



Case Study 1

Sports Vouchers

From coffee chat to improved equity in children's access to sport

Parties Involved

Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing (ORSR), University of South Australia (UniSA), Department of Education, Non-Government Organisations, Sports Clubs, Parents

Overview

Established in 2015, the South Australian Sports Vouchers program provides two \$100 vouchers per child living in South Australia each year, to be used for sport, active recreation and music fees.

In 2020, the South Australian Department of Education partnered with UniSA to better understand the Wellbeing and Engagement Census, which found that, for low socioeconomic status children, higher wellbeing was associated most consistently with more frequent sport participation. With this finding, the Department of Education provided an introduction between UniSA and ORSR, who met for a coffee to discuss the potential for collaboration.

This collaboration led to a data-sharing agreement which enabled UniSA to analyse Sports Voucher uptake by population characteristics where they found relatively lower uptake in female, low socioeconomic, and metropolitan populations. These insights subsequently informed a master's student project creating an evaluation framework for the Sports Vouchers program.

Research-Translation Successes

- Project co-design between academics and policymakers meant the project was steered towards realistic, pragmatic, and cost-effective goals.
- By the time the master's student thesis was submitted, the recommended changes were already being implemented – highlighting an example of **rapid research translation**.
- Use of the Delphi methodology (see methods) with diverse panellists meant the agreed upon Sports Vouchers Evaluation Framework was easily approved by stakeholders.
- When later applying for a NHMRC grant, having a track record of collaboration supported the grant application through a demonstrated body of work.
- ORSR developed a data dashboard which allowed the data to be displayed accessibly. This dashboard was very well received by government executives and ministers.
- The relationships built through this project have led to further, expanded, and ongoing projects.

Research-Translation Challenges

- The data sharing process was made difficult and took longer than anticipated due to personnel changes and governmental caretaker period.
- Governmental and sport stakeholder needs were found to be different to research needs and wants, which required consideration throughout the master's students project.



Transferable Insights

Key Methods

- Utilise informal methods of conversation (coffee chats) to establish trust and mutual understanding in a relaxed setting.
- **Delphi consensus method:** use a structured, multi-round process to gather stakeholder opinions anonymously through questionnaires. After each round, share a summary of the group's responses with all participants and ask them to review the feedback and refine their answers in the next round. Repeat this process until the group moves toward consensus.
- Utilise methods that facilitate shared responsibility and understanding with diverse parties.
- Schedule recurring meetings to safeguard time in each other's diaries.
- Collaborate with the understanding that all parties will have differing interests, timelines, and methodologies.
- Share a mutual understanding of the problem and the ambition to address it with project co-designers.

Reflections

- The informal nature of an initial coffee chat aids trust building.
- Visuals play a key role in simplifying messages and getting approval from stakeholders.
- Having a boundary spanner* as a supervisor, especially one from policy, opens doors that academics can't, and vice versa.
- Keeping stakeholder needs and goals at the centre of research assures it is aligned to their needs – these stakeholders could be government, non-government, or even community members.
- Understanding the priorities of decision makers allows you to keep them informed with tailored information that is aligned to their needs.
- Collaboration between government and academics brings with it the luxury of extra time and resources, allowing for deeper consideration of issues and more creativity in the methods used.
- Research-policy translation isn't always easy – patience and tenacity are key.

For more info about Sport Vouchers

- [Sports Voucher Website](#)
- [The relationships between school children's wellbeing, socio-economic disadvantage and after-school activities: a cross-sectional study.](#)
- [Uptake of a Universal Sports Subsidy Program for School-Aged Children: A Population Data Analysis](#)

*For more information about boundary spanners, please see the *Boundary Spanning Statement of Value*.