



# Relational Contracting

## Provider Readiness Self-Assessment Checklist

### Purpose

This checklist helps Providers prepare for relational contracting with the Department of Social Services (the Department). You can use it to:

- self-assess your current level of readiness
- identify strengths and areas to improve
- find supports and guidance where needed
- guide your planning and capability development

**The checklist is a development tool, not a compliance or audit tool.** Your readiness may change over time as your organisations grows, staff change, and systems evolve. This checklist also helps you take part in transition and partnership discussions with the Department.

### How to use the Relational Contracting Readiness Checklist

To get the most value, ensure you:

- involve people across your organisation, including executives, managers and frontline staff
- answer questions honestly to support learning and improvement
- use your responses to identify areas for development
- record notes, examples and reflections for each indicator

| Rating          | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 — Emerging    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Practices are informal or inconsistent</li><li>• Work relies on individuals rather than systems</li><li>• Limited evidence of forward planning or capability development</li><li>• Risks to effective relational contracting are likely without targeted uplift</li></ul> |
| 2 — Developing  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Some structures and processes are in place</li><li>• Practice varies across teams or partnerships</li><li>• Capability is often reactive</li><li>• With support, capability can improve</li></ul>                                                                         |
| 3 — Established | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Clear and well understood ways of working</li><li>• Consistent practice across the organisation</li><li>• Capability is actively supported and improved</li><li>• Well placed to deliver in a relational contracting environment</li></ul>                                |

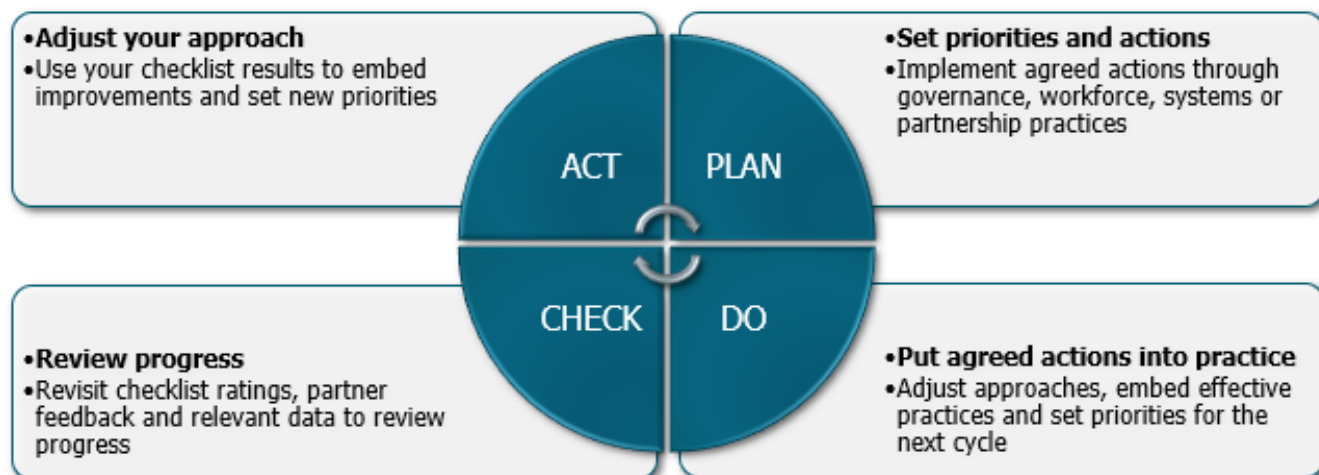
### When to use the checklist

Start using the checklist early when preparing for transition to relational contracting. Use it regularly in the lead-up (for example, monthly) to track progress and build readiness, then continue using it as part of good practice. Complete a more detailed self-review at least once a year.

The checklist helps you identify priorities, support planning, and track improvement. It is not part of formal governance, but insights can inform discussions with the Department. If readiness is lower in some areas, use support resources or work with the Department on an action plan.

## Quality Improvement Approach

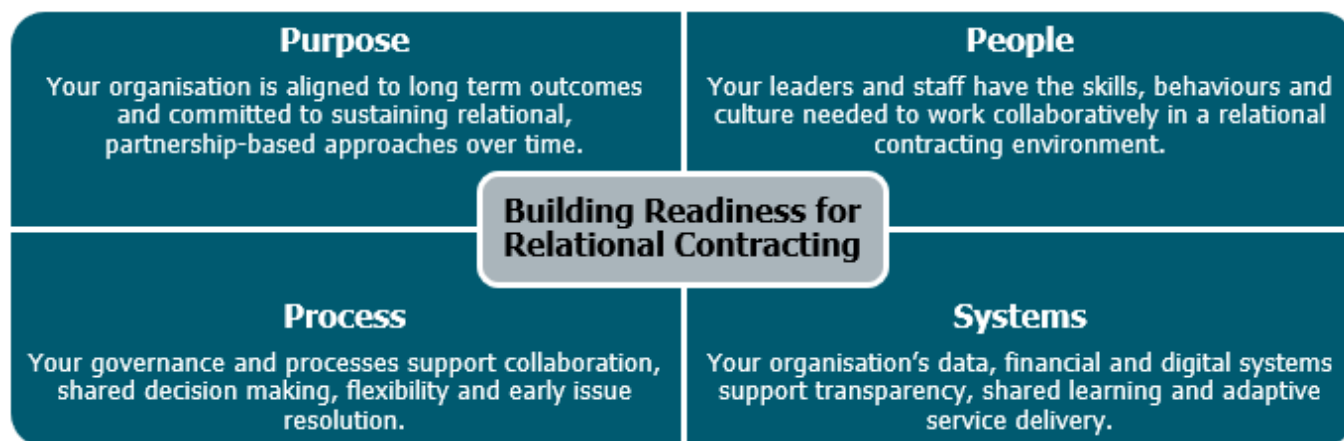
Use this checklist to support continuous improvement. You can follow an established quality improvement approaches such as the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle.



Using the checklist in this way helps organisations strengthen relational contracting capability over time. You can use it across your whole organisation, specific programs, domains or partnerships.

## Readiness Domains and Indicators

The checklist looks at readiness across four key domains. These domains reflect the capabilities needed for effective relational contracting and are used throughout the checklist.



## Support tools

Each indicator includes examples of support, tools and guidance (see "Where to go for support").

These may include:

- internal activities within your organisation
- sector-led initiatives
- Department guidance, training or communities of practice (where available)

If your readiness is lower in some areas, use the checklist to identify priority areas, reflect on current practice, and plan targeted improvements. This checklist is a development tool. It supports learning and improvement. It is not a compliance measure.

## Building capability

Building capability takes time. You are not expected to be fully ready across all areas at the start. The level of effort should match your organisation's size, role and capacity. Instead, you can:

- focus on priority areas
- plan improvements over time
- sequence changes based on your context and capacity

If your readiness is still developing after a relational agreement starts, you should have a plan to continue building capability.

Where capability development is needed, the Department will work with you to set realistic expectations and identify appropriate supports. This may include:

- guidance and tools
- communities of practice
- targeted initiatives (where available)

## Working in delivery partnerships

In many arrangements, funded organisations work with delivery partners (e.g. subcontractors, community partners, ACCOs or intermediaries).

While DSS contracts with the funded organisation, relational contracting principles are expected to be reflected across delivery partnerships.

If you are a lead organisation, how are:

- relational principles reflected in your subcontracting arrangements?
- you supporting capability uplift of partners?
- decisions shared or influenced across the partnership?

## After completing the checklist

After completing the checklist, you can:

- review your results across domains
  - identify strengths and gaps
  - decide on priority areas for improvement
  - consider available supports
  - use your results in discussions with the Department
  - revisit the checklist to track progress over time
- 

# Relational Readiness Checklist

**Ratings: 1 = Emerging, 2 = Developing, 3 = Established**

Choose the rating that best reflects your current, typical practice, not your best example or intended future state

| Purpose (strategy, alignment and change)                                         | 1 | 2 | 3 | Comments |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|----------|
| Your strategy and governance documents reflect relational contracting principles |   |   |   |          |
| Your organisation is set up to deliver through partnership-based models          |   |   |   |          |
| Your strategy aligns with long-term outcomes and partnership goals               |   |   |   |          |
| You have clear goals for transitioning to relational contracting                 |   |   |   |          |
| You have assessed how this change affects your people, processes and systems     |   |   |   |          |
| You have a clear change plan with timelines, roles and resources                 |   |   |   |          |
| Training, communication and support are in place to help implement change        |   |   |   |          |
| You use available guidance, tools and supports for relational contracting        |   |   |   |          |
| Roles and responsibilities are clear across delivery partners                    |   |   |   |          |
| <b>Average Score: ____ / 3</b>                                                   |   |   |   |          |

## Where to go for support

- DSS guidance on long-term outcomes and success measures beyond individual contract cycles
- Board and executive-level resources to support embedding relational contracting principles into organisational strategy and governance
- DSS supported opportunities for providers to contribute to system learning and policy feedback
- Sector networks and Communities of Practice to share experience, challenges and effective approaches
- Access to any long-term capability roadmaps or transition guidance from policy to support planning and staged uplift

**Ratings: 1 = Emerging, 2 = Developing, 3 = Established**

Choose the rating that best reflects your current, typical practice, not your best example or intended future state

| <b>Systems</b> (Data, Digital, Financial and Reporting)                                                                                     | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>Comments</b> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------|
| You understand system and reporting requirements for relational contracting                                                                 |          |          |          |                 |
| You can adapt your systems and processes when requirements change                                                                           |          |          |          |                 |
| Your systems capture the information needed to support relational contracting (for example, outcomes, performance and partnership activity) |          |          |          |                 |
| Data sharing with the Department and partners is clear, secure and timely                                                                   |          |          |          |                 |
| Reporting meets requirements and is used to support conversations with partners                                                             |          |          |          |                 |
| You regularly review and improve how data and reporting are used                                                                            |          |          |          |                 |
| Your workforce can use systems and data to support learning, problem solving and decision making                                            |          |          |          |                 |
| <b>Average Score: ____ / 3</b>                                                                                                              |          |          |          |                 |

### Where to go for support

- Guidance on system expectations for relational contracting, including outcomes, data definitions and reporting principles (DEX Protocols)
- Relational indicators resources to help capture and monitor partnership health and partnership quality
- Systems training (DEX, National Map)
- DSS-supported uplift initiatives for digital or systems capability (subject to policy and funding availability)

**Ratings: 1 = Emerging, 2 = Developing, 3 = Established**

Choose the rating that best reflects your current, typical practice, not your best example or intended future state

| People (Leadership, workforce capability and culture)                                                | 1 | 2 | 3 | Comments |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|----------|
| Leaders understand relational contracting and what it means for how you work                         |   |   |   |          |
| Leaders actively promote collaboration and partnership behaviours                                    |   |   |   |          |
| Staff understand how relational contracting differs from transactional approaches                    |   |   |   |          |
| Your workforce is supported to develop the skills and behaviours needed for partnership working      |   |   |   |          |
| Training supports key partnership skills (for example, communication, collaboration and negotiation) |   |   |   |          |
| Leaders promote learning, reflection and continuous improvement                                      |   |   |   |          |
| Feedback processes are in place and used to improve partnership practice                             |   |   |   |          |
| <b>Average Score: ____ / 3</b>                                                                       |   |   |   |          |

### Where to go for support

- DSS facilitated transition or improvement supports, including workshops or tailored advice where available
- Foundational training on relational principles, expected behaviours, differences from traditional contracting, and RC agreements
- Advanced skills training on conflict resolution, negotiation, trust-based governance and using data for shared decision making
- Role specific capability uplift for staff leading governance and partnership forums
- Learning partners and Communities of Practice to support peer learning
- Practical tools to support reflective practice and monitor partnership effectiveness (e.g. case studies, short videos, diagnostic or reflection tools)

**Ratings: 1 = Emerging, 2 = Developing, 3 = Established**

Choose the rating that best reflects your current, typical practice, not your best example or intended future state

| Process (Governance and decision making)                                         | 1 | 2 | 3 | Comments |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|----------|
| You have governance structures that support shared decision making with partners |   |   |   |          |
| Clear roles, responsibilities and escalation pathways are in place               |   |   |   |          |
| Your operating model supports consistent and effective delivery                  |   |   |   |          |
| You can respond flexibly to meet partnership needs                               |   |   |   |          |
| Risk management is built into your operations and reviewed with partners         |   |   |   |          |
| You regularly plan, review and deliver services with partners                    |   |   |   |          |
| You use continuous improvement processes to review and adjust how you work       |   |   |   |          |
| Your policies and procedures support partnership and collaboration               |   |   |   |          |
| <b>Average Score: ____ / 3</b>                                                   |   |   |   |          |

### Where to go for support

- Case studies, practical guidance and/or examples of escalation pathways and joint decision making via the PGF and Relational Manager
- PGF templates that help link partner feedback, data insights, action planning, etc.
- Templates and sample Terms of Reference for joint governance groups and partnership forums
- DSS facilitated transition or improvement supports, including workshops or tailored advice where available

# Relational Contracting Capability Action Plan Template

Use this template to plan and track actions based on your checklist results.

**Organisation:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Checklist date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Review period:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participants:** \_\_\_\_\_

## PLAN – Priority areas for this cycle

(Select up to 3 areas from the Readiness Checklist)

| Priority area | Why it matters | Outcome |
|---------------|----------------|---------|
|               |                |         |
|               |                |         |
|               |                |         |

## DO – Actions to progress priorities

| Actions | Owner | Support needed | Target timeframe |
|---------|-------|----------------|------------------|
|         |       |                |                  |
|         |       |                |                  |
|         |       |                |                  |

## CHECK – Progress and learning

| What are we seeing? | What is working well? | What needs to change? |
|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
|                     |                       |                       |

## ACT – Next steps

|                            |  |                                     |  |
|----------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| Keep doing what is working |  | Seek additional support or guidance |  |
| Adjust actions or timing   |  | Set new priorities for next cycle   |  |

**Key decisions / changes:**

**Next review date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Note:** This template is a supporting tool only and is for internal use. It does not require submission to the Department and may be adapted to suit organisational context.

# Relational Contracting Capability Action Plan (EXAMPLE)

**Organisation:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Checklist date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Review period:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participants:** \_\_\_\_\_

## PLAN – Priority areas for this cycle

(Select up to 3 areas from the Readiness Checklist)

| Priority area (domain / indicator)                | Why this matters now                                                 | Intended outcome                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Process – Joint planning and adaptive delivery    | Current delivery reviews are largely internal and transactional.     | More collaborative planning and review discussions with DSS.           |
| People – Leadership reinforces partnership health | Managers are unclear on expectations under relational contracts.     | Consistent leadership behaviours that support trust and collaboration. |
| Systems – Quality and performance reporting       | Reporting meets requirements but is not routinely used for learning. | Data informs shared performance and improvement conversations.         |

## DO – Actions to progress priorities

| Action                                                        | Owner           | Support needed                     | Target timeframe |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|------------------|
| Introduce quarterly joint review agendas aligned to PGF.      | Program Manager | PGF templates and DSS guidance     | By July 2026     |
| Run leadership workshop on relational contracting behaviours. | Executive Lead  | Foundational RC training resources | June 2026        |
| Pilot a simple shared performance dashboard.                  | Data Lead       | DEX support and internal analytics | August 2026      |

## CHECK – Progress and learning

| What are we seeing?                                      | What is working well?                             | What needs to change?                                |
|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Early joint reviews are occurring but feel agenda-heavy. | Improved openness and early issue identification. | Allow more time for reflection and two-way feedback. |

## ACT – Next steps

|                            |   |                                     |  |
|----------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| Keep doing what is working | X | Seek additional support or guidance |  |
| Adjust actions or timing   |   | Set new priorities for next cycle   |  |

**Key decisions / changes:**

**Next review date:** \_\_\_\_\_

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