Response to:

Supporting Business-School Connections

Discussion Paper of the Business-School Connections Roundtable

The discussion paper identifies a number of stakeholder groups. Which do you identify with?

- schools
- businesses
- broker organisations
- school councils
- parents

- teachers
- school leaders
- students
- education authorities

- teacher training institutions
- researchers
- other National Children's Charity

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Executive Summary

- As research has shown, supporting education is one of the most effective means of breaking the cycle of disadvantage and ensuring all children and young people have the same opportunity to realise their potential and it is also critical to Australia's productivity challenge.

- Learning and education are the responsibility of the community, not schools alone and businesses have an important role to play in supplementing them through providing resources in the form of time, talent and dollars.

- Businesses can contribute to the achievement of key outcomes such as: meeting basic literacy and numeracy standards, keeping young people engaged in education and learning and assisting smooth transitions from school to work or further education.

- While it is good for business to make connections with schools, it is important that these connections are strategic, well planned and well executed. Schools should not be expected to manage disparate opportunities without assistance and additional resources.

- Sustainable Partnerships take ongoing time and energy to develop and nourish. Given the current workload of schools (and in particular school Principals), some consideration needs to be given to how they are supported and recognised for this effort.

- The role of an intermediary (or 'broker') is critical to ensuring that school-business partnerships are sustainable, planned, holistic and ultimately successful. An intermediary can engage both schools and businesses, alleviate schools of the burden of partnership development and management and take a more planned and holistic approach to the deployment of business resources.

- Cross sectoral models that utilise intermediaries to broker partnerships should be recognised as a viable option for facilitating larger scale school-business relationships in Australia.

- Schools should have the ability to internally resource partnership managers or to engage non profit intermediary organisations such as The Smith Family to assist them to manage business partnerships.

- It is limiting to look solely at business-school connections. While these relationships should definitely be encouraged, it is important that this seen as one part of a broader strategy towards raising educational attainment that involves parents/carers as contributors to the decision making process as well as relevant third sector agencies.

About The Smith Family

The Smith Family is pleased to be able to comment on the Business-School Connections Roundtable discussion paper. We have been dedicated to an education agenda for over a decade that has seen us work with over 100,000 children and young people and 4,189 education institutions last year alone. Located in over 95 communities throughout Australia, The Smith Family works with schools to improve educational and transition outcomes for disadvantaged Australian children, young people and their families by:

- Enhancing school based curriculum through our evidence-based *Learning for Life* programs which focus on key literacies (comprehension, numeracy, financial, emotional and digital) at critical transition points (home to school, primary to secondary school and school to work) through tutoring, peer support and mentoring.

- Utilising a whole of community approach to develop relationships with parents, other educational institutions (both TAFE and Universities), community organizations and business to effectively identify and bring in learning opportunities from the community appropriate to school priorities and needs.

As an organisation we are dedicated to seeing the development of school-business relationships that have a focus on supporting schools to achieve outcomes for students. Our interest in doing so is driven by an evidence base that demonstrates that supporting children's education and learning is one of the most effective means of breaking the cycle of disadvantage and ensuring all children have an equal opportunity to realise their potential.

In partnership with our 265 corporate partners, The Smith Family has continued to demonstrate the value that businesses can bring to the task of improving educational outcomes for children and young people, securing the contribution of their: *time* (e.g. as mentors, tutors etc.), *talent* (providing *pro bono* strategic resourcing services) and *dollars* (including funds and goods in kind*).*

For more information on The Smith Family, please visit www.thesmithfamily.com.au

School Partnerships

While children learn across a range of settings such as in the home and in their communities, the school remains a focal point for education. Schools can be considered some of the most influential institutions in our society –nearly all communities have at least one local school and most families come in contact with them at one time or another in their lives. They play a critical role in achieving outcomes for individuals, families and communities and they contribute to the quality and availability of an adaptable future workforce.

The importance of supplementing the resources available to schools (especially those in low socio economic communities) from a national productivity perspective has also been made evident by startling data recently released in COAG Reform Council Baseline Reports. For example:

- 43% of working age Australians have literacy skills below the minimum level COAG considers is required to meet the complex demands of work and life in modern economies (49.8% for numeracy). Moreover, there is evidence that Australia's performance is not improving over time relative to other countries as there has been a significant decline in mean scores in reading literacy between testing in the years 2000 and 2006.[1]

- 48.1% of Australians do not have the minimum level qualifications COAG considers necessary for improving employment outcomes and providing pathways to further education and training (at or above Cert III);

- Students from lower socio economic backgrounds have consistently lower performance against the national minimum standard in national testing than students from higher socio-economic backgrounds. For example, 75.1% of students with parents not in paid work were at or above the national minimum standard for Year 5 reading compared with 96.4% of students with parents who were senior managers or professionals; and

- Indigenous student performance is consistently below non-indigenous performance. The gap varies across jurisdictions from a low gap of 6% for Tasmania to a high of 63% for the Northern Territory. Gaps are generally larger in States and Territories with higher numbers of Indigenous people with the exception of NSW;[2]

If schools are to play a role in meeting these challenges, then we need to shift our thinking from that of education as the responsibility of the school alone, to that of learning and education as a joint responsibility of the school and the community where schools are supported by a series of partnerships that includes business.

The importance of school-business partnerships

The Smith Family supports the development of school-business partnerships as one example of bringing additional community resources to bear for schools and their populations of students, families and teachers. This is conditional on the partnership being: strategic; appropriate to the

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[1] Program for International Student Assessment
[2] Data sourced from COAG Reform Council Baseline Performance Reports 2009.

needs of the school and its community; and considerate of having a minimal impact on the ability of the school to focus on its main role - to provide a high quality education to students.

Businesses can play a variety of roles in school partnerships and have a vested interest in contributing to what The Smith Family sees as key outcomes:

Meeting basic Literacy and numeracy standards
Research identifies a clear link between the development of good cognitive skills such a literacy and numeracy at an early age and higher levels of educational achievement, greater employability, higher earnings and greater social participation. Poor literacy and numeracy has been linked to high rates of welfare dependency, low self esteem, substance abuse and teenage parenting[3].

Keeping young people engaged in education and learning
Too many young people disengage from school, especially during the middle years of schooling (years 5-9). Disengagement and early school leaving are strong predictors of lifelong socioeconomic disadvantage. Without the skills gained through education and training, early school leavers face significant challenges in the workforce over the long term, including lower wages and long term unemployment at later stages of their lives.

Transitions from school to work or further education
Lack of employment is the single greatest predictor that an individual will be in the poorest 20% of Australia's population. Furthermore, lack of employment is highly correlated with a myriad of significant social detriments including depression, abuse and crime. Supporting successful school to work or study transitions for students is a prerequisite for increasing our productivity levels in a 21st century economy.
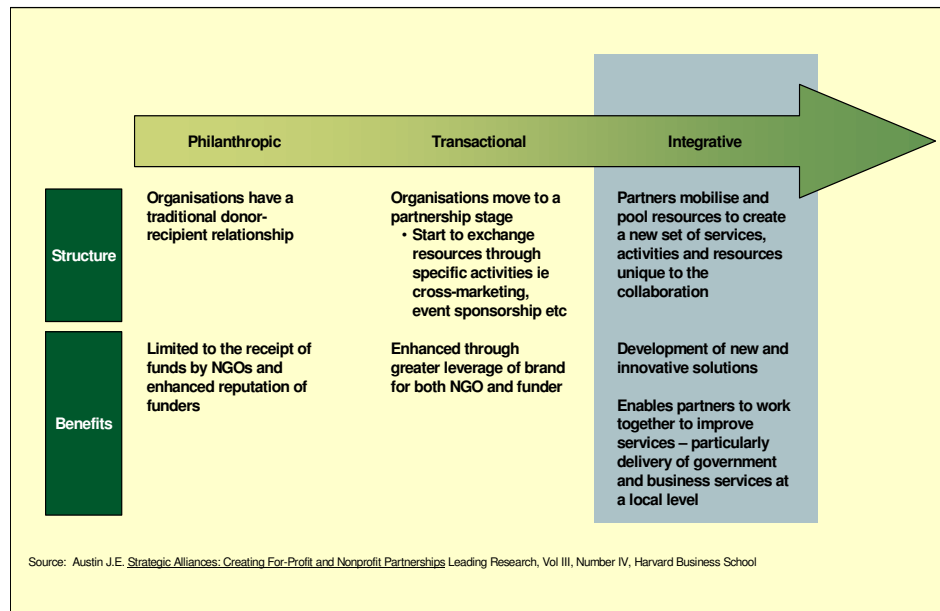
The Cross Sector Collaboration Continuum (CSCC) developed by James Austin at Harvard Business School[4] (as summarised below) offers a simple but useful approach to examining the key dimensions of community-business partnerships and how they might develop over time.

The CSCC sees partnerships as falling into one of three 'stages' – philanthropic, transactional or integrative. Movement along the continuum from left to right sees partnerships that are more complex and layered in terms of engagement, mission match between the parties, resources employed, activities undertaken, and interaction. As the managerial complexity of the partnership increases so too does the partnership's strategic value.

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[3] Shokoff and Phillips (2000) *From Neurons to Neighbourhoods*, National Academy Press, Washington DC.
[4] James Austin, *The Collaboration Challenge*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000

Figure 1. The Non profit and for profit Collaborative Continuum

	Philanthropic	Transactional	Integrative
Structure	Organisations have a traditional donor-recipient relationship	Organisations move to a partnership stage · Start to exchange resources through specific activities ie cross-marketing, event sponsorship etc	Partners mobilise and pool resources to create a new set of services, activities and resources unique to the collaboration
Benefits	Limited to the receipt of funds by NGOs and enhanced reputation of funders	Enhanced through greater leverage of brand for both NGO and funder	Development of new and innovative solutions Enables partners to work together to improve services – particularly delivery of government and business services at a local level

Source: Austin J.E. Strategic Alliances: Creating For-Profit and Nonprofit Partnerships Leading Research, Vol III, Number IV, Harvard Business School

Despite the potential for business to support these outcomes, there are a number of challenges in promoting partnerships of any kind and certainly in regards to school-business relationships.

Challenges to school - business partnerships

The Smith Family recognises that it is possible for businesses and schools to form ad hoc partnerships. However, forming strategic, well planned and well executed partnerships that provide mutual benefit, is a greater challenge. Many of the challenges outlined within the *Supporting Business-School Connections* Discussion Paper are experienced as a result of informal and unplanned approaches to partnership development. These are the types of issues often experienced in partnerships more generally, however, the nature of the work of schools and the limited resources available, can make school-business connections more fraught with difficulty than most. The Smith Family considers the following key challenges to be the most problematic:

- **Time and resources**
  Although partnering with business has the potential to garner additional resources for a school, the development and management of these partnerships can be highly resource intensive. The ability for a school to contribute resources to a relationship (such as staff time, classrooms etc.) will ultimately impact on the quality and sustainability of the overall partnership which becomes problematic when scarce school resources have to be diverted away from other key school activities. Businesses - generally driven by efficiency and profit paradigms - may also find it difficult to plan for and manage a relationship where the school cannot meet their timeframes. In effect a culture clash can occur.

It follows that if a successful school-business connection requires time and resources, then a lack of available funding to develop and manage these school-business partnerships, is a significant challenge to overcome. Under the *COAG National Partnership on Low Socio Economic Communities*, funding has been made available to the most disadvantaged schools through various state funding mechanisms. This has provided some avenues for schools to invest in models and programs for working more closely with business; however, it does not always result in the development of integrated collaborative arrangements with business. Without adequate resourcing it is difficult to build sustainable strategic relationships.

- **Reluctance of schools**

Schools can often be reluctant to take up partnering opportunities. This might be due to a history of poor partnership experiences or from the strain of stretched resources. It can be the case that the schools that have the most to gain from an effective business partnership often have the greatest reluctance to engage often already dealing with a multitude of issues and competing demands.

- **Reluctance of business**

Schools and school staff often intimidate business people, especially those people who have had little to do with schools since they were there themselves. Those from small business will recognise a principal with 60 staff as potentially more 'powerful'. The public often have a poor perception of the school environment and barriers they face as a result of media misrepresentation.

- **Potential school-business conflict**

It is not uncommon for conflict to take place between stakeholders engaged in any partnership. In the case of business-school relationships, disputes regarding the use of resources and spaces; a misalignment of expectations; lack of a formal agreement or protocols; and divergence in language and culture can all contribute to conflict.

Mechanisms are required to resolve conflict, however, these may not be developed as a priority in informal relationships.

- **Sustainability issues**

As covered by the Discussion Paper, sustaining school-business partnerships beyond a 'one off' event can be a challenge due to a turnover of staff. Similarly, sustainability can be impacted upon when a project or partnership does not have clear objectives or outcomes and when the resources are not available.

- **Ability to undertake a strategic, planned, holistic approach**

Without support and encouragement (and often 'exceptional permission') schools may continue to engage business in a limited way by seeking donations and sponsorship. In addition, school Principals may not have the time or skill set necessary for strategic planning of the nature required to maximize potential from strategic partnerships.

Other barriers to success

There are often other limiting factors that prevent successful relationships. For example, in regional areas, a lack of transport to get kids to and from activities can frustrate efforts to engage them with opportunities provided by business. Transport even when made available, can be expensive and thus not an option in a low socio economic region. This can be a major barrier to partnerships based on sharing curriculum across schools, increasing availability of TVET courses, work experience and other career development activities or any other initiatives that involve student movement.

Children and young people from disadvantaged background are often, for a wide variety of reasons, unwilling or unable to take advantage of potential opportunities offered to them through school-business connections, which can be difficult for businesses to understand and may lead to disengagement from the partnership.

Cross Sectoral Models for Success

The Smith Family would like to propose two cross sectoral models for consideration by the Roundtable: The S*chool-Business Intermediary* and The Smith Family's *Social Incubator Model*.

Model One: The School-Business Intermediary

The Smith Family proposes that the role of an **intermediary** can mitigate those challenges outlined above and in the Roundtable Discussion Paper, as well as provide valuable assistance to schools in brokering and managing partnerships. An intermediary attracts support from business (and other stakeholders such as community agencies) to provide schools with evidence informed initiatives, programs and resources. The Australian Business and Community Network (ABCN) and The Smith Family are examples of organisations promoting partnerships between business and the education sector.

The intermediary role might operate at a broad level – deploying and coordinating the resources or *time, talent* and *dollars* of businesses into targeted schools and communities across a wide geographic region and at a local level, by identifying opportunities for connections within a local community.

There are several advantages to the intermediary model which are outlined below.

1. **A holistic approach**

   At a larger scale, an intermediary can deploy the resources of businesses across schools in a planned and holistic way, by identifying areas of greatest need and brokering school-business connections that will provide mutual benefit. At a local level, intermediaries can contribute their understanding of what might work for a particular school and seek out or broker a business partnership for one school or a cluster of schools.

2. **School engagement**

   Despite the initial reluctance of schools to take on a business partnership, an intermediary can work to encourage their participation through the facilitation of relationships. Schools and businesses need avenues to develop relationships and to build confidence in each other.

3. **Business engagement**

   Often intermediaries have a particular value proposition that they can offer businesses to engage them in school partnerships by building on a 'knowledge bank' of what works in relationship building and having the opportunity to invest time in the relationships. The best way to encourage partnering in business is to build a solid business case based on *'what's in it for me*?' (e.g. by leveraging workforce planning issues such as skills shortages and corporate social responsibility) as well as the creation of regional 'champions' and promotion of best practice.

4. **Risk management and conflict resolution**

   An intermediary can assist in developing the protocols and processes that mitigate risk and conflict between partners setting the partnership on a solid footing at establishment. It is important that as a first principle a project or initiative 'do no harm'.

5. **Sustainability**

   Having allocated responsibility for external partnerships allocated to a school member of staff or intermediary, helps to overcome the issue of constant staff changes and loss of champions. It also helps to reinforce a partnership culture in the school environment.

Program Examples: The intermediary role in facilitating cross sectoral collaboration

There are several existing models that have demonstrated the value of the intermediary role in facilitating sustainable and strategic cross sectoral relationships for particular outcomes. These include the following.

School, Business and Community Partnership Brokers (DEEWR)
A Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) program to:

- Foster a strategic, 'whole of community' approach to improve education and transition outcomes for all young people
- Broker sustainable partnerships between schools, education providers, business/industry, community groups, and parents and families
- Lead planning for local area buy in from other partners.
- Build community capacity and infrastructure.

COAG National Partnerships: Extended School Hub pilot (DEECD), Wyndham VIC
The Smith Family is the lead agency for the innovative Extended School Hub pilot in Wyndham - an integrated school model that works in partnership with government, local providers, business and community members to facilitate a range of extended services to students, their families and the community including:

- School transition support and early childhood programs

- Programs that develop social competence, communication and physical health
- Parenting sessions to help parents and carers engage with their child's learning at school and at home
- ICT, cooking and arts classes for children and adults
- Vocational education opportunities through strategic partnerships with business, adult education, TAFE, RTOs and universities
- Community & health services (including health, dental, mental health, counselling and migrant services)

Communities for Children (C4C) (FaHCSIA)

Communities for Children forms part of the Australian Government's Family Support Program providing prevention and early intervention initiatives for children aged 0-12 years and their families who are at risk of disadvantage and who remain disconnected from childhood services. The initiative takes a 'whole of community' approach to directly assist young children, their families and communities by creating more supportive learning environments and a broad range of trusted cross sectoral relationships.

Model Two: The Social Incubator

This model builds on the intermediary model to build strategic, targeted initiatives for a region.

In 2006, The Smith Family commissioned The Boston Consulting Group to conduct, on a *pro bono* basis, a feasibility study to investigate the need and characteristics of a new model of sectoral convergence through which innovative solutions to a number of social issues could be developed. A *Social Incubator* emerged as a possible vehicle for these collaborative outcomes, and a detailed process to attract commitment to the concept was then developed by the Foresight Group at Swinburne University of Technology through a synergy grant with The Smith Family.

A Social Incubator seeks to foster collaboration between individuals with different skill sets and backgrounds - from across the education, business, and government and not for profit sectors - to drive innovative solutions to existing problems. It works in two broad stages:

Stage One: The Incubator Thought Process

The initial 'thought process' phase involves the collocation of selected team members within an intensive "hot house" environment where research combines with practice to create practical initiatives and solutions. This process leverages the individual skills and expertise of government, business, nonprofit, educators, academia and community through teams working together to create one or more innovative initiatives addressing the issue identified within the community. The process takes place over a confined period of time (which could be days, weeks or months depending on the issue being addressed) with experts seconded into the Incubator to focus exclusively on the outcomes being sought.

Stage Two: Skills Transfer in the Field

The second 'skills transfer' phase is where members of the Incubator move into the field and work alongside practitioners in order to transfer the necessary skills and knowledge to the community members/groups tasked with piloting the initiatives. In this way, the Incubator goes beyond the traditional 'think tank' research/advocacy model, and is premised upon strong community involvement in the entire process, from identification of the problem to be addressed to the development and implementation of a response.

The social incubator model has the following advantages:

- The flexibility of the Incubator model allows it to target a range of issues affecting particular communities, in different ways and at different times. It may be the case that an 'isolated' Incubator is created around one particular issue in a community, and then dissolved following the implementation of successful initiatives; or the Incubator may be 'ongoing' in the sense of addressing a number of priority issues in the community one by one, changing the range of stakeholders involved as appropriate;

- Part of the value of the Incubator lies in its broader potential to provide a formative and systematic structure to community interventions that have through circumstance to date, been ad hoc and piecemeal in their success; and

- Social capital is built up through the creation of collaborative relationships between multiple sectors – relationships that are strengthened through a process of negotiation, skills development and a shared commitment to achieving more.

Importantly, this collaboration is sustainable beyond the Incubator itself, and remains one of the most important elements for making collective change happen.

These two models are best placed to ensure that a helicopter view is taken of a region as a whole, in order to understand relevant issues; the way in which these affect attainment rates ; and to build effective networks that facilitate partnerships. Both proposed models allow for and require the creation of a 'knowledge bank' – to enable best practice modelling within and across regions, and to avoid unnecessary duplication.

Recommendations:

- An Australian set of guiding principles for school-business relationships similar to those of the BCTF would not add any considerable value from The Smith Family's perspective. Resourcing the development of relationships provides greater value.

- Schools should have the ability to internally resource partnership managers or to engage non profit intermediary organisations such as The Smith Family to assist them to manage business partnerships.

- Consideration should be given to *long term funding* of this strategy. Changing culture and creating systemic change through encouraging partnerships is a long term proposition that needs to be nurtured and encouraged over time - a minimum of 5 years. Short term funding arrangements lead to increased cynicism amongst community, business and school representatives and also lead to short term thinking.

- It is limiting to look solely at business-school connections. While these relationships should definitely be encouraged, it is important that this seen as one part of a broader strategy towards raising educational attainment that involves parents/carers as part of the decision making process as well the third sector agencies.