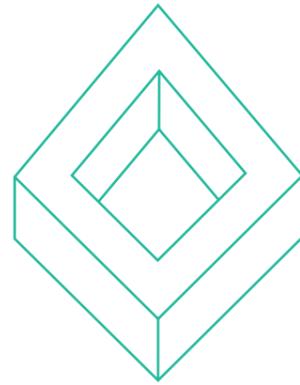


# Connected communities: Flourishing places

## 2017 IPAA QLD Forum Outcomes report



**Place-based approaches to the business of government have never been more relevant. Whether our challenge is to provide human services, protect the environment, ensure public safety, or grow the economy we know traditional, siloed approaches to policy design and service delivery are no longer working.**



Connected communities: Flourishing places, the first forum from the newly re-established IPAA Queensland, explored experiences and unpacked the potential of place-based approaches to address complex policy issues. The event brought together professionals from the public service at all levels of government, along with representatives from community organisations and leading academics. Significantly, regional colleagues participated via live stream in Rockhampton, Townsville and Cairns — bringing a lively and local flavour to the discussions, and highlighting the realities of grass roots issues facing all communities.

It was always our ambition for the 2017 IPAA Queensland Forum to be an agenda-setter for the kinds of cross-sectoral discussions we'd like to see in the future. Our job was made easy by the high calibre speakers and their knowledge, experience and insights of place-based approaches. Participants gained important lessons on what works, as well as the benefits and barriers that need to be addressed for ever-better and impactful public service.

Post forum feedback confirmed the power and potential of place-based approaches to the business of government to significantly enhance policy development, service delivery, and most importantly effective outcomes for our communities. IPAA Queensland looks forward to facilitating further conversations in this space.

The report on the 2017 Irene Longman Oration unpacks the themes and ideas explored by Ken Smith, CEO and Dean of ANZSOG, when he presented the first of the annual oration series.

I take this opportunity to gratefully acknowledge the IPAA Queensland Advisory Council and the Leadership Board, whose commitment to creating a strong IPAA Queensland, means we will grow into the state's professional association for public servants across all levels of government as well as academics, industry and community organisations.

**Robert Setter**  
Commission Chief Executive  
Public Service Commission



9.00 – 9.05am **Welcome**  
**Martin Stewart-Weeks**, Public Purpose Pty Ltd

9.05 – 9.10am **Welcome to country**  
**Henry Thompson Jnr**

9.10 – 9.25am **IPAA and the profession of public service**  
**Robert Setter**, Queensland Public Service Commission

9.25 – 10.45am **Place matters for prosperity**  
In this session, speakers will challenge your thinking about place, exploring the tensions and complexities, approaches and challenges, to deliver sustainable solutions to the intractable policy problems facing our communities.  
**Prof Anne Tiernan**, Policy Innovation Hub, Griffith University  
**Dr Tim Reddel**, Commonwealth Department of Social Services  
**Prof Ross Homel AO**, School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Griffith

10.45 – 11.15am **Morning tea**

11.15 – 12.00pm **Let's get inspired by place based approaches in action**  
**Logan Together**  
Join Matthew Cox as he takes you on a journey of the Logan Together Initiative, a long term, whole-of-community effort to create the best life opportunities for every child in Logan.  
**Nhulunbuy, NT**  
Hear Jim Rogers share how the community of Nhulunbuy, Northern Territory, along with NT agencies, the Arnhem regional council, Traditional Owners, and Rio Tinto, overcame looming economic downturn to build a diversified and robust economy through co-owned and designed, place-based approaches.  
**Matthew Cox**, Logan Together  
**Craig Allen**, Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment, Northern Territory (presented for Jim Rogers, Northern Territory Office of the Chief Minister)



12.00 – 12.30pm **Break out discussions**  
Now it's your turn to lead the conversation!

12.30 – 1.20pm **Lunch**

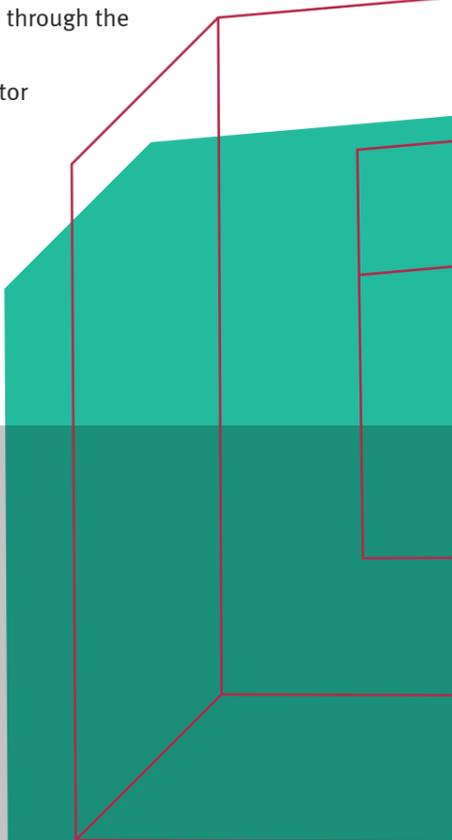
1.20 – 2.30pm **Creating the ingredients for success (panel session)**  
Join the conversation and quiz our panel members as we uncover the 'who, what, where and how' of place-based approaches to solve complex policy issues.  
Participants across all locations will join the conversation through the live Twitter feed.  
**Prof Mark Moran**, Institute for Social Science Research, University of Queensland  
**Belinda Drew**, Community Services Industry Alliance  
**Georgina Richters**, PwC's Indigenous Consulting  
**Prof Anne Tiernan**, Policy Innovation Hub, Griffith University

2.30 – 3.00pm **Break out discussions**  
Prepare to get energised!

3.00 – 3.25pm **Afternoon tea**

3.25 – 4.15pm **Leadership, craft, culture and practice (panel session)**  
Hear the diverse voices of our panel members as we explore the ability of public sectors to facilitate and participate in place-based approaches.  
Participants across all locations will join the conversation through the live Twitter feed.  
**Erma Ranieri**, South Australia, Office for the Public Sector  
**Gabrielle Borggaard**, Domestic Violence Action Centre  
**Fahim Khondaker**, BDO and MDA Ltd  
**Robert Setter**, Queensland Public Service Commission

4.15 – 4.30pm **The promise of place**  
Summary, next steps and close  
**Martin Stewart-Weeks**, Public Purpose Pty Ltd



After a five-year hiatus, the relaunch of IPAA Queensland saw more than 300 public servants, academics, service providers and community leaders in Logan, Cairns, Townsville and Rockhampton take part in a lively forum, with an outstanding line-up of experts and public service professionals.

*'The need to accommodate diversity and difference was built into our federal design. It's reflected in our constitution, our political institutions and processes but increasingly not in the way our federation works in practice.'*

Anne Tiernan, Professor in the School of Government and International Relations, Griffith University

*'Place underpins our notions of identity, civil society and democracy.'*

Tim Reddel, Group Manager of the Policy Office, Commonwealth Department of Social Services



The forum's theme, Connected communities: Flourishing places used 'place' as the springboard for discussion: what does it mean to consider place in a policy and public service context? Why is place important for tackling complex social problems? And how can considering place benefit those who share a commitment to the enduring value of a professional public sector?

Professor Anne Tiernan framed these questions by reflecting on the fact that there is nothing new about a place-based approach to public policy. Australia, and Queensland in particular, has a long history of experimentation and innovation in place-based initiatives. Why then, does there appear to be a resurgent interest in place?



*'We should create formal support systems that generate and strengthen informal support systems, that in turn reduce the need for the formal systems.'*

Ross Homel, Foundation Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Griffith University, quoting Urie Bronfenbrenner

According to Professor Tiernan, 'The demographic and spatial dynamics of policy problems, taken together with community concerns that "political elites" lack awareness and understanding of local issues, are giving rise to demands for devolution and local control.' In other words, an increasingly turbulent political and economic period, compounded by a greater urban/rural divide and diminishing trust in national politicians and policy-makers, means that people in Australia are calling for a degree of state and federal power to be relinquished and reinstated at the community level.

Dr Tim Reddel confirmed the notion that this isn't new ground for Australia. Quoting the final report of the 1944 Commonwealth Housing Commission, he noted that, even then, government opinion was that 'national policies and programs should be seen in a regional context which promoted "a rising standard of human welfare" and the participation of local people in planning for their communities'. Yet despite decades of attempts – largely at a national level – to take a place-based approach to policy and program design and implementation, the practice lacks strategic intent and so programs very often fail to combat disadvantage or garner support for further investment.

Dr Reddel stressed the importance of learning from these past attempts to consider new modes of evaluation; new, evidence-based methodologies; and, perhaps most importantly, new approaches to governance founded on a better understanding of risk, and a shared power to address it. While collaboration and co-design in place are important for achieving this, Dr Reddel noted that localism has its limits, and that strong central framing and direction are still important.

Professor Ross Homel went a step further, stressing the importance of leadership at the national level to empower communities to develop sustainable methods for combating disadvantage. But there is important work to be done at the local level as well. Professor Homel's research with the Australian Community Capacity Study – which focused on the relationship between public violence and social disadvantage in Brisbane suburbs – found very clear evidence to suggest that higher levels of social cohesion (i.e. the connections between individuals and their community) can lessen the impact of damaging social, health and economic conditions on community wellbeing. These findings provide an important example of how data, research and evidence can and must be used to develop place-based, collective-impact approaches. According to Professor Homel, a foundation in science is something currently lacking in the majority of collective impact initiatives, but after decades of learning and experimentation 'we are on the cusp [in Australia] of doing this sort of thing better than anyone else in the world'.

# Distance and scale

The differences in demographic and geographic factors between places in Australia – particularly between urban and regional/rural areas – are an ongoing source of tension in the public sector. This same tension is expressed in the division between the national and local levels. Centralised, blanket-policy approaches result in isolated delivery of social services programs, which does little to combat localised disadvantage (much as policy targeting the relative uniformity of Australia’s capital cities often bears little relevance to its regions). This was made alarmingly clear by Dr Reddel in the case of Roeburn, WA – a remote town that, despite being the target of a large number of programs reportedly achieving their goals, still suffers from systemic disadvantage.

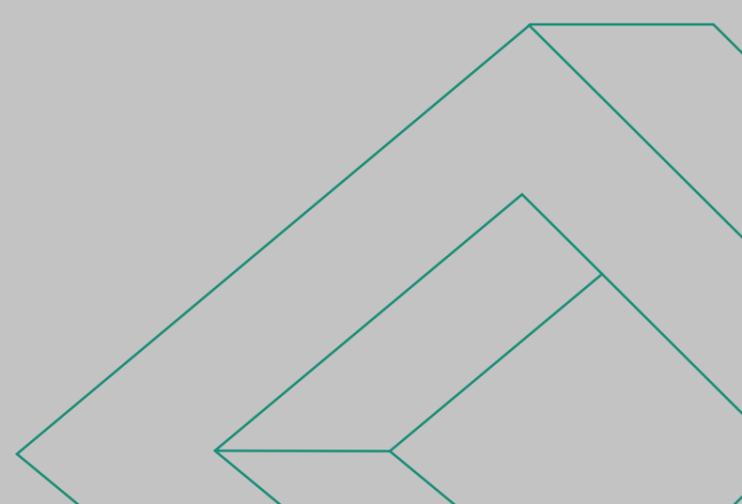
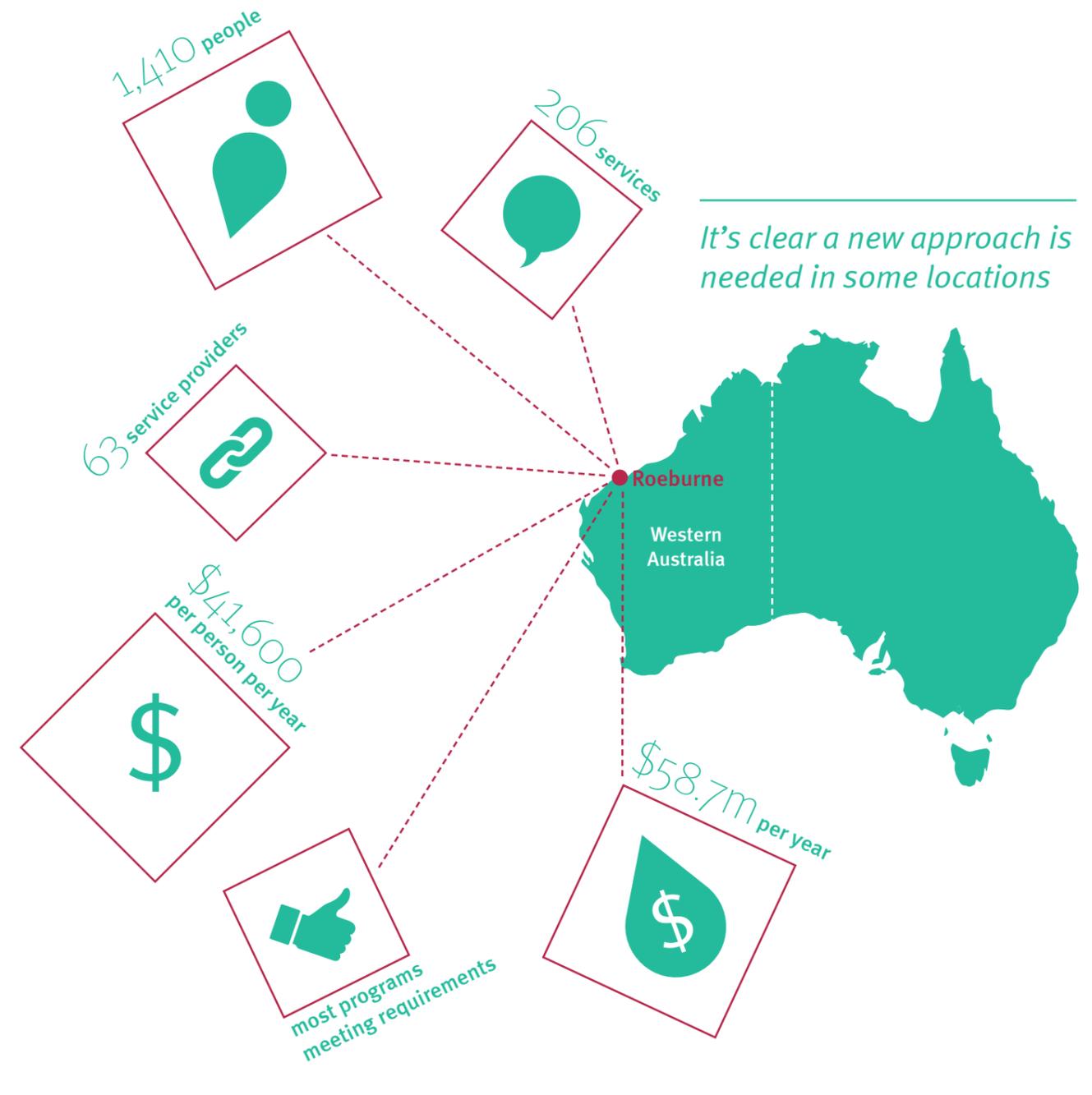
A lack of overarching and collaborative governance for services delivery in Roeburn likely plays a significant role in this. As Belinda Drew pointed out, strategic governance is too often viewed in opposition to place-based approaches. Evidence in practice suggests the opposite: Drew gave the example of her work around developing the workforce for the National Disability Insurance Scheme, where feedback from on-the-ground providers in relation to strategic efforts has been used to inform further governance and policy direction, which is in turn used to more effectively connect service providers and unblock barriers.

The reason this false dichotomy persists is because governance is based, as Professor Tieman put it, on ‘strong culture and expectation of consistency and sameness’. Successful place-based approaches require an acceptance of diversity and difference. Perhaps, too, policy-makers need to acknowledge that urban/regional and national/local tensions are inevitable; and equally that place-based approaches are premised on communities accepting they share responsibility for outcomes.

*‘It’s very important to understand who you’re dealing with, and don’t think that because you’re dealing with someone in Logan that it’s going to be the same as dealing with someone in the Torres Strait or Cape York.’*

Georgina Richters, State Director – QLD, PwC’s Indigenous Consulting

It is important to note, though, that ‘regions’ cannot be generically taken as place-targets for policy. Georgina Richters drew attention to the fact that accepting and working with diversity and difference requires proper community engagement, and an understanding of the differences in people. Expressing a level of worth for the culture of a particular place is essential for effective community development.



# Case study: Logan Together

## The issue

In the Logan LGA, the number of children with developmental vulnerabilities is 14,000 or 32%, which is 6% higher than the Queensland state average. The problem, as Matthew Cox illustrated, is that there is very little strategic framework for social investment. This stems from a flaw in policy design that focuses on small numbers of kids in certain areas with particular issues. Instead of identifying individual issues and adding to the 140+ social investment programs already operating in Logan, Logan Together started with a question: 'How do we help children thrive and reach adulthood in great shape?'

## The plan

Logan Together is attempting to deliver a strategic framework to answer this question. Cox stressed the importance of data and evidence in taking a population-level approach. The framework for Logan Together was built on acquiring as much information as possible to give a comprehensive picture of disadvantage and wellbeing for kids and families in the Logan LGA geographic area. Once areas of developmental vulnerability were identified, an estimate of the number of Logan children this applied to was taken and a gap figure (when compared to the Queensland average) was calculated to set a clear target for the next ten years. For most areas of vulnerability, Cox said, closing the gap comes down to making a difference for less than 1,000 kids.

## Who was involved?

To deliver this strategy, Logan Together is engaging with government at all levels, tertiary education institutions, private and NGO funding and community partners, existing local service delivers and, most importantly with community members. Community consultation and co-design occurs at all levels of the Logan Together operating model – from senior governance to community boards to project implementation.

## What now?

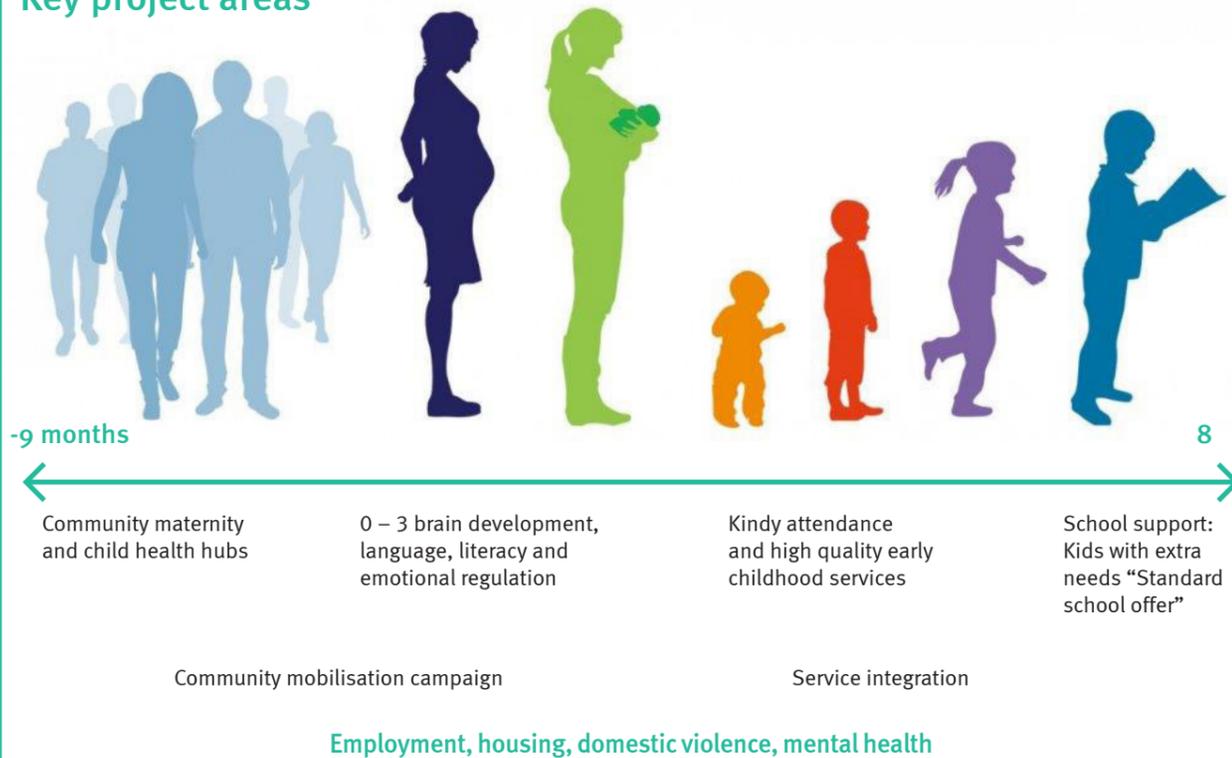
Logan Together is a longitudinal project; it aims to close the gap in developmental milestones for Logan children by 2025. Cox believes it will work, but there is still a level of institutional reticence to overcome – particularly within and across governments. Given that Logan is home to 7% of the Queensland population, if Logan Together can achieve its goals it will make a significant impact to the state (and even country) more broadly. Perhaps most importantly, as Cox identified, the concept is scalable – similar initiatives could work in towns and cities across Australia.

*'We know what to do, we know what healthy childhood development looks like at each age and stage and the sorts of things that support that. It's not a knowing problem, it's a doing problem.'*

Matthew Cox, Director, Logan Together



## Key project areas



## Policy problem

The town of Nhulunbuy in the Northern Territory was purpose-built as a mining town in the 1960s and early 1970s, centring on a bauxite mine and its associated refinery. Four years ago, the decision was made to close down the refinery, which employed 1,350 people in a town of ~4,000. As Craig Allen illustrated, the resulting population drop was clearly going to be a significant threat to the local and state economy and the longevity of the town itself.



## The plan

Local and state government recognised the importance of preventing the fourth-largest community in the Northern Territory from collapsing. The response was to establish an on-the-ground transition team, and to provide immediate support to the community and local businesses. This meant ensuring public servants and services such as teachers and schools continued to run after the population drop (an act of government faith in the community); it also meant engaging private companies to ensure essential institutions for small towns such as banks and supermarkets wouldn't disappear. This on-the-ground response was complemented by an executive team in Darwin, whose function was to clear barriers and align funding for the community development initiatives. Allen stressed the importance of this dynamic for any place-based approach: that executive groups have no role in decision-making, but instead act as enablers and provide focus. Medium- and long-term goals for Nhulunbuy revolved around stabilising the community and the economy, diversifying industries and social investment, and developing new infrastructure.

## Who was involved?

As with Logan Together, Nhulunbuy was a whole-of-community project, engaging NGOs, Traditional Owners, Indigenous councils and local Rio Tinto representatives, as well as various levels of government.

## What now?

In 2013, the population estimate for Nhulunbuy after the refinery closed was 1,200–1,500. In 2017, the actual population was 2,800 (and is now estimated to grow to 3,300). The stabilisation and growth that occurred was a direct result of the transition plan. This has also resulted in greater community and business diversity (more even ratio of Indigenous to non-Indigenous residents), a 20% increase gross regional product over three years, a 200% increase in tourism, improved government services, and better engagement with Indigenous labour and skills development. At this point, Allen stated, the project is not sustainable – it still relies heavily on government intervention and expenditure. But the framework has been set for a shift, and other mining towns facing a similar future will use Nhulunbuy as a starting point for engagement planning, design and response.

*'It's about Nhulunbuy, but it can be about any single industry town in Australia.'*

Craig Allen, Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment, Northern Territory



Logan Together and Nhulunbuy are examples of collective impact in practice. One of the defining factors for both is an acceptance that success needs to be measured at the community level, as improved population outcomes and reduced disadvantage over time. The program-focused 'public administration modality', in the words of Professor Mark Moran, instead uses individual program delivery and implementation as measurements of success. This is not to say that these programs cannot achieve positive outcomes on their own; but it has become increasingly clear that effectively combating disadvantage requires an outcomes approach that looks beyond program goals to assess wider community change and impact. Belinda Drew pointed out that currently, 'even as we try to talk about an outcomes approach, we continually revert to our program obsession'.

One of the key ingredients for the success of a place-based approach – identified by Dr Reddel and confirmed throughout the forum – is a cultural shift within the public sector. Teasing out contentions around standards of evidence is crucial to this. For collective impact approaches, which can have broad aggregate measures of success, it can be difficult to identify the precise cause of an outcome in any given case. As Professor Moran put it, such an approach may see more students attending high school, but the reasons for this may vary between students and schools. According to Professor Moran, contemporary public services modalities view this as having an insubstantial evidence base, as it lacks an isolated measure of success. In the case of Logan Together, if all of the 5,000 disadvantaged children aren't reaching the clear health and education milestones necessary to close the gap, then the project is failing. It's a simple outcome that involves complex systems of service delivery and community collaboration, and the reasons for success will often vary between cases – something that doesn't align with the current desire for universal standards.

*'We've got a real problem with standards of evidence in the way programs are determined. Aggregate measures of outcomes are important; the problem is the public administration modalities that come in and don't know how to deal with each other.'*

Mark Moran, Professor in Development Effectiveness, University of Queensland



Another important element of this cultural shift is around notions of time. The forum identified three ways this plays out. First, the 'churn' of bureaucracy doesn't align with effective policy in place. Gabrielle Borgaard and Georgina Richters both pointed out that relationship-building – whether between government and community or NGOs and the public sector – takes time and an ongoing commitment. Second, time (and resources) need to be invested in training the people delivering programs and services. One of the six CREATE principles for practice, used by Professor Homel and his colleagues through the Communities for Children framework, is a focus on training and empowerment for the workforce through continuous skills development. Third, institutional change is slow going: it takes resilience on the part of the public servants working for it, and an understanding of the complex nature of government.

*'You can't expect poorly paid, often poorly trained people working in NGOs to perform miracles. We've got to engage in a whole program of training and development and empowerment for these community workers.'*

Ross Homel

Speaking through a private-sector lens, Fahim Khondaker, Principal Adviser, BDO Australia, identified the need for an improved focus on the hard sell of policy reform. The goals of the private sector are, in some ways, at odds with those of the public: 'Let's be realistic, the private sector does most of its work based on money, and profits, and return on investment.' However, this isn't mutually exclusive to what Khondaker called an 'ethical responsibility' on the part of private-sector advisors to focus on the end-goal, the community outcome, when collaborating with government. Improving private-sector engagement hinges on a greater focus on the positive effects of change from an economic perspective, but this falls under the umbrella of mutual benefit.



Belinda Drew, Mark Moran and Georgina Richters

**The most consistent theme to emerge from the discussions at the 2017 IPAA Queensland Forum was ‘trust’. This is perhaps the most significant factor that needs to be addressed for a cultural shift in public administration to take place: less fear of difference, more trust that providers and communities know what needs to be done.**

Rob Setter identified periods of significant downsizings to the public sector as a bottom-up source of distrust, saying that employment precarity makes people afraid to try different things, lest they draw attention to themselves. Compounding this is an often top-down lack of trust in giving authority to people working at the local level. Professor Moran identified this as a problem of authorisation: complex problems cannot be worked out in advance, only in attempting to tackle them – and this requires an environment that allows people to experiment, to try new things, and to fail. Acceptance of failure is key; Dr Reddel highlighted the need for a better understanding of risk and its necessity, and a sharing of power between the systems and local levels to identify and address risk factors.

Unfortunately, the present institutional design makes such shifts difficult. Bold and committed leadership is essential for driving them. Erma Ranieri reflected on her work running a reform program within the South Australian public sector, which provided a clear example of the flow-on effects of driving change ahead of widespread approval. Without a team and internal resources, Ranieri created a system for implementing 90-day projects through Change @ South Australia, which focused on complex problems and required teams of public servants to collaborate (across at least two or three departments), and involve NGOs, citizens and/or private sector players. The incremental changes that dozens of these projects have brought about, through trial and error, have led to larger-scale institutional changes. The key to their success was strong personal leadership – something not limited to chief executives and ministers, but that can be expressed by all public servants as community leaders – and time to develop.

Another point of broad agreement was the need to adopt a strengths-based approach. There is an element of trust involved in this, too: as Professor Tiernan identified, trust in what we already know. It’s not necessary to reinvent the wheel for every new program or strategy; a place-based focus is more about devolution of control, and a change to the craft of public administration that, as Rob Setter pointed out, is already occurring.

At the base level, place-based policy is about working towards greater social cohesion. As Professor Homel noted, social cohesion is an indication of community-level trust. It relates to the bonds local people feel with others in their neighbourhood: how willing they are to help each other, how friendly they seem to each other, how aligned their values are. Trust within institutions and between government and third-party players is essential for effective service delivery, but the ultimate goal is to find ways to foster trust between community members, in order for them to depend more on each other and less on larger-scale intervention.

*‘Where we have our successes is where individuals find ways to work around the system, as opposed to having a system designed in a way to enable the shift to occur quite naturally.’*

**Rob Setter, Commission Chief Executive,  
Queensland Public Service Commission**



Erma Ranieri and Gabrielle Borggaard



Fahim Khondaker

# Do nothing about us without us

18

Perhaps the most succinct summary of the forum's theme, Connected communities: Flourishing places, came from Georgina Richters: 'Do nothing about us without us.' This was suggested particularly for an Indigenous perspective, but as Richters notes it applies to all communities. The point neatly captures some of the key themes to emerge from the 2017 IPAA Queensland Forum: recognising difference, collaborating in place, accepting that communities know what they need.

At the close of the forum, facilitator Martin Stewart-Weeks reflected on the main points of the conversations (which are available on his Public Purpose blog). He highlighted a tension that had been touched on in various ways: the persistence of the place lens relates to its ties to the personal and the political, both in its role as 'a "container" within which to collect problems that need tackling' and as 'an "explainer" that helps to understand and solve these problems'. At the same time, place isn't always the point, 'or at least isn't the only point. Much as the opportunity to grow the practice of place as a powerful platform for policy and performance, the obverse risk is to assume that place is the only way to tackle every problem.' Sometimes, other tectonic forces are at play, such as economic policy, technological advancement, social and cultural change – each a complex problem, each requiring its own policy lens but nonetheless needing strategies based on evidence and collaborative efforts.



Stewart-Weeks also noted that "the instinct to "command and control" should be replaced by a willingness to "connect and amplify" the work of individual places'. Noted at the beginning by Professor Tiernan, this need for a cultural shift within public administration modalities was a constant message throughout. It is a significant challenge but, as Erma Ranieri found, there is widespread appetite for such change among public servants, among ministers, and among NGOs and the private sector.

**Overwhelmingly, it is clear that people want what is best for their community – and their concerns are, have always been and always will be rooted in place.**

*'Place is never just a container, an arena in which problems and challenges gather. It is where people live and work and engage and forge ties and strengths too. It matters to people.'*

Martin Stewart-Weeks, Principal, Public Purpose Pty Ltd



Participants at the 2017 IPAA Queensland Forum

