

Summary of evaluation of the NSW Settlement Partnership and the delivery of the SETS Program

November 2022

Background

The NSW Settlement Partnership (NSP) is a consortium established in 2015 of 21 community organisations¹, led by Settlement Services International (SSI), delivering settlement services in agreed areas of NSW under the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) program². From 2015 to 2018, the consortium was funded by Department of Social Services under the Settlement Grant Program (SGP), then from 2019 to 2024 the consortium has been funded by Department of Home Affairs under SETS. Consortium members are located in metropolitan and regional/rural locations and vary in the size of their settlement programs.³

The SETS program aims to equip and empower humanitarian entrants, other eligible permanent migrants and their communities to address their settlement needs, in order to improve social participation, economic well-being, independence, personal well-being and community connectedness. One of the main entry points for the SETS is the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) which is provided for up to 18 months to refugees and humanitarian entrants who arrive through Australia's offshore Humanitarian Program.

The SETS provides interventions in two streams:

- **Client Services: providing clients with settlement-related information, advice, advocacy, and assistance to access mainstream and other services;**
- **Community Capacity Building: helps new and emerging community groups and organisations support their communities to increase social participation, economic and personal well-being and ensure that positive settlement outcomes are sustained.**

In mid-2020, SSI contracted ARTD Consultants to conduct an independent evaluation to describe the NSP model for client-centred service delivery, its evolution over time and its effectiveness delivering settlement services through the SETS program.

This evaluation aims to build the evidence base on the NSP model to better understand the key enablers of the consortium model and SETS program delivery that result in positive settlement outcomes for clients and communities.

The NSP Service Delivery Footprint

The Consortium (at October 2021) was comprised of a diverse range of organisations in metropolitan Sydney and regional NSW, including migrant resource centres and multicultural service providers and generalist, and ethnospecific organisations located in NSW (see overleaf).

¹ The Consortium comprised 21 organisations at the time of this evaluation

² Formerly the Settlement Grant Program (SGP) under the Settlement Services Programme (SSP)

³ For more information on the NSP go to: nsp.ssi.org.au

The NSP Service Delivery Footprint

- Advance Diversity Services (formerly St George Migrant Resource Centre)
- Accessible Diversity Services (formerly Auburn Diversity Services)
- Core Communities Services
- Community Migrant Resource Centre
- Illawarra Multicultural Services
- Focus Connect (formerly Macarthur Diversity Services Initiative)
- Metro Assist
- Mosaic Multicultural Connections (formerly Northern Settlement Services)
- Sydney Multicultural Community Services
- SydWest Multicultural Services
- Western Sydney Migrant Resource Centre
- Community Northern Beaches
- Connecting Community Services (formerly Dubbo Neighbourhood Centre)
- Gymea Community Aid and Information Service
- Manning Valley Neighbourhood Services Inc.
- Nepean Multicultural Access
- Mt Druitt Ethnic Communities Agency
- Cambodian-Australian Welfare Council
- Lebanese Community Council of NSW
- Melkite Charitable Foundation (formerly Melkite Catholic Welfare Association)



Methods

The evaluation used mixed methods including:

- A desktop review of NSP documents to describe the operations and governance of the consortium;
- A partnership survey of all CEOs and Settlement Managers of NSP members to reflect on the effectiveness of the NSP consortium model;
- Interviews with a sample of 14 organisations, SSI stakeholders and the Department of Home Affairs to explore the strengths and challenges of the partnership;
- An analysis of a range of data to explore outputs and client outcomes in the SETS program including a review of NSP reports to the Department of Home Affairs, an analysis of SCORE (Standard Client/Community Outcomes Reporting) data – described in more detail below - from four organisations in the NSP and interviews with 12 clients⁴.

The evaluation was overseen by an advisory group with representation from four NSP organisations and SSI.

Findings

The consortium membership has been very stable, with only a very small number of changes in membership since it was formed in 2015. One significant change has been the shift to a common data platform by almost all organisations during 2020, to promote greater consistency of data collection and reporting. Another, more recent change, has been the acquisition of funding to increase the level of specialist support in the area of domestic and family violence in 2021. In recent years, the consortium was well-placed to pivot to online service delivery and adapt to the challenges faced by clients and communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A partnership survey (adapted from the Nuffield Partnership Assessment Tool) provided the evaluation with a framework for assessing strengths and areas for development in the NSP. The NSP members reflected on the effectiveness of the partnership model which generated mean scores (Table 1) across the three dimensions of the Tool which can be summarised as:

- **The need for partnership**

There was very strong agreement that the NSP is addressing important place-based community needs and that they are addressed in an innovative way, without duplicating existing services. There was less agreement that there are sufficient resources available to the consortium.

- **Partnership governance**

Between 70% and 90% of CEOs and of Managers agreed to each of the attributes in this governance dimension. CEOs emphasised that partners were involved in developing the vision and goals of the partnership and that the terms of reference were clearly defined. Managers emphasised how the partnership can better demonstrate or document outcomes of its collective work.

- **Partnership in action**

There was strong agreement on the top three attributes: that partners have the necessary skills, that they actively work together to ensure goals are met and that partners make changes to organisation practice to meet the needs of the partnership.

⁴ Care was taken to include different size organisations (large, medium, small), based in both regional and metropolitan locations in all samples.

Findings continued

Table 1. Mean scores of CEOs and Managers of the NSP on the three dimensions of the Nuffield Partnership Assessment Tool.

Dimensions	Mean score CEOs n=11	Mean score Managers n=11
The need for partnership	3.0	3.5
Partnership governance	2.9	3.0
The partnership in action	2.8	3.1

Scale: 1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Agree; 4=Strongly agree

Overall, settlement managers assessed the NSP more positively than CEOs in the surveys. Areas where CEOs were more reserved were in relation to sufficient resources, inclusion of all partners in decision-making and administration/communication processes.

Stakeholder interviews provided additional data for assessing strengths and areas for development in the NSP.

The main strengths and challenges of the consortium, highlighted through the partnership survey and stakeholder interviews, included:

Governance and Structure

Strengths

- **Successful in gaining SETS funding as a consortium.** Through responding to the changing environment of Commonwealth funding priorities by creating the NSP consortium, several organisations were able to preserve their settlement services and maintain their long-term service to local communities.
- **SSI facilitates conversations within the consortium and beyond it.** In its role as consortium lead, SSI works to facilitate conversations within the consortium through convening regular meetings as well as working groups and other opportunities for dialogue. SSI also provides strong advocacy to the Australian Government on behalf of the consortium and settlement services more generally as well as working to support individual organisations to advocate for change at the local level.
- **The NSP is a network, and a platform, with communities of practice.** Consortium members share information, learn from each other and support each other, including through sharing resources, particularly at the Settlement Manager level. The network provides opportunities to form additional partnerships for projects which are supported through the Settlement Innovation Fund (SIF) (an internal NSP grant funding mechanism to foster innovation). The consortium also provides a platform for organisations to share views with other organisations, regardless of size.

Challenges

- **Retaining individuality of philosophy and approach vs conformity for reasons of consistency, comparability.** A tension of the consortium model is between organisations' unique or distinctive characteristics and the pressure to shift towards consistency across the group in the delivery of SETS. For example, there are different views on using volunteers within services.
- **Advocacy.** Some organisations feel the loss of having a direct relationship with the SETS Program funder, that they enjoyed before the formation of the consortium, which they feel reduces their visibility with the Australian Government.
- **Relationship with SSI.** A number of organisations commented on the tension between SSI as lead organisation of the consortium, with privileged access to information about organisations, and also a potential competitor with these organisations in other contexts. SSI stakeholders responded that while SSI has expanded its service streams, it was not a competitor of members of the NSP in the settlement area. It wasn't clear the extent to which this was a consortium issue or a tension within the SSI membership (some members of the NSP are also members of SSI).
- **Changes in settlement/ external environment.** The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migration and settlement, and the focus on regional settlement were raised as external challenges that might be drivers of change to the structure of the NSP in the coming years.

Operations and Service Delivery

Strengths

- **Depth of knowledge and experience.** The consortium brings together a great depth of knowledge and experience in settlement services. Through regular Quarterly Meetings, Settlement Manager meetings and working groups there are opportunities to think collectively, with the benefit of insights and expertise of the group.
- **Strategic thinking in a dynamic environment.** There is an ongoing need for the consortium to adapt to changes in government policy and practice within the settlement sector. Strategic thinking within this dynamic environment is a necessary part of leadership and can benefit from the combined insights and experience across the organisations.
- **Place-based approach.** The organisations in the consortium do not overlap in their geographic areas, and in this way provide a place-based approach across a very large area of NSW, without duplication at a local level. There is considerable diversity across the consortium, with many settlement communities represented, which facilitates a seamless transition from the HSP to the SETS.

Findings continued

- **Data collection and reporting.** Significant progress has been made during this evaluation towards consistency of reporting through the work of the Data Working Group and the cooperation of members in adopting the same data collection platform and adjusting their processes to new requirements.

Challenges

- **Operational level.** Operational level challenges seem to be well understood and are being addressed in an ongoing way, with attention to streamlining of processes and clarification of requirements. The areas raised included: number of meetings, reporting requirements, documentation and reporting templates, data collection, and the frequency and timeliness of communication.

- **Shared understanding.** There is a need for clearer documentation and communication on some matters, where a shared understanding is assumed, but may be lacking. The documentation is particularly relevant when there is turnover of key positions within organisations. Topics included the financial modelling used to allocate resources, the role and responsibilities of SSI as the lead organisation and decisions made by Working Groups. Work is being done to address many of these.

- **Reduced resources.** In recent years, the consortium has had to adapt to reduced funding (e.g. an overall reduction for final years of the contract, cost shifting for Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS) services, and expiry of the Social and Community Services (SACS) Awards supplementation).

Outputs and outcomes for refugees, migrants and their communities

For the period July 2019 to June 2020 (a period chosen to cover the first impacts from the pandemic as well as pre-pandemic output data), the NSP consortium reported 12,626 individual clients, delivering 26,917 sessions and 1,759 group sessions. There were 2,901 sessions on education and training and 1,388 sessions on facilitating employment pathways.

Monitoring program-wide quantitative analysis of client outcomes requires some form of pre and post assessment, with guidelines to promote consistency. In the SETS this is being provided to the Department of Home Affairs through the Data Exchange (DEX) using the Standard Community/Client Outcomes Reporting (SCORE). The DEX works to streamline outcome reporting across human services funded by the Australian Government measure what has changed for clients because of services they have received.

Findings from SCORE outcomes data

This evaluation analysed SCORE outcomes data from a sample of four NSP organisations for the period from July 2019 to June 2020. There was a total of 1,806 clients in the sample. Analysis of the demographic data for these clients showed a similar pattern to that of the whole NSP consortium.

The SCORE data has three categories: Circumstances, Goals and Satisfaction. Each category has multiple outcome domains, and uses a 5-point scale, from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)⁵.

⁵ Adapted from Measuring Outcomes: a beginner's guide available at: <https://dex.dss.gov.au/document/301>.

SCORE category outcomes

Circumstances

- Physical Health
- Mental health, wellbeing and self-care
- Personal & family safety
- Age-appropriate development
- Community participation & networks
- Family Functioning
- Financial Resilience
- Material well-being
- Employment
- Education & training
- Housing

Goals

- Knowledge and access to information
- Skills
- Behaviours
- Empowerment, choice and control to make own decision
- Engagement with support services
- Impact of immediate crisis

Satisfaction

- The service listened to me and understood my issues
- I am satisfied with the services I have received
- I am better able to deal with issues that I sought help with

Outputs and outcomes continued

Overall, the pattern of change shown by the SCORE data in the NSP was positive, with an average shift of two points on a five-point scale for domains within the Circumstances and Goals categories. In these two categories of SCORE the five domains with the strongest change in the SETS are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Top five domains with highest shift in average SCORE (Pre, Post) in Circumstances and Goals categories.

SCORE data: Circumstances	Change in SCORE (Pre, Post)
Community participation and networks	2.3
Family functioning	2.2
Personal and family safety	2.1
Employment, education and training	2.1
Housing	1.9
SCORE data: Goals	Change in SCORE (Pre, Post)
Changed skills	2.2
Changed confidence to make own decisions	2.2
Changed impact of immediate crisis	2.1
Changed behaviours	2.0
Changed knowledge and access to information	1.8

The final SCORE category of Satisfaction covers three outcome domains and is only measured following SETS service delivery, so the average was used. Overall, there is a high degree of satisfaction (average of 4.7 out of 5) with the level of listening and understanding of the issue demonstrated by the services, and also with the services received. In addition, the average score for the domain of whether the person is better able to deal with the issues they sought help for is also high (3.8 out of 5).

Findings from client interviews

Interviews with 12 clients accessing seven NSP organisations with a range of cultural backgrounds, age and gender, corroborated the positive findings of the SCORE data⁶.

Clients spoke about valuing:

- **Practical assistance.** Clients noted the importance of receiving support tailored to what they needed in the present moment. The availability of interpreters, and/or bilingual staff, was frequently mentioned as providing crucial support.
- **Information/education sessions.** Clients emphasised the value of receiving the information and support that gave them and their families the confidence to navigate service systems and access the services they need. Some clients emphasised how important it has been for them to have English language lessons.
- **Community activities.** A small number of clients talked about enjoying community activities where they can meet people and learn more about Australian culture (though these activities were less common during the pandemic).



⁶ Originally, focus groups with SETS clients were planned. However, a wave of COVID-19 in mid-2021 resulted in major public health restrictions across NSW and it was not feasible to proceed with focus groups (even online).

Conclusion

The NSP consortium, formed in 2015, has delivered settlement services and related initiatives that reached thousands of refugees, migrants and their communities across metropolitan, regional and rural areas of NSW. For example, in the two financial years when this evaluation was conducted on one measure of the reach of the NSP's delivery of the SETS, more than 25,000 (19/20) and 30,000 (in 20/21) group and individual clients were supported. This was a period of significant disruption for SETS clients and communities during critical phases of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The evidence from this evaluation indicates that the NSP is not only reaching communities but is providing consistent, valuable and place-based support for individuals, families and communities as they settle in Australia. Overall, the views of organisations gathered through this evaluation were positive regarding the need

for and value of the consortium, with the strengths of the NSP outweighing the challenges. The consortium is enabling smaller organisations to continue to provide settlement services in their area to their communities, thus providing localised and tailored services across more areas and to a larger number of clients, than would otherwise be possible. Settlement Managers benefit from the community of practice provided through their joint meetings and other opportunities to share practice experience, ideas and resources. The depth of sector experience across the NSP provides opportunities for shared learning and for strategic planning and advocacy in a dynamic and challenging environment, which has the potential to benefit all of the partner organisations and the communities they serve into the future.



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Reference

ARTD Consultants. (2022). *Evaluation of the NSW Settlement Partnership and Delivery of the SETS Program*.