

Working with a Service Provider

Stake out the parameters of a partnership by examining three major questions

Looking to choose a service provider to host funding you have been deemed eligible for?

We think it is vital that this relationship is treated as a genuine partnership.

It can be intimidating to negotiate and enter into a partnership (often formalised as a service agreement), especially when this is unfamiliar territory and someone's life is in the mix!

Through our work with people negotiating their arrangements, we have found that the following three questions are very useful in shaping thoughts and coming to the table with

firm ideas about what you want and how you want the partnership to operate into the future. The idea is that your service provider will also examine these questions and a process of negotiation ensues.

What are the values and principles you want underpinning the partnership?

This is all about setting out your desired way of working with each other. Clearly setting out the values and principles you hold dear will form the foundation of the partnership and will help guide decision-making when it comes to operational matters. Having these clearly defined will act as the framework through which problems or challenges are analysed and solutions arrived at – solutions that are in the person's best interests and not diluted by competing interests.

Most organisations have mission and vision statements, and you may have come across some when you were researching potential service providers. These statements can be a useful tool through which to filter what is being said to you, and if needed, hold them to account. But they are



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About InCharge

InCharge exists to make self-direction possible and sustainable for people with disability.

also usually quite sweeping and generalised in their scope. So don't be tempted to just adopt what the organisation as a whole has; remember, a key advantage of self direction is personalisation. Values and principles should make sense and have meaning to you and be quite specific.

There is no room here for templates and for being 'sent the service agreement'. The risk here is that often the conversation will be guided by what is in it, regardless of the relevancy of its content, and consequently standardisation sets in early. People tend to feel compelled to defer to the template and as a result there is a danger of important things being left unsaid and undocumented and irrelevant things being addressed. It is possible the service provider will present you with a stock standard service agreement, but don't feel compelled to adopt it yourself. This is fine if it is used as a position statement and starting point for negotiation, but not the endpoint.

Teasing out who has what role

In any successful working relationship, there needs to be clarity around who does what. Ask yourself, what is most important to me in order to work well



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with and have trust in my chosen service provider? What are your expectations of the service provider? What things do you want to retain authority over and what things make sense to be delegated and/or shared?

The role domains to consider include:

- staff (and all that comes with this, like supervision, OH&S, job descriptions, recruitment, team building, lines of communication, rostering, day-to-day management).
- Administration of your package of funding and the acquittal process.
- Reporting and reviewing.
- Budgeting and financial statements.
- Planning and goal setting.
- Complaints procedures and dispute resolution.

Keep in mind that the balance will undoubtedly shift back and forward as circumstances evolve. Therefore it is important to incorporate into the partnership a regular review mechanism to examine what is working and what is not working.

Thinking through this process will bring you to a clear position on the types of roles you want to hold onto and the ones you feel comfortable

delegating. There may be others in your tribe for whom it makes sense to take on a particular role. Usually there is already a certain level of trust existing here, which makes delegation easier. When delegating roles to your service provider, often trust takes longer to build, so the process of “handing over” may take longer. This process is a useful starting point for building that required trust.

And finally – Managing shared roles

Not everything will be separated into ‘family business’ or ‘service business’. Some roles will be shared and this is the essence of a supportive partnership and “right relationship”. It is important to be clear about what should happen with these shared roles. Where does the line of authority sit? Under what circumstances is it right for you to take the lead and for your service provider to take to the lead? For example, a shared role might be staff supervision, where you take the lead when it comes to day-to-day direction and planning for staff and the service provider takes the lead if ever there was any unsatisfactory staff conduct. Or the service provider may take the lead when it comes to advising you on OH&S responsibilities but you take the lead when it comes to incorporating this into an induction process for new staff.



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This is what [Homes West](#) call the “dance in between”. It is a dynamic and variable process. Ultimately, it is a safeguarding process that ensures maximum personal authority is maintained and your values and principles remain undiluted.

We can work with you to negotiate a partnership with a provider

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