



# MEASURING THE OUTCOMES OF COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

## ROUNDTABLE COMMUNIQUÉ

On 22 April, 2010 a roundtable of representatives from the not-for-profit, government and philanthropic sectors met to discuss how to improve outcome measurement for community organisations. The focus of the roundtable reflects the purpose of the host- the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY). ARACY has a key focus of tackling complex issues for Australia's children and young people through building collaboration across sectors. The roundtable considered that:

1. Improving the measurement of impact and outcomes of services and interventions by the not-for-profit sector is critical for a number of reasons:
  - a. to establish the evidence for effectiveness of services and interventions
  - b. to allow for comparison of various interventions and services
  - c. to establish a common agreed 'language' in measurement of impact and outcomes
  - d. to ensure responsiveness of services to the needs of local communities
  - e. to assist in the effective allocation of resources
  - f. and ultimately, to ensure the long term sustainability of the third sector
2. The time is right for a strong push toward better measurement of impact and outcomes of community organisations. This was clearly outlined by the recommendations of the recent release of the Australian Productivity Commission report on the Contribution of the Not-for-Profit Sector and the National Compact between the Australian Government and the Third Sector.
3. It is most important to build the foundations for the achievement of useful and functional outcome management systems. The most pragmatic and logical way to achieve this across a very diverse sector is to focus on one particular aspect of the sector such as Australian children and young people. Similar approaches have been applied across other countries within the OECD of which Australia is a member.
4. While there are currently various methods used to measure impact and outcomes in community organisations, there are currently no agreed standard impact and outcome measures. This makes comparison of "apples with apples" impossible. In addition, there is not an agreed national children and young people's outcome framework from which to work.

5. The development of standard measures requires the development of a shared national, action-oriented 0-24 year old (OECD recommended age) child and young people wellbeing strategy as the framework for these measures. This strategy would unite current policies and programs of government, community and private sector organisations into an integrated framework, and also include a focus on the middle years. It was noted that this framework needs to be jointly owned by all stakeholders, and that ARACY hopes to facilitate the collaborative development of this strategy.
6. Leadership within community organisations is essential to progress this process – we should not wait for funders to establish the measures for us.
7. The not-for-profit sector must work collaboratively toward establishing standardised outcome measures associated with improving the wellbeing of children and young people. This includes early and active involvement with and by government and philanthropic organisations, and development of bipartisan agreement for a national children and young people’s outcomes framework.
8. The issue is complex and systemic in nature. Therefore the way forward is to start with small, achievable outcomes – for example by establishing and trialling a small number of agreed standard impact and outcomes measures, in order to assess the effectiveness and resource implications of outcome measurement, and how these measurements will contribute to a national framework for outcome measurement in the Not-for-Profit Sector and ultimately improvement of child and youth wellbeing.
9. As such, a project will be progressed that draws together expertise and resources from across not-for-profit, government and philanthropic sectors in collaborative effort.
10. A second imperative of the project is to improve the relationship between outcome measurement and the structure of funding received by not-for-profits. This will need to include consideration of how grant and sponsorship contracts facilitate outcome measurement, the capacity of not-for-profits to measure outcomes and how evaluation is undertaken by not-for-profits.
11. ARACY is committed to providing leadership and facilitation of this project, working with partners to resource and realise this first step in improving outcome measurement for the benefit of children and young people.