

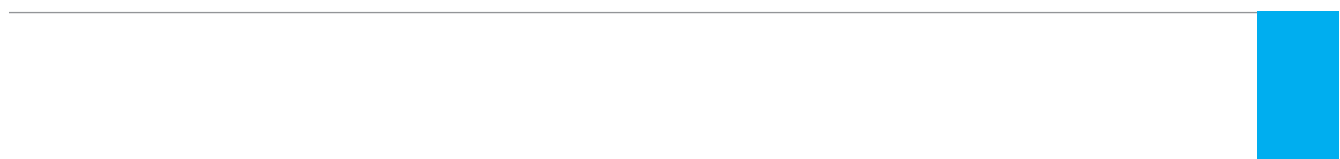


# SaferKidsPH Program

Case Study on the Establishment and Functioning of an Innovative Consortium Model to address Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children in the Philippines

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This publication has been funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The views expressed in this publication are the author's alone and are not necessarily the views of the Australian Government.

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Design and layout: Beetlebugs Communications, Inc.

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# 1. Introduction

This case study seeks to document the establishment, achievements, ways of working and lessons, to date, from the SaferKidsPH (SKPH) Consortium. The consortium consists of Save the Children Philippines (SCP), the Asia Foundation (TAF), and UNICEF Philippines (hereafter UNICEF). The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is the donor to the consortium, and works closely with it, as does the Australian Federal Police (AFP). The case study does not focus on the programmatic outcomes of the consortium, which are detailed in regular reporting and M&E arrangements. Rather it looks at the ways of working which have facilitated and underpinned the establishment and success of the consortium thus far. The case study focuses on the relational and collaborative elements which are central to delivering a complex and challenging program (which are often not spelt out in program designs, or articulated in program reports), as well as the structures and processes established to support collaboration. It is envisaged that this case study will act as a learning reference for donors and other stakeholders who are interested in adopting or supporting a consortium or partnership approach to programming. This case study has been prepared as part of a broader partnership review of the SKPH Program and has been derived from interviews and workshops with consortium members.

The SKPH Consortium was established as an innovative model of joint program delivery, unique to both a Philippine context and the online sexual abuse and exploitation of children (OSAEC) sector. The consortium was not necessarily conceived of as a 'partnership,' in the purest form, rather as a means to consolidate scarce resources and amplify the outcomes of a group of organisations either already working on OSAEC or interested in working on OSAEC. In building a collaborative consortium model, it has developed many similar characteristics to arrangements which are described as 'partnerships,' and certainly has deeper partnership aspirations moving forward. The establishment, achievements, and challenges of the SKPH consortium offers valuable learning to those interested in both consortium and partnership program delivery models. SKPH is, at the time of writing, at the mid-way point of the program, making this an opportune time to explore lessons that have emerged from this consortium experience so far, as well as to identify challenges



and learnings for the future of the program as it moves into a new phase of work focused more closely on results and outcomes.

This case study explores some of the Consortium’s successes and achievements, including:

- Successfully bringing together a group of organisations with different interests, focus areas and skills and strengths, to build a coherent program with shared outcomes, benefits, and risks.
- Establishing business processes and program management arrangements which work for a range of organisations with very different ways of working, and in some cases limited previous experience of working in similar arrangements.
- Drawing on the strong sense of personal and professional commitment of staff across all consortium members to eliminating OSAEC to build shared objectives and mission.
- Utilising the strategic value of close personal and professional relationships to build trust and respect throughout the consortium, enabling innovation and productive risk taking.
- A focus on spaces for learning, sharing and professional development – including recognition of the contribution of younger and more junior staff.
- Effective use of both formal and informal communication channels to promote effective and efficient day to day interaction between implementing staff.

SKPH hopes to consolidate the strong foundation built for collaboration and demonstrated success in navigating the establishment of the consortium and various challenges over the first two years of the program, for continuous improvement in the second half of the program.

There are several elements identified in consortium wide review discussions that the group seeks to deepen as they move into the next phase, including:

- Learning how to navigate ‘challenging conversations’ and raise ‘sticky issues’ without jeopardising the strong professional and personal connections within the consortium.
- Navigating staffing transitions and sharing the workload for inducting new consortium members.
- Exploring what mutual accountability looks like in practice, navigating power dynamics, and negotiating tensions between innovative and adaptive aspirations and traditional program management structures and processes.
- Defining what ‘flexible and adaptive programming’ means for the consortium as a whole, as well as individual organisations



## 2. Methodology and approach

This case study was prepared as part of a broader partnership review of the SKPH Program, undertaken in September-October 2021. This process sought to review the function, strengths, and challenges of the consortium to date and identify opportunities and risks for the consortium moving forward. This review focused on two objectives:

1. Facilitating an internal dialogue within the consortium to workshop experiences of the consortium to date and discuss guidance and recommendations to further strengthen the work of the consortium moving forward, and
2. Documenting the consortium's achievements, ways of working and lessons to act as a learning reference for an external audience who is interested in adopting or supporting a consortium or partnership approach to programming.

This case study responds to the second objective, above, and has been prepared in parallel with relevant internal documents, in line with objective one, in collaboration with consortium members.

The approach used a qualitative, strengths-based methodology. A team of two consultants comprising a researcher and an accredited partnership broker reviewed relevant program documents and background material and conducted twelve individual or small group interviews with consortium members. Individuals were identified based on their role within the consortium (past or present) and included staff involved in the consortium at both a strategic and/or senior leadership level, as well as technical and operational staff involved in the more day-to-day functioning of the program. Interviews were grouped together by organisational affiliation for a small group discussion where appropriate, with representation from Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the Australian Federal Police (AFP), UNICEF, The Asia Foundation (TAF) and Save the Children Philippines (SCP) across the interviews. Interviews were semi-structured in nature

to allow sufficient flexibility to respond to emerging insights from informants and allow scope to adapt to unique individual experiences working within the consortium.

The following interview guide was used to structure the discussions:

- Talk us through your experience of the establishment of the consortium:
  - What attracted you to participating in the consortium? What were you hoping to get out of your participation?
  - What history/baggage did you bring into participation in the consortium? Did you have any expectations or fears?
  - How was the consortium established? What was your role in its establishment?
  - What business processes were set-up to make the consortium work?
- What is working well in the interactions within the consortium? What could be better?
- What is working well in the consortium's interactions with DFAT and AFP? What could be better?
- What are your organisations hopes/expectations for the consortium going forward?
- What are your organisations fears/worries for the consortium going forward?
- If you were looking back, in ten years' time, what would a successful consortium look like to your organisation? How would it have functioned? What would it have achieved?

These interviews were then analysed for key themes to generate insights into what is working well and what can be improved within the consortium, as well as offering guidance and recommendations for the future. Flexibility and responsiveness were prioritised throughout the review process, as central to a meaningful partnership review. It was important for consortium members to feel a sense of ownership over the process and emerging insights and, as such, a two-way feedback loop between consultants and consortium members was essential. Preliminary findings and insights were discussed in a workshop with consortium members, DFAT and AFP on September 27th and 28th 2021. Furthermore, drafts of all documentation - both internal guidance and recommendation and this public-facing case study - were distributed to consortium members, DFAT and AFP for feedback and endorsement.

The nature of this partnership review necessitated a process of facilitating frank, open, honest, and constructive conversations. To encourage free and open dialogue, it was essential to ensure confidentiality for participants. As such any quotes or paraphrased insights from interviews which have been included in this document, have been de-identified. While a list of individual participants consulted as part of this process has been provided to the consortium, we have not included one as an annex in this case study to further protect confidentiality.





### 3. Partnership principles and frameworks

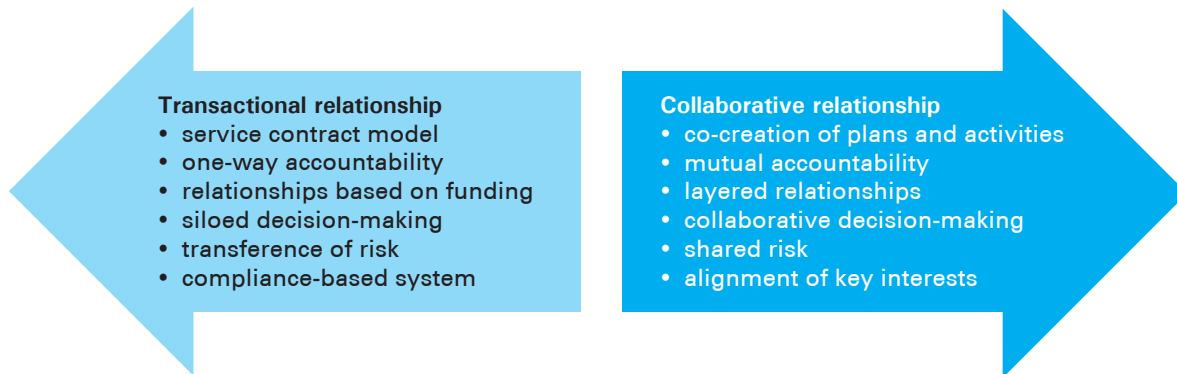
This case study should not be considered an ‘evaluation’ of the SKPH Consortium against leading partnership practice. While the consortium had loose ‘partnership’ aspirations from its inception, it did not take a deliberate and structured ‘partnership’ design and approach from its establishment, so it would be unfair to evaluate the consortium against such an approach now. However, the consortium, at its mid-way point, clearly has a desire to understand how its current form and function maps against a partnership framework and consider ways to embed more of that partnership framework in its future collaborative practice. This desire is evidenced by the consortium’s decision to use an independent partnership broker and a partnership approach for this review. To this end, this case study uses partnership principles as a lens for exploring the consortium’s success and to respond to the consortium’s appetite for ongoing development of their collaborative practice.

This case study and review process has been underpinned by the Partnership Broker’s Association (PBA)<sup>1</sup> partnership model and framework. The PBA model focuses on the following partnership principles, and associated challenges to working as a partnership:

Partnership Principle	Associated challenge/constraint
Embracing diversity to unlock new value	Anxiety about difference
Ensuring equity for inclusion and respect	Power imbalance
Being open to build trust and accountability	Hidden agendas
Developing mutual benefit for ongoing commitment	Competing interests
Having courage to achieve results	Uncertainty

<sup>1</sup> For further information about the Partnership Broker’s Association and their partnership model and framework please see: <https://partnershipbrokers.org/>

The PBA understands partnership as a continuum, with a transactional relationship on one end and a collaborative relationship on the other (see below).



Relationships situated towards the transactional end of the spectrum tend to be characterised by a service contract model, one-way accountability flows, relationships which are primarily centred around funding, decision-making and problem solving which is siloed in nature, transference of risk from one party to another, and a compliance-based system. By contrast, relationships situated more towards the collaborative end of the spectrum tend to be characterised by processes of co-creation, mutual accountability flows, layered relationships, decision-making and problem solving which is collaborative in nature, the sharing of risk between parties, and alignment of key interests. It is important to note that this is a continuum, with relationships typically falling somewhere in between both ends of the spectrum and often including elements and characteristics from both the transactional and collaborative ends. While not deliberately constituted as a partnership, the consortium displays many of the characteristics of the collaborative end of the partnership spectrum.

For the PBA, key features of a partnership include:

- An agreed common purpose or shared vision.
- Respect for individual organisational, as well as shared organisational interests.
- Co-creation of plans and activities.
- Sharing of risks and benefits between partners.
- A commitment to mutual accountability.
- A principled approach to working together.

This framework provided a structure and scaffolding for the SKPH review. Consultants designed a review process that attempted to embody these principles by fostering openness, respect, and trust to facilitate honest and sometimes challenging conversations. Furthermore, these partnership features and principles were used as a lens for analysis of interviews as well as a launching pad for facilitating dialogue and discussion internally within the consortium.



## 4. Background – the birth of SaferKidsPH

SKPH is an Australian Government initiative focused on advancing children’s rights to protection against all forms of abuse, exploitation, and violence. In particular, the program aims to strengthen the Philippine child protection system to address and respond to online sexual abuse and exploitation of children (OSAEC).

SKPH has three outcomes:

1. Positive behaviours, practices towards protection of children from online abuse and exploitation.
2. Strengthened investigation, prosecution, and adjudication of OSAEC cases.
3. Improved service delivery for OSAEC prevention and child protection through support of community-based mechanisms in OSEAC hotspots.

SKPH is an AUD8 million-dollar initiative and is implemented through two grant agreements. The first is with the Australian Federal Police (AFP) which supports AFP’s longstanding partnership with Philippine law enforcement, particularly through Philippine Internet Crimes Against Children Center (PICACC). The second is with UNICEF Philippines as the lead organisation of an implementing group with The Asia Foundation (TAF) and Save the Children Philippines (SCP), to deliver the broader components of the program. Program interventions and activities focus on research, advocacy, policy dialogue, technical assistance, and capacity building at a national and sub-national level, with an initial focus in the National Capital Region, Cagayan de Oro, Iligan, Angeles and Cebu.

## 4.1 Establishing a consortium takes time

SKPH is delivered under a consortium modality which brings together large international organisations under one umbrella to address the complex, multi-dimensional nature of child protection issues. Prior to the emergence of the SKPH program, in 2015 the Australia-Philippines Child Protection against Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Program was launched with the aim of protecting children against OSAEC, prosecuting offenders, and promoting children's rights. This program, which ended in 2018, was implemented by the AFP, TAF, UNICEF, in partnership with the Philippine Government, and private sector. The SKPH consortium emerged from discussions between stakeholders about further opportunities for engagement with DFAT in the OSAEC space.

Individuals who were involved with this inception phase each recounted a similar rationale for their desire to work within a consortium or partnership framework, highlighting a set of common perceived benefits to this way of working, including:

- The complex nature of OSAEC and the fact that there is 'lots of work to be done' and 'lots of different issues to tackle', making it difficult for one organisation alone to adequately respond.
- A desire for coordinated and harmonised responses to OSAEC interventions, particularly given the large number of organisations working in this space in the Philippines and the potential for fragmentation and duplication of efforts.
- Recognition that tackling OSAEC requires interventions and activities operating at different levels – from national advocacy to community-level activities – and that different organisations are best placed to work at each level.
- The importance of existing collaborations, and bilateral relationships, between organisations, as well as strong interpersonal relationships between key individuals across the sector and a desire to 'capitalise on the momentum' and 'keep doing good work together' while seeking to welcome others into the fold to fill any gaps in programming.
- A sense of excitement about a new and innovating way of programming and doing things.
- A desire to stretch limited resources 'as far as possible' and maximise value for money.

Individuals reflected on a desire to 'bring as many pieces of the puzzle together as possible' to achieve better outcomes for children and maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of work in the OSAEC space. Existing relationships between individuals and organisations – both through the 2015-2018 program, as well as other bilateral programs and interpersonal relationships - helped facilitate an informal canvassing of suggestions, ideas, and opportunities for future work in this space and allowed organisations to informally test preliminary ideas and opportunities. This also allowed DFAT to canvas known stakeholders and bring shortlisted organisations together to brief them on the call for proposals. Ultimately the call for proposals

encouraged applicants to work as a consortium group. However, the canvassing work that had been undertaken in the lead up meant that this did not come as a surprise to interested parties, who were well placed galvanise around a consortium model and, indeed, recognised the potential value inherent in this way of working.

When reflecting on the process of pulling together a team for the proposal, consortium members articulated that it felt like a 'natural progression' of existing strands of work, collaborations, and interpersonal relationships that were already in place. UNICEF and TAF had a history of working together in the child protection and juvenile justice space, including with DFAT as a donor – as well as each having some bilateral links to DFAT programs. For UNICEF and TAF it was a natural fit to continue this existing collaboration, albeit in a new form. It was TAF that initially suggested invited SCP into discussions after recognising the value of their community work and networks, and existence of strong interpersonal connections between individuals within the two organisations. TAF staff reflected the process behind this decision and the process of considering whether to bring another organisation into the fold, stating:

“we talked about whether we wanted to just keep things as a TAF-UNICEF partnership, but ultimately it was a productive mix to bring SCP in for a conversation' and 'the work SCP is now doing [in the consortium], is work we could have done if we had gone out to hire the right people, but why would we if there is another organisation already doing it.’ ”

In parallel to these conversations, SCP had been independently considering putting together a proposal for this work as well. So, when the three parties came together for an exploratory conversation, all parties recognised the strategic advantage in combining their efforts, ultimately leveraging TAF's strong relationships with the judiciary, SCP's NGO networks and community engagement skills and UNICEF's links to national government and advocacy channels for a successful bid.

Reflecting on this process, consortium members emphasised the importance of personal links and relationships between the three organisations, as well as with DFAT. Similarly, the nature of the child protection sector in the Philippines meant that even if individuals and organisations had not formally worked together in a programming sense, 'we all still knew each other'. Once the process had commenced, consortium members were able to leverage pre-existing relationships and past working relationships to their advantage. As one consortium member reflected:

“Once up and running, there was a good degree of familiarity . . . a sense that we were one team that could work, and problem solve, together. People generally liked each other, liked working together, and valued each other's contributions. This was built over time before the project even started. We knew each other and what we were going to bring to the work relatively well’ ”



Once the proposal was accepted, the consortium entered into planning and preparatory work with DFAT. Once again, existing levels of familiarity between each of the consortium organisations and DFAT through bilateral channels and existing engagements in the sector as well as rapport with key staff and individuals were crucial in the early stages of consortium establishment. It was noted that:

“DFAT were very hands on. It felt like, from the moment we won the bid, they weren't acting as a donor but were working to contribute to the substance of the work' and that they 'were always available for phone calls, strategizing and sharing... it wasn't like "we are the donor and you are the implementer"; instead it was like "how are we going to use our roles to make this work?"”

At the same time, DFAT offered a conduit between the consortium members and the AFP. As part of industry briefings during the call for proposals, DFAT made it clear that AFP would form part of the process through and independent grant directly with DFAT. To some, this may be perceived as a donor mandate imposed on the consortium rather than a matter for discussion. However, consortium members articulated a strong acceptance and valuing of AFP's contribution to the SKPH program, recognising that the AFP are uniquely placed to provide briefings and updates from a case work perspective, as well as specialised knowledge from a law enforcement standpoint as well as share links to PICACC. It should be noted, however, that while AFP are constrained in their ability to provide detailed updates of operational investigations, particularly while court proceedings are underway, they are able to provide broad outlines of matters that are relevant to SKPH. As one consortium member reflected, 'they [AFP] weren't integrated into the design, but everyone was happy to have their contribution'. For the AFP, collaborating with the NGO and development sector was an opportunity to harmonise work in the OSAEC space, noting 'collaboration is important, so the more organisations involved and coordinating with each other the better'. Despite this enthusiasm, however, it was necessary to consider the form and function of the AFP as an 'ad hoc' consortium member, while operating under a separate contracting arrangement with different metrics and reporting frameworks. In the early days of the consortium, DFAT played a key role brokering interactions between the AFP and consortium members, while lines of direct engagement began to slowly emerge.

## 4.2 Functioning as a consortium requires fit for purpose business processes

Despite the decision to work together being labelled a 'natural progression' for consortium members and existing connections between individuals and organisations making for an easier transition into a consortium way of working, the process of consortium formation and functioning was inevitably a time intensive process. Once the bid was awarded, DFAT allocated six months for the consortium to develop a set of frameworks and guidelines – the completion of which was considered a significant milestone for the group. Allocating this time for establishing the functioning criteria to support genuine collaboration is an important learning for donors or organisations considering going into consortium or partnership arrangements. The members of a consortium need time to build trust, as well as a deeper understanding of each other's drivers, incentives and risks, and design management arrangements which will facilitate, rather than inhibit, collaboration. DFAT provided this space for the consortium to be established effectively

by building in the six-month establishment period, and consortium members reflected that this period being set aside for establishment was integral to the current level of success enjoyed by the consortium.

This six-month establishment phase saw twice weekly meetings with consortium members to develop shared processes and systems, as well as additional time allocated for each individual organisation to do the work required internally to ensure relevant business processes and systems were able to adapt to a new and innovative way of working. This was a particularly challenging, and possibly confronting process, for larger international organisations such as UNICEF who are bound by more rigorous and risk averse international standards and financial accountability systems and processes.

One early decision that faced the consortium was the distribution of funding, and appointment of an organisation to the consortium lead role. Identifying a consortium lead was necessitated by DFAT's contracting processes and drive for more streamlined program management. While it was recognised that UNICEF, TAF and SCP initially came together as peers to form a consortium proposal, it was quickly realised that UNICEF's function and positioning at an international level would make it very challenging, logistically, for them to be able to receive funding channelled to them from an NGO. As articulated by a TAF representative, 'it was more complicated for them [UNICEF] to take money from us than the other way around' and so the decision was easily reached for UNICEF to play the lead role in the consortium. As it stands, UNICEF receives funding from DFAT and then allocates it to TAF and SCP through Partnership Agreements, with AFP maintaining a separate grant and contract directly with DFAT.

While this decision was readily agreed to by the consortium, there was still a degree of uncertainty about how some of these arrangements would work in practice. For UNICEF staff in the Philippines, there was a constant stream of communication and interest from UNICEF headquarters who had no template for how to work in this way. As one UNICEF staff member noted, '...within the UN we have mechanisms for multi-UN agency agreements, but we don't have these mechanisms in place for non-UN consortium'. A lot of internal work was required within UNICEF to facilitate the allocation of resources, budgeting and reporting process with the ultimate success of this work attributed to the support and good will of key senior staff members as internal advocates for the consortium.

For TAF and SCP, there was a ready acceptance of the need to work within and navigate UNICEF's systems. As one SCP staff member expressed, 'we knew it was going to work this way going into it and we have worked through the UN system before, so this wasn't a surprise'. Consortium members expressed an understanding for UNICEF's need to 'do their due diligence' and the opportunity to learn a lot from working with them. Despite this there have been a few learning curves and sticking points that the consortium has navigated along the way – such as challenges converting foreign exchanges and currencies across different organisational financial reporting systems, as well as challenges for SCP visibility in the UN portal, which only allowed one registered entry for Save the Children, despite SCPs independence from the Swedish chapter. Remedying these procedural challenges was an important step for consolidating the consortium's approach and ways of working in this formative phase. Consortium members explained that addressing these challenges was greatly aided by the approachability and openness of consortium members and being able to 'pick up the phone and have a chat' when problems arose. This highlights the importance of keeping open channels of communication and 'open doors' between consortium members. However, it is important not to minimise the time and effort contributed by key staff and consortium members in managing and responding to these concerns and making themselves open and available to such conversations.

### 4.3 Consortium governance structures are central to success

The SKPH Consortium relies on clear governance structures to oversee program implementation and coordinate between consortium members. SKPH's Programme Coordination Committee (PCC) provides strategic guidance and decision-making for the program, while the Programme Implementation Team (PIT) acts as the central coordinating body for SKPH with responsibility for day-to-day operationalisation of the program. The PCC, chaired by DFAT, meets quarterly to discuss strategic inputs into SKPH, including discussions of risk and sustainability concerns as well as contingency planning and navigating key challenges to the program, particularly in the wake of inevitable COVID-19 impacts on programming activities and timelines. Consortium members noted that it 'took a little while' to get the nature and format of quarterly PCC meetings right, but that over time the PCC has become a valuable mechanism for providing direction and framing to SKPH as well as helping steer the consortium through challenges. Reflecting on this, consortium members highlighted the way in which the PCC had navigated implementation extensions and continuity planning to align with shifting needs and demands during the pandemic as evidence of this success. The PCC is underpinned by strong engagement and commitment by the principals from each organisation, and the support provided by technical staff to principals in preparation for PCC meetings.

The PIT provides technical and administrative support to the PCC and acts as the central coordinating body for SKPH. Each consortium member has a staff member who leads their team in the PIT, and these organisational leads work together to coordinate efforts on day-to-day program implementation, communications, planning, learning, reporting and performance management. The PIT makes regular ad hoc decisions on the implementation of the program, as well as maintaining the formal arrangements for each of the grants and partnership agreements which govern the function of the consortium. DFAT and UNICEF staff work intensively together on the oversight of the consortium within the PIT. The PIT is an important forum for sharing insights and lessons from implementation experience, as well as offering a valuable opportunity for learning across and between organisations. While the structure of SKPH activities and components means that, in theory, individual organisations can work and lead on individual components of the program, the reality of multifaceted and complex nature of OSAEC is front of mind for the consortium members. As such, there is a great value in learning from the experience of others and sharing insights across organisations.

The governance arrangements for the consortium, embodied in the PCC and PIT, have been central to the success of the consortium to date. Staff participating in both groups highlight the importance of frank, open and honest conversations, and collaborative decision-making processes as central to their successful function, along with the flat hierarchy that the consortium has managed to cultivate across both PCC and PIT forums. The forums have not been perfect. Both groups identify that they spend a lot of their meeting time providing generalised reporting, for information, across the breadth of the work that all consortium members are doing. In the future, both groups are going to develop generalised written updates to be read before the meetings, so the PCC can focus more on strategic discussions looking at changing context and emerging challenges and opportunities. The PIT will look to spend more time learning from each other's implementation experiences and creating more space for younger and/or more junior, as well as field staff, to lead meetings and build professional skills and confidence.

The Manual of Operations is also an important mechanism for achieving the collaborative goals of the consortium. The Manual of Operations was put together collaboratively over the establishment period of the program, led by UNICEF, and drawing heavily on UNICEF's internal processes and existing operational procedures. The other members of the consortium were happy not to have to reinvent the wheel and demonstrated a high degree of trust in UNICEF's leadership of the development of the Manual. When there have been unforeseen challenges to the function of the consortium, the group has leaned on the agreed processes and procedures within the Manual to guide their shared response to those challenges.



## 5. Successes and achievements of SaferKidsPH so far

SKPH is an innovative model both for the Philippines as well as the OSAEC sector and can yield lessons and learnings from the first few years of the program. Some clear and consistent successes and achievements emerged from review discussions, embodying some of the PBA partnership principles, outlined above.

### 5.1 Personal and professional commitment to a shared objective and mission provides strength to overcome challenges

The SKPH consortium brings together a diverse group of organisations with different constituencies, stakeholders, interests, focus areas, skills, and strengths. This diversity is one of the strengths of the consortium, but there is also a risk that this diversity can bring with it anxiety over difference or a sense of competition between stakeholders working in a similar space. In this case, consortium members are clearly galvanised around a strong shared objective and mission to eliminate OSAEC and derive a strong sense of solidarity and support from working together and collaborating towards a common goal. Working in this space is more than just a job for the staff involved. As one consortium member stated, 'we don't need to be the lead or the driver, as a group we just need to all achieve our individual goals.' Another consortium member likened work in the child protection space to a marriage – working together towards a shared objective and purpose and helping each other deal with challenges along the way.

The overwhelming consensus from discussions with consortium members was that the strong personal commitment to child rights and/or child protection that drives individual and organisational work in this space, and the fact that this commitment was so clearly shared by fellow consortium members was central to their ability to successfully work together, collaborate and compromise. The strength and depth of this shared personal and professional commitment has enabled the consortium to overcome many of the procedural challenges which were faced during the first two years of establishment and implementation. Other consortiums, or partnerships, which do not have such a solid core of shared commitment, would have been severely tested by some of the challenges SKPH has faced, and might not have survived.

Similarly, a sense of shared purpose helped consortium members to keep an eye out for each other, and take an interest in personal and individual wellbeing, particularly given the emotionally intensive nature of child protection work and the personal and professional challenges presented by the COVID-19 crisis, as discussed further below. Consortium members spoke about the ability of the consortium to share in and celebrate each other's small victories or 'work with comradery'. When discussing objectives for the consortium alongside objectives for each individual organisation involved, one consortium member noted that it was hard to separate these goals 'as they are so embedded in personal frameworks and our rationale for working together'. This speaks volumes to the importance of a shared sense of mission as a galvanising factor for a diverse consortium. A key learning for donors seeking to support work in this space is the importance of cultivating a strong common purpose and shared vision.

## 5.2 The strategic value of personal and professional relationships for building trust and respect and providing support

Personal and professional relationships between staff across the consortium are the 'glue that holds the consortium together'. As aforementioned, many of these relationships pre-dated the establishment of the consortium and were central to the decision to partner together and consortium establishment conversations. Consortium members reflected that histories of working in the child protection and/or child rights space had fostered a strong sense of shared advocacy between organisations and individuals and, in turn, had fostered a robust professional network from which the SKPH consortium was able to derive a high degree of strength. Many individuals likened the child protection space to a family with high levels of trust and mutual professional respect.

“That's the beauty of having friends and co-workers, it's like an army against powerful online abuse of children.”

High levels of trust and respect between individuals and organisations within the consortium was an overwhelming takeaway from the review. This included a recognition of the organisational strengths that each member contributed to the consortium and respect for the diversity of skills, strength and interests present within the group. There are deep levels of respect for the individual contributions that each consortium member brings to the table and the opportunity for others to learn from these. Furthermore, consortium members valued the ability to lean on their colleagues (both within and outside their own organisations) for solidarity and support. From these close professional networks, individuals and organisations have been



able to form a tapestry of support to not only help them achieve their professional mandates, but to also help them process the personal impacts of work that can be incredibly emotionally draining in nature. This took on a new significance for the SKPH consortium during the COVID-19-19 pandemic, when the provision of emotional and wellbeing support to colleagues took on a new dimension. Consortium members reflected on the way the collective trauma of the COVID-19-19 pandemic was able to further strengthen these networks of solidarity and support within SKPH.

While these relationships form the spine and strength of the consortium, they may also present a challenge when times get tough, particularly in situations where staff may not want to jeopardise personal and/or professional relationships by having challenging professional conversations. This will be discussed in subsequent sections.

### 5.3 Focus on spaces of learning, sharing and professional development

Alongside recognition and respect for the diversity of contributions that individuals make to the consortium, there is also recognition of the need to accommodate and welcome individuals with varying degrees of tenure and experience in the sector. Consortium members expressed a shared desire for sustainability of outcomes and activities beyond current funding cycles and, as such, highlighted the importance of younger and more junior staff as future leaders in the sector. As one senior consortium member stated, ‘they are the ones implementing the program and they will be the future of this partnership’.

In recognition of this, the consortium has not only been structured to ensure effective delivery of the program, but also designed as a learning space where all staff have an opportunity to develop and come to the end of their time with the consortium with more confidence and skills. In discussions with consortium members, the value of informal learning and sharing spaces such as ‘brown bag’ sessions or ‘coffee mornings’ were emphasised as a key learning opportunity, with staff expressing a desire to consciously carve out time space for these activities in the remaining years of the SKPH program.

Younger or more junior staff spoke to the welcoming nature of the consortium and conscious attempts to foster a horizontal power dynamic within implementation team meetings and discussions. This is particularly important in a context where younger or more junior staff, who may often be less inclined to speak, share, and lead because of cultural expectations around hierarchy. As one staff member reflected:

“ ‘Previously if I was struggling to meet a deadline, I would not have been very open about it, but as our relationship and rapport has increased over the past two years [within the consortium] ... I feel more candid having laid back conversations and going to others for help and support.’ ”

Moving into the next phase of the SKPH program, the consortium identified a desire to further these efforts, including exploring opportunities for younger or more junior staff to take on more of a leadership role in program meetings and opportunities for more ‘front line’ staff to share insights from the field.

## 5.4 Effective communications

All consortium members place a high premium on effective and proactive communications. The consortium employs formal communications methods and uses informal communications (such as Viber and WhatsApp group chats) effectively. Given the primacy of interpersonal relationships and networks within the consortium it comes as no surprise that informal channels of communication are valued by members. Consortium members spoke to the approachability of staff, regardless of their individual or organisational role within the group and the value inherent in being able to ‘pick up the phone’ when needed. This was highlighted even more during the COVID-19 crisis when face-to-face interactions became impossible, and informal channels of text and phone communication became an important mechanism for maintaining rapport and checking in on each other.

Frank, open, and honest communication was highlighted as a central feature of formal program governance, including through PCC and PIT meetings. As mentioned above, this was particularly welcomed by young and/or more junior staff within the consortium who were able to lean on the consortium for workshopping concerns, seeking feedback, and asking candid questions. However, there is recognition that the consortium comprises a mix of lawyers and development professionals, with varied degrees of familiarity and comfort with legal jargon. The consortium hopes to leverage the open and collegial space they have been able to foster to date to become more cognisant of the way in which legal jargon and technical language may be a barrier for some staff.



## 6. Challenges and learnings for the future of SaferKidsPH

SKPH has achieved many successes to date, as highlighted by the snapshots above. To build up on these successes in the next phase of the program, it is necessary to explore some of the challenges that have emerged so far throughout the program and the learnings these can yield for consortium in the coming years. While considering these challenges, which have been identified by consortium members themselves as part of the review process, it is hoped that readers will view these not as a deficit or something that is currently lacking within the program, but rather as an opportunity for the consortium to build upon their successes to date, and to add an additional layer to what is already a strong and successful consortium.

### 6.1 Navigating ‘challenging conversations’ and ‘sticky issues’

The consortium has had some experience, to date, navigating challenging conversations. SKPH overcame a significant challenge in the early stages of the program when they were required to debate and decide on a controversial funding opportunity from the private sector and weigh up different member’s positioning on the issue. This was highlighted by consortium members as an issue which had the potential to derail SKPH but was able to be overcome through sound and ethical due diligence processes, careful consideration and conversation, and the good will and personal respect between the individuals involved in these discussions.

Despite this example, however, the partnership review identified a significant level of discomfort among consortium members, particularly in the PIT group, when it came to providing or receiving critical or challenging feedback at an individual or organisational level. The consortium helped to workshop a few possible reasons underpinning this. Firstly, consortium members may lack the time in their busy working days to pause and reflect on ways of working within the consortium. Secondly, the close interpersonal relationships which have been identified as crucial to SKPH's success may also act as a barrier to surfacing critical feedback for fear of jeopardising longstanding personal and professional relationships. Alternatively, the unique culture created within the consortium, leveraging specific elements of Filipino culture, may make it more challenging to raise 'sticky issues' in a direct way. One Filipino consortium member, reflecting on the challenge of being direct with friends and colleagues, explained:

“When we talk to friends about 'sticky issues' we tend to beat around the bush and first talk about happy memories, and then very slowly and gently try to bring issues to the surface.”

There are also some cross-cultural implications within a consortium comprised of international, expatriate, and national staff. The Filipino staff working in the consortium are understandably highly motivated to maintain relationships, as they will probably be working together in other roles and organisations after the consortium funding has come to an end. They also have Filipino cultural imperatives to maintain harmony and work as far as possible through consensus. This means that Filipino staff may potentially face challenges in having challenging conversations at various points. However, Filipino staff also have access to cultural means for addressing challenging conversations and resolving disputes. International staff, who mostly cycle through the consortium, will not have access to that cultural skill set. They will rely on their Filipino colleagues for advice on using culturally appropriate methods, and will also bring to bear, when it is useful, their higher cultural tolerance for more direct challenging conversations. Consortium members reinforced the primacy of Filipino national staff in this space, explaining:

“Most of the leaders of our organisations are aware of local context and culture, but when they are in doubt they defer to their national counterparts. When they do have to make decisions, they consult and listen to us and take our views on board.”

For consortium members, the fact that SKPH is moving into a new phase focused on delivery of results rather than establishment, means there may be a need for new, different, and sometimes challenging conversations about results, accountability, and responsibility for delivery. Through this learning, the consortium hopes to build in an intentional space and opportunity to surface some of these challenging conversations – whether that's through a standing agenda item dedicated to discussing 'sticky issues' or developing a particular 'code' or language signpost for staff to use when they need to carve out space for surfacing a challenging professional conversation without jeopardising a personal friendship.

## 6.2 Navigating staffing transitions and inducting new members into ways of working

Given the primacy placed on interpersonal relationships within the consortium, it comes as no surprise that the loss of key staff and personnel represents a risk for the group moving forward. Transitions and staffing changes are a feature of any work, particularly in a consortium which includes some partners whose staff rotate on diplomatic postings cycles of two to three years. Loss of staff is a particular risk for SKPH due to the positionality of key staff as central within relationship networks – both internally within the consortium, as well as with external partners - as well as key staff who are seen as repositories for institutional memory and knowledge. The consortium has identified a need to workshop collective induction processes for incoming staff to ensure they have been briefed by the group as a collective on the consortium’s preferred ways of working and principles of communication etc, rather than relying on a more general briefing by their employer as an individual organisation. Maintaining and updating induction tools and resources as a collective will enable SKPH to manage staffing transitions more efficiently and ease the burden on the staff who have enduring tenure within the program who may be looked to for institutional memory and briefings.

## 6.3 Negotiating mutual accountability and power dynamics within management processes

The consortium has made a deliberate and concerted attempt to share power and promote equity between partners, and foster an environment where individuals feel able to share concerns, ask questions and seek help and support from others, regardless of whether that organisation sits in a contractual hierarchy as a donor or a lead agency. However, in its use of traditional contracting and financial management models, some of the management structures of the consortium can be seen to unintentionally undercut the aspiration for genuine mutual accountability and power sharing. These processes may also, again unintentionally, be creating less equitable power dynamics.

DFAT maintains a dual role as both the donor and a consortium member, and there is a lack of clarity around when DFAT is playing which role, and consequently what the ‘rules of the game’ are associated with this shift between roles. This has the potential to make it difficult for the rest of the consortium to hold DFAT to account for its contributions, as either a donor or a consortium member. During the review process, consortium members frequently articulated and recognised DFAT’s efforts within the consortium to act transparently, share power and promote an open and approachable atmosphere, akin to that of a ‘partner’. This approach, however, has largely been built on the professional approach of DFAT staff who have worked on the program, rather than a structural ‘partnership’ program management design which commits DFAT to working in particular ways within the consortium.

UNICEF is in a challenging position within the consortium with regards to accountability and power dynamics. As the consortium lead, UNICEF has a contractual obligation to demonstrate results to DFAT and, in doing so, hold consortium members accountable for their share of the activities, while simultaneously trying to foster a horizontal and equitable culture as a consortium member themselves. This may make it difficult for UNICEF staff to ‘switch hats’ as needed within the consortium, something which may be exacerbated by the consortium culture and the hesitancy for critical or challenging conversations (as discussed above). UNICEF is also the only member within the consortium subject to a partner performance assessment (PPA) with DFAT, placing it in a particular power dynamic with DFAT, and excluding the other consortium members



from the same level of accountability for their performance.

While the AFP participates in both the PIT and PCC and is situated by DFAT as a contributor to the consortium, and part of the shared collaborative effort, the AFP's formal accountability is purely to DFAT, through its bilateral grant funding arrangement, and the other members of the consortium do not have any formal mechanism for holding AFP accountable for its contributions. Both TAF and SCP expressed a sense of being accountable to DFAT, even though contractually they are explicitly accountable to UNICEF.

For other organisations seeking to learn from the SKPH experience, and for the future collaborative work of the SKPH consortium members, it would be useful to consider designing innovative program management structures around contracting, financing and performance, which consider the impact of business processes on power relations and equity, to match the innovative aspirations and intent of a consortium model. The SKPH consortium has managed to stay true to the equitable and innovative intent of the consortium, despite the traditional program management structures it employs, but the tension between innovative intent and traditional management models has caused some strain so far and has the potential to cause more strain as the focus of the program turns more strongly to results. The use of traditional management models may also limit the range of innovation and collaboration which could be achieved with a management model which more deliberately embedded equity, power sharing and mutual accountability within the design of its management processes.

## 6.4 Defining flexible and adaptive programming

Consortium members universally celebrated the flexible and adaptive nature of SKPH programming. Flexibility and agility were seen as crucial to not only working within a consortium model, but also responding to the ever-changing nature of OSAEC crimes and issues. A commitment to the idea of flexible and adaptive programming is clearly shared by all implementing partners, as well as prioritised by DFAT as a donor in this space. However, what this looks like in practice can at times be difficult to define. It was necessary for consortium members to reconcile flexibility in programming alongside some of the bureaucratic processes that are essential for accountability and rigour – including systems like financial procurement, amendment requests and extensions. The consortium recognises the need to strike a balance in this space, particularly in the face of ongoing challenges and changes to programming brought about by the COVID-19 crisis. Furthermore, the consortium may need to revisit what agile programming looks like for the second half of the program, to ensure realistic expectations for program delivery, outcomes, and results.

# Conclusion

The table below shows how the SKPH consortium is tracking against some of the key elements found in leading partnership practice.

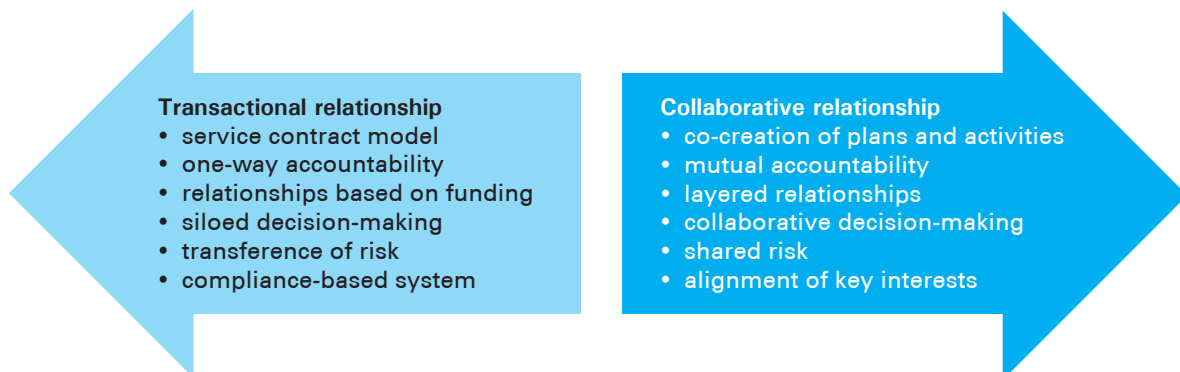
Leading practice Partnership principles	Insights and lessons from The SKPH Consortium
An agreed common purpose and shared vision	SKPH is galvanised by a strong organisational and individual commitment to the elimination of OSAEC, from which the consortium can draw a high degree of mutual benefit associated with working collaboratively. <i>The purpose and vision of the program was not co-designed, it was established by DFAT through the initial program design process, but the consortium has managed to build from that design a genuinely shared purpose and vision.</i>
Respect for individual as well as shared interests	There is a high degree of trust and respect between consortium members, with a recognition of the unique contribution and skillset each organisation makes to SKPH and the value of working together to tackle the complex problem of OSAEC. <i>In a leading practice partnership model, the individual interests of each organisation would be differentiated from the shared interests of the consortium, and validated and monitored, for individual as well as shared success. This consortium has not found it necessary to take this step.</i>
Co-creation of plans and activities	By generating fit for purpose governance structures, including the PCC and PIT, SKPH has been able to foster a high degree of collaboration and input into problem solving and decision-making processes. The consortium has also clearly spelt out where individual members are responsible for work areas, and where collaborative work is undertaken.
Sharing of risks and benefits between partners	SKPH organisations are clearly sharing the benefits of ongoing learning, innovative collaboration, and program wide achievement of outcomes. They are also sharing considerable risks, through their clear association with each other within the consortium, and their shared branding and identity in the OSAEC space.
A commitment to mutual accountability	SKPH has a strong informal commitment to mutual accountability, in which individual staff and organisations feel accountable to each other. However, this informal environment of mutual accountability relies on the professional and personal approach of all the staff involved, and not on formal mutual accountability mechanisms. There is potential for tension to emerge between working innovatively towards mutual accountability within the consortium and the more conventional financial and performance accountability mechanisms that are employed within SKPH.
A principled approach to working together	Through the review process, the SKPH consortium highlighted a unique set of principles underpinning the process of working together. Hopefully the review process itself has been a beneficial starting point for the consortium to begin codifying some of these principles and ways of working, and in doing so, help the consortium to manage inevitable transitions and staffing changes throughout the future of the program. The consortium's new set of principles is attached as Annex A.

This case study demonstrates that SKPH sits definitively towards the collaborative end of the partnership spectrum (see diagram below) in several ways, including:

- consortium members continually working together on plans and activities,
- maintaining an informal commitment to mutual accountability (although without formal mutual accountability mechanisms),
- maintaining many layers of relationships throughout all five organisations, particularly through the PCC and PIT groups where they undertake collaborative decision making, and
- sharing reputational and programmatic risks.

SKPH also contains elements of more transactional relationships, as highlighted in this case study, including:

- formal mechanisms of one-way accountability,
- some transference of risk for outcomes through contracting (DFAT to UNICEF), and
- some elements of compliance-based functioning (DFAT and UNICEF defining the compliance environment).



The SKPH has been well established as a functional consortium, based on strong leadership commitment from all consortium members, a shared commitment to the mission of addressing OSAEC, trusting and respectful personal and professional relationships, and fit-for-purpose management and governance arrangements which facilitate effective collaboration. All of this has been achieved largely in the time of the COVID-19 crisis, which has placed staff under enormous personal and professional strain. The consortium has overcome several challenges in order to build its success, including a highly divisive unsolicited grant from the private sector, minimal previous experience in similar consortia, diversity of organisational interests and perspectives, and the use of traditional contracting/performance/financial management models which do not necessarily align with the innovative and collaborative intent of the consortium.

Given the success it has had in establishing an innovative consortium model, through the COVID-19 crisis, it is reasonable to anticipate that the consortium will continue to grow in strength and depth in

the second half of its funded program. There are several elements of the consortium's function which could be further developed, in the second half of the program, to achieve more partnership outcomes, and maximise the possibilities presented by the consortium. These include building resilience for holding challenging conversations about performance, designing shared induction processes to manage the risk of staff turnover, refining and responding to the concept of 'flexible and adaptive programming,' and giving ongoing attention to maintaining the informal environment of mutual accountability within the consortium in lieu of formal mutual accountability mechanisms.

Donors and other development agencies interested in using a consortium or partnership model can take the following key messages from the SKPH experience to date:

- Building a consortium takes time. Give space in program design for the consortium to develop and test management and governance procedures which facilitate collaboration, rather than hindering it.
- Focus early on a shared mission and vision, which can overcome the diverse interests, drivers, and risks of different consortium members. Try and assess how deeply the shared mission/vision is held, as genuinely shared commitment to the same vision will allow the consortium to overcome unforeseen challenges.
- Ensure senior leaders of all consortium members are willing to allocate sufficient time to the development and management of the consortium and will create the authorising environment for their teams to be fully committed to the collaboration.
- Avoid using traditional, 'business as usual' contracting, financial management and performance management mechanisms if the intention is to build an equitable, innovative base for collaboration. Such management structures need to be specifically designed to support the collaborative intentions and aspirations of the consortium or partnership, particularly if the collaboration seeks to have more balanced power dynamics.
- For donors intending to contribute to collaborative programming, consider clearly spelling out the agreed way of working as a donor (when and how) and the agreed way of working as a member (when and how), with formal accountability to the consortium/partnership for both.
- See pre-existing relationships as a foundational asset for genuinely collaborative work, allowing consortiums/partnerships to establish mutually trusting and respectful relationships much more quickly.

## Annex A

# Principles underpinning relationships within the consortium (established in consortium ways of working workshop in September 2021)

The Manual of Operations outline a set of principles relating to program delivery. The principles below underpin the way the consortium members work with each other, rather than the way they deliver the program.

### Personal commitment to elimination of OSAEC

Staff of all consortium members are personally committed to the elimination of OSAEC. This is not just a job for them. This means that they will work hard to find solutions to challenges and compromises between consortium members that will allow them to continue to make progress on the issue. It also means that care must be taken for their personal wellbeing when working in this area, particularly through the challenges of COVID-19.

### Relationships are at the centre of the consortium's success

Personal relationships between staff across the consortium are the glue that holds the consortium together. Some of these relationships pre-dated the consortium, some are professional relationships generated by the consortium which have also become personal. These relationships form the spine and strength of the consortium, but they may also present an issue when times get tough, and staff do not want to jeopardise personal relationships by having challenging conversations. The consortium has managed challenging conversation in the past, and will do so again, and staff will continually build their resilience to have these conversations.

#### *A note on challenging conversations between Filipino staff*

The Filipino staff working in the consortium are understandably motivated to maintain relationships, as they will probably be working together in other roles and organisations after the consortium is disbanded. They also have Filipino cultural imperatives to maintain harmony and work as far as possible through consensus. This means that Filipino staff will potentially face particular challenges in having challenging conversations at various points.



### *A note on challenging conversations between international staff and the rest of the consortium*

Filipino staff have access to cultural means for addressing challenging conversations and resolving disputes. International staff, who mostly cycle through the consortium fairly regularly, will not have access to that cultural skill set. They will rely on their Filipino colleagues for advice on using culturally appropriate methods, and will also bring to bear, when it is useful, their higher cultural tolerance for more direct challenging conversations.

## **High level of respect for the professional contributions of all consortium members**

Every consortium member brings different organisational strengths to the consortium, and all members recognise and respect those different strengths, and work to protect the diversity of skills, strengths, and interests within the consortium.

## **Commitment to effective and proactive communications, both formal and informal**

All consortium members place a high premium on effective and proactive communications. The consortium employs formal communications methods, and uses informal communications (such as Viber and WhatsApp) effectively. Consortium members will prioritise speaking on the phone whenever practical, rather than relying on emails. This is especially important through the COVID-19 crisis when face-to-face meetings are largely impossible. The many Lawyers within the consortium also recognise that their professional language may be difficult for non-Lawyers to understand, and they will be alerted to using legal jargon with non-Lawyers.

## **The consortium should be a place to build professional experience and confidence**

As well as delivering the program effectively, the consortium will provide a space where all staff have an opportunity to develop and come to the end of their time with the consortium with more confidence and skills. This is particularly the case for younger or more junior staff, who may often be less inclined to speak, share, and lead because of cultural expectations around hierarchy. The consortium will deliberately create opportunities for the leadership and development of younger/more junior staff.



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