

Establishing a statewide simulation facilitator pool and extending VSA's capacity to support health educators

Background

The Victorian Simulation Alliance (VSA) has been in existence since 2010 and provides a 'community of practice' bringing together and supporting health professional educators involved in implementing simulation-based teaching and learning within Victoria. The VSA is an active network with a broad membership representation across all health care disciplines. The Alliance provides members with a platform for: valuable networking; resource sharing; access to expert advice and information; collaboration in research and development; high-quality education and training and validated simulation scenarios. The VSA is currently governed by a Steering Committee comprising a multi-disciplinary membership from health services and education providers.

To enhance the ability of the Alliance to meet current and emergent needs in health professional education, the VSA identified a number of needs including:

- The lack of appropriately prepared educators as a key limiting factor in the implementation of simulation-based teaching and learning health professional education; and
- The need to secure the ongoing viability of the Alliance through the development of a sustainable business model and improvements in the existing infrastructure.

Key activities

In response to these identified needs, funding was sought in 2012 to support the following activities:

Establishment of a statewide simulation facilitator pool/bank (Facilitator Network) aimed at maximising the use of existing simulation educators and increasing access across the state to appropriately prepared educators through an online database search facility

Funding was directed at program software and consultancy services to develop and implement an online search system, through the existing VSA website: www.vicsim.org.au.

The VSA Facilitator Network is an online search system linking education providers and health services in simulation directly with simulation educators, facilitators and technicians. This initiative has enabled appropriately qualified and experienced simulation professionals to publicise their availability for additional work in the field. It has also supported health services and education providers with the ability to scale staffing levels

up and down to match the fluctuating levels of simulation activity within teaching programs. This new initiative ensures simulation is more readily accessible and cost effective, therefore leading to a greater use of this fabulous teaching and learning approach.

Development and implementation of a sustainable business model for the VSA to ensure the financial viability and ongoing operation and expansion

A foundation for a sustainable business model has commenced through establishing the VSA as an 'Incorporated Association'. This business model will provide a platform for a potentially sustainable future. The capacity of the VSA to support and enhance simulation-based education and training (SBET) has strengthened and will continue beyond the scope of the project funding.

The project period encompassed a review of the Alliance from the perspective of 'sustainability' leading to the recognition, by the VSA Steering Committee, of the need to establish the VSA as an independent legal and financial entity that would have the capacity to raise revenue and manage its own funds. This was viewed as an essential platform upon which a sustainable business model could be applied. For this purpose the VSA sought expert advice from an external consultant who presented a variety of models for consideration. Following examination of the models the Steering Committee agreed to establish the VSA as an Incorporated Association.

Additionally the Steering Committee:

- Reviewed the costs associated with the ongoing operation,
- Identified a range of potential revenue streams,
- Developed the VSA Constitution and obtained legal advice with regard to same.

The new constitution will be presented for ratification at the next General Meeting in November 2013. It is anticipated that the Incorporated Association will come into effect in early 2014. In the twelve months following this, the VSA shall introduce membership fees and source other sources of revenue to support its operations.

It would be reasonable to say that the achievement of financial sustainability appears to be ambitious in the context of a 'community of practice'. However, through the establishment of the VSA as an Incorporated Association a more robust platform is being created on which the Alliance can work towards this longer-term goal.

Improvement and extension of the infrastructure of the VSA through high-level administrative assistance, to ensure effective support for educators engaged in simulation-based education (undergraduate, post-graduate and ongoing professional development) across a range of health disciplines

Funding enabled the employment of a Project Coordinator to ensure the provision of high-level administrative support and further develop the existing communication system and infrastructure.

The Project Coordinator developed and coordinated the following:

- Further expansion of the multi-professional membership and scope of the VSA;
- Determined teaching and training resources needs of the Alliance through the development and evaluation of statewide member survey;
- Access for educators to quality online resources and information, supporting simulation-based education in health professional education;
- Diverse opportunities for information dissemination, networking and collaborative research through the implementation of a range of strategies including regular newsletters, network event updates and coordination of VSA regional and metropolitan symposiums.

Conclusion

The project was successful in establishing a user-friendly, online statewide simulation Facilitator Network. The network will require ongoing marketing and promotion to ensure adequate usage and longevity into the future.

While a 'sustainable' business model has not yet been fully realised, the project enabled the development of a robust foundation which will provide a stable platform on which to build this business model.

Through the project, the Alliance has seen an increase in its multi-disciplinary membership and a strengthening of its capacity to support health care professionals through ongoing professional development, networking, fostering collaboration and resource sharing.

Further information

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