



Strategic Partnerships

using Systems Thinking

Systems Thinking for Strategic Partnerships and Convening

A one-day practitioner workshop for charity, social impact and sustainable development leaders on building strategic partnerships and convening people in ways that unlock collective impact, navigate complex problems and create the conditions for meaningful systems change.

FORMAT

One full day, 09:30 to 16:30, delivered live online. Materials, toolkit and certificate included.

DATES

Friday 11 December 2026
Monday 5 April 2027
Monday 24 May 2027

FEE

£249 per person.
£199 early bird until 30 October.
Group and organisational rates on request.

📌 Who this is for, and what it does

Read this page first if you are deciding whether to book, or putting the case to a manager or a learning budget holder.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND

Partnership directors and managers, heads of strategy and policy, programme and portfolio leads, convenors and event designers, funders and commissioners, and chief executives of smaller organisations who personally hold the partnership relationships.

It is written for charities, social impact companies, funders and sustainable development organisations, and for public sector colleagues who work alongside them. No prior background in systems thinking is assumed.

WHAT TO BRING

One live problem: a partnership you are building or trying to repair, or a convening you are designing. You work on it through every module, so you leave with something you can act on rather than notes you will not revisit.

WHY THE DAY EXISTS

Across charity, social impact and sustainable development, leaders are being asked to deliver greater impact with fewer resources as health, housing, poverty, migration, climate and employment become increasingly interconnected. These challenges cross organisational and sector boundaries, while the institutions addressing them often remain organised around individual issues.

Strategic collaboration therefore matters more than ever. Yet many partnerships still rely on approaches designed for relatively predictable problems: an MOU, a logic model, a steering group and a quarterly dashboard. In complex systems, these can address one problem while creating consequences elsewhere, often for people with the least power to absorb them.

This workshop introduces practical methods for understanding the wider system before designing the partnership or convening. Participants examine boundaries, power and competing worldviews, then apply these approaches to a live challenge they are responsible for.

📌 The day at a glance

Times are indicative and flex a little with the group. Breaks are protected, and the two longest blocks are the ones where you work on your own situation.

TIME		SESSION
09:30 – 09:45		Welcome and framing Introductions, the problem each person has brought, and how the day will work.
09:45 – 11:00	A	Seeing the system before you design the solution Introduction to systems thinking and the main methodologies, and how to tell which one a given problem needs.
11:00 – 11:15		<i>Break</i>
11:15 – 12:45	B	The practitioner's toolkit Thinking tools, methods, frameworks and practical application for your areas of concern. Worked, not described.
12:45 – 13:30		<i>Lunch</i>
13:30 – 15:00	C	Designing partnerships that can carry complex problems Applying the methodologies and tools to your own strategic partnerships, including the ones currently going wrong. Includes the live clinic.
15:00 – 15:10		<i>Break</i>
15:10 – 16:10	D	Convening as a systems intervention Using systems tools to shape roundtables, conferences and collaborative events that move a tough problem rather than describing it.
16:10 – 16:30		Commitments and close What each person will change in the partnership or convening they brought, and what they need next.

HOW THE DAY IS TAUGHT

Live, not pre-recorded. The workshop runs in real time with both facilitators, so questions are answered as they come up rather than left to a forum afterwards.

Worked on your own problem. Every module applies to the partnership or convening you bring, which is why the two longest blocks of the day are the applied ones.

No prior background assumed. Module A gives anyone who has not used a systems method before what they need to work confidently through the rest of the day.

Materials sent in advance. Joining instructions and the workbook arrive before the day, so none of the six hours is spent on setup.

📌 The modules in full

Four modules, each moving from method to application.

Module A

09:45 – 11:00

Seeing the system before you design the solution

An introduction to systems thinking and the main methodologies, and how to tell which one a given problem needs.

- The difference between tame, complex and wicked problems, and why the diagnosis determines everything that follows
 - Why reductionist planning tools fail in interdependent systems, with examples from live sector programmes
 - A working map of the main methodologies: soft systems, viable systems, critical systems heuristics, system dynamics
 - Choosing a methodology deliberately rather than defaulting to the one you already know
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Module B

11:15 – 12:45

The practitioner's toolkit

Thinking tools, methods, frameworks and practical application for your areas of concern.

- Rich pictures and causal mapping: getting a messy situation onto one page that a board can actually read
 - Boundary critique: who and what your current framing includes, excludes and marginalises
 - Surfacing worldviews, so that you can tell a genuine disagreement from a vocabulary problem
 - Reading feedback, delay and unintended consequence before they show up in your evaluation
 - Identifying leverage: the small number of places where intervention actually moves the system
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Module C

13:30 – 15:00

Designing partnerships that can carry complex problems

Applying the methodologies and tools to your own strategic partnerships, including the ones currently going wrong.

- Surfacing the level at which partners are thinking, and aligning that thinking
- Diagnosing why a partnership is underperforming structurally, and designing what it can realistically do and not do
- Designing purpose, governance and decision rights so that the partnership stays viable when conditions change
- Cross-sector work: aligning public bodies, funders, corporates and the voluntary sector without flattening what each brings
- Building in the capacity to adapt, so the partnership survives a funding cut, an election or a restructure
- Thinking through archetypes in partnership design
- Using behavioural science and truth tables in partner selection and asset mapping
- Biomimicry: nature's approach to large multi-collaboratives
- Live clinic: you bring a real partnership and work it through the method with the group

Convening as a systems intervention

Using systems tools to shape roundtables, conferences and collaborative events that move a tough problem rather than describing it.

- Building a shared purpose for your convening, and a barriers wall
- Designing a convening backwards from the system change you want, not forwards from the agenda
- Who is in the room, who is missing, and how that single decision determines the outcome
- Structuring sessions so disagreement becomes usable rather than being managed away
- Roundtables, summits and inquiry-style events: choosing the right format for the problem
- Converting a day of good conversation into commitments, ownership and a next step that holds

📌 Every tool and method covered

The full inventory, grouped by what you would reach for it to do. Each one is practised on the day rather than described.

DIAGNOSING THE SITUATION

- Tame, complex and wicked problem typing
- Rich pictures
- Causal and feedback loop mapping
- Delay and unintended consequence analysis
- Leverage point identification

CHOOSING A METHODOLOGY

- Soft systems methodology
- The viable systems model
- Critical systems heuristics
- System dynamics
- Matching method to problem type

POWER, BOUNDARIES AND WORLDVIEWS

- Boundary critique
- Worldview surfacing
- Stakeholder and inclusion mapping
- Marginalisation checks: who carries the consequence

DESIGNING THE PARTNERSHIP

- Partnership viability diagnostic
- Levels of thinking alignment
- Purpose, governance and decision rights design
- Scope setting: what the partnership can and cannot do
- Systems archetypes in partnership design
- Behavioural science and truth tables for partner selection
- Asset mapping
- Biomimicry principles for large multi-collaboratives
- Adaptive capacity: surviving funding cuts, elections and restructures
- Cross-sector alignment without flattening difference

DESIGNING THE CONVENING

- Shared purpose canvas
- Barriers wall
- Backwards design from intended system change
- Room composition: who is in, who is missing
- Structuring productive disagreement
- Format selection: roundtable, summit or inquiry
- Commitment capture and ownership

✦ What you take away

Editable templates and materials, yours to keep and to use across your organisation.

01 Rich picture and causal mapping pack

Guided templates with worked sector examples.

02 Partnership viability diagnostic

A structured assessment you can run on any live partnership.

03 Boundary and stakeholder critique canvas

For testing who your framing includes and excludes.

04 Convening design canvas and facilitation runsheet

From shared purpose through to commitments and follow-through.

05 Cross-sector partnership agreement checklist

The structural questions to settle before you sign.

06 Workshop workbook and curated reading list

Everything covered on the day, plus where to go deeper.

07 Certificate of completion

Issued to every participant after the workshop.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the day you will be able to:

- ✓ Diagnose whether a problem in front of you is tame, complex or wicked, and select a method that matches it
- ✓ Produce a rich picture and a causal map of a live partnership situation that others can read and challenge
- ✓ Apply boundary critique to expose who your current partnership design is quietly excluding
- ✓ Assess whether a partnership is structurally viable, and identify the specific design flaw when it is not
- ✓ Design a partnership governance model that adapts rather than fractures under pressure
- ✓ Design and run a convening that produces decisions and ownership rather than a write-up
- ✓ Make the case internally for a systems approach, in the language your board and funders use

◆ Facilitators

Two practitioners who have not only taught these methods but used them on real multilateral, government and multisectoral system problems.

Bami Osidele

Systems change leader. National Partnerships, Macmillan Cancer Support

Bami has spent over a decade designing partnerships where finance, policy and multisector collaboration meet. He has structured more than 50 partnership and commercial deals and secured international financing in partnership with UNICEF, UN-IOM and Partners for Development, and has worked with UK-DCMS, UK public bodies and African governments on programmes where the problem was never contained within a single institution.

At Macmillan Cancer Support he works on national partnerships across the four nations, building multisectoral collaboration on the most complex challenges facing people with cancer. He is an international advisor on systems intervention for the Nigerian Cancer Society, creator of the Biomimicry Partnerships Approach and the Viable Systems of Partnerships framework, and a trustee of the Royal Microscopical Society.

Christian Baron, PhD

Trainer, consultant and systemic coach

Christian Baron, PhD, is a trainer, consultant, and systemic coach working at the intersection of systems thinking, collaboration, and organisational change. His work focuses on social systems: on how people relate, how collaboration develops, and how patterns of interaction can enable or constrain change.

Drawing on research and experience with small and medium-sized businesses, he designs interactive learning formats that connect conceptual clarity with practical application. He works with real situations rather than simplified case studies, helping people use systems thinking to better understand complexity and identify possibilities for action.

Christian is the author of several methodological books, including *Methods for Systems Thinking*.

PARTNERSHIPS THESE METHODS WERE BUILT ON

UNICEF · World Health Organization · IOM, UN Migration · UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport · Lagos State Employment Trust Fund · Partners for Development

📌 Dates, fees and booking

One workshop, three dates. Pick whichever suits you, and tell us by email if your plans change.

DATE	DETAIL
Friday 11 December 2026	09:30 to 16:30, live online Places available
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£199 ~~£249~~

Early bird until 30 October, per person. Standard price £249 from 31 October.

Book by card at bamiosidele.com, or pay by bank transfer using the details below.

Groups of three or more, and private in-house sessions built around a specific partnership or convening:
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Refunds. Full refund if you cancel more than 21 days before your workshop. Within 21 days you can transfer your place to a colleague or move to a later date. If the workshop is postponed you are offered a full refund or a transfer, whichever you prefer.

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