

Multi-party Collaboration Models in Large-scale UK Reading Promotion Projects: A Postprint

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Abstract

The multi-stakeholder collaborative organizational and implementation model constitutes one of the primary factors underpinning the successful execution of large-scale reading promotion initiatives in the United Kingdom. Multiple stakeholders—including government entities, social organizations, public libraries, enterprises, and the general public—assume distinct roles and functions to forge collaborative relationships and networks, thereby establishing distinctive and effective collaborative mechanisms. This model exhibits characteristics and advantages such as cross-sectoral collaboration, partnership orientation, dual-core structure, professional expertise, broad participation, and adaptability, yet also presents potential drawbacks of organizational looseness and instability. China may draw upon these experiences through innovating and refining government guidance and support mechanisms, establishing public libraries as the “core” of multi-stakeholder collaboration, actively attracting social capital and leveraging social resources, promoting cross-sector collaboration, and instituting standardized and stable collaborative frameworks.

Full Text

Analysis of the Multi-collaboration Model in Large-scale Reading Promotion Projects in the United Kingdom

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Abstract: The “multi-collaboration” implementation model is one of the main factors contributing to the successful implementation of large-scale reading promotion projects in the United Kingdom. Multiple stakeholders—including government, social organizations, public libraries, enterprises, and the public—establish collaborative relationships and networks through different roles and functions, creating distinctive and effective collaboration mechanisms. This

model features cross-boundary collaboration, partnership, dual-core structure, professionalism, extensiveness, and adaptability, but also has potential issues of looseness and instability. China can draw lessons from this experience in terms of innovating and improving government guidance and support methods, establishing the “core” status of public libraries in multi-collaboration, actively absorbing social funds and making full use of social resources, promoting cross-domain collaboration, and establishing standardized and stable collaboration mechanisms.

Keywords: reading promotion; multi-collaboration; social forces; United Kingdom

1 Formation of the Multi-collaboration Model

The multi-collaboration model for large-scale reading promotion projects gradually formed and developed through their continuous implementation over the years, with the model and project development being mutually causal. Taking the Bookstart program as an example, its multi-collaboration development can be roughly divided into three expanding stages. The first is the initial stage (1992–1998), when Booktrust relied on social donations and collaborated with local public libraries, universities, and healthcare institutions to launch the program as a local initiative. The second is the development stage (1999–2004), when charitable foundations, large enterprises, and particularly the central government and various local governments began providing funding and support. Collaboration between social reading organizations and public libraries and other public service institutions continued to deepen, and cultural industry enterprises such as publishers began participating in project organization and implementation, making it the world’s first national book-gifting program. The third is the mature stage (2005–present), during which collaborative relationships and networks among government, social organizations, public service institutions, and enterprises have taken shape and gradually stabilized, with collaboration mechanisms further optimized to form a relatively mature multi-collaboration model. As Booktrust states on its website, “Today’s Bookstart—a public/private partnership for promoting reading for pleasure... The UK government funds Bookstart through Arts Council England. With continued support from children’s book publishers, and through the joint efforts of program coordinators and libraries, health and early childhood institutions, Booktrust continues to provide this national program to infants and young children” [4].

Both the Summer Reading Challenge and World Book Night started slightly later than Bookstart. Like other reading promotion projects, they naturally entered into multi-collaboration in their organization and implementation. In fact, the multi-collaboration model is not an “individual achievement” of one or a few reading promotion projects, but rather something collectively formed and “owned” by numerous projects through continuous exploration, verification,

and mutual learning during their simultaneous development. While specific collaborating entities vary across projects, they share commonalities in the types of collaborating subjects and in the collaborative relationships and mechanisms among multiple stakeholders.

2 Multi-collaboration Relationships

In the organization and implementation of reading promotion projects, government, social organizations, public service institutions, enterprises, and the public each assume different roles and functions based on their respective mandates, resources, and professional advantages. They connect and coordinate with one another to form collaborative relationships and networks, the structure of which is shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper].

2.1.1 Guides and Supporters: Government

The UK central and local governments occupy a dominant position in this multi-collaboration relationship, playing irreplaceable roles in policy guidance, funding, coordination, and supervision. Government policy guidance is mainly reflected at three levels. At the macro-strategic level, since the 1970s, the UK has actively promoted public service reform, guiding social organizations and enterprises to participate in public service provision and establishing partnership relationships with social organizations. At the cultural and related policy level, the government emphasizes the important value and significance of reading and reading promotion, encouraging their development. At the reading promotion project implementation level, it encourages multiple stakeholders to participate jointly and promotes collaboration between public libraries, schools, and other institutions with social organizations. The first level will be discussed later in detail; here we focus on the latter two levels. For example, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the UK's cultural affairs administrative body, published *Framework for the Future: Libraries, Learning and Information in the Next Decade* in 2003 [5], and Arts Council England, a Non-Departmental Public Body representing DCMS to promote cultural development, released two ten-year strategies—*Great Art and Culture for Everyone: 2010–2020 Ten-Year Strategic Framework* [6] and *Let's Create: Strategy 2020–2030* [7]. All three policy documents emphasize the important significance of reading, list reading promotion as a primary objective, and regard cooperation with public, private, and social sectors as an indispensable driving force. Policy documents concerning public libraries, such as Arts Council England's *Envisioning the Library of the Future* [8], DCMS's Libraries Taskforce's *Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016–2021* [9], and the Local Government Association's *Delivering Local Solutions for Public Library Services* [10], further highlight the value of reading while emphasizing enhanced mutual assistance and collaboration among public libraries, other public service institutions, social organizations, and enterprises in jointly implementing reading promotion projects.

Funding is a powerful means for the government to support socialized reading promotion projects. All three projects mentioned above receive funding from the UK central government, primarily provided through Arts Council England in two ways: direct funding (project grants) and indirect funding (institutional grants). Arts Council England signs agreements with Booktrust to fund its children's reading promotion programs, with Bookstart as the main component. The current agreement began in 2019 for a four-year term, with annual funding of £5.76 million [11]. This direct funding specifically supports reading promotion projects. Indirect funding “invests” in social reading organizations to provide overall support for their reading promotion initiatives. As a National Portfolio Organization of Arts Council England for 2018–2022, The Reading Agency receives £475,394 annually for programs including the Summer Reading Challenge and World Book Night. In 2019–2020, 2020–2021, and 2021–2022, Arts Council funding accounted for 57.6%, 55.4%, and 52.0% of Booktrust's total annual income, respectively, and 13.9%, 7.3%, and 15.9% of The Reading Agency's income. In addition to the central government, government departments in Wales and Northern Ireland also provide funding for reading promotion projects. Government funding serves as the main and stable financial source for social reading organizations and their projects. Beyond its explicit supporting role, it has more profound impacts: it demonstrates exemplary leadership to guide and encourage social organizations and other social entities to invest in reading promotion; and it leverages government funding as a “lever” to endorse social reading organizations and projects, attracting more social capital and resources.

UK local governments actively coordinate cooperation among various entities, playing a “bridge” role. Based on partnership relationships with social reading organizations, local governments mobilize and support public libraries, schools, and early childhood education institutions to collaborate with social reading organizations, other social organizations, and enterprises to implement large-scale reading promotion projects locally. As Booktrust described in its 2017–2018 annual report: “Local government is our key delivery channel, through which children's centers, libraries, and health visitors across the country deliver our rich resources to children and families” [12].

2.1.2 Initiators and Organizers: Social Reading Organizations

Booktrust and The Reading Agency are the initiators of the three reading promotion projects. Both are charitable organizations dedicated to promoting reading and focusing on reading promotion, which this paper refers to as “social reading organizations.” The prominent feature that “large-scale reading promotion projects are mainly initiated by social reading organizations” is also a distinctive characteristic of UK reading promotion.

As initiators, social reading organizations oversee overall project preparation, implementation, and evaluation. They raise funds, develop implementation plans and programs, select and release annual recommended booklists, compile

reading materials, coordinate communication among implementing entities, distribute donated books to various institutions, develop and distribute guidelines for reading activities, conduct project publicity through news and social media, and carry out project evaluation and improvement—all coordinated by Booktrust and The Reading Agency.

2.1.3 Primary Implementers: Public Libraries and Other Public Service Institutions

The specific implementation of large-scale reading promotion projects is mainly undertaken by local public libraries, primary and secondary schools, early childhood education institutions, and healthcare institutions. In the Bookstart program, distributing “reading packs” is the foundational and primary task, delivered to every eligible infant and toddler family through health visitors or registrars in the healthcare system, nurseries, kindergartens, children’s centers, and public libraries. Another important component is the “Rhymetimes” and “Storytimes” series of parent-child reading activities, primarily organized by public libraries, nurseries, or children’s centers. The World Book Night program can also be divided into book gifting and activity components. Book gifting is mainly completed by public libraries, schools, hospitals, prisons, and care homes, while the main theme events and local reading activities are primarily organized by the British Library and local public libraries, schools, prisons, and hospitals. The Summer Reading Challenge is mainly implemented by local public library systems (including branch libraries), which publicize the program locally, accept registrations from young readers, provide borrowing services for recommended books and other titles, track and evaluate participants’ reading progress, award certificates and medals, and organize series of themed reading activities. Primary and secondary schools play an important auxiliary role in publicity and guiding student participation.

2.1.4 Donors and Assistants: Other Organizations and the Public

In addition to government funding, social donations are another major funding source for reading promotion projects. The public, enterprises, charitable funds, and other social organizations are the main donors, primarily contributing to the social reading organizations that initiate reading promotion projects. In 2019–2020, 2020–2021, and 2021–2022, Booktrust received social donations of £1.244 million, £1.776 million, and £1.796 million, respectively, accounting for approximately 12.6%, 17.1%, and 16.2% of its total annual income. The Reading Agency received £761,000, £536,000, and £523,000, accounting for approximately 22.3%, 8.2%, and 17.6% of its total annual income. Taking Booktrust’s 2021–2022 social donations as an example, £1.286 million (71.6%) came from individual public donations, £424,000 (23.6%) from partners (including enterprises and social organizations), and £86,000 (4.8%) from charitable trusts and foundations. Some social donations are “restricted funds” that can only be used for designated projects. For example, in 2020–2021, the Kusuma Trust

and Pearson company donated £10,000 and £3,000, respectively, specifically for the Summer Reading Challenge.

Social donations are not limited to monetary contributions but also include in-kind donations. For instance, the 85,280 books (including e-books and audiobooks) distributed during the 2021–2022 World Book Night were donated by 17 publishers.

Beyond donations, various organizations and the public provide assistance to large-scale reading promotion projects in different ways. Publishers and bookstores organize the compilation and publication of suitable books or reading materials according to project needs (such as Bookstart), provide or donate books at low prices, conduct related reading activities, and coordinate writers, illustrators, and others to participate in events organized by other institutions. Homeless shelters, food banks, community volunteer organizations, and corporations like Sainsbury’s supermarket chains also participate in implementing large-scale reading promotion projects. During the special period affected by COVID-19, when public libraries and schools could not operate normally, food banks, community volunteer organizations, and supermarket chains became the main force for book distribution. National and local television, radio, and newspaper media provide important publicity by reporting on large-scale reading promotion projects and major reading activities. Universities and research institutions provide professional support, such as participating in recommended booklist selection, conducting project evaluations, and proposing improvement suggestions. The public actively participates as “volunteers” in organizing, implementing, and serving reading promotion projects and activities. For example, in 2019–2020, The Reading Agency’s programs involved 10,255 volunteer participants, with public volunteer service hours for the Summer Reading Challenge exceeding 90,000 hours [13].

2.2 Collaboration Networks

The various participating entities described above connect and coordinate with each other to form collaboration networks (as shown in Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]). These networks can be said to be the “embodiment” of multi-collaboration relationships, within which all entities play their roles. Specifically, the collaboration networks for large-scale reading promotion projects consist of two major components: a joint support network and a collaborative implementation network.

The joint support network is mainly composed of central government, local governments, social reading organizations, enterprises, charitable funds, professional institutions, and the public. It raises funds and resources for reading promotion projects, conducts planning and preparation, and provides various support and assistance. The collaborative implementation network mainly consists of social reading organizations, public libraries, schools and other public service institutions, charitable and volunteer organizations, professional insti-

tutions, enterprises, and the public, who collaborate on project organization and local implementation. These two networks interweave and connect closely. Their integration lies not only in the fact that social reading organizations, enterprises, professional institutions, and the public exist in both networks, but also in the direct and indirect support, assistance, and coordination among entities in the former network toward those in the latter. Together they constitute the overall collaboration network for reading promotion projects.

3 Multi-collaboration Mechanisms

Each participating entity plays its role within the collaboration network, working synergistically to form relatively orderly and effective collaboration mechanisms around the organization and implementation of large-scale reading promotion projects. These can be broadly categorized into resource allocation mechanisms, communication and consultation mechanisms, collaborative implementation mechanisms, and supervision and evaluation mechanisms.

3.1 “Centralized-Decentralized” Resource Allocation Mechanism

Resources are the foundation for project sustainability. Large-scale reading promotion projects rely primarily on funding, but also include physical resources such as books, reading materials, and activity spaces, as well as human resources for organizing book distribution and activities. Resource allocation essentially involves resource input, pooling, distribution, and utilization, which can be divided into two levels: “centralized” and “decentralized.” At the centralized level, government, enterprises, charitable funds, and the public donate funds, books, and other resources to social reading organizations, which pool them and allocate them according to overall project needs to various matters or distribute them to local implementing institutions such as public libraries and schools. At the decentralized level, local implementing institutions pool resources allocated by social reading organizations and various local resources, configuring and using them according to specific implementation needs. Through this “centralized-decentralized” allocation mechanism, public and private social resources can be maximally raised while achieving demand-based distribution for effective utilization. Resource allocation is a prerequisite for project implementation and runs throughout the entire process of large-scale reading promotion project organization and implementation.

3.3 “Two Synchronizations and One Integration” Collaborative Implementation Mechanism

The collaborative implementation mechanism is key to landing large-scale reading promotion projects, reaching target audiences, achieving project goals, and obtaining good results and benefits. First, it involves “synchronized” implementation, where collaborating partners across regions implement projects simultaneously, with the same steps and progress. For example, the Summer Reading

Challenge takes place every summer vacation, with processes including preliminary publicity, reader registration, themed reading activities, and certificate and medal awarding being synchronized across all regions. Second, it involves “same-content” implementation. Taking Bookstart as an example, its main components—distributing reading packs and conducting “Rhymetimes” and “Storytimes” series—are the same nationwide, with identical reading packs distributed across regions. Although local libraries independently arrange themes, presenters, and specific content for these activities, Booktrust develops and publishes unified activity guidelines that libraries must follow, ensuring both consistency and local relevance. Third, it involves “integrated” implementation, where local implementing entities do not “operate independently” but rather divide labor and collaborate to implement the project as an integrated whole locally. For World Book Night, for instance, local public libraries, hospitals, other health institutions, homeless shelters, adult education institutions, and prisons collaborate to publicize the program to local service populations, especially vulnerable groups, and distribute books. Under unified themes and plans, they each conduct reading activities tailored to their audience characteristics.

3.4 Systematic Supervision and Evaluation Mechanism

For large-scale reading promotion projects with numerous participating entities, information communication and sharing among collaborating partners and consultation and coordination of various matters are crucial. Adequate and effective communication and consultation are necessary conditions for maintaining collaborative relationships and conducting synergistic cooperation. In addition to conventional methods such as meetings, information release, and document transfer for overall coordination by social reading organizations and local coordination by local governments, “intermediaries” play a unique role in the communication and consultation mechanism. For example, Bookstart has “Bookstart Coordinators” in various locations, who are public librarians serving as intermediaries between Booktrust and local collaborating partners. They are responsible for liaising with local partners, transmitting information, and coordinating local project implementation. Meanwhile, industry organizations also play important “intermediary” roles, such as the Local Government Association, Libraries Connected, Publishers Association, and Booksellers Association. On the one hand, they represent their industry members in discussions and consultations with central government, social reading organizations, and other partners to establish and maintain collaborative partnerships and reach project collaboration intentions and plans. On the other hand, they promote and coordinate joint project implementation among their industry members and other parties.

The “supervision” in the supervision and evaluation mechanism mainly comes from government. Both central and local governments supervise the use of funds and the implementation process and effectiveness of reading promotion projects. At the central government level, this is primarily conducted by Arts

Council England and the Charity Commission. Arts Council England continuously monitors funded projects and institutions, which must submit annual reports on fund usage and project implementation. The three projects' initiators and organizers—Booktrust and The Reading Agency—are both large-scale charitable organizations (with annual incomes of £10,000–£10 million; charity numbers 313343 and 1085443, respectively) subject to daily regulation by the Charity Commission and required to submit detailed annual reports. Local governments also conduct relevant supervision within their jurisdictions. For example, social reading organizations must obtain permission from local governments to conduct public fundraising activities, and local governments have the authority to supervise fundraising activities and the use of raised funds according to law. They also supervise multi-stakeholder collaborative reading promotion projects within their jurisdictions, especially those involving public service institutions. In addition to government supervision, public social supervision, media supervision, and mutual supervision among collaborating partners are also comprehensive and relatively effective.

The “evaluation” in the mechanism refers to the regular investigation and assessment of project implementation, outcomes, and benefits by social reading organizations and their partners. Booktrust has a dedicated “Research and Impact Team,” one of whose functions is to organize and coordinate evaluations of Bookstart and other programs. Since 2000, Booktrust has publicly released annual evaluation reports on the Bookstart program on its website, with 41 reports currently available. These include both overall and sub-item/regional evaluations, single-year and periodic assessments, and evaluations of both the program itself and its collaboration. The Reading Agency, jointly with Booktrust and other reading organizations, has developed the *Reading Outcomes Framework Toolkit*, providing mature, feasible, and universal evaluation indicators and methods for reading promotion projects of various scales and types. The Reading Agency generally conducts a comprehensive evaluation of the Summer Reading Challenge every four years, with the most recent public report from 2018, and evaluates the World Book Night project annually. Evaluations typically involve implementing partners submitting reports and data, followed by analysis and research commissioned to professional institutions and researchers to form evaluation reports. Problems identified and recommendations made in these reports become the main basis for subsequent improvements. Overall, considering its subjects, frequency, content, methods, and functions, the supervision and evaluation mechanism can be said to be mature and systematic.

4 Characteristics, Advantages, and Disadvantages

After examining the collaborative relationships and mechanisms of large-scale reading promotion projects in the UK, it is necessary to further analyze and answer several interrelated questions: why this collaboration model can form and survive, what characteristics and advantages it has, and whether it has defects.

4.1 Background and Foundation: Public Service Reform and Social Organization Development

After World War II, the UK established a “welfare state” system with comprehensive government provision of social security and public services [14]. However, by the 1960s and 1970s, the drawbacks of the welfare state system—such as low public service efficiency and heavy government fiscal pressure—became increasingly apparent. The UK government consequently began public service reforms focused on marketization and socialization, transforming the direct government provision model and initiating a “multi-governance” model that “applied cooperative principles among government, market, and third-sector voluntary organizations to the supply of social public goods” [15]. In public services for the cultural sector, the government also actively transformed into a “primary sponsor role” [16], guiding enterprises and “third-sector” social organizations to participate in the “governance” and supply of cultural public services.

The UK has long had strong traditions of social autonomy and mutual assistance. During public service reforms, social organizations accelerated their growth, first reflected in the increase in their numbers. According to the Charity Commission, the UK currently has over 183,000 registered charitable organizations (including more than 30,000 cultural and artistic charities), with even more small-scale voluntary and community organizations. Simultaneously, social organizations have gradually penetrated fields such as education, culture, science, arts, and community development, becoming increasingly specialized and refined. Social organizations dedicated to reading promotion have also emerged and developed in this process, playing an increasingly significant role.

Therefore, it can be said that the UK’s public service reforms and social organization development have created strategic, overarching policy environments and social conditions for multi-collaboration in the public cultural service sector, particularly in reading promotion. The formation, survival, and development of the multi-collaboration model for large-scale reading promotion projects are also based on this background and foundation.

4.2 Internal Driver: Reading Value Identification and Common Responsibility Fulfillment

Since the 1990s, new theories on public administration and public services—such as collaborative governance, holistic governance, and network governance—have all emphasized that “shared concepts and goals” are the internal foundation and driving force for multi-collaboration [17-18]. UK society generally recognizes reading as one of citizens’ cultural rights and acknowledges that reading has important value for individual development, public interest, and social progress. Based on this shared concept, promoting reading has become one of the main social goals. Reading promotion is the government’s responsibility, a corporate social responsibility, and a common responsibility of social organizations and the public. The pursuit of common values and fulfillment of common responsibilities

drive multiple social entities to collaborate on large-scale reading promotion projects.

4.3 Cross-boundary Collaboration and Partnership

In terms of characteristics, the multi-collaboration in UK large-scale reading promotion projects can be classified as an emerging public management and service “cross-boundary governance” model. It even transcends the “boundaries” generally crossed in cross-boundary governance, achieving integrated collaboration across regions, departments, organizations, and sectors. In cross-regional terms, it spans both the major “regions” of the UK—England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland—and local administrative divisions within these regions. In cross-departmental terms, it spans public, private, and “third” sectors, which is the “core” of cross-boundary collaboration. In cross-organizational terms, it mainly refers to coordination not only between central and local governments and among local governments at various levels, but also among different government departments such as culture, education, health, and social security. Cross-sector refers to crossing “industry” boundaries, prominently the “book” industry—from authors, publishers, distributors, and bookstores to public libraries—with “full-chain” integration, along with joint investment from multiple fields including the education industry from kindergarten to university, the health and medical industry, news media industry, and other cultural and artistic industries. Researchers generally believe that collaboration across multiple “boundaries” offers advantages such as “resource sharing, efficiency and effectiveness improvement, and action consistency” [19].

Collaborative governance, holistic governance, network governance, and cross-boundary governance theories all emphasize “partnership” among multi-collaboration entities, generally defining partnership as “two or more organizations or agencies working together with a shared agenda while maintaining their own goals and activity independence” [20]. The multi-collaboration entities in UK large-scale reading promotion projects represent a typical “partnership,” whose formation first depends on strategic partnerships between government and social organizations. In 1998, the UK government and social organizations signed and publicly released *The Compact on Relations between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector* (COMPACT) [21], after which nearly all local governments signed Local Compacts with social organizations in their regions [22], thereby establishing partnership relationships between government and social organizations in public affairs. In large-scale reading promotion projects, the two parties continue this partnership and extend it to all participating entities. Partnership means that collaborating entities are equal, voluntary, and mutually trusting, “adopting a joint consultation decision-making method based on equal relationships” [23] to collaboratively promote project organization and implementation. The maintenance of partnerships facilitates each entity to utilize its respective advantages, exert initiative and creativity, and is also a factor in generating

overall advantages through “cross-boundary collaboration.”

4.4 Project Organization and Implementation Cores

Having social reading organizations as the project organization core and public libraries as the project implementation core is another important feature of the UK large-scale reading promotion project multi-collaboration model. The core status and role of social reading organizations have been fully discussed previously. As initiators of large-scale reading projects, social reading organizations occupy a central position and play a core role in project design, planning and program formulation, fund and resource raising and allocation, information communication and consultation, project evaluation and improvement, and even establishment and maintenance of collaborative relationships.

Public libraries and other public service institutions are the primary implementers of large-scale reading promotion projects, with public libraries being the “core.” In the Bookstart program, almost all public libraries in its implementation areas have joined the program, with librarians generally serving as local “coordinators.” Public libraries (including branch libraries) are one of the main distributors of reading packs, and the “Rhymetimes” and “Storytimes” series of reading activities are also mainly organized by public libraries, with over 2,000 libraries regularly conducting parent-child reading activities. The main event of World Book Night is generally held at the British Library, with local public libraries again being the main book distributors (while also providing borrowing of program-recommended books) and reading activity organizers. The Summer Reading Challenge is entirely implemented by public libraries; in 2021, 5,220 public libraries across the UK implemented the program, with public libraries publicizing the program, accepting registrations from young readers, providing book borrowing services, organizing series of reading activities, supporting participants in completing reading plans, and awarding certificates and medals, all with assistance from some primary and secondary schools.

4.5 Professionalism, Extensiveness, and Adaptability

The extensiveness of collaborative implementation entities also expands the extensiveness of large-scale reading promotion project audiences. The diverse types and large number of collaborative implementation institutions enable projects to reach and benefit various population groups. Taking World Book Night as an example, its implementation institutions include public libraries, schools, hospitals, care homes, prisons, homeless shelters, bookstores, and community organizations. Public library patrons, students of all ages, hospital patients, bookstore customers, and even prisoners—especially special groups such as the elderly, disabled, homeless, and low-income populations—all have opportunities and channels to participate in and benefit from the program.

The flexibility of the multi-collaboration model enhances project adaptability, enabling relatively sensitive perception of changes in environment and condi-

tions, quick and flexible responses and adjustments, accurate adaptation to changes, and effective project implementation. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when public libraries and schools could not operate normally and Bookstart pack distribution was affected, the program quickly adjusted its plan and distributed “BookTrust Care Packages” through food banks and community volunteer organizations, gifting over 237,000 books to families with infants and school-age children [25]. In 2021, recognizing that children in underdeveloped areas were more severely affected by the pandemic and faced more difficult reading conditions, The Reading Agency, together with public libraries, social security, children’s services, and public health institutions, launched a special Summer Reading Challenge pilot across ten regions, benefiting nearly 100,000 children and young people [26].

4.6 Looseness and Instability

The multi-collaboration in large-scale reading promotion projects is not based on administrative relationships from administrative orders or contractual relationships, but on partnerships based on independence, equality, and voluntariness without coercive power. While this brings benefits such as extensibility, flexibility, and adaptability, it also leads to potential problems of looseness and instability. It requires continuous high-cost investment in maintaining collaborative relationships, conducting communication and coordination, maintaining synergy and consistency, and ensuring implementation effectiveness. There are also risks of major collaborating partners temporarily withdrawing, collaborative relationships breaking down, and project implementation being frustrated or suspended.

5 Implications for China

The UK’s experience clearly demonstrates that mature and effective multi-collaboration models require long-term exploration, 磨合, and continuous improvement. China similarly needs long-term joint efforts from all parties to develop suitable, distinctive, and efficient mechanisms for social participation and multi-collaboration in reading promotion. Currently, efforts can begin from at least five aspects.

First, further strengthen the government’s leading role and improve guidance and support methods: enhance policy guidance, leverage organizational advantages of governments at all levels, and encourage and support public sectors to actively collaborate and cooperate with social forces such as enterprises and social organizations; increase public investment in reading promotion projects while exploring various support methods such as “selective” funding and “competitive” awards beyond “government procurement” to support the professional development of social reading organizations and attract social forces to participate.

Second, public libraries should leverage their layout, resources, talent, and pro-

professional advantages to play a greater role as the “core” of multi-collaboration in building collaborative relationships and organizing and implementing large-scale branded reading promotion projects.

Third, encourage active absorption of social funds through donations and mutual assistance, and fully explore and utilize social resources.

Fourth, promote cross-regional, cross-departmental, cross-organizational, and especially cross-sectoral (culture, education, publishing, media, arts, social security, etc.) collaboration, while emphasizing the “intermediary” role of party and government departments, industry associations, or similar organizations.

Fifth, leverage the cohesion of government and public libraries to standardize collaboration through agreements, alliances, and declarations based on the independence and equality of collaborating entities, establishing relatively stable collaboration mechanisms while maintaining openness, flexibility, and adaptability.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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