

## Comparison of Doula Business Models

### Which model best suits your skills and personality?

Comparison Parameters		Independent Doula	Doula Partnership	Doula Collective	Doula Agency Owner	Agency Doula
<b>Peer Support</b>	<b>Camaraderie, not being isolated</b>	Doing your own thing; may feel isolated	Sharing everything with your partner(s)	Doing your own thing AND collaborating	Lots of interaction	Part of a group
	<b>Ease of backup</b>	Must arrange on your own	Shared on-call	Backup by group members	Set policy	Backup provided
	<b>Time off call</b>	Up to you; arrange backup or refrain from taking clients	Yes	Variable; depends on the group	Always responsible for business	Depends on policies; doulas accept assignments on a case-by-case basis
<b>Degree of Control</b>	<b>Control over business decisions</b>	Complete control	Shared equally with partner(s)	Complete control over your own business; consensus on group operations	Complete control	No control

Comparison Parameters		Independent Doula	Doula Partnership	Doula Collective	Doula Agency Owner	Agency Doula
Degree of Control (continued)	Speed of decision making	As slow or fast as you alone are capable	Slower due to need to come to agreement; more partners yield a slower process	Slow; more members yield a slower process; challenge of getting group members together	As slow or fast as you alone are capable	N/A
	Control over choice of clients, backup	Complete control	Shared with partner	Good control; depends somewhat on group policies	Complete control	Variable; depends on policies but often matches are made and doulas assigned
	Accountability (who responsible to?)	Responsible to self and clients only	Responsible to self, partner(s), and clients	Responsible to self, group members and clients	Responsible to self, agency doulas and clients	Responsible to self, agency owner, potentially other doulas (e.g., if working in teams) and clients
	Job security	High, if ... *	High, if ...	High, if ...	High, if ...	Can be fired or agency can stop making referrals any time)

Comparison Parameters		Independent Doula	Doula Partnership	Doula Collective	Doula Agency Owner	Agency Doula
<b>Marketing</b>	<b>Branding</b>	Sole control	Shared with partner	Done by the group	Complete control	No control
	<b>Website creation</b>	Sole control	Shared with partner(s)	Group control; or already done if joining an existing group	Complete control	No involvement
	<b>Social media, blogging</b>	Sole control	Shared with partner(s)	Shared by group members	Complete control	Not required
	<b>Events, other</b>	Sole control	Shared with partner(s)	Shared by group members	Complete control	May be asked to attend “Meet the Doulas” events or other promos
<b>Simple vs. Complex</b>	<b>Getting set up</b>	Complex; solely responsible for everything	Potentially easier since you can split the tasks; however more complex as you negotiate all aspects of the partnership agreement	May be relatively simple if you are joining a well-established existing collective	Complex; lots of decisions and tasks	Simple; few responsibilities; if independent contractor, then responsible for that piece
	<b>Ongoing administrative tasks</b>	Everything is up to you	Split equally with partners (theoretically)	Depends on what the group decides	Everything is up to you	Relatively little; just what the owner requires

Comparison Parameters		Independent Doula	Doula Partnership	Doula Collective	Doula Agency Owner	Agency Doula
<b>Simple vs. Complex (continued)</b>	<b>Communication challenges</b>	Very little; responsible to communicate with clients, backup doulas	Challenges increase with number of partners	High potential for issues; increases with number of group members	Complex; lots of people to communicate with and manage	Medium; communicate with owner and other doula team members
<b>Control over Reputation</b>		Complete control	Actions of partner(s) reflect on you, for better or worse	Actions of other group members reflect on you, for better or for worse	Actions of agency doulas reflect on owner, for better or for worse	Can control your own reputation but are associated with the agency brand and overall reputation
<b>Income Potential**</b>		Keep all client fees; occasionally pay for backup	Split the income between the partners	Keep all client fees; may need to pay a fee to collective to cover administrative expenses	Keep percentage of fees	Payment amount pre-determined; agency keeps a percentage; may make it easier for new doulas to earn an income sooner rather than later

Excerpted from The Doula Business Guide Workbook, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition © 2024 by Patty Brennan

\* The caveat here is that the business owner must have the skills and determination to stick with it and do what is required to be a successful small business owner.

\*\* The real answer on “income potential” is, “It’s up to you!” Each model has its pros and cons and there are many parameters for success.



For more information on doula business models and structures, see Chapter 1 of *The Doula Business Guide, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*.

## Examining Your Priorities Exercise

Take out two different colored highlighters (e.g., yellow and green). Use the green to highlight any factors above that are of value to you or that strike you as a strong advantage.

Next, highlight any items in yellow that strike you as a strong disadvantage. Now, rank the highlighted items according to their importance to you. A picture should be starting to emerge. Which business model appears to most happily fit who you are today?

Remember, some of these categories are not mutually exclusive and where you start out does not necessarily dictate where you end up. You could, for example, work on building an independent practice as you accept jobs with a doula agency.