DEX and reporting considerations raised through SETS Community of Practice

This document provides responses to the DEX and reporting issues raised by SETS grant recipients via the SETS Community of Practice (CoP). It has been developed by the Department of Home Affairs (the Department) in consultation with the Data Exchange Team at the Community Grants Hub in DSS.

Context

DEX reporting is a key component of the Government's 2014 streamlined grants administration initiatives. DEX was introduced to focus on the collection of consistent data across all Government programs. Through the aggregated service delivery data items, government is seeking to build the evidence base regarding the effectiveness of client facing programs and service delivery approaches. SETS providers are also required to submit an annual Activity Workplan Report which is complementary to DEX reporting and was designed to capture qualitative reporting.

DEX Guidance

The Data Exchange Protocols and Program Specific Guidance provides significant information on definitions and categories on DEX to assist providers with reporting. A targeted DEX training webinar session for SETS grant recipients was provided in late 2019. The webinar was recorded and is available on the DEX website together with a Questions and Answer document from the session. There are also a range of factsheets, task cards, other webinars and learning modules available. All guidance and training materials are available on the DEX website at: https://dex.dss.gov.au/training#a-webinars

The Data Exchange team is happy to receive feedback regarding system improvements. Many of the features of the current system have come from suggestions made by users. If any SETS grant recipients have ideas on how navigation or usability could be improved please forward then through for consideration to dssdataexchange.helpdesk@dss.gov.au

For assistance with specific queries on DEX: ring the DEX helpdesk on 1800 020 283 or email dssdataexchange.helpdesk@dss.gov.au.

For assistance on general reporting requirements for SETS, please contact the SETS Funding Arrangement Manager (FAM) in the Community Grants Hub in the first instance.

Issue from SETS CoP: Capturing demographic information

With greater reliance on online platforms during COVID-19, SETS providers have experienced difficulty in capturing demographic information needed for DEX. Many platforms only show participant numbers or provide limited details (such as first name). COVID-19 has caused a reduction in client numbers overall, however, the difficulty with accurately capturing data makes this reduction appear more significant, while also increasing the number of 'unidentified clients' reported.

Mandating the collection of demographic information at the beginning of an online activity may result in clients disengaging, either by not attending the session at all or by leaving prematurely.

There are particular challenges with regard to collecting the information in a group setting. Already prior to COVID-19, SETS providers would only collect a name and phone number at the start of a group session. They would then call the client at a later time to collect full demographic details.

Response:

- The Data Exchange team have developed a Fact Sheet to assist organisations in determining how online or other alternative forms of service delivery should be recorded in the Data Exchange. The Fact Sheet is available on the DEX website.

- If it is not feasible to collect individual client details due to the method of service delivery, then you can record them as unidentified clients. The Department recommends letting your FAM know how your service delivery is changing via the Activity Workplan Report to help them understand why your numbers of unidentified clients have increased.

Issues from SETS CoP: Community Capacity Building (CCB)

It is even more challenging to collect demographic information from a community leader, as they are engaging on behalf of their community rather than accessing support through SETS in their individual capacity, and the extent of demographic information needed for DEX may make them hesitant to provide the details.

Response:

- As with any client, community leaders should be informed about why the SETS organisation is asking for this sort of information and what it will be used for. The objective of SETS CCB is to empower new and emerging community groups and organisations to support their specific communities towards collectively increasing the social participation, economic and personal wellbeing of community members, to ensure that positive settlement outcomes are sustained in the long term. As the recipient of government funding, SETS CCB providers are required to collect program performance information to report how they are spending this money and how their work is contributing to the SETS CCB objective.

- In some cases, community leaders may actually be provided with SETS – CCB services in their own individual capacity eg leadership training. Where services are delivered directly to individuals, it is expected that 5% of clients should be recorded as unidentified clients in each reporting period. Where community leaders are representing communities, there is a higher threshold for unidentified clients. In these cases, it is expected that 25-40% of clients or less should be recorded as unidentified clients in each reporting period. See the Program Specific Guidance

- Collecting demographic information like country of birth and language spoken at home helps SETS organisations and the Department understand which ethno-specific communities are being engaged and supported. Similarly residential information is requested to understand where clients live in comparison to service delivery outlets, and look at the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) rankings of locations being serviced.

Providers are unclear whether to report the CCB support provided to community leaders who have been settled in Australia for over 5 years, but are themselves supporting community members who have resided in Australia for under 5 years.

Response:

- The Program Specific Guidance for SETS CCB states that clients can be 'leaders and representatives of new and emerging ethno-specific organisations, whose members have arrived in Australia in the last five years and/or who are from a culturally and linguistic background.' p. 210 As such, SETS CCB organisations should be reporting support provided to community leaders who represent/support community members who have resided in Australia for under 5 years, even if the community leader themselves have been in Australia for more than five years.

It is suggested that the principles for Client Services (CS) that have been used as part of CCB DEX reporting do not fully reflect the work undertaken in CCB, resulting in some providers receiving negative feedback on their CCB DEX reporting.

Response

- The Department and Data Exchange Team are happy to review the program specific guidance for CCB and provide more clarity if the current descriptions are not sufficient. Organisations should provide specific examples of the work being undertaken in SETS - CCB that they do not feel is being reflected in current DEX reporting. Please note the Data Exchange is about reporting services delivered to clients, rather than organisational effort to administer services.

- Please send any feedback to your Funding Arrangement Manager.

Issues from SETS CoP: DEX measures

By virtue of being exclusively quantitative in nature, DEX data does not provide a comprehensive overview of work undertaken in SETS, particularly in CCB (i.e. work with community leaders, relationship building with communities and other stakeholders). Additional supports provided through the COVID-19 pandemic, such as client check-ins, are difficult to capture.

Response:

- As per the Program Specific Guidance for SETS CCB, work with community leaders and other stakeholders should be captured by reporting the individual details of community leaders and the instances of service (sessions) delivered to them. The relevant service types are advocacy/support, community engagement, education and skills training, governance and mentoring/peer support.

- The changes occurring as a result of this engagement (the outcomes) can be captured using SCORE (Standard Client/Community Outcomes Reporting). If you have suggestions for other service types or examples of work being undertaken with leaders that does not reflect the SCORE outcomes, please send through examples to your Funding Arrangement Manager.

- How to record client ‘check-in’s depends on the nature of the service. If a client is known to your service and has previously provided their full details, you can record the check-in by attaching a session to the client’s record, using a service type that describes the type of service delivered. If you are checking in with group clients, and only have the client’s name, these clients are ‘unidentified’ clients. If a provider does not want to create a separate session for each, they could report one session for the entire day, or week if they are spread out over a number of days. A case could be created called ‘COVID Check-in’, with a session called Week 1 Group and all unidentified clients across the week could be attached to this session.

- The Add a Case task card and a video on adding unidentified group clients are available on the Data Exchange website.

- In addition, the Activity Work Plan Report provides providers with the capacity to report on a range of qualitative aspects.

Many SETS providers rely heavily on volunteers and invest time intro the training and capacity building of volunteers. However, volunteer engagement cannot be captured through DEX.

Response:

- The Data Exchange Protocols Program Specific Guidance identifies the primary clients as ‘new or emerging ethno-specific communities, community leaders and emerging community representatives and new and emerging ethno-specific organisations with limited corporate capacity’. Work undertaken by volunteers is important work undertaken as part of the delivery of services, however, the purpose of the Data Exchange is to record services delivered to, and outcomes achieved by, the primary client cohort rather than administrative effort. The capacity building and skills training of volunteers or paid staff in order to deliver services is administrative effort rather than service delivery.

- Organisations can report this information via Activity Work Plan Reports.

There are no operational definitions for categories, making DEX scoring unclear, vague and up to interpretation. This causes inconsistent responses across SETS providers, with some providers creating their own internal definitions to ensure consistent reporting within their organisation. For example, does reported ‘income’ refer to the individual to the entire household? Further, what is the age bracket for reporting children on DEX?

Response

- Data Exchange Protocols provides explanation and direction on how to record data in the Data Exchange, including about income and children. For example p. 25 of the Protocols specifies approximate gross income relates to the client's gross income (earnings before tax), meaning it relates to the individual client rather than the household. The heading of this section titled 'Household Income' is acknowledged to not be helpful. The Data Exchange team has indicated they will change this in a future edition to the Protocols.

- In terms of children, there is no age limit or age bracket for reporting children in the Data Exchange. Clients of any age can be reported in the Data Exchange. If you are storing personal information in the Data Exchange, you do need to be mindful of how to collect consent from children; guidance about this is included in Section 4.2.4 of the Protocols.

- Organisations are encouraged to refer to the Data Exchange Protocols if they are unclear on what information should be included as part of collecting client information.

Providers are unclear about the criteria for DEX, specifically what is Department looking for and what constitutes good outcomes. With the lack of clarity around performance assessment, many providers are uncertain of how they are tracking and what areas require improvement.

Response:

- An outcome, in relation to service delivery, is the change that occurs for a client(s) as a result of an interaction with a funded service. Outcomes are a vital part of the service delivery story as it demonstrates the value and impact a program is making in people's lives. Outcomes can be positive, negative or neutral, intended or unintended. Negative outcomes does not mean organisations are delivering a poor service and in some cases clients going 'backwards' before making improvements is expected and a part of their journey. We also understand service delivery is complex and things occur that are outside the control of the organisation. The important thing is to accurately assess where a client is at the time you're doing the SCORE assessment.

- As per the Program Specific Guidance , both SETS programs aim to improve social participation, economic wellbeing, independence, personal wellbeing and community connectedness for eligible clients and communities. As part of this overarching goal, SETS organisations are offering activities that support some or all of these parts. The Program Specific Guidance outlines the types of activities that could be conducted for each service type.

- SCORE consists of 4 different types of outcomes or components – Circumstances, Goals, Satisfaction and Community. Within each component there are a number of standard domains. When creating a session, organisations select the most dominant service type addressed in the session. A SCORE assessment could then be conducted against as many domains as a relevant to the session.

- For example, using the service type '*Facilitate English Learning pathways',* an organisation could run a series of small group workshops for clients where they are given opportunities to role play practical setting in order to practice and improve their understanding and use of the English language. A SCORE assessment could be conducted in the Goals component for changed skills, changed behaviours and changed knowledge. They could also be assessed in the Community Participation domain if you have worked through the feelings of social isolation and non-participation in the community due to low English language skills.

- Another good resource for information about expectations is the FAM as they conduct 6 monthly assessments of the data and provide feedback about areas of data quality requiring improvement. Organisations can discuss any concerns they may have around the quality of their data with their FAM.

- The Data Exchange reports also allow organisations to see their data represented back to them in graphs, charts and tables, which clearly show how many people have accessed their services, the types of services delivered, the demographics of the people accessing the services and the impact they are making. Organisations are encouraged to use this data to improve their services, identify gaps in their service delivery and celebrate the great achievements they have made.

- We would encourage all organisations to upload their data on a regular basis and use the reports to evaluate how they are going in achieving outcomes for their clients.

It may also be beneficial for SETS providers to better understand the use and the impact of the DEX data, and how their reporting contributes to the broader program outcomes.

Response:

- The Data Exchange was established in 2014 as the new approach to program performance reporting. The data collected helps tell the 'story' about program outcomes by answering questions like:
  - How much is being done?
  - How well is it being done?
  - Did we achieve what we expected?

- Evaluating the outcomes achieved as part of a program is very important as it enables Government to better understand the complexities of a program and the people it is aiming to support. By focusing only on outputs, or what is being done, the Department is unable to see the real impacts that are taking place. SCORE has greatly contributed to the Department being able to:
  - better understand what levels of service leads to the best outcome
  - assess the gains made by a program.
  - understand where more effort or investment needs to be made.
  - better understand a client's pathway and the services they access
  - gain insights into what works and what isn't working in terms of service delivery for continuous improvement

It is problematic for SETS providers to capture complexity through DEX, e.g. a client presenting with a range of issues is only scored against one of the areas of concern. Some clients are more difficult to score than others. There is no clear guidance of what is considered a low category or a medium category client, and how this should be reflected in scoring. Additionally, continuous clients are difficult to score, as there is a lack of understanding of how to adequately track their progress.

Response:

- The Data Exchange enables organisations to record SCORE assessments across as many domains as are relevant to the session. As an example, using the *Facilitate employment pathways* service type, an organisation could work with an individual or group to run an employment readiness program. Outcomes could be assessed in the Goals component under the knowledge, skills and behavior domains as well as the Employment domain within the Circumstances component.

- Organisations are limited to selecting one service type per session. Within a session organisations may be addressing numerous issues, however the Data Exchange asks organisations to select the most dominant issue and record this by selecting the matching service type.

- As per the Program Specific Guidance:

  - A low intensity client would be someone requiring minimal assistance to meet their settlement needs and achieve their goals. The client may present at the service only once or at infrequent intervals, and may not see the same caseworker. This includes warm referrals where possible.

  - A medium-intensity client would be someone requiring greater support as identified through the needs assessment, which targets individual needs. This includes assigning a case worker to the client to ensure continuity of support, developing a case plan to identify the actions, responsibilities and timeframes needed to achieve identified outcomes, warm referrals to mainstream and other relevant services, and regular contact with the client until needs are met.

- There are no firm rules around when a SCORE assessment needs to be conducted as this is left to the discretion of the organisation. The Program Specific Guidance material states that at least two SCORE assessments need to be conducted – one at the start of service delivery and the second at the end of service delivery. However, organisations can conduct a SCORE assessment more often to capture the change over a longer period of time.

- It is likely that organisations will only conduct two SCORE assessments for low-intensity clients as they may only access the service once or at infrequent intervals. Medium-intensity clients could have more than two depending on the length of the activity/program being offered. If a 12 month program was in place, organisations could conduct a SCORE assessment every 3 months.

In the absence of some guidance, scoring may done in a subjective, arbitrary manner, which may impact on the adequacy of support provided to clients.

Response:

- The Data Exchange team aims to provide as much guidance and support as possible. The free call helpdesk is available on 1800 020 283 as well as a range of resources on the Data Exchange website.

- Some useful resources include:
    - Using SCORE with a client
    - Adding a SCORE assessment
    - Measuring Outcomes: a beginner's guide
    - The Data Exchange Protocols also provides more practical details on how to apply SCORE.
    - View and Edit a SCORE assessment
    - SCORE – at a glance