

## Measuring Community Capacity: An Electronic Audit Template

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### Abstract

In view of the evidence that community capacity is positively related to economic and social development and well-being in rural communities, it is important to be able to measure and monitor it over time. In this paper, we present an electronic template that communities and government departments can use to profile and increase community capacity that is based on residents' on-the-ground understandings of the concept. The template was developed through participatory action research methodology involving literature reviews, framework development, workshops and interviews with residents of two South Australian rural communities, trial audits in these communities, and community capacity development planning workshops. Although we set out to develop a tool to audit a community's capacity to support primary industry growth, the template can be used with minor modification to assess community capacity more generally and for other objectives. In this paper, we present the template, template outputs, key underpinning concepts, project methodology, examples of community capacity profiles, and ideas for further template development.

### Keywords

Community capacity, social capital, community strength, audit tool, measurement

### Introduction

In this paper, we present an electronic template to measure community capacity in rural places. Although the template can be readily adapted for other purposes, it was designed specifically to measure community capacity to support local primary industries. The template draws on rural and community theory, provides a tool for communities and government departments to profile and increase community capacity, and is based on residents' on-the-ground understandings of the concept. Here we present the template, its outputs, the methodology used in its development, and its uses for policy and community development.<sup>1</sup>

Several years ago, the Department of Primary Industries and Resources South Australia (PIRSA) sought to develop an instrument to assess the capacity of a rural community to support the development of local primary industries and economic growth. Such an instrument was needed for several reasons. It is well recognised that community capacity contributes to economic growth and social development in rural communities (Luloff 1996, 1998; Flora 1998; Claude et al. 1999). In response to this evidence, governments seek to increase community capacity and provide funding on the assumption that a community already has the capacities required to conduct the project. So PIRSA needed a tool to profile a community's capacity and

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<sup>1</sup> For full details of the template and its development see the full technical report of the project (Cheers, Kruger and Trigg 2005) and demonstration template, which can be obtained from Hilton Trigg at Rural Solutions, Port Lincoln Office, Port Lincoln Office, PO Box 1783, Port Lincoln SA 5606 or email [trigg.hilton@saugov.sa.gov.au](mailto:trigg.hilton@saugov.sa.gov.au).

match this against capacities targeted by various funding programs. It was also decided that existing instruments are too subjective, general, or narrow, based on vague definitions of community capacity, uninformed by established rural and community theory and research, or are designed for different contexts. PIRSA also required community capacity data that could be integrated with other existing databases of, for example, industry capacity, markets, and the natural environment. Finally, an instrument was needed that is meaningful to, and readily used by rural people themselves.

So we designed a template to meet the needs of all stakeholders — residents, government, and local industry. Specific aims were to work with two communities to develop the template, trial it by conducting audits in these communities, and engage residents in a community capacity building planning process based on the audit. In keeping with stakeholders' objectives, we focused on the community's capacity to support the growth and development of local primary industries and, through this, the local economy. Nevertheless, we believe that the template can be used with minor modifications to measure community capacity for other purposes, such as supporting the development of health and human services or building community capacity per se. Requirements for the template were that it should be based on, and true to, coherent concepts and frameworks, informed by existing theory and research, and as objective, precise, and comprehensive as possible. The template also had to be user friendly, easy to complete, engaging, based on strong information, capable of producing sound quantitative results and graphic outputs that are easy to interpret and useful for community planning, and accessible to all rural communities using locally available hardware and software.

## **Methodology**

The template was developed by a team comprising PIRSA and Rural Solutions SA staff, social researchers from the Centre for Rural and Regional Development (CRARD) at the University of South Australia, and community participants. We used a participatory case study design involving two rural, primary industry-based communities in South Australia. Methodology involved five steps.

**Step 1: Preparation.** Initially, PIRSA and Rural Solutions SA team members contacted a key local person in each community, visited the communities, and engaged participants. In each community, participants formed a local group to work with the research team. At the same time, we read literature reviews on community capacity and related concepts that had previously been conducted through CRARD (Cheers 2002a, 2002b; Edwards et al. 2003; Cheers et al. 2004a, 2004b; Edwards and Cheers 2004) and scanned other literature, searching for potentially useful concepts, frameworks and instruments.

**Step 2: Conceptual development.** A conceptual framework was constructed to underpin the template, drawing on preliminary work by PIRSA (McClure and Cock 2003), established rural and community sociology theory and research, and a community strength framework (Cheers et al. 2004a, 2004b). We decided to organise the framework and template according to sectors (e.g. *primary industries, employment, and education and training,*) and capacities (e.g. *management and leadership*). We then drafted a list of sectors in preparation for the first community workshops. During these, we introduced participants to the project, obtained their feedback on the draft conceptual framework and sectors, identified some capacities for each sector, brainstormed indicators for these capacities, and had preliminary ideas about how capacities might

be presented in the template. Following these workshops, the research team finalised sectors and drafted a list of capacities. Finalising sectors involved sending the draft list to all community participants for comment followed by telephone conversations with them. Eventually, a draft matrix of 16 capacities by 11 sectors was constructed, which subsequently went through several iterations in discussion with community participants.

**Step 3: Operationalisation.** Having decided which sectors and capacities would be included, we now had to work out how the capacities would be operationalised, or actually presented, in the template. This meant establishing how they were understood by community participants and developing indicators for them. This is what we did in the next workshops. Following these, the research team finalised capacities, drafted a template format, and drafted indicators for each capacity for finalisation at the next workshops.

**Step 4: Template construction.** In consultation with two ‘community advisors’ in each community, the researchers drafted *statements* to present each capacity on the template, devised a scale to measure their strength, and drafted indicators for discussion at the next community workshops (see below). During these workshops, we did a final review of capacities and indicators, changed statement wording, made final decisions about scales to be used on the template, and reviewed draft descriptions for each sector (see below). The researchers then finalised capacity statements, indicators, and scales, sector descriptions, and an introduction to the template. We also finalised the electronic version of the template<sup>2</sup> and entered existing statistical data about the communities into it.

**Step 5: Audits and strategic planning.** Each community then conducted a community capacity audit. Graphic outputs were generated from the template (see below), which were then used in planning workshops to review each community’s capacity profile and develop capacity-strengthening strategies.

### Key concepts

We defined ‘community capacity’ as follows:

“Community capacity comprises the resources a community has that potentially can be used for primary industry growth, and the community’s ability to use these for this purpose in changing economic, social, and environmental contexts.”

This is similar to the Aspen Institute’s definition (1996). We distinguished between resources available to a community and the community’s capability to use these. *Resources* include, for example, financial and human assets, physical infrastructure such as facilities, the talents of individuals and organisations, relations between people and between organisations, access to services outside the community, and community attitudes toward local primary industries.

What a *community* resource is depends on how ‘community’ is understood. Because the template is intended for use by rural communities, it is based on the classical understanding of a community of place as ‘*people living in the same location and their relations with each other*’ (e.g. Wilkinson 1991; Cheers et al. 2004a, 2004b). This includes social structures such as organisations, clubs, and social groupings. A

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<sup>2</sup> The electronic form of the template was developed by Justin Dixon of Rural Solutions SA in consultation with the research team.

'community resource', then, is inherent in the people, organisations, and relations that comprise the community, the services available to it, and the community's relations with its external networks, partnerships, and organisations. 'Inherent in' means produced, sustained, owned, and/or used by the people, organisations, and relations comprising the community. Community resources usually are not specific to a particular industry or enterprise although, when they are, they are freely available to the wider community for a range of purposes.

Community capacity can be audited either generically or for a particular purpose. So the question arises as to whether community capacity is a generic concept or depends on the purpose of the audit. Can we measure community capacity per se or only a community's capacity to achieve a particular goal? There are three options. Firstly, community capacity can be regarded as constant in a community at a particular time regardless of the audit's purpose. Logically, then, the same capacities should be audited regardless of the purpose and each contributes equally to total community capacity. Alternatively, community capacity can be viewed entirely according to a particular purpose (e.g. Landscape and Social Research 2003). In this case, which capacities are included in an audit and the relative contribution of each to total community capacity depends entirely on the purpose at hand. The third view is that although the concept *community capacity* remains the same regardless of the audit's purpose, how it is operationalised in a particular audit depends on the purpose at hand. In other words, the same capacities are included in all audits of community capacity although how much each contributes to total community capacity depends on the purpose. For example, leadership in primary industry probably contributes more to the community's capacity to support local primary industries than leadership in religion. Accordingly, the relative contribution of various capacities to total community capacity to achieve a particular purpose is an empirical issue to be assessed as part of the audit. This template is informed by this view.

The template is informed by rural sociological theory and a framework of community strength. Our definition of community capacity encompasses both relations within a community, or *horizontal ties*, and those of local people and organisations with the community's external environment, or *vertical ties* (Warren 1963, pp. 237-8). Both are incorporated into the template. So, too, are the *strong ties* of dense networks of close relationships and the *weak ties* connecting people and organisations with networks they are not normally part of (Granovetta 1973).

*Community strength* is defined as *people (encompassing individuals, groups, and organisations) in a locality engaging with each other and the social infrastructure<sup>3</sup> for community betterment* (Cheers et al. 2004a, 2004b) (Figure 1). *People (and organisations) engaging with each other* is incorporated into many capacities in the framework (e.g. networks and partnerships). The notion of *community betterment* focuses an audit on a purpose, whether it is community betterment generally or a particular activity such as development of local primary industries. *Engagement with the social infrastructure* is the concept *community capability* introduced earlier as the community's ability to use available resources.

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<sup>3</sup> The term *infrastructure* is used differently in the community strength and community capacity audit template frameworks.

With one possible exception, all components of what is called *social infrastructure* in the community strength framework are incorporated into the template. The exception, *community narratives*, is not included

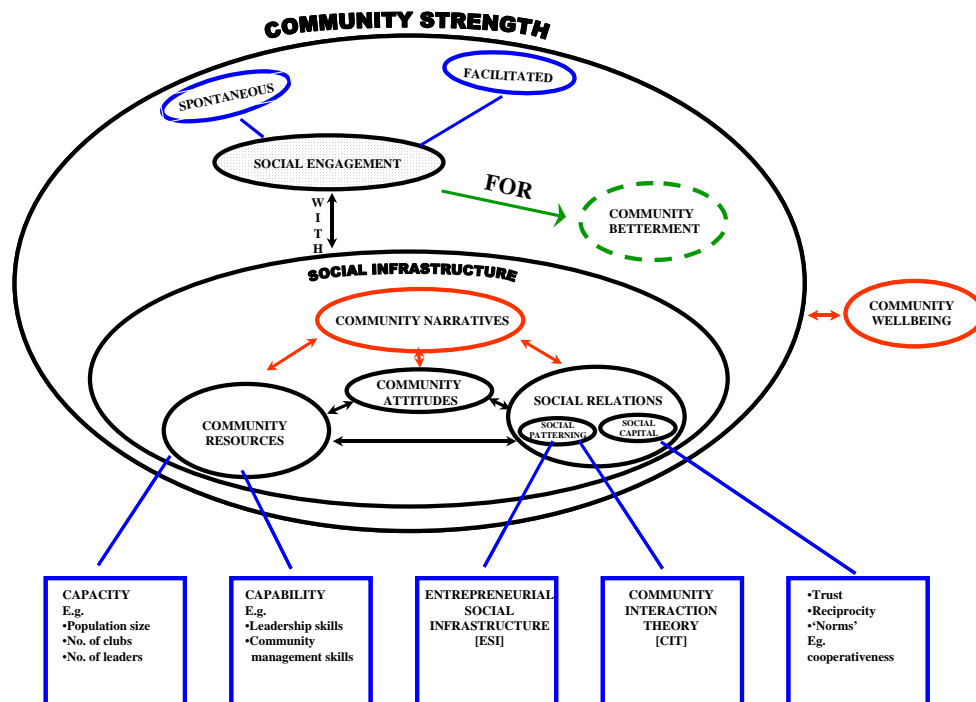


Figure 1. Community strength framework (from Cheers et al. 2004a, 2004b)

because it is not a capacity as defined here and cannot be measured simply in a quantitative template. Even so, the entire audit can be viewed as a community narrative because it is a story that at least some people in the community are collectively telling about its capacity.

*Community attitudes*, or shared understandings of what is worthwhile in and for the community, appears on the template as a distinct capacity. What is called *community resources* in the community strength framework embraces both infrastructure and capabilities as these are defined in the template framework. *Social relations*, the fourth component of social infrastructure, includes (1) the *patterning* of the links amongst people, organisations, and groups, and (2) *social capital*. Both are incorporated into the template, *social patterning* in a number of capacities, especially *networks and relationships*, and *social capital* as a capacity in its own right.

There are many frameworks for understanding social patterning in communities of place. The template draws most strongly on the concept 'entrepreneurial social infrastructure' and community interaction theory. Flora et al (1997, pp. 627-9) identified three dimensions and seven indicators of entrepreneurial social infrastructure, all of which are incorporated into the template. These are the extent to which, in a community of place:

- Different opinions, views, and attitudes are legitimated by acceptance of controversy, depersonalisation of politics, and focus on process
- Local resources are mobilised through individuals investing in the locality both individually and through collective structures
- Social networks are diverse and inclusive, and have dense inter-linkages and permeable boundaries.

While entrepreneurial social infrastructure emphasises purposes and outcomes, community interaction theory emphasises social engagement, networks, and partnerships. According to community interaction theory, a community has four components: locality, local society, social fields, and a community field. The locality is where the community is located geographically, the boundaries of which are identified by the community at the beginning of an audit. The local society is how the interaction, networks, and social relations are organised in the community. It includes informal relations such as groups of friends, semi-formal social structures such as families, and formal ones such as organisations. These are all incorporated into various capacities on the template. A local society has several social fields. Each of these is made up of people who share a common interest, such as business development or sport, and the relations between them. Social fields are identified as sectors in the template. But, according to community interaction theory, a local society is not a community unless it has a 'community field'. In the community field, people get together for the benefit of the entire community, not just particular interests. The community field is made up of "all those acts that contribute to the interests of the community as a whole by interlinking and coordinating the other social fields ..." (Wilkinson 1991, pp. 35-6). The community field is the *social organisation* sector in the template.

Finally, *social capital* is usually defined in terms of trust, reciprocity, and norms, such as cooperativeness, mutual support, partnership and the like, inhering in relations between people (e.g. Bourdieu 1985; Coleman 1988; Putnam 1995; Portes 1998). Social capital is defined as such on the template.

### **The template**

The template was designed to be simple and clear, user friendly, easy to understand and complete, engaging, true to its conceptual framework, accessible to virtually all rural communities using locally available hardware and software, and useful for planning by communities and governments. It also had to be capable of producing valid quantitative results and graphic outputs that are easy to interpret, have immediate visual impact, and are useful for community planning. It is written in *Microsoft Access 2000* because this program is widely available, easy to use, sufficiently powerful, and can produce the required outputs quickly. The template is completed collectively by people from a community in interaction with each other rather than by a sample or population of individual respondents. This is consistent with the macro concept of 'community' on which it is based, in contrast to viewing 'community' as the simple aggregation of individuals.

### **Sectors**

Thinking in terms of sectors is so common that the concept seems universally obvious, which was the case in the two pilot communities. A sector is defined for the template as a sphere of human activity in a community. The template is partitioned into 11 sectors, each of which is described on the initial screen for that sector. Table 1 presents these together with their operational definitions developed during the project. Sectors are *social organisation, primary industry, business, financial services, education and training, employment, environment, health and human services, sport and recreation, arts and entertainment, and religion*. They are presented in this order on the template for three reasons. *Social organisation* is first because it focuses on the community as a whole and the template is presented on the first screen as a tool designed to audit the capacity of the entire community. Placing *primary industry* next is consistent with the

purpose of this particular audit. The other sectors are ordered according to how directly they bear on primary industry development (e.g. *business* compared with *religion*), and how closely related they are (e.g. *business* and *finance*).

### **Capacities and sub-capacities**

Sixteen capacities were identified for the template: *mass, programs, access, information, marketing, financial resources, human resources, facilities, equipment, management, leadership, networks and relationships, government, politics, social capital, and attitudes* (Table 2). They are ordered this way on the template. Some capacities have two or more sub-capacities although not all of these appear for that capacity in every sector. For example, the capacity *access* has the sub-capacity *use of informal networks* only in the employment sector. Some capacities change their character from sector to sector. For example, the capacity *access* is defined in the *social organisation* sector as access to community and economic development organisations and services *within* the community because these organisations usually only service the local community. In contrast, in *education and training*, *access* is presented as access to programs and services provided by *local and non-local organisations*.

### **Capacity assessment**

For each capacity and sub-capacity, the template records community perceptions of the following:

1. *Capacity strength (CS)* — the strength of the capacity;
2. *Capacity importance (CI)* — how important the capacity is for total community capacity for the purpose at hand (e.g. to support local primary industries);
3. *Capacity contribution (CC)* — how much a particular capacity contributes to total community capacity relative to the others; and
4. *Capacity confidence (CO)* — how confident auditors are in their assessment of the strength of the capacity.

For each of these, the mean of sub-capacity scores for the variable is taken as the score for that capacity in the sector. Figure 2 presents a screen of the template demonstrating how they are presented on the template.

**Capacity strength (CS)** is measured on a four-point likert scale on which auditors record the extent to which they (collectively) agree or disagree with a statement provided (the *capacity strength statement*) (Figure 2). For example, the statement for the capacity *mass* in the *social organisation* sector is: "This community has the community and economic development organisations and services it requires". Capacity strength statements are introduced with this question:

**Table 1. Sectors**

Sector name	Template sector description
Social organisation	The <i>Social Organisation Sector</i> comprises all the people, resources, and community organisations within your community taken as a whole. Community organisations focus on the community as a whole. They include, e.g., community development associations and service clubs (e.g. Lions, Apex, CWA).
Primary industry	The <i>Primary Industry Sector</i> includes all the local enterprises and people involved in primary industries, and local and non-local organisations that support it. Organisations include, e.g., the South Australian Farmers Federation, the Agricultural Bureau, other producer and industry organisations and networks. Primary industries include agriculture, horticulture, viticulture, fishing, aquaculture, mining, and forestry.
Business	The <i>Business Sector</i> includes all the local businesses and enterprises that provide goods and services to your community, and local business support organisations such as chambers of commerce and business development organisations.
Financial services	The <i>Financial Services Sector</i> includes all the financial services to your community, whether they come from local or non-local providers. Services include, e.g., financial planning, deposit and cheque accounts, life and general insurance, superannuation, managed funds, shares, debentures, and other more complex financial investments. Providers include, e.g., banks, credit unions, accountants, taxation agents, financial planners, stockbrokers, and investment consultants.
Education and training	The <i>Education and Training Sector</i> includes all the education and training programs provided to your community. Education programs are provided by local and non-local formal education institutions, such as preschool, kindergarten, junior primary schools, secondary schools, TAFE Colleges, and Universities. Training programs are provided by employers, government departments, and private providers such as consultants.
Employment	The <i>Employment Sector</i> includes agencies that help local workers to find employment and local employers to find workers. Employment agencies can be locally or non-locally based.
Environment	The <i>Environment Sector</i> includes all the organisations and people involved in managing, conserving, protecting, and enhancing the community's natural environment. These could be located within or outside the community.
Health and human services	The <i>Health and Human Services Sector</i> includes all the health and human services provided to people in your community, whether by local or non-local organisations. These include, e.g., health care services in hospitals and the community; promoting better health; mental health services; a range of support services for families, children, youth, the aged, people with disabilities and homeless people; and housing programs. Services can be provided by a range of organisations, such as hospitals, community health, government departments, welfare organisations, churches, and meals on wheels.
Sport and recreation	The <i>Sport and Recreation Sector</i> includes all the local sporting activities, events, clubs, and organisations in the community and recreational activities that involve local people getting together. Sport encompasses competitive and non-competitive as well as outdoor and indoor sports. Recreation includes a variety of more formal activities such as dances, and informal activities such as socialising at the pub, picnics, parties, and going to the beach.
Arts and entertainment	The <i>Arts and Entertainment Sector</i> encompasses a wide variety of arts and entertainment activities that involve people getting together. Arts include, e.g., music, dance, pottery, and painting. The sector also includes all the entertainment provided to the community from both local and external sources. There are a wide variety of entertainment activities including, e.g., shows, festivals, movies, and theatre.
Religion	The <i>Religion Sector</i> includes all the local and non-local religious services provided to your community, such as church services, weddings, christenings, and spiritual and pastoral care. These are normally provided, e.g., by churches, chapels, synagogues, and mosques.

**Table 2. Capacities and sub-capacities**

<b>Capacity</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Sub-capacity</b>
<b>Mass</b>	Number and range of programs (services, provisions, activities, goods) <sup>4</sup> and organisations available to the community	
<b>Programs</b>	Suitability of organisations and programs to community needs and context	
<b>Access</b>	Community access to programs and organisations	Community access to programs and organisations
<b>Information</b>	Availability of information about, and to, the sector	Use of informal networks to find employment
<b>Marketing</b>	Marketing of the sector	Information in the sector about programs provided to it Marketing of the sector generally Marketing of the sector locally Marketing of the sector outside the community
<b>Financial</b>	Financial resources available to the sector	
<b>Human resources</b>	Human resources available to the sector	
<b>Facilities</b>	Facilities available to the sector	
<b>Equipment</b>	Equipment available to the sector locally	
<b>Management</b>	Management of organisations and programs in the sector	Local services and programs External services and programs
<b>Leadership</b>	Leadership in the sector	
<b>Networks and relationships</b>		Networks and relationships within the sector Networks and relationships between the sector and the rest of the community Networks and relationships between the sector and the community's external environment
<b>Government</b>	Government support for the sector	General government support State and Commonwealth government support Local government support
<b>Politics</b>		Management of diversity within the sector Advocacy by the sector to governments and other external organisations for resources for the sector Community success in attracting resources from government for the sector
<b>Social capital</b>	Social capital within the sector — trust, reciprocity, cooperation, and collaboration	
<b>Attitudes</b>	The extent to which the community supports the sector	Support for the community as a whole and each other Priority to economic growth and social development Cohesive, friendly, welcoming, and caring community Support for the sector

<sup>4</sup> The term 'programs' includes services, provisions, activities, and/or goods throughout this chapter and the template.

“What is your assessment of your community’s capacity in the ----- [e.g. Social Organisation] Sector using the indicators provided? Indicate your assessment by clicking whether you ‘strongly disagree’, ‘disagree’, ‘agree’, or ‘strongly agree’ with the following statements using the indicators provided.”

A Likert scale was chosen because it is easy to understand; direct, clear, and concise; demands a definitive response; a proven tool; and familiar to most people. A four-point scale was chosen to avoid a mid-point, which we<sup>5</sup> agreed could be used incorrectly as a ‘don’t know’ option.

Assessment of capacity strength should be based on sound information. We decided that a full community stocktake (e.g. of meeting rooms, telephones, and staff) would be far too onerous for communities to undertake, resulting in low template usage and poor information. At the other extreme, auditors could simply make an entirely subjective, global judgement without using sound information. So we adopted the middle ground of identifying indicators for each capacity from workshops and interviews, empirical and theoretical literature, and our pooled expertise. Indicators were chosen to be as objective and precise as possible, as few as possible for each capacity, but enough of them to provide sound information. Community auditors assess the strength of a capacity according to each indicator using this statement: “Assess your community’s capacity in the ----- [e.g. Social Organisation] Sector using the indicators provided”. Three response options are provided: ‘*strong*’, ‘*weak*’, and ‘*irrelevant*’.

A dichotomised scale was chosen to keep the instrument simple, clear, and direct. Auditors then use these assessments to complete the capacity strength scale.

**Capacity importance.** The *capacity importance (CI)* scale indicates participants’ assessment of how important a particular capacity is to total community capacity. The relevant template question is: “How important is this capacity in auditing your community’s total capacity?”. There are four response options: ‘*not important*’, ‘*minor importance*’, ‘*important*’, and ‘*extremely important*’.

**Capacity confidence.** Participants are then asked to indicate how confident they are (*CO*) in their assessment of the strength of the given capacity through this question: “How confident are you in this assessment?”. Four response options are provided – ‘*not confident*’, ‘*some confidence*’, ‘*confident*’, and ‘*extremely confident*’. This scale is included to assess the extent to which participants believe that the assessment of the strength of a particular capacity is based on sound, adequate information.

**Capacity contribution (CC)** is an assessment of how much a particular capacity is contributing to total community capacity at the time of the audit. It is obtained by multiplying *capacity strength (CS)* and *capacity importance (CI)* (i.e.  $CC = CS \times CI$ ).

**Text comments.** Auditors can also record brief comments relating to their assessment of each capacity. This provides contextual information that can be important for interpreting the quantitative ratings.

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<sup>5</sup> ‘We’ includes researchers and community participants.

## Template layout

Only a brief description of the layout of the template is possible here<sup>6</sup>. It has a number of screens.

**Screen 1** presents the purpose of the template, how it was developed, and who developed it.

**Screen 2 — Community Contacts** records auditors' details, their role in conducting the audit, and details of the particular audit (e.g. community, date). It also provides access to all outputs (see below) and every screen in the template.

**SOCIAL ORGANISATION SECTOR**

What is your assessment of your community's capacity in the *Social Organisation Sector* using the indicators provided? Indicate your assessment by clicking whether you 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'agree', or 'strongly agree' with the following statements using the indicators provided.

**This community has the community and economic development organisations and services it requires.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree

Assess your community's capacity in the Social Organisation Sector using the indicators provided.

	Strong	Weak	Irrelevant.
Number of organisations and services	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Range of organisations and services	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Additional Comments: (no more than 5 brief dot-points)

Organisations include, e.g.: community development organisations, economic development organisations, chambers of commerce, business development organisations, service clubs (e.g. Lions, Apex).

**CONFIDENCE LEVEL**  
How confident are you in this assessment?

Extremely Confident  
 Confident  
 Some Confident  
 Not Confident

**IMPORTANCE**  
How important is this capacity in auditing your community's total capacity?

Extremely Important  
 Important  
 Minor Importance  
 Not Important

Show Results

Orroroo > Social Organisation > Mass -- Statement No: 54

Figure 2. Template capacity screen for the capacity mass in the social organisation sector

**Screen 3 — Community Statistics** provides essential statistical data about the community from other databases. It includes demographic and economic data for both the local area and the postcode area, a measure of how remote the community's is (*Australian Remote Index for Areas (ARIA)*, Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001a), a measure of its socio-economic status (*Socio-economic Index for Areas (SEIFA)*, Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001b), and statistical data for each sector.<sup>7</sup>

The rest of the template is made up of capacity audit screens grouped into sectors.

<sup>6</sup> For a full description and an electronic copy see Cheers et al. (2005).

<sup>7</sup> We are considering incorporating data from other databases.

**Sector description screens.** At the beginning of each sector is a *Sector Description Screen*, which identifies, defines, and provides descriptive information about the sector. This is followed by the capacity (and sub-capacity) screens for the sector.

**Capacity audit screens (Figure 2).** Each screen presents the scales for measuring capacity strength (CS), importance (CI), and confidence (CO); indicator scales; and space for text comments. At the bottom left of each screen is a listing of the community, the sector, the capacity, and the capacity's number in the *Access* database. Clicking on these takes the user to the *capacity reports* for the capacity on the screen (see below). Several buttons at the bottom right of the screen take the user to the quantitative and graphic outputs and reports (see below) and to other places in the template.

## Reports

The template produces various outputs, each of which contains a set of quantitative and graphic reports that present a profile of a particular component of the community's capacity (Table 3). These form the basis of community capacity-building strategic planning. The most immediately useful reports are:

1. *Overall sector profile* — capacity strength, importance, and contribution scores for each sector (Figure 3)
2. *Overall capacity profile* — capacity strength, importance, and contribution scores for each capacity (Figure 4)
3. *Capacities for the sector* — capacity strength, importance, contribution, and confidence scores for each capacity in a particular sector (Figure 5)
4. *Sectors for the capacity* — capacity strength, importance, contribution, and confidence scores for a particular capacity in each sector (Figure 6).

**Table 3. Outputs and reports**

<b>Output</b>	<b>Reports</b>
<b>Overall community summary report</b>	Overall sector profile Overall capacity profile
<b>Sector reports</b>	Overall community profile Overall sector profile Capacities for the sector Capacity confidence If-then statements for the sector Capacity/sub-capacity comments for each capacity in the sector Capacity/sub-capacity raw data for each capacity in the sector
<b>Capacity reports</b>	Overall community profile Overall capacity profile Sectors for the capacity Capacity confidence If-then statements for the capacity Capacity/sub-capacity comments for the capacity Capacity/sub-capacity raw data for the capacity

### Overall Sector Profile

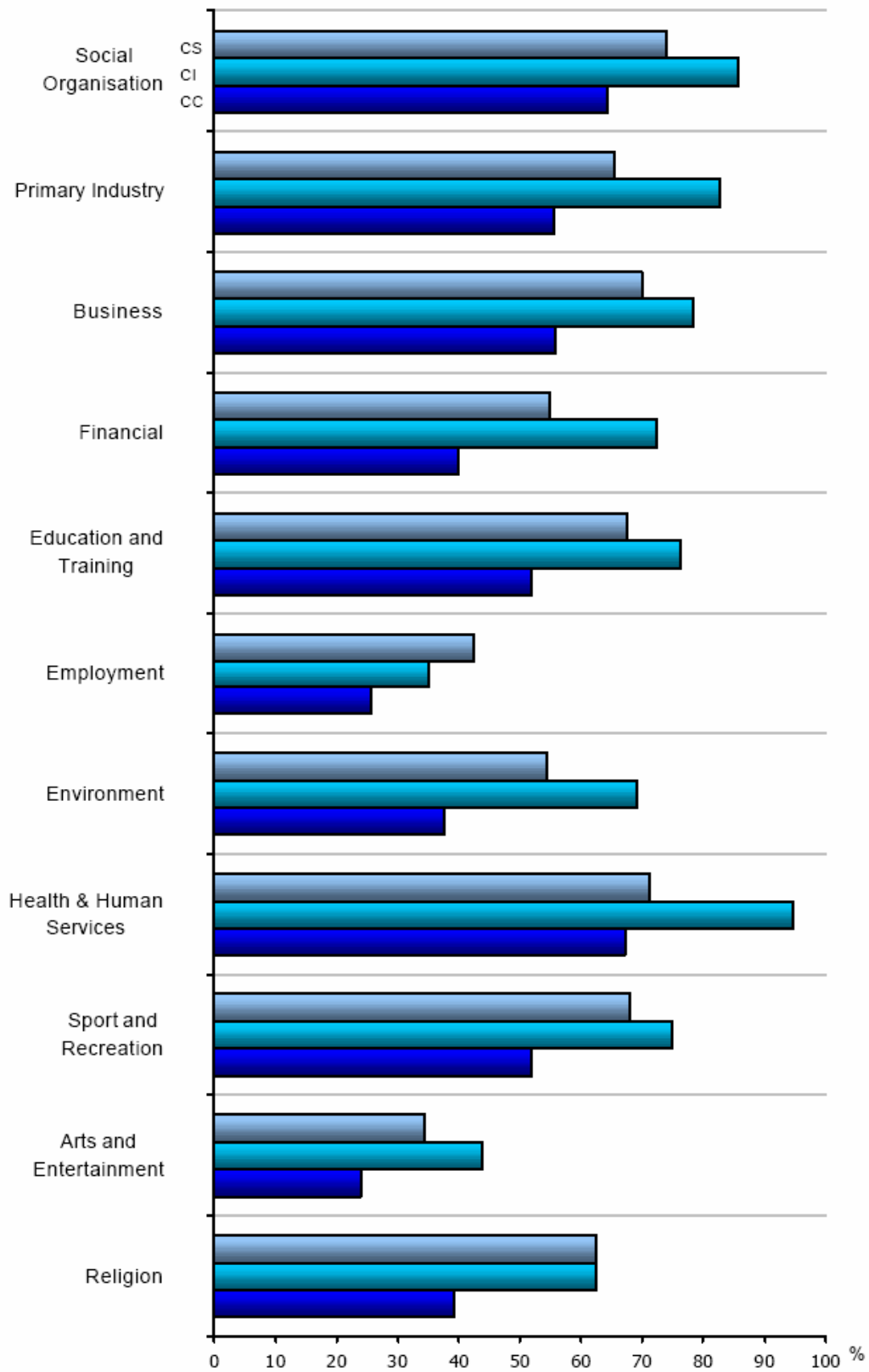


Figure 3. Overall sector profile for Farmland

### Overall Capacity Profile

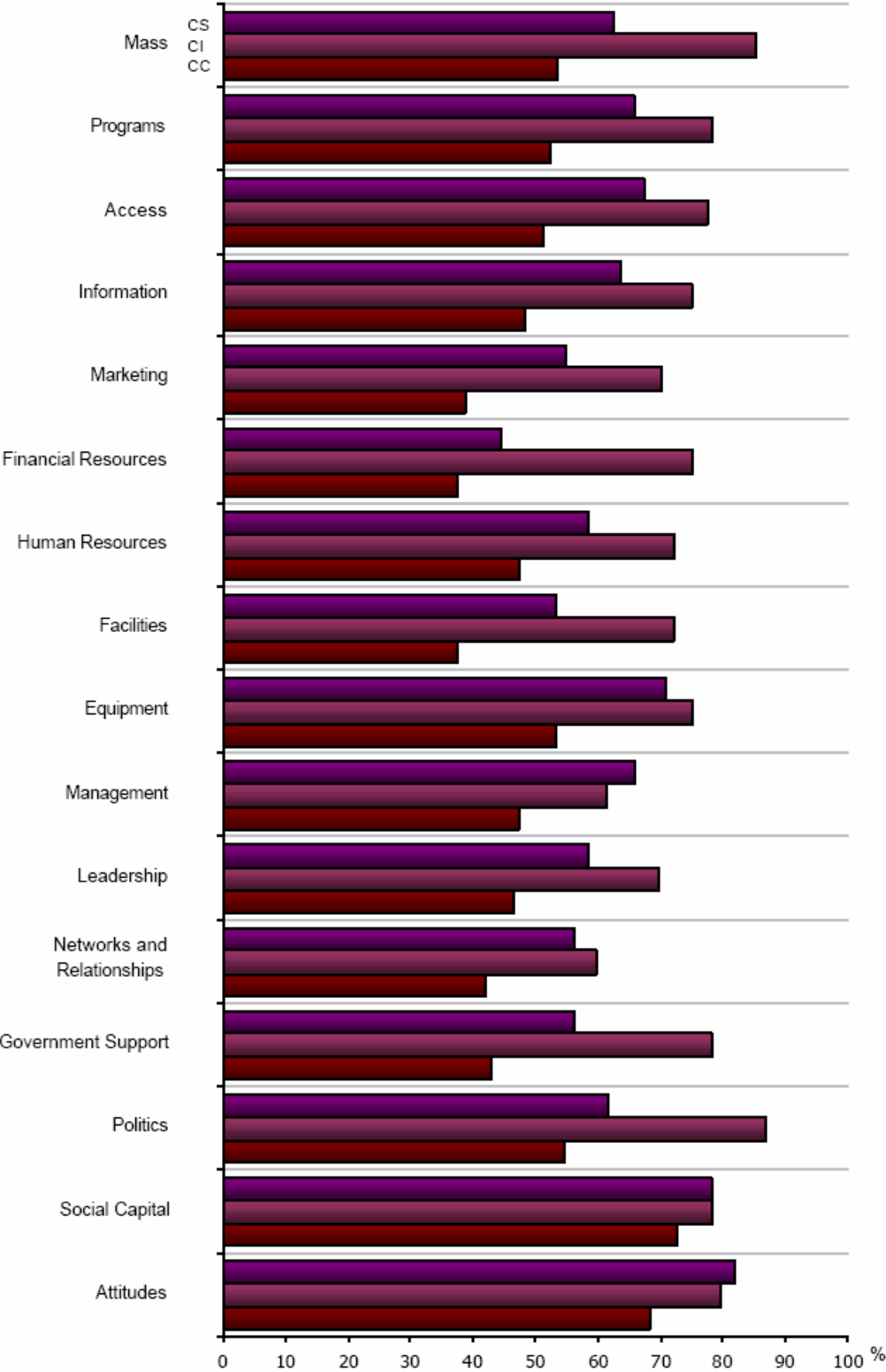


Figure 4. Overall capacity profile for Farmland

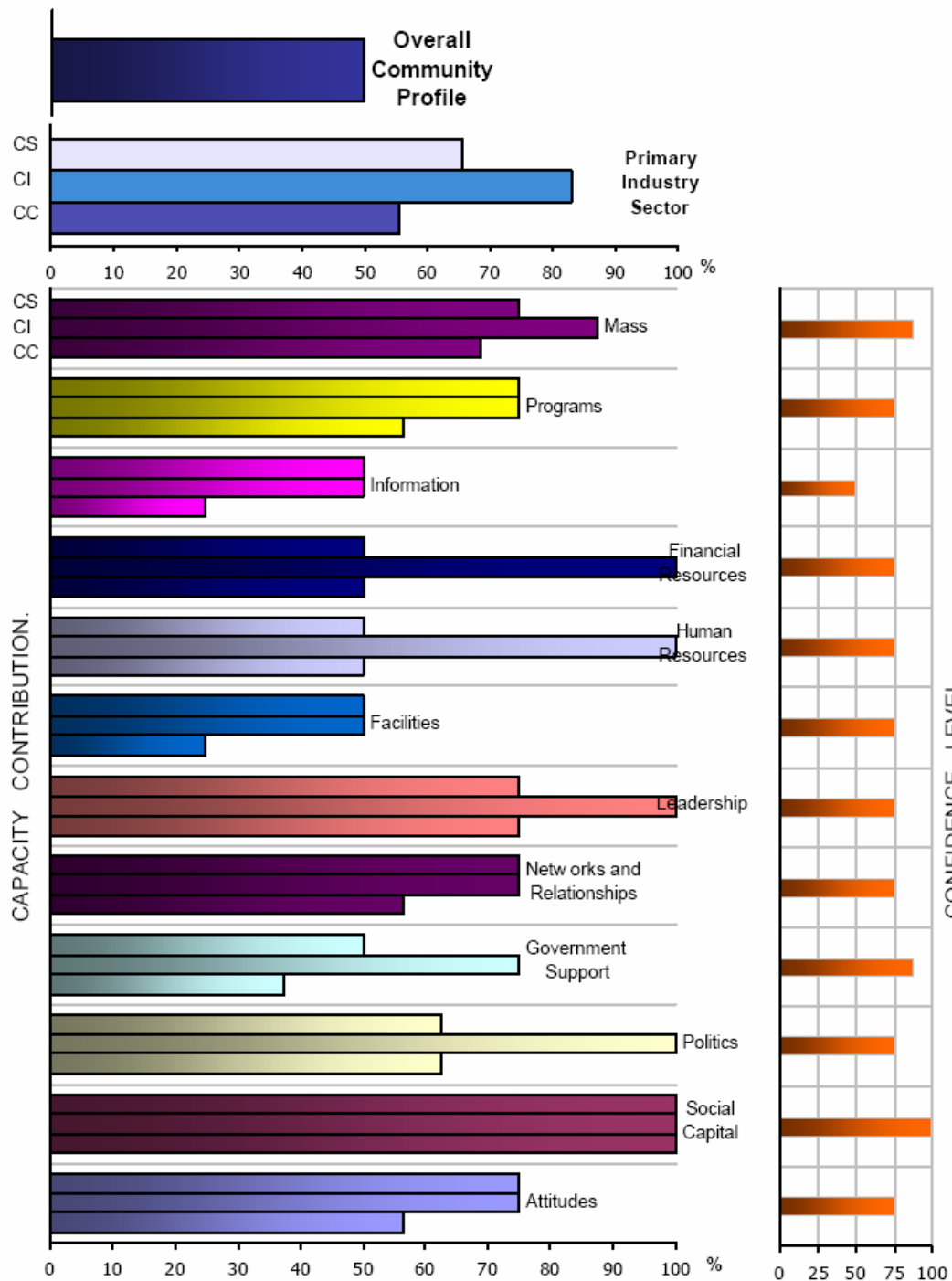


Figure 5. Capacities for the sector — Farmland *primary industry* sector<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> 12, rather than the full 16, capacities are profiled because results of actual audits are currently available only for an earlier version of the template, which did not have all capacities in all sectors.

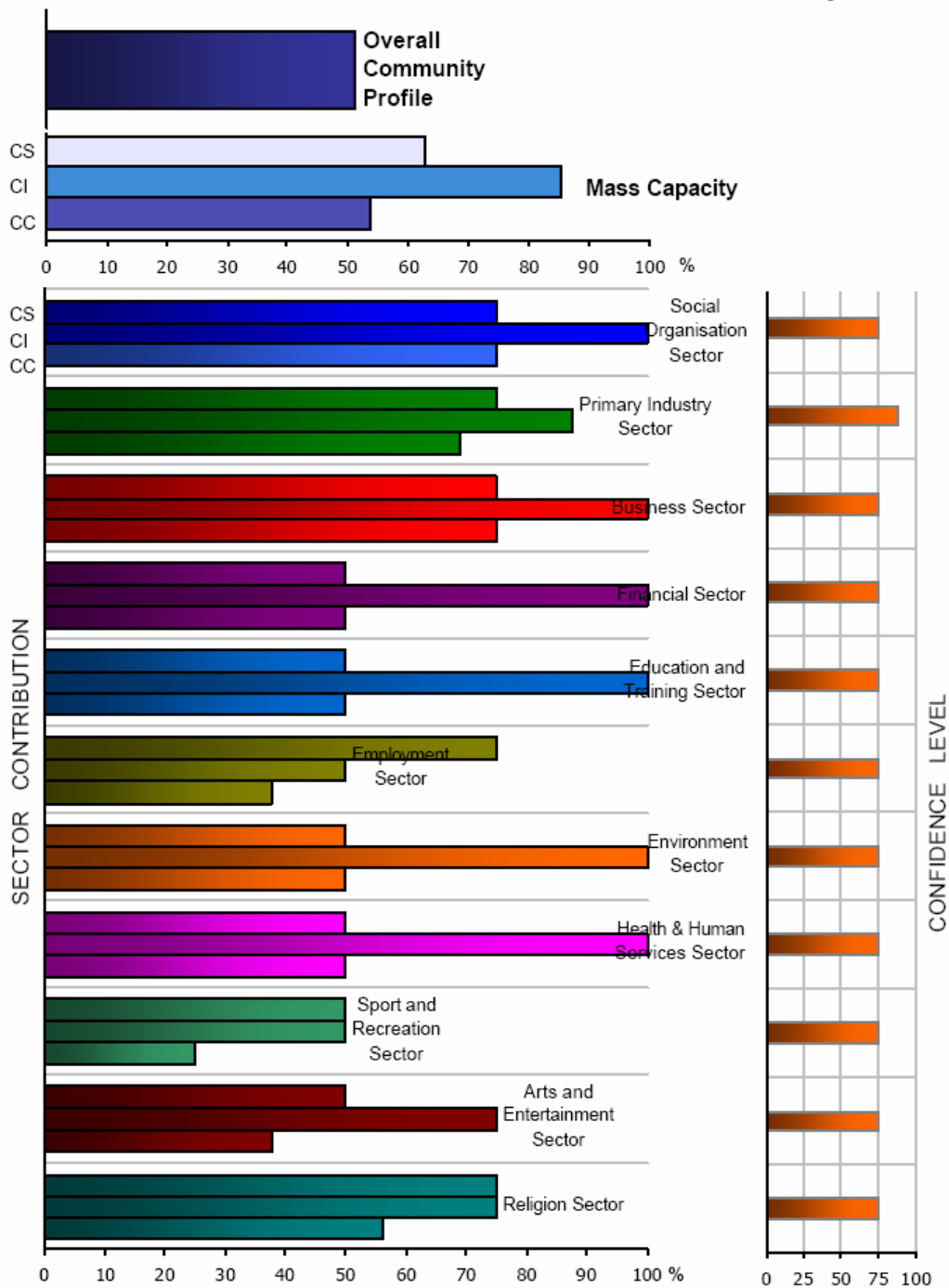


Figure 6. Sectors for the capacity — Farmland *mass* capacity

All quantitative reports are presented in terms of actual performance as a percentage of the total possible performance for the variable. So, for example, a score of 50 per cent for the strength of the capacity *leadership* in the *education and training* sector means that it is only 50 per cent of what it would be if it were fully strong.

**Example: Sector report — Primary industry sector (refer to Figure 5)**

Figure 5 presents the report for Farmland's Primary Industry sector<sup>9</sup>. Total community capacity strength for Farmland is a moderate 50 per cent, which means that the community is performing at half of its maximum possible strength. As a sector, *Primary Industry* is performing better than this at around 65 per cent. The auditors considered that this sector is highly important to total community capacity (over 80 per cent), which, of course, makes sense given that the purpose of this audit was to measure the community's capacity to support the development of local primary industries. Given that the sector is so important but its capacity strength is only moderate, this sector was contributing only around 55 per cent of its full potential to total community capacity when the audit was done. Clearly, then, increasing the capacity of this sector would be a high priority for this town.

But which particular capacities should be prioritised in strategic planning to increase community capacity? From Figure 5, the poor performers in relation to capacity strength are *information*, *financial resources*, *human resources*, *facilities*, and *government support*. In other words, this sector (not individual enterprises) lacks the information (about services and resources available from primary industry support organisations), financial resources (within the sector locally and industry support organisations), human resources and facilities (within local primary industries) it needs to prosper, and requires more government support (from Commonwealth, State, and local government policy and administration). However, judging from the *Capacity Importance (CI)* scores, while all capacities are of some importance to the community's total capacity to support local primary industries, the sector can get by without improved access to information and additional facilities. On the other hand, given their high importance, the sector urgently requires increased financial resources, human resources, and government support. These, it seems, would be the highest priority for the people of Farmland. They would also prioritise developing and implementing strategies to increase their success at lobbying governments for resources because community auditors rate it as highly important to the growth of local primary industries yet rate its strength as only moderate.

On the positive side of the ledger, local primary industries in Farmland tend to have sufficient industry support services and local enterprises (*mass*), there is strong local *leadership* in the industry, and the sector uses strong *networks and relationships* within local primary industry, between the industry and other sectors in the community, and between the industry and the world outside the community. There is very high *social capital* in the industry and the community has a positive attitude towards the growth of local primary industries (*attitudes*).

In view of *Capacity Confidence (CO)* scores on the right-hand side this community can develop and implement capacity strengthening strategies with reasonable confidence that their database is sound. The

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<sup>9</sup> The profile is of an actual community although the name is fictitious.

exception is the capacity *information*. While strategies to increase this capacity can be developed and implemented the community should continue to seek further information relating to its indicators.

### **Further Development**

This is the first version of the template. We are currently conducting a follow-up project focussing on several issues. The template has been developed thus far with self-selected participants in each community. Consequently, some groups (such as youth) and some sectors (such as *arts and entertainment*) were not represented amongst participants in each community. People from all groups and sectors are included in the current trial.

Audits were done by these groups in workshops. It is possible that participants lacked sufficient information to ensure validity of audit responses. In the current project, we are using a different method in which participants from each sector complete a draft audit for their sector then come together in workshops to complete the audit as a group. Comparing results from both methods provides another test for the template.

We have assembled a panel of experts from government, communities, non-government organisations, and social sciences. The panel is reviewing concepts, the conceptual framework, and the template. It is also weighting each capacity with respect to conceptual categories mentioned earlier such as 'infrastructure' and 'capability' so that these can be profiled. For example, the capacity *human resources* in the *education and training* sector might be weighted 0.6 for infrastructure and 0.4 for capability. Using these, we can then derive separate scores for infrastructure and capability for the total community, each sector, and each capacity.

An important aim of the overall project is for governments to use the template to target funding programs according to community capacity. This might mean resourcing communities to develop particular capacities or to conduct projects that assume the existence of identified capacities. Clearly, measuring community capacity is necessary. However, it is equally important to be able to profile capacities targeted by particular programs so that these can be matched with capacity profiles of communities. So the panel is using the template framework to audit government funding programs. In this way, programs and resources can be matched to community capacity profiles.

The template was developed to assist communities to profile their capacity with respect to a particular purpose. An important aim is for communities to use profiles to develop strategies designed to increase capacity, implement them, and monitor outcomes over time. This will be done as communities use the template at regular intervals.

Finally, in the current project we are also reviewing the meanings and wording contained in the template with a wider range of community participants and the expert panel, correcting minor spelling, grammatical, and technical glitches, constructing more sophisticated reports and graphics, and writing an electronic manual for the template.

## Conclusion

The template has a number of uses. It provides a reasonably precise, quantitative, electronic tool to support government policies and community activities aimed at increasing community capacity, which contributes to economic growth, social development, and personal wellbeing in rural communities. Communities can undertake community capacity building initiatives, monitor their success using sound empirical data, and modify their strategies accordingly. And governments, together with communities, can match programs to the particular needs of any given community, confident that they are likely to have the intended effects and that these can be monitored over time.

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