



Relational Contracting

DSS-Provider Governance Framework

This Framework explains the Department of Social Services' approach to relational contracting governance. It ensures engagement, oversight and reporting are proportionate to the funded activity, while consistently applying relational principles.

Governance under this framework supports impact, learning and innovation. It also maintains appropriate oversight and reduces administrative burden.

Governance Approaches

Governance Approaches describe the intensity and form of governance engagement for a funded activity. They ensure oversight is proportionate to risk, system impact and organisational maturity, while maintaining consistent relational practice.

Primary Partnerships

Used where activities are well-established, present lower risk to clients and systems, and can be managed through routine, proportionate engagement.

Enhanced Partnerships

Used where activities have higher service type risk, greater system impact, or developing organisational maturity. These require closer and more frequent engagement.

Approaches are set at the start of an activity and reviewed over time using professional judgement. Activities may move between Approaches as risk, context, scale or maturity changes.

For information on organisational readiness and capability, refer to the [Relational Contracting Readiness Checklist](#).

How Approaches are determined

The governance approach for a funded activity is based on the following considerations. These ensure oversight is aligned to risk, system impact and organisational context.

- **Service type risk** – The inherent risk of the service type, including how critical it is to client outcomes and the impact if delivery fails. Where this risk is high, it may outweigh other factors such as delivery scale, criticality, complexity or maturity.
- **Delivery context** – Where service type risk is moderate or low, consideration is given to:
 - **Delivery Scale:** scale, investment and how well established the activity is
 - **System Criticality:** role in supporting priority cohorts or system continuity
 - **Service Complexity:** delivery complexity and coordination required

- **Maturity:** provider maturity and readiness for relational practice

This diagram shows how the governance approach is determined.



Figure: Process for determining decision flow

Assess service type risk and apply guiding considerations:

- High or Extreme risk service types are assigned an **Enhanced Partnership**
- Moderate or low risk service types are assessed against delivery context using judgement to decide if an **Enhanced Partnership** is needed. Otherwise, a **Primary Partnership** applies.

The proposed governance approach is offered to the provider, and the agreed Approach is confirmed during onboarding discussions prior to activity commencement.

Governance Forums and Cadence

The governance model operates across two levels of decision making and monitoring:

- Partnership Governance Forum (PGF)
- Relational Manager (RM) check-ins

Both Approaches use the same governance settings for decisions, data and assurance. The difference between Primary and Enhanced Approaches is the meeting frequency and cadence.

Partnership Governance Forum (PGF)

Annual PGF:

- Includes a strategic discussion within a scheduled PGF
- Confirms shared outcomes, performance indicators and forward planning
- Endorses major adaptations, investments and strategic shifts
- Review system insights, sector trends, place-based needs and funding sustainability

Regular PGF:

- Quarterly meetings for Enhanced Partnerships or Twice-yearly meetings for Primary Partnerships
- Translate strategy into deliverable plans and monitor progress
- Support adaptive planning based on emerging needs (e.g. demographic shifts or crisis response)
- Conduct joint risk assessments and mitigation planning
- Oversee performance, quality and financial sustainability

Relational Manager (RM) Check-in

- Monthly scheduled check-ins, with availability for ad hoc problem solving
- Enable rapid response to service delivery challenges
- Provide ongoing feedback from clients and staff

The following table is an **example only**. In practice, meeting timing and frequency may change based on delivery context, risk and operational needs.

Approach	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Enhanced	PGF	RM	RM	PGF	RM	RM	PGF - Annual	RM	RM	PGF	RM	RM
Primary	PGF	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	PGF - Annual	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM

Governance settings

Decision Rights (see Decision Matrix)

Operational changes – Minor in-scope changes to improve impact, quality or delivery can be made within budget with support from Relational Manager check-ins. Moderate changes, including innovation or improvement initiatives, are reviewed by the PGF.

Material changes – Major changes affecting outcomes, budget, footprint or service design are reviewed by the PGF and may trigger escalation. Refer to the Decision Matrix.

Data

Core data requirements – Mandatory DEX datasets apply to all activities, including SCORE.

Use of existing data and reporting – Governance will use existing organisation reports and datasets wherever possible. It follows a “report once, use often” approach to reduce burden. Providers may choose to use dashboards or linked datasets to support strategic discussions.

Reporting quality will improve over time to support learning, continuous improvement and innovation. This builds on existing data and avoids new baseline reporting unless it is proportionate and beneficial. Governance forums also provide opportunities to share learning, innovation and examples of effective practices to supporting continuous improvement.

Assurance

Internal – Draws primarily on existing organisational and program level reports, audits and certifications, consistent with a “report once, use often” principle. Additional internal assurance activities are introduced only where necessary to address identified risk or system impact.

External – External assurance is not a routine requirement of relational contracting. Where needed, it relies first on existing regulatory and assurance arrangements, including ACNC reporting and publicly available financial and governance information.

Independent evaluation or external audit may be commissioned by the Department only where there is a clear and specific risk, material system impact, or need for independent assurance.

Any additional assurance is applied selectively, proportionately and transparently, is time-limited, minimises burden and cost, and does not duplicate existing obligations.