

An Important Message

Welcome to this special edition of *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies e journal*. The focus of this issue is **Measuring Social Impact**. The topic has become one of increasing concern within the community sector as government and corporate funding bodies demand ever more detailed evidence of value achieved in return for the funding provided. This demand has now gone far beyond the traditional need for accountability metrics. It is not just a matter of whether the money is appropriately acquitted, but whether it actually makes a difference, and if so, to whom. This is no easy question to answer. Are we talking about assisting a specific identified group of clients? Or more generally, providing support to the wider community? Are we talking about the impact of a single program? Or of the organisation as a whole? Or indeed of a whole industry?

Some would argue that the attempt to measure impact is pointless, and indeed dangerous if it leads to an ever increasing bureaucratic specification of what is valued. Social impact is not the same as economic impact, and it is dangerous to try to measure one in terms of the other. With social impact we seek measures of quality of life, not dollars saved. Often social impact is diffuse and long term, and as such not easily amenable to any metric.

However, as the adage goes, if you can't measure it, you can't manage it, and ultimately there is no justification for allocating resources to it. So increasingly there is a call, not just by funding bodies, but by the public at large, for a better evidence base for assessing the value of the social impact of the service or event in question. It is therefore becoming more imperative to develop rigorous measures of social impact, both for planning purposes, but also as a means of political justification and advocacy of a policy, and more locally as a justification for continued resources. This special issue of the *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal* is concerned with issues of social impact in the Australian context. However, the reader should find the material as relevant in most other jurisdictions where there is a call for better measurement.

All the papers in this issue arose out of a special seminar/ workshop held by the Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Research Centre of the University of Technology, Sydney

(CCS) in 2011. An invitation was extended to academics and practitioners alike, and some 100 people attended. The morning was devoted to a series of papers, several of which are presented here. The afternoon was devoted to small group workshops designed to identify current issues in measuring social impact within civil society organisations in Sydney, and explore potential solutions to those issues. In preparation for the day's workshop a small survey of civil society organisations was commissioned, and the overall findings presented at the opening of the seminar/ workshop. Thus, the first paper in this special issue is "everyone's story counts" by the commissioned author of that work, Dr Barbara Bloch. This paper served to frame the day's proceedings, but also provides a brief summary of the results of the workshop groups in the afternoon. Using a brief literature review and the results of some 20 community sector interviews as well as the proceedings of the workshop itself, Barbara Bloch presents a series of challenging questions that need to be resolved in the search for good social impact measures.

The second paper is by a research team from CCS, headed by Dr Melissa Edwards, and funded by a UTS partnership grant. This team worked with Surf Life Saving Australia, a large iconic community based organisation to develop measures of social impact. This paper reports the first stage of that enquiry with an analysis of a series of focus groups from Queensland, NSW, Victoria and South Australia. The aim of the project is to identify what kind of social impact the organisation has among its members and the wider community, apart from water safety.

The third paper in this special issue then broadens the quest for social impact indices, this time in the context of the fishing industry in Australia. The author, Dr Kate Barclay, argues that while much progress has been made in assessing the environmental and economic sustainability of fisheries in Australia, there has been scant attention to social sustainability of fishing communities impacted by recent changes to the industry.

The fourth paper also looks to finding measures of wider community impact, this time of aboriginal communities, and using tools that allow control of the measurement process to remain within those communities. Thus measurement and community planning are integrally related, and within the ownership of the community itself. This paper reports a project carried out by a team of NSW Government researchers headed by Bronwyn Batten and Kellyanne Stanford.

The final paper turns to the impact of a major event on the social life of an urban suburb. The team, including Dr Jason Prior and Dr Giorgio Blessi, examines the place of social capital in culture-led urban planning and development processes, and again, although in a different context and coming from a different discipline and a different industry, makes the same plea for better attention paid to the social impact of major events on the local community.

The five papers in this special issue of *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal* thus present an interesting and important message. We need to pay more attention to the social impact on local communities at every level, from the work of single community based organisations to major national industries and public cultural events. People matter, not as units in economic development, but as people who live and work in a place, whose well being matters. New ways of measuring social impact are emerging, but of course, much more research is needed to develop and embed these measures in the broader thinking of planners, funders and the general community.

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