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## 9 Cross-Strategy Evaluation

### 9.1 Themed Studies

Over the course of the evaluation a number of Themed Studies will be conducted on various aspects of the SFC Strategy. The purpose of these studies will be to explore particular topics in depth. These studies will enhance our understanding of ‘what works’ by exploring in more depth ‘why’ and ‘how’ things work. These studies will cross the three SFCS initiatives that are covered in the evaluation – CfC, Invest to Grow and Local Answers.

It is intended that the Themed Studies will be undertaken in partnership with the Local Evaluators and that the themes will be chosen in negotiation with the SFCS Partnership and the Evaluation Steering Committee. We would envisage five to six Themed Studies over the course of the evaluation.

Possible themes could include:

Client Groups	Process Issues	Service Types
Indigenous	Governance	Home visiting
CALD	Partnership	Parent training
Fathers	Information sharing	Family centres
Children with a disability	Parental involvement	Rural
Parents with a disability	Volunteering	Services focusing on specific outcomes:
Families who are isolated		Health, early learning, behaviour, parenting, community cohesion
		Family violence

### 9.2 Promising Practice Profiles

One of the key objectives of this Evaluation is to identify ‘what works’ in early intervention, in order to be able to disseminate such practices to communities across Australia. AIFS will lead this aspect of the evaluation on behalf of the National Evaluation to identify, validate and disseminate promising practice arising from the Strategy. This will involve collaborations between the service providers, FPs and the local and national evaluators.

Promising practice does not refer only to front-line service delivery. There may also be promising ways, for example, of consulting communities, engaging with hard-to-reach families, or helping small NGOs develop new services. A number of the Promising Practice Profiles will be able to focus on issues needing examination, such as family violence and change in Indigenous families.

Promising practice will be identified through a call for submissions. Submissions will be short-listed for external validation. After external validation a selection of practices found to be promising against the established criteria are to be incorporated into the National Evaluation as Promising Practice Profiles. These will be presented as descriptive cases with justifications for why they are promising. Analysis will be undertaken linking the practice to specific aspects of the Strategy and relevant policy and research.

It is not always easy to identify promising practice. It is likely that some services may see themselves as particularly innovative or worthy, but they may not be as promising

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when compared to others or may not be suitable for wider application. Others may not see themselves as being particularly promising but may be doing things in a potentially interesting and challenging way. It is important, therefore, that a consistent and clear method is developed which can be used to assess whether a particular service or approach should be counted as ‘promising’.

The Promising Practice Profiles will be linked to the overall evaluation questions and the underlying principles and outcomes identified for each of the initiatives within the Strategy. The approach to each of the initiatives will each have different foci to align with the Strategy. For example, where it is appropriate Local Evaluators will undertake tasks for cases within ItG and CfC.

The most promising approaches will be developed into comprehensive profiles that will include justifications for selection. The profiles will also include analysis that links local practice to the aims of the Strategy and policy and research issues. These will then be disseminated broadly. It is anticipated that these practices will be adopted by SFCS projects in the first instance, and by the broader community in other parts of the country.

### **Communities for Children**

**Process:** FPs will have the primary responsibility for identifying promising practice in the CfC initiative. These will be shortlisted and then validated by the Local Evaluators according to national criteria and process established by the National Evaluators. The National Evaluators will be responsible for monitoring and auditing the process, as well as for final review of submissions.

**Focus:** Profiles will be selected on the basis of the Outcomes Framework (Healthy Young Families, Early Learning and Care, Supporting Families and Parents, Child-Friendly communities, Families and Children’s services working effectively as a system). Also, there will be calls for practice that demonstrates the ability to reach the most disadvantaged communities and includes ingredients of successful change and ways of overcoming barriers to change.

### **Invest to Grow**

**Process:** These initiatives have already been assessed as having potential for broader application. There are considerable resources dedicated to local evaluation and so greater capacity to work in partnership with the National Evaluators to validate submissions (see below).

**Focus:** The outcomes for this initiative are more concerned with models of service delivery so promising practice will include consideration of: the factors which facilitate improved outcomes, the factors which facilitated and inhibited the project logic models being implemented in different contexts, the effectiveness/efficiency of the model, and suitability for national or broader application. The Outcomes Framework is also relevant for assessing promising practice.

### **Local Answers**

**Process:** Project Managers will have the primary responsibility for identifying promising practice in the CfC initiative. These will be shortlisted and then validated by the Project Managers according to national criteria and process established by the National Evaluators. The National Evaluators will be responsible for monitoring and auditing the process, as well as for final review of submissions.

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Focus: The outcomes identified in this initiative include local responsiveness and the extent of the participation of local stakeholders. The emphasis here will be on demonstrating impacts, including significant and micro change as well as unintended outcomes.

### **Criteria for Promising Practice Innovation**

- Evidence-based
- Explicit theory of change
- Viability
- Sustainability
- Replicability
- Other criteria

These criteria will be clearly defined in consultation with SFCS stakeholders through an e-discussion, through the SFCS Partnership and with FaCS. Details can be found at <http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/index.html>. The profiles will then be assessed using the criteria with relative weightings according to each funding stream.

### **Process for Selecting Promising Practice Profiles**

*Finalise evaluation criteria and validation process.*

1. The selection criteria will be outlined in a short document that the NE will develop in consultation with the Evaluation Steering Committee, the SFCS Partnership, FaCS and the SFCS network.
2. The validation process will be developed by the NEs and the LEs and is expected to incorporate a mix of independent peer review, linking to research literature, participant involvement, review of management data, internal evaluation, reflections on practice and ongoing improvement. This will also be developed in consultation with the Evaluation Steering Committee, the SFCS Partnership, FaCS and the SFCS network.

*Submissions*

3. There will be up to three calls for submissions over the three years. Notices will be placed on the two e-lists (CAFCA-chat & e-valuation), in the evaluation newsletter and on the relevant websites. The call for submissions will be in the following areas:
  - Improved services and other initiatives in early childhood (coordination, quality, reach, sustainability)
  - Supporting families/parents
  - Early learning and care
  - Healthy young families
  - Child-Friendly Communities
  - Other processes and practices (especially for hard-to-reach families)

*Shortlisting and validation*

4. Short-listing of Promising Practice Profile submissions. The selection of submissions is expected to include examples of each outcome area (as above), as well

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as other processes and practices. These processes and practices are expected to be similar to topics that have been identified for the themed studies, such as family violence, rural/remote and change in Indigenous families (See section 9.1 for list of possible themes).

5. Request Local Evaluators (CfCs and ItG) to validate submissions using nationally developed methodology. The National Evaluators will be responsible for monitoring and auditing the process, as well as for final review of submissions.

6. Support and coordinate validation of projects (in partnership with Local Evaluators) and prepare justification statements and policy/research analysis on final selection of projects.

7. The final review of submissions will be undertaken by the National Evaluators in consultation with FaCS and SFCS Partnership.

#### *Dissemination*

8. Discussion papers will be published and distributed. Feedback will be invited from Evaluation Steering Committee, SFCS Partnership, SFCS Network and FaCS.

9. Publish a list of all submissions and case studies of validated Promising Practice Profiles on Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia website.

### **9.3 Link between National Evaluation and Local Evaluations**

Each strand of the SFCS has varying responsibilities in terms of the National Evaluation. These are outlined in more detail in Appendix E. (see Table E1, Table E2, Table E3 and Table E4). In summary, in CfC Local Evaluators are responsible for undertaking a number of tasks for the National Evaluation (see Table E1). National Evaluators will develop templates for data collection that will be available for CfC, ItG and LA to use as appropriate. Analysis of evaluation reports and project-level data from each stand will be used in the Synthesis Report.

### **9.4 Progress Reports Analysis**

Information to be analysed in this component of the process evaluation will include output data collected by services in the progress reports and provided to the FP and Project Managers. It will include information about the types of services provided, the intensity (how often a service was provided per day/week/month) and duration (over what period of time a service was provided) of service provision, staffing, levels of funding, a profile of participants (children and families). Additional information to be analysed in this component, such as satisfaction outcomes and perceptions of change, could be collected by Local Evaluators.

### **9.5 Database Options and Data Flows – Progress Reporting (CfC, ItG and LA)**

The proposed database for progress reporting is based on the following principles:

- The effort required by CfC, ItG and LA projects should be minimised; and
- The flow of information should be as simple as possible.

There is no direct flow of progress information between the sites/projects themselves and the National Evaluator so that the reporting requirements of projects to FaCS are not duplicated. Rather the National Evaluator will draw upon the regular reports that FPs or individual projects produce for FaCS. The progress report information for each strand of the Strategy will use information drawn from the FaCS Evaluation

Module where possible and will depend on the timely provision of data by FaCS to the NE.

A detailed map of proposed data flows between projects, FaCS and the National Evaluators is contained in Appendix F. As the map shows, the National Evaluation database will interface with FACS project management systems, drawing on existing information where possible, to minimise duplication of data collection and entry. Linking to the Evaluation Module will also mean that National Evaluation data for each project is linked to relevant funding data and milestones, geographical and target group data and other information about the projects and their management. Sites and projects will have an established reporting mechanism from February 2006.

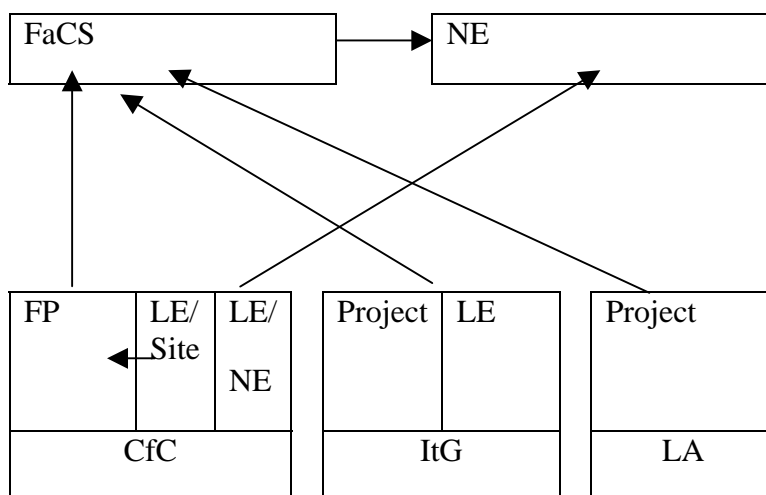
Reports go to FaCS and are uploaded by Project Officers. The NE will minimise the amount of extra data that needs to be collected and entered by aligning data for the National Evaluation with FACS project management data as much as possible.

We propose the following data flow option for progress reports:

- For CfC, individual services to complete statistics and provide returns to nominated data manager<sup>9</sup> within three weeks of the end of the reporting period. Note that the FP will neither hold nor report identifiable data on participants. The data manager will then provide data to FaCS within six weeks of the end of the reporting period.
- For ItG and LA, projects to provide data to FACS within three weeks of the end of the reporting period.

Figure 2 provides a graphic representation of these data flows.

**Figure 2 Data flows for progress reporting**



## 9.6 Other Data Flows

In addition to the progress reports, FPs will provide annual progress reports to FaCS, which will include local evaluation milestones and interim reports. Data collected from projects by Local Evaluators as part of the National Evaluation will flow directly

<sup>9</sup> In some areas it may be the Local Evaluator who is responsible for data collection and local analysis.

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to the NE team, and will use templates provided by the NE. Quantitative data collected directly by the evaluation will be stored in a relational (Microsoft ACCESS) database at SPRC. Qualitative data will be analysed using NVivo software. Information relating to Promising Practice Profiles will be held securely by AIFS on behalf of the National Evaluation.

### **9.7 Synthesis Report**

The Synthesis Report will combine information from each of the initiatives of the Strategy (CfC, ItG and LA) and draw out common themes relating to the efficiency and effectiveness of early intervention. This will focus not only on ‘what works’ in terms of outcomes, but also on implementation issues at the strategic and operational levels.

The purpose of this report will be to synthesise the data collected from various components of the SFCS evaluation, including the National Evaluation, local evaluations and project data. This will allow the National Evaluator to identify general principles and themes arising from the implementation of the Strategy as a whole.

The analysis will synthesise the evaluations of specific programmes undertaken by the local evaluators, and will assist in building the evidence base by identifying the key elements of successful programme delivery, and highlighting areas for further development and research. The findings in this report will act as the foundation for future research and contribute to the evidence base.

Analysis for the synthesis will involve triangulation of data and methods from the various evaluation components. Comparing and contrasting findings will help test effectiveness and attribute causality, recognising that most communities benefit from more than one project and are situated in the broader context of other Commonwealth and State policies.

### **9.8 Communication Strategy**

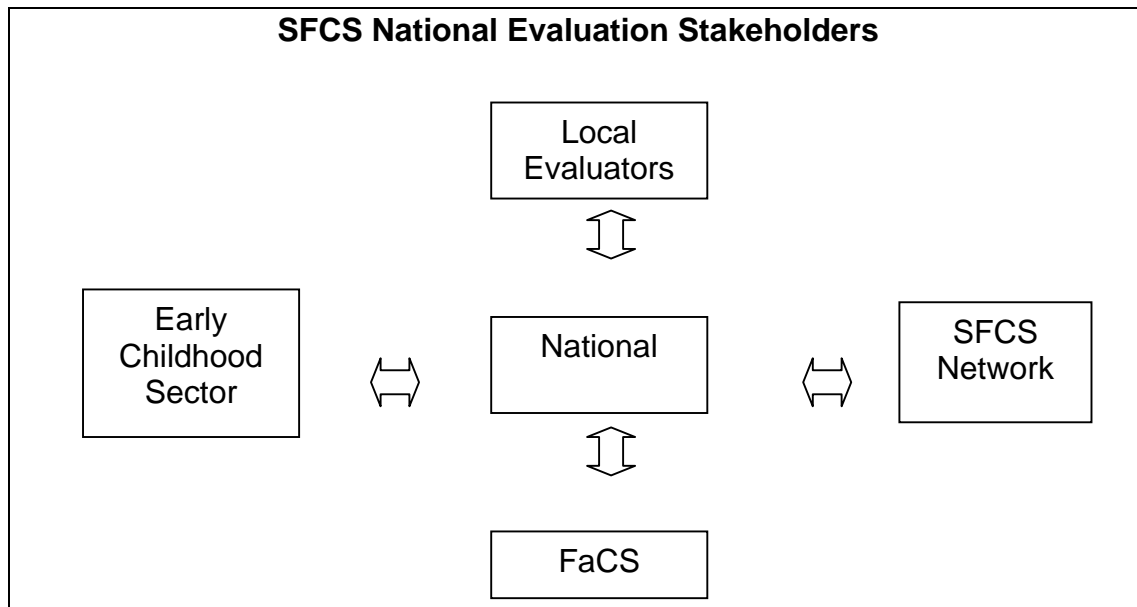
The Communications Strategy serves the major stakeholders, including the Minister, FaCS, CfC Facilitating Partners, Project holders (ItG and LA) and Local Evaluators (CfC and ItG). For the purposes of communication, these groups are referred to as the ‘SFCS network’, which includes all organisations and projects directly related to SFCS, including the Local Evaluators. The Communication Strategy also addresses the broader community. The Local Evaluators have a special relationship to the National Evaluators and so these are also addressed as a distinct group. There are also stakeholders in the early childhood sector who have an interest in the outcomes of the Strategy.

The Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia (CAFCA) located within AIFS, has a central/specific role in facilitating communication between National Evaluators and Local Evaluators and the Project Holders. CAFCA will develop and operate an organised, coherent and integrated set of activities and services to enhance linkages and communications among the SFCS network. The provision of relevant and accessible information is aimed to improve participation in, and support for, the SFCS National Evaluation.

There are four main linkages across which information would pass as a two-way transfer. Each of these linkages is addressed in the Communication Strategy.

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In addition, there are relationships within the National Evaluation Team between SPRC and AIFS (the National Evaluation Team); the National Evaluation Team and expert advisers, and the National Evaluation Team and FaCS. This communication Strategy does not address these internal linkages.



### **Purpose and Objectives**

This Communication Strategy has been prepared to identify and facilitate timely and strategic information exchange between all parties who have a direct responsibility for the process and outcomes of the SFCS National Evaluation.

The objectives are:

- To increase interaction and feedback between the evaluators and the SFCS network;
- To enhance the range of knowledge and experience available to all parties involved in evaluating SFCS initiatives;
- To promote the integration of good practice within SFCS funded initiatives;
- To recognise the diversity of participants in the early childhood sector; and
- To distribute evaluation material and publications relevant to the SFCS network and the early childhood sector.

### **Expected outcomes**

It is expected that this communication Strategy will lead to a number of outcomes for the National Evaluation team, FaCS and the SFCS network including:

- The availability of useable, practicable and understandable resources for local evaluators, as well as other practitioners in early childhood;

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- Awareness of the National Evaluation activities at local, regional and national levels will enhance participation in the evaluation of services and facilitate the expansion of best practice, networks and models;
  - Active support for the National Evaluation is expected to improve the quality of data collected;
  - Connections and linkages among the SFCS network will be enhanced by knowledge and information sharing across the research, practice and policy sectors;
  - Potential for collaboration, coordination or even integrated connections could be generated; and
  - Expanded knowledge of early childhood will inform SFCS funded initiatives and improve local outcomes.

With feedback and interaction between, within and across agencies and persons contributing to the SFCS evaluation effort (local and national), there will be increased opportunities to create, develop, test and disseminate appropriate research and learning. This will influence policy and practice within the SFCS network and more broadly.

### **Communication with Stakeholders**

#### *Approach*

Communications will be multi-faceted based on principles of adult learning and community development. The National Evaluation will use the AIFS partners existing communication services through CAFCA to support the communication activities of the National Evaluation. CAFCA actively promotes 2-way learning through:

- *Active participation:* whereby adults learn best by doing and through active participation.
- *Meaningful material:* learning is more effective when participants can relate new material to their existing knowledge and experiences.
- *Holistic learning:* it is important to start with the big picture of entire job, and break down into component parts
- *Practice and reinforcement:* appropriate opportunities to practice and apply new skills and knowledge enhance the learning process. Positive feedback and encouraging comments about work or progress reinforce the learning.
- *Multi-sensory learning:* a variety of mediums are employed.
- *Feedback:* learning is more effective when participants receive appropriate feedback, whereby the knowledge of results of past performance leads to modification and improvement of future performance. Feedback should occur through the process and not be confined to the end.

The next step to implement this Communication Strategy is to determine the information needs of the key audiences. In the first instance these are the local evaluators and the SFCS network. The needs identified here will relate directly to specific responsibilities related to the Strategy but will overlap with those of the early childhood sector more broadly. AIFS is in an excellent position, having hosted

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SFLEX (now CAFCA) in the previous Strategy, to understand the needs of the SFCS network. CAFCA will consult with the identified stakeholders to determine their information needs and how these should be met.

This process has commenced with a recent survey of Clearinghouse members that sought to ascertain their information needs. Through this survey, along with internal evaluations of SFLEX and the projects they supported, a number of preferences have been established. It has been consistently established that face-to-face communication is highly valued. In the past, information has been highly valued in the form of the SFLEX bulletin. Stakeholders have indicated that they are also interested in the internet and e-discussion as a resource for information and networking.

Further work in ascertaining information needs will involve the identification of communication processes within each of the stakeholder groups. Examples of this are that the CfC strand has its own newsletter that may be used for distribution of information. It has been suggested that the ItG project holders and the Local Evaluators may require their own e-discussion list. It is also expected that the National Evaluators will take advantage of events such as the ARACY national conference for CfC. As these processes and events are identified they will be incorporated into the communication plan. Where possible, information needs will be met through existing processes. This will ensure that communication is appropriately targeted and that resources are used efficiently. It is likely that gaps in the information flow will be identified over time and the Strategy will be flexible enough to address these as they arise.

#### *Activities*

CAFCA proposes 6 separate but overlapping and linked communication activities to involve and inform the SFCS network and the broader sector. These include:

- SFCS Evaluation Newsletter

A six monthly newsletter will be published and distributed to the SFCS network. It will be published electronically and distributed by email and on the website. These newsletters will be short, simple and accessible. It is envisaged that they will include short notices and newsletter type items. They could contain information about the SFCS, project descriptions and news, articles on best practice elements of projects, descriptions of research-in-progress, news and reviews of the latest publications and resources, developments in relevant policy or legislation and training/conferences and workshop notices. More widespread and direct dissemination is possible through the CAFCA (previously SFLEX Bulletin) mailing list (approx. 7000 members).

- National Evaluation website

CAFCA will host a regularly updated and widely recognised web site with links to FaCS, SPRC and others where relevant. The site will be identified with the consortium and include updates on the National Evaluation, Promising Practice Profiles, bibliographies, forthcoming events and links to related sites. Tailored evaluation resources and publications will also be published electronically on this site.

- Subscriber-based e-discussion list

CAFCA will provide an interactive, monitored medium for open use by individuals in the SFCS network. It is envisaged that two distinct lists will be run. First, a general early childhood and community development discussion list would support the

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network of SFCS initiatives across Australia. Second, a more specific list would focus specifically on the National Evaluation.

The e-lists will provide the structure for discussion of research, policy and practice issues. It has the potential to facilitate dialogue on key issues arising within the evaluation process. A recent survey of Clearinghouse members found that respondents were interested in discussion about the evaluation of the SFCS 2004-2008.

In order to have some control over the issues being discussed and the quality of the electronic interchanges, the list will be monitored. Being 'monitored' means that there is a list owner who scrutinises messages and intervenes where required. The list owner may also actively promote discussion on the list. AIFS will work closely with FaCS on issues arising and in responding to these.

- Clearinghouse Library Service/ Help Desk (funded separately)

Researchers, professionals and community groups who are involved in the evaluation require access to the best and latest information to help them with their work. The AIFS library already compiles and catalogues a comprehensive collection of the latest International and Australia prevention and early intervention research and practice literature and resources. Because many of these resources are already being acquired, substantial savings for the Stronger Families Clearinghouse are enabled.

Primary stakeholders (Clearinghouse members) will be provided with material directly, and will be able to place requests through the website. Material will be made available to other clients by the interlibrary system.

A Help Desk is established in the AIFS library to answer queries by telephone, fax, mail, email or in person. General queries are handled by the Help Desk staff and requests for more specialised information are referred to the CAFCA team. Help Desk staff are experienced reference librarians who will respond to queries by drawing on the extensive resources of the research library and all in-house databases. Where necessary the staff can also draw on external online and Internet services to supplement existing information resources.

- Resources

CAFCA has the capacity to develop and disseminate reports, templates and other resources produced by the National Evaluation team. For example, model instruments, ethics guidelines and consent forms, research/evaluation guidelines.

- Conferences, Seminars and workshops

CAFCA has the capacity to design and deliver presentations and workshops at pre-existing forums designed for the SFCS network. They also have the expertise to tailor events specifically for local evaluators and the SFCS network (for example regional workshops).