

Partner Engagement & Collaboration Policy		
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Scope

Mercy Ships Australia (MSA) is guided by The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) and committed to ensuring that we engage with governments and organisations to achieve mutually agreed objectives in aid and development and humanitarian and crisis response activities (this may include affiliates). The equal relationship with these partners will be characterised by mutual respect, transparency, accountability and by a commitment and openness to two-way learning and support.

The purpose of this policy is to guide MSA and our partners on the expected nature of our engagements with other organisations. This policy addresses our ACFID compliance obligations when initiating and maintaining partnerships and collaboration for the purpose of achieving MSA’s Mission. MSA recognises that effective humanitarian responses require collective action. MSA will share information and knowledge with other stakeholders and participate in joint planning and integrated activities wherever possible, including national and local authorities, without compromising humanitarian principles.

When responding to humanitarian emergencies, MSA will apply the principles of humanity, impartiality, independence, and neutrality as defined in the CHS. In determining its humanitarian responses, MSA commits to work with local communities and local organizations wherever possible, recognising that they are the first to respond, better positioned to respond and often last to leave.

This Policy is intended to apply to all MSA partnerships.

This policy applies to all MSA Board Directors, staff and volunteers and extends to MSA partners and associated implementing organisations within Australia or overseas.

Partner Engagement

MSA forms in-country partnerships with governments, medical institutions, local actors, and NGOs to achieve our work on improving the quality of life for people living with diseases of poverty, disfigurement, and disability, through direct medical services, whole-person care and building the capacities of healthcare systems to meet the needs of the future.

Working in partnership with local organisations and communities enhances our capacity to effectively facilitate relevant and sustainable programs and projects focussed on education, crisis and humanitarian aid, infrastructure development, community uplift, and health promotion. Through partnerships and collaborative relationships, we harness existing knowledge and expertise to enhance capacity for community needs to be met locally.

Rather than act simply as a funding agency, MSA regards partnerships as mechanisms for realising positive, constructive change and will ensure all activities are carried out responsibly, honestly and with transparency. MSA expects the same of partner governments and organisations.

MSA’s partners must comply with certain standards set by the ACFID Code of Conduct and may be required to comply with contractual obligations to DFAT. Wherever relevant, MSA will document how partners are held financially accountable, accountable for the protection of children and accountable for ensuring that funds do not reach terrorist organisations. MSA will also document that partners are responsible for ensuring any subcontractors comply with those obligations to DFAT. Partners must document in written agreements with subcontractors how they will manage the subcontractors’ financial accountability.

MSA works in accordance with principles of alignment and harmonisation determined at international aid effectiveness forums (Rome 2003, Paris 2005, Accra 2008, and Busan 2011). We see value in donor countries

building coordinated partnerships where there is mutual accountability and a focus on development results. We also aim to deepen engagement with civil society and promote a culture of zero tolerance for corruption.

MSA management and staff will:

- support carrying out adequate research to be confident that the potential partner organisation is suitable. Capacity Assessment will verify that the organisation is financially viable and:
 - has appropriate procedures to minimise the potential for fraud
 - has appropriate processes to prevent transmission of funds to terrorist organisations
 - shares MSA's objectives and understands MSA's vision, mission and values
 - is considered legitimate, locally
 - has an accountable and democratic organisational structure and is financially transparent
 - is open to being monitored by MSA and will be responsive to recommendations. MSA must also be open to being monitored by the partner
 - does not discriminate based on age, gender, religion, ethnicity, physical or intellectual ability or political affiliation
 - will not engage in evangelising or proselytising
 - has sufficient human and financial resources to achieve desired partnership outcomes
 - is accountable to communities and donors
 - is not on the DFAT and National Security Australia lists of terrorist organisations and proscribed persons or entities
 - abides by MSA's child protection requirements including signing the Child Protection Code of Conduct
 - promotes greater equality within staff and community
 - promotes equal participation of people with a disability or marginalised groups
 - promotes gender equity
- formalise relations with partners, clearly identifying roles and responsibilities in a mutually accountable and respectful manner
- ensure that partner contributions and mutually agreed outcomes are adequately documented and monitored
- build partners' capacity so they can sustain their work in all areas of eye health care and where partners do not have the capacity to meet organisational commitments for partnership we will support them to strengthen their systems and procedures to ensure that they meet national, and where relevant international, good practice standards
- ensure that partner organisations comply with relevant policy requirements in any DFAT agreements
- only enter partnerships that are compatible with local cultural needs and values, and which are aligned with MSA's purpose and values
- clearly identify roles, responsibilities and guidelines to ensure the partnership remains mutually beneficial and effective in achieving agreed outcomes and take responsibility for ensuring roles, responsibilities and guidelines are agreed and documented when partnerships are established and that these are reviewed and adapted as partnerships evolve
- Ensure that partner organisations maintain environmental sustainability through safe practices which are in line with country guidelines
- Partners are committed to a shared and common objective
- Encourage partners to develop similar documentation with their other partners and key stakeholders
- Complies with all requirements of the ACFID Code of Conduct as required from time to time.

Core Principles

Equity - In any relationship, there will be divergences of power, resources, and influence. Equity recognises that all parties have an equal right to be part of and benefit from the collaboration, decision making and outcomes.

Transparency - Sharing accessible information. Transparency is a precondition for accountability, and both are required for trust. Transparency will enable accountability to primary stakeholders, partners, donors, and other stakeholders.

Accountability - Taking responsibility for our actions and commitments. Involves accountabilities to and amongst all stakeholders at all levels.

Mutual respect - The participants must respect each other's mandates, obligations and independence and recognize each other's strengths, constraints, and commitments. Mutual respect must not preclude organizations from engaging in constructive dissent.

Shared Interests - This enables solidarity between parties and is critical to any form of collaboration. The degree of mutuality may differ with different types of collaborations from a shared interest or mission, to fully negotiated and mutually agreed objectives and outputs.

Mutual benefit - This is linked to shared interests. While benefits for the various parties may differ, all parties should benefit in some way if they are contributing to the collaboration. Neither party should be just serving the purpose or interests of the other party.

Autonomy and independence - All parties should be able to determine their own identity and manage their own governance. These principles are linked to mutual respect. Be aware of power imbalances that might undermine autonomy and independence.

Clarity of roles and responsibilities - Trust and transparency come from understanding the expectations, roles, and responsibilities of all parties. These may differ depending on the relationship and the parties involved but it is important to have shared and clear understandings of expectations and accountability.

Collaborative Relationship

Collaboration is one of MSA's core values, ensuring participation of all stakeholders. In addition to collaborating with partners to develop projects, MSA also collaborates with other non-government organisations where possible and appropriate and is a member of relevant bodies to delivery development work.

All parties to the partnership have an equal right to be part of and benefit from the collaboration, decision making and outcomes. The objectives and activities pursued throughout the life of a partnership are fully transparent and involve mutual accountabilities and mutual contributions as well as shared risks and benefits among all partners.

Partner Capacity Assessments

Sustainability is one of MSA's values, fostering self-reliance through comprehensive evidence-based projects. Prior to the commencement of each project, MSA conducts a partner capacity assessment. The assessment ensures that the project to be conducted is meeting the needs of the partner country and partner organisation. The assessment also ensures that the project will address cross cutting issues such as gender, people with disabilities and child protection. The information gathered through the capacity assessment is used to develop the project design.

Reviews

Throughout each project opportunities are available to review project activities, implement recommendations and make changes to future projects. This review allows for ongoing collaboration and reflection by all partners.

Grievances

MSA recognises the rights of individuals and partner organisations to lodge a grievance and have it resolved quickly and fairly. To enable MSA to conduct an investigation into a grievance, the organisation is reliant upon the in-country contact to liaise with the individual lodging the grievance. The involvement of an in-country contact in this process ensures the matter is handled sensitively and comfortably in line with cultural

sensitivities. The in-country contact liaises with the MSA Managing Director who (in line with the Grievance Policy) compiles a report and makes a recommendation to the Board.