



Good practice guide

Creating effective ACE and VET partnerships

Organisations within the adult and community education (ACE) and vocational education and training (VET) sectors operate effectively within their own separate spheres of influence to deliver vocational learning to their students and clients. However, some ACE and VET organisations are working together in order to expand their delivery capabilities and to provide further benefits to the broader communities in which they are located.

This guide provides strategies for establishing effective partnerships and collaborations between ACE and VET organisations. It is envisaged that these good practice suggestions could be adapted for any system, both within Australia or overseas, even though administration systems may differ.

Planning

- ✓ Find a partner who has a common interest or is likely to share your organisation's goals.
- ✓ Clearly define the goals and expectations of both/all partners, and give reasons for considering a partnership.
- ✓ Examine what incentive is driving the partnership—establish what community/regional needs it will serve and determine how such a partnership will benefit your area.
- ✓ Define an agreed set of goals (these may change but will give parties something to work with initially) and consider them in light of possible conflicts of interest—for example, differing learning/teaching styles, potential 'poaching' of students and rates of pay for personnel involved.
- ✓ Be honest and realistic about the expected outcomes—differing expectations can create disappointments among participants and may disadvantage learners.
- ✓ Promote acceptance of the partnership within the organisations concerned and to all personnel likely to be involved.
- ✓ Set a timeframe for the completion of various tasks, in order to give more structure to the planning.

Setting up

- ✓ Decide whether the partnership will be formal or informal and know the reasons for your choice—if formal, draft a memorandum of understanding; if informal, devise a letter of intent that includes the parameters of the collaboration.
- ✓ Establish the financial procedures and budgets for the expected life of the partnership.
- ✓ Decide on and document the roles and responsibilities of each organisation/person involved. Base these decisions on reasonable expectations rather than 'wish lists' of roles.
- ✓ Ensure there are effective means of passing on all information about the partnership across the organisations involved—for example, how it operates, roles and responsibilities, and funding structure—so it can continue, and students/clients/communities will not be disadvantaged, if personnel change.
- ✓ Implement a system for exchanging information—for example, regular meetings, workshops or staff training and development—and allow time to reassess needs and resources.
- ✓ Establish a conflict resolution process that includes a clear definition of inclusive practices.



This good practice guide is based on the report, *Learning collaborations between ACE and vocational education and training providers: Good practice partnerships*, by Susan Gelade, Tom Stehlik and Peter Willis, which is available from the NCVER website at <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/11708.html>.

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Personnel

- ✓ Where possible, appoint designated personnel/coordinating staff with some knowledge and experience of the sectors involved. Select those who are positive about the collaboration and/or who have good leadership skills.
- ✓ Have contingency plans for managing staffing needs as the partnership becomes more established or if it grows beyond initial expectations.
- ✓ Try to involve and establish links with stakeholders in other agencies or organisations likely to strengthen the partnership or help provide clients/students—for example, Centrelink, local industry, local councils or state government, and schools.
- ✓ Establish trust between key participants by organising both formal and informal discussions and meetings in an environment that does not put either party at a disadvantage.
- ✓ Monitor personal (as opposed to organisational) acceptance of the partnership across all organisations concerned.
- ✓ Respect each other's aims and vision, and be willing to accept differing organisational cultures.

Use of resources

- ✓ Where possible, share or combine resources—for example, manuals, computer programs and recording systems—to cut costs and reproduction of effort, and to promote transparency between the partners.
- ✓ Develop defined structures for sharing resources and ensure that learners can access what they need in a timely manner.
- ✓ Where funding has a limited allocation, try to establish financial procedures and constantly revise the budget. Plan to apply for more funding when the partnership is successfully established, and keep evidence and records to back any claim.

Information and communication

- ✓ Set up a structure for both internal and external communication that all parties understand and have access to.
- ✓ Learn how each other's organisation operates and exchange information about teaching styles, hopes and aspirations, and what expectations are placed on learners.
- ✓ Promote a regular exchange of information—let each other know when significant changes occur or policies alter, and get on the phone when problems arise or praise is due.
- ✓ Provide students with regular updates about events involving both partners so they can see the connection between organisations.
- ✓ Keep cross-partner records of students and other stakeholders involved in the partnership and ensure any updates are communicated.
- ✓ Provide staff and students with simple and straightforward guidelines about each partner and the practices within the partnership.
- ✓ Clarify and make visible any differences in bureaucratic and administration systems that might affect the exchange of information or cause bottlenecks.
- ✓ Provide students with personal and direct assistance that is both timely and clear, and do not place unrealistic expectations on students moving between organisations.

What to avoid

- ✗ Avoid over-bureaucratisation of the partnership's administration in order to facilitate good ideas and promote good relations between organisations.
- ✗ Don't try and achieve too much—having unrealistic expectations of the partners or the students involved can affect the outcomes of all participants.
- ✗ Don't underestimate each other's abilities—the length and levels of staff experience in the sector may prove more valuable than simply having accreditation or qualifications.
- ✗ Don't 'lock in' the partnership until everyone is certain that they want to continue with it.

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