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Reasons for evaluating performance
To identify where networking and collaboration can improve performance, evaluate how each support person’s service delivery is functioning. Regular review procedures will help identify performance gaps, but your own self-reflection and evaluation is vital.

Service needs may change as each person’s needs, goals and preferences change resulting in adoptions and adjustments to service delivery. Additionally, regulatory changes, workplace and operational changes, and changing job roles also affect performance. Regular self-assessment of your work performance is crucial to keep improving and expanding your skills.

Here are some common questions that you can use to evaluate each person’s service delivery performance for collaboration needs.

Performance evaluation questions:
- Have the person’s needs, goals or preferences changed?
- Have any regulations, legislation or best practice standards changed?
- Can the person’s goals be met more efficiently?
- Do I need more information to meet the person’s needs?
- Can collaborating with others create greater opportunities for improvements to services?
- How can I create greater access and equity for the person?
- How can I use what I’ve learnt to improve my organisation’s service delivery?
- How can I provide more flexible services?

Principles of networking and collaboration
To work effectively in a collaborative manner, you need to understand the fundamental principles involved. Working collaboratively ensures the best service delivery is based on mutual respect, good communication and a shared understanding of common goals.

Here are some of the basic principles that underpin networking and collaboration as tools in providing support services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principles of networking and collaboration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All people are valued members of the community and each person has something of value to contribute; participation is encouraged and valued.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All collaborators should clearly understand their role, their responsibilities and the goal of the activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working together to reach a common goal involves teamwork, good communication and problem-solving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback, suggestions and reviews are encouraged and acted upon; information is shared (where appropriate) and decisions are made together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>While all team members and collaborators should work together, individual ideas, opinions and needs are respected and valued.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The aim is to reach a clearly-defined goal in the most effective way possible; this commitment underlies all collaborative activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Identify and prioritise needs

Once you have identified the areas of professional development that will improve your performance and selected appropriate networks, prioritise these opportunities by date and relevance. Choose opportunities that are relevant, useful, timely and within the service’s resource capacity.

Identify and prioritise organisation and individual needs

Jacob is Matt’s support worker. Matt is starting a TTW (transition to work) programme on Monday and is ringing Jacob for the third time today. Matt experiences anxiety in new and unfamiliar situations.

Jacob answers his phone at his desk, which is piled full of papers, files and forms.

‘Hi Matt! Good to speak to you again!’ Jacob smiles as he reaches for Matt’s case file.

‘Oh, Jacob! I’m sorry, I’m sorry. I know I shouldn’t call. But I’ve forgotten. How will I get home every day?’

Jacob smiles. ‘It’s okay, Matt. Let’s go through it again. It’s all organised. I’ve asked the local care access bus to pick you up and bring you home after class every day.’

Matt interrupts. ‘But can’t you take me? I don’t know them! What if they go without me?’

‘I hear you Matt. But it’s okay. I know Bill, he’s the driver and a really nice bloke. I’ve spoken to him and he’s going to make sure that you get on the bus every day. Remember that we talked about being more independent?’

‘Yeah. But I want you to take me! Can’t you take me?’ asks Matt.

‘You can do this, Matt. I tell you what. What about if I come with you on Monday afternoon so that you meet Bill and know exactly where to go?’

‘Really?’ Matt sighs. ‘That’d be great, Jacob.’ He pauses, ‘But what about Tuesday?’

Jacob has networked with an alternative transport service to assist Matt to travel to and from his TTW programme. Matt would love Jacob to transport him every day, but Jacob’s organisation needs him to work with other people at these times. Jacob also knows that Matt’s stated goal is to increase his independence and that all possible care has been taken to ensure his safety.

Practice task 2

1. What needs to be balanced in order to provide service support?

2. List one element that you need to consider when prioritising the needs of the organisation and the individual’s needs.

Click to complete Practice task 2
**Religious organisations**

Religious organisations provide a range of community services at local, state and national levels. In many states, religious organisations are the biggest providers of services to low income and vulnerable people.

Some examples of these organisations include:

- Uniting Care Australia – [www.unitingcare.org.au](http://www.unitingcare.org.au)
- Jewish Care – [www.jewishcare.org.au](http://www.jewishcare.org.au)

**Types of individual networks and collaborations**

Networking and collaborations often occur between individuals. Whether networking or collaborating with colleagues, people with support needs, family members, carers, health professionals or other experts, building and maintaining good relationships with individuals is a vital skill. Even when collaborating or networking with larger organisations, you are likely to interact with specific individuals.

Here are some of the many work activities that involve networking and collaborating with individuals.

Collaborative work activities include:

- meeting a person with support needs for the first time (for example, forming a collaborative partnership)
- creating an individual support plan (for example, collaborating with the person and other stakeholders)
- making a referral (for example, networking and collaborating with the other service’s representative)
- supervisory meetings (for example, collaborating with your supervisor in providing improved services)
- group projects (for example, collaborating and networking with colleagues)
- job sharing (for example, joint care of specific people or tasks involves collaborating with the person and the colleague)
- inductions or hand-overs (for example, collaborating with a colleague when you start or leave a job).

**Types of virtual networks and collaborations**

In today’s working environments, we have the opportunity to network and collaborate worldwide with virtual, online communities, groups and remote individuals. Collaboration is based on interaction, and your ability to interact with industry experts, colleagues and community members is greatly increased using virtual networks.
Developing network relationships

- Informal networks develop as you make friends with colleagues or find individuals in government departments or other organisations who are helpful and a good source of information. These networks act as unofficial channels of information relevant to your work.

How informal networks help

- Your informal networks play an important role in helping you carry out your work effectively. Sometimes, the fastest way to obtain information is to phone a contact for the answer. Other times, you may simply need support from a colleague who is a good listener and understands the work you do.

Participating in informal networks

- Some workers find it useful to set up a small group of colleagues and meet for lunch once a month to discuss work-related matters. Other opportunities to participate in informal networks include using the internet to read blogs and participation in online forums relevant to your work.

Identify gaps in networks and collaborative practice

You need to regularly monitor, assess and review how well your networking and collaborative activities are working, in terms of supporting people’s needs. To identify gaps, you need to use your service’s regular reviewing procedures (such as scheduled reviews of individual people’s service outcomes) and reflect on each person’s services and related collaborations.

With the goal of providing the best possible individualised services to each person, ask yourself if and how you could make changes in your networks and collaborative practices to make greater improvements. For example, has a collaboration served its purpose and is it no longer needed? Identifying gaps where people’s needs are not being met, or where they could be improved, is the first step in making needed changes.

Here are some of the questions that you can ask yourself to identify these gaps.

Self-reflection questions on networks and collaborative practice:

- Are the person’s needs currently being met?
- Is the person’s individual plan sufficiently flexible to allow for changed needs, goals and preferences?
- Am I up to date with all the relevant networks and collaborations that could benefit the person?
- Have I invited feedback and suggestions and implemented them, where appropriate?
- Can I improve my communication skills or engage in other professional development activities?
- Have I learnt anything from this network or collaboration that could benefit other people in my organisation?
- How can I contribute more to my networks and collaborations?
Gather and review information about relevant services, organisations and key people

The first step in any collaborative relationship is gathering information. You need to know as much as possible about potential services, organisations and individuals you can collaborate with. Knowing what services are available, how they can help and how you can contribute is vital to ensuring best practice service delivery. There are many established networks in the community service industry that can be used to improve support services.

Once you have gathered a wide range of information, you can then review it to find appropriate matches for people’s needs.

Gather information about services

Providing services to people is a collaborative effort. People receiving support may need a wide range of services to meet their individual needs. To help people effectively, gather all the relevant information about the services available in your location, both through your own organisation and through other organisations.

Workplace policies and procedures will have detailed information about the services available through your workplace. When you understand the parameters of what is available, you can begin to investigate other services and how to access them.

Here are some of the categories of services that you may need to familiarise yourself with to provide support services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service categories</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medical services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural and language services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Here is a range of contacts that you may like to consider.

**Work colleagues**

Work colleagues may provide additional contacts and information regarding services provided.

**People to whom you provide services**

Families, friends and carers of the person receiving support can provide valuable information and feedback on services received, and also recommended services.

**Suppliers**

Suppliers can provide information about the service or product and the suitability of products or services for particular target groups. They may also help with training on the usage of products.

**Funding bodies**

Funding bodies, program contacts or liaison officers will provide information relating to funding availability, submission requirements, government policy and funding directions.

**Services**

Disability services and professionals can provide information relating to referral processes and criteria, person’s need and eligibility for services. They can also provide up-to-date expert medical advice, and best practice tools and techniques.

**Advocacy groups**

These groups can provide you with information relating to current issues relevant to the group you work with, and feedback on services received.

**Teachers and training bodies**

Teachers, training bodies and their organisations can provide you with best practice knowledge, tools and techniques, information and advice on suitable professional development programs.

**Support and networking groups**

Professional support and networking groups can provide information relating to current issues relevant to the group you work with, best practice tools and techniques, referral processes and criteria, and relevant services in your local area or region.
People’s privacy and confidentiality must be upheld at all times. Personal information should only be shared with permission and when absolutely necessary. Before sharing information, you may need to gain permissions, edit or provide partial information as relevant, or de-identify information, as needed.

What level of security is required for the information? This must be established and agreed upon between all partners. For example, private client information must be kept secure at all times, including meetings and transferring to other parties.

Any information that is shared must be maintained. All information should be up to date, clearly identified and easily accessible to appropriate people. If different individuals are working on the same document or information, each version needs to be clearly marked and identified by a version control system.

Resources
It is important to consider the resources a network can provide such as people, materials and services. Different networks will have different levels of resources. For example, some networks have a large number of staff working in a variety of capacities such as social workers, mental health professionals, doctors and other health professionals. Consider the following ways resources may be accessed and resources you can contribute.

**Resources you can access**

- Resources may be made available to you in different ways; for example through:
  - professional expertise that exists within a network
  - libraries that provide research and document delivery services
  - mentoring and training opportunities.
- If you belong to a small organisation that has very limited information resources, access to another organisation’s resources may be very valuable.

**Resources you can contribute**

- Be practical. Some networks require organisations to take turns hosting network meetings and providing administrative support. Small organisations can join forces with others to host meetings. Networks should operate on principles of equality, but should also recognise that smaller organisations cannot always make the same contributions as larger ones due to time, funds and resources.
**Update**

Update information immediately according to your workplace’s procedures. Schedule time to keep your records current and complete.

**Research**

Always check for later versions of information and be proactive in researching what’s available.

### The importance of currency maintenance

Maintaining the currency of the information that you use and provide is vital when working collaboratively. Providing services as a team depends on current information. For example, individual service plans and other documentation must be kept current at all times to ensure correct and efficient service provision. Incorrect or out-of-date information can result in delays, duplication of services or cause harm.

Keeping current information regarding regulations and legislation is critical, and ensures the provision of best practice services. When providing information to networks or collaborative partners, work as a team with respect for others. Always provide information that has been checked, verified and is current.

### Ensure information is current and relevant

Information that is incorrect wastes time and can damage relationships between your organisation and others.

Here are some strategies to ensure the advice, materials and information is current and relevant.

#### Maintaining currency and relevancy

- Ensure you have the most recent copies of your organisation’s marketing and promotional material.
- Keep the most recent copy of your regional community services directory and other service information on file.
- Periodically review files, folders and your address book to keep them current.
- Actively participate in formal and informal networks.
- Keep informed about current issues and information via industry journals, websites and organisational newsletters/bulletins.
- Attend conferences, workshops and training events.
Summary

1. Gathering, maintaining and reviewing information about potential and current networks and collaborators is vital to ensure efficient service delivery. Keep an up-to-date contact list for all possible collaborators and networks that could benefit key stakeholders involved in your work activities.

2. You can always initiate new relationships with collaborators and networks to extend services and to innovate. Polite, professional relationships rely on good communication and mutually beneficial interactions.

3. Information and resources should be shared with collaborators, team members and organisations, where possible, to avoid service duplication. However, sharing must occur within important considerations like privacy and confidentiality and accessibility.

4. Information needs to be updated and maintained for currency. This ensures efficient collaboration and effective service provision. Information must also be easily accessible to appropriate people.

5. Before entering into collaboration, define your needs and preferred strategies, and communicate them to relevant people. Listen to their needs and preferences, and negotiate an approach that creates a win–win outcome for all. All aspects of the collaboration need to be documented appropriately.
and choose a network that provides access to a support group as well as medical services, as this helps the person improve both their physical health outcomes and their mental health and social contact.

Here are some other considerations when identifying the vision and purpose of collaboration or networking opportunity.

### Vision and purpose of collaboration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practicality</th>
<th>Is this opportunity likely to support goals, outcomes and preferences in practical ways? Can they be measured and documented?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarity</td>
<td>Do you have a clear idea of your vision and purpose for the collaboration? Does this match the specific goal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alignment</td>
<td>Does the proposed network or collaborator have a vision/mission statement? Does this match your vision and purpose?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>Sometimes, collaborating with a group or individual with a different vision or purpose can create innovative approaches.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Identify opportunities that meet goals

Fiona is a support worker appointed by her organisation to make an assessment of various options to increase their participation in the local community. Her organisation wants to be more visible in the local community to reach more people and to investigate possible local fundraising opportunities.

She has contacted the local council for information about council-run activities such as fetes, markets and charity activities. Fiona has researched the local newspapers and is contacting a journalist regarding writing a story on the organisation and its activities. She has also reached out to her colleagues, professional network and friends and family for ideas about how to be more involved in the local community.

Much to her surprise, Fiona receives an email from a local business who has heard that she is looking for collaborations in the local community. The business proposes a fundraising street stall selling its products, with part profits going to Fiona’s organisation.

Fiona is hesitant about the idea at first as she is concerned that the business may want to just make money using her organisation’s good name. However, in researching the local business and networking with the owner, she realises that this would be a great opportunity to increase her organisation’s local exposure. It turns out that the owner has a niece who is being provided services by Fiona’s organisation, and the owner wants to show his support for their work.

Even better, some of her colleagues and some of the people for whom she provides services are interested in staffing the stall, which would provide social opportunities for them and increase their community participation.
Plan and implement integrated projects and service delivery

Here is an example of how an integrated project plan might be outlined and documented.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Time line for implementation</th>
<th>Person responsible</th>
<th>Reviewed Y/N</th>
<th>Suggestions?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>XYZ Service (Project manager, David)</td>
<td>To share translation services for workplace activities</td>
<td>1. Investigate language skills of staff at both services</td>
<td>One week from commencement, via staff emails.</td>
<td>David and Bilquis to communicate findings at weekly joint meeting.</td>
<td>Y. Completed ahead of time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC Service (Project manager, Bilquis)</td>
<td>2. Identify community needs regarding translations at both services</td>
<td>Two weeks from commencement, via council demographics, service reports and feedback from stakeholders.</td>
<td></td>
<td>David and Bilquis to separately collate and communicate findings at weekly joint meeting.</td>
<td>Y. Completed behind schedule, more time needed for this stage to allow for more feedback from stakeholders.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Identify gaps in required language services</td>
<td>Three weeks from commencement, via meeting to discuss and collate information from previous two steps.</td>
<td></td>
<td>David and Bilquis to communicate findings at weekly joint meeting</td>
<td>To be completed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Research funding and external resources</td>
<td>Four weeks from commencement, via independent research according to task</td>
<td></td>
<td>David to research funding available. Bilquis to research external resources and providers. Findings to be communicated at weekly joint meeting.</td>
<td>To be completed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Coordinate translation services</td>
<td>Five weeks from commencement, via twice-weekly planning meetings, culminating in a combined staff meeting before implementation.</td>
<td></td>
<td>David and Bilquis working jointly to co-chair the joint staff meeting.</td>
<td>To be completed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hypothetical questions

Hypothetical questions are asked to probe a certain situation further. They are usually used to consider future and possible scenarios.

Listen actively

Listening is an active process that requires you to be alert and responsive. Active listening means that you are really hearing what the other person is saying and are responding appropriately.

There are four main types of listening, which are described below. You may find that different situations benefit from a particular listening approach.

Attending

Attending listening involves physical attention to the speaker via body language and acknowledging comments. Examples include using nonverbal body language, such as nods, facing the person, open posture and positive facial expressions. Attending listening is really saying ‘I hear you …’

Encouraging

Encouraging listening invites the speaker to disclose their thoughts and feelings. You can encourage listening by asking questions such as, ‘I would like to know why you think …?’ or ‘What do you think was the best thing about the …?’

Reflective

Reflecting listening restates (paraphrases) what the speaker has said, and is useful for the confirmation of a message. Examples include, ‘So, you really think that is a good service’ and, ‘You seem pretty impressed’.

Active

Active listening focuses attention and provides feedback to match the perceived message and the intended message. It is a conscious attempt to relate to what the other is saying. An example includes, ‘I understand what you mean; it sounds a really exciting idea’.

Other communication protocols

There are a number of other protocols to which you should adhere when communicating with collaborators. There are some common protocols that are found in all support worker roles, as discussed here.

Seek permission

Request permission before using personal information. If you wish to use or share someone’s personal information, you must first seek their permission. When requesting permission, explain how and why you want to use their details. If you are quoting what someone has said or written, you must gain their permission.
Promote a positive image of the organisation

Every day provides opportunities to promote a positive image of your organisation. Acting professionally at all times, undertaking your work activities to best practice standards and modelling respect, courtesy and compassion, all demonstrate your professionalism and that of your organisation.

Reasons to promote a positive image

As a support worker, you are a valued member of your workplace’s team. Teamwork involves supporting other team members, taking personal responsibility for your actions and contributing to the team. One of the important ways that you can contribute to your workplace team is by promoting a positive image of your organisation.

Here are some of the main reasons why promoting a positive image is an important part of your professional activities.

Promoting a positive image:

- demonstrates professionalism
- builds morale in the team
- helps advertise the organisation to people with support needs
- promotes strong relationships with existing networks and collaborators
- promotes the organisation to potential networks and collaborators
- helps to extend the reach of the organisation, so more people can be supported
- creates a sense of community and achievement.

Represent your organisation

When you participate in a network or as a collaborator, remember that you represent your organisation. Other people gain an impression of you and your organisation through your words and actions. Here are some considerations to keep in mind.

Your responsibilities

- As a representative of your organisation, your responsibilities include:
- maintaining ethical and professional standards
- communicating in a clear and appropriate manner
- maintaining confidentiality
- adopting a collaborative rather than an adversarial approach
- adhering to network guidelines (for example, treating all participants equally and informing the network members if you are unable to attend a meeting).
Permissions
You can use copyrighted material if permission is granted. This is done by contacting the copyright owner, who specifies how, when and where it can be used.

Infringement
Using copyrighted material without permission is unlawful. To do so is an infringement on the rights of the person or organisation that owns copyright.

Identify other issues, policies and practices
Aside from privacy, confidentiality, copyright and intellectual property considerations, sharing information, resources and materials with your network or collaborators may be subject to other legal and ethical considerations. For example, your workplace will have a policy prohibiting sharing detailed financial information and personal information about staff and clients.

Workplace policies and procedures will contain detailed information about:
- which information, materials and resources are owned by the organisation and considered proprietary
- which information, materials and resources can be shared and by whom
- who is the authorised person to contact for permissions
- what documentation is required for permissions
- the consequences of inappropriately sharing information, materials or resources.

Communicate issues, policies and practices in appropriate formats
Researching how copyright, intellectual property and other legal and ethical considerations operate will help identify what can be shared and the appropriate format to do so. Consider the format that is best suited to convey the correct information, and the needs of the intended audience.

For example, if you are working on an integrated project with another organisation, you need to have clear boundaries about what information is appropriate to be shared for the task. This may involve sharing workplace documentation (such as a training manual), and you may need to provide a section of the manual to your collaborator, or provide it with clear instructions over its use and ownership.
Security of personal information
An organisation must take reasonable steps to protect personal information it holds from misuse, interference and loss, and from unauthorised access, modification or disclosure. An entity has obligations to destroy or de-identify personal information in certain circumstances.

Access to personal information
Outlines an organisation’s obligations when an individual requests to be given access to personal information held about them by the organisation.

Correction of personal information
Outlines an organisation’s obligations in relation to correcting the personal information it holds about individuals.

How to maintain privacy
Maintaining privacy means you are keeping a person’s information private. You need to make sure unauthorised people do not have access to personal information. Maintaining privacy extends to networking and collaboration – only appropriate people should have access to the information, and only with consent.

The following strategies can assist you to ensure people’s information remains private.

Privacy strategies

- Keep files in a locked filing cabinet; files should not be left open on a desk or computer, and all files should be returned to the filing system when not in use.
- Electronic files should be protected by a password system; each staff member should have a different password to monitor file access.
- Only people with authorised access to files should have access to the key or access to areas where files are kept.
- Files should not be left in a vehicle in view of the general public; files should be stored in the boot in a file case.
- Interviews, case conferences, secondary consultations and hand-over should be conducted in a private space where others cannot overhear.
- Names should not be recorded on pin-up boards or whiteboards where members of the general public can view them.
- Details must not be discussed with family, friends or collaborators unless you have authority from the person to do so.

File confidentiality
There will be policies and procedures about where reports and documents should be filed or stored, so they can be easily located and referred to. Many organisations use electronic systems that record client details, referrals, assessments and case notes in a client database. To protect the client’s privacy and confidentiality, files are password-protected, so only authorised people can access the information.
Maintain and enhance networks and collaborative partnerships

Good collaborative partnerships take time to establish and need to be nurtured. Regular contact and a commitment to helping others creates strong bonds and ensures that others will be available to help you meet your goals. This topic examines how to maintain the networks and collaborations that you establish, and how to enhance them to create even greater opportunities for service delivery.
Case conferences

- A case conference is an organised meeting that focuses on a particular person or family group to ensure people requiring a complexity of service provision are receiving well-managed and coordinated care. These may be scheduled regularly or are required when needs change. Case conferences are usually held when there are a number of different services providing support. It may be your role to coordinate the participants or take and distribute the meeting minutes.

Interagency meetings

- Interagency meetings are where a number of different agencies meet together to discuss topics of mutual interest, such as a mutual person group or a community service issue. They are usually held at a regional or local level. They may be held regularly – monthly, bi-monthly (every two months) or quarterly (every three months) – or be a once-off meeting for a specific purpose. Chairing the meeting and minute-taking is usually shared among the member agencies. Terms of reference are generally developed that describe the aims and objectives of the meeting, when and where the meeting will be held and how the meeting will be organised.

Consultative committees

- Regional or local consultative committees are developed to find out the needs, interests and preferences of residents and/or services in a specific geographical area. Examples include committees established for:
  - the development of major new programs, services or infrastructure
  - urban and neighbourhood renewal
  - redevelopment or building of public housing stock
  - major government policy redevelopment or creation.
- Committees may include representatives from organisations, government, business and the community.

Joint projects

- Many organisations work together to deliver one-off events, time-limited groups or ongoing services and programs. Working together can bring many benefits such as shared resources, shared skills and knowledge, access to a wider range of personnel including specialists and coordination of service provision rather than repetition.
- Examples of joint projects may include Carers Week, Seniors Week, Mental Health Week activities, reconciliation and National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee Week activities, joint training, conference organisation and shared community facilities.
Improve and maintain networks and collaborative partnerships

Relationships with collaborators and networks are not static – you can always work to improve how you contribute to these relationships and utilise them to provide improved services. In this section, strategies that you can use to both improve and maintain these valuable partnerships are discussed.

Improve networks and collaborative partnerships

Networking and collaborative practices need to be approached with a commitment to continuous improvement. Identifying the benefits that arise from these networks and collaborations is an important step in understanding how to improve these relationships. Information gathering is vital to understand how to strengthen and improve your collaborative partnerships.

Aside from your own analysis, there are software tools available that can help you analyse your networks and collaborations, track participation and optimise resource-sharing and modes of collaboration.

For more information, consult PARTNER (Program to analyse, record and track networks to enhance relationships), at: www.partnertool.net

Improvement strategies

There are many different strategies that can be employed to improve and maintain networks and collaborative partnerships. Here are some of the options that you can use, dependent upon your needs and particular situation.

**Improvement strategies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improving a network is a collaborative process. Ask for feedback from stakeholders and collaborators. Work together to identify successes and where improvements can be made.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study the data</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use data and documentation from current and past collaborations to identify trends, patterns and gaps. Look for what has worked in the past and implement it.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Reward teamwork</th>
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<tr>
<td>Celebrate success and reward teamwork. Acknowledging and rewarding success is important for motivation and team cohesion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some of the common limitations encountered in networks and partnerships include the following.

### Common limitations to networks

- Insufficient resources
- Insufficient participation
- Communication issues
- Lack of cohesion and clear goals
- Incorrect size for task (too large or small)
- Unclear results

### Dynamics of networks and partnerships

The dynamics of networks and partnerships are also good indicators of whether participation is providing clear benefits. If the network contains many members, but only a few actively participate, this may indicate a number of problems. To work well, a network or collaborative partnership needs to be a safe space where all members feel supported, valued and respected and can feel free to brainstorm ideas and innovate.

The desired dynamics of a network or partnership include the following.

### Desirable network or partnership dynamics

- Equal access
- Full participation
- Ease of communication
- Cohesive structure with clear role boundaries
- Appropriate sharing of information and resources
- All members feel valued and respected

### Monitor benefits to worker, organisation and client group

The following are examples of questions that may be included in a network evaluation form workers are asked to fill in to monitor network activity:

- What is the purpose of the network and does it generally achieve its aims?
- As a worker, what benefits do you obtain from belonging to the network?
- What benefits do you think the network offers the organisation?
- Do you think participating in the network helps improve service delivery to person groups?
- What constraints limit or affect your participation in the network?
- Does the network provide relevant professional development opportunities?
- Are meetings and network activities relevant to the organisation’s aims and needs?
- Do you believe that ongoing participation in the network provides benefits to the organisation, workers and person groups?