

Synopsis Review of the COAG Trial Evaluations

**Report to
the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC)**

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Executive summary

This Synopsis Review, undertaken in October 2006, draws on independent evaluations of the eight Council of Australian Government (COAG) Trials to identify the key lessons learned.

The aim of the COAG Trials, announced in 2002, was to explore new ways for governments to work together and with communities to address the needs of Indigenous Australians¹. COAG envisaged the lessons learned would be applied more broadly in Indigenous affairs to achieve better outcomes over the longer-term. This independent Synopsis Report therefore focuses on what worked well, the challenges, and the lessons learned about how to improve the way governments interact with each other and with Indigenous communities in a whole of government environment.

In order to facilitate a comparison of evaluations across the eight Trial sites for this Synopsis, an evaluation framework was developed which identifies a common pathway, beginning with the rationale for action, through the whole of government framework being trialled, to the generation of outcomes. The full report also contains a brief literature review drawing on international research, and a detailed discussion of the lessons learned. The literature review confirms that whole of government and partnership approaches aimed at changing the economic, health and social circumstances of disadvantaged communities (in particular Indigenous communities) require long term commitments of 10 to 20 years in order to be realised. The literature review also confirms that, for addressing complex problems, whole of government and community partnership strategies are better suited than program driven silo approaches.

The objectives of the Trials

The objectives, as stated on the COAG Indigenous Trials website, are to²:

- tailor government action to identified community needs and aspirations
- coordinate government programmes and services where this will improve service delivery outcomes
- encourage innovative approaches traversing new territory
- cut through blockages and red tape to resolve issues quickly
- work with Indigenous communities to build the capacity of people in those communities to negotiate as genuine partners with government
- negotiate agreed outcomes, benchmarks for measuring progress and management of responsibilities for achieving those outcomes with the relevant people in Indigenous communities, and
- build the capacity of government employees to be able to meet the challenges of working in this new way with Indigenous communities.

In 2002 the COAG trials represented a pioneering approach to 'shared responsibility' efforts. Between 2002 and 2004, as the Trials progressed, a broader agenda for shared responsibility approaches emerged across all levels of government. This broader agenda has implications for the future and is addressed later in this summary.

¹ COAG Communiqué April 5 2002

² http://www.indigenous.gov.au/coag/trial_sites/default.html

What worked well

The evaluations of the Trials demonstrate that significant learnings have occurred in all sites with some evidence of improved whole of government, cross government, and partnership links. Most of the evaluations identify that, despite some cynicism at the outset, all partners believed other partners engaged with the Trial process in a spirit of genuine commitment and good faith. The reports found that the Indigenous communities have valued governments working together and the effort made to engage with the communities, despite some disappointment with some processes.

Improved relationships and intergovernmental effort are evident in all of the Trials. Improved partnerships with Indigenous communities are also seen in every Trial although the extent of the improvement varied across the eight sites. In Trial sites where community committee membership and lead agency staff have been consistent the evaluations reported a higher level of trust between all government and community partners. Where there was evidence of strong government partnerships across all three levels of government, stronger relationships were evident with Indigenous communities. Where local government was actively engaged in partnerships and whole of government initiatives this was welcomed by the Indigenous community concerned.

Although not a key purpose of the Trials, the evaluations showed some limited evidence of improvements in the economic, health or social circumstances emerging for some Trial site communities. The level of improvement is consistent with international evidence on what could be expected within the short timeframe of the Trials.

The understanding of what 'shared responsibility' means varied across the sites although it appears that in some sites, for all government and community partners, the understanding of the concept has improved over the past three years.

The Synopsis finds that leadership provided through the Secretaries' Group was important evidence of government commitment to new ways of working. The Trials have affirmed the importance of this leadership in whole of government and shared responsibility efforts. Secretaries who were interviewed for the evaluations confirmed the significance of the learning that had occurred for them in leading in a whole of government environment. How well Secretaries worked to model a whole of government approach, as opposed to single agency approach, was identified as a significant factor in supporting the Trials. It has also been reported that government officers at all levels have a better understanding of how the way in which governments deliver programmes can contribute to lack of ownership and action by communities. This improved understanding is a significant factor in relation to government officers supporting Indigenous communities to be viable partners.

Over time the notion of the Trial being a place-based initiative emerged in thinking at the most senior policy and planning level. In a parallel development, during late 2004 and 2005 several sites began to incorporate this approach by, for example, appointing local or regional place managers. These place based approaches appear to work most effectively where there were clearly identifiable Indigenous communities with strong, representative leadership, and where government agencies play a facilitative leadership role, engaging across all levels of government and with community leaders. Other shared responsibility initiatives are increasingly adopting place-based practice and, based on the Trials, these seem promising.

The evaluations found that allowing appropriate time for the negotiation of agreements and the associated planning processes had been valuable, given that partners needed to identify and work in different ways together. However some partners in some sites believed the time taken in establishing these agreements was in the end too long. In some sites the expectations about what could be achieved in the timeframe of the Trials were unrealistic - for governments and for communities.

Challenges

Challenges reflected in the evaluations included:

- There was some confusion about the Trial objectives. The emphasis on working together in new ways was not as clear or as well supported as was needed to maintain a clear focus on both **'how'** to work together differently and on progressing action priorities. This same confusion about objectives led to some of the controversy in some of the Trial sites
- Development of manageable priorities and evaluating progress were challenges for most sites.
- Learning to develop effective, respectful relationships and partnerships was a challenge in most Trials. Some government officers did not have sufficient understanding of Indigenous communities and culture, and some Indigenous leaders did not have enough understanding of government processes and culture. Not understanding culture, community processes and roles may have a bigger impact in a small community than in larger towns and cities – being disrespectful in a small community can bring an initiative to a halt.
- In some sites working outside agreements undermined community confidence in both government and community leaders. These problems reportedly occurred when partners were frustrated by the time it was taking to reach agreements or progress initiatives, or when some partners resorted to their previous ways of working. When partners reacted in this way it undermined both partnerships and shared responsibility efforts. In the case of some of those people involved it reflected the limited understanding of how to work in, and promote, a shared responsibility model. This applied to some government and some community members.
- The COAG Trial approach recognised the need to make changes at all levels in the system, national, state and local, but this was difficult to achieve consistently across levels and sites. Involving more partners increases the risk that decision making processes become too complex, unless it is made clear that the involvement of some players is to improve coordination, clear blockages and reduce red tape, not to add more steps to the decision making processes.
- Maintaining the momentum in developing effective relationships and ensuring work kept moving was a challenge in sites where there was a high turnover of government agency staff.
- Many government staff lacked the skills and experience to work in whole of government and intergovernmental approaches. This was mirrored by many community leaders needing increased skills in relation to community governance, engagement and capacity building.
- Across the sites it took time to develop an understanding of the systemic supports and mechanisms needed to foster whole of government work and shared responsibility.
- The evaluations found that some of the issue-specific Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs)³ developed in some sites during the Trials did not clearly

³ Not the Trial SRAs but the SRAs related to other specific initiatives in communities.

state the action required by the community involved and thereby undermining communities taking their part in sharing responsibility.

Key lessons and ‘what should we do differently’

The Trials were all very different in the way in which they were implemented. They focused on different priorities and the Indigenous communities adopted different ways of engaging with decision-making processes in the Trials. They also managed some of the challenges differently. The key lessons are summarised as follows:

Whole of government

- Governments must be willing to understand and work respectfully with Indigenous communities, and Indigenous communities must be willing to understand and work with governments. Both may need to review the ways in which they interact with one another to ensure that interactions are appropriate and foster the development of productive and lasting relationships.
- Government staff need training in how to engage with respect for the protocols and processes in Indigenous communities; this is particularly true for those staff who are new to Indigenous affairs or to a community.
- Partners need to stay focused on the shared responsibility for improving social and economic outcomes and avoid blaming each other or working outside agreements, either due to frustration or reverting to old ways. To do otherwise undermines both the shared effort and community confidence.
- The solutions should be responsive to local circumstances and be within the parameters that mark a whole of government, as opposed to single agency, initiative. Flexible approaches need to be applied which reflect the individual circumstances of communities, the nature of the issues facing communities, and the developmental status of intergovernmental and cross sectoral relationships. There cannot be a one size fits all approach.
- Whole of government, place-based initiatives require systemic changes at the local community, state and national level. The extent to which an initiative can achieve a whole of government approach is impacted by the effectiveness of interaction within and between these systemic levels (i.e. not just government levels). Coordination and decision making mechanisms need to be effective and differentiated from each other and decision making needs to be timely. More widespread reward and recognition for good whole of government practice is needed.
- Understanding ‘*how*’ to work differently in the process of taking action to address priorities is a crucial success factor and applies to both governments and community leaders.
- Staff engaged in whole of government initiatives need training to provide them with the skills and knowledge on how to do whole of government work⁴. Training is needed across all levels: senior executive, middle management and field staff. Similarly, communities and their leaders need to be supported and resourced to enable development of capabilities which will assist in engaging in whole of government and community-led solutions.
- Where negotiated expectations are realistic and clearly understood by all parties the likelihood of positive outcomes is greater. Agreements aimed at ‘quick wins’ and ‘runs on the board’ can undermine more effective solutions and are not always appropriate – i.e. there are quick wins that are done in old

⁴ The Australian Government material on whole of government initiatives is valuable for this training. http://www.connected.gov.au/good_practice_guide

silo ways and quick wins that are firmly grounded in whole of government and community partnership approaches.

Building partnerships with communities and between governments

- Consistency in government personnel helps in building effective relationships both between government agencies and with communities.
- Leadership across all levels of the system is important; having shared leadership at the Ministerial, senior executive and planning levels, and at the level of service delivery, assists in achieving both process and impact outcomes. Building the capabilities of leaders from both communities and governments to work differently is an important strategy for sustained change.
- Significant lessons were learned about governance structures and processes and how to support them

Shared responsibility and improved capacity

The evaluations indicate that there has been considerable learning regarding the meaning and challenges of shared responsibility. Lessons from this Trial on understanding and building capacity in relation to shared responsibility are all relevant to the development of future agreements including Regional Partnership Agreements (RPAs) and SRAs. Some comparisons with other communities, not involved in Trials, where SRAs have been developed, will be an valuable research task for future learning.

Implications for the future

The lessons learned through the Trials reflect current knowledge and understandings of whole of government initiatives, and contemporary approaches to engaging with Indigenous communities to address social and economic barriers and build community capacity – both capability and resources. The achievements and challenges of the COAG Trials are consistent with international evidence, including from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

COAG, at its meeting on 25 June 2004, committed all levels of government to cooperative approaches on policy and service delivery between agencies and to maintaining and strengthening government effort to address Indigenous disadvantage. To underpin this commitment, COAG agreed to a National Framework of Principles for Government Service Delivery to Indigenous Australians. This broader agenda, developed since the Trials were conceived, represents a second generation of whole of government and partnership approaches in Indigenous affairs.

Governments have been pursuing place-based initiatives in many locations in Australia for some years. The difficulty of the task, because of the significant paradigm shift and systemic change required, has been reflected in the Trials, and progress has been made. The lessons learned from the Trials can further inform the evolution and refining of the arrangements in Indigenous affairs.

Community leaders in Indigenous communities have demonstrated that they can engage actively in initiatives to find solutions which work for families and communities. The evaluations provide evidence of the value of governments and communities working together and sharing responsibility for establishing foundations for achieving longer-term outcomes through locally agreed solutions.

Synopsis Report

1. Introduction

Between July 2005 and June 2006 the Australian Government commissioned an independent, formative evaluation for each of the eight Council of Australian Government's (COAG) Trials. The Trials are part of the COAG agenda to explore new partnerships, or 'new ways of doing business' in Indigenous communities. The Trials were announced during 2002 and the eight Trials across Australia commenced between 2003 and 2004.

In September 2006 the Australian Government commissioned a consultancy to undertake a Synopsis Review of the eight formative evaluations with the following aim, set out in the Request for Quotation:

To draw qualitative conclusions on the lessons learnt to date in a whole-of-government context and provide the Australian Government with options it might consider for continued positive change for the future and, in particular, best practice 'place-based' interventions.

This is the Report of the Synopsis Review.

Strong features of the Trials were:

- a commitment to ensure that the Trials were initiatives which fostered creativity and flexibility in the way they were developed and implemented and to adopt a 'lessons learned' approach
- the importance of each site being an opportunity to work with the respective Indigenous communities involved and to decide together what would work and how to work differently.

Thus each Trial evolved differently and the evaluations, undertaken with an almost identical framework of questions, have revealed eight diverse stories behind and about the Trials. **Attachment 1:** provides the evaluation questions. At the time of writing this Synopsis all of the evaluations were either complete or in their final stage of completion.

The Synopsis was asked to address five key areas:

- the comparability of the evaluations of the various sites taking account of both the geographic and socio-economic contexts of the communities in which each Trial is located
- what has been learned about new ways of working across the eight sites
- how governments worked together and what might account for differences/similarities across the sites
- the extent to which partnerships have been achieved or built between governments and Indigenous communities across the sites
- the extent of capacity building and shared responsibility achieved across the sites.

This report provides the findings and lessons in relation to these five areas.

2. Context

In April 2002 COAG agreed to trial new ways in which governments worked together and with Indigenous communities and embarked on an innovative approach to testing new ways to do this. The theme of this approach was 'Shared responsibility – Shared Future' and the vision was for each selected Trial site to develop their own governance arrangements, to agree what priorities would be addressed, and to embark on each of the Trials using a negotiated agreement between the parties.

There was an explicit agreement that each site would be likely to have at least three partners: the Australian Government, the relevant state or territory government, and some 'representative' body or group from the respective Indigenous community. In places where there was a local government body there was an expectation that this level of government would also be engaged.

The objectives, as stated on the COAG Indigenous Trials website, are to⁵:

- tailor government action to identified community needs and aspirations
- coordinate government programmes and services where this will improve service delivery outcomes
- encourage innovative approaches traversing new territory
- cut through blockages and red tape to resolve issues quickly
- work with Indigenous communities to build the capacity of people in those communities to negotiate as genuine partners with government
- negotiate agreed outcomes, benchmarks for measuring progress and management of responsibilities for achieving those outcomes with the relevant people in Indigenous communities, and
- build the capacity of government employees to be able to meet the challenges of working in this new way with Indigenous communities.

There was very little prescribed for the Trial with the deliberate intent that each Trial site would evolve and be driven by the needs and aspirations of the community (or communities) in which each Trial was located. A consultation process with each jurisdiction followed and by late 2003 eight Trial sites had been agreed.

The commencement dates varied but most were in the negotiating phase by the middle of 2003. The final agreed trial sites were:

- The Australian Capital Territory (ACT)
- Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yakunytjatjara (APY) Lands (SA)
- Murdi Paaki (NSW)
- Shepparton (Victoria)
- North Eastern Tasmania
- East Kimberly (WA)
- Wadeye (NT)
- Cape York (Qld).

The agreements and priorities for action were negotiated over a period of months with Indigenous communities and between the Australian and state and territory

⁵ http://www.indigenous.gov.au/coag/trial_sites/default.html

governments. Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs)⁶ specific to the Trials were eventually agreed and signed with six of the sites. The other two sites did agree to priorities but these agreements were documented in an exchange of letters between the partners.

The COAG Trials have been important initiatives in testing new approaches to the way governments can work together and in partnership with Indigenous communities to find solutions to Indigenous disadvantage and to improve service delivery to Indigenous people. As the Trials are whole of government initiatives they can also be seen as a test of the development of whole of government practice across Australia at the time.

The COAG intergovernmental process is relatively new in Australian politics and public administration. Since the late 1980s and early 1990s the Australian and state/territory Governments have used the COAG process to progressively work together on a range of major social and economic issues. There is a long history of the separation of responsibilities between the two jurisdictions and the recognition of the importance of major joint commonwealth/state processes is relatively new.

There are three key ideas which underpin the Trials in 2006:

- whole of government approaches
- shared responsibility between governments and communities in finding solutions, and
- place-based frameworks.

The concept (and language) of 'place-based' approaches is more recent in the practice of the Trials. Place based initiatives involve exploring solutions with local communities which are more likely to work for the people who reside in and identify with that community (or place). Place-based initiatives are one of the approaches being tried across the world in communities identified as impoverished or disadvantaged or in the process of revitalising. The concept is very compatible with the practices of whole of government and shared responsibility.

3. The Trial sites

The Trial communities are profoundly different geographically, culturally, economically and socially. The priorities agreed in the sites were all different, the governance arrangements differed considerably, and the path of each Trial was unique to the communities in which they were located. **Attachment 2: Features of the COAG Trial Sites** provides a summary of some of the key features of each of the eight sites at the time the Trial in that location was established.

What the Trials all had in common at the commencement was the mandate to shape what emerged and to learn as they went. The other common features were that:

- At the time the Trials commenced ATSIC still existed.
- All Trials were in train at the time the Australian Government introduced the new arrangements for Indigenous affairs including the abolition of ATSIC (including the Regional Councils) and the establishment of the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) and Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) in July 2004.

⁶ Two different 'batches' of SRAs are referred to in this report: the six that were negotiated as part of establishment of Trials in six of the sites. Another 'batch' have been negotiated, during the period of the Trials, in a number of the sites in relation to specific initiatives some within the Trial and some in other processes.

- Each Trial site had a lead Australian Government agency and a respective state/territory government lead agency. These two agencies worked together to negotiate with communities on the agreed priorities and the structures for each of the Trials. Most of the Trials received high-level leadership from Secretaries of Australian Government agencies and in some cases by very senior executives from state or territory government agencies.

Attachment 3: *Summary of key elements of each Trial*, provides an outline of key elements of each COAG Trial in relation to the:

- main focus of the Trial site
- leadership structures
- community governance model
- planning processes used, and
- major changes to these aspects during the course of the Trial.

4. Brief summary of the purpose and rationale of the Trials

Some of the controversy about whether the Trials have been a success or not has been based on misunderstandings about the purpose and potential of the Trials. This section gives a brief summary of the purpose and rationale. **Attachment 4** discusses the purpose and rationale in more detail and **Attachment 5** provides a summary of some of the major evidence and literature relevant for initiatives such as the Trials.

4.1 Governments and Indigenous communities working in new ways in partnership

A major step leading to the establishment of the COAG Trials in 2002 was a decision by COAG in 2000 that all governments would work together to improve the social and economic well being of Indigenous people and communities. This decision recognised that the response of the Australian and state and territory governments to Indigenous issues needed better coordination of the activities spread across many departments, agencies, and programs. There was recognition that significant change would not be achieved by continuing to address the problems in the current 'silo' approaches and without the active engagement of Indigenous communities. The Trials therefore were established for:

- governments to work together better at all levels and across all departments and agencies, and
- Indigenous communities and governments to work in partnership and share responsibility for
 - achieving improved life outcomes
 - building the capacity of people in communities to manage their own affairs.

The Trials were referred to as the *Shared Responsibility Trials*. This concept of partnership refers to government and Indigenous communities sharing responsibility for finding the solutions which could improve the conditions and wellbeing of Indigenous communities.

4.2 Complex problems, whole of government responses and place based approaches

Much of the literature on whole of government/connected government responses refers to their value in addressing complex (so called 'wicked') problems or 'priority challenges'. It is also argued that program and service delivery should be 'seamless' to the community while, behind the scenes, government officers will be working to bring resources together to address the problems.

The continuing disadvantage of Indigenous communities in Australia was seen as being due to the complex problems facing the communities – economic, governance, health, and social problems – which would not be overcome in a short time frame even with a more coordinated approach by governments working together.

A place-based approach has also been identified as an element of the Trials. Place based initiatives involve a focus on planning for areas - places and communities - rather than the program and function based planning of government agencies. In addition to this key paradigm shift from 'program' to 'place' there is a significant shift of decision-making and accountability to the local and community level. Whilst many local level service delivery staff may have worked together well for many decades, to a lesser or greater degree, this has not been the case at the executive, administrative, policy setting, planning and management spheres, across levels of governments

Governments have been pursuing place-based initiatives in many locations in Australia for some years. The difficulty of the task, because of the significant paradigm shift and systemic changes required, has been reflected in the Trials.

4.3 Indigenous communities as partners

A key mode for achieving ownership by Indigenous communities is the negotiation of effective partnership with communities. Effective partnerships require viable governance processes or structures and leadership in the communities. The implication for the Trials is the need to recognise that government personnel need to understand Indigenous culture as it affects the development and maintenance of partnership; *and* Indigenous leaders and communities need to understand government culture and constraints. In this Synopsis we identify this as a major lesson learned and an aspect to be addressed further in the communities.

4.4 Summary of the COAG Trials rationale

In summary therefore the rationale for the Trials has been that;

- Indigenous disadvantage continues in Australia.
- The factors involved in addressing the disadvantage are many and complex and therefore require the involvement of a range of government departments and agencies in place-based, whole of government approaches.
- The complex interaction of factors requires a coordinated commitment across government departments and agencies (whole of government), and between levels of government (intergovernmental).
- In addition to the shared responsibility across government there is a requirement for shared responsibility with Indigenous communities, built on a partnership between viable partners.
- The governance of Indigenous communities needs to be able to engage in effective partnership based on a sense of shared ownership and responsibility.
- Both Indigenous communities and their culture, and government culture and constraints, needed to be better understood in the process.

This rationale provided the basis for the evaluation questions for the individual Trial sites and was the foundation for the evaluation framework used to understand and compare the individual evaluations in this Synopsis.

5. Comparability of the evaluations

The evaluations were undertaken by five different companies with one company undertaking three and another company undertaking two of the evaluations. All were contracted following a selective tender procurement process managed by OIPC. The common evaluation questions were agreed between the lead Australian Government agency, the agency representing the partner state or territory government, and in several cases, the Indigenous partner or partners. Minor variations to the common questions took account of local evaluative issues or questions. The Synopsis Review was required to address the comparability of the evaluations of the various sites taking account of both the geographic and socio-economic contexts of the communities in which each Trial is located

Although the evaluations were conducted by different evaluators, the consistency in the questions and the framework of 'lessons learned' contributed to some consistency in what was being assessed, the conclusions reached regarding some common outcomes, and the analysis of the lessons learned. However it was apparent that the outputs and outcomes of each Trial had been to some extent differently valued in the different evaluations. In undertaking the Synopsis analysis we were asked to explore this.

We were asked to use a 'lessons learned' approach and to locate these lessons in the context of current evidence and literature. In order to strengthen the overall 'lessons learned' we sought, in the time available, to establish a very preliminary framework to inform the structuring of our analysis and reporting. The framework supports comparison of the formative evaluations particularly in relation to the valuing of the outputs and outcomes of the Trials.

In **Attachment 4: Purpose and rationale of the COAG Trials** the preliminary framework based on program logic is provided in more detail – particularly in the chart entitled Table 1: *Output and Outcome Hierarchy*. This chart is offered as an indicative framework, which enabled identification of the place of the outputs and outcomes of the Trials along the critical path in the chart.

The indicative evaluation framework shows an approach to a critical path of outputs and outcomes, over time, to achieve concrete improvement for Indigenous communities, families and individuals – i.e. for example changes in their economic, health and social circumstances. The Trials did not set out to achieve these concrete changes/outcomes in 1-3 years. The aim was to make major systemic changes to the way governments worked, and how they worked with communities, as a key element towards the achievement of significant longer-term change. The approach of the framework recognises the legitimacy and importance of *process* outcomes as well as *impact* outcomes and shows the relationship between process outcomes, outputs and impact outcomes. This distinction is explored further in **Attachment 4: Purpose and rationale of the COAG Trials**.

5.1 Process or impact outcomes

Each evaluation addressed to a greater or lesser extent, both process and impact outcomes when assessing achievements, although there was not a consistent approach to this assessment. The concepts of impact and process outcomes are core to contemporary evaluation frameworks.

All eight evaluations explored in depth the various governance structures used to engage Indigenous communities and attributed some success or otherwise to these structures in assessment of process outcomes for the respective Trial.

However there does appear to have been some difference in the conclusions reached regarding what this meant. For example one evaluation concludes that whilst the structures achieved a considerable level of community engagement in the Trial process, the failure to achieve 'discernible life outcomes' within the life of the Trial was a significant issue in relation to being more results/outcome focused. By comparison five other evaluations either implied or explicitly stated that achieving discernible life outcomes in the time frame of the Trial was unrealistic and not a reasonable expectation. As indicated in our synopsis framework, process and impact outcomes have their place in the longer timeframe of the Trial; what needs to be addressed is the relationship between the two sets of outcomes that builds towards 'discernible life outcomes'.

All of the evaluations attempted to establish the conditions in each Trial site prior to the commencement of the Trial. One evaluation had access to a Scoping Study, undertaken at the commencement of the Trial, which attempted to establish some baseline data. All evaluations noted the absence of baseline data, however there was no consistency in what that baseline data should have been. Thus it was very difficult in any of the sites to assess *impact* outcomes, as it was not clear what impact the strategies and activities were meant to be addressing. Only one Trial had clear *process* outcomes articulated. This Trial was better able than others to report on changes in behaviour – this was also assisted by the evaluator being familiar with the Trial and having undertaken prior work in the previous year which they were able to draw upon in making an assessment of changes during and attributable to the Trial.

5.2 Expectations

Most of the evaluations reached similar conclusions regarding expectations and appeared to use a similar approach – that is they tried to assess:

- how realistic were the expectations of the Trial by community members
- how well was the purpose of the Trial understood by each of the partners, and
- how did the wider community understand and engage with the Trial processes?

There were significant divergence in the analysis of these aspects. Some evaluators assumed that a high level of community understanding and knowledge should exist if the Trial was a 'partnership' with the community. In four evaluations the evaluators questioned how much the wider community might be expected to understand quite complex public policy processes such as whole of government partnerships or place based initiatives, and concluded that this was not a realistic measure of success.

There was strong agreement across the evaluations that expectations were probably too high across all sites and that governments and communities needed to manage this better. At times this may mean seeking to ensure that local media understand the nature of the Trial. In some cases the expectations of governments were too high and

this added to the sense of disappointment amongst the communities involved. Even in the single-issue site the expectations regarding what could be achieved were very high given the complexity of the issue being addressed.

5.3 Differences across sites: rural, regional and metropolitan

Whilst the Trial sites were very different there were common messages on two significant lessons, namely that:

- time to engage communities was crucial and that quick wins are not always possible when you are dealing with complex issues, and,
- achieving 'representative' governance processes was not easy, irrespective of the circumstances of the community; even though 'community' was more easily identified in two of the sites than others – both of those communities were in remote areas.

The engagement of communities as an evaluation issue was dealt with differently by the evaluators. This included taking account of whether the location was rural, remote or urban. In some locations the evaluators interviewed members of the governance structures only. In one location the elected governance members opposed a broader consultation on the basis that it would be potentially divisive to do so because of community tensions. The evaluators respected this assessment. In two communities the evaluators undertook wide community consultation. Thus the assessment of community engagement may have been more comprehensive in the evaluation of some Trials than in others.

5.4 Activity across the Trial period

Most of the evaluations reported some periods of low activity and the possible reasons for this. In several sites this related to gaining agreement within the communities on priorities or possible solutions to an issue and the time it took to achieve this. All of the evaluations noted the important learnings that occurred with respect to allowing adequate time for communities to engage and understand the process.

In one site the period of inactivity was reportedly related to the behaviour of a government member and relationships between the officer and the community involved. In one site a protracted legal process related to a land title claim impacted on the goodwill and trust within the community. At the time of writing this Synopsis all are reported to be progressing work commenced within the Trial.

5.5 Attention to the 'how' of the Trials.

The '**how**' of the Trial – i.e. what partners did to explore new ways of working together, is concerned with whether there had been explicit conversations or processes within the Trials regarding:

- what each partner needed to understand or do differently,
- what would constitute working differently?

Only three evaluations addressed this issue in any detail in their report. However when this was followed up in interviews with the evaluators, two evaluators reported that they did discuss '**how**' but had not reported this.

This issue is further discussed in Section 6.

6. Themes in the findings of the evaluations

This section discusses what themes emerged in each of the four areas:

- what has been learned about new ways of working across the eight sites
- how governments worked together and what might account for differences/similarities across the sites
- the extent to which partnerships have been achieved or built between governments and Indigenous communities across the sites, and
- the extent of capacity building and shared responsibility achieved across the sites.

During discussions of the draft Synopsis Report with government officers, concern was raised about the term 'capacity building'. The term can be understood to mean having the capability (or skills) and the structures and resources relevant to a situation, however this is sometime forgotten. In this Synopsis Report therefore we have used '*capability*' to refer to skills required and to '*capacity*' as encompassing capabilities, structures and resources.

Changed administrative arrangements for indigenous affairs

The changed administrative arrangements in Indigenous affairs, which were implemented between 2004 and 2005 had some impact in several locations. This included the need to transfer Indigenous governance arrangements to a new body. However in most locations this transfer of Indigenous governance was undertaken relatively well.

In two sites a decision was made by one lead agency to withdraw as the lead Australian Government agency. This decision is reported to have had considerable impact in one community. The decision to withdraw by this lead agency was said to be because OIPC has whole of government responsibility for Indigenous affairs from July 2005. A key tenet of the COAG Trials was the whole of government role of the lead agencies for the Australian Government. This action would appear to imply that OIPC should be the lead agency for all the sites rather than each Australian Government agency adopting and modelling a whole of government approach. In one site the lead agency is reported to operate more as a single agency than a whole of government leader, whilst in that jurisdiction OIPC has an active collaborative relationship with the State Government central agency.

ICCs have picked up an active role in many sites. In some communities the loss of ATSIC did contribute to increased cynicism regarding the willingness of governments to foster and support local Indigenous governance and capacity building.

6.1 Working differently

All of the evaluations reported that each site had generated new understandings regarding new ways of working. However this assessment varied from significant learnings to limited new understandings. The most common reported lessons learned across all 8 sites were that:

- Governments reported that they had learned a lot about listening and taking time in Indigenous communities and that changes in life/impact outcomes needed to be understood as a long term process which involves finding workable solutions with communities.
- Taking the time to understand each other was an important goal – almost all of the Indigenous communities reported that they understood that sometimes

government processes took a long time but not necessarily why this happened.

- Having high level leadership from government was important and this helped to make things happen.
- Working differently on the ground meant spending time in communities and building trust and developing understanding of each other's culture takes time.
- Most evaluations noted the cynicism and caution with which all of the communities entered the partnership but all reported that communities did in the main, value the effort made to work with them.

The 'how' of working differently

Only three of the evaluation reports canvassed the issue of what needed to happen to achieve this objective. In those reports one of the evaluators concluded that there had been limited attention to any discussion on the '**how**', another noted that government agencies participating in one site had supported the need to focus on building community capacity in order to develop new ways of working. One evaluation identified a set of indicators which might be used to assess what had been achieved if the '**how**' was addressed. This included attention to:

- the role of Elders and community protocols and processes
- the familial and community responsibilities of community leaders and how government structures and processes might cut across or assist those
- awareness of how to adapt government processes to respect culture and tradition
- awareness of how challenging whole of government initiatives can be and what support is required to foster such initiatives
- awareness of how, by working together, partners can find solutions to most issues
- what skills all members might need to develop and encourage in staff, and what training might be required to achieve sustainable culture change across both government agencies and the Indigenous community involved
- action required at different levels to achieve change
- the need to work alongside the community leaders in supporting the roles they have to play.

And particularly for communities, attention to:

- understanding the requirements of governments and of where there was room for flexibility
- appreciation of the different roles of state, regional and nationally based government agencies
- ways of bringing communities along and helping them understand governments better
- the value of working together to find solutions and increasing understanding of each other's roles and cultures
- whether the process had built a better understanding of government and of finding new ways to work collaboratively
- whether there was any evidence that the processes and structures had led to better understanding amongst government agencies of Indigenous culture and familial/community traditions and practices.

The issue of the '**how**' of working differently was followed up in the telephone interviews with four of the evaluators. All four evaluators reported that there had been

no evidence of any concerted discussions regarding what new ways of working meant to all of the partners. One evaluator noted that despite the fact one of the sites had stagnated for over six months (partly as a result of a government agency representative coming into the community in ways which did not respect the customs, community processes and community roles of members), when the agency representative was changed there were still no organised or deliberate discussions regarding culturally respectful ways of engaging with the community.

Only in one Trial site was there reported to be cultural awareness training for government officers. This same site had the only reported example of training on understanding working with government for people involved in the Indigenous community governance structures.

Examples of some joint planning included planning days, community forums, '100 day plans' and the adoption of Action Plans in a number of sites. All sites had undertaken some form of community consultation to engage local communities.

Many of the lead government agencies appear to have demonstrated a high level of support for the lead time required to engage communities and to reach agreement on the priorities and community governance structures. Most of the evaluations included a summary of the trajectory of the development of the Trials and in most cases it was 6-12 months before the structures and agreements were signed. In six sites agreements were reached and signed off by all partners within a year. In one community, although a formal agreement was never signed, there was agreement reached regarding the priority and the best process for working in the five communities.

There was a diverse range of governance structures and processes, and there was a high level of flexibility exercised across the Trial sites.

Whilst the objectives agreed to in the individual Trial SRAs may have been too demanding for many of the Trials, most of the community leaders or members reported that the process of negotiating the Trial agreements had been a serious effort at engaging differently, which they all valued. An important insight that emerged from one site was the view of a senior government officer that there is now a better understanding about how the way in which many government programs are delivered to Indigenous communities can contribute to lack of action by or 'passivity' in communities.

Understanding the purpose of the Trials

One of the common findings across all of the evaluations was the extent to which communities, and in some cases governments, really understood the purpose of the Trials. In six of the Trial sites evaluators reported that the objectives of the Trial were not well understood by communities; this also relates to the assessment that expectations were too high in most of the communities. With respect to governments, almost all of the evaluations identified that government officers involved in most of the Trials also had a limited understanding of what 'whole of government' meant.

To a large extent it appears that most of the communities and governments entered into agreements in the belief that the Trials were primarily about addressing major priorities and issues in their communities.

In five of the locations the Trial objectives were macro level objectives related to:

- economic and employment development

- infrastructure development including housing
- public safety and justice
- cultural identity
- education
- service delivery improvements.

Whilst all of the evaluators concluded that the objectives agreed in those sites were way beyond the capacity of a single Trial to address, two evaluations did attempt some analysis of whether there had been any progress on Indigenous outcomes in these domains. The macro level nature of these objectives appears to have added to the frustration and disappointment within Indigenous communities. It is therefore not surprising that four of the evaluations concluded that communities felt that little or no impact outcomes had been achieved from the Trials.

In two locations the objectives were more manageable in that one site chose a single issue (family violence) and the other chose capacity building and governance for the first two years. In the case of the single issue Trial site, this became more complicated by having five separate communities to work within, with each community being different and requiring a high level of engagement. In three sites place-based managers were appointed and a place-based approach was actively pursued.

The evaluation of one site, in which capacity building and governance were the agreed priorities, concluded that the community was very clear that in order to work differently they needed to develop their capability to engage with the Trial and with governments generally. This site also set some measurable indicators regarding the priorities and the evaluators were thus able to assess these. In this case the evaluation concluded that the outcomes were achieved as agreed. This SRA was also 'refreshed' as agreed in the original SRA.

Governance structures and processes

There have been some significant lessons regarding the governance structures and processes developed and utilised in the Trials. Some of the important and common lessons learned across the sites include:

- Local community governance mechanisms and processes must be developed to reflect local communities views/wishes and are likely to differ across communities – there is no 'same size fits all'.
- Community leaders need to engage in these structures or they are not likely to be effective.
- Community governance structures and processes need some capability building and some resourcing of the participants if communities are to engage effectively.
- Using existing structures where these are working and building on existing strengths will foster trust and respect between governments and communities and is more likely to be an element of a successful community engagement strategy.
- Most of the community partners are quite capable of engaging with joint government processes and could do even more if they are well supported.

In one Trial site community tensions created significant challenges for the governance mechanism and this needed to be discussed with and by government more openly. Old ways of working prevailed to some extent in this location in that the issues were not discussed with or by the government officers within the joint structures established, but government officers felt frustrated and community leaders felt

pressured to 'fix' something which was beyond their capacity to 'fix'. Some conversations regarding what this situation meant for the Trial (and the Trial partners) may have greatly assisted all of the partners and reduced the pressure experienced by the community leaders.

In another location the community had made considerable concessions to enable their leaders to participate in the Trial. This community now feels like there has been inadequate progress on the agreed priorities; they believe that these leaders should relinquish their engagement and return to their communities to fulfill their traditional roles and responsibilities. If the expectations of the Trial had been more realistic and a more manageable agenda had been established then the community may have been willing to agree to their representatives remaining engaged.

Leadership and consistent membership

The importance of leadership by both government and Indigenous leaders was a significant lesson and consistency of membership of the respective government lead agencies was related to leadership.

In those sites where lead agencies had consistent membership, at all levels, the building of trust, understandings and commitment was markedly higher. In most Trial sites communities commented on this; either to commend the lead agencies for retaining this consistency, or being critical in those sites where there were constant changes in government representatives. Consistency in personnel was articulated by Indigenous leaders and government representatives as an important factor in building trust and knowledge of each other, and by Indigenous communities as a sign of the integrity of the serious effort to maintain and build an effective partnership and good relationships.

It is worth noting that in the two locations where there is the most ambivalence or uncertainty about where to take the work done to date through the Trials, there has been constant change of members or a major change at a key point in the Trial. In one site the only original members of the Trial still involved are all of the original Indigenous partners.

From a government perspective the leadership provided by Indigenous communities was an important part of engaging differently. Indigenous leadership was consistent across every site. The most significant Indigenous change in some sites occurred when ATSIIC was abolished and some ATSIIC Chairs left the respective Trial governance structure. However this did not appear to impact on the wider network of leaders engaged in these Trials.

Summary

Most partners see positive changes have been achieved with respect to working differently especially when it comes to taking time and allowing community processes to take their course. Indigenous partners are more ambivalent about how much governments have learned about their communities and cultures. Based on the information in the independent evaluations there was not enough attention given to conversations regarding working differently nor to cultural awareness training of the government agencies engaged in the Trials. This was identified by several of the evaluators as a significant oversight in the quest to work differently.

The lessons learned vary little across regions and the Trials have been shown to be equally relevant in any community or initiative involving Indigenous communities. However the consequences of not understanding and/or respecting culture,

community norms, processes and traditions are more likely to be profound in a remote or clearly identified geographic community.

6.2 How governments worked together and what might account for differences/similarities across the sites

There are two dimensions to governments working together – intergovernmental working together between levels of government, and whole of government in which departments work together across one level of government. Both dimensions are covered in this section.

In **Attachment 3: Summary of the key elements of the COAG trials**, some of the key government structures are identified but overall there are so many that we have not tried to address them all in the report. Mechanisms, and processes for improving coordination across government included:

- issue-based working groups comprising cross government and indigenous members
- joint officers' groups for information sharing and coordination and updating on COAG activities and initiatives
- lead agency meetings
- accessing forums of regional managers
- utilising existing state based senior executive meetings.

Most evaluations reported positively on the success of these mechanisms at sharing information, with some improved coordination about funding proposals. With time these mechanisms and processes were seen by several lead agencies as potential opportunities for enhancing joint activity, delivery, and coordination. In some sites regional managers' forums have proactively engaged with the COAG agenda and now meet of their own accord or include whole of government initiatives on their agenda.

Intergovernmental connection

Intergovernmental working together is an aspect on which the most progress seems to have been made across the sites; the progress varies from significant to minor. However there is some intergovernmental link in every site at least between one Australian Government department and one state government department. In one site the COAG Trial was seen as an Australian Government initiative rather than a joint initiative with the respective state government.

Across the sites the features more likely to foster progress are commonly identified as follows:

- the skills of key personnel were sharing leadership, listening, respecting difference, collegiality, effective negotiation, flexibility and capacity to keep progressing when faced with barriers and obstacles
- the role of the lead agency was facilitative leadership
- leadership was demonstrated from the top or on the ground and, in two cases, leadership from both senior government and community leaders
- a state/territory government already pursuing an active whole of government strategy to Indigenous issues, either in the specific area of the site or overall for Indigenous issues in the State – this foundation was a significant factor in relation to what progress was made, on what issues and how the Australian Government lead agency approached its role.

However conflicts between governments reportedly occurred in a couple of sites and impacted on progress.

Local governments were engaged in two sites and this was strongly supported by the community. This is an area where future COAG activity needs to be more proactive where there is a local government body with which to engage.

Whole of government approaches

The understanding of working together in a whole of government approach varied across sites. Some state/territory governments seem to have been progressing significant initiatives of this nature. However there is less information about the state/territory government whole of government operations in these evaluations than there is about the activities of the Australian Government lead agencies and structures (such as meetings of the state/territory managers of Australian Government departments at state level) therefore it is hard to be definitive about this.

In both levels of government there was evidence that the skills, attitudes and abilities needed to operate effectively in whole of government activities need building: skills and abilities such as:

- ability to think and act across agency boundaries and work collegially – not defend territory
- team work skills
- flexibility and adaptability; creativity and innovation
- skills of communication, consultation and negotiation to build strategic alliances, collaboration and trust
- ability to work with and encourage the expression of diverse views, and analyse and represent those views in advice to government
- cultural competence
- ability to balance the tension between short-term and long-term goals.

Other aspects of whole of government experience and competence, some also identified in the Australian Government Good Practice Guides (Commonwealth of Australia 2004), relate to:

- competence in managing and sharing information and knowledge
- sufficient experience and authority to interact with local communities and to make decisions on behalf of the agencies involved, and
- ability to capitalise on windows of opportunity, tolerate mistakes and manage risk.

The challenge is to support what might be called a 'networking or horizontal culture'.

Several evaluations noted that having people involved in meetings who could make quick decisions was often important. Where decisions were made outside the agreed Trial structures, or external to a department, there may not be sufficient ownership. Sites needed a mechanism or process to provide quick and effective linkages and coordination between agencies across any one level of government: such as for example the meetings of state/territory managers of commonwealth agencies mentioned above. This of course requires that at the outset the range of departments that need to be connected have been scoped.

Whole of government and intergovernmental

This is an important distinction and is worth exploring by using two case examples.

In one site there was effective intergovernmental working but not necessarily between the nominated lead agencies. In this same site it was stated that 'whole of government' working was not presented as an aspect of the Trial' and that the Australian Government lead agency 'was not really involving other Australian Government departments'.

In another site, each level of government seems to have been operating reasonably well on a whole of government basis but there was rather more complementarity than joint intergovernmental work. The complementary working seems to have been based in a solution broker role for the worker involved and the contribution of Australian Government personnel to structures that were set up for partnership between the State Government and the Indigenous community. The State Government whole of government initiative was strong and had a working partnership with the Indigenous community governance organisations. It was a strategic decision to work through these existing structures. The results included mobilisation of resources for joint funding of some significant ventures. This strategy achieved useful pragmatic results and was within the aims of the Trials. However it could have been strengthened by having articulated a coherent strategy identifiable as a COAG initiative. The lack of this articulated approach reportedly resulted in criticism of the Trial for inaction and/or little recognition of there being a COAG Trail in the region. The intergovernmental nature of the COAG Trial model was not apparent to participants and not well developed. As a result the evaluation reported that government activity was still seen by participants as fragmented, and systemic change, such as addressing barriers to information sharing and the difficulties in integrating administration systems, was not addressed.

In the light of the lessons on this issue we believe it would be valuable to develop a range of differential models for engaging with other partners according to the stage of development of some basic elements of partnership and whole of government models. An example of a differential model which might be used at the stage of engagement in projects is provided in **Attachment 7: A Differential model for engagement in whole of government exercises** to clarify this approach.

Investment and commitment

The evaluations have some information about funding and other resources invested by governments in the sites. However this information was not consistent or extensive enough to draw conclusions about the relative investment or commitment of governments to each site. There were clear reports of strong commitments as well as participation by both state and territory and Australian Governments across a number of sites. Several state/territory governments seemed to be heavily invested in the initiatives that they were pursuing before the commencement of, or parallel to, the Trials. There was also qualitative evidence of strong participation, commitment and investment across Australian Government departments.

Several Australian Government agencies reported that it has been a challenge obtaining ongoing commitment to resources across departments and governments and that there is a need for approaches which enable single contracts, or agreement to streamline SRA and project funding where this is agreed to be appropriate.

6.3. Partnerships built between governments and Indigenous communities

The processes by which these partnerships were built varied across the sites. Six of the sites established a leadership structure with Indigenous representatives included. It was in these steering committee structures that the shared strategic leadership for the respective Trial occurred. The structures usually involved very senior representatives of the two levels of government (usually the lead agencies) and at least one senior Indigenous member. In two of these six sites the Trial steering committees included local government members.

In the remaining two of the total of eight sites, one worked through existing structures for another cross government initiative, in the other a forum of regional managers, with Trial project staff attending, oversaw the implementation of the Trial.

Every Trial site evaluator reports that the Indigenous community, although slightly cynical in some sites about the eventual success of the Trials, believe all of the government partners have entered into the Trial process with a high level of good will and good faith. This is a very significant finding and it will be important to support and build on this in the decision-making process of the next phase for these whole government initiatives.

What did the partnerships look like?

The Indigenous governance varied significantly across the Trial sites. **Attachment 3: Summary of the key elements of the COAG trials**, summarises the structures and Indigenous governance arrangements across the Trial sites. The governance methods included:

- Working through existing structures initially – in five locations ATSIC was one of the original mechanisms with this responsibility transferring to another Indigenous governed organisation within the first year or after the abolition of ATSIC.
- Larger Indigenous Community Councils or Land Councils in four sites were utilised as the Indigenous governance bodies.
- In two urban Trial sites negotiated structures were established to reflect the diversity of the communities rather than engaging with a single organisation. In both locations this was seen as not feasible or desirable as choosing a single organisation would have provoked a strong reaction from other organisations. In these Trial sites the community elected the members or endorsed the proposed membership of the negotiated structures.
- In one site, one of the negotiated Indigenous governance structures evolved into a jointly funded (Australian and State Government) Strategic Planning and Policy Unit which is funded for two years to build the community governance and community capacity and to engage the Indigenous community in the ongoing work on agreed priorities.
- In one site, the chair of the original Indigenous governance structure established for the Trial has been co-opted onto the Ministerial Indigenous Advisory Council for that jurisdiction.
- In another site, small working groups were established at the local community level with no involvement in steering committees by Indigenous members because of the fragmented nature of the communities involved.

How Indigenous communities perceive these partnerships

Most of the evaluations found that the majority of Indigenous partners did believe that being involved in the Trials had helped to build improved relationships and understandings between their communities and governments. They also report that, even though some communities felt frustrated at the slow progress on Indigenous outcomes, almost all of the communities wanted the effort at partnerships to continue: several understood and supported the specific characteristics of the Trial and did not want to revisit objectives. Many government agencies articulated the same desire, but more government partners than their Indigenous partners were impatient to get on with 'getting results'. However they did not necessarily have the answer to how they can do that without working with Indigenous organisations and communities especially in regional and remote communities where there are strong Indigenous identities and identified communities.

In one of the two urban Trial sites it appears from the evaluations that it is highly unlikely that the Indigenous leaders would accept a return to what existed before the Trial was established. In one site the community may be willing to negotiate another arrangement in the context of the bi-lateral negotiations and this community is currently exploring an alternative jurisdictional Indigenous governance mechanism. In the other site where there is no separate steering committee structure, the community leaders are engaged in a parallel whole of government initiative and have a strong leadership role in that process.

In the remaining six sites the evaluations indicate that communities have actively and deeply engaged with the Trial goals and objectives, and despite some disappointments, would be unhappy and further disillusioned to lose this initiative in partnerships with governments.

Planning mechanisms and processes

Attachment 3: *Summary of the key elements of the COAG trials* summarises the planning mechanisms and processes across the Trial sites. Whilst there were reported planning processes in most locations the evaluations almost all concluded that the planning at the outset could have been improved. This conclusion appears to have been reached for different reasons including:

- In four sites the objectives and goals were way beyond the capacity of the Trials to achieve and this contributed to unrealistic expectations and hopes, and to frustration about the lack of impact outcomes.
- In one site the focus was very unclear and poorly understood by the Indigenous participants and may have been too diffuse to be adequately articulated in any community planning process.
- In one site the priorities were renegotiated twice and responsibility for shared leadership in implementing the community's priorities is not clear – in this site the Indigenous members have expressed frustration that no-one seems to be leading at the government level.

In one site there is a reported high level of community satisfaction with the partnerships, and the planning processes have included a significant allocation of resources to community capacity and governance training. In another site the allocation of resources to a capacity building unit has also drawn a high level of community support. However given that every partner was on a rapid learning curve the effort given to planning was important and is a further indication of the good faith demonstrated in every site.

Engaging the broad community

Low levels of community engagement in the consultation processes were reported as an issue in several sites. However in two of these evaluation reports this assertion is questioned. In one report the evaluators challenged this assertion by independently assessing the consultation activity as reasonably high and questioning whether this reported issue is a reflection of participants not fully understanding what events were auspiced by the COAG partners. This evaluation also revealed that there had been four separately funded and long consultations on key aspects of the Trial activities. In the other evaluation, the evaluator also questions this reported assertion and raised the possibility that different community members attended different events without realising that they were attending a COAG auspiced consultation.

Most of the evaluations conclude that community consultation could be improved to build stronger ownership of solutions. However this assertion raises the question of what constitutes a reasonable level of community engagement in what are complex government processes? This needs to be explored in the next iteration of whole of government, place-based partnerships. It should also be the subject of discussions within the respective steering committee or other structures on any ongoing initiatives.

It is difficult to evaluate this in retrospect if there is not agreement on what that engagement should be, what purpose it is serving and how it will be evaluated. This issue goes to the heart of questions related to how to change communities and what say communities want to have, and about what. The site addressing family violence is struggling with this very question and is grappling with how to manage different and competing community views regarding tolerance of family violence.

The evaluations raised a series of relationship issues in the building of partnerships. These included:

- consistency of membership and engagement of government members and staff to build relationships and trust over time
- sharing leadership and demonstrating collegiate relationships with other government agencies – this was reported by Indigenous participants as a significant issue on which good progress was made in most sites
- to build effective partnerships a common set of required skills for government officers was identified by Indigenous partners including: good listening; acting in good faith; high levels of good will; willingness to share power; recognising and acknowledging intra-community and familial relationships and how these impact on leaders; understanding the pressures on communities; being honest and open, and being human.

Two of the evaluators raised issues related to how gender issues were addressed in the Trials and raised concern that in some remote areas how women's voices can be heard is a major issue. In one of the Trials women raised concern that a strategy in relation to youth was one of the most significant issues and yet that has not been addressed in the Trial at all to date. This is despite the fact that it was agreed as one of the highest priorities for the whole community and subsequently was acted out in major disruption in the community. The evaluator for this Trial raised issues about the predominance of men in the decision making structures for the Trial and questioned how to address this in the future as one of the challenges for communities.

In the Trial where family violence is the focus, the evaluator raised the complexities of dealing with issues where the dominant non-Indigenous paradigm for analysis and policy response is at odds with Indigenous values and responses. In this case the tensions between the dominant explanations and understandings of violence against

women, and Indigenous explanations and understandings of family violence generally, have made working with the women in the five communities a complex process. This was made more complex by disputed identity issues.

These tensions have emphasised the need to work collaboratively with Indigenous communities and with women and men to build a better understanding of what these tensions mean for policy and service delivery.

Community tensions were apparent in most communities and whilst this created challenges from time to time, in most cases government officers found ways of managing these. In two sites these tensions reportedly slowed progress but ignoring these tensions was not going to change this. It is significant that in neither of these Trials did the partnerships created lead to any significant conversations with Indigenous partners about how to manage these tensions. Government officers expressed frustration about them to each other and expected Indigenous leaders to sort these out. Government officers did however allow time for the community to try and find a solution and did not try and impose their own solutions - which was seen as 'working differently' in both cases.

Several Indigenous leaders expressed the view to evaluators that they needed government leaders to understand and respect both the history and reasons for these tensions and to find ways to support the sorting out of these tensions in Indigenous ways, rather than criticising and labelling them as 'family feuds' or 'infighting'. In some cases the issues are cultural and familial and are not easily resolved.

From a government perspective these tensions sometimes manifest in 'no win' situations for them and this was particularly so in one site when reaching agreement regarding whom to talk to was not easy. In another example, agreement on where to locate funding for community capacity building was delayed considerably as the community could not agree. The governments involved were criticised for allowing this delay to continue but the evaluators concluded that, had the government officers imposed a decision, they would have been criticised for not allowing the community time to sort out a solution.

In summary, progress in building partnerships between Indigenous communities and governments has probably been one of the most significant achievements of the Trials identified in the evaluations. It is also probably where the biggest lessons have been learned on all sides. Existing structures have been well used as a basis from which to develop in many cases. Building the capacity of Indigenous communities to engage with government processes and in finding solutions to community issues has been embraced by most communities and major lessons have emerged. The opportunity for ongoing learning and building cultural understandings is high and needs to be a focus for the future in shared responsibility negotiations and mainstreamed whole of government effort involving Indigenous communities.

6.4 The extent of capacity building and shared responsibility achieved across the sites.

There are varied understandings of what 'shared responsibility' means across the Trial sites and most evaluations reported that most communities grappled with the concept at the commencement of the Trials. In the lead up to the commencement of the Trials considerable effort was employed by lead agencies in the negotiation of the agreements.

In six sites SRAs were signed for the establishment of the COAG Trial, two sites never reached the stage of a signed formal agreement although they did participate in a Trial and signed a letter or other form of agreement. Four of the COAG Trial site SRAs included clearly articulated expectations from communities. In one Trial SRA the community placed five conditions on their participation. In three sites communities were explicit about what they could achieve and each met their commitments as best they could. Commitments by partners included:

- agreements to work jointly on finding solutions
- agreements to share information
- commitments to engage and represent communities
- intentions to work flexibly and openly
- agreements to address problems together and to sharing ideas about how to address these
- finding community leaders to act as champions
- agreeing to be flexible about funding
- improving funding arrangements and addressing red tape
- contributing to improved understandings between the partners.

In some sites Indigenous partners did not believe that governments had fully met their commitments especially those related to flexibility with funding and improved streamlining of funding arrangements. In one Trial site almost \$1m was allocated to 15 projects in the communities engaged in the Trial. The evaluators in that particular Trial could find no evidence of any pooled funding arrangements despite a high level of joint planning and some of the funding reportedly going to the same auspice.

However in another site the major joint allocation of resources to a capacity building project was negotiated, with local government as the auspice with the community's agreement. This was seen as a significant achievement and a milestone for the Trial.

There has been some progress over time on the understandings of SRAs and in each of two sites more than 12 further specific SRAs have been signed during the period of the Trial. In another site three specific issue SRAs have been signed and two are being negotiated.

In summary, most communities embraced the opportunity to engage with governments around the Trials. In two communities there is considerable evidence of improved capacity reported; one of these targeted capacity building and governance. In four sites some capacity building progress is reported to have been made. In the one site the capacity building attributable to the Trial was difficult to assess because there is a parallel state-based whole of government process in that region.

All of the six SRAs signed to establish Trials had a stated commitment to evaluation and monitoring of the Trials. This was not well met by most of the Trials and only one Trial 'refreshed' their agreement and kept track of their achievements against the SRA. The evaluations being considered in this Synopsis Report are the first formative evaluations to be undertaken.

6.5. Summary

In summary the Trials present a paradox in that, given the purpose and framework as explicated in this Synopsis, the Trials could not completely fail because the 'lessons learned' are legitimate outcomes. However it is important that this is not seen as sufficient outcome – if governments are to work differently this will take time and all of

the evaluations highlighted this as one of the key lessons. Many of the sites are at the stage of consolidating partnerships and seeing projects or initiatives come to fruition.

This highlights some of the most significant lessons to emerge from the evaluations, namely that:

- These Trials were about learning new ways of working together to find solutions, but the emphasis was often on getting things done with insufficient attention to how that could happen. In most locations there was almost no discussion between the partners regarding what working differently meant. It is our assessment that this was assumed and that the new ways of working were considered to be the new structures established and did not extend to the new ways and processes for working within these structures. Discussions are needed between the partners on how to address this perception and ensure that there is agreement about what effective partnership will look like for both sides.
- The expectations of what can be achieved must be discussed and agreed at the outset within a framework for planning and evaluation. Most of the Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) negotiated for the Trials were very ambitious and set goals which were not achievable. This was either because the number and nature of the priorities were too many or too big to make a difference in two years, or because the issue chosen was too complex or sensitive to achieve impact outcomes in the timeframe. Progress could be made on outcomes along a critical path but the final impact outcomes require more time, possibly more resources and a clearer strategy.

Two case studies provided in **Attachment 8** highlight the challenges in the Trials and the paradox that the Trials represent.

The Trials were not expected to achieve significant change on the complex issues for Indigenous communities, families and individuals in 1- 2 years. They were designed to begin to make radical change to how parties worked together that was recognised to be an essential change to achieve major improvement.

Unfortunately one of the problems that emerged early in some sites was that over ambitious plans were set with the implication that the issues might be addressed in a short time frame. This confusion about realistic expectations placed an unfair burden on the Indigenous partners and agency partners to deliver. This confusion came from outside of the Trials too and one of the very public criticisms of the Trial in Case Study 1, from an external organisation, has been that the Trial has not delivered on these outcomes. This type of commentary has been very problematic for the Trial. A challenge for the sites is to manage the expectations and this would be assisted by having a clear framework of priorities, outputs and outcomes along a critical longer term pathway for community change.

In Case Study 2 the Trial has achieved a very significant and new understanding amongst many of the government and Indigenous partners of the issues, the possible solutions, and the nature of the work that will need to be done to have an impact on the incidence of and the response to family violence. An SRA on family violence has been signed by one of the communities involved. This foundation will need to be built on rapidly and effectively to begin to move to the hierarchy of impact outcomes agreed.

At this point in time the majority of the communities and government agencies involved are still working within a COAG process at the local level. Most communities and government agencies want to have a say in what happens next. The formative evaluations which inform this Synopsis were meant to inform the next steps and most of the communities involved want to continue the focus on the issues and priorities agreed at the commencement of the Trials.

7. Implications for the future

The lessons learned from the Trials have important implications for the future. The most significant implications:

- The leadership provided through the Secretaries' Group on whole of government initiatives needs to be sustained. This leadership has been an important feature in the development of the role of ICCs and their capacity to foster increased attention to whole of government effort at the local, regional and national levels. The Trials have affirmed the importance of this leadership in whole of government and shared responsibility efforts.
- Since the Trials were conceived other initiatives and a broader whole of government approach have been fostered within the Australian Government. Whole of government and intergovernmental effort has also increased in some states and territories. These developments suggest that second generation models and frameworks are emerging and the Trial sites need to be understood in that context. In some of the Trial sites the work undertaken during the Trial is likely to be progressed through mainstream efforts. In other sites the partners need to be involved in decisions regarding how to progress the work to date.
- An improved and shared understanding of place-based interventions, and when this is appropriate or not appropriate, needs to be developed.
- Future SRAs and RPAs must have negotiated, clearly understood and achievable outcomes if all parties are to be able to deliver on agreements.
- Training for staff in whole of government work and how to work respectfully in Indigenous communities is essential and this applies at all levels within governments.
- Training for Indigenous leaders in how to work with governments is equally important. Understanding the barriers and challenges all parties face in achieving shared outcomes, including the systemic and/or community barriers, is likely to assist in improving social, economic and health outcomes.
- Identifying simplified decision making processes and wherever possible exploring more efficient funding arrangements, including single agreements in locations or initiatives where this is possible and achievable. Single funding agreements are not easy, nor always appropriate, and should not be seen as the panacea for addressing Indigenous life outcomes.
- Developing approaches using the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage framework for planning and evaluation, and existing whole of government frameworks, would provide a sound framework for Australian and state/territory governments to use as the broad approach to addressing Indigenous life outcomes.

Attachment 1: Questions common to the formative evaluations

1. Setting the scene (The History)

- A broad overview of the region, conditions and challenges at the start of the Trial.
- The history of the Trial – key dates, agreements, significant events, specific initiatives, the establishment of governance and partnership arrangements.
- Any commitments made by governments and the community.
- The extent of involvement of the community in setting the objectives and priorities for the Trial.

2. Working together (The Process)

- What has and has not worked with the Commonwealth and State lead agency arrangements and why.
- The mechanisms in place to improve coordination between and within governments and what difference they have made.
- The extent of Commonwealth and State agency knowledge of and support for the COAG trial.
- The kind of working relationships that have been built between the government and community partners and how this is affecting the operation of the Trial and community outcomes.
- What Shared Responsibility Agreements are in place and how these have worked.
- How well the concept of shared responsibility has been understood and adopted by both governments and communities.
- Whether governments have delivered on their commitments/undertakings.
- Whether community has delivered on its commitments/undertakings.
- Who was involved when the Trial began, and who is involved now. Any changes that have occurred. Whether the work of the Trial is largely confined to governments and service providers.
- The extent of understanding of and support for the Trial within the broader Indigenous community and how this has been demonstrated.

3. Lessons learnt (Interim Outcomes)

- The extent to which the community continues to support the objectives/priorities agreed at the start of the Trial. Whether they have changed, and if so why.
- The extent to which the new Indigenous affairs arrangements are understood and/or accepted by the communities.
- What has worked and not worked from the community's perspective.
- What has worked and not worked from governments' perspective.
- Any initiatives that have been undertaken as part of the Trial and what the outcomes are.
- Any interim outcomes from Shared Responsibility Agreements.
- Whether in practice the Trial has resulted in a new way of working together or doing business, and what is new or better.
- Whether one part of the Trial is working better than others and why.
- What progress has been made in implementing a whole of government approach. Whether there is better coordination of government programs and services. Whether this has led to improved service delivery arrangements and outcomes.
- Whether there have been any (good or bad) unintended consequences, outcomes or changes.

- Whether the proposed commitments and undertakings are likely to achieve the agreed objectives and priorities.

4. Next steps

- Whether the Trial has progressed as far as hoped, and if not what the critical barriers were. What could be done about any barriers that exist.
- Whether there would be benefit in revisiting the agreed objectives, priorities or commitments for the Trial.
- Whether the Trial will be ready for evaluation in 2007-08. Whether agreements have measurable and achievable objectives and priorities. Whether there are baseline and/or ongoing performance monitoring reports.
- Suggestions for issues that should be examined in the 2008 evaluation.
- Suggestions for any other changes that could be made to improve the work of the Trials.

Attachment 2: Features of the eight trial sites

Lead agencies	Brief summary of the features of each of the Trial sites
<p>Department of Environment and Heritage (Aust)</p> <p>Chief Minister's Department (ACT)</p>	<p>ACT: Urban capital city, 2001 census counted 3600 people in the Indigenous community, local community estimates around 6,000 pop, two traditional custodian groups with diverse ATSI population, 8 identified communities, had constant changes in working groups and government officers, the Indigenous Working Group (IWG) was the only consistent membership throughout. Chair of the IWG was paid to consult the community. Two lead agencies located in capital city, no local government, Had four priorities - strong focus on justice, education, health, with cultural pride lesser focus. Had a Joint Steering Committee with Indigenous members drawn from the IWG</p>
<p>Department of Health and Ageing (Aust)</p> <p>DAARE and then DPC (SA)</p>	<p>Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yakunytjatjara: (SA) very large geographic area in remote South Australia with pop. of 2,600 – part of the NPY region which crosses three state/territory borders. Community owned land, strong language and cultural ties, land tenure issues and cross border issues, SRA is currently being reviewed, new Trial Steering Committee formed in Feb 2005, had 6 community partners – all Indigenous organisations. Strong cultural ties and communities. The original focus of Trial was improved health and wellbeing, education and training, provision of government and financial services, improved infrastructure and improved governance. The trail contributed to the process which led to the establishment of a new regional coordination group, the TKP, with Australian Government, the State Government, community and service provider and the appointment of a Regional Service Coordinator and Place Manager. Two key projects – improvement of regional stores and the establishment of customer service centres across the lands for government and financial services.</p>
<p>Department of Employment and Work Place Relations then OIPC from 2005 (Aust)</p> <p>Department of Aboriginal and Torres Islander Policy (Qld)</p>	<p>Cape York: (Qld) large geographic area in northern Queensland, total target community is 15 communities spread across 150,000 square miles, for the COAG Trial it was decided to focus on 5 – Lockhart River, Aurukun, Coen, Hopevale and Napranum. 2001 census - 6,200 people, 5.9% of Queensland Indigenous population. No SRA ever agreed for the Trial but recently 2 SRAs signed with Lockhart River and Hopevale communities. Qld government was implementing an extensive whole of government strategy for the Cape – <i>Meeting Challenges Making Choices</i>. This strategy involved setting up partnership and governance processes so COAG Trial opted to work within these to work alongside this process using a 100 day planning agenda and focussing on a worker and the facilitations of projects and initiatives – a solution broker type of role. Objectives identified by DEWR related to capacity and facilitation of connection with Australian Government agencies particularly in relation to access and funding and projects with a focus on jobs, family financial management and infrastructure development</p>

Lead agencies	Brief summary of the features of each of the Trial sites
<p>Department of Education Science and Technology (Aust)</p> <p>Department of Education and Training (NSW)</p>	<p>Murdi Paaki: (NSW) very large geographic area across western NSW, 20 towns, and includes a mix of small cities and towns, and tiny remote towns, pop. 7540. Murdi Paaki Regional Council is a very large Aboriginal Corporation, had strong existing partnerships and structures at commencement of Trial. Main focus of Trial was on governance and community capacity building. Signed a single SRA with several key goals focused on partnerships, governance and capacity building, strong leadership from lead agencies and community partner. Indigenous population across the region represents 14% of the population. Some participating communities are primarily Indigenous, some diverse Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Focus of this trial was: capacity building and local governance, and activities to work on health and wellbeing of children and young people, educational attainment and school retention. Community Working Parties and Community Action Plans are key mechanisms of the Trial and a focus for governance and capacity building. Indicators were agreed for measuring what was achieved in relation to governance and capacity building.</p>
<p>Department of Employment and Work Place Relations then OIPC from 2005 (Aust)</p> <p>Department of Premier and Cabinet then Department of Victorian Communities (Vic)</p>	<p>Shepparton: (Vic) Regional city with two traditional family groups and a wider and diverse population of Indigenous families who have moved to Shepparton over time, largest indigenous population outside Melbourne, growing younger group with implications for future leadership: DEWR was lead agency until 2005 then OIPC assumed responsibility, City of Greater Shepparton is an active member. Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group (ACFG) established to work as partner - ACFG comprising 13 community members representing local Indigenous organisations or former ATSIC councillors, Yorta Yorta land claim occurred in midst of the Trial, issues around the land claim process impacted on the whole community. Eureka Project active in community and high level of media attention on this Trial for two years, agenda for Trial was 12 priorities, now has funded unit to support ACFG and partnership. Solution broker model used by DEWR and Department of Victorian Communities. Departmental staff worked locally. Significant consultancies contracted for this site.</p>
<p>Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs then OIPC from 2005 (Aust)</p> <p>Department of Premier and Cabinet (Tasmania)</p>	<p>Northern Tasmania: Trial site in north eastern region and has a single focus on family violence, works across 6 communities including Launceston (regional city) and Flinders Island localities, 2001 census of total Aboriginal population of around 15,000 across Tasmania – 20%, 59% of population is under 25, small working groups, no formal SRA ever signed but communities and governments agreed on family violence as the single focus through a letter of agreement. This focus was maintained throughout the Trial. Project staff employed to work specifically on the Trial. Lead Agency Forum and intergovernmental Coordinating Committee worked with the State Advisory Committee on Family Violence and YPK.</p>

Lead agencies	Brief summary of the features of each of the Trial sites
<p>Department of Transport and Regional Services then OIPC (Aust)</p> <p>WA Department of Indigenous Affairs (WA)</p> <p>Halls Creek Council (Local Government)</p>	<p>East Kimberly (WA) remote communities spread across 200-300 kms and five communities, 2001 census count was 888, one community is deserted, 60% of population under 25 and only 8% over 55, 12 SRAs signed in region, 4 SRAs in Trial all focused on young people. Halls Creek Council a strong partner. Major scoping study done, Munjurla Study funded by Lingiari Foundation, and has guided action in Trial through the Joint Action Plan. Significant event Grog Summit and an Alcohol Management Plan. Strong leadership by all three levels of government, Councils in each community and Tjurabalan Native Title Land Aboriginal Corporation a partner. Two DOTARS staff recruited as Community Initiative Coordinators and a WA DIA Place Manager appointed – these three are the Place Management Team. Community Consultation Fund. Focus on alcohol and community safety, with ‘side tables’ initially proposed on education, youth, housing and infrastructure</p>
<p>Family and Community Services then OIPC (Australian Govt)</p> <p>Office of Indigenous Policy and Chief Minister’s Department (NT)</p>	<p>Wadeye (NT) Remote traditional community in NT, 420 kms from Darwin, cut off in wet season, targets Aboriginal community in NT, three ceremonial groups comprising 23 tribal groups and seven language groups, existed since 1939 and history as a Catholic Mission, 2215 people in town of Wadeye, 45 out stations, 700 children of school age, 100 people over 50, 150 under 25, Baseline study done by CAEPR in 2004, Thamarrurr CC local partner, focus of trial - women and families, youth, and housing and construction. Tripartite Steering Committee established with Priority Working Groups.</p>

Attachment 3: Summary of key elements of each COAG Trial

Site	Focus	Leadership Structures	Community governance	Planning	Major changes during the Trial
SA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved health and wellbeing Provision of govt and financial services Improved infrastructure Improved governance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Steering Committee – one Aust. Govt agency, SA government coordination agency AP Lands Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initially through the AP Lands Council Since 2025 through the TKP Regional Council which has an Action Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation in the communities plus planning days between 2003 and 2005 in Adelaide Canberra and 2 in Alice Springs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SA Government level Aboriginal Task Force established and more intergovernmental connection between DPC and OIPC than with DOHA
ACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening cultural identity Feasibility of a healing farm Indigenous justice sentence Education options for children and young people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Steering Committee – ATSIC, one Aust Govt agency, ACT govt agency and Indigenous Working Group (IWG) members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IWG – 8 elected members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working groups to progress priority areas 2 day facilitated community leaders meeting Joint Partners Committee Service mapping exercise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ATSIC not replaced in the structure Only IWG members still involved from the beginning
WA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on alcohol and community safety With 'side tables' on education training and youth, health, housing and infrastructure, land issues and cattle Regional governance strengthened as a first step 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management Group – ATSI (until 2005), one Aust Govt agency, WA Govt, Local Government Regional Reference Group included also Community reps (TNTLC) and Local Govt. C/W Heads group at state level No intergov'tal body Whole of Govt. bodies in state govt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Four communities each with its own Aboriginal Corporation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting of 90 traditional owners Munjurla Scoping Study involved consultation process Joint Action plan developed and '100' day Plan Community Consultation Fund. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two DoTARS staff recruited as Community Initiative Coordinators and a WA DIA Place Manager appointed - this is the Place Management Team Current priorities – housing, stores, youth and law and order

Site	Focus	Leadership Structures	Community governance	Planning	Major changes during the Trial
Vic.	<p>12 strategic areas for action –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> strengthening families; governance; strategic planning; leadership strategy; pride, image, social connectedness and respect strategy; cultural enhancement, education and training strategy, jobs strategy; economic devt strategy; justice strategy; community health strategy; housing strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Steering Com – Aust govt, Vic Govt, local govt, and reps of Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group (ACFG) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12 member Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group (ACFG) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Facilitator Service mapping exercise A series of issue based planning days – e.g. employment summit, education summit, community forums 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead agency changed to OIPC late 2005 Participation by ACFG has fluctuated – currently 13 members Social Policy Planning Unit est. late 2005- jointly funded by Australian and Victorian Governments for 2 years- auspiced by City of Greater Shepparton
Qld	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting the Qld government whole of government strategy – <i>Meeting Challenges Making Choices (MCMC)</i> Jobs, family financial management and infrastructure development no SRA signed for commencement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worked within the structures established for MCMC using solution broker model and on ground worker C/W Regional managers Forum for Qld 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 Separate Community groups – e.g. Lockhart River Community Council, Hope Vale Aboriginal Community also worked with the Cape York regional organisations such as Cape York Partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Action Plans Negotiation tables, Development of SRAs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DEWR withdrew in Oct 2005 because of the WoG role of OIPC – no action since A number of specific SRAs signed

Site	Focus	Leadership Structures	Community governance	Planning	Major changes during the Trial
Tas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family violence Introduction of a family wellbeing course 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead Agency forum – Aust and Tas. Govt officers – 2 state, 2 Australian Govt, + project staff Intergovernmental Coordinating Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Five separate communities engaged directly by project team YPK group input 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intergov'tal Coordinating Committee (IGCC) Joint planning day 2005 Place based discussions IGCC Action Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead Agency changed to OIPC in 2005 State formalised its Aboriginal identity policy in July 2006 2 field based staff introduced in the north of the state
NT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women and families Youth Housing and construction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tripartite Steering Committee with Aust govt, NT govt and Thamarrurr Regional Council Chair (rotates) and CEO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thamarrurr Regional Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Priority working groups – joint govt/indigenous working groups 2 planning days 	<p>Steering Committee expanded to 27 attendees by Dec 2005 Phase 2 initiated by Thamarrurr to renegotiate priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutions and econ dev't Infrastructure and construction social dev't natural and cultural resource management; communication and engagement <p>April 2006 partners agreed to new priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> rationalisation of the management structure; safety and land tenure

Site	Focus	Leadership Structures	Community governance	Planning	Major changes during the Trial
NSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening community and regional governance structures (1st priority) • Health and wellbeing of children and young people, • educational attainment and school retention • helping families raise healthy children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Murdi Paaki COAG Trial Steering Committee - Aust and NSW govt, Murdi Paaki Regional Council (MPRC) Chair 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MP Regional Assembly • 15 Community Working Parties (CWP) – one per community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COAG Trial Action Team of Aust and NSW govt and ICC staff works with the CWP to develop Community Action Plans • 5 x 3-day Community Governance workshops held with CWPs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPRC became the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly in 2005 • SRA refreshed in 2005

Attachment 4: Purpose and Rationale of the COAG trials

In this section the rationale underpinning the COAG Trials is outlined and a preliminary or indicative evaluation framework was developed for this Synopsis. In evaluation terms this rationale provides the program logic, which contributes to the evaluation framework. The literature that supports the rationale and the framework is explored in **Attachment 5**.

Governments and Indigenous communities working in new ways in partnership

A major step leading to the establishment of the COAG Trials in 2002 was a decision by COAG in 2000 that all governments would work together to improve the social and economic well being of Indigenous people and communities. This decision recognised that the response of Australian and state and territory governments to Indigenous issues needed better coordination and was spread across many departments, agencies, and programs which operated mostly in a silo approach. The Trials therefore were established for:

- governments to work together better at all levels and across all departments and agencies; and
- Indigenous communities and governments to work in partnership and share responsibility for
 - achieving outcomes
 - building the capacity of people in communities to manage their own affairs.

The Trials were referred to as the *Shared Responsibility Trials* because of the recognition of the need for a partnership between government and the Indigenous communities based on sharing responsibility for the 'condition and wellbeing of Indigenous communities'.

In 2002 in a Communiqué from COAG the Trials were further specifically described as

"... trials of a whole-of-government approach to addressing the needs of identified communities and regions, in cooperation with communities and ATSIC".

This description linked the Trials to the work being done by governments on whole of government approaches – particularly the work being done by the Australian Public Service led by the Secretary of Prime Minister and Cabinet. This work is found on the Australian Public Service Commission website⁸ and on the Connected Government Website⁹.

Complex problems and Whole of Government responses

As indicated in the literature review in this report, much of the literature on whole of government/connected government responses refers to their value in addressing complex (so called wicked) problems or 'priority challenges'.

*'every major challenge of public administration...necessarily requires the active participation of a range of central and line agencies.'*¹⁰

⁷ www.coag.gov.au/meetings/050402

⁸ www.apsc.gov.au/mac/connectingguide.htm

⁹ www.connected.gov.au

¹⁰ Preface to *Connecting Government: whole of government responses to Australia's priority challenges*. www.apsc.gov.au/mac/connectingguide.htm

This government document also states that program and service delivery should be 'seamless' to the community while behind the scenes '*all the resources of govt will be brought to bear in the search for innovative solutions to the complex challenges*'¹¹

The continuing disadvantage of Indigenous people in Australia was recognised in the rationale for the COAG Trials approach. Further this continuing disadvantage was seen as being due to the complex problems facing the Indigenous communities – e.g. economic, governance, social problems – which would not be overcome in a short time frame even with a more coordinated approach by governments working together.

The Australian Government Good Practice Guides and other material available in Australia on whole of government approaches is clearly world class. Best Practice is identified in Australian government literature as encompassing four key elements

- Culture and philosophy of whole of government practice
- New accountabilities and incentives
- New ways of working
- New ways of developing policies, designing programs and delivering services

Indigenous communities as partners

Experience in Indigenous affairs in Australia and internationally has shown that a crucial factor that contributes to working successfully with Indigenous communities is ownership by the communities of the strategies, programs and services that are required. A key mode for achieving this sense of ownership is the negotiation of effective partnership with communities. In order for communities to be able to engage in partnerships there needs to be viable governance of the communities.

For most Indigenous communities the challenges to their culture that have come from colonisation have undermined traditional governance and often left communities with weakened governance capacity. For this reason whole of government approaches are couched in partnerships based on viable community governance and initiatives or activities to improve/support community governance are a key element of the overall strategies. This is the case in the COAG Trials.

Summary of the COAG Trials rationale

In summary therefore the rationale for the Trials has been that;

- Indigenous disadvantage continues in Australia
- The factors involved in addressing the disadvantage are many and complex and therefore call for the involvement of a wide range of government departments and agencies in place based whole of government approaches
- The complex interaction of factors requires a coordinated commitment across government departments and agencies (whole of government), and between levels of government (intergovernmental)
- In addition to the shared responsibility across government there is a requirement for shared responsibility with Indigenous communities built on a partnership between viable partners
- The governance of Indigenous communities needs to be able to engage in effective partnership based on a sense of shared ownership and responsibility
- Both Indigenous communities and their culture, and government culture and constraints needed to be better understood in the process.

¹¹ ibid

Program logic associated with the rationale

A program logic approach identifies the *inputs, outputs and outcomes* of the proposed activity as a methodological tool for the data collection and analysis of evaluation. In order to develop such a tool the plan of the program or project, or in this case the Trials, being evaluated needs to be articulated and this is often the task of early or formative evaluations such as the evaluations undertaken to date on the Trials and this Synopsis. This has happened in a tacit and unstructured way in the evaluations in keeping with the 'lessons learned' approach required of the evaluators.

For this Synopsis we have also been asked to use a lessons learned approach and to locate these lessons in the context of current evidence and literature. In order to strengthen the overall 'lessons learned' we have sought, in the time available, to develop a very preliminary program logic framework to inform the structuring of our analysis and reporting. For ambitious imperatives for change or improvement such as the Trials it is essential that the strategy, plan and program logic that support the initiative are not far too complicated to be understandable, achievable and accessible. However at the same time they must be plausible, defensible and motivating.

In some ambitious projects there has been a trend to look for quick wins not related to a coherent program logic and long-term strategy. These are sometimes defended on the grounds of demonstrating progress to get more 'buy-in'. Such wins can be in the end dangerous, a win for win sake, in that they do not contribute to the building of systemic and sustainable change, only 'pointable activity'. This danger is highlighted in the literature and evidence review (**Attachment 5**)

In the case of these COAG Trials the *inputs* are numerous including many indigenous communities, nine governments and all of their respective departments and agencies, wide ranges of funding, programs, activities, processes, and services across economic and social sectors or fields, and many categories of participants. In this Synopsis we have pulled together brief summaries of the main inputs for each site in the charts on the Trial sites in **Attachments 2 and 3**.

Outputs are commonly identified in the categories of the activities, processes and participants that relate to the 'operational pathway' of the initiative. A program logic needs to show how these components are expected to produce the desired outcomes. For the Trials the components include:

- activity outputs - such as projects undertaken, training provided, funds used, groups and networks etc established
- process outputs - such as coordination and collaboration processes established, governance capacity building and community development processes
- participant outputs - such as information about people or groups involved.

Outcomes are the results or impacts that are desired by the partners and are often identified in both short term and long term timeframes and/or linked in a chain of relationship over time known as an *outcomes hierarchy*. Because of the complexity of the problems, the acknowledged long term nature of the initiatives required in these Trials, and the nature of the systemic changes required to support the achievement of outcomes over time, both *process outcomes* and *impact outcomes* are recognised as valid findings within an outcome hierarchy for the framework outlined in the next section.

Evaluation framework

The Evaluation framework for this report provides a means to assess the eight different evaluations with some basis for comparability.

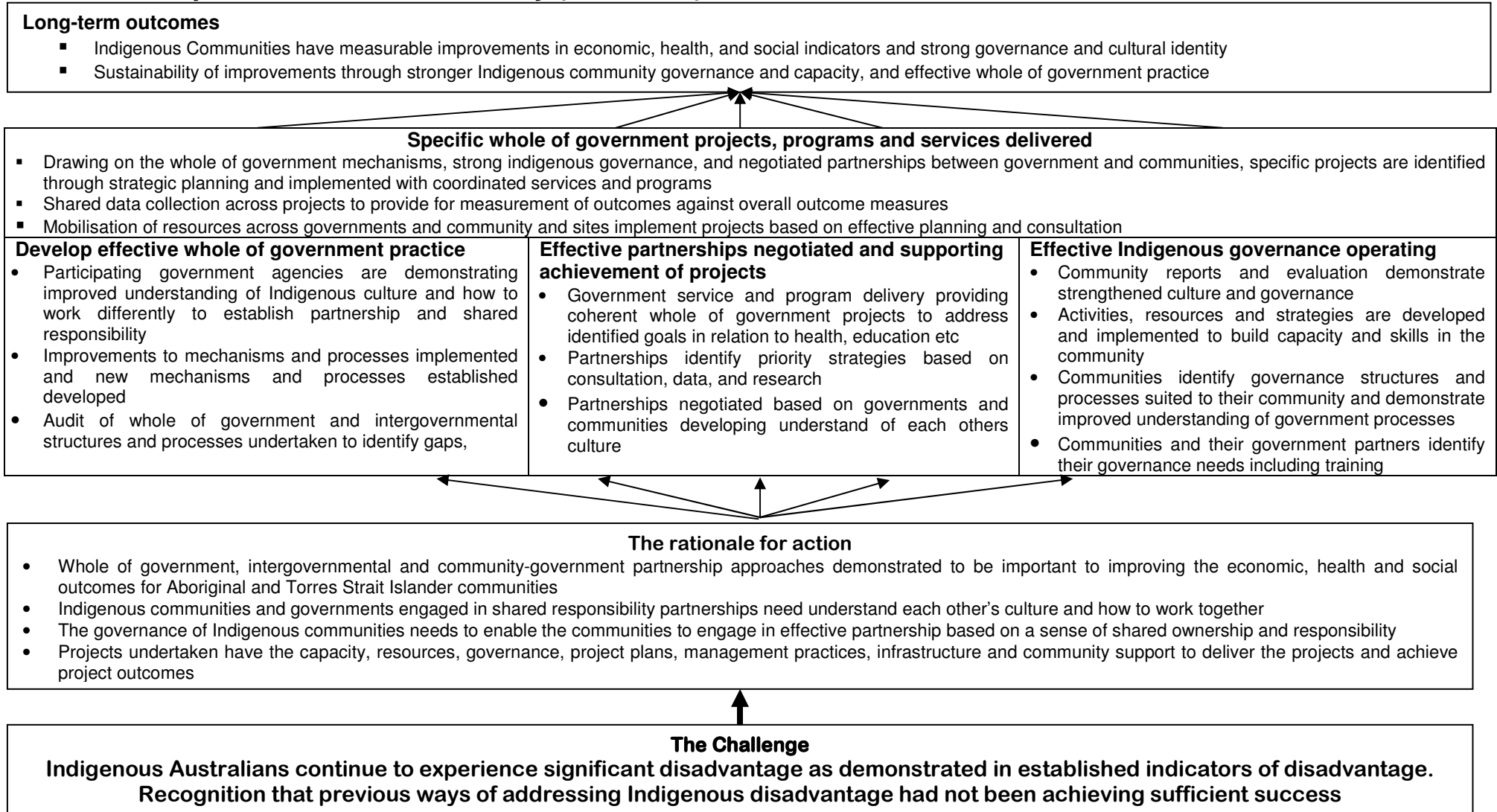
From the material available on the Trials the very preliminary program logic/ theory of change for the Trial process as a set of Australia wide initiatives can be identified. From this program logic an outcome hierarchy is developed here against which the plan and outcomes identified for each Trial site can be located. In one of the evaluations there was a program logic that had been developed in a scoping study for the community and this has informed the outcome hierarchy developed here.

The preliminary draft for an *outcomes hierarchy* for the COAG Trials is provided in **Table 1**.

The *outcomes hierarchy* enables the progress of Trials to be mapped against a framework which shows the relevance of process outcomes and impact outcomes to the overall strategy. This supports comparability and identifying 'lessons learned'.

Any data collection related to an evaluation framework for the Trials could use the framework and baseline data of the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage (OID) reports (Productivity Commissions 2003, 2004 and 2005). The framework for measuring disadvantage set out in the first OID report could also be used for the planning framework for the Trials and for future whole of government Indigenous initiatives thereby promoting aggregation of information and achievements across initiatives and comparability.

Table 1: Output and outcome hierarchy (indicative)



Attachment 5: Evidence, literature and the framework for the Synopsis Review

This brief literature review examines some of the most up to date literature from Australia and across the world on whole of government initiatives, partnerships, and working with Indigenous communities. There is not the time nor the scope for a comprehensive literature review in this Synopsis Review and we cannot do justice to the growing and now quite substantial body of research and writing on all of the literature relevant to the Trials. What we have provided is a small snapshot of the most relevant messages and lessons for the evaluations of these Trials in three bodies of work. In the literature there is no single body of work, or any agreed single framework relevant to the Trials, however there are four bodies of policy, evidence, theory and research relevant to the evaluations:

- whole of government initiatives, place-based initiatives and intergovernmental relations
- partnerships and integrated approaches to addressing longstanding issues of disadvantage and so called 'wicked problems'
- place-based frameworks
- Indigenous governance and economic and social development in Indigenous communities.

Whole of government frameworks

The Australian Government's own web site – *Connected Government* – contains a wealth of recent and emerging evidence on the importance of whole of government and partnership approaches to addressing complex problems and issues and outlines why it is an important policy goal for the Australian Government. The publication *Connecting Government: Whole of government responses to Australia's priority challenges* – defines whole of government as follows:

...denotes public service agencies working across portfolio boundaries to achieve a shared goal and an integrated response to particular issues. Approaches can be formal and informal. They can focus on policy development, program management and service delivery (MAC Report 2005).

This Guide is a comprehensive document which sets out the evidence base, practical advice and guidelines for public servants on whole of government practice. The Guide is intended to act as the blueprint for implementing the Government's commitment to whole of government goals.

This commitment is being implemented across the Australian Public Service as part of the Australian Government's commitment to improving service delivery for all Australians. This commitment intersects with the Government's earlier commitment to address issues for Indigenous communities articulated first in the announcement of the COAG Trials in 2002 and later incorporated into the broader whole of government agenda.

COAG, at its meeting on 25 June 2004, committed all levels of government to cooperative approaches on policy and service delivery between agencies and to maintaining and strengthening government effort to address Indigenous disadvantage. To underpin this commitment, COAG agreed to a National Framework of Principles for Government Service Delivery to Indigenous Australians. The principles address sharing

responsibility, harnessing the mainstream, streamlining service delivery, establishing transparency and accountability, developing a learning framework and focusing on priority areas. This broader agenda represents a second generation of whole of government and partnership approaches in Indigenous affairs.

In 2004 when the Connected Government report was released, Dr Peter Shergold, with respect to the new arrangements which would apply to Indigenous affairs in Australia, noted that the government '*was about to embark*' on a '*bold experiment in implementing a whole of government approach to policy development and delivery*' and noted the test of the rhetoric which would apply to the new arrangements. In a series of interviews with Secretaries in 2005, Gray and Sanders and asked them about the COAG Trials. The seven Secretaries who had been involved in the Trials with their departments as lead agencies, all reported that they had learned a lot about working differently with Indigenous communities, some wanted to move on to a broader focus which could apply more broadly across Australia but also acknowledged that none of the Trials had been evaluated at the time of interview (Gray and Sanders, 2006, pp14-15).

Thus the COAG Trials were conceived in 2002 as the Government was simultaneously exploring ways of improving its broader role in service delivery and developing a broader and mainstream approach to whole of government work. They were also conceived at the same time as a growing body of work emerged on Indigenous governance in Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

Three of the recurring themes in the Australian Government's statements and publications on whole of government practice are:

- The importance of leadership and collegiality
- Flexibility and culture change
- The need for processes and mechanisms for decision making and or coordination at each systemic level – Ministerial, senior executive, program management and in the field and the levels addressing policy setting, implementation and service delivery within programs.

These themes feature significantly in other work on partnerships and integration in publications across the world including in the OECD, in the UK reforms to the health system and social care, in New Zealand and Canada in human services and health, and in research on Indigenous governance and government/community partnerships. In late 2003 the Canadian Government produced *Managing Collaborative Arrangements: A Guide for Regional Managers*, following a Privy Council Task Force study which recommended a series of reforms on 'horizontal management' across government policy and service delivery. In New Zealand a Regional Partnerships Programme drives an economic reform agenda underpinned by a model of central coordination of government activity and strong partnerships between government, business, and community.

Today, the dialogue regarding whole of government, or coordinated government, is almost synonymous with a dialogue about partnerships and collaboration. The COAG Trials were established in the first wave of serious attention in Australia to whole of government initiatives. The evaluations need to be seen in this context.

Whole of government and partnerships

It is around 15 years since the interest in creating partnerships with communities to assist in addressing longstanding and complex issues emerged as a major social policy goal across the world. As described above this move coincided with a growing belief that whole of government and inter-government processes needed to underpin these partnerships if complex and longstanding problems were to be addressed. In 2000 the

OECD undertook an international study of partnerships in four different member countries, including New Zealand, to assess what was being learned about this unprecedented interest in partnerships. The result was the publication of *Local Partnerships for Better Governance* in 2001 and in 2004 the establishment of the *OECD LEED Forum on Partnerships and Local Governance*. This Forum is hosted jointly by the OECD and the Austrian Federal Ministry of Economy and Labour and aims to build expertise and networks amongst member countries that have embarked on area-based partnership and community governance initiatives.

In 2006 the OECD LEED Forum produced *Successful Partnerships – a guide (OECD LEED, 2006)* a publication aimed at assisting member countries to establish partnerships which worked by providing practical lessons learned from hundreds of partnerships across the world. This Guide identifies three challenges in establishing area-based partnerships:

- Engaging all of the relevant actors in the task recognising that they may not see that they have similar goals or solutions
- How to develop partnerships where partners have equal rights, and
- How to build ownership for the goals, vision and outcomes to be achieved through the partnership arguing that seeking consensus on these was an essential element of any effective partnership (OECD LEED Forum, 2006 pp3-4).

The Guide suggests that since, *all problems have local ramifications*, it is essential to challenge and break down existing barriers, build shared ownership, agree on what outcomes are possible, and find the right structures to foster understandings and solutions at the local level. This Guide makes the following observation about partnerships:

Running a partnership is a very delicate operation requiring individuals who can really understand and work with different organisations and their requests. Thus there has to be on the one hand a stable framework, and on the other hand a certain degree of flexibility to allow for all of the necessary (and immediate) changes and adaptations. In addition there has to be strong communication, among the partners, so that there is maximum transparency both within and outside the partnership (OECD LEED, 2006, pp5).

The Guide provides a full account of the requirements of effective partnerships including:

- the characteristics of good partnerships such as collaborative and flexible structures, the resources (human and financial) to do the job agreed, and an achievable work program
- a learning culture which fosters new understandings and respect for roles and responsibilities
- the behaviours and features which undermine partnerships including no shared values or vision, no sharing of risks, responsibility and accountabilities, power imbalances, hidden agendas and inadequate training and support including the capacity and ability to address conflict and differences
- the importance of good communication
- monitoring and evaluation and how to ensure that partners agree amongst themselves on what can be achieved, how they will evaluate and the importance of beginning this conversation at the commencement of the partnership.

The Guide notes that the evaluation and monitoring process should build trust between the partners, and bring credibility to the partnership itself (OECD LEED, 2006).

The US based Aspen Foundation funded a three year study, between 2001 and 2004, of community change in poor communities involving partnerships between governments and local communities across the USA and the United Kingdom. This study focused on:

- understanding how change takes place in poor communities
- how knowledge and evidence about community change is being gathered and used, and
- how governments, communities and evaluators needed to think differently about community change and to move out of old evaluation and policy paradigms.

This three year research project summarised the implications of what is being learned about place based strategies in the following statement:

Community based approaches to improving outcomes for residents of poor neighbourhoods have been shown to have great potential. In order for them to fulfil that potential, we need to learn how to do them better. Learning how to do them better will depend on improving the knowledge base about how to about community change, how to implement community change strategies, how to assess what is working and why, and, finally, how to ensure that all of the key actors make use of and apply that knowledge (Auspos and Kubisch, 2005).

Thus the COAG Trials can be located in the context of community change processes and place-based initiatives and the growing body of evidence regarding how to change the circumstances of communities dealing with very complex and longstanding issues.

Indigenous governance and partnerships

Sitting alongside this growing body of evidence in the mainstream public policy literature, there is an equally strong body of knowledge and evidence emerging regarding engaging Indigenous communities in partnerships to address longstanding disadvantage and disempowerment. Canada, New Zealand and Australia are leading the way in this regard with New Zealand being at the forefront of researching and understanding how to build effective partnerships with the Maori community.

However this literature is also much more contested than the literature on whole of government and partnerships within mainstream policy and service delivery with divergent views regarding the role of governments in achieving significant change in Indigenous communities. This contest of ideas is very strong in Australia. Pearson (2006) challenges conventional approaches to addressing Indigenous disadvantage and argues for a new dialogue regarding rights and responsibilities and new understandings of accountability. Pearson seriously questions the extent to which governments can address the dire situation facing Indigenous communities, arguing that governments have actually helped create what he terms the 'social disaster' of the present. Pearson suggests that governments are at their best when they realise their limitations in Indigenous communities and therefore play a role to support processes in which Indigenous communities find and implement solutions which work best for them.

He argues for reform based on notions of both rights and responsibilities underpinned by:

- a foundation of social and cultural norms
- a generous investment in capabilities support, and

- getting the incentives right.

He concludes by arguing that a more appropriate approach is to focus on the interface between indigenous people and governments, a truly shared responsibility based on a mutual accountability between the two. In this institution building approach Pearson suggests that there is an assumed right for Indigenous people to take responsibility and would engender both accountability and incentives. In this model of accountability there is also strong recognition of cultural norms and decision making processes (Pearson, 2006. p 7).

Pearson's thesis is supported by recent Indigenous governance work by the Harvard Project located in the John F Kennedy School of Government and the Native Nations Institute in Arizona. The Harvard Project has applied a model of Indigenous governance to the Australian context, and the New Zealand based Waitakere City Maori Community Research project, Strengthening Communities Through Local Partnerships (LPG, 2004). These two studies are too complex to try and summarise in this small project. However both studies have some common themes and messages, namely that:

- The answers and solutions to complex issues in the respective Indigenous communities of New Zealand and Australia lie with increased capacity for Indigenous governance which is culturally recognised and supported by governments
- Government efforts must include a willingness to understand and respect culture, to do things differently and to build new institutional responses to contemporary complex problems
- Governments must abandon the notion of quick wins, rapid results, or easy solutions in whole of government initiatives in Indigenous communities – the issues are too complex, require time and learnings which can only be acquired over time and must be sustainable over time
- Ownership of solutions is built over time and through good community and government processes (Sullivan, 2006 and LPG, 2004).

These messages are all consistent with the findings of the work by Auspos and Kubisch, (2005) on community change.

Place-based initiatives

The literature on place-based initiatives emerged during the late 1990s and by 2006 there is a growing body of evidence on the value of this framework for initiatives such as the Trials. The key concepts of local knowledge, accessing and using local expertise, framing programs within a clear policy 'blend', targeted approaches, intergovernmental processes and local solutions are all consistent with shared responsibility frameworks. The literature emphasises the importance of relationships building across sectors, with communities and between governments; the need to take a longer-term perspective; the importance of flexible policy and program delivery; and locally led solutions (MacLellan, 2006).

All of these ideas resonate with the policy directions being pursued through the Trials and wider government agendas, at all levels, seeking to support a greater say by indigenous communities in how to address local issues.

Conclusion

In summary, what emerges is a remarkable synergy between the four bodies of evidence and research on whole of government approaches, partnerships and community change, Indigenous governance and capacity building, and place-based

initiatives. The COAG Trials can also be located in the frameworks of place-based initiatives, capacity building and shared responsibility, and Indigenous governance. We have attempted to locate the Trials in the context of the latest evidence and research on overlapping and related areas of knowledge. New policy ideas are rarely radical or entirely new, mostly they are evolutionary and cumulative. This does not detract from the courage required to embrace new understandings and knowledge and should also not detract from the challenge of the task facing Indigenous communities as they try to improve the lives of their citizens.

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Attachment 6: A differential model for engagement in whole of government exercises

Circumstances	Model – initial but would evolve - Differential focus – not single track
Strong state government WoG initiative underway, more developed indigenous governance	1. Strategic solution broking: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engaging actively, • mobilising resources across government and working to ensure WoG at national level, • working on intergovernmental relationships • Must have a clear articulated strategy • Skills
Strong existing Indigenous governance, engaged with State government	2. Partnership building: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emphasis on ability to engage and build effective partnership – intergovernmental and community • supporting the strong partnership focus • mobilising resources across government and working to ensure WoG at national level • skills
Community in crisis, demoralised and no leadership, and not strong state level WoG process going yet	3. Leadership building in crisis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high level, <i>local</i> leadership partnership particularly identifying and supporting community leaders – men & women • identify a crucial strategy issue for change that will unify – e.g. the future for a children • while addressing the issue do it in the WoG community partnership way that builds infrastructures as it addresses the problem – does not undermine or ignore existing processes, or only focus on getting action going • skills
Variation on Model 3 circumstance - state government is working in a WoG way on the crisis	4. intergovernmental and partnership focus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engage and negotiate effectively with state government process • focus on developing and supporting building partnership with effective indigenous governance process or structure • skills
Divided diffuse urban community with low profile government presence and engagement	5. Shared responsibility focus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • negotiate strongly on a shared responsibility model – all working to deliver on their responsibility including the leaders of the divided groups to work together for the good of the community • mobilise effective intergovernmental partnership and bring in local government • skills

Attachment 7: Two case studies

Case study 1.

This Trial site had 12 priority strategies including housing, economic and employment development, community health, education, cultural identity and justice. The community is in a regional city with a very diverse Indigenous population and a land claim running throughout the first two years. There is a low level of Indigenous employment in the region. There is a long history of contested cultural identity issues running through the community. Whilst the relationships between government agencies were reasonable prior to the Trial, there was a very limited history of commonwealth/state collaboration in the city, very limited engagement between local government and the Indigenous community, and almost no engagement between the business community and the Indigenous community.

The Indigenous leaders in the city negotiated an agreement with the three levels of government over 12 months. There was no single Indigenous community or partner – there were 13 individuals (partners) representing different organisations and from different families and other interests including former ATSIC councillors. The agreement amongst the Indigenous partners was a significant achievement, but it contained 12 priorities around housing, economic development, education etc.

The establishment of such a united community governance structure was an unprecedented achievement, this structure has faced some inevitable challenges but all of the partners want to keep talking. However, to date only small gains have been made on those priority issues with respect to Indigenous outcomes; there is some evidence that improved educational outcomes might be emerging and some employment outcomes are on the agenda.

Mid way through this Trial a contested land claim created an added burden and dynamic for the community to deal with. Whilst some partners dropped out of the Indigenous governance structure two years into the Trial the same members were keen to stay engaged in some way if some of the community tensions could be resolved.

In 2004 a decision was reached to fund a unit to support the capacity building of the community, this unit is supported by joint funding by the Australian and State Government involved and is auspiced by local government with the support of most of the Indigenous leaders. In 2005 a search for an executive officer took some time but the unit is now established and the Indigenous leaders are working to make this initiative work.

Case study 2.

This Trial had one priority: addressing family violence.

This was in a smaller jurisdiction with five separate communities in one region. There is a long history of contested cultural identity across the jurisdiction, there are five distinct communities in five locations and a high level of distrust of government from the Indigenous communities involved.

There is some history of place-based initiatives and reasonably good relationships at the service delivery level. Family violence is a very difficult and sensitive issue in Indigenous communities across Australia. Non-Indigenous explanations and solutions are located in the criminal justice system and often involve isolating men and using gaol as a deterrent and punishment.

Many people in the Indigenous community challenge non-Indigenous explanations, and the solutions, and are fearful of what will happen to their family members if they are engaged in a criminal justice response with no understanding of familial and community relationships, responsibilities and traditions. The communities involved wanted to engage in conversations about these complex issues and were mostly positive, albeit cynical, about the potential of the Trial to make some inroads into the issue, together.

Progress across the five communities has varied and in some cases the conversations have been slow and hard, in others positive and consistently moving forward. Some community members are disappointed that more has not changed, some government members want to see more rapid change than the community is ready for, some government officers are seen as listening better than others, some are seen as 'pushing their own agenda', some families are seen as colluding in maintaining a silence around an issue that needs to be challenged. Most partners in this site agree they are all reaching a better understanding of the issues and of each others views, values, experiences and solutions.