

# What Works for Place-Based Approaches in Victoria?

## Part 2: A review of practice

Prepared for Department Jobs Precincts and Regions (DJPR)

Prepared by Jesuit Social Services' Centre for Just Places, Centre for Community Child Health (Murdoch Children's Research Institute) and RMIT University





## Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Dja Dja Wurrung, Gunaikurnai, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Yorta Yorta as the Traditional Custodians of the unceded lands on which this project took place. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present, and extend this acknowledgement to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who continue to care for Country, community, and culture across Victoria and beyond.

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- RMIT University (RMIT)
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## Oversight Committee

The Oversight Committee included representatives from:

- Place-Based Reform and Delivery, DJPR
- Research and Evaluation, Our Place
- Regional Policy, Engagement and Coordination, DJPR
- Latrobe Valley Authority, DJPR
- Dusseldorp Foundation
- Centre for Evaluation and Research, DoH
- Stronger Places, Stronger People, DSS
- Give Where You Live Foundation
- Strategic Partnerships, DET

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The Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions funded the development of this report. The project 'What works for place-based approaches in Victoria' comprises of three work packages: 1) meta-synthesis of critical factors for place-based approaches; 2) case studies of place-based approaches in Victoria; and: 3) knowledge translation of project outputs. The overall project management was led by the Jesuit Social Services' Centre for Just Places. The meta-synthesis was led by RMIT University, with Jesuit Social Services' Centre for Just Places and Murdoch Children's Research Institute leading the case study work packages, and University of Queensland providing a policy review of place-based approaches as part of the meta-synthesis. The overall objective of the project was to increase the availability of high-quality evidence in understanding whether place-based approaches are effective in addressing complex issues and what works in the Victorian context.

Extensive research was conducted to address the overall objectives of the project. Consequently, research report findings are separated into 2 major reports: *Part 1: A review of the literature* addresses

the meta-synthesis;<sup>1</sup> and *Part 2: A review of practice* addresses the case study analyses. This report is Part 2 and contains an overview of place-based approaches both nationally and in Victoria, and focuses on five Victorian case studies of place-based approaches. These case studies explore themes arising from the meta-synthesis and provide evidence to address gaps in the literature, overall offering a sense of what is working and what needs strengthening in current Victorian PBAs.

## For further information

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The Centre for Just Places was established by Jesuit Social Services, with seed funding from the Gandel Foundation and Victorian Government, to enable and support place-based approaches nationally through research, collaboration, engagement and knowledge exchange.

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## Executive Summary

In recent years, Victorians have endured difficult times with catastrophic summer bushfires (2019–2020), floods and the COVID-19 pandemic with its associated impacts including local and regional lockdowns, school closures, unemployment, changed migration patterns, financial distress, increasing family violence and impacts on mental health. These disruptions and emerging issues have occurred in the context of a rapidly changing climate with higher temperatures, more frequent and extreme weather events, greater risk of bushfires and sea-level rises, all which will have disproportionate impacts on people living with socio-economic disadvantage. Consequently, to address the interconnections between these socio-economic and environmental issues at a local level applying a place-based lens is critically important, particularly as policy and planning moves from responding to crises, into recovery, transition, adaptation and preparing for the future.

This research has been funded by the Place-Based Reform and Delivery branch of the Victorian Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR) to consolidate and review evidence on what works for place-based approaches (PBAs) in the Victorian context. The major objective of the project was to increase understanding of the effectiveness of PBAs and make this evidence available to decision-makers, practitioners and funders of PBAs. The ultimate project objective has been to support PBAs, increase their effectiveness and improve the wellbeing of Victorian communities.

The project has been led by Jesuit Social Services' Centre for Just Places, with RMIT University Centre for Urban Research and the Centre for Community Child Health at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute. The research has been delivered and developed in partnership with DJPR and guided by the Department's project Oversight Committee as well as an independent Advisory Group.

The specific aims of the project were to identify elements of PBAs that influence success across the lifespan of initiatives, factors that influence effectiveness, barriers to effectiveness, government influences on effectiveness and successful partnerships, and the use of economic evaluation in PBAs. The project consisted of two major work programs: Part 1, a meta-synthesis of existing literature on PBAs; and Part 2, an examination of selected case studies across Victoria. This report provides results for Part 2 of the project, which includes a brief review of longstanding initiatives across the nation, and an overview of PBAs in Victoria with a focus on five case studies of different PBAs located in different parts of the state. These case studies were selected (three with DJPR involvement as required by the project terms) to offer insights into what elements contribute to successful establishment, consolidation, longevity and eventual outcomes for PBAs in Victoria and whether these are consistent across case studies. The case studies include the Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project, Go Goldfields, Flemington Works (Community Revitalisation), Latrobe Valley Authority, and a case study of First Nations-led, place-based approaches with a focus on The Gathering Place in Morwell. Interviews were conducted with practitioners delivering initiatives and policy makers both nationally and in Victoria including members of the Oversight Committee.

## Key findings from case studies

The analysis of these case studies draws on and highlights both the findings and gaps, identified in the review of literature in Part 1. The narratives and stories from each case study provide grounded evidence to inform the government's understanding of enabling conditions and barriers to success for PBAs in Victoria.

Each case study provides insights into what is working and not working well for PBAs as they work to affect change in their communities. Each demonstrates many of the principles and conditions required for success in PBAs, for example:

- Adopting a strengths-based, long-term approach;
- A focus on equity;
- Effective leadership and governance models;
- A commitment to listen to and work in genuine partnership with communities;
- Long-term flexible funding and resourcing to improve capacity strengthening;
- Well resourced, designed and rigorous monitoring, evaluation and learning processes.

The dominant themes and issues cutting across the case studies reiterated many of the themes emerging from the literature including:

- The importance of adequate, ongoing and flexible funding;
- The need to foster robust, trusted and effective relationships between initiatives and government, and between initiatives and their communities;
- The recognised need to shift towards systems thinking and system change approaches;
- The importance of building capacity and resourcing well designed evaluation frameworks using a variety of metrics and methods;
- That moving beyond deficit and disadvantage or 'the problem to fix' narrative is essential to ensure places and communities aren't stigmatised;
- There is much to learn from First Nations-led initiatives and experiences about the importance of strengths-based, holistic, culturally-centred practice as well as sovereignty over community data and governance.

## Working and learning together in place

There is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to working in and with communities. While these case studies offer some insights, further work is needed to deepen our understanding of the diversity of practices across PBAs and the range of conditions that enable success.

Government is presented with a number of key challenges and opportunities in changing the way it works with communities. Developing ongoing flexible funding models and improving policy alignment and coordination to address inequities and community needs were highlighted across the case studies. Valuing and building on the deep and trusted relationships that PBAs establish, and drawing on those community voices and leaders to inform decision-making, was also a key message from practice.

The promise and impact of PBAs relies on an ongoing commitment from different levels of government and a range of other stakeholders to support community-led work within a culture of continuous learning with communities.

There is enormous potential to support and learn from the innovative work of PBAs to inform policy decisions and systems change to address inequities and build a more equitable and resilient future in light of key challenges like Covid-19, energy transitions and climate change.

## Introduction

This document presents the case study research for the project 'What works for place-based approaches in Victoria'. In order to better understand PBAs in practice in Victoria we first provide an overview of the current landscape of PBAs across Australia focusing on Commonwealth Government partnered initiatives and highlighting five key long-running initiatives from Tasmania, New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria. We then turn to look more closely at what is happening in Victoria discussing the range of initiatives that can be characterised as place-based. This work is reflected on in the context of the Victorian Government's place-based framework released in early 2020 which distinguishes between place-based and place-focused approaches by government.<sup>2</sup>

### Definition of place-based approaches

Different definitions of 'place-based' are used in place-based practice in Australia. The place-based approach definition we have used in this research comes from Dart:<sup>3</sup>

*A collaborative, long-term approach to build thriving communities delivered in a defined geographic location. This approach is ideally characterised by partnering and shared design, shared stewardship, and shared accountability for outcomes and impacts.*

The wording was developed through a co-design process to develop a place-based evaluation framework and is based on definitions and design principles from the Queensland Government Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors, the Australian Government Department of Social Services, and place-based initiative, Logan Together.

Following this broad overview of existing practice, five case studies are presented which explore themes arising from the literature review (see Part 1) and provide evidence addressing some of the gaps identified in the literature, offering insights into what is working well and what needs strengthening in current Victorian PBAs. The rationale for case study selection and research methodology is outlined. Each case study highlights lessons from the literature, focusing on key themes and narratives as well as areas for further strengthening. These selected case studies are not presented as 'best practice' examples but rather provide grounded and context specific insights into different methods, challenges and issues involved in designing and implementing PBAs in Victoria informed by evidence from the literature captured in Part 1.

<sup>2</sup> State Government of Victoria. (2020). *A framework for place-based approaches: The start of a conversation about working differently for better outcomes*. Melbourne: Victorian State Government.

<sup>3</sup> Dart, J. (2018). *Place-based evaluation framework: A guide for evaluation of place-based approaches in Australia* (Commissioned by the Queensland Government Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors (DCDSS) and the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS), p. 7.

## Research questions

Through a meta-synthesis of existing literature and case studies of Victorian PBAs, this project aims to answer the following research questions. Part 1 focuses on addressing research questions 1,5,6,7 through examining the literature, this report Part 2 focuses largely on Q. 2,3,4.

### **Evidence of what works for place-based initiatives:**

1. What are the elements of place-based approaches that contribute to successful establishment, consolidation, longevity and eventual outcomes?
2. To what extent are place-based approaches effective in the Victorian context? What key factors and/or conditions are linked to greater effectiveness in the Victorian context?
3. What are the common practices among place-based initiatives in Victoria? Of these, which contribute to progress towards outcomes and which do not?
4. What are the most significant barriers to achieving success most commonly faced by place-based approaches in Victoria?

### **Evidence of what works for funders and/or government:**

5. What key functions or enablers of government are needed to support place-based approaches?
6. What conditions are required to enable government to be an effective partner to place-based approaches?

### **Evidence of social return on investments:**

7. What evidence is there on social return on investment of place-based approaches in Victoria, Australia and Internationally?

## Place-based approaches in Australia

PBAs are not new in Australia, where a relatively long history of place-based policies and initiatives have been used to address complex and persistent social disadvantage. PBAs in Australia can be seen as far back as the 1940s, evident in the focus on regional development, communities, and place that shaped priorities in the post-war reconstruction period. The form and application of place-based policy and initiatives has shifted considerably over time, however with a more sustained commitment to place-based policy approaches since the turn of the century (see Part 1, Appendix 1 for a more comprehensive overview of place-based policy history in Australia).

PBAs in Australia have been influenced by broader shifts and debates regarding what constitutes good governance, the role of government in service delivery and funding, the role of community voice in decision-making as well as variations over time in social, economic and environmental policy as relates to place. Many applications of place-based approaches at a national level have been short term often taking the form of trials, pilots or time limited programs. This makes assessing the true impacts and outcomes of such programs difficult, as long-term commitment is a foundational and essential feature of successful place-based work.

### Commonwealth Government involvement in place-based work

The Commonwealth Government supports a number of place-based programs and initiatives to address various forms of disadvantage at a local level. The majority of the recent PBAs supported by the Commonwealth Government employ a collective impact framework reflecting the growing international popularity of this method of place-based intervention.

### Collective impact

Collective impact can be defined as 'a collaborative approach to addressing complex social issues, consisting of five conditions: a common agenda; continuous communication; mutually reinforcing activities; backbone support; and shared measurement'.<sup>4</sup>

A key feature of the collective impact approach is the role of a backbone organisation – a separate organisation dedicated to coordinating and supporting the various dimensions and collaborators involved. Supporting backbone infrastructure is essential to ensuring the collaborative effort maintains momentum and facilitates impact across PBAs.<sup>5</sup>

For further information see:

<http://www.collaborationforimpact.com/collective-impact/the-backbone-organisation/>

Despite the emphasis on PBAs there has been no national body overseeing the diversity of place-based work around Australia. This has been continually identified as an issue as there is no standard definition of 'place-based' or official pathways for information and learnings to be disseminated and shared between initiatives. However, in April 2022, the Commonwealth Government, through the Department of Social Services, announced they are in the process of establishing a National Centre for Place-Based Collaboration (Nexus Centre).<sup>6</sup> This Nexus Centre will provide support to current and emerging place-based initiatives in Australia, initially focusing on the Commonwealth programs and initiatives.

<sup>4</sup> Smart, J. (2017). *Collective impact: Evidence and implications for practice*. CFCA Paper no. 45.

<sup>5</sup> Dart, J. (2018). *Place-based evaluation framework: A guide for evaluation of place-based approaches in Australia* (Commissioned by the Queensland Government Department of Communities, Disability Services and seniors (DCDSS) and the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS).

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.dss.gov.au/place-based-collaboration>

**Table 1** Place-based programs currently supported by the Commonwealth Government

Initiative	Description
Stronger Places, Stronger People 10 sites across Australia	Stronger Places, Stronger People (SPSP) is a community-led, collective impact initiative, stewarded by the Australian Government in partnership with state and territory governments and 10 communities across Australia. It seeks to disrupt disadvantage and create better futures for children and their families through locally tailored and evidence-driven solutions to local problems, in partnership with local people. <sup>7</sup>  Participating communities were selected based on criteria including existing community collaboration, with an existing collective impact practice preferred.
Communities for Children Facilitation Partners 52 sites across Australia	The Communities for Children Facilitating Partners (CfC FPs) is a place-based model of investment supporting children and families. CfC FPs facilitates a whole-of-community approach to support early childhood development and wellbeing with a focus on children from birth to 12 years, and can include children up to 18 years and their families.  CfC FPs take an early intervention approach that supports families to improve the way they relate to each other; improve parenting skills; and ensure the health and wellbeing of children. <sup>8</sup>
Connected Beginnings 24 sites across Australia (expansion to 50 by 2025)	Connected Beginnings aims to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children based on evidence of what works in community building and collaboration from Australia and overseas.  The program uses a collective impact approach, which brings people together in a structured way to achieve community-led social change. <sup>9</sup>
Stronger Communities for Children 10 sites across Northern Territory	Stronger Communities for Children (SCfC) is a flexible, place-based initiative that works with 10 Northern Territory communities to identify and implement local, integrated services and activities that create a safe and positive environment for children and families. <sup>10</sup>
Regional Deals 3 sites across Australia (more anticipated)	Regional Deals bring together all levels of government around a clear set of objectives. Deals are tailored to each region's comparative advantages, assets and challenges and reflect the unique needs of regional Australia. Regional Deals support 'a place-based approach' by putting community-identified priorities at the centre. <sup>11</sup>
Empowered Communities <sup>12</sup> 8 Indigenous communities around Australia	Empowered Communities involves Indigenous communities and governments working together to set priorities, improve services and apply funding effectively at a regional level. Importantly, it aims to increase Indigenous ownership and give Indigenous people a greater say in decisions that affect them. <sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.dss.gov.au/families-and-children-programs-services/stronger-places-stronger-people>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/programs-services/family-support-program/family-and-children-services>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.dese.gov.au/community-child-care-fund/connected-beginning>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.niaa.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/education/stronger-communities-children>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/territories-regions-cities/regional-australia/regional-deals>

<sup>12</sup> The Empowered Communities Program was funded from 2016-2022, it is included here because of its recent timeframe and ongoing impacts.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.niaa.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/empowered-communities>

## Key place-based approaches and initiatives around Australia

Around Australia, there are a diversity of place-based initiatives working with communities to effect change. Some of these initiatives may work in a place-based way, but do not necessarily use this label or descriptor for their work; others may call themselves place-based but their work may be more place-focused – where government ultimately leads in decision-making with input from communities.

When PBAs are being discussed, five Australian place-based initiatives are frequently referred to: Burnie Works (TAS); Maranguka Justice Reinvestment (NSW); The Hive (NSW); Logan Together (QLD) and Hands Up Mallee (VIC) (see [Table 2](#) and [Appendix 2](#) for more information on these initiatives). These initiatives illustrate the different ways in which place-based practice is situated in a local context with its own specific geographies and histories. They address complex local issues, build on local strengths and opportunities and demonstrate successful ways of working and meeting challenges over the long-term. A key part of this has been the reflection and learning which has taken place through embedding evaluation within their practice and tackling challenges in measuring and evaluating outcomes. All are based on a collective impact approach, and 4 of the 5 are now under the umbrella of Stronger Places, Stronger People (SPSP). Each initiative involves a range of leading and partnering organisations (such as universities, philanthropy, local government). As many of these initiatives have emerged and evolved over some time, they have helped inform place-based thinking and practice in the Australian context.

**Table 2** Key place-based approaches in Australia

<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Description</b>
Burnie Works, Burnie, TAS 2014 – ongoing (collective impact)	Focusing on education, employment, justice, children and youth, families and wellbeing in the regional town of Burnie, Tasmania, in a context of industrial transition.
Maranguka Justice Reinvestment, Bourke, NSW 2013 – ongoing (collective impact)	A model of 'Indigenous self-governance which empowers community to coordinate the right mix and timing of services through an Aboriginal community owned and led, multi-disciplinary team working in partnership with relevant government and non-government agencies.' <sup>14</sup>
The Hive. Mt Druitt, NSW 2014 – ongoing (collective impact)	The Hive focuses on the health and wellbeing of children and families in the 12 suburbs that share the Sydney 2770 postcode. The Hive run a range of on the ground projects, and community initiatives, as well as play an advocacy and leadership role in the local community.
Logan Together, Logan, QLD 2015 – ongoing (collective impact)	Aiming to reduce the number of developmentally vulnerable children in the area through a series of early years projects to ensure every child in Logan can thrive. Bringing together over 1,000 people and 100 organisations, Logan Together uses a place-based collective impact model to develop and deliver programs that help children reach developmental milestones.
Hands Up Mallee, Mildura, VIC 2016 – ongoing (collective impact)	Hands Up Mallee was established to bring local leaders and community together to address social issues and improve health and wellbeing outcomes for children, young people and their families. Hands Up Mallee works in partnership with the community, local service providers, agencies and takes a place-based approach to solutions for local issues. The Hands Up Mallee Backbone is a team of staff from the Northern Mallee Community Partnership and Mildura Rural City Council.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.justreinvest.org.au/justice-reinvestment-in-bourke/>

## Place-based approaches and initiatives in Victoria

Across Victoria there are a range of initiatives differing in their approach, forms, scale, areas of focus, and involvement with different levels of government, as well as a number of initiatives led by philanthropy, community and First Nations organisations.

Located in both urban and regional Victoria these initiatives focus mainly on health and wellbeing, education and training, and children and the early years. With a range of terms used to describe the ways in which work is informed by place; the phrase 'place-based' is not always used. A majority of initiatives have involvement in some capacity from the Victorian Government, sometimes with input from several departments. Local government is also commonly involved in place-based initiatives, often in the role of 'backbone' support or 'backbone organisation'. External agencies and consultancies are also active in this space, playing an influential role in the design, implementation, and evaluation of many initiatives. These organisations hold, create, test and disseminate knowledge and skills around implementing place-based methodologies.

In 2020 the Victorian Government released its framework for place-based approaches, which is intended to inform current and future work of the Victorian Government engaged in place-based initiatives. This framework recognises the diversity of place-based work already occurring across the state and highlights the need to improve the way government enables place-based approaches

through programs and initiatives such as Regional Partnerships and Community Revitalisation. The framework characterises place-based and place-focused as two different ways of working in place.<sup>15</sup> This distinction can sometimes be blurred with government working and intervening in places in multiple ways. Some initiatives have a multifaceted way of working that includes or bridges both place-based and place-focused work. An important distinction is that place-based approaches are characterised as community-led rather than driven by government which is typical of place-focused work. While place-based and place-focused represent different approaches, there is capacity for initiatives to move between these approaches, with the role of community in decision-making changing over time.

<sup>15</sup> State Government of Victoria. (2020). *A framework for place-based approaches: The start of a conversation about working differently for better outcomes*. Melbourne: Victorian State Government.

## Focus on Regional and Metropolitan Partnerships

In Victoria, government has been working with communities in new ways. This is exemplified through the changes to regional governance arrangements, that established the Regional Partnerships in 2016. Regional Partnerships bring together regional representatives from community, business, local, and state governments to identify economic, social and environmental priorities. Through ongoing consultation, Regional Partnerships ensure regional communities have a greater say about what matters to them, and that the voices of these communities are heard directly at the heart of Government.

This work is led by Regional Development Victoria (RDV), the government's lead agency supporting regional and rural development. RDV works closely with Victorian Government agencies to share regional priorities and, facilitate social, economic and community development throughout regional Victoria. RDV's work incorporates diverse community voices and experiences when representing regional concerns across government portfolios and departments. This represents an attempt to respond to complex intersecting issues in a 'whole-of-government' way.

Taking a similar approach, Metropolitan Partnerships bring together experts and leaders from all levels of government, business and the community to identify and progress issues that matter in metropolitan regions of Melbourne. There are six Metropolitan Partnerships, overseen by the Office of Suburban Development. Regional and Metropolitan Partnerships demonstrate how the Victorian Government is improving place-based and place-focused work through better coordination and consultation with stakeholders in different regions.

## Case studies of place-based initiatives in Victoria

Five case studies were selected to represent a range of PBAs across different parts of Victoria involving diverse areas of focus, types, methodologies, and scales. These are: Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project, Go Goldfields, Flemington Works (Community Revitalisation), Latrobe Valley Authority, and a case study presenting lessons from First Nations-led, place-based approaches with a focus on The Gathering Place in Morwell (see Table 3).

**Table 3** Description of case studies

<b>Case study</b>	<b>Description</b>
Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project (Lighthouse) <i>Yorta Yorta Country</i>	A collective impact initiative that focuses on improving outcomes for children and young people living in the Greater Shepparton area. Building meaningful partnerships with local organisations and individuals, Lighthouse is able to utilise community strengths, resources and capital to develop local solutions.
Go Goldfields <i>Dja Dja Wurrung Country</i>	A collective impact initiative which brings together community members and key stakeholders from government and the service sector to improve outcomes for children and families living in the Central Goldfields Shire.
Flemington Works <i>Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country</i>	A Community Revitalisation site based in the inner-city suburb of Flemington, Melbourne. Focusing on the root causes of unemployment, Flemington Works takes a place-based, systems change approach to support women and young people who are residents of the Flemington Housing Estate access employment opportunities.
Latrobe Valley Authority (LVA) <i>Gunaikurnai Country</i>	Established in 2016 to support the Latrobe Valley region through a sustainable economic transition ahead of the 2017 closure of the Hazelwood coal fired power station and mine. While a government authority, LVA is embedded in place and has adopted and developed a range of place-based approaches working with communities demonstrating government working differently.
First Nations-led place-based approaches <i>Gunaikurnai Country</i>	This case study draws on a number of First Nations-led, place-based approaches in Victoria in the context of Treaty, Yoo-rrook truth-telling, self-determination and associated government frameworks with a focus on The Gathering Place in Morwell.

## Case study selection rationale

A number of considerations informed the selection of the five case studies, including parameters set by DJPR partners below, how they offer insights into gaps or issues highlighted in literature (see Part 1).

*Key considerations informing case study selection identified by DJPR:*

- 50% of case studies have some DJPR involvement/role
- Case studies may be more issues/topic focused
- Case studies may pick up or offer further insight into an issue emerging from the meta-analysis
- Case study may address a gap in evidence
- Case studies willingness to engage with the project
- Case study has some documentation/evaluation but may have gaps

*Other considerations:*

- Case studies include diverse methodologies, types, focus and governance
- Case studies include approaches with different time scales

## Data collection and analysis

The case study research used both desktop analysis and semi-structured interviews to provide insights into the selected initiatives. Data collection focused on addressing the research questions particularly identifying: conditions and enablers of success; barriers to success; common practices adopted in delivery of initiatives; and roles for funders and governments in supporting ongoing success.

### Interviews

Semi-structured interviews took place with individuals who held a professional role in the design, delivery, or evaluation of the selected case studies. Interviews were conducted via video call (or telephone, where video calls were not possible) and recorded with participants' consent. Between 2-4 individuals from each selected case study initiative were interviewed. In addition, a number of interviews were conducted with public and private organisations and government representatives who have an oversight, funding or professional relationship to place-based initiatives in Victoria. Some of these interviewees were members of the project's Oversight Committee or were contacts they provided.

### Collaborative design

To ensure the rigor and relevance of the case study profiles, and build positive relationships through the project, the research team worked with respondents in a collaborative way to help identify themes they thought were relevant and what stories were important to tell regarding their initiatives. Case study drafts were shared back with respondents for their feedback and approval. In addition, stakeholders from the wider project and the Oversight Committee were given opportunities to provide critical feedback on the development of the case studies. All contributors to this research were anonymous in the final case study profiles.

## Analysis

To analyse the themes which emerged across the five case studies we drew on findings from the meta-synthesis (see Part 1) which reviewed literature (including previous reviews, authoritative summaries, reports and articles sourced through academic and grey literature) covering an extensive range of PBAs both within Australia and internationally. From this, a list of key **principles**, **conditions** and **practices** that are features of successful PBAs was developed (see [Appendix 1](#)), and was used to reflect on findings from the five case studies.

**Principles** refer to the broad commitments and underpinning values that initiatives ought to engage in with their work with communities.

**Conditions** speak to the ecosystem of relationships, policies, and institutional and social structures that enable successful initiatives.

**Practices** refer to the 'on-the-ground' ways of working involved in designing and implementing initiatives and activities.

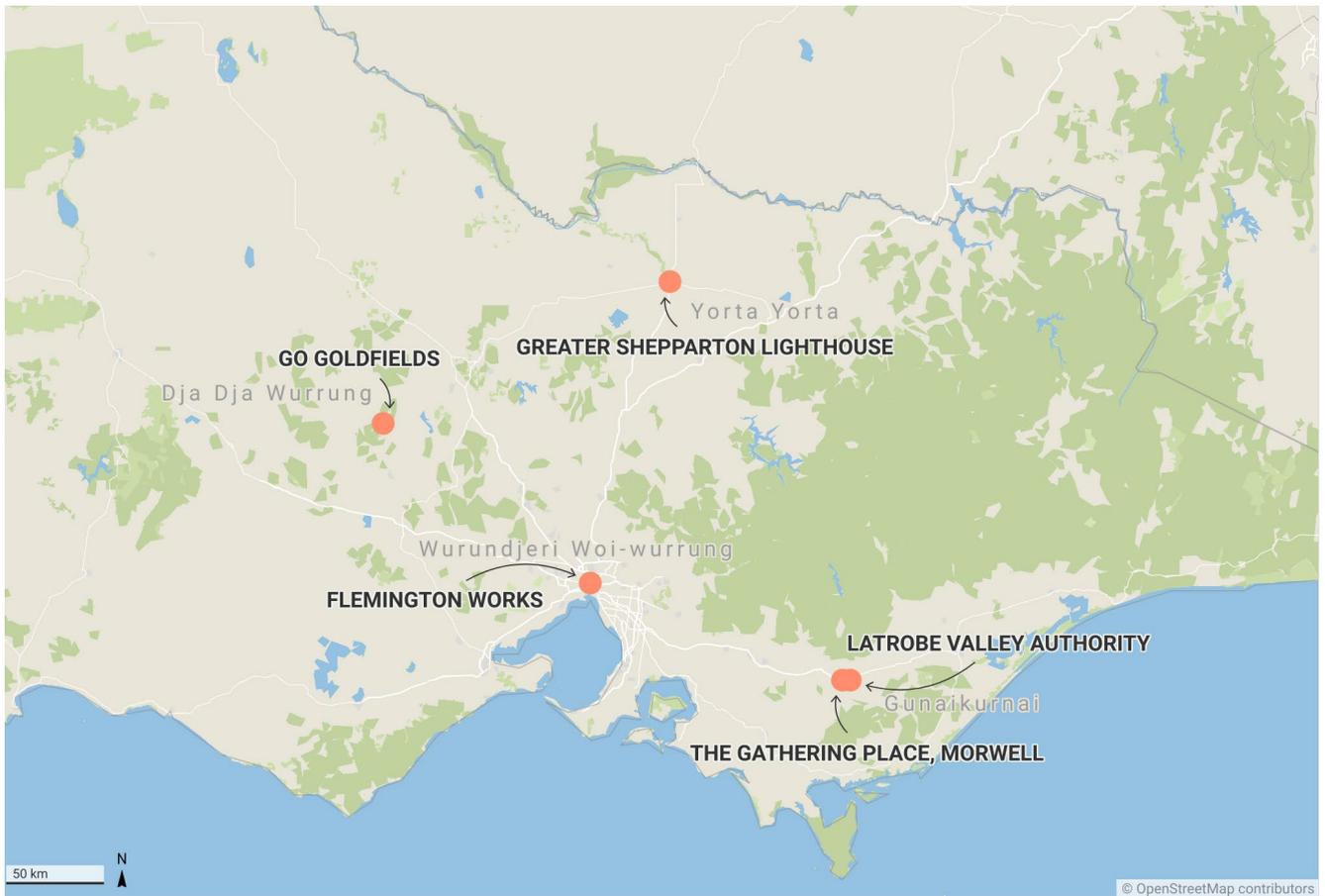
In reflecting on each selected case study, different principles, conditions, and practices are highlighted, providing grounded examples of where and how these principles are evident in practice. This approach offers a useful way to reflect on existing practice in Victoria in light of what the literature identifies as important characteristics of successful PBAs across their lifespan.

**Table 4** Overview of case study themes and narratives

Case study	Meta-synthesis themes (i.e. principles, enabling conditions, effective practices)	Key case study narratives
Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Place and people</li> <li>• Equity and social justice</li> <li>• Effective governance and leadership</li> <li>• Theory of change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building trusting relationships with community (deep listening; ongoing and authentic engagement; flexible support provision; investing time; Covid-19 response)</li> <li>• Creating local solutions co-designed with the community to address local challenges</li> <li>• Systemic enablers (flexible funding; power-sharing; policy alignment)</li> </ul>
Go Goldfields	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long-term commitment</li> <li>• Effective governance and leadership</li> <li>• Place and people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlighting essential nature of inter-departmental investment and co-ordination to ensure initiative success</li> <li>• Opportunity for better public policy alignment (initiatives embedded in public policy; policy co-design with community)</li> <li>• Working to strengthen meaningful engagement and power-sharing (community as experts and equal partners)</li> </ul>
Flemington Works (Community Revitalisation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Place and people</li> <li>• Equity and social justice</li> <li>• Effective governance and leadership</li> <li>• Theory of change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengths-based practice at a neighbourhood scale</li> <li>• Power-sharing (co-design; partnerships across state and local government)</li> <li>• Community empowered to respond to needs (listening to lived experience; Covid-19 response)</li> <li>• Shifting towards systemic change approach</li> </ul>

Case study	Meta-synthesis themes (i.e. principles, enabling conditions, effective practices)	Key case study narratives
Latrobe Valley Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengths-based approach</li> <li>• Effective governance and leadership</li> <li>• Theory of change</li> <li>• Monitoring, evaluation, learning and accountability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government endorsed resourcing and scope for innovation</li> <li>• Enabling conditions to support place-based approaches</li> <li>• Monitoring, evaluation and learning for success</li> <li>• Building and sustaining authentic partnerships</li> <li>• Systems change approach</li> </ul>
First Nations-led place-based approaches (The Gathering Place)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-determination</li> <li>• Strengths-based approach</li> <li>• Equity and social justice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-determination</li> <li>• Strengths-based/empowerment framework</li> <li>• Governance and sovereignty over community data</li> <li>• Holistic, culturally-centred practice (listening to lived experience; Covid-19 response)</li> </ul>

## Case study profiles



**Figure 1:** Map showing selected place-based initiatives across Victoria

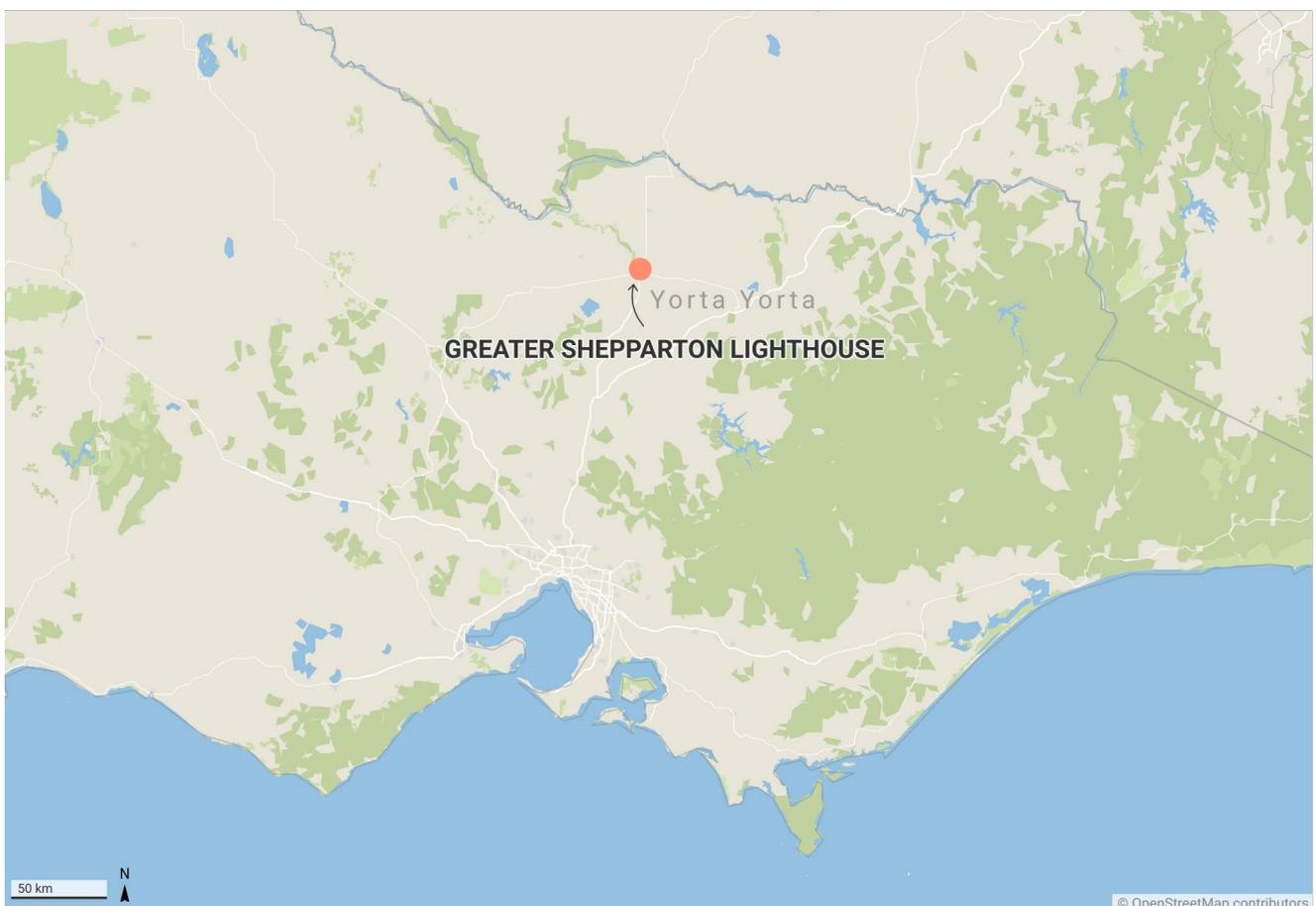
## Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project: Drawing on local strengths to meet local goals

Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project (Lighthouse) is a place-based, collective impact initiative that focuses on improving outcomes for children and young people living in the Greater Shepparton area. Building meaningful partnerships with local organisations and individuals, Lighthouse is able to utilise community strengths, resources and capital to develop local solutions to addressing challenges and meeting community needs.

Findings are presented across three themes and respective sub-themes. Where relevant, quotes by Lighthouse staff members are provided to support findings.

### Place-based principles explored in this case study:

Place and people; Equity and social justice; Effective governance and leadership; Theory of change



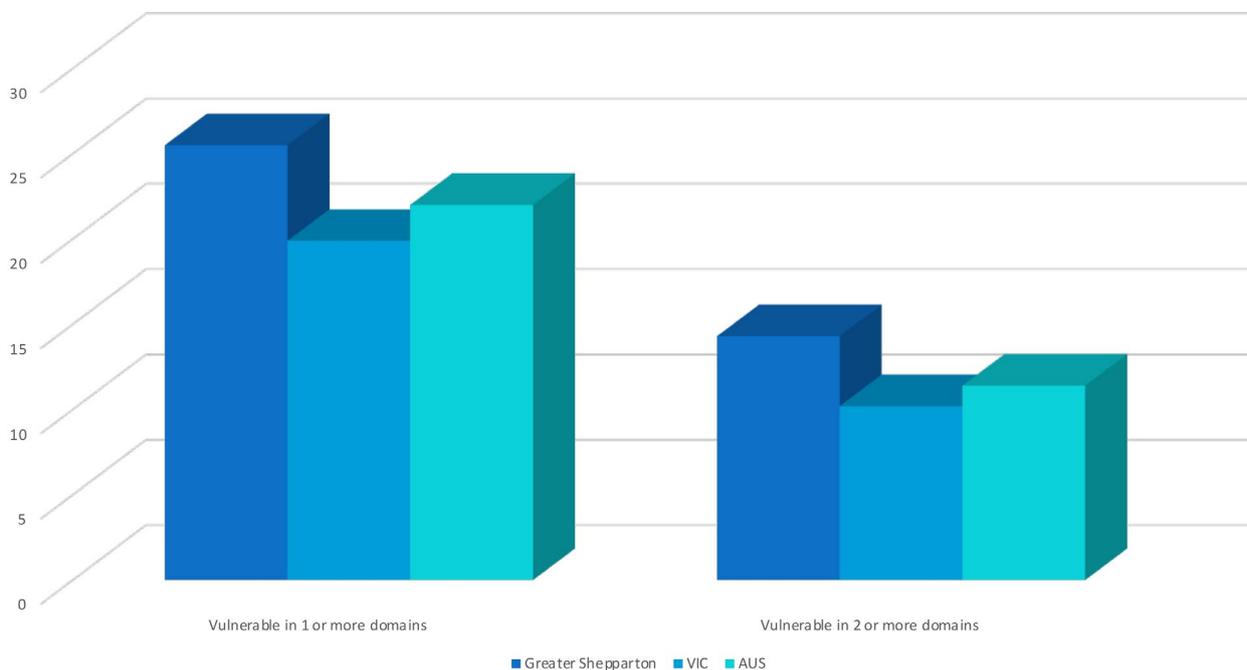
**Figure 2:** Map showing Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project

## Background

The Greater Shepparton region is located approximately 200 km north of Melbourne. It consists of a central urbanised area focused on Shepparton, Mooroopna and Kialla, as well as a number of smaller townships and substantial rural agricultural areas, creating a wide range of social contexts and needs.

Home to a large multicultural and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, the Greater Shepparton population is extremely diverse. According to the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), and the *Dropping off the Edge* report (Tanton et al., 2021), many communities

within the Shepparton Local Government Area (LGA) experience disadvantage, with the most disadvantaged communities in the region concentrated geographically in pockets in the centre of Shepparton. Additionally, as evidenced by data from the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC, 2021), children in Greater Shepparton are more likely to experience vulnerabilities across two or more developmental domains (physical, social, emotional, language, and communication) than their Victorian and other Australian counterparts (Figure 3). In addition, it should be noted that rates of developmental vulnerability among children in Shepparton has reduced significantly since 2018 (by up to 5.3%).



**Figure 3:** Percentage of children in City of Greater Shepparton who were developmentally vulnerable in 2021

## Aims and activities

Greater Shepparton Lighthouse was created in 2014 in response to community concern regarding poor outcomes for children and young people living in the area. Lighthouse seeks to improve these outcomes so all young people in Greater Shepparton can reach their full potential and thrive. At its heart is a small backbone organisation led by a Board of Directors, backed by collaborative leadership tables of local community and thought leaders to drive the change, using a collective impact model. Lighthouse uses data, collaboration, innovation and system thinking to support children before they fall into crisis and at every step of their life trajectory, from conception to career. Decision-making is driven both by data (Lighthouse co-funded and co-designed a platform with Seer Data & Analytics) and by ongoing and meaningful community consultation.

The initiative involves 50 local leaders in decision-making and is supported by more than 450 volunteers and over 100 partnerships with local businesses, schools, organisations, and individuals who help create local solutions. Projects are being undertaken in 26 discrete settings and include: hubs and safe havens for teens, toddlers and their families, literacy, school engagement, industry linking and transport initiatives.

Lighthouse is not a formal service organisation, but functions as an enabler, facilitator and advocate leading a movement for change in Greater Shepparton. Children and families who need formal services are referred on to appropriate agencies, Lighthouse seeks to create safe and nurturing environments for families to come together. This enables it to engage with vulnerable and marginalised young people and families that the regular service system might not even know exist. It uses deep listening with communities to identify emerging needs of such families, and then develops and tests programs to meet these needs. Ultimately, these can be handed over to formal service agencies to become permanent service offerings.

## Impact of the initiative

In 2020 Lighthouse commissioned Clear Horizon to evaluate the impact of its work and how effectively it had been meeting its objectives thus far. The evaluation found that:

- Lighthouse is successfully working toward reaching its shorter-term outcomes of improving learning conditions and creating opportunities for improving student literacy.
- The establishment of 'The Haven' had provided young people with a safe and inclusive space to connect with one another and access individualised supports. This has led increased social capital, motivation, and increased access to work and learning opportunities.
- The Lighthouse Youth Leadership Table offers opportunities for young people to be heard, feel empowered, and make a genuine contribution to their community.
- Significant involvement from community volunteers has led to a feeling of unity, with the community now taking greater ownership of local issues and drawing on community to address issues.

Lighthouse has facilitated increased connection between schools and the community, which has helped to alleviate the stigma associated with schools that serve disadvantaged populations.

In late 2021, Lighthouse was able to respond swiftly and effectively to the communities' immense challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic (Dusseldorp Foundation, 2020). This resulted in at least one third of its population (including the working population) unable to leave home, leaving many families with no access to food or other necessities like medication and baby formula. Lighthouse responded rapidly by calling into action 'GV Cares', a committee it had set up during the

initial phase of the pandemic in March 2020. as the community arm of the Greater Shepparton Response. GVCares included the Committee for Greater Shepparton, Greater Shepparton City Council, the Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative, the Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District, Shepparton Food Share and other organisations. The group was able to leverage relationships to access food to top up Food Share's supply from large business in the region such as SPC, Freedom Foods, and Tatura Milk. Together, they completed over 4,800 deliveries to more than 6,600 community members over 14-days, including culturally inclusive food relief, meals, and special items.

Additionally, Lighthouse and Rotary contributed funding to relevant organisations to tackle immediate supply shortfalls, while Lighthouse assisted Shepparton Family & Financial Services with grant writing, requesting an increase in council funding to assist more families. They also delivered over 500 activity packs to support parents and to keep children engaged during home-schooling. The collective and community-wide response resulted not only in meeting the basic needs of vulnerable community members, but also the strengthening of social cohesion and a sense of community togetherness.

## Key enablers for success

The following section describes key enablers to Lighthouse's continued success, as described by long-term members of their staff. Findings are presented across three themes and respective sub-themes. Where relevant, quotes by Lighthouse staff members are provided to support findings.

## Theme 1: A recognised brand – the importance of trust

Through **deep listening** and **community engagement** to identify community concerns, goals, priority actions and indicators of progress, Lighthouse has been able to build **trusting relationships** and work towards effective change for the community.

Since its start, Lighthouse has worked diligently to establish a reputation as a trusted brand. This sense of community trust was emphasised as critical to the initiative's ability to serve the community, by bridging the divide between community members and the service system, thereby facilitating access to supports and resources for those most vulnerable. This was particularly evident in how rapidly and successfully Lighthouse was able to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic where it received over 300 requests for support on the first night it set up its COVID-19 support Facebook page, called 'GV Cares'. The large volume of requests (a total of 2000) for a wide range of supports from families continued to pour in for weeks, all of which Lighthouse were able to swiftly respond to.

The three following sub-themes each describe a key enabler to Lighthouse's ability to generate trust within the Greater Shepparton community and bridge the gap between complex service systems and the people for whom they were designed.

### Deep listening - authentic and ongoing community engagement

For Lighthouse, deep listening has been part of a process of authentic community engagement and participation since its conception. There is an understanding that authentic community engagement enables community members to identify and agree on community concerns, goals, priority actions and indicators of progress. In 2015, through their 1000 Conversations initiative (Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project, 2015, 2019). Lighthouse asked one thousand local community members what young people in Greater Shepparton need in order to thrive. The process was described as 'powerful and uncovered a groundswell of concern, ideas and willingness to assist.' This was repeated in 2018, where 1000 conversations were had around kitchen tables, workspaces, childcares, schools, parks, and other places where families came together. Additionally, a separate process called Children's Voices was designed to capture the voices of children under the age of 14 years where questions were modified to suit this cohort and their responses were captured through drawing and verbal responses.

Other ways that Lighthouse fosters deep listening and community engagement is through the creation of leadership tables where community members, have the opportunity to have their voices heard. These include the Youth Leadership Table, where young people have shared that they felt empowered because of their participation at the table and felt they were making a difference in the community as a result. As of October 2019, these tables have included 49 collaborative leadership members, including 11 youth table members, who play an important role in identifying and supporting emerging priorities aligned to Lighthouse's vision and common agenda. There are three collaborative leadership tables – 1) early and primary years, 2) transitions, and 3) learning and thriving in secondary school – and one youth leadership table. The role of these tables includes identifying issues and gaps by drawing on the local wisdom of table members and implementing locally led solutions. These tables sit below the Lighthouse Board and form part of the governance of Lighthouse, providing oversight to the strategic priorities of the organisation. The mechanism of the tables is designed to drive diffused leadership and decision-making (Clear Horizon, 2020). Additionally, the existence of these tables means that community engagement (i.e. truly hearing and understanding the lived experiences of community) is continual, widespread, and systematic, rather than episodic or tokenistic.

## Serving what we hear – the role of flexibility in support provision

Lighthouse recognises that listening to people's stories, priorities, fears, and hopes is only the first step, and that deep listening entails the ethical responsibility of responding to what their community has so generously shared and ensuring that their community's voice is heard within the broader system:

*Anything we've done and any success we've had has been based on really clearly understanding what people need. We have made it our goal to unflinchingly serve what we hear people say they need...and when you do that, the response [trust] is then very strong [from the community].*

In this way, the initiative responds in what has come to be known as 'the Lighthouse way', which entails a 'whatever it takes' approach and positions children and young people at the heart of everything. This means that Lighthouse recognises the huge value in remaining flexible and adaptive in not only what they do, but how they respond to local challenges. In their 2020 evaluation, Clear Horizon found that community members valued the agility and flexibility that Lighthouse offered and felt that this allowed things to 'get done' with greater speed and efficiency:

*Our work is whatever it needs to be – from advocating on behalf of a family who needs a house to the real-estate agent, to referring family to a DV service, paying for their car to be repaired so they can get their kids to school. Whatever it looks like to unpack the complex needs of the family and lead to positive change. Navigating complex systems on their behalf and empowering them to take the lead as much as possible.*

## Examples of community priorities actioned by Greater Shepparton Lighthouse

Creating **'The Haven'** after extensive community consultation where it became apparent that young people in Greater Shepparton wanted a safe space where they could come together and engage socially and/or in organised social activities. The Haven is staffed by trained youth workers as well as volunteers drawn from the business and wider community, allowing young people to meet new friends and create new relationships with positive adult role models.

Creating **'The Family Haven'** where parents/carers and children can connect with one another, as well as staff and volunteers who are there to support families with their unique needs in an advocacy and referral capacity. The Family Haven also has staff from places such as Centrelink come on site on set days so that families have easy access to co-located services. In recognition of the fact that lack of transportation is a barrier to social engagement and accessing supports for many families, The Family Haven also offers transport to and from the facility for families and their children,

Initiating the **'Laptops with Love'** program after learning that many families had limited computer access for education and job purposes during lockdown. Lighthouse partnered with four local organisations who donated and 'cleaned' these devices at no cost. The initiative was launched at the end of 2021 with 2 laptops being issued and in 2022, 100 donated laptops will be distributed to students as well as parents who want to further their education and job opportunities with online learning.

## Time

Lighthouse recognises that building trusting relationships with community and working toward effective change takes time. The trust and credibility that Lighthouse has earned has come with years of meaningful engagement, co-design, and responding to what community identifies as key priorities. It is only by doing so consistently over many years that Lighthouse acquired the permission and authority to act on behalf of the community, particularly during times of crisis:

*... people knew if Lighthouse are involved in this it must be safe, good.*

Lighthouse has a 20-year plan which it pursues daily through a range of local means, resources and insights. The key enablers to effectively working toward its long-term goals are discussed in the next theme and respective subthemes.

## Theme 2: Creating local solutions with the community in response to unique local needs

Lighthouse draws on their **deep understanding of local context**, and the **social capital** of **committed volunteers** to create appropriate solutions to context specific local issues.

While the 'usual' approach to tackling complex social problems is often to invest in greater service delivery, Lighthouse understands that for their community, tackling such issues requires a different approach. At the heart of all place-based approaches is a commitment to addressing community issues at a local level, as well as strengthening the entire community by supporting whole-of-community capacity building, connectedness, and resilience (Moore et al., 2014). To that end, Lighthouse views community as central to supporting its understanding of local challenges and finding local solutions to these challenges. This section outlines key ways in which Lighthouse leverages local knowledge and expertise to understand and tackle entrenched community challenges, at a local level.

### Deep understanding of the local context

The success that Lighthouse has had thus far, including its ability to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, is made possible (in part) due to its deep understanding of the local context. This includes in-depth knowledge of different lived experiences within the diverse local population and understanding how this impacts their unique and shared challenges, the barriers to accessing supports and services, facilitators and barriers to engagement, as well as community strengths and assets. For example, Lighthouse understood that many of the families living in their community were from refugee backgrounds and hesitant to approach government entities for support during lockdown. They also understood that many of their vulnerable families were not in a position to make phone calls (required by most other places who were offering help) due to limited credit on their phones:

*We knew that vulnerable people didn't like to go to a bureaucracy ... we needed something which was accessible by our vulnerable community members. We set up a Facebook page called GV cares. This was more accessible... Many families don't have phone credit to be on hold for ages and with the Facebook page, they were able to get in touch with us on messenger.*

Additionally, Lighthouse utilises population-level (e.g. data from the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy, the Australian Early Development Census, crime rates, and family violence data) and locally collected data (as mentioned Lighthouse co-designed a community data platform with Seer Data & Analytics) to better understand how children and young people are tracking and inform its decision-making. To contextualise this data (i.e. understand how it looks in the everyday lived experiences of the community), Lighthouse regularly engages with the community to 'unpack' the data, through various mechanisms such as the community feedback register; surveys of volunteers and students; and various leadership tables. For instance, if data indicates that children from a particular area are missing medical appointments on a regular basis, Lighthouse will engage community members and professionals in the area (e.g. social workers, educators, and engineers) to gain a better understanding of what may be causing this problem. Local insights and local expertise are provided by a range of community members and professionals who volunteer their support and form collaborative leadership tables:

*We use a combination of people to interrogate the data. New people approach us all the time to be at the table. Teachers, social workers, speech therapists. Lots of people come together.*

## Utilising community strengths, resources and capital

Since its inception, Lighthouse has been very successful in engaging community volunteers with high social capital. The Lighthouse Core Group (who deliver core activities and work with partners on strategic priorities) represents a cohort of individuals in the Greater Shepparton region who possess high social capital and as a result can tap into their broader networks for a range of supports and resources. Their high level of social capital means that they are well positioned to advocate for local issues, facilitate and support volunteers, as well as connect young people to industry and relevant organisations. Moreover, Lighthouse has had great success in working with local businesses who seek opportunities to engage with and give back to community. This large-scale involvement and engagement by volunteers and businesses has resulted in a greater sense of community ownership of local issues and has connected groups of people in Greater Shepparton from across the socioeconomic strata. This is a notable point of difference between Lighthouse and many other initiatives aiming to improve outcomes for children and young people. While most such initiatives try to bring about positive change by exclusively targeting children and young people, Lighthouse's theory of change, which centres around strong connections is that if you alter the perceptions and motivations of those in positions of power, this will have a positive ripple effect on the cohort intended as the ultimate beneficiary:

*We relied on people in the community with lots of social capital – they had the financial and other resources to help, and they did and people who were vulnerable were really feeling supported. The volunteers really visited thousands of homes [during lockdown] and shared positive experience in nurturing and supporting each other. Building connections and social capital.*

## Theme 3: Systemic enablers

There are a range of **systemic enablers** that Lighthouse relies on to achieve **sustainable success** including access to **adequate long-term funding**, trust from government partners that the community is well placed to set **local priorities**, and recognition of broad state and federal policy impacts on local communities.

There is no doubt that addressing deeply entrenched and complex social and economic challenges requires great long-term effort and commitment from a range of stakeholders across government, the service sector, philanthropy, and local residents. Moreover, government (local, state, and federal) can play a critical role in aiding the success of place-based initiatives by ensuring that its policies and funding mechanisms are aligned with, and capable of, supporting locally defined objectives. This section explores the role of government in supporting Lighthouse to achieve its long-term objectives, as it relates to three key areas: 1) funding; 2) trusting relationships and power-sharing; and 3) policy alignment.

### Funding

Access to adequate funding, as well as the conditions under which funding is provided, significantly impacts the success (or demise) of place-based initiatives. Most government funding for place-based initiatives are time-limited. That is, they are funded for (typically) 1-3 years, during which time the initiative is required to demonstrate that it is making significant progress toward achieving its long-term objectives, in order to ascertain ongoing funding (i.e. another 1-3 years). This represents a significant problem for most place-based initiatives given the magnitude of the challenges they seek to overcome. Research suggests that place-based approaches should be considered a 25-year investment (Rae, 2011), with some benefits for disadvantaged children manifesting only once they have reached adulthood (Burgemeister et al., 2021).

Lighthouse receives funding from the Victorian Government (through the Department of Education), the Greater Shepparton City Council, and through philanthropic donations. The current three-year government grant supports the backbone organisation and two of the programs. Other programs are funded through philanthropies with whom Lighthouse has established strong relationships, as well as from individuals, local businesses, and service clubs, and from community fundraising activities. This funding is utilised not just for governance arrangements and project facilitation, but also for investment in the initiatives and ideas that flow from this process. Notably, while Lighthouse is required to report on its use of philanthropic funds, funders do not have significant involvement in managing funding arrangements, including how funds are directed. Having this large degree of flexibility regarding how funding is utilised, allows Lighthouse to direct resources toward reaching outcomes which have been identified by community, and not funders who may have diverging agendas:

*We have philanthropic funders who say that we trust you, we know you're doing it for the right reasons, and we support you in whatever that looks like. So, we've been able to be agile and nimble because of that and our response to COVID was an example of that.*

*Services are often forced to stay within the guidelines and are not able to say, 'no that's not what's best for our town and no that's not working'. Their funding doesn't offer the flexibility. And there is the mindset of staying in your own lane. I don't think that's led to a culture of creativity, or entrepreneurial approach to problem solving.*

Similarly, Lighthouse received 'flexible' government funding, where the provision of funds is not contingent on pre-defined outcomes and/or outputs established by government. Flexible funding has meant that Lighthouse has been able to set goals that have been identified/prioritised by its community, but also work toward meeting established goals in ways that are aligned with the community's strengths and capabilities:

*[Flexible funding promotes] nimbleness and a 'whatever it takes' approach to problem solving] ... We're able to do that because we don't have an agenda tied to our funding. The flexible funding allows us to work on the community's agenda.*

To ensure transparency, each year Lighthouse presents government with a detailed plan on how it intends to utilise its funding over the course of the year. It then reports on its expenditure, based on the proposed plan:

*We're still very accountable and providing a lot of data on our output and data but we put our efforts where it is needed.*

## Trusting relationships and power-sharing

Flexible funding would not have been possible without the trust that government has shown in not only the Lighthouse Project, but also in the Greater Shepparton community. Government recognises that the community is best placed to establish its own goals, set priorities, and trusted to come up with solutions that utilise local knowledge and local capabilities.

*Trusting that the community voice is as equally valid as any expert ... it's working with community to problem solve rather than minimising their capacity or believe the solutions need to be imported.*

Being fully trusted by government also gives permission and space for community to activate solutions. It means moving toward community goals knowing that your community has the backing and support of government.

*The strength is taking the community knowhow and aligning it with government support... Neither alone [government nor community] is the answer. Together is the real strength.*

Developing an effective partnership between a place-based initiative such as Lighthouse and a government department such as the Department of Education requires adjustment on both sides. On the one hand, place-based initiatives have to accept that there needs to be some formal planning and accounting processes for the funding they receive, and that they cannot be given total freedom to do as they see fit.

On the other hand, government departments have to accept that place-based initiatives that seek to respond flexibly and continuously to community priorities need different accountability and reporting protocols to those commonly used by governments. When either party fails to accept these constraints, tensions can arise and the partnership will suffer. Factors that have strengthened trusting relationships between Lighthouse and government include, ongoing formal and informal communication, sharing of data and data transparency, government's willingness/openness to trying different way of working, and trusting the community voice as equal experts.

## Policy alignment

Evidence highlights the need for place-based initiatives to be embedded within public policy (Ferris & Hopkins, 2015). If incorporated into state and federal government efforts, place-based initiatives have the power to serve as vehicles for implementing public initiatives on the ground. In this way, government can foster favourable environments for place-based initiatives through place-conscious policies, addressing fundamental conditions of inequality and allocating resources where they are needed most (Ferris & Hopkins, 2015).

As a major funder of the initiative, the Department of Education has been keen to see a greater alignment of Lighthouse programs and the Department's Shepparton Education Plan. For its part, Lighthouse believes that there is further work government can do to align policies to community needs. For example, while there are strong working relationships between Lighthouse and local and state government, there are gaps in how government policies (which impact the lives of people in Greater Shepparton) align with and facilitate the initiative's long-term outcomes. Lighthouse have highlighted a greater need for improved consultation and communication between the initiative and various levels of government to inform and co-design policies which support improved outcomes for children and young people in the Greater Shepparton community.

What works well?	What needs strengthening?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lighthouse prioritises partnership and power-sharing with community through practices including collaborative leadership tables, deep listening and co-design. This enables agile responses to complex local challenges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Better alignment of local and state policies to support Lighthouse's long-term objectives</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flexible funding supports the community's right to establish tailored objectives based on local needs and local expertise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More in-depth and committed government consultation with community to ensure that policies and service models adequately reflect community strengths and needs</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Long-term funding supports the backbone organisation allowing Lighthouse to set long term goals, and helps to support a culture of innovation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policies and service models/objectives which impact community must be designed and implemented in a process of genuine co-design between government, community and Lighthouse</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engaging community members in interpreting and use of population-level and locally collected data to track progress and inform decision-making</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effective utilisation of community strengths, assets and resources, including community volunteers with strong social capital, underpin Lighthouse's success</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Genuine trust and nurturing a culture of openness between community, philanthropy and government authorises Lighthouse to act on the community's behalf</li> </ul>	

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## Go Goldfields: The role of good governance in achieving long-term objectives

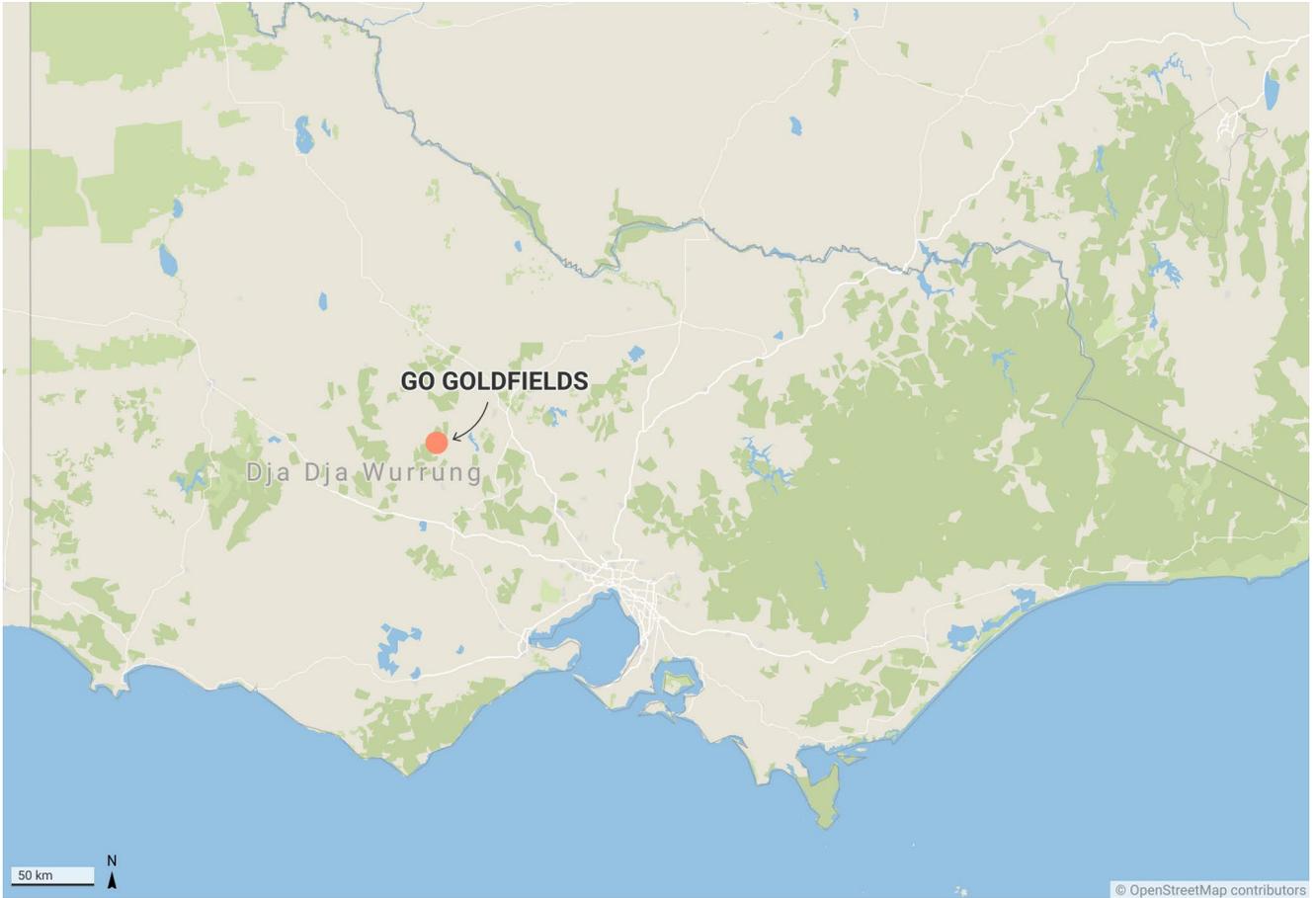
Go Goldfields is a collective impact initiative which brings together local community members and key stakeholders from government and the service sector, to improve outcomes for children, young people and families living in the Central Goldfields Shire. The primary focus of this case study was to understand the role that government plays in supporting Go Goldfields as a place-based initiative. Three specific questions were addressed:

- What is government's current approach to supporting Go Goldfields?
- What is the impact of this existing approach on Go Goldfields' capacity to achieve its long-term objectives?
- How could government better support Go Goldfields' activities?

The case study is based on interviews with the backbone Manager, the Central Goldfields Shire Council General Manager of Community Well-being, and government bureaucrats from Regional Development Victoria, Department of Health, Department of Education and Training, and Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. Quotations are from these interviews, identified as general source rather than named individuals. The responses are analysed according to three key questions being addressed.

### **Place-based principles explored in this case study:**

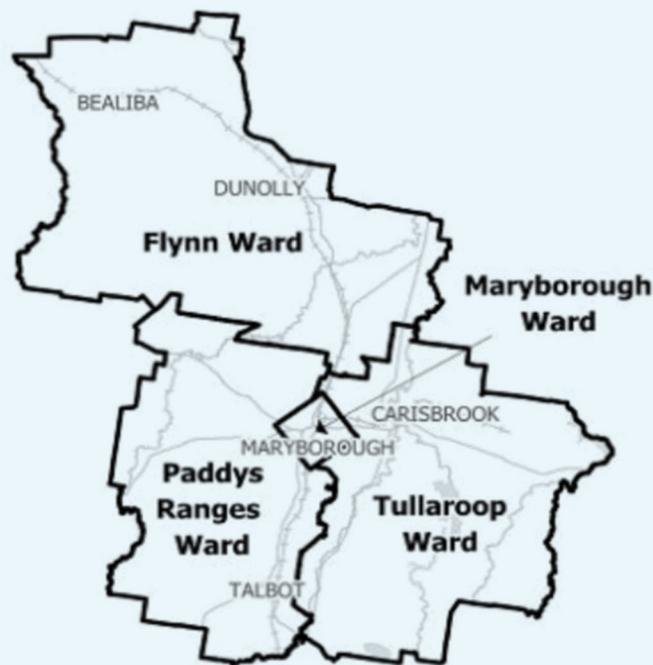
Long-term commitment; Effective governance and leadership; Place and people



**Figure 4:** Map showing Go Goldfields

## Background

Located at the geographic heart of Victoria, approximately 150 km north-west of Melbourne, Central Goldfields Shire is home to just over 13,000 people. Maryborough is the region's major business, health and retail centre for surrounding towns, which include Castlemaine, St Arnaud, Avoca, Talbot and Dunolly. The Shire is also uniquely positioned approximately 40 km north of Ballarat, and 55 km south-west of Bendigo – two rapidly growing regional cities.

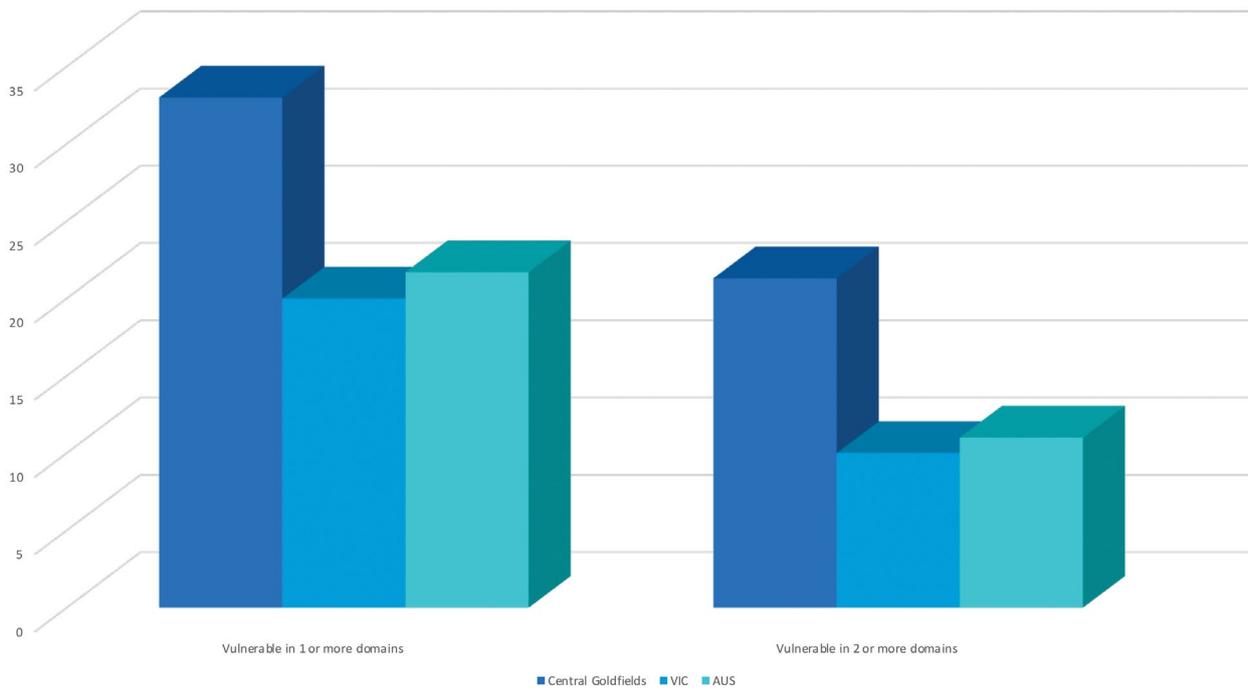


**Figure 5.** Central Goldfields Shire

According to the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), Central Goldfields Shire is the most disadvantaged Local Government Area in Victoria, which means that the community is impacted by a variety of complex issues, including high unemployment, low income, low education levels and inter-generational poverty. Moreover, as evidenced by data from the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC, 2021), children in Central Goldfields are significantly more likely to experience vulnerabilities across two or more developmental domains (physical, social, emotional, language, and communication) than their Victorian and other Australian counterparts (Figure 6).

When the initiative began in 2010, it was as an alliance of service providers interested in improving

service delivery. However, it soon became evident that tackling the complex and deeply entrenched issues facing the young people and families in the shire would require collaboration from a diverse range of stakeholders across government, community members, as well as the service and private sectors. To that end, in 2014, the initiative adopted a collective impact approach, which seeks to capitalise on the community's unique skills, knowledge, and resources to change existing systems and advance towards a shared vision. Go Goldfields is led by a collaborative partnership comprising of the local community, businesses and local services and policy makers, and is implemented by action groups organised around the initiative's aims. Their work is supported by a 'backbone' team hosted by the Central Goldfields Shire Council.



**Figure 6.** Percentage of children in Central Goldfields shire who were developmentally vulnerable in 2021



In 2020, the Go Goldfields Collaborative Table unanimously decided to focus all its efforts on the early years, by promoting positive outcomes for children aged 0-8, as well as their families, and ensuring that they have the social supports, access to services and opportunities they need to thrive. The decision to refine the initiative's focus was made in part to maximise benefits from several recent developments. These included: a partnership agreement between Go Goldfields and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute to provide a robust evidence base and identified areas for collaboration; an increased capacity of the Shire's Maternal Child Health services, including the recent commencement of an enhanced service for home visits; and the roll-out of free three-year-old preschool to the Shire as part of the Victorian Government's Education State Reforms.

This new *Every Child, Every Chance* framework focuses on five Priority Change Areas:

1. **Supported and Healthy Pregnancies** – to support mothers and parents throughout pregnancy and to prepare for the changes a baby brings.
2. **Confident and Connected Parents** – to equip new parents and carers with the community network and access to services to help them with one of the most difficult but important jobs in the world.
3. **Safe and Thriving Children** – to nurture every child's sense of self, ensure their safety from violence, and acknowledge their place in the community.
4. **Valued Early Years Education and Care** – to promote the value and increase participation in early years education that builds curiosity, supports identity, and nurtures children's social and emotional wellbeing.
5. **Great Start to School for all Kids** – to work together on pathways to schools that nurture healthy, safe, and confident children.

## Theme 1: Current government support

*What is government's current approach to supporting Go Goldfields?*

Go Goldfields receives most of its funding from state government (Regional Development Victoria). The Central Goldfields Shire Council auspice the funding and provide in kind support for the backbone team. Government funding has been instrumental to the partnership's formation and the initiative's ability to progress its work. Additionally, it has enabled the initiative to recruit the most qualified individuals with the necessary skill sets for what can be a difficult role.

Regional Development Victoria (RDV) supports place-based initiatives and has provided four rounds of funding for Go Goldfields. Budget bids require careful preparation, revision and negotiation. The funding decisions are made centrally and the decision-making process is totally confidential.

Originally, Go Goldfields' focus was broad, and included youth, family safety, economic participation and children and families. The refined focus of Go Goldfields work for the *Every Child, Every Chance* initiative raises a question of whether the responsibility for funding should be managed by a department other than RDV. However, given the issues that Go Goldfields seeks to address cover all aspects of child and family functioning, it is not clear which of the other departments would be the most appropriate.

Go Goldfields' governance arrangements are at three levels:

- An Executive Group that has oversight of the RDV contract
- A Leadership Table that provides strategic leadership and enables place-based collaboration
- Priority area governance groups

The other government departments involved with Go Goldfields do not provide direct funding to the initiative, although they do provide funding for services of various kinds in the local area. Departmental representatives sit on the Leadership Table and describe their role as peer supporters and 'dot joiners', linking services and building relationships between them.

Go Goldfields' *Every Child, Every Chance* initiative provides a framework for co-ordinating services across departments, but this can be challenging when existing service models have limited flexibility to be adapted to the local context in place-based approaches.

## Theme 2: Capacity to achieve long-term objectives

*What are the impacts of this approach to funding on Go Goldfields' capacity to achieve its long-term objectives?*

While consensus exists within the initiative that the amount of funds granted by the government is sufficient, several aspects of the existing funding arrangement limit Go Goldfields' capacity to pursue its long-term objectives most effectively. These, as well as ideas for how the current funding model can be improved, are described below.

### **A move away from short-term funding cycles**

While there is widespread agreement that the community-wide challenges addressed by the initiative are complex and frequently intergenerational in nature, longer-term, more secure funding would better enable the initiative to address local challenges. Place-based initiatives, such as Go Goldfields, seek to effect change in behaviours, systems, and policies and therefore require long-term vision and commitment by all stakeholders, particularly funders. Evidence indicates that many place-based initiatives fail when they do not effectively address sustainability (Crew, 2020) due to time-limited funding which fails to resource the processes and structures needed to facilitate long-term outcomes.

Moreover, not only does the current short-term funding arrangement limit Go Goldfields' capacity to work confidently toward its long-term objectives, but it also places an unrealistic expectation on the initiative to demonstrate 'impact' over 2–3-year timeframes in order to secure ongoing funding.

*Longer-term funding would give us assurance and allow us to tackle long-term problems with long-term solutions.*

(Go Goldfields)

The government departments involved with Go Goldfields are well aware of the high levels of entrenched disadvantage in the local community, and recognise that the efforts made so far have been difficult to measure and may not have led to any significant improvement at a population level. They also recognise that significant changes will require long-term commitments.

*The level of vulnerability that exists in Central Goldfields Shire is not going to change in a two or three or even 10 year time frame. When we look at some other really well-run place-based initiatives, their starting point is 20 years – we start today and we'll fund for 20 years. That's looking at a generational potential change here.*

(Government bureaucrat)

Governments can play a critical role in supporting Go Goldfields' long-term outcomes by committing to funding the initiative over a time period that is consistent with the long-term commitment required for meaningful system change to occur. Attempting to address complex problems through short-term funding cycles will not result in long-term solutions – which can only occur when a long-term commitment is made to addressing the underlying conditions which cause and perpetuate these problems.

## A coordinated response and commitment from across government

As previously stated, Go Goldfields receives the bulk of its funding from a single state government agency – Regional Development Victoria (RDV). However, the complex problems that Go Goldfields (and other place-based initiatives) seek to address cut across departmental boundaries and levels of government and require long-term commitment from more than a single government department (Moore & Fry, 2011).

*When we're talking about funding it's important that we think about some total of cash involved across the different government bodies that have a key foothold in this work: education, housing, health. It's partnership work, so the funding needs to reflect that.*

(Go Goldfields)

Receiving funding from across government has multiple benefits, including (but not limited to):

- Demonstrating a whole-of-government commitment and response to improving outcomes for families in the Central Goldfields Shire
- Facilitating system change which requires commitment from across departments such as education, health, and human services
- Promoting a co-ordinated approach which reduces the risk of duplication of efforts across departments and ensuring that policy and planning across departments are aligned and support a shared outcome

Finally, it was identified that the funding model could be better designed to enable a more joined-up approach to addressing shared community objectives.

For example, a number of services in the Goldfields are funded (by different government departments) to support school readiness – an outcome shared by Go Goldfields. However, under the terms of their various funding agreements, services are required to comply with statewide policy directions set by the relevant portfolios. The implications of this traditional government funding model are wide-ranging, including (but not limited) to:

- Limiting opportunities for innovation
- Inhibiting a coordinated, collaborative, and sector-wide response to shared objectives
- Encouraging competition for funding between local organisations, further limiting opportunities for collaboration

*One of the traps that government gets into is funding place-based initiatives like Go Goldfields as if it was a stand-alone thing, when actually it's really about supporting mainstream services to be far more responsive than they could be... It supports the funding already going into these communities.*

(Go Goldfields)

The underlying challenge is that there is no high-level central mechanism or process that enables a coordinated cross-sectoral planning to support regional initiatives such as Go Goldfields. This can lead to funding decisions with limited knowledge of what other departments that provide services in Central Goldfields are planning. Timely revision of the existing funding and planning might help to support a more cohesive and locally designed approach to reaching shared community outcomes.

An example of access to flexible local funding and government departments working collaboratively with local place-based backbone organisations is the Department of Education and Training's School Readiness Funding (SRF). This program funds a range of programs and supports that aim to build the capacity of early childhood education and care services, professionals and families to support children's learning and development. SRF funding is provided to state-funded kindergarten programs which prepare a plan for how the money will be spent based on their development needs and the needs of their specific community.

*School Readiness Funding has been a turning point in enabling early childhood services to implement place-based initiatives. Prior to School Readiness Funding, early childhood services were funded to provide kindergarten programs. Through School Readiness Funding, flexible funding is now provided to kindergarten services to build the quality of the service through evidence-based programs that respond to services local context and which strengthen the knowledge and skills of early childhood professionals. SRF has empowered early childhood services across Goldfields to partner with other early childhood providers, families, schools and key stakeholders such as allied*

*health and MCH that have similar challenges and goals and implement a place-based approach to positively addressing outcomes across the early years. SRF has also enabled expansion of allied health support in Goldfields including Early Childhood Educators having access to a Psychologist to support their practice.*

(Government bureaucrat)

Although these plans can be developed without any input from other services, a more holistic place-based approach results when the SRF plans are developed in collaboration with the local backbone organisation, in this case Go Goldfields.

*School Readiness Funding is a great opportunity to build equity across communities, although issues of rurality including staff shortages and lack of allied health services still unevenly impact on places where disadvantage is most prevalent. After a hectic start to the SRF implementation that missed some early opportunities for collaboration, Go Goldfields has worked with local DET Early Childhood Improvement Branch to utilise the flexibility of the SRF funding model to develop a place-based project focusing on Transition to School in Central Goldfields. The project includes workshops and coaching with all early childhood professionals, foundation teachers, maternal and child health and allied health across Central Goldfields Shire and will culminate in a whole of Central Goldfields approach to early years transitions.*

(Go Goldfields)

## Flexible funding and less 'top-down' directives

While government is accountable for the responsible management of public funds, it is important to ensure that departmental objectives align with and facilitate the initiative's locally defined objectives. Effective place-based initiatives utilise in-depth knowledge of local conditions, resources, and needs, to establish locally defined objectives, as well as help make informed decisions regarding how and where resources should be allocated. Despite this, there is an opportunity to consider how decisions about how Go Goldfields utilises its funding could be less prescriptive and for Go Goldfields to have greater control with respect to decision-making around its funding. This could help ensure that funding is more effectively allocated given its strong understanding of the local context and issues.

*We have the money, but we have limited authority to influence where it goes or how it is spent so a lot of it is probably not hitting the mark as well as it could.*

(Go Goldfields)

*We are trying to work with our government colleagues around how to work better together at the earlier stages of co-design so that there is a broader set of data and local knowledge that can inform that early design work. Often it seems that decisions have already been determined without any consultation with the community. The model is very much a top-down approach which works against how place-based initiatives operate.*

(Go Goldfields)

One of the key challenges to enabling more localised and flexible funding decisions is the suitability of broader system policy settings (including existing planning and reporting procedures), which – while effectively supporting other services and programs – are not conducive to place-based approaches' ways of working.

If some of the funds could be pooled, this would allow more localised and more efficient supports and services to be provided.

## Recognising the value of local expertise through meaningful co-design and power-sharing

Recognising the value of (and capitalising on) Go Goldfields' local expertise is important not only to ensuring the most efficient use of government funding, but also for designing policies and service systems that are responsive to community needs and priorities. As it stands, government's approach to community consultation, its understanding of local needs, knowledge, and resources, as well as its efforts to coordinate its work with their community partners, including Go Goldfields, all have significant potential for improvement. This ultimately limits opportunities for innovative and collaborative decision-making and action.

*The value of the way we are set up is that we have folks with lived, local experience and expertise, but no one is capitalising on that. Sometimes we are not sure of where the value is in some of the outputs we are asked to produce. It's about getting people together who know the situation, the context, who have the lived experience to try to problem solve.*

(Go Goldfields)

Building effective partnerships with communities takes time. This is recognised by those government departments that work directly with Go Goldfields, but not necessarily in the standard systems and ways of working of government.

Government's traditional ways of working do not enable effective local approaches. These include centrally-determined policies and programs, and funding and service agreements with government-defined outputs with limited flexibility and minimal input from, or co-design with, local partners.

*There is a high focus on throwing in services, but it's not about adding more services, but rather re-examining how existing services are operating and being delivered, the relationships with community. We need to ask - how do we do this better?*

(Go Goldfields)

*You can't procure your way out of systemic disadvantage and poverty and racism.*

(Government bureaucrat)

The following example, which references government's rollout of an initiative in Central Goldfields, illustrates how such challenges can manifest in practice and their resulting consequences.

*The [initiative] opened up in the community recently. We felt this was a wonderful opportunity to think about how this service was being delivered and where it was operating out of... We thought maybe they shouldn't be based in a hospital, in a clinical environment, maybe we can do this in a different way and think about how this service can link in with universal services like kindergarten and MCH. But, we were unable to have any of those conversations because we were told by government that, no, we have already signed a contract with a provider to deliver this and they have targets to meet in terms of timeframes for recruiting their staff, and the program outcomes have already been written and those referral pathways that you are talking about have not been included in the outputs,*

*therefore we can't spend our time doing that because they will run the risk of not meeting their outputs. All the deliverables and outputs were written without consultation with community... You have someone in Melbourne designing what the program looks like, there may be some involvement from community, but not a great deal. But what it means is that the program is designed and at the regional level the role is purely to oversee the rollout and monitoring performance of outputs.*

(Go Goldfields)

Government's view of the role of local expertise and lived experience appears to be mixed. The government departments that are directly involved with the initiative are strongly supportive.

*We're content experts in government: we know how to make things happen, but we don't have the context of lived experience in those communities, we don't know what it is to that has to happen to improve people's experiences and outcomes, and on those sorts of things. But if we do ask them, we have to ask them in a way that allows us to genuinely and respectfully act on that.*

(Government bureaucrat)

However, there is still an opportunity for government systems and processes to support more localised community consultation and deep listening exercises, with a tendency for some funding and program decisions to be made on the basis of existing studies of community needs carried out elsewhere.

## Theme 3: Opportunities to improve support

*How could government better support Go Goldfields activities?*

As stated previously, at the heart of all place-based initiatives (including Go Goldfields) is the ultimate objective to influence system change. However, influencing system change is difficult and complex, particularly for resource-poor organisations outside government policymaking circles. While Go Goldfields' partnership with government offers some degree of access to stakeholders within government who can advocate on its behalf, there are some ways in which advocacy can be strengthened. This section outlines key characteristics of an effective government advocate who can influence system change.

### Authority

Despite having access to government employees whose role is to support and advocate on behalf of the initiative, the degree of influence and authority held by these individuals is very limited.

*The government people we work with don't necessarily have the authority or the influence to change the core things around designing policy and funding models. All they can do is advocate for our work, but their job is only about making sure that the instructions are followed (i.e. funds are spent according to contract, outputs are met on time etc).*

(Go Goldfields)

### The willingness to try a new approach

Skilful practitioners in this area can identify Go Goldfields (and other place-based initiatives) as providing opportunities to try new ways of working.

*Go Goldfields offers a lot of opportunity to trying a new approach to the way things have always been done because we know that throwing additional money at a service landscape is unlikely to make meaningful change..., so Go Goldfields and other similar initiatives can be a vehicle to try a new approach. That is the role of bureaucrats who are involved in place-based initiatives.*

(Go Goldfields)

### Understanding the macro, as well as the micro

There is a strong belief within Go Goldfields that in order to facilitate system change, government stakeholders and advocates must understand and value both the individual and broader community experience equally. This requires a deep understanding of the local environment and established and trusted relationships within community.

*At the level of policy making high up, you're not likely to be thinking about individual families and their experience, but more an overall trend. But you need to be able to think about those things concurrently. You can't lose sight of the individual experience.*

(Go Goldfields)

*Rather than taking this back to Melbourne and saying, we need a program to address X and Y, it's more about being able to be responsive to things that are happening for individuals and families at the community level.*

(Go Goldfields)

What works well?	What needs strengthening?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Through a collective impact approach, Go Goldfields enables local community members, key stakeholders from government and the service sector to work together to improve outcomes for children and families living in the Central Goldfields Shire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Go Goldfields short-term and insecure funding cycles create a significant mismatch with the initiatives commitment to long-term solutions needed to enable meaningful change</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government funding has been instrumental to the formation of Go Goldfields and the initiative's ongoing ability to progress its work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing government funding and planning frameworks need to be revised to enable whole-of-government coordination and commitment to engage with and support locally designed approaches</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is on-going dialogue between Go Goldfields and directly involved government departments regarding the need to revise existing planning and funding frameworks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shifting from a top-down approach towards more consultative decision-making would allow Go Goldfields to utilise its in-depth knowledge of local conditions to allocate funding more effectively</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With strong local expertise Go Goldfields offers an opportunity to explore innovative new ways of working in place responsive to community needs and priorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is a need to recognise and value local knowledge through inclusion of co-design practices and power-sharing to help all stakeholders better identify and address key priorities</li> </ul>

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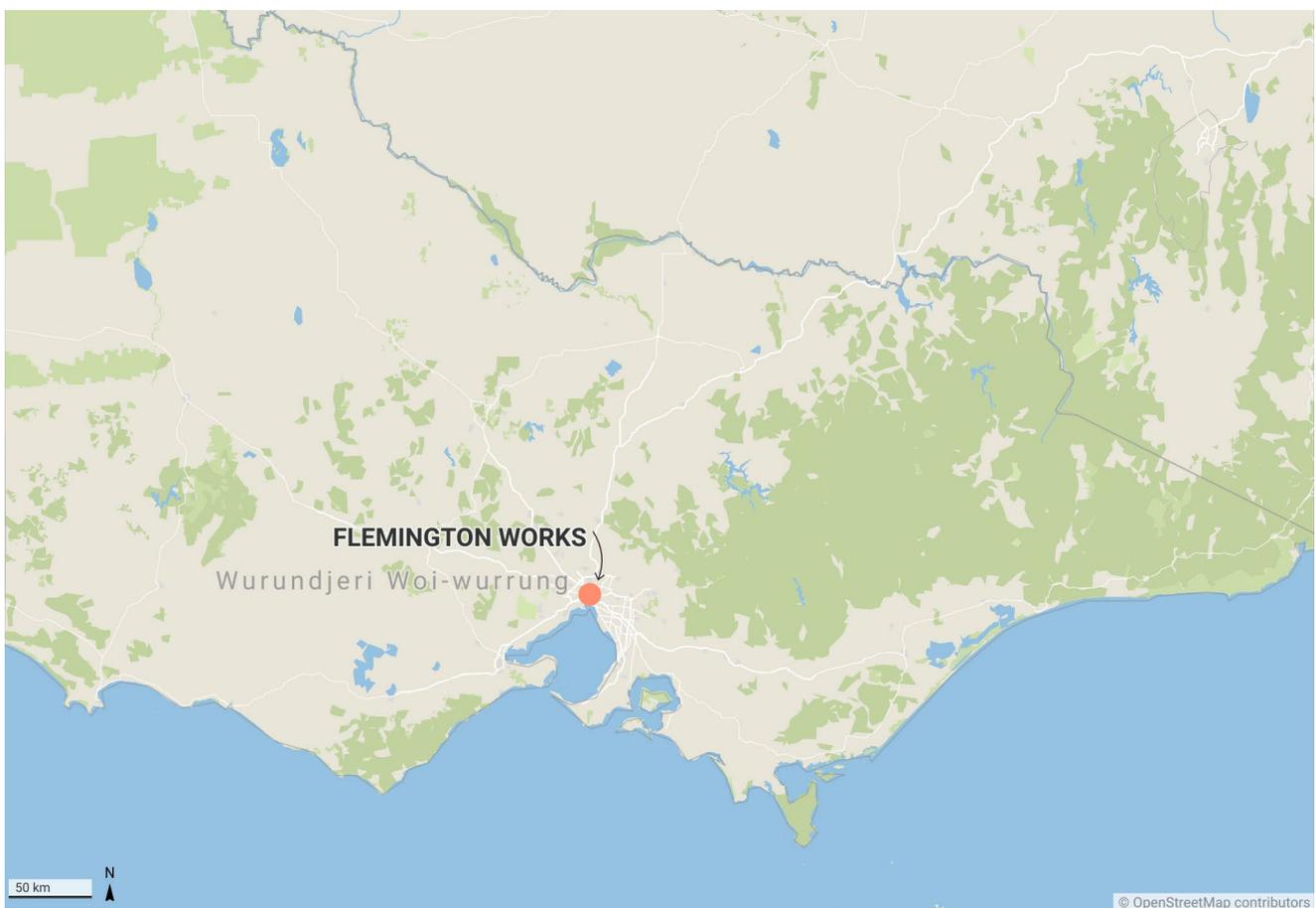
## Flemington Works (Community Revitalisation): Power-sharing to inform systems change

Flemington Works is a Community Revitalisation initiative based in the inner-city suburb of Flemington, Melbourne. Focusing on the root causes of unemployment, Flemington Works takes a place-based, systems change approach to support women and young people who are residents of the Flemington Housing Estate access employment opportunities.

Findings are presented across three themes and respective sub-themes. Where relevant, quotes by Flemington Works staff members are provided to support findings.

### Place-based principles explored in this case study:

Place and people; Equity and social justice; Effective governance and leadership; Theory of change

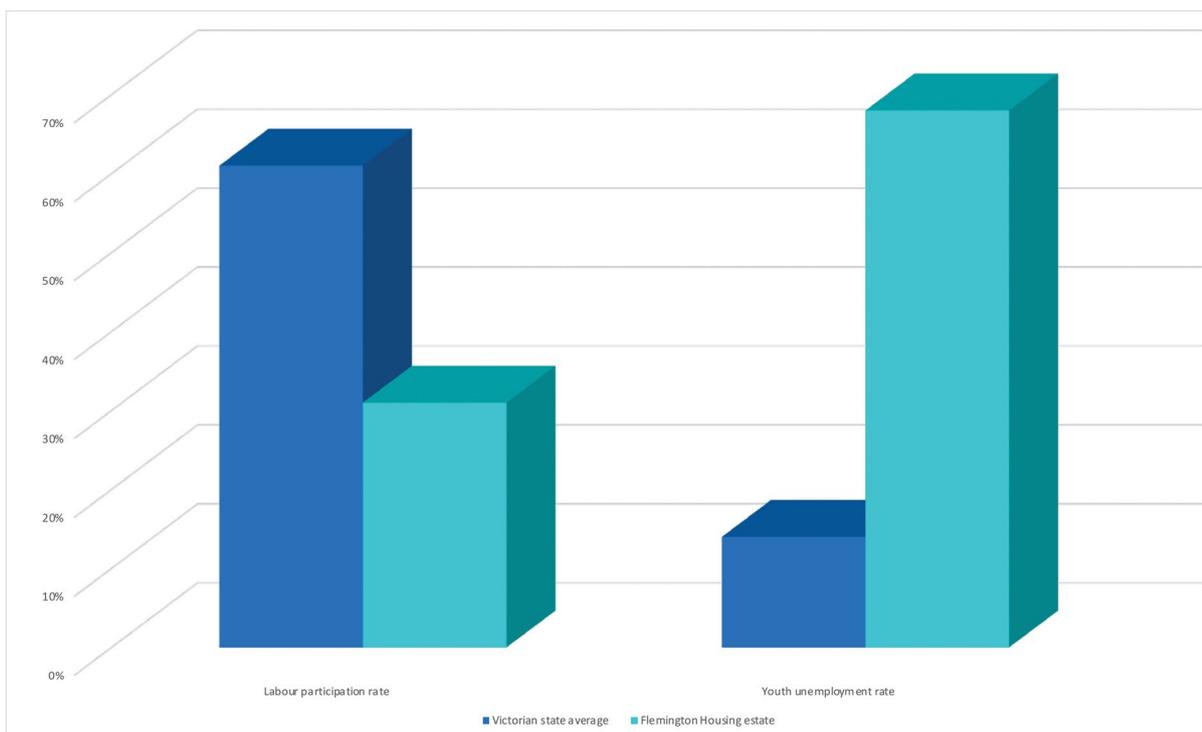


**Figure 7:** Map showing Flemington Works

## Background

Residents of the Flemington Housing Estate face high levels of social and economic disadvantage including, in 2016, a labour participation rate of 31% compared to the Victorian state average of 61%, and a youth unemployment rate of 68%, more than four times the Victorian state average (First Point Consulting, 2019). Women and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, who live on the Flemington Estate, can face additional barriers to sustainable employment.

These include access to transport (including private vehicle) to support employment, caring commitments that make shift work unsustainable, limited number of entry level positions, as well as racism and discrimination that restrict opportunities and access to employment (First Point Consulting, 2019).



**Figure 8:** Labour participation and youth unemployment rates for Victoria and Flemington Housing Estate, 2016.

Despite the presence of other employment services within the area, community members and other stakeholders identified that existing programs were not adequately engaging with, or assisting, particular cohorts in navigating the complex and multiple barriers to accessing employment, highlighting the need for a tailored and place-based approach (MVCC, 2019).

Population of Moonee Valley	Flemington Housing Estate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Almost 1/3 of population born overseas, around 30% speak a language other than English at home (ABS, 2016).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Largest area of public housing in Moonee Valley. 916 public housing dwellings and home to over 2000 residents.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Includes areas of both relative advantage and disadvantage; eight of 24 most socio economically disadvantaged 'small areas' in Victoria are located in municipality.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Built in the 1960s, currently undergoing works as part of State Government Public Housing Renewal Program to update and rebuild parts of the site. The renewal program will see 198 dwellings in the Holland Court 'walk up' flats replaced by 218 new dwellings, as well as a number of new privately owned dwellings (Message Consultants Australia, 2017).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Third highest proportion of social housing dwellings in Victoria (most located in Flemington) (MVCC, 2019).</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural and linguistic diversity concentrated in Flemington; 47.3% of residents born overseas, and 49.4% speak a language other than English at home.<sup>16</sup></li> </ul>	

## Initiative aims

Flemington Works aims to support and enable local people entering employment through activities including direct recruitment, social procurement, work experience opportunities, micro-enterprise development and the development of community-driven employment initiatives. This includes ongoing work with Moonee Valley City Council (MVCC) to improve their social procurement policy and recruitment practices. Essential to this approach is a commitment to fostering local autonomy and working to change systems that pose barriers to employment for many locals. The use of a co-design process is instrumental to this work, and to the successes of the Flemington Works initiative.

<sup>16</sup> Small area refers to a geographical unit used by the ABS to provide data on particular locations below the SA2 level. Small area estimation involves producing estimates for small geographical regions for which direct survey estimates are statistically unreliable.

## The importance of place

Flemington Works has been able to draw on and contribute to the strong sense of place that characterises the Flemington Housing Estate community. The relatively contained geographical area of the Flemington Housing Estate, and the comparatively small community and cohorts it targets, is seen as an asset of the initiative. This differs from more broad or 'universal' employment programs, and even other Community Revitalisation sites that focus on much larger geographical areas. The confined geographic and community focus gives the program clear boundaries and a sense of place and identity which is key in building confidence, and was also highlighted as an outcome of the initiative.

The location of Flemington Works within the Flemington Community Centre on the Housing Estate has been essential for the program's successes (The centre is currently being redeveloped as part of broader improvements to the Estate). The community centre was a place people already found familiar. They were comfortable with the space and the programs offered there. This location also allowed for easy collaboration with other social change organisations and programs who shared the space and who have been involved in providing employment focused services in the area for a long period of time:

*we had also the community centre, which was already a beautiful place that a lot of people were very familiar with. And comfortable with coming in.*

Co-location at the community centre has also enabled participants from Flemington Works to have the opportunity to provide ideas and insight into the design of the new community centre currently under construction. Their input has resulted in additions such as the inclusion of commercial kitchen spaces in the new centre which can be utilised by the catering microenterprises established through Flemington Works. Furthermore, Flemington Works and MVCC were also able to work with the contractors building the new centre on social procurement commitment for the project and engage two individuals from the community to work on the construction.



**Who is involved?**

<b>Department of Jobs, Precincts, and Regions (DJPR)</b>	<b>Moonee Valley City Council</b>	<b>Flemington communities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DJPR supports Flemington Works through the Community Revitalisation initiative. Initially receiving \$650,000 (2018 – 2020), the support will continue with Community Revitalisation recently funded for a further 4 years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MVCC is the lead organisation for Flemington Works, overseeing the day-to-day running of the initiative including working with community members. Two paid staff oversee the program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Flemington a women's co-design group, and a young people's co-design group are involved in designing, delivering and evaluating the Flemington Works activities and programs</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DJPR provides program-wide governance for the Community Revitalisation program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MVCC also contributed \$60,000 to the initiative, and an estimated \$200,000 in-kind contribution which takes the form of salaries for the Flemington Works management and access to facilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participants in the co-design groups are employed as Program Support Workers, and seen as valued team members</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DJPR facilitates a Quarterly Learning Forum which brings together Community Revitalisation sites to connect and share</li> </ul>		

## What is Community Revitalisation?

Community Revitalisation is a Victorian Government initiative started in 2017 that uses a place-based approach to improve economic inclusion and social wellbeing for those who experience barriers to employment. Based on its early success, the program recently received a further four years funding through the 2021 State Budget.

The Community Revitalisation program currently has five sites each focusing on particular cohorts that experience complex and multiple barriers to employment and are vulnerable to long-term economic and social exclusion. These sites include:

<b>Flemington</b>	Supporting women and young people who are residents of the local housing estate who experience high levels of social and economic disadvantage
<b>Shepparton region</b>	Supporting Aboriginal young people who face multiple entrenched barriers to employment
<b>Wyndham</b>	Supporting young people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds, specifically African and Pasifika backgrounds
<b>Dandenong</b>	Supporting vulnerable jobseekers, particularly humanitarian settlers and CALD residents
<b>Hume</b>	Supporting young people, women and people from CALD backgrounds across the suburbs of Broadmeadows, Campbellfield and Meadow Heights who face significant sustained disadvantage

(Adapted from First Point Consulting (2019) Community Revitalisation Program Evaluation)

Four of the five Community Revitalisation sites are local government led, with the Shepparton site led by the Kaiela Institute, a First Nations-led organisation. There are different activities across Community Revitalisation that all work with individuals to:

- Increase readiness for employment
- Help transition to sustainable employment
- Increase workforce participation
- Increase sustainable incomes
- Improve confidence and wellbeing of program participants (First Point Consulting, 2019).

## Theme 1: Power-sharing – Co-design and collaboration

Government has found innovative ways to work differently and support the outcomes of Flemington Works. **Co-design** has been used as a form of **power-sharing** which has enabled the Flemington community to define the priorities of the initiative. This method is supported by a collaborative mindset from government partners.

In Flemington Works, state government takes a different approach to service design. Rather than a top-down approach to establishing the priorities of the initiative or determining ways of working, decision-making power is shared with community members through a co-design process which is supported by a collaborative mindset from state government and other actors.

Recognising the need to share decision-making power with community to enable genuine and sustainable place-based outcomes, Flemington Works is centred around a co-design process through which community members shape the initiative. Two co-design groups (a women's co-design group and a young people's co-design group, identified as two cohorts from the housing estate who would benefit from the initiative) comprised of residents who live on the Flemington Housing Estate are employed as Program Support Workers, and play a central role in the design and delivery of the Flemington Works initiative. An understanding from initiative partners that community members are best placed to identify their own needs, and draw on their own lived experience to design strategies to address these, supported the use of this method.

The women's co-design groups and the young people's co-design group are each made up of approximately 10 members who are employed as Project Support Officers. To recruit members a position description for the role of Project Support Officer was developed by MVCC and Flemington Works Project team, and expressions of interest were extended through community leaders and local services in a range of ways to ensure they were accessible to all of the Flemington Housing Estate community (including via email, SMS, and word of mouth). After an interview process, co-design groups members were employed on 6-8 month contracts, ensuring they were paid for their work in the initiative:

*we paid the co-design group participants because we look at them as people that I have expertise in their life... we acknowledged from the first go that 'what you tell us will be very valued. And the reason why we're paying you is not because we want you to come, it is because we value your feedback.*

Through a series of meetings over a period of 6-8 months, the co-design groups worked to define the goals of the initiative, framing the barriers to employment they face, and developing strategies to overcome them. These meetings were facilitated by MVCC and external consulting organisation Clear Horizon, and followed a four-stage co-design model tailored to the initiative context. These meetings included training for participants around skills including systems thinking, root cause analysis, public speaking, interviewing and survey-design and thematic analysis. Through this process co-design group members not only shared their experiences to inform project design, but undertook social research with the wider community to ensure voices from across the Flemington Housing Estate community were included in the initiative.

The co-design format itself was also shaped by participants. This included the incorporation of opportunities for co-design group members to share their culture and skills, with lunch preparation for women's co-design meeting rotating between members, sharing their cultural knowledge through food. This extended beyond facilitated sessions to include providing catering for council events. To ensure facilitated meetings were accessible to all members, additional interpreter support was provided, and a requirement established to ensure communication was delivered visually and through story to ensure all members could engage and participate in the process.

The co-design process at Flemington Works has been commended by participants as helping to create a 'safe space where they felt comfortable and heard'. This has led to ongoing collaborative relationships as illustrated by the extensive consultative process to workshop and produce an evaluation report and to co-design the theory of change and action plan for Flemington Works for 2021-2024. In using a co-design model to

determine the direction and delivery of the initiative, Flemington Works is actively including community members at each stage of the initiative:

*Through co-design, collaborative design work there's been a really strong commitment to the community voice ... community voice informing how they go, where they go next.*

The co-design method requires a different way of working from government partners, a willingness to truly share power and decision-making responsibilities, and a commitment to supporting community as experts in their own lives. This approach goes beyond simply consulting communities on the design of government delivered program to incorporate key place-based principles in the initiative. The co-design method used in Flemington Works is supported by a collaborative environment between DJPR, MVCC, and the Flemington community. This environment is aided by the support of key players such as MVCC executives, including the CEO, as well as Minister Danny Pearson (the local Member for Essendon). While the role of funder is an important part of the state government's involvement in Community Revitalisation and Flemington Works, a collaborative mindset, and in particular 'passion' for the project, help the relationship between DJPR and MVCC exceed that of a funding partner:

*they were not just the funder; they are very interested in what we were doing ... they are [a] collaborator.*

## Theme 2: Place-based systems change for job creation and social inclusion

Identifying the **systematic barriers** to employment for participants, Flemington work has worked with MVCC to change institutional policy and practices to create **equitable employment opportunities** and foster **social inclusion**.

Through community engagement and a co-design process, Flemington Works has been able to identify specific needs regarding employment in the local area and tailor the initiative to address these. This process highlighted a key barrier as the lack of appropriate jobs in the locality rather than a lack of work readiness skills or qualifications from participants, which has been the focus of previous employment programs and often assumed to be the primary reason for unemployment. Recognising this, Flemington Works centres its focus on creating entrepreneurship opportunities, and supporting development in social procurement and workforce diversity policies to deliver local jobs:

*our focus had to be 'how do you unlock employment opportunities in the long-term for residents?'*

Highlighting the need for local jobs for local people led to significant reform to social procurement processes at MVCC with social procurement now embedded in Council practices through the Social and Sustainable Procurement Guidelines and Policy. Under these guidelines, suppliers must now provide employment opportunities for residents living in local social housing in order to secure council contracts. Council staff too, as an added benefit, are actively encouraged to support businesses located in MVCC local government area.

The change agenda led by Flemington Works has also resulted in MVCC undertaking a reform of their labour hire practices and making a number of changes that aim to make employment opportunities more accessible and appropriate for Flemington Works participants. This includes the simplification of Position Description templates and replacing formal interview panels with a walking interview around a park in a less formal setting. In addition, measures to ensure a safe working environment have been implemented including pre- and post-placement surveys to ensure the cultural competency of supervisors, and to identify experiences of race-based discrimination. So far there have been 74 employment outcomes from MVCC, these are typically, entry level roles in: customer service, community development and engagement and business administration and support across council units including Libraries, Arts facilities, Community Development and Engagement, Early years and Maternal & Child Health units (MVCC, 2021).

Undertaking systems change work has not been without challenges. The short-term funding that Flemington Works receives makes working to create systems change difficult as sustainable change usually requires longer time frames (MVCC, 2020).

## Sharing place-based lessons across initiatives

Through quarterly learning sessions that bring together the five Community Revitalisation sites place-specific lessons are able to be shared. These sessions play an important role in offering a space for exchanging ideas, experiences and providing peer support for all of the teams. The differences between Community Revitalisation sites, including their geographical focus, the cohorts they work with, and the challenges to employment the different communities face, offer opportunities for learning. Each site offers unique insights from their own context. The Kaiela Institute who lead the Community Revitalisation initiative in Shepparton is the only site not led by local government. As a First Nations-led organisation they approach their work with community in a different way which provides a new perspective:

*It's good to hear from them, because they all have a different... way that they look at community and how they work with businesses and all that type of thing. And they're not a council.*

## Theme 3: Understanding and measuring impact: Beyond employment figures

The impacts of a tailored place-based approach to increasing employment opportunities include outcomes beyond employment figures and include an increase in **confidence, social connection**, as well as **expanded community mobilisation** and increased **community advocacy**.

Because each place-based initiative is unique in the way it approaches complex social, economic, and structural issues, understanding and capturing the impacts of initiatives is not straight forward. Some outcomes can be more easily recognised and quantified, while others involve more subtle changes at the level of the individual and community and occur over longer timeframes.

### 'Measurable' impacts

Focusing on barriers to employment, and aiming to increase employment opportunities for locals, Flemington Works has been successful delivering a range of quantifiable outcomes around economic participation rates. Up to June 2021, Flemington Works has achieved 183 employment outcomes for 127 people. This includes 16 full-time positions, 29 part-time positions, and 25 casual positions. A range of pre-employment pathways has also been achieved including paid internships, traineeships, and work experience positions. In addition, 32 micro-businesses have been developed in catering, consultancy, and creative industries. Businesses established through Flemington Works have delivered over 46 catering events, to the value of \$32,000, since March 2019 (Clear Horizon, 2021). Particular employment and entrepreneurial outcomes were part of contract agreements around Flemington Works. These opportunities have had social and economic benefits for participants and their families beyond simple job creation outcomes.

### Impacts beyond employment figures

While measuring employment impacts demonstrates the successes of Flemington Works, these are just one way of assessing the initiatives' impact. Flemington Works, its participants and government partners are also keen to share many other less tangible but far-reaching outcomes which have resulted from the initiative. These include a range of positive changes in people's personal lives and day-to-day experiences. For example, participants from the women's and young-people co-design groups identified a range of changes including improvements in; confidence, motivation, social connection, understanding employment barriers, communication and team work skills (MVCC, 2021). Others impacts include support for the catering micro-business Mamma's Kitchen, (see box below) with key outcomes being the confidence of participants to navigate employment systems and apply for further jobs:

*it went beyond ... the specific skills. And it was more about that confidence that they were employable, and knew how to navigate Australian employment system.*

The ripple effects past employment outcomes also include expanded community mobilisation and participation in community advocacy (MVCC, 2021). This can be seen in the creation of three youth-led organisations supported by Flemington works; Young Australian People, Rabita Youth and Young Women's Social Change Organisation. Young Australian People, and Young Women's Social Change Organisation support the educational and employment goals of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds living on the Flemington Estate and Rabita Youth works with young people who felt disconnected from the

broader community and have been in contact with the justice system (MVCC, 2021). Young Australian People has designed and delivered two youth-led employment forums called 'Connecting the Dots', bringing young people together to learn about employment and academic opportunities and connect with employment mentors from similar backgrounds (Young Australian People, 2020). The 'Connecting the Dots' events engaged 336 young people and 51 African-Australian mentors, and the organisation has been contracted to deliver similar events in partnership with The Huddle, in the City of Wyndham (MVCC, 2021).

## Mamma's Kitchen: responding to Covid-19

During the 2020/21 Covid-19 pandemic, food insecurity became a critical issue for residents at Flemington Housing Estate, a situation exacerbated by the hard lockdowns that occurred at the Estate during this time. Due to their strong consultative relationships with local communities, established through the Flemington Works co-design processes, and understanding the 'skills and passion' (MVCC, 2021, p. 8) of community members, Flemington Works was able to assist in accessing 'Working for Victoria' funding to establish Mamma's kitchen. These prior relationships allowed MVCC to be 'very responsive and reactive ... to the community's needs'. A catering enterprise, Mamma's Kitchen employed 14 women to prepare and distribute 10,000 culturally-appropriate meals to 250 households living on Flemington and Ascot Vale Housing Estate during this time at times personally delivering 'meals hand to hand [to] community members' enhancing the community connection. Connecting to the community in this way, and being able to provide essential support at this hard time resulted in a 'transformative' pride which 'lifts up the individual, the entire program, the families and ultimately a community' (MVCC, 2021, p. 7).

Further to providing community members with essential and appropriate food, Mamma's Kitchen provided the women involved with a real income that enabled them to provide for their families both at home and overseas. It also offered the participants an opportunity to gain work experience in a commercial kitchen setting and to explore their own entrepreneurial aspirations:

*now when you hear from these ladies, the way they talk about employment is no more about resume writing. They talk about how that program actually helped them feel confident that now they can go look for work.*

What works well?	What needs strengthening?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flemington Works engages the community in understanding needs and designing responses through co-design process - representing genuine power sharing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flemington Works is impacted by uncertain or short-term funding and staff turnover at MVCC and within state government. When staff change knowledge and experience can be lost</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Responding to identified systematic barriers to workforce participation, Flemington Works has unlocked appropriate local jobs for participants by influencing MVCC on uptake of social procurement and labour hire practices creating local jobs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flemington Works does not yet reach all the diverse cultural and ethnic groups residing in Flemington. Newly arrived migrants and refugees, as well as male youth were identified as underrepresented demographics</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flemington Works has achieved non-employment outcomes for participants (increased confidence, networks, sense of community belonging and uptake of advocacy) within the Flemington community. This speaks to broader capacity building in the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flemington Works is run by two FTE MVCC staff. While the position of the staff in the Community development team is advantageous to their work, the initiative is limited to two positions. This capacity should be considered when considering the successes of the initiative and any expansion or replication to the initiative or its approaches</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flemington Works draws on the geographic and social assets of the Flemington Housing Estate. Based in the Flemington Community Centre has further encouraged engagement with local residents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flemington Works does not currently include a focus on First Nations communities as has concentrated on communities living in the Flemington Housing Estate (prominently African Australian communities)</li> </ul>

## References

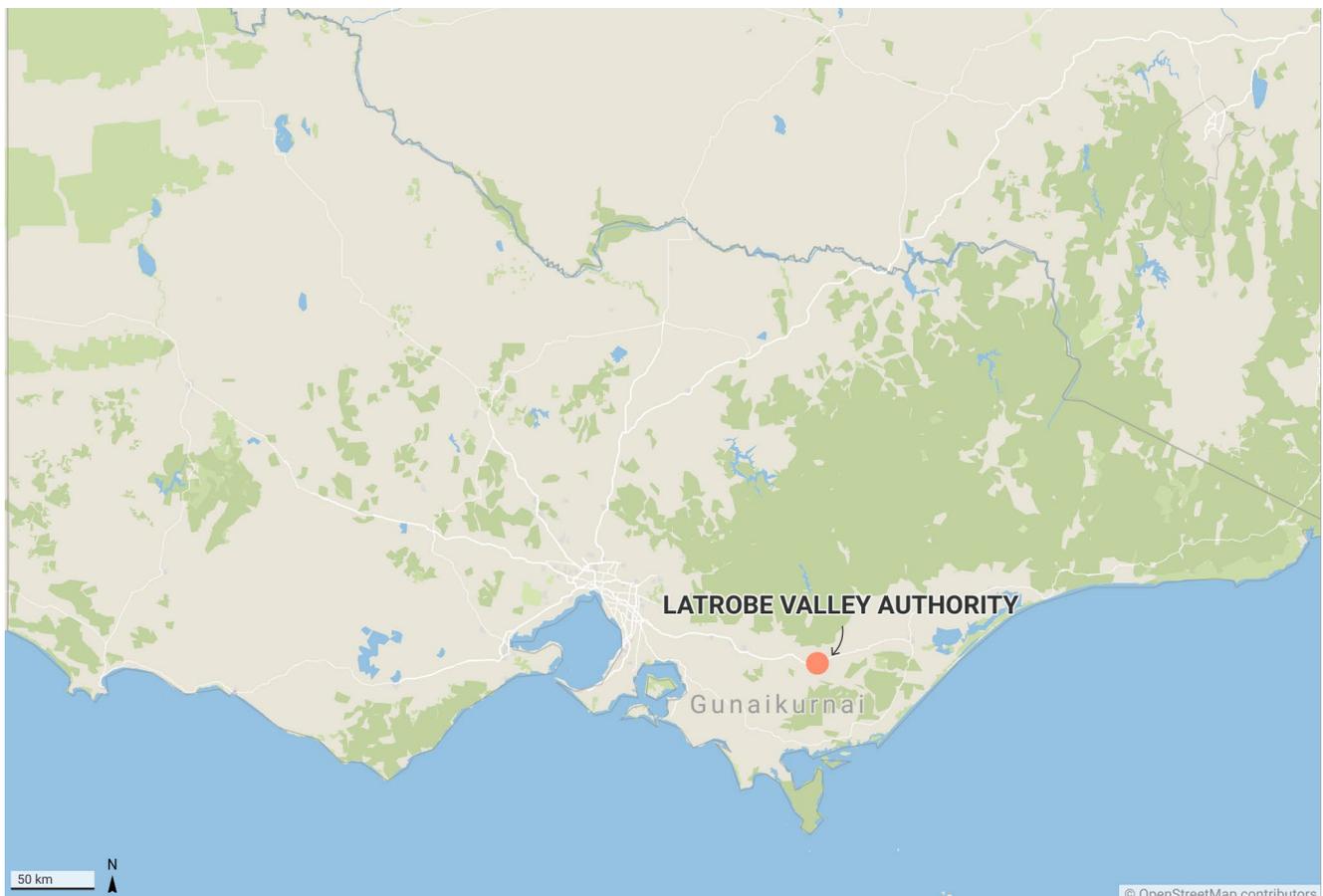
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## Latrobe Valley Authority: Government in place

The Latrobe Valley Authority (LVA) is a government place-based initiative established in 2016 to support the Latrobe Valley region through a sustainable economic transition ahead of the 2017 closure of the Hazelwood coal fired power station and mine, and the movement away from high carbon dioxide emitting industries in the region. Well-resourced, staffed by locals and given autonomy to explore new ways of addressing needs and opportunities for communities in transition through a place-based approach, LVA offers an insight into government working differently in place. This case study explores LVA's multifaceted, systems focused, principles-based way of working and their innovative methods of evaluation to measure impacts and develop effective place-based practice. Findings are presented across three themes. Where relevant, quotes by LVA staff members are provided to support findings.

### Place-based principles and themes explored in this case study are:

Strengths-based approach; Effective governance and leadership; Theory of change; Monitoring, evaluation, learning and accountability



**Figure 9:** Map showing Latrobe Valley Authority

## Background

Situated on the lands of the Gunaikurnai people, the area now known as the Latrobe Valley in the Gippsland region of Victoria has long been renowned for being the State's powerhouse as well as for timber, paper and agriculture. Located to the east of the state, the Gippsland region is home to approximately 290,000 people, with 175,500 residing in the Latrobe Valley area (comprising the local government areas of Baw Baw, Latrobe, and Wellington) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

The Latrobe Valley is home to one of the world's largest brown coal reserves. Prior to the rapid growth in renewable energy, the region produced around 85% of Victoria's electricity needs. There are numerous power stations located in the Latrobe Valley region, including Jeeralang Gas Power Station and the coal stations Yallourn W, Loy Yang A, Loy Yang B, and the former Hazelwood Power Station (Mercier, 2020). The coal power stations are scheduled to close over the next 20 years, however these closures are likely to take place sooner.<sup>17</sup>

## The 2014 Hazelwood mine fire and inquiry

In 2014 the Hazelwood open cut coal mine caught fire, sparked from nearby bushfires. The fire burned for 45 days. The mine is located next to the town of Morwell and the fire blanketed the area in heavy smoke and ash. Residents reported a range of adverse health impacts however, it took 3 weeks before advice was issued for vulnerable residents to evacuate the area.

While the Victorian government of the time opened an inquiry into the fire, the results and detail of this inquiry were seen as inadequate by members of the Gippsland community. This motivated the establishment of local advocacy group Voices of the Valley who were able to present new data that challenged key findings of the initial inquiry including the impact of the fire on death rates in the surrounding area in the months following the fire.

The inquiry was re-opened in 2015. This time the inquiry found that the mine fire was likely to have contributed to deaths in the community, and offered a number of recommendations to the Victorian government including the establishment of the Latrobe Valley Health Innovation Zone.

<sup>17</sup> AEMO (2021) Draft 2022 Integrated System Plan. [https://aemo.com.au/-/media/files/major-publications/isp/2022/draft-2022-integrated-system-plan.pdf?la=en&mkt\\_tok=NjM5LVpFUSo5MzYAAAGBQEW6WA4SLgfhPSS89T2c0sb\\_9pDJxYtXyjtHfLNFAKlaMA-z\\_AjQHroKZWuChezkuHn1OcNsZ2-Jpb6s2Sdb2uC1ghulpg2v19Mm3S9w](https://aemo.com.au/-/media/files/major-publications/isp/2022/draft-2022-integrated-system-plan.pdf?la=en&mkt_tok=NjM5LVpFUSo5MzYAAAGBQEW6WA4SLgfhPSS89T2c0sb_9pDJxYtXyjtHfLNFAKlaMA-z_AjQHroKZWuChezkuHn1OcNsZ2-Jpb6s2Sdb2uC1ghulpg2v19Mm3S9w)

## The LVA Approach

To work with and for the people of Latrobe Valley to:

- Build on community strengths and capability for the future
- Lead collaboration and innovation
- Draw on and use the best ideas for what works, both locally and from outside the region
- Support opportunity for all (LVA, 2019).

The LVA was established to work in the region through a complex community transition. It has a mandate to work across government, engaging different government departments when necessary, and with local stakeholders and partner organisations. To enable this flexibility to work as needed in place, LVA was initially given the authorisation and resources to '*be creative*', and to '*do things in a way that hasn't been done before*.' Over time, the LVA has transitioned from immediate response, to medium term recovery and capability building, to long-term plans for sustainable system wide change.

LVA's extensive research indicates that regional development is 'most effectively achieved through integrated, place-based approaches by government' (LVA, n.d, p. 7) which LVA has enacted through developing a principles-based way of working, a detailed Statement of Direction and a purpose-built dynamic place-based model. This LVA way of working marks a new approach to government supporting regional social and economic development (Beer et al., 2021).

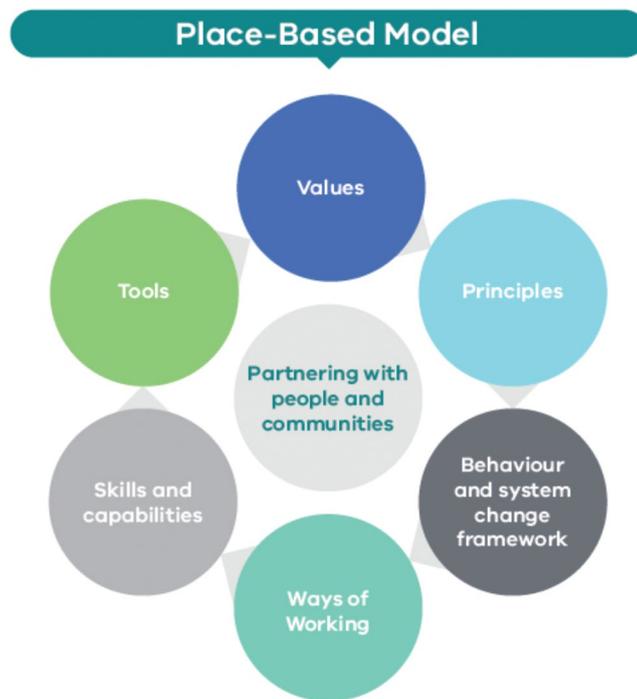
## LVA principles and place-based model

Five LVA principles guide the work of the LVA and involve 'listening to what matters to people, building on the strengths of the region and drawing on international research on contemporary regional development for long-term sustainable prosperity' (LVA, n.d, p. 9).

LVA Principles

1. Locally Owned Ideas
2. Genuine Partnerships
3. Action Orientated
4. Coordinated Effort
5. Outcome Focused

Six years of place-based working and learning has led the LVA to place more emphasis on systemic change. Their place-based model (see Figure 10), developed over four years and based on six interrelated aspects, reflects this systems thinking. The model centres *partnership*, *collaboration*, and the inclusion of genuine *community partnerships* to inform their directives and practices. The model was developed through what is described as an 'action oriented top-down and bottom-up approach' that draws on lessons learned from working in the region, and on 'the latest research into contemporary regional development, behaviour change and systems thinking to enable positive change for individuals and communities' (LVA, n.d). While this place-based model both reflects and directs much of their work, LVA note it has been developed specifically within, and for, the Gippsland region. Key aspects of the model and ways of working could inform place-based work in other areas, but would need to be tailored specifically to the conditions of that place; local solutions need to match and reflect local circumstances.



**Figure 10:** LVA Place-based Model

## Government embedded in place

*LVA is government, we're all government employees and a big backbone that has been set in place. And it's probably the only one that's been set up the way it has ... with a level of autonomy... so we could be more flexible in place.*

The structure of the LVA brings decision-making to the ground in Gippsland, and with staff embedded in context and community. The LVA is based in Morwell, at the heart of the Latrobe Valley. The majority of the staff, including the leadership team, are locals to the area. *'They take great pride in the fact that they are Gippslanders working for Gippsland in Gippsland.'*<sup>18</sup> This is an important shift in the power dynamics of traditional regional governance arrangements, with decisions made at a local regional level rather than in a more centralised way, removed from place. These shifts have had multiple benefits for the efficacy of the LVA. Decisions are made quickly and responses to emerging regional issues can be enacted in agile ways. In addition, partner organisations are able to work directly with decision-makers: observing process and outcomes delivered as promised enables trust to be built and maintained. The LVA team are experienced in working in the complex context and systems that shape the area. The location of the LVA (as a state government office) in the Latrobe Valley has been essential in building relationships with local communities, and in creating a sense of ownership and belonging regarding the LVA in the Gippsland region (as has been affirmed by a range of contributors across community organisations to the recent Parliamentary Inquiry into the effectiveness of the LVA).

Initially well-resourced with \$22 million funding to lead work on economic transition strategies, the LVA was further supported by a state government support package totalling \$266 million<sup>19</sup> aimed at promoting job creation economic growth, and investment in the wider Gippsland region (Wiseman et al., 2017). Between 2016 and 2021 LVA have 'contributed to the creation of more than 4000 jobs through varying projects and programs'.<sup>20</sup> With less government funding now available, LVA staff are shifting the way they work to focus even more strongly on building the capability and the capacity of the staff as partners with community, local government, industry and educational providers.

### Key projects implemented by the LVA include:

- A worker transition service that supports workers from the Hazelwood Mine and Power Station navigate this transition and enter other employment
- Economic Growth Zone Reimbursement Scheme provided funding to 374 businesses resulting in 1,156 jobs
- The GROW Gippsland employment program which works with local business to increase capacity and support local procurement
- A business support service
- Delivering \$20 million in grant funding for local community infrastructure
- \$85 million Latrobe Valley Sports and Community Initiative to upgrade community sporting infrastructure, create jobs, and attract sporting events to the region (LVA, 2022)

<sup>18</sup> Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee Inquiry into the Closure of Hazelwood and Yallourn Power Stations. Traralgon, Chris Buckingham, CEO, Latrobe Valley Authority. Wednesday 2nd March 2022.

<sup>19</sup> LVA had an overall coordination role for \$266m of this package and was directly responsible for \$192m of it.

<sup>20</sup> Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee Inquiry into the Closure of Hazelwood and Yallourn Power Stations. Traralgon, Chris Buckingham, CEO, Latrobe Valley Authority. Wednesday 2nd March 2022.

## Drawing on previous place-based experience in Gippsland: Children and Youth Area Partnerships

The LVA benefits from the legacy of previous Victorian Government supported place-based initiatives in the Gippsland area. One significant approach was the Children Youth Area Partnership (CYAP) (through the Department of Education and Training, and Department of Health and Human Services) based on a holistic, place-based collective impact approach to better support vulnerable children and young people in the region. The work, *'took a very brave approach to understanding young people in terms of services and from a lived experience approach and the idea of human centred design approach as well'* and was significant too for central government with *'a lot of lessons learned and probably practices that have continued within government through that experience'*. Several of the LVA team had previous experience working on CYAP and brought the learnings, local knowledge and connections to the community with them to the LVA. A key part of the CYAP legacy was the building of a body of practice:

*Not just local practice but at an international level to really go out and find people with serious expertise and understanding of what it takes to do this work at a really local level...really testing and understanding what it takes for things to be successful.*

This CYAP emphasis on consulting experts and building knowledge to inform local practice has helped shape the LVA approach.

## Theme 1: Partnerships: Deepening relationships in place

Building **strong relationships** forms the foundation of the LVA's work in Gippsland. The LVA is committed to **listen and learn from diverse community voices** to inform and guide the direction of the work both at the community level and what is taken back to central state government.

In many ways, LVA is a story of strengths built through effective and reflexive partnerships; 'working collaboratively in partnership is at the heart of our approach' (LVA, 2022). From the start, LVA prioritised partnering with people across the Gippsland community and beyond, including community members, businesses, policy makers and researchers: *'They all have experiences and they all have knowledge and they have a part to play.'* Investing resources and energy in establishing partnerships has helped LVA build and sustain capacity:

*If you're given the right resources and a very skilled team, you can go and do agile work really well and you can gather up a whole lot of people in partnerships to do that quickly, depending on what it is you want to do, but you've got to grow the system.*

Listening, developing trust and building effective relationships between different sectors of the community and government takes time and careful work. Across the place-based literature a frequent message is that government place-based work often is not really in 'true' partnership with communities - that it is community consultation rather than active ongoing participation by government. As a government agency, the LVA is conscious of the community feeling on this:

*people are sick of just being asked to come in and give information to government for them to take away and do something to you.*

Due to the long-term complex range of issues in Gippsland, there are a number of organisations who work in the region alongside LVA, including Regional Partnerships, the Latrobe Heath advocate, and the Latrobe Health Assembly. Despite different understandings of the notion of 'place-based' and different understandings of the boundaries of place, LVA has looked for ways they:

*can build the shared work, integrate findings across groups and find a common language in a conscious effort to strengthen all of their work.*

Collaborative work begins with building community trust through listening and learning, then demonstrating the capacity to act on that learning:

*you listen and you understand what matters, then you say 'Well what should we do about that? ... What are the things we can do together? What are the real things we can do straight away?' ... You know, talk is cheap. And people will only give you their time if you're going to really do things so we talk about transition in action, not in plans.*

Acting on this for the LVA included taking time to get to know partners and establish personal relationships, being responsive and adaptive, and sharing knowledge.

To build understanding of the complexity of the work and be accountable to the Gippsland community, LVA has advocated gathering people in place: *'bring the policy makers in on the ground here...Get them out of Melbourne, get them to come down.'* This is also true for LVA's partnership with university researchers. The university team coming to Gippsland from Melbourne has changed the way research has been viewed within the community: *'they're not seen as academics from Melbourne anymore. They're seen as people who care about what happens in this community. What a big shift that is.'* In addition, LVA has strong and growing relationships with local regional university, Federation University, and has been instrumental in linking researchers and policy makers from Federation University and universities in Melbourne. This approach is backed by a 2022

Government report on regional development which advocates that 'policy makers go to the regions to hear the views of the Australians living and working in regional, rural and remote communities before, during and after the development of policies and programs that directly affect their lives' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2022, p. iv.).

*This is about relationships and trust at the end of the day. This is about our collective commitment to something. So, once you get people around the table from all walks of life who are working on something that matters to people, where you are from ends up not really mattering. It's about your genuine commitment to something and what government can bring is we can bring ...expertise, and together by that collective knowledge, expertise and commitment, we can do wonderful things.*

## Doing government differently: from response to ongoing commitment

The announcement to close the Hazelwood coal fired power station was made in November 2016 and it closed just four months later, leaving a community in shock:

*There were a lot of angry people, a lot of upset people. Whole lot of workers that were going to be out of work. Whole lot of businesses impacted*

While immediate, mid-term and long-term responses were called for, in the first instance the LVA's response focused on doing 'very, very quick agile work' informed by findings of the 2009 Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission Report. They went directly to those most impacted; workers, then business and community more generally, to identify what was needed and ask how best to work together. This resulted in a consortium of people who had never worked together before but were committed to the future of the Latrobe Valley community.

Initially there was a lack of trust in the LVA as a government organisation, and at times LVA staff felt working with the community was not going to work *'They're too angry, they don't want to talk to us.'*

However, their brief was to:

*go back down to that office tomorrow and listen to what they say...work with them to understand what matters to them. Then we will say we can support you in partnership... not in an office somewhere with us, but down in their workplace.*

The LVA was committed to engaging with workers, unions and others through establishing the Worker Transition Service which brought several organisations together in a partnership. Listening to the needs of the community was a large part of the first phase of the scheme, as well as implementing services including counselling, training, and career support. Reflecting on this early work of the LVA, the Regional Director of Regional Development Victoria notes:

*It was an extraordinary act of a government – to see distress in a community and then to respond...that has been quite significant in terms of changing the sense of understanding and conversation that we have around transition ...the ability and the history that we now have of being able to respond in different ways.*

## Supporting partnerships and building trust into the future

The establishment of partnerships and their consolidation over time, alongside trust built with communities, are a key part of the strength and sustainability of the LVA's ongoing work. The maturity of their partnerships mean that these relationships are strongly networked within the community, are robust and flexible to change and reflection, and opportunities for developing new partnerships are encouraged.

As outlined above, in the initial days of the LVA, workers and union officials were angry due to the loss of jobs through the transition. After working with those communities for a number of years, the LVA now has:

*a great relationship and partnership. And so, when there's another issue or another transition that's going to occur, that partnership and the way of working has been truly tried and tested.*

Gippsland faces further transition with the remainder of the coal fired power stations set to close in the future, the next being Yallourn scheduled to close in 2028. The LVA Worker Transition Service will form the basis to support the Yallourn workforce when needed. However, as importantly, the relationships and community empowerment narrative LVA has established as government on ground within the community mean:

*there's a platform there to be able to build on, to learn from... people are already starting to see this as an opportunity, as opposed to going through it as a problem for the community. And I think that's part of really establishing those strong partnerships, that are place-based ... and those relationships that you can build, and the trust that's built, that can't be done from central offices.*

## Theme 2: Opportunity focused – changing the regional narrative

The LVA uses a **strengths-based opportunity focused** lens to change the narrative around the economic future of the Gippsland region. Employing a **Smart Specialisation Strategy** the LVA is working with industry, education, community, and other parts of government to build **sustainable long-term responses**.

### More than a 'problem to fix'

Key to the LVA approach is the adoption of a strengths-based, opportunities-focused lens to understand their role in the region. This is seen as a welcome difference between the LVA's way of working and previous interventions in the region from government and elsewhere that focus on 'problems to fix'. Within the initial context of transition, change and job losses there was a sense that LVA might be another group arriving to fix problems:

*there was a really strong focus on shifting the language ...[it] should not be focused at the problems ... that was really critical.*

In working to shift to an 'opportunity focused' lens and developing a way of 'working together to leverage those opportunities' they have moved away from 'problem orientated language'. This reflects a key principle identified in the literature review (Part 1) that place-based work should be focused on community strengths rather than beginning from a deficit model:

*[the LVA] has always worked in the way of seeing the opportunities and working with what matters. If you go in [to a community] to try solve a problem you don't even uncover the opportunities that are sitting there. This works to dismantle narratives of Gippsland as a place of disadvantage and instead tells a story of a dynamic and innovative region where change is future-focused.*

The LVA's opportunity focused approach however does not ignore the need for immediate responses to the impacts facing the Gippsland region, with these responses forming a significant part of LVA's initial work. Recognising the need for different kinds of responses at different times, the work of the LVA follows three distinct but interconnected phases; Immediate response, recovery and capacity building, and strategic and sustainable growth (LVA, 2019). The opportunity focus of the LVA recognises that focusing on the strengths of the region not only brings local residents on board, but is essential in building more sustainable long-term responses.

## Building on regional innovation

This regional opportunity lens, and focus on strategic and sustainable growth has led to the LVA building on work which was already underway in the four key areas of economic growth and regional strength: energy, food and fibre, health and wellbeing, and tourism (LVA, 2019). These areas represent industries in which the region has an existing capacity and identified future growth potential. With partners from industry, education, community, and other parts of government, the LVA is working towards fostering investment to support economic growth and job creation in these areas, building on existing identified regional knowledge, innovation and expertise.

The adoption of a Smart Specialisation approach builds upon regional strengths and assets, including expertise, and works in a way that fosters regional innovation across a range of industries. Smart Specialisation:

*takes a design approach ... ensuring that you understand your context ... brings the same set of principles as collective impact ... where you have, really refining those opportunities, and building innovation and areas of investment and potential for future growth.*

## Smart Specialisation

Smart Specialisation is an approach or methodology to support regional strength through economic development. Developed in the EU and drawing from its history of strong regional economic focus, tools and methods, Smart Specialisation provides a framework to understand regional economic strengths and assets, and identify opportunities for sustainable regional economic growth.

Smart Specialisation brings people from industry, education, community, and government around the table to develop a shared vision and plan for the region's future economic prosperity and social wellbeing. Smart Specialisation has been employed in Gippsland for approximately four years. LVA have worked with Melbourne University, RMIT University and Federation University who have been funded to support the establishment and implementation of the approach in the region.<sup>21</sup>

In taking on this Smart Specialisation framework, LVA connected to an international network of stakeholders and regions undergoing similar transitions, with the ability to engage with globally renowned experts. This means they can draw on knowledge and resources such as case studies and frameworks from around the world to think creatively about ways to meet present and future growth needs of the region (LVA, 2019).

For the LVA, the attraction to Smart Specialisation as a framework and methodology arose from the desire to find an approach that shared the commitment to community engagement and inclusion of community voice that established place-based methodologies of collective impact, and co-design are based on, but which was tailored for a regional economic focus:

*When you talk about collective impact, or co-design, those sort of things maybe don't ring so well, with the economic and industry space.*

<sup>21</sup> More information on the project available at: <<https://sustainable.unimelb.edu.au/research/research-projects/gippsland-smart-specialisation-strategy>>

## Theme 3: Measuring systems change and building a culture of learning

LVA has found innovative ways to embed evaluation as part of their **long-term commitment** to enable communities to **build capacity**, value **partnerships** and continue to reflect on and develop a **systems approach** to measuring impact.

Across the literature the need to effectively evaluate place-based approaches is a persistent theme. From the start the LVA have embedded evaluation and measurement, applying and testing approaches and methodologies and reflecting on the results. They have developed a monitoring and evaluation framework and metrics to critically measure change across their programs and projects both organisationally as well as tracking and recording the impact these projects and programs are having on the ground with communities:

*we gather a range of different metrics and stories to understand where projects are leveraging, and where they're starting to see change.*

Initially very much focused on behavioural change, over time, LVA's learning, documentation and evaluation has led to a more systems-based analysis which has in turn led to a refinement of their place-based model and domains of change. Aware of the short-term nature of many projects, this was also designed to address issues of sustainability. This reflects LVA's determination to

draw on all sources of experience and knowledge to work towards effective practice.

In designing their projects and evaluation methods to ensure that they monitor, evaluate and track change across systems LVA have prioritised training staff in systems thinking. They identify that this has been:

*really critical [for staff] to understand some of the bigger picture ... still focused on particular areas and projects, but getting people to see right across: how are these things fitting together? How does that connect to another? If you're doing this, how does that nudge that?*

## Developing measurement tools

Another key component of measuring systems change across their projects is the designing and testing of new data gathering and evaluative tools. LVA's aim is to develop an evaluation system which 'supports learning, tracks emerging change, and measures impact across individual programs and a portfolio of projects' (LVA, n.d). Within this they are attending to the need to:

*find balance between what government kind of want in terms of some of the bigger data, versus trying to understand how you can capture some of the emerging changes and impacts which are quite significant. But they're sort of little ripples. And so how do you kind of bring those ripples together to measure in that way is some of the things that we're looking at, at the moment, both getting data and stories in a mixture.*

LVA's approach to measuring success and impact across their portfolio projects is multilayered and complex. They identify six domains of change which indicate sustainable and transformative systems change brought into being by several integrated actions (including multilayered governance, partnerships and collaborative networks and activating place, spaces and people). Implementing this transformation requires all actors involved to move through stages of change from knowledge and understanding, to applying this knowledge, to changes in behaviour and belief.

Part of the work has also been to tell a different narrative about place through sharing and interpreting the data and *'going back out to the community and talking about the transition story*

*through the immediate response to the recovery, through to this sort of long-term strategic change.'*

*we did a lot of work in understanding both those sets of data and that's been useful in that conversation. But it's also been useful to dispel a whole heap of myths that are still out there...when you're in a community that constantly gets 'you're the most vulnerable community', you have to go reasonably strong to change some of the kind of things to think about people's opportunities.*

## Capturing place-based impacts across systems

One component of the LVA place-based model is the Behaviour and System Change Framework which covers a suite of methodological and evaluation tools and enables a consistent language across the LVA in the delivery of projects. This framework enables the place-based model too as behaviour and systems are interconnected. It captures the shift from knowledge, to a behaviour and attitude change, over ultimately to systems change. The methodologies under this framework are 'integral to the way LVA designs, delivers, monitors and evaluates the impact of place-based work' (LVA, n.d, p.11).

Amongst the methodological tools to capture the evidence of impact of LVA's place-based work are two recently developed innovative methods.

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**Storytelling and impact logs**

This tool helps capture some of the more intangible aspects of change and a projects impact across systems. Using logbooks, 'stories' are recorded from a variety of interactions including those 'observed, heard, experienced or discussed at a meeting, event, media, conversation or via email' or larger level impacts on communities or even the LVA domains in their behaviour change model. Prompted by a number of questions, evidence is entered into a logbook and stories are created: The logs:

*have been quite successful [in] understanding where we are gathering emerging stories of change that we then can categorise in a way to start to see where they can be used for learning and for measurement.*

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**Measuring outcome and impact of partnerships**

Monitoring and evaluating partnerships is critical to assessing the strength, effectiveness and sustainability of ongoing relationships. Given the centrality of partnerships to their place-based work, the LVA are interested in measuring the value, outcome and impact of their partnerships and collaborations rather than just 'saying they are a good way to go'. They recognise that while collaborations can be valuable for the people involved, this value might not always extend out beyond the collaboration itself:

*it's important to have people that are in the circle or the collaboration get value, but you can actually make it worse for everyone outside of the circle.*

Metrics exist to assess the 'health' of partnerships (Partnership Health Checklists),<sup>22</sup> but for the LVA these don't adequately capture the value and track the outcomes of partnerships on systems change. They are in the process of developing a multilayered measurement system which attempts to track and record the complexity of partnership impacts, shifts and connections across the system.

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## Staying reflective

Critical self-reflection has been built into the LVA's place-based approach as an ongoing part of this learning. Running for over four years, they have been able to have enough time to reflect on achievements to date and have been through a 'refresh' to develop a 3-5 year strategy and in terms of its statement of direction and understand a theory of change from an LVA perspective. Reflection for staff within place-based organisations is also crucial:

*It's not only the people in the place that need time, it's the people working in these positions, in the work, need time. Because we're as much of the problem... There's a whole heap of learning that has to occur in any backbone to be effective in this kind of work, and you still learn as you go along. And so it's both, you know, places need time, but the actual work in building the capability and the capacity of both the team and the place is just as critical.*

<sup>22</sup> For example see VicHealth's partnership analysis tool. <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/the-partnerships-analysis-tool> or VCOSS's partnership guide <https://vcoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/VCOSS-Guide-3-Sustaining-the-Partnership.pdf>

What works well?	What needs strengthening?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The LVA's location in the heart of Gippsland ensures that decision-making about regional priorities occurs on the ground and actively involves the Gippsland community, rather than coming from centralised government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stronger connection between the quick and agile work needed in the community and the processes within central government systems that often work at a slower pace. This includes using the same language between government and communities</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Large number of staff allows individual members time and capacity to deeply engage with the work they are undertaking including investing time into making meaningful relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Central government commitment to continue long-term funding to enable planning independent of short-term political cycles</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LVA has a strong focus on local peoples' experiences, stories and connection to place. The principles-based approach and place-based model has enabled learnings to be captured and acted on meaning people trust their voices have been heard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stronger connection to First Nations communities and self-determination principles</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengths-based approach that recognises and utilises local strengths, assets, and expertise; a focus on strengths rather than problems to fix</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding by central government that building knowledge takes time and resources. Sharing the findings of this knowledge with other place-based initiatives</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LVA has an ongoing commitment to creating a culture of learning and reflection. Evaluation has been a large part of LVA's contribution to the place-based space – innovative evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dialogue between the LVA and climate change action groups could be strengthened</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Systems thinking to relate to the changes in the community through their work over time and in relation to social determinants of health</li> </ul>	

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## First Nations-led 'place-based' approaches in Victoria

*Listen to the people's stories...and invest long-term in Aboriginal community-led, trauma-informed solutions ... based on connection to Aboriginal Culture, Country, Community, and Kin.*<sup>23</sup>

*Traditional Owners should be meaningfully engaged throughout the process and enabled to make decisions in accordance with principles of self-determination.*<sup>24</sup>

This case study explores contemporary First Nations-led 'place-based' approaches in Victoria across both urban and regional areas in the context of Treaty, truth-telling, self-determination and Indigenous data sovereignty. Several recent Victorian government policy frameworks developed to address systemic racism and engage respectfully with First Nations communities are presented to illustrate the ways in which the state government is already guided when working with First Nations.

While many current First Nations community initiatives in Victoria do not refer to themselves as place-based, their ways of working and engaging with local communities involve similar principles and practices. First Nations place-based and strengths-based approaches often work to create safe and supportive spaces for Aboriginal people to meet up and access services in ways that are culturally appropriate and advocate for recognition of First Nations lived experience and rights. These spaces include Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), Local Aboriginal Networks (LANs) and Gathering Places, place-based justice approaches and the work of the Kiaela Institute (Yorta Yorta Country) through

Empowered Communities. As with all place-based community-led work, First Nations-led approaches will differ depending on histories and geographies of place as well as shifts to meet changing contexts. With that in mind, a case study of The Gathering Place in Morwell, Gunaikurnai Country is presented below.

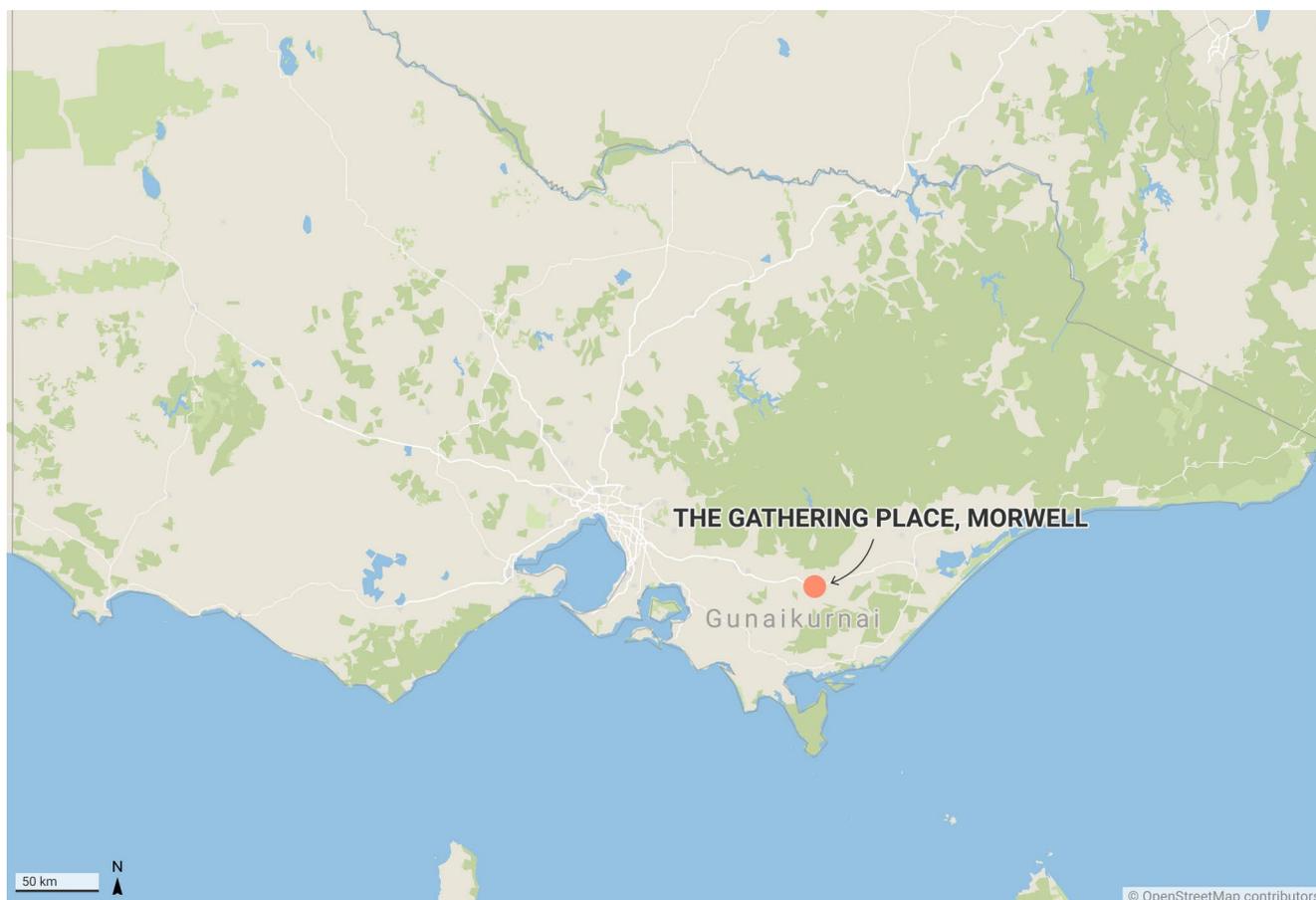
Understanding the diversity of ways First Nations-led PBA work and understand place is crucial for communities, place-based practitioners and government to: (i) acknowledge and recognise First Nations self-determination and lived experience (ii) share power with First Nations communities on their terms, (iii) rethink ways of collaborating, partnering and governing.

<sup>23</sup> Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation. (2020). *Balit Durn Durn - strong brain, mind, intellect and sense of self: Report to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System*. Melbourne: Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation.

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## Key principles in this case study:

Self-determination; Strengths-based approach; Equity and social justice



**Figure 11:** Map showing The Gathering Place, Morwell

## Context

This section details key context for understanding place-based work in First Nations communities in Victoria, self-determination, Treaty including the Yoo-rook truth-telling process, Indigenous data sovereignty and government frameworks to work on structural and systemic transformation and work respectfully with First Nations communities in Victoria.

## Self-determination

*Self-determination is critical and to ensure that change occurs, our voices must be heard by government at every level of society. We perpetually recommend the same approach: to involve us, to listen, to reform and invest. Be it systemic reform, policy design. Service delivery, evaluation or agreeing upon funding, 'nothing about us, without us.'* (Lowitja Institute, 2021)

First Nations people in Victoria have long fought for self-determination – the right to make decisions about their own lives. Self-determination 'encompasses a spectrum of rights that are necessary for Aboriginal Victorians to achieve economic, social and cultural equity, based on their own values and way of life'<sup>25</sup> with government policy to enable self-determination advocating that 'Aboriginal Victorians hold the knowledge and expertise about what is best for themselves, their families and their communities.'<sup>26</sup>

*Self-determination is about us having control of our own voice, it's about us as Aboriginal people telling our story but also tapping into the systems of knowledge and governance that have existed in this country for thousands and thousands of generations. It's about us saying what success means to us as Aboriginal people. (Tirirki Onus, Yorta Yorta)<sup>27</sup>*

As self-determination sits at the heart of First Nations work towards Treaty and recognition, key aspects of self-determination – often referred to as 'principles of self-determination' have been identified by First Nations to assist and direct government in understanding how to work in culturally safe and respectful ways with community and what actions to prioritise. Lists of self-determination principles can be found on several government sites such as the Human Rights Commission<sup>28</sup> and Victorian Government<sup>29</sup> (see Figure 12).

<sup>25</sup> State Government of Victoria. (2018) *Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023*. Melbourne: Department of Premier and Cabinet, Victorian State Government, p. 22.

<sup>26</sup> State Government of Victoria. (2018) *Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023*. Melbourne: Department of Premier and Cabinet, Victorian State Government, p. 22.

<sup>27</sup> Onus, T. (n.d.). Why is self-determination important to Aboriginal people. Victorian Public Sector Commission (video). <https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/html-resources/aboriginal-cultural-capability-toolkit/aboriginal-self-determination/>

<sup>28</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission. (n.d.). Right to self-determination. <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/rights-and-freedoms/right-self-determination>

<sup>29</sup> State Government of Victoria. (2019a). *Nargneit Birrang: Aboriginal holistic healing framework for family violence*. Melbourne: Victorian State Government.

## Self-determination Principles

Eleven self-determination guiding principles were developed for the Victorian Government Self-Determination Reform Framework (2019) following extensive community engagement with Aboriginal Victorians. In enabling self-determination, government action should be consistent with the guiding principles:

- human rights
- cultural integrity
- commitment
- Aboriginal expertise
- partnership
- decision-making
- empowerment
- cultural safety
- investment
- equity
- accountability

The guiding principles set the minimum standards for all existing and future work with Aboriginal Victorians and will guide all government work to progress self-determination going forward.

**Figure 12:** Self-determination principles as identified in Victorian Government Self-Determination Reform Framework (State Government of Victoria, 2019b)

## Treaty in Victoria

*Treaty is so many things. It is about exposing past injustices. It is our chance to challenge the power imbalances that have held many in our community back for too long. And it is our chance to work together and agree on meaningful structural reform to make Victoria a fairer and better place for everyone.<sup>30</sup>*

In 2018, the Victorian Parliament enacted legislation to start the process of advancing a Treaty between Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians and the state. The passing of the Treaty Act *Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018* was the first time an Australian parliament had legally engaged with Treaty negotiations. The First Peoples Assembly of Victoria was established to negotiate with the Victorian Government to establish the structures for future Treaty negotiations.

The process to establish legal recognition of First Nations sovereignty of the First Peoples of what is now called Victoria, has been in process since invasion. Living on Country where sovereignty was never ceded in self-determining ways, looking after local community and activating for system reform, compensation and justice has always been part of First Nations place-based work. However, this recent journey towards Treaty marks a new way for governing, partnership and policy in the Victorian Government. It places Aboriginal self-determination at the heart of how government works with First Nations communities going forward which is critical to thinking about place-based work in Victoria.

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.vic.gov.au/nargneit-birrang-aboriginal-holistic-healing-framework-family-violence/principle-1-self>

## Yoo-rrook Justice Commission: Truth-telling

The Yoo-rrook Justice Commission is the first formal truth-telling process in Victoria that will look into both past and ongoing 'injustices experienced by First Peoples in Victoria as a result of colonisation'.<sup>31</sup> The official truth-telling process began in March 2022 hearing stories and gathering information through truth-telling forums (such as yarnning circles), wurrek tyerrang (public hearings), and nuther-mooyoop (submissions).

*Truth-telling lays the foundation for treaty with a shared understanding and creation of public record.*<sup>32</sup>

The goals for the Yoo-rrook commission are: understanding, truth and transformation. To achieve these goals, Yoo-rrook will:

- Establish an official public record of the impact of colonisation on First Peoples in Victoria.
- Develop a shared understanding among all Victorians on the impact of colonisation, as well as the diversity, strength and resilience of First Peoples' cultures.
- Make recommendations for healing, system reform and practical changes to laws, policy and education, as well as matters to be included in future treaties.<sup>33</sup>

## Indigenous Data Sovereignty

Place-based work relies on accurate and appropriate data as a foundation on which to set priorities, and make decisions. First Nations-led data collection, management, and interpretation is critical to informing evidenced-based decision-making, and achieving place-based successes. Collecting and reporting data about First Nations communities in a way that is culturally safe and community owned allowing for data sovereignty is an essential part of First Nations-led place-based work.

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in its first and second sessions<sup>34</sup>

recognised that a key challenge faced by governments is the lack of local level data about Indigenous peoples, their health and wellbeing, and the realisation that their individual and collective rights are directly related to the ability and willingness of governments to support Indigenous decisions and programs.

The concept of Indigenous data sovereignty, is linked with Indigenous peoples' right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions. As Kukutai and Taylor (2016, p. 1) state 'while indigenous peoples have long claimed sovereign status over their lands and territories, debates about 'data sovereignty' have been dominated by national governments and multinational corporations focused on issues of legal jurisdiction. Missing from those conversations have been the inherent and inalienable rights and interests of Indigenous peoples relating to the collection, ownership and application of data about their people, lifeways and territories'.

Kukutai and Walter (2015) also recognise a 'recognition gap', which is the tendency of official statistics to ignore or misrepresent the social and cultural phenomena that are important to the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples. Building on this, Taylor (2008) describes the need to build a 'recognition space' (see Figure 13) between Indigenous and non-Indigenous understandings to allow a conversation with governments in the language of statistical evidence that they both understand and culturally respect, reframing the narratives about us and them. As Ryks et al (2018) discuss, Taylor's recognition space also provides a useful mechanism for thinking about how a measurement framework and appropriate indicators could be developed to understand Indigenous wellbeing.

<sup>31</sup> Yoorrook Justice Commission. (n.d.). *Information Sheet 1: What is Yoorrook?*

<sup>32</sup> State Government of Victoria. (n.d.b). Truth and Justice in Victoria. <https://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/truth-and-justice>

<sup>33</sup> <https://yoorrookjusticecommission.org.au/>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/unpfi-sessions-2.html>



**Figure 13:** Taylor's recognition space (Taylor, 2008, p. 116)

## Indigenous Data Sovereignty in First Nations-led, place-based work in Victoria

On Yorta Yorta country, in the Goulburn Murray region of Victoria, the Kiaela Institute is part of the Empowered Communities network. The Institute builds on a long history of local First Nations leadership and has worked for many years in partnership with other research institutes and government (local and state) as well as supporting numerous Aboriginal-led initiatives in the Goulburn Murray area. As backbone for the Empowered Communities region of Goulburn Murray, the Kiaela Institute have established the place-based Goulburn Murray Prosperity Plan (2021) 'designed from the ground up': in the region, by the region, for the region' (Kiaela Institute, n.d.a).

To ensure governance and sovereignty over data is kept with local First Nations communities, the Kiaela Institute has established the Algabonyah Data and Research Unit. The unit 'ensure measures and evaluations of prosperity and progress of the community are led, managed and controlled by our First Nations community itself' (Kiaela Institute, n.d.a).

By working respectfully together, the region will share in the value and prosperity that is generated from a place-based circular economy model, whilst also building understanding of, and respect for, the social, cultural and economic contribution of Yorta Yorta and First Nations people (Kiaela Institute, 2021, p. 6).

## Recent relevant Victorian Government frameworks

There are a number of recent government frameworks to guide government in working with First Nations communities across Victoria and which emphasise the transfer of power and resources to First Nations communities. The frameworks selected below all emphasise working collaboratively in place, shared decision-making and power-sharing all through the lens of self-determination.

- **Korin Korin Balit-Djak: Aboriginal health, Wellbeing and Safety strategic plan 2017–2027:** Sets out a plan for action to improve the health, wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal Victorians. The plan covers actions around 5 domains: 1. Aboriginal community leadership, 2. prioritising Aboriginal culture and community, 3. system reform across the health and human services sector, 4. safe, secure, strong families and individuals, 5. physically, socially and emotionally healthy Aboriginal communities. The plan engages with a 'cultural determinants approach to Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety, which aligns with the Aboriginal community's holistic understanding of health' (p. 8). The plan embeds self-determination throughout the plan's priority areas and recommends place-based changes to governance for First Nations organisations and community.
- **The Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023 (VAAF):** provides an agenda for Aboriginal Affairs in Victoria that extend beyond Closing the Gap towards 'long-term generational change and improved outcomes for all Victorian Aboriginal people, families and communities' (p. 12). The framework has two key purposes: '1. It is the Victorian Government's overarching framework for working with Aboriginal Victorians, organisations and the wider community to drive action and improve outcomes. 2. It sets out whole-of-government self-determination enablers and principles, and

commits government to significant structural and systemic transformation' (p. 10).

- **Victorian Government Self-Determination Reform Framework (2019):** In conjunction with the VAAF, and recognising that self-determination underpins positive outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians as highlighted in the framework, the Victorian Government also released the Self-Determination Reform Framework. The self-determination framework is intended 'to guide public service action to enable self-determination in line with government's commitments in the VAAF. [and provide] an architecture for reporting on this action' (p. 5). This framework includes list of eleven principles (see Figure 12) developed by Aboriginal communities, and identifies four self-determination enablers, around which government attention of self-determination will be focused. These are; prioritise culture, address trauma and support healing, address racism and promote cultural safety, and transfer power and resources to communities.
- **Victorian Government Framework for Place-based Approaches (2020):** This framework is intended to guide improvements in how the Victorian Government works in place, and supports place-based approaches in the state. The framework recognises that 'Place-based approaches can be a key tool for the Victorian Public Service to enable self-determination as they support the transfer of power and resources to Aboriginal communities and organisations to pursue their economic, social and cultural priorities' (p. 33). The framework recognises that place-based approaches do not inherently empower Aboriginal people, as well as the need to commit to reform government systems and structures to support self-determination. The framework outlines that place-based approaches should 'commit to inclusive engagement and include self-determination as a guiding principle, regardless of the outcome or model identified' (p. 33).

## Closing the Gap: Framing the national approach

Closing the Gap refers to the commitment for governments in Australia to act to close the gaps in health outcomes and life expectancy between Aboriginal Australians and non-Aboriginal Australians (2007/2008). Recognising the slow progress towards reaching Closing the Gap targets, the strategy was refreshed in 2018 and a strengths-based approach was adopted to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were central to the development and implementation of the strategy. In 2019 a partnership agreement was established between the Commonwealth Government, state and territory governments, the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations, and the Australian Local Government Association. This partnership ensures shared decision-making between government and peak organisations around work on the national agreement to closing the gap.

The Closing the Gap commitment, and the target areas and timelines that it outlines, inform policy approaches across Australia.

## First Nations place-based approaches in Victoria

While the term 'place-based' may not always be used within First Nations-led, community run spaces, there are a number of initiatives and networks in Victoria which work in place, with local communities and partners in ways that involve the same or similar principles and practices to initiatives which identify as place-based. Due to the way in which First Nations cultures are inextricably tied to Country and care of Country, and given the ongoing impacts of colonial racism in Victoria, First Nations place-based work and engagement with community can be essential to self-determination, identity and accessing essential services in a culturally safe way. This includes building on community strengths and priorities, and understanding what works in terms

of appropriate evaluation methods and developing indicators which capture the diversity of Aboriginal lived experience. An important aspect of this is Indigenous data sovereignty (as mentioned above).

There are a range of First Nations-led community place-based initiatives that reflect the contexts of their communities. A few key examples are ACCOs, LANs, and Gathering Places.

**Table 5:** Examples of First Nations-led PBAs

<b>Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations (ACCOs)</b>	ACCOs are Aboriginal controlled spaces which generally centre around providing essential services (health, legal assistance, land justice, housing and employment to community. Key places for community advocacy and organisation since the 1970s, there are dozens of small and large ACCOs presently operating throughout Victoria. (Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations, 2019).
<b>Local Aboriginal Networks (LANs)</b>	LANs are voluntary community networks that bring Aboriginal people together at the local level to 'set priorities, develop community plans, improve social cohesion and empower Aboriginal Victorians to participate in civic and community life'. Established in 2007 there are 39 LANs across Victoria. The LANs program has been designed to allow for flexibility in the way LANs operate in order to best respond to community needs. LANs also provide a valuable forum for Government to engage with Aboriginal communities.
<b>Gathering Places</b>	Community owned and operated spaces that provide opportunities for First Nations to safely meet and access services. Fourteen Aboriginal Gathering Places can be found across Victoria. Gathering Places receive funding through the Victorian Government's Koolin Balit Aboriginal Health Strategy however, Gathering Places run independently from one another.
<b>Empowered Communities</b>	Empowered Communities is national First Nations-led PBA active across ten regions across Australia with a site on Yorta Yorta Country in Victoria. Empowered Communities is a proposal for an Indigenous Empowerment agenda. It involves leaders from each Empowered Communities region working together with government and corporate Australia to reform how Indigenous policies and programs are designed and delivered. It aims to increase Indigenous ownership and give Indigenous people a greater say in decisions that affect them (Kaiela Institute, n.d.b).

## The Gathering Place, Morwell: A place-based space for connection and services

The Gathering Place in Morwell provides a culturally safe and inclusive space for all First Nations people and represents, supports and advocates for self-determination. Run by volunteers, activities at The Gathering Place include amongst other things: womens' group, Koori youth group, food bank, information hub and advocacy, yarnning rooms, free clothing, Koori homework club and parents' rooms and Elders art. The Gathering Place 'provides the community with a one-stop resource hub to offer and advise on different services being delivered to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in Latrobe Valley'.<sup>35</sup> The work however stretches beyond these services to responsive and creative ways to reach and look after community across a wide region, such as delivering food parcels to those who are isolated, delivering special occasion hampers to Elders, helping people in the justice system, talking to people who are unwell and in danger, catering for funerals and running community events.

<sup>35</sup> State Government of Victoria. (n.d.a). Gippsland Local Aboriginal Networks. <https://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/gippsland-local-aboriginal-networks>

## Self-determination on the ground

For The Gathering Place it is essential they are able to operate as an autonomous organisation – an Aboriginal organisation, run by Aboriginal people and in ways appropriate to their community but changes such as this can take time which causes frustration.

Since they began in March 2017, The Gathering Place has operated in an auspice Agreement with Berry Street<sup>36</sup> which ensures support to the Aboriginal community in self-determination. This Agreement is predicated on cultural empowerment of the Aboriginal community and as such was approached as an interim auspice for the employment of staff and capacity building of The Gathering Place. While, The Gathering Place is presently working towards becoming incorporated and standing independently, this process has been

held up for a variety of reasons. During this time the support offered to The Gathering Place by Berry Street includes a key role in managing quality and risk in relation to all aspects of the operations of The Gathering Place including all OH&S policies & procedures as well as Human Resources.

The Self-Determination Reform Framework (2019) commits the Victorian Government to support First Nation's self-determination through systemic and structural reform as it is recognised, self-determination is critical to positive outcomes for Aboriginal communities. A key enabler of self-determination is the transfer of power and resources back to community. Securing long-term, flexible funding arrangements would allow The Gathering Place to be autonomous, sustainable and able to make decisions about the most effective ways to meet the needs of their community, celebrate strengths and build capacity.

## Responding to the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns and restrictions have greatly impacted The Gathering Place's ability to provide support to their community. Aware that many they work with are isolated and doing it tough, often relying solely on public transport to access food and services, over Covid-19 pandemic they have continued to help people when other services could not:

*we just had to keep thinking outside the square every time something changed. We had to come up with a new way of doing it.*

Before the Covid-19 pandemic hit in March 2020, The Gathering Place was supported by around 20 volunteers, and welcomed people to the community space for a range of services and support. During the height of restrictions, The Gathering Place was not able to open as normal, and as a result has lost almost all regular volunteers. With a remaining core of 4 volunteers, and taking extra precautions to protect the health of the Aboriginal community, they continued to operate in a limited capacity, providing contact-free outreach support and essential services such as food via Foodbank and other items to community members they knew were in need. This was particularly important with isolated Elders:

*The hardest thing was to stop them from hugging us...It's like 'no, Aunt step back' Because it's offensive to our mob not to be grateful for what it is you're getting.*

The lasting impacts of extended lockdowns, school closures, job losses, and financial hardship caused by the pandemic will continue to shape the kinds of supports and services The Gathering Place will provide.

<sup>36</sup> Berry Street run several community-based programs in regional Victoria working collaboratively with locals, local businesses and service organisations to help build capacity in local communities.

## Open Doors – culturally safe and inclusive

*let's open the doors and see what the people need. No good us telling them what they need. We need to listen to them and go, 'Oh, so you're having trouble with housing? Oh, there's no food around for you...*

As a First Nations-led organisation, The Gathering Place provides a culturally safe space for Aboriginal community members to gather, and access services and support. An essential part of this is the 'open door' approach. Everyone is welcome; even meeting community needs after hours, if staff are still on site; often the work of delivering food or checking in with vulnerable community members happens in the evening. While The Gathering Place's core work is with local Aboriginal communities, their open door means no one is turned away. People from a range of cultural backgrounds, who might not be able to access other services for cultural safety and other reasons, can find support at The Gathering Place. In effect this means the few funds available are stretched further when in fact extra resourcing is needed for the wider non-Aboriginal community the Gathering Place cares for.

Many people who come to The Gathering Place are living with multiple intersecting vulnerabilities such as lacking permanent or safe accommodation, poor mental health and involvement in the justice system. In order to support these intersectional issues, staff have strong relationships with a number of different organisations and are networked with local service providers to enable culturally appropriate solutions to complex problems. This may mean continuing to check in on people they know are vulnerable or arranging so service providers can come to The Gathering Place to meet someone in a Yarning Room, a safe place to talk: *'a gathering place in our mob is like a healing place.'*

Listening, reflecting, healing, and understanding are key to this place-based work. Anyone in The Gathering Place acting in a way that is damaging to others present is taken aside for a cuppa to have a chance to reset or perhaps reflect on how their behaviour affects others. Likewise, the same is true for someone who has an issue with another person's conduct – they are encouraged to reflect on what might have brought that person to act in that way, on that day and listen to their story (if appropriate), *'Give them a coffee and something to eat. Anybody's going to start thinking better.'*

The complex and agile work of The Gathering Place relies on the work of volunteers. Before the pandemic this involved around twenty people who worked in different roles across the centre such as front desk, administration, and in the food bank, providing job training leading to building confidence, skills and ultimately paid employment:

*We bring people in as volunteers, but they're treated as a person with a job. Now I can tell you I've 100% success rate with people applying for jobs and then using me as a reference.*

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of volunteers has been reduced to a core of four people due to restrictions with funding.

## Closed Doors – Incompatibility with government

The Gathering Place's place-based open door approach constantly comes up against the 'closed doors' of bureaucratic systems that do not allow for the flexibility that The Gathering Place's approach requires:

*we do it totally different. They didn't know how to categorise it.*

The issues and impacts that The Gathering Place deals with on an everyday basis are beyond one government department and need a whole-of-government response to address community issues: In one day, 'You just ticked how many boxes?'

### Key opportunities for improvement

**Table 6:** Key opportunities to improve government's support for The Gathering Place, Morwell

<p><b>More secure funding:</b></p>	<p>In terms of resourcing, The Gathering Place does not have on-going funding and relies on grants from government that often only last for 6 months at a time. This makes long-term planning almost impossible:</p> <p><i>how can I plan? How can I plan for The Gathering Place if I don't have five years funding?</i></p>
<p><b>More flexible funding:</b></p>	<p>One of the issues with meeting government funding criteria is that The Gathering Place prioritises the needs that emerge within their community so cannot necessarily determine that ahead of time. They need flexibility in funding to be able to do this agile, responsive work. The Gathering Place:</p> <p><i>offers what the people need. So you don't make it up. The government doesn't make it up.</i></p>
<p><b>More consistent government contacts:</b></p>	<p>Relationships, accountability and trust are key to the ethos of The Gathering Place. However, constant changes in the structure and staffing of the government departments The Gathering Place works with impact both the ability to build strong relationships, and mean it is difficult for government to build knowledge about the initiative and the complexities of the community they work with:</p> <p><i>they don't introduce you to the next person that's taking over so then it leaves a gap. So then you're like, Okay, so we're back to square one again.</i></p>
<p><b>Cross-portfolio approach:</b></p>	<p>The requirement to show government departments and funding bodies that there is a community need evidenced through particular measures and statistics sits uncomfortably with the holistic and responsive approach of The Gathering Place. Much of the work that The Gathering Place does, does not fit neatly into reporting categories and rigid funding:</p> <p><i>When you look at what The Gathering Place does. It does the things on the ground. Now the government says 'can you write that up?' Yeah, I can give you [that] but we don't go on numbers...</i></p>

## Evaluating The Gathering Place

The Gathering Place has recently undergone an evaluation process with Koorreen Enterprises, the results of which are still in the process of being distributed back to the community. The Gathering Place hopes the findings of this evaluation will illustrate to government the complexity and importance of the place-based, strengths-based work they do and the importance of secure and ongoing funding so they can action their ideas and share learnings with others:

*you've got to dare to throw the first stone. And in our mob, you know, when you throw it you never know where the ripples end up. But you've got to dare to throw the stone first.*

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### How can the Victorian Government better support First Nations-led place-based initiatives?<sup>37</sup>

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- Follow the recommendations of policy frameworks such as the Victorian Government Self-Determination Reform Framework (2019) to inform place-based work with First Nations-led PBAs, including focusing work on the identified enablers of self-determination
    1. Prioritise culture
    2. Address trauma and support healing
    3. Address racism and promote cultural safety
    4. Transfer power and resources to communities
  - Recognise that as with all place-based, community-led work, First Nations-led approaches will differ depending on histories and geographies of place, and be agile to meet changing circumstances
  - Challenge damaging deficit narratives and support strengths-based approaches that privilege the voices and expertise of First Nations people
  - Support funding arrangements that allow First Nations-led initiatives to be autonomous and make decisions about the best and most effective way to support and meet the needs of their community
  - Identify and reform systems that disadvantage First Nations communities and First Nations-led place-based initiatives
  - Ensure future work recognises and builds upon the long history and legacy of First Nations-led work
  - Support First Nations governance and sovereignty of data and information about First Nations communities
  - Resource holistic, culturally-centred approaches to disadvantage that address trauma and support healing.
- 

<sup>37</sup> While the Victorian government is already in a process of reflecting on and changing ways of working with First Nations communities under a new framework of Treaty, there are some specific areas which have been identified by people we spoke to while doing this work. As stated above, there is no one way of working with any community and these are general approaches.

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## Key findings from the case studies

Each case study provides insights into what is working and not working well for PBAs as they act to affect change in their communities. Each demonstrates many of the principles and conditions required for success in PBAs, for example:

- Adopting a strengths-based approach;
- A focus on equity;
- Effective leadership and governance models;
- A commitment to listen to and work in genuine partnership with communities;
- Long-term flexible funding and resourcing to improve capacity strengthening;
- Well resourced, designed and rigorous monitoring, evaluation and learning processes.

Most initiatives operate on limited budgets and with a small number of staff which is all the more impressive when documenting their successes and agility over time. This also raises many challenges to grow and expand the work of these PBAs which require more certainty around government funding for long-term planning and appropriate and learning-based evaluation processes. Those involved in implementing PBAs are deeply embedded in their communities and have strong relationships with diverse stakeholders. These relationships and opportunities for deep listening and hearing are of real value to government decision-makers.

There are clear calls from many of the initiatives for more certainty from government around an ongoing commitment to support and resource their work and most importantly to listen to what their communities are saying and better respond to their needs. Without this commitment and support from government, the capacity of PBAs to address inequities in their communities is limited. There is also a need for government to commit to improving methods of power-sharing through effective partnerships with local initiatives, coordination around decision-making across government and through joining the dots across policy and existing government initiatives in a region.

Evaluating and measuring the outcomes and impacts of PBAs involve diverse methods and metrics. This is a key challenge for PBAs who often have insufficient resources to do ongoing evaluation, have limited access to data or are constrained by narrow measures of success from governments and funding bodies. These enabling conditions around deep listening, adequate and flexible resourcing, effective partnerships and evaluation frameworks are necessary to support the success of PBAs. PBAs have a key role to play in shaping systemic change but require whole-of-government support to address the complex and intersecting challenges they face in their communities.

The following captures some of the dominant themes and issues from practice highlighting what is working and what needs improving across place-based approaches in Victoria.

## Adequate, ongoing and flexible funding

Across the case studies a common theme was the importance of long-term, flexible, and appropriate resourcing to allow initiatives to consolidate their activities, relationships, and processes past initial establishment phases. Evidence indicates that many PBAs struggle when they do not effectively address sustainability (see Part 1).

Precarity of short-term funding cycles, or insecure funding affected all case study initiatives highlighted in this research. This uncertainty around funding creates a significant mismatch with the long-term commitment required to address complex causes of disadvantage as is highlighted by **The Gathering Place**. This was also felt in **Go Goldfields**, which seeks to address community-wide challenges but is constrained by short-term funding tied to the ability to show 'impact' over a short 2-3 year time frame.

Another consideration is the departmental responsibility for funding PBAs when the community issues they address span multiple government department portfolios (as is illustrated by **The Gathering Place** and **Go Goldfields**). This is partially addressed in **Go Goldfields** through participation by other relevant (non-funding) government departments in the work of the PBA in ways such as providing in-kind support i.e. sitting on the Leadership Table, and in playing an active role co-ordinating services across government.

In contrast, appropriate resourcing allowed the **LVA** to establish the foundations for their work, attract experienced and qualified staff to build their team and embed critical data collection and evaluation processes. Initial funding also gave the **LVA** the

ability to 'be creative' in their work, to work in agile ways that allowed them to quickly build trusting and effective relationships between different sectors of the community and government. This was essential for their success in implementing change at the community level.

The importance of 'flexible' funding is also illustrated in the case of **Lighthouse** who received state government funding that was not contingent on pre-defined outcomes and/or outputs defined by government. This has meant that **Lighthouse** have been able to set goals prioritised by its community, and are able to work toward meeting outcomes aligned with their community's strengths and capabilities.

## Trusted and effective relationships

Fostering and nurturing ongoing relationships within communities, and between government and communities, is essential for place-based work. The importance of robust relationships was highlighted across two domains; initiatives' relationships with government, and initiatives' relationships with communities.

### Relationships with government

Effective relationships with government departments and agencies are essential in enabling PBAs to achieve their goals. The willingness and a commitment from government to work in tailored and flexible ways to build these relationships was a common requirement across all case studies. This readiness from government to work in partnership reflects the longer-term vision required to support PBAs. Developing effective governance processes to ensure consistency and certainty around government's relationship with PBAs is important. PBAs can provide a very important space through which relationships of trust can be built between government decision-makers and community members.

Changes in government bureaucracies and staffing can disrupt these processes of relationship building which are often conditions of success for PBAs. This was emphasised by all case studies. Turnover of staff can also lead to the loss of institutional knowledge both within PBAs and within government. Considering the unique and ongoing nature of place-based work, it is important that this context specific institutional knowledge informs decision-making. Understanding this context and developing processes to share this knowledge over time as staff change is important. This helps to avoid reinventing the wheel as new personnel come on board. This highlights the importance of developing a culture of learning, monitoring and evaluation which, if well designed, can record valuable knowledge about change processes over time. Changes to staffing and personnel does not

have to mean a loss of institutional knowledge if effective knowledge sharing and capacity building processes are established early.

### Relationships with community

Collaborative work begins with building community trust through deep listening and learning, then demonstrating the capacity to act on that learning. For the **LVA**, acting on learning was a key way in which relationships with the Gippsland community were forged. Acting on local priorities quickly was critical to overcoming or navigating any apprehension or mistrust that some community members felt towards government.

In **Flemington Works**, strong relationships with local communities developed through effective co-design processes, allowed agile and innovative work to come together quickly to meet urgent needs. Their creative and quick response to the Covid-19 lockdowns through facilitating the establishment of a catering enterprise that could deliver culturally appropriate food by locals to locals is testament to this. For **Lighthouse** leveraging strong relationships with philanthropic funders, local businesses, service clubs, and individuals is essential to their ongoing work in securing funding, and in delivering its programs supported by a strong volunteer base.

Listening to lived experience is essential for policy makers and can ensure the most efficient use of government funding, and design of service systems that are responsive to community needs and priorities. This is clearly illustrated by **The Gathering Place** where culturally appropriate solutions to local complexity are best delivered in partnership with those who know the community.

## From place-based to systems change

Across the case studies it is evident that initiatives have a detailed understanding of the complex and intersecting nature of the issues they seek to address. There is recognition that in order to address complex challenges around improving employment or early learning outcomes for example, multi-level and coordinated responses are needed. This requires a systems lens and a whole-of-government approach to policy and decision-making. While many place-based approaches are shifting their thinking towards systems change, they are constrained without the necessary support from government and other key stakeholders.

A key challenge is how PBAs navigate their role in a systems change process which varied across each initiative. The **LVA**, as a government office, is well situated to pursue systems change and indeed its establishment reflects a change in the way in which government engages in working in place. With **Lighthouse**, in recognising the complexity of issues faced by residents in their region, there has been a call for better policy alignment, to ensure that federal and state policy that impact locals supports the work of the initiative.

This is also reflected in **Go Goldfields** where traditional government funding models limit opportunities for innovative and collaborative decision-making. Government agencies and departments directly involved with **Go Goldfields** also recognise these challenges such as the mismatch between centralised decision-making and the need to prioritise and include local expertise and lived experience. This highlights the need for new innovative funding and program planning approaches that work across government silos and value the expertise of community partners.

**Flemington Works** has had success in working towards local systems change in their work with Moonee Valley City Council (MVCC) around their social procurement guidelines, labour hire and recruitment practices. Changes including the simplification of position descriptions and interview processes at MVCC, and requirements for council contractors to meet minimum social procurement levels aim to make the systems that structure local employment more accessible for participants and others in the community often excluded from economic participation.

Across many collective impact initiatives, there is a shift towards focusing on systems change or systems thinking. This reflects a broader movement within the field, to critically reflect on methods and practices and adapt to a systems change approach (see Part 1). Work towards systems change by case study initiatives included advocacy to ensure that federal and state policy that impact locals supports the work of the initiative, and working with partners to create change in systems like social procurement policies, labour hire and recruitment policies. Case study initiatives were also able to take a 'joined up' approach to tackling complex public policy issues, building on the long-term commitment of stakeholders from across philanthropy, communities and government. This new way of working signals the beginning of system change, and is based on the acknowledgement that no single government department, or policy intervention, can tackle the causes of inequities and disadvantage

## Evaluation, learning and measuring outcomes and impact

Monitoring, evaluation, learning and accountability (MELA) are essential processes required to understand, measure and improve on outcomes and impacts of PBAs. The selected case studies highlight a number of innovative approaches to measuring change, that is representative, captures more than indicators of disadvantage, and can speak to intersecting and complex issues. This includes gathering different metrics and stories to understand where projects are leveraging or starting to see change. Measuring success and impact is a challenging and complex task for PBAs (see Part 1).

Flexibility and agility from different stakeholders, including government, underpins innovation and progress in the area of MELA. Building the capacity and skills for ongoing learning is crucial to the success of PBAs. If the true value and impact of PBAs are to be captured and learned from, then more time and resources are required to support this work. This support would ensure that appropriate data for evaluation and decision-making exists, is collected and, can be accessed and analysed in timely, safe ways to support long-term place-based outcomes, something which requires commitment from government partners who may hold useful data.

## Beyond the 'problem to fix' narrative

Countering narratives about place that focus on 'problems to fix' was a common theme across all case studies. Narratives of disadvantage and deficit can stigmatise the places and communities in which they work. Listening to and drawing on the voices and lived experience of community members focuses attention on the strengths, desires and opportunities within a community and is key to empowerment and power-sharing. The **LVA** uses a strength-based opportunity focused lens to change the narrative around the economic future of the Gippsland region. Rather than depicting the region as 'a problem to fix', this works instead tells a story of a dynamic and innovative region where change is future-focused. Challenging this narrative to focus on strengths has been important in gaining trust and support for locals.

For **Lighthouse**, identifying and drawing upon community strengths, (including social capital, local expertise and local resources) has been essential for their work and has allowed them to create appropriate solutions to context specific issues. Much of their work is supported by committed local volunteers, invested in community strengthening and in challenging narratives of disadvantage and lack of local opportunity.

## Learning from First Nations experiences

While the term 'place-based' may not always be used within First Nations-led, community run spaces, the ways of working and engaging with local communities in these spaces often involve similar principles and practices. For example, a key part of First Nations-led place-based work is rejecting damaging deficit narratives and adopting strengths-based approaches that privilege the voices and expertise of First Nations people. First Nations place-based and strengths-based approaches work to create safe and supportive spaces for Aboriginal people to meet up and access services in ways that are culturally appropriate, and advocate for recognition of First Nations lived experience and rights. As with all place-based, community-led work, First Nations-led approaches will differ depending on histories and geographies of place, as well as shifting to meet changing circumstances.

Aboriginal people in Victoria have long fought for self-determination – the right to make decisions about their own lives. Self-determination 'encompasses a spectrum of rights that are necessary for Aboriginal Victorians to achieve economic, social and cultural equity, based on their own values and way of life', and is an important aspect of place-based work. In the context of Treaty and Yoo-rrook truth-telling, the Victorian government is guided by several recent policy frameworks, such as the Self-determination Reform Framework, developed to address systemic racism and engage respectfully with First Nations communities.

Enabling self-determination includes funding arrangements that allow First Nations-led initiatives to be autonomous and make decisions about the best and most effective way to support and meet the needs of their community. Self-determination is also a matter of appropriate, flexible, long-term funding for First Nations-led initiatives to enable the transfer of power and resources back to community. This shift in power enables First Nations-led initiatives the ability to respond to and plan for their communities needs enabling them to lead rather than fit to short-term funding agendas that may be culturally inappropriate or limited.

First Nations-led data collection, management, and interpretation is critical to informing evidenced-based decision-making, and achieving place-based successes. Collecting and reporting data about First Nations communities in a way that is culturally safe, community owned, and allowing for data sovereignty, is an essential and growing part of First Nations-led place-based work. In Victoria, the Kaiela Institute has established the Algabonyah Data and Research Unit to ensure governance and sovereignty over data is kept with local First Nations communities. Evaluation of initiatives also needs to be done in a way that recognises and represents the complexities of cultural ways of working.

## Working and learning together in place

This exploration of practice through these five case studies has reinforced many of the findings and evidence from the literature (see Part 1).

There is no 'one-size-fits all' approach to working in and with communities. While these case studies offer some insights, further work is needed to deepen our understanding of the diversity of practices across PBAs and the range of conditions that enable success. This understanding will improve how government, funders and other stakeholders can support these initiatives and most importantly work to address the systemic challenges they face and seek to change. This requires a commitment to developing trusted relationships, deep listening and partnerships with communities.

Creating spaces where communities can drive change around the issues most important to them is at the heart of what a place-based approach is about. PBAs are characteristically 'bottom-up' and must be led by communities themselves. They must be provided with the necessary resourcing and capacity strengthening to help them to flourish.

Government is presented with a range of key challenges and opportunities in changing the way it works with communities. Developing ongoing flexible funding models and improving policy alignment and coordination to address inequities and community needs were highlighted. Valuing and building on the deep and trusted relationships that PBAs establish and drawing on those community voices and leaders to inform decision-making was also a key message from practice.

Creating more opportunities to learn from each other and across sectors is essential to improve practice and decision-making going forward to avoid 'endemic policy forgetfulness' (see Part 1). Cross-sectoral learning is critical with regard to the present disconnect between the movement of community-led climate change initiatives and other social issue focused PBAs. Overall, the promise and impact of PBAs relies on the ongoing commitment from different levels of government, and a range of other stakeholders and a culture of continuous learning with communities.

There is enormous potential to support and learn from the innovative work of PBAs to inform policy decisions and system change to address inequities and build a more just and resilient future in light of key challenges like Covid-19, energy transitions and climate change.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1. Principles, conditions, practices

**Table 7:** Principles, conditions and practices of place-based approaches

Guiding principles (Commit to...)	Enabling conditions (Government plays a leading role)	Effective practice (PB Initiatives/Funders/Community Leaders play a leading role)
<b>Place &amp; People</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commitment to take the time &amp; resources needed to listen &amp; learn from diverse voices and experiences to inform &amp; guide PBAs</li> <li>• Community readiness &amp; support for shared vision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communities empowered to tell histories, desires, lived experiences to build, shape PBA</li> <li>• Deep listening, deep hearing of diverse place experiences as ongoing practice</li> </ul>
<b>Self-determination</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whole-of-government commitment to self-determination principles</li> <li>• Proper resources for ongoing 'truth-telling'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledge First Nations Country &amp; work in partnership with Traditional Owners &amp; First Nations communities</li> <li>• Embed culturally appropriate practice (in PBA &amp; with partners)</li> <li>• Governance structures, co-design &amp; co-production with First Nations and Traditional Owners</li> </ul>
<b>Strengths-based approach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commitment by all involved to strengths-based approach (shared understanding)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communities self-identify strengths, assets, desires (using co-design methods)</li> <li>• Diverse community voices &amp; lived experience informs ongoing practice</li> <li>• Data on strengths &amp; assets inform Monitoring Evaluation Learning and Accountability (MELA) processes.</li> </ul>
<b>Equity &amp; social justice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared commitment across govt &amp; service providers to address inequities &amp; injustice</li> <li>• Trust between organisations &amp; communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop inclusive decision-making &amp; governance structures in PBA design</li> <li>• Identify structural &amp; systemic barriers to equitable outcomes (local &amp; diverse experiences) &amp; align policies &amp; services to address</li> <li>• MELA tools to capture equity-focused work &amp; outcomes</li> </ul>

<b>Guiding principles (Commit to...)</b>	<b>Enabling conditions (Government plays a leading role)</b>	<b>Effective practice (PB Initiatives/Funders/Community Leaders play a leading role)</b>
<b>Theory of change</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theory of Change (ToC) grounded in socio-ecological frameworks &amp; systems lens</li> <li>• Whole-of-government approach informed by Social Determinants of Health &amp; ecological resilience thinking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop ToC in collaboration with community, reflect their priorities</li> <li>• Revisit ToC, continuous cycle of learning &amp; sharing knowledge</li> <li>• M&amp;E grounded in ToC (immediate, intermediate &amp; long-term outcomes, track assumptions)</li> <li>• Integrate &amp; align policies, strategies, approaches to address SDOH, community resilience to ongoing shocks &amp; stressors</li> <li>• Strengthen links between community-based initiatives</li> </ul>
<b>Long-term commitment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bi-partisan, long-term commitment to PB change</li> <li>• Governance structures-long-term resourcing &amp; policy commitment to address place inequities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish Federal, State &amp; Local govt leadership &amp; coordination mechanisms</li> <li>• Fund place leadership in &amp; with places</li> <li>• Promote &amp; invest in long-term intergenerational leadership &amp; capacity building through training &amp; resourcing</li> </ul>
<b>Effective governance &amp; leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diverse, inclusive governance (shared power &amp; decision-making), across govt, stakeholders &amp; community</li> <li>• 'Place readiness', strong leadership/ existing networks</li> <li>• Flexible, sustainable funding, resourcing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multi-level government &amp; agency change strategies informed by PB principles</li> <li>• Reform managerial approaches focused on program management &amp; 'client-oriented' service delivery</li> <li>• Focus on cultivating relationships/partnerships (through consistent points of contact) &amp; networks &amp; build on those existing</li> </ul>
<b>Monitoring, evaluation, learning, accountability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adequate expertise &amp; resources dedicated to MELA</li> <li>• Recognition and inclusion of diverse types of data to inform MELA</li> <li>• Embed MELA from the beginning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture of shared learning, ongoing engagement, power-sharing</li> <li>• Evaluation – regular data collection, evidence &amp; community knowledge using mixed methods approaches</li> <li>• Data sovereignty &amp; strengths-based lens/ principles of First Nations</li> <li>• Risk-averse to 'failing forward' culture - 'failures' into opportunities for learning</li> </ul>

## Appendix 2. Long established PBAs in Australia

### Burnie Works, Burnie TAS

Burnie Works is a collective impact, place-based initiative that focuses on the areas of education, employment, justice, children and youth, families and wellbeing in the regional town of Burnie, Tasmania. Since 2019 Burnie Works is funded through Stronger Places, Stronger People implemented through the Australian government Department of Social Services, in partnership with the Tasmanian Government. Situated on the North West coast of Tasmania. Burnie has a long history as an industrial city and is going through long-term change. The area has a history of long-term unemployment despite a high job-vacancy rate. Burnie Works aims to address this complex problem by focusing on multiple area and social issues that can contribute this situation.<sup>38</sup>

Burnie Works comprises 5 working groups; BIG (employment and industry collaborative), the Employment partnership Group, Every Day Counts (intensive education program, Dream Big (Grade 5 work exposure program), and the Local Drug and Alcohol Team.

Programs include:

- Finding VET students in their final stages of their degree placements with local businesses
- 'Social recovery' workshops and programs during the Covid-19 pandemic to support local families during this time. Engaging with local artists and creatives in art competitions and workshops
- Cultural awareness workshops in conjunction with the Tasmanian Aboriginal Council.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> <https://burnieworks.com.au/what-is-burnie-works/>

<sup>39</sup> <https://burnieworks.com.au/what-is-burnie-works/>

## Maranguka Justice Reinvestment, Bourke, NSW

*'Growing our kids up Safe, Smart and Strong'*

Established in 2013 Maranguka Justice Reinvestment is a place-based, collective impact initiative based in Bourke NSW and is the first initiative to use the Justice Reinvestment model in Australia. Bourke is located in remote northwest NSW and is home to around 2,500 people, one third of which are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. The median age for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is very young (25) with 33.7% of the population aged 0-14 years.<sup>40</sup> Maranguka justice reinvestment emerged in response to concern in the community around the level of youth offending, social disadvantage, the complex and confusing landscape of program delivering services into Bourke, and the short-term nature of the funding of these programs. Despite large amounts of money and services being directed to Bourke, these problems were persistent, indicating the need for a new way of doing things, beyond the existing service delivery model. Maranguka, meaning 'caring for others' in the Ngemba language, is a model of 'Indigenous self-governance which empowers community to coordinate the right mix and timing of services through an Aboriginal community owned and led, multi-disciplinary team working in partnership with relevant government and non-government agencies'.<sup>41</sup>

On the ground Maranguka is run by a backbone team, which facilitate a range of initiatives including housing and support for vulnerable youth, a driver's licence program, and a Warrants clinic, as well as developing a number of Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) including an MOU with the Bourke Local Area Command for breach of bail.<sup>42</sup> A key part of the governance structure of Maranguka is the Bourke Tribal Council, a group of representatives from the different Tribes and families that make up the community of Bourke, who work together to identify issues facing the community and develop strategies and goals for the initiative.<sup>43</sup>

In 2018 a KPMG Impact assessment of Maranguka identified the following improvements

- **Family strength:** 23% reduction in police recorded incidence of domestic violence and comparable drops in rates of re-offending
- **Youth development:** 31% increase in year 12 student retention rates and a 38% reduction in charges across the top five juvenile offence categories
- **Adult empowerment:** 14% reduction in bail breaches and a 42% reduction in days spent in custody.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.justreinvest.org.au/justice-reinvestment-in-bourke/>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.justreinvest.org.au/justice-reinvestment-in-bourke/>

<sup>42</sup> KPMG (2016) *Unlocking the future: Maranguka Justice Reinvestment Project in Bourke: Preliminary assessment.*

<sup>43</sup> <https://maranguka.org.au/about-us/bourke-tribal-council/>

<sup>44</sup> KPMG (2018) *Maranguka Justice Reinvestment Project impact assessment.*

## The Hive (and Together in Willmot), Mt Druiitt, NSW

Established in 2014 and located on Darug land in Mt Druiitt, Sydney, The Hive is a place-based, collective impact initiative focusing on the health and wellbeing of children and families in the 12 suburbs that share the 2770 postcode. The Hive believes that a postcode should not determine a child's opportunity or success in life, and is based on the vision that all children in Mt Druiitt should have the same opportunity to start school well, to learn, be healthy, and 'participate in a quality community life'.<sup>45</sup> In working towards this vision, The Hive run a range of on the ground projects, and community initiatives, as well as play an advocacy and leadership role in the Mt Druiitt community. The Hive is the backbone team for the broader Together in Willmot/Together in 2770 collaboration (established 2016), which is comprised of local service providers, community members, government agencies, and businesses in Willmot NSW.<sup>46</sup>

While 100s of organisations deliver services for early years and children in the Mt Druiitt area, developmental and educational outcomes from kids in the area are still below average. The Hive understand that just putting more money or services into the area is not simply the answer; tailored coordination, and collaboration with the local community to understand what is needed and to direct the best ways to achieve this is needed.

Activities and programs at The Hive include:

- Tuesday breakfast
- School holiday program
- Clean-up days
- Community Conversations
- Volunteering, traineeships, and employment opportunities
- Suburb Welcome Kits
- Casework
- Willmot Community Kitchen
- Systemic advocacy

Systematic change is a key focus on The Hive/Together in Willmot who undertake systemic advocacy, including 'lobbying and advocating to local and state government, building relationships with key agencies, changing the way services approach their work, and through broader movement building activities, like hosting ChangeFest<sup>47</sup> in 2019'.<sup>48</sup>

Evaluation of the collaboration reported system-level changes including 'shifts in the practice of service providers and service referrals processes; changes in how resources are being shared and deployed between organisations, and attracting investment; advocacy and policy changes [...] and advocacy with state government'.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> <https://thehivemtduitt.com.au/about-the-hive/>

<sup>46</sup> The collaboration involves a core group services, including The Hive (United Way Australia), Jesuit Social Services, Baptist Care Hope Street, Willmot Public School, Child, Salvation Army, and Connect Child and Family Services as well as Willmot community members.

<sup>47</sup> ChangeFest is a national conference of place-based initiatives and collective impact stakeholders.

<sup>48</sup> Clear Horizon. (2020). *Together in Willmot evaluation report*. Prepared for United Way & Jesuit Social Services.

<sup>49</sup> Clear Horizon. (2020). *Together in Willmot evaluation report*. Prepared for United Way & Jesuit Social Services.

## Logan Together, Logan, QLD

Logan Together is a collective impact initiative in Logan Queensland that aims to reduce the number of developmentally vulnerable children in the area through a series of early years projects to ensure every child in Logan can thrive. Located between Brisbane, and the Gold Coast, Logan is home to a diverse community of around 310,000 people and is one of Australia's fastest growing regions. Logan residents come from over 215 different cultural background, and Logan has a notable Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander community. Around 50% of Logan's population are under 30.<sup>50</sup> Logan also faces a range of social disadvantage. As such a young community, this impacts Logan's children, with children in the area more developmentally vulnerable than their peers throughout the state and country. Bringing together over 1,000 people and 100 organisations, Logan together uses a place-based collective impact model to develop and deliver programs that help children reach developmental milestones, and thrive.<sup>51</sup>

The backbone team that oversees Logan Together is situated within Griffith University and work with the Logan Together leadership table, Logan Together action group, and government partners to deliver a range of programs. Logan Together programs focus on ensuring children have a great start to life and including accessing and entering quality early years education.

While Logan Together remains a young initiative, and population level changes have not yet been tracked a number of achievements are highlighted in a 2019 progress report;

1. Logan Together has continued to keep a strong focus on early childhood development and intervention.
2. Delivery of 50 projects across all Roadmap domains for 0-8 year olds.
3. Logan Children's Charter and Child Friendly Toolkit was developed, in partnership with The Salvation Army, Communities for Children and Logan City Council.
4. Refresh of collective governance arrangements, including establishment of new auspicing entity and co-leadership with Warril Yari-Go Karulbo.
5. A key pivot has been addressing First Nations equity and inclusion in the Movement.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Logan Together. (2021). *Logan Together annual report 2020 - 2021*.

<sup>51</sup> Ten20. (2019). *Funding community-led, place-based practice in Australia*.

<sup>52</sup> Logan Together. (2019). *Logan Together progress report 2019*.

## Hands Up Mallee, Mildura, VIC

Established in 2016 Hands Up Mallee (HUM) is a collective impact approach focused on improving health and wellbeing outcomes for children, young people and their families in the Northern Mallee region. Hands Up Mallee works in partnership with the community, local service providers, agencies and takes a place-based approach to solutions for local issues.<sup>53</sup>

To understand community needs and priorities for action, Hands Up Mallee undertook over 1600 conversations with community members over the 2016-17 period. This informs HUMs work and helps to establish their aim of creating a *connected community, where families matter and children thrive*. Informed by community priorities, HUM currently has a 'preventative focus' and specifically works with 0-25 years in the community to ensure everyone has the best start in life and that the voice of young people is reflected in decision-making.<sup>54</sup>

Hands Up Mallee has a Backbone organisation with staff to coordinate and align the efforts of all participants. The Hands Up Mallee Backbone is a team of staff from the Northern Mallee Community Partnership and Mildura Rural City Council.

<sup>53</sup> Hands Up Mallee. (2016). *Hands Up Mallee directions paper, 2016*.

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.dusseldorp.org.au/2020/06/29/place-based-resilience-during-covid-19-hands-up-mallee/>

