

# National Partner Strengthen & Adapt Programme: Year 1 national evaluation

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

In May 2020, Sport NZ received \$265m funding over four years to support the play, active recreation, and sports sector to re-set and rebuild from COVID-19. \$30 million of this was allocated to the National Partner Strengthen & Adapt programme (NPS&A programme). This programme is intended to build the capability, capacity, and resilience of National Partner organisations (partners) and their delivery networks.

Investment was made available from 1 July 2021 for 3 years for the first wave of organisations (Wave 1). This evaluation report provides a process evaluation that reflects on the progress of Wave 1 after the first year of funding.

### Evaluation design

The evaluation will test the NPS&A intervention logic (see Appendix 1). At this stage, a process evaluation is appropriate for understanding what has happened so far, how well things are going, and the factors that are supporting and challenging partners. To explore this, the evaluation involved:

Data source	Timing	Level of data
<b>Formative interviews</b>	May 2022	9 partners
<b>Partner reporting to Sport NZ</b>	June 2022	9 partners
<b>Sport NZ interviews</b>	September-October 2022	17 stakeholders
<b>Partners' self-rated progress and transformation ratings</b>	October-November 2022	10 partners
<b>National Partnership Managers' perceptions and partner progress ratings</b>	December 2022	4 National Partnership Managers

Draft findings were presented at a sensemaking discussion session on 23 November 2022 and additional insights from the session have enriched the analysis.

As time progresses an outcome evaluation will be appropriate. This will require quantitative data from partners and Sport NZ, more extensive surveys, interviews, and case studies.

The following summarise the evidence against each evaluation question using the data sources listed above.

### How well have the partners managed the process of changing, managing and implementing projects?

Overall, partners are making good progress across most change projects. Representatives from 10 of the 11 Wave 1 partners rated the progress of their change projects (total n=33) as:



Ratings from NPMs matched the self-ratings of partners for 23 of the 33 change projects (70%). Differences between partner self-ratings and NPMs' ratings were usually half an interval measure and no differences exceeded one interval measure.

Using change project documentation, we identified the main focus or foci of each change project and explored patterns according to perceived level of progress. We found that:

- 'Highly developed' change projects tended to focus on improving workforce, engagement, and set-up
- 'Consolidating' projects tended to focus on changes to organisational process, systems, and structures
- 'Emerging' projects tended to focus on digital technologies, new areas/approaches to implementation and strategic changes that required buy-in.

When aggregating progress scores, two of the larger partners were 'highly developed' in terms of progress and this is likely to be due to greater capacity and capability; and most others were 'consolidating'.

## Were the projects implemented as intended?

All change projects were underway and most projects were being implemented as intended. Variations related to delays in recruitment, needed adjustments, and COVID-19. Sport NZ stakeholders agreed that partners were attempting significant change and that they would be strengthened for the future.

The relative emphasis on "strengthening" versus "adapting" was discussed by a few Sport NZ stakeholders. Many perceived that partners were attempting significant change and that they would be strengthened for the future.

## What supported partner progress?

Key enablers were:

- Support from and via Sport NZ (supportive NPMs, workshops, access to subject matter experts, online drop-ins, evaluation capability support)
- Leadership, governance, and stakeholder buy-in and support
- Recruiting/engaging the right people with the right skills
- The skills of specific individuals, with cultural expertise specifically mentioned.
- Communication and relationships with networks
- Collaboration and clear communication
- Partners' mindsets

## The importance of “mindset”

While partners identified many challenges to implementation, they felt they had also made significant progress. They expressed commitment to change and resolve to realising their goals. Key reflections included:

- Keep the focus on project goals and desired change
- Remind yourself that it is natural to experience uncertainty
- Find ways to feel okay with change, experimentation, and learning

## What challenged partner progress?

The barriers were naturally the reverse of these things. Other key barriers were:

- The disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Changes in legislation
- The time required by partners to support engagement, collaborate, and set up groups
- Internal capacity to deliver on the change projects
- Difficulties with recruitment
- Resistance to culture change and behaviour change
- Sustaining organisational buy-in and engagement.

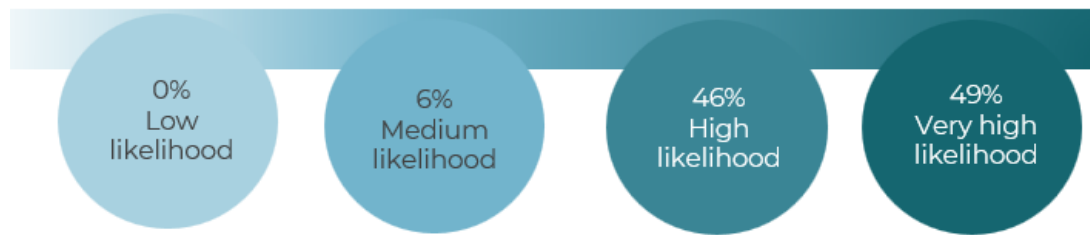
The ability of partners to continue to deliver their change projects with the ongoing challenges of COVID-19 was frequently acknowledged. Partner leads emphasised the importance of people and relationships in creating and managing projects and the importance of “mindset” during these evolving circumstances.

## To what extent have partners changed their business, organisational structure, or operating models? And, how well have they managed any change process?

This question is more challenging to answer because success varies across partners in terms of their vision for change. Stakeholder interviews highlighted the complex nature of transformation. A range of stakeholders also felt that it was too early to tell but that the process would bear fruit.

*“I think some learnings come out of that period... [the pandemic]. There will be good thinking and future tweaks that come out of things. I think it's probably too early to expect they're going to have all of these amazing ideas and transform their organisations in the next couple of months.” – Senior advisory*

Most partners were confident that their change projects would support transformation in the future (ratings were provided by 10 of the 11 Wave 1 partners for 33 change projects: n=33)



Discussions with NPMs about partners' change projects and potential transformation highlighted the range of understandings and aspirational nature of transformation.

## Conclusion and considerations

Overall, most projects are being implemented as intended and are making good progress. Despite the challenges of COVID-19, all change projects have commenced, and partners have often found ways to work around recruitment challenges and skill and knowledge gaps within their teams. Projects focusing on changes to organisational systems, structure, and processes are naturally taking longer than some of the projects focused on workforce and engagement. That said, recruitment continues to be a challenge for many partners.

While it is too early to reflect on the transformative nature of the work undertaken to date, there is confidence at a partner and Sport NZ level that the efforts are on track to result in learning and achieve transformation in the future.

## Key considerations

The process evaluation has highlighted:

### ***There is a need to continue supporting partners***

- Continue to adapt the types of supports available, for example, the partners were keen to have professional development relating to change management, project management, community engagement, and data management and security
- Continue to provide opportunities for partners to connect and share with one another (for example, a national hui is planned for February 2023).

### ***Partner activity could be explicitly linked to NPS&A outcomes***

- This could create greater visibility of the contribution of partner activity to the NPS&A outcomes, the role of support from Sport NZ, and the external factors that will support and challenge progress. While this detail has been considered, it would be beneficial to represent it in the intervention logic.

### ***Future reporting and evaluation activities could be refocused to deliver deeper and richer evaluation insights***

- Review ideas for enhancing the 'data' or evidence provided for the partner reporting. This could be informed by the one-to-one evaluation capacity building support provided by Synergia. In addition, detailed partner profiles could be developed in order to track change over time.
- Use a revised intervention logic to be more specific about the outcomes that each partner is contributing to, and reporting on in the future.
- Consider using the progress rating scale as a regular means of tracking progress through the NPMs (this could be incorporated into internal dashboard reporting) and consider creating ratings that are negotiated between partners and NPMs so that a natural form of moderation is included.