

HOW-TO GUIDE 3: Ethical Partnerships Risk Decision Tree

This tool supports youth work organisations to assess ethical, safeguarding, and reputational risks when considering a partnership with a technology company. Sharing the outputs of this risk review process with the technology company counterpart encourages openness and transparency. Understanding how they are assessing perceived partnership risks would be advantageous – the onus shouldn't sit with the youth work organisation to undertake the risk review alone.

- USE THIS TOOL AT THE EARLIEST STAGE OF A POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIP

The decision tree is designed for initial risk scanning. Use it before signing agreements, submitting joint bids, or publicly announcing collaborations.

It is intended for youth workers, managers, safeguarding leads, and trustees.

- Start at the top and follow each question in sequence

Step 1: Alignment with mission, values, and youth-work ethics

If *no*, the tool instructs: DO NOT PROCEED.

Step 2: Transparency and ethics of the tech partner's motivations

If motivations are unclear or extractive, seek clarity.

If concerns cannot be resolved → DO NOT PROCEED.

Step 3: Identify any red flags

Red flags include:

- Data exploitation
- Unsafe technologies
- Refusal to follow safeguarding
- Exploitative PR motives
- Refusal to pay young people
- Reputational risk

If red flags exist, ask whether concerns can be addressed; otherwise → DO NOT PROCEED.

Step 4: Safety, safeguarding, and responsible digital practice

Check whether the company meets your standards in:

- Child protection

- Online safety
- Harm prevention
- Data responsibility

If not, judge whether risks can be mitigated contractually.

Step 5: Youth involvement and fair compensation

Partnerships should enable meaningful youth influence and fair recognition.

If not, redesign the partnership, if impossible → DO NOT PROCEED.

Step 6–10: Assess practical and reputational conditions

The remaining questions test whether:

- All relevant groups can participate safely/equally
- Data practices are safe and non-exploitative
- You have staff/time/resources to deliver safely
- Funding conditions uphold good youth work
- The partnership will enhance community trust

If barriers cannot be removed or conditions cannot be renegotiated → DO NOT PROCEED.

➤ DOCUMENT YOUR REASONING AT EACH STEP

Capture:

- Risks identified
- Mitigations planned
- Any additional safeguards required
- Reasons for proceeding or stopping

This strengthens accountability and ensures transparency.

➤ USE THE TOOL ALONGSIDE THE ETHICAL PARTNERSHIP CHARTER

The charter sets the values - the decision tree tests whether those values are achievable in practice. Used together, they give a comprehensive ethical foundation.

➤ RE-RUN THE DECISION TREE IF CIRCUMSTANCES CHANGE

Reassess if:

- New data practices emerge

- Tech products update
- Staffing or funding changes
- Red flags appear mid-project
- Community concerns arise

This helps prevent drift into unsafe or unethical territory.