



Vanuatu

LONELY PLANET 2025 | TOP 10 COUNTRIES TO VISIT



# SKILLS FOR TOURISM

## 6-MONTH PROGRESS REPORT

Image 1: Yakel traditional village on Tanna featured in Lonely Planet advertisement, Source VTO



July – December 2024

## INTRODUCTION

This progress report provides an update on the Skills for Tourism (SfT) workstream activities that have been implemented over the six-month period from July to December 2024. The SfT workplan has been collaboratively designed and implemented with partners from the Department of Tourism (DoT), the Vanuatu Tourism Office (VTO), provincial tourism sector and the Ministry of Education Training (MoET) Skills Centres.

The key objective of the workstream is to continue to support the recovery of Vanuatu's tourism sector through the vector of skills development. Key priorities for July-December included:

- Supporting the VTO to roll out the 'Tourism Market Ready' program targeting Santo, Tanna and Malekula.
- Supporting the DoT to roll out Product Readiness checks on Efate, Santo, Tanna and Malekula.
- Supporting the construction and re-establishment of the new Malekula Travel Information Centre.
- Strengthening provincial tourism human resources and tourism association governance systems.
- Developing a 'Roadmap to Change' with the VTO.

These activities are in line with DoT and VTO work priorities, the government response and recovery strategy and with overall alignment to the National Sustainable Development Plan 2030 under the Economic, Social and Environmental Pillars.



*Image 2: VSP facilitating the 'Roadmap to Change' workshop with VTO management team*

## CONTEXT

The tourism sector is gradually recovering from past and recent crises. Disruptions caused by the national airline, Air Vanuatu, entered voluntary administration in May have largely been resolved with several new airlines including Jetstar, QANTAS and Air Niugini taking up the opportunity to establish links to Vanuatu. It is now anticipated that there will be an increase in tourist arrivals in the coming years as new carriers increase their flights.

Promisingly, a recently published Vanuatu Brand Sentiment Tracker Report by the VTO noted that holiday makers and other travellers continue to share positive feedback about Vanuatu as a destination, despite the challenges with Air Vanuatu. Additionally, Lonely Planet recently listed Vanuatu as one of the top ten countries to visit in 2025.

The 7.3 magnitude earthquake that struck Port Vila on 17 December immediately impacted the sector on Efate with cancellation of commercial flights and many tourists and Ni-Vanuatu alike impacted. Flights resumed five days after the quake with many tourists accessing repatriation flights earlier through their governments. The DoT has responded by conducting an impact assessment in Shefa province to assess damage to tourism operators while the VTO has focused on recovery initiatives to reassure potential tourists that while parts of Port Vila are currently unsafe, the rest of the country remains unaffected.

While Vanuatu continues to maintain its brand with strong marketing campaigns targeting the new aviation opportunities, there is a lack of consolidated information on the current capacity of tourism products and services, specifically accommodation and tours. This is needed urgently to ensure the sector can accommodate the potential increase in tourist arrivals in 2025. There is heavy political pressure on the DoT and VTO to provide this information to the wider GOV and donor partners in addition to international airline carriers interested in establishing new routes.

This emerging priority for data, in addition to the lack of reliable domestic air travel during 2024, influenced the direction of the SfT work plan in the last six months. Several of our priorities, such as tourism association development and human resource development, were postponed as we shifted focus to support VTO and DoT collect the information they needed.

## PARTNERSHIP STATUS AND CO-CONTRIBUTIONS

A four-year Partnership Implementation Agreement (PIA) is current with DoT and VTO which is due to end in December 2025.

A Partnership Implementation Framework (PIF) with VTO was signed in September 2023 and ended in December 2024. A deed of amendment was signed in May 2024 outlining a clear workplan for 2024 with an agreed co-contribution of VUV 6,200,000. From this fund, VUV 3,500,000 was used to implement priority activities relating to the Tourism Market Ready program on Efate and the construction of the Vanuatu Travel Information Centre – Malekula Branch. The remaining balance will go towards the furnishing and launching of the Centre in Q1 of 2025.

The PIF with DoT included an agreed co-contribution from DoT of VUV 2,000,000. These funds were originally to be used to progress priorities such as provincial tourism human resource development, product readiness, governance and management of the tourism associations and strengthening of tourism standards. However, given the shifting priorities to gather status information on tourism businesses, the funds were used to support product readiness and to assess product inventory in Tanna, Santo, Malekula and Efate.

In 2024, VTO, DoT and VSP were engaged in more regular partnership meetings. From these meetings, the team were able to discuss success, challenges and opportunities across the joint work plan and were able to share resources to implement our priorities together. This has paved way for a stronger partnership and demand for a renewed PIF for 2025 with an increased financial commitment from DoT.

PARTNER	AMOUNT COMMITTED FOR 2024 (VUV)	AMOUNT RECEIVED BY 31 DEC 2024 (VUV)	AMOUNT SPENT as of 31 DEC 2024
Vanuatu Tourism Office	6,200,000	6,200,000	3,500,000
Department of Tourism	2,000,000	2,000,000	2,000,000

## QUANTITATIVE DATA (JUL- DEC 2024)

SKILLS PROVIDERS ENGAGED	PARTICIPATION IN PARTNERSHIP SUPPORTED SKILLS TRAINING
<p>Six skills providers including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Five women</li><li>One man</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>62 participants including:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>35 women</li><li>27 men</li></ul></li></ul>
<p>Nine auditors (eight women, one man)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>One woman with disability</li></ul>

## KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED

### Audit of accommodation providers in Sanma, Tanna, Malekula, Efate and offshore islands.

- The insolvency of the national airline created new aviation opportunities with more routes and seats now available through carriers such as Jetstar, Air Niugini and QANTAS. This, in addition to strong destination marketing campaigns from the VTO, provides confidence there will be an increase in visitor numbers in coming years. While this is good for the sector, there was insufficient data to determine if current tourism products and services are sufficient to cater for a large increase.
- In collaboration with DoT and VTO, the Partnership supported the rollout of an accommodation audit in Sanma, Tanna, Malekula and Efate using the product readiness tools and resources developed earlier in 2024. The audit questions focused not only on the physical attributes of the accommodation providers but also on their business setup. Questions on accessibility, waste management and climate resilience were included.
- 243 accommodation providers were assessed during the audit (61 on Santo/Aore, 103 Efate and offshore islands, 39 Malekula and 40 on Tanna) by nine auditors engaged through SfT (eight women and one man). The data highlights those businesses that are 'product ready' and can be connected with VTO for market ready assessments in addition to those who still need further support from the DoT and basic skills training to enable them to meet product quality standards.
- The findings of this audit are vital for sector partners (including VTO, DoT and the Partnership) to ensure that future tourism development is demand driven and that skills training addresses key issues and concerns. Additionally, the data will complement the impact assessments being conducted in Shefa province following the earthquake on 17 December to enable a more effective recovery effort.



*Image 5: Product Inventory assessment, Whitesands, Tanna*

# KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED

## Targeted product development in Tanna, Malekula and the Banks

- In collaboration with the DoT, three targeted skills development activities were delivered in the second half of 2024. This includes a tour guide workshop and coaching session on Tanna, a basic hospitality workshop and coaching in the Banks, and First Aid training in southwest Malekula. These workshops were attended by a total of 62 people (35 women and 27 men, including one woman with a disability).
- Key outcomes from these skills activities include:
  - **Tour Guiding workshop on Tanna:** Enhanced skills for tour guides from major tour assets focusing on customer service, risk management and safety. The coaching session including discussions on climate adaptation, environmental impact and protection for each business.
  - **Hospitality on Mota Lava and Vanua Lava:** Improved skills in hospitality focusing on housekeeping, food and beverage using local produce as well as customer service to support domestic tourism in the area.
  - **First Aid in Malekula:** Improved knowledge and skills on how to be first respondents during an emergency or accident for tours and accommodation providers.
- With support from DoT, the Partnership will continue to deliver targeted skills training through the Skills Centres in 2025 based on the key skill gap areas identified in the product inventory assessment to ensure local tourism businesses thrive and are operating responsibly and sustainably.



Image 5: Bed making during workshop in Sola

*"Afta long workshop ya, yumi expectem blong luk wan difference long setup blong table mo how umi cleanim mo mekem bed blong guest blong yumi."*

**Motalava Community Liaison  
Officer**

# KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED

## Tourism Market Ready data now available in digital dashboards

- Building on the successful collaboration earlier in the year, the Partnership worked with the VTO to develop an online digital dashboard to present the summary of findings from the Market Ready Survey. A pilot was successfully rolled out in Shefa earlier in 2024, however the VTO did not have a clear and easy way of extracting the data summaries needed.
- The new Dashboard tool presents live data linked to VTO's Kobo Toolbox forms and will enable the VTO Business Intelligence Team to share critical information on market ready products with the wider VTO staff in addition to wholesale and marketing partners.
- The dashboard was created using MS PowerBI and is refreshed weekly, ensuring the latest data from the Market Ready Survey is being presented. As more assessments are conducted in 2025 the data will automatically load into the system for real time reporting.

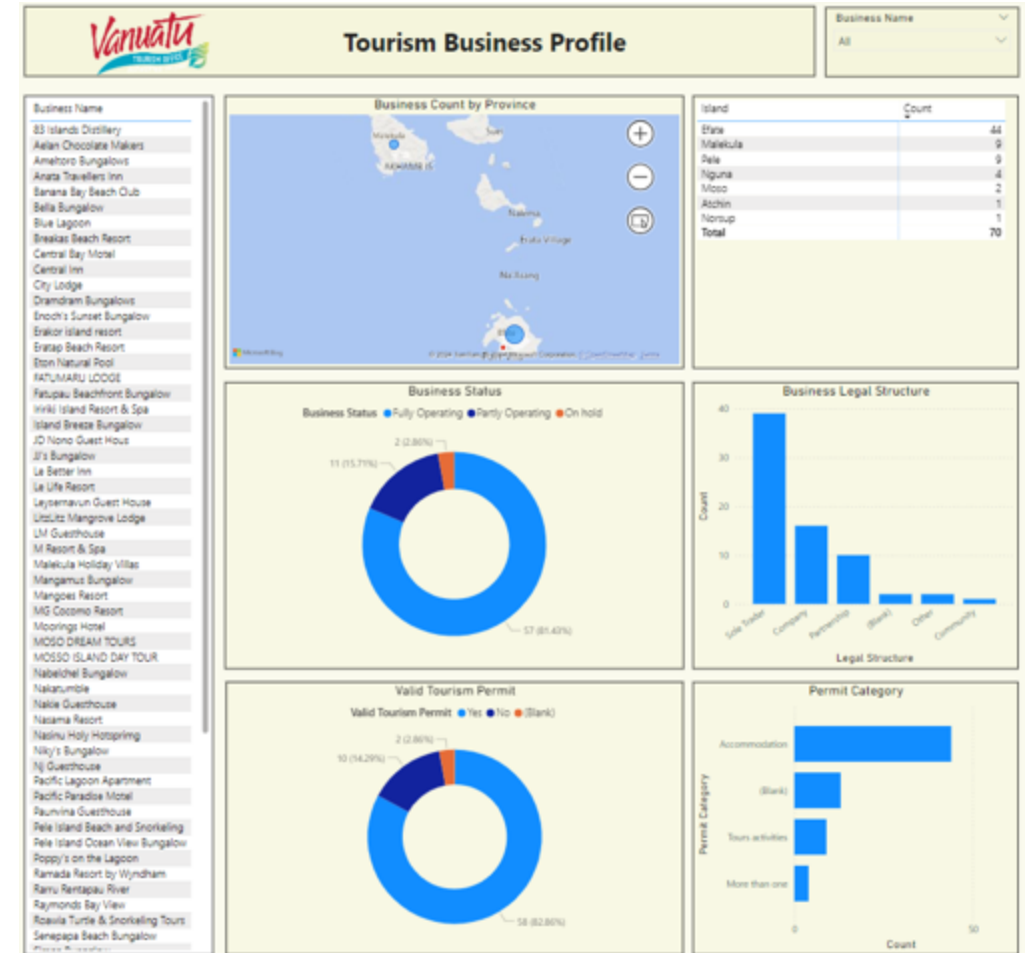


Image 6: Draft screenshot from the VTO's new market ready dashboard



## KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED

### Progress establishing the Vanuatu Travel Information Centre – Malekula Branch

- The Partnership is supporting the VTO and the Malampa Tourism Association to establish the Vanuatu Travel Information Centre (VTIC) Malekula as a market access hub for provincial tourism operators in Malampa. The VTIC Malekula, which will operate within the VTO's network of provincial Travel Information Centres, will create opportunities for local tourism operators to promote their businesses directly to domestic and international markets.
- A groundbreaking ceremony took place on 23 August 2024, officiated by the VTO, Malampa Skills Centre, Malampa DoT, Malampa Tourism Association and the Malampa Provincial Government. The building has been designed to be cyclone resistant and disability accessible. An Environmental Impact Assessment was conducted by the Department of Environment prior to the construction of the building.
- With support from the Malampa Skills Centre, the building is being constructed by a local contractor and is in the final stages of completion. Recruitment of staff is in progress and the opening of the centre is now scheduled for Quarter 1, 2025. The VTIC Malekula Branch will complement the existing VTO's Travel Centre Network branches in Port Vila, Tanna and Santo.
- The Partnership, with support from DoT and VTO, will deliver skills training in 2025 to the VTIC staff as well as tourism operators in Malampa who were identified as champions from the product inventory assessment this year to ensure they are operating to standard and are providing quality services and experiences for domestic and international visitors alike.



*Image 7: Partners officiating the groundbreaking ceremony for the VTIC- Malekula Branch*

# KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED

## Support for VTO to develop a 'Roadmap to Change'

- The VTO plays a key role in promoting and developing Vanuatu's tourism sector, including implementing marketing strategies, building partnerships with international and domestic stakeholders, and supporting the growth of tourism-related businesses to enhance the appeal of Vanuatu as a destination for both international and domestic tourists.
- Despite its potential, the development of the tourism sector in Vanuatu faces many challenges, and the VTO is at the heart of efforts to address these. In discussions between Partnership staff and the VTO Chief Executive Officer (CEO) throughout 2023, it became clear that it is difficult to summarise the collective impact of VTO's efforts, and to determine whether the VTO's limited human and financial resources are being allocated to priorities that will deliver the greatest impact.
- In July, the Partnership's Quality Systems team provided technical support to VTO staff to develop a Theory of Change or 'Roadmap to Change'. The training began with an introduction for VTO staff on what a 'Roadmap to Change' is and why it is used, followed by a collaborative session where VTO staff co-created their own roadmap, outlining the long-term outcomes the VTO is aiming to achieve and the steps that need to be taken to achieve them (i.e the pathways, or 'roadmap').
- The Partnership will continue working with the VTO to finalise the Roadmap in 2025 and may also provide support to develop a monitoring framework to track progress.



*Image 8 and 9: VTO management and VSP staff at the first 'Roadmap to Change' workshop.*

## ADDITIONAL RESULTS (CROSS CUTTING)

### Better Balance

- 35 women participated in targeted skills training in the second half of this year representing 56% of all participants. In addition, eight male champions attended skills training in basic hospitality (housekeeping and customer service) in Torba, a role traditionally held by women.
- 13 women industry experts (skills coaches and audit enumerators) assisted with the implementation of activities in the last six months.

### Disability Inclusion

- One woman with a disability from Vanua Lava has participated in skills training in the last six months.
- The VTIC - Malekula Branch building has been built with accessibility in mind and ramps and wider doorways have been constructed to allow wheelchair access.
- The Product Readiness Audit survey also included questions on accessibility and available services for tourists with disabilities.

### Environmental Sustainability

- The Tour Guide workshop delivered on Tanna included an emphasis on sustainability principles, including environmental conservation and cultural preservation. This approach will help to safeguard Vanuatu's natural and cultural assets for future generations while fostering responsible tourism practices. This approach will be scaled up in tour guide training and coaching in 2025 in all provinces.



*Image 10: Tahnia and Dora, two female auditors, conducting the product readiness survey audit on Efate.*

# LESSONS LEARNED AND ACTIONS

**Lesson 1:** In addition to ensuring our coaches and skills providers have the correct technical skills, there is a need to ensure our local coaches understand their responsibilities when operating as consultants (rather than employees of the Partnership) including an explanation on activity costs versus private business costs.

**Action:**

- Clear information needs to be provided during activity briefings in addition to allowing time of coaches to raise any challenges or questions.
- Include a session around consultant business ownership at the annual coach's induction.

**Lesson 2:** It is important for SfT to ensure our national and provincial partners are aware of our shared priorities and the implementation requirements within them to ensure effective partnering.

**Action:**

- Discuss with partners the importance of them taking the lead on implementation.
- Suggest national DoT and VTO partners share our PIF and work plan priorities with their provincial staff while also encouraging the Skills Centre Managers to meet with the provincial DoT and VTO staff to discuss shared priorities.

**Lesson 3:** SfT needs to understand any specific reporting requirements needed from partners during the development of PIFs. This is especially critical when partners are co-investing in our shared priorities with funding from a third source. For example, DOT contributing money from New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) into the Skills Development Fund.

**Action:**

- Encourage partners to include this information at the beginning of partnering discussions and ensure they provide clear requirements on reporting to enable the team to report in a way that allows the information to be used, as well as facilitate reporting to donors.

## ANNUAL QUANTITATIVE DATA (JAN-DEC 2024)

SKILLS PROVIDERS ENGAGED	PARTICIPATION IN PARTNERSHIP SUPPORTED SKILLS TRAINING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Eight skills providers including:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Five women</li><li>Three men</li></ul></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>74 participants including:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>39 women</li><li>35 men</li></ul></li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Nine auditors (eight women, one man)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>One woman with a disability</li></ul>

## SFT WORK PLAN SUMMARY FOR 2024

<b>WORK PLAN PRIORITY AREAS &amp;/OR GREEN SHOOTS</b>	<b>END OF YEAR STATUS UPDATE</b> (no progress, limited progress, adequate progress, good progress, excellent progress)	<b>ADDITIONAL COMMENTS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Product Readiness</li> </ul>	<p>Adequate</p>	<p>Product inventory delivered in four locations (Efate, Sanma, Tanna and Malekula). Infographics developed and a detailed report outlining recommended skills development activities and challenges that need to be addressed including dashboards developed to summarise data for decision making. Skills training package to be developed and implemented in Sanma, Tanna and Malekula in 2025 considering available human resources (coaches) to implement.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Market Readiness</li> </ul>	<p>Adequate progress</p>	<p>The Partnership and VTO were only able to conduct surveys on Efate in the first half of the year. There were plans to continue delivering the surveys on other islands during the second half of the year but with the change in the context it has been decided that this will be conducted after DoT has completed the Product Inventory. This will be implemented in 2025.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Market Readiness (cont): VTIC - Malekula Branch</li> </ul>	<p>Good progress</p>	<p>Construction of the building is in its final stages with interior work being completed in December. Staff recruitment is underway with professional development scheduled for January and February 2025. Opening of the Centre was scheduled for January 2025, however given the dissolution of Parliament and the national election, the opening has been moved to March 2025.</p>

## SfT WORK PLAN SUMMARY FOR 2024

<b>WORK PLAN PRIORITY AREAS &amp;/OR GREEN SHOOTS</b>	<b>END OF YEAR STATUS UPDATE</b> (no progress, limited progress, adequate progress, good progress, excellent progress)	<b>ADDITIONAL COMMENTS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Tourism Human Resource Development</li> </ul>	Limited progress	<p>Workshops and coaching including First Aid delivered to Tour Leaders in Q1 of 2024. Only one Tour Leader was engaged on Tanna as an assistant coach to deliver Tour Guide workshop along with the head coach. Other planned activities were put on hold due to changes in the context (Air Vanuatu entering administration and new airlines flying to Port Vila).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ VTO Strategic Support</li> </ul>	Good progress	<p>Two sessions conducted with the VTO management team to develop VTO's 'Roadmap to Change'. A draft version of the roadmap was completed and shared with VTO pending further discussion. This priority will be carried forward in 2025.</p> <p>Strategic systems support provided to VTO Business Intelligence Team to enable them to develop new digital dashboards to view and share information via the MS Power BI platform.</p>

## OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS IN 2024



- Overall, despite challenges, SfT was able to deliver several activities as planned for 2024 and successfully demonstrate the ability to adapt planning to fit with emerging priorities. For example, the Product Readiness work was fast tracked in the second half of the year given the political pressure on DoT and VTO to provide information to the Council of Ministers.
- In 2024 SfT focused on supporting the tools and processes used by DoT and VTO in the roll out of their new Product Ready and Market Ready programs. This included supporting with revisions of checklists, processes, terminology as well as data collection and visualisation tools. In this way SfT has invested time in supporting our partners to establish quality, fit for purpose strategies to collect relevant tourism information and to determine the most urgent areas of skills development needed for roll out in 2025.
- It is likely that we will see more tangible changes in quality and prosperity of tourism operators in 2025 after the product ready skills training program commences. In this way SfT is contributing to both Long-Term Outcome (LTO) 3 – sustainable benefits for clients by supporting DOT and VTO partners and LTO 2 – driving collective action and testing new approaches to improve tourism development in provincial Vanuatu.



# 2025 PRIORITIES

## **Tourism Product Readiness**

- Facilitate skills training through the Skills Centres in targeted areas for tourism accommodation and tour clients in Sanma, Malekula and Tanna based on the findings of the product readiness assessments.
- Support product inventory in Torba and Penama (remotely) and potentially deliver one or two targeted workshops (for example, development of the Grand Manaro trek). Aiming for a product readiness package of support for Torba and Penama by 2026.
- Facilitate accredited training (Tour Guiding) on Aneityum.
- Facilitate governance workshops for tourism associations on Tanna (dependant on when DoT reviews the Tourism Council Act and confirms governance structures).

## **Tourism Market Readiness**

- Support Market Ready baseline assessment/surveys (Tanna, Sanma, Malekula).
- Facilitate Market Ready coaching sessions (Tanna, Sanma, Malekula).
- Facilitate digital training to tourism operators specifically targeting Market Ready champions (Tanna, Sanma, Malekula).

## 2025 PRIORITIES (continued)

### **VTO Strategic Support**

- Finalisation of the 'roadmap to change' with VTO management and potential further support to develop a monitoring framework.

### **Tourism Human Resource Development**

- Facilitate professional development for VTO staff to maximise the use of new Power BI Dashboards.
- Facilitate professional development (package development) for VTIC - Malekula Branch staff
- Remuneration support for VTIC - Malekula staff (10 months only).
- Provincial human resource development, including development of industry coaches (housekeeping in Torba).

## KEY RISKS TO CONSIDER FOR 2025

RISKS	MITIGATION STRATEGIES
<p>The continuing limited domestic flight options may impact the delivery of our priorities in 2025.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Partnership will continue to explore alternative transport options to deliver its planned activities, including Vanuatu Ferry and charter flights. Activities will be prioritised and targeted to Santo, Tanna and Malekula, and options considered to proceed on a case-by-case basis. The Partnership will also continue to have open discussions with partners on how to share resources.</li> </ul>
<p>Lack of clarity from DoT and VTO on their priorities and requirements for Partnership support in 2025. The recent earthquake in Port Vila in addition to a new government have added further complexity. A budget for 2025 has not yet been passed in January 2025 and so partners are unsure of their financial allocations. There is a risk they will not be able to co-invest in joint-activities or that there will be increased pressure on SfT to cover all costs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Partnership will continue to facilitate quarterly meetings with management of both DoT and VTO to better understand the changes to the context of the sector, challenges and opportunities, and engage in discussions on how to best support tourism recovery.</li> </ul>
<p>The limited number of coaches available to deliver skills development activities may impact the potential response to findings from the product inventory assessments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Build the pool of tourism coaches in the provinces and link them with head coaches for mentoring.</li> <li>▪ Ensure that coaches understand their business requirements as ‘consultants’ and not employees of the Partnership</li> </ul>