2012 Results of SFA structure and decision-making review

Our term 2, 2012 workshop completed the review of the SFA's structure and decision-making processes. This paper outlines changes to the Alliance that have resulted from this process and what this will mean for the way we use our network to create resilience and well-being in Blue Mountains children, families and communities.

Results of the review: Over-View

What stays the same?

The majority of the structure stays the same:

- The basic structure of a main group, with two-way links to three implementation groups (Neighbourhood Service Networks, Moving Children Beyond Vulnerability & Child Friendly Community), each linked to the three parts of the Plan, remains the same.

What changes?

Structure changes:

- An Executive has been placed into the SFA as a sub-group, designated a role to play within the Alliance network, delegated limited decision-making authority (with a requirement that major decisions are brought back to the main group) and initial members selected.

- The communication management and professional development sub-groups have been removed from the structure. The functions that these groups served previously have been incorporated in different ways.

- Council's role as the collaboration driver has been formally delineated in the new structure. We have used the Stanford Innovation Review's definition and name for this role – "Collaboration Backbone". Mountains Community Resource Network joins Council in the Collaboration Backbone for 2012-13. Formal roles and decision-making delegation related to these roles has been given to the Collaboration Backbone.

<u>Function changes: (what each sub group does)</u>

- The main group's major function has been changed. The main group's primary focus will now be on implementing the Child and Family Plan through the cultivation of synergies, relationships and innovation across the Alliance network. Previously a major focus of the main group was on building our collaborative network, creating the Child and Family Plan and direction setting for subgroups.

- Developing and communicating 'strategic line of sight' will occur at implementation group level. This means that understanding and articulating the translation of the Plan's outcomes and objectives through to initiatives on the ground will occur at implementation group level. This process will be supported by the Executive and Backbone Organisations.

- The Collaboration Backbone formally adds the functions of internal communication (for us this means communication that targets our sector) and evaluation.

Results of the review: The Detail

<mark>The Main Group:</mark>

What stays the same?

<u>Representation:</u>

- The main group remains a large group, aiming to achieve multi-stakeholder representation of all organisations and networks in the Blue Mountains who impact on child development.

<u>Decision-making power:</u>

- The main group remains the place in the Alliance where major developments, decisions etc about the Alliance direction are approved (the exceptions of four areas outlined below).

What changes?

<u>Decision-making power:</u>

- The Executive can now make decisions regarding <u>forming external partnerships</u> and the <u>management of the Alliance's political interface</u> without main group approval.

- The Collaboration Backbone can now make decisions about the <u>facilitation of the Alliance collaboration network</u> and <u>internal communication</u> without main group approval.

- Both the Executive and Collaboration Backbone will clearly communicate about decisions they have made through the SFA newsletter and a standing agenda item in the main group agenda. In this communication they must share all knowledge that informed decisions and show how any conflict of interest issues were managed in the decision making process.

<u>Decision-making process and communication:</u>

- Previously main group meetings involved facilitated decision-making processes around most aspects of the Alliance's development.

- Now much of the decision making processes about the Alliance's development will occur either in the Collaboration Backbone or Executive. Therefore discussion, thinking and relationship development involved in getting to the point of a decision-making will take place off-line from the main group process.

- The Collaboration Backbone and Executive will bring decision topics to the Main Group to share their thinking / knowledge thus enabling the Main Group to make an informed decision. (Except in the four decision-making areas underlined above where either the Executive or Backbone Organisation can make decisions without seeking main group approval).

<u>Primary purpose of the main group:</u>

- In the last five years the purpose of the main group has evolved as the Alliance developed. For example previous work achieved by the main group has included forming the Alliance network, creating a common mindset and evidence base, create a common vision, create Alliance structures, writing the Child and Family Plan and setting implementation directions for the sub-groups.

- Now the major purpose of the main group is to facilitate the implementation of the Child and Family Plan by providing a space where synergies, learning and resources across the Alliance network can be brought together. Specifically this will occur in the main group through processes designed to:
  (i)   Maintain shared vision;
  (ii)   Facilitate cross implementation group synergies, opportunities, learning and innovation;
  (iii)   Provide direction to the 3 implementation groups when needed
  (iv)   Collectively respond to evaluation information
  (v)   Identifying initiatives to support the implementation groups

- In appreciate inquiry terms the main group has now passed through the Discover, Dream and Design stages. It is now going to focus on the fourth appreciative inquiry stage - Do.

- The Do stage in appreciative inquiry is supported by (i) empowering, learning, adjusting in response to implementation experiences and improvising (giving things a try without being fully prepared) (ii) creating structures to support success (iii) collecting and promoting stories of success (iv) maintaining an affirmative culture.

Evaluation approach

- Previously we have evaluated the SFA process itself – its energy, relationship quality, level of coordination, stakeholder diversity, engagement etc.

- Now the evaluation focus will be on the impact of the SFA on increasing the wellbeing and resilience of children, families and communities in the Blue Mountains (using the Child and Family Plan to guide us).

- Our Alliance processes will still be an important component of evaluation however for the next 12 – 18 months we will focus primarily on developing an approach and framework to evaluation re: what we have positively changed on the ground for children, families and communities. This work will be lead by the Collaboration Backbone. Consultation will occur at main group meetings. The Executive will have final sign off of the Evaluation plan.

Changes in the implementation groups: Neighbourhood Service Networks / Vulnerable Children / Child Friendly Community

What stays the same?

Basic structure:

- Three sub-groups, each devoted to implementing the three parts of the Plan.

Purpose of the sub-groups:

- Direct implementation of the Child and Family Plan.

What has been clarified?

Decision-making about direction setting (i.e. deciding how to implement the Plan)

- Direction setting will be a two-way process between the main group and sub-groups.

- The main group sets **or** approves major directions of each sub-group. This ensures the Alliance tradition of consensus decision-making is maintained (i.e. whole of system buy-in to decisions made about any one part of the network.)

- <u>Main group lead direction setting</u>: Historically we have seen that when direction setting occurs in the main group the implementation groups experience much more impetus and ease in implementation. For this reason we will continue to use the main group meetings for this purpose when necessary.

- <u>Implementation group direction setting</u>: Direction setting can also occur within the implementation sub-group as well. Historically we have seen that when direction setting occurs through the process of experiential learning through project development, excellent strategic level directions can be generated. However to ensure the whole Alliance networks buys into these directions, major decisions about how to implement the Plan that originate in the implementation groups will be brought back to the main group for approval. This process will ensure we continue to build shared vision and understanding across sectors, and are able to leverage implementation synergies across the sub groups.

<u>Initiative & project development</u>

- Bright ideas, coordination, planning and reporting about initiatives / projects occur at Implementation Group level.

- How this process is managed in each implementation group currently varies. However with a move towards evaluating the impact of our initiatives on children, families and the community, there will likely be some alignment in the implementation sub groups about this.

What changes?

<u>Aligning leadership approach</u>

- Previously Tanya (Neighbourhood Service Networks); Kerry (Moving beyond vulnerability) and Toni (Child friendly community) facilitated and lead each implementation group differently and interfaced with each other through the main group structure.

<u>Aligning group process approach</u>

- In the next 18 months we are trialling facilitating the implementation groups using a common and more formalised approach articulated in Collective Impact. The process involves managing each initiative through the process of (i) planning (ii) doing (iii) evidence based feedback about how the initiative is making a difference on the ground (iv) communication about the initiative to a broader audience

Maintaining and communicating strategic line of sight

- Strategic line of sight is present in our network when everyone can see the relationship between the Child and Family Plan's outcomes, objectives and implementation group initiatives.

- Previously this has been maintained through the Collaboration Backbone and Main group.

- Now strategic line of sight will be supported by the Executive but responsibility for maintaining and communicating this will occur primarily at implementation group level.

The Collaboration Back-bone

*This term 'collaboration back-bone' has been drawn directly from the Collective Impact article which describes this role in similar terms to the role Council currently plays in the Alliance. The SFA has taken up many of the recommendations made in the Collective Impact article about how to structure the Collaboration Back-bone to best enable the Alliance's success.

What stays the same?

Council's contribution to the Back-bone

- Council will continue to resource the Back-bone.

What will change?

Formal role delegation

- The roles Council plays out within the Back-bone Organisation are now more formally clarified. Council's delegated role at the moment is to (i) facilitate the collaborative network (ii) manage internal (sector and SFA) communication processes (iii) design and implement an Alliance evaluation plan (iv) contribute to the professional development necessary to deliver the Child and Family Plan.

Initiatives to develop a collaborative network

- Formally Council convened and lead groups formed to develop the SFA. Now Mountains Community Resource Network will join the Collaboration Backbone undertaking this work. The Main Group, Executive or an Implementation group may identify the need for these initiatives.

Stronger Families Alliance collaboration convener, Tanya James: sfa@bmcc.nsw.gov.au

- The development of these ideas will be done off-line from the Main Group. The structure of the Collaboration Backbone enables any organisation in the Alliance to temporarily (or permanently) join the Backbone Organisation to facilitate collaboration building initiatives.

- The initiatives currently in development are (i) the Alliance marketing plan (ii) resource to assist the implementation groups carry out community education. These initiatives are being led by Mountains Community Resource Network.

The Executive

Membership

- Membership at this stage consists of the Implementation sub group leaders, Council and 2 neutrals – Rotary and Mountains Community Resource Network.
- Collaboration Backbone organisation (at this stage Council) convenes the Executive.

Roles

- Think about the Alliance's long-term future and in this position the Alliance for future success
- Keep the Implementation Groups strategically on track
- Manage the political interface
- Link to the Backbone Organisation
- Source and manage external partnerships
- Determine funding directions
- Sign off on the Alliance Evaluation plan.

Responsibilities

- Maintain vision
- Lead the Alliance using the collaborative leadership approach outlined in the Child and Family Plan
- Trouble shoot any problems in terms of (i) proactively bringing them to the table (ii) taking personal responsibility in the Alliance network for their resolution
- Maintain a conflict of interest process.

Decision-making power:

- Major decisions arising from the Executive's role are still made at the Main Group with the exception of sourcing and managing external partnerships and managing the political inter-face.
- Decisions that go back to the Main Group will be presented to the group with the majority of the research, relationship development and thinking having been done off-line in the Executive group.

Initial tasks

- Implementation group leaders meet firstly to implement changes in the Implementation Group functioning arising from this review.
- Larger Executive to then form, review their role and in light of this review their membership. Any recommendations about changes to the Executive membership then brought back to the Main Group.
- Design a Declaration / Conflict of Interest policy and process. One of the intentions of this policy is to ensure that the forming of an Alliance executive does not preclude all organisations in the Alliance being equally considered as Lead Agency candidates for any future program or funding development.