



On the Fast Track

Bringing Capacity Building Research and Practice Together

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Foreword

On the Fast Track was a member-initiated project by partners in the Cooperative Venture for Capacity Building (CVCB) to improve and accelerate the use of the CVCB research outputs by rural R&D corporation project managers and practitioners. The project was led by the dairy industry and involved a trial of a 'route to market' for the CVCB's research investment.

More than 60 people, representing a variety of rural industries from all over Australia, participated in the project. At its core was 'translating' CVCB research outputs into meaningful learning tools and supporting capacity building practitioners in applying their learning in their day-to-day work or projects through mentoring.

This report provides an overview of the approach, key learnings, results and outcomes from the *On the Fast Track* project. The report concludes with recommendations concerning research to practice in capacity building and further issues and questions worthy of collective investment by rural R&D groups.

The experiences of participants in the project suggest that the *On the Fast Track* approach has led to their increased confidence in the methods, approaches and outcomes from capacity building. This confidence has led to better RD&E projects and through this, a greater reach and impact into rural industries. Many participants valued the mentoring and support to their practice and personal development in capacity building through the project. There was an expressed demand by managers and practitioners of RD&E projects for continued support to help them to better support rural industries.

That capacity building (i.e. improving our ability to learn and adapt to change) is a journey rather than a destination comes as no surprise to people involved in supporting the profitability, sustainability and resilience of rural industries. However, investing in the development of the practice of capacity building requires a longer-term view. The *On the Fast Track* project and its approach should represent a beginning rather than an end for the resources and collective will of the CVCB members and others concerned about the future of rural industries.

This project was funded through the Cooperative Venture for Capacity Building in Rural Industries which is made up of: Australian Wool Innovation; Cotton Research and Development Corporation; Dairy Australia; Grains Research and Development Corporation; Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation; Horticulture Australia Limited; Land & Water Australia; Meat & Livestock Australia; Murray-Darling Basin Commission; Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation; Sugar Research and Development Corporation; and the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

This report is an addition to RIRDC's diverse range of over 1800 research publications which can be viewed and freely downloaded from our website www.rirdc.gov.au. Information on the CVCB is available online at <http://www.rirdc.gov.au/capacitybuilding/>.

Peter O'Brien
Managing Director
Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation

Abbreviations

APEN	Australia-Pacific Extension Network
AWI	Australian Wool Innovation
CRDC	Cotton Research and Development Corporation
CVCB	Cooperative Venture for Capacity Building
DA	Dairy Australia
DAFF	Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
GRDC	Grains Research and Development Corporation
HAL	Horticulture Australia Limited
LWA	Land & Water Australia
NRM	Natural Resource Management
RD&E	Research, Development and Extension
RIRDC	Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation
SRDC	Sugar Research and Development Corporation
VET	Vocational Education and Training

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Executive Summary

What the report is about

The Cooperative Venture for Capacity Building (CVCB) was established in 2001 by R&D corporations to enhance capacity building in rural industries. The CVCB invested in R&D focused on enhancing the understanding of learning, improving organisational arrangements to support rural human capacity building, and inspiring innovative farming practices. The research, conducted over six years, has added significantly to the stock of knowledge about capacity building in rural industries, however, the CVCB has struggled to introduce the research outputs into member organisations or significantly influence capacity-building efforts. To improve the use of its research outputs among rural R&D corporation project managers and practitioners the CVCB commissioned the *On the Fast Track* project as a trial of a ‘route to market’ for the CVCB’s research investment.

This report provides an overview of the approach, key learnings, results and outcomes from the development and delivery of the *On the Fast Track* project in 2007. It concludes with issues and questions worthy of collective investment by rural R&D groups.

Who is the report targeted at?

The report will be of interest to rural industry R&D corporation executives and boards, public and private sector investors in capacity building projects, project managers and practitioners, rural communities and all those interested and involved in supporting change and adaptation in the rural sector.

Background

Capacity building is about improving our ability to learn and adapt to changing circumstances. Given the current context facing rural industries (e.g. long-running droughts; uncertainty and complexity associated with climate change; access to resources like water and people; and changing consumer preferences) improving how we adapt through these conditions for resilient and sustainable industries can be seen as a priority investment for governments, research and development organisations and rural industries themselves.

The collective investment in capacity building R&D by rural industries through the CVCB has resulted in an important body of literature and examples of the importance of capacity building for the future of rural Australia (www.rirdc.gov.au). However, the use of this research by the CVCB member organisations and capacity building practitioners had been less than ideal. It is a significant issue that the ‘world’ of the project managers and practitioners choosing, designing, implementing, supporting and evaluating capacity building have not aligned sufficiently (and meaningfully enough) with the ‘world’ of capacity-building research. This represents significant cost and inefficiency because the networks and linkages the member organisations bring to the CVCB are not being used effectively to support learning and change, and research is not being grounded enough to effectively inform and transform the practice of capacity building. The 12-month project ‘*On the Fast Track* – bringing capacity building research and practice together’ was initiated by the CVCB partners to further engage these groups.

Aims/Objectives

The project aimed to:

- Design and test a route-to-market for CVCB research
- Bring together key capacity building project managers and practitioners¹ to enhance their capacity to choose (invest), design, support and evaluate their current capacity building programs
- Identify new research and/or development questions in capacity building.

The objectives of the project were that:

- Participants in the project (i.e. CVCB partner organisations and their project teams) gain:
 - greater skills, knowledge and abilities in capacity building
 - greater capacity to work together because of the links and networks created between managers and practitioners from different industries.
- Capacity building projects (that participants were currently working on and were a focus for their involvement in the *On the Fast Track* project) demonstrate:
 - greater efficiency in resource use and fewer errors
 - better design, delivery and evaluation leading to more productive and sustainable industries.

Methods used

Ten key elements make up the *On the Fast Track* approach:

1. Collaboration between CVCB partners to develop a route-to-market for CVCB research investment
2. Identification of issues in capacity building, review of CVCB research outputs and development of a framework for thinking about capacity building
3. Translation of CVCB research outputs into a workbook and workshop design
4. Invitation of participants from CVCB partner networks
5. Invitation of mentors from CVCB partner networks
6. Delivery of cross-sector 2-day workshops
7. Development of action plans and choice of mentors by workshop participants
8. Implementation of action plans by participants with mentor support
9. Support of mentors in their role through teleconferences
10. Presentation of participant results at final workshop.

Critical success factors for the approach have been identified as:

- Collaborative development of the project enabled different interests, expectations and perspectives on capacity building to be discussed and built into project objectives. This created ownership and involvement in the whole project by the stakeholders.
- Application of the principles of capacity building to all dimensions of the project provided a solid basis for learning and reflection for the project team – and a high level of responsiveness to participant needs.
- Development of the capacity building wheel as a framework was central to the project and fulfilled an important role in supporting the project outcomes of increased confidence in capacity building and improved projects.
- Design of a workbook and workshop concurrently is important for consistency in delivery.

¹ Practitioners are people involved in supporting innovation and change in industries. They include farm/rural advisers and consultants, project officers and managers/investors, project designers and extension staff as well as people involved in community development.

- Active recruitment by the project team was effective in having the right people participate. Active recruitment required an intimate knowledge of what the project was about and what people would get out of it.
- Workshop size of 18-20 participants was ideal for optimising learning and allowing sufficient time for networking and mentor matching.
- Designation of a mentor development role within the project team was critical to the success of the mentor process.
- Acknowledgement of mentors as a key target audience for use of CVCB research (this was initially underestimated).
- Contributions of the foundation elements of the *On the Fast Track* approach (Elements 1 through to 5) to the workshop design and delivery ensured an effective and useful workshop for participants that increased the use of CVCB resources.
- Preparation of quality action plans was a central part of successful mentoring experiences and so ensuring action plans are meaningful, well constructed and relevant to participants is important. Having a mechanism to check on this would be a useful addition to the workshop process.
- Acknowledgement that the needs of the mentors (e.g. for benefits, stimulation, challenge and reward) need to be prioritised through the mentoring experience.
- Mentor support is critical for mentor development, mentor motivation and learning.
- The final workshop is essential for consolidating learnings, celebrating successes and building networks to improve capacity building approaches.

Results/Key findings

Forty-three participants and twenty mentors, representing a variety of rural industries from all over Australia, participated in the project. Seventy-seven per cent of participants came from the dairy, cotton, sugar, pastoral or horticultural industries, with an equal representation of project managers and practitioners. Participants were highly satisfied with the project. The combined score for the workshop effectiveness and usefulness, and the value of the *On the Fast Track* model was an average of 8/10.

Project results by objectives

The project enhanced participant's capacity to choose (invest), design, support and evaluate their current capacity building programs and increased their skills, knowledge and abilities in capacity building:

- Most participants reported a direct benefit from involvement in the workshop and exposure to the CVCB resources. Involvement in the project increased the reported rate of use of CVCB research from 25% pre-project to 55.6% post-project. The majority of participants (90%) who completed the post-project survey reported an increase in confidence for at least one aspect of capacity building.
- Of those participants that followed through into projects and mentoring, 75% reported a moderate to high impact as evidenced by their project reports and mentor comments. Of the 20 mentors involved, most suggested that they benefited directly from involvement and 60% reported a great benefit through exposure to CVCB resources and using it in their work.
- Participants reported a range of impacts from their involvement including:
 - improved team work in projects
 - more engagement with stakeholders in projects leading to better participation and greater results
 - better quality projects from well executed engagement strategies and design, delivery and evaluation of projects
 - used their experience to train others in capacity building
 - more motivated extension teams
 - used the links and networks from involvement with different industries to improve projects.

The capacity building projects of participants demonstrated that greater efficiency in resource use and fewer errors in projects was occurring through better design, delivery and evaluation:

- Nineteen of thirty-three participants agreed or strongly agreed that they (or their mentee) now have a more robust project from a capability building perspective.
- Twenty-eight of thirty three participants agreed or strongly agreed that they (or their mentee) now have a framework to use in future capacity building efforts and in communication with their organisation about capacity building.
- Twenty eight of thirty three participants agreed or strongly agreed that they (or their mentee) now have an ongoing ability to critically appraise and find out information about capacity building.

Additional findings

Mentoring was shown to be an important process in the *On the Fast Track* approach for:

- increasing confidence of participants in capacity building
- exposing more people (e.g. the mentors) to capacity building research
- supporting people to turn increased confidence into action – mentoring supported the development of the capacity building practitioner and mentor alike.

In exploring the impact and outcomes from involvement in the project, a conceptual representation of how involvement in *On the Fast Track* impacted RD&E projects and thereby the sustainability of rural industries emerged. The outcomes from involvement in the project can be represented as a four-stage process:

1. Increased engagement with and use of CVCB resources, leading to
2. Increased confidence in capacity building (and helping others understand capacity building), leading to
3. Better RD&E projects, leading to
4. More people benefit from RD&E (i.e. increased benefits to producers and communities involved in these projects and increased return on investment from RD&E).

Benefit-cost analysis

A social benefit-cost analysis considered the level of benefit needed to justify the expenditure on the *On the Fast Track* project. An acceptable benefit would be an amount that covered all costs and returned 15%. With an estimated total project cost of \$496,000 and a reported 25 projects achieving cost efficiencies or greater impacts for the people involved, the benefits would need to be equal to or greater than about \$13,000 per project in the first year.

The project team suggests that the level of improvement needed to justify the project is quite low. The *On the Fast Track* approach has a reasonable probability of being an efficient and effective means to improve returns from RD&E.

Implications for stakeholders

As a route-to-market for research in capacity building it is clear that the *On the Fast Track* approach delivered increased use of CVCB research and was well accepted by practitioners as a way to increase their confidence in capacity building and improve their practice in capacity building. In this way, the approach offers a way for rural industries to develop their current and future capacity building professionals.

This is a significant development. In the past, for many rural industries the nurturing and development pathway for field workers, managers and practitioners in the development and extension part of RD&E occurred via public sector investment in ‘growing the profession’. With changes in public investment and greater privatisation, a sustainable professional development pathway has been lacking. *On the Fast Track* may offer an alternative for rural industries. A seamless access to R&D on capacity

building holds promise – but requires further development to explore how well it allows a capacity building profession to self manage its development.

From this project, gaps have been identified in three main areas that would be of interest and concern to rural industries, policy makers concerned with the development of the capacity building professional and investors in capacity building:

- There is strong demand from practitioners for further professional development in capacity building. Areas that have been identified to address this include a cross-industry needs analysis study of capacity building; a second delivery of an *On the Fast Track* approach to a wider audience and over a longer time-frame; exploration of the possibility of establishing a centre for capacity building practice to further drive a research and development agenda in capacity building.
- Getting the right balance and timing of investment in ‘development’ and ‘delivery’ is often difficult and yet there are limited tools or processes to help these decisions – this is an area worthy of investigation and has been supported in the evaluation report of the CVCB (Hassall and Associates, 2008).
- Enhancing capacity building requires the right approach in the right situation. The *On the Fast Track* approach may be adequate (if adapted and adopted) to achieve greater capacity building outcomes for rural industries and to some extent address issues of market failure. However, this alone does not address future issues for capacity building such as how the professional adapts their practice to future challenges. It is the ‘Where to next?’ questions that provide a focus for further collaborative investment.

Conclusions and recommendations

The conclusions from the management and delivery of *On the Fast Track* have led the project team to recommend that:

1. A second round of collaborative investment by RDCs is made to investigate and address the issues of sustainable professional development in capacity building using the *On the Fast Track* approach.
2. Each rural industry adapt the *On the Fast Track* resources to their own capacity building requirements and also collectively invest in an across-industry analysis of this adaptation (so learning can be shared to further improve the approach) in terms of:
 - a. the continuous improvement of materials (i.e. expand on and elaborate materials, standardise for quality assurance)
 - b. the documentation of best-practice.
3. Collective investment by CVCB partners to conduct a feasibility study into the merits of establishing an R&D centre for capacity building practice.

Continued co-investment is recommended around opportunities that cannot be fully captured by CVCB partners individually. This requires organisations to be sufficiently focused on their own capacity building requirements to make full use of a co-investment initiative.

Introduction

Capacity building is about improving our ability to learn and adapt to changing circumstances. Macadam et al. (2004) define capacity building as ‘externally or internally initiated processes designed to help individuals and groups associated with rural Australia to appreciate and manage their changing circumstances, with the objective of improving the stock of human, social, financial, physical and natural capital in an ethically defensible way’.

Improving our ability to adapt is not straightforward and progress can be hindered. For instance, the push toward privatisation of knowledge can slow adaptation because knowledge and information are viewed as tradable commodities to be protected rather than shared (Carney 1995; Leeuwis 2000; Marsh and Pannell 2000). Further, techno-centric investment in research and extension removes the focus from human and social capacity and privileges technology as the adaptation solution (Vanclay and Lawrence 1995). Finally, professions that focus on how best to build and support an individual or groups ability to adapt (e.g. extension, farm advisers, natural resource management and community development services) may suffer from limited support and development and therefore the adaptation of an industry or system is constrained (Nettle 2003; Campbell 2001; Bouma 1999).

To address some of these hindrances R&D corporations co-invested in the Cooperative Venture for Capacity Building (CVCB) to enhance capacity building in rural industries in Australia.² The research outputs from the past six years (available at www.rirc.gov.au) investment form a body of literature and examples of the importance of capacity building for the future of rural Australia. The use of this research by the CVCB member organisations and capacity building practitioners had been less than ideal and so to further engage these groups a 12-month project called ‘*On the Fast Track* – bringing capacity building research and practice together’ was initiated by the CVCB partners.

This report outlines the *On the Fast Track* approach, the critical success factors in its design and delivery, the impacts and outcomes for participants and conclusions and recommendations for rural industries considering ‘What next?’ for capacity building research and development.

² The Cooperative Venture for Capacity Building (CVCB) was established in 2001 by R&D corporations and invests in R&D that focuses on enhancing the understanding of learning, improving organisational arrangements to support rural human capacity building, and inspiring innovative farming practices. Its partner members are the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry; Australian Wool Innovation; Cotton Research and Development Corporation; Dairy Australia; Grains Research and Development Corporation; Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation; Horticulture Australia; Land & Water Australia; Meat & Livestock Australia; Murray-Darling Basin Commission; Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation; and Sugar Research and Development Corporation.

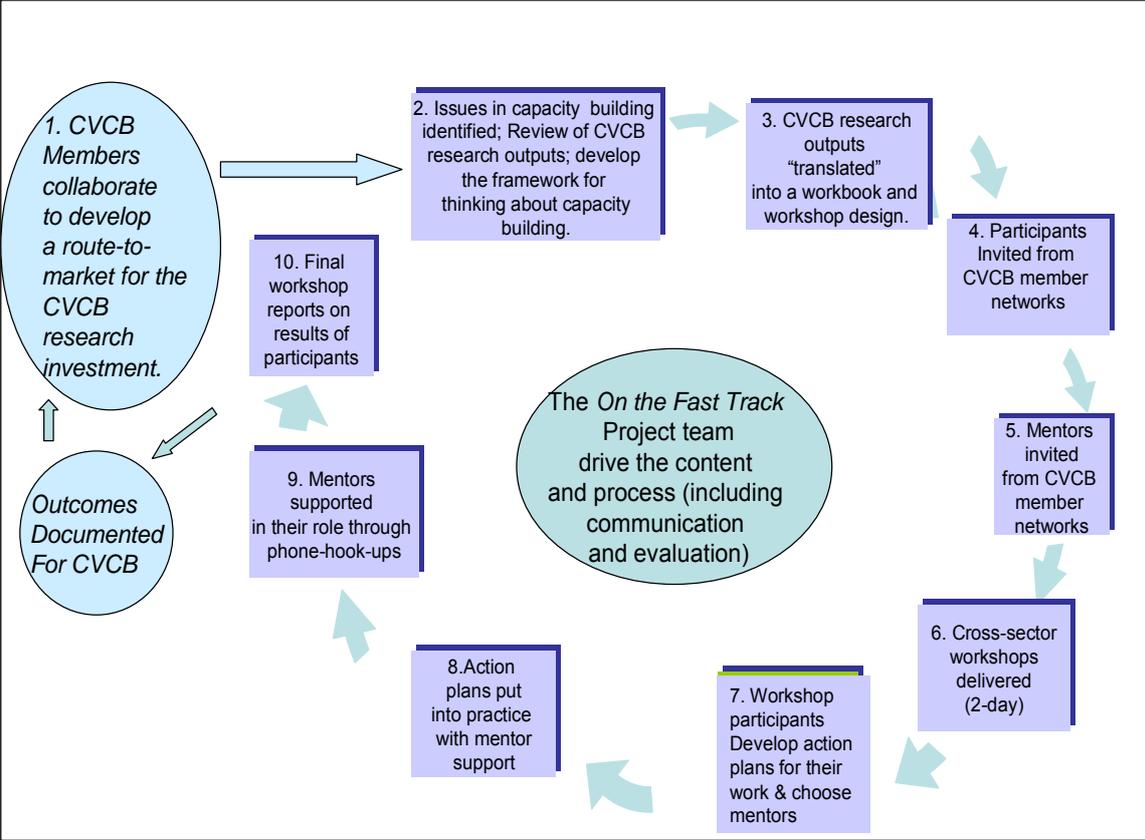
The *On the Fast Track* Approach

Ten key elements make up the *On the Fast Track* approach (see Figure 1):

1. Collaboration between CVCB partners to develop a route-to-market for CVCB research investment
2. Identification of issues in capacity building, review of CVCB research outputs and development of a framework for thinking about capacity building
3. Translation of CVCB research outputs into a workbook and workshop design
4. Invitation of participants from CVCB partner networks
5. Invitation of mentors from CVCB partner networks
6. Delivery of cross-sector 2-day workshops
7. Development of action plans and choice of mentors by workshop participants
8. Implementation of action plans by participants with mentor support
9. Support of mentors in their role through teleconferences
10. Presentation of participant results at final workshop.

In the following sections of the report, each element is described in terms of what was done in the project. Key lessons and critical success factors for the element working effectively to increase the use of CVCB research outputs are also described.

Figure 1: The *On the Fast Track* project elements



The people

Capacity building is about people, and the project revolved around the collaborative efforts and commitment of people involved in capacity building in rural industries across Australia.

Delivering *On the Fast Track* – The core project team, led by the dairy industry, was responsible for delivering the project. This team consisted of the four main industry groups behind the design of the project (i.e. dairy, cotton, sugar, wool) and key project consultants critical to content development and delivery, mentor support, communication and evaluation. The project team were:

- Ruth Nettle (Dairy CVCB member and project co-ordinator)
- John Mckenzie (CVCB project manager and project consultant)
- Bruce Pyke/Rohan Boehm/Helen Dugdale (Cotton CVCB members)
- Diana Maldonado (Sugar CVCB member) (and Tracy Hendersen in project development)
- Claudia Wythe/Peter Hanrahan (Wool CVCB member/representative)
- Jeff Coutts (Consultant, project development and delivery)
- Jenny O’Sullivan (Consultant, mentor development)
- Stephen Kelly (Consultant, evaluation)
- Anne Currey (CVCB communications and project communications)

Overseeing *On the Fast Track* – A wider working group consisting of the remaining members of the CVCB (not in the project team) was responsible for overseeing project delivery. The working group were:

- Kevin Goss (CVCB chair)
- Jane Fisher (RIRDC, CVCB host organisation)
- Ian Bamford (MLA, CVCB member)
- Michael Lester (LWA, CVCB member)
- Elwin Turnbull (DAFF, CVCB member)
- Richard Stephens (HAL, CVCB member)
- Tom McCue (GRDC, CVCB member)

Mentors for *On the Fast Track* – Commissioned for the project, mentors worked with the project team to support participants in applying CVCB research to their day to day work. Mentors were:

- Bevan Bessan (Private sector)
- Rohan Boehm (Cotton industry)
- Pauline Brightling (Private sector/Dairy industry)
- Jeff Coutts (Private sector)
- Rob Dugdale (Private sector/Cotton industry)
- Amabel Fulton (Private sector)
- Mark Gardner (Private sector)
- Peter Hanrahan (Private sector/Wool industry)
- Sarah Hood (Private sector/Cotton industry)
- Bridget Jackson (Private sector/Cotton industry)
- Cathy McGowan (Private sector)
- Nigel McGuckian (Private sector)
- Simon McGuinness (Private sector)
- John McKenzie (Private sector)
- Frankie McLennan (DSE Victoria/Public sector)
- Jenny O’Sullivan (Private sector)
- Mark Paine (Dairy industry)
- Bruce Pyke (Cotton industry)
- Kate Schwagger (Private sector/Cotton industry)
- Mike Stephens (Private sector)

Participants, including the managers and practitioners involved in capacity building in rural industries are described in the following section.

Participant profile

Forty three people and 20 mentors were involved in the project representing different rural industries. Appendix 1 lists the participants involved in *On the Fast Track*. The participants' main industry, their role and employing organisation are represented in Tables 1, 2 and 3, respectively.

Table 1: Participants' main industry

Industry	No.	%
Dairy	12	28
Cotton	8	18.5
Sugar	5	11
Meat & pastoral	4	9
Horticulture	4	9
NRM/property planning	3	7
Wool	2	4.5
Researcher	2	4.5
Grains	2	4.5
Community	1	2
Irrigation	1	2
Total	43	100.0

Table 2: Participants' main role

Role	No.
Investor	2
Project manager/coordinator	19
Project practitioner/field worker	22
Total	43

Table 3: Participant and mentor employing organisations

Organisation	No.
Rural Development Corporation or rural industry organisation	25
State government or university	22
Private sector organisation	14
Community organisation	2
Total	63

Case studies of participant experiences in *On the Fast Track*

Case study 1. I'm inspired: Dairy industry mentoring program benefits from CVCB resources

Karen Baum, project manager, DairySage Mentoring

“In designing and delivering an industry mentoring program I found myself jumping in and out of the spokes of the ‘capacity building wheel’ – integrating the elements of capacity building – it helped me focus each decision I make or action to be delivered. I have a greater appreciation for incorporating evaluation into the project design. My mentor was amazing and contributed so much to my personal development and the project. I am inspired”

The DairySage Mentoring project is piloting a process with 150 dairy industry mentors and mentees (involving farmers and industry service providers) that is aiming to establish a sustainable mentoring framework and ethos in the dairy industry. Karen reports that her involvement in *On the Fast Track* and exposure to the CVCB resources has tightened her project design (project logic, planning for evaluation and communication) and provided focus. In addition, the exposure to other industries meant increased learning about mentoring programs in other contexts and enabled other industries to learn about how the dairy industry approached mentoring and the lessons for their industries. This helped to reduce errors and improve the robustness of the project design which contributes to the effectiveness of the project. Mentoring helped Karen to scope out her training and evaluation needs for the project which resulted in well-prepared tender briefing documents. Both Karen and her mentor have agreed to continue their mentoring partnership beyond the project voluntarily and undertake activities for their mutual professional development – they also share books and resources of mutual interest.

Case study 2. Confidence in capacity building can make the difference in extension: Pastoral industry uses CVCB resources to help deliver benefits to producers

Phil Hausler, extension coordinator, Pastoral Production, Department of Primary Industry, Fisheries and Mines, Northern Territory

*“Through my involvement with the *On the Fast Track* project I led an exercise with our main stakeholders to work on a strategic direction, planning, mentoring and support for extension practitioners within our group. The stakeholders appreciated being engaged in this way, the extension team increased in motivation and they were able to see their work and role in the ‘bigger picture’ and the mentoring helped me do things – a little pressure to get things done!!”*

Phil used the capacity building wheel and lessons from the *On the Fast Track* workshop to work with his team to plan more effective extension for the pastoral industry in the Northern Territory – which is now being put into practice. Phil reports that scientists are now increasingly recognising their role in capacity building and there has been a good start to more effective linkages between extension, scientists and stakeholders in projects for the pastoral industry.

Case study 3. Building capacity in the supply chain: CVCB resources used by a mentor to build industry networks

Bevan Bessen, mentor, *On the Fast Track*, Bessen Consulting

"The workshop provided an excellent overview of the current state of extension research and practice in Australia. For me as a mentor it brought me up to date with current research that I could use to support my two mentees but I could also use in my work both nationally and internationally. It was extremely useful and a timely refresher on the current extension environment."

Bevan used the resources of the *On the Fast Track* project and CVCB research in his work for Meat & Livestock Australia aimed at increasing awareness of capacity building practices amongst animal scientists in South Africa. This resulted in follow-up demand for CVCB resources on 'best practise extension' in Australia. Further linkages and networks are being developed in the red meat industry with a capacity building focus, including a reciprocal visit by scientists to Australia in April 2008.

Case study 4. Capacity Building as a way of doing business: CVCB resources used to help build a cotton industry extension strategic plan

Geoff McIntyre, Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, Cotton Industry

"The workbook and framework worked for our planning – they were a good resource – particularly the examples. We supported our regional groups in developing their plans using the capacity building framework – to address priority issues in a design sense and monitoring and evaluation and reporting. It was particularly helpful for encouraging regional groups to think harder about the outcome or 'usage' level for their work."

Geoff and his colleagues in the cotton industry were interested in seeing if the route-to-market model from the CVCB project could be applied to extension planning at an industry scale. The cotton industry adaptation of the approach for strategic planning appears to hold promise as a 'focusing tool' for managers and project teams. However, more development work is necessary to better utilise the resources for this purpose.

The *On the Fast Track* approach and critical success factors

Element 1 – Collaboration between CVCB partners to develop a route-to-market for CVCB research investment

The CVCB partners' working group determined the key outcomes of the project and provided input to the project team at critical early stages (e.g. choice of consultants and nomination of participants). This group set the vision for the project to 'walk the talk' of capacity building. That is, the project needed to reflect the values, principles and approach of good capacity building.

With input from the core project team, the project co-ordinator developed roles and responsibilities for project team members and consultants, developed and implemented a work plan and time lines for the project, sought expressions of interest for the key project roles of mentor development, communication and evaluation, and commissioned contracts with consultants and mentors through Dairy Australia. The core project team ensured the project kept on schedule and was meeting expectations of stakeholders.

CVCB members and the project team were located across most states of Australia. Working together effectively required regular teleconferences and some face-to-face meetings.

The project title *On the Fast Track* was chosen to convey to participants and stakeholders notions of 'speeding up' people's ability to use CVCB research or being able to 'by-pass' getting bogged down in less than relevant information. An *On the Fast Track* logo/masthead (Figure 2) was developed to give the project a 'look' consistent with the CVCB.

Figure 2: *On the Fast Track* logo/masthead



A communications plan was developed to:

- ensure the CVCB steering committee was kept up to date with project progress
- provide a means for those involved in the project to communicate with each other
- keep those involved in the project informed of developments
- provide general information on the project to a wider audience.

A participant contact list was developed along with a BLOG (web-log) for participants to keep informed about the project and share progress (see Figure 3). Anne Currey led the communications development. Bimonthly project updates from the communications leader were sent to CVCB members as part of the communications plan for the project. An example of a project update for stakeholders can be accessed through the CD of project resources.

Figure 3: A snapshot of the BLOG front page



An evaluation plan was also developed by the project team with input from the independent evaluator commissioned for the project. The communication and evaluation plans are in Appendices 2 and 3, respectively.

A list of all *On the Fast Track* resources available can be found in Appendix 4.

Element 1 – Critical success factors

- Collaborative development of the project enabled different interests, expectations and perspectives on capacity building to be discussed and built into project objectives. This created ownership and involvement in the whole project by the stakeholders.
- Tight project leadership and management were important to keep to project deadlines, work collaboratively to meet participation targets and involve CVCB members in their area of interest. Phone hook-ups at key decision points were useful to keep people up to date, gain necessary input and increase participation of the different industries.
- Involvement of a core team in key ‘doing’ roles (mentor support, evaluation, communication and content design and delivery) ensured people were up to date, knew their role and were aware of the ‘bigger’ picture and the project’s intent.
- Application of the principles of capacity building to all dimensions of the project provided a solid basis for learning and reflection for the project team – and a high level of responsiveness to participant needs.

Element 2 – Identification of issues in capacity building, review of CVCB research outputs and development of a framework for thinking about capacity building

In order to align CVCB research outputs to the needs of practitioners, CVCB members were asked to identify potential participants for the project. These people were asked to complete a pro forma that outlined their area of work, interest in participating and their issues in managing and delivering capacity building projects. From these, the project team listed the key questions and issues of practitioners. The project team believed that starting from these needs and issues would increase the project's relevance and attractiveness to participants.

Examples of issues and questions listed:

- How do we encourage involvement of people in activities?
- How do our projects encourage stakeholder or 'community of practice' buy-in?
- How do we best work with others to get the job done?
- How to better design projects to make more of a difference?
- How to choose the best delivery approaches – and practice best-practice?
- What tools and techniques in delivery can we draw on?
- What makes activities best-practice?
- How do we best monitor and evaluate and present the impact we have?
- How do we know we've achieved stronger and more resilient industries/communities or groups (i.e. achieved the capacity we've sought to affect)?

These issues and questions became the basis for the development of the capacity building framework, content and delivery approaches for engaging prospective participants, translating research outputs into a workbook for use by practitioners and designing the workshops.

A framework for thinking about capacity building

The confusion about what capacity building is and what approaches are (or are not) capacity building led the project team to design a framework that people could use to think about capacity building – and how to position the CVCB research with respect to their practice. The resulting framework helped people think about capacity building as a process of focusing on outcomes for rural industries that built the 'capitals' (human, social, financial, natural and physical), engaged both target audiences and stakeholders in achieving these outcomes, designed and delivered innovative approaches to support those outcomes, and continuously monitored, adapted and evaluated impacts.

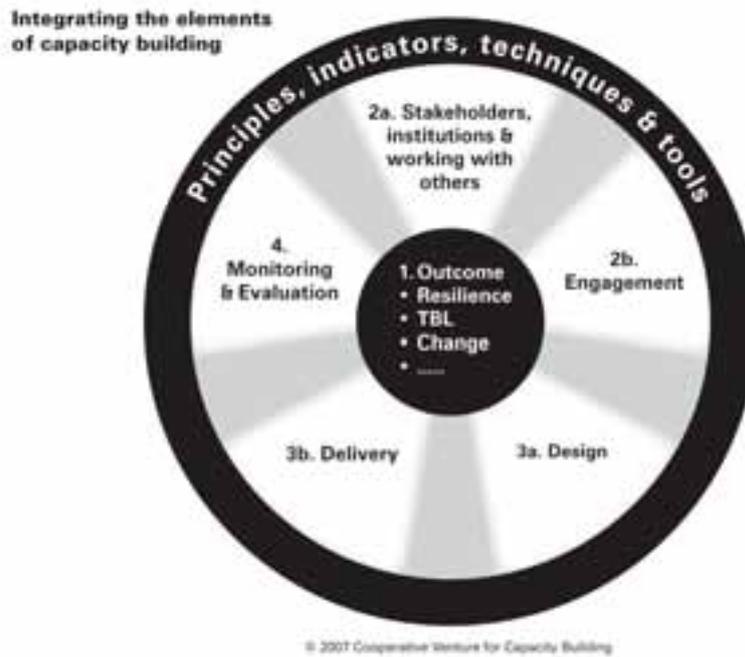
The framework was built on a metaphor of a bike wheel – 'the capacity building wheel' (Figure 4). If the outcomes for capacity building are well defined and central to the process (wheel 'hub'), if all capacity building elements (wheel 'spokes') are operating well and are continually informed by best practice principles, and if there are sophisticated indicators of progress and useful techniques and tools (the bike tyre is pumped up so the tyre is at full inflation), then the wheel runs smoothly and achieves its intent (the destination).

"The wheel gave me a way of better explaining capacity building to others." - *On the Fast Track* participant

If one or more spokes, the hub or the tyre are not working well – so the wheel is unbalanced or broken – the aim will not be achieved. This framework was suggested as a way to think systemically about capacity building – whether participants were project managers, practitioners or investors.

This framework was used to develop the workshop program and align CVCB research outputs to a 'topic'. The capacity building wheel became a key tool for project participants to relate CVCB research outputs to their own situation and to communicate capacity building to others. It became a 'translating device' for CVCB research and was a creative development of the project.

Figure 4: 'The capacity building wheel'



"I have found using the capacity building wheel to be a useful model for planning delivery of projects, and I will use it again." - *On the Fast Track* participant

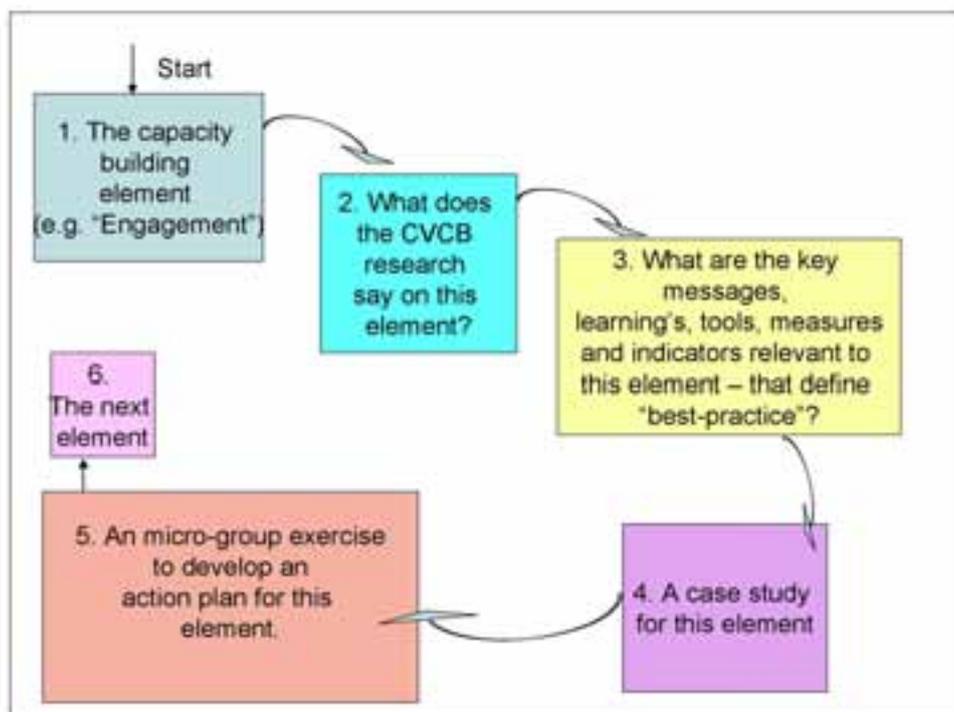
Element 2 – Critical success factors

- Development of the capacity building wheel as a framework was central to the project and fulfilled an important role in supporting the project outcomes of increased confidence in capacity building and improved projects. It was an engaging metaphor for capacity building, it helped people position the CVCB research for the day-to-day work of managing and doing capacity building, it provided a way for people to talk about capacity building with each other, it enabled a workshop that presented research findings to be designed in a logical way, and it enabled participants to target areas for improvement in their own approaches. It emerged as a key legacy of the project. The development of such frameworks is therefore an important part of project designs for bringing research and practice together – such translation devices are creative developments and are an outcome in themselves.
- Involvement of a key CVCB researcher and the CVCB project manager (who were very familiar with the CVCB research findings) in mapping the research against the needs and issues of those involved in capacity building was an important part of developing resources that met participant needs.

Element 3 – Translation of CVCB research outputs into a workbook and workshop design

The project team developed a workbook and action planning document that summarised key CVCB research findings relevant to the questions and issues of participants. Building off the capacity building wheel, key CVCB research documents (e.g. *What works and why*, *Fostering involvement*, *Institutional arrangements*, these and other capacity building documents are available from RIRDC at <http://www.rirdc.gov.au/capacitybuilding/reports.html>) were summarised. Key messages and case studies from CVCB member organisations were compiled. Following adult learning and action learning principles, exercises were formulated for participants to formally reflect on their current practices, think about how the research could be applied to improve their current ways of doing things and, with the critical questioning and support provided by other participants, decide on steps to improve each element of capacity building (Figure 5).

Figure 5: The workshop and workbook process built off the capacity building wheel



Element 3 – Critical success factors

- Design of a workbook and workshop concurrently is important for consistency in delivery.
- Provision of a practical workbook was highly valued by participants and led people to look further into research findings – it made the full research reports more accessible. The workbook and action plan resources are available on the CD of project resources.

Element 4 – Invitation of participants from CVCB partner networks

Participants in the project were sourced by three main pathways. CVCB members nominated people from their industries and projects who they felt would benefit. The project was advertised on the e-mail list of the Australia-Pacific Extension Network (APEN). Once mentors were commissioned, they became conduits for people to become involved. The project team developed guidelines in relation to the type of people who would benefit from the project and people were provided with information about what to expect. Participants also completed a pro forma outlining their role, their area of work and the project they wished to pursue through involvement.

The following criteria were used to assist recruitment and selection:

- be associated with a CVCB member organisation (e.g. Cotton RDC, Sugar RDC, Dairy Australia, MLA, AWI, etc.) or a rural industry
- be a capacity building project manager/investor or a key practitioner
- have a capacity building issue (i.e. something they would like to improve or get support for over the next 12 months)
- have a desire to improve their practice as a capacity building investor/manager or practitioner
- would value mentoring
- be able to improve or act on their issue (i.e. have the power, resources and mandate to act)
- be able to articulate realistic outcomes that they are seeking from involvement
- have a funding source to pay for involvement
- have the support of their employing organisation
- be highly interested in/enthusiastic about participating
- be prepared to show how seriously they take their involvement by allocating time to their action plans and engaging with mentoring (this will show itself as a commitment across the 8-9 months of approximately 14 days – 4 days of workshops, 1 day of presentation preparation, 1 day of mentoring and about 5 days minimum actively working on their action plan)
- be willing to put together a brief presentation on their project and capacity building issue to present to other participants.

Element 4 – Critical success factors

- Active recruitment by the project team was effective in having the right people participate. Active recruitment required an intimate knowledge of what the project was about and what people would get out of it.
- Involvement of people at the early stage of their own projects was more likely to deliver benefits.
- Involvement of participants who did not fit the preferred participant characteristics did not get a lot out of the project (this was because they were not briefed well enough by the supporting CVCB member, were unfamiliar with the project intent, did not commit to the time and purpose of the project or did not value mentoring).
- Demonstration, at the end of the project, by CVCB members and participants that they now understood what the project entailed much better and they could now identify many more people that would benefit.
- Workshop size of 18-20 participants was ideal for optimising learning and allowing sufficient time for networking and mentor matching.

Element 5 – Invitation of mentors from CVCB partner networks

Mentoring was a key feature of the project and created a great deal of interest among participants and stakeholders. Although mentoring is often a stand-alone intervention, to assist a less-experienced person in their development (Hobson, 2003) mentoring in this project was conceived as a process to assist with the uptake of research and support participants to put the research into practice. Mentoring was designed to offset the post-workshop slump in motivation and action often experienced in one-off training events.

Mentoring was also considered consistent with the principles of a capacity building, i.e. supporting continuous improvement. A mentor support person (Mentor Development) was commissioned by the project team to ensure the mentoring component of the project ran smoothly and the mentors were supported adequately. This role emerged as a key design feature for the project. The objective for the mentoring was to help participants put their plans into action after the workshop, continue to support their development as ‘capacity builders’ and encourage continued use of CVCB resources.

A number of potential mentors were identified by the core project team and mentor developer drawing on public and private sector experience and networks. Mentors were contacted to see if they were interested and had the time to allocate to the project. There was an enthusiastic response to the invitation with mentors also interested in finding more out about the CVCB research.

The project team decided that mentors should be paid for all their expenses – and reimbursed for their time – unless their industry or organisation was happy for their mentoring time to be volunteered to the project. Of the 20 mentors in the project, 14 were reimbursed for their time and the remaining mentors had the support of their organisation. Reimbursement for mentoring time was not provided at commercial consulting rates and this was discussed with the mentors prior to them being contracted to the project

The mentors’ roles and responsibilities included:

- participate in mentor briefing (estimate 0.5-1 day)
- attend the workshop in which mentees will be present (2 days/workshop)
- effectively support/mentor participants in implementing their action plan developed from attending the first workshop
- be a pro-active mentor (support, advise and encourage participants in addressing their capacity building issue) to 1-4 participants over 6-7 months, working with each for 8 hours over this time
- keep records of the time spent mentoring and the nature of the mentoring with each participant as well as any issues arising
- report on mentees’ progress in relation to their a) increased capacity, b) extent of use of CVCB research, c) level of networking with other participants between projects, and d) level of reflection and critical thinking on their role in capacity building and capacity building project design, implementation and evaluation.

“The mentor role is designed for people who are highly regarded by the different industries in the capacity building area and will actively take an interest in what people are trying to achieve.” - Ruth Nettle, project leader

The project involved 20 mentors supporting 43 mentees. Most mentors (12) had two mentees to look after, with a range between one and four.

Briefing sessions for mentors were important to provide a context for the project and explain the role of the mentor. There was inadequate time (and budget) for specific training. However, the mentor developer aimed to draw on the knowledge of the group at all opportunities. The briefing session and training provided an opportunity for this sharing to get established.

“One lesson from this process is that mentor training is important and should be factored in to ensure the mentors have adequate skills. Briefing alone is not adequate. Our phone hook-ups provided a forum for support and informal training and made up for the inadequate training in this project design.” - Jenny O’Sullivan, mentor developer

An unexpected outcome from this approach was the appreciation expressed by the mentors in being more exposed to the CVCB research, sharing and learning with each other and being able to use the approaches and tools from their involvement in broader contexts. This meant the CVCB resources were used more widely than envisaged by the project team when focusing on the participants and their development as capacity builders. All people involved in the project developed as co-learners.

Element 5 – Critical success factors

- Designation of a mentor development role within the project team was critical to the success of the mentor process.
- Acknowledgement of mentors as a key target audience for use of CVCB research (this was initially underestimated).
- Reduction of isolation in the mentor role was helped by mentors learning from each other.
- Involvement of more CVCB researchers as mentors would provide greater connection between CVCB research and participants as many of the project’s mentors were not familiar with CVCB research until their involvement in this project.

Details of mentor development and support activities can be found in the mentor report in the CD of project resources.

Element 6 – Delivery of cross-sector 2-day workshops

The project was designed around participants attending two workshops (one at the beginning of the project and one towards the conclusion) with a project undertaken by each participant between workshops.

Design principles for the workshops included:

- begin with the issues of participants and where they are ‘at’ in their efforts, i.e. position the content from the CVCB research to the issues of relevance to the participants
- recognise the personal aspects of people’s participation – people are coming to improve their project but this also brings up their part in achieving improvement and their personal agency and ways of doing things
- develop learning tools alongside the content to encourage reflection, e.g. exercises, case studies, use of participant experiences
- ensure clear messages (otherwise increased confidence can’t occur)
- ensure the workshop process builds off the learning cycle, i.e. reflection on current practice; making sense of CVCB research; planning for action; and taking action
- ensure the workshop helps participants build an action plan
- ensure the workshop, although systematically going through the elements of capacity building, integrates the elements in a holistic way.

Case studies, exercises (see Plate 1), ‘expert panels’, peer support groups and participant presentations were used to help consolidate learning. Over the two days of the workshop, participants built action plans. These plans formed the basis of a mentoring relationship that supported putting these plans into action over the next eight months.



Plate 1: An exercise in design and delivery

In total, the project held three ‘kick-off’ workshops in Brisbane (19-20 April 2007), Sydney (14-15 May 2007) and Melbourne (28-29 May 2007) and one final ‘end-of-project’ workshop in Sydney (3-4 December 2007). A key purpose of this delivery mode was to encourage cross-sector networking and learning. To a great extent this was achieved through people purposefully attending workshops in

locations away from their normal networks and each workshop having a balance of different industries and roles (e.g. cotton and sugar participants attending workshops in Melbourne; a mix of project managers and field workers present).

There was significant benefit gained from the new professional networks developed by participants through the project. In the post-project survey 53% ($\pm 10\%$) of participants indicated they had utilised new professional networks developed during the project.

"A major outcome for me - I accessed information from other participants and mentors." - *On the Fast Track* participant

A running sheet and power point presentation for the Melbourne workshop is provided for demonstration purposes in the CD of project resources.

Participants covered their own travel, accommodation and meals to both workshops. Workbook materials and mentoring costs were covered by the project.

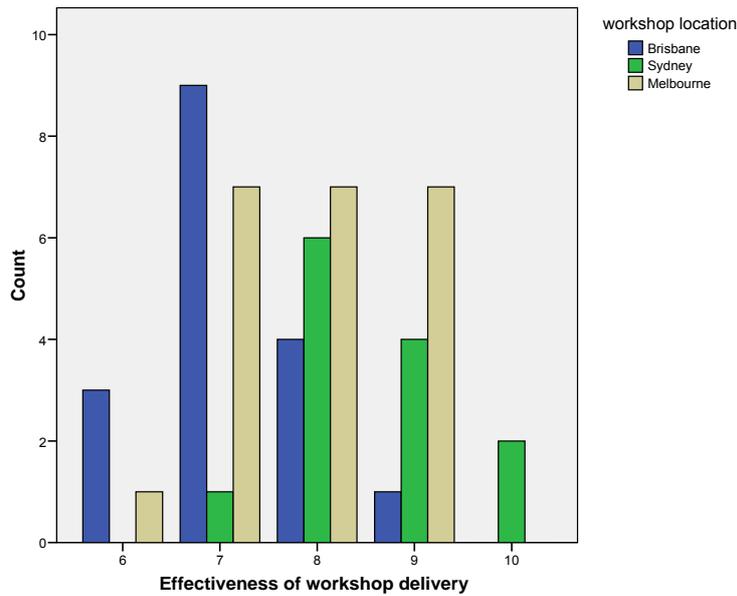
The initial workshop was heavily evaluated (see Plate 2), and the evaluation recommendations were used to make minor modifications to the workshop approach. This contributed to improved evaluation results for the final two workshops. Further, participants completed a self-assessment questionnaire of their current knowledge and skills in capacity building as well as their current awareness and use of CVCB research. This questionnaire was repeated at the end of the project.



Plate 2: Day 1 evaluation

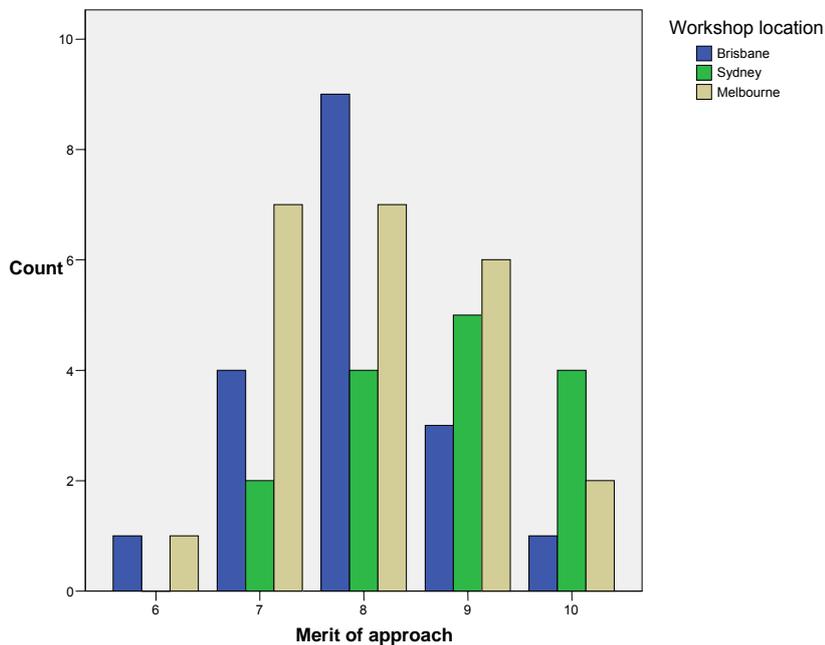
The improvement in workshop score after the first Brisbane workshop is depicted in Figure 6 where there was a big improvement in the participant's assessment of the effectiveness of the workshop delivery for the Sydney and Melbourne workshops.

Figure 6: Participant scores of effectiveness of workshop delivery in each workshop location (Source: Stephen Kelly, evaluation report)



At the end of the first workshop participants were asked their opinion on the *On the Fast Track* approach to improve practitioner use of CVCB resources (see Figure 7). Participants at this stage were generally confident that the approach held a great deal of merit.

Figure 7: Merit of the *On the Fast Track* approach versus workshop location (Source: Stephen Kelly, evaluation report)



"The whole experience (workshop presentations, and activities, interaction with others, mentoring process and action plan) was valued by the workshop participants. A common highlight mentioned by participants was meeting and sharing common concerns with the other participants and mentors." - Stephen Kelly, evaluation report

Participants found the workshop delivery process to be an effective way to learn about CVCB resources. Participants were highly complimentary about the skill and enthusiasm of the workshop presenters. Most participants felt that the workshop process should be 'left as it is' for future delivery.

Element 6 – Critical success factors

- Contributions of the foundation elements of the *On the Fast Track* approach (Elements 1 through to 5) to the workshop design and delivery ensured an effective and useful workshop for participants that increased the use of CVCB resources.
- Evaluation by participants on what they believed made the approach successful included: hearing about other industries; hearing from others; meeting others; small group work; balanced mix of learning, pondering and doing; the mentor matching and mentoring process; and the effectiveness of the follow up process to get the action plan 'on the ground'.

Element 7 – Development of action plans and choice of mentors by workshop participants

Through the workshop, participants developed action plans for each element of the capacity building wheel to apply to their topic or project. Further, participants formed groups of 2 or 3 to help build each other’s action plans (Plate 3) for each element of capacity building (see Box 1 for a sample action plan template). This worked like a ‘critical friend’ feedback approach.



Plate 3: Action planning in Melbourne

Box 1 Example of an action plan template

Your action plan: engagement

Your aim is to develop a clear and robust action plan about the engagement approach for your project.

How satisfied are you with your current engagement of target audiences, stakeholders, communities of practice and/or groups you need to work with?

Satisfaction level: _____

Is there anything that would be good to change/could be better? _____

How could it be better? _____

What will you change? _____

What do you need to make this happen? _____

Who else is currently involved? _____

Who needs to be involved? _____

How will you involve them? _____

When will it be done? _____

How can your mentor help? _____

Participants were asked how effective the action planning process was in assisting them use the CVCB research resources (see Table 4).

Table 4: Participant's scores for the usefulness of the action plan

Score for usefulness of action plan	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No. of participants	5	2	2	3	11	4	1	4	0	4

The effectiveness of action plans varied widely. The comments accompanying high scores were:

"The action plan helped me clarify my goals and build confidence in my own research capabilities."

"Gave me a plan to get out of the current nightmare of workload."

"It was an excellent place to start our mentoring relationship and conversation."

"Process was good to use & helps you plan projects better & build in M&E [monitoring and evaluation] at the beginning."

The reason behind low scores was usually because the mentee's project changed or the mentee and mentor did not refer back to the action plan after the workshop. It was common that mentees who attended the workshop without a suitable project to work through gave a low score for the usefulness of the action plan. One participant gave a low score because they ran out of time to complete the action plan during the workshop.

At the end of the first day, participants nominated their preferred mentor. Mentors circulated among participants and contributed to discussion and panels (Plate 4) so that participants were able to get to know the mentors a little more and to think about who they might prefer as a mentor to help them put their plans into action. The matching process is a critical foundation for effective mentoring relationships. The aim is to ensure the mentees have adequate time to get to know mentors, and mentors are comfortable with the mentees that have selected them. Box 2 provides key steps in the mentor-mentee matching process at the workshops.



Plate 4: Mentor forum

Box 2 The mentor-mentee matching process at workshops

1. The participants had the opportunity before attending to outline their projects and preferences for mentors – with respect to preferred industry involvement and gender.
2. Profiles of mentors were provided to all participants from day one
3. The design of the workshop program on day one optimised mentor interaction with all participants. For instance there were two mentor panels where the group could draw on the mentors experiences and knowledge around the areas of ‘outcomes’ and ‘engagement’ in capacity building. Also, action planning sessions involved small group work where two participants worked with one mentor. Finally, over the evening meal mentors are given the opportunity to speak and the participants are encouraged to speak with a variety of mentors before they make their final choices.
4. Before they retired for the night participants wrote down their three preferences for mentors that they would be happy to work with and described why they chose them.
5. The mentor developer then sorted the preferences, making an informed attempt at sorting the matches before presenting this to mentors.
6. A table of ‘matchings’ was presented to the mentors in the morning. The mentors discussed if they were comfortable with the match. In this respect, mentors get the final say about who they work with.
7. Mentors were formally matched on the morning of the second day, after which they had two hours for building the relationship and discussing and establishing expectations about how they would work together.
8. They signed a mentoring agreement and discussed mentees’ projects and created first-steps around the participant’s action plans. Plans for next meetings were made after this.

At the conclusion of the workshops, mentees and mentors were asked to score and comment on the effectiveness of the mentor-mentee matching process. The high scores (see Table 5) reflect the satisfaction with the process.

Table 5: Participant’s assessment of the effectiveness of the mentor-mentee matching process (NB. The scores are from both mentors and mentees. There was no significant difference in scores for these two sub sets.)

Score	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Effectiveness of the mentor-mentee matching process.					1		4	18	17	9

The mentors were very happy with the process in that it allowed meaningful discussions (Plate 5) to commence quite quickly between them and their mentees.



Plate 5: Mentor-mentee discussions

Suggestions for improvement from the mentees were:

- more time to hear from or meet mentors before putting in selections
- mentor 'profiles' to be sent out as pre-workshop materials.

Suggestions for improvement from the mentors were:

- a little more time for discussions
- a description of the mentees so the mentor could target their skills towards mentees
- more social time together.

"This process could be improved if we could do some learning profiles and have all involved aware of individual learning styles before the selection process and to use during relationship throughout the project."

- Jenny O'Sullivan, mentor developer

A template of the contract for mentoring can be found in the CD of project resources.

Element 7 – Critical success factors

- Preparation of quality action plans was a central part of successful mentoring experiences and so ensuring action plans are meaningful, well constructed and relevant to participants is important. Having a mechanism to check on this would be a useful addition to the workshop process.
- The mentor-mentee matching process designed for this project is an important foundation for effectively starting mentoring relationships. However, effective relationships still require effort and commitment from mentees and mentors and do not rely on effective matching alone.
- Better preparation of both mentees and mentors for their role would improve the project.

Element 8 – Implementation of action plans by participants with mentor support

Building people's confidence and skills in the principles and elements of capacity building is not an overnight process. In addition, in the every-day world of managers and practitioners, projects change, evolve or don't get funding. These two issues (personal capacity and project imperatives) had a significant impact on the mentoring relationships that were established and therefore the overall outcomes flowing from the project.

The *On the Fast Track* approach revolved around participant's projects and their role in those projects. Participant projects were diverse and included:

- developing mentoring systems in the dairy industry
- improving women's involvement in industry decision making
- improving grower group processes
- designing effective farm business management groups in the sugar industry
- building stronger young farmers networks
- developing a better extension project proposal with a greater focus on capacity building
- creating extension leverage from NRM networks
- building Indigenous employment strategies in the cotton industry
- building capacity of commercial irrigation services in the cotton industry
- more effective reporting of capacity building efforts to stakeholders.

This diversity of topics also affected the nature of the action plans developed by participants, and mentors then needed to position their mentoring approach to the action plans and needs of participants.

Participants who gave a positive assessment of the usefulness of the action plan also gave a high score for the value and effectiveness of mentoring. A low a score for the action plans led to a wide range of scores for mentoring.

"...Although a poor experience with the action plan did not necessarily lead to a poor mentoring experience- a good experience with the action plan always led to a good mentoring experience." Stephen Kelly, evaluation report

The mentoring period of the project produced a wide range of different experiences and assessments of mentoring for both mentors and mentees. Thirty-five participants (26 mentees and 9 mentors) gave an assessment of the effectiveness of their mentoring experience in the post-project questionnaire.

Forty-six per cent (46%) of participants assessed their mentoring experience as highly effective, 34% as OK, and 20% as ineffective. Highly effective and rewarding experiences for both mentors and mentees appeared critical to the size of the participant outcomes flowing from project involvement.

For instance, participants' opinion of the usefulness and effectiveness of the mentoring was a predictor of their self-reported rate of increase in confidence in capacity building.

In their mid-term reports some mentors reported straightforward and stimulating experiences:

"[My mentee] has been open and forthcoming. It has been important that I listen (and not speak at times) as talking through issues has been very beneficial to them."

"[My mentee] has been motivated to get real progress on their project so that motivation has really enhanced the ability to work together effectively. It has been important for me to be available to them when they have needed me."

"It has been interesting to hear and discuss the areas that my mentees are involved in. [One of my mentees] is extremely positive and proactive and as such, is a stimulating mentee. [Another] is very appreciative of the opportunity to talk through and evaluate

different options. Each discussion with my mentees has been positive and has resulted in agreed next steps."

"Some outcomes for me have been... Building relationships. Skill development. New contacts. Increased knowledge of work places and how other government and NGO [non-governmental organisation] systems operate."

Other mentors had less than stimulating experiences, and although this did not lessen their commitment to the project, this experience did reduce the overall benefit to them from participating and gave them (and the project team) a sense of 'missed opportunities' for some project participants.

Comments from mentor mid-term reports included:

"Given the level of investment in the mentoring project to date, I feel that I have not been fully utilised by my mentees and that is somewhat frustrating. Ultimately, the mentee owns the project so the mentor does seem peripheral to the action. Maybe that is my learning as a mentor to date!"

"I had difficulty engaging [my mentee] and feeling that I have not been very successful as a mentor with him, although not through a lack of effort on my behalf. It's a little frustrating as I feel the opportunity being provided to him is not being fully taken up by him. I would love the opportunity to have a mentor!!!"

"I've not been able to get any feel from [my mentee] that he wants to be mentored or values this opportunity."

For some participants mentoring was the make-or-break for a successful project. Comments collated from post-project surveys of participants included:

"If it had not been for the workshop and mentor I don't know where this project or my sanity would be"

"The contact with my mentor made all the difference to my project. The help I got to focus the project on better outcomes and how to achieve them was invaluable."

"Our mentor played a vital role in providing direction and challenged our thinking about capacity building for our projects and mostly importantly for ourselves."

For others, mentoring did not meet their project or personal needs at this time. Comments included:

"The mentoring was good and the project had good quality personnel. I found it hard to integrate the mentoring into existing work and I didn't know what I was getting into at the start of the (On the Fast Track) project."

"A mentor hasn't really been needed for this project to date - no fault of the Mentor, but there just hasn't been any requirement for significant input".

The mentoring program added significant leverage to the confidence building impact of the workshop activities and resources. A successful mentoring experience led to an increase in the confidence of participants in more aspects of capacity building. - Stephen Kelly, evaluation report

Mentoring was the only component of the *On the Fast Track* project that was a statistically significant predictor of the degree of increase in participant's confidence. - Stephen Kelly, evaluation report

The project team examined some of the reasons for less than optimum mentoring experiences to harness lessons for the role of mentoring in capacity building. Mentor phone hook-ups, mentor reports and questionnaire responses provided this insight.

The predominant causes for less effective mentoring experiences as reported by mentors were:

- mentors (rightly) expecting interest and motivation from their mentees and mentees not playing their part
- mentors spending time trying to chase up and help – with no reciprocal effort
- mentors feeling pressured by the time scale of the mentoring program and the scale of their mentee's project – this worked to thwart possibilities for good rapport and connection with their mentee to result in effective support
- mentor not knowing enough about the role of the mentor and how to effectively mentor (e.g. one mentor received more benefit or stimulation from the support phone hook-ups than 'doing' the mentoring role).

The predominant causes for less effective mentoring experiences as reported by mentees were:

- mentees taking time to come to terms with their mentors style and approach and for some, trust and rapport did not develop
- mentees not knowing how to use the mentoring resource
- mentees not perceiving a need or wanting mentoring.

Experiencing an imbalance in 'supply/demand' concerning mentoring was very frustrating for the mentor involved, but not always frustrating for the mentee. Hence the mentee's assessment of effectiveness was usually higher than their mentor's.

Element 8 – Critical success factors

- Acknowledgement that the needs of the mentors (e.g. for benefits, stimulation, challenge and reward) need to be prioritised through the mentoring experience.
- Commitment to the mentoring relationship relies on
 - both parties wanting to be involved in a mentoring relationship, i.e. joint commitment to and interest in mentoring (people who truly want to be mentored, not just fulfilling a manager's or funder's directive)
 - both mentor and mentee understanding their roles
 - joint motivation towards the goals of mentoring
 - rapport between mentor and mentee (including trust and respect) and a sharing of some common passion
 - a project or topic/issue of a mentee is stimulating to both parties
 - mentor interest in the situation of the mentee – not just their project
 - mentor being available and non-judgemental
 - mentor developing a good understanding of the company the mentee is working within
 - developing a mutual trust, i.e. do what you say you'll do; don't let each other down
 - commitment and action on the part of the mentee.
- Allocation of adequate time to develop the relationship relies on:
 - both parties being available for each other
 - mentors need to take the time to discuss and make suggestions.
- Use of communication skills relies on:
 - mentor being willing to listen from the outset, in order to understand a mentee's current situation and understand what the mentee is grappling with
 - mentor using support and feedback skills and 'being there' when needed

- good two-way contact between parties.
- Demonstration of solid mentoring processes rely on:
 - a culture of reviewing and reflecting on action taken or tools used is built through the relationship
 - mentors with a wide breadth of life experiences so they can change approach depending on the mentee
 - mentors helping mentees to move action plans into tasks that are manageable
 - mentors encouraging mentees to do a first shot at an action rather than waiting for the perfect plan
 - mentors providing strategic comment and discussion
 - mentors bringing background knowledge and networks to their situations
 - mentors conceptualising options and empowering mentees to take manageable steps that are appropriate to their situation
 - mentors relating what mentees need to do back to the capacity building framework outlined in the workshop
 - meeting face-to-face assists the relationship.

"On the Fast Track is a good approach that has taught me a lot, as a mentor." - On the Fast Track mentor

Element 9 – Support of mentors in their role through teleconferences

Mentors appreciated being exposed to the CVCB research materials and interaction with other mentors as well as participants. This ‘co-learning’ between participants, mentors and the project team throughout the whole project became a key feature of the project.

Twelve teleconferences were conducted by the mentor developer from May through to November with the mentors. There was a final hook-up for all mentors on 14 January 2008, to discuss final outcomes and reports (Table 6).

Table 6: Mentor teleconferences

Location	Number of teleconferences	Dates
Brisbane	5	22 May; 29 June; 20 August; 8 October; 23 November
Sydney	4	14 June; 7 September; 2 August; 30 October
Melbourne	3	16 July; 10 September; 30 October
All	1	14 January 2008

The purpose of these were to provide support, answer queries, encourage sharing of mentor learnings and keep mentors motivated. The sessions were also a valuable way for the project team to keep informed of the mentees’ progress during the project.

At each hook-up the mentors would report on:

- the project their mentee was working on and progress to date
- how the mentoring process was working
- what was working well and what challenges were being faced.

Mentors rated this support highly as shown by the following comments:

“The project staff have been reliable and focused throughout the process and have provided clear outlines of what has to be done.”

“There has been strong on-going contact with Jenny - and the phone hook-ups have been useful - helped with direction and motivation.”

Element 9 – Critical success factors

- Mentor support is critical for mentor development, mentor motivation and learning.
- Mentor support sessions also provide a way of monitoring project progress without placing too great a burden on participants or mentors for completing regular written updates on progress.

Element 10 – Presentation of participant results at final workshop

The project ended with a final workshop in Sydney involving people from all workshops coming together to share their results with each other and think about 'next steps' in capacity building for themselves and their projects. This not only consolidated and reinforced learning but also turned networking opportunities into more established relationships that would endure beyond the project. Attendance at the workshop was encouraged but not mandatory, and the project budget did not enable funding of travel, accommodation or time of mentors to attend. Despite this, 27 people attended the final workshop including six mentors and six project team/CVCB members.

In the final evaluation, the rate of participants reporting an increased confidence in engagement and design and delivery aspects of capacity building was much higher among those who attended the final workshop in Sydney.

All participants in the project were asked to submit a summary (abstract) of their project, key learnings and outcomes. A booklet of project abstracts was produced for the final workshop. This can be accessed through the CD of project resources.

The workshop consisted of activities designed to focus participants on capacity-building principles, participant presentations on their progress and learnings, sharing of new tools and insights in capacity building, and developing ideas and plans for having a wider impact beyond the project into participant's region or organisation. A running sheet for the final workshop is contained in the CD of project resources.

Although a project BLOG was established to aid the sharing of information and progress, feedback from participants indicates that the use of the BLOG has been quite low. Reasons for the low usage include lack of computer skills, difficulty in access, not enough content added by the project team and 'shyness' to add comment.

Element 10 – Critical success factors

- The final workshop is essential for consolidating learnings, celebrating successes and building networks to improve capacity building approaches.
- Encouragement and support of mentors to attend the final workshop would enhance outcomes and acknowledge the mentor role.

Results and outcomes from the project

The impacts and outcomes from the *On the Fast Track* project were documented through three main data collection methods:

- participant and mentor questionnaires (pre- and post-) about their experience in the workshops and use of CVCB resources
- participant project reports detailing what participants did and the results they achieved (for a list of projects completed refer to the project abstracts in CD of project resources)
- mentor reports.

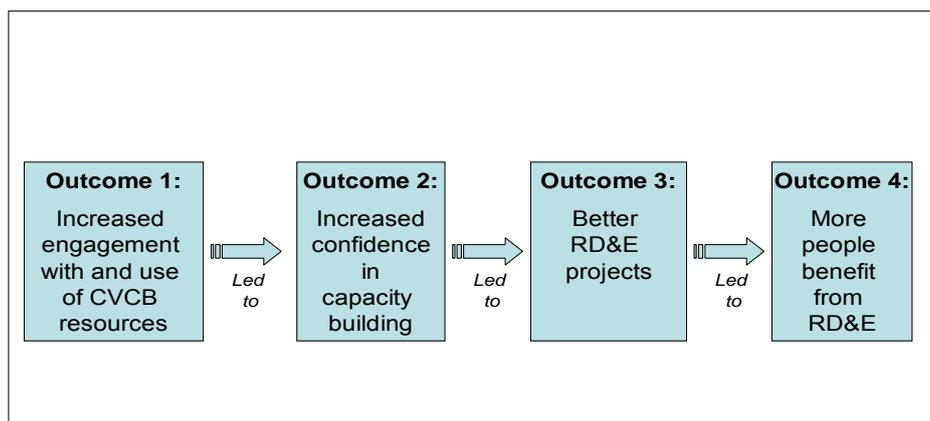
Further, the key evaluation questions outlined in the evaluation plan guided the nature of the reporting of impacts.

From feedback sheets and project reports it is estimated that 40 of the 43 participants benefited directly from involvement in the workshop and exposure to the resources (three participants did not continue in the project after attending the first workshop). Of those that followed through into projects and mentoring 30/40 (75%) had a moderate to high impact as evidenced by their project reports and mentor comments, and 10/40 had a low impact. Of the 20 mentors 18/20 suggested they benefited directly from involvement and of these it is estimated that 11 (60%) benefited greatly through exposure to CVCB resources and the use of it in their work beyond this project.

The overall outcomes from the project can be conceptualised as a four stage process (see Figure 8):

1. Increased engagement with and use of CVCB resources, leading to
2. Increased confidence in capacity building (and helping others understand capacity building), leading to
3. Better RD&E projects, leading to
4. More people benefit from RD&E (i.e. increased benefits to producers and communities involved in these projects and increased return on investment from RD&E).

Figure 8: Four stages of outcomes from involvement in *On the Fast Track*



Outcome 1 – Increased engagement with and use of CVCB resources

The reported rate of use of CVCB resources and research by participants increased from 25% pre-project to 55.6% post- project.³

The most commonly used CVCB research was:

- The role of extension in building capacity – What Works and Why (RIRDC Publication 05/094)

Participants also reported using:

- Agribusiness role in extension, education and training – a case study (RIRDC Publication 05/086)
- Fostering involvement – how to improve participation in learning (RIRDC Publication 05/105)
- Mapping of rural industries service providers (RIRDC Publication 05/044)
- Growing the capital of rural Australia – the task of capacity building (RIRDC Publication 04/034)
- Aligning extension and the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector (RIRDC Publication 07/063).

The *On the Fast Track* resources were also extensively used by participants post-workshop including:

- the ‘program logic’ approach
- ‘the Capacity Building Wheel’
- project planning and reporting frameworks
- the five approaches to design and delivery of extension.

The use of CVCB research by participants doubled through involvement in *On the Fast Track*

Because of their involvement in *On the Fast Track*, 28 out of 33 participants surveyed (85%) agreed or strongly agreed that they now have an ongoing ability to source and critically appraise and find out information about capacity building. The same number agreed or strongly agreed that they now have a framework to use in future capacity building efforts and in communication with their organisation about capacity building.

The majority of participants (77 %) who completed the post-project survey used their workbook as a resource for their capacity building work after the workshop.

³ This increase is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level (Stephen Kelly, evaluation report).

Outcome 2 – Increased confidence in capacity building (and helping others understand capacity building)

Thirty-three of 36 (92%) surveyed participants reported an increase in confidence for at least one aspect of capacity building (see Table 7). Participants reported that their involvement with the project provided new insights into aspects of capacity building that they were able to apply to their work.

Table 7: Participants’ response to the survey question: By being involved with this project, in which aspect(s) of capacity building has your confidence increased?

Capacity building aspect	Confidence increased
The definition and understanding of capacity building outcomes	26 (72%)
Engagement of different stakeholders and groups in capacity building	22 (61%)
Design and delivery of capacity building programs	24 (67%)
Evaluation of capacity building programs	18 (50%)

The mentoring had a measurable positive impact on participants’ confidence in various aspects of capacity building. The participants’ assessment of the value and effectiveness of the mentoring program was a statistically significant predictor of the level of increase in confidence. No other individual component of the *On the Fast Track* project made a statistically significant impact on the confidence statistic.

Mentoring provides a significant leveraging effect for increasing confidence in capacity building – Stephen Kelly, evaluation report

For some participants, the impact of the workshop and mentoring went well beyond an improved project outcome. Reports of profound personal growth were noted:

“[The project] and mentoring assisted one mentee to reach some major life decisions.” – On the Fast Track mentor

“I would never have even thought to run my project before the first workshop.” – On the Fast Track participant

“[Being involved was] extremely valuable. Critical thinking that produced higher outcomes in project action plan & results.” – On the Fast Track participant

Participants were asked to provide evidence for their increased confidence in the elements of capacity building:

- Defining outcomes in capacity building: human, social, natural, physical and financial capitals
 - “I have learnt how to do an evaluation plan that does a better job of demonstrating impacts on people’s capacity from involvement in our NRM programs.”*
 - “It has reinforced the importance of an outcome and impact focus – to establish and demonstrate change and the benefits to industry, government and community from investment in RD&E.”*

- Improving engagement in capacity building
"You need to know your target audience well to achieve effective engagement. Each market segment has their own unique qualities and one simple method of engagement usually does not suit all My involvement in the project has meant I have a tighter focus on farmers' needs and ensure all efforts are put into producing a quality product to meet these needs."
- Designing and delivering capacity building efforts
"I have found using the capacity building wheel to be a useful model for planning delivery of projects, and I will use it again."
- Evaluating capacity building
"You can do it without a questionnaire! This is probably one of the best bits I got from my mentor. It has made me think about evaluation in a different way - I am probably evaluating more things, but with less effort (i.e. not torturing people with surveys)."
"Evaluation is an integral part of the design and delivery and can't really be extracted as a separate component. It should be included as a part of the design."

This increased confidence at a personal level has resulted in:

- personal goals being achieved
- higher impact at work from personal development directly increasing capacity for projects to occur in a region
"I have submitted an application to vary the project to something that is much more meaningful and deliverable." - On the Fast Track participant
"I now have...the confidence to commence the design and delivery" - On the Fast Track participant
"A better outcome for my clients and other extension projects through an increased level of my own effectiveness, and improved empathy and ability to communicate with my staff and clients to assist them in their capacity building efforts." - On the Fast Track participant
- increased motivation in work
- people seeing capacity building as their core business – and something to be continually developed and focused on as their professional practice
- finding CVCB resources more accessible.
- feeling confident in being part of a network and community.

An interesting anomaly in the evaluation data was that increased confidence did not necessarily translate to a self-assessed increase in capacity. Participants who scored themselves lower for capacity building skills and confidence in the pre-workshop questionnaire were more likely to offer a lower score for the usefulness of the workshop. It appears from comments on the evaluation sheets that this was because they were more likely to be unfamiliar with capacity building terms and definitions.

Outcome 3 – Better RD&E projects

The increased confidence in capacity building translated into more robust projects from a capacity building perspective. Nineteen out of thirty three participants (58%) agreed or strongly agreed this to be the case because of their involvement in *On the Fast Track*.

To gain an appreciation of the type and range of projects impacted across rural industries, project titles of participants are provided in Appendix 5. For a full report from participants on the impact of involvement in *On the Fast track*, please refer to the project abstracts document in the CD of project resources.

Better RD&E projects have flowed from involvement because participants' projects and programs are more focused, involve more stakeholders, are better designed and delivered and are better monitored and evaluated. Other projects that participants have been involved with have also been positively influenced.

Project reports suggest direct impact on project outcomes through the use of tools, networks and resources from CVCB and this project. Some of these impacts include:

- clearer project outcomes for project teams and their stakeholders
- more stakeholders engaged in projects
- more participants involved in projects
- more formalised and professional approaches to projects
- evaluation and monitoring being a part of project design
- overall better ways of doing things
- engagement of science teams in capacity building
- mentors using CVCB resources and tools in their work beyond the project
- principles, tools and resources being used in projects and programs more widely and not just confined to the one project participants were working on.

"This [On the Fast Track] approach is an important management tool for business. The low risk participation has been an effective learning process; the new experiences can be applied to employee management." - On the Fast Track mentor

"I attended a sugar industry event as a result of my involvement in this project. I ... explained how the 'women in cotton group' was set up and what worked and what didn't and this gave the sugar women some idea of how to set up their network." - On the Fast Track mentor

Outcome 4 – More people benefit from RD&E (i.e. increased benefits to producers and communities involved in these projects and increased return on investment from RD&E)

Because participants in the *On the Fast Track* project were predominantly involved in managing and delivering projects aimed at increasing productivity, profitability and sustainability of rural industries, improvements in their projects would increase the return on investment from these projects. Increased returns would come through either increasing the reach of projects (more people involved) and/or the extent of positive change from involvement in the project. To corroborate this, the *On the Fast Track* project team sought examples of how participant reports of better RD&E projects (Outcome 3) might be increasing the return on investment from these projects (Outcome 4). This data was sourced from participant project reports and mentor reports on participant projects (i.e. not direct observation of enhanced outcomes among rural producers).

Examples of industry impacts are provided here to point to longer-term *potential* outcomes from involvement in *On the Fast Track*.

In the dairy industry

- Direct improvement in the design and delivery of an industry mentoring scheme affects the outcomes for 150 farmers and service providers involved in that project. Farmers and service providers benefit from improved design and delivery through a) quicker establishment of mentoring relationships and b) more successful mentoring. It is envisaged that this will speed up the rate in which goals are achieved and improve the quality of the outcomes of this project – and ensure the project is delivered on time (e.g. less lag time in coping with errors) – with potential cost savings.
- Dairy farmers benefit from greater expenditure in RD&E in their region because of a manager's capacity to redirect their efforts and harness more leveraged dollars.
- Better dairy project evaluation increases visibility of impacts, reduces costs (e.g. unnecessary data collection) and benefits farmers involved through better project design that makes change on-farm easier to achieve (use of lessons from evaluation).

In the cotton industry

- More effective alignment of extension and VET increases the use of industry knowledge among more farmers and advisers. This increased the use of previous research investments.
- A service sector with greater capacity to advise farmers increases profitability on-farm and reduces errors in farm decision making.
- An emphasis on engaging communities effectively increases the number and suitability of Indigenous workers on farms.
- Capacity building used as a strategic framework for an industry improves the return from industry investment in RD&E.

In the sugar industry

- Greater involvement of women in the sugar industry widens the exposure of farmers to research and development outputs.
- A better designed business planning project increases the uptake of business planning in the sector and improves farm performance.

In the horticulture industry

- Increased collaboration with stakeholders and regional groups as well as improved engagement of growers in projects increases the use of resources to improve sustainable horticulture.

In the meat industry

- More motivated extension teams in the pastoral industry aligning their work to capacity building outcomes increases the reach of RD&E investment.
- Applying project resources to more meat and livestock programs reduces costs of design and development for R&D managers, freeing up resources.

In the wool industry

- Improved project partnerships between wool R&D and regions increases the amount of benefit 3600 wool producers achieve from involvement in a farm profit and sustainability project.

In NRM

- Farmers have better property management plans that increase the likelihood of environmental outcomes being achieved.

Overall

It appears rural producers and communities will benefit directly through greater participation (more people benefiting) and through being able to utilise knowledge and information from RD&E more quickly and with fewer errors (people benefiting more). The networks established through this project also contribute to this outcome. It is also reasonable to infer that the learning and benefit for participants influences other projects and programs they are involved in, thereby widening the scope of benefits beyond the projects they worked on through *On the Fast Track*.

Cost-benefit analysis

In delivering the project, a common question from participants was, ‘How do we report or measure the benefits from investing in capacity building?’ This is an important issue for investors, managers and practitioners delivering projects that aim to have an impact in rural industries. This question led to the project team thinking about how a value could be placed on the outcomes (benefits) from the *On the Fast Track* project.

Using a standard social benefit-cost approach that had been used in the dairy industry (see Malcolm and Paine, 2007) the first step was to consider the level of benefit that would be needed to justify the expenditure on the *On the Fast Track* project.

The financial costs are detailed below (Table 8) and these were used to calculate the net present value per participant or per ‘effective’ project. All costs (including opportunity costs for participant’s time in being involved) have been considered in this calculation.

Table 8: Total project cost estimate⁴

Cost centre	Costs (cash or in-kind) incurred (2007 dollars)
RIRDC-CVCB project funding	\$120,000
DA	\$60,000
CRDC	\$20,000
AWI	\$15,000
SRDC	\$10,000
Value of unpaid mentor time (@\$1000/day)	\$19,200
Value of differential between commercial rates and actual rates for paid mentor time	\$22,400
Participant's workshop attendance costs (covered by participants and their organisations @ \$1000 per person)	\$58,000
Participant's time in the project ⁵ (@\$1000/day, 4 days/participant average)	\$172,000
Total estimated project cost	\$496,600
Project cost per mentored participant (40)	\$12,415
Project cost per participant (including mentors) (63)	\$7,883
Project cost per 'effective project result' (25)	\$19,864

To calculate the required net benefits to make this project a good investment (i.e. repay the costs and provide a real return of 15% on the investment), we assume that 50% of the total benefit from *On the Fast Track* occurred in the year after it was conducted (2008), 20% in year 2 and 10% per year for the following three years as the development effort improved more projects (Table 9).

Table 9: The size of required benefits to pay off the project costs and earn a return of 15% per year

Year	0 (2007)	1	2	3	4	5
Net Present Value of benefits required ⁶		\$327,000	\$131,000	\$65,000	\$65,000	\$65,000

From the preceding discussion of outcomes, better projects were believed to be resulting in greater participation (by farmers or advisers), better and/or quicker use of RD&E or cost efficiencies in projects (e.g. greater results from the same cost, or cost savings).

If most of this benefit was occurring in 25 projects (i.e. from the project evaluation 25 people had greater confidence in all areas of capacity building and many of them reported that this was directly leading to improvement in their project) then this means the net present value of the benefit per project

⁴ In-kind contributions consisted of the time of CVCB member representatives in the core project team, including the project co-ordinator (Dairy Australia) and some of the mentors. For this calculation, in-kind support was valued at \$1000/day and represents the value of the time spent on this project that could have been used elsewhere or was required to be replaced by their organisations.

⁵ Participant time to attend workshops, be mentored and work on their action plans in the *On the Fast Track* project is included because it is assumed that participants would be doing something else (and therefore needing to earn a return on their time) if not involved. This opportunity cost is represented in these calculations at 15% (what could have been earned if their time was used elsewhere) which may be considered to be overstating the cost (e.g. 8% is the rate governments often use as the benchmark for earnings from public expenditure). Some project team members argue that involvement in this project was part of participants work and/or projects and should therefore not be included.

⁶ Net present value at a 15% discount rate. Note: These are benefits net of any additional expenditures participants or projects may need to incur to achieve the benefits.

would need to be about \$13,000 in the first year, \$5,200 in the second year and \$2,600 in the following three years.

Using the previously described project outcomes (See Outcome 4) as examples, the project team believe it is reasonable to expect that over \$13,000 of benefits have flowed from each of these 25 projects in the first year.

Further, this analysis spreads the initial investment across all participants and assumes only 60% received a direct benefit. However, we know *On the Fast Track* resources are being used by most participants in some way and many participants took their learning and experience from this project and applied it to other projects or helped others apply it in their projects (the networking and trickle-down effect). This would extend the time across which benefits could be expected and widen the size of the benefit. Therefore, this analysis may underestimate the benefits that could be attributable to the investment in capacity building. However there is also uncertainty as to how great the benefits at the farm gate might be.

The project team suggest that from this analysis and discussion it would appear that the level of improvement needed to justify the project is quite low. The *On the Fast Track* approach has a reasonable probability of being an efficient and effective means to improve returns from RD&E.

Improving the *On the Fast Track* approach

The project team documented important issues and lessons from delivering *On the Fast Track* in order to improve subsequent projects. The key areas identified for improvement fall across the 10 key elements in the approach:

Increase collaboration in design and delivery

The more collaborators from different rural industries in the project design and delivery – the greater the reach and impact into rural industries. This is because they better understand the potential benefits of being involved and can better nominate appropriate people to participate. Collaborative work also builds ownership of the projects objectives.

Target potential participants and ensure a critical mass from industries

Better results from participation are achieved if participants:

- have a specific project or issue they can directly apply their learning to
- are accountable to their organisation for results from participating
- are open to improve their approaches and value mentoring
- are part of a work-team that can participate together and apply the principles into their organisation.

Although capacity building is a key element for the sustainability and viability of rural industries, for some people their current work does not have capacity building as their ‘core business’ – despite good intentions for it to be. Part of the journey of this project is enabling people in rural industries to reflect and consider the question – ‘*Should capacity building be our core business?*’

Further, for some participants, their involvement in the project did not impact their confidence or support their particular issues. Explanations from participants for this lack of impact were:

“I am not confident at all. As it turned out, I was in the wrong place at the wrong time and it was not for me. Maybe under different circumstances I could have given it a better shot but obviously not this time.”

“None really to be honest. I was quite ok to start with I thought.”

This suggests that future projects need to understand the variation in needs of participants better and have a more robust ‘checking’ procedure for alignment between the project and these needs.

Some participants’ projects changed over the time or were too broad to enable effective action over a short period of time. The project team believes more effort in defining and tightening participant’s projects and aims for involvement would have improved their outcomes. Overall, more time is needed to support people effectively – and longer time frames should be part of any improved project (e.g. 1 to 3 years, rather than 9-12 months).

Three participants dropped out of the project altogether (i.e. did not continue with a project or mentor) because of extended leave, leaving their job or changing their job significantly. This rate of ‘drop-out’ did not expose the project to more risk – but lessened opportunities to benefit at an industry level if the number of participants from an industry was low. This means that a critical mass of people from each industry is needed to enhance outcomes. The project team suggest 8-10 people per industry as an ideal.

Choice and support of mentors

To enhance the ongoing use of CVCB research, future *On the fast Track* projects could involve more capacity building researchers as mentors. Their familiarity with the research and applying it to the needs and issues of their mentees could improve both research and practice. To address variation in mentor familiarity with CVCB research and the mentoring role, more mentor training and guidelines for conducting mentoring sessions would assist them in their role. Separate mentor networking events (beyond the teleconferences) would enhance the mentors' experience.

Action planning

A review or feedback session on participant's progress with their action plans at the workshops would improve their quality and ensure a more focused start to the mentoring relationship.

Supporting effective mentoring relationships

Some mentoring relationships were less successful than they could have been and some enthusiastic mentors were let down by not enough interest from their mentee. To improve this, the project team believes more effort could go into ensuring participants are motivated enough to use and value mentoring, helping participants in how to use their mentors effectively and giving more guidance to both mentor and mentees in how to work effectively together.

Continuing the networking

Not everyone attended the final workshop to report back on progress. Those that did attend were rewarded with peer support, further learning opportunities and feedback on their progress. The project team consider it an important lesson that having everyone come together at the project end is critical to building a community of capacity building professionals.

Conclusion

***On the Fast Track* as a 'route- to- market' for capacity building research**

It is clear that the *On the Fast Track* approach delivered increased use of CVCB research and was well accepted by practitioners as a way to increase their confidence and improve their practice. The way in which theory and practice were combined in the delivery of this project was seen as an important feature, as was the networking and learning between rural industries. Each element of the approach was essential for achieving the reported outcomes.

The impact from *On the Fast Track* could have been greater if:

- more collaborators and participants were involved
- participant projects were more tightly defined with clearer expectations from their supporting funding or employer organizations
- participants were more highly motivated toward being involved in mentoring;
- mentors were better equipped for their role
- all participants (both mentees and mentors) participated in end-of-project activities
- the project had a longer time frame in which to operate and build mentoring relationships.

Mentoring as an approach to building capacity

Mentoring was shown to be an important process in the *On the Fast Track* approach for: increasing confidence of participants in capacity building; exposing more people (e.g. the mentors) to capacity building research, and; supporting people to turn increased confidence into action.

Although mentoring may be viewed as one tool amongst many for increasing confidence in capacity building we argue that characterising mentoring in this way diminishes its value. Certainly, without mentoring, this project would not have achieved the amount or extent of its impact, however, the more significant finding is that mentoring emerged as a vehicle for capacity building itself – for both mentee and mentor. That is, mentoring supported the development of the capacity building practitioner and the mentor alike.

Although the suitability and success of mentoring relationships varied widely in this project, it can be concluded that if mentoring processes are improved (as outlined in the report) and supported then mentoring provides the leverage for turning capacity building knowledge into tangible outcomes for RD&E projects and ultimately for rural industries.

Building capacity in capacity building

It is clear from this project that participants have limited opportunity to meaningfully participate in professional development opportunities apart from once-off extension conferences or belonging to extension professional organisations (e.g. APEN).

The *On the Fast Track* project met a need in this area for ongoing and meaningful connection to others with similar interests and needs. A community of practice (a group of people that share an interest in a way of doing things) is therefore developing and requires nurturing. A key feature of this community is that project funders, managers and deliverers share the need to develop themselves in this realm to improve outcomes from RD&E.

In the past, for many rural industries the nurturing and development pathway for field workers, managers and practitioners in the development and extension part of RD&E occurred via public sector investment in 'growing the profession'. With changes in public investment and greater privatisation, a sustainable professional development pathway has been lacking. *On the Fast Track* may offer an alternative for rural industries. A seamless access to R&D on capacity building holds promise – but requires further development to explore how well it allows a capacity building profession to self manage its development.

Increasing people's ability to support themselves and others in adapting to the needs and issues of rural Australia requires development of the professional practice of capacity building; ongoing research to improve the practice of capacity building; and ongoing support when capacity builds. Participants in this project report these three things as essential for increasing their effectiveness in contributing to the issues of rural industries.

Further research questions and collaborative investment opportunities

From this project, gaps have been identified in three main areas that would be of interest and concern to rural industries, policy makers concerned with the development of the capacity building professional and investors in capacity building:

- There is strong demand from practitioners for further professional development in capacity building. Areas that have been identified to address this include a cross-industry needs analysis study of capacity building; a second delivery of an *On the Fast Track* approach to a wider audience and over a longer time-frame; exploration of the possibility of establishing a centre for capacity building practice to further drive a research and development agenda in capacity building.
- Getting the right balance and timing of investment in 'development' and 'delivery' is often difficult and yet there are limited tools or processes to help these decisions – this is an area worthy of investigation and has been supported in the evaluation report of the CVCB (Hassall and Associates, 2008).
- Enhancing capacity building requires the right approach in the right situation. The *On the Fast Track* approach may be adequate (if adapted and adopted) to achieve greater capacity building outcomes for rural industries and to some extent address issues of market failure. However, this alone does not address future issues for capacity building such as how the professional adapts their practice to future challenges. It is the 'Where to next?' questions that provide a focus for further collaborative investment.

Recommendations

The conclusions from the management and delivery of *On the Fast Track* have led the project team to the following recommendations:

1. A second round of collaborative investment by RDCs is made to investigate and address the issues of sustainable professional development in capacity building using the *On the Fast Track* approach.
2. Each rural industry adapt the *On the Fast Track* resources to their own capacity building requirements and also collectively invest in an across-industry analysis of this adaptation (so learning can be shared to further improve the approach) in terms of:
 - a. the continuous improvement of materials (i.e. expand on and elaborate materials, standardise for quality assurance)
 - b. the documentation of best-practice.
3. Collective investment by CVCB partners to conduct a feasibility study into the merits of establishing an R&D centre for capacity building practice.

Continued co-investment is recommended around opportunities beyond those that can be individually captured by CVCB members. This would include:

- synergy from linking common questions (thereby pooling scarce resources)
- more efficient use of networks
- co-development and learning in capacity building methodologies across organisations and programs.

To achieve these synergies will require organisations to be sufficiently focused on their own capacity building requirements to make full use of a co-investment initiative. Achieving this greater or improved focus at an individual rural industry level is primarily the responsibility of each organisation but it could be addressed as a co-development area.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Participants involved in *On the Fast Track*

Danielle Auldist, Dairy
Chris Aylward, Sugar
Karen Baum, Dairy
Veronica Chapman, Cotton
Natalie Davey, Dairy
Helen Dugdale, Cotton
Quentin Farmar-Bowers, Research
Doug Hall, Irrigation
Phil Hausler, Extensive Meat and livestock
Mark Hickman, Cotton
Mike Ison, Dairy
Rod Jackson, Cotton
Emma Jakku, Sugar
Renelle Jeffrey, Wool
Paula Jones, Cotton
Sherry Kaurila, Community
Dana Kelly, Research (Observer)
Sean Kenny, Dairy
Geoff Knights, Wool
Theresa Kunde, Dairy & Grains
Andrew Lashmar, Sugar
John Lucey, Dairy
Susan Maas, Cotton
Lisa Macdonald, Sugar (Withdrew from project)
Naomi McGrath-Kerr, Horticulture
Geoff McIntrye, Cotton
Alison Medhurst, Horticulture
Margie Milgate, Vegetable industry
Joe Muscat, Sugar
Trudi Oxley, Extensive meat and livestock
Jodie Presnell, Property Management Planning
Luke Prime, Dairy
Jenny Quealy, Landcare
Avril Robinson, Sugar
Katrina Sait, Grains
Helen Sargent, Horticulture
Katrina Sinclair, Dairy
Julianne Sargant, Landcare
Ross Warren, Dairy
Jane Weatherley, Meat and Livestock
Mike Weise, Dairy
Simone White, Extensive Meat and livestock
David Wigginton, Cotton
Claudia Wythe, Wool (Observer)
Barry Zimmerman, Dairy
Annette Zurrer, Dairy

Appendix 2: Project Communication plan

The following strategies were used to communicate with each of the audiences:

Aim: To keep the CVCB steering committee up to date with project progress

Activity	Who	When	Indicator
Monthly update emailed to Steering Committee members. This update will also include Synthesis project updates. Committee members to send this update through their organisations.	Anne Currey to develop in consultation with Ruth Nettle and John McKenzie	Monthly, beginning January 2007	Update written and sent out by end of each month

Aim: To provide a means for those involved in the project to communicate with each other and to keep them informed of progress and developments

Activity	Who	When	Indicator
Develop a project BLOG	Anne Currey in consultation with executive team and John McKenzie	BLOG to be online by end January 2007	BLOG online and people registering via RSS feed to read and contribute
Evaluation of usefulness of BLOG for project communications	Anne Currey in consultation with John McKenzie and Jeff Coutts	June 2007	Evaluation completed based on use of BLOG by participants.

Aim: To provide general information on the project to a wider audience as represented by the recipients of the CVCB newsletter

Activity	Who	When	Indicator
Updates on project progress in Capacit-E and sent as short updates each quarter to communications managers of RDCs and NRM facilitators	Anne Currey to develop in consultation with Ruth Nettle and John McKenzie	Quarterly, beginning February 2007	Items in <i>Capacit-E</i> and short updates sent to newsletter mailing list, RDC communications managers and NRM coordinator.

Appendix 3: Project Evaluation Plan

A monitoring and evaluation plan has been developed for the project as follows:

Project Logic:

Hierarchy of Outcomes	Performance Information for outcomes
11. CVCB research directly used by CB investors and practitioners.	Participant satisfaction and rating of usefulness of resources and project. Extent of reference to CVCB full research reports (hits on web-site, orders of publications, use of research in action plan). Mentor reports on participant progress.
10. 60 people with demonstrated improved capacity (i.e. greater efficiency in resource use and fewer errors made) to understand and do (i.e. effectively choose/invest, design, support and evaluate) capacity building.	Pre-post Self-assessment of capacity of participants Satisfaction levels of participants with project Use of participant blog. Survey of mentors.
9. Increased confidence in use of CB processes (know when and when not to apply) among CB managers and practitioner population.	Perceptions of credibility of workbook and workshop plan by users, mentors and working group. Feedback on resources by participants and mentors. Self-assessment of increased confidence in CB by participants.
8. Sustained increase in social capacity among agricultural and NRM CB managers/practitioners (more outward looking, i.e. increased bridging capital; more forward looking, i.e. strategic; more collaboration (increased bonding capital) on common issues.	Track use of alumni by participants during the project and post-project.
7. Increased understanding and trust between project managers/investors in capacity building and capacity building practitioners.	Track pre-post level of understanding and trust between project managers/investors in capacity building and capacity building practitioners.
6. Acknowledgement of new capacity among project managers and practitioners by stakeholders.	Track the degree of acknowledgment of participant results by stakeholders.
5. Improved understanding among target audiences (Chair of chairs, RDCs, practitioners, RDC board members, DAFF, state governments) of the value of Capacity Building in delivering economic, environmental and social benefits.	Results of participants documented. Report provided to RDC GMs and boards.
4. Greater investment by government and RDCs in capacity building in proportion to other investments for rural change (e.g. science/technology/incentives).	Level of investment in CB tracked post-project.
3. Future joint action among RDCs on capacity building builds off CVCB work.	Track shifts in collaboration among RDCs on capacity building and sources of this shift post-projects.
2. Greater levels of desired practice change in rural industries.	Track impact of project among participants' project outcomes post project.
1. More productive and sustainable industries.	

Audiences for evaluation results:

- CVCB member project working group and CVCB Steering Committee.

Stakeholders targeted for change:

- 43 workshop participants
- mentors
- CVCB steering group
- partner RDCs.

Key Evaluation Questions (KEQ):

1. To what degree were participants of the workshops and mentoring scheme able to engage with research outcomes from the CVCB?
 - a. Do the participants feel the resources presented at the workshop will be of value for their capacity building work?
 - b. Did the participants find the workshop process enabled them to learn about the CVCB research resources?
 - c. What did participants gain in terms of new insights, motivation and ways forward as their result of engagement?
 - d. How effective were action plans in assisting participants to use the CVCB research resources?
 - e. How did the mentoring process work in practice (pairings; interaction; contribution; action)?
2. To what degree were participants of the workshops and mentoring scheme able to integrate learnings into their projects?
3. To what degree have participants developed as capability builders?
 - a. increased confidence
 - b. ability to select and apply CVCB research resources
 - c. professional networks
4. To what degree were participants of the workshops and mentoring scheme able to see added value and impact as a result of participation?

KEQ	Data source	Data collection method	Timing
1	All Participants	Questionnaire Mentor reports	a,b,c = Workshop 1 d,e = Throughout process
2	Mentors Mentees	Mentor reports Questionnaire Case study Blog activity	Throughout process Post-
3	All Participants	Questionnaire (self assessment)	Pre- and Post-
4	All Participants Mentees	Questionnaire Case study	End of workshop 2

Appendix 4: *On the Fast Track* resources available

CD of resources developed for the project

The participant pro forma for registering interest in participating

The workbook

The action planner

The Running Sheet for workshops

The pre- and post- participant and mentor self assessment questionnaires

The mentoring agreement template

Workshop evaluation questionnaires

The power-point presentations from the Melbourne workshop

The mentor profiles

The reporting templates

CD of reports from project

The final project abstracts written by participants

Mentor report: Jenny O'Sullivan

Project Evaluation report: Stephen Kelly

Appendix 5: Project titles of *On the Fast Track* participants

	Participant
Sugar industry projects	
1. Improving women's participation in decision making in the Sugar industry	Emma Jakku
2. Improving the delivery, evaluation and reporting of the "Where are the women?" women in sugar project	Sherry Kaurila
3. Improving grower groups through improved facilitation and an understanding of farms attitudes to change	Joe Muscat
4. Improving the design and delivery of grower groups	Chris Aylward
5. Supporting the evolution of farm system grower groups in sugar to farm business management groups	Andrew Lashmar
NRM and community projects	
6. Agricultural Extension Tools for NRM & Production – East Gippsland Pilot Project	Julianne Sargent
7. Integrated Property management planning in the Southern NRM Region (Tasmania)	Jodi Presnell
8. Dawson Rural Community Capacity Building Breakfasts	Susan Maas
9. Even Better Indigenous Landcare – ensuring appropriate approaches, people, resources & embedded in community	Jenny Quealy
10. Facilitating the establishment of a sub-committee in south-west Western Australia for the Irrigation Association	Doug Hall
11. Building all the "capitals" in the current NRM dairy projects in the region: improve design/project logic	Annette Zurrer
Extensive Livestock Industry projects	
12. Enterprise Planning Project – Improving design and delivery	Simone White
13. NT Pastoral Extension Coordinator Project – Building the capacity of project leaders in supporting change on-farm	Phil Hausler
14. Developing useful production and environmental benchmarking products suitable for business analysis and planning in the northern Australian environment	Trudi Oxley
15. Supporting high impact capacity building projects in the meat and livestock industries (e.g. "More beef from pastures"; "Sheep and lamb plan"; "Northern beef program")	Jane Weatherley
16. Research into farmer decision systems	Quentin Farnar-Bowers
Cotton industry projects	
17. Knowledge management in cotton and grain irrigation	David Wigginton
18. Application of CVCB models in the Cotton CRC regional extension program	Geoff McIntyre
19. Investigating the potential merging of cotton extension activities and the Vocational Education & Training sector	Mark Hickman
20. "Catchment research – Connecting to your industry" – engaging cotton agronomists in working with producers on environmental issues of the cotton industry	Veronica Chapman
21. Growing the capacity of Indigenous communities to sustain a skilled cotton workforce through engaging school based trainees	Paula Jones and Helen Dugdale
22. Investigating synergies between cotton industry capacity building projects	Helen Dugdale

23.	Engaging industry groups and individual growers to achieve increased water-use efficiency and productivity	Rod Jackson
Horticulture projects		
24.	Sustainable Landscapes	Margie Milgate
25.	Engaging clients in management skills training	Naomi McGrath-Kerr
26.	Strategic planning for horticulture	Helen Sargent
Dairy industry projects		
27.	Improving the Dairy Sage Mentoring project	Karen Baum
28.	Capacity Building in a regional development program – GippsDairy	Danielle Auldist
29.	People in Dairy – aligning the NSW region with national resources	Michael Ison
30.	Increasing the demand by farmers for tools and information in adapting for climate change and variability	Katrina Sinclair
31.	Building capacity in the Darling Downs young farmers network	Theresa Kunde
32.	Design of an extension project within a new farming systems research development	Ross Warren
33.	FutureDairy – Improving multi-disciplinary R&D projects via extension	Sean Kenny
34.	Developing a strategic plan for the south-west Victorian dairy industry	Mike Weiss
35.	Greener pastures project (farm productivity and environmental outcomes) building capacity of partner farms and their role in the project	John Lucey
36.	Evaluation strategy for the InCalf project: design and implementation	Nathalie Davey
37.	To develop, implement, monitor and review a marketing plan for the NCDEA advanced diploma of agriculture – dairy	Luke Prime
38.	Developing products advisers can use one-on-one to improve dairy herd reproductive performance	Barry Zimmerman
Grain industry		
39.	Grain and Graze – development of a plan to measure engagement and effectiveness (M&E)	Katrina Sait
Wool industry projects		
40.	Influencing the development of a regional extension and adoption strategy	Renelle Jeffrey
41.	Engaging wool producers in far-west Queensland to improve returns	Geoff Knights