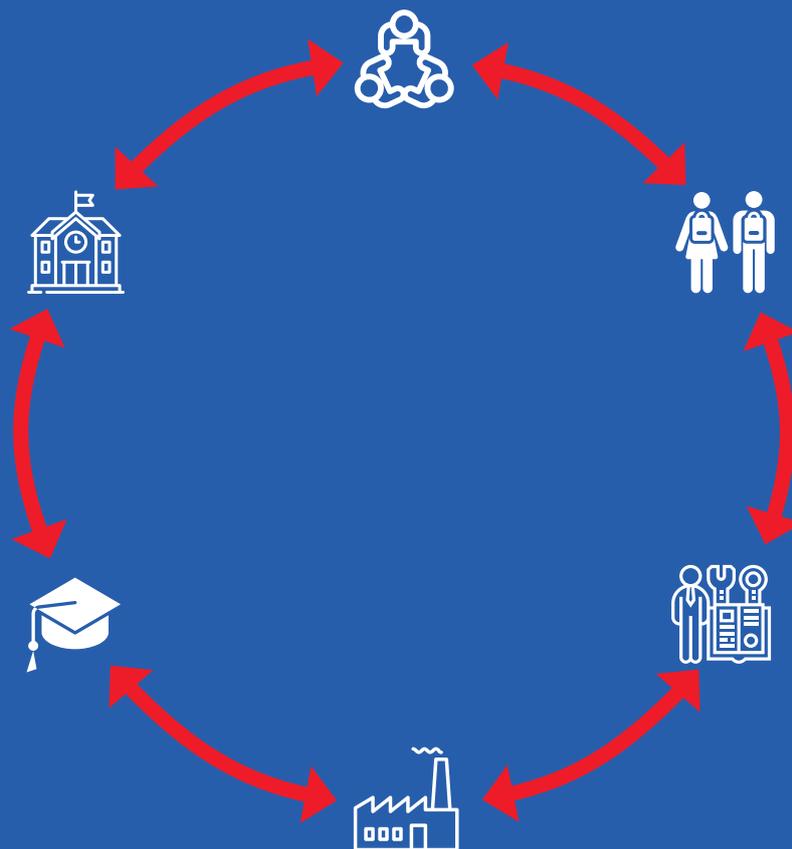# GUIDE TO PARTNERSHIPS

A partnership approach that involves collaboration between schools, industry, communities, universities and vocational education providers is best practice when designing and developing career development learning activities.

THIS GUIDE FOR PARTNERSHIPS HAS BEEN DESIGNED FOR PRACTITIONERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION, VET AND INDUSTRY WHEN ESTABLISHING PARTNERSHIPS WITH SCHOOLS, TO ENABLE QUALITY CAREER DEVELOPMENT LEARNING TO OCCUR THAT VALUES THE EXPERTISE OF CAREERS ADVISORS AND SCHOOL TEACHERS.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT LEARNING

The term 'Career Development Learning' will be utilised throughout this document to describe "...learning about the content and process of career development or life/career management. The content of career development learning in essence represents learning about self and learning about the world of work. Process learning represents the development of the skills necessary to navigate a successful and satisfying life/career' McMahon, Patton & Tatham 2003 p6.

WHAT ARE PARTNERSHIPS?
Partnerships occur when two or more organisations work together to achieve a shared or common goal. Partnerships involve schools, workplaces, communities, vocational education providers and universities working together to create opportunities for students to successfully transition from school to work or further education.

WHY PARTNERSHIPS?
Partnerships have been identified in national higher and vocational education policy, as well as by education state government departments, as the vehicle to achieving best practice career development learning for students currently in primary and high school. The Australian Government identifies that partnerships between schools, communities, industry, vocational and higher education providers are necessary to enhance student learning and increase capacity to navigate post-school pathways. Despite the emphasis on the creation and implementation of partnerships, there is currently limited guidance for practitioners on how partnerships can be understood and subsequently created and implemented. This document is designed to provide guidance to school, higher education, vocational education and industry practitioners in developing successful partnerships that enhance the provision of effective career development learning for students.

GUIDE TO PARTNERSHIPS
This document lays out six considerations to guide practitioners in the successful formation and continuance of partnerships. The six guidelines covered are:

1. **ENSURING THE 'RIGHT' PARTNERSHIP COMPOSITION**

2. **DEVELOPING A SHARED VISION FOR THE PARTNERSHIP**

3. **OPTIMISING THE CAPACITY OF SCHOOLS TO ENGAGE IN THE PARTNERSHIP**

4. **ENABLING A SHARED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE**

5. **DISSEMINATING THE 'ETHOS' OF THE PARTNERSHIP THROUGH ORGANISATIONAL LAYERS**

6. **DEVELOPING TRUST AND NETWORKS THROUGH PARTNERSHIP WORK**

Each section outlines a key consideration in the development of partnerships, the specific challenges which might arise, tips to overcome those challenges as well as practical examples to illustrate each guideline.

1. ENSURING THE 'RIGHT' PARTNERSHIP COMPOSITION

Good partnerships are key to success across the business field, but this is a relatively new concept within the broad education sector. Partnerships can effectively 'make' or 'break' an innovation, so getting it right from the beginning is crucial to positive outcomes for all parties.

Like any relationship though, partnerships come with complexities, which need to be considered, including the 'size' of the partnership, and who is 'included' in the partnership.

CHALLENGES:
Large partnerships, with multiple stakeholders, can be complex to manage.

The organisational layers that exist in large complex partnerships can be impacted by a lack of timeliness in decision-making and limited communications between different layers of each organisation.

TIPS FOR PRACTITIONERS:
Practitioners can consider the following in configuring the partnership:

- Identifying the community or policy need first and then collectively brainstorm what partners need to be sitting around the table to address this need;
- Undertaking a skills assessment of each partner. Thinking about whether the partners identified need to be formally engaged in the partnership, or can instead be engaged as a stakeholder at key points throughout the project.

EXAMPLE:
There are examples of partnerships, which relate to enabling student aspirations that only include the school and the university. In these examples, the focus of the partnership can easily centre around access to higher education and not consider broader post-school pathways that are available to students. Larger partnerships, that include schools, universities, communities, TAFE and industry allow for a broad range of career options to be explored.

2. DEVELOPING A SHARED VISION FOR THE PARTNERSHIP

Developing a shared vision for a partnership involves partners agreeing on a common purpose or goal. This can involve partners identifying a community need that together they need to address or can involve partners having similar goals that are then re-shaped into a common goal. A shared vision, purpose or goal for partnership work characterises good partnership practice.

CHALLENGES:
Often organisations bring their own priorities to partnership work that are influenced by national or state policy or the organisation's own mission and values.

TIPS FOR PRACTITIONERS:
In order to achieve a shared vision for the partnership, practitioners can consider:

- Developing a new shared vision for the partnership that:
  - Is reflective of a community need that has been identified by the partners; or
  - Aligns the partner's individual strategic priorities to a shared vision or common goal. The advantage of this approach is that partners can still see their link to the vision and have the ability to direct resources, as they had already identified this as a strategic priority of the organisation.
- Establishing a vision that places students at the centre of the partnership. This assists partners to focus on the student and guides future decision-making that places the student at the heart of the partnership. It can also help to establish and foster trust and integrity amongst partners, as it removes the focus from any one organisation.
- A shared vision is collaboratively designed at the commencement of a partnership and renegotiated throughout the partnership as the partnership matures or the needs of the students shift.

EXAMPLE:
Figure 1: Partners in Career Development Learning (page 5) provides an example of different goals of partners involved in a large-scale partnership involving universities, vocational education providers, local industry, communities and schools. Whilst the goal of the partnership was to improve student's post-school pathways, partners may perceive a shared vision or goal in diverse ways.

FIGURE 1: PARTNERS IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT LEARNING
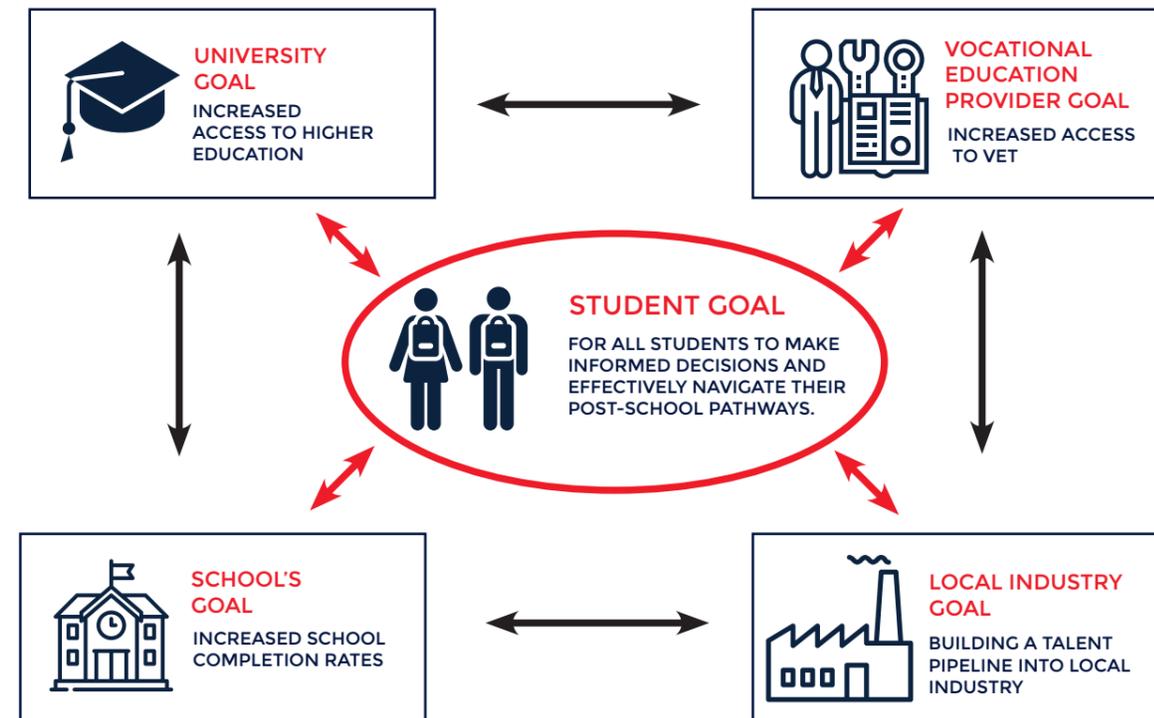
As can be seen in this example, each organisation brought their *own* organisational values and priorities to the partnership. Interestingly, each organisation saw their role as the 'endpoint' or 'goal' of the partnership.

Being transparent and openly discussing the diverse priorities that each organisation brings to a partnership, can allow a common ground to be found and a shared vision or goal to be achieved.

3. OPTIMISING THE CAPACITY OF SCHOOLS TO ENGAGE IN THE PARTNERSHIP

Creating the space for schools to effectively engage in the partnership is critical to the success of post-school focused partnerships. Schools know their students and provide an invaluable opportunity for specialisations such as career development learning to be embedded into the curriculum in order to achieve whole of cohort approaches to effective career development learning.

CHALLENGES:
Schools are busy places and school staff have many teaching and administrative responsibilities. Given this, often partners will design programs for school delivery that aim to take the burden off schools and subsequently develop a menu of activities for the schools to select from. This approach presents a challenge for partnerships as, in most cases, the knowledge and expertise of the schools have not been optimised.

TIPS FOR PRACTITIONERS:
Practitioners can consider the following in building schools' capacities for partnership work:

- Budgeting for teacher relief as part of career development learning initiatives to ensure that teachers have the space to engage in projects outside of their teaching commitments;
- Building in partnership work and career development learning practices into teaching workloads and position descriptions;
- Embedding workshops on partnership creation and implementation and career development learning practices into mandatory school professional development days; and
- Working with schools to identify this as part of their strategic planning.

EXAMPLE:
One school has established a series of Head Teacher 'Transition' roles to establish partnerships and support students in their post-school decision-making.

Time is built into the teacher's workload to work with organisations external to the school and to work with staff internally to build their knowledge and capacity to deliver effective career development learning activities.
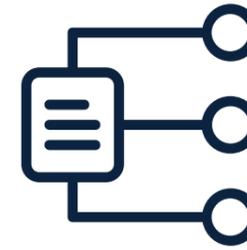
4. ENABLING A SHARED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Effective management of successful large-scale partnerships is often underpinned by a shared governance structure to enable shared input into the goals of the partnership. Shared governance structures can foster a strong sense of shared ownership amongst the partners and a sense that 'they are all in this together'.

CHALLENGE:
The success of partnerships is often attributed to the equal input of all partners. However, some organisations have greater capacity for partnership work, in terms of their knowledge and time that they can commit to a partnership.

TIPS FOR PRACTITIONERS:
Practitioners may wish to consider the following in establishing a shared governance structure:
- Establishing a separate organisational entity to manage the partnership;
- Establishing a co-chaired partnership model, where there is joint responsibility for managing the partnership;
- Ensuring equal representation of all partners on a partnership committee or board;
- Ensuring that the people who are sitting on the partnership committee or board have the delegation to make decisions on behalf of their organisation;
- Providing professional development to senior staff on collaborative practice, to ensure the effective shared leadership of the partnership; and
- Developing collaboration matrices that articulate how each partner is contributing and benefitting from the partnership.

EXAMPLE:
One university had established a partnership board, with representation from the schools, TAFE, university and industry. Over the course of four meetings throughout the year, the meeting of the partnership board would be hosted and chaired by each partnering organisation.

Organisations were represented by staff in executive roles, who had delegation to make decisions about their organisation's role in the partnership. Also, at the commencement of the partnership, a shared vision was established which then informed the work plan of the partnership over the course of the year. The partners were clear from the outset their role in the partnership and what needed to be achieved and by when.

5. DISSEMINATING THE 'ETHOS' OF THE PARTNERSHIP THROUGH ORGANISATIONAL LAYERS

The vision or goal of the partnership can diminish from the inner to the outer layer of the partnership. Staff who are engaged in partnership boards or committees, or who are responsible for the delivery of the partnership have an intimate understanding of the goal of the partnership, as well as the context in which the partnership was formed. However, staff who are further down in the partnering organisations can often have a less sophisticated understanding of the partnership, in terms of why it was established and what it is trying to achieve.

CHALLENGE:
The partnership is only as strong as those who are implementing the activities. Even though principals and university, vocational or industry executive are all engaged in the ethos of the partnership, this communication does not always flow through the multiple layers of each organisation. Therefore, it is often left to individuals, who are influenced by their own motivations and values, to interpret the goals of the partnership.

TIPS FOR PRACTITIONERS:
Practitioners may wish to consider the following to enable the dissemination of the 'ethos' of the partnership through organisations layers:
- Embed an overview of the partnership, it's vision and work practices, as part of the induction process for new staff;
- Provide professional development activities to staff at all partner organisations to build knowledge and capacity of the partnership; and
- Establish two-way communications between strategic and operational governance structures to allow practitioner experiences to inform the strategic direction of the partnership.

EXAMPLE:
One University had established a strategic governance group and an operational group that met regularly. The strategic governance group was comprised of school principals, university and TAFE executive staff and executive staff from industry. The operational group included school teachers, widening participation practitioners and outreach staff from the partnering organisations.

There was cross-representation of executive and operational staff on each group as well as duplication of staff on each group to ensure a free flow of communication between the two groups. Staff from the strategic governance group would run professional development for operational staff to disseminate the knowledge about the partnership. This also provided a role for operational staff to have a voice in the strategic operations of the partnership, as they understood how the strategic decisions were playing out at the coalface of the partnership.

6. DEVELOPING TRUST AND NETWORKS THROUGH PARTNERSHIP WORK

The benefits of partnership work can far outweigh the goals originally set by the partners. Through developing trust, partnerships can increase the networks and social capital available to organisations.

CHALLENGE:
Developing trust that can lead to effective relationships and cross-sector networks takes time. Often partnerships that are driven by policy imperatives need to demonstrate outcomes within annualised funding cycles. Therefore, opportunities and time to build trust can be limited.

TIPS FOR PRACTITIONERS:
Practitioners may wish to consider the following in developing trust and increased access to networks within a partnership:
- Provide 'space' for partners to come together informally and share their practice. This might include scheduling breakfast or lunch prior to meetings to allow partners the time and space to develop their relationships with one another;
- Establish mechanisms to support the partnership beyond the funding cycle or project commitment. Building trust and networks takes time, so consideration needs to be given to the long-term commitment of the partnership. Examples that require no ongoing funding include, the establishment of organisational knowledge sharing sessions, as well as informal opportunities for staff in the organisations to meet, network and share practice; and
- Structure the goals of the partnership to enable some early 'quick wins' for the partners that allow partners to demonstrate that they are engaged in the partnership for the 'right reasons.' This might include applying for an external grant or sharing data or information (where appropriate).

EXAMPLE:
Career development learning activities led by staff in schools given by staff in schools can often be limited by that individual's own experiences or the people, organisations or information sources that they have access to. The quality of career development learning provided to individual students can be higher if the school teachers or career advisors providing career development learning can make contact with and draw on the expertise of his/ her broader network.

In order to facilitate this, one school held breakfast meetings with their school staff and their local universities, vocational education providers and community organisations each term. This provided an opportunity for networking, as well as an opportunity for the school to share information about their own practices that other organisations could learn from.

This guide was produced as part of a National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) funded project, titled 'Higher Education Career Advice for Students from Low Socioeconomic (LSES) Backgrounds.'

This project aims to critically investigate best practice initiatives in career development learning for students from LSES backgrounds and establish overriding principles to guide career development learning provided to school and non-school leavers across the sector.

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