

# A QUESTION OF PARTNERSHIP AND PERFORMANCE; CREATING A MONITORING FRAMEWORK FOR THE CWIC INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM

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## IN CONTEXT

Putting a monitoring framework in place improves an organisation's efficiency and enables it to demonstrate the value of its work more effectively. Capacitybuilders' National Performance Programme has provided funding for the infrastructure partnership Coventry and Warwickshire Infrastructure Consortium (CWIC) to develop such a framework and to link in tangible results for the sector to learn from. Working initially with 10 of CWIC's 15 partners, The Solution Shedd is aiming to deliver a draft monitoring approach by 31st March 2010.

## CWIC IN FOCUS

CWIC is a partnership between 15 organisations that all support and deliver services to the sub-region's voluntary and community sector. It evolved in 2004 from a Local Development Agency forum and is now primarily funded by Capacitybuilders. CWIC volunteered to take part in the National Performance Programme as it has not, to date, found a successful method to demonstrate the effectiveness and impact of its collaborative work between its partners. And while a lot of money and time has in the past been invested in infrastructure consortia, little appears to have been invested in finding methods to demonstrate the effectiveness and added value of collaboration /consortia working.

CWIC's aim for the project is to develop a framework that marries its management needs with the goals of its partners. In particular, CWIC wants to ensure it is fulfilling what it strategically aims to do in its business plan, to provide value for money for its partners and to achieve the highest impact possible.

## THE CHALLENGES

Participating in this project does present significant challenges for the consortium. As CWIC is a partnership and not a legal entity – its projects are owned by individual members, not CWIC itself. This can produce the difficulty of how to ensure that the projects keep to target and report back on their milestones. CWIC currently runs a quarterly action plan that's oriented towards receiving monitoring reports from the projects run by its members. However, there have been qualitative differences in how each group and institution has participated in the process and so the system has not been as successful as one might hope.

The members themselves highlight that CWIC's reporting is yet another evaluation requirement beyond what funders expect. With resources generally already stretched, it is not possible to prioritise CWIC's framework. Crucially, they feel the current approach gives them little value as it does not provide the type of data that funders need to justify continuous support, indicate how well the partnership itself is performing or show how much they each are investing in it.

This situation is underlined in so far as CWIC's members are a disparate group of organisations and The Solution Shedd's research indicates that while there may be many topical similarities, there are an equal number of dissimilarities. Monitoring is (and not surprisingly) aligned to their funders and/or relevant quality marks and some partners have strong overlaps (such as with NAVCA). A couple of the organisations have also created tight frameworks – such as those based on RAGs or Balance Scorecards – but the majority are affixed to action plans and milestones, and so are very much output-oriented.

**CWIC's mission is to: 'provide equitable support and coordinated services to frontline voluntary organisations and community groups; maximise resources, skills and expertise; reduce unnecessary duplication of activity and create a framework through which the sector can express its views and influence policy, service design and delivery and issues which affect its communities'**

In particular, impact is ultimately what everyone seeks – to not only justify their programmes but also replicate the experience effectively. The majority of members measure this through either dedicated project evaluations or participation in national surveys – such as the Ipsos MORI ‘Sports Participation’ statistics required for Local Authorities. CWIC itself does not have a consistent way to measure impact.

## PROJECT STRUCTURE AND MOVING FORWARD

As was detailed in the *Valuing Performance* campaign for the Capacitybuilders-funded National Performance Programme, third sector organisations are facing two critical realities. Firstly, if you can’t demonstrate the value of what you do, you won’t survive. Secondly, valuing performance by investing in the performance management process will improve what you can achieve for beneficiaries and enable you to thrive.

In the hope of identifying core elements that overlap across all of CWIC’s partners, as well as looking at how they measure success and performance, the first port of call has been a so-called ‘information audit’. All the participating members have shared their business plans, organisational structures, internal performance monitoring details as well as examples of reports submitted to ongoing funders. Those that align themselves to specific quality marks (IIP, ACRE, PQASSO) or performance systems (NAVCA, Volunteering England, Sports England) were asked to provide details.

The resulting analysis has indicated that there are strong overlaps in the types of services and support and to some extent objectives. Members are not only concerned about fundraising, but also the need to increase the number and effectiveness of volunteers, to increase capacity building, to be at the forefront of third-sector policy and to provide services etc. But as performance measurement is driven by funders, quality marks, internal resources or alignment to sector standards, each member conducts its monitoring in a radically different manner. Even where there are similarities, the small definitional nuances mean that evaluating the data would be like comparing apples and oranges.

The Solution Shedd’s next step will be to analyse the information gathered to create two bespoke directional frameworks for the project’s sponsor, CWIC’s Operational Group, in order to identify which it is most comfortable with. From there we will build a strategy map for CWIC’s members and focus on what indicators are viable. We do however anticipate, as is often the case, that there may be a need for phased indicators – those that can be easily collected now versus indicators that will ultimately tell the right story but will require more time to implement.

By 31st March the project aims to deliver a draft framework and roadmap for implementation after consultation with individual members. It is anticipated that CWIC itself will be implementing the programme under the Operational Group’s guidance.

In creating a performance monitoring system, success essentially relies upon four factors: a strong internal leader and if possible an incentive factor (such as funding); an accepted strategic framework to serve as a backbone; clear and communicated expectations of what the framework should deliver; and a plan that ensures the project is prioritised appropriately. While at this juncture three out of the four factors would appear to be in place, the potential effect of what could be a paucity of incentive remains to be seen.

*This is the first of a three-part case study, the second part will be published in the April edition of the National Performance Programme e-bulletin.*

