



CONNECTING
GOVERNMENT

Whole of Government Responses
to Australia's Priority Challenges

MANAGEMENT
ADVISORY
COMMITTEE

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>> PREFACE

I am pleased to present this important Management Advisory Committee Report on *Connecting Government: Whole of Government Responses to Australia's Priority Challenges*.

My strong perception is that the Australian Public Service (APS) performs well, compared to other public sectors around the world, in working across the organisational boundaries of bureaucracy. Every day, in many ways, we bridge successfully the demarcations of officialdom that can undermine successful policy development and delivery. But we cannot be lulled into a self-satisfied complacency. Challenges remain. More than ever before, agencies must continue to find new and better ways to work together to deliver results for the Australian Government and the community.

There are many reasons that we should work in a whole of government way. Not least is the fact that every major challenge of public administration—ensuring security, building a strong economy, coping with demographic change and crafting social policy—necessarily requires the active participation of a range or central and line agencies.

Australians rightly demand the delivery of government programs and services in a seamless way. They should also expect that, behind the scenes, all the resources of government will be brought to bear in the search for innovative solutions to the complex challenges of developing public policy.

It is important that commitment to a whole of government perspective is not misinterpreted as a call for 'group think'. Governance has been improved by the fact that public policy is an increasingly contested terrain. The challenge is to ensure that the collective decision-making of the Australian government is based upon the best informed articulation of the challenges faced and a strategic assessment of the relative merits of different approaches to how they might be addressed. For this, a comprehensive whole of government approach is required.

Connecting Government goes beneath the surface of the 'coordination' that the APS strives to achieve. It examines the many different and sometimes competing imperatives that contribute to successful whole of government work and seeks to learn from our successes and failures.

The report does not believe that effective solutions lie in moving around the deckchairs of bureaucratic endeavour. Rather it reinforces the need to continue to build an APS culture that supports, models, understands and aspires to whole of government solutions. Collegiality at the most senior levels of the service is a key part of this culture.

Portfolio secretaries and agency heads will be responsible for driving cooperative behaviours and monitoring the success of whole of government approaches. This has many elements. They will be required to ensure that their staff understand that their role on interdepartmental committees or task forces is not to defend territory but to seek

solutions in the national interest. They will be expected actively to champion whole of government projects and to model critical behaviours such as collegiality.

The report also highlights the need for agencies to recruit and develop people with the right skills. Relevant topics should be included in induction and training so that coordination, cooperation, negotiation and openness are truly valued. Agencies will be encouraged to give their high performing staff experience on whole of government projects and to support their participation with other agencies in such projects.

Commitment needs to be recognised. New service-wide awards will be offered to celebrate the best whole of government work. The success or failure of the APS in taking whole of government approaches will be reported through the State of the Service report.

Knowledge is a key to cultural change. A web presence will be established to encourage agencies to share information, expertise and ideas so that the increasing volume of research on the organisation of whole of government approaches can be collected once but used many times.

MAC will fail if its reports are quietly filed away under the heading 'Read on a Wet Sunday'. There are many more initiatives in this report which offer practical help to Australian government agencies in their efforts to continually improve the way they work across boundaries. The objective is to implement many more.

Whole of government is the public administration of the future. It offers links and connections to the global community of ideas, knowledge and understanding essential for the APS to face the governance challenges of the 21st century. It extols team-based approaches to solving the wicked problems that are endemic to public policy.

Connecting Government: Whole of Government Responses to Australia's Priority Challenges is a valuable guide to participating effectively in that future.

I hope it makes a difference.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Shergold', with a horizontal line underneath.

Dr Peter Shergold AM

GOODNA SERVICE INTEGRATION PROJECT

Objective

The Goodna Service Integration Project (SIP) was developed to test how community and government and non-government agencies can work together to improve community wellbeing. The development of a transferable model of human service integration for other regions of Queensland was a key goal.

The community of Goodna is situated between the outer boundaries of Brisbane and the regional centre of Ipswich and has a population of 9000. It has long recognised problems stemming from significant socioeconomic disadvantage, including a high rate of unemployment, low household ownership and a significant incidence of child abuse and domestic violence.

As a state government-funded service, initially aimed at addressing a local crisis, Goodna SIP focused on enhancing the capacity of government agencies to develop integrated responses to community needs through the development of collaborative relationships between state, Australian government and local government agencies active in delivering services in Goodna. The project was a partnership between the Queensland Government, Ipswich City Council and the people of Goodna. Australian government involvement was at the regional level through membership of the Service Integration Project Team.

Funded from September 2000 to March 2003, Goodna SIP's broad aim was to reform and improve government processes and structures according to local need. Changes were informed by research and aimed at ensuring that delivery of human services were better planned and integrated, and improved overall community wellbeing. Specific areas for review included the ways in which government approached planning, funding, implementation and evaluation strategies to reduce crime, improve school retention rates, improve community health, as well as a variety of other issues identified as important by the Goodna community.

Key players

Key players were:

- the Goodna community (e.g. Pacific Islander community, Goodna State School P&C, Goodna Special School)
- non-government agencies (e.g. Ipswich Women's Centre against Domestic Violence, The Smith Family, St Vincent de Paul's Community Services, the Queensland Government)
- local government
- University of Queensland
- the Australian Government at a regional level through Centrelink and Department of Transport and Regional Services (DOTARS)
- The Queensland government.

Overview of learnings

The project identified the following learnings:

- how to work collaboratively with different organisations (state government, universities, local government in conjunction with local neighbourhoods)
- that relationships will make or break a project—relationships are built on frequent communication and excellent interpersonal skills
- that personal commitment (e.g. expressed through each team member signing up to a shared protocol) can motivate people more effectively than departmental drivers
- that developing a story that others could engage with, as people changed within organisations, is important—followers can come in and pick up on the story
- that putting emphasis on sustainability and the development of sustainable processes from day one is important
- that government does not ‘drive’ is important—government must engage the community sector and enable them to set their priorities and then link them with government priorities.

Key findings of the areas of investigation

1. Structures and processes

	Issues	Response	Key learnings
1	There were not only changes needed to the overall program of service delivery, but also to the way front-line staff carried out their tasks.	Policy and funding frameworks were reviewed. Outcomes were developed which reflected primary aims of each participating agency and were aligned with the state government performance measurement framework and priority needs of the Goodna community.	It is important to align outcomes to reflect both agency and community requirements—for example, increased local job opportunities. Some issues were very hard to address—for example, transport.
2	When SIP started, government program and policy units that were centrally located did not have a regional or neighbourhood focus. Also, multiple agencies at the neighbourhood level were poorly coordinated.	The needs and aspirations of the Goodna community became the priorities of government and service agencies. Building relationships and promoting learning and evaluation achieved this.	Centrally located agencies need to focus their efforts at a neighbourhood level to be successful in a community like Goodna.
3	Focus was needed on how to ensure the project could continue to operate and achieve outcomes after the initial SIP project officer coordinating position was withdrawn (i.e. maintain sustainability).	A detailed transition strategy was developed between agencies and community members.	Transition strategies take a lot of time and careful planning and need to be thought about right from the beginning of a community project.

2. Culture and capability

	Issues	Response	Key learnings
1	Strong leadership was needed for this project as the issues facing Goodna had been a problem for a long time and attempts at addressing these problems had been unsuccessful.	Ipswich City Council and University of Queensland took the leadership role and championed the project through a dedicated project coordinator and researcher/educator position.	Using carefully selected champions with agreed roles can be important in building momentum to achieve the right outcomes.
2	There was a need for a dedicated project coordinator for this complex community development project requiring service integration.	Project and research officers took the project forward and facilitated community and agency interaction and commitment to solving problems.	There needs to be dedicated resources—for example, a paid coordinator to facilitate integration and collaboration.
3	The problems in the Goodna community have been long and enduring and government attempts through individual agency interventions have not been successful. The community was cynical about previous government attempts at service integration.	The SIP demonstrated it would be different from previous attempts by delivering early wins. SIP also ran ongoing consultation forums to ensure open and honest communication. This included the development of long-term community forums.	It is important to establish integrity up-front and quickly to get community on board and establish credibility through some quick wins.
4	When the project started, neither the staff of agencies nor key community members necessarily knew how to go about integrative and collaborative ways of working.	The project team leaders were proactive in fostering a learning culture such as consultation and communication skills, trust, community development skills and challenging traditional problem solving.	It is essential to challenge traditional ways of solving problems and be prepared to unlearn old ways and learn new skills.
5	Formal and informal learning by agency staff and key community members was seen as a critical part of the project and was encouraged.	Formal learning programs (short and long courses) in collaborative leadership were developed by University of Queensland. Students were from government and community with special support for members of disadvantaged communities.	Having a formal course as part of a whole of government project helps ensure ongoing systemic change through application of learnings.
6	Staff from different organisational structures (e.g. different levels of government and non-government organisations) needed to develop skills and capacity to fully collaborate.	Position descriptions and performance agreements were rewritten to place more emphasis on acquiring, using and assessing new skills such as communication and consensus building.	A need for new or unusual skills sets should be identified at the outset of a project and emphasis placed on ensuring that people with these skills are selected for appropriate positions or that training is provided.

3. Information management and infrastructure

	Issues	Response	Key learnings
1	There was a need to create information infrastructure tools—for example, a community website.	Community consultation identified a desire for a website. It was built, and featured key information about community and government providers servicing Goodna and a listing of local businesses in the area.	Creation of tools that communities want is important in work with community agencies and builds local people's skills.
2	Regular communication about project progress with all stakeholders was regarded as vital to their continued support for the project, particularly as small projects developed under the SIP umbrella.	A name/address database was established to enable regular communication and was updated quarterly through mail-outs.	Communication mechanisms such as newsletters or emails to stakeholders can provide valuable gains in involvement and provide mechanisms for input, regardless of location.
3	The sensitivity of some issues being addressed in the project, such as child abuse, meant that there was reluctance and uncertainty about sharing some information.	An agreed process was developed which meant explicit permission was obtained from families for this information to be shared with other agreed parties.	Issues that have been dismissed as 'too hard' can be addressed through new solutions such as asking those affected for their own solutions and ideas.

4. Budget and accountability framework

Issues	Response	Key learnings
1	Tensions were created by different agency approaches to, and requirements for, measuring inputs and evaluating spending.	A measurement and modelling strategy was established to design indicators to assess community wellbeing. This tool has state and national significance in terms of its capacity to better allocate resources in areas of critical community service need at a neighbourhood or regional level.
2	Resources needed to be coordinated and obtained from different agencies to support project officer positions at a local level.	State government provided funding for positions, while other agencies, local government and the University of Queensland provided resources such as staffing and administrative services.
3	Each SIP-initiated project needed to work more creatively with existing resources and in accordance with SIP goals and state government priorities.	To get the best results from available resources, this project looked at the full complement of programs across all agencies before allocating extra resources.
4	Funding was not provided for an overall external evaluation of Goodna SIP. However, the outcomes of each program within the SIP were evaluated through clear performance indicators. It has been stated that the performance of the network structure used for collaboration between agencies could not be judged by traditional evaluation methods. This structure focused on community meetings and could only be evaluated qualitatively.	The SIP used continuous assessment and learning for each of the components of the SIP. Surveys were undertaken to obtain baseline data for the possibility of a longitudinal study of the Goodna community. Innovative approaches to evaluation can help in demonstrating project success. Community meetings provided an ongoing informal evaluation to reality check that SIP was addressing the major issues of concern. It is also important to have formal evaluation to measure outcomes, particularly for government funding.
5	Government departments had little flexibility to pool resources/funding to address problems at local level.	Resources were allocated on the basis of negotiated outcomes across agencies. Results can still be achieved without formal sharing or pooling of agency resources.
6	There were differing reporting and accountability requirements for different organisation types.	At key points, such as clearance of the final report, there was confusion over who had responsibility. Try to streamline, align or agree on accountability and reporting arrangements at the commencement of the project.

5. Making connections outside the APS

	Issues	Response	Key learnings
1	A community development process was required to address the needs of the Goodna community.	Key regional agencies prioritised community development processes—that is, working with community representatives and helping Goodna residents build their own skills and leadership.	It is essential to not only develop but sustain relationships, including effective community consultation/engagement processes.
2	People and agencies had to work together for the first time.	Formation of network structures, including a community forum (involving all stakeholders) which was a mechanism for issues to be fully discussed, prioritised and acted on.	It is essential to build the capacity of communities to own and address their own issues over the immediate and longer term.
3	With no new resources to distribute, SIP's interest had to be in better service integration, not new services.	One-stop shop and central coordinating agency approaches were rejected. Instead, existing agency resources were used in a more strategic and integrated way.	Focus on integrated services at the level of delivery rather than develop a single system.

Major takeaway messages

‘The community at this late stage is acknowledging that services in Goodna are improving significantly, because they know what is happening.’

‘Yes, absolutely whole of government works and is absolutely essential to dealing with complex problems. But it takes time, resources, learning, skill development, relationships and therefore please, please, please only do it when systems are in crisis, don’t just do it all the time because you will burn people out.’

‘We are doing what we know we should in the end, it’s not that we know this is straightforward, people know they need to collaborate, they want to collaborate, but they have to get past all the constraints. You do what you need to facilitate this.’

Sources

References

Goodna Service Integration Project: *Doing what we know we should* —Final Report.

Goodna Service Integration Project: *Learning stories*.

Goodna Service Integration Project: *Project overview*.

Interviews

Catherine Boorman, former SIP project manager.

Dr Geoff Woolcock, former SIP research project manager (University of Queensland).

Father Brian Fitzpatrick, community leader and chair/member of several Goodna committees related to the project.