



Partnerships Strategy Policy

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Version Control

Contact names	Role / position	Version number	Date	Review date
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CONTENTS

Policy Statement.....	3
Scope.....	3
Purpose	3
Definitions	3
Policy Framework	3
<i>Types of partnerships</i>	4
<i>Mapping partnerships</i>	5
<i>Partnerships challenges</i>	8
References and Resources	8
Related Policies, Procedures and Legislation	9
Roles and Responsibilities.....	9
Effectiveness and Review	10
Further Advice or Assistance	10

Policy Statement

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW Support Services (Support Services) is committed to working in partnership with a range of organisations, businesses and community groups to achieve best practice outcomes for clients and to facilitate social change.

Creating sustainable internal and external partnerships will help ensure seamless client service delivery and assists our clients at every stage of their journey.

Scope

This Partnerships Strategy Policy applies to all Support Services' staff, volunteers and members.

Purpose

This policy provides a framework for the development of strong partnerships in order to maximise the reach and capacity of Support Services to make lasting change in people's lives and build the capacity of our communities.

Definitions

Concept	Meaning
Partnership	A partnership is a collaboration in which organisations work together in a transparent, equitable and mutually beneficial way towards agreed outcomes for the benefit of our clients. Partnerships cover a range of relationships from informal through to formal arrangements.
Memorandum of Understanding	A Memorandum of Understanding or MOU is a documented agreement that sets out how a partnership arrangement will operate. It enables all parties to see that they are agreeing to the same thing, and provides a solid reference to go back to should disagreements arise. MOUs are usually non-legally binding documents but provide structure to the collaborative process.

Policy Framework

In line with the goals of the Support Services' Strategic Plan, services and programs will build strong and lasting partnerships with individuals, organisations and other service providers in order to deliver better outcomes for our clients.

Partnerships are an important mechanism to achieve coordinated services, address service gaps and pool resources to meet the needs of the people we assist. Successful partnerships require an investment of time to obtain the benefits of working in partnership, which include:

- building capacity;
- providing opportunities to share workloads and resources;
- allowing for diverse and creative thinking to lead to better outcomes;
- enhanced service coordination across agencies, with improved referral pathways for clients, and

- increased capacity to successfully submit tenders and to deliver projects.

For an effective partnership, the following key guiding principles should be agreed by Support Services and our partners:

- the client is at the centre of every partnership. A partnership must primarily be of benefit to our clients;
- partnerships must be culturally appropriate;
- partnerships must be trauma informed;
- shared vision or goals;
- mutual accountability;
- risks and rewards are shared fairly; and
- effective use of resources.

Types of partnerships

Staff are encouraged to work in partnership with internal and external agencies, services and programs. Support Services is committed to ensuring strong connections between staff, members and volunteers to ensure enhanced client care and service delivery.

Different objectives will necessitate different partnership approaches. Partnership arrangements may be informal or formal, and vary to the extent in which goals, resources, risks and resources are shared.

Informal arrangements include networking, interagency meetings, cooperation and coordination and are characterised by:

- exchange of knowledge for mutual benefit;
- developing relationships and connections within local communities;
- minimal sharing of resources;
- often no fixed conclusion date; and
- building block to developing formal collaborative relationships.

In informal cooperative endeavours, the focus is primarily on sharing knowledge and expertise. Networks built around a common theme or purpose can assist workers from diverse organisations in identifying what others are doing, what is new and what is considered best or leading practice. Networking can foster the development of good relationships between individuals and their organisations, and lead to formal collaboration.

Partnerships such as collaborations and joint working arrangements are formalised by documentation such as contracts or MOUs which set out key points of the partnership and usually contains a fixed conclusion date. Other characteristics include:

- exchange information;
- pooled and/or shared resources;
- extensive time and trust required;

- share risks, responsibilities, rewards;
- interdependent connections, and
- joint planning.

Mapping partnerships

Planning for a successful partnership should be systematic. The following mapping exercise can help to ensure the development of sustainable and effective partnerships.

Steps within this exercise should also be applied to pre-existing partnerships to ensure they are still benefiting clients and to assess if informal partnerships should be formalised.

1. Preparation

The first step when considering a partnership is to identify the person(s) who will manage the partnership. The person should have authority to make decisions and to lead the process, along with partnership skills such as communication, judgement, openness and an understanding of different partnership roles. Partnership responsibilities should be supported in supervision sessions.

Time and resources available, as well as potential partners should also be identified.

Key questions:

- *Who will drive the partnership?*
- *What are the necessary time and resource commitments?*

2. Clarify purpose and roles

Preliminary discussions with identified potential partners should be held to ensure each that each party is willing and able to partner, and that there is a clear shared purpose and an alignment of values between all parties. Time should be taken to develop a trusting relationship where all parties feel there is mutual benefit from partnering.

The reasons for establishing the partnership and the benefits for clients should be clearly articulated, understood and agreed by all parties. Partnerships should be strategic alliances, with risks and rewards weighed. Realistic expectations regarding capacities, skills, authorities and resources of all parties are essential. The benefit of running a pilot program should be considered, if appropriate.

Develop a partnership agreement which outlines:

- the structure;
- roles and responsibilities;
- resources each organisation will bring;

- decision making process;
- who will manage information and communication, and
- processes for resolving disagreements or conflicts.

Key questions:

- *What is the purpose of this partnership?*
- *How does the partnership benefit our clients?*
- *What role does Support Services have in this partnership?*
- *What role does our partner have?*

3. Level of partnership

Consideration should be given to the appropriate level of the partnership in terms of the degree of collaboration. Based on the aims of the partnership is a simple cooperation arrangement appropriate, or something more interdependent?

If a planned, ongoing relationship is envisaged (or currently occurring) formalisation of the partnership is recommended. Staff must speak to their line Manager when considering formal arrangements.

Formal partnerships will have a signed a formal agreement outlining key points such as roles, objectives, financial commitments, resourcing commitments, dispute resolutions and agreed terms. The agreement will usually be [Memorandum of Understanding](#), Service Level Agreement or contract. Dependant on the scope of the partnership, formalisation will be approved by the Regional Manager, appropriate Senior Operations Manager or Executive Officer of Support Services.

Partnerships such as Joint Working Arrangements are approved and signed with reference to the [Delegations of Authority Policy of St Vincent de Paul Society NSW](#); in most cases this will be the Executive Officer of Support Services or Chief Executive Officer of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW. For certain agreements it may also be appropriate for contracts to be reviewed by the Society's solicitors.

Key questions:

- *How partnered should we be?*
- *Do we need a formal agreement?*

4. Resources

There should be clarity about what resources the partners will be contributing, both financial and in-kind. Information regarding all contributions should be recorded, including financial, administrative, equipment, venue provision etc. The contribution of resources to ensure worker and client safety under WHS legislation must also be clarified.

Allocation of resources should be budgeted for. Any financial implications of partnering should be considered with reference to the [Delegations of Financial Authority Policy](#).

It is vital that any intellectual property of Support Services bought to the partnership is documented as remaining the property of Support Services.

Key questions:

- *What financial or in-kind support will Support Services provide?*
- *Is the support budgeted for?*

5. Communication and documentation

Communication is vital to the success of a partnership. Identify who is responsible for communication between the partners, what information needs to be shared and the best method for sharing information.

Establishing a communication plan helps ensure:

- partners are informed about what is going on;
- a trusting and productive working relationship is maintained;
- conflict is avoided, and;
- partners achieve the objectives of the partnership.

Outcomes of meetings, what has been agreed to, decisions and actions should be documented. Any incidents, hazards or injuries occurring as part of the partnership arrangement must be documented. Please refer to the Support Services' [WHS Workbook](#).

Regular reports of progress help to maintain support and enthusiasm for the partnership. Minutes of meetings should be sent on a timely basis.

Key questions:

- *Who is responsible for timely communication between partners?*
- *How do we report on progress, decisions and actions?*

6. Reviewing progress

It is important that there is a regular process for reviewing the milestones and achievements of the partnership. The review process allows for decisions to continue, make variations or end the partnership. It also provides an opportunity to celebrate the achievements made to date.

The relationship between partners should also be reviewed to assess if there are particular concerns that need to be addressed.

Key questions:

- *How will we measure and report the achievements of our partnership?*
- *Do we need to make changes to the partnership arrangement?*

7. Evaluating the partnership

Evaluation is a vital component of continuous quality improvement. Evaluating the partnership is done to assess the methodology and benefits, justify the expenditure of resources and confirm and promote successes.

Successful partnerships should be celebrated and insights shared within Support Services to help inform future partnerships.

Evaluation can be done via questionnaire or group discussion, using the key questions below as starting point.

Key questions:

- *Why did we decide to work as partners? Are the reasons still valid?*
- *What has been the impact on our service/program, our clients and our communities?*
- *Did we achieve our partnership goals?*
- *What else has happened as a result of our partnership?*
- *Was the outcome worth the expenditure of effort and other resources?*
- *Are there better ways of working together?*
- *What did we learn?*
- *If we made mistakes, how can we avoid them next time?*
- *How will we use the evaluation findings?*

Partnerships challenges

Some of the issues that can impact on the success of a partnership include:

- the rationale behind the establishment of the partnership was not clearly understood or accepted by stakeholders;
- partners have not fully committed to the partnership;
- the time to establish a trusting relationship of mutual benefit has been underestimated;
- the partnership lacks a shared vision or direction;
- capacity shortfalls or inadequate resourcing; and
- problems with communication or decision making processes.

Planning and ongoing monitoring of the partnership can help to minimise the challenges of sustaining a partnership. Agreeing on acceptable standards of performance can assist to build accountability and confront poor performance.

References and Resources

- [St Vincent de Paul Society NSW Support Services Strategic Plan 2013-2018](#)
- *Collaborative Partnerships with Other Agencies*, Grace Leotta, Affirm Organisational Development and Training.
- [VicHealth The partnerships analysis tool](#)
- [VCOSS Partnership Practice Guides](#)
- [NCOSS Formalising Partnerships Kit](#)
- [Community Door](#)

- [Memorandum of Understanding Template](#)

Related Policies, Procedures and Legislation

Society policies and procedures relating to this policy include:

- [Child Protection Policy](#)
- [Client Access and Eligibility Policy](#)
- [Client Assessment and Planning Policy](#)
- [Client-Centred Service Delivery Policy](#)
- [Client Charter Policy](#)
- [Client Transition and Exit Policy](#)
- [Client Referral Policy](#)
- [Client Review Policy](#)
- [Code of Conduct for Members, Volunteers and Employees](#)
- [Critical Incident Policy and Procedure](#)
- [Cultural Safety and Diversity Policy](#)
- [Delegations of Financial Authority](#)
- [Media Policy and Procedures](#)
- [Police Check Policy](#)
- [Privacy Policy](#)
- [Quality Management Policy](#)
- [Trauma Informed Care Policy](#)

Legislation relating to this policy includes:

- *Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014 (NSW)*
- *Aged Care Act 1997 (Cth)*
- *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW)*
- *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW)*
- *Community Welfare Act 1987 (NSW)*
- *Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007 (NSW)*
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)*
- *Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002 (NSW)*
- *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986 (Cth)*
- *Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)*
- *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW)*
- *Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)*
- *Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)*
- *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994 (Cth)*
- *Work, Health and Safety Act 2011 (NSW)*

Roles and Responsibilities

These policy requirements will be followed by all people included within the scope of this policy.

Effectiveness and Review

This policy is scheduled for review yearly from its date of endorsement and every two years thereafter, or more frequently as needed to align with legislative or practice changes.

Further Advice or Assistance

Please speak with your Manager if you have any questions regarding this policy. You may also contact the Support Services Policy Coordinator to provide feedback on this policy.