CHCPRP001
Develop and maintain networks and collaborative partnerships
Release 2

Learner guide

aspire
learning resources

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Release 2, version 1.1	April 2017	First release
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Contents

Before you begin

This learner guide is based on the unit of competency *CHCPRP001 Develop and maintain networks and collaborative partnerships*, Release 2. Your trainer or training organisation must give you information about this unit of competency as part of your training program. You can access the unit of competency and assessment requirements at: www.training.gov.au.

How to work through this learner guide

This learner guide contains a number of features that will assist you in your learning. Your trainer will advise which parts of the learner guide you need to read, and which practice tasks and learning checkpoints you need to complete. The features of this learner guide are detailed in the following table.

Feature of the learner guide	How you can use each feature
Learning content	▶ Read each topic in this learner guide. If you come across content that is confusing, make a note and discuss it with your trainer. Your trainer is in the best position to offer assistance. It is very important that you take on some of the responsibility for the learning you will undertake.
Examples and case studies	▶ Examples of completed documents that may be used in a workplace are included in this learner guide. You can use these examples as models to help you complete practice tasks and learning checkpoints. ▶ Case studies highlight learning points and provide realistic examples of workplace situations.
Practice tasks	▶ Practice tasks give you the opportunity to put your skills and knowledge into action. Your trainer will tell you which practice tasks to complete.
Video clips	▶ Where QR codes appear, learners can use smartphones and other devices to access video clips relating to the content. For information about how to download a QR reader app or accessing video on your device, please visit our website: www.aspirelr.com.au/help
Summary	▶ Key learning points are provided at the end of each topic.
Learning checkpoints	▶ There is a learning checkpoint at the end of each topic. Your trainer will tell you which learning checkpoints to complete. These checkpoints give you an opportunity to check your progress and apply the skills and knowledge you have learnt.

Foundation skills

As you complete learning using this guide, you will be developing the foundation skills relevant for this unit. Foundation skills are the language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills and the employability skills required for participation in modern workplaces and contemporary life.

The following table outlines specific foundation skills noted for your learning in this learner guide.

Foundation skill area	Foundation skill description
Learning	▶ Understanding your job role, organisational procedures and legal responsibilities ▶ Managing your work and seeing how well you are going and making goals for yourself at work ▶ Seeking professional development opportunities for continuous improvement
Reading	▶ Understanding how documents are presented and being able to navigate through documents ▶ Understanding industry- and job-specific terminology ▶ Interpreting key information in relevant documents ▶ Understanding routine workplace checklists and documentation
Writing	▶ Planning, drafting and writing reports and documents ▶ Communicating through written letters, email and online ▶ Recording progress; reporting incidents
Oral communication	▶ Clarifying instructions ▶ Providing information ▶ Supporting others through encouragement, negotiation and conflict resolution ▶ Using body language to model desired behaviour and responding to others' body language
Numeracy	▶ Calculating costs, weights, measurements of height and distance ▶ Interpreting measurements
Teamwork	▶ Working well with other people by cooperating, collaborating, encouraging and building rapport
Planning and organising	▶ Planning your workload and commitments ▶ Implementing tasks ▶ Completing work on time ▶ Knowing how to deal with hazards and risks
Making decisions	▶ Understanding and applying decision-making processes ▶ Reviewing the impact of your decisions
Problem-solving	▶ Identifying problems ▶ Working out how to fix a problem using problem-solving processes and reviewing the outcome
Innovation and creation	▶ Recognising opportunities to develop and apply new ideas ▶ Generating ideas by thinking of new ways to do something ▶ Making suggestions to improve work

Foundation skill area	Foundation skill description
Technology and digital literacy	▶ Efficiently using digitally based technologies and systems correctly and safely ▶ Accessing, organising and presenting information ▶ Using equipment correctly and safely

What do you already know?

Use the following table to identify what you may already know. This may assist you to work out what to focus on in your learning.

Topic	Key outcomes	Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 1 Identify networking and collaboration needs and opportunities	1A Evaluate the ways performance may be improved through collaboration	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	1B Identify and prioritise organisation and individual needs	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	1C Identify gaps and required action to fill gaps	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
Topic 2 Develop collaboration strategies	2A Gather and review information about relevant services, organisations and key people	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	2B Pro-actively initiate relationships with other professionals and organisations	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	2C Share information and resources to overcome duplication in service delivery	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	2D Maintain currency and accessibility of information	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	2E Define, document and negotiate collaboration	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident

Topic	Key outcomes	Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 3 Work collaboratively	3A Identify opportunities that meet client, personal and organisational goals	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	3B Plan and implement integrated projects and service delivery	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	3C Liaise with staff from relevant organisations on a formal and informal basis	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
Topic 4 Represent the organisation	4A Promote a positive image of the organisation	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	4B Communicate the organisation's issues, policies and practices	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	4C Implement confidentiality measures that protect the client, organisation and network	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
Topic 5 Maintain and enhance networks and collaborative partnerships	5A Maintain networks and other work relationships	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	5B Improve and maintain networks and collaborative partnerships	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	5C Monitor benefits to worker, organisation and person group	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	5D Evaluate strengths and weaknesses of collaborations and recommend actions	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident

Topic 1

In this topic you will learn how to:

1A Evaluate the ways performance may be improved through collaboration

1B Identify and prioritise organisation and individual needs

1C Identify gaps and required action to fill gaps

Identify networking and collaboration needs and opportunities

Providing excellent services and care to people with disabilities is a team effort. Making connections, utilising everyone's expertise and working collaboratively are vital skills in today's working environments. People, their family, carers and friends are important collaborators in providing service delivery. Colleagues, supervisors, other agencies, services and community members are also valued collaborators and partners.

This topic introduces you to some of the ways to identify networking and collaboration needs in providing services, and how to fill these needs. Making the most of networking and collaboration opportunities not only enhances your service delivery, but also allows you to improve your professional practice.

1A Evaluate the ways performance may be improved through collaboration

Working collaboratively means taking a partnership approach to providing services to people with a disability. Your individual ability to provide services and your organisation's service provision can be improved by collaboration. While the person receiving support services is the most important partner, there are many other individuals, groups, agencies and networks that can function as collaborators.

To benefit from working collaboratively, you need to identify and evaluate how you and your service perform and how performance can be improved by working in a collaborative manner. It is important to understand the principles and benefits of networking.

What are networks?

Networks involve individuals and groups working together to share information, ideas and resources to help them meet common goals. The term 'networking' is often used to describe the process of making contacts with others to foster mutually beneficial and supportive relationships.

Different sectors within community services have their own networks. For example, aged care, disability, mental health, youth and alcohol and other drugs (AOD) services have established networks that link all the agencies and services within each sector. Some networks are based on a cross-section of organisations within a particular community, while others focus on a particular issue, such as housing.

Here are some of the ways that networks can benefit you and the service you work in.

Networks are a means to:

▶ connect

▶ communicate

▶ learn

▶ interact

▶ share

▶ expand

▶ access.

Improvements made through collaboration

As a support worker, you should seek out collaborative opportunities to make improvements to the service provision. Your service will have a commitment to continuous improvement of professional practices and will involve constantly reflecting on, assessing and improving all work activities.

In many cases, collaboration is needed to ensure that individualised, thorough, flexible and effective services are provided to people with support needs. At other times, working collaboratively enables efficient, cost-effective services that benefit our service. At all times, meeting the individual needs of the person with a disability is the primary goal. Here are some examples of improvements that can be made through collaboration.

Collaboration leads to improvements

Information

We need collaborators as information sources, such as the person, their family/carer, friends, community members, colleagues and experts. Effective service provision is based on complete, accurate and relevant information from a wide variety of sources. Relevant information can include the person's needs and goals, expert research and data.

Understanding

Working collaboratively creates rapport and is based on empathy and respect for others. By treating the person and others as valued partners, you express a commitment to understanding and respecting the person's needs, goals and aspirations. Seek feedback and suggestions from all collaborators and work on fostering strong relationships.

Access

Supporting a person's individual needs and goals involves ensuring that they have equal access to all services, activities and supports. Working collaboratively allows us to support a person's access and equity by ensuring access opportunities, even if they are beyond our job role or organisation's parameters. Other services and providers are important collaborators in providing complete supports.

Finances

Other services, agencies and government departments can be valued collaborators in terms of helping people access financial services and benefits. Often, colleagues and your professional networks have valuable information and expertise about gaining additional funding and financial services.

Community

Working collaboratively fosters a sense of community by working together to reach common goals. Strong working partnerships are vital for effective service provision and good morale. Offer your experience and expertise to your colleagues and others as a collaborator in reaching their goals – you have much to offer. Working collaboratively involves both giving and taking, seeking the best possible service delivery for all.

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 adaptions 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.

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

Benefits of networking

Networking involves creating, maintaining and strengthening professional relationships that support effective service delivery. The networks that you can contribute to will vary depending on your job role, but will include people with support needs, their families/carers, community groups, colleagues, experts and other health providers, professional groups and other services.

Good networking benefits you, your organisation and the people for whom you provide services. Using relevant networks, communities and individuals allows you to recognise when a gap in a person's service delivery may be met by another collaborator. Regularly contributing to professional networks and creating strong relationships is an important way to optimise service delivery to people in your care.

Benefits of networking and collaboration for clients

Providing excellent services to people with support needs is the primary goal and all networking and collaboration activities should be undertaken to increase your ability to provide best practice care. As experts in their own lives, people with support needs are your most important collaborators, as you work together to meet their goals. Collaboration ensures services can be customised to meet individuals' needs.

Networking involves good communication, developing and strengthening relationships and sharing information, skills and expertise.

Here are some of the benefits of networking for people with support needs.

Working collaboratively and networking with others ensures that people's individual needs, goals and preferences can be supported thoroughly and efficiently. Networks allow you to gain support from colleagues, agencies, services and individuals to support each person's individual needs.

Individualised care

Many people with support needs require complex supports, some of which may fall outside of your job role or organisational capacity. Networking ensures that additional supports, expert advice and assistance can be gained so that people's right to equal access can be upheld.

Improved access

Networking creates good communication, reciprocal skill-sharing and mutual respect. These aspects create strong working relationships and support a sense of community. People with support needs benefit from perceiving that they are valued, supported and respected members of the community.

Community building

Networking supports a teamwork approach to service delivery that draws upon a wider range of skills, knowledge and expertise than a single person may have. Working together as a team benefits people with support needs to gain the best possible services and care and to be valued as experts in their own lives.

Teamwork

Benefits of networking and collaboration for the organisation

Aside from benefitting people with support needs, networking and collaboration also benefits your service. This includes internal collaboration between workers, supervisors and management, as well as external networks such as other service providers, agencies, health professionals and community groups.

Here are some of the benefits that your organisation may gain from networking and collaboration.

Efficiency

Networking and collaboration within your service ensures that resources are used effectively and efficiently and that skills, knowledge and expertise are shared.

Access

Networking with external agencies, services and individuals ensures that people's needs can be met if they fall outside of the service's capacity.

Currency

Networking also ensures that your service is up to date with current information, best practice standards and innovations in the industry.

Promotion

Networking and collaboration also promotes your service in the community and industry and helps form strong relationships that will benefit the people for whom you provide support services.

Benefits of networking and collaboration for the worker

Networking and collaboration are rewarding aspects of being a support worker. Collaborating with people to help them reach their goals creates a great sense of achievement and fulfilment. Your ability to network with other professionals also contributes to the collaborative effort of providing best practice, individualised care. Networks provide a support structure to access and contribute to the ongoing development of the industry and its support workers.

Here are some of the benefits that you will discover through networking and collaboration.

What you will gain from networking and collaboration is:

▶ satisfaction in meeting people's individual needs efficiently
▶ the ability to learn, grow and share your skills
▶ good relationships with colleagues, people and professional networks
▶ the opportunity to innovate, solve problems and create solutions.

Example

Evaluate ways that individual and organisational performance may be improved through collaboration

Maria is heading into a supervisory meeting with Graciela. She is looking forward to the meeting and speaking with Graciela, as she is finding it difficult to meet Toby's support needs.

'Hi Graciela. Thanks for meeting me, I could use some help.' She smiles and takes out Toby's case notes.

'No worries, Maria. That's what I'm here for', smiles Graciela.

Maria gives a quick overview of Toby's situation in general terms to protect his privacy.

Graciela frowns and summarises what she's heard. 'So, you're saying that none of the external agencies that you've contacted will take him on?'

Maria nods and sighs. 'I've had no luck at all; they all just pass the buck.'

'Have you got some time later this afternoon?' Graciela asks. 'I'd like to consult a colleague for suggestions and possible other contacts. Can you give me a list of the agencies that you've contacted so that we don't double-up?'

Maria and Graciela agree to meet later that day to discuss further collaboration to meet Toby's needs.

Practice task 1

1. What is one way that collaboration can improve service for a person requiring support?

    ....

2. What are two of the underlying principles of networking and collaboration?

    ....

3. Name two benefits of collaboration and networking for your organisation.

    ....

4. Name two benefits of collaboration and networking for you.

    ....

Click to complete Practice task 1

1B Identify and prioritise organisation and individual needs

Providing support services is a balance between meeting the person's individual needs and meeting your organisation's needs. To find this balance, clearly identify both these needs and prioritise them appropriately. For example, the person's individual needs are your primary focus, but your service needs your time, expertise and skills to be shared with others as well.

The person with support needs is your primary collaborator in identifying their needs. Your job description and other organisational documents can help identify your services' needs. Networking and collaboration can be useful ways to balance the needs of people and your service, by pooling resources, information and skills.

Identify and prioritise networking needs

To select appropriate networks, analyse your networking needs and research which of the available options best meets your needs and the needs of the person for whom you are providing support services. Here are some elements to consider when making decisions about prioritising networking needs.

Organisational objectives

▶ Identify your organisation's objectives and the needs of people or target groups. For example, you may work in disability services with people who also have substance misuse issues. You may seek a network that can help you learn more about working with people who have substance misuse or alcohol and other drugs (AOD) issues. This information can inform your organisation's service provision.

Individual objectives

▶ The individual's objectives form your primary focus. Collaborate with the person to identify their goals, and then research networks available that can assist the person to meet their specific goals. Having a clear idea of the person's objectives, setting measurable benchmarks and time frames can help you to monitor whether the chosen network is helping the person meet their objectives.

Potential networks

▶ Most organisations keep files or databases on services and networks relevant to their work. Use the internet, community resource directories or talk to colleagues to find networks. Your aim is to improve service delivery for people you work with. Identify where your service needs to improve and join a network where you can benefit from the skills and experience of network members.

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.

Example

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

1C Identify gaps and required action to fill gaps

All work practices need to be regularly monitored, reviewed and assessed to identify gaps in service provision and to identify where improvements can be made to existing services. This includes the way that you use networks and engage in collaborative practices. Regularly identifying gaps can help you to pinpoint the required actions needed to fill these gaps.

To help identify gaps and required actions, you need to examine how different types of collaboration can be undertaken with:

▶ organisational networks

▶ individual networks

▶ virtual networks

▶ formal and informal networks.

Types of organisational networks and collaborations

As a support worker, you will collaborate with governmental and large-scale organisational networks to access services, funding, resources and information. The first step in collaborating and networking with these groups, is familiarising yourself with the organisations that have services available in your location. Some organisations function nationally, while others operate at the state/territory level or on the local level. International organisations can be useful for research and information.

Here is a summary of key community providers to be familiar with.

Community services departments

Each state or territory, as well as the federal government, has a government department that is responsible for community services. These departments are responsible for funding community-based services to provide the care and support that Australians need.

Sites to visit for further information include:

▶ Federal: Department of Health – http://aspirelr.link/dep-health

▶ State SA: Department for Human Services – http://aspirelr.link/dep-human-services-sa

▶ Local VIC: City of Melbourne Community Services –http://aspirelr.link/melbourne-community-services

Aged care services

These organisations provide a range of services to older Australians, including Aged Care Assessment Teams/services (ACAT/ACAS), in-home support, respite care, residential care and other services.

Information can be obtained by visiting the following sites:

▶ Aged Care Online – http://aspirelr.link/aged-care-online

▶ Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT) or Aged Care Assessment Services (ACAS) – http://aspirelr.link/acat-assessments

Health services

The health services sector is very broad and includes community health, general and specialist medical practitioners, district and community nursing, allied health (such as physiotherapy, dietetics, speech therapy, podiatry, occupational therapy and counselling), palliative care, acute health (hospitals, psychiatric services), rehabilitation, mental health, and maternal and child health.

Information can be obtained by visiting the following sites:

▶ VIC: Eastern Health Service – http://aspirelr.link/eastern-health-services

▶ NSW: Northern NSW Local Health District – http://aspirelr.link/northern-nsw-health

Indigenous services

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services are designed to meet the needs of Indigenous people. These services may be community controlled (services run by Indigenous organisations) or services provided by non-Indigenous organisations. Sites for further information include:

▶ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health programs – http://aspirelr.link/indigenous-health

▶ Medicare's Indigenous Access Program – http://aspirelr.link/medicare-indigenous-access-program

▶ Victorian Aboriginal Health Service – http://aspirelr.link/vahs

▶ Aboriginal Hostels Limited – http://aspirelr.link/ahl

Disability support services

These provide direct care services as well as advocacy, information and lobbying services for people with disabilities and their carers.

Information about such services can be obtained by visiting the following sites:

▶ National Disability Insurance Scheme – http://aspirelr.link/ndis

▶ Scope – http://aspirelr.link/scope

▶ Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors Queensland – http://aspirelr.link/dcdss-qld

▶ Melbourne City Mission Disability Services – http://aspirelr.link/mcm-disability-services

Income and employment

The federal government provides income support through a number of different allowances, pensions and payments. Employment services include résumé and application preparation, job search skills and interview skills. Employment services also advocate for unemployed people and create links to employment through targeted employment programs. Information can be obtained by visiting the following sites:

▶ Centrelink – http://aspirelr.link/centrelink

▶ Red Cross Disability Employment Service (QLD) – http://aspirelr.link/red-cross-employment-service-qld

▶ Gold Coast Employment Support Service Inc. – http://aspirelr.link/gcess

Accommodation services

Accommodation services include aged care and disability residential services as well as more general housing and homelessness services. Some accommodation services target specific groups such as older people, youth, students, people on low incomes, people with disabilities, refugees and women experiencing family violence. The following sites provide information:

▶ Red Cross homelessness services – http://aspirelr.link/red-cross-homelessness

▶ NSW Wesley Mission homeless services – http://aspirelr.link/wesley-mission-housing

▶ Department of Social Services housing programs and services – http://aspirelr.link/dss-housing-support

Transcultural services

Transcultural services are services that respond to the specific needs of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Services include the full range of community services including interpretation, cultural awareness training and consultancy, accommodation, aged care, mental health, employment support, advocacy and counselling. Visit the following sites for information:

▶ Multicultural Aged Care – http://aspirelr.link/mac

▶ Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria – http://aspirelr.link/eccv

▶ Multicultural Centre for Women's Health – http://aspirelr.link/mcwh

Advocacy services

National, state, regional and local specialist advocacy services provide confidential and independent information and advice to vulnerable people and those with special needs about their rights and entitlements. They also lobby governments to protect these rights.

Some examples of these organisations include:

▶ ACT Mental Health Consumer Network – http://aspirelr.link/act-mental-health-network

▶ Carers NSW – http://aspirelr.link/carers-nsw

▶ Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA) – http://aspirelr.link/dana

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:

▶ Salvation Army – http://aspirelr.link/salvos

▶ Uniting Care Australia – http://aspirelr.link/uniting-care

▶ Anglicare Australia – http://aspirelr.link/anglicare

▶ Jewish Care – https://aspirelr.link/jewish-care

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.

Here are some of the ways that you can improve services by accessing virtual networks and collaborations.

Virtual networks and communication methods
Social media Your workplace is likely to use social media to connect to people and to advertise its services. This is a great way to let community members know what you're achieving.
Industry forums Industry groups, associations and businesses may host forums where you can connect with colleagues. Posting to forums is a great way to make new contacts.
Blogs You can start your own blog and share your knowledge, or use other blogs as research tools and to make new connections.
Online seminars and meetings There are several great ways to participate and hold online seminars and meetings. Become familiar with the online technology available.
Video calls Skype and other forms of video calling make contacting people remotely much easier, giving a personal connection to networking with others.

Types of formal and informal networks and collaborations

Networking and collaboration can occur both formally and informally. You use informal networking every day when you attend work meetings with colleagues, connect with people with support needs and speak to your supervisor. These informal networks run on good communication, goodwill (i.e. helping others as well as asking for help), respecting and valuing everyone's contributions and clear role boundaries.

Formal networks include industry groups, agencies and associations, accreditation bodies, organisational partnerships and taskforces. Much like informal networks, similar requirements for good communication and role boundaries are required, as well as respect for other people's expertise and knowledge. Formal collaborations can be a great way to access information and services that extend beyond your own expertise, which can be very fulfilling.

Here are some of the kinds of formal collaborations that you may be involved in during your career.

Types of formal collaborations
▶ Formal partnerships (where two organisations agree to partner on a specific task or project)
▶ Affiliations (where your organisation joins or connects to a larger group)
▶ Parent organisations supervising smaller groups (where a national organisation supervises local groups)
▶ Mergers (where two organisations merge together to form one organisation)
▶ Taskforces (where groups or organisations agree to work together on specific tasks or activities)

Formal networks

A formal network is usually made up of representatives from various organisations who work in related areas. In most cases, formal networks have membership requirements and obligations, clearly defined processes and regular meetings or activities. They are set up to achieve specific objectives, such as providing a forum to discuss issues and share information between organisations working in the same sector, or setting up a working party to address an issue of concern (for example, youth disability needs).

Below are some examples of formal networks, with an explanation and examples of members of each.

Local organisational networks

Your organisation should have links with a range of other agencies and service providers in the local area. People may be assisted by more than one organisation, or require referrals to other services. For example, a person with AOD concerns may also require mental health, accommodation and health services.

Members include:

▶ government services such as Centrelink

▶ housing departments and other accommodation services

▶ employment services

▶ health services and local councils

▶ education providers

▶ welfare and charitable organisations

▶ local AOD, disability, homelessness, youth services and aged care agencies

Interest and support groups

Interest and support groups are usually consumer-based. They include self-help groups aimed at providing support to their members.

Members include:

▶ carers' groups

▶ mental health groups such as ARAFMI, Grow, NEAMI National, Mental Health Foundation of Australia and PANDA

▶ groups aimed at supporting people with AOD concerns such as Alcoholics Anonymous

▶ special interest groups such as mothers' groups or Riding for the Disabled groups

▶ Black Dog Institute wellbeing groups.

Regional and specialist associations

These associations represent the interests of a particular region, specialist service or sector. For example, there are peak organisations for every sector. The aim of these organisations is to ensure that community services in each sector have a unified voice. They can raise awareness of relevant issues and lobby for funding at a national or state level.

Members include:

▶ Aged and Community Services Australia

▶ Cairns Youth Services Network

▶ Carers Australia

▶ Ethnic Communities Council

▶ Mental Health Council of Australia

▶ National Disability Services.

Professional or occupational associations

These associations include groups representing different professions or organisations such as community and welfare workers, social workers and psychologists. They each represent the group's interests and promote professional and ethical practice and standards.

Members include:

▶ Australian Community Workers Association

▶ Australian Association of Social Workers

▶ Youth Workers Association

▶ Australian Community Counselling Association

▶ Australian and New Zealand Mental Health Association

▶ The Australasian Professional Society on Alcohol and Other Drugs.

Informal networks

Informal networks include the links and relationships you make as part of your work or training that are not dependent on formal agreements. They are primarily based on sharing information and providing mutual support. Consider the following points relating to the nature and value of informal networks.

Types of informal networks

▶ Informal networks include:

– other workers, particularly those in the community services industry

– trainers, teachers and academics

– contacts in policy and funding bodies.

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 makes 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?

Identify required action to fill the gap

Once you have identified a gap in a person's services, identify various options for actions to fill that gap. Networking and collaborations are often used in this stage of delivering services, as you seek input, ideas and information from others. Your networks are there to help you provide excellent services – so make the most of them. Ask questions, invite feedback and research alternative options and approaches that could benefit the person with support needs. For example, if you have identified that a collaboration has helped a person reach a certain outcome, you may need to research other collaborative options that can help the person reach their next goal.

As always, the person with support needs is the expert in their own lives and they are the most important collaborator. Wherever possible, offer several possible actions to fill service gaps that they can choose from. This demonstrates respect and upholds their right to self-determination.

Example

Identify gaps and required action

Mikhaela is meeting with Jerry for their monthly meeting to discuss his progress and supports. Jerry has been attending a day program run by another service and Mikhaela is checking in with him about the program.

'Hi Jerry! Great to see you!' Mikhaela says, as she enters Jerry's home.

As they have coffee together, Mikhaela notices that Jerry looks somewhat tired and down.

'So how's it going, Jerry? I'm looking forward to hearing about what you've been up to this month.'

Jerry barely smiles. 'Oh, um. It's been okay.'

'That doesn't sound very positive. Is something wrong?'

'Oh, no. I guess not. Just don't like going,' Jerry mumbles.

'To the day program?'

Jerry nods.

'That's not good – what about it don't you like?'

'It's boring. Everybody's older than me,' Jerry replies.

'Thanks for telling me Jerry. That wasn't the idea of you going at all. Let me check in with the program manager and I'll see if there are some other options with people closer to your own age.'

Jerry smiles, 'Really? That'd be great. I hate bingo!'

Practice task 3

1. What are two ways that you can identify a gap in a person's services?

   .   .. .

2. List one action you could take to fill a gap in service provision.

   .   .. .

3. List two types of virtual networks used for collaboration.

   .   .. .

   .   .. .

4. List two types of formal networks used for collaboration

   .   .. .

   .   .. .

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Click to complete Practice task 3

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Summary

1. Working collaboratively and networking ensures that skills, knowledge and resources are shared efficiently, and that people's individual needs are met. This benefits people with support needs, workers and organisations.

2. Providing effective services involves identifying people's needs and those of your organisation. With this knowledge, you can set priorities and identify networks and collaborative opportunities that meet everyone's needs.

3. Networks and collaborative practices are subject to change and adjustment. Regularly review and assess how these activities are improving each person's services. Identify any gaps in services and offer the person options to fill these gaps. Networks and collaborations are great sources of information and inspiration.

Learning checkpoint 1
Identify networking and collaboration needs and opportunities

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in identifying networking and collaboration needs and opportunities.

1. Provide two questions you can ask that will help you to evaluate the way that performance can be improved through collaboration.

2. Provide one way that opportunities should be prioritised.

3. What is the first step in identifying if there is a gap in networks and collaborative practice?

4. What are three underlying principles of networking and collaboration?

5. Describe two benefits of networking and collaboration for people with support needs.

6. Describe two benefits of networking and collaboration for the organisation.

7. What are the benefits of networking and collaboration for the worker?

8. Provide two examples of an organisational network and collaboration that you might use in community services.

9. List two types of individual networks and collaborations might you engage in your daily activities as a support worker.

10. List two types of virtual networks and collaborations that can improve how you deliver services.

11. List two types of formal networks and collaborations that you might use.

12. List two types of informal networks and collaborations that you might use.

Topic 2

In this topic you will learn how to:

2A Gather and review information about relevant services, organisations and key people

2B Pro-actively initiate relationships with other professionals and organisations

2C Share information and resources to overcome duplication in service delivery

2D Maintain currency and accessibility of information

2E Define, document and negotiate collaboration

Develop collaboration strategies

To make the most of your collaborators and networks, you need to develop effective strategies. These strategies involve gathering and reviewing information about potential collaborators and initiating relationships with them. Good collaborative relationships are negotiated with defined roles and documented processes. They involve sharing information and resources for efficiency, and rely on current, accessible information.

2A 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.

Service categories
▶ Medical services
▶ Accommodation services
▶ Mental health services
▶ Financial services
▶ Mediator services
▶ Legal services
▶ Social services
▶ Cultural and language services

Information sources

Information about the range of relevant information may be available in a variety of forms, such as pamphlets, booklets, flyers, posters, price lists, business cards, information packs, referral forms, audiovisual formats (photographs, audio tapes, video footage), websites, media articles and advertising, service directories and annual reports.

When providing information, ensure that it is accessible and understood by the person or people requiring the information. Information may need to be available in other languages and formats such as large print, Braille or as audio. The language and format offered should reflect all groups and be culturally sensitive to these groups. For example, material for Indigenous Australian people should not contain images of people who are no longer alive.

Information must be current and up to date. Printed information can become out of date very quickly, so it is important to regularly check and update this material. Refer to organisational websites and use the services' website to promote services.

Collect information from relevant sources

Information about agencies, services and contacts may be collected in many ways. For example, you may collect information formally via professional groups, or informally via other contacts such as family, friends or the internet. When attending formal forums, talk to other people and expand your network of contacts. If you are there with a colleague, network separately and pool information after the meeting.

The following lists some common formal and informal information collection methods.

Formal methods

- ▶ Place a topic on the agenda at staff meetings to share knowledge.
- ▶ Join a professional networking group and host meetings.
- ▶ Join an advocacy or interest alliance such as Disability advocacy Network Australian (DANA).
- ▶ Create a list of relevant services; phone around to introduce yourself.
- ▶ Investigate funding options that are offered to partnerships.
- ▶ Approach possible partners with a project in mind.
- ▶ Attend briefings, conferences and seminars and work-based functions.

Informal methods

- ▶ Collect pamphlets.
- ▶ Search the internet for organisations' networking opportunities.
- ▶ Discuss with colleagues what services they have used in the past.
- ▶ Ask colleagues and friends to introduce you to their contacts.
- ▶ Develop a broad range of interests in your personal life.
- ▶ Introduce yourself to new acquaintances and tell them about your work.
- ▶ Ask your people what other services they have used and why.

Gather information about organisations

As a support worker, you act as a liaison for the people receiving support services, particularly when accessing external services or liaising with other service organisations. Your workplace will have a number of established partnerships with a range of service providers and organisations, as well as established relationships with contact people and set referral protocols.

Research other service organisations to keep up to date with the services and activities offered. Do this regularly, as organisations frequently change and adapt.

Here are some ways to gather information about service organisations.

Ways to gather information about service organisations

- ▶ Check for established partnerships
- ▶ Ask your colleagues and supervisors
- ▶ Ask people for whom you provide services about their past providers
- ▶ Research online
- ▶ Check industry groups, contacts and networks
- ▶ Read relevant articles, blogs and forums and contact the authors
- ▶ Ask your contacts about their networks

Identify key stakeholders and gather information

Different networks are available that are designed to meet the needs of specific stakeholders. For example, professional networks support you, your colleagues and people receiving support, while other networks may be focused on sharing information among specific industry sectors. Other networks are established for the purpose of advocacy and education.

Identify the key stakeholders that require information and investigate networks and resources that are available or relevant to them. This information will help you to provide relevant information and support to stakeholders.

Here are some key stakeholders that you may work with, and examples of the kinds of networks that may be relevant for each group.

People with support needs

▶ There are many networks available to people with support needs, including support groups for specific conditions and disabilities, advocacy groups and community services.

Families and carers

▶ Families and carers have specific needs and often require specialist supports, including advocacy groups, support networks and respite access.

Support workers

▶ Workers need peer support networks to connect with in order to share information, expertise and evolving practices. Professional networks are vital to ongoing professional development.

Community members

▶ Educational services, outreach organisations and funding bodies are relevant for community members. These services support them to create opportunities for interaction and support for the people in your care.

Keep a list of relevant services

Relevant and up-to-date service directories are invaluable in any kind of community services work. Keep a list of services in a directory or database for your region, state or territory. This information might be stored alphabetically, or grouped according to the services provided, and may be printed or digital.

Here are some tips for keeping a list of relevant services.

Check that any information you have includes:

▶ name and contact details of the service agency

▶ details of services offered

▶ eligibility criteria for services offered

▶ referral process for services offered

▶ location of services offered

▶ hours of operation

▶ cost of services offered

▶ contact details for the organisation and range of services.

Keep a list of relevant contacts

Details of specific contacts may be kept in a hard-copy file, such as an address book or diary, or stored electronically on a phone, tablet or computer, using your device's contacts features, apps, Word or Excel files. Include information such as the organisation's name, contact's name, services provided, location and when contact was last made. A broad range of contacts means that you have access to a wide range of information and advice.

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.

Review information about relevant services, organisations and key people

Once you have information about the relevant services, organisations and key people that you are likely to need, this information should be regularly reviewed. Schedule periodic reviews to ensure the information is complete, up to date, relevant and easily accessible. To review information about services, organisations and key people, you may:

▶ source service information on a website

▶ email organisational contacts

▶ check organisational newsletters and blogs

▶ collaborate with work colleagues

▶ utilise service networks and contacts.

Example

Gather and review information about services and organisations

Simon is a freelance consultant and trainer. For one project Simon, brought together 16 different disability and aged care groups to run 70 workshops for employees who provide support services to this sector. When asked about networking and gathering information, Simon says:

'Networking is about working together, sharing information and supporting one another. I usually network informally, and attend most events I am invited to. This helps me to keep up to date with new information and services, and keeps me informed on how to provide best practice service. I use the information to review the way service is currently delivered and to expand my support networks.'

Practice task 4

1. List two ways to gather information about relevant services and organisations.

2. List two ways to review information about services, organisations and key people.

3. Provide two examples of stakeholders that you may involve in a collaboration.

Click to complete Practice task 4

2B Pro-actively initiate relationships with other professionals and organisations

Once you have created a database of current, thorough information about potential collaborators and networks, you can begin approaching them. Learning how to initiate productive relationships involves understanding the structure of the industry and how organisations relate to each other. Community services work involves both public and private organisations, who work together to provide best practice supports and care.

While your workplace will have established partnerships and relationships with other inter- and intra-sectoral professionals and organisations, being pro-active about forming new relationships supports best practice standards and allows for evolving, flexible service provision and innovations in care.

Industry structure and interrelationships between different organisations

The community services industry allows extensive opportunities for collaboration and networking. Your workplace will have a specific function, serving a specific community, group or service provision. The way that your workplace fits into the wider industry depends on the activities it undertakes, how it is funded and its reach in the community. For example, community service organisations exist on the national, state/territory and local levels. Some organisations are publically funded and others are private businesses who may or may not operate with some public funding. Some organisations are not-for-profits or charities, who may function purely on private donations and/or government funding. Other organisations are founded to serve a particular demographic or community, while some specialise in a particular type of service provision.

The wide range of organisations, structures and activities undertaken in the industry open up opportunities for groups, organisations and individuals to work together on a range of activities. Here are some examples of the benefits of interrelationships.

Creating policy

Many individuals, groups and organisations contribute to creating best practice standards and policy in the industry, by maintaining professional networks and undertaking professional activities. These include joint partnerships, conferences and specific task forces.

While information and ideas can be sourced from the industry as a whole, a specific task force or partnership may be formed, or funded, to undertake certain activities, such as policy recommendations and sector development activities.

Meeting needs

Many organisations work together to meet the needs of specific communities. For example, in a local area, a range of organisations that provide specific services may collaborate to ensure thorough service provision in their community.

This may involve smaller organisations collaborating on a wider regional development plan, or to share funding for community service activities.

Advocacy

All support workers advocate for people in their work. This advocacy can extend into widespread action by joining advocacy groups designed to educate and call for change on a specific issue or to uphold the rights of a specific group.

Advocacy groups can be specifically funded, volunteer-run or a combination of the two.

Interrelationships between public organisations

Working in this industry involves collaboration on all levels. Whether your organisation is publicly or privately funded, you will work with other organisations in providing the best possible care to people. Public organisations work together on numerous levels, including sharing information, sharing resources, creating joint projects or policies, referring services or people, undertaking regional, sector or community development activities.

Effective interrelationships between public organisations rely on many elements, including the following.

Good organisational interrelationships are based on:

▶ clearly defined roles

▶ excellent communication

▶ transparency (clearly defined and accountable processes)

▶ sharing information, resources and expertise

▶ accountability and a commitment to continuous improvement

▶ mutual respect and a common purpose

▶ thorough documentation

▶ a commitment to the value of collaboration and teamwork.

Interrelationships between different private organisations

Private organisations are usually funded separately, but may collaborate to expand the reach of their services, to share resources or information, to meet the needs of a specific community or group, or as formal partnerships.

Working together in an organisational interrelationship starts with understanding your own role and that of your organisation. Be familiar with how your organisation is funded, its vision and mission statements and any existing relationships to other organisations. This information is usually provided during induction and

can be found in your workplace's policies and procedures. You can contribute to these interrelationships by collaborating with existing partners, by researching other relevant organisations and by reaching out and initiating new collaborations and partnerships.

Proactively initiate relationships with other inter-sectoral professionals and organisations

To provide better, more complete services you may need to work with professionals and organisations outside of your specific field or the community services industry. These are called 'inter-sectoral' relationships ('inter-' means 'between' or 'among'; for example, different groups sharing information between each other). Effective, efficient service provision based on each person's individual needs is your starting point, and in some cases, their needs fall beyond what you, your workplace or even the industry can provide. For example, if you work in an organisation that provides health services for people with a disability and a person has an accommodation crisis, you may need to initiate a relationship with someone in a charity, governmental department or accommodation service to help the person find a home.

Once you have identified a person's need that may require networking with someone outside of your industry or existing network, begin looking for inter-sectoral networks and potential partners or collaborators. This is all about making connections, in a professional, friendly manner. Here are some ideas about how to proactively initiate relationships.

Existing networks

Ask colleagues, supervisors and members of your professional network for their contacts, suggestions and recommendations. Often, a colleague can facilitate a new relationship by introducing you to another individual or organisation. Personal recommendations often provide good indications that an individual or organisation is good to work with and can provide a point of connection. If a colleague suggests that you contact someone that they know, make sure to mention them in your initial contact.

Research

Research online or in the local community to find potential collaborators. Look for official accreditations and vision/mission statements. Organisations and individuals with common values and goals tend to work well together, and these can provide a point of connection for initiating contact.

Personal connections

Wherever possible, try to make a personal connection. Remember that you are representing your organisation, and communicate in a friendly, respectful manner. Whenever you meet someone or make a new contact, make sure that they know how to contact you, and keep their contact information easily accessible and up to date. Maintaining personal contacts is important as well, be sure to keep in regular contact with people and inform them of any changes to your services, contact details and so on.

Advertise and offer

Be clear about what you have to offer. Most collaborations are formed to be mutually beneficial, so that both parties give and take. Advertise your services and offer your knowledge and expertise to a wide range of potential collaborators and community members. While you may need to initiate some relationships when you first identify a need, maintaining a wide network of valued collaborators that you have assisted in the past can ensure efficient service delivery when new needs are identified.

Proactively initiate relationships with other intra-sectoral professionals and organisations

'Intra-' means 'within', so intra-sectoral relationships are between you and your colleagues within the community services industry. Good professional relationships are based on many elements, including mutual respect, good communication, accountability and transparency. These working practices should be in place from your first contact with a potential collaborator within the industry. Here are some tips on how to proactively initiate good professional relationships.

Initiating a relationship

1 **Be informed**

Research beforehand and contact the most relevant person.

2 **Come prepared**

If you have a specific enquiry, make sure that you have all the details needed before making contact.

3 **Respect people's time and needs**

Be flexible and concise. People are busy and appreciate alternative forms of contact and clear communication.

4 **Represent your organisation**

Use official letterhead or your work email address to identify yourself and remember that you are acting as a spokesperson for your workplace.

5 **Maintain privacy and confidentiality**

Only share information that is relevant and with permission.

6 **Make specific requests**

Make it clear how the other person can help you.

7 **Be polite**

A friendly smile and greeting helps establish rapport. Genuine gratitude for people's help ensures that a good connection has been formed.

8 **Be reciprocal**

Offer your services or expertise in return and where appropriate.

Example

Pro-actively initiate relationships with professionals and organisations

Jenny is starting a new job with a local organisation that provides mental health services in her community. Using information from her job description and induction package, she is introducing herself to her workplace's established partners and making new connections.

Jenny picks up the phone and calls a local charity.

'Hi, my name is Jenny and I'm calling from XYZ Services. Can I speak to your community outreach representative? Thanks.'

As she's transferred, Jenny makes notes. 'Oh hi, who am I speaking to?' She writes down the person's details as she speaks.

'Great to talk to you, Ahmed. I'm calling from XYZ Services; we provide mental health support services in the local community. We're looking for partners to expand our services and I'm well aware of the work that you do to support vulnerable community members. I was wondering if you were available to meet and to consider how we could work together? Absolutely, at your convenience. Next week? Tuesday at two p.m.? Perfect. I'll email you some information about what we do and about some funding options that we could explore. Yes, it is great to talk to you too. Looking forward to next Tuesday. Have a great afternoon!'

Jenny adds this date to her calendar and updates her contact list with Ahmed's name, number and email address. She emails the information to him immediately, and confirms the meeting time and place also.
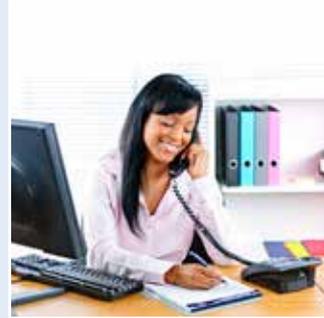
Practice task 5

1. List two ways to proactively initiate relationships with inter-sectoral professionals and organisations.

2. List two ways to proactively initiate good professional relationships with intra-sectoral professionals and organisations

3. Describe one way you can contribute to interrelationships between organisations.

Click to complete Practice task 5

2C Share information and resources to overcome duplication in service delivery

One of the great benefits of collaboration and networking involves sharing information and resources. While some information needs to be kept private and confidential, good communication skills and resource-sharing can increase efficiency and ensure that available information and resources reach the people who need them most.

Duplicated services are a waste of resources and limit what can be provided. Efficiently sharing information and resources to avoid duplication means that wider and deeper services can be available to people who need support.

Duplication of service delivery

Effective collaboration can enhance the service delivered to people with support needs. It also ensures that duplication in service delivery is reduced, minimised or eliminated. Duplication can be minimised by finding out what other organisations offer, and what equipment and resources may be available. Promoting shared service delivery may involve developing sector-wide service arrangements, regional service arrangements or engaging in joint activities with other organisations.

By engaging in shared service delivery, the service or organisations involved can benefit by having access to:

▶ a wider range of resources

▶ a wider range of specialist services

▶ improved access to skills and knowledge

▶ greater utilisation of resources and assets.

Share information

Any collaborative partnership relies on information that is communicated and shared efficiently. Members of a team or joint project need to pool their information, to ensure that time is not wasted finding information that has already been located.

However, in sharing information, there are some considerations that must be taken into account, as shown here.

Privacy and confidentiality	Relevance
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.	Only share information that is relevant to the task, activity or purpose. Having clear goals, outcomes and processes ensures that only relevant information is shared, which ensures efficiency.
Security	Maintenance
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.

Share resources

Community groups and organisations may have a limited income. They will be looking to larger community service organisations to assist them with the resources they need. Sharing resources is a way to link and network with others, and results in greater efficiency for everyone. It brings benefits to your own organisation, as well as to the community groups and their members. There are a number of different types of resources that can be shared. Examples and benefits these resources bring to community groups are outlined below.

Aids

The aids a person utilises are rarely in use full-time, and may sit unused for much of the time. Sharing resources provides people with faster and cheaper access to the aid they require.

Some organisations establish a library of aids that can be hired out. This is suitable for people with temporary or changing needs who only require the aid for a short time. For example, a person with a progressive disability may require a manual wheelchair for a short time and then an electronic wheelchair.

Equipment

Expensive equipment is seldom in use full-time. Increasing the number of organisations that have access to a piece of equipment reduces the costly need of each company acquiring the same equipment.

Many organisations have equipment such as minibuses, high-low beds and various lifting devices that are not in use full time. Small equipment includes display boards, AV equipment and catering items.

Facilities

Most organisations have venues, training rooms, meeting rooms, respite accommodation or recreational facilities that are not in use full-time.

Some organisations may only use training rooms and meeting rooms on certain days of the week, so they are available at other times including weekends and evenings. Other organisations may have respite accommodation that is not used at 100 per cent capacity.

Training

Organisations run training programs such as WHS, first aid or managing volunteers for their staff. There is often capacity for additional participants, so that people can receive the latest industry-based training and costs can be shared or reduced.

Most organisations require certain training before employees commence work. Community group members can be invited to share in this training.

Knowledge and expertise

Sharing knowledge and supporting others groups and individuals is part of the work role of a community services worker. Generalist or specialist staff can provide secondary consultations, advice, information, debriefing or mentoring to community groups and their members to ensure appropriate support for a person and members of groups.

Issues to consider when resources are shared

There are many advantages to sharing resources, but there are still logistical and cost issues that should be considered. It is important to consider these issues, and establish appropriate procedures before commencing sharing resources. Here are some of the factors you need to consider.

Service fees

▶ A fee/cost structure should be established to ensure the organisation runs within budget. Use received fees to maintain/replace the resource used. Put fee-for-service arrangements in writing to avoid misunderstandings (for example, establish a price list for the services offered and then invoice on use). Consult with your supervisor or the organisation's business administrator to determine fees.

Borrowers' registers

▶ When sharing aids and equipment, a booking system is usually required. Some organisations may establish a borrowers' register (similar to a library system) where equipment and aids are signed in and out. If any costs are involved, they should be agreed in writing and invoiced through the organisation's finance system.

Intellectual property

▶ Where resources are of an intellectual or knowledge-based nature (for example, a brochure or a training guide), copyright and ownership must be observed. It is also necessary to ensure that organisational policy and procedure such as privacy and confidentiality are observed.

Terms of reference

▶ If the sharing of resources involves a joint project, subcontracting or research, terms of reference should be established to define the roles, responsibilities, relationship and the scope of the project. If subcontracting, a formal agreement should be determined and signed by all parties.

Example

Share information and resources with other organisations

Tamara works for a community organisation. The organisation is located in an inner-city area where there are a relatively high proportion of people from cultural groups. She belongs to a network that is made up of organisations providing community and welfare services in the local area. Member organisations include housing, youth, families, AOD, mental health and ethno-specific services.

Tamara is able to make a valuable contribution to the network by providing information about the needs and interests of the cultural group. She gives talks about different cultural needs and, when appropriate, she helps workers from other organisations and support areas within the network. She also frequently liaises with the different community service organisations in the network to provide services.

Practice task 6

1. List two benefits that an organisation can gain from sharing services rather than duplicating services.

    .   ...

    .   ...

2. What are two considerations to take into account before sharing information with a collaborator?

    .   ...

    .   ...

Click to complete Practice task 6

2D Maintain currency and accessibility of information

As with all workplace activities, networking and collaboration relies on up-to-date, relevant and accessible information. There are a number of techniques that can be used to maintain the currency and accessibility of information, so that networking and collaborative activities are productive and beneficial for all.

Maintain currency of information

Receiving information or being offered resources that are out of date or unsuitable can be counterproductive. The information provided must be current, correct and recently prepared. It must also be appropriate and applicable to the situation for which it is needed. Check that content is accurate and that it will meet the needs of those receiving the information.

Information that is provided must be current and represent the current thinking and views of the industry. You have a duty of care to make sure any advice or information you provide is correct and factual.
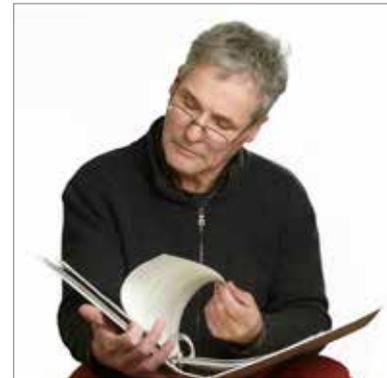
Strategies to maintain currency

There are many ways to build maintenance of information into your work activities and professional development. Workplace policies and procedures will have strategies for maintaining currency of information in place, such as regular reviewing and monitoring procedures, self-reflection, supervisory activities and gaining new qualifications.

Here are some of the most common strategies to ensure that the information used and distributed is current.

Policies

Provide feedback if you identify information in policies and procedures that needs to be updated.

Development

Participate in professional development activities such as attending conferences, reading journal articles and research and contributing to professional forums and discussions.

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.

Maintain accessibility of information

Information needs to be accessible to be used efficiently to collaborate and improve services. You need to ensure that the information you provide is only accessible to appropriate people. People's privacy and confidentiality must be upheld at all times, as does the organisation's professional standards regarding information-sharing.

Strategies to maintain accessibility

There are many ways to ensure that the information used and provided for collaboration is appropriately maintained and accessible. These strategies may be built into the workplace's information management procedures.

Here are some ways to facilitate accessibility of the information used and provided to collaborative partners.

Support access needs

▶ Information that you provide should be accessible to all people, including those with access needs, language and cultural differences, and different levels of ability.

▶ This may involve using translators and providing information in different formats, to cater to levels of ability and different access needs.

Correct storage

▶ Your workplace will have a procedure for storing different types of information, which you should follow in all instances.

▶ This may involve following file-naming conventions, using multiple storage locations and keeping multiple copies. All physical documentation should be stored safely and securely, and all electronic information needs to be easily identifiable to others who may need it.

Tailor to the audience

▶ Consider the needs of your audience and tailor the way you present the information to them. Avoid jargon and make sure all information is concise, clear and logically ordered. This ensures that others can readily access the information and use it efficiently.

▶ Use correct spelling and grammar, and consider how others will interpret the information. In some cases, a task requires detailed, exhaustive information, while in others, a summary will do.

Use technology

▶ There are many information-sharing technologies that can facilitate easy access between networks and collaborative partners. For example, cloud storage and file-sharing software applications make it much easier for collaborators to access common information securely.

Importance of accessible information

An effective partnership or collaboration relies on accessible information to ensure efficiency. Having accessible information demonstrates respect of other people's time and supports effective collaborative processes.

Here are some common examples of when accessible information is vital, and why.

People's changing needs

▶ Keeping current, accurate and appropriately accessible information is important to support people's changing needs. For example, when meeting with someone to whom you provide supports, any changed needs, preferences or goals need to be recorded appropriately. This is so that others who work with the person have access to the information in order to avoid mistakes and duplicated services.

Teamwork

▶ Working in a team often involves several people working on different elements of a single task. All team members need to understand their role and have access to the information that they need to undertake their part of the task. If one team member holds onto all the information, other team members cannot complete their tasks.

Documenting and monitoring

▶ In many cases, processes and work activities need to be documented so that they can be appropriately monitored and reviewed. Ensuring that the appropriate people are monitoring and reviewing the information means that gaps can be identified and that all processes can be continuously improved.

Store information

It is important to develop and maintain effective systems for storing the information you have gathered. Storage systems need to allow for different formats of information and be clearly understood so that information can be accessed easily. Organisations have policies and procedures in place to create an understanding of how information is to be stored. In some organisations, it may be your responsibility to maintain sufficient supplies of information to meet demand.

Here are some specific details regarding storing information in the workplace.

Storage systems

Typical storage systems include paper-based filing cabinets, electronic management systems, a website and/ or intranet and locked storage rooms or cupboards.

Information may be confidential or in the public domain. Whatever system is in place, it is essential that information is readily available to those who require it.

Storing information

Always follow organisational policy and procedures regarding duty of care, privacy and confidentiality. Confidential information such as health or medical records should be kept in lockable filing cabinets.

Organisations may use an electronic security system, allowing confidential files to be accessed using a password. Workers may be required to sign a register to access the information.

Example

Maintain currency and accessibility of information

Nandina works at an advocacy service. She coordinates a program that focuses on the needs of people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. She receives a lot of requests from organisations for information about services and the law regarding disability issues. Brochures for her service have been written in a number of different community languages. Nandina speaks a number of languages and uses interpreters when required.

Nandina produces a frequently asked questions resource that outlines key questions about the law, discrimination and the role of guardians. To ensure this resource is up to date and accurate she liaises with the local community legal service.

Nandina also works with people who have a disability and their carers, so she is aware of the issues that are important to them. She makes sure she keeps abreast of the relevant legislation. Any materials and resources that are developed are reviewed and edited by the service's consumer reference group.

Practice task 7

1. Describe two strategies you could use to ensure that information consulted and distributed is current.

2. Provide two ways that you can ensure advice, materials and information you are using are current.

Click to complete Practice task 7

2E Define, document and negotiate collaboration

Good collaborative partnerships are based on a thorough understanding of the values, limitations and dynamics of how these relationships function. Clear role boundaries, negotiated outcomes and good documentation all contribute to effective and efficient networks committed to excellent service provision.

Define the type and level of collaboration

There are several different types and levels of collaboration that are appropriate for different tasks, individuals and organisations.

Defining the type and level of collaboration is important in order to ensure that everyone understands their roles and responsibilities, and to set the parameters of the relationship. In some cases, this may involve signing contracts or other legal documentation.

Here are some of the most common types and levels of collaboration that you may encounter as a support worker.

Levels of collaboration include:

▶ networking (sharing contacts and some information)

▶ cooperation (supporting colleagues and sharing resources)

▶ partnership (negotiated joint action)

▶ collaboration (working closely to fulfil a specific need or task).

Identify objectives and level of collaboration

Before entering into collaboration, define your own objectives and the level of collaboration that you require and can reasonably offer. These parameters will help you recognise the limitations of the collaboration and help to define the dynamics of how it operates. For example, if you are negotiating a formal partnership with a larger organisation, the limitations of what you can offer needs to be clearly understood. Although the partnership may be based on the value of equality, the dynamics of how and which resources to be shared needs to be clearly defined.

Here are some of the questions that you can ask yourself to identify the the objectives and level of collaboration with a specific network.

Questions to ask before contributing to a network or collaboration	
▶ Do I have clearly defined objectives?	▶ Do I and my collaborators have shared values and understanding of how collaboration works?
▶ Have I identified all of the key collaborators and stakeholders?	▶ Have I considered the limitations of this collaboration?
▶ Have I defined the type and level of collaboration that I need?	▶ Have I identified and negotiated how the collaboration will occur (i.e. the dynamics)?
▶ Have I defined the type and level of collaboration that I can reasonably offer?	

Develop strategies for networking and collaboration

It is important to reflect on why you are engaging in this networking and/or collaboration. Having a clear idea about the purpose for the activity helps you to define a desired outcome. With a clear purpose and outcome, you can evaluate different strategies and decide on the best fit for your needs.

For example, if you are networking to find services to share resources, a networking strategy that involves forming nationwide contacts may not be the best fit.

Here are some of the networking and collaboration strategies that you can consider to meet your needs.

Networking and collaboration strategies include:

▶ working with individual colleagues within your organisation

▶ working with individual colleagues external to your organisation

▶ online networking with professional groups

▶ partnering with another organisation

▶ mentoring or being mentored by another individual

▶ forming a task force or collaboration to meet a specific need

▶ collaborating with individuals or groups outside of your industry.

Negotiate collaboration strategies with relevant people

Once you have developed some preferred collaboration strategies, start negotiating with other relevant people. Successful collaboration is mutually beneficial, so being clear about your needs and proposed strategies helps others evaluate whether the collaboration will work for them.

In this context, relevant people include potential collaborators, any colleagues who may want to be involved, your supervisor and the people for whom you provide services. In many cases, people with support needs will be involved in the collaboration, but if they are not involved directly, consider whether informing them about your progress and including them in the construction of a collaborative strategy supports their rights and self-esteem.

Negotiate collaboration strategies

Working collaboratively involves negotiation at all stages. Learning how to negotiate is an important professional skill. Negotiating strategies with a collaborative partner sets a solid base for working effectively together.

Some of the key features of negotiation include the following.

Keys to good negotiation
▶ Listen (use active listening techniques)
▶ Know what you need, want and can offer
▶ Confirm what others need, want and can offer
▶ Demonstrate respect and value everyone's contributions
▶ Clear communication
▶ Compromise (create a win–win situation)
▶ Acknowledge challenges and other people's needs
▶ Be open to new ideas, approaches and suggestions

Negotiate with relevant people

Good collaborations value participation, clear communication, feedback and suggestions from all stakeholders. When negotiating a new collaboration, identify all the relevant stakeholders involved and ask for their input. All the people directly involved in the collaboration need to be consulted in negotiating the collaborative strategies that are being considered. All collaborators need to contribute to ensure that the most beneficial strategy is chosen. This inclusion also demonstrates a commitment to full and equal participation that demonstrates respect and encourages everyone to be involved.

There are many different formats that you can use to negotiate with people, depending on the specific situation and the needs of the people involved. Here are some formats to consider.

Formats for negotiation
Face-to-face meetings Make sure that everyone's access needs are met and that the meetings are documented.
Feedback and submissions If working with an established network or large group, feedback can result in a wide range of responses.
Review Document a proposal and send to all participants for their review, suggestions and feedback.
Brainstorming Free-form discussions that can lead to more formal negotiations and positions.
Surveys Send an email or document surveying people's needs. All responses must be collated and then communicated back to the participants.

Document collaboration

All collaborative decisions need to be appropriately documented, including the type and level of collaboration undertaken. This documentation allows you to review the collaboration and improve your next collaborative partnerships. In some cases, documentation is required for legal purposes such as confidentiality and resource-sharing. Negotiated positions, outcomes and proposed collaborative strategies need to be clearly documented and communicated to all the participants for their review. This ensures that everyone has been heard and that you will be working from a common starting point.

For example, if you are negotiating a partnership with another organisation, document each part of the negotiations so that everyone involved understands their role, and so that progress can be monitored. This might involve someone taking minutes during team meetings and then sending the minutes to each participant for their records. Any decisions taken can then be recorded and referred back to in case of disagreement or confusion later. Remember, the point of collaboration is to work effectively with others, so clear communication and documentation facilitates this process.

Example

Define, document and negotiate collaboration

Nadine and Marco are meeting to discuss collaborating on a joint project. They work for disability support organisations in neighbouring areas and are investigating whether they could pool resources, information or activities. They have agreed to meet at Nadine's workplace, so she can show Marco around and introduce him to some of the other staff.

'It's great to meet you Marco, and I appreciate you meeting me here. Perhaps next time I could come to your workplace?' Nadine offers.

'That would be great. I'm really looking forward to working together to expand our reach. I'd like to hear more about what you had in mind.'

They head to Nadine's office and get out their laptops to take notes.

'Okay, I've looked over the information about your service that you sent me Marco, and I think we have a lot in common. I'd like to take this meeting to set out our position and to hear yours. I think establishing what we have in common is the best first step. What do you think?'

Marco nods. 'Perfect. We haven't collaborated formally with another organisation on the same level, so I'd like to get a clear idea of what you're after and how we could work together'.

Nadine agrees and they decide to meet up fortnightly to explore collaborative options. Next time, they will meet at Marco's workplace and they both commit to consulting with their respective teams and creating some proposed outcomes for their collaboration.

Practice task 8

1. Briefly describe two levels of collaboration.

2. What are two questions that should be considered to help you identify the values, limitations and dynamics of a network or collaboration?

3. Suggest one reason that collaborative strategies should be documented and communicated to participants for their review.

Click to complete Practice task 8

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.

Learning checkpoint 2
Develop collaboration strategies

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in developing collaboration strategies.

1. Provide two examples of formal information gathering methods.

2. List two ways you pro-actively initiate relationships with other professionals and organisations.

3. How do you avoid duplication in service delivery when collaborating with other organisations?

4. Describe two strategies that can be use to maintain the currency of information.

5. Provide one reason that the type and level of collaboration needs to be defined.

6. Who are two groups of key stakeholders in your work and what kind of networks are available to help them meet their needs?

7. Describe one reason it is beneficial to create an interrelationship with another organisation.

Topic 3

In this topic you will learn how to:

3A Identify opportunities that meet client, personal and organisational goals

3B Plan and implement integrated projects and service delivery

3C Liaise with staff from relevant organisations on a formal and informal basis

Work collaboratively

As a support worker, you have the opportunity to share your skills and expertise with others and learn from other people's experience by working collaboratively. This topic explores some of the elements involved in working collaboratively in a productive, efficient and rewarding manner. These include understanding how to use collaboration to meet your own goals, your organisation's goals and those of people with support needs. Additionally, you need to know how to plan and deliver excellent services arising from collaborated projects, and explore how to liaise with colleagues in collaborative projects.

3A Identify opportunities that meet client, personal and organisational goals

While some networking and collaborative activities serve the purpose of general support, connection and access, other collaborations are undertaken to serve particular purposes and to meet specific goals. To use networking and collaborative activities in a targeted way, begin by defining specific goals that could be met through collaboration. Defining your goals, the goals of the people with support needs that you work with and your organisation's goals allows you to identify specific opportunities where collaborations may assist in meeting or exceeding these goals.

Many relevant networking and collaborative opportunities arise from engaging with established networks in the community services industry. However, to be able to use these networks to meet specific goals, you need to understand the vision and purpose of these industry networks and recognise how you can participate in them.

Client, personal and organisational goals

Helping people with support needs to meet their goals is one of the most rewarding aspects of being a support worker. However, you and your organisation also have goals that need to be met. In many cases, networking and collaboration can be used to meet all of these goals, but you need to define them all carefully first.

Here are some of the important points to consider when identifying these various types of goals.

People's goals

▶ As a primary collaborator, you may need to help people receiving support to identify and define their own goals. Having clearly identified goals also supports people's self-esteem and their rights to self-determination. Check to ensure you understand their goals and whether these have changed.

▶ Goals may include increasing access to specific activities or services, gaining increased independence and community participation.

Organisational goals

▶ Helping to meet your organisation's goals is also part of your daily work activities. These are usually specified in your job description, the organisation's vision and mission statements and any performance indicators, budgetary constraints and other information that you are provided.

Personal goals

▶ Your professional development and job satisfaction are important goals that need to be considered. Apart from your workplace's regular performance reviews (which may help you identify and express your goals), regular self-reflection on your work activities, career goals and professional development opportunities should be part of your regular schedule.

Identify networking and collaborative opportunities that meet goals

With a clearly defined set of personal goals, organisational goals and goals of the people to whom you provide services, you can then begin to assess and consider the range of different networking and collaborative opportunities available. Being strategic about how different networks and collaborations will help you meet specific goals allows you to identify which opportunities to create and follow. Good research is vital in identifying a range of networking and collaborative options.

While some collaborations and networks need to be built from the ground up, using established networks can be extremely efficient to provide best practice services, resources and information. For example, if you need to gain the services of a specific allied health professional, contacting the national network of accredited practitioners is an efficient way of using that network. You could contribute to the network by adding a recommendation to their website.

Here are some examples of established networks that may help you meet various goals.

▶ National Disability Services, at: http://aspirelr.link/nds
▶ Disability Services Australia, at: http://aspirelr.link/dsa
▶ People with Disability Australia (PWDA), at: https://aspirelr.link/pwda

Identify vision and purpose of networking and collaboration

With a clear set of goals and a detailed knowledge of the range of established networks and collaborative opportunities that are relevant for your work, you can begin to refine which options to choose. Understanding the vision and purpose of established industry networks helps identify which ones may assist in reaching specific goals. This process involves clearly identifying your vision and purpose for the networking and collaboration, and matching this vision and purpose with the characteristics and opportunities that each network provides.

For example, you might have a clear goal to improve the health outcomes of a particular person. You have identified several established networks that could provide opportunities to support this goal. In your assessment of which option to follow, you might define the vision and purpose of the proposed collaboration with the person,

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

Practicality

Is this opportunity likely to support goals, outcomes and preferences in practical ways? Can they be measured and documented?

Clarity

Do you have a clear idea of your vision and purpose for the collaboration? Does this match the specific goal?

Alignment

Does the proposed network or collaborator have a vision/mission statement? Does this match your vision and purpose?

Innovation

Sometimes, collaborating with a group or individual with a different vision or purpose can create innovative approaches.

Example

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.

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Practice task 9

1. List two things you should consider when identifying the vision and purpose of a collaboration.

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2. When considering the goals of a person receiving support, provide one aspect that you must always check.

    .

    .

3. Describe what benefits a network can provide when sourcing opportunities for participation.

    .

    .

Click to complete Practice task 9

3B Plan and implement integrated projects and service delivery

Working collaboratively can mean networking and pooling information and expertise. It can also involve working closely with collaborators on specific projects. This involves an integrated approach to project design and management, and shared responsibilities for reaching a specific outcome.

These collaborations can be incredibly productive, as long as the correct foundation is laid. Having clear goals, intended outcomes and defined roles (based on the structure of the networks being used) is vital to ensure services can be delivered in an integrated way that serves all collaborators.

Plan integrated projects that rely on networking and collaboration

Working together with another organisation, team or collaborator on a project can be a great way to broaden the scope of a service, to meet a specific need, or to develop a new activity, procedure or service. Organisations often work together to provide services to people with complex needs, such as multiple disabilities. However, to work together effectively with networks and collaborators on an integrated project, you need to implement strong project management skills.

Initially, identify the goal that you are trying to achieve and develop a relationship with a network or collaborator who can help you reach that goal. In many cases, small organisations will work together to provide joint services or to deliver one-off activities (such as promotional activities or training).

Here are some of the basic stages of project management that you will follow in working with collaborators on an integrated project.

Project management steps

Identify

1 Identify the goal of the project. This can be done independently, and then you can seek out collaborators, or established collaborators can identify a goal together.

Define

2 The scope of the project needs to be clearly defined. Goals and proposed outcomes need to be set and appropriate information needs to be gathered (funding, time frames and so on). Collaborators should work together to define and plan the project in the most efficient manner.

3 **Combine**

At this stage, action strategies need to be confirmed and all collaborators' roles need to be clearly delineated and defined. Resources need to be allocated and ways to avoid service duplication need to be considered.

4 **Coordinate**

Once action strategies have been decided upon by consensus, the specifics of the project need to be coordinated and documented. Everyone needs to be clear about their role and responsibility, and feedback needs to be given and implemented.

5 **Review**

All projects need to be monitored and reviewed to identify challenges and successes, and to make adjustments as needed. All collaborators and stakeholders need to provide feedback and suggestions, which needs, to be thoroughly assessed and evaluated.

Plan structure of integrated projects

All project stages require clear communication between collaborators. Initially, the scope and structure of the project needs to be established, which is often determined by the structure of the network being used. For example, if it is a joint project sponsored by a large, national organisation but carried out by a smaller, local service, the structure of the project will reflect this relationship.

Plan the structure of integrated projects carefully and in close collaboration with all the parties involved. Good planning promotes efficient service delivery. When working on integrated projects, planning is especially important to ensure that the project's collaborators are working together on the project's goals. A project manager coordinates the project and provides a focal point for collaborators to communicate their needs, concerns and suggestions.

Here are some of the structural components of integrated projects to consider.

Goals

Are clear goals defined and agreed upon by all collaborators?

Measurements

Have measurements been set by which the achievement of the project's goals can be observed?

Scope

Has the scope of the project been clearly defined? Who is involved, in what way, for how long, using what and for what reason?

Resources

Are the appropriate resources available and allocated? Are they documented and tracked?

Roles and responsibilities

Are the roles and responsibilities of each collaborator clear, defined and documented?

Time lines

Has a time line been set for the project including commencement, action dates, completion and review?

Actions

Have various action steps been considered, assessed and evaluated? Has a consensus been reached on which steps to implement?

Reviews

Has a monitoring, assessment and reviewing procedure been built into the project? Who is undertaking the review and when? How is feedback sought and assessed?

Debriefs

At completion of the project, are all collaborators debriefed about their experiences and are these communicated to all parties? What have the collaborators learnt from the project and how can this affect service delivery in the future?

Implement integrated projects that rely on networking and collaboration

Planning an integrated project takes time, good communication and a commitment to working together to meet the project's defined goals. Just like planning, the implementation stage of an integrated project requires excellent communication between all parties.

When an action is being implemented, it needs to be observed, monitored and reviewed and any required changes have to be communicated to the entire project group. Often, a project manager oversees the implementation. For example, if two services are working together to expand their reach and provide integrated disability and mental health services, a project manager may be appointed from each service. These two individuals will then oversee their respective organisation's contributions to the project and ensure that the project's stages are integrated with each other effectively. This may involve the managers meeting weekly to review the implementation and to communicate their needs, concerns and suggestions for further action.

Example

Plan and implement integrated projects and service delivery

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

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

Practice task 10

1. List three structural components that you need to consider when integrating projects.

2. When collaborating with another organisation, which step of project management would you confirm the action strategies?

Click to complete Practice task 10

3C Liaise with staff from relevant organisations on a formal and informal basis

One of the challenges of working collaboratively is liaising, cooperating and interacting with staff from other organisations and groups. You are likely to encounter a wide range of personalities and levels of expertise in your networks and collaborations. Understanding how to interact professionally helps to form strong working relationships where innovative collaborations can flourish.

Liaising with staff and colleagues is another form of professional communication, relying on good communication skills, mutual respect and courtesy.

Liaise with key stakeholders from other organisations

Effective communication is essential in establishing and maintaining links within your own organisation and with other services, and to ensure services are responsive, well-coordinated and do not duplicate each other. Key links and communication relationships include those between you and:

▶ other workers in your own organisation

▶ organisations that provide the same type of services

▶ organisations from different types of service sectors; for example council or shire-wide community or human services networks.

Liaise with staff from other organisations on a formal basis

Creating good working relationships with staff from other organisations takes time and commitment. Many of these interactions will occur on a formal basis, such as attending meetings, conferences and workshops; first contacts by phone, email or face-to-face; and introductions via other staff, colleagues or professionals. Specific examples include industry conferences, making referrals and working with health experts, translators and mediators.

Whatever the form, arena or method of communication, treat all others as valued and respected professionals. Keep in mind that your ultimate goal is to work together to provide the best possible services and care, which can only be achieved by collaborating.

Here are some of the key elements to successfully liaising with staff from inside your organisation, or other organisations.

Mutual respect

▶ Respect the people you are working with, and look for ways to give as well as receive. Be open to other people's time frames, preferred methods of contact and needs. Offer your assistance, where appropriate, and return favours.

Preparedness

▶ Gather all the information you need to ensure effectiveness and efficiency. If you do not have information ready, or require approval or consent before moving forward, give the person a time frame for getting back to them.

Communication

▶ Demonstrate active listening, professional communication and openness.

Presentation

▶ Professional presentation is important when representing yourself and the organisation. This applies to personal presentation, documentation, emails, social media and other forms of visual presentation.

Liaise with staff from other organisations on an informal basis

Aside from formal interactions with staff, there will be opportunities to participate with other professionals on a more informal basis.This may include meeting someone in passing, participating in a workshop or attending a professional social event. Informal interactions that create good impressions can lead to formal collaborations.

Here are some basic dos and don'ts for informal interactions.

Dos	Don'ts
▶ Do communicate effectively	▶ Don't gossip
▶ Do respect people's time	▶ Don't hold people up
▶ Do request help when needed	▶ Don't make demands
▶ Do take time for small talk and greetings	▶ Don't ignore the real topic
▶ Do listen (more than you talk)	▶ Don't monopolise the interaction
▶ Do support people's access needs	▶ Don't assume that people have access
▶ Do be friendly and professional	▶ Don't forget that you are a professional
▶ Do maintain relationships	▶ Don't make contact only when you have needs

Be positive

A range of communication skills are required to establish and maintain links with other services and professionals. Part of managing a situation involves applying positive communication skills. This enhances your ability to establish and maintain links with other workers, and demonstrates your value as a potential collaborator who is focussed on solving problems and achievement.

Small changes in language can make a big difference when expressing positivity. Here are some examples of positive and negative ways of communicating.

Positive messages	**Negative messages**
Let's make an appointment so I have the time to answer your questions.	I'm too busy.
Let me find someone who can help you.	I can't help you.
That is an issue we need to address.	That's a problem.

Use questioning techniques

Asking the right question is essential for effective communication and gaining the required information from other professionals. Your questions should always be asked in an open manner that invites the other person to respond. The other person should not feel like they are being cross-examined, judged or patronised.

Some common questioning techniques and when to use them are summarised here.

Closed questions

▶ Closed questions require a very short or single-word answer, such as yes or no.

Open questions

▶ Open questions are phrased to receive a much longer answer than a closed question. They allow people to express their thoughts and opinions.

Probing questions

▶ Probing questions are an extension of open questions. You want to know more details and information about the topic you are discussing. Probing questions clarify the details of what you have heard.

Leading questions

▶ Leading questions are designed to lead the other person to your way of thinking. A leading question will include the direction the question asker wants to go in. They are structured as a question rather than a statement, so that the listener still has freedom in their response.

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.

Meet duty of care

▶ Observe duty of care. While communicating information, you must observe the duty of care you have to people. This means protecting them from potential risk or harm. Before you communicate information, consider if it has dutyofcare implications. For example, discussing that a person lives alone may breach their safety.

Maintain confidentiality

▶ Any personal information about people is highly sensitive and must be kept confidential. This includes information that is communicated internally. For example, it is never acceptable to talk about a person's personal details where other people may overhear. Ensure personal files are locked away securely.

Respect privacy

▶ Respect other people's privacy and personal space. This includes not interrupting people while they are with others and not invading other people's personal space. When working with people in a sensitive situation, take steps to ensure no interruptions occur; for example, switch off mobile phones or lock the door.

Respect people's time

▶ Accept that people are not always available. You and your colleagues can't always be available to your network. There may be times when you are unavailable because you are with people or you have major work commitments. Accept that people can't always be available and arrange a more suitable time for communication.

Follow up

▶ Do what you say you will do in a timely and efficient manner. If you are unable to carry through with actions you have made a commitment to, notify the people concerned and make alternative arrangements.

Example

Liaise with staff from relevant organisations

James is attending a conference with other community service professionals. During the day, he attends lectures, workshops and seminars with a wide range of industry experts, colleagues and professionals. He wears his name badge, takes time to interact with other people and passes out his business card while making positive connections with others. He takes other people's details down and follows up in a few days with an email to re-introduce himself.

In the evenings, many of the conference attendees eat dinner together and James attends. This is a great opportunity to get to know some other people in the industry in a more informal manner. He is friendly and open, but remembers that he is representing his organisation, so he does not participate in gossip and or drink alcohol.

In asking people about themselves and their work, and by being genuinely interested in their responses, he comes away from the conference with a wider network and a number of close contacts that he is looking forward to working with more closely.

Practice task 11

1. Provide two key elements to a formal liaison with another organisation

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2. Describe one questioning technique you can use when informally liaising with person from another service or organisation.

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Click to complete Practice task 11

Summary

1. Making the most of a network or collaborative opportunity involves having clear goals. Professional goals, personal goals and organisational goals are all important considerations when selecting collaborations. Clearly identifying your vision and purpose for the collaboration helps to identify the best options.

2. Many collaborative projects involve integrated service delivery. Following project management techniques ensures that collaborators can plan, implement and document their integrated projects. Clear role boundaries based on the structure of the network or collaboration are vital to undertaking these projects effectively.

3. Liaising with staff effectively involves forming and maintaining strong professional relationships. Be positive, accessible and genuine in your interactions, both in formal and informal settings. Use good communication skills and follow your workplace's communication protocols.

Learning checkpoint 3
Work collaboratively

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in working collaboratively.

1. Describe the first step in identifying collaborative opportunities that meet client, personal and organisational goals?

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2. List two things that should be considered in the scope component of the plan structure.

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3. List two specific examples of ways that you can liaise with another staff on a formal basis.

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4. Describe why it is important to identify the vision and purpose of established networks in the industry.

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5. Once you have identified established networks that could provide opportunities to support a specific goal, how can you determine if the network is appropriate for the person requiring support.

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Topic 4

In this topic you will learn how to:

4A Promote a positive image of the organisation

4B Communicate the organisation's issues, policies and practices

4C Implement confidentiality measures that protect the client, organisation and network

Represent the organisation

In all your work activities, you act as a representative of your organisation. Your networking and collaborative activities provide opportunities for you to promote your organisation by presenting a positive image of what the organisation does, how it operates and its goals. To present this positive image, exhibit the professionalism required to work sensitively with people with support needs, including upholding confidentiality.

In this topic, you will find out how to project a positive, professional image as an organisational representative, including how to implement measures to protect the confidentiality of people with support needs, your organisation and the networks in which you participate.

4A 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).

Working collaboratively

▶ Effective networks are based on cooperation, trust and clear communication. Treat network members with courtesy and respect, and value each network participant for the skills and knowledge they contribute. The goal of work-based networks is to collaborate to provide better services for people. Effective collaboration requires you to consider the needs of other network members, rather than focusing purely on your own needs or those of your organisation.

How to promote a positive image of the organisation

Part of managing any situation involves applying positive communication skills. This enhances your ability to establish and maintain links with other workers, networks and collaborators. Using effective communication skills is one method to promote a positive image of the organisation. Here are some other methods to consider.

Think before speaking and acting

At all times, make sure that you are speaking and acting in a professional manner.

Self-reflect

Regularly take the time to reflect on your actions and words to consider how your represent the organisation.

Focus on solutions

Focussing on solutions rather than problems demonstrates capability and a commitment to problem-solving.

Be well-informed

Be informed about your organisation, its goals, services and projects. What is its place within the industry?

Be friendly

Common courtesy, respect and friendliness create instant rapport, and advertise your organisation as a great collaborator.

Reciprocate

Return favours and be open to other people's needs. Being helpful and interested in others demonstrates your value as a collaborator.

Communicate success

Communicate progress and successes to stakeholders and networks. Let people know what the organisation is achieving.

Promote a positive image of the organisation

Alexandra is attending a workshop to extend her skills. After the first class, many of the other attendees (who are all in the community services industry) get together for coffee.

Jill, one of the attendees starts complaining about the organisation that she works for. 'I'm so over it, really. There's no support from management and we're run off our feet'.

Alexandra has sympathy for Jill's experience but is concerned that she's not acting very professionally.

When asked about her workplace, Alexandra answers, 'Yes, it's a challenging industry to work in, but I love being able to provide tangible help and support to people in need. My organisation has been operating in our community for over twenty years and it's great to realise what we've achieved in that time'.

Practice task 12

1. List two reasons that promoting a positive image of your organisation is important.

2. List two responsibilities when representing your organisation.

Click to complete Practice task 12

4B Communicate the organisation's issues, policies and practices

In networking and collaborative activities, it is important to be clear, concise and appropriately communicate information about your organisation. As an organisational representative, you need to thoroughly understand and be able to communicate your organisation's role, services, policies and practices to people.

Communicating organisational information to others needs to be undertaken within clearly defined boundaries. All collaborative practices and networks need to operate within appropriate legal and ethical considerations about sharing information, including copyright and intellectual property issues.

Appropriate format for communication

All communication must be tailored to suit the recipient. When networking and collaborating, consider the correct format for the purpose of each communication. For example, a mass email to your network is not the appropriate format to communicate sensitive information about people to whom you provide services, as this breaches their rights to confidentiality.

Here are some of the questions that you need to ask yourself to determine the appropriate format for a communication.

Questions for determining the appropriate format for a communication:

▶ Does it contain any private, confidential or copyrighted information? If so, do I have consent to share it?

▶ Who is the recipient and do I need to share this information with them?

▶ What is the purpose of sharing this information? Is it serving a particular need?

▶ Is the format suitable (i.e. is it formal/informal, written/verbal)?

▶ Is the communication style suitable (i.e. is it full of jargon or technical language)?

▶ Does the format support the recipient's needs (i.e. do they have access, language or cultural needs)?

Legal and ethical considerations

As with all your work activities, networking and collaborative practices have to be performed within appropriate legal and ethical boundaries. Not all information is appropriate for sharing, and you must be thoroughly informed about the legal and ethical considerations involved in sharing information. Apart

from upholding privacy and confidentiality, these considerations include sharing information, materials and resources that are copyrighted or are the intellectual property of your organisation or another party.

Copyright and intellectual property

Copyright refers to the legal protection of new material that is created by individuals and organisations. Creators are granted copyright over their creations automatically under the federal *Copyright Act 1968* (Cth). This legal protection is designed to prevent other people profiting from the hard work, creativity and innovation of creators.

Intellectual property (IP) refers to the legal protection of creativity, innovation and product development. In some cases, you need to register your IP for protection, such as the granting of a patent or trade mark. Businesses rely on owning and protecting their IP to help them fund further research and innovation.

You can learn more about copyright and IP via:

▶ The Australian Copyright Council, at: http://aspirelr.link/australian-copyright-council

▶ IP Australia, at: http://aspirelr.link/ip-australia

Copyright and intellectual property considerations

The service you work in may have copyright over any textual materials created, sound and visual recordings, training materials or promotional photographs. Copyright and intellectual property considerations affect what information, resources and materials can be shared with collaborators or networks. Any material that is copyrighted must have permission from the owner before sharing. Any intellectual property may be trademarked and require a license to share with others.

Your service may own IP including, a trademark of a brand, a patent over equipment or a design. Any material that is new and created by the service may be covered by copyright and/or IP legislation. This means that it cannot be shared with others for use without permission. Before using any material within a network, consider whether it might be subject to copyright or IP.

Here are some common terms regarding copyright and IP.

Copyright-free

Copyright does not cover information, ideas, concepts, styles and techniques.

Patent

A patent is a right that is granted for any device, substance, method or process. It is legally enforceable and gives the owner of the patent exclusive rights to commercially exploit the invention.

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.

Example

Communicate the organisation's issues, policies and practices

Claire is working with Andrea on a possible collaboration between their respective organisations. The organisations are separate, but they are investigating the possibility of establishing a network to avoid duplicating services to people in their shared location. Clare and Andrea are meeting at Clare's office to discuss the details.

Andrea is very excited about the project, 'This is great! We can save so much time and funding by specialising in different services. Can I have a look at your client demographics to check that we're covering the same people?' She moves over to Claire's desk and gestures at her computer.

'It'll be on your intranet, right?' She sits at Claire's desk and swivels her chair around.

Claire looks a bit confused. 'I'll have to get those statistics for you later, Andrea. We have a strict policy regarding access to the staff intranet. I'm sure you understand there's a lot of proprietary information that I'm not permitted to share outside the workplace. I think we need to come up with a detailed charter for this collaboration to make it clear what kinds of information we can share and what remains private. I'm really looking forward to working with you on this.'

Practice task 13

1. List two aspects to consider when determining the correct format for communication.

2. Provide a brief definition of copyright.

3. Provide a brief definition of intellectual property.

Click to complete Practice task 13

4C Implement confidentiality measures that protect the client, organisation and network

Although good collaboration is based on openness, shared information and trust, these values must be balanced with confidentiality measures that protect people with support needs, your organisation and the network within which you are collaborating.

There are significant legal and ethical considerations involved in collaborative practice, including privacy, confidentiality and disclosure.

Privacy, confidentiality and disclosure considerations

The main piece of Australian legislation designed to uphold people's privacy and confidentiality is the *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth). People's right to privacy and confidentiality must be upheld at all times and you must not share private information without the person's consent. Your organisation will hold private information that should not be shared with collaborative partners, such as financial information.

The same privacy, confidentiality and disclosure considerations that apply to your work role apply when you are collaborating or networking with another person or organisation. Establish exactly what information needs to be shared, gain consent if required, and establish how the information will be secured once it is shared.

Here are some questions to ask before sharing information within a network or collaboration.

Privacy, confidentiality and disclosure in collaboration questions:

▶ Is the information to be shared necessary to the collaboration and its goals?	▶ Can I de-identify the information to be shared while still retaining the value of the information for the collaboration?
▶ Will sharing the information breach anyone's rights to privacy and confidentiality?	▶ Will the information be stored securely at all times?
▶ Have I gained consent for any relevant information-sharing?	▶ What will be done with the information once the collaboration is complete?
▶ Is the purpose for the information-sharing clear and do I know what will be done with the information?	▶ Do I need to disclose information to appropriate authorities to ensure the safety and wellbeing of a person?

Privacy

When discussing a person's situation in any network or collaboration, always be aware of maintaining the person's privacy and confidential details. There are 13 Australian Privacy Principles (APP) that are requirements when recording, reporting or sharing sensitive information. These are shown below.

Further details about privacy can be found on the Australian Government Office of the Australian Information Commissioner website, at: https://aspirelr.link/oaic.

Collection, use and storage of personal information

1
Open and transparent management of personal information
Ensures that organisations manage personal information in an open and transparent way.

2
Anonymity and pseudonymity
Requires organisations to give individuals the option of not identifying themselves, or of using a pseudonym. Some exceptions apply.

3
Collection of solicited personal information
Outlines when an organisation can collect personal information that is solicited. It applies higher standards to the collection of 'sensitive' information.

4
Dealing with unsolicited personal information
Outlines how organisations must deal with unsolicited personal information.

5
Notification of the collection of personal information
Outlines when and in what circumstances an organisation that collects personal information must notify an individual of certain matters.

6
Use or disclosure of personal information
Outlines the circumstances in which an organisation may use or disclose personal information that it holds.

7
Direct marketing
An organisation may only use or disclose personal information for direct marketing purposes if certain conditions are met.

8
Cross-border disclosure of personal information
Outlines the steps an organisation must take to protect personal information before it is disclosed overseas.

9
Adoption, use or disclosure of government-related identifiers
Outlines the limited circumstances when an organisation may adopt a government-related identifier of an individual as its own identifier, or use or disclose a government-related identifier of an individual.

10
Quality of personal information
An organisation must take reasonable steps to ensure the personal information it collects is accurate, up to date and complete.

11 **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.

12 **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.

13 **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.

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Confidentiality

Services and organisations holding personal information must take all reasonable steps to safeguard confidentiality. Confidentiality applies to written information such as personal details including bank accounts, medications, care plans, family contacts, data collected in a survey or information in a complaints form. A person's record is highly confidential, so when collaborating and networking with another person or organisation, you must ensure that you adhere to privacy legislation.

Implement confidentiality measures

All community service organisations must have confidentiality and privacy policies in place. This is a legislative requirement designed to protect the rights of individuals who use the services. The same principles that apply to organisations apply to networks.

Confidentiality ensures personal and sensitive information relating to people, staff and organisations is kept private and only accessed by people who are authorised to do so, such as the workers providing direct services. Confidentiality measures that can be implemented include having clearly defined role boundaries within a network or collaboration, ensuring that all information is kept secure at all times, confirming how information is stored by the recipient when shared appropriately and obtaining written consent before sharing confidential information.

The following outlines critical points relating to maintaining confidentiality.

Written information

▶ Written information that must be kept confidential includes:
  – any written information that may identify a person, such as their name, contact details, case notes, medical information and individual support or treatment plans
  – meeting minutes
  – letters, emails and faxes relating to people or to organisational and network business
  – applications for funding, packages or programs.

Verbal information

▶ Verbal information that must be kept confidential includes:
  – telephone calls relating to personal information
  – meetings
  – consultations
  – case conferences
  – informal discussions about people.

Personal information

▶ In a networking environment, workers must ensure that they protect confidentiality. This means not discussing organisational plans and activities, individual staff members or any business-related information, unless authorised to do so. Workers who discuss confidential information will quickly lose the trust and respect of their colleagues and supervisors.

Organisational and co-worker information

▶ You may find in networking situations that there is a tendency for individual workers from different organisations to compare notes about their working conditions and management personnel. Take care that you do not discredit your organisation or other employees by making negative comments.

Disclosure of information

There are some instances in which you are permitted to disclose information as part of your duties. For example, if the person in need of support is being referred for medical treatment, the hospital, specialist or doctor needs to know the person's medical history, allergies and other personal details.

A person needs to give their consent to any information about them being released to another person, including networks and collaborators. Permission may be required to receive services from another organisation and to access information held by another organisation.

Sometimes the term 'informed consent' is used. This is a legal term where consent is given based on an appreciation and understanding of the fact s and consequences of a decision or action. A person must understand the relevant facts and must not have impaired judgment at the time of consenting. The different ways of giving consent are provided here.

Signed consent

A person may:

▶ sign a care plan to give consent for the service delivery strategies outlined to be implemented

▶ sign a general consent or release of information form

▶ sign a specific consent form that describes exactly what is being consented to.

If a person is not able to give informed consent, then the next of kin, guardian or a person given power of attorney may sign the consent form.

Verbal consent

The person may give verbal consent via telephone or in person. Examples include:

▶ if a telephone referral is being made the person may speak to the provider and give consent before the coordinator continues the conversation about the service delivery required

▶ when a person makes contact with a service provider, but then hands the telephone over to the coordinator to advocate on their behalf.

Example

Implement confidentiality measures

Simon works for a neighbourhood community service and is planning to join an interagency network that focuses on young people at risk, made up of community organisations from the youth, mental health, homeless and AOD sectors. As this is a particularly sensitive area of work, he is pleased to see that the network has measures in place to protect confidentiality within the network. All network members must:
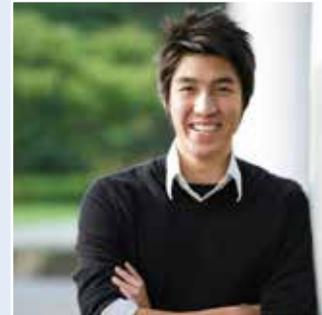
▶ sign a confidentiality agreement requiring them to acknowledge that privacy and confidentiality laws and policies apply to the network

▶ agree not to discuss network business or activities with workers or organisations who are not members of the network.

Practice task 14

1. Name one situation when it may be appropriate to disclose someone's information without consent.

2. List two types of information protected by confidentiality legislation.

3. Name one piece of legislation that is designed to uphold people's privacy and confidentiality.

Click to complete Practice task 14

Summary

1. You represent your organisation at all times, so consider your words and actions, and how others may interpret them. Acting professionally involves communicating your organisation's achievements, services and role in the industry.

2. There are legal and ethical limits to what can be shared with your networks and collaborators. Copyright or intellectual property rights may apply to material created within the workplace or to material that has been licensed for use internally. Before sharing anything with your collaborators, consider the legal and ethical implications of doing so and refer to your workplace's policies and procedures and your supervisor. Using the correct format involves considering these matters.

3. Privacy, confidentiality and disclosure considerations apply to all collaborations and networking activities. Only share information for which you have consent, which is vital for the collaboration and upholds people's rights. Your organisation also has a right to privacy over much of its internal information.

Learning checkpoint 4
Represent the organisation

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in representing the organisation.

1. List two reasons it is important to promote a positive image of your organisation.

2. What are some of the ways to communicate your organisation's issues, policies and practices appropriately to networks and collaborators?

3. Define intellectual property.

4. When collaborating, what kinds of materials may be subject to copyright and intellectual property rights?

5. Describe two ways that you can ensure disclosure of information is permitted.

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6. Describe one way that you could implement confidentiality measures when networking and collaborating.

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    .   .. .

Topic 5

In this topic you will learn how to:

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.

5A Maintain networks and other work relationships

Maintaining strong, productive networks and professional relationships has many benefits for you, your colleagues, your organisation and for the people for whom you provide support services. Clearly identifying the benefits gained from participating in a network is an important activity to encourage further participation, and to ensure that the network is maintained. It is important to nurture and strengthen these relationships as a fundamental resource that you need in order to provide the best possible services and care.

Benefits of networking

It is important to clearly identify the benefits for individual people, for you and for your organisation. Networking allows service providers within the network to coordinate their services. For example, a person's personal care needs may be timetabled to fit in with their community transport to a local club later in the same day. This avoids duplication of services and streamlines services for people.

Wherever possible, specific benefits that arise from networking should be identified and maximised. Networks that provide identifiable benefits can be the target of extended participation.

Organisational benefits of networking and collaboration

The benefits of networking for service providers (organisations) within a network are extensive, particularly involving maximising the resources available.

Some of the many benefits of networking with other service providers are outlined below.

Work and cost efficiencies

A network provides a larger group of people to draw on for help, support and advice.

Sharing resources, venues and equipment reduces spending and increases utilisation of resources. It can result in the need to purchase fewer capital items for each organisation in the network, as organisations may lend resources such as minibuses, hoists or specialist staff.

Benchmarking

Coordinators may use their network to benchmark aspects of service delivery. Benchmarking allows honest comparison of service standards. For example, you might benchmark the caseload a coordinator can manage, and then make a comparison with other services so improvements or changes may be made.

Best practice

Networking allows coordinators to share examples of best practice and duplicate ideas that have worked. For example, one organisation trained people who delivered Meals on Wheels to monitor people's welfare by observing any decline in their condition. This procedure worked successfully, so it was implemented by other organisations in the network.

Industry standards

Networking allows coordinators to have an industry perspective when implementing industry standards into their work practice. Organisations may share policy and work instructions that have been developed to best meet industry standards.

Debriefing and sharing information

Networking provides coordinators the opportunity for debriefing outside of their own organisation. This allows coordinators to get together with other workers to discuss issues they have with people or practices, and to seek assistance to resolve these issues.

Community profile and marketing

Partnerships created through networking may create a profile for the industry in the community, and increase people's awareness of the services your organisation provides. Partnerships also increase market share without undercutting each other for contracts and tenders. For example, a group of service providers in a region may organise an expo to promote all their services and raise their profiles.

Marketing together as a network, rather than separately, or in competition with each other, is more cost-effective. For example, a group of services may advertise the range of services or options they offer to make them more attractive to prospective people.

Fundraising and lobbying

Fundraising jointly and working together, rather than competing for funds, allows more funds to be raised, which may be shared across the entire network.

Lobbying the government is more effective when undertaken by groups of service providers, like those in a network. For example, a group of service providers may highlight the issue of younger people with disabilities living in nursing homes.

Individual benefits of networking and collaboration

There are many benefits to networking and collaboration for individuals. Networking and collaboration allows you to benefit from other people's knowledge, expertise and experience, but also provides opportunities for you to share your own. Support from other colleagues is important to maintain motivation, to increase your skills and knowledge and to innovate. Aside from this, it is often a highlight of the job to work and interact with other service providers.

Importantly, people with support needs benefit from your networking and collaboration. Here are some of the ways that these activities benefit people.

Transition as needs change

▶ As a person's condition changes, they may need to move from home care to residential care or to access other services, experts or resources. Networking provides options for these changing needs, including needs that are outside your competency to provide or cannot be met by your service.

More flexible services

▶ Working with a network provides more flexibility in services. If services can be shared, it is easier for people to access a full range of services. For example, a person going on holiday may require personal care when they are away, and a network may provide them with options to achieve this.

More information

▶ Organisations in a network are able to provide more information to people about the range of options that are available in the community. For example, people receiving home care may not know about respite opportunities, or people may be assessed as eligible for services but not know where to purchase them.

Maintain networks to provide identifiable benefits

Take the time to regularly evaluate the benefits that you, your organisation and people with support needs gain from your networks and collaborations. Ask yourself specific questions and trace where these benefits are arising and whose needs are being met.

This kind of reflection and evaluation allows you to identify which networks are beneficial and which are less so. This information allows you to make appropriate decisions about the networks that you participate in. In some cases, you may want to strengthen your participation in a network. In others, you may want to limit or change your participation.

Here are some of the questions that you can ask yourself to evaluate and maintain your networking activities.

Maintaining networks:

▶ Have I identified any benefits from participating in this network?
▶ Who benefits from participating in this network?
▶ Can these benefits be extended by further participation?
▶ Could another network provide more benefits?
▶ Could I adapt my participation to create greater benefits?
▶ Does my participation benefit others in the network?

Strategies to maintain networks

There are many different strategies that you can use to maintain your networking relationships. This is an important professional activity, as efficient, functional networks optimise the services that you can provide people in your care. Schedule regular time to employ these strategies and to consider new ways to support your networks and increase your participation.

Establish and maintain links with services

Establishing and maintaining direct, courteous and up-to-date connections with other services in your network creates efficient pathways for service delivery. Here are some of the ways that you can establish and maintain links with other services.

Referrals

▶ If you provide services to people, then one of the main contacts you will have with another service is via referrals. You may be responsible for managing all referrals on behalf of a person. Remember to keep an up-to-date file of services you refer people to and their referral details, and follow up each referral made. Take the time to meet the intake workers at larger agencies such as general practices, community health services, housing and homelessness services, family support services, mental health services, addiction services and family violence services.

Telephone contact

▶ Personal contact via the telephone or face-to-face enhances relationships and avoids any misunderstandings. Use the telephone to introduce yourself to new services on your contact list. Keep telephone calls brief and to the point. Do not phone workers on their mobile telephones unless you have been invited or instructed to do so. It's important to keep an up-to-date telephone contact list.

Worker networks

▶ Worker networks are an excellent forum to familiarise yourself with other workers and the services they represent. Worker networks may be internal (staff meetings, project working groups, special interest groups, committee groups) or external to your organisation (state, regional or local service sector networks, referral network meetings, project working groups, state, regional or local committees).

Informal contacts

▶ Contacts can also be informal, such as friends, family, acquaintances, and members of the community or workers who have specific information of interest to you. For example, you may have a cousin whose father has used a particular stroke support service, or a friend who work for a service. You can contact them to find out how supportive they have found that service.

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.

Maintain active participation in relevant networks

It takes time to develop relationships and networks with other services. There are a number of actions to help you maintain active participation in networks. Firstly, you need to understand what makes an effective networker. The following information explains what effective networkers do, in comparison with ineffective networkers.

Effective networkers	Ineffective networkers
▶ Keep in touch regularly.	▶ Contact people only when they need something.
▶ Build productive relationships over time.	▶ Focus on their own products, services or needs on first contact.
▶ Return favours whenever possible.	▶ Fail to reciprocate when others need help.
▶ Receive help graciously.	▶ Are discourteous or unappreciative of others' help.
▶ Respect people's time.	▶ Expect too much help. Only aims for power brokers.
▶ Realise that each contact has something to offer.	

Keep in contact

Regular contact means you remain up to date with information and that other participants know you are still actively involved in the network. If you do not make the effort to keep in regular contact, people may assume you no longer want or need to be kept informed. You may also lose contacts if they move on to other roles or organisations without your knowledge.

If you become known as a resource for others, people are more likely to approach you for ideas and contacts. This shows you are committed to two-way networking, demonstrates trust and increases your own chances of being offered help and opportunities in the future. Plan when to contact people, including regular network or regional meetings. Send information to others about new programs or changes to funding requirements that they may find useful.

Follow up

Always follow up any referrals you are given quickly and efficiently. This reflects positively on you, your organisation and the person who gave you the referral. It also provides opportunities for new contacts to be developed. Choose a follow-up strategy that best meets the needs of the people you are contacting, the resources you have available and your expectations of the process. This follow-up strategy could be undertaken via email, phone, letter or a face-to-face meeting.

There may be times when contacts cease to be relevant to your network and it is no longer appropriate to keep in touch. For example, when an organisation's strategic focus shifts, people's roles or your needs may change.

Here are some considerations about following up.

Considerations when following up

▶ A group email may be best to contact all the providers of a service.

▶ A phone call may be better for a one-off referral.

▶ Face-to-face meetings are often the most effective form of follow-up, as there are fewer distractions and you can assess the person's response closely.

▶ Select a time and place that suits the person you are following up with and respect their time by being well prepared.

▶ Do not expect an immediate response every time.

Ensure information is current

Having out-of-date information may significantly reduce the benefits of being part of a network and may affect the efficiency of your organisation. Time and effort can be wasted using information that is dated or no longer relevant. The following describes a range of reasons why you should keep information current.

Contacts

▶ People in key positions may leave or their areas of responsibility may change. Also, contact details may change, due to relocation, or key contacts may be absent or on extended leave.

▶ Existing and well-established relationships may need to be re-established with someone else when the previous person is promoted, relocated or goes on leave.

Services

▶ Services may change due to increased or decreased demand or funding, and there may be changes to national standards, addresses, delivery methods and service delivery partnerships. New services may be introduced and new person groups may emerge. Infrequently used services may cease, and services may be improved due to feedback.

▶ Services may be put to public tender at each new funding cycle. You need to know who has been successful in each funding round and who now provides the services. For example, the Department of Veterans' Affairs and several local councils do this annually or biannually.

Agencies

▶ Agencies may relocate, be taken over or combine, and new agencies may emerge. New regulatory authorities may be created and new strategic directions may take place. Agencies may also form new partnerships.

▶ As part of its strategic planning cycle, a national organisation may, for example, decide that it is not cost-effective to continue to provide services in regional areas. You should be aware of what new organisations emerge to fill the market gap created.

Example

Maintain networks and other work relationships

Carla has scheduled an hour to connect with her networks. She begins by logging in to several industry forums to read other peoples posts and contribute to discussions. She checks her email and follows up on a couple of enquiries sent by colleagues within her organisation and others from different services.

She goes over her contact list and realises that she has not heard from Margot for some time. Carla and Margot worked together on a joint project last year. She picks up the phone and calls Margot.

'Hi Margot, it's Carla from XYZ Services. It's been a while since we last spoke, and I just wanted to let you know that I really enjoyed collaborating with you last year and I'm here if I can help in any other way. I hope you have a great day'.

Later that day, Carla receives a return call from Margot who was happy to hear from Carla. They schedule a lunch meeting next week to discuss further collaborations.

Practice task 15

1. What are two benefits of maintaining networks for your organisation?

2. What are two benefits of networking for people with support needs?

3. What are two ways that participating in networks benefits you?

Click to complete Practice task 15

5B 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 Tool (Program to analyse, record and track networks to enhance relationships), at: http://aspirelr.link/partner-tool

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
Feedback 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.
Study the data 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.
Reward teamwork Celebrate success and reward teamwork. Acknowledging and rewarding success is important for motivation and team cohesion.

Broaden the network
Are there other collaborators or groups who could contribute to the network? New input supports innovation and creativity.

Research competitors
What are other networks, organisations or teams doing? Could you benefit from a different approach? Always look for new ideas, tools and expertise.

Maintain networks and collaborative partnerships

Improvement strategies can be applied as a way to maintain your current networks and collaborative partnerships. Taking the time to connect with your collaborative partners and asking them how the process has been working for them is a useful way to demonstrate your commitment to teamwork and continuous improvement.

All professional relationships are based on respect, courtesy and good communication. Make sure that you express your gratitude to your collaborators and restate your interest in continuing and improving the partnership.

Example

Improve and maintain networks and collaborative partnerships

Debbie is the project manager of her service's integrated service delivery activities. This position involves interacting with a wide range of stakeholders and collaborators, and she wants to maintain and improve all these relationships.

Many of her collaborators are from smaller organisations, and Debbie knows that some do not know each other. To build a stronger network, she decides to hold a meet-and-greet network meeting so that her collaborators can get together and meet in person. She allocates some funding and investigates appropriate locations where all the collaborators could meet and share a meal.

Debbie also wants to know detailed information about each of the collaborators and their experience integrating services with her organisation. With each email invitation to the meet-and-greet, Debbie also sends out a short questionnaire asking each collaborator to identify:

▶ what benefits they have identified from the collaboration

▶ any gaps or concerns they have regarding the collaboration

▶ any other needs that they think could be met by the collaboration

▶ any suggestions for extending and improving the collaboration.

She closes the email with a personalised thank you to each collaborator, expressing her gratitude for their hard work and commitment to providing support services to community members. Debbie is looking forward to the lunch meeting, not only as a thank-you gesture to her collaborators, but as a way to form a more integrated network that could lead to even better collaborations and improved service delivery.

Practice task 16

1. List two strategies you can use for improvement of network and collaboration partnerships.

.   .. .

.   .. .

2. How can studying data help you improve collaborations?

.   .. .

.   .. .

Click to complete Practice task 16

5C Monitor benefits to worker, organisation and person group

As with any workplace activity, it is important to monitor how your networking and collaborations are operating in terms of benefitting you, your organisation and the people to whom you provide services. These benefits are not always obvious, so careful consideration needs to be taken to identify which collaborations and networks are providing benefits and to identify any changes that you may need to make. Understanding the values, limitations and dynamics of networks and collaborative partnerships helps you to identify how they are assisting all stakeholders in providing the best possible services and care.

Monitor participation in networks against benefits

Participating in networks requires time and effort. Workers and organisations must monitor network outcomes to ensure people you work with, colleagues and the organisation obtain benefits from their participation.

Organisations and workers may monitor the value of network participation in several ways, as outlined below.

Methods

▶ Examine reports and notes written by workers who are network members.

▶ Encourage regular discussions between workers who participate in networks and their supervisors.

▶ Hold meetings to review and identify the benefits of ongoing participation in particular networks (or lack of benefits).

▶ Obtain feedback on workers' experiences of networks.

Considerations

▶ Is the network managed in an effective way, and is it meeting its stated aims?

▶ How well does the network meet the networking needs of the organisations, workers and groups?

▶ What specific benefits have the organisations and workers obtained from belonging to the network?

▶ What constraints limit their participation in the network?

Check that a network is beneficial

To help you determine whether a network is successful in providing benefits for you, your organisation and the people you work with, you may need to consider the characteristics of effective and ineffective networks. These are outlined below.

An effective network

An effective network:

▶ has a clear purpose, guidelines and goals that reflect the needs of members

▶ has meetings that are interesting, informative and relevant to needs

▶ provides convenient locations and times for meetings

▶ promotes constructive processes for resolving any conflicts between members

▶ encourages effective communication and decision-making among members

▶ promotes trust and a collective identity by encouraging the sharing of tasks and responsibilities

▶ is mindful of not wasting members' time

▶ encourages input from all members and does not allow a few individuals or organisations to dominate proceedings

▶ has regular meetings that are well-attended.

An ineffective network

An ineffective network:

▶ has no clear purpose

▶ does not have a strong vision

▶ has a lack of trust

▶ has a lack of cohesion among network members

▶ is unable to achieve goals

▶ has irregular meetings and activities

▶ often leaves conflict within the group unresolved

▶ has poor attendance at meetings and activities

▶ has a lack of willingness among members to participate in group projects.

Constraints to networking

A number of factors that may limit the benefits that organisations and workers gain from participating in networks. These include constraints that affect your ability to make effective use of a network. You may need to consider changing the way you participate in networks or what type of networks to join. For example, you may change from physical participation to electronic participation, or find a network that is more suitable for the time and resources you have available.

The following are some of the constraints you may experience.

Lack of time

▶ In busy community service organisations, workers may find it difficult to make the time to go to network meetings or to participate in interagency work groups.

Limited resources

▶ Workers from smaller organisations may find it difficult to participate at the same levels as workers from larger organisations, due to tighter budgets and fewer staff.

Lack of clear understanding of networking needs

▶ Organisations and workers who do not clearly establish what their networking needs are may benefit less from network participation than those who do.

Poor network management

▶ Poorly managed networks often fail to achieve their objectives, and can cause frustration for their members; for example, poorly run meetings may result in a few members dominating proceedings and ignoring the needs and contributions of others.

Travel time or inconvenience

▶ If a worker has to travel long distances or through heavy traffic to attend network meetings, they may feel less inclined to go or to participate with enthusiasm.

Lack of awareness of networking benefits

▶ Some workers may find that their organisation's management does not understand or support networking activity; for example, they may believe that the organisation and people you work with are better served by workers staying at work rather than attending networking meetings.

Network benefits for workers, organisations and people

There are many benefits to networking for all stakeholders. The benefits that workers, people and organisations can expect to receive from a network are presented below.

Worker benefits

▶ Professional development opportunities

▶ Opportunities to use communication and problem-solving skills in group situations

▶ Peer support and review among members

▶ Opportunities to collaborate with interagency workers

▶ Information-sharing opportunities

▶ Opportunities to build relationships with other workers who have a range of skills, experience and resources

▶ An increased range of contacts within the community and other sectors

Organisation benefits

▶ Professional development for workers

▶ Information that supports planning and policy development; for example, information about funding initiatives, changes to government policy and emerging community, and social and political issues

▶ More efficient use of resources via pooling and collaboration on projects

▶ Increased awareness of other services and expertise available in the community

▶ Opportunities for group advocacy and lobbying

▶ Coordination of services to avoid duplication and identify areas of need in the community

Person benefits

▶ The main benefit that people can expect from organisation and worker participation in networks is more coordinated service delivery; for example, AOD and mental health services working together to integrate services for people with dual diagnoses.

▶ Networks also benefit person groups because they enable organisations and workers to share information and resources with other agencies and services. This allows organisations and workers to have access to a broader skill, knowledge and resource base, which has flow-on benefits for service provision to people.

Values of networks and partnerships

The values of networks and partnerships should be clearly understood and stated at the beginning of any collaborative project. These values are likely to form some of the goals of the collaboration or network. All parties should contribute to defining and redefining the values of that specific network and partnership to help monitor the benefits of participation.

Some of these values could include:

▶ working together to provide specialised services

▶ working together to provide flexible services

▶ professional support, education and training

▶ respecting and valuing all people's contributions in working collaboratively.

Limitations of networks and partnerships

All networks and partnerships have their limitations. These limitations should be identified and addressed to see if they can be overcome or managed more efficiently. Regular reviewing procedures should help to identify these limitations, but it is important to regularly self-assess to identify any gaps.

Any limitations that are identified in the service should be documented and monitored by the team, as well as any attempts to address the limitation. This will form valuable data to monitor and assess the benefits of participating in the network or partnership.

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

Example

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?

Practice task 17

1. Name two methods you could use to monitor participation of a network or partnership.

    . ...

    . ...

2. What are two characteristics of a successful network?

    . ...

    . ...

3. What are two common limitations encountered in networks and collaborations?

    . ...

    . ...

Click to complete Practice task 17

5D Evaluate strengths and weaknesses of collaborations and recommend actions

Collaborations, networks and their results need to be regularly evaluated to ensure that you are optimising what you are gaining from them, and what you can contribute. Evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of a collaboration allows you to identify any challenges and make recommendations for actions to improve your services.

Evaluate strengths and weaknesses

Networking and collaborations should be assessed and evaluated for their strengths and weaknesses in order to identify how to make improvements. You can also use this information to understand and improve how to engage with networks and collaborations in the future. Evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of collaborations enables recommendations for action, such as whether to maintain the current activities, adapt them or seek further collaboration.

Periodically during your participation in a network or collaboration, and at completion (for time-based collaborations), carefully evaluate what benefits were gained from involvement, how stated goals were met and what you have learnt from the experience. Equally, evaluate the weaknesses and challenges of the relationship and identify unmet goals.

Structure your evaluation using the following headings.

Evaluation areas
Communication How well did this function and could it be improved?
Resources Were they sufficient and shared appropriately?
Roles and responsibilities Did everyone understand and fulfil their role?
Goals Were clear goals defined initially? Were these goals met?
Teamwork Did all members function well as a team? Was there a cohesive team identity?
Lessons learnt What was the takeaway from this experience?

Make recommendations for action

As a result of your evaluation, you will have a clear, defined list of benefits to participating in the network or collaboration, as well as a number of identified strengths and weaknesses. This information is valuable, not only to yourself, but to your organisation and the other collaborators. Some joint partnerships and collaborations build in an evaluation and recommendation stage, so that adaptations and changes can be made as needed. At the completion of a project, a report should be generated that can be given to all relevant parties, such as stakeholders, other collaborators and management. This report should contain clear, detailed and specific recommendations for action.

Common recommendations for action include the following.

Resource recommendations

▶ Recommendations regarding the need for further resources, how to access and share them and how to fundraise or lobby for additional resources are common. Make specific recommendations regarding services used, time lines, use between the collaborators and suggestions for alternative or improved sourcing and purchasing.

Communication recommendations

▶ Ways to improve communication between collaborators is a common action to recommend. This information is vital to facilitate improved, more efficient collaborations and services in the future.

Goal-based recommendations

▶ Did the collaboration or networking lead to the specified goals being met? Why or why not? Successful practices and strategies can be transferred to other collaborations and unsuccessful practices are just as useful in terms of recommending actions for the future.

Example

Evaluate strengths and weaknesses of collaborations to recommend actions

Carlos is writing a report for his supervisor about his experiences working with another organisation to provide integrated services to Niall, a person with support needs. Carlos has been keeping detailed notes about the collaboration, which he refers to in producing his report.

The proposed goals for Niall included increasing his social access and to transition to employment. Carlos reviews Niall's service plan and the collaboration documentation, and finds that Niall has substantially increased his social activity and is nearing completion of a transition-to-work program, which is administered by the collaborating organisation.

Carlos prepares a report for his supervisor using de-identified information about Niall and the collaborative practices used to fulfil his support needs. Carlos is happy to recommend working with the collaborative organisation again, but has additional recommendations for meeting Niall's changing needs and to extend the collaboration to help other people.

Carlos requests feedback on the process of collaboration with his partner in the collaborating organisation, and checks in with Niall to confirm that his needs are being met. He prepares a list of detailed, specific recommendations including more scheduled contact with people and collaborators, formalising the collaboration into a joint partnership and investigating shared promotional opportunities for the two organisations.

Practice task 18

1. List two evaluation areas that need to be considered to make improvements.

. ...

. ...

2. List two things that can be identified when evaluating the strengths of a network or collaboration.

. ...

Click to complete Practice task 18

Summary

1. Good networking relationships need to be maintained. Identifying the benefits that you, your organisation and people with support needs gain from participating in each network helps determine how to participate further. Keeping in regular contact, following up and using current information all help you to maintain strong connections with your networks.

2. Networking and collaborations need to have the same commitment to continuous improvement as all other work activities. Taking time to connect, ask for feedback and review data all assist to improve and maintain current networks and partnerships.

3. Ongoing monitoring and assessment is needed to identify benefits to participating in a network or collaboration. Clear, cohesive ideas about the values, limitations and dynamics of the network need to be understood and communicated.

4. All networking and collaborations should be evaluated for strengths and weaknesses. This should lead to a number of recommendations for action that can be used to improve collaborative practices in the future.

Learning checkpoint 5
Maintain and enhance networks and collaborative partnerships

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in maintaining and enhancing networks and collaborative partnerships.

1. Provide one reason it is important to maintain networks and other work relationships.

2. List two strategies that you can use to improve and maintain networks and collaborative partnerships?

3. List two values of networks and partnerships.

4. Provide two indicators you can use to monitor whether or not the network and collaboration is beneficial.

5. When evaluating a collaboration, who should receive the evaluative report?