

School Councils Information Module

1 Introduction

School councils drive the involvement of the community in setting the school's strategic direction and tone as well as endorsing important decisions such as strategic plans and budgets. This module is designed to provide information about the effective management of school councils including their purpose, their relationship with other governance and advisory bodies in the school, their establishment and constitution and how they can help develop the school's strategic direction and key partnerships. This module can also be used to provide information about key school council roles and responsibilities to principals and new and prospective members.

School councils are also an essential and mandatory component of accountability in schools participating in the Independent Public Schools initiative.

This module has been developed as part of the support package for IPS schools but has been made available to support any school that chooses to establish a school council.

See also [Independent Public Schools Prospectus \(PDF, 920K\)](#)

2 Purpose

Education Queensland recognises that good decision-making often occurs at a local level through direct engagement with the needs and aspirations of the school community.

School councils are the primary mechanism for ensuring these needs and aspirations are addressed. School councils contribute to the strategic leadership of the school and act as the bridge between the school and its local community including staff, parents, governments, community groups and local business and industry.

With the freedom to respond to community needs and through the use of local expertise, school councils are well-positioned to embrace innovation to maximise student learning outcomes.

School councils play an important role in reviewing and/or approving school-based innovations such as:



- working autonomously with local businesses, industry and other community organisations, leading to innovative models for sponsorship, industry and infrastructure partnerships
- contributing strategically to the shape of curriculum offerings that suit the needs of students, for example: International Baccalaureate programs, extracurricular programs, gateway programs and centres of excellence
- using local flexibility over finance and human resources to ensure resourcing and staffing plans meet local needs
- the development, use and sharing of facilities and resources.

Independent Public Schools

In particular, the principal of an *Independent Public School* has autonomy to:

- participate with local councils, industry and their community to plan joint facilities
- contract and manage their own maintenance using QBuild or contractors. School councils may have input into the principal's deliberations, but may not enter contracts
- develop and implement a Strategic Infrastructure (Assets) Plan directly with central office. School councils may provide input to the principal.

School councils offer Independent Public Schools the opportunity to draw on the professional networks and expertise of members to complement the educational expertise that already exists in the school. Schools can use this opportunity to develop innovative partnerships and educational programs to achieve the best outcomes for students.

Fostering innovation

School councils foster innovation when they:

- monitor the school's strategic direction
- approve and monitor the implementation of:
 - school plans and policies of a strategic nature
 - other documents affecting strategic matters, including the annual estimate of revenue and expenditure for the school.
- advise the school's principal about strategic matters.

The school council must perform its functions in a way that achieves the best learning outcomes for the school's students.



Out of scope

Areas outside the scope of responsibility for a school council include:

- input on school operations, implementation and the direction of school staff in their work duties
- managing the principal, teachers or staff
- management of day-to-day operations of the school and its curriculum
- operational decisions about the use of teaching or learning resources at the school
- decisions about the individual teaching styles used, or to be used, at the school
- controlling funds
- entering into contracts
- representing external sectional interests
- acquiring, holding, disposing of or dealing with property
- establishing a committee or subcommittee
- fundraising
- advising on class allocations.

In addition, council members must not make any decision that is contrary to legislation, industrial instruments, directives, delegations, whole-of-government policy or national agreements. They cannot sue other parties or be sued.



3 Interaction between school entities

Schools have three main entities with separate responsibilities to ensure the school's efficient functioning:

1. **The principal** is responsible for leading the strategic direction of the school, planning, reviewing and reporting, as well as day-to-day school operations. Principals have performance agreements established within their departmental line of reporting, not to the school council. (In the case of *Independent Public Schools*, a principal's performance agreement is with the Director-General directly).
2. **The school council** has an accountability role and is responsible for informing and monitoring the school's strategic direction, thereby strengthening local decision-making. Members are responsible for approving strategic documents that set the direction, culture and tone of the school.
3. **The Parents and Citizens' (P&C) Association** has a support and advice role and is responsible for school fundraising activities.

Table 1 (below) outlines the responsibilities of the three entities.

Table 1 — School entities and responsibilities

		Responsibilities			
		Governance	Advice	Operations	Fundraising
Entities	Principal	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
	School council	Yes	Yes	No	No
	P&C	No	Yes	No	Yes

The P&C can provide advice and guidance to a school and raise funds on its behalf. However it does not have accountability responsibilities. The school council, on the other hand, has an accountability and advisory responsibility but not an operational or fundraising responsibility.

However, it is important that the school council and the P&C function well together. Both entities are well positioned to advise the principal and school leadership, as well as each other. A key role for school principals is facilitating a productive working relationship between the two entities.

The establishment of a school council will not have any impact on existing P&C functions. However, there are some important interactions that should be noted:



- The P&C president, or nominee, is automatically on the school council as an official member along with the principal. The P&C president's role on the school council is to represent the views of the P&C.
- Staff members, parents, or community members are eligible for P&C membership and therefore election to the office of president.
- Prior to the establishment of a school council, the P&C president must call a special meeting to approve the proposed school council's draft constitution.



4 Establishing and operating the school council

The Department's [School Councils](#) procedure outlines the processes for the establishment, operation and dissolution of school councils. The procedure includes a model constitution for school councils to adopt within their local context.

The procedure provides guidance on various aspects of school council operations which are summarised below. For full details, refer to the procedure and the school council model constitution, which are available through [OnePortal](#).

Establishment

Schedule 2 *Procedures of the model constitution* outlines the establishment procedure which begins with the principal using the draft model constitution as a starting point and involves consultation with staff, students, P&C, parents and local community members and groups. The process results in the school council being established through election/appointment of members. The process has been summarised in a flowchart provided in the [School Councils](#) procedure.

Membership

The [School Councils](#) procedure and the model constitution define the membership and officers of a school council. This includes the size and a defined mix of official members, elected staff members, elected parent members, appointed members, and elected or co-opted student members and how these various types of members join the school council.

In particular, elections should be held at the beginning of the school year, in February or March. School councils must meet at least twice in each semester.

Table 2 (below) outlines school council member types and roles. Please note, it is assumed all members are employed at, students of, or parent and community members of the school.



Table 2 — School council member types and roles

Member type	Description	Model constitution clause**	Term
official members	Principal and President of P&C (if one exists) or P&C president's nominee	5	For duration of their official role (e.g. principal, P&C president)
elected staff members	Teaching and non-teaching staff	7	Half the <i>first</i> elected staff members may hold office for 3 years (Schedule 2, cl.11). Otherwise 2 years.*
elected parent members	Parents and carers of students	6	Half the <i>first</i> elected parent members may hold office for 3 years (Schedule 2, cl.11). Otherwise up to 2 years.*
appointed members	Industry/community members	10	2 years*
elected student members	Students in Years 10–12	8	1 year while enrolled*
co-opted student member	Students in Year 7 of <i>Independent Public Schools</i> without students in Year 10–12.	11	1 year while enrolled
chairperson	School council elects one member as chairperson (except a co-opted student member or principal)	14	Term decided by school council unless the person's term as a member of the council ends sooner than their term as Chairperson
secretary	School council elects one member as secretary (except a co-opted student member or principal)	15	Term decided by school council unless the person's term as a member of the council ends sooner than their term as Secretary

* Under cl.13.2 if a vacancy occurs in the office of an elected or appointed member during their term, another person must be elected or appointed to fill the vacancy for the remainder of the vacating member's term.

** See also model constitution — Schedule 3: *Staff and Parent Election Procedures*



Council composition

A school council must include at least one elected:

- parent member
- staff member
- student member (if the school enrolls students in Years 10–12).

A school council must include no more than:

- two elected student members
- two appointed members.

The official members of a school council are:

- the principal
- the P&C president (or nominee).

The model constitution provides a table in Schedule 5, showing the possible compositions for primary schools and for secondary schools (or those enrolling students in years 10–12).

Where a school council provides for two elected staff members, one must be a member of the teaching staff and one non-teaching.

Voting rights

All members of a school council (except co-opted student members) are able to vote at council meetings.

Attendance

All school council meetings require attendance of at least one elected parent member and the same number of elected staff members. However, best practice would be to include two staff members (including, but extending beyond teaching staff) and therefore, two parent members, to capture broader perspectives.

Quorum

A quorum establishes how many school council members must be present in order to conduct the meeting. In the model constitution this is set at two-thirds of the school council members, and the quorum must be present within 30 minutes of the advertised start of the meeting.

Chairperson

A school council must elect one member as chairperson. The school's principal may not be elected as chairperson, and nor may a co-opted student member, however the P&C president is eligible.

The school council's chairperson must preside at all council meetings they attend.



Term

Each elected or appointed member holds office for the term (maximum two years) stated in the school council's constitution.

However, if newly established, the council's constitution may provide for half of the first elected members to hold office for a maximum term of three years.

Majority vote

The answer to a question at a school council meeting, other than a question about a constitutional amendment, must be decided by a majority of the votes of the council members present.

Vacancies and removal of members

Schools councils will deal with vacancies that arise for a number of reasons including death, resignation, eligibility change, a member ceasing to attend meetings and students no longer being enrolled. The model constitution deals with these in Clause 13.

Dissolution

The school council can be dissolved by the Chief Executive and Minister under clause 28. These provisions would be activated if the school for which the school council was established is closed, or the Minister gives notice that the council is dissolved.

More information

[School Councils: A Guide for Members](#), Ontario Ministry of Education — for ideas on how to engage parents and community (see section 5.8) and how to recruit community representatives (section 5.3).

[Involving Parents in the School: Tips for School Councils](#), Ontario Ministry of Education



5 Strategic planning

Induction of new members

The induction of new school council members should introduce them to:

- rules, roles, and responsibilities of being a member
- terminology and acronyms specific to education
- compulsory school and departmental policies, procedures and other requirements
- the school's organisational structure
- the key stakeholders and their roles
- where to go for more information.

Independent Public Schools — annual school self-assessment

A key added autonomy available to independent Public Schools is to undertake an annual school self-assessment against agreed performance targets. The school council will approve performance targets and strategies as part of the schools strategic planning. In addition, as part of its role in monitoring the school's strategic direction, the school council will be responsible for endorsing the school's performance against planned targets.

Goals and priorities

School councils are a vital partner in the development of the school's strategic direction. To be effective, school councils need to establish clear priorities and goals aligned with the school's direction, and work consistently towards achieving them. This allows the school council and its members to be consistent in their focus and work towards achieving agreed outcomes. It also allows a school council to identify one or more areas to focus on in a particular period of time and what members wish to achieve during their term in office.

The priorities a school council chooses can assist the principal in their planning processes to address the expectations of the school community and support the strategic direction and policies of the school. By discussing current priorities and outcomes, and exploring potential changes to support continual improvement, the council provides the principal with a broad context to support decisions about future directions at the school. The council may wish to explore planning questions such as:

- **Where are we now — how well are we doing?**
This question is about the current state of the school. It is the question that helps define the nature of issues to be addressed and problems to be solved. It is how a sense of urgency is developed to lead change. To answer this question, current and potential issues need to be identified. Schools have



access to a range of data about performance that can be used to inform this analysis including student academic performance, attendance, behaviour management and responses to school consultation activities such as surveys and forums. School councils may also consider information about finance, current resources and assets.

- **What do we want to achieve — where do we want to be**
This question drives the development of a future vision for the school. This question can help articulate both the destination to arrive at, and the benefits the school community is seeking from realising the vision. In Independent Public Schools this includes the approval and monitoring of performance against an annual school self-assessment. The School Planning, Reviewing and Reporting Framework outlines the fundamental requirements of implementing state and national reforms.

The school council may also wish to explore implementation and evaluation questions such as:

- **How will we get there?**
This is where strategies and interventions are considered, including changes (new ways of doing things) and assets (things to develop or acquire). In any organisation's strategic planning, there is a temptation for members to attempt this question first — promoting one or other particular solution — but to ensure the planning is both evidence-based and strategic, it is important to address the first two planning questions before determining strategies and interventions.
- **What will success look like and how will we know?**
How will members know the school council has achieved the vision and realised its benefits? This question allows the development of qualitative and quantitative performance indicators used to evaluate progress, and mechanisms to evaluate progress.
- **When does this need to happen?**
Good strategic planning includes timeframes such as destinations and progress points which can be used within the school governance model to make decisions about ongoing planning directions.

Questions such as these help elicit conversations with council members and the community, and ensure goal-setting is based on a group agreement about priorities. They promote evidence-based planning informed by the full range of perspectives that council members bring. They help principals to help councils reach a clear and agreed model of issues to be solved and the opportunities to be seized. Most importantly they can help avoid the organisational pitfall — of choosing solutions and interventions before full consideration of all issues.



Strategic planning — a process:

The school's four-year strategic plan and annual implementation plan will have the same elements as currently required under the [School Planning, Reviewing and Reporting Framework 2012–2015](#). All school plans must be approved by the school council. The school council also takes on a monitoring role of the plans and direction, providing high-level strategic advice to the principal.

(For more information see [2.7 Legislation, policy and accountability](#))

One possible approach is:

- developing a vision based on gathered information about the school and the agreed goals and priorities
- determining the strategies to achieve the vision
- defining procedures to monitor progress
- defining measures to evaluate progress
- using evaluation data to review priorities and goals.

Your information sources can include existing policies and procedures, as well as reports and data related to finance, performance and capacity.

It is also important that you establish procedures for monitoring your progress and use the information from these evaluation activities to review your priorities and goals.

Increased flexibility for Independent Public Schools

School councils in Independent Public Schools provide strategic advice taking into account the increased flexibility and autonomy available to their schools. While operational matters are outside the scope of school councils, strategic planning should consider that the following flexibilities are available to principals of Independent Public Schools:

- a direct line of communication with the Director-General and other senior executives who help prioritise innovation by paving a smooth path through departmental processes
- the freedom to directly recruit staff and to build a team that is fit-for-purpose to drive innovation
- more autonomy to manage and utilise infrastructure, financial resources and human resources
- opportunities to work in new ways with local businesses, industry and other community organisations
- an option to pursue creative models of sponsorship, industry partnerships and infrastructure partnerships



- increased flexibility to shape curriculum offerings that suit the needs of their students e.g. International Baccalaureate programs, extracurricular programs, gateway programs and centres of excellence
- freedom to shape and deliver innovative educational practices that maximise outcomes for students.

Further resources:

- Ontario Ministry of Education – School Councils
(<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/council/>)
- School Councils: A Guide for Members (pp 6.2–6.4)
(<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/council/council02.pdf>)
- John Kotter's 8 step model for leading bold change
(http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newPPM_82.htm)
- Victoria DTF's Investment Logic Mapping
(<http://www.dtf.vic.gov.au/CA25713E0002EF43/pages/investment-management-theory-behind-the-ims-investment-logic-map>)
- SMART Goal Setting
(<http://www.goal-setting-guide.com/goal-setting-tutorials/smart-goal-setting>)



6 Effective school council operation — partnership, co-operation and dispute resolution

Effective school council operation depends on strategic partnerships, co-operation and the ability to resolve disputes effectively.¹

To achieve this it is important that a climate of mutual trust and respect is developed and nurtured within the school council. The principal, school council Chairperson and P&C President are in a unique position to lead the development of this climate and need to work together to achieve it.

Effective school councils also build and maintain the trust and respect of their community. This is essential to enable the school council to engage the school community and communicate effectively with community members and external stakeholders.

Well respected and trusted school councils can lead dialogue with the school community about educational issues and the school's strategic direction. They can fairly represent the views of the school community as they approve strategic plans and reviews and endorse school budgets and staffing plans. They can act as an advocate for the school community ensuring decisions align with the needs and values of the community. They can also influence and lead the community's views and understanding of the school's strategic direction.

This is why it is important that all members of the school council act with integrity and maintain the highest ethical standards possible. Trust and respect are hard won and easily lost.

School councils may also benefit from team building strategies. Team building may be challenging as school councils do not meet often, time is always limited and decisions need to be made in a timely fashion.

A simple process for school councils to follow is articulated through [the five Cs of effective team building strategies](#). They give members a sense of belonging and help focus them on working co-operatively towards school council goals. They are:

- **Clear expectations** — set expectations out in the model constitution and in the roles of each school council member. They should be made clear during induction processes. Furthermore, members need to know the scope of influence of school councils — what they can and cannot do (see table 2.1 above). In this way, everyone knows their roles and the roles of others in the

¹ Department of Education and Training, Western Australia Independent Public Schools; Roles, responsibilities and operations of an effective school board, slides 33–37, http://www.det.wa.edu.au/redirect/?oid=com.arsdigita.cms.contenttypes.FileStorageItem-id-12902168&stream_asset=true, last accessed 30 October 2012



school council and everyone clearly understands what they are expected to do and how they fit in the team.

- **Channels of communication** — these are essential to the success of the school council. As discussed, school councils need to communicate and consult with the school community, local community, and partners. Communications within the school council need to be professional, courteous, clear, efficient and on-topic.
- **Conflict resolution** — this is invariably necessary because there will be times when members will have differences of opinion, feel overwhelmed or stressed and not be able to resolve their issues without a mechanism or support for resolving problems. (See below for more ideas on Conflict Resolution and problem solving).
- **Consequences** — these allow members to feel responsible and accountable for team achievements, and be aware their contribution is an essential part of the whole picture.
- **Celebrating achievements** — as a team, this can be a simple affair of acknowledging the efforts and contributions of all.

Conflict resolution and problem solving

Conflict is a normal part of decision-making in a group context, however, it needs to be proactively and sensitively managed. It needs to be acknowledged that individuals and groups can hold different views. It helps if problems can be identified early, prioritised and resolved. All pertinent information needs to be gathered, and all relevant members need to be involved in generating possible solutions which are evaluated against organisational goals.

Conflict can be managed effectively² if school councils:

- have a climate of trust and respect in place
- openly acknowledge the disagreement early
- focus on the nature of the problem rather than on the people involved
- listen actively to all views with the purpose of maximising understanding
- encourage the use of productive and non-emotive language
- identify zones of potential agreement
- approach complex problems in stages or parts
- seek agreement on processes going forward

² Ibid, slides 40–41



- maintain the welfare of students as the highest priority.

The school council needs to seek a consensus, make decisions based on best available information, and progress its activities.

The model constitution sets out a simple mechanism for dispute resolution:

12.1 The school council must endeavour to work together, with their community and with their school, in an open and collaborative manner.

12.2 If a dispute arises, the chairperson should lead a process acting as a facilitator to resolve the dispute through mediation.

12.3 If the chairperson is involved in the dispute, the principal should lead dispute resolution process.

12.4 If both the principal and the chairperson are involved in the dispute, a written request for mediation should be submitted to the principal's supervisor.

School council members should be mindful that their purpose is to work co-operatively to influence the strategic direction of the school to improve student outcomes.

Fifteen signs of an effectively functioning school council:

- meetings are interesting and run to the scheduled time
- members are clear about their responsibilities
- members are aware of the importance of their role in contributing to the school council vision/goals/performance
- the council has a positive and productive relationship with school personnel
- members support and respect each other's knowledge of, and endeavour to be aware of, current education developments and issues
- members work together to achieve the school council vision/goals and are supported in exercising conflict management skills
- the council has strong leadership which considers and values the views of all members
- the council has low turnover in members
- the council is vibrant — ideas are incubated, generated and developed into strategies which inform the school council vision/goals
- members take an active interest in council functions
- the council is equipped to handle change or crisis in a professional and efficient manner
- members are knowledgeable about their roles and how they relate to the school council vision/goals, and supported to meet gaps in their knowledge



- the council is well respected in the community
- the community is aware of the purpose and functions of the school council
- clear channels of communication are established between council members, school staff and stakeholders.

Effective meeting procedures

Effective school councils enjoy effective and efficiently run meetings where purposes are clear, discussions are relevant and progress is transparent and apparent. To achieve this, it is important that³:

- The secretary administers the meeting processes effectively including circulating agenda and papers well in advance, and minutes promptly after meetings.
- The chairperson maintains a well organised agenda and an effective meeting pace, balancing the need to give members time to consider important issues with the need to keep discussions relevant and on topic.
- The school council has well defined and consistent processes for decision making.
- The school council periodically reviews its meeting procedures to ensure efficiency and effectiveness.

Use communication media and technology effectively

Effective school councils select and use a range of media for communication, collaboration and management of their business. They consider their audience, purpose and requirements and blend face-to-face communication with appropriate online and digital media and spaces. This can include⁴:

- email for distributing and circulating procedural documents such as agendas, minutes, reports and papers
- school website (publicly visible) for keeping members of the general school community — or the world — informed about the work of the school council
- school website or intranet (password protected) for sharing information with staff, students, parents and officially recognised partners
- social media for engaging individuals and groups in school council activities (e.g. surveys, consultations)

³ Ibid, slide 48

⁴ Ibid, slide 50



- closed collaboration space (e.g. virtual classroom, edStudio, section of school intranet) for school council members to store, share and work on key documents and other resources
- SMS or other mobile media for reminders and alerts
- Tele/web conferencing to facilitate meetings and discussions for members, guests or stakeholders unable to attend in person.

More information

- Wilson, C (2010) [Bruce Tuckman's Forming, Storming, Norming & Performing Team Development Model](http://www.performancecoachtraining.com/resources/docs/pdfs2/BruceTuckman_Team_Development_Model.pdf), Performance Coach Training, http://www.performancecoachtraining.com/resources/docs/pdfs2/BruceTuckman_Team_Development_Model.pdf, last accessed 26 June 2013.
- DET WA: Independent Public Schools: Roles, responsibilities and operations of an effective school board. http://www.det.wa.edu.au/redirect/?oid=com.arsdigita.cms.contenttypes.FileStorageItem-id-12902168&stream_asset=true
- Team building strategies — Remember the five Cs <http://www.smartentrepreneur.net/team-building-strategies.html>
- 12 Tips for team building — How to build successful work teams http://humanresources.about.com/od/involvementteams/a/twelve_tip_team.htm
- Ourcommunity.com.au — Improve my group http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/directories/directories_article.jsp?articleId=3490



7 Legislation, policy and accountability

School councils are required to comply with all Commonwealth and State legislation, local government by-laws, industrial instruments, directives, delegations, whole-of-government policies, and national agreements. Clause 20 of the model constitution explains the specific laws that apply to school councils.

In the case of *Independent Public Schools* there are some DETE procedures that IPS schools have the flexibility to adapt or replace with local procedures to meet local needs and enable innovation. More information about these is available in the Departmental procedures for Independent Public Schools, to be made available in OnePortal from the beginning of the 2013 school year.

Policy and strategy

As part of the strong Queensland public school system, *Independent Public Schools* will continue to participate in, and be committed to the major policies, strategies and priorities of the Department. It is important that school councils consider the contributions they can make to help their school meet these commitments.

School Planning, Reviewing and Reporting Framework

All state schools follow the School Planning, Reviewing and Reporting (SPRR) Framework 2012–2015 and school councils can play an important role in providing advice about school planning and review and in engaging the school community to participate.

Independent Public Schools will also be required to undertake planning, reviewing of plans and performance and reporting, and school councils will play an important part in that process.

The four-year strategic plan and annual implementation plan for *Independent Public Schools* will have the same elements as currently required under the School Planning, Reviewing and Reporting Framework 2012-2015, with all school plans being approved by the school council.

The General Retention and Disposal Schedule for Administrative Records applies to school council records which include, but are not limited to Minutes of school council meetings; and all records that come into existence in connection with a school council election, including all ballot papers. These requirements are outlined in clause 27 of the model constitution.

Further information can be found in the [Legislative and policy requirements fact sheet](#).

Limitation of liability

A school council member does not incur civil liability for an act done, or omission made, honestly and without negligence under the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006.



8 Leading innovation

A major benefit of having a school council is harnessing a range of knowledge, skills and talent with a local focus through members in the school council. This will drive the development of ideas into innovative solutions making best use of schools resources for the whole community.

Possible scenarios for innovative opportunities involving community/industry partnerships include:

- physical assets: for example, sharing or co-developing sporting facilities, commercial kitchen or gallery space
- school resources: for example, arrangements to trial or contribute to educational resources developed by not-for-profit or commercial organisations
- industry partnerships that prepare students for work in IT or vocational education industries and/or influence the provision of services to the schools sector. Examples of these types of arrangements include [Queensland Academies](#), [DEEWR Youth Attainment and Transitions project](#), [Partnership Brokers Success Stories](#), [Australian Children's Television Foundation Advisory Schools](#), [Microsoft Partners in Learning Schools program](#) and [Education Services Australia](#). It is envisioned that *Independent Public Schools*, with greater flexibility and autonomy, will be able to use these examples as springboards to achieving even greater innovation which will drive improvements in student outcomes.

Finding the right partner

Traditional models of philanthropy, particularly as straight gifts or donations, are often not adequate to support the complex relationships now required between schools and their communities.

School councils can engage in the following activities to attract the right partner and cultivate a productive partnership:

- Identify strategic needs within the school which could benefit from an external partnership by conducting a gap analysis, particularly focused on capabilities and resources that the school needs which a partner could provide.
- Prioritise the needs and address the most urgent ones first.
- Identify companies, local councils, not-for-profit groups or other possible partners to best match needs.
- Build allies and support by exploring zones of mutual agreement or interest.
- Do basic due diligence on the prospective partners before entering into discussions (for example, start with Google searches to ensure the company



has not been embroiled in a public scandal which would then bring the partnership with the school into disrepute).

- Consider how to approach the prospective partner. For example, does a school council member have any association with a key decision maker in that organisation?
- Promote the school in the community in a positive way (for example, newspapers, radio, television news, social media) as prospective partners will be more interested in partnering with a high-profile school or one which is seen to be doing something particularly well.
- Develop a plan of action with the partner with key dates for deliverables.
- Establish teams, processes and procedures in place, clearly identifying and implementing mandatory departmental requirements.
- For strategic planning and decision making, conduct a SWOT analysis, evaluating strengths, weaknesses/limitations, opportunities and threats of any potential projects or joint ventures/partnerships.
- Consider whether the proposed partner has experience in joint ventures/partnerships with schools or not-for-profit organisations.

Incentivising partners

School councils could create interest in the corporate sector by suggesting some of the benefits they might achieve, such as:

- a competitive edge through community leadership and participation or good corporate citizenship. Indirectly, this may raise brand awareness, offering companies the chance to grow loyalty with existing customers and attract new customers.
- the opportunity to attract future staff from the pool of school leavers
- increased morale (knowing that they are making a difference in the community) and broader or deeper experience and job satisfaction for partner employees (for example, secondment scenarios)
- promotion of positive consumer attitudes, community visibility and public profile.

Targeted partnerships

Before approaching possible partners, the school council should decide whether:

- the needs to be addressed relate to the whole school, or to a target group (e.g. indigenous, students with disability, geographically isolated, at risk/disengaged, gifted and talented)
- a possible partnership would focus on particular curriculum or co-curriculum areas (e.g. the arts, design, engineering, science, community service, leadership)



- possible partners or joint venturers should be contemplated from particular sectors (e.g. business, health organisations, not for profit organisations, community services).

Managing partnerships

In managing partnership relations, school councils should consider:

- planning:
 - collaboratively develop an implementation plan
 - establish realistic scope of the work to be done
 - clarify roles and responsibilities
 - establish clear guidelines for managing expectations
 - identify and ensure mutual benefit
 - identify goals and a schedule for regular review against performance.
- risk management:
 - full risk assessment to identify risks and plan mitigation
 - consider impacts on the school's operations, student outcomes or the partners' ability to contribute effectively
 - undertake due diligence to determine the chance for financial exposure or legal liability for the State of Queensland
 - monitor risk levels throughout the partnership.
- productive partner relationships
 - understanding the background of each partner
 - set realistic expectations as to what can be achieved
 - respond to partners promptly, clearly and directly (oral and in written)
 - maintain written notes of all dealings with partners
 - keep all parties on task to ensure goals are met.
- communication and promotion:
 - establish and maintain open, respectful and effective communication
 - maintain engagement with partners and also key stakeholders (for example, parents, community, staff, chairperson, principal)
 - engender mutual trust and respect between partners
 - promote positivity and enthusiasm
 - communicate early and often to prevent misunderstandings
 - positively acknowledge the work of partners in the school community



- communicate, promote and model the school's values and beliefs.
- capability and performance
 - objectively identify strengths and weaknesses in the partnership and address them
 - build capacity and skills for all partners
 - provide recognition and celebrate success.
- accountability
 - plan, supervise and document activities
 - coordinate resources and timelines
 - report regularly and with transparency.

Further reading

- Finding the Best Partnership Model for your Group or Organisation
http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/funding/funding_article.jsp?articleId=830
- Community-business partnerships case studies
http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/funding/funding_article.jsp?articleId=806
- Department of Education, Training and Employment, Queensland (2011) Queensland VET Sector Partnership Due Diligence: A best practice guide for partnership due diligence,
<https://oneportal.deta.qld.gov.au/EducationDelivery/international/TQI/Documents/due-diligence-best-practice-guide.pdf>, last accessed 30 October 2012.