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## COLLABORATE OR DIE

Why investing in relationships can ensure a mature economy.

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Contracting with the public sector works well for large organisations that have strong negotiating skills, sufficient income streams to ride breaks in cash flow when funding streams end and have the time and energy to invest in completing the lengthy tendering process and ongoing monitoring.

However, small organisations also have a depth of knowledge, specialist skills and experience to offer in delivering complex public sector requirements. The current procurement processes and even charitable funding streams are often too challenging for smaller companies and local charities. But by offering to work collaboratively with a larger company, who may have the infrastructure to compete for the tender, but not the necessary expertise to deliver the end service SMEs and registered charities may find a new lease of life.

Looking at things from the other side of the coin, larger companies need to be aware of the vast number of small companies, specialist charities and community organisations that are closing every year as traditional funding streams are drying up. Offering opportunities for these small locally built organisations to work collaboratively in delivering a larger contracting will maintain the decade of knowledge and community service as well as ensure that the primary function of the smaller organisation survives, that is to serve its community.

Collaboration in tendering to deliver a large PFI contracts can tie organisations into a partnership of 10-15 years, during which time it is expected that staff will turn over, and policy and demand may also change. Entering into such a long term working relationship requires an initial investment of time and commitment in managing the relationships of the people who will be working together. There will be an ongoing need to invest in the face to face working relationships and ensure that a consistent approach is embedded in the systems and processes and ethos of the organisations is critical for long term success.

Having a broker, separate from the day to day delivery of the contract, to keep their eye on the importance of continuity of knowledge, of the foibles of relationships between key personnel, maintaining good, clear communications and the ongoing evaluation of original and current objectives is an important investment. A skilled partnership broker will assist you in understanding the business drivers of your partners in any contractual relationship. A broker brings emotional intelligence to the equation, assisting in negotiations, coaching key staff members in how they are perceived, developing sincerity, integrity, and develop your staff to building meaningful relationships across the partnership and beyond the working interface of partners. Good partnership relationships are all about good relationships.