

Partnering Procedures¹

1. Overview of the Procedure

This procedure is a guide for **[insert organisation name]** in developing partnering agreements with individuals and other entities.

This procedure should be read with the Integration Policy.

2. Considerations

A partnering agreement is a document outlining the purpose of a relationship and the agreed objectives between partners.

Agreements can be developed at systemic, inter-organisational, intra-organisational and individual levels.

Partnering agreements record the agreed terms and conditions of collaboration between **[insert organisation name]** and other individuals or entities. The term 'agreement' is sometimes used interchangeably with 'guidelines' and 'Memoranda of Understanding (MOU)'.

There can be both legally binding and non-legally binding agreements. MOUs are non-legally binding agreements. A formal contract is legally binding. Agreements should be contractually binding if there are consequences for partners for not complying with the agreed terms.

Consideration on how partnerships will be evaluated needs to be addressed at the beginning of the partnership

3. Partnering Relationships

There are many reasons for developing partnering relationships; sometimes it will be to embark on a new initiative or take action on a common goal, and at other times it may be in response to issues that are having adverse effects on partners.

¹ Based on Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) Partnership in Practice Guides.

3.1.1 Exploratory meeting

[insert organisation name] may arrange or attend exploratory meetings with potential partners to discuss joint activity, membership and structure of the partnership.

At this initial meeting, the agenda may include the following items:

- Understanding each other; seeing the other's possible contribution to the partnership
- Possible governance structures that might suit the partnership
- Resourcing – what contribution is possible (and funded?) from each organisation?
- Membership – who are the best people from which organisation for this partnership and who is best to chair?
- What protocols and communication processes will we need to make this work (Memorandum of Understanding or Partnering Agreement)?
- In principal agreement / contact

3.1.2 Resources to support partnering

A person in the organisation is identified who will manage the partnership. It is essential to get the right people to the table, taking into consideration skill, authority to make decisions, an understanding of governing structures, support mechanisms and role clarity.

This step should identify how much time the person can commit (weekly, fortnightly, monthly) to the partnership. It also involves the identification of resources available (financial and non-financial) to commit to the partnership.

3.1.3 Assessing the Need for Partnerships

Questions to consider about partnerships may include:

1. Should we partner?

*Partnerships should be strategic alliances, with risks and rewards weighed.
Partnering is one strategic option for getting something done.*

Decision Issues

- Can we do it ourselves, or do we need to develop this capacity?
- How much control do we need over the process and output?
- What would partnering enable us to accomplish over and above the alternatives?

Learnings

- Many partnerships are hastily entered.
 - Partnering often sacrifices control for the sake of unique gains.
2. What overall purposes would this partnership serve?
Partnerships may produce something special or produce it more effectively through joint work. They also often provide the legitimacy or political support that complex problems require.

Decision Issues

- Who are the key stakeholders, and what are their expectations?
- Who has the credibility and capacity needed to act on this issue or problem?
- Are we ready to hitch our reputation to theirs?
- Do we trust their motives as well as their competence?
- How will other stakeholders respond?

Learnings

- Taking a “multilateral” approach is often crucial for complex problems.
 - An ineffective partnership, however, may make it harder for the individual players to “deliver the goods” that stakeholders expect.
3. How should we define success?
Too many efforts forget to evaluate the multiple dimensions of performance in partnership work. Partnerships often face great expectations and confusing demands.

Decision Issues

- What outcome (change in the “state of affairs”) do we want to create together?
- What measurable outputs (of our work) will those outcomes require?
- What kinds of knowledge and what operational processes will help us produce the outputs?

Learnings

- Not all successful relationship building leads to improved joint output, which requires learning, risk taking, and new behaviour.
 - Partners may also ignore the external factors that affect outcomes, creating a relational success and an outcome failure.
4. How partnered should we be?
Partnership arrangements can operate at various levels of depth or “integration” in terms of the partners’ activities and resources.

Decision Issues

- Based on our capacity and aims, do we envision “light” cooperation arrangements or deeper, blended activities and pooled resources? Or something in between?

Learnings

- Partnerships struggle when participants have different, and often unexpressed, assumptions about the right degree of partnership.

3.1.4 Structuring the Partnership

The most appropriate type of partnership structure will vary according to the nature of the partnership, pre-existing coordination arrangements and prior history of working together and other context and operating factors.

The structure needs to suit the purpose they are to achieve. Simplicity is the most powerful criterion. Partnerships require a structure through which the participating organisations are able to communicate and negotiate agreements. This might include working groups to work on particular issues.

Partnerships work best when supported by clear structures and formal written agreements developed collaboratively, that clearly set out partnership

- purpose,
- common goals,
- joint objectives,
- roles and responsibilities,
- performance expectations,
- review mechanisms and
- an exit strategy.

It requires a clear governance structure that states how the partnership is controlled, and the systems and practices in place to manage this partnership.

Members benefit from agreements on how they will

- communicate effectively
- use protocols to guide their work, and
- provide a means for dispute resolution when things go wrong.

3.2 Partnering Agreements

3.2.1 Purpose of Partnering Agreements

Partnering agreements can serve a number of purposes:

- clarifying roles and responsibilities
- maintaining consistency of partnering relationships and practices

- explicitly stating what individuals, agencies and/or sectors have committed to
- providing a basis for negotiation of responses to a situation or resolution of differences between agency approaches, and/or
- providing an agreed process for resolving partnering differences

3.2.2 Functions of partnering agreements

A partnering agreement may be:

- a) a broad, high-level agreement that documents the relationship between groups of agencies, such as between:
 - the community managed sector and state, federal or local government, about:
 - roles and responsibilities;
 - community development activities
 - government and a peak body about the interests of members
 - professional groups such as social workers, psychologists, welfare workers agreeing on inter-professional practices
 - universities / TAFE and the community managed sector agreeing to provide learning, development and career pathways for community services workers
 - the community managed sector and business about how to realise corporate social responsibility goals through utilising staff as volunteers, mentors or coaches.

- b) a simple agreement between different agencies about specific aspects of their work, such as:
 - a shelter for homeless men having an agreement with the local mental health team for responding to crisis situations involving people they support with mental health issues
 - a family support service having an agreement with an accommodation service for people to access weekend respite care services for clients,
 - a network of after-school care programs having an agreement about delivery and access of workers to a training program operated by one of the agencies.
 - a women's refuge having an agreement with a specialist immigrant women's support service on how referral and ongoing support procedures will include access to interpreters for women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
 - an aged care provider offering community options having a partnering agreement with local hospital social workers and community health

social workers regarding the way eligibility criteria and referral processes will operate

- an out-of-home care network of agencies having a partnering agreement outlining how each agency's role will operate in the continuum of support and referral processes between agencies.

c) between two or more agencies about specific staff carrying out actions to support a person with their recovery goals.

3.2.3 Content of Partnering Agreements

A detailed potential content list is provided in Appendix 1.

3.2.4 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

An MoU describes the goals, governance structures and management arrangements of a partnership. It is not a legal document and is distinct from a funding and service agreement.

An MoU might include:

- Context and Rationale
 - Mission or Purpose Statement
- Values & Principles
- Governance structure and authority
- Goals and Objectives of the Partnership
 - what is to be achieved in terms of the relationship
- Partnership Coordination
 - Membership
 - Structure
 - Roles and responsibilities of all partnering members, including Chair
 - Meeting schedule
- Signatures to the MoU (date and time line for review)

A MoU might also include protocols for working arrangements such as:

- Communication, information sharing and consultation processes
 - Meeting – purposes, agenda, minutes and processes
 - Roles and Responsibilities
 - Resourcing meetings
 - File management
 - Accountability mechanisms – performance monitoring and reporting to the Partnership

- Complaints handling
- Problem or dispute resolution processes
- External stakeholder or network engagement across geographic areas
- Budget or resources management and allocation
- Partnership performance monitoring, review and evaluating the partnership

3.2.5 Terms of Reference (ToR)

The ToR document describes operational working arrangements for the partnership. These are generally drafted prior to the first meeting and agenda for discussion and/or ratified at the meeting. These might include:

- Purpose
- Membership
- Partnership coordination and management arrangements
- Service operations – planning; day to day operations – who does what; when and how; communication and information sharing
- External stakeholder or network engagement – will the membership expand, who needs to be at the table?
- Meeting schedule
- Dispute resolution processes
- Administration and other systems support
- Review and Evaluation

3.2.6 Sustaining the Partnership

The success of any partnership depends on sustaining the process, particularly as leadership, administrations, and policy makers change.

Initial commitment and energy of partners commences the partnership, however the following components are the key to sustaining partnerships over a long period or until they conclude naturally through meeting their goal (time limited):

- creating a sense of interdependence
- recognising and rewarding members
- combining planning with action, and
- creating a learning partnership

a) Servicing the partnership

Identify and agree on:

- roles, responsibilities, skills and expectations of members
- the level of administrative support and who will provide the funds
- training, briefings, specialist expertise and resources where required

b) Ongoing monitoring

Ongoing monitoring and shared reflection of how the partnership is working is critical to strengthening and sustaining relationships and achieving effective outcomes.

Regular (Minuted) progress reporting will help maintain support and enthusiasm for the partnership and its activities. Brief, structured reports linked to the Strategic Plan and annual Action Plan enable members to monitor progress and to take prompt action where required.

Adopting a project methodology to plan for and report against indicators, timeframes and milestones, will enable tracking of any deviations and implementing corrective action.

Reports are also a means of communicating with participating organisations and those whose support is required. They can be used to promote successes and to build and maintain support.

3.2.7 Managing partnering differences

When implementing agreements tensions may occasionally arise. This can be because of:

- a lack of clarity about roles
- professional and organisational philosophies
- different expectations about priorities and ways of working
- perceived power differences between partners
- communication failures, and
- varying degrees of commitment to the agreement.

The early recognition of problems and a shared commitment by all partners to deal with the problem are keys to resolving differences. Solving issues within the partnering group is the preferred approach. In some circumstances the assistance of external mediators may be sought

3.2.8 Strategies for a Failing Partnership

Every partnership will go through lifecycles. Some partnerships may not survive strategies to revamp it; some partnerships choose to struggle on; some partnerships acknowledge their difficulties and seek outside support. Options may include:

1. Terminate or discontinue the partnership
2. Reorganise the group from a partnership to an 'arrangement'

Both options require careful navigation to acknowledge the achievements of the partnership and plan for alternate arrangements. In some instances, closing the formal partnership can be a positive measure of success. It also may have achieved its purpose and have no further need to continue.

3.2.9 Action required to cease the partnership relationship:

Identify the partnerships major accomplishments and acknowledge those people and organisations who have contributed

Determine how to inform people – both inside and outside the partnership of the decision to dissolve

Document the partnerships history and the lessons which can be drawn from its operations

Recommend an appropriate alternative to the current partnership

Select a time, place and event to celebrate what has been accomplished

3.2.10 Evaluating the Partnership

Consider how the partnership will be monitored, reviewed and evaluated. What should be in place at the beginning to ensure data and information is recorded for measuring success?

Evaluations may be conducted for a variety of reasons including assessing whether the methodology is working; assessing the benefits of individuals and organisations; justifying expenditure of resources and confirming and promoting success.

In its simplest form, a partnership evaluation could address the following questions:

1. Why did we decide to work as partners? Are the reasons still valid?
2. Did we achieve what we set out to do?
3. What else has happened as a result of our working together?
4. What have been the impacts on our organisations and our clients/ community?

Outputs need measures at commencement and completion of the project.

5. Were the achievements worth the expenditure of time, effort and other resources?
6. Do we need to still work together to achieve these outcomes?
7. What have we learnt?
8. What revisions need to be made to the partnership and how will we use the evaluation findings?

4. Partnerships Resource List 7 – Agreement Writing (from MHCC, 2010)

Using Agreements

- Tennyson, R (2005) *The Partnering Toolbook*. International Business Leaders Forum, London. [Accessed 20/08/2009]. <http://www.ThePartneringInitiative.org>

This publication offers an accessible and concise overview of the key elements to developing and maintaining effective partnerships. It also provides a range of corresponding tools most supportive in guiding stakeholders through all phases of the partnering process. Chapter 3 discusses issues concerning partnering agreements with a Sample Partnering Agreement in the Tools section.

- Tennyson, R (2005) *The Partnering Initiative*. International Business Leaders Forum, London. [Accessed 29/01/2010]. <http://www.who.int/management/partnerships/overall/Partnership%20tools-en.doc>

Supporting tools to the *Partnering Toolbook*. Tool1: Partner assessment form; Tool 2: Coherence assessment questionnaire; Tool 3: Sample partnering agreement; Tool 4: Partnering roles and skills questionnaire; Tool 5: Guidelines for partnering conversations; Tool 6: Partnership review template; Tool 7: Casestudy template; Tool 8: Communications checklist.

- Stern, R., Heaney, D & Britton, B. (2001). *The Partnership Toolbox*. World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). Surrey, UK. [Accessed 28/ 01/2010]. http://assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/wwf_partnershiptoolboxartweb.pdf

This publication offers a structured approach to developing partnerships with tools to assist with partnership agreements, monitoring and evaluation.

- NCOSS & DoCS (2008). *NCOSS Formalising Partnerships Kit*. Authored Tim Childs Consulting. New South Wales Council of Social Service and Department of Community Services. [Accessed 10/01/2010]. <http://www.ncoss.org.au/resources/080801-formalising-partnerships-resource-kit.pdf>

This resource kit provides information and guidance on formalising partnerships. Sections 8 and 9 address legal issues and contracts.

- Our Community – Building Stronger Communities through Stronger Community Organisations. [Accessed 05/09/2009]. http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/funding/funding_article.jsp?articleId=805

This site provides a broad range of information and advice on Community Business Partnerships which can also be applied to cross-sector partnerships.

Guidance on putting together a community agreement can be found in Help Sheets Part 1.

- University of Kansas. (2010). The Community Toolbox. [Accessed 28/08/2009]. <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/>

This site provides a wide range of information and toolkits in community-building skills, many of which can be applied to the stages of partnership development. Chapter 24 – Improving Services, Section 3 is on ‘Promoting Coordination, Cooperative Agreements, and Collaborative Agreements Among Agencies.

- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. *Culture Counts: a roadmap to health promotion*, [Accessed 25/08/2009]. http://www.camh.net/About_CAMH/Health_Promotion/Community_Health_Promotion/Best_Practice_MHYouth/Culture_Counts/index.html

This Canadian mental health and addiction centre presents an on-line guide (also in pdf version) intended for organisations undertaking a health promotion initiative with ethno cultural communities. The information is broad and sections applicable to partnership development. Chapter 2 – ‘Work with Community Partners’, looks at agreement writing.

- Social Compass. (2007) *Partnering with community organisations: a toolkit for small to medium sized businesses*. An Australian Government Initiative. [Accessed 05/01/2010]. <http://www.socialcompass.com/index.cfm/Partneringtoolkit/>
[http://www.socialcompass.com/docs/PartneringTools\(Final\).PDF](http://www.socialcompass.com/docs/PartneringTools(Final).PDF)

A publication providing a toolkit aimed at promoting community business partnerships. Sections can be applied more broadly to cross sector partnerships. Section 2 addresses agreement issues and Tools 3 and 4 support the agreement building process. 7:

- Kowalski, S & Krattiger, A. *Confidentiality Agreements: A Basis for Partnerships, Handbook of Best Practices*. [Accessed 05/01/2010]. <http://www.iphandbook.org/handbook/ch07/p02/>

This article discusses the elements of Confidentiality Agreements for partnerships and provides a template / example.

- The Community Toolbox. *Assessing Community Needs and Resources*. [Accessed 05/01/2010]. Available: http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/chapter_1024.htm

This site provides a wide range of information and toolkits in community-building skills, many of which can be applied to the stages of partnership development.

Chapter 24 – Improving Services, Section 3 is on ‘Promoting Coordination, Cooperative Agreements, and Collaborative Agreements Among Agencies.

- Management Services for Health. *Forming Partnerships to Improve Public Health*. [Accessed 10/01/2010]. Available: <http://erc.msh.org/mainpage.cfm?file=2.2.1s.htm&module=planning&language=English>

This site has an online guide which supports partnership development including a section on Forming a Partnership Agreement.

- Stern, R., Heaney, D & Britton, B. (2001). *The Partnership Toolbox*. World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). Surrey, UK. [Accessed 28/01/2010]. Available: http://assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/wwf_partnershiptoolboxartweb.pdf

This publication offers a structured approach to developing partnerships with tools to assist in monitoring, evaluation and the development of shared objectives. The Partnership Baseline Tool provides a framework for developing a more systematic understanding of the nature of the partnership between organisations.

Legal considerations of agreements

- Australian Government, IP Australia. *What is Intellectual Property?* [Accessed 05/01/2010]. Available: <http://www.ipaustralia.gov.au/ip/index.shtml>

This site explains intellectual property.

- Rural Law Online. Victoria Law Foundation ‘Partnerships’ [Accessed 01/10/2009]. Available: <http://www.rurallaw.org.au/handbook/xml/ch06s09.php>

This site provides information on a variety of legal issues including partnerships, agreement writing and dissolving partnerships.

- Berlin, R. ‘*The Benefits of a Partnership Agreement*’. AllLaw.com: The internet’s premier law portal. http://www.alllaw.com/Articles/business_and_corporate/article13.asp

This article discusses the benefits of a partnership agreement.

5. References

Spall, P and Watters, S. *Developing interagency protocols and service agreements* <http://www.communitydoor.org.au/node/139> accessed 26th May, 2011.

MHCC (2010). *Partnerships Resource List 7 – Agreement Writing*.

http://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:YrHxDwR-ticJ:www.mhcc.org.au/documents/Partnerships/Resource%2520List%25207%2520-%2520Agreements.doc+partner&hl=en&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEEESiZNGMWm0-MWJC0CmyK8Te8IG50pNNcsM9Sflt1X4tUB4L7-1gyF1b17KietPTY5OQ6fgdL9p7GwYoZj7yhtQcTgPfp97czZzlyl2gYDAnh gJqGF1IDZ_Bxi4y9AhAx02tshCx&sig=AHIEtbQ-e2rBiJnrq8Xr3hjPZnEa9bkh9A&pli=1

Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS), Human Services Partnership Implementation Committee (2010). *Partnership in Practice Guides*

http://www.vcross.org.au/documents/VCOSS%20docs/HSPIC/00911_vcross_partner_guide_1_WEB.pdf accessed 27th May, 2011

Appendix 1: Potential Content of Partnering Agreements

Partnering agreement content may include:

- Principles for the agreement:
 - eg equity, diversity, interconnectedness, democratic decision making processes, open communication, cooperation consistency and efficiency of processes, focus on quality of life outcomes for people being supported, transparency and accountability, keeping stakeholders informed.
- Background/ introduction
- The legal background or other important contextual information about compliance requirements
- Purpose of the agreement, including aims and objectives
- Parties involved and their roles
- The agreement's perceived benefits
- Desired outcomes
 - achievement of desired outcomes or how the partnering agreement will be enacted (such as activities to be undertaken or procedures to be followed)
- A conceptual framework or map which provides a whole of system diagram outlining the agencies involved in the agreement
- Participating agencies' roles and responsibilities
- Any structures or existing networks that have a role and what that role is
- A set of procedures that provide practical guidance on how the agreement will be implemented
- Review processes and time frames
- Arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the use of the agreement and responding to any breaches or grievances
- Complaints procedures
- Life of partnering agreement
- Status of the agreement (whether it is legally binding or not)
- Any terms the parties agree to abide by and any consequences for breaching the agreement
- Signatories and date.
- Attachments, including forms, legislation, check lists, flow charts and a glossary of terms.