



## Targeted Earlier Intervention (TEI) Program

Sector Assistance Strategy  
STAGE 3

# Completion & Outcomes Report

October 2021

### **Acknowledgment of funding**

ncoss acknowledges the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) who funded this project as part of the NSW TEI Sector Assistance Strategy.

## About NCOSS

The NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS) is the peak body for the social services sector in New South Wales. With over 400 members and a wider network of organisations and individuals who share our values, we advocate to alleviate poverty and disadvantage in NSW.

NCOSS was founded in 1934 during the Great Depression when unemployment rose to 28% and extreme poverty was rampant. With few government programs available, assistance was provided through a limited number of overstretched religious charities. A small group was motivated to improve the lives of those suffering and so the NSW Council of Social Services was formed, to coordinate relief efforts and maximise benefit for those in need. Our core vision remains unchanged: a NSW free from poverty and disadvantage.

To achieve this vision, we work to:

- Amplify the experience of people affected by poverty and disadvantage
- Support a diverse, collaborative and innovative community sector
- Form constructive partnerships to influence change
- Ensure a strong, effective and sustainable organisation.

As at the 2016 Census, over 880,000 people were living below the poverty line in NSW and this number is growing. As communities struggle to meet the cost of living, many people are being left behind. Natural disasters as well as the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated the already growing number of vulnerable communities.

As the peak body for the social services sector, NCOSS is uniquely placed to work with our members, government, business and other stakeholders to strive for a more equitable and inclusive society. We provide a platform for sharing information, resources, analysis and research, developing and advocating on agreed positions, progressing joint work and seeking greater transparency and delivery on commitments from government.

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## BACKGROUND AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2016, the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) outlined plans for a [Targeted Earlier Intervention \(TEI\) Program Reform](#), aimed to improve (and measure) long-term outcomes for families, young people and children, and communities.

DCJ's [TEI Sector Assistance Strategy](#) (the Strategy) was aimed at supporting existing TEI-funded services to 'effectively and confidently transition to the new TEI program'. The Strategy evolved over time, and was ultimately delivered in three stages over approximately four years, with DCJ laying 'Stage 1' groundwork in 2017-2018.

In July 2018, DCJ released a [TEI Program Outcomes Framework](#) which underpins the way that TEI services are to capture client and community outcomes, as reflected in Program Logics.

In 2019, the [Data Exchange](#) (DEX), a Commonwealth reporting platform, became the TEI reporting platform, initially under a 'try, test and learn' period, then moving towards mandatory reporting in January 2021.

Amidst these service system and reporting changes, many TEI services transitioned onto the new multi-agency contract template called the [Human Services Agreement](#) (HSA).

Against this backdrop of rapidly moving pieces, NCOSS provided 'Stage 2' support activities under the Strategy in 2018-2020: (a) TEI Practice Forums, (b) targeted learning circles, and (c) individualised support.

Following on from successful Stage 2 implementation (*read project report [here](#)*), DCJ engaged NCOSS in 2020-21 for 'Stage 3' of the Strategy, involving the further provision of individualised support packages. This involved providing 1:1 goal-based support to TEI services that were directly referred to NCOSS by DCJ districts, via a statewide allocations process, to assist them in transitioning to the TEI Program Outcomes Framework and related requirements.

The combined results of Stage 2 and Stage 3 activities point to overall success, in terms of numbers and outcomes.

### In a Nutshell

#### NCOSS TEI INDIVIDUALISED SUPPORT PACKAGES

Measure	Stage 2 (April 2019-June 2020)	Stage 3 (Jul 2020-June 2021)	Stage 2 & Stage 3
# of support packages completed	54	171	225
# of support hours allocated	565	1775	2340
# TEI services supported	54	163	217
# NCOSS support panel members	10	15	15*

#### SUPPORT OUTCOMES

SCORE domain	% of individual feedback respondents who Agreed or Strongly Agreed		
	Stage 2 (n=22)	Stage 3 (n=121)	Combined (n= 143)
1) <b>Goal</b> was Achieved	95%	94%	94%
2) Has <b>Knowledge</b> to meet TEI milestone	100%	96%	98%
3) Has <b>Skills</b> to meet TEI milestone	96%	93%	94%
4) Has <b>Confidence</b> to meet TEI milestone	100%	89%	94%
5) Was ' <b>listened to &amp; understood</b> ' by NCOSS support person	<i>not captured**</i>	94%	N/A
6) Was <b>Satisfied</b> with the support	<i>not captured**</i>	96%	N/A

*\*Most, but not all, support panel members were active in both stages.*

*\*\*'Listened to & understood' and 'Satisfaction' were only introduced in Stage 3 for NCOSS DEX reporting purpose.*

# 1 Goals Achieved

As with Stage 2, Stage 3 individualised support was about the achievement of specific goals by a TEI-funded service, within an allocated number of support hours (5, 10 or 20), provided by an NCOSS support panel member.

'Goals' -

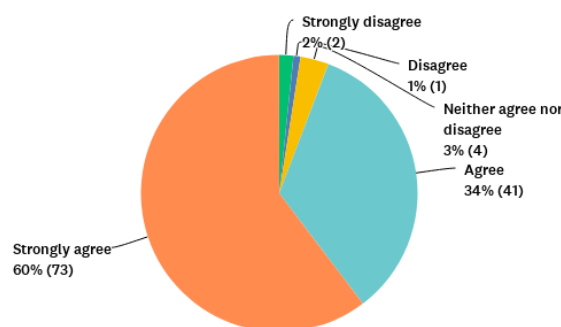
- a) had to support the achievement of a 'Milestone' or milestones that were specified in new TEI contracts;
- b) had to be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-bound);
- c) aimed to be a three-way agreement between the support recipient, the support person and the DCJ district contract manager; and
- d) were documented via a one-page 'Support Plan'.

## 1.1 'Overall Goal Achieved'

The achievement of Stage 3 'overall goals' was captured via feedback received from 121 support recipients, reported via an online ['service provider feedback'](#) form submitted to NCOSS, at the completion of the allocated support hours. The responses received represent 70% of completed packages.

All but seven out of 121 respondents (or 94%) either Strongly Agreed or Agreed that their overall Goal was achieved.

Q4 GOAL: Please rate this statement- The overall Goal identified in my Support Plan at the start of the support was achieved.



## 1.2 'Unreported' Goals

A proportion of completed packages (approx. 50 out of 171, or 29%) did not involve a reporting of Goals as such. This was either due to the straightforward nature of support provided (e.g. 5-hour DEX support packages), or in contrast, the confidential 'inappropriate to report' nature of the support (e.g. support around a sensitive governance or merger issue).

*We have not yet reached the goal - a merger with another service provider. This process has not been straightforward but very complex and difficult. (NCOSS support person) has faced many difficulties...It is expected that the goal will be met in the short term. – DCJ district officer*

*(NCOSS support person) provided 5 hour individualised support to the worker...to setup in DEX and to help her completing a program logic. I met the worker afterward. She was able to start entering data into DEX and she forwarded the Program Logic to DCJ. – DCJ district officer*

### 1.3 Outputs

The specific outputs/types of 'Goals Achieved' were captured from 107 individual responses of support panel members, submitted to NCOSS via a simple ['completion advice' online survey](#) following the completion of allocated support hours.

The top three most frequently mentioned outputs (multiple responses allowed) were-

- (a) Program Logic finalised or drafted (combined mention)
- (b) alignment with DEX SCORE outcomes achieved
- (c) 'how to use DEX' staff training/workshop held

Unsurprisingly, the identification of 'top 3' outputs/outcomes achieved by support panel members reflects the TEI sector's most in-demand areas for learning and support in the past two years, in order to align with TEI reforms.

**Table 2. Outputs/Goals Achieved**

Individual responses (n=107)	# of times cited	%
Align with SCORE	74	69%
How to use DEX	67	63%
Program Logic finalised	58	54%
Outcomes tools	52	49%
Program Logic drafted	51	48%
Staff dev/training	50	47%
Access to Data Exchange (DEX)	43	40%
Governance support	7	7%
Strategic/implementation plan	6	6%

Total individual responses = 107 (multiple responses allowed)

*Just wanted to thank you for the opportunity to be part of the TEI Assistance Package (sic). It was a great experience- although frustrating at times (for reasons outside of our control) and I really enjoyed meeting with and helping those Service Providers who are doing such great work with vulnerable clients.*

– NCOSS TEI support panel member

## 2 Individual Outcomes

Individual outcomes were captured from 121 individual feedback responses, received from participating Service Providers and submitted to NCOSS via a simple online survey at the completion of the allocated support hours.

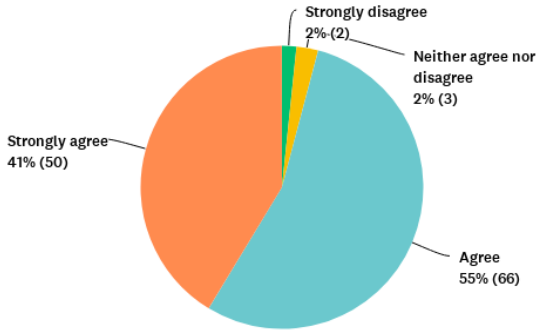
### 2.1 Knowledge

All but five of 121 respondents (or 96%) either Agreed or Strongly Agreed that they have the Knowledge needed to meet the TEI milestone/s in their new contract Schedule.

Those who neither agreed nor disagreed cited a 'it's-me-not-them' reason for their uncertainty. One cited being 'very new to this role', and that the rating was a reflection of 'my own knowledge (lack)'; but 'thanks to (support person), I'm not flying blind'.

Two respondents stated that the support process did not result in positive outcomes overall. This will be unpacked further in section 3- 'Discussion'.

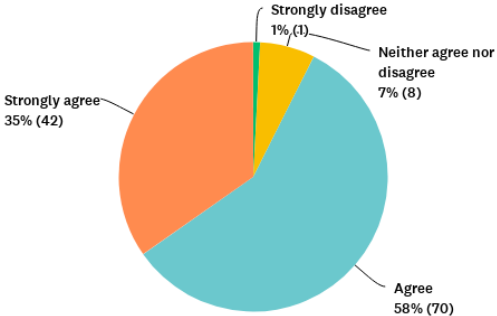
**Q5 KNOWLEDGE: I have the knowledge I need to meet the Milestone identified in our TEI Schedule.**



**2.2 Skills**

All but nine of 121 respondents (or 93%) Agreed or Strongly Agreed that they have the skills to meet the TEI milestone/s identified in their new TEI contract Schedule. The most valued aspects as well as the challenges in the area of learning new skills are discussed in section 3-*Discussion*. For the most part, "skills" were seen as evolving, as captured in comments such as, "It's a work in progress. We will comply with everything, however, we are also learning as we go" and "I am learning every day".

**Q6 SKILLS: I have the skills I need to meet the Milestone identified in our TEI Schedule.**



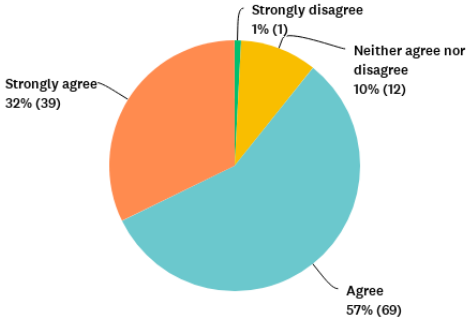
**2.3 Confidence**

All but 13 of 121 respondents (or 89%) indicated feeling confident in making decisions to meet the TEI milestone/s in their new TEI contract Schedule.

Early on in the project, both NCOSS and DCJ project teams had identified 'Confidence' as the most desirable outcome, as this would presumably indicate an increased capability to do future work, past the support period. Qualitative results are described in section 3-*Discussion*.

The sense that Confidence is a 'work in progress' was captured in one comment: "There are still a few areas that we need clarifying, but generally, (we) feel much more confident that we have what we need to complete a quality program logic".

Q7 CONFIDENCE: I feel confident in making decisions to meet the Milestone identified in our TEI Schedule.

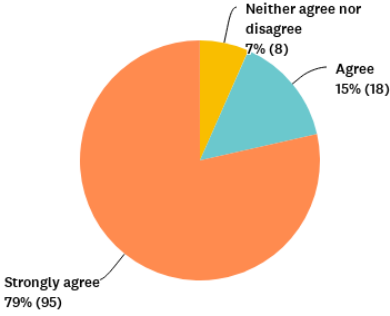


### 2.4 'Listened to and understood'

All but eight of 121 respondents (or 94%) either Strongly Agreed or Agreed that they felt 'listened to and understood' by their support person. This domain garnered the highest proportion of 'Strongly Agree' (79%), which was reflected further in the amount of qualitative comments regarding the support person (strong praise in many instances).

Support persons were variously described as: "(she) knew where we were coming from", "able to normalise our situation/concerns", "took time to understand the services we deliver", "allowed me to speak openly and (with) confidentiality", "built our conversations into a very usable TEI tool", "putting everything in a way it was easy for me to understand", among others.

Q8 SATISFACTION: The person who provided me with TEI Individualised Support listened to me and understood my issues.

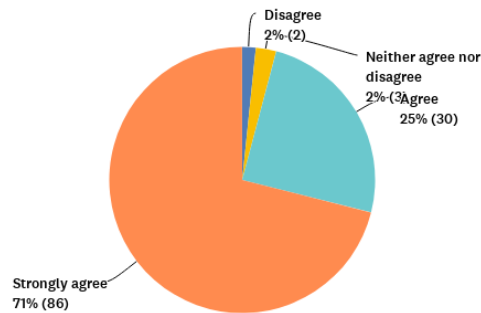


## 2.5 Overall Satisfaction

All but five of 121 respondents (or 96%) either Strongly Agreed or Agreed that they were Satisfied overall with the support that they received. This domain garnered the second highest proportion of 'Strongly Agree' (71%), next to 'listened to and understood'.

The reasons for the few cases of dissatisfaction are stated in section 3-*Discussion*.

Q9 SATISFACTION: Over-all, I am satisfied with the support I received.



As evidenced in comments, in many cases support was perceived as having gone 'above and beyond'.

*We initially needed support with Program Logic which she (and another peak) have given us; but we ended up with MUCH MORE - we were gifted with two position descriptions (one Aboriginal), an org chart and a succession plan. We feel like we won the lottery.*

– NCOSS TEI support recipient

*Initially we expressed a need to look at the way we do the actual work now that TEI has changed our KPIs and day-to-day functions. During the engagement, it became more of looking at the processes, forms, program logic and systems which as it turns out was incredibly helpful.*

–NCOSS TEI support recipient

The pivot to online mode of support, a result of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and subsequent lockdown, gained positive feedback.

*(Name of support person) did really well doing it online when we first didn't want to (do it online). She did quite a good job making it as personal as possible instead of it feeling like an online meeting.*

– NCOSS TEI support recipient

Some Department district officers also welcomed the opportunity to give feedback.

*(Support person) has excellent communication skills and has developed plans for the service providers that meet the needs and expectations of both the services and the Department FACS/DCJ.*

– DCJ Commissioning & Planning Officer (CPO)

*(Support person) is an absolute legend, I'm extremely thankful for her assistance and support to all of the services within my contracting patch across Armidale, Guyra, Uralla and Walcha. She is a wealth of knowledge and an asset to your team.*

– DCJ Commissioning & Planning Officer (CPO)



### 3 DISCUSSION

The TEI Program Reform is a significant reform undertaken by the NSW Government. Its implementation was impacted by successive crises, from bushfires in late 2019 to the COVID-19 pandemic from early 2020, which created for participating service providers: increased demand and workloads; an uncertain operating environment; and the need to provide services and support in different ways .



In conditions that were far from 'Business as Usual', NCOSS was able to successfully complete the delivery of the TEI Sector Assistance Strategy Stage 3 due to the TEI sector's resilience, the strength of NCOSS partnerships and the robustness of the project model. Whilst experiencing occasional challenges, overall, the project delivered solid learnings and new opportunities.

#### 3.1 Strengths

##### a) Goal-based model and simple tools

DCJ and NCOSS project teams developed simple one-pager operational tools and guidelines at the outset. This proved instrumental in communicating the goal-based nature of the support, as well as streamlining the process – from referral/ intake to completion/evaluation. Webpage links to project tools are in the Appendix below.

##### b) Commitment and quality of support panel members

Support panel members were engaged, through a selective tendering process in Stage 2, based on their understanding of the sector and key areas relevant to the TEI reforms, as well as experience in coaching and mentoring. In Stage 3, a few additions to the panel were made, for a total of fifteen (15) members - a mix of seven independent consultants, three regional trainers, three state and regional peaks, and two research centres. It was a highly competent line-up with one curious 'handicap': that of being on the same 'try, test and learn' trajectory with the rest of the TEI sector (including DCJ), particularly around new reporting requirements. The 'handicap' turned into an 'opportunity' as support panel members adjusted in time to be 'one step ahead', eventually becoming 'TEI reform experts' in their own right.

##### **Skills that TEI support recipients valued about their support providers include -**

*ability to provide clear, concise advice and tools to navigate the complexities of data collection and reporting into DEX, clarification around the use of SCORE, outcomes and surveys as well as...the development of relevant tools to meet the data reporting requirements; and*

*how to distil down the vast descriptions of our service into a coherent easy to follow Program Logic, how to interpret what information was needed in the program logic columns, how to link column to column.*

##### c) Robust engagement and partnerships

There were levels of engagement and collaboration between and among stakeholders that contributed to this project's success. Apart from NCOSS and the DCJ TEI Reform team, Stage 3 stakeholders included: 15 support panel members, seven DCJ district offices, 163 TEI services, and DCJ district commissioning and planning managers/officers. The remarkable support that the NCOSS project team received from the DCJ contracting and TEI Reform team is worth mentioning. In addition, the participation of about 21 key TEI stakeholders and peaks in seven TEI Sector Assistance Forum meetings led to timely information sharing and coordination.

### Some remarks from NCOSS TEI support panel members –

*It was a great opportunity, contributed to our own professional development, and confidence and credibility-building within the regions;*

*The level of trust and relationships developed were mutually beneficial;*

*The value of 'goal-based' networking (was) driven by tangible common purpose.*

## 3.2 Challenges

### a) Staff/management/organisational changes

Transferring know-how, particularly involving significant new concepts and processes such as the TEI Outcomes Framework and DEX reporting, is difficult in the best of times. Changes in TEI service staff midway through (or even near the end) of the support process were a challenge. Some support persons had to 'start over again'; and support results and timeliness of delivery were impacted.

- *I only came in during session 5 out of 6 sessions (previous person had left), so basing my score on that one session. – TEI support recipient*
- *The previous staff members positions...were made redundant and I have done some short term work with the incumbent...now covering both previous positions. It has been a quick learning experience for them. – NCOSS TEI support person*

### b) Time constraints or lack of engagement

For a good number of support recipients, it took several months from first engagement to completion of allocated support hours. Delays were largely attributed to resource constraints. Further investigation (outside the scope of the project) may well reveal more nuanced reasons such as organisational or personal crises, contract issues or governance issues – some of which are mentioned in other sections below.

*(You need) Patience in engaging with them, not straightforward, they're time-poor and under-resourced, not funded enough. – NCOSS TEI support person*

### c) 'Disconnect' in understanding, approach or timeframe with DCJ district/s

The TEI Reform process had many moving parts, and therefore, not all aspects were able to be aligned at all times. Additionally, the transition to a "commissioning" approach (and away from traditional government contracting) was a significant and ongoing learning for all parties. Despite best efforts, instances of 'disconnect' between three main players - DCJ contract managers, TEI services and NCOSS support panel members - were reported in a number of instances. The disconnect was serious enough in two instances to have merited feedback indicating overall dissatisfaction with the process. Contentious points mostly concerned: required use of DCJ Program Logic (PL) template and 'checklist', disagreements in contract deliverables, perceived "changing of goalposts", and updating of DCJ resources that required significant pivoting.

- *Program Logics can have all sorts of different frameworks...I got the feeling that consultants come with their own construct and bring it when they work with providers.- DCJ district officer*
- *It seemed that our local (district) office and our organisation were speaking different languages. (NCOSS support person) managed to translate our dialogues so we could better communicate what we do in a way that was digestible to the department.-TEI support recipient*
- *Our CPO seems to move the goalposts and increase what is needed by this service to meet the milestones identified in the TEI requirements.- TEI support recipient*
- *There are inconsistencies across districts re CPO understanding and application of DCJ Program Logic template. Some use rigid marking 'pass-fail' approaches, inconsistent with 'you have to own it' messaging... (preference for) one-pagers don't always work. – NCOSS TEI support person*

#### d) Disenchantment with compliance and reporting requirements

Even with the provision of support, some support recipients questioned the new reporting system. This was echoed by support panel members who felt that the number of hours required (for smaller organisations particularly) to learn, understand and meet compliance/reporting processes is an area of ongoing concern.

*Whilst I now have the skills to meet the Milestones, the DEX TEI reporting requirements are onerous for small organisations, such as ourselves, who receive less than \$50,000 p.a.funding. This funding equates to 0.6 FTE which ultimately means that often unpaid hours are needed to meet these Milestones.* - TEI support recipient

#### e) Impact of COVID-19 pandemic

The long-term impacts of COVID-19 are still unfolding and will be a research subject for years to come. Some of the immediate impact was described in a few comments from support recipients.

- *The timeframe to deliver the program logic was unreasonable and rushed...no face to face consultation... and also the reliable internet or phone reception when trying to speak with (support person) made the process confusing and not clear.* – support undertaken during December 2020 NSW outbreak
- *This was not important for services under great pressure during Covid and with a population also affected by Covid, but in addition, we work with high risk clients and situation during this transition.* - TEI support recipient

### 3.3 Opportunities

This project presented previously untapped opportunities, two of which are articulated below.

#### a) Leveraging the network of expertise and the current high social capital generated by the project

As the NSW Government progressively implements a commissioning approach in its procurement of social services, the focus for service providers naturally moves away from the inputs and outputs associated with services offered, to outcomes achieved. The working relationship between DCJ and service providers is evolving in this context towards a shared responsibility for the achievement of outcomes.

As this was new to everyone, the expertise gained by the support panel during the ‘try, test and learn’ period of the program was fast-tracked by necessity.

Over and above the expertise, the number and quality of relationships developed by support panel members with TEI service providers, and between TEI service providers themselves, across wide geographic areas of NSW was noteworthy.

Given the significant social capital achieved in this project, there could be value in maintaining the support panel/a ‘learning circle’ approach to sector development in the TEI program. The panel could be convened and attended on an opt-in basis by those organisations not funded by TEI for sector development; and as a condition of funding for those that do receive TEI sector development funding.

*Being able to meet the team from Galambila face to face really made a difference in terms of building a relationship with this Aboriginal organisation. They were very open to ideas and strategies, and they felt that the end result was one that they 'owned'- a culturally significant factor that impacts on the success of any project with Aboriginal clients and organisations.*

– NCOSS TEI support panel member

## b) Optimising the use of resources developed through this project

This project resulted in the development of fit-for-purpose resources to suit varying needs of TEI services: e.g. a culturally appropriate workbook, intake forms, survey forms, templates etc. There is an opportunity to continue to collate and build an accessible collection of tools.

- *What (support person) did, how she did it (workbook) and why was really good. When we revisit next year, we have all the information....* - NCOSS TEI support recipient (Aboriginal)
- *(Support person) was also able to help us develop realistic client feedback systems that could be implemented with highly marginalised young people.* – NCOSS TEI support recipient

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## 4 CONCLUSION

*Overall, we have the skills, but feel it's important to continue to...add to existing skills and knowledge by way of study/discussions.*

– NCOSS TEI support recipient

We have evidenced that the TEI Sector Assistance Strategy including the Individualised Support program has been valuable and valued. The TEI funded services alongside DCJ and the sector development ecosystem enthusiastically engaged with the range of offerings, including individualised and group support, and information and resources, which shows a willingness of the sector to accept and engage with reform given the right conditions.

The approach created a strengthened sector eco-system and substantial social capital in the midst of considerable change. In addition to strengthening organisational capabilities, the approach has contributed to the evolution of the Department's transition to commissioning.

### **NCOSS recommends that DCJ gives consideration to:**


1. Targeted sector assistance that includes individualised support being an essential part of any future DCJ reform program – as long as it is goal-based, time-limited and appropriately resourced.
2. The continuance of a TEI Sector Development Forum, convened for organisations and individuals that provide support activities and training for the TEI sector, whether or not they receive DCJ funding for TEI sector development. It is envisaged that this could become a platform for: sharing developments and collectively monitoring progress in the TEI commissioning cycle; providing on-the-ground insights into ongoing sector development needs of TEI service providers; and ensuring that there is a coordinated approach to sector development within the TEI service system.

## APPENDIX

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### PROJECT TOOLS AND RESOURCES

1. Tools and templates
    - a) [Flowchart Stage 3 TEI Individualised Support](#)
    - b) [1-REQUEST FORM Stage 3 TEI Individualised Support-Feb 2020](#)
    - c) [1a-REQUEST FORM Stage 3 TEI Individualised Support-Dec 2020](#)
    - d) [2-ENTRY INTERVIEW-SUPPORT PLAN Stage 3 TEI IS](#)
    - e) [Support Agency Completion Advice Stage 3 TEI Individualised Support](#) - online form
    - f) [Feedback \(TEI service provider\) Stage 3 Individualised Support](#) - online form
  
  2. [NCOSS support panel and support services \(Stage 3\)](#)
  
  3. [NCOSS TEI Sector Assistance Forum participants \(2019-2021\)](#)
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NCOSS Targeted Earlier Intervention (TEI) Program  
Sector Assistance Strategy project

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