

# REGIONAL INNOVATOR'S NETWORK

## Evaluation Framework

### Context

Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation (VFFF) and the Dusseldorp Forum (DF), have made a significant commitment to place-based funding in Western NSW that supports collaborative community efforts to address local social challenges and endeavours. For example: reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal young people in the Juvenile Justice system; ensuring that both the youngest and oldest generations in a rural area can contribute to and thrive into the future; or exploring economic development as an integral part of community renewal. These are big and sometimes fuzzy challenges, which require capability to engage others in innovative thinking, creating new solutions and making change happen.

In order to build capability specific to regional innovation and addressing local social endeavours, VFFF and DF have partnered with The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI). TACSI has developed a Regional Innovator's Network (RIN) to support people working out in community by linking them with one another and sharing learning in an expert-supported approach to innovation. The model fundamentally focuses on building the capability of communities to catalyse change, learning by doing and 'doing with not for' people. TACSI has drawn upon their expertise in co-design, place-based initiatives, systems thinking, service design and social innovation as the basis for a curriculum and learning platform.

Capability building is facilitated through two primary expert-supported components:

1. **Individualised coaching** that facilitates capability development by working alongside community connectors as they develop and lead co-design projects that are linked to their communities' goals
2. **A peer learning network**, which includes:
  - a. fortnightly peer sessions to explore the 25 curriculum capabilities
  - b. an online platform that provides learning resources, tools and case studies linked to the capabilities
  - c. annual peer learning sessions that the entire network is invited to attend

### **Purpose of evaluation**

The purpose of conducting evaluation of the RIN is to learn about the model:

- Measure changes in capability as a result of engaging with the RIN
- Reflect on, iterate and refine the model in terms of how it supports the capability needed for regional innovation; assess each of the components as well as the 25 capabilities; what works, what doesn't, what's worth doing?
- Observe any flow-on effects and 'ripples' for the wider project stakeholders
- Understand what needs to be in place, what preconditions need to exist, for participants to be able to engage and benefit from the learning opportunity
- Assess the 'stickiness' of the capability build and ongoing utility of the skills that have been developed – the relevance to community
- Test the potential to scale the network, e.g. within and beyond NSW
- Enable self-reflection

### **Scope of evaluation**

The scope of the evaluation will be focused on how TACSI efforts contributed to capability development for coaching and network participants. This will include an analysis of the contribution of the different components to capability development: coaching on projects; online peer sessions; and portal resource. 'Ripples' that may occur for project participants, e.g. how the community projects may have influenced changes in community, will be observed but not evaluated per se as the evaluation is focused on the effectiveness of capability build rather than the effectiveness of the projects run by participants. The evaluation will include reflection from TACSI, community connectors and peer feedback.

### **Audience**

The primary audience for the evaluation report will be VFFF and DF, as well as other potential funding partners. The results will be shared with the connectors and the TACSI team, but they are not a primary audience.

### **Approach**

The following methods will be used:

- **Most Significant Change (MSC)** stories will be gathered at the mid-point and at the end of the project, supported by ongoing gathering of **'moments of impact' stories**
- **Qualitative and quantitative surveys** of capability development against the 25 capabilities will be assessed for community connectors and other network participants. There will be a baseline assessment (or estimation, if required) for participants when they begin and another assessment at the end of the project
- **Reflection circle** - Community connectors, funders, TACSI and other key participants (e.g. potentially members of CAPP and the Lachlan Alliance) will reflect on the project at the end in order to gather key learnings

## Principles

In order to manage the evaluation within the scope and timeframes of the project, the team will work according to the following principles:

- Only collect data that is useful and needed
- Ensure a relevant level of rigour by combining qualitative and quantitative methods, within the project constraints
- The evaluation approach will be lightweight and nimble
- The evaluation will be used to inform future iteration and development of the RIN
- Create the conditions for honest feedback – particularly because there will not be a third-party evaluator
- Enable real learning
- Take a lean approach and keep it simple, in-line with scope

## Key evaluation questions

As an evaluation that seeks to learn about the model in how it contributes to capability building, we seek to understand shifts in capability for participants, and what led to those shifts.

1. **Effectiveness** – How effective has participation in the Regional Innovator’s Network been for building your capabilities to do the work of regional innovation
  - a. For connectors and core project members if appropriate
  - b. For network participants
2. **Contribution of components** – To what extent did each of the activities contribute to your capability development? E.g.
  - a. Project-based coaching
  - b. Governance activities
  - c. Peer network sessions (participating)
  - d. Peer network sessions (facilitating)
  - e. Platform learning resources
  - f. Yearly in-person peer network learning workshops
3. **Potential** – What are the early instances that speak to further potential of the Regional Innovator’s Network model to...
  - a. Build skills for community connectors that can be used in other work or long term
  - b. Contribute to increased capability at scale – observed via opportunities to iterate and grow the network model
  - c. Contribute to the change that communities seek – observed via ‘ripples’ with connectors and other participants

Additional reflection at the close of the project:

1. What are the conditions required for participants to:
  - a. Engage in the capability building opportunities?
  - b. Utilise what is learned? (in context, for instance in the reality of rotating roles)
2. How might the model be improved?
3. What is the potential to scale; and what would it take to scale?
4. Observe platform stats

Method	Frequency	Key Evaluation Questions (KEQ) answered	Evaluation purpose addressed
MSC	Mid-point End-point	KEQ1 – Effectiveness KEQ3 – Potential	Measure capability change Observe effects
Impact stories	Ongoing	KEQ1 – Effectiveness KEQ2 – Contribution of components KEQ3 – Potential	Refine the model Observe effects Assess stickiness
Survey	Baseline End-point	KEQ1 – Effectiveness (others as needed)	Measure capability change
Reflection circle	Mid-point End-point	KEQ1 – Effectiveness KEQ2 – Contribution of components KEQ3 – Potential Additional reflection	Measure capability change Refine the model Observe effects Understand preconditions Assess stickiness Test potential to scale

## METHODS – DETAIL

### 1. Most Significant Change (MSC)

Method – MSC is a participatory and qualitative process that enables the assessment of highly subjective and hard to measure changes. It involves collection of stories as responses to specific questions (below) and group ranking of stories in terms of significance in order to evaluate the extent of change that has occurred.

Questions:

- Effectiveness of capability build: “Looking back over the last year and a half, what do you think was the most significant change in your capability as a result of your involvement in the Regional Innovator’s Network? Why was this significant to you?”
- Ripples: “Looking back over the work that you have participated in as part of the Regional Innovator’s Network, what do you think was the most significant shift – or sign of potential shift – for the community? Why do you believe that is significant for community?”

### 2. Impact Stories

Method – collection of quotes, anecdotes and testimonials, often spontaneous

Questions: (if not spontaneous feedback)

- What happened?
- Why was that significant?
- What is the result?

Cohorts:

- Community connectors
- Project participants
- Peer network participants

### 3. Survey

Method – online survey based on initial in-person prototype

- Use of a rating scale to gauge level of competency from: No knowledge, aware but little to no experience, basic user, experienced user, subject matter expert
- The intent is to take assessments at the following stages: baseline (starting point) and final point

Questions:

- Overall capability – “To what extent do you feel you have the capabilities needed for the work of regional innovation?”; also “To what extent do you feel you have the capability to lead a co-design project?”
- For each of the 25 capabilities – “To what extent do you feel competent in this capability?”
- Rank the 25 capabilities – most and least useful
- Open-ended responses:
  - “What capability or capabilities do you think are most important in the innovation work you do? Why?”
  - “Are there any capabilities you need that have not been addressed through the Regional Innovator’s Network?”
  - How might you re-frame, re-organise and/or combine the capabilities to make more sense to you?

### 4. Reflection Circle

Method – Facilitated conversation around agreed questions

Goals: Celebrate, reflect on what has been achieved (capability building and community initiatives), provide feedback on the model and plan for scale & sustainability

Timing: Mid-point and end-point reflection

Questions:

- What has been your experience of the Regional Innovator’s Network? What value do you see in the experience and the model?
- To what extent has it contributed to your capability?
- What are the conditions required for participants to:
  - Engage in the capability building opportunities?
  - Utilise what is learned?
- How might the model be improved?
- What is the potential to scale; and what would it take to scale?
- What is needed to ensure sustainability of the work in each location (e.g. our responsibility to the community vs contract ends)? And of the RIN overall?
- What comes next?

- Legacy: what memories have we created together? What impact have we seen?
- Cheers: what appreciations would you like to offer the team?

Objectives of the reflection session:

- Improve/iterate the model – what works well, not so much, what’s next?
  - Individual reflection / graffiti wall / collage
  - Print piccys
  - Discussion reflection
  - Lego – future models – make scenarios of what these look like
- Sustainability of the work – sites, this model
  - Backcasting – from the scenarios – work backwards – what conditions, what needs to be in place
- Planning for Feb session – Southern Initiative (via Gael) visit?
- Planning/anticipating the schedule for next year (sites and cross-sites)
  - Bring next year’s schedule
- Celebrations – roasts and toasts /