



SYNERGIA

National Partner Strengthen & Adapt Programme Evaluation

YEAR 2 SUMMARY REPORT FOR SPORT NZ | IHI
AOTEAROA

DECEMBER 2023

Acknowledgements

Synergia would like to acknowledge the time and contributions of the National Partners and Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa (Sport NZ) stakeholders that took part in this evaluation. We would particularly like to acknowledge the National Partners who gave their time and insight through surveys and interviews to support the evidence presented in this report.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the second annual evaluation report for Sport New Zealand’s National Partner Strengthen & Adapt Programme (the S&A programme). This Year 2 report focusses on progress and outcomes, factors supporting and challenging implementation, adaptation and learning, and key considerations.

The S&A Programme

\$31.5m of funding was allocated to S&A over four years, from July 2021. This provided support for Partners to strengthen and adapt their organisational infrastructure and capabilities to enhance their sustainability, and resilience to future COVID-like events.

S&A is designed to build the capacity, capability, and resilience of Partners and their delivery networks, so that they are best positioned to meet the needs of participants and athletes into the future.

Partners (34) have been brought on in four, successively smaller, Waves. S&A operates in the spirit of partnership and the following principles:

Figure 1. Strengthen and Adapt programme principles.



Evaluation of S&A

This Year 2 evaluation report draws our evaluation support to Partners and evidence up to September 2023 from:

Data source	Timing	Level of data
Sport NZ Partner Progress Dashboard	Up to September 2023	All 34 Partners
Partner reporting	September 2023	11 Partners
Sport NZ interviews	July-August 2023	11 stakeholders
Partners survey	August 2023	25 Partners
Deep dives (Partner interviews and data analysis)	Finalised August 2023	4 Partners

Key findings

How well have Partners managed the process of creating and implementing projects?

Most Partners are delivering their projects as intended and managing them well:

- 18 of the 25 Partners indicated that they are managing their projects well.
- Over 80% of projects (43 out of 53) are on track (some completed), eight are delayed but progressing, and two projects are at-risk.

Delays relate to changes in senior leadership, time to set up change projects and getting the right people on board, particularly in the bi-cultural and digital transformation space. Projects identified as 'at risk' were paused due to changes in senior leadership.

Partner feedback indicates that the demands of BAU provision, and changes in key personnel are particularly felt by smaller organisations.

Given the scale and complexity of change projects, this result represents good progress. There are no red flags in terms of the approach. The main aspect for Sport NZ to consider is that a partner-centric approach to implementation will impact on the timing of short-term outcomes. This is the pragmatic reality of walking alongside the sector for a transformational change journey.

What supported and challenged Partner progress?

Enablers	Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support from Sport NZ National Partnership Managers• Recruiting the right people with the right skills• Flexibility from Sport NZ to support the pace of transformational change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recruiting people with the right skills and expertise• Staff turnover, especially senior leadership• Limited internal capacity and competing priorities• Creating buy-in and a desire for change within the organisation, across associations, clubs, etc.

In contrast to last year, COVID-19 was not identified as a barrier. Capacity, staff turnover, and leadership remain a dominant theme. Having dedicated leadership is important and turnover in roles is felt acutely across the Waves.

This year concerns about sustaining S&A beyond the contracted period was raised as a potential challenge, particularly from Wave 1.

How has the S&A Programme supported Partners to connect, network and share learning with one another?

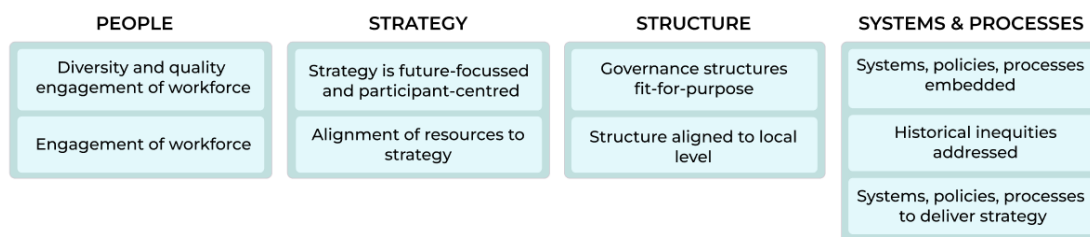
Sport NZ facilitate online and in-person hui to support connection and engagement across Partners. Regular drop-in sessions also provide opportunities for Partners to connect, and these continue to be well attended. The communities of practice have been valued, particularly in the technology space.

The support that S&A provides to enable Partners to connect was identified as an important aspect of strengthening the system. There has been a deliberate effort from the Sport NZ team to increase this aspect of programme delivery this year.

Relationships with National Partnership Managers (NPMs) are positive and remain crucial, as are relationships with Sport NZ Subject Matter Experts (SMEs).

How well have Partners achieved their change project outcomes?

Partner change projects contribute to five S&A short-term outcome areas:



Partners are at very different stages. This impacts on the visibility of outcomes. At this time of this report:

- Wave 1: 2 years, 2 months in
- Wave 2: 1 year, 3 months in
- Wave 3: 3 months in
- Wave 4 are just starting.

Subsequently, Waves 2, 3 and 4 are not expected to report on outcomes yet.

Partners and their change projects are also at various stages of implementation; 5 of the 8 Partners identified as 'delayed but progressing' are Wave 1. This means that even some Wave 1 Partners are not in the position to identify outcomes.

What can we tell from the available evidence?

We have three ways of identifying outcomes for Partners; Sport NZ Partner Reporting, deep dives, and our evaluation support. At this stage, we are focusing on Wave 1.

What we can tell from the evaluation support is that some Wave 1 Partners are collecting outcome data, although most Partners are not using this data to report to Sport NZ. Synergia received 11 Sport NZ Partner reports (eight Wave 1 and three Wave 2):

- A third of Wave 1 Partners are not in a position to report on outcomes yet.
- Most Partners who are in the position to report on outcomes do not include evidence of outcomes, with only three providing evidence of outcomes.

More systematic integration of monitoring and evaluation plans into reporting and NPM quarterly sweeps will enhance visibility of outcomes for the programme.

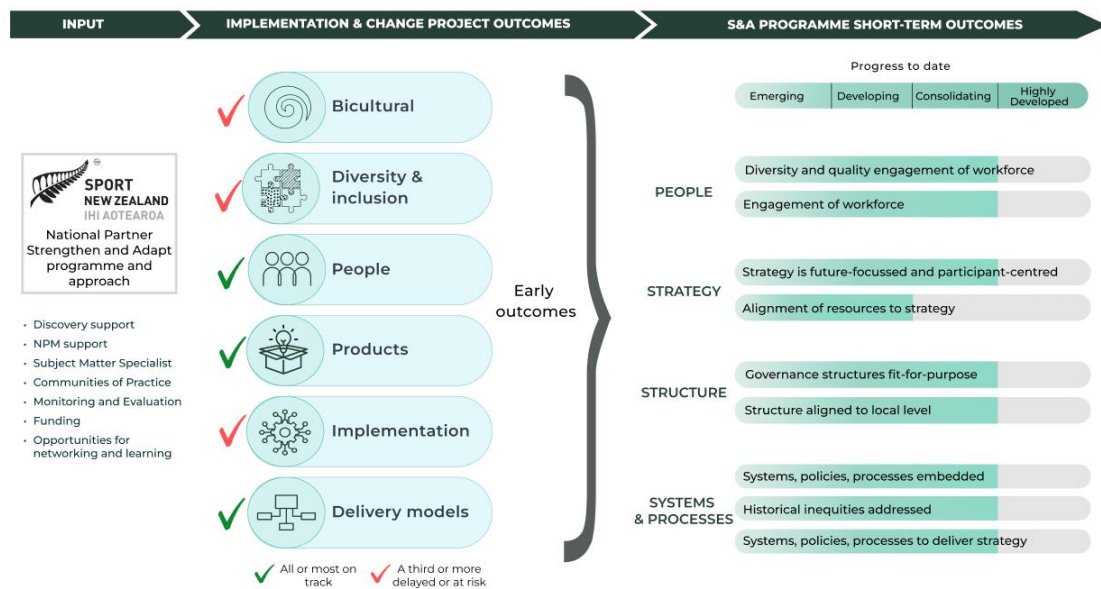
The deep dives in the full evaluation report provide a more in-depth view of Partner outcomes. They also highlight the value of more intensive evaluation support for securing visibility of outcomes.

What do Partners say about the S&A Programme outcomes?

Partners reflect on the status of the S&A outcomes through a survey (Figure 2). This identified that:

- Waves 1, 2 and 3 rate most of the S&A outcome areas and subdomains as consolidating. This means that this domain is well established, with no concerning gaps or issues, but not yet reached full potential.
- Alignment of resources to strategy was more likely to be rated as developing. This means that Partner resource planning somewhat enables the achievement of their strategic goals.

Figure 2. Partner reported progress against short-term S&A outcome



There is little variation in the survey ratings across the Waves. This is due to other initiatives and strategy work contributing to these outcome areas, as well as S&A.

What else are we seeing and learning in terms of outcomes?

- Sport NZ's intervention logic indicates that S&A outcomes will be visible from 1 to 3 years. This is likely for some change projects and not others.
- Nearly all Partners are engaged in an extensive amount of work for S&A and have shared insights that while not always specific to the S&A intervention logic outcomes, reflect the value and contribution of the S&A programme.
- Transformational change is a process and a long-term outcome. Many Partners reflect on the ways that they are learning and adapting from this work. The journey is as much an outcome and a catalyst for change.
- Change management is not fast or easy. Partners are building their change management capability, an S&A outcome that improves the strength and agility of the system.

Learning and adapting

The S&A programme has adapted to the capabilities and capacities of each Wave. This has included changes in the investment cap, investment amounts for the discovery phase, and changes in the approach to evaluation support.

The evaluation indicates that the next phase of learning and adapting is likely to relate to how Partners are supported to transition S&A work into BAU.

Looking to the future

- Continue supporting the sector to strengthen and adapt. Recognise that strengthening and adapting could reflect a continuum of change, not all Partners are ready for a big leap.
- Continue to recognise that some Partners might need more time or support to get going but balance this with a focus on identifying outcomes.
- Extend this way of working into other Sport NZ work.

Tracking progress and Partner reporting

- Review the way that Partner progress is tracked to better highlight the extent of delays or progress in the Sport NZ dashboard.
- Increase the focus on the M+E outcomes and financial sustainability in the quarterly sweeps. Ensure this information is consistently recorded.
- Simplify the approach to Partner reporting: The reporting asks: What impacts have you seen? The reporting could ask: What changes have you seen in your outcomes of X, Y and Z as a result of your S&A change project? Please include any evidence that you have to support this.

Understanding the value of S&A

- Developing a theory of value creation (the value proposition of S&A).
- Align the evaluation to the Sport NZ value for investment framework.
- Be more explicit about the links between S&A and Sport NZ's Futures Work in the intervention logic. This has been a focus from Wave 2 onwards.
- Allocate more evaluation support time to Partners, build on the deep dive approach. This will reduce the risk of little of outcome data in future reports.

Adapt the approach to telling the story of change for Partners

- Use the operational themes to provide a deeper insight into sector change, the impact of the communities of practice, and systems changes.
- Develop an approach to data collection or quarterly sweeps that recognises the delays in delivery and outcomes for many Partners.

Working with Partners and NPMs

- Increase the connection between Synergia and the NPMs to enhance a focus on outcome tracking.
- Engage Partners in a shared sensemaking to better identify outcomes.