

Guidance to Support Effective Inter-agency Working Across Irish Children's Services:

Executive Summary

Purpose: the purpose of our guidance document is to provide a succinct but comprehensive, evidence based, guidance to support effective inter-agency working across Irish children's services. This Executive Summary presents key points from the guidance.

Definition: inter-agency co-operation or working can be defined as any joint action by two or more agencies that is intended to increase public value by their working together rather than separately. It can involve the exchange of information, altering activities, sharing resources, and actively enhancing of the capacity of other agencies for mutual benefit.

Inter-agency co-operation can be formal or informal, take place across different sectors, and take place at policy, at operational or at front-line service delivery level. It is an activity that covers a very broad range of actions and can be applied in numerous areas and settings.

Rationale: there are five broad reasons or rationale for inter-agency co-operation, namely:

- addressing problems with multiple and inter-related causes;
- generating economies of scale;
- benefiting from collaborative advantage;
- reducing policy and service fragmentation;
- adhering to policy or legal requirements.

Impacts: inter-agency co-operation can result in benefits and negative consequences (i.e. impacts). The evidence base consists mainly of the views of those involved in inter-agency co-operation, very little 'hard' or 'numeric' evidence (positive or negative) is reported. Nevertheless, positive benefits are reported for service users, professionals, agencies and the Exchequer.



Tools: different levels of inter-agency working require different tools (also referred to as models, structures, mechanisms, and approaches) and a range of tools are available. They fall into three categories, namely: tools to support inter-agency co-operation in communication and decision-making; tools to support co-operation at operational level; and tools to support co-operation in front-line service delivery. Our guidance document provides a detailed description of tools that can be used to support inter-agency co-operation.

The tools used should be relevant and specific to the particular level of inter-agency work being undertaken as well as to the settings, agencies and professionals involved. In many cases a combination of tools are used in an inter-agency initiative or project. For example, in a two tiered structure at local level, the first tier uses a consultation or planning mechanism (which may be formally structured as a board, a committee, a steering group) and the second tier uses a service delivery tool (e.g. coordinator or co-ordinating unit, centre-based delivery).

Influencing factors: factors influencing inter-agency co-operation fall into five main categories, namely, working relationships, inter-agency processes, management and governance, resources to support the work and service context. There are a considerable number of facilitators and inhibitors under each of these factors.

Good practice: because of the extensive number of actions that can constitute inter-agency co-operation and the very broad range of contexts within which it can be used, a 'single model' of good practice cannot be identified. Instead, from our analysis we can identify 15 features associated with good practice in inter-agency co-operation.

1. Have a justifiable rationale.
2. Ensure effective leadership.
3. Develop a shared purpose.
4. Clarify roles and responsibilities for inter-agency working.
5. Discuss and allay workers' fears and concerns.
6. Secure commitment from staff at all levels; strategic, operational and service delivery.
7. Build trust and mutual respect in inter-agency groups/workers.
8. Foster understanding between agencies.
9. Create an inter-agency culture and remove cultural barriers.
10. Ensure effective communication and information exchange.
11. Plan and organise effectively.
12. Achieve effective representation and participation in inter-agency working groups/teams.
13. Invest adequate time, staff and money.
14. Have appropriate corporate governance systems.
15. Monitor, evaluate and renew.

Additional guidance on how to achieve these 15 features is provided in our guidance document.

For more information check out www.caab.ie:

- ✓ **To see the full guidance document or to view a presentation on the guidance.**
- ✓ **To access research reports, an online database and a web-conference on inter-agency co-operation.**