
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY FINANCE & DELIVERY COMMITTEE

FOR INFORMATION

Title: PROJECT CLOSURE: BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNITIES IN CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK

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Purpose

To close and review the pilot project exploring the use of the Building Stronger Communities Framework in Cairngorms National Park.

Recommendations

The Finance & Delivery Committee is requested to:

- a) Note the closure of the project
- b) Note the lessons learned and recommendations

Executive Summary

1. This paper summarises the formal closure for the project piloting the Building Stronger Communities Framework in the National Park. Brief background to the purpose and aims of the project is provided, along with a summary of the activity that took place. Key project outputs are listed along with lessons learned and recommendations for future use of the Framework. A project closure report was also considered at an earlier stage by the Operational Management Group.

Background

2. This project piloted the use of the Building Stronger Communities (BSC) Framework to develop a baseline of community capacity and support in four pilot communities in the National Park; and to seek to identify potential long-term improvements in each community. The outputs of the project will be used to inform strategic planning of community related work within the Park, improve monitoring of investment and identify lessons for future work.

Summary of Project Activity

3. Cairngorms LEADER team and CNPA jointly commissioned the project which was financed through Leader. Following a competitive procurement process, the Scottish Community Development Centre was commissioned to undertake this pilot activity.

4. In each of the four communities a Steering Group was established, to oversee the key stages of the process. The process involved drawing up a list of all known community groups in each area; contacting them to encourage their involvement; sending out a questionnaire; holding facilitated sessions for Steering Group members and community representatives to self-assess their capacity based on the results; and a final session to consider possible improvements.

Key Outputs

5. Baseline reports based on the self-assessments were produced for Steering Group members and community groups in each community. An Improvement Plan was produced in two of the four communities. Additional work was undertaken in the remaining two communities, where the Steering Group did not favour continuing with an Improvement Plan, to ensure that the project outputs were put to best use. The main summary project report form SCDC is attached at **Annex I**.

Main Lessons Learned

6. The Building Stronger Communities Framework is fairly logical and straightforward and provides a reasonable basis for assessing community capacity objectively;
7. The “traffic lights” assessment provides a useful visual summary. However, it required to be modified to give greater precision and to suit needs of each community and this undermined the benefits of a quick visual overview.
8. The survey as part of the assessment phase took too long and elements of it were potentially unnecessary.
9. The importance of quality facilitators is imperative and, where capacity allows, we should use trusted and known local facilitators wherever possible.
10. Excellent communication with community groups is fundamental to the success of the process:
 - a) Some staff in the contracted organisation that was working on the project did not meet the required standards in terms of facilitation skills and communication this seriously adversely affected the results in two communities. This was taken up at senior level with the relevant organisation and the two communities affected. Modifications were made to the final stages of the project.
 - b) Public sector partners have a key role to play in communication and need to commit at a senior level in order to ensure community groups are kept informed and buy into the process
 - c) Community groups should be involved in, and ideally be leading, the development and roll out of this process in their community
 - d) CNPA staff could use local Board members and other contacts more effectively to build support for the project

11. The facilitated sessions needed a strong framework and excellent facilitation to guide the discussion:
 - a) Key third sector support bodies (such as Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey (VABS) and Marr Area Partnership (MAP) should play a more significant role in overseeing the process
 - b) Reinforcing the context and purpose of the sessions and how they tie into the practical projects that the community is working on is essential
12. The process needs to be contextualised to reflect Community Action Plans and broader community development activity; and time management is an important consideration – the process should not be unduly long.
13. Key staff who had been involved in the initiation of the project, within both LEADER and CNPA, changed. Although this adversely affected the project to a small degree, processes were in place to provide suitable continuity.

Recommendations

14. The results of the project are widely shared amongst the community development network within the Cairngorms National Park, the Community Planning work in each local authority area – this has already largely taken place to a significant degree.
15. A streamlined version of Building Stronger Communities process is used in other communities in the National Park at the discretion of the community support organisations, principally VABS and MAP, but only where the process is more strongly tied to the development of Community Action Plans
16. Any future use of the Building Stronger Communities approach should:
 - a) Be facilitated by locally based facilitators that are suitably trained in the BSC technique
 - b) Be overseen a steering group of key agencies and community groups (Community Council/Association and Community Company);
 - c) Not rely on a questionnaire or survey – a summary of known activity in each community would be produced in advance by the steering group to provide the context for the self-assessment phase;
 - d) Involve a one-off facilitated session with agency and community representatives;
 - e) Produce an Improvement Plan for community to help inform future Community Action Plan delivery and implementation;
 - f) Take approximately six weeks from start to finish.

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