Philanthropic and School Partnerships

Background

It is now widely acknowledged and accepted that philanthropic organisations have an important role to play in supporting the educational outcomes of children and young people. In particular, the Gonski Review highlights the need for businesses and philanthropy to play a greater role in assisting schools to increase the opportunities, support and services available to all children and young people.

Philanthropic activities are undertaken by a range of individuals, groups, families and companies. There are also organisations which have been created as legal vehicles for philanthropy; trusts or foundations. There are currently 5000 trust and foundations contributing an estimated $1 billion in support to a range of organisations in Australia. According to the Leading Learning in Education and Philanthropy (LLEAP) 2011 Survey\(^1\), 25 per cent of philanthropic organisations have an education related budget of between $501,000 and $1 million.

Philanthropy Australia defines philanthropy as:

"The planned and structured giving of money, time, information, goods and services, voice and influence to improve the wellbeing of humanity and the community\(^2\)."

Philanthropic partnerships with schools support a range of activities including:

- initiatives to reduce the impact of disadvantage e.g. breakfast programs and scholarships
- programs to enrich the infrastructure of schools in low socio-economic areas
- initiatives to improve educational outcomes, e.g. literacy, numeracy and school retention programs.

Tax Status

If business and philanthropic organisations are interested in establishing a partnership with a school, the school is required to become a Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR). This requires the school to establish a library, building or scholarship fund.

Under current income tax legislation government schools can only accept tax deductible donations using the library, building or scholarship fund which are DGRs endorsed by the Australian Tax Office (ATO) with school councils acting as appointed trustees.

This enables donors to obtain a tax deduction in their own personal or company income tax returns for donations made to these funds.

DEECD has established guidelines and Model Rules to assist schools in this process. Once the Fund has been established and Model Rules adopted, the school needs to seek DGR endorsement, via DEECD, from the ATO. It must also be recorded on the DEECD Register.

Schools should contact Greg Hart (tax@edumail.vic.gov.au) of the Tax Compliance Unit for details of the Guidelines, Model Rules and for copies of the ATO DGR application forms.

**Business Working with Education Foundation**

The Victorian Government has established the Business Working with Education Foundation (BWE) to work with businesses, philanthropic and non-profit organisations to provide support to Victorian government schools.

The areas of priority for BWE are for raising educational outcomes to ensure all young people have access to, and engagement with, a quality education, regardless of circumstances. As well as assisting all young people to fully realise their potential.

Visit the **BWE website** for more information about how they can assist your school.

**Grant applications**

Philanthropy Australia recommends the following steps when applying for a grant:

1. Ascertain the charitable status of your school.
2. Using The Australian Directory of Philanthropy, make a shortlist of foundations which may be able to fund your project.
3. Contact each of these organisations individually to obtain their most current set of guidelines.
4. Consider attending a Grantseeker Workshop. These provide grant seekers with information on how to research potential funders, and how to most effectively frame grant applications.
5. Apply to each organisation individually, being sure to follow their guidelines. Ensure you include all the information the grant maker requests, that you frame your application in the manner they request, and you do not apply to them if you do not fit their guidelines.

**Create**

Regardless of whether your school is initiating or responding to a partnership request, it is always important to ensure any partnership is based on an identified need. Look at your school’s data and implementation plan and consult with families and the local community about what their views and priorities are before embarking on any kind of partnership arrangement. Visit the "Identifying goals" webpage of the Create section of this website for more information.

The next critical step is to ask if both organisations share the same values, objectives and priorities. As schools are accountable for any decision to enter into a partnership with a business or philanthropic organisation, there are a variety of questions and issues schools should explore so they are aware of any risks associated with a partnership.

Some specific questions you can ask include:

- What is your organisation’s area of interest or expertise?
- What education outcome(s) do you want to support through the partnership?
- How do you think your organisation can mutually support our school?
- Is your organisation located within the school’s enrolment catchment (geographically)?
- Do you have any experience of working with schools?
- Do you have any particular knowledge of our school’s ethos and operation?
- How would you describe your organisation’s ethos?
- Are you aware there are rules and restrictions on who schools can partner with?
- Does your organisation want to take a local or state-wide approach to the partnership?
- Are there any potential conflicts of interest with the school’s policies?
- What benefits does your organisation expect from this partnership?
- Will you be seeking to promote or advertise your organisation on school property?
- What are some of the non-negotiable aspects of the partnership?
- What are the expectations your organisation has from the partnership?
- How will these expectations be managed and are these expectations clearly understood?

The responses to these questions will help your school determine whether it is appropriate or not to enter into a partnership with a particular organisation.

Always review the partnership proposal with your school council (as authoriser of all partnership activity), and with the broader school community including students and families to ensure the partnership is relevant and beneficial for the school.

**Implement**

It is important for both partners to understand and recognise the important differences in organisational structure, operations, responsibilities and the wide range of stakeholders each partner may have.

Once you have agreed to enter a partnership, plan a strategy to achieve your goals/vision, which includes:

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• agreement on clear and realistic objectives
• agreement about how resources will be provided
• invitations to relevant organisations and people to contribute to the partnership
• equitably assigning responsibilities between the partners
• agreement on a dispute resolution mechanism, just in case things go wrong
• development of an ongoing evaluation process.

It is also important to build and plan for sustainability to ensure the program, project or initiative is able to continue into the future even if current funding sources or administrative arrangements are no longer possible. Visit the ‘Sustainability’ section of the Education Partnership Resource website for more information.

Grow

Even well planned partnerships can encounter barriers that may impede the ability to achieve the partnership’s objectives. Tackling problems early and embedding ongoing communication trust and respect as non-negotiable values can help resolve any issue as it emerges.

Visit the ‘Addressing problems’ section of the Education Partnership Resource website and the ‘Partnership Troubleshooting’ fact sheet which details some common barriers and tips to overcome them.

Schools need to keep in mind the philanthropic sector has different ways of working. For example, some philanthropic organisations are large, whilst others may only have a small number of staff, some of which might not work full-time.

These factors affect the way in which a philanthropic organisation is resourced and operates. Schools should recognise these organisations can work under constraints that affect the functioning of your partnership, such as having a high demand for support and limited administrative assistance to undertake its work.

Effective partnerships respect the diversity of styles and skills amongst members of the partnership and acknowledge what this brings to a partnership.

More information

Auscharity - www.auscharity.org
AusCharity list some charities on their website and also distribute this listing as The Charities Book.

Australian Taxation Office - www.ato.gov.au
DEECD Tax Compliance unit: tax@edumail.vic.gov.au or (03) 9637 3702

Givewell - www.givewell.com.au
Givewell is a research service for informed giving, which conducts research on charities and encourages a more accountable, efficient and effective charitable sector.

Leading Learning in Education and Philanthropy (LLEAP) - www.acer.edu.au/lleap
LLEAP is a three-year research project that seeks to build knowledge about the impact of philanthropy in education.

OurCommunity.com - www.ourcommunity.com.au
OurCommunity have an extensive listing of charities and also offer an online donation service.

ProBono Australia - www.probonoaustralia.com.au
Pro Bono have a listing of charities on their website, and they also produce their listing as a booklet which is distributed free of charge to solicitors, accountants, corporations, philanthropic trusts and other decision makers.

Tenderbridge – www.tenderbridge.acer.edu.au/home
Tenderbridge can help schools locate and access funds to establish educational projects.

SPAG contains guidance for schools about entering into partnerships with business.