

Local Area Planning Support Program Progress and Final Reports

How the project has made a difference and changed the way council does business

The project has had an enormous impact on our Councils because of the priority given to the reporting of plans and strategies and the understanding of the performance rate of the actions within these plans and strategies. The program has also provided staff with the insight into how the plans and strategies have relevance and an impact on individual program delivery areas

The intended outcomes from the introduction of the program included: -

- Fully integrated planning system

Our Councils have ensured that we have full integration between our Council Plans and our service delivery area business plans. Our service area business plans include the actions from other Council Strategies and Plans, in particular our Municipal Public Health Plan, Capital Works Plan and the Risk Strategy. Each service delivery area is monitoring and reporting on their actions on a monthly basis.

- Staff, Councillors and community trained in Local Area Planning

Our staff and Councillors are now more aware of the actions that we have committed to through the various Strategies and Plans and they are being reporting on regularly. The program allows us to identify specific actions that will be addressed in each community. This is proving to be a valuable tool for our staff and Councillors in developing Community Plans and talking to our communities about the activities that are already planned.

- More responsible and accountable to community, State and Federal Government

Both Councils are reporting on their Council Plan to the community through the Council Meeting. Bass Coast has developed this further and is reporting quarterly on the Council Plan and the Capital Works Plan. The Councillors find the reporting on these two Plans to be a great tool for them when engaging with their communities.

- Provide accurate, timely data to plan for the communities' needs.

In the development of our Community Plans we are able to talk to our local area meetings about the planned activities, their progress, where they link into other major Council strategies and anticipated completion dates. Our communities are responding positively to receiving specific data about project within their areas.

- Promoting a culture of cross functional planning and community engagement within our organisations and the wider community

The use of the program has encouraged conversations across departments within our Councils. The program has introduced a level of the accountability because of the regularly reporting on actions. Our plans are now more focused and achievable and are starting to limit duplicate actions across Strategies and Plans.

Bass Coast has recently used the program to develop the Drug and Alcohol Strategy, Access and Inclusion Strategy and the Education Strategy with our stakeholders and community.

- Key learning's

Our Councils have received great benefit from this program, some of our biggest learnings have been around obtaining a greater understanding of Council's commitments and the resources required to meet these commitments, a greater understanding of how the related plans and strategies link to our Council Plan and individual work plans. We have also learnt a lot from re-examining our process for integrated planning.

Process

- Understand the current situation

Both Councils met to understand what systems and processes already existing with our organisations and discussed what we needed to achieve through the program.

Extensive research was conducted by visiting a number of Councils who were all having different experiences and using the program for different purposes. We included the positive things from our visits in our implementation and worked through the things that didn't work in other Councils.

- Develop the implementation plan

In conjunction with CA Technologies we developed a plan for implementing the software. We encouraged our management team to be part of the development of the software and had regular conversations about how it would be implemented.

- The implementation

A group of key staff from across our organisations volunteered to be part of a full day intensive training for the software. During this process we populated the database with our Council Plan. These trained staff are now ambassadors for the program and have been working within their own departments to train and help others use the program.

All managers participated in full day training on how to use the software to include their business plan profiles, add actions and generate reports.

Each service areas invited their key staff to participate in a training session on how to develop their business plan. By the end of the session each department had a business plan and individual work plan all linked to the Council Plan.

- The reporting

Once the Council Plan and Business Plans were complete reporting commenced on the Council Plan to the Council meeting and the Business Plans to the Corporate Management Team. Bass Coast has also included reporting on the Capital Works Plan to the Council.

- Where to from here

After almost a year of using Interplan, we are now reviewing the structure that is in place before we start the next cycle of business planning and before we populate our database with any additional Strategies and Plans. This review will be complete by the end of December 2007.

How the project has worked across Council eg involving different departments and levels of council. Indirectly or through collaboration

The program has been a very positive experience for gaining cooperation across our Councils from all levels. The management team are engaging in conversations around the development of Strategies and Plans and how the action plan may impact on their service areas. Staff are talking to their managers about the actions they have been allocated and their progress. The organisation is reporting to the Council regularly and Councillors are talking to community groups about the activities happening in their local areas.

How the project has contributed to capacity development of council

The program has increased our Council's capacity in developing business plans. Our Councillors have participated in an Environmental Analysis and considered how this links to existing Strategies and Plans. Council staff have a better understanding of their workloads and their resource commitments over a longer period of time.

Critical decision points in the progress of the project

During the course of the project, we made decisions to abandon populating all plans and concentrating on some key ones, we felt it was important to get the structure right and work through any reporting issues with a small number of plans.

How has the project enabled the council to better engage with the community?

The community has a better understanding of our commitments and progress reports for specific plans and strategies.

How has the project made a difference to the community and other stakeholders?

The program has made a difference to our community by keeping them informed of the activities that we will be undertaking and their progress. It will make the biggest difference once we start to formalise our local area plans and begin reporting to them on their identified priorities.

Recommendations to other councils who may be undertaking similar projects

Invest time in planning and visit other council, learn from their mistakes, take advantage of their successes. Understand who your stakeholders and consult appropriately. Keep it simple – start small and with limited plans. Build as you build the skills within your organisation.

How the project could have a sector wide implementation

The project has great opportunities for Councils to inform higher levels of government on the needs of our community by the activities that they have articulated as a priority through their local area plans. The program could allow Councils to make the links on how we are responding to higher levels of government strategies.

How State departments are involved in the project

We have not engaged with State departments at the moment but would be interested in incorporating the Gippsland Regional Development Strategy as one of our plans that we measure and report on to the Regional Managers Forum.