

Non Profit Management Support On Line

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Background

A proposal for a management resource website for non government human services providers (NGOs) has been designed and developed by Bradfield Nyland Group, a private consultancy company specialising in community and non profit management. Bradfield Nyland Group approached the Strategic Projects Division, Premier's Department with this proposal for consideration in the context of the Capacity Building Project for NGOs, and approached the Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS) to form a strategic partnership to manage the project.

The project is being developed as a joint venture between Bradfield Nyland Group and the Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS), with the support of the Strategic Projects Division of Premier's Department. It is proposed that the project be financed through subscription by funding departments, with additional sources of development funds being explored.

Management Support

'Management support' refers to a range of methods of enhancing and improving the way in which NGOs conduct:

- The business of boards of management, and how they fulfil the governance role. 'Boards of management' is a generic term used to refer to governing bodies, which may be constituted as Boards of Directors, Management Committees or Collectives.

- The management and coordination activities of staff
- Administration processes and systems

- The structure and general operations of the organisation

Management support is designed to address the different needs of a wide variety of NGOs, including:

- Small organisations with few staff and a local community management committee

- Medium to large organisations, working with management committees or boards, and sub committee structures

- Collectives, with staff and 'broader collective' governing bodies

- Cooperatives with boards of directors

- Large multi layered organisations with multiple divisions and sub committee structures

It is also designed to address:

- The specific needs of NGOs in particular circumstances, such as those undergoing rapid growth or change, or those working with large volunteer workforces.

The specific needs of NGOs with particular community contexts, such as Indigenous organisations or those in rural and remote areas.
The scope of needs of staff working at different levels of management complexity and practice, from sole project workers through to CEOs of large agencies.
The scope of information and skill needs of different compositions of boards of management, ranging from boards of management composed of people with limited knowledge through to 'skill based' boards.

'Management support' may take the form of:

- Provision of written resources and information
- Direct assistance with problem resolution or management improvements
- Training and skill development programs and activities
- Assistance with designing and restructuring organisations

Capacity Building and Management Support

Within NSW, the key human services departments fund an approximate 4,000 NGOs with an estimated total grant monies of \$1,330 million annually. These organisations range widely in size, structure and composition, and management practices.

Management support can assist the functioning of the management of NGOs, which in turn supports the quality of the services they deliver, and efficient use of the organisation's resources (including its human resources). Management support can also prevent serious problems or collapse in the management of NGOs, which otherwise results in a drain on the resources of communities, and, in many cases, on the resources of government funding administrators.

Management support, however, is only one of a raft of industrial development strategies required to shore up a sector that is undergoing significant restructuring and change.

Ideally, capacity building with NGOs should incorporate:

- Enabling and supporting a viable NGO infrastructure for human service delivery.
- Developing the sustainability and self reliance of NGOs.
- Enhancing the management expertise and maximising the outcomes of good management practices of NGOs.
- Developing the capabilities of NGOs as components of community capacity building.

NGO management and sustainable communities

NGOs are an integral part of the social infrastructure of communities, and this is particularly noticeable in bounded communities such as rural towns, Indigenous communities and other communities of interest. In rural and remote communities in particular, strengthening the

management of NGOs is a vital part of any strategy for community renewal and developing sustainable communities.

There is a direct link between capacity building for organisations and community capacity building and sustainability. At a number of levels, NGOs can either contribute to the social capital of a town or community, or, where they are faltering, they can contribute to the deterioration of a community. Well run organisations can harness and develop social capital, and provide the vehicle for skill development that enhances the capacity of entire communities. Failing organisations use up the energy of ever decreasing pools of active community members, and often lead to community disputes and tensions. Organisations provide a venue for community leaders, and their performance can highlight the general 'health' of the community.

Managing for excellence

The majority of NGOs do not have acute management problems that put them at risk. However, there has been no coordinated development or enhancement of the management of NGOs in NSW, and, as a consequence, there is a limited culture of performance excellence, and limited distribution of useful resources for management improvement.

Many NGOs are competent in their management, but most have a variety of management support needs, and could benefit from improvements to key aspects of their management. The importance of the potential for not only the initial improvement of management practices, but the sustainability of good practice over time and the development of a culture of organisational and management excellence, cannot be understated.

'Organisations at risk': Impact on government staff resources

Frontline government staff working with NGOs report that they are required to spend a substantial proportion of their time dealing with management related crises that have developed within organisations. A recent sample of Department of Community Services Community Program Officers estimated that they spend in excess of 60-80% of their time working intensively with organisations experiencing severe management difficulties.

The provision of a comprehensive management support service, that can be used by both NGOs and government officers, would act as a prevention and early intervention strategy. Encouraging organisations to seek assistance directly from management experts would ease the call on the time and resources of frontline Departmental staff, and potentially prevent organisations from deteriorating or collapsing.

Management Support Online

'Management Support Online' is a project to establish a website offering management support, training and resource materials to NGOs in the human services sector in NSW. It is expected that the vast majority of site users would be NGOs receiving government funding.

Using technology to provide management support

In the current funding environment, community sector organisations are under considerable pressure to demonstrate that the management and operations of their services are both effective and efficient, maximising high quality service provision and sustainable outcomes for user groups. Inevitably, funding bodies will also require community sector organisations to make use of the internet to transfer service information and data.

The internet also provides an opportunity to develop resourcing and training in an extremely cost effective fashion. With the internet, it is possible to provide:

- Unlimited resource documents, that can be updated or added to without the restrictions and costs of distributing hard copy resources.

- Tools and materials that can be downloaded electronically, and then adapted and used by organisations.

- Self directed training programs in a range of competencies for a variety of learners.

- Training programs that are interactive, involving trainers and participants in group activities such as real time chat sessions.

- Forums for users to exchange information and ideas.

- A 'help line' via email that can be accessed by people at any time of day or night.

- Affordable video conferencing links for work with individual organisations at distance, that can be used for training or facilitated organisational development work.

These facilities are particularly suited to servicing the management support needs of community sector organisations and their staff, board of management and volunteers.

There are already examples of web sites that the sector uses to exchange information and access general resource material, and we know that this aspect of web sites works well for people, as long as the sites are well designed and very user friendly.

Components

The MSO website will have several components:

- Parameters:** This area of the site will provide summaries of the key operational parameters required by incorporation, programming and funding arrangements and other accountability requirements, along with guides to planning and reporting. The site will offer entry points and content tailored to each subscribing funding program. This section

assists organisations to set the parameters for their activities, ensure compliance with service agreements and other legal parameters, link and streamline their planning and reporting, both internally and with their funding department, and develop effective accountability and risk management procedures.

Skills development: This area of the site will provide training courses for paid staff, volunteers and board of management members covering the key components of their roles in managing and operating organisations. Training courses can be taken as a self directed training program, with computer based self assessments tasks, or offered as an accredited training program that is interactive, involving trainers and participants in group activities such as real time chat sessions and tele- or electronic tutorials.

The content will address a range of competencies for a variety of learners, encompassing generic board of management competencies at basic and advanced levels, management skills for staff aligned to competency standards through to Advanced Diploma level, and advanced management skills for staff, aiming to articulate to post graduate qualifications. It will also provide skills development for those with specific professional skills, such as law or accountancy, who are wanting to expand their management competency base.

Organisational development: This area of the site will offer guided self assessment processes for organisations, enabling people to conduct evaluations of various aspects of their organisation, and then follow through using resources to address under performing or problem areas, using guides to change management and the development of viable infrastructure. This section will also have a long distance facilitated evaluation and organisational support service, where people can organise to work with a specialist on an affordable video conferencing link, undertaking an organisational evaluation, working on specific areas or issues as a group, or having a group training session.

Resources: The resources section of the site will service other areas of the site, and provide tools and resource materials that can be downloaded, links to other relevant sites, chat and messaging facilities for exchanging ideas and resources, problem solving, and an online information and advice service. Site users will be able to visit a virtual library with resource documents they can obtain printed copies of, select tools and materials that can be downloaded electronically, and then adapted and used by organisations. They will also be able to drop in to a 'real time' forum to exchange information and ideas, check a diary to see when specific sessions and topics are scheduled, or arrange to meet colleagues for a chat.

These facilities will also allow people to read a message board, and leave their own contribution, reading the advice and ideas of other organisations and from management specialists, or call on a 'help line'

via email that can be accessed at any time of day or night, for confidential advice on problems and issues.

The site will also act as an online publisher, and will publish material and resources from a range of sources and authors.

Relationship to other websites

There are a number of 'companion' sites that will need to be linked to the MSO. Some are already in existence (such as 'Community Builders', COSSNET and some peak agency sites), and others will develop over time. To work well for users, websites need to be limited in size and scope so as to remain easily navigable. Site construction that allows seamless links and transitions to other relevant sites can extend the information access for service users without creating a large and confusing site. Using this approach, the MSO will sit alongside more generic sites dealing with community services, and more specific sites dealing with particular service delivery requirements or program areas (for example, sites like Communitybuilders, COSSNET, or peak body sites could have a reciprocal links with the MSO, so that each site acted as an adjunct to the other).

Program and Indigenous portals

One of the principals of the site design is the creation of pathways into and through the site that are designed for particular user groups (such as particular service types, Indigenous organisations, or different organisational types). Site users draw on a common pool of materials and site content, with some specific material, but travel through a site pathway that is specifically tailored to their needs.

This approach to the design of the site and its materials will enable individuals, or teams within an organisation, to assemble resources or a learning program that is individually tailored to their needs.

Jane Bradfield and Julie Nyland

Bradfield Nyland Group is a consultancy practice specialising in community management, organisational development and capacity building for communities and organisations. The principal consultants are Jane Bradfield and Julie Nyland, both of whom have substantial experience working with community and public sector organisations, and community programs and services.

Bradfield Nyland Group specialises in:

- Management of community sector organisations
- Evaluation and development of community service programs
- Government programming and service provision
- Social policy development
- Resource and training materials
- Use of computer based technology for skill development and organisational resourcing