

Employer partnership guide for RTOs



A planning guide for RTO managers in automotive and mining Vocational Education and Training (VET) contexts.

Part of the AUSMASA Trainer and Assessor VET Career Framework

About this guide

Strong relationships with employers and industry organisations are among the most effective ways for an RTO to maintain the currency and credibility of its training. This guide supports RTO managers and program leaders in deliberately thinking through the industry relationships their organisation needs and in planning how to build and sustain them.

The term relationship is used broadly here. It covers connections with employers, original equipment manufacturers (OEM) suppliers, specialist organisations, industry associations and other RTOs. Any sustained working connection that helps your organisation deliver better, more current training.

Who might a relationship involve?

A useful industry relationship can be with any organisation that helps you deliver better, more up-to-date training. In automotive and mining contexts, this typically includes:

- employers in the automotive or mining sectors - those who employ your graduates, whose workforce you currently train, or with whom you want to build a connection
- OEMs and equipment manufacturers who can provide technical training, access to current equipment, or specialist knowledge in areas such as electric vehicles, autonomous systems, or emerging diagnostics
- specialist organisations that can address specific knowledge or currency gaps, for example, a battery technology company, a safety systems provider, or a diagnostics software developer
- industry associations with state-based coverage, such as Motor Trades Associations, which can connect your organisation with broader sector networks, intelligence, and professional development opportunities
- other RTOs where a complementary relationship could strengthen delivery, share resources, or extend your scope
- large employers operating under third-party or auspicing arrangements, where training is delivered using employer facilities, equipment, and staff, with your RTO providing quality assurance and issuing certification.

The question to ask is not only 'who are our existing contacts', but also 'where are the gaps in our currency, capability and delivery that a relationship could help address', and 'who do we need to be talking to that we are not currently'.

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Types of industry relationships

Industry relationships vary in the support they provide for your organisation. Most RTOs will benefit from relationships across multiple types. Use this table to identify where your current relationships are strong and where there are gaps.

Relationship type	What it looks like in practice
Industry intelligence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular contact with employers, industry bodies and peak bodies who can tell you what is coming before it arrives Attending industry events, participating in advisory groups, and maintaining relationships with people who work at the operational edge of the sector Knowing what your graduates will encounter in the workplace before they get there
Currency and upskilling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationships that actively build or maintain the technical knowledge and skills of your trainers and assessors OEM and equipment manufacturers delivering technical training to your team in emerging areas such as electric vehicles, autonomous systems or new diagnostics platforms Specialist organisations. For example, a battery technology company or safety systems provider, sharing expertise that your trainers cannot readily access elsewhere Site visits and return-to-industry arrangements that keep your trainers connected to current workplace practice
Delivery and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrangements where an organisation contributes to how training is delivered. Facilities, equipment, subject matter experts delivering alongside your trainers, or real workplace environments that cannot be replicated on campus Third-party or auspicing arrangements where an employer delivers training using their own facilities, equipment and trained personnel, with your RTO providing quality assurance, compliance oversight and certification. These arrangements carry specific obligations under the Standards for RTOs Manufacturer or brand-specific delivery models, where training is tailored to a particular product range and delivered in partnership with the RTO

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Relationship type	What it looks like in practice
Validation and quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationships that help you test whether your training is producing the outcomes industry needs Industry involvement in assessment validation. Checking that your assessment tools and judgements reflect real workplace standards Employer feedback on graduates. Are they work-ready? What is missing, what needs to change Industry representatives participating in Training Advisory Groups and contributing to training design and review
Networks and connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Industry associations with state-based coverage, such as Motor Trades Associations, which can connect your organisation with sector networks, intelligence and professional development opportunities Relationships with other RTOs where sharing resources, expertise or delivery scope strengthens what both organisations can offer Connections to peak bodies and national industry groups that give your organisation visibility and influence in sector-level conversations

What makes relationships work?

The relationships that endure and deliver real value are built on trust and open communication, not on formal agreements alone. Both parties understand what they are contributing and what they are getting. Contact is maintained between formal activities, not just when something is needed.

In practice, this means:

- being clear from the outset about what each party needs and what each can offer
- following through on commitments; reliability builds trust more effectively than any formal agreement
- maintaining regular contact, not just reaching out when you need something
- recognising that your contacts have limited time and competing priorities
- looking for ways to contribute to the other organisation's goals, not just to draw from the relationship.

Relationships held by a single person on either side are vulnerable when staff change. Where possible, build connections at multiple levels to make the relationship more resilient over time.

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Initiating a new relationship

Starting a new industry relationship requires a clear sense of what you are looking for and what you can offer in return. A useful first conversation covers three things: what your RTO does and the training context you are working in; what you hope the relationship might offer; and what you can offer the other organisation in return.

Being specific about what you can offer strengthens your approach. An organisation is more likely to engage when the benefit to them is clear. This might include access to your training facilities and equipment, upskilling options, training and assessment services tailored to their organisation or equipment, qualification pathways for their workforce, or visibility among apprentices and trainees who may become future employees.

Before making contact, be clear on

- what specific gap or need is driving the approach
- what type of relationship are you seeking
- what your RTO can offer in return
- who the right person to approach is, as it may not always be the most senior, but the one closest to the area of interest
- what a realistic first step looks like, such as an initial conversation, a site visit, or attendance at an industry event.

Planning your industry relationships

Use the prompts below to assess your current relationships and identify where to focus your efforts.

What do you currently have?

Map your existing relationships honestly. Which are active and genuinely reciprocal? Which exist on paper but have little real activity? Which have lapsed but could be revived? Are you talking to the right people, or have they moved on to different positions? Are there gaps in your coverage relative to the industry, the units you deliver, and the qualifications you offer?

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What do you need?

Where are the specific gaps a relationship could address? Do your trainers need access to current equipment or emerging technology? Are there areas of practice where your team's currency is at risk? Is there specialist knowledge you cannot generate internally? Are there employers whose workforce you train but with whom you have no real working connection?

What can you offer?

What does your RTO offer that another organisation would value? This might include access to training facilities or equipment, training and assessment services specific to their organisation or equipment, qualification pathways for their workforce, input into workforce planning, or a track record of producing work-ready graduates. Being clear about your offer is as important as being clear about what you need.

How will you maintain it?

What regular contact will you maintain? Who is responsible for each relationship on your side? What does contact look like, and how often will you do it?

Your relationship plan

Use this table to map your current and intended industry relationships. Be specific about what each party contributes and what the next step is.

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Part B: Session engagement checklist

Organisation	Relationship type	What they offer us	What we offer them	How maintained	Next step

Learn more about the Trainer and Assessor VET Career Framework

Explore more practical tools, guides and resources supporting VET capability, wellbeing, industry engagement and career development