

Belfast City Council: Planning outcomes for the Capacity Building Grant Programme

This case study illustrates how *Measuring Change* was used to inform the development of an outcomes-focussed approach for Belfast City Council’s (BCC) revised Capacity Building Grant Programme. This included developing an outcomes framework setting out the types of changes which the programme would be expected to achieve and using this to assess ‘change readiness’ amongst a sample of currently funded projects.

Against a backdrop of the Review of Public Administration and a tightening financial environment, Belfast City Council was interested to explore outcomes-focussed approaches to funding.

Within this context, the Council’s Capacity Building Grant Programme had been under review and, in 2012, was selected for a pilot application of the *Measuring Change* approach. This programme has operated for a number of years, funding some 17 different support organisations across the city. Strategically, there was a need to establish a better fit between the Capacity Building Grant Programme and the broader outcomes of the Council’s new Strategy for Community Development. Operationally, the development of new programme outcomes could help inform assessment criteria for the operation of a revised programme.

How was *Measuring Change* used?

1 Defining change

The existing Capacity Building Grant Programme had well established monitoring systems and relationships between the projects and Council staff. In developing a framework for a revised programme it was important to acknowledge this context and engage with key policy and programme staff to consider its possible future focus and direction. As a starting point, CENI reviewed existing documentation to identify common outcomes as stated by the projects themselves which could be grouped into proposed outcome themes.

CENI then held a series of facilitated sessions with policy and programme staff to explore what they thought should be objectives for a revised Capacity Building Grant Programme and what they anticipated these would achieve. Through this process a ‘theory of change’ emerged and the proposed outcome themes were revised to reflect this.

The outcomes themes reflected that the primary focus of the programme should be on **developing the capacity of local groups**, which in turn could support the **development of individuals**, with the ultimate strategic goal of **enhancing communities** in the city. However, it was also recognised that in order to do this, the funded organisations themselves needed to be competent to deliver the support required and that programme funding could **enhance their capacity** to do this.



A framework was developed, structured around these themes with associated outcomes. Each of the outcomes was accompanied by illustrative indicators describing the kind of evidence required to show the outcome is being achieved.

Theme	Outcome
Core: Developing the competency of the funded group to deliver capacity building support to its catchment area and/or client groups	Enhanced capacity of funded support group
	Stronger partnership
	Increased leverage
Operational: Developing local groups to be more capable, representative and resilient	Improved infrastructure of local groups
	Improved group capacity
	Increased group resilience
Operational: Developing individuals to become more involved and better skilled	Increased individual participation
	Improved individual skills
	Enhanced volunteering
Strategic: Developing communities - relationships, services and well-being	Improved social capital
	Improved quality of life

2 Capturing change

The proposed framework set out specific high level outcomes which projects could be expected to achieve under a revised Capacity Building Grant Programme. It was recognised that there would need to be a transition period to consult with current projects on a revised programme and proposed outcomes and, if implemented, to support them to adjust to a new programme over time.

At this stage the focus was not on baselining and capturing change, but rather on using the framework to inform an assessment process. This would help to assess projects' existing capacity against the proposed outcomes and identify what support might be needed.

An internal stakeholder panel made up of BCC staff was set up and facilitated by CENI. A small sample of existing projects was identified by the BCC staff panel and, drawing on their knowledge of these projects, they estimated each project's 'readiness' to deliver on the proposed new outcomes using a 0-10 scale.

3 Showing Change

In this case, the process helped to show 'change readiness' by demonstrating the capacity of a small sample of funded projects to deliver against the proposed outcomes for the revised Capacity Building Grant Programme.

Analysis of the sample showed that there was some variation in terms of capacity between these groups. Potentially the exercise could be replicated and used to assess capacity of support projects across the programme. This would also help identify the type and level of support which some groups might need to deliver against the new outcomes if the revised programme was to be implemented.

How did *Measuring Change* help?

It assisted the Council to explore an outcomes-focussed approach by:

- ▶ Informing the development of a proposed framework of high level outcomes for the revised capacity building grant programme
- ▶ Illustrating how the proposed framework could be used to:
 - Assess the 'readiness' of existing groups to deliver on the proposed new outcomes; and
 - Identify support that may be required to improve their delivery capacity
- ▶ Outlining a plan for a transitional process from the existing funding arrangements through to the implementation of a revised programme.

"This (Capacity Building) programme has a real opportunity to make a difference. Agreeing what that difference is now will allow us to select which projects have the best chance of supporting positive change and also to identify what ongoing assistance we need to deliver alongside the grant".

Catherine Taggart, Community Development Manager, Belfast City Council