Partnering to improve education and transition outcomes for young people

About SVA Consulting

SVA Consulting shares evidence and knowledge to build social sector capacity. We work with non-profits, major funders and governments to strengthen their capacity to access and manage capital, talent and evidence, measure impact, and deploy new approaches to delivering services, to achieve profound social change.

About this project

The Partnership Brokers National Network (PBNN) commissioned Social Ventures Australia (SVA) Consulting to research and analyse the impact of school, business and community partnerships on education and transition outcomes. This includes analysing the effort required to establish effective partnerships.

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Executive Summary

Overview

- School, business and community partnerships are an effective way to deliver high quality education and transition outcomes for all young people. They provide access to broader and deeper learning opportunities that support young people to reach their educational and developmental potential. Partnerships also support businesses and other organisations to achieve their own objectives including the development of a skilled workforce for business and industry.
- Developing and working in partnerships is challenging. It involves a strategic assessment of needs and opportunities, strong cross-sector relationships and a deep understanding of working effectively in partnership. This is a challenge for schools, businesses and other organisations alike as many do not have access to such skills and resources internally.
- The effectiveness and nature of partnership activity involving schools, business and other organisations is often varied. While organisations often collaborate, partnerships are not always in place or targeted to provide all young people with the support or opportunities they need for future work and learning.

Case for Government support

- Through SVA Consulting's work and research, we believe there is a strong case for government action facilitating the development of partnerships. This case is underpinned by the role partnerships can play supporting education and transition outcomes and the limited capacity of schools and other organisations to develop (and support) partnerships.
- The Australian Government can play a particularly important role ensuring that successful partnership models can be scaled up and applied nationally, and that the focus of partnership activity benefits young people across Australia. Such support can facilitate the development of new partnerships as well as maintain the collaborative effort of existing partnerships. Importantly, government support can ensure partnerships facilitate the achievement of government policy objectives across areas such as school to work transitions.
- Three policy options to support partnership development have been identified for analysis. These options are outlined below.
- Importantly, Government support can be focused into specific geographies and areas of high need as well as focused on achieving Government priorities. This can include funding Partnership Brokers or backbone organisations in rural and remote areas or providing partnership seed funding to organisations working to support improved transition outcomes.

Potential policy options

- **Program of intermediary organisations - Partnership broker model**: Program of Partnership Brokers established to build cross-sector partnerships and to build the capacity of partner organisations to collaborate
- **Program of intermediary organisations - Backbone organisation model:** Program of Backbone Organisations established to manage cross-sector partnerships and to drive partner organisations to the achievement of the common goal
- **Partnership seed funding:** Provision of funding direct to partnerships to support the setup or expansion of partnership activity.

1 Introduction

1.1 Setting the scene

School, business and community partnerships are an effective way to deliver high quality education and transition outcomes for all young people. They provide access to broader and deeper learning opportunities that support young people to reach their educational and developmental potential. Partnerships also support businesses and other organisations to achieve their own objectives including the development of a skilled workforce.

Across Australia, partnerships are being developed to enhance links between education and industry, increase student involvement in the community, engage students at risk of leaving formal education and improve school to work transitions. However, developing and working in partnerships is challenging for schools, businesses and other organisations alike. This can limit the focus and scale of partnership activity which in turn limits the support provided to young people.

1.2 Purpose of the paper

The purpose of this paper is to consider and discuss three questions.

1. What is the role and impact of school, business and community partnerships on education and transition[1] outcomes?
2. What effort is required to develop impactful partnerships?
3. What can the Australian Government do to increase the impact of school, business and community partnerships?

The consideration and discussion of these questions draws on academic and organisational literature as well as the work and observations of Social Ventures Australia (SVA) Consulting in the area of cross-sector partnerships.

1.3 Defining partnerships

"Partnerships" is a widely used term, generally adopted to describe relationships that involve some form of cooperation (typically between individuals or between organisations). However, its use can cover everything from routine transactional relationships to truly collaborative efforts.

Within the education sector, the term is often used to describe relationships that cover sponsorship agreements (involving a business donating funds to an individual school) through to collaborative joint ventures where organisations work closely together to drive social and economic change for young people and communities.

For the purpose of this paper, we use the term "partnerships" as defined by the International Business Leaders Forum (IBLF) Partnering Initiative (see inset). This is not the only definition that could be used, but is one we think conveys a helpful picture of the topic and issues we are discussing in relation to school, business and community partnerships; the collaborative and sustained effort of schools, businesses, education institutions and other organisations working together in pursuit of a common goal.

> **Defining the term partnership**
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> *"A cross-sector or multi-stakeholder partnership is an ongoing working relationship between organisations combining their resources and competencies and sharing risks towards achieving agreed objectives while each achieving their own individual objectives."*
>
> International Business Leaders Forum, The Partnering Initiative

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[1] "Transitions" is defined as the transition from school to further education, training and employment.

2 Supporting education and transitions through partnership

2.1 Overview

This section of the paper discusses the role and impact of school, business and community partnerships. It sets out the context of education and transitions in Australia and looks at how partnerships support education and transition outcomes as well as the objectives of business and other organisations.

2.2 Changing demands on education and learning

Young people are facing a range of new challenges in relation to the skills and capabilities they need for future work and learning. Among these is the increasing importance of further education and training; equipping young people with the job-ready proficiencies they require to participate in the knowledge-based economy. Others include the need to understand and engage with scientific concepts as well as the need to problem solve in different ways.[2] Such challenges stem from the rapid change in technology alongside the complex social, economic and environmental pressures experienced across communities. In a report looking at the skills young people need for the future, Johanna Wyn writing for the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) notes that the pace of social and economic changes taking place across communities means that young people need to develop new skills with increasing frequency that are adaptable in new contexts.[3]

At the same time, business productivity and competitiveness depend on strong alignment between the skills employers need and those of the workforce (existing and future). The 2013 How Young People are Faring Report[4], published by Foundation for Young Australians (FYA), notes that employers need job seekers with technical skills and broader job-ready skills including interpersonal skills, critical thinking and analytical skills. This requires a clear focus and outcome of schooling, training and further education being the preparation of young people for economic participation.

> *"Being able to demonstrate desired employability skills, however, is becoming increasingly important for young people entering the workforce, and we need to better understand whether the types of skills young people are developing match the needs of employers."*
>
> Foundation for Young Australians, 2013

These challenges are changing the demands on education and learning. For instance, there is a need for broader learning opportunities (that align with the social, economic and environmental context of communities) as well as the provision of differentiated instruction (such as experiential learning) and personalised learning. There is also a need for schools and education institutions to work closely with employers to ensure the skills young people develop meet employers' needs.

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[2] Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, 2008.

[3] Wyn, J., "Touching the future: building skills for life and work", *Australian Education Review*, Australian Council for Educational Research, 2009.

[4] Foundation for Young Australians, "How young people are faring", 2013

2.3   Extending education and learning outside the school walls

In this context, there is growing recognition that schools cannot respond to changing demands on education and learning alone. They simply do not have the skills, resources or opportunity to support all young people to achieve successful education and transition outcomes. However, there is increased awareness of the role business and other organisations can play supporting education and learning. Collectively, these organisations have a skill and resource base that can support young people to access the learning experiences and opportunities they need. In particular, businesses, education institutions and community organisations have sector expertise and resources that can be combined to support student learning and engagement alongside the support provided by schools.

"Achieving [our educational goals for schools and young people] is the collective responsibility of governments, school sectors and individual schools as well as parents and carers, young Australians, families, other education and training providers, business and the broader community."

Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, 2008

As an example, SVA Consulting's work looking at the provision of career advice to young people for FYA and Beacon Foundation found that the high utilisation of staff and financial resources within schools limited their capacity to offer personalised, experience-centred approaches to support student career decisions.[5] This in turn limited the appropriateness and quality of support provided to students in making important decisions about the future. Instead, a new collaborative approach joining schools with industry and community organisations was needed to achieve improved outcomes. In a similar vein, Rosalyn Black in *Beyond the classroom* notes that key organisations such as the Business Council of Australia (BCA) recognise that schools can no longer achieve their purpose by acting in isolation.[6] Instead, cross-sector collaboration is needed to increase the participation of young people in education, training and employment, which will underpin Australia's economic competitiveness in the future.

Finally, with an increasing number of young people making poor transitions alongside limited progress addressing the impact of disadvantage, there is a critical need for schools and governments to look at the most effective ways to support improved student education and learning. SVA Consulting's work and research indicates that one such way is through collaboration and partnerships.

Snapshot of education and transition outcomes for young people

Reading and numeracy outcomes
- Between 2008 and 2012, national average scores improved in Yr 3 and Yr 5 reading and Yr 5 numeracy. Yr 7 and Yr 9 did not improve in reading, and Yr 7 declined in numeracy.

Attainment and transition outcomes
- Between 2006 and 2011, more young people (20-24 y.o) completed Yr 12 or equivalent (increasing from 82.8% to 85.0%).
- Between 2006 and 2011, the proportion of young people (17-24 y.o) fully engaged in work or study following school declined from 73.9% to 72.7%

Performance of disadvantaged students
- Between 2008 and 2012, the reading achievement of students in the lowest socio-economic group increased in Yr 3 and Yr 5 but declined in Yr 7 and Yr 9.
- Large gaps in achievement between low and high socio-economic groups remain.

COAG Reform Council (2013)

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[5] For more information on this work, contact Social Ventures Australia Consulting.
[6] Black,R, "Beyond the classroom: building new school networks", ACER, 2008

2.4   The role and impact of school, business and community partnerships

School, business and community partnerships offer an effective way to deliver education and transition outcomes for young people. They involve the development of local solutions to local problems and have been found to support improved engagement and learning outcomes, as well as increased vocational knowledge, employability skills and career awareness.[7]

Partnerships also support businesses and other organisations to achieve their own objectives. This can include the provision of opportunities for business employees to participate in the community and contribute to improved outcomes for young people. It can also include businesses working with schools, education institutions and other organisations to help shape and develop the skills and capabilities that young people need for future work and learning. The benefit to all parties ensures that individual organisations "stay the course" and keep working towards the partnership's goal.

"Motivations for business range from very broad, such as corporate citizenship; improving education standards; and broadening student horizons – to more specific, such as sustaining the future of an industry; addressing issues within the local community – to those more directly related to the business itself, such as improving reputation; exposure to potential recruits; retention of staff and providing opportunities for staff community engagement."

Business School Connections Roundtable, 2011

Importantly, school, business and community partnerships can represent a cost effective and efficient way to address an identified need. This is particularly the case where financial and resource constraints limit the availability and appropriateness of schools (or other organisations) purchasing outside expertise or even building expertise internally. For example, where a school believes there is a need to strengthen the alignment of in-school learning to industry needs, it may partner with local businesses to provide specialist advice and in-kind support to teachers and students, in place of purchasing outside resources.

Partnerships can also represent a more effective way to address an identified need where the impact of one organisation acting alone may be inherently limited. For example, if students have already disengaged from school, a school may lose the capacity to influence student learning. In such a situation, a partnership between organisations working with young people (including a school) may be well positioned to support student learning; involving organisations from different sectors in the design and delivery of a pathway for students to re-engage and participate in education.

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[7] Australian Council for Educational Research, "The Benefits of School–Business Relationships", prepared for Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 15 March 2011

Case study – Yamaha Motor Australia: Student Grand Prix Programme

Recognising a shortage of suitably trained and qualified motor and marine technicians, Yamaha Motor Australia partnered with schools and TAFE colleges in Sydney's south west to deliver the Yamaha Young Technicians programme. Following its early success, the partnership initiative expanded across NSW and into Queensland. The Yamaha Student Grand Prix (as it is now known), has allowed Yamaha to address its workforce development needs, whilst providing new and exciting learning opportunities for participating young people.

Students visit local TAFE colleges, road race events and Yamaha dealerships, gaining insight into industry apprenticeships, exposure to marine/motorsport and hands on, face-to-face experience with Yamaha technicians. High performing students are selected to compete in the Student Grand Prix and are ultimately introduced to the dealer network as apprenticeship candidates.

The Gold Coast Institute of TAFE has developed a Certificate II Automotive school-based traineeship option for student participants in the programme, addressing industry needs that they were not previously aware of. Sandgate District High School is now developing a training centre to deliver its own Certificate II, with a focus on Marine and Motorcycle Automotive skills.

An overwhelming majority of students credit the program with helping them to think about their careers (95%) and increasing their motivation to perform well at school (90%). Importantly, the partnership has now become entrenched in the culture of participating institutions, with schools promoting the programme's outcomes to parents and the wider community.

Recognised benefits of school, business and community partnerships

ACER has completed extensive research into the demonstrated benefits of school, business and community partnerships.[8] In making the case for strengthening partnerships, it documented the key benefits commonly reported by stakeholders.[9] These benefits (summarised below) highlight the broad range of drivers and opportunities that are leading organisations to collaborate.

Students	• Vocational knowledge, employability skills and career awareness • Improved academic performance and engagement levels • Greater health and well-being
Teachers	• Professional learning and training opportunities • Exposure to industry management and leadership practices
Schools	• Access to external human, financial and physical resources • Improved curriculum; greater practical / theoretical alignment • Innovative marketing, governance and management insights
Parents	• Benefit from partnership programs that engage with family • Indirect gains derived from student benefits
Communities	• Tangible products/enterprises produced through many partnership programs • Greater community engagement amongst young people
Business	• Improved staff morale, motivation, self-esteem, job satisfaction and professional development opportunities • Heightened community profile and promotional opportunities

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[8] Ibid.
[9] Australian Council for Educational Research, '*The Benefits of School–Business Relationships*', prepared for Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 15 March 2011

Case study – building job ready skills for young people with disability

In northern Tasmania, four organisations (The Northern Support School – St Georges campus, Ravenswood Community Garden, Inspirations Garden Centre and Natural Resource Management Northern Tasmania (NRM North)) have collaborated to create "Off-shoots", a sustainable community enterprise operating from the Ravenswood Community Garden which is co-located on the grounds of the Northern Support School. "Off-shoots" operates as an authentic workplace for up to 60 young people with disability. Students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities benefit by engaging in work experience and developing skills and knowledge that enable them to produce high quality vegetable seedlings for a local nursery, as well as native seedlings for revegetation projects.

The "Offshoots" partnership leverages members' human capital and other resources, recognising the need and opportunity for collaboration. In so doing, it provides an effective and efficient way to address a complex issue – that being the historic lack of transition and work opportunities for young people with disability and the need for tailored training and support.

3 Developing impactful partnerships

3.1 Overview

This section of the paper discusses the effort required to develop impactful partnerships. It considers key characteristics of effective and impactful partnerships alongside the role intermediary organisations can play supporting partnership development.

3.2 Characteristics of impactful partnerships

Impactful partnerships rely on the involvement of organisations[10] with the understandings and resources to facilitate effective collaboration. Through SVA Consulting's work and research, we have identified three key characteristics of impactful school, business and community partnerships that ensure any collaborative effort is productive, sustainable and focussed on a set of issues (or opportunities) that is valued by each of the participating organisations.

These characteristics are identification of a common goal underpinned by the realisation of mutual benefit; engagement of the right organisations; and clearly defined collaborative processes. A brief outline of each is included below.

Common goal	Right organisations	Collaborative processes
• The common goal of the partnership sets the focus and vision of the collaborative effort. The goal should align with a recognised need or opportunity. • For school-business-community partnerships, all stakeholders should be committed to achieving education and transition outcomes for young people. The specific focus of individual partnerships will obviously vary. For instance, some partnerships will have a strong focus on learning outcomes while others may support school to work transitions. • Underpinning the common goal is the experience of mutual benefit. This involves each partner deriving individual benefit from participation in the partnership. This in turn supports the sustainability of the initiative.	• Partner organisations should collectively possess the skills and capabilities required to achieve the common goal and the complementary resources necessary to deliver mutual benefit to each other. • The nature of the common goal will inform the types of organisations that should be involved in a partnership.	• Partnerships need to determine the roles and activities required to create and sustain demonstrable impact. • Organisations need to know how to work effectively together to achieve the common goal. This includes a commitment to ongoing review and evaluation of the outcomes achieved through the partnership. • A partnership's effectiveness will depend on the processes that are put in place to manage this collaboration.

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[10] Up to this point, we have referred to "organisations" as participants in partnerships as they represent the majority of partnership members. However, individuals including community members, parents and students themselves may also participate in partnerships. These members bring different skills and capabilities (as well as perspectives) needed by many partnerships. Nonetheless, for ease, we will continue referring to organisations, recognising that many of the issues and themes concerning how organisations link and work together also affect individuals (unless otherwise stated).

3.3 Developing impactful partnerships

Through SVA Consulting's work and research, we have observed that developing and sustaining impactful partnerships is a challenging process. It involves a strategic assessment of the needs and opportunities within a community, strong cross-sector relationships linking the right organisations together and the "partnership-know-how" to ensure organisations collaborate effectively to deliver demonstrable impact. And while these are not the only processes or activities required, they do highlight some of the critical success factors for developing and sustaining partnerships. In a 2012 essay looking at the case for school-community collaboration, Michelle Lonsdale and Michelle Anderson note that building and sustaining school, business and community partnerships is hard; linking the right organisations, embedding effective working relations and identifying real needs makes collaboration difficult and requires a unique set of skills and resources.[11] This is a challenge for schools, businesses and other organisations alike as many do not have ready access to such skills and resources internally.

> "*Despite the clear benefits that can come from schools engaging with their communities, these kinds of collaborations are not easy to build or sustain. Not all school-community partnerships run smoothly. Finding potential partners and resources, knowing who might have the professional expertise to advise and guide program development, gathering information about an area of identified need, knowing how to monitor and evaluate the impact of a collaboration all take time and require different kinds of knowledge and skills.*"
>
> Lonsdale, M and Anderson, M, 2012

As a result of such challenges, the effectiveness and nature of partnership activity involving schools, business and other organisations is often varied. In completing a baseline study of school-business relationships for the then Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) in 2010, education consultants PhillipsKPA found significant variation in the types of relationships, activities, and extent to which schools were involved in partnership with business.[12] The analysis found that most activity took place in secondary schools in metropolitan areas (schools in regional and remote areas did not always have access to industry to facilitate collaboration) while partnerships that did exist focused on school to work transitions (including supporting work experience placements and the provision of career information). As a consequence, partnerships were not always in place or appropriately targeted to provide all young people with the support or opportunities they need for future work and learning.

In addition, schools, businesses and other organisations across the community do not always recognise the need or benefits of collaboration. In an interview with SVA Consulting, Scott Harris from the Beacon Foundation explained that when Beacon started working with schools and communities "we recognised that schools were complicated places to work in. Many schools didn't see the need to engage with communities to get good outcomes."[13] This knowledge gap is such that schools, businesses and other organisations do not always understand the benefits that partnering could have on the outcomes and objectives they are working in isolation to achieve.

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[11] Lonsdale, M and Anderson, M, "Preparing 21st century learners: the case for school-community collaborations", ACER, 2012.
[12] Phillips KPA, "Unfolding opportunities: a baseline study of school-business relationships in Australia", Report prepared for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2010
[13] Harris, S in Prout, K, "A beacon for school-community partnerships", *SVA Consulting Quarterly*, Issue 6, 2013.

3.4 The role of an independent intermediary

Responding to these challenges, independent intermediary organisations such as partnership brokers have come to play a critical role developing impactful partnerships. Intermediaries can link organisations together to establish partnerships; help partnerships align their focus with a real need or opportunity; and support organisations to collaborate effectively. And while they might not be required to develop all partnerships, they can support a strategic and systematic approach to the development of partnerships – ensuring that the scale and scope of partnership activity meets the growing need and opportunities across the community.

The impact of independent intermediary organisations is underpinned by two features: partnership expertise and independence. These features are discussed below.

- **Partnership expertise**: Intermediary organisations (including partnership brokers and backbone organisations) specialise in collaboration and partnership development. They recognise the benefits of organisations working in partnership and collaboration; understand the key elements and processes of collaboration and typically have established cross sector networks, enabling strong links to be formed between the right organisations. This ensures that the development and foundation of partnerships is informed by the experience and knowledge of what works.

- **Independence**: Independent intermediary organisations ensure that partnership development is not unduly influenced by the interests or bias of one organisation or sector. Rather, they can support a cross sector focus of a partnership and ensure each partner organisation understands and is committed to the common goals of the partnership. This includes assuming an objective view of the collaboration.

To highlight the impact of independent intermediary organisations on developing impactful partnerships, we have outlined examples of two types of intermediaries: partnership brokers and backbone organisations. These examples come from the Commonwealth School Business Community Partnership Brokers program (Partnership Brokers program) and Collective Impact. They show that intermediaries play an important role in promoting the benefits of collaboration and linking organisations from different sectors together. They support partnerships to develop a common goal and implement evidence-based collaborative processes.

School Business Community Partnership Brokers Program

The Federal Government's School Business Community Partnership Brokers program supports the development of partnerships between schools, businesses, community organisations and other stakeholders to improve education and transition outcomes for young people. It involves a network of 100+ Partnership Brokers organisations working with schools, businesses and other organisations across Australia. Partnership Brokers focus on building the effectiveness of partnerships as well as building the case for partnerships. To this end, capacity building and supporting partnerships to become self-sustaining are key elements of the Partnership Broker role. This enables the Partnership Broker to "exit" the partnership once it is self-sustaining and move on to support the development of new partnerships. As at September 2013, Partnership Brokers supported 2,000 partnerships and more than 6,000 partner organisations including 1,200 schools. The majority of these partnerships (86%) were not operating prior to the commencement of the program in 2010. The program is funded to the end of 2014.

Through SVA Consulting's own work evaluating the impact of five Partnership Broker organisations operating across NSW and Queensland, we found that the program created significant value for stakeholders participating in partnerships. Brokers worked across the community to develop partnerships which delivered outcomes for stakeholders in how they operated and supported young

people, leading to benefits for young people themselves. Using the Social Return on Investment (SROI) framework, we found that the government's investment generated social and economic returns of between 1.1 and 3.7 times.

One of the key outcomes of the evaluation was the development of the program logic. This showed that Partnership Brokers spent time working with organisations to explore the benefits of partnerships; they linked schools, businesses and other organisations together; and supported organisations to work effectively together to achieve improved outcomes for young people. The analysis also found that the value generated through the program was underpinned by a high level of partnership activity supported by Partnership Brokers, comprising a high number of partnerships and partners.

Backbone organisations and Collective Impact

The Collective Impact framework also highlights the importance and impact the intermediary can play, in this case the "backbone organisation". Collective Impact is a framework for collaboration that is receiving increased attention across policy circles. It has been developed by US-based social impact consultants, FSG,[14] which researched and identified the common features of effective and large scale collaboration across the social sector.

Five common features of collective impact were identified as follows:[15]

1. **A common agenda**: All participants have a shared vision for change including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed actions.
2. **Shared measurement systems**: Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensures efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable.
3. **Mutually reinforcing activities**: Participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.
4. **Continuous communication**: Consistent and open communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation.
5. **The presence of a backbone organisation**: Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organisation (or organisations) with staff and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organisations and agencies.

While the Collective Impact framework reinforces a number of the characteristics previously identified as integral to impactful partnerships, the role and importance of the backbone organisation is of particular importance to supporting the collaboration to deliver demonstrable impact. Backbone organisations provide an ongoing centralised infrastructure, dedicated staff and a structured approach to delivering the four other elements of Collective Impact. While sharing similar characteristics to the Partnership Broker role, the ongoing nature of support provided by backbone organisations is a key point of difference.

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[14] Founded in 2000 by Michael Porter and Mark Kramer as 'Foundation Strategy Group' (since abbreviated)
[15] Hanleybrown F, Kania, F and Kramer, M "*Channelling Change: Making Collective Impact Work*", Stanford Social Innovation Review, January 2012

4 Government support for partnerships

4.1   Overview

This final section of the paper discusses the role the Australian Government can play supporting the development of school, business and community partnerships. This includes an outline of different policy options that could be adopted to support schools, businesses and other organisations to work in partnership.

4.2   Supporting effective collaboration

Through SVA Consulting's work and research, we believe there is a strong case for government action facilitating the development of partnerships. This case is underpinned by the role partnerships can play supporting education and transition outcomes and the limited capacity of schools and other organisations to develop (and support) partnerships.

In particular, the Australian Government can play an important role ensuring that successful partnership models can be scaled up and applied nationally, and that the focus of partnership activity benefits young people across Australia. Such support can facilitate the development of new partnerships as well as maintain the collaborative effort of existing partnerships. Importantly, government support can also ensure partnerships facilitate the achievement of government policy objectives. This could include supporting school to work transitions, supporting further education priorities or supporting partnership development in areas of high need.

Three policy options to facilitate partnership development have been identified for analysis. These options are outlined and discussed below. The impact of intermediary organisations, as discussed in Section 3, implies a focus of government support should include the role intermediaries can play in partnership development.

Finally, there is a need for government to consider how it monitors the performance of partnerships. This includes tracking the impact of partnerships on young people themselves to ensure that the effectiveness of partnerships is understood and that successful partnership approaches are identified and replicated.

Partnership program policy options

- **Program of intermediary organisations - Partnership broker model**: Program of Partnership Brokers established to build cross-sector partnerships and to build the capacity of partner organisations to collaborate
- **Program of intermediary organisations - Backbone organisation model:** Program of Backbone Organisations established to manage cross-sector partnerships and to drive partner organisations to the achievement of the common goal
- **Partnership seed funding:** Provision of funding direct to partnerships to support the setup or expansion of partnership activity.

4.3   Option assessment

An assessment of the each policy option against the key characteristics of impactful partnerships (identified in Section 3.2) is included below. This assessment shows that the different policy options target different stages and elements of partnership development. As part of the implementation of any partnership policy or program, Government needs to identify the areas where it believes support is required.

Importantly, Government support can be focused into specific geographies and areas of high need as well as focused on achieving Government priorities. This can include funding Partnership Brokers or backbone organisations in rural and remote areas or providing partnership seed funding to organisations working to support improved transition outcomes.

Characteristics of impactful partnerships	Policy options		
	Partnership Broker model	Backbone Organisation model	Partnership seed funding
Overview of policy option	• Program of Partnership Brokers established to build cross-sector partnerships to support young people • Program can be focussed on specific geographies or populations that may be identified as high need (e.g., rural populations / disadvantaged communities)	• Program of Backbone Organisations established to manage cross-sector partnerships to support young people • Program can be focussed on specific geographies or populations that may be identified as high need (e.g., rural populations / disadvantaged communities)	• Provision of funding direct to partnerships to support the setup costs and / or costs incurred to replicate and extend partnership activity • Funding only available where organisations are already working in partnership or where they are committed to a future collaborative project
Common goal • Strategic assessment of need • Goal development (in line with need)	• Partnership Brokers to complete strategic assessment of need to inform partnership development • Partnership Brokers to work with partner organisations to develop and agree partnership goal	• Backbone Orgs. to work with partner organisations to complete strategic assessment of need to inform partnership development • Backbone Orgs. to work with partner organisations to develop and agree partnership goal	• Funding to support resource requirements for the development of a strategic assessment
Right organisations • Linking cross-sector organisations together • Assessment of organisations' skill and resource base against common goal	• Partnership Brokers to facilitate cross-sector networks and link cross-sector organisations to work in partnership • Partnership Brokers to assess skill and resource base of organisations against common goal (to ensure the right mix of organisations is working in partnership)	• Focus of Backbone Orgs. does not involve linking organisations • Backbone Orgs. to assess skill and resource base of organisations against common goal (to ensure the right mix or organisations is working in partnership)	• Linking cross-sector organisations not supported by seed funding
Collaborative processes • Development of partnership approach and activities • Allocation of roles and responsibilities across partner group • Development of measurement and evaluation approach / activities	• Partnership Brokers to work with partner organisations to develop partnership approach and different roles and responsibilities • Partnership Brokers to support the development of a measurement and evaluation framework • Partnership Brokers to build capacity of partner organisations to collaborate and then exit the partnership when it is identified as self-sustaining	• Backbone Orgs. to work with partner organisations to develop partnership approach and different roles and responsibilities • Backbone Orgs. to support the development of a measurement and evaluation framework • Backbone Orgs. to support the ongoing management and administration of partnership and drive partners to achieving the common goal	• Funding to support resource requirements for the development of partnership approach and a measurement and evaluation framework • Funding to support replication of partnership activities where required

Characteristics of impactful partnerships (as per Section 3.2)

4.4   Measurement and evaluation

A final focus area for Government is measurement and evaluation. Supporting partnerships to identify the impact they expect to deliver will help to improve the quality of measurement and evaluation. One initiative that is likely to enhance Government's ability to track and monitor the impact of partnerships is shared measurement.

Shared measurement involves organisations selecting and reporting on a common set of measures that track the impact of individual programs. It is a particularly helpful framework for supporting the measurement of programs or activities that involve a number of different organisations or services. For any partnership program, shared measurement would allow different organisations to each report on the same core outcomes and objectives that the partnerships are seeking to support – young peoples' education and transition outcomes.

Alongside shared measurement, the use of Results Based Accountability (RBA) would also support government to better track and monitor the impact of partnerships. RBA is an outcomes based approach that enables organisations and services to identify and track their impact on communities and peoples' lives. RBA is a particularly helpful framework for evaluating partnerships as it allows organisations to identify whether their effort working together has made meaningful and sustained changes to young peoples' education and transition outcomes.

A case study on shared measurement – Communities in Schools (US)[16]

Communities in Schools is a US organisation that provides coordination services to ensure young people get the support they need to stay in school. This involves the placement of a coordinator inside schools who works with school staff to identify students at risk of dropping out. Once students have been identified the coordinator then establishes relationships with local businesses, social services, tutoring services and other community organisations to ensure students access the support they need to stay in school and graduate.

Communities in Schools works across 28 states and the District of Columbia, supporting nearly 2,700 schools and more than one million students. It is one of only a handful of organisations in the US that has a proven model and body of evidence demonstrating its role in keeping young people in school and supporting increased graduation rates.

A key component of the organisation's success has been its commitment to tracking and measuring its impact. This is supported by the use of a shared measurement framework that involved the development of a clear program logic, identification of metrics the organisation needed to collect to monitor its performance, and up-skilling of staff to collect and use data.

4.5   Conclusions

School, business and community partnerships provide access to broader and deeper learning opportunities that support young people to reach their educational and developmental potential. They also support businesses and other organisations to achieve their own objectives. However, developing and working in partnerships is challenging, limiting the focus and scale of partnership activity. In this context, Government support can represent a critical driver of collaboration. It can do this by supporting intermediary organisations (which themselves develop and manage partnerships) or funding organisations to work in partnership. Importantly, Government support can be structured to facilitate the development of partnerships in line with its key priorities.

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[16] See http://www.communitiesinschools.org/.