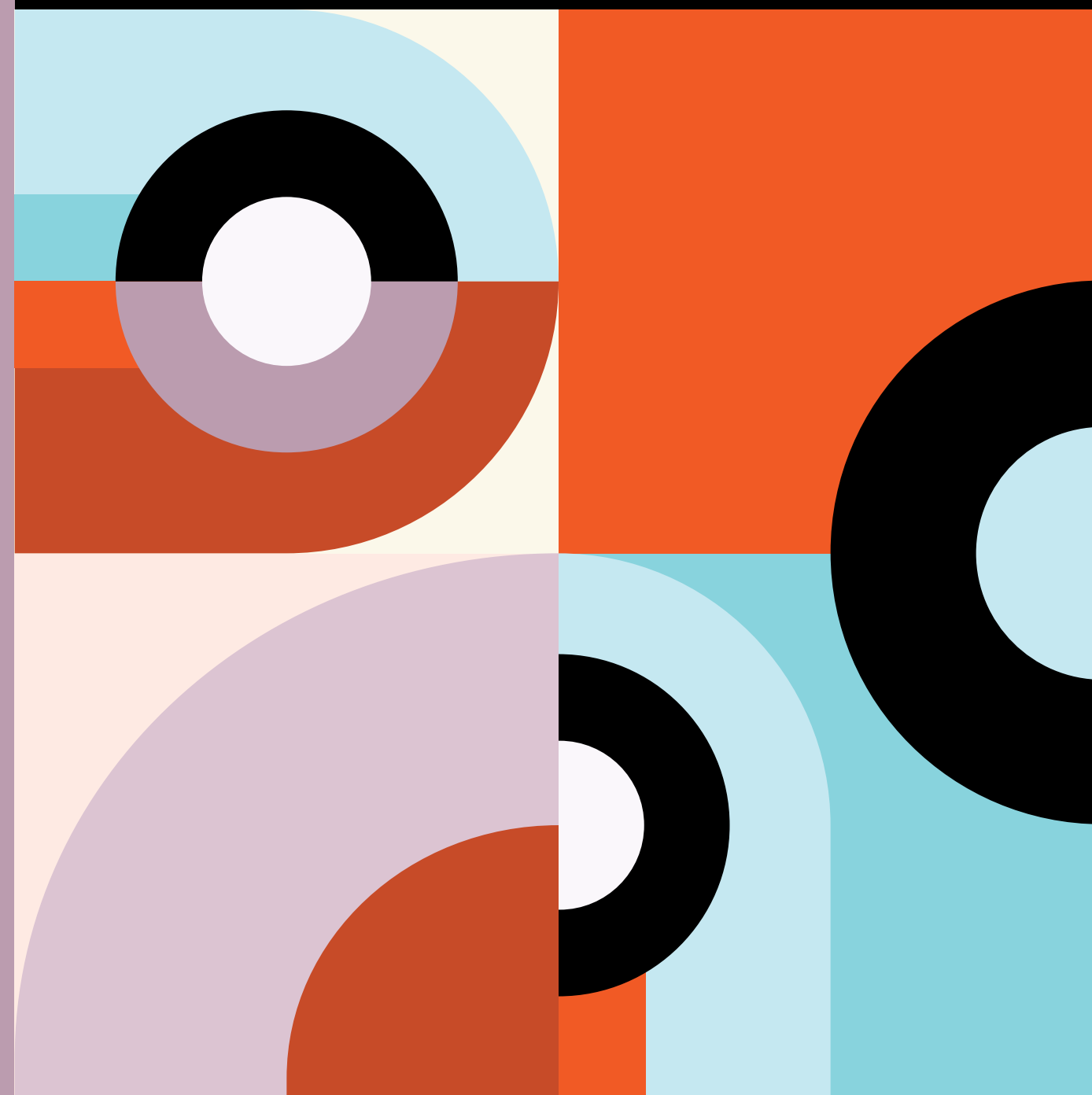
Cooperation:

Cooperation is generally activity or task focussed. It requires relatively low commitment, investment or risk (for example, no change within your organisation is generally required). It can be helpful to view cooperation as a more “time-limited” activity.

If your challenge or goal sounds like: “I’d like [X] to contribute to a stall at [Y event]” or “I need to do [X] for the person I’m working with, and a letter of support from [Y] will really help”

Then you might benefit from: Cooperation, for example, working alongside another service on a discreet activity, like an information stall at a local event or one-off request for support.

Ways of working together



Coordination:

Coordination involves developing longer-term relationships and more formal understandings between services (for example investing in activities such as planning, co-creating referral pathways and bridge building between your services.)

If your challenge or goal sounds like: “I want to create a seamless referral pathway across our hub-based services” or “The people my service is trying to reach are not walking through our doors”

Then you might benefit from: Coordination, for example identifying the services the people you’re trying to reach are accessing for help, and negotiating with one of those services to set up a space from which a client-facing outreach clinic can be based.

Ways of working together

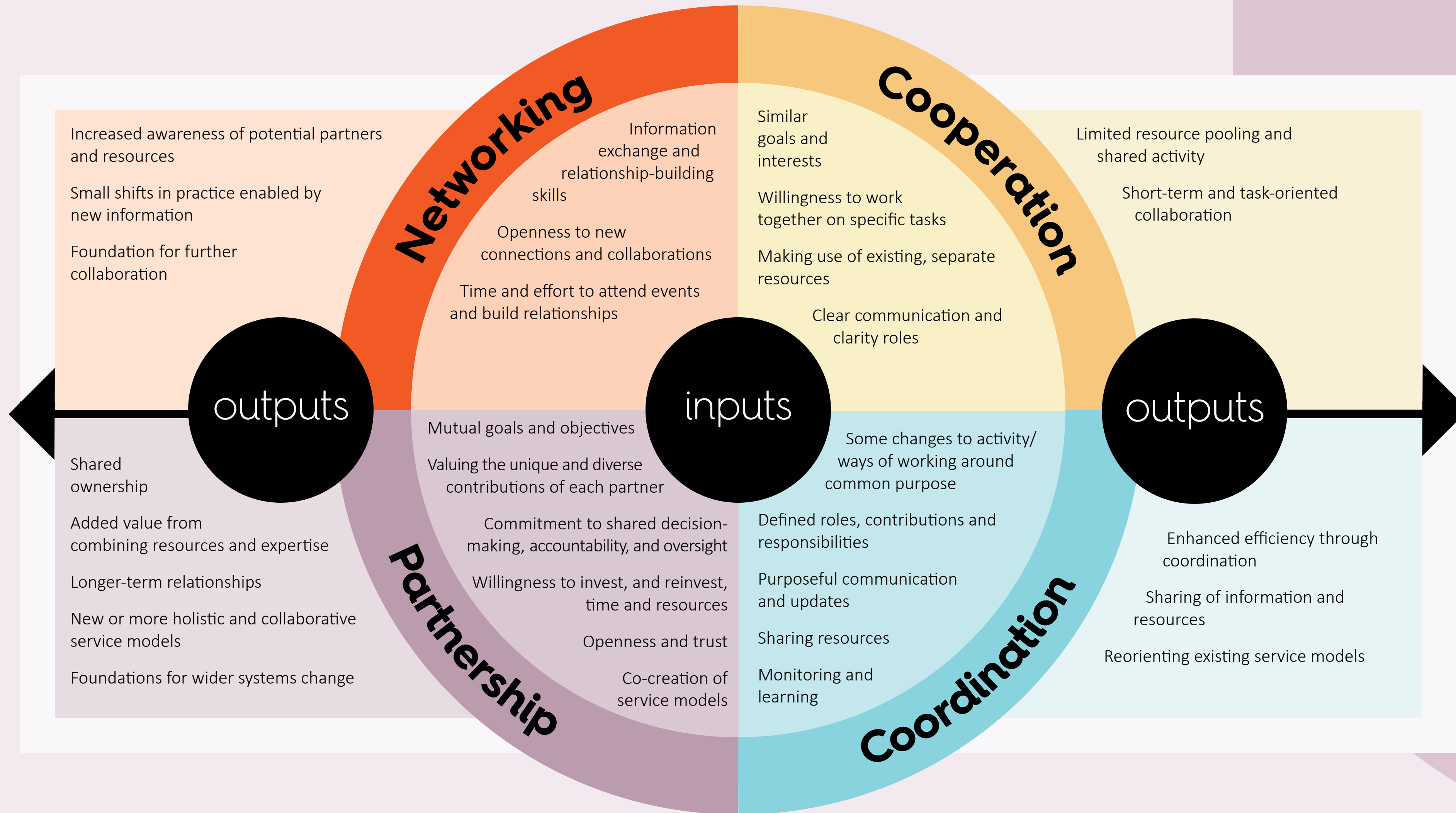


Partnership:

Partnership describes services coming together to develop sustainable relationships, with shared vision and goals. This often includes detailed planning and role clarification, as well as the co-creation of new strategies and solutions (where no single agency can achieve success on their own). The primary goal of partnership is to change the system and find new ways of doing things.

If your challenge or goal sounds like: “My service wants to address the systems that make or keep people unwell, as does [community X] and the other local health and social services” or “We’ve tried more transactional ways of working with other services, but we’re not seeing a change in service access patterns for people with multiple, intersecting needs”

Then you might benefit from: Partnership, for example, leveraging relationships with local health, legal assistance and/or community services you’re already connected with (through a network, activity you cooperated on, or existing outreach clinic) to scope, co-create and implement a partnership-based service that starts to address your shared interests and needs.



One size doesn't fit all

Remember, there's no one size fits all approach when it comes to choosing the right way of working together. You might even require different ways of working for different activities. For example, the Community Legal Education (CLE) activity of a health justice partnership can involve different people to those who manage the partnership, so in addition to the partnership's broader process management the CLE team will likely benefit from the "input" of cooperation.

Next steps

Ultimately, there's no exact science to determining the most fit-for-purpose way of working together. We each bring our own frame of reference, expertise, and experience to the process, and this will heavily inform how we see and understand the challenges before us. After using this resource, you may choose an approach that later leads to a deeper level of engagement, for example, cooperation leading to coordination, as this makes more sense for your collective goals. Alternatively, you might choose an approach that you later find doesn't serve your purpose. If your approach doesn't work out, don't be disheartened. Return to this resource and ask yourself what you might have missed (the "input" row will be useful here). You can also reach out to the Health Justice Australia team to find out how we can assist you further.

Further reading

Himmelman, A. (2002). Collaboration for a Change. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 8(2), 245-273.

[Tamarack Institute \(2017\). The Collaboration Spectrum](#)



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