

6.23 School–community partnerships

School partnerships acknowledge that the learning, development, health and wellbeing of children and young people are the collective responsibilities of families, community and Government.

All families and schools want the best for children and young people. Regardless of barriers to success, all children and young people have the right to the opportunity to reach their full potential. Sometimes this requires additional or more flexible development and learning opportunities and support. Partnerships with families, community organisations, businesses, local government or other education providers offer a possible solution to improve the outcomes for students.

Schools wanting to enter into a partnership must all have this single purpose of improving the educational outcomes for children and young people.

6.23.1 What is a school community partnership

An effective education partnership provides opportunities to achieve improved learning, enhance engagement, wellbeing and development and contribute to successful transitions and pathways for children and young people. It is a mutually beneficial relationship that achieves outcomes that extend beyond what organisations can achieve in isolation.

6.23.2 What makes an effective partnership?

The primary purpose of a partnership will be to improve learning outcomes. There are many ways that learning outcomes can be improved so partnerships will be developed to achieve different goals that contribute to learning.

Prior to entering into a partnership, schools and partner organisations need to make sure they are clear that there is:

- an agreed vision and shared goals
- strong leadership support
- understanding of and mutual respect for each stakeholder’s expertise and role
- a representative and equitable management of partnership activities
- an understanding of the outcomes that will benefit all partners
- a plan to build capacity
- agreement about how resources will be sustained to maintain the partnership activity
- an evaluation process.

6.23.3 What are the first steps to an effective partnership?

All partnerships should be well considered and planned to ensure the relationship adds value to the partner and the school and ultimately improves student outcomes. It is advisable before entering into a partnership, that a school partnership policy is produced which outlines the principles, options

and method that will guide a school through the partnership process and the types of partnerships a school will and will not consider.

Consultation with school council, staff, students and families should direct the development of the school partnership policy. Taking into account these views and the needs of the community, the school council plays an important role, in determining the suitability of any proposed partnership.

The checklist of questions below could provide the starting point for a school partnership policy or be reviewed before entering into a new partnership.

Is the purpose of the partnership to improve learning and development outcomes for children and young people?

Has the school discussed developing a partnership with other neighbouring schools or the regional network leader to explore what other activity is occurring in the school community, network or region?

Has the school conducted research on the potential partner to ensure that they are appropriate?

What is the philosophy underpinning the potential partner organisation? Do the values goals and policies of the organisation align with the local school community, school charter, other school policy and DEECD policy direction?

How would partnerships align with the annual school plan and implementation plan?

What will the mutual benefit be for the potential partner?

Does the potential partner seek to make a direct profit from the relationship?

Will the partnership set the school up as a place for marketing goods, services or products?

6.23.4 What is the role of school council?

School council approval is required for all arrangements, formal agreements and partnerships between the school and external organisation. Apart from donations or gifts without conditions, the arrangements for all relationships must be confirmed in writing.

All relationships are subject to audit and public accountability processes and should be reported by school councils in their audited financial statements as part of their annual reports. A copy of all documents relating to an approved partnership must be made available (if required) to the Department or for audit purposes. Under no circumstances should any relationship be entered into on a 'confidential' basis.

6.23.5 What are the types of partnerships a school can enter?

The type of partnerships that schools enter into varies widely in scope, complexity and formality. Sometimes, a school may partner with one organisation to respond to a specific issue. In other instances, partnerships are broader, and involve a number of individuals and organisations joining

together to address a particular opportunity or issue. Some of the types of partnerships a school may consider are with:

- families
- children and young people
- business
- community
- local government
- other education providers.

This document will only examine the risks associated with business, local government and community partnerships, however the risks highlighted need to be considered for all types of partnerships.

6.23.6 Partnerships with Business

There are a number of benefits to forging a partnership with business. A business can provide range of additional human, knowledge, and physical skills and resources including expertise and strategic planning, mentoring and broader curriculum choices.

In any business relationship with a school, business must not directly profit or gain financial benefit through marketing or product placement.

The mutual outcome for the school and business is to contribute to school improvement. The following must be considered before entering into a relationship with a business.

The Department deems some relationships and partnerships with specific businesses or organisations as inappropriate and arrangements should not be entered into. Any retail advertising of products or services from organisations that are deemed inappropriate or other arrangements with such organisations are excluded. These include specifically:

- advertising from gambling venues
- advertising of tobacco or alcohol products, or
- other offensive materials or themes so deemed by the Department. See Executive Memorandum No. 98/048 'Offensive Materials or Themes' (see EduLibrary at Schools/Official Memoranda, Circulars & Notices/Executive Memoranda/1998).

The *Tobacco Act 1987* makes it a criminal offence for any person to promote the interests of a manufacturer or distributor of a tobacco product in exchange for a sponsorship. The *Trade Practices Act* (section 53) makes it unlawful for a corporation to represent it as a sponsorship, approval or affiliation it does not have.

6.23.6.1 Sponsorship

For the purpose of this document, sponsorship involves the support of an educational institution or program. The support can take various forms, for example, financial resources, human resources, good or services.

The support can be:

- without conditions (e.g. a gift), or
- with conditions or as part of a formal agreement (e.g. in return for advertising space in the school bulletin or on the school notice board).

Other examples of sponsorships are outlined below.

The provision of direct funding, such as:

- cash donations that are given generally for scholarships or for specific projects
- cash donations (normally tax deductible) to the school's library, building, or building maintenance trusts, or
- supporting the school's fund raising efforts.

The donation of goods and materials, such as:

- classroom materials and equipment, buildings and grounds, materials and teaching resources
- sporting equipment, material and equipment for school productions
- goods or products for school raffles, or
- books and other material prizes for students or for general purposes.

The provision of services, such as:

- sports and production tutors and coaches
- guest speakers for teaching areas and assemblies
- tradespeople, technicians and service companies, or
- publication of brochures, school newsletters and year books.

Sponsorship does not include grants, which are money, goods or other benefits provided to a school for a specific purpose.

In all cases the sponsorship must comply with the guiding principles detailed above and, schools must consider the risks of association with potential business partners and carefully consider the intent of the potential partner. In addition to gaming, alcohol and tobacco companies, the [DEECD Sponsorship Policy and Guidelines](#) and the [Victorian Government Sponsorship Policy](#) further lists some of the following classes of activity or organisations as inappropriate for the purposes of sponsorship.

6.23.6.2 National competition policy

Schools engaging in business activity with business/community groups must comply with the 'National Competition Code', which details the requirements that guide fair trading practices. The Executive Memorandum 96/019, The Competition Code and State Schools details the competitive conduct rules contained in Part IV of the *Trade Practices Act 1974*, which applies to all business activities undertaken by government departments, including schools.

Schools should refer to the details in that memorandum of which the following is a summary.

The following matters are absolutely prohibited:

- Agreements between competitors to price fix or primary boycott
- Third line forcing, or
- Resale price maintenance.

The following matters are prohibited if they are likely to substantially lessen competition in the market:

- Anti competitive agreements
- Misuse of market power
- Exclusive dealing and
- Mergers resulting in substantially lessened competition.

School-community partnerships should not restrict the choice of families and students in the purchasing of goods and services. This does not prohibit schools entering into preferred supplier arrangements under competition policy guidelines after appropriate consultative process have been undertaken.

6.23.6.3 Information, Communication and Technology

Risk may also be associated with the increasing use of information, communication and technology (ICT) based promotion, sponsorship and development.

Caution needs to be taken when embarking on a relationship that involves ICT development. Pop ups, external website links and advertising of inappropriate material may appear on websites that may not be initially brought to a schools attention or part of a negotiated arrangement.

DEECD have developed the Acceptable Use Policy for ICT Systems and guidelines for ICT support and services that can help schools navigate the ICT domain.

6.23.7 Partnership with community

Community can include the organisations and service providers that have a unique expertise or an interest in supporting the outcomes of children and young people. Community based organisations can also be brokers in establishing partnerships and support the multiple stakeholders in managing the partnership.

There are multiple opportunities for schools to engage with community organisations to address issues ranging from transition, student wellbeing, addressing disadvantage, or diversifying curriculum activities.

Schools often seek a relationship with an external community organisation to provide canteen services. The school council should develop appropriate guidelines, whichever system is adopted. The 'Go for your life' Healthy Canteen Kit has been developed to support students making healthy food choices at school and through life.

The Kit contains a number of resources including the School Canteens and Other School Food Services Policy to assist schools to develop healthy canteens and other food services. For further information the 'Go for your

life' [Healthy Canteen Kit](#) is available on the DEECD website and see also sections 4.14 and 7.17 of the Schools Reference Guide.

6.23.8 Shared use facilities

Schools are an important part of the community. The opportunity to enter into an arrangement with local government or a local community organisation around shared use facilities can provide a good catalyst to partnership activity. The sharing of facilities between schools and the community is usually formalised in a legal agreement to ensure that all parties know their responsibilities and obligations.

The Department has developed standard agreements to support the sharing of facilities on school land. These include:

- hire agreements (when a school facility is used on a one-off basis by the community),
- licence agreements (when a school facility is used by the community on a regular basis) and
- joint-use agreement (when a school and one or more partner organisations come together to plan, build and in some cases jointly manage a facility that is to be used both by the school and by community groups or organisations).

The Department's resources [Shared Facility Partnerships: A guide to good governance for schools and the community](#) and [Schools as Community Facilities](#) Policy Framework and Guidelines, provides examples and guidance for schools wanting to develop shared facility partnerships. Section 7.25 of the Schools Reference Guide provides further details on the benefits and options for schools entering into shared facility partnerships.

6.23.9 Partnership with local government

Establishing a relationship with your local government provides a broad scope of initiatives, other than shared facilities, that could be developed to improve the outcomes of children and young people. This could include integration of early years services, access to youth services or involvement of place based planning or service coordination.

6.23.10 Do I need to consider information privacy when developing partnerships?

In all partnerships the information privacy principles of the *Information Privacy Act 2000* requirements must be strictly adhered to. Under this law the sharing of personal information, such as names and address of students or parents, with an outside organisation for a purpose other than directly providing an education for the student, can only be done with the consent of the parent, or, in the case of a secondary school student, with the consent of the parent and student.

If consent is obtained and personal information is shared with a business or community organisation, it must be made explicit that this disclosure is for a specific purpose and that the business or community organisation cannot

use this information for another purpose or disclose this information to another organisation without the explicit consent of the parent or student and the approval of the school.

Details of the *Information Privacy Act* can be found at:

www.privacy.vic.gov.au

Further advice on information privacy and schools can be accessed on the [Privacy](#) intranet site.

Resources

Contact

Community and Stakeholder Relations Branch

9637 3432

Education Partnerships Division

9637 2525

Shared Facility (Infrastructure Division)

9637 3052