Dr Barbara Crump and Dr Keri Logan

e-Rider Pilot Project

Interim Report: Phase 2

(22 May 2008)

Acknowledgements

We thank the stakeholders, partners, e-Rider clients and members of the e-Rider Steering Group who participated in the evaluation to date. Your time and contributions to this report are much appreciated.

Participating organisations

Wellington ICT (formerly Wellington Region 2020 Trust)

Wellington City Council

Volunteer Wellington

Association of NGOs of Aotearoa

Living Streets Aotearoa

Wainuiomata Community House

College of Business, Massey University at Wellington

22 May 2008

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

The goal for the e-Rider Project is to provide support for community and volunteer organisations (CVOs) to help build their information and communication technology (ICT) capacity. Established by the Wellington Region 2020 Communications Trust (now called Wellington ICT) the project commenced operations with the appointment of an e-Rider in October 2007.

Evaluation

As at 21 May 2008 15 organisations have joined the e-Rider Service. When data collection began in April 2008, eight CVOs had joined the Service. The evaluation involved a total of 21 interviews; five with clients, selected because of their differences in size, location, technology and organisational focus. Four observations of the CVOs technology systems were also undertaken. Further interviews were held with partners and stakeholders and eight non-subscribers – a sample of those organizations that had been contacted but declined to join the Service. Apart from two telephone interviews, all the interviews were face-to-face.

Interim Findings

The interim findings as at mid-May 2008 are:

1. high client satisfaction with the e-Rider Service at this point in time. Key contributing factors are:
    a. the effective communication style of the e-Rider
    b. a Service that has a focus and understands the unique constraints and problems of the community and voluntary sector
    c. a well organised Service
    d. a satisfactory fee structure
2. majority agreement amongst partners and stakeholders that the Service should be based on subscription in order to become sustainable
3. strong administration and governance
4. initial slow uptake gaining momentum after six months of operation
5. the sole e-Rider presents a risk to the project should he become unavailable

It is recommended that:

1. the e-Rider Service continues for at least another year
2. funding for this be sought from corporate sponsors
3. Wellington City Council official(s) be appointed to regularly attend Steering Group meetings
4. marketing is afforded a stronger focus
5. eLearning Porirua be contacted as a potential client

Chapter 1

Background

Introduction

Planning for the e-Rider Service began in 2006 with Phase 1 and 2 of the Pilot Project funded largely by the government's Community Partnership Digital Divide Fund. The goal for this Strategy is to "help communities realise their ICT aspirations" (Digital Strategy, n.d.) through the key enables of Confidence, Content and Communication (see http://www.digitalstrategy.govt.nz/). In February 2007 results of the Feasibility Study led to the decision to undertake Phase 2 of the e-Rider Pilot Project. Activities of this phase included the appointment of the e-Rider computer expert, client sign-up, refinement of the business plan, appointment of an Implementation Manager and external, independent, evaluation of this phase of the Project.

This section describes the objectives and services for the e-Rider Pilot Project and briefly backgrounds Phases 1 and 2.

e-Rider Objectives

The purpose of the e-Rider Service is to provide community and volunteer organistions (CVOs)[1] based in Wellington, Hutt Valley, Porirua and Kapiti access to a mobile, affordable, unbiased, tailored advisory and technical support information and communications technology (ICT) service.

The Project's objectives are to:

- provide advice and technical support to CVOs in such a way that workers can relate to and be comfortable receiving
- maximise the opportunities for personnel within the organisations to both learn and increase their knowledge, skills and confidence in managing their ICT infrastructure in ways that are affordable and within set technology budgets

The first objective relates to the practical outcomes of the project but the deeper rationale for the project concerns building the ICT capacity and knowledge of the

[1] In this report we use the acronym CVOs to include the terms "not-for-profit community and voluntary organisations"

personnel involved in CVOs which, it is hoped, will contribute to a sustainable service.

The e-Rider Services

The e-Rider services are clearly detailed on the website http://www.e-rider.org.nz/drupal/?q=node/4. They include:

- Telephone and email support
    - Initial help with information and communications technology (ICT) problems
    - Tips for dealing with a problem and preventing similar problems in the future.
    - Advice on minor requirements – you will need to make an appointment if you want more in-depth advice.
- Regular ICT check-ups
    - Regular visits, liaising with a nominated ICT support person running through the ICT checklist to ensure a healthy environment.
    - Question and answer session to help you make the best use of your current ICT environment.
- Advice and referrals to support the improvement and expansion of the ICT environment
    - Purchasing advice.
    - Help with the tendering process.
    - Help to research and develop specifications and budgets.
    - Advice and referrals on website design.
    - Review of support contracts.
- General ICT advice and resources
    - Providing access to any general ICT advice and resources such as newsletters, tips, FAQs.

These services were identified in the Feasibility Study as areas of need for CVOs and their ICT equipment and usage.

Service Fees

Potential clients initially had a choice of three Annual Fee Packages – small, medium and large (see Table 1). Due to the slow uptake by CVOs the fee structure was revised in March include two additional options: the Starter which costs $135 (including GST) for three hours within a two month period, and the Pay as You Go that provides casual information technology (IT) advice and support on an hourly basis at the rate of $65 per hour (including GST).

Table 1.1. Annual fee for packages

Package size	Guaranteed hours	Annual fee (excl GST)	GST	Total
Small	15	$400	$50	$450
Medium	22	$700	$87.50	$787.50
Large	38	$1,400	$175	$1,575

Preparation for the Pilot Project: Phase 1

In mid 2005 Stephen Blyth, a Trustee of Wellington Region 2020 Communications Trust[2], championed the need for improved ICT support for CVOs within the Wellington Region. Supported by a core volunteer group from Wellington ICT, a workshop of 15 interested participants that included representatives from CVOs and local government was held in September 2005. As a result of findings from this workshop, a preliminary application (supported by several funding agencies) was made in December 2005 to the government's Digital Strategy Community Partnership Fund. The application was approved and the full application submitted in April 2006. Approval to proceed was granted in June 2006 and Phase 1 commenced shortly after.

The Trust's partner for the project is Wellington City Council. Stakeholders identified as key to the success of the project are:

- Volunteer Wellington
- Massey University
- eLearning Porirua
- National 2020 Communications Trust

Each entity brings particular strengths, skills and an interest that supports the project. For instance, Wellington City Council has a strong community focus and commitment, Volunteer Wellington is the umbrella organisation for many CVOs and promotes the e-Rider Service to their members; eLearning Porirua has experience with the Computers in Homes Project and need a technical support organisation and

[2] For the remainder of this report the Trust will be referred to as Wellington ICT.

National 2020 Communications Trust are an interested group that would support the Service if it was implemented nationally.

Phase 1 of the project began with a Feasibility Study (McDonald, 2007) to determine whether CVOs in the Wellington Region needed ICT advice and technical support and, if so, the scope. After discussions with representatives of 11 CVOs, nominated sector experts, and consideration of the results of reports of similar services in New Zealand and internationally, it was anticipated that there would be a high level of interest in such a service. The market size was stated as approximately 1,000 and at an uptake rate of about 10 percent, it was thought an e-Rider Service might potentially deal with 100 clients.

McDonald's (2007) study noted that the sector did not have access to "relevant, affordable and suitable ICT support services" (p. 3) based on participants' views that:

- Funding, time and lack of technology knowledge inhibited their effective use of ICT.
- Security (backups, spam, viruses), software and hardware problems were concerns.
- 'Just in time' training, that is, face-to-face, informal, individual help on specific problem areas and advice on purchasing new equipment (especially the larger organisations) were necessary components of an e-Rider Service.
- There was a need for such a Service, particularly for building ICT capacity through mentoring and training.

The study concluded with a financial analysis and options for membership fees.

At a workshop of partners, stakeholders and representatives of five community sector groups, consideration was given to the study's results. Discussion revolved around what the Service would focus on, the way it would be delivered, choice of costing scenarios, and who might use it. Agreement was reached that the Service would meet a need for ICT support in the CVO sector, and Wellington ICT should implement Phase 2 of the e-Rider Pilot Project.

Phase 2

This Interim Report presents the evaluation of the implementation stage (Phase 2) of the e-Rider Pilot Project. The activities of the Pilot Project include:

- Revision of the project plan
- Recruitment of the e-Rider
- Establishing systems and collating resources
- Service delivery
- Independent Pilot Project evaluation
- Revision of business plan and sustainability
- Appointment of the Implementation Manager
- Project management and administration

The roles and membership of the management and governance teams (recognised as essential components of the project) are defined as follows:

Management Team: Wellington ICT appointed a core of four Trustees with management responsibilities for the Pilot Project.

Steering Group: A ten-member core group with representation that includes the four management team members, two ICT specialist industry representatives, Volunteer Wellington representative, and others. All work for the e-Rider Pilot Project in a voluntary capacity until May 2007 when the scope of management and work resulted in the decision to appoint the Implementation Manager to oversee the Project. The Steering Group has responsibility for driving the project.

Chapter 2

Evaluation Design

The independent evaluation of the e-Rider Pilot Project, Phase 2, is being conducted by two researchers from Massey University, Wellington, experienced with community ICT projects. A Partnership Research Model that adopts a collaborative, cooperative approach with the partners and stakeholders (including the e-Rider himself) and relevant business and community organisations frames the evaluation. Fig 2.1 shows the elements of the research.

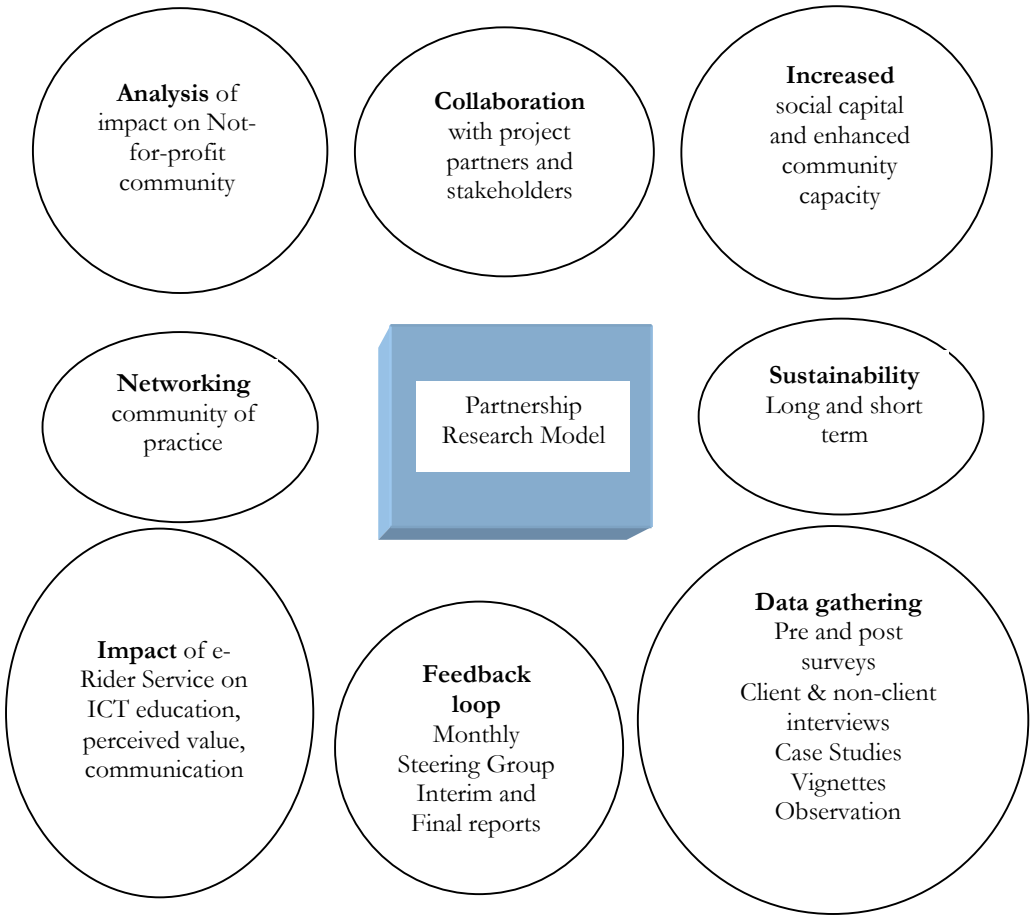

Figure 2.1 Elements of the Research

In response to the shortfall in the anticipated client numbers which, in January 2008 was two, changes were made to the original evaluation design. In addition to the activities in the original design (see Table 2.1), case studies of organisations that had signed for the Service and interviews of a sample of organisations that had been approached by the Implementation Manager and the e-Rider, but declined to subscribe were added to the revised design. Table 2.1 Data Collection Methods for the Original and Revised Evaluation Design shows the participant categories and the methods used.

Table 2.1 Data Collection Methods for the Original and Revised Evaluation Design

Original Evaluation Design	Revised and Existing Evaluation Design
1. A pre- and post-survey evaluation of the e-Rider Pilot Service 2. Interviews of : a) the e-Rider b) subscriber organisations' manager/coordinator c) project partners d) IT specialists who may deal with referred jobs e) Steering Group members	1. As for Original Evaluation, and 2. Case studies of selected, subscribed, representative organisations 3. Survey of organisations that have been contacted but declined to subscribe

A Visual Model

The Visual Model for the e-Rider Pilot Project Sequential Explanatory Design Procedure (a notation system used by Ivankova, Creswell and Stick, 2006) is shown in Figure 2.2. The qualitative and quantitative elements of the mixed method design adopted for this evaluation are shown in the Phase column. The procedures involved in each Phase are depicted in the second column along with its corresponding output or Product. A third column has been added to Figure 2.2 to describe the sample (where appropriate). The shaded rows indicate evaluation that will occur post-Interim Report, the results of which will appear in the Final Report.

The second Phase element shows that the evaluation design was reviewed and changed. This was in response to delays relating to receipt of funding, and hence the advertising and appointment of the e-Rider technician, and the slow client uptake of the e-Rider Service.

Revision of the original design and extension of the evaluation period to December 2008 was done in the spirit of the partnership research model. Given the shortfall in the anticipated client numbers (at mid-May 15 of the 100 CVOs estimated to join the Service in the first year) it was thought unlikely that the small number of responses to the pre- and post-evaluation survey would yield meaningful and useful statistical results beyond means and standard deviations. Emphasis was therefore on the qualitative data (shown by capitalisation in Figure 2.2). The inclusion of case studies and a survey of organisations that had been approached by the Implementation Manager and e-Rider, but declined to subscribe, yielded useful data that will illuminate the evaluation findings.

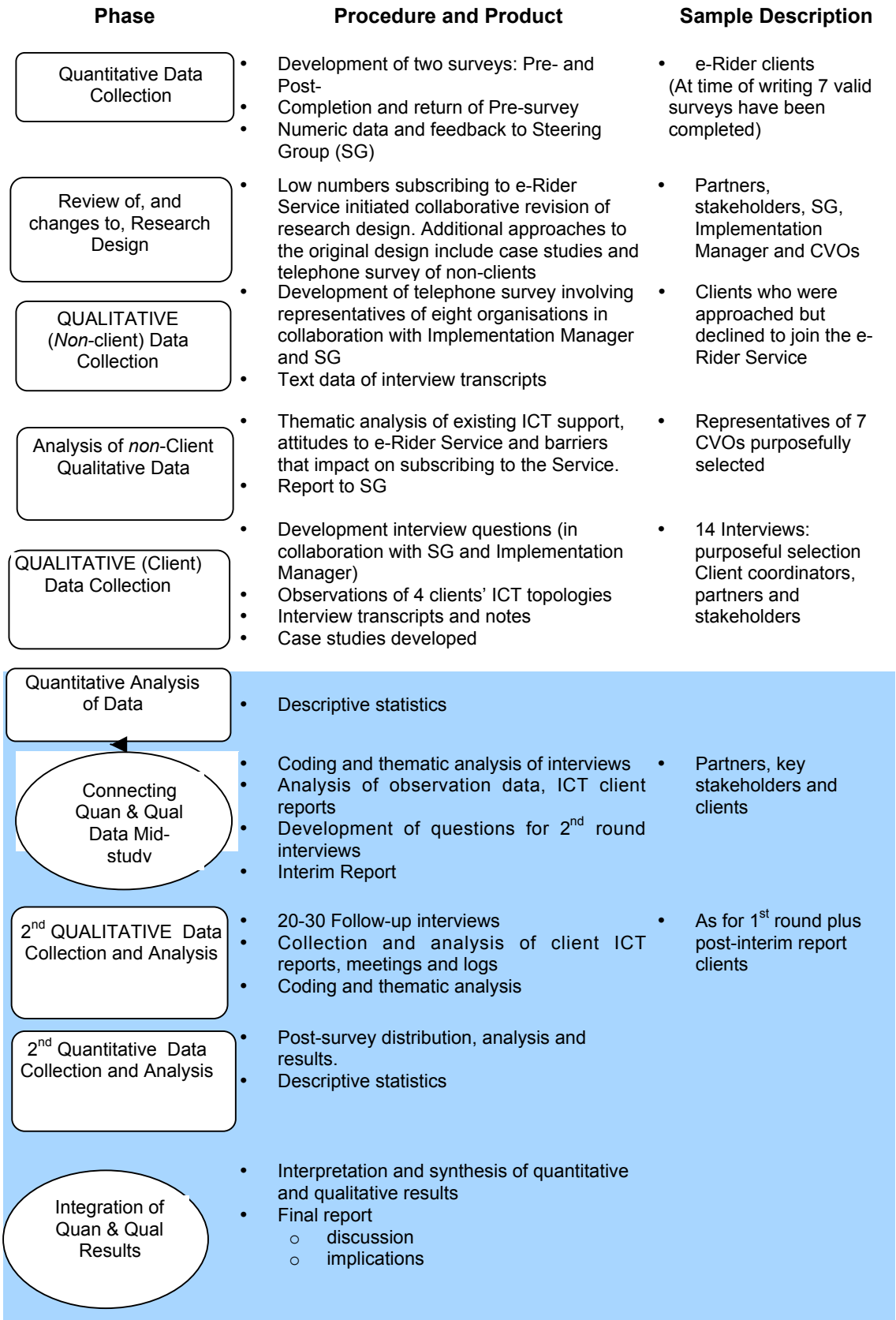

Figure 2.2 Visual model for the e-Rider Pilot Project mixed methods design: Sequential Explanatory Design Procedures (after Ivankova, Creswell & Stick, 2006).

Chapter

3

Implementation

The original action plan saw promotion of the Pilot commencing in April, the recruitment of the e-Rider in May and the official launch at the end of June 2007. Evaluation was to begin in May and be completed in December 2007.

Receipt of project monies was delayed for Phase 2 and it was not until August 2007 that recruitment of the e-Rider could begin, resulting in his appointment in October. Marketing began in earnest once this appointment had been made and in November and December 2007 the first clients were signed for the e-Rider Service. By February 2008 just four CVOs had subscribed to the Service. In the 11 weeks since that time much progress has been made and at the time of writing (mid May 2008) there are now 15 clients receiving computing support from the Service.

A Schedule of the Pilot Project activities during 2007 and 2008 is shown in Figure 3.1. The schedule shows the different Phase 2 activities, indicated by colour, over these years. They include the Steering Group's major activities involving the preparation for, and appointment to, the e-Rider position, appointment of the Implementation Manager and two new Steering Group members, the introduction of a collaborative communication tool and the e-Rider function in March where the Honourable Ruth Dyson congratulated those involved with the Project. Documentation noted in the Schedule includes the Feasibility Report, the introduction of the new pricing structure and the Business Plan. Evaluation activities are also noted.

Figure 3.1 Schedule of e-Rider Pilot Project Activities for 2007-2008

2007

Jan	Feb	March	Ap-May	June-July	Aug-Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Phase 2 Evaluation Contract finalised	McDonald's Feasibility Report presented	Introduction Sharepoint collaboration tool	Implementation Manager appointed	2 new Steering Group members	Advertisement for e-Rider technician	e-Rider appointed. Service begins	e-Rider launch postponed	Updated R/design V.1
Collaboration in developing survey		Development, cognitive testing of pre- & post-survey & information sheet					New Content Management System	
		Business Plan finalised					**Pre-survey begins with each new client**	
	Feedback to monthly Steering Group meetings; ongoing liaison with e-Rider and Implementation Manager							
					Marketing e-R Service to CVOs: ongoing throughout 2008			

Colour Key

	SG activities
	Documentation
	Qualitative tasks
	Quantitative tasks

2008

Jan-Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Updated R/design V2	Public e-Rider celebration	Visits to, and interviews of, Clients, Partners and Stakeholders		**Interim report**		2nd round in'views & observation. Complete case studies		Pilot ends		
Meet with Imp.Manager re changes to Fees structure	Non-client Interviews	Non-client analysis and Report	Client, partner, and stakeholder interview analysis				Analysis and synthesis of data	Preparation and feedback of Final Report		**Final report**
Planning for e-Rider celebration		Begin advertising new service fees/structure from early April	Steering Group begins deliberation on business model from 1 Nov. 08		Post-survey conducted; quantitative data analysed					
Pre-survey continues with each new client										
Feedback to monthly Steering Group meetings continue; ongoing liaison with e-Rider and Implementation Manager										

Chapter 4

Interim Findings

Data Collection

As each organisation subscribed to the e-Rider Service an information pack, which included the pre-project survey, was sent to them. When completed, they were returned to the evaluators. Data from these will not be used until after the Pilot Project is completed and participants have filled in the post-project survey.

In order to obtain a range of different perspectives, and a broader and deeper understanding of the issues, 21 interviews were held with different groups – five representatives from the signed up clients, the e-Rider, three members of Wellington City Council including the signatory to the funding application, members of the Steering Group including the Implementation Manager, the Wellington ICT representative, the author of the Feasibility Study, and a representative from eLearning Porirua. Except for two telephone interviews and one emailed response to the interview questions, these interviews were face-to-face with both evaluators attending. Most were tape-recorded although shorthand notes were taken for some. Telephone interviews were also undertaken with representatives from those organisations that had been contacted and declined to subscribe to the Service.

At the same time as the client interviews were undertaken the ICT equipment and environment were inspected at the client sites.

Results of Interviews with Members of Client Organisations

When data collection commenced in April eight organisations were clients and of this number five clients were interviewed - selected because of their different locations, size of computing software and hardware, and operational focus. At the time of the interviews the e-Rider had completed a Health Check for the information systems of the eight client organisations. All aspects of the e-Rider Service are reported on very positively by the clients and this result augurs well for the success of the Pilot Project. Table 4.1 gives the names of the CVOs (permission was granted to use CVOs' names), their size and a brief synopsis of each organization. Some of the verbatim responses to interview questions are presented as vignettes in boxes in this section as well as two case studies.

Table 4.1. Organisations and relevant information

Name of organisation	Size	Number of computers	Type of package	Other
ANGOA	Small National	One laptop	Small	One person working from home.
Wellington Women's Health Collective	Small Local	Two	Small	Three people using computers. Very information sensitive organisation.
Living Streets Aotearoa	Small Regional – other regions	Four	Small	Four people using computers. Network and printers shared with another CVO.
Wainuiomata Community House	Small Local	One laptop plus seven PCs.	Large	PCs used for teaching elderly and people on low incomes.
Volunteer Wellington	Large Local – part of national organisation	Ten	Small	Thirty people using the computers

Subscription choices for the other ten organisations who have joined the e-Rider Service include three small, three medium and one large Annual Fee packages. Two chose the new Pay as You Go package and one has signed up for the Starter option.

e-Rider Effectiveness

In response to the question "How would you rate the e-Rider Service so far?" all interviewees were overwhelmingly positive with all but one person giving a 5 (where 5 is Completely Satisfied and 1 is Completely Dissatisfied). The interviewee who rated the Service 3-4 adopted a cautious approach when she said, *"it's early days yet and we do not know what will happen as the year progresses"*. She was satisfied with the Service so far. The following are comments made by the interviewees indicating their satisfaction:

- *5 – definitely 5 because seeing the e-Rider working – he's extremely thorough, he knows his subject and he communicates well.*
- *A resounding 5 – fantastic.*
- *4-5 – no probably 5. The e-Rider understands community values and realises that we are not interested in bells and whistles.*
- *4_ - 5. What we find most useful is the way he can talk to us in layman's language and has an understanding of working in the sector as well. You don't feel stupid when you ask – he is very approachable.*

Reasons for Subscribing

A variety of reasons were given for subscribing to the e-Rider Service from needing to have PCs networked to wanting to ensure that backups and security were appropriate. At the time of subscription three of the organisations whose members had been interviewed had little or no technical support. One was happy with their present arrangement using a volunteer computer expert but felt that because of their special role in the community they should subscribe and one had been paying for commercial help with whom they were very dissatisfied. Having an e-Rider person who understood the CVO community was important to all the interviewees. They felt that commercial providers, apart from being too costly for them, were not aware of their special needs and constraints.

Living Streets
E-Rider sounded just the right thing for us. The fact that it was for community and voluntary groups and we are small – we don't want commercial firms. E-Rider is an organisation that values and understands the community. It is certainly a niche that needs doing because commercial firms don't understand our sector. That was one of the important factors of joining e-Rider – they know what our problems are and the constraints – what I want to make ***my*** *life easier.*

Value, Cost and Funding

At this early stage of subscribing to the Service all the CVO interviewees considered that the e-Rider Service was providing value for money. There was general agreement that the Health Check was well worthwhile and the cost was considered reasonable, especially when compared with a commercial solution.

WWHealth Collective
It's absolutely brilliant; we're thrilled. The idea is just so wonderful for us because we are so non-IT savvy. It was hard for us to find the money. We didn't have the budget for it, but we just knew we had to do it. It is not an unreasonable cost. I imagine we will apply for funds in advance (next year); hopefully I am thinking that we will be a bit more liberal in our sources of funding.

None of the organisations had a 2008 budget for e-Rider. However, because they appreciated how essential it was to have affordable IT expertise available to call upon as required they found funds to enable them to subscribe. One organisation, although only small, decided to go for the largest Annual Fee package to get the maximum number of 38 hours (see Case Study 1). Most intend to include provision for payment for the Service in their applications for funding for 2009.

All interviewees considered the two new packages (Pay as You Go and Starter) to be good value but were satisfied with the Annual Fee package for this year. The question "would you pay a larger amount?" elicited a mixed response with one interviewee saying they would possibly pay more if they felt it was necessary. Two stated they were happy with their present package and cost but would look at the "Pay as You Go" package in 2009.

Wainuiomata Community House
The new packages are good value but we are happy with our package. I knew we had to have a lot of work done for us, we will get real benefit for the year and probably after that, then we will do it on the consultancy idea.

ANGOA
I would very much look at price when renewing. If it was too expensive I would

Case Study 1

The Wainuiomata Community House

The Wainuiomata Community House has been running for 25 years this June. There is a strong sense of identity in Wainuiomata, probably due to its isolation and the perception of distance from Wellington and the Hutt Valley. A variety of activities are organised and take place under the auspices of the House including teaching basic computing to the elderly and people on low incomes. The main reason for students enrolling in these classes is to learn how to use email and the internet. They are supported by contestable funding from the Hutt City Council with donations from local sponsors, and their budget is tight.

There are seven PCs used for teaching and one laptop which is in the office. Four of the PCs are second hand and were donated by the Hutt City Council and the others were purchased by the House. There are also two printers, neither of which work because they have not been used and the print mechanism has become blocked. Since obtaining the ICT equipment the House has had no reliable technical support (the one person they had took some equipment away and they never saw it again).

The PCs had never been networked, nor was there access to the internet so they desperately needed some technical assistance if the PCs were to be usefully deployed for training. In particular, the equipment needed to be reliable as the people to whom the training was targeted were not PC literate and therefore likely to be hesitant and afraid of using a computer. So it was crucial that the Co-ordinator could feel confident that everything would work, and that access to the internet would be available.

Technical support for computers was not built into their budget but when the e-Rider Service came to the notice of the Co-ordinator, she recommended that the Management Committee seriously consider opting into the e-Rider Service. They realised how important it was if the equipment was to be used appropriately and at the beginning of 2008 a contract was signed. After consultation, although only a small organisation with a very limited budget, they decided to take the larger package which gave them 38 hours and cost $1,575 for a year's subscription. Initially the e-Rider undertook a Health Check and since then has networked the eight computers and organised internet access, enabling classes to be run successfully.

The Co-ordinator is very pleased with the Service saying the e-Rider "is extremely thorough". She is convinced that, given time, she will be able to learn from the e-Rider and be able to attend to many of the technical issues herself.

Community of Practice

A primary consideration in setting up the Service was the eventual growth of a community of practice whereby the group of clients would be able to help each other solve their IT problems. It is very early days for this to happen. One interviewee felt this could develop saying:

> *I think we got one of our router boxes from another CVO. We gave the e-Rider all our cables and bits and pieces and if he can use them in the scheme it's good. He sorted through and threw out what was rubbish and kept other things; if we can share it is good; it's a real community effort.*

This quote shows that the e-Rider is facilitating a community of practice (COP) amongst the CVOs, albeit at an incipient stage.

Another early example of COP is the Monthly Bytes, a newsletter with tips and hints that is emailed at regular intervals to clients. All interviewees found it well worthwhile reading and appreciated receiving Bytes via email. One interviewee said *"I actually read it because it's emailed"* and others felt they would not take the time to go to the e-Rider website to obtain it.

Living Streets Aotearoa and Cycling Advocates Network are two CVOs that share offices and have combined to join the e-Rider Service, thus sharing the cost of their computing support (see Case Study 2).

`

Case study 2

Living Streets Aotearoa

More people walking more often and enjoying public places - young and old, fast and slow, walking, sitting and standing, commuting, shopping, between appointments, for exercise, for leisure and for pleasure.

Living Streets Aotearoa was set up 10 years ago by a group of people in Wellington with an interest in the benefits of walking and the rights of pedestrians. There are three people in the Wellington office and a South Island networker in Christchurch. It is led by an Executive Council of eight people and there are eight affiliated walking advocacy groups in other cities in New Zealand.

In Wellington they share their computing resources with the Cycling Advocates' Network (CAN) and have two laptops and one desktop computer while the CAN has one laptop. All computers are networked and the two organisations share two printers.

Previously they paid a professional to look after their network and see to backups etc. Unfortunately he went overseas and although a list of names was left for them to contact for computer support it became too difficult and they did nothing. When they were told about e-Rider they felt it was "just the right thing for us" because it was specifically for community and voluntary groups and would have an understanding of that sector. Sharing the costs for e-Rider with the Cycling Advocates' Network made it affordable for both small organisations. They find it reassuring to have telephone access to someone who can visit when there is a need.

Prior to the Health Check the Living Streets Director had advised the e-Rider of concerns regarding intermittent email sending problems. After the Health Check of the computers and peripheral equipment, including the laptop used by CAN, the e-Rider made the following recommendations:

Systematise anti virus and anti spy ware
Install Picasa for image management and editing
Publish policy on file location, av, backup and workstation ergonomics etc.
Consider replacing the mouse on Laptop800 and the keyboard on Laptop600
Consider raising the screens of the laptops perhaps 200 mm
Set up the CAN computer to backup to the external drive on Machine700

The e-Rider is investigating the e-mail problems which he thinks will require writing a small script for testing the mail server connection when the problem occurs. The Living Streets, Wellington, Director also asked for advice on Customer Relationship Management systems and the e-Rider is looking into suitable options which may be available. They also appreciate receiving the Monthly Bytes via e-mail.

They are very happy with the Service so far, and particularly with the e-Rider himself who is "very easy to talk to".

Results from Interviews with Members of the Management Team, Steering Group, Wellington City Council and eLearning Porirua

Financial Sustainability

Financial sustainability was an acknowledged issue for the Wellington City Council, Management Team and the Steering Group. Six of the eight people who were interviewed intimated a belief that some form of payment should be made by the clients – that ICTs are an essential component of organisations (including CVOs) and therefore maintenance and planning for them should be integrated completely and not treated as something separate. They have also specified that they do not believe that a commercial Business Model should be used but one that is unique perhaps to the CVO sector.

Wellington City Council
Sustainability is a key issue to sort out. I do believe people need to be charged. I think that is fair.

Wellington ICT
We need to develop a different Business Model in order to be sustainable. Not a commercial model.

eLearning Porirua
It is difficult to build a commercial model. IT corporates want to become involved in community projects – maybe they need to be approached.

Wellington City Council, as partner, provided financial support and printed brochures that promoted the Service.

The Wellington City Council signatory said she strongly supported the e-Rider concept but some of her staff had been concerned as to whether e-Rider could deliver a satisfactory service. Some officials had also anticipated that the e-Rider Service would consist of one professional staff (the e-Rider) and a number of volunteers who would be able to provide a greater range of skills. This perception appears to be out of alignment with the Business Model proposed in the Business Plan. Two other Wellington City Council officials expressed initial doubts about the chances of success for the e-Rider Pilot Project, believing that the cost structure would deter CVOs from subscribing because of their tight budgets and a preference for spending their money on core activities. To quote one official:

> *We love the concept of e-Rider without a doubt in terms of what not-for-profits need to increase their capability. We did feel that price was a barrier. We definitely thought price was a barrier for the organisations in terms of the cost. … we know – we fund these small organisations – of their struggle in terms of getting the dollars to do their core work.*

Support

There is strong support for the e-Rider Service from all members of the Management Team, Steering Group and key stakeholders. This is evident through the regular

attendance at the Steering Group monthly meetings, members' concerns regarding the slow initial uptake and the reflexive and reflective way with which this issue has been handled, resulting in changes to the Business Model and fee structure. Although many of the members of the Steering Group are in business and understand the commercial world they are all imbued with communitarian values, and this is an essential element in a Project such as e-Rider.

The composition of the Steering Group where there are representatives from different corners of the corporate and voluntary worlds means that members bring diverse strengths and skills; key success factors of the Pilot Project so far. The appointment of an Implementation Manager who is committed to community values, is enthusiastic and champions the project is another positive factor.

Wellington City Council
I really want it to work. If cost is a barrier to individual users we need to sort that out

Wellington ICT
The way it is being (has been) conducted is right and I wouldn't recommend any changes. The interaction between the Steering Group, Management Team, the e-Rider and the Implementation Manager is just right.

Considerable care was taken by the Steering Group in creating a suitable profile for the e-Rider position to ensure that a person with the appropriate technical knowledge, personality, communication skills and understanding of the special needs of the voluntary sector was appointed. The team approach adopted by the Steering Group in preparing the advertisement, developing appropriate technical tasks and interview questions and placing an emphasis on an empathetic, communicative and knowledgeable candidate paid dividends.

Communications

To facilitate communication amongst Steering Group members a content management system was introduced where reports, files, meeting agenda, minutes and other documents could be stored in a central, accessible repository (see Figure 3.1 Schedule of e-Rider Pilot Project Activities for 2007-2008). This has proved an effective tool.

The monthly Steering Group meetings provided an effective forum for communication. Wellington City Council committed to representation at these meetings and in the early months one, and sometimes two, council officials were present. However, there has been lack of continuity of Wellington City Council representation due to promotions and resignations within that organisation. Several months have elapsed with no council official attending the meetings. A council interviewee, noting the *"vacancy at the moment"* on the Steering Group reflected *"I need to know when those meetings are on"*. The non-representation has contributed to the Wellington City Council not being aware of the progress made in the uptake of the Service in recent months and to a sense among some Steering Group members of a lack of commitment to eRider. Specifically, it was believed that the Council had the

ability to market the concept directly to approximately 2,500 CVOs but had not always been supportive in doing so.

Uptake Lag

Interviewees' responses varied when asked their opinion as to why they thought the uptake of the e-Rider Service had been slow. One common reason suggested was the mind set of many workers in the sector, whereby if a job can be done freely or cheaply by friends, family or other volunteers then there is no reason to pay for a Service. One City Council official said:

> *The groups come to us and they expect us to give them a grant and want to employ their friends for ICT. I think there has been push-back – 'We know somebody who can do it cheaper'.*

Another reason suggested was the time factor and how it impacts on marketing and the transfer of information by word of mouth or advertising. It takes time to see the results of marketing initiatives. Any new business venture takes at least six months to start gaining momentum let alone become sustainable (Clark, 1997).

Some noted that CVOs often have the additional problem of complicated governance. They may have to go through various levels of management for approval for budget items and the board or governing authority may not meet on a monthly or even regular, formal basis. Therefore gaining approval to spend money could take several months. For example, one interviewee commented that:

> *Governance is an issue. There's the management committee and then the sub-committee of the trust and then the trust board; a $700 item would have to go to the full trust board and that can take months.*

The "*ambulance at the bottom of the cliff*" syndrome was a further reason suggested as contributing to the slow uptake. The term was explained by noting that while CVOs may set aside a small sum of money in their budget for ICT, they tend not to spend it unless something goes wrong. This reactionary attitude sees them spending considerable amounts of money when the system crashes because they need urgent attention whereas regular checking can often fix a problem for a fraction of the cost. As the e-Rider said:

> *We can fix things if they break but it is more efficient and effective if we prevent the breakages in the first place. A hidden cost for any organisation is the time loss, ie lowered productivity. An organisation struggling with money will also be struggling with time.*

Some considered that because the e-Rider Service began close to Christmas when many CVOs, as with commercial organisations, are beginning to wind down, timing was a factor in the slow uptake. However, another interviewee felt the pre-Christmas wind-down was a time when the core activities of a CVO were not so pressing, thus

giving them time to consider other matters.

Finally, none of the CVOs budgeted for e-Rider in their 2007/8 budget but may consider doing so in their 2008/9 budget.

How to Increase Uptake

After discussion and consultation with an experienced marketing person and Steering Group members it was decided to extend the Package options to include a Starter and a Pay as You Go choice – each cheaper than the Annual Fee options. The idea behind this was to give organisations a taste without needing to commit to funding for a full year. It is commonly understood that most projects will arrive at the right pricing model, the right business model, or the right sales pitch only after a number of attempts.

The eLearning Porirua representative commented that he would like to contract the e-Rider Service for ICT support at Porirua schools but the difficulty would be in convincing the Board to pay someone else to do the technical support. When asked how he perceived the Service could become involved with eLearning he said:

> *The models will be slightly different because we provide technical support to families [of the Computers in Homes Project] at no cost (paid by the Trust). E-Rider could provide support for the technology in Porirua schools.*

The following are further suggestions that were made as to how uptake of the Service could be increased:

- The e-Rider to call on potential clients just to make contact, have a chat and answer questions with no cost involved. This could create a sense of trust and provide an opportunity for discussion.
- Make follow-up calls rather than rely on organisations contacting the e-Rider Service.

We understand that these are being/have been implemented.

Memorandum of Understanding

Interview data from the three Wellington City Council officials and representatives of the Steering Group confirmed that no Memorandum of Understanding was in place. Members of both Wellington City Council and Wellington ICT considered that it was always a good idea to define expectations when working as a partnership and that a Memorandum of Understanding would be useful.

Results of Interviews with Non-subscribers

Telephone interviews were undertaken with eight representatives of organisations who had been contacted but had declined to subscribe. A report of these interviews was submitted to the Steering Group in March 2008. The reasons for declining were as follows:

- Five of the organisations already had some form of computer support. Three relied on informal, unpaid help from husbands and brothers, while the other two paid for commercial support.
- One interviewee said she felt her organisation did not have satisfactory ICT support arrangements. She reported that her Board did not approve a recommendation to subscribe to e-Rider as they viewed payment for the service as "insurance" and would rather wait until "something drastic happens".
- Another CVO representative expressed considerable interest in the Service after an in-depth discussion with the evaluators and requested further information and clarification. The Implementation Manager was going to contact the organisation to provide further information. This organisation has since subscribed to the Service.
- Interviewees from two CVOs indicated little to poor knowledge of the e-Rider service which suggested that follow up calls could be useful for non-subscribers.

The responses were useful for targeting promotion activities and follow-ups but with such a small number of participants it is difficult to generalise to the wider community.

Summary

To summarise, the client organisations were very satisfied with the Service they had received so far, noting the jargon-free, clear and appropriate communication style and "thorough" work of the e-Rider. They considered the Service good value for money, but some would rethink their package if the costs went up. There was strong support from partners and key stakeholders. While financial sustainability was an issue, they considered that different Business Models could be looked at and stronger marketing undertaken to improve uptake rates. Non-subscribers could be given follow-up calls to see whether their circumstances had changed.

Chapter 5

Interim Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings reported in this Interim Report are limited due to the small number of clients who had subscribed and completed their Health Check at the time of data gathering. We have used qualitative data only (interviews, observation and case studies) as quantitative data will not be available until the Pilot Project ends. This section includes our conclusions and recommendations at this point in time.

Interim Conclusions

The e-Rider Service clearly offers value to the CVO sector. The personality of the e-Rider in terms of his understanding of the sector and its constraints and special attributes, his technical expertise and his ability to make the clients feel comfortable when discussing the technology with them is a real strength. It was always intended to have two e-Riders (one full-time and one part-time), but the slow uptake so far has meant that only one full-time e-Rider is likely to be employed during this Pilot period. While this is obviously necessary in order to keep the Service going for the entire period, it is a risk to be completely reliant on one person for providing a service. If he leaves, or becomes unwell, then the Service becomes unavailable until a further person is employed.

The structure, support and enthusiasm of the Steering Group are critical factors in the continuation of the Service and its success, as is the support of the key stakeholders. The diverse skills of the Steering Group's members and the continued commitment and energy of the Implementation Manager are necessary to sustain the momentum.

While there was some discussion with officials of the Wellington City Council about whether CVOs could afford the Service, the cost structure was considered fair and reasonable by those organizations, both small and large, that had subscribed to the Service. They were satisfied with the packages they had selected. However some may reconsider their type of Package if the price increases substantially.

Some CVOs may find using volunteers, friends and family to deal with ICT problems cheaper but there are frequently difficulties in this dependency. First, volunteers have other responsibilities which may preclude them from providing the service in a timely fashion. Second, they are often not experts, and their fixes are not necessarily professional. A third consideration when relying on volunteers is highlighted in the

Dominion Post of 12 May 2008. Their report on a recent survey of "issues of significance" in the CVO sector showed a potential vacuum of volunteers due to a reduction in volunteer numbers.

Wellington City Council is in a unique position to promote the need for CVOs to adopt a pro-active approach in computing maintenance and good housekeeping of their information systems. While recognizing the valuable contribution that volunteers make to the not-for-profit sector, the increasing reliance on effective, operational computing systems requires an independent, community-focused service such as e-Rider which is rarely met by volunteers. Officials of the council's Grants Committee are well placed to promote e-Rider.

One major concern is that clients have paid an annual fee for a certain number of hours work yet the Pilot Project finishes at the end of October. In recognising the difficulties that may arise for the CVOs that have subscribed to the Service, the Steering Group has retained sufficient monies so that should the e-Rider Service not continue, organisations would be offered two alternatives. First, a refund for the contract period not serviced and second, continued technical support until contract end. (The latter has been negotiated with parties committed to this solution).

The results suggest that as information about, and reputation of, the e-Rider and e-Rider Service is spread throughout the CVO community subscribers will build exponentially. In January 2008 there were two subscribers. In April when we began our data collection there were eight subscribers. Now, in May, 15 organizations subscribe to the Service. If this continues then by July it is reasonable to expect there will be 20-30 organisations using the Service, thus moving towards a critical mass which would make e-Rider financially sustainable.

Sustainability is about having a strategy for gaining access to, or generating the finances necessary to keep the Service available on an ongoing, long-term basis. If the Management Team and Steering Group decide that the Service is potentially sustainable and should continue, then consideration must be given to who will take overall responsibility for managing the ongoing e-Rider Service – Wellington ICT, Wellington City Council, the Steering Committee or the development of a completely different business model?.[3]

The results for these early months of the e-Rider operation show that already, the Project's objectives (see page 2) have been met in many respects. Advice and technical support to CVOs is being provided in a way to which workers can relate and are comfortable receiving. It is too early to judge whether the second objective has been fully met whereby the e-Rider Service can provide opportunities for personnel within the organisations to increase their ICT knowledge, skills and confidence. However several interviewees indicated they were developing new skills and confidence.

The e-Rider Pilot Project, although still small in terms of participants, is contributing to the government's Digital Strategy goal of helping communities "make the most

[3] We should clarify that we are not referring to environmental sustainability in this paper, but rather economic sustainability.

from ICT" (see Communities making the most of ICT). The results show positive signs that the key enablers of Confidence, Content and Communication as defined in the Strategy are being met, thus ICT becoming a powerful tool for community groups.

Interim Recommendations

1. The e-Rider Service continues for at least another year. This additional time will provide the Service with the opportunity to build up its client base and will give a better sense of ongoing sustainability.

2. The Steering Group investigate funding for additional year(s) from corporate ICT sponsors such as IBM, Fujitsu and Hewlett Packard. As part of their social responsibility such organisations may be willing to support community initiatives, especially a community-focused, ICT venture. The excellent results for the Pilot Project, presented in this report, provide a basis for seeking such sponsorship to provide funding to bridge the Service until reliable and recurring money is generated from the Service itself, or it is decided that the Service is unsustainable.

3. Wellington City Council appoint officials to replace those who initially attended the monthly Steering Group meetings. Representation of the council will facilitate awareness of Project developments and progress and improve communication between the partners.

4. A stronger marketing policy be adopted that involves Wellington City Council promoting the e-Rider Service to the wider CVO community. The Grants Committee is well positioned to publicise and recommend the Service to their clients.

5. Liaise with eLearning Porirua with a view to employing the e-Rider as their technician for maintaining the computers in Porirua schools.

References

Clark, S. (1997). *Reasons for business failure come in three broad groups*, Puget Sound Business Journal. Retrieved August 15, 2007 from http://www.bizjournals.com/ seattle.

Digital Strategy: Communities making the most of ICT . Retrieved from http://digitalstrategy.preview.intergen.net.nz/Parts-of-the-Digital-Strategy/Communities/ on 22 May 2008.

Ivankova, V., Creswell, J.W. & Stick, S.L. (2006). Using mixed-methods sequential explanatory design: From theory to practice, *Field Methods, 18*(1), 3-20.

McDonald, S. (2007). *e-Rider IT service: Feasibility Study*. Wellington Region 2020 Communications Trust.

Williams, A. J. (1975). Why so many small businesses fail, *Real Estate Journal, 22*, 16-18.