Stakeholder Involvement during COVID-19 and implications for SVI Assurance and Accreditation

Social Value International (SVI) are publishing this short document in response to the Covid-19 global pandemic and the challenges this brings in relation to applying Principle One: Involve Stakeholders to the levels required to meet the SVI Assurance Standard.

Overall Covid-19 should not stop people from being able to progress with assurance or individual accreditation. However, it is recognised that these are unprecedented times with difficult working conditions across the world especially in relation to social distancing and the inability to convene people. Stakeholder involvement has new challenges.

With the new challenges, SVI need a consistent response to the reports submitted for assurance that have been based on limited stakeholder involvement as a result of Covid-19.

**Current issues:** SVI have identified several issues that have arisen in relation to stakeholder engagement during the covid-19 crisis. These are:

1. *Mixed levels of stakeholder involvement.* Adequate levels of stakeholder involvement have taken place in the process of defining outcomes and amounts of change however the analyst still requires data on value and/or causality.
2. *Biases towards those with internet access.* Covid-19 restrictions are limiting stakeholder involvement to those with internet access only
3. *Lower response rates.* Engagement with stakeholders is limited, response rates are lower than usual due to the conditions created by Covid-19

**Advice for practitioners submitting analyses for assurance:**

As is normally the case, each report will have different circumstances and an element of professional judgement is always required in judging whether the principles have been applied adequately. The SVI executive team provides consistency of judgements and application of the principles.

SVI agree that during the Covid-19 crisis practitioners are working in extreme circumstances and this should be recognised. However, if an analysis has no stakeholder engagement at all it cannot be assured.

Reports for assurance must address the situation directly and work with stakeholders appropriately. The assurance will check that and pass judgment accordingly. It is like any other disaster situation – say refugees following an earthquake. We would expect analyses and reports to take account of the situation of the refugees, we would not identify a special limitation statement on that account.

It is likely that during these challenging times, where elements of stakeholder involvement is proving impossible that the best way to apply the principle is to use proxy voices although, as always, these proxies should not be stakeholders that have a vested interest for example the project managers of the intervention. Applicants should take care to describe any biases or risks associated with using these proxy voices.
Practitioners must still include best attempts at stakeholder engagement in the circumstances. Reports seeking assurance must include transparent description of any limitations, and the attempts that have been made to carry out sufficient levels of engagement.

It is important that practitioners provide some detail about the work they have performed to reach their conclusions and explain how it is different to what would normally be done: for example

“In forming our opinion we normally undertake X, Y and Z as a means of assessing A. Given the current restrictions with the Covid19 pandemic we were not able to carry Z because group interviews are difficult to arrange under the current circumstances. For that reason there are several risks in relying on this data and we would stress caution against over reliance on this work in gauging the impacts on the community as a whole…”

Where reports are suffering from limited stakeholder involvement, the applicant is advised to explore the option of changing the report from an analysis to a forecast. If is not presented as a forecast, the reasoning must be clearly outlined as to why the data is good enough to be an evaluative analysis.

Assessors should discuss with the SVI Assurance Team reports that have these issues with the understanding that this is unprecedented circumstances and there is high levels of subjectivity to the decision. SVI will be providing consistency in these professional judgements

**Assurance Statements:**
Reports will not be receiving special limitation statements in relation to limited stakeholder involvement.

**Review of this response:** To be reviewed in January 2021