

Learning collaborations between ACE and vocational education and training providers: Good practice partnerships – Support document

SUE GELADE

TOM STEHLIK

PETER WILLIS

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Methodological information

Background

The research for this project was planned as a series of inter-connecting stages that progressively built evidence and directions for good practice in partnerships/collaborations. It outlines qualitatively from the evidence gathered the benefits that can accrue from such connections (see below for stages).

It should be noted that the qualitative methodology adopted for this research follows a previously successful national research design undertaken in the ACE-VET area (see Gelade et al. 2003). Given previously established national connections made by the research proponents in that and other projects, the researchers are using a large ACE-VET database accrued through the projects as a means of initial contact with possible participants. Given the requirement that the findings from this research need to have national relevance, it is planned to investigate the good practices within, and the benefits from, ACE-VET collaboration in both regional/rural and urban areas across six Australian states.

The initial stage of the research required participants to self-select on the basis of their failed attempts or successes in one or more collaborations or partnerships. We had originally stated that it was not possible to absolutely define which states would be more prominently covered and instead gave an estimate of the likely coverage. This estimation was for a minimum of three urban state-based localities (Melbourne, Perth/Fremantle and Adelaide) with a probable two different organisations in each of these metropolitan locations, and three regional/rural state-based localities (NSW, Qld and Tasmania) – with two or three organisations in each locality. The result was expected to be a total of 14 organisations and, with each having either successful/unsuccessful partnerships to describe, a minimum of 28 case organisations would be available for analysis. Where personnel from other stakeholders were available, further interviews would be undertaken. Following the first stage analysis, a smaller selection of site visits – likely to be five or six – would involve one case in each locality in order to obtain further in-depth qualitative information.

Regarding our intention to have purposeful self selection of sites, of note is commentary by deVaus (1995; 107) who argues that facilitation of a survey is a key factor in response rates and that unsolicited mailed surveys do not obtain high responses. Hence this project has not used surveys. Rather, we have employed personal, telephone and email contact in the first instance to *canvass* for a research cohort via enquiry about whether any partnerships or connections have been attempted and whether the organisation is prepared to discuss their attempts. The previously constructed database of ACE-VET organisations provided addresses where such canvassing took place.

It has been our intention to initially gather data from the literature to provide indications of good practice in developing and sustaining partnerships and/or connections between organisations and identify where or how benefits and outcomes may occur. We acknowledge the participating localities may not be fully representational of all partnerships or collaborations and hence the literature data will be a form of benchmarking or counter-balance against which our selected sites can be qualitatively compared. In addition, the juxta-positioning of the successful examples of partnerships/connections with the unsuccessful ones will provide another backdrop against which the good practices of and the outcomes from the former may be interpreted.

Stage One – set up

- ✧ Secure ethical clearance from University of South Australia Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)
- ✧ Review existing literature, from both Australia and overseas, and policy documentation, to consolidate evidence from previous/current research to answer the following enquiries:
 - ◆ How are partnerships and connections perceived as engendering life long learning, social capital and economic benefits?
 - ◆ In what ways have previous partnerships been ‘auspiced’?
 - ◆ What benefits have so far been identified?
 - ◆ What, if any, negative issues have been identified?
 - ◆ What, if any, ‘good practices’ can be identified?
- ✧ Use the literature to initially define an understanding of the key issues where available, inherent in the characteristics of good practice seen to underpin partnerships and collaborations in ACE-VET
- ✧ Write up a literature review that includes identified good practice definitions and benefits, intended as a form of simplified qualitative benchmarking.
- ✧ Progress report to NCVET

Stage Two – parameter design

- ✧ Identify organisations making or abandoning ‘learning journeys’
 - ◆ Organisations identified and contacted through an ACE/VET database held by researchers and previously collated (see above). Using this means, approximately 1500 ACE-VET organisations were approached via email and/or telephone contact.
- ✧ Invite participation through a process of self-selection. Participants nominated on the basis of both positive and negative outcomes from collaborations, and interest in participation in the project.
- ✧ Define parameters of the research through this purposeful self selection of interviewees across states.
 - ◆ Purposeful selection ensured that participants were selected to cover the various differing contexts of ACE-VET across Australia.
 - ◆ These interviewees included stakeholders within the partnerships or collaborations such as education managers, educators, administrators, community workers, etc

Stage Three – data collection

- ✧ Data collection – via the following:
 - ◆ ACE-VET telephone interviews (usually lasting for approximately one hour each) structured around previously defined key issues inherent in positive and not so positive collaborative practice
 - ◆ Visits to nominated/selected sites to follow through wider and more in-depth discussions as interviews with stakeholders - as identified above
 - ◆ Interviews and discussions with identified ACE-VET articulating learners where available
 - ◆ Discussions and interviews with past and present Community Co-ordinators in regional and urban localities where available
 - ◆ Discussions and interviews with other stakeholders in localities as identified
- ✧ Interim report to NCVET.

Stage Four – analysis and writing

- ✧ Analysis and consolidation of good practice identifiers
 - ◆ Data (including findings from the literature consolidation and review) would be subjected to close reading to draw out relevant qualitative data in its own right, and to identify both positive and negative practices, the outcomes and hence accruing benefits. This analysis aimed to build on the overview of interviews to firstly distinguish practices engendering or that mitigate against both sustainable partnerships across organisations and sustainable alliances among individuals related to ACE-VET delivery. Secondly the analysis would examine the benefits indicated from the interviews to understand them in terms of defined outcomes within respective communities.
- ✧ Consolidation of findings
 - ◆ The findings were consolidated, bringing together the above elements and drawing practical conclusions about current good practices that engender and sustain partnerships leading to benefits for their communities. Similarly the consolidation could draw conclusions about those practices that provide cautionary information about practices that mitigate against collaborative partnerships and connections and hence do not lead to positive outcomes
 - ◆ A brief, but succinct ‘what works’ set of guidelines to conclude the consolidation
- ✧ Draft final report to NCVER
- ✧ Alterations and editing as required
- ✧ Final report to NCVER.

It should be noted here that the final report consolidated the findings so as to include an analysis of distinguishing practices that sustain or work against partnerships and collaborations, and a succinct ‘what works’ guide to good practice partnerships.

Ethical clearance

Research ethics clearance has been sought and obtained through the University's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). A copy of this clearance is inserted below.

Re: Ethics protocol P117/05 "Learning the journey between ACE and VET: good practice partnerships. A National VET Research and Evaluation Research Program on ACE-VET connections".

Thank you for submitting your ethics protocol for consideration by the Chairperson of the University's Human Research Ethics Committee.

I am pleased to advise that your protocol has been approved. Please note that the Chairperson's decision will be reported to the next meeting of the Human Research Ethics Committee for endorsement.

Please regard this email as formal notification of approval.

Ethics approval is always made on the basis of a number of conditions detailed in the attachment; it is important that you are familiar with, and abide by, these conditions. It is also essential that you conduct all research according to UniSA guidelines, which can be found at <http://www.unisa.edu.au/res/ethics/default.asp>

Best wishes for your research.

Regards, Vicki

Vicki Allen
Ethics Officer
Research and Innovation Services
University of South Australia
Mawson Lakes Campus
Mawson Lakes Boulevard
Mawson Lakes SA 5095
Telephone: +61 8 8302 3118
Fax: +61 8 83023921
Email: vicki.allen@unisa.edu.au
CRIS Provider No. 00121B

Table 1: Full source listing of defined good practice indicators/characteristics

Author	Good practice characteristic
Bateman & Clayton (2002)	Willingness to collaborate Shared vision and goals Respect and trust Good communication Effective and respected leadership Acceptance of differing cultures Flexibility and willingness to take risks New skills and mindsets
Callan (2004)	Cooperation, Sharing of resources Development of 'partnering skills' that are focussed on long term outcomes (17) Trust also important factor Sharing of information Agreed sets of goals
Daniel et al (2001)	Write and sign an agreement or memo of understanding between partners Establish a conflict resolution process Consider potential conflicts of interest Recruit and select project workers Constantly reassess community needs and project resources Establish financial procedures and revise budget
Elmuti (2005)	Set time frame Commitments, Understood roles Careful partner selection Good working relationships Effective communication Defined goals
Falk (2000)	Continuity of personnel Cohesive vision and its continuity Relevance of needs Relationships between partners Memorandum of understanding Community and regional focus as drivers
Hawke et al (2001)	Combined resources and funding Leadership History and memory Preparedness of ACE to be 'bridge' (5) eg between NHs and TAFEs Try to build relationships between people so that contact is easier
Kilpatrick (2003)	Developing networks Strong social infrastructure based on values and trust Resource sharing Shared learning and cooperation Local decision making shared values

Marsh & MacDonald, 2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build in time for local networking into job descriptions Give time release for attending conferences and for a Employ staff with knowledge and experience of particular sectors Participate in LLEN networks Research local needs and relevant successful strategies Managed support of partnership program development Pooled funding
Plane (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Willingness to listen Commitment to the organisation Preparedness to forge links A goal to promote the common good Common vision, aims that re respected Willingness to pool resources Ethical commitment to training and learning Mutual consideration and trust Understanding of pressures of each others' workplaces (9)
Rose and Schooneveldt (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition that groups using services may not be at same level or interest/skill Recognition that support might be needed Recognition of reasons for adopting a partnership model Recognition of institutional commitment
Saunders (nd)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular updated info to staff and students Simple (straight forward?) guidelines for staff and students Personal and direct assistance to students
Saunders (2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building personal relationships Building strategic plan for region Sharing resources Coordination and information exchange Assisting students with linkage use Having a coordinator between organisations Provision of incentives for collabs between orgs Develop defined structures for sharing resources Set up school Appoint designated linkage personnel Provide training to staff (about others' pathways) Collaborate and cooperate by implementing systems for exchange, meetings, workshops, etc. Effective system for students to utilise linkages Acceptance of the concept of partnership linkages by all/both parties
Tas Govt. (2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear purpose Key stakeholders fully involved Consideration about current community activities Community vision and priorities developed Cross sectoral linkages built Concrete plans arise out of vision Effective structure for internal communications Strong management and coordination team Inclusive practices

Table 2 - Framework of good practice characteristics and indicators from literature

<p><i>Good Practice characteristic/indicators when planning:</i></p> <p>Define goals and set a time frame Recognise reasons for adopting a partnership model Research local needs. Develop concrete plans Use community and regional focus as a driver Investigate relevance of needs in partnership areas Have an agreed set of goals. Consider potential conflicts of interest Ensure partnership concept is accepted by all involved Carefully select partners based on common interests Provide incentives for collaborations</p>
<p><i>Good Practice characteristic/indicators when setting up the structure:</i></p> <p>Set up a memorandum of understanding Establish financial procedures and budgeting Recruit and select project workers at outset Implement systems for exchange, meetings, workshops, etc. Provide regular updates to participants Develop a cohesive vision, have a shared purpose Establish a conflict resolution process. Have inclusive practices clearly defined Provide area for re-assessment of needs and resources</p>
<p><i>Good practice characteristics/indicators applying to personnel involved in partnerships:</i></p> <p>Appoint designated linkage personnel Establish personal relationships. Have good working relations Make cooperation a key, be prepared to work in new ways Appoint a coordinator Ensure community leadership is available or effective and respected coordinators Establish trust between key participants Check on acceptance of partnership linkages by all/both parties Use staff with knowledge/experience of sectors involved Respect each others' aims and vision. Be willing to accept differing organisational cultures</p>
<p><i>Good practice characteristics/indicators relating to use of resources:</i></p> <p>Share resources to cut costs and reproduction Develop defined structures for sharing resources Establish financial procedures and constantly revise budget Combine/pool resources for specific needs</p>
<p><i>Good practice characteristics/indicators regarding use of information and communication:</i></p> <p>Build cross sectoral linkages Ensure exchange of information occurs regularly Offer simple and straightforward guidelines for staff and students Ensure organisations can provide personal and direct assistance to students Set up an effective structure for internal communications Regularly update information given to staff and students</p>

The questionnaire

The following key research questions as set out in the original proposal were used to drive this research.

1. Where are **examples of successful and unsuccessful AVE-VET partnerships and/or connections** in outer urban, regional and rural localities across Australia, and how do they work?
 - ✧ Why and how were they initiated?
 - ✧ What are the key stakeholder roles?
 - ✧ What are their responsibilities?
 - ✧ How are the partnerships and/or connections sustained and managed?
 - ✧ What role do community development officers have in building connections or partnerships?
 - ✧ Are there alternative partnerships and/or connections beyond ACE-VET involved?
2. What **outcomes** do the respective stakeholders in these examples expect from these partnerships and/or connections, and to what degree are these expected outcomes achieved?
 - ✧ What evidence is available? And from where is it derived?
 - ✧ What outcomes are identifiable within the partnerships and/or connections?
 - ✧ What, if any, are the differing roles of ACE and VET in achieving these outcomes?
 - ✧ Are there barriers to both/either sector becoming acquainted with linkage concepts and recognition of each other's VET provision?
 - ✧ To what extent do the stakeholders judge these outcomes are being met?
3. What **good practices** currently underpin partnerships and/or connections in these examples?
 - ✧ What examples of good practice can be identified?
 - What processes should be avoided?
 - ✧ Are there regions and/or circumstances where ACE-VET organisations work better alone or together?
 - ✧ What enablers and barriers are there to the connections?
 - ✧ Are there contexts where ACE-VET undertakes non-traditional roles (e.g. ACE in economic development and VET in community capacity building)?
 - ✧ If so, how do these non-traditional roles benefit either the connections or their local context?
 - ✧ In what ways could these good practices be replicated and implemented elsewhere?

4. What are the **implications** of the research findings for policy and practices?

- ✧ In order to answer this final question, the researcher planned to consolidate the findings into a 'Good Practice Guide' that would provide policy makers and practitioners with a means of comparing and contrasting present practices against identified good practices in a form of benchmarking. This guide now forms part of the Final Report.

In the initial phase the telephone interviews being conducted were necessarily be constrained by the amount of information that could competently be recorded as well as given, through that medium. However, it was expected that data obtained during the telephone interviews would, in the first place, supply new information for analysis, and in the second, provide information that could be compared and contrasted to the good practice characteristics as presented within the literature above.

The later follow up case studies made use of the first round of interview data as a basis on which to build a deeper knowledge of issues relating to partnerships and collaborations between ACE and VET. To that end the interview format during the case studies more fully addressed a number of the research questions as set out above.

As the initial interviews were via telephone, a proforma was developed to assist interviewers follow a clearly structured format that better facilitated validity across the cohort. A copy of this proforma is attached below and is provided in the same format as was used by the researchers while they were conducting the telephone interviews.

LEARNING JOURNEYS – RECORD OF TELEPHONE INTERVIEW

Date Interviewer Interview # allocated

Name of organisation (NFP)	
Name of interviewee (NFP)	
Telephone number (NFP)	
Position in organisation (NFP)	
Name of organisational partner (NFP)	

NB Prompts in brackets.

How would you describe the nature of your partnership? (Formal or informal or both, etc?)

Tell us about the partnership (what does it entail, how does it operate, what does it do, etc?)

How would you describe the partnership in terms of success or otherwise? (NB *Reiterate that the information given is confidential and no organisation/person will identified.*)

1. Beginnings

1.1 Please tell us how the partnership began. (What is/was the driving force, did it come from local council, community development officer, or your two organisations?)

1.2 Who were the main people involved in setting it up? (What role do they play in the organisation?)

1.3 How long has it been going and how long do you expect it to go for? (Does it have a timeframe?)

1.4 What sort of preparation did you need to make at the beginning? (MOU, canvassing the community, selecting partners, etc?)

2. Maintenance

2.1 What strategies do/did you use to maintain the partnership? (Good communication, regular meetings, etc?)

2.2 What roles and responsibilities do/did each of the partners take? (Tell us how it is/was shared out)

2.3 What do you think is the main support for its continuation? Or alternatively, reasons for its failure? (Good/poor leadership, staff, local council help/hindrance, do students have a stake in the process, etc?)

2.4 What other organisations (if any) are/were involved other than ACE and VET? (Is there an industry partner or community development or government organisation as well?)

3. Outcomes

3.1 What outcomes did you originally expect from the partnership? (What were you hoping to achieve?)

3.2 Please describe how these expectations been realised - or not? (What changes, improvements, etc?)

3.3 In what way might you quantify these outcomes? (Can you give 'hard' evidence, provide any figures, etc?)

3.4 In what way did each of you work towards achieving these outcomes? (Where there differing roles each partner undertook in getting to the outcomes? Did this affect the outcomes?)

3.5 Please tell us how you see this partnership benefitting your community.

3.6 Are you and your collaborating organisation satisfied with what you have achieved so far?

3.7 If not, what are the barriers to you achieving your aims? (What else could you do, what is stopping you going further, etc.)

4. Advantages/disadvantages in the partnership

4.1 Have there been distinct advantages for your organisation?

4.2 Tell us about what you have either gained or lost from the collaboration or partnership (autonomy, more students, better outcomes, shared funding sources, etc)

4.3 If gained, how have you been able to capitalise on these advantages? (Have they led to any further initiatives?)

4.4 Is your role in this partnership a traditional one for your organisation? (Are you involved in a partnership where you are offering training or accreditation that is normally left to your partner/collaborating organisation, or are you offering/doing something that does not have the accreditation you usually offer, etc?)

4.5 (If yes) How do you see this non-traditional factor benefiting the partnership or your local community?

5. Good Practices

5.1 If you were helping someone set up a partnership, what practices would you suggest be the best to follow? (What sound processes can you describe?)

5.2 Similarly, what would you suggest be best avoided? (What practices hinder a collaboration?)

5.3 If you were going to make changes to the way in which *your* partnership/collaboration operates, what would these changes be?

Thank you very much for your time and effort – would you be prepared to have our researchers come and visit your two organisations and undertake some extended interviews among the stakeholders involved in this good practice partnership?

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