Part 1 - Summary Details

Please use your TAB key to complete Parts 1 & 2.

CRDC Project Number: CRDC1511

Project Title: “Consultancy Agreement: CottonInfo monitoring and evaluation support system”

Project Commencement Date: 1/7/14       Project Completion Date: 30/6/15

Part 2 – Contact Details

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Part 3 – Final Report

(The points below are to be used as a guideline when completing your final report.)

Background

1. Outline the background to the project.

The Cotton Info team undertakes extension and communication for the cotton industry. Those in the team are from different organisations and are geographically spread. Information about activities was captured via phone meetings but was not being systematically captured or recorded. This limited the capacity to report, review and evaluate the full activities and impact of the group.

The YourDATA M&E platform is a web-based application that provides a central data collection point for projects. It allows team members to input raw data, view real-time graphical reports, and export collated data to spreadsheets, at any time and from anywhere (http://dev.couttsjr.com.au/yourdata/). It can be particularly tailored to collect and collate M&E data across regions, individuals and projects to allow reporting against milestones and strategic objectives.

The platform was seen as a way of better capturing the monitoring and evaluation of the cotton info team and this initial phase was to trial its value and effectiveness.
Objectives

2. List the project objectives (from the application) and the extent to which these have been achieved.

The objectives of the project were to:

- Develop an understanding of the monitoring, evaluation and reporting needs of the Cotton Info Team;
- Establish a YourData internet based M&E platform for capturing and collating activity, output and impact data;
- Provide support to the team as they sought to use the platform and the information generated.

All objectives were achieved with a fully operating platform in use by the Cotton Info team providing the information required for reporting.

Methods

3. Detail the methodology and justify the methodology used. Include any discoveries in methods that may benefit other related projects.

Coutts J&R provides the technical and logistics support to this platform to ensure that data collection and analysis best meets project needs over the life of the project. Note this is a unique platform and support service.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Timing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establishing the platform</td>
<td>• Providing input into developing the MER plan</td>
<td>July-Dec 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Establishing the platform with appropriate logos and explanation and help sections</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Developing the categories and data collection input forms</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Developing the output tables and reports</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Testing and modifying</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• One day face to face MER training and training in use of the platform</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Follow up support through email, phone and/or webinar in getting started/using the platform.</td>
<td>Completed on time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating and supporting the platform</td>
<td>• Full access to use of platform – including input forms, help information, updated reports and spreadsheets</td>
<td>July 2014 - June 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Assistance with design and uploading of event feedback forms and other data inputs</td>
<td>Completed on time</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Modifications to reports as needed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Technical issues support</td>
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Outcomes

4. Describe how the project’s outputs will contribute to the planned outcomes identified in the project application. Describe the planned outcomes achieved to date.

The outputs of the project are being used to capture and collate activity, output and outcome data from the Cotton Info Team. The platform itself is an output of the project. The following screen shots show something of the data being captured and collated by the platform.
Activity/Outputs report choices

Example of a Dashboard ‘quick look’ at statistics

Participants by activity type:
The outputs have already provided a significant increase in the quantity and quality of information being captured from the activities and outputs of the cotton extension team and so providing a solid basis for monitoring, reviewing and reporting on their role and contribution to the RD&E effort in the industry.

5. Please report on any:-
   a) Feedback forms used and what the results were
   b) The highlights for participants or key learnings achieved
   c) The number of people participating and any comments on level of participation

This is a means by which the Cotton Info team can capture and report their extension and communication activities and their evaluation of these activities. The use of the platform by the team and the value of it for team management, reporting and evaluation of the Cotton Info Team is the key form of evaluation. Feedback from activities are uploaded onto the platform.

To date 11 of the Cotton Info team have entered data on the system: all 7 of the Regional Development Officers and 4 of the Technical Specialists – as well as the Cotton Info Team Program Manager.

Feedback from the Program Manager on the platform was as follows:
   • The system has worked well for the cotton info team. It was seen as a fairly seamless process with an initial overview and training session helping the team understand the rationale and value to them;
   • The data recording process was seen as simple to use and straightforward – it was intuitive and easy to follow through;
   • The activity feedback templates provided during training were being used and were very helpful in planning what information to collect;
   • Having data from the geographically diverse team and across different programs in the one place, allowed the program manager to scan and be aware of the range of activities – including those outside of the larger projects (opportunistic or requested) – and to read the reflections/ comments on the different activities (monitoring/improving);
   • Reporting to the Management Committee was seen as having been improved with having a full data set on activities and engagement by the team.
   • Team members managing specific large projects (e.g. Climate; Irrigation) have been using the relevant data from the platform for reporting on their projects.

Further improvements suggested included:
   • Being able to nominate which group initiated specific activities
   • Amalgamating some of the activity categories.
   • Being able to pull together reflection information over time
   • Having activity feedback sheets on-line for data to be entered and collated
   • Gaining more impact data – narratives, case studies and follow-up surveys

**Budget**

6. Describe how the project’s budget was spent in comparison with the application budget. Outline any changes and provide justification.

The budget was spent as planned. There were no changes needed.

**Conclusion**

7. Provide an assessment of the likely impact of the results and conclusions of the research project for the cotton industry. What are the take home messages?

For the first time, engagement, activity, output and impact data from the Cotton Info Team has been able to be captured in real time and collated for on-going improvement and reporting purposes. This is a significant jump in being able to demonstrate the role and value of the cotton team activities and
clearly demonstrate the extent to which they are supporting the RD&E process and assisting industry to maximise the take up of new research, improved management practices and obtain productivity, profitability, environmental and social benefits.

This should provide cotton growers and other stakeholders with the confidence they need that their levies and funding being used for this purpose is an effective investment.

The process and system is flexible, easy to use and delivers timely information needed for decision-making about this significant development and extension delivery program to the cotton industry.