

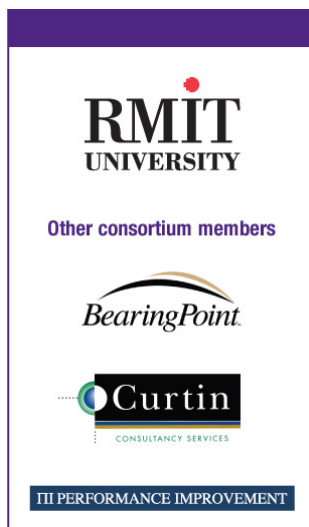
Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy

2000 - 2004

**Sustainability
and Legacy**

Issues Paper

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Summary

This paper has been developed as part of the evaluation of the Australian Government's Stronger Families and Communities Strategy ('the Strategy'). The evaluation is intended to report on the achievements and learnings from the Strategy to inform future policy, planning and implementation of projects to strengthen families and communities.

Sustainability is an important issue for the Strategy and was one of the criteria considered when recommending which projects would be funded. This paper sets out a conceptual framework for sustainability, illustrated with examples from Strategy projects. The paper draws on previous research literature on sustainability, Strategy documentation, and information about projects funded under the Strategy, including all questionnaires then available from completed projects, project documentation (progress reports and final reports) from a sample of 20 projects nominated by State and Territory Offices as particularly relevant and telephone follow-up interviews with a sample of 20 completed projects. This conceptual framework will form the basis for the more comprehensive empirical analysis of the Strategy, including questionnaires from projects about their plans for sustainability when the project ends, and follow-up interviews with a larger sample of completed projects to gather information about what has happened since funding ended.

Much of the research and policy literature on sustainability focuses primarily on the issue of environmental sustainability, or on sustainability in terms of the continuation of project activities after initial short-term funding ends. This paper sets out five different aspects of sustainability relevant to the Strategy that incorporate these aspects and add several more. Some of these types of sustainability are important during the lifetime of the project, but many only become evident after the project has formally ended.

1. Sustainability of participation (of clients, staff, partner organisations and the community) during the project;
2. Sustainability of capacity, both pre-existing capacity and that built during the project;
3. Sustainability (and possibly augmentation) of the outcomes that were achieved for individuals, families and communities during the projects;
4. Sustainability of activities (often, but not always, linked to securing ongoing funding);
5. Sustainability of the service model exemplified during the project.

Two of these aspects of sustainability have been addressed in previous papers produced – sustainability of outcomes has been discussed in a paper on early intervention, and sustainability of capacity has been discussed in a paper on community capacity building.

Since the term 'sustainability' is often used to refer to only one or two of these aspects, it may be useful to use the term 'sustainability and legacy' to clearly include all of the lasting impacts of the Strategy projects, particularly those which are often inadvertently excluded due to a focus on continuation of services – changes to capacity, lasting outcomes for participants, and continuation of service models. The issue of sustaining engagement during project implementation is also an important issue that cannot be taken for granted.

1 Explicit focus on sustainability in the Strategy

The issue of sustainability was recognised as important from the beginning of the Strategy, including during processes of developing project proposals. Two of the eight principles underpinning the Strategy related to sustainability:

Building community capacity: Capacity-building is about increasing the personal and collective resources of individuals and communities so that they can respond to challenges and seize opportunities that come their way.

Making the investment count: It is important that the benefits delivered by a project are sustainable and comparable with the benefits delivered by other projects of a similar cost. Projects should contribute to community strength not just in the short term but should also help communities build the skills to deal with any future issues.

Information provided to prospective applicants for Strategy funding (through Stronger Families and Communities Strategy Community Kit Fact Sheets) focused on sustainability in terms of developing the capacity of communities to deal with challenges and take advantage of opportunities.

It [the Strategy] aims to help families and communities develop the skills and resources they need to meet the challenges of economic and social change and to grasp opportunities that come their way.

Within the detailed description of their project, applicants were advised to provide detailed information on: “The short and long term impact of the project” and “How the impact of the project or its effect would be sustained”.

Organisations developing proposals for Indigenous Strategy projects were directed to “give priority to initiatives that encourage self-reliance, and sustainable economic and social development.” Organisations developing projects for CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities) were advised that “The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy aims to help multicultural communities build the skills, resources and knowledge they need to be able to solve their own local problems and take advantage of any opportunities that come their way.”

Sustainability was a factor in selecting projects for funding. The Department of Family and Community Services also provided guidance for the State and Territory Offices (involved in reviewing project applications and making recommendation for funding) about how sustainability was to be understood within the Strategy. Those assessing project applications were encouraged to think of sustainability more broadly than whether a project was likely to obtain ongoing funding and remain operational, to also include the project “legacy”, the ongoing impacts of the project and sustaining the Strategy’s broader principles after project funding ceased.

The rest of the report discusses these different aspects of sustainability in more detail. Examples from projects are intended to be illustrative. Analysis of the frequency of particular responses will be conducted in the next stage of the evaluation.

2 Sustainability of participation during the project

By their very nature, Strategy projects required the sustained participation (involvement and support) of many different groups during implementation – participants (the intended users of a service, or participants in an activity or project), the broader community, project personnel (including paid staff and volunteers), and partner organisations.

There can be challenges in initially engaging these different individuals and groups, and in maintaining their active participation.

2.1 Sustaining the participation of participants

Achieving and sustaining the participation of participants is critical to the success of projects and has been a focus of much activity. For some projects reviewed as part of this paper, this participation has meant sustained involvement by particular individuals and families; for others it has meant sustained involvement by the target group as a whole while actual clients have moved through the service.

Some projects reported higher than expected levels of participation:

The Expo exceeded our expectations with over 700 people passing through the doors.

Exceeded anticipated participant numbers.

Some other projects, however, reported difficulties in attracting and retaining participants, particularly some early intervention projects, where families have been reluctant to self-identify as needing additional assistance for fear of being labelled ‘bad parents’:

...when working with disadvantaged sections of the community we need to take a long time to develop trust and learn to work with a particular group in a way that is going to be respectful and effective – a much longer time than we had anticipated. The need for what we had to offer in the first part of the project existed and still exists, however it was not acceptable to the clients it was intended to help. The idea seemed workable to us, to FaCS and to the schools as community programs. A lesson for us all.

For this reason, several projects have begun with a community-focused activity with a focus on fun, before offering activities that focus more particularly on developing skills and knowledge.

For example, one project reported on an approach used to attract participants before beginning the community capacity building work:

On International Women's Day community profiles were put on display, a video was made where we interviewed both men and women in our community on their views, on what they thought of women in general.[the early stage of the project] "Mother's Day Pamper Yourself" – involved about fifty mothers participating in the day... [which included] massage, foot massage, stress management, hairdressing, modelling, aromatherapy, nails, makeup.... - provided an entry point to work with the Murri community in a non-threatening environment.

Another project reflected on difficulties in engaging participants and planned to introduce these broader community activities:

Even when consultations have been conducted and the community has expressed interest in the area, it seems that the community is not ready to commit or engage in specific activities... Due to these observations, emphasis is being put on the organising of community activities such as celebrations of community days where the community can be brought together, be informed and invited into the program in a more direct way.

Some projects have focused on identifying and overcoming barriers to participation, such as transport and location of activities:

Participation in the project was high and consistent. Offering transport to the project allowed many this opportunity to attend such a program that would otherwise have missed out.

[What advice would you give a similar project?] Make sure you think about how best to engage the client group and that they may need a whole lot of assistance in order to attend such as child care and help with transport.

The project demonstrated that home visiting works well and is effective in meeting the needs of families, particularly where there are problems with transport, isolation, difficulty getting children to appointments etc. Home visiting was the most common method for meeting with families. As much evidence suggests, meeting in the families' homes is effective in building trust and a degree of ease for clients and is supportive for families with transport and motivation issues.

Many projects found that community involvement in project planning (discussed in the next section) was important in encouraging participant engagement. One project commented:

Families participated in the planning of the project at each stage and assisted in identifying activities that would attract the engagement of other families – established a reference group.

Several projects found that having a tangible product, such as an education pack or information kit, to work on was helpful in sustaining participants' engagement.

Other projects have worked with either an established auspice organisation, or employed trusted local people, in order to build on existing trusting relationships with the community and facilitate engagement. In some other cases, an organisation or person with skills in community engagement was effective in working in a new community. For example, one project commented:

The auspice organisation had the experience from previous work to consult and engage the community – this is important to bringing the model to new communities.

It is crucially important that the worker not only has the necessary skills, but also has the trust and respect of the communities they work with. Such trust and respect take time to develop, therefore short-term one-off projects often do not achieve the outcomes that the funding body and the funded organisation hope for.

2.2 Sustaining the participation of the community

The Strategy funding procedures required organisations to involve the community in some way during the planning and development of project proposals. Data on this is available for most projects, as this was collected at the start of projects (unlike other information about sustainability which is collected at the end of projects). Almost all projects reported involving the community, in ways ranging from brief consultations to lengthy processes involving communities in identifying issues to address and strategies for doing this.

Individuals and communities can participate in a project to varying degrees with varying levels of influence. Such levels are often presented in the form of a ladder of participation.

The following table shows these different levels in order of increasing influence by the community together with some details of what activities might be associated with each level of engagement. These distinctions were not always clearly made in projects' descriptions of community participation, and it is not possible to classify all projects by the types of community participation involved.

Approach	Strategic level – setting priorities	Delivery – decisions on implementation	Community control over resources
<p>Passive, one-way People are informed about what has been decided: information shared between professionals only</p>	Community and user groups, newsletters	Community and user groups, newsletters	Information made available to community on opportunities for resource control (e.g. grants or awards schemes)
<p>Reactive ‘community consultation’ People are consulted or answer questions – the process does not concede any share in decision making. Professionals under no obligation to respond to peoples’ views</p>	Questionnaires, surveys, focus groups, panels and juries	Community groups and forums respond to service proposals. Users in the minority on management committees	Meetings with groups and community interests to explore opportunities for resource transfer
<p>Pro-active ‘community participation’ Communities influence priorities, resource use and service provision to be provided through the community planning partnership</p>	Joint planning groups and forums. Some co-options to statutory committees	Joint management arrangements over specific projects and activities	Local service development on a franchise basis; terms and conditions set by the ‘purchaser’
<p>Interactive or partnership working People participate in joint analysis, development of action plans and the strengthening of local groups and institutions. Learning methodologies are used to seek multiple perspectives and groups decide how resources are used</p>	Support is provided for community to have equivalent access to expertise, advice and training	Users / community have management control over specified services	Local service provision with joint community / public sector control or negotiated contracts
<p>Community mobilisation / empowerment People participate by taking initiatives independently to change systems. They develop contacts with external institutions for the resources and technical advice they need, but retain control over how those resources are used</p>	Pressure group and campaign activity to influence policy	Complete community authority for management of services	Service provision independently funded and managed by the community
<p>Entrusted community control As above, but community also influences prioritisation and control of service provision or associated budgets</p>	Community has lead role in determining policy priorities	Community has lead role in delivery of services	Community makes decisions over public budget allocation

Hashagen, S., (2002) “Models of Community Engagement”, Scottish Community Development Centre.



Almost all projects saw that community support had been very important to their project, and many pointed to the level of resourcing and time needed to do it well. One leadership project commented:

We are trying to get our internal processes in better order to be able to support the project through the initial stages of community engagement which has high levels of uncertainty ... [we] have experienced both models. By far the most successful was spending lots of time up-front in engaging the community in the design and content of the program rather than being the object of it.

Another project, when asked for advice it would give similar projects, commented:

Be cognisant of the specific issues regarding engagement and trust by the indigenous community and their cynicism regarding governments' agendas and allow adequate time for building of relationships.

The consultations at first were difficult. There were high levels of distrust and uncertainty. Residents felt we may just ask questions and leave. They wanted to know we were there for more than a year! We were quick to find some areas we could work with immediately and in doing so built trust and learnt more about what residents really wanted. Now they come to us with ideas.

The time taken to build relationships, particularly in Aboriginal communities is significant. It can take at least 2 years to build networks and develop high trust relationships. Communities that frequently see agencies visit for a brief time develop negative attitudes towards support.

[Advice to other projects] Allow time for the community to build trust. It takes time to build a rapport with community and for them to develop a sense of ownership of the project – once this happens you will start to see results.

Services need to continue and be funded for a reasonable length of time to build relationships and trust with participants.

There was sometimes a tension between the time needed to adequately involve the community in a project and timelines for completing phases in the project to meet funding requirements. One project reported:

The timeline set by the department has made true engagement and involvement from the community in the development of submissions for phase three difficult.

In some cases, a separate project focused solely on this consultation and community engagement and developed a proposal for a subsequent project to be funded under the Strategy. While this was in line with the objectives of the Strategy, in some cases, by the time a project proposal had been developed, available funding had already been allocated. This was less of a problem in regions identified as 'Targeted Areas' where there was more continuity of planning across projects.

Other projects have worked with an established auspice organisation in order to build on existing trusting relationships with the community and facilitate engagement. In some other cases, an organisation or person with skills in community engagement was effective in working in a new community. Examples of comments were:

The auspice organisation had the experience from previous work to consult and engage the community – this is important to bringing the model to new communities.

[A factor contributing to success]: Support provided through the infrastructure of the organisation. The importance of providing families with high quality care and a service they can trust was extremely evident. This is only possible through the stable infrastructure provided by the auspicing agency.

Community consultation was carried out in conjunction with other NGOs working with ethnic communities. This provided an expedient avenue for reaching these communities and their trust and involvement in the project.

The auspice organisation had developed a relationship and level of trust with many families who then come into the project as leaders in assisting to develop networks.

[The auspice organisation] has a proven track record in delivering community-based programs, have a thorough knowledge of, and trust of, the community.

They trust the organisation that the playgroup is carried out at.

[Auspice organisation] has been an effective facilitator of the Project, due to the credibility and trust associated with its position as an a-political community organisation and peak body. It is well placed to facilitate co-operative approaches between a range of stakeholders and has played this role in the Project very well.

Consistent advertising, developed a reputation in the community so fathers and service providers trust the quality of the groups for fathers.

Other projects focused on the work that staff needed to do to earn trust:

It is necessary to earn their trust and not just to expect it – the mutual respect then gained is so incredibly powerful and empowering for both the facilitator and the participant. It is a two way street – facilitators learn as much as the participants.

It was important to establish trust and rapport with individuals, before holding the quite different dialogue to what group dialogues allow. They also built a trust between [staff] ('the outsider') and community members, which allowed the collaborative workshop to run more smoothly and effectively.

By the faith of the people they have accepted my role. Firstly the people have recognised me as a traditional landowner and a community leader for the Women. When I sat down with the few individual families the family had trust with me, because I have already been doing things for them. If they need me for some reason I respond to their call.

Working with an auspice organisation that is trusted by the community may be particularly important for projects working with Indigenous communities. Several projects reported difficulties engaging Indigenous participants:

An Indigenous worker engaged early in the project was unable to generate any significant interest in the Indigenous community and it appears that a large amount of work would need to be undertaken to address the needs of this group. This was outside the scope and resources of this project, however some connections have been made and these might bear fruit in the future.

In order to explore this issue further, the next stage of the evaluation will include an analysis of projects that have been more successful in engaging Indigenous participants, including the strategies used and the context in which they have been successful.

Engagement of the community was also not something that was done only once at the beginning of the project and then ignored. One of the projects, when offering advice for other projects, suggested:

Ensure lots of time. Once the community is engaged, don't let that contact slip.

Another advised future projects to keep working on this aspect:

...the service provider needs to constantly reach the wider community, via local radio and newspaper promotions, being the guest speaker at the Senior Citizens, Citizens Advice Bureau, Country Women's Association, Apex, Lions, etc. Visibility reminds people you are there. As service providers we must be aware of the trends in our community and incorporate them into speaking engagements. The wider community then have a knowledge you can provide a particular service and that you are aware of what's happening in your region.

Delays in implementing projects, for whatever reason, could lead to a dissipation in community support:

The significant time lag from submission of application to receiving funding meant that much previously generated community support and interest had been lost and had to be re-engaged.

2.3 Sustaining the participation of project personnel

In many human service projects, a key factor in success is getting the right people to work on projects (both paid staff, volunteers, and supporting agencies). These people's skills, personal qualities and existing relationships with the community and other organisations

are vital to the success of projects. Having a critical mass of staff and/or volunteers is also important for supportive relationships, diverse contributions of skills and attributes and for sustainability.

There are implications in this for lead times and continuity of funding – these special people are a very finite resource – and also in terms of the ongoing support needed for these people, who can be at risk of burn-out in short projects that do not pay sufficient attention to staff development and support, including formal debriefing where appropriate.

The recruitment, retention and professional development of staff in rural and remote areas is not just an issue for Strategy projects. These are human resource management issues that many projects and programs experience in rural and remote regions.

The quality of the relationship between personnel (paid staff and/or volunteers) and participants is particularly important. This can be difficult to maintain if there is significant staff turnover or if the project is very short. Some projects have addressed this through employing suitable local staff with existing good relationships with the community:

It is crucially important that the worker not only has the necessary skills, but also has the trust and respect of the communities they work with. Such trust and respect take time to develop, therefore short-term one-off projects often do not achieve the outcomes that the funding body and the funded organisation hope for.

Most projects reviewed as part of this project appear to have been successful in attracting and retaining appropriate staff – a significant achievement given the short-term nature of the projects which often have difficulty attracting and retaining suitable staff.

Some projects did however report difficulties with staff turnover:

[What I would do differently]: insist that the project be over a longer period in order to keep experienced staff.

Short-term pilots contribute to the constant turn over of staff in organisations. Partnership is based on the quality of trust in a relationship between people in organisations. This takes considerable time to establish and staff turnover adds to the challenge of maintaining partnerships over time.

Where staff turnover has occurred, there have sometimes been difficulties reported in adequately replacing them.

Volunteer turnover can also be a problem. An Early Intervention project reported:

One of the things that this project would do differently if undertaking this project again, would be to spend more time sharing the training with the paid trainer to try to build up a better rapport with the new volunteers, thus ensuring a reduction in the drop-out rate of the volunteers.

2.4 Sustaining the participation of partner organisations

For many projects reviewed as part of this paper, it was important to develop and sustain partnerships with other organisations and projects, including referral agencies for projects providing direct services:

...the service must be promoted at all levels throughout the community. This includes personal contact by the provider to their target referral source.

Some projects saw benefits in working with an auspice organisation that already had these partnerships in place:

[The Council] has a Youth Services internal department who has staff that had the skills and background in youth projects to support the project. [They] also had the connections with the youth sector and community to engage support for the project.

If these referring agencies do not develop and sustain trust in the project, they are unlikely to refer people to it, leading to difficulties in engaging participants. In one project where the numbers of families participating in the project was low, an evaluation that included interviews with referring agencies suggested that a lack of engagement of partner organisations has been a contributing factor:

There were some concerns expressed by the workers towards the end of the project that some of the referrals they had made to [the project] had not been followed up with the families. Some also felt that they did not have a strong working relationship with the Family Support Worker and did not have confidence in her ability to follow up with families and provide appropriate support.

3 Sustaining and using capacity built during the project

A key focus of the Strategy was to build the capacity of individuals, families, organisations and communities to undertake future activities and respond effectively to future challenges and opportunities.

One useful way of thinking about capacity is in terms of different types of capital:

1. Human capital – skills and knowledge;
2. Social capital – norms of trust and reciprocity that support co-operation;
3. Economic capital – including physical resources (including the environment) and infrastructure;
4. Institutional capital – processes and systems within organisations and products that can be re-used.

The issue in terms of sustainability is, firstly, whether capacity has been built during the project, and, secondly, whether it is used and maintained afterwards. These issues apply across all types of capital.

For example, one very small project involved existing community groups working together to erect playground equipment in a local park. This project created both economic capital (the physical playground) and social capital (co-operation between community groups that had not previously worked together). The ongoing success of the project will depend on whether this capital is used and maintained. In terms of the playground, this means children and families using it, and necessary repairs and topping-up of soft-fall mulch. In terms of the social capital, this will mean further activities to continue the links and supportive work between the different community groups.

Another project supported the building of a community garden, building economic capital (in terms of the physical garden), human capital (in terms of skills and knowledge developed during its planning and construction) and social capital (between and within groups using the garden). Ongoing work to maintain and use the garden has been important in continuing the success of the project.

Some examples of the different types of capital that have been built during projects follow. A separate paper for this evaluation, on community capacity building, has explored this issue in more detail across a sample of community projects. A future study following up projects will provide more information about the capacity built by projects and its subsequent use and maintenance.

3.1 Human capital

The following completed projects provide examples of activities or outcomes related to the development and/or use of human capital.

A leadership project provided a series of forums for community leaders with input from visiting mentors to develop their skills and knowledge about a range of issues affecting the local community. Part of the legacy reported by the project included:

A new sense of confidence to make changes for the betterment of the community.

Another legacy was an increased willingness to undertake training due to exposure to the project's training workshops and mentors. This project illustrates the link between developing of human capital (skills and confidence) and the development of social capital (networks and community involvement).

A project funded under the Local Solutions to Local Problems initiative delivered parenting classes to develop participants' parenting skills and knowledge of services and organisations providing family support.

The project noted an improvement in the confidence of participants and their parenting skills:

Parents' use of yelling and smacking their children decreased. Parents felt closer to their children and that their relationship had improved.

A project funded under the Early Intervention – Family Relationship Support initiative provided a parenting group. The human capital development outcomes reported by the project included seeing:

Women transform from often exceptionally angry, powerless individuals to women who could control their daily life and positively speak out for their children. One woman who was pregnant had (prior to the group) decided to adopt her baby out at birth but by the cessation of the group not only decided to keep her baby but is parenting safely and enjoying her role as a mother.

Other outcomes related to human capital that the project observed, were improved parenting skills and improved psychological wellbeing.

3.2 Social capital

The following projects provide examples of activities or outcomes related to the development and/or use of social capital.

A Potential Leaders in Local Communities project reported the application of skills acquired through the project to community activities, and the development of networks among the participants.

A Local Solutions for Local Problems project that provided parenting classes remained in contact with other parents from the program. That is, social capital was sustained beyond the parents' period of engagement with the project. Another Local Solutions project reported improving the interaction between its members (people with a disability) and the community.

Among the positive outcomes mentioned by a project funded under the Early Intervention – Family Relationship Support initiative was that a group of the women who participated in this project formed and became involved in running a support group with other parents in the community.

Project facilitators at each of the schools participating in a Local Solutions project reported students connecting with and becoming participants in local youth activities and that students had become active participants in the management and delivery of the project.

A community garden commented that there had been:

Interest by the wider community in the achievements of participants [and that] the neighbourhood has seen migrant and refugee families working together to achieve a tangible and useful garden.

Social capital can refer to trusting relationships within the community and also between the community and organisations, including Government departments. Some examples of these different types of social capital are reported below:

Community-based agencies and Council became resources to the community – the community members drove the ideas and sought assistance as required – [Families have] increased trust in the organisations available to families and the community.

Case histories are recorded documenting increased levels of trust and participation.

Community pride and increased trust between established residents and newly arrived families were two things we thought would take longer to establish than 12 months.

More trust between community and services including government departments.

One project discussed the need, however, to achieve a critical mass:

In each community where the course was conducted, there are now enhanced community networks. To a greater or lesser extent, these networks are characterised by greater trust and resilience (not sure about adaptability). But at the end of each course we were very aware that there were only a small group of graduates, and that the critical mass of people equipped to support one another in building a better community had not been reached. If we were doing it again, we would want to conduct three courses.

3.3 Economic capital (including physical)

Economic capital includes money and tangible assets, physical infrastructure, and natural resources, including the environment. Clearly there are links between developing human capital (skills and knowledge) and economic capital through increasing economic participation such as employment or enterprise generation.

An example of economic capital in terms of physical infrastructure can be seen in a Local Solutions project that renovated the local community centre and library and had since observed increased use of library resources and demand by groups booking the facility for meetings.

An example of economic capital in terms of financial resources can be seen in a project funded under the Early Intervention – Family Relationship Support initiative that reported that families who had participated were more self-reliant in a number of ways including:

Some finding employment ... [and] greatly reduced reliance on emergency funds, food hampers, etc.

There are numerous examples where employment followed participation in Strategy projects. Economic and social participation is explored in more detail in a separate paper produced as part of the evaluation.

3.4 Institutional capital

Another significant legacy of the Strategy is its contribution to organisations' development in terms of ability to find, and work, with relevant partner organisations, to consult more effectively with the community, and the development of facilities and management systems.

The support provided to organisations by the Strategy throughout the project application, approval and implementation stages had the potential to contribute to organisation capacity building through, for instance, the transfer of skills in project proposal development, negotiating the FACS system, assistance to locate or establish partnerships, or advice on preparing reports. The legacy of such capacity building in organisations is likely to extend well beyond the period of strategy funding.

Part of the legacy from participating in the Strategy that would apply to future projects reported by a Local Solutions project was having learnt to write "a better, more concise budget".

A Leadership project reported that the additional support received through the Strategy (over and above the funding provided) "encouraged other partners to become involved to a greater degree".

This project also reported having a "group of organisations around the coop that understand how to develop their own assets and support people to create structures that help them develop their own assets". This example also illustrates a link between the development of organisational capital and the development of economic capital.

Many projects developed tangible products such as information kits to assist organisations work better with community groups.

For example, a project funded under the Early Intervention – Family Relationship Support initiative developed an education pack comprising a CD with major input from the women who participated, a video and a booklet.

The project had received feedback from community agencies using the education pack that they felt “more aware of the impact of abuse on the women, on their daily lives and how they relate to others”.

While the group-based program underpinning the development of the education kit was not expected to continue without further funding, the kit was being distributed throughout the state to create awareness among other organisations and for use as a therapeutic tool or resource.



4 Sustaining outcomes for participants

The sustainability of outcomes achieved through projects is very important, particularly given the short-term nature of the projects. Many projects reviewed as part of this paper reported achieving important outcomes. Projects working with families reported outcomes including improved parenting skills, improved psychological wellbeing, and improved relationships between parent and child. Projects working with communities reported greater levels of trust and involvement in the community, and greater participation in community activities. Many projects reported outcomes related to economic and social participation, including participants commencing work, study or volunteer activity (these types of outcomes are discussed in more detail in another paper from the evaluation on social and economic participation).

The principle of early intervention is based on the premise that early intervention in problems or in life transitions can lead to lasting benefits – to outcomes that are sustained over time, or that even increase over time.

For example, one project, which used Strategy funding to create a physical space for Indigenous men, reported that the project had been the start of a significant chain of events. Since the funding ended, the organisation has gone on to secure significant funding (over \$500,000, much of it recurrent) and expanded into aged care, childcare, domestic violence, and a night patrol to get people home safely. The impact of these subsequent activities has been significant.

Since the project started, there has not been one suicide in the community (there were seven last year). There is still domestic violence and other violent behavior, but we have seen violence reduced by 50 per cent, which was achieved in the first 12 months of the project.

However, as the paper previously produced on early intervention makes clear, early intervention by itself is not always sufficient. In many cases, some level of ongoing support is needed to maintain these outcomes. As one project stated bluntly:

Such a program is dependent on relationships at all levels (families, staff, community). Trusting, safe relationships take a lot of time to develop. Short-term pilots do not achieve sustainable outcomes.

Other projects raised similar concerns:

Without ongoing funds to sustain the project and follow up on the last three years, we believe the families in this community will look at the last 3 years as just a bandaid approach to ongoing problems in the area. We believe we need a ten-year plan to achieve more trust and reconciliation in the [area]. Ideally you need almost a one-stop shop to cater for the needs in this community – this would be achievable over time, given there is always someone there to drive it. Community capacity building cannot sustain a community but it can make a change.

We knew that the community would feel aggrieved with the short time frame.

The project is coming together very well. I would like to see a longer period of funding (at least 4 years). This would ensure that maximum benefit was gained from the project. Indigenous communities take a while to trust such services and want to know that it is not going to 'disappear' just when it is running well. This would ensure that time is spent providing the funded service and not looking for and writing submissions for further funding to keep the Service going.

Lack of continuity can even lead to negative impacts. The external evaluation of one project warned that:

Cessation of this project may in some instances do more harm to some families (in need of more intensive support) than had it not been started.

Another project discussed the negative impact on community willingness to engage in future projects:

[Advice to other projects] The community is extremely willing to participate in capacity building and eager to have a say in developing programmes and services that support their needs but continued short-term projects undermine their trust in service providers and governments and foster a sense of apathy towards future involvement in these projects.

This leads to the understandable focus on the next aspect of sustainability – the sustainability of the activities of the project.

5 Sustaining access to services or activities

Even where a project has focused on building capacity, there can be an ongoing need for the activities or services of the project. For example, one project provided a program for teenage mothers during pregnancy and after birth to develop their skills and knowledge about parenting and to provide support during this transition. For these participants, sustainable access to ongoing support was achieved through linking them to other programs in the local area. However, there was an ongoing need for this type of project, which required securing some additional funding to repeat the program for another group. Initially this was provided through securing funding through the Strategy for a subsequent project, but ultimately, since the Strategy is a terminating program, some alternative ways of funding these activities will be needed.

There are four main ways of sustaining access to the services of activities that a project has provided:

1. Securing ongoing resourcing (usually funding, but sometimes volunteer support);
2. Incorporating project activities within the activities of an ongoing program (sometimes referred to as 'routinisation');
3. Linking participants to ongoing services;
4. Developing self-supporting networks (such as self-help groups or mutual support networks).

Based on information from projects that had completed by mid-2004, most projects expected the project to continue in some form. In a few cases the project was seen to have either achieved its goal and did not need to continue (such as one-off events including conferences and expos), or to have not worked well enough to justify continuing.

However, most projects identified a need for ongoing funding for the project to continue.

The following examples illustrate these different methods of ensuring the sustainability of activities, based on a small sample of projects that have been followed up. A later paper will report on the follow-up of a larger sample of completed projects.

5.1 Securing ongoing funding and other resources

Sometimes a project has been able to secure ongoing funding from another source.

For example, one project was designed to provide a parents' group and a playgroup for newly arrived migrants of one particular language group. When Strategy funding ended, the local Council funded it:

FaCS funding allowed the organisers to demonstrate a need for the program. Once the program was successfully running, and fulfilling a demonstrated need, the Council were prepared to continue the funding.

The group has now expanded to include other Asian migrants with poor English skills. One of the aims of the group is to promote interaction between language groups to overcome the isolation of many of these parents.

Another project has secured ongoing funding from the local Council, which will also run the program, together with funding from State government and support from other agencies such as schools and police. This project works with children in an isolated regional centre who are considered to be at risk. It provides a mentoring program and works in conjunction with a youth drop-in centre.

Sometimes projects have not managed to secure ongoing funding commitments. One project worked to support Year 11 and 12 students to make decisions about their future in work or further education. Since funding ended, the project has continued and has expanded to other year levels, currently involving nearly 500 students. Due to the support it has within the school and the wider community, it has managed to access “drips and drabs” from a mix of short-term sources, but it has not secured ongoing funding.

5.2 Incorporating project activities within the activities of an ongoing program

Sometimes it is possible for an organisation to incorporate some of the activities of a project into an ongoing program. It does not address the needs of families who have not yet received any services.

For one project, funded under the Early Intervention – Family Relationship Support initiative project, while the original project was unlikely to continue beyond the Strategy funding period in the same form, that is providing group-based support for participants, it was considering the option of providing a supported playgroup as a way of continuing support for target families.

5.3 Linking participants to ongoing services

Most projects funded under the Early Intervention initiative sought to link participants into ongoing services so that they would continue to get the support they needed after the Strategy-funded project ended. Projects reported outcomes such as women accessing community support such as playgroup, parents and children accessing counselling.

One Local Solutions project reported that chaplains and staff at targeted schools had engaged with students as a result of the project.

Linking participants to ongoing programs is important in terms of sustaining these participants' access to services developing self-supporting networks.

In some cases, capacity was sufficiently developed to be likely to be self-sustaining. For example, one project reported the development of a support group with other parents in the community.

However in many cases, this is not currently seen as a feasible way of sustaining participants' access to the support provided by the Strategy project, without at least some ongoing funded support:

At this stage the project has not gained enough community strength to continue without a paid employee at the helm to show, mentor leadership etc.

We discovered that the notion of sustainability is unrealistic in regard to continuation of programmes once funding ceases. As long as families have children such services will be required. Parents and communities do not currently have the knowledge, skills and resources to "go it alone". Although this project supported individuals and communities directly involved – and their individual knowledge and skills were enhanced, to make a significant long-term difference requires long-term approaches (i.e. 20-30 years).

Self-funding, and drawing on families' own resources were not seen to be sufficient to support the continuation of services in many cases. This poses a considerable threat to the sustainability of outcomes (where the same participants need ongoing support that is not available) if such funding is not available.

6 Sustaining the service model

Another way in which sustainability can occur is through documentation, diffusion and adoption of the service model. This can be an important function played by short-term projects.

To support this kind of sustainability, the Strategy included funding for Can Do projects that aimed to document successful projects so that the service model could be adopted elsewhere.

Tracking evidence of this kind of wider adoption of service models is more difficult, since it can be done by organisations which are not connected to the Strategy and do not report to it. The next stage of the evaluation will include asking auspice organisations of a sample of completed projects about this issue.



7 Further work on the evaluation

The national evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy is due to make its final report in August 2005. As part of the final stage of the evaluation, a study following-up project sustainability is planned. This will include:

- an analysis of organisations' views on the projected sustainability of their project (drawn from the questionnaires completed at the end of the project);
- follow-up of a sample of completed projects to gather data about their actual sustainability and legacy; and
- an analysis of the factors that best predict the actual sustainability of projects.



References and further reading

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Other issues papers produced as part of the evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004

Partnerships and Networks

Community Capacity Building

Early Intervention – particularly in Early Childhood

