12. Collaborative approaches to 'people-based' and 'place-based' issues in Victoria

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This chapter explores specific examples of collaborative approaches within the community sector, addressing issues within the broader context of the 'people-based' and 'place-based' approaches that the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC) has championed.² It goes on to reflect more broadly on the principles that have underpinned a successful approach to changing the way government works.

Family violence

Family violence is a major social problem in the community. It does not involve just two people, but affects the entire family, sometimes over generations. Family violence is the leading contributor to preventable death, disability and illness in Victorian women between 15 and 44 years of age. It can often start or intensify during pregnancy. It is associated with increased rates of miscarriage, low birth rates, premature birth, foetal injury and foetal death. It is a factor in more than half of the substantiated child-protection cases, and children are present at more than half the attendances for family violence.

Family violence also has a significant impact on a range of associated public services that are called on to deal with or support the people involved. These include the police, who can be called to the initial incident, the courts, where it is possible to obtain an intervention order, mental health departments and services, as well as housing services and education departments and schools, where family violence has a major impact on school attendance and learning.

In addition, there is a range of community-based services that takes an active role in supporting victims and perpetrators of family violence (because the perpetrators also need help). In 2002, as part of the Women's Safety Strategy, the Victorian Government formed a state-wide steering committee to reduce family violence. DVC took the lead role in coordinating the delivery of the strategy.

The policy was the result of the government finding different ways to listen and work. This was not just a government strategy, but a whole-of-community strategy. The idea was to link family violence services with a focus on outcomes: improving the safety of victims who experience family violence and improving the accountability of the perpetrators of violence. Initially, the government

provided \$35.1 million over four years for a range of strategies, which resulted in significant improvements for victims of family violence.

Several key elements led to a successful collaborative approach to improving government responses to family violence. The most important was the agreement of five ministers and three government departments, all of which wanted to make the strategy work. New resources, joined with the old, leveraged the reforms. The willingness to create regional partnerships that went beyond government boundaries and worked with communities was critical.

There were also some significant systemic and structural changes that were required. A revised police Code of Practice (in 2004) and the support of the Chief Commissioner, Christine Nixon, led to changes in the way in which intervention orders were used. The creation of a specialist court response (the Family Violence Lists in the Magistrates Courts) supported joined up approaches to helping people. In July 2006, the Victorian Department of Human Services facilitated regional partnerships with refuges, outreach services, counselling and support services and men's behavioural-change services. A common framework for risk assessment and a focus on information and communication supported these changes.

From the perspective of the person who has lived with family violence, the outcomes are now much better. There are improved counselling and support programs for women and children and, through a private rental program, additional funding and support for women who have experienced family violence. An intensive case-management system has been implemented to support women with complex needs (where there has been not only domestic violence but drug abuse and a history of broken relationships). Men's behavioural-change programs and crisis accommodation for men are also now available.

An important aspect of the program has been a willingness to look at new and more effective ways of dealing with the perpetrators of family violence—the police can now direct or detain them. This has resulted in a 34 per cent increase in the use of intervention orders and has enhanced the capacity of the police to deal with a situation before it escalates out of control, as well as improving defendant support. As ever, there is more to be done. Work is under way to link service and workflow systems so that victims experience consistent, integrated support and intervention and are not required to tell the same story over and over again.

Currently, a benchmark study across agencies is also being planned to evaluate the results achieved to date and to measure the effectiveness of new changes. The department is now scoping these additional pieces of work and working closely with government agencies to make them possible. While further work needs to be done, it is already clear that a significant impact has been made in

a relatively short time, providing a coordinated government and community response that works.

Streamlining Indigenous funding agreements

In July 2004, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Gavin Jennings, conducted a series of Indigenous community forums on a range of key issues relating to Victorian Indigenous affairs. In these consultations, one of the issues raised was the need for the government to look at simplifying the level of red tape involved in administering state-funded Indigenous programs. To address this issue, the government made a commitment in *A Fairer Victoria* to introduce single funding agreements for Indigenous organisations. This is part of the state government's commitment to change the way it works in an area characterised by complexity.

In 2005–06, there were agreements with 76 Indigenous organisations for 623 projects. Approximately 50 per cent of funded Indigenous organisations received funding from more than one state agency. In all, 33 Indigenous organisations received funding from state and Commonwealth agencies. Typically, they would receive funding from five to 10 different program areas to deliver more than 10 different services. Indigenous organisations have been asked to manage a large number of projects and to manage a number of funding relationships across and within government agencies.

The terms and conditions of the programs had different expectations about how funding should be managed and different rules for the management committees to abide by depending on the source of funding. Within the Victorian Government, only one department used the same set of terms and conditions for all its funding programs. More generally, there was an inconsistent use of 'plain English', which meant that terms such as 'strategy', 'objective' and 'outcome' meant different things in different agreements. Administration tasks had different payment dates, different invoicing requirements, different reporting requirements and different funding arrangements (with varying levels of flexibility and differing focuses on partnership, communication and compliance).

As a starting point to developing single funding agreements, DVC in collaboration with many other departments developed a common funding framework, illustrated in Figure 12.1. This was agreed to by all departmental secretaries. The framework captures the component parts of a funding agreement. It proposes the development of common processes and documentation for funding administration, as well as a shared sense of the way government and Indigenous organisations do business.

Figure 12.1 The single funding agreement for Indigenous organisations

On the left of Figure 12.1 are a number of contractual elements, which will make up the funding document, with non-contractual elements on the right. Single funding agreements for Indigenous organisations display the elements that should be the same across every funding agency and these are shown in the blue or dark boxes. The elements that should be written on a common template with organisation-specific content are shown in the yellow or lighter boxes. A single core set of terms and conditions to cover circumstances that are common to all funded activities and relationships has been agreed on. Additional terms and conditions can be added for activities that have unique circumstances or specific requirements, or for unique relationships. Common ‘pay days’ and ‘report-due’ dates and work towards common reporting formats have also been agreed to. The initial impetus for single funding agreements was the need to reduce the administrative burden for Indigenous organisations. It will also, however, reduce the administrative burden for government agencies.

The improvements mean that activity specifications are better understood by provider organisations. Furthermore, the government has better awareness of each organisation’s complementary and competing funding arrangements. Government agencies together can also gain a shared understanding of organisational capacities. Because of this, organisational risks are better understood and managed collectively across government.

Streamlining funding arrangements within the department supports improved transparency and better risk management. Streamlining funding arrangements across the whole of government will support the DVC's strategic directions. It will result in arrangements that are focused on community needs and outcomes, not programming silos. It reinforces the department's focus on place and people, and is a practical demonstration of running government differently.

Regional management initiatives

A key strategy of *A Fairer Victoria* was the alignment of regional boundaries of state departments into eight administrative regions so that community organisations and individuals could overcome any problems created by different regional management structures or boundaries. This simple change fostered collaboration across government agencies at a regional level. Regional Management Forums were created to provide opportunities to explore shared priorities and projects at a regional level. They comprise a regional champion (one of the departmental secretaries or chief commissioner of police) and regional managers of state government agencies and CEOs of local government. At these forums, joint recognition of the issues impacting on the provision of services and infrastructure to a shared population is generating agreement on shared priorities and projects. These forums are evidence of dynamic collaboration driven by needs and opportunities, as well as by better sharing of information and resources across agencies.

Improving information networks through 'iPlace'

Being able to access and share information across organisational boundaries is becoming a strategic enabler for competitive advantage, networked government and stronger communities. The Victorian Government's initiative 'iPlace' consolidates access to federal, state and local government information through one resource to provide 'place-based' information. It is the means by which public-sector employees (and ultimately the public) can gain easy access to thousands of government information sources about any place in the state of Victoria. It is based on a strong governance model of shared responsibilities (horizontally and vertically) across jurisdictions, and a federated model of information sharing that ensures that the information owner is able to make copies of their information available but also control who is entitled to access it.

By aggregating data from disparate sources, a platform is available for informed planning, resource management and decision making. The project, endorsed by the Victorian state coordination and management committee, is working with three regional management forums: Hume region, Northern and Western Metropolitan and the Grampians. It is an example of the value of technology in making it possible for people and organisations to share knowledge and insights,

and ultimately to contribute to improving service delivery, investment mixes, policy development and local priority setting.

Conclusion

It is impossible to identify a single factor that makes effective collaboration work. Rather, many factors interact and contribute to successful outcomes. Agreement on shared goals and vision, 'branding' and communication, accountability, customers, common capabilities and individual trade-offs, clarity of governance arrangements and processes, are fundamental to successful collaboration. Experience demonstrates that relationships, the sharing of capability and building of trust take time but also create the environment for change, allowing for greater leverage and better outcomes. To ensure projects were completed and issues addressed, it was necessary for the DVC to explore various collaborative approaches. These approaches and enablers made it possible to achieve positive results and reach successful outcomes in changing the way government operated in 'people-based' and 'place-based' programs operating across the Victorian public sector.

The design principles underlying these projects were clear and simple. They included viewing the world through the lens of people, families or communities, developing a simpler or single face of government and harnessing the capacity of local leaders and entrepreneurs. Shifting from government controlling and directing the delivery of services to government playing the role of facilitator and enabler was also fundamental for successful collaboration. Devolution of service planning and service delivery to the local level meant greater awareness and cooperation between the different sectors as well as developing cross-sectoral approaches to addressing social opportunities and problems through partnerships between governments, community agencies and the corporate sector.

ENDNOTES

¹ This chapter was written when Citizen Access and Transformation was part of the former Department for Victorian Communities. After machinery-of-government changes, that department is now the Department of Planning and Community Development. Citizen Access and Transformation is now part of the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development. Commitment to collaboration, joined-up government and designing services with Victorians so that their needs are met remains critical to delivering accessible and accountable government.

² The functions of the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC) are now incorporated in Department of Planning and Community Development following machinery-of-government changes announced in August 2007.