

Partnerships & collaborations

Advice for schools as community hubs (SaCH)

In a nutshell

There is growing interest in how schools and community members, organisations and service providers can collaborate more to enhance students' health, education, and social and emotional development, while extending their services and benefits to the wider community.

Such partnerships require significant investment and can dramatically expand the capacity of SaCH to have **lasting positive impacts**.

What school-community partnerships exist?

All schools partner with parents and carers in students' education and welfare. Some schools also partner with multiple agencies and organisations to offer integrated, wrap-around, community services and development activities.

In Australia, SaCH may provide any or all of the following, often in association with local government:

- Early childhood education and care.
- Student-focussed services such as allied health care.
- Parent- or community-focussed classes and groups.
- Sports and recreational activities.

Photo: Yarrabilba Family and Community Place by Queensland Community Hubs and Partnerships



Based at The University of Melbourne, **Building Connections: Schools as Community Hubs** is an Australian Research Council Linkage project that has advanced understanding of how to design, implement and sustain SaCH. Produced by the research team, this advice sheet is part of **How to Hub Australia**, a suite of resources for policymakers, school leaders, and designers.

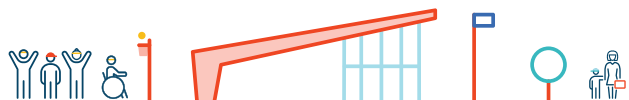


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What are the benefits for schools?

Through their partners, schools can access extra funding, materials or equipment and people with complementary knowledge and skills. Partnership activities and services can enhance the health, education, connection and engagement of school staff, students, and families.

And for community partners?

Co-location and integration of facilities and services with schools can reduce community partners' capital and operating expenses, extend their reach, and diversify their revenue sources.



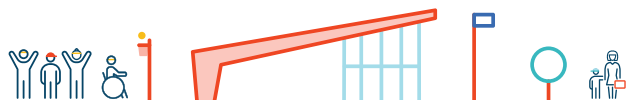
Photo: Kurranjang Community Hub, VIC, by Brand Architects

How to develop lasting, productive partnerships

1. Identify needs and goals for your SaCH or a specific program or service in consultation with school staff, students, families, and the wider community. Refer to the '[Community strengths and needs analysis](#)' advice sheet in this series.
2. Locate potential partners and initiate discussions about collaboration by exploring shared priorities. Refer to the '[Policy alignments](#)' advice sheet.
3. Negotiate formal agreements that benefit all partners. There are many examples of models for ownership, governance, funding, resourcing and operation of SaCH that can guide you. Refer to the '[Leadership and governance](#)' and '[Funding and resources](#)' advice sheets.
4. Engage in collaborative activities.
5. Evaluate the extent to which activities are addressing your needs and goals. Refer to the '[Evaluation and evidence](#)' advice sheet.

Consider how you will:

- accommodate the varying priorities, funding cycles, and reporting requirements of local and state governments and private sector partners
- provide activities and services for adults while keeping students and other children safe – and how to demonstrate to stakeholders that you are doing so (refer to the '[Safety and security](#)' advice sheet)
- manage access to school facilities and determine who has authority over SaCH operations when the principal is not on-site after hours
- ensure users leave school spaces, furniture, and equipment in order, to prevent any inconvenience for school staff.



Avoid:

- territorialism (exerting excessive control over resources or information for fear of losing control)
- agendas developed without community input
- assumptions about community needs made by leaders with different life experiences
- mismatches between partners' expectations.

Do:

- involve school staff, students, and families in creating community partnerships to **promote their buy-in** for successful, long-lasting collaborations

- communicate the benefits of collaboration and a sense of **shared purpose** to potential partners, school staff, students, and families
- focus on **strengths** the community can bring to your SaCH, rather than on deficits
- consider using a **professional facilitator** or partnership broker to assist in establishing strong foundations for collaborations
- allocate partnership resources to employ a **SaCH manager** to monitor and maintain collaborative relationships
- keep **two-way communication channels** open with all partners
- stay **flexible**: even formal, contractual partnerships need room for re-negotiation, and SaCH activities and programs should adapt to the evolving needs of the school, partners, and community.

Photo: Ulumbarra Theatre, Bendigo Senior Secondary College, VIC.



Want to learn more?

Read the following chapters in [*Schools as Community Hubs: Building 'more than a school' for community benefit* \(2023\)](#):

- *School-community Collaboration: Insights from Two Decades of Partnership Development* by Catherine M. Hands
- *Brokering School-community Partnerships: Cross-sector Advocacy and Hard Work* by Lynden Lauer, Shirley Watters, Kari Morris, and Sandra Griffin