

ABM Vendor Partnership Initiative (VPI)

Partner Operating Framework

How the partnership is organised, governed, and supported within the Association of Bureau Managers

Prepared for existing and prospective Vendor Partners

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Purpose of this document

As the VPI moves from concept into day-to-day delivery, we want Vendor Partners to feel confident that they are investing in a professional, consistent and well-supported arrangement. This short briefing sets out the practical mechanics: who does what, how engagement is planned, how feedback is captured and shared, and how we maintain quality on both sides.

What the VPI is (and what it is not)

- A structured communications framework between your organisation and a cross-section of payroll bureau leaders.
- A member-led channel for honest insight, practical feedback and early issue surfacing - designed to improve outcomes for bureau teams and vendor teams alike.
- A way to replace dozens of fragmented one-to-one conversations with fewer, higher-quality touchpoints and clear follow-up.
- Not a sales channel into the membership. We protect member trust and keep engagements useful, relevant and respectful of members' time.

How the partnership is organised

Each Vendor Partner relationship is delivered through a small ABM delivery team, backed by ABM operations support. This creates a single, reliable point of contact, clear accountability, and a consistent rhythm of engagement.

Key roles and responsibilities

1) Vendor Partner Lead (ABM - Barry Matthews)

- Owns the overall partnership model, standards and quality control.
- Provides executive oversight and escalation route for any issues.
- Reviews quarterly progress and helps shape the annual engagement plan.

2) Member Representatives (ABM Members - two per Vendor Partner)

- Act as the member voice: gather, validate and summarise bureau feedback from across the membership.
- Co-design an annual engagement plan with the Vendor Partner (topics, timings, formats).
- Support delivery of engagements (focus groups, Q&A, roundtable sessions, polls) and help ensure follow-up actions are tracked.
- Report back to ABM leadership on progress, issues and member sentiment.

3) Event Manager (ABM)

- Coordinates calendars, invitations, venues/virtual logistics and attendee confirmations.
- Ensures each engagement has an agenda, the right member mix, and a smooth on-the-day experience.
- Owns post-session admin: notes, action logs, deadlines, and follow-up communications.

4) Operations Manager (ABM – Sarah Hatch)

- Provides dedicated operational support to ensure the VPI runs consistently and professionally as the programme grows.
- Maintains templates, schedules, delivery checklists and reporting cadence across all Vendor Partners.
- Supports the Event Manager with capacity and continuity (including cover, coordination and documentation).

Planning the year: the engagement plan

Within the first 30 days of partnership start (or renewal), we agree a simple 12-month engagement plan. This keeps activity realistic, member-first and results-focused.

The plan typically includes:

- A short list of priority themes (e.g., service/support, adoption, roadmap feedback, compliance-related needs, onboarding).
- A target number of structured engagements (commonly 3–6 per year, depending on tier and objectives).
- A regular check-in cadence (e.g., monthly or every 6–8 weeks).
- Clear success measures for both sides (see 'How we measure value').

Engagement formats (menu)

Engagements are selected to suit your objectives and member value. Typical formats include:

- Member focus group (in-person or virtual): structured discussion with a curated cross-section of bureau leaders.
- Live Q&A session: topic-led session to surface common questions and share best practice guidance.
- Webinar (education-led): practical session for members; not a product pitch.
- Member poll / pulse check: quick quantitative insight to validate direction or prioritise issues.
- Roundtable sponsorship / session slot: facilitated discussion within an ABM event, where appropriate.
- 1:1 executive check-in: partnership governance, planning and escalation.

Quality standards and guardrails

We protect member trust by setting clear expectations for all engagements.

ABM will ensure:

- The right audience: participants are curated to match the topic and provide balanced, real-world insight.
- Preparation: every engagement has a clear agenda, outcomes and questions in advance (where appropriate).
- Neutral facilitation: sessions are chaired to keep discussion constructive and actionable.
- Follow-through: actions, owners and timelines are recorded and progress is reviewed.

Vendor Partners commit to:

- Respectful engagement: no hard selling to members during sessions; education and listening first.
- Clarity: be transparent about what can/cannot be changed and on what timescales.
- Responsiveness: acknowledge issues raised and provide updates, even where the answer is “not yet”.
- Professional conduct: treat member insight as valuable professional input.

Feedback handling, confidentiality, and data

Members are more candid when they know their input is handled properly. ABM therefore operates a simple 'safe channel' approach:

- We agree in advance what information is attributable vs anonymised.
- Session notes are shared promptly with an actions log; sensitive points can be anonymised to protect individuals.
- Where we run polls, we share aggregated results only (unless explicit consent is given).
- ABM does not share member contact details for sales outreach without permission.

Operating rhythm and communications

A typical operating rhythm looks like this:

- Regular check-in call (monthly or every 6–8 weeks): progress, upcoming topics, open actions.
- Structured engagement (quarterly, or as agreed): focus group / Q&A / webinar / poll.
- Post-engagement follow-up (within 5 working days): notes, actions, deadlines and next steps.
- Quarterly partnership review: what we learned, what changed, what we'll do next.

How we measure value

We keep measurement practical, not bureaucratic. Examples include:

- Reduction in repeated support issues through early surfacing and shared guidance.
- Improved adoption outcomes (onboarding, usage, feature uptake) based on member feedback.
- Clearer vendor communications to bureaus and fewer "mixed messages".
- Documented product/service improvements influenced by the bureau community.
- Stronger relationships and trust on both sides, evidenced by participation and sentiment.

Next steps for current Vendor Partners

If you are already contracted as a Vendor Partner, the immediate next steps are:

- We will confirm your two ABM Member Representatives.
- Schedule an initial planning call to agree your 12-month engagement plan.
- Select your first engagement topic and preferred format.
- Agree confidentiality / attribution preferences for session notes and outputs.

For any questions, contact:

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