

PERFORM

**An Outcomes Approach
for
Voluntary and Community Sector
Infrastructure Organisations**

REPORT



January 2006

This Report outlines the findings from a project to design a performance improvement framework for voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisations. PERFORM has been worked up through a consultative process over a period of fifteen months. This process has involved the drafting and redrafting of materials in response to consultation within the sector and piloting of the framework and planning tool with eleven very different infrastructure bodies.

PERFORM is primarily a self-assessment tool for organisations providing infrastructure services to voluntary and community organisations and it should be seen as complementary to existing quality assurance models and standards. Its purpose is to help develop and implement an outcomes based approach to strategic planning and review.

Findings and proposals regarding the future of PERFORM are outlined on page 16, along with a revised framework (page 17) to reflect the learning generated. There are two accompanying documents; 'Case Study Findings from the Pilot Organisations', and 'the PERFORM planning and assessment tool' which provides the guidance material.

Introduction

The development of **PERFORM** has been funded through the ChangeUp programme. ChangeUp calls for improved and accessible infrastructure support for frontline voluntary and community organisations and for infrastructure organisations to be more systematic in planning and assessing their contribution to front line organisations.

This initiative has aimed to develop, test and agree an outcomes-focused performance improvement framework and basket of performance improvement tools/learning models for the delivery of voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisation core functions. It was expected that the framework would:

- have application across the diverse range of infrastructure organisations
- be fit for purpose i.e. coherent, relevant, flexible and achievable across the range of infrastructure organisations
- be consistent with and complementary to existing standards and quality initiatives
- be within a framework of continuous improvement
- be outcome focused and linked to effective and achievable assessment
- be developed in consultation with infrastructure organisations and their funders

A Steering Group of infrastructure organisations and other stakeholders has led this development, NCVO has provided project management and a consultancy organisation, COGS, has delivered the work programme.

What is voluntary and community sector infrastructure?

This refers to the support functions and organisational structures necessary for voluntary and community sector organisations to operate and deliver their missions effectively. For example, this could include advice and support around volunteer development, development of constitutions, business plan development etc.

It is recognised that many infrastructure organisations also provide direct services to the public and equally that some voluntary and community organisations contribute to the provision of infrastructure.

PERFORM is a framework to help infrastructure organisations plan and review those functions which specifically relate to infrastructure provision.

What is an outcomes approach?

Outcomes are the changes and benefits that happen as a result of services and activities. An outcomes approach starts with a broad vision of what we want to see, in this case what we want the voluntary and community sector to look like, and then identifies outcomes - the kind of changes, benefits and learning that happen as a result of the delivery of services and activities. Outcomes are therefore identified at the start of the planning process as the intended changes and benefits that you aim to bring about in the voluntary and community sector (or a particular sub-sector). Planning in relation to outcomes necessitates the assessment questions; what will tell us / how will we know if we are making a difference – what is changing?”

What is PERFORM?

PERFORM takes organisations providing infrastructure services through a planning and assessment process whereby they can develop a strategic infrastructure plan. In PERFORM, we identify four broad ranging high level outcomes as a starting point in relation to which a range of organisations delivering infrastructure services can plan and assess their contribution to the vision. These enable the identification of organisationally specific outcomes which in turn inform the aims, objectives and activities of your infrastructure provision.

PERFORM is primarily a self-assessment tool which should be seen as complementary to quality assurance models and standards. The use of PERFORM could help to provide relevant evidence for the NACVS standards, for example.

Background

Development

PERFORM was worked up as an outcomes based planning and assessment framework through a consultation process between July 2004 and January 2005, and then tested between February and September 2005 by organisations acting as pilot sites. The revised draft framework and proposals result from the findings of these processes.

In December 2004, organisations were invited to apply to test out the 5th draft of PERFORM. This draft framework comprised:

- A common vision and ‘high level’ outcomes that were intended to provide broad ranging statements of purpose and intent for the voluntary and community sector:
- Suggested infrastructure functions, aims and objectives to provide a strategic framework for the role of infrastructure in helping to bring about the vision and outcomes.

Draft framework, Dec 2004 The Vision: A strong, diverse and vibrant voluntary and community sector	
High Level Outcomes for voluntary and community organisations	Functions
VCOs are confident, skilled and knowledgeable in running their projects and activities	Sector support
VCOs network and collaborate for mutual benefit	Sector collaboration
VCOs deliver high quality and inclusive services	Sector strategy and practice
VCOs influence relevant policy and programme development	Sector influence

The idea was that organisations providing infrastructure support should be able to place themselves within the framework and adapt it to their own situation though it was acknowledged that not all of the suggested objectives would be relevant or applicable to all infrastructure organisations. Whilst some common features were anticipated, e.g. all organisations operate within a national policy context, it was recognised that a large part of their work is specific to the needs of their intended users. In order to apply the framework therefore, organisations were encouraged to follow guidance material around identifying their own context, outcomes, indicators, objectives and activities.

Piloting exercise

Eleven piloting organisations have tested **PERFORM**. They were selected to include a range of organisations delivering infrastructure services - geographical reach (e.g. national / local), an urban and a rural focus, generic / specialist / sub sector functions, a range of sizes, and whether they had experience of other assessment systems and quality assurance processes.

They were:

- Action for Communities in Rural England (ACRE)
- Black Ethnic Community Organisations Network (Becon)
- Community Development Xchange (CDX)
- Kensington and Chelsea Volunteer Centre (KCVC)
- National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service (NACVS)
- Voluntary Action Westminster (VAW)
- Voluntary Sector North West (VSNW)
- Voluntary Youth Services Devon (VYS Devon)
- Warwickshire Rural Community Council (WRCC)
- Watford Council for Voluntary Service (WCVS)
- Winchester Area Community Action (WACA)

(There were two other organisations selected but they withdrew during the process; one at the very beginning due to a change in staffing, and another left mid-way through due to capacity issues within a very small organisation.)

The pilot process ran from February to September 2005. Each pilot site was expected to try out the framework and the supporting materials within their organisation, to participate in three progress workshops, to meet with the **PERFORM** consultants at least twice, and to complete some recording materials. A grant of £5,000 was available to all piloting organisations. This contributed to expenses incurred in the pilot implementation process e.g. staff time, facilitators' fees, surveys etc. Additional expenses were made available for travel to the three progress meetings for pilots.

We were looking to identify and assess:

- value and relevance of an outcomes based approach to planning and assessment
- accessibility of the framework and ease of use,
- examples of application and resulting strategies
- the extent to which outcomes can be evidenced
- different approaches to implementing the framework
- ideas for improvements to the design of the guidance materials
- any 'added' benefits to organisations using **PERFORM**
- involvement by Funders
- the resource costs of implementation
- the place of this framework alongside other performance improvement approaches and planning and audit tools.

Findings from pilots

Understanding and implementing an outcomes approach

PERFORM is an outcomes approach to planning and assessing the delivery of infrastructure. With an outcomes focus, organisations are encouraged to assess the needs of their users and other stakeholders, as these will help to define specific outcomes to be achieved and help to determine organisational aims and objectives.

The pilots found an outcomes approach useful and recognised its significance for improving services. Several organisations commented upon how it enabled them to define the difference they could make alongside others and to consider and evidence the impact of their work; *“It’s had a big impact in the way we think about what we do, because it has forced us to shift to outcomes thinking. I think this will have a long term impact on our work and how we plan and evaluate it”.*

Outcomes thinking, however, is still quite new to many organisations and this was the key barrier in using the framework. Some organisations found it difficult to get away from an internal focus, i.e. on the needs of their own organisation and the accepted organisational aims.

“Starting from outcomes is like doing the process in reverse - It’s like looking through the other end of the telescope.”

A key finding is the need for more opportunities to learn about and understand outcomes at the start of implementing a framework like PERFORM, and that these opportunities need to be available across the whole organization as this creates broader ownership.

“Organisationally we needed to all participate in changing our mindset from output thinking to outcome thinking”.

Several organisations said that they would like an opportunity to undertake outcomes training, and that it would be valuable for this to be tailored ‘in house’ training. However, what was termed “training” varied considerably from generic awareness raising through to 1:1 mentoring or support for the lead person(s) within an organisation adopting the approach for the first time. There can be advantages in linking training to a particular framework or piece of work, rather than participating in a training course where the theory is abstracted from the organisational context; *“An outcomes approach doesn’t necessarily create clarity and ownership – depends on how organisation handles it”.*

Some organisations felt they had a head start because they already had an ‘Outcomes Champion’ (someone trained through Charities Evaluation Service) within their organisation. Certainly, those organisations that brought in someone with outcomes knowledge and expertise made the most effective use PERFORM.

Summary: Understanding and implementing an outcomes approach

We believe that an outcomes approach is a valuable way to develop strategic plans and enables assessment of change and development as opposed to a more straightforward but less meaningful reporting of outputs. The pilots agreed but they all identified the need for support (albeit that the level of support required would vary between organisations) in developing a shared (organisational) understanding to implement an outcomes approach; *“(It) may need an investment of time but crucial to resolve”.*

In addition, there was a recognition that this was an outward looking process which enables organisations to gauge the **actual** impact of their work and gives credence to “selling” infrastructure activities and services to funders and other stakeholders.

The **PERFORM** framework

Starting from outcomes - why does your organisation exist?

PERFORM poses the question - “what is it we need to / can do to contribute to achieving a strong, vibrant and diverse voluntary and community sector?” As one pilot stated, “*PERFORM starts from the position of what does the sector need and how do we enable that?*”

All the pilots were encouraged to start from this common vision, whether or not they work with a constituency broader than the voluntary and community sector, or work with a particular sub-sector. Nearly all the piloting organisations used the proposed high level outcomes to structure their strategy and found them useful “*High Level Outcomes are relevant (and) provide a sound basis upon which to build*”. One organisation was less positive about the presence of high level outcomes and wondered whether they are necessary, stating that “*The high-level outcomes are only meaningful and appropriate as a yardstick against which an organisation can measure its own high-level outcomes once these have been identified. The framework’s outcomes may not all apply equally to all infrastructure organisations and they are not necessarily exhaustive.*”

Many organisations undertaking infrastructure functions have particular specialisms and / or are engaged in additional projects and services which are not about infrastructure support, and **PERFORM** recognises that these also need to be planned and assessed. Certainly, some pilots did amend the wording, though not necessarily the meaning, of the high level outcomes to ensure relevance e.g.

- KCVC changed the wording of the first high level outcome, (VCOs are confident, skilled and knowledgeable in running their projects and activities) to ‘VIOs (volunteer involving organisations) are competent and have sufficient volunteers to run their volunteer programme’;
- CDX rephrased it as ‘Community development practitioners and agencies are skilled, knowledgeable and supported in running their projects and activities’.

Others kept the generalist wording of the high level outcomes and used it to inform their own specific strategy, e.g.

- in relation to the fourth high level outcome, (VCOs influence relevant policy and programme development), Devon Voluntary Youth Services identified one of its functions as ‘Providing a voice’, with the organisational aim of ‘Enabling the Voluntary Youth Sector to have a Voice and Influence’;
- in relation to the second high level outcome, (VCO’s network and collaborate for mutual benefit), Becon defined a core function as ‘Engagement’ with the aim “To enhance the capacity of BME groups to engage” which then helped to inform specific organisational activities such as ‘assisting BME groups to work together and form viable networks’.

Some organisations added a specific high level outcome to the framework e.g. one was around resourced community action and another related to civil renewal. A few of the pilots suggested that there should be a high level outcome around the health, management and sustainability of the infrastructure body itself, and added their own e.g. ‘WCVS will sustain its services to VCOs’, which for DVYS translated into a function around management of the charity. Organisations can add any additional high level outcomes that they feel are significant to them but these are not included in **PERFORM** as they are either too organisationally specific or are covered by other performance management processes such as PQASSO. They are however signposted on the **PERFORM** flow diagram (page 15).

Where there was some commonality in the findings around applicability of the framework, we have made amendments. Several organisations found the third high level outcome - VCO’s deliver high quality and inclusive services’ – the least useful and a duplication of the first. In addition, the testing process illustrated a gap around equality, diversity and inclusion. This

outcome was designed with a partial focus on equity. PERFORM therefore now has a different third high level outcome to make more explicit planning for outcomes around equity; 'VCOs reflect and promote diversity and equality', the related infrastructure function being to support sector diversity and equality.

PERFORM of course is not intended to provide standards, nor to be a regulatory tool; rather it is a tool that organisations can use in the way that best suits them. The key thing is that the existence of a starting point helped to focus minds and that within the context of ChangeUp, organisations are helped to strategically plan the infrastructure support they provide to the voluntary and community sector (or a particular part of it).

Summary: The PERFORM framework

The infrastructure focus of PERFORM is what makes this framework different to other planning and performance improvements approaches, supported by a plea for assistance in an arena where organisations may be driven to seek funding for survival of the organisation, rather than intended outcomes for the sector

"There is a distinct lack of a framework for voluntary/community/youth sector infrastructure".

This was also seen to be important in an intense period of change.

The project has spent a lot of time determining 'what it is that is core to infrastructure provision and what contribution does it specifically make (as opposed to voluntary and community organisations solely providing front line services)?' The vision and high level outcomes are designed to specifically meet the needs of organisations planning infrastructure support to the voluntary and community sector. Several pilots liked this specificity:

"Helps to define infrastructure – tested out at local / regional / consortium levels & all agreed with the four high level outcomes ". . . However, there are a number of organisations that provide infrastructure support to other sectors, not just the VCS e.g. CDX, volunteer centres, and there are many organisations that run frontline services in addition to carrying out second and third tier functions. From feedback given it is clear that organisations felt a common starting point was beneficial, with a critical proviso of flexibility to adapt to the particular context and purpose of the individual organisation. Particular benefits in supporting effective strategic planning both by individual organisations and by consortia of infrastructure providers were highlighted.

The framework was also seen as useful in promoting, and increasing understanding of, infrastructure with different stakeholders with an additional benefit of commonality of description of function supporting credibility of infrastructure organisations.

"..most organisations like ours spend a huge amount of time explaining what they do. If there were a commonly accepted model for infrastructure support it would be much easier to explain our work to funders and partner organisations. Conforming to such a common model might also help small specialist organisations like ours to gain credibility and status in the wider voluntary sector."

Reservations about the feasibility of the framework were mainly related to resource and capacity issues when considering the range of diverse organisations it is aimed at.

Planning for Outcomes

In addition to testing the value of a common starting point or framework, pilot organisations were asked to apply a process of more detailed planning and evaluation. The aim was to design useful guidance material.

Involvement of stakeholders

PERFORM encourages the involvement of a range of stakeholders of the infrastructure organization in the strategic planning process. An outcomes focus necessitates the involvement of 'users' of infrastructure as well as others who have a legitimate interest in the organisation

such as staff teams, volunteers, trustees and funders. Different approaches were employed to engage different stakeholders reflecting their different levels of involvement and what is appropriate and realistic.

“Interesting methods of involvement must be used to encourage active involvement of all.”

“Important to look for opportunities to use events or consultations that are already planned.”

“If the pilot had run at the time when our AGM is held (Oct), we might have been able usefully to run a session working through the framework at the AGM.”

“E-groups worked well with staff and trustees, but external stakeholders did not engage as actively outside meetings. wider stakeholders seemed more interested in being kept informed than being actively involved. But I think the wider stakeholders learned the most through the process, especially a new colleague from the Council who had just taken up his post.”

“Would expect stakeholders to benefit from their involvement as it should have increased and improved their understanding of a diverse infrastructure organisation and its work.”

“We have agreed (partly because of this work and partly because of our work to implement the ACRE Quality Standards) to undertake a users needs survey in October this year. Questions will be asked which give us ideas about the strategic direction users wish us to take in the future.”

Several of the pilots established a **PERFORM** steering group or reference group to broaden involvement from the start. This was found to be really useful in providing support to the staff involved as well as ensuring broader ownership, increased understanding of the infrastructure organisation, collaborative working and embedding of the resulting strategy:

“Reference group has been invaluable – the challenge and positive questioning has been great in helping think it through”

“Stakeholders included in steering groups enjoyed involvement and steering group worked collaboratively”

*“Internal stakeholders (trustee board and senior management team) learnt about the **PERFORM** framework and how to utilise it to inform the organisation’s Strategic Plan for 2005-08”*

Those organisations that involved the whole staff team found this beneficial because each individual can now see how their particular work contributes to a bigger picture albeit not without some difficulties:

“Internal stakeholders (staff and volunteers) learnt about how to identify outcomes for their work and how to devise and relate them to outputs. The process also enabled them to learn about the organisation as a whole as the work undertaken in their workshop fed into the organisation’s Operational Plan. This process will be undertaken annually.”

“Now halfway through staff involvement process. Some signs of frustration at the lengthy navel-gazing, although staff at least now know the processes involved have a better overview of the work of the organisation and know where things fit together. Involving all staff was the right decision, but it took a lot of time.”

For some of the pilots, stakeholder involvement presented a new experience and challenges. Difficulties encountered were in identifying who the stakeholders were, encompassing the views of those VCOs who are not already members, and involving those where current relationships are not strong e.g. policy makers / funders. Also, time is a big issue for everyone including trustees (and the need to bring them up to speed on outcomes) and funders.

“Had some difficulty deciding who were stakeholders and how we could involve users.....We need to find a mechanism for engaging our users with our strategic planning process or accept that our trustees are reflective of our users (although not necessarily representative).”

“Staff involved and enthusiastic but more difficult involving trustees to give strategic feedback. Issues around how to facilitate engagement and work from different starting points”

“We don’t have good links with some stakeholders, such as policy makers and funders. How would we include them?”

These statements reflect concerns over the involvement of trustees. Everyone agrees that they should be involved but are sensitive to overburdening them.

"I should have introduced the topic and ask for trustees to join the steering group earlier. A bit worrying that only one trustee is engaged in this high level planning work."

In one organisation, it was agreed that the management team should lead the process but that there would be regular overview and discussion from trustees at both board meetings and in a newly established corporate working group, as part of their overall strategic lead.

Learning from the pilots showed the importance of leadership – that whoever is responsible for directing and driving the organisation forward strategically should be centrally involved in, if not leading, the planning process.

"There is a considerable reliance placed upon the Manager's leadership in this situation"

Another organisation found that it was helpful to have one staff member and one trustee leading on PERFORM.

Reviewing context - what internal and external factors affect your organisation?

The guidance material provided to pilots recommends exploring the context in which the organisation is operating. Indeed, the changing context can be the catalyst for using PERFORM; *"Took me while to fully come to grips with the framework. It was my need to look at the re-positioning of the organisation within the changing world that really triggered my involvement"*.

Many of the pilots had already completed similar exercises and so didn't need to repeat them but just to use the information effectively;

"Have already gathered information through a series of staff and Board awaydays and planning meetings. I need to work out how to filter and use this, rather than just store it."

Also, those staff with a policy function have a lot of this information already in their heads, though involving stakeholders in the exercise did sometimes provide additional perspectives.

"Personally I didn't learn anything new about the organisation but the process consolidated my knowledge of what I know about its functions."

"I did learn about external stakeholders (member organisations) expectations of our organisation as their local infrastructure organisation"

"Combination of voices brought in some new ideas – otherwise might have been difficult to rise above current concerns."

The pilot organisations used different approaches to learn more about the context. PERFORM provides some headings to help to focus on the context:

- The needs of your actual and potential members and users
- The policy climate
- The 'state' and health of the voluntary and community sector
- Availability and access to infrastructure services provided by other organisations

Some used these headings and found them easy to understand. Several others preferred to use a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis;

"We regarded the SWOT analysis as key to engaging attention by all staff in understanding the context in which we work".... it was seen to form part of the overall planning/developmental process i.e. the results of the SWOT analysis can be used as a baseline for the next planning cycle".

Some organisations looked at the context in relation to each high level outcome and some just did the exercise once

"It might have been more useful to ask for each high level outcome – what needs/issues are arising in the local context which this outcome would address? This would tie the stages together."

The difficulty was sometimes knowing where to end the exercise;

"Feels like this isn't an exhaustive list – there are many issues that we just take for granted, particularly in terms of members' needs".

Developing a delivery strategy

The concept of PERFORM is that having agreed some broad ranging needs within the voluntary and community sector (high level outcomes) and the specific operational context, organisations are then in a position to focus on what this means for their organisation over the next three to five years. The process for this is to identify specific organisational outcomes and, then to move on to defining objectives which will turn determine activities – the everyday work of staff. As part of this process indicators are identified which can be used to track and assess progress. For example:

Warwickshire Rural Community Council			
Vision: A strong, diverse and vibrant voluntary and community sector			
High level outcome: VCOs are confident, skilled and knowledgeable in running their projects and activities			
Core function: Providing information & advice and enabling local action			
Aim: To improve the capacity and confidence of rural communities			
Intended outcomes	Indicators	Objectives	Activities
Increased confidence of rural communities	Levels of confidence expressed by rural communities	enable VCOs to access relevant information, guidance and/or advice, and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support communities in identifying local need and creating action plans to meet these needs ▪ Support 6 parish plan/community consultations ▪ Promote and administer the Interim Parish Plan Grant from DEFRA ▪ Promote and administer the Parish Plan Grant Fund from North Warwickshire Borough Council ▪ Support 60 rural enterprises ▪ Complete the Rugby Rural Regeneration Project ▪ Initiate housing needs surveys and site canvassing as appropriate ▪ Undertake 5 disability access audits ▪ To support the delivery of the Stour Power Health Check & PIE Delivery Plan
Increase in community activities	Number of community projects	enable VCOs to access high quality and diverse opportunities to learn and share skills	
		support VCOs to build their organisational capacity and development potential	

Pilots approached this in different ways. For most, indicators development was the most difficult part of the process, especially when trying to involve a range of people, although one pilot found that all the preparatory work they had done made this exercise relatively easy. One organisation identified new outcomes and indicators in consultation with projects and services managers through a series of information workshops, whilst for some (in part due to the time limited nature of the pilot process) this was more a one person paper exercise.

Several organisations found they had far too many indicators and so had to then choose which to focus on when collecting evidence. Factors to consider included not only which indicators were most realistic and measurable but also which could be most useful in assessing progress, but may be harder to evidence;

“Difficult to get a balance between setting challenging indicators and the reality of the resources we have (both to achieve the indicators and to measure our progress against them).”

“If forming outcomes was a trial, finding acceptable measures of change or ‘making a difference’ was even more complicated. The major lesson learned from this is that it couldn’t really be done by committee – individuals had to come up with ideas about evidence and data collection and add them to the collective pot for subsequent review/collation”

There was also a great variation in whether pilots found the guidance material helpful or irrelevant. Some used the **PERFORM** examples as guidance and then adopted their own, *"We would not have been able to do this had there not been any templates. The exercise actually brought everything together and at a glance we could see the aims and objectives"*

Another organisation felt the step by step guidance was too linear and that it could not identify indicators until it had identified activities though it did say that:

"We can start with an overall idea of what those measures might be, but the final decisions on indicators of success are fed by the rest of the process".

The nature of the pilot meant that only some organisations managed to work right through the process. The evidence gathering stage of the process was the one which most pilots struggled to implement within the timeframe;

"It is a major task to change the way in which information is reported in an organisation. It was also impossible to implement these changes until we had decided our outcomes and indicators."

"Started looking at what to collect how and when and got very confused as this was a massive task!"

Some did attempt this however using a variety of methods.

"All staff were given the outcomes and indicators and asked how they were going to provide evidence. All staff were amazed at the amount of work they do when they did this exercise".

Examples of how information was collected:

- interviews with relevant stakeholders
- surveys and online questionnaire, (offering a prize draw proved to be a good incentive and produced returns),
- subscriber evaluation,
- reports from database (linked to answers supplied on our membership forms)
- evaluations of work undertaken e.g. conferences, website, network meetings
- funding achieved,
- assessment of progress as recorded in writing e.g. list of facts and figures that demonstrate level of success or otherwise in various tasks, which needed to be collected internally.

Some of the pilots still find it easier to work from organisational aims and existing plans rather than undertaking a review which starts from outcomes, *"it's like starting from scratch"*. Yet, there are examples from those organisations that reached the evidence gathering stage, that they found this a useful way of to approach strategic planning;

"The analysis of the evidence collected helped us to make judgements about our contribution towards meeting (or not) the outcomes we had identified and to consider the question: 'has the infrastructure organisation made a difference?'"

"..... Progress to date does indicate that the work we are now undertaking as an organisation is better honed towards meeting the needs of our members".

"We will be planning our work round the outcomes and providing the evidence to all our funders. This is certainly been a worthwhile exercise that has made us more aware of how to collect the evidence and for what purpose"

"It gives us clear information about what we need to do ... (It) has thrown up the need for different activities, such as equalities training."

Summary: Planning for delivery

Discussions between the pilots showed that stakeholder involvement presented lots of challenges but was a good thing to do and had many benefits.

Understanding the context in which you are providing infrastructure functions is important but it really doesn't matter what exercises are used so long as they generate some collective understanding about context amongst those leading the strategic process – people will have different perspectives. *“Feels reassuring to have done this exercise. We rarely take time to stop and think about what's happening in the outside world and how this might affect us”.*

Some of the pilots valued examples in the guidance material of what organisational outcomes, indicators and objectives might look like whilst others found they got in the way and made the whole thing seem too unwieldy. As a result, the pilot material has been pared down to the “Tool” itself with an accompanying document giving Case Studies of implementation which have been well received. Feedback has indicated that the quantity, content and format of guidance material required is a very individualistic issue which is unlikely to be resolved totally by following only one of the range of recommendations given by pilots:

- Templates & step-by-step guidance
- Book of tools/resources with lists of available facilitators and other groups doing PERFORM
- Ring binder broken down into different tasks & blank sheets
- Diagrams
- CD / web-based / paper-based
- Online toolkit with e-learning tutorials & forms
- Workbook in loose leaf format allowing for updates & own materials to be inserted

Overall, implementation ideas and examples were seen to be useful to start the thinking processes and as long as these were regarded as non-prescriptive. However, some organisations felt this was insufficient for an organisation starting with PERFORM for the first time:

“I think they need to be backed up by additional support - particularly if the organisation is fairly new to the outcomes approach”

“They can be used as a basis and can be adapted if needed. If people do not find them useful they can ignore them.”

Examples of suggested support were: talking to managers who had taken their organisation through the process, peer support, reference group/buddying support, network development for organisations implementing PERFORM.

Overall benefits of implementing **PERFORM**

However tightly or flexibly organisations applied the framework, it had some kind of positive impact. There are some organisations that are very clear as to its worth and are gearing up to integrate **PERFORM** into the organisation:

"We will be planning our work round the outcomes and providing the evidence to all our funders. This is certainly been a worthwhile exercise that has made us more aware of how to collect the evidence and for what purpose"

"The framework process has helped the organisation to review and amend the Mission Statement and has arrived at an explanation of infrastructure that people could understand"

"Enabled whole organisation picture"

"Helped to understand own work and staff - analysis of who and what we are"

Although the pilot was short, some organisations were very positive about the way the framework involves a wider range of people in the planning and assessment process e.g. *"It is difficult at this point to be sure of the implications for VCOs in our area but progress to date does indicate that the work we are now undertaking as an organisation is better honed towards meeting the needs of our member VCOs"*.

"Most infrastructure organisations don't have a tool to help them focus broader than quality standards on: outcomes; stakeholders; and strategic planning"

PERFORM has provided the opportunity to inform more people about what infrastructure is about, as well as what it isn't;

"It must be helpful therefore to have a clarity as to just what is infrastructure and why do we need it".

"The whole framework is relevant and appropriate. It does help us to define infrastructure and our funders thought so too".

In addition, some organisations have already reached the position of reprioritising time and resources and feel more confident in proactively developing their services;

"The analysis of the evidence collected helped us to make judgements about our contribution"

"Presents an opportunity to raise profile of 'why' infrastructure both to funders and the wider VCS."

PERFORM is a primarily a tool and therefore organisations are expected to use **PERFORM** only if they find it helpful. For some of the pilots **PERFORM** was just another addition to an already planned strategy development process and for them it had a more minimal impact on the organisation. For others however, it provided what they needed;

"Having undertaken this pilot and done all this work on our strategic and operational plans, it is a selling point to other organisations that it is now easy to identify relevant information and hard evidence for use in bids and grant applications to support and validate our achievements."

"I'm sold. I think it is necessary to move forward, more essential than useful. People also need to know that it comes with practice and that they will learn and get better. Getting others to buy-in will be the trick."

There was a general consensus that clarity was required in terms of how **PERFORM** links in with *"everything else out there!"* Both Volunteering England and NACVS are intending to carry out 'mapping' work to track and be able to show the links between their own quality systems and **PERFORM**. NACVS reported that so far they *"fit together like a glove"*. There is a need to continuously reinforce the fact that **PERFORM** is a strategic planning tool and that relationships with internal standards such as PQASSO will be 'quite mild'.

Concerns around **PERFORM**

The **PERFORM** development process and the pilots highlighted some concerns and health warnings:

- The starting point needs to be a commitment to change if necessary; *"don't do this until fundamentally ready to question your own organisation's existence"*.

- In a very small organisation, there is more pressure to do everything and the need for support / mentoring is more stark. This was particularly highlighted by the pilot organisation that dropped out part way through.
- There is a widespread feeling that in the context of 'rationalisation', this is not an open culture and organisations feel vulnerable and wary about being too honest about what needs to be improved. *"That in developing a framework for all infrastructure organisations to use it is not seized upon by public agencies as something that must be used - in other words it becomes 'a stick to beat the sector with.'* A further related concern was whether funders would prefer organisations using one particular system.
- Some may be tempted to use **PERFORM** as a quality system - it was not intended for this purpose. *"Devise a simple description of what different systems are for e.g. PQASSO, different QA Standards."*
*"Clarification of **PERFORM** as a framework within which other processes can nestle e.g. PQASSO for quality planning, liP for HR planning and organisational development etc."*
- There are some costs involved in **PERFORM**, as in any strategic planning process. Will funders be comfortable with covering the costs of resources to make it effective? *"..... maybe asking for ChangeUp plans to include **PERFORM**."*
- Fears were expressed that **PERFORM** may become *"... just another tool and offered without support as an off the shelf package"* and one organisation went so far as to say that they would not use it unless *".... it is relatively easy to use; it has wide recognition and acceptability and links with other tools; it retains its flexibility; and adequate support is offered"* whilst another organisation suggested that this must be offered to all implementers of the framework.
- Organisations may superficially follow the process but neither take it seriously (e.g. around stakeholder involvement) nor act on the results. *"Finding a balance between using **PERFORM** to force our internal stakeholders to stand back from our activities and see them more objectively (in terms of outcomes and the needs of our clients) worries me a little that the intended flexibility might be used as an excuse to opt out of the more difficult (but potentially most valuable) aspects of the framework."*
- The process of using indicators isn't always easy and organisations may miss out on useful evidence. *"..... lots of examples and indicators (needed) on a website."* *"Develop outcomes/indicator banks."*
- Organisations may try to fit their existing plans into a **PERFORM** format i.e. simply rationalise what they are already doing. *"Groups rushing into it without buy-in / commitment / understanding / planning."* There was a consensus that implementation training or guidance would be beneficial.
- **PERFORM** is a strategic planning and assessment process. As a strategic planning process it is to be used, probably, every three to five years. As an assessment process it is expected to inform annual work plans as well as longer term strategy.
- Feedback stressed that any roll out plan developed would need to spread resources over 3 years so that organisations have the flexibility to link implementation of **PERFORM** with their own strategic planning cycles.
- The response to the proposal that *"..the Performance Hub and Capacity Builders (to) take this forward"* promoted further concern in terms of resource implications and the fact that *"... there is a lot of work to be done with funders"* specifically related to *"Funding to implement (the) process and funders to 'buy' into the concept"*. It is clear that many organisations fear that they will not be able to engage funders in *"owning the process"*.
- The ACU and the Hub Management Board have stated that they want **PERFORM** to be part of the Hub but that roll out is not presently budgeted for and there needs to be further clarity re what 'roll out' means in practice. Further clarification is still needed about support is needed and how **PERFORM** can be developed and, although the value of **PERFORM** to infrastructure is clear, it is still not clear how it fits with Capacity Builders development.

Costs of implementing **PERFORM**

All the pilots were asked to look at the costs of implementing **PERFORM** in terms of time and expense. The results however, are difficult to analyse as some of the organisations were already involved in other exercises at the same time e.g. quality assurance, and it is difficult to separate one from the other, staff time is costed very differently in different organisations and depends upon how many and what level of staff were involved, some organisation brought in an outside facilitator and some didn't. The results therefore vary from 85 hours to 555 hours, and from £1200 (not including staff time) to £10,845 (which is mainly staff time).

Feedback from the Stakeholder Conference indicated that it may be useful to include, in **PERFORM** implementation guidelines, an outline of potential activities that need to be costed. The cost implications of a move to assessment of outcomes need to be borne in mind as it may entail involving and collecting evidence from a wider sample of stakeholders than any previous exercises.

Training and Support

Most of the recommendations made by the pilots have been incorporated into the revised framework and guidance material. In addition however, there are a number relating directly to training and support:

- Outcomes training courses (including 'in-house' training)
- Mentoring support for those leading the process (re preparation and planning, introducing the framework to others, dealing with organisational change, providing feedback on proposed indicators and sources of evidence)
- Opportunities to share experience around application and development of the framework - examples of how others have used it, how others are collecting evidence, tried and tested questionnaires etc. These could be met through facilitated workshops / networking events, (the three pilot networking events were found to be useful), website / on line support, a **PERFORM** 'club'.
- *"The idea of a wider training course with **PERFORM** at the heart - a management training course with market value for professionals in the VCS."*
- Events which are aimed at being promotional / awareness raising / an introduction to - rather than specific skill / knowledge development with the best advocates being organisations who have gone through the process. The emphasis being on examples of where it has worked and the benefits e.g. being able to attract additional funding / contracts, aiding an organisation's credibility and maximising the ability to work with partners e.g. everything in the open, increased self-knowledge and confidence
- A **PERFORM** Champion per Consortium - trained and able to deliver to others.
- The use of existing networks / **PERFORM** Champions

Decisions may have to be made about the most effective support than can be provided. Experience illustrates that without face to face induction and implementation guidance and support, frameworks and toolkits can either be just left on the shelf or used inappropriately.

Summary: Findings & Proposals

- ▽ Some organisations find it difficult to move away from an internal organisational focus towards a focus on the needs of the sector and their specific contribution.
- ▽ Organisations do find an outcomes approach useful (and recognise the significance for improving their service) but there need to be more learning opportunities to understand outcomes.
- ▽ **PERFORM** is useful as a strategic framework for infrastructure organisations which when used alongside organisational development tools such as PQASSO feeds into the business plan and informs annual work plans.
- ▽ Outcomes around ensuring equity and diversity management need to be explicit within the framework.
- ▽ All organisations gained something from piloting the planning tool and for several organisations the involvement of stakeholders was particularly significant.
- ▽ **PERFORM** raises understanding about the nature of the whole organisation and helps to identify which parts relate directly to the infrastructure functions. This contributes to better reporting and promotion.
- ▽ **PERFORM** needs to be clearer about what is a 'given' and what is flexible within the framework and implementation process.
- ▽ Some people like a 'prescriptive' starting point and lots of material to draw from, others prefer something much more 'outline'.
- ▽ Strategic planning and assessment takes time and needs to be valued and resourced. Outside support from a facilitator or consultant helps.
- ▽ **PERFORM** requires a commitment to change and to manage change processes.
- ▽ Organisations feel overloaded with change and development and are concerned about funders' agendas and how information is / will be used.
- ▽ **PERFORM** should be promoted as a self assessment framework and planning tool for all infrastructure organisations.
- ▽ Resourced support should be made available for organisations wishing to implement **PERFORM** over the next three years e.g. training, facilitation and consultancy advice, mentoring, networking, etc
- ▽ Information systems should be set up to enable the sharing of examples of indicators and methods for evidencing performance
- ▽ Further work should be carried out to define the relationship and ensure complementarity between **PERFORM** and quality assurance systems.

Vision A strong, diverse and vibrant voluntary and community sector			
VCOs are skilled, knowledgeable and well run ----- Sector support and development	VCOs network and collaborate ----- Sector collaboration and co- ordination	VCOs reflect and promote diversity and equality ----- Sector diversity and equality	VCOs influence policies and programmes ----- Sector influence and representation

