

Applying an Impact Practice approach with DSD's RISP Faith Based Engagement Strand

This case study outlines how Inspiring Impact Northern Ireland piloted an outcomes focused approach with public sector funders by supporting the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme's (RISP) Faith based engagement strand to apply an impact practice approach.

The Department for Social Development's RISP provides funding for regional infrastructure organisations involved in playing a supporting, co-ordinating or development role in relation to voluntary and community sector organisations, particularly in those policy areas which are the responsibility of DSD.

The Faith based engagement strand supports the Churches Community Work Alliance (CCWA) to promote faith based community development work through providing support, training, advice, advocacy, information and resource services to those faith based organisations interested in or engaged in community work.

1 | What was done?

The pilot with this particular funder's case study has operated across two distinct phases. The first phase (delivered by PWC) provided initial guidance and support to relevant staff within the Voluntary and Community Unit (VCU) to develop a theory of change for this strand of the programme. A second phase (delivered by CENI) continued this support to VCU but also engaged with CCWA staff to develop an agreed outcomes framework and support monitoring and reporting. The tasks included:

- Understand and apply the principles of good impact practice (See figure 1)
- A self-assessment of the current funding programme against the plan-do-assess-review cycle
- Develop a theory of change for this strand of the RISP programme
- Co-design an agreed outcomes framework
- Revise monitoring form in line with outcomes framework
- Support CCWA to generate monitoring and outcomes data

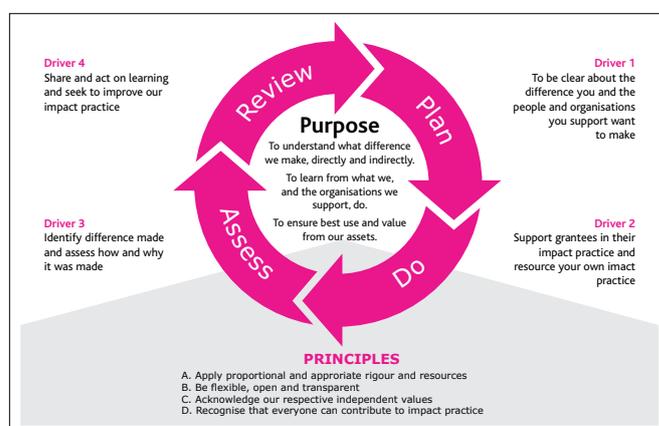


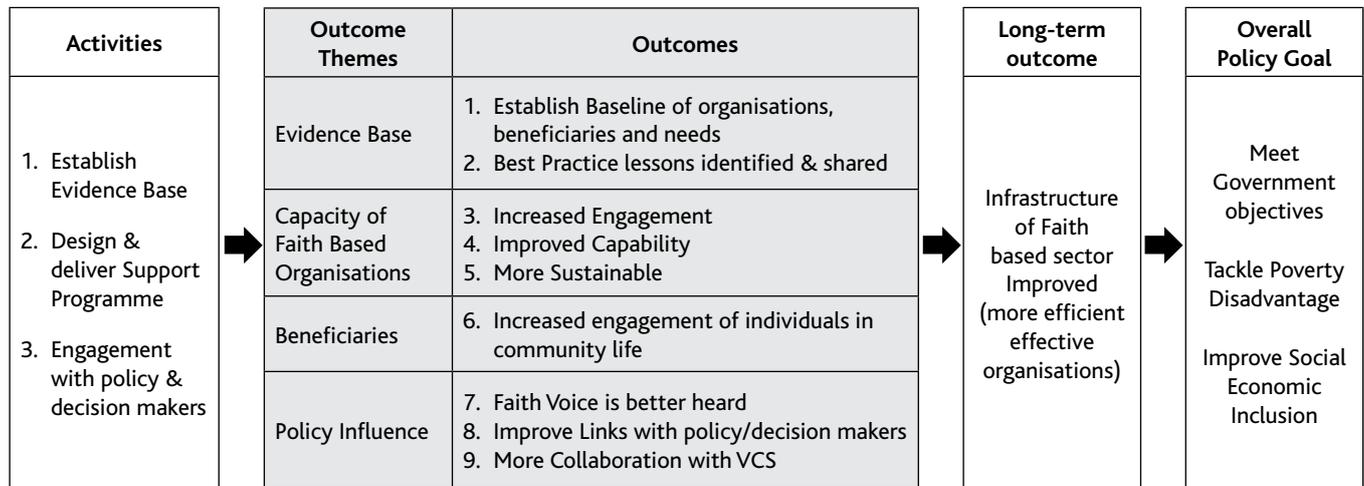
Figure 1

The first phase (Dec 2014 – March 2015) pilot tested the online Measuring Up! resource to review how VCU plan for, deliver, assess and review information that could demonstrate whether the programme has an impact on the groups it supports. From here they then embarked on developing a Theory of Change setting out in an overarching document what they hoped to achieve with this strand of funding.

¹ **Impact Practice:** the activities that an organisation does to focus on its impact. This can include planning desired impact, planning how to measure it, collecting information about it, making sense of that information, communicating it and learning from it.

While the initial support concluded in March 2015, CENI have been able to provide ongoing support to CCWA and the VCU as part of its own support commitments under the Generic strand of RISP. This involved refining the theory of change (Figure 2) and supporting VCU and CCWA to 'co-design' an agreed outcomes framework with accompanying indicators for this strand of the RISP programme.

Figure 2. Faith Based Engagement Theory of Change



Based on the above a more detailed framework was developed with indicators and specific targets set against each outcome and aligned with CCWA annual plan for the coming year. CENI then assisted VCU to revise the existing monitoring form to align with this new outcomes framework, while also supporting CCWA to test this and capture mostly quantitative monitoring data. In addition, the more qualitative outcomes evidence requirements were also identified and CCWA supported with data collection including using case study methods to evidence their achievements against these outcomes.

2 | What benefits are likely?

This process has helped us review our approach to thinking about and developing programme outcomes. Using the Measuring Up tool helped to identify gaps in our programme planning and management in relation to impact.

Developing a theory of change helped to align a diverse range of activities with programme outcomes and link to broader policy goals. The co-design approach to this and the resulting outcomes framework and accompanying indicators, lead to new conversations that the previous system and mechanisms had not asked –specifically asking the “so what” question. This has led to us having a greater understanding of CCWA’s work and how it can help address the Department’s policy priorities.

A revised monitoring process aligned with these agreed outcomes has been successfully developed and tested. A case study methodology is currently being developed to capture and document progress against the outcomes.

3 | What next?

The case study has successfully moved from the 'Plan' to 'Do' part of the impact cycle and is currently in the process of generating monitoring and outcome data. As part of DSD’s ongoing support to Phase 2 of the Inspiring Impact NI programme the RISP Faith based engagement strand will continue to be supported to complete the 'Do' and progress to the 'Assess' stage of the impact practice cycle. In addition, based on the learning from this work the Advice theme within RISP (which was also one of the initial funder demonstration projects) will also be supported to complete the 'Plan' and move to the 'Do' part of the cycle.