

Disclaimer

In December 2021, the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* National Leadership Working Group was tasked with progressing the concept of a National Centre for Place-Based Collaboration. This discussion paper was developed over January and February 2022 to inform the development of Grant Opportunity Guidelines, and reflects working group discussions held to date.

This document is the most recent of three versions of the discussion paper. It is being made publicly available to ensure that all potential applicants to the grant opportunity 'Foundation Partner for a National Centre for Place-Based Collaboration' have access to the same information.

The discussion paper has been edited slightly from the original:

- to remove references to informal advice provided by other Commonwealth departments, as these discussions are still ongoing;
- to remove earlier drafts of proposed selection criteria for the grant opportunity, to avoid confusion with the current selection criteria in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines; and
- for accessibility purposes.

National Centre for Collaboration Working Group

Outline of Requirements for a Grant for Foundational Work to Establish a National Centre for Place-Based Collaboration (Nexus Centre)

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Purpose

This paper outlines the broad requirements the Department of Social Services (the department) will use to engage a Foundation Partner to establish the foundations for a National Centre for Place-Based Collaboration (Nexus Centre¹). It reflects a workshop held on 31 January 2022 with the National Centre for Collaboration Working Group and the department.

Key points

- The initial \$2.5 million available from the Commonwealth to 30 June 2024 is intended to fund a **foundation partner to host** the first phase of work to build the foundations for the Nexus Centre and deliver some key pieces of infrastructure that will inform the implementation of a fully operational Nexus Centre.
- For this foundational phase project, the foundation partner will:
 - engage with key leaders and stakeholders across relevant communities, sectors and government, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and leaders, and social entrepreneurs, to build consensus for and co-design a Nexus Centre, that could provide strategic and developmental support for place-based collaboration for communities across Australia;
 - deliver a range of foundational infrastructure; and
 - develop arrangements for the transition to a longer-term funding base and governance structure to ensure the Centre's longevity beyond 30 June 2024.
- The foundation partner will act as a custodian of the National Centre during this developmental phase, and may or may not be the same entity that becomes the Nexus Centre after 30 June 2024².

Background and Context

What is place-based collaboration

There is a long history of collaborative community-based projects in Australia. Place-based approaches recognises that complex or "wicked" social problems cannot be solved through traditional models of service-based program delivery. This is not because of any particular failure of service-based program delivery, but rather a product of the complexity of multiple and intersecting causes of disadvantage.

As a result, multi-faceted interventions informed with the input of a diverse range of stakeholders are better equipped to make sustainable and meaningful change across

¹ The branding of the National Centre will be key to its momentum. The final name will need Ministerial endorsement and to be discussed with a range of stakeholders including this working group, the NLG and government agencies. The NLG has proposed the name Nexus Centre, which is used for the purposes of this paper.

² For example the successful applicants may transition into the Centre, may be a custodian that 'holds' or supports the transition to another entity or may handover relevant documentation, relationships and work to another entity.

generations. Approaches that build on the local leadership to empower a locally-led agenda are emerging as preferable.

These sorts of multi-faceted approaches are often conceived as "place-based approaches". Place-based approaches are collaborative, long-term approaches to building thriving communities, delivered in a defined geographic location. The underlying theory is that better outcomes for communities are more likely to be achieved if all stakeholders work together collaboratively to identify goals and undertake actions that improve the conditions in which families and communities live, work and raise children.

Place-based approaches are being implemented in a number of Indigenous communities, and will be strengthened as governments implement Closing the Gap reforms, such as partnerships and shared decision-making and shared access to data at the regional level. This foundational work for a national centre for place-based collaboration has very strong alignment with these Closing the Gap reforms.

Place-based approaches generally include the following:

- Driving cross-sector collaboration to integrate and address fragmented service delivery and supports in pursuit of long-term outcomes;
- Devolving accountability, decision-making, funding and service delivery to the local level to facilitate strategically targeted solutions tailored to community needs;
- Building community capacity and social infrastructure;
- The use of collaborative and relational ways of working, including promoting community engagement and participation for citizens;
- An emphasis on systemic rather than programmatic responses, flexible service delivery and funding models; and
- Operating within a long term strategic context and working with the investment in place.

Stronger Places, Stronger People (SPSP) and other Commonwealth place-based initiatives

There are at least 6 Commonwealth place-based initiatives operating in over 130 locations that could be in scope for a Nexus Centre, including Stronger Communities for Children, Empowered Communities, Connected Beginnings, Regional Deals, Stronger Places, Stronger People, and Communities for Children Facilitating Partners.

The department proposes to start foundational work for a Nexus Centre with these measures in mind, acknowledging that there are many more relevant initiatives being delivered from state, territory, local and philanthropic funding which will enable the Centre, and its scope and offer, to grow over time.

Why we are pursuing a national centre – what's the problem we want to address

The need for a national entity to amplify, advocate, and facilitate development of place-based collaboration in Australian communities has been identified by previous consultations over the last few years. A national entity has been envisaged to provide oversight and strategic partnerships to better amplify place-based work across portfolios

by identifying common experiences of barriers, achieving a more joined up approach to have them resolved and working with Government and other system actors on institutional reforms required to enable place-based approaches. It could also result in more streamlined and targeted capability building efforts for communities and developing a locally driven professional workforce in these related fields. The entity would be non-government, with bi-partisan support, focused on working with communities and governments at the systems level.

Values and benefits sought by a national centre for place-based collaboration have been described as:

- Acting as an independent voice with integrity, and having the sole interest in the success of place-based approaches.
- Championing change, in both government and communities, by offering an external, independent view, and facilitating change.
- Working with partners across all domains to design and progress reforms essential to the success of place-based approaches; including integrated data capacities, locally-engaged decision-making and investment coordination and reform.
- Acting as a relationship broker, being a voice to all parties, speaking truth from a more objective, external view point of view, building and maintain communities of practice, share learnings, and translate between communities and government to build a shared agenda.
- Providing expertise not available in government or communities for success across numerous relevant fields.
- Providing support for communities in a culturally appropriate, flexible and adaptable way, including accommodating community-led governance styles and structures.
- Providing long term continuity beyond government and communities' cycles of change.
- Offering project delivery assurance, to both government and communities, by being committed and held to outcomes.
- Building capacity in collective impact and other skill areas across the system.
- Agreeing ways of measuring social impact at the community level and developing a measurement system.

Engaging with First Nations place-based initiatives and other reform agendas

Some of the leading examples of locally-driven place-based initiatives and related reforms come to us through First Nations leadership. At both a local level and in terms of the system-level reforms they are driving, we have much to learn and build on from these experiences. The insights First Nations leadership is bringing and the changes being driven are widely relevant to the way Government and other system actors need to respond all communities experiencing persistent disadvantage.

Positioning the work of the proposed Nexus Centre within this context will take some thought and respondents will need to outline their approach to interweaving the broader place-based agenda with Indigenous self-determination approaches.

Foundations for a National Centre for Place-Based Collaboration

Key Focus of the Foundation Phase Project

The department is seeking to engage a foundation partner over an initial two-year period to progress the establishment and early phase work of a potential ongoing national centre (Nexus Centre). The foundation partner could be a single entity or a consortium of organisations with relevant expertise.

Foundational work of this sort is likely to attract interest from a wider range of applicants than those currently engaged with SPSP. Applicants could include academic, philanthropic and private sector organisations and non-government organisations from Indigenous and mainstream fields. This work is not a consultancy project. Rather, this foundational work will include two major areas of focus:

1. **Focus Area 1: Nexus Centre Design:** explore – via stakeholder engagement, research and design – the conceptual framework, guiding principles, scope and functions of a Nexus Centre; the extent of stakeholder support and investment required; and translate these findings into a detailed proposal for a Nexus Centre to be established as an ongoing entity. This work should align with the proposed objectives and outcomes of a Nexus Centre as outlined below. It is expected the foundation partner will:
 - a. consult broadly and establish partnerships with communities and key leaders and stakeholders, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and leaders, and leverage existing government relationships and forums, in order to identify the core value a national centre could provide and what its core functions should be;
 - b. access Australian and international research and investigate existing models to provide a sound evidence base for an Australian national centre for place-based collaboration;
 - c. co-design a model for the Nexus Centre, including conceptual framework, guiding principles (including self-determination, community voice and leadership, collaboration and partnerships), scope and functions and governance;
 - d. investigate the extent of stakeholder support and investment required and secure, where possible, investment sources to support an independent, effective and sustainable Nexus Centre; and
 - e. deliver to the department a detailed and fully costed proposal (or prospectus) for a Nexus Centre.

2. **Focus Area 2: Foundational infrastructure** to deliver an initial range of community supports:
 - a. work with communities and governments to develop data sharing arrangements, and capacity within communities to request and use data;
 - b. develop strategic investment frameworks to better align investment in communities to community-identified priorities;
 - c. explore and develop a framework for shared decision-making;

- d. upskill local people to improve community capacity through trialling new and different ways of learning and supporting workforce development for community-led ways of working;
- e. build and share the evidence of what does and doesn't work, including collating existing quality place-based resources (i.e. research, tools and forums) for access by interested parties (free of cost); and
- f. act as an intermediary to enhance communication and information exchange between communities and governments.

The foundation partner will be required to deliver on all aspects of the first area of focus outlined above; and to propose whether some or all elements of the second focus area can be delivered within the funding and timeframes of the project. Timeframes will be specified for the delivery of interim and final reports. It is expected that the first focus area will be completed by mid-2023; with the agreed elements of focus area two being delivered by June 2024.

Responses to this expression of interest from potential foundation partners that include co-investment and / or in-kind contributions for this initial two-year phase will be welcomed.

The proposed objectives of a Nexus Centre are to:

- Model collaboration in its own governance, methodologies and working styles, to set a national standard for open, constructive and non-territorial practice;
- Advance the common pursuit of existing and new place-based community-led agendas and principles of self-determination;
- Work with and build upon the work of like-minded organisations to learn from, contribute to, complement and accelerate their efforts;
- Integrate policy, research and practice consistent with its 'real world' roots to achieve tangible and sustainable outcomes;
- Foster the creation of shared solutions that go beyond what individual communities could do acting alone, including driving system-level reforms; and
- Seek to always further and build the local capabilities that exist within a place.

The proposed outcomes of the National Centre are:

- To work with, and on behalf of, place-based approaches.
- To make accessible and strengthen place-based knowledge, learnings, practice and resources in a way that respects the diversity and local leadership of communities across Australia.
- To create a culture of collaboration, partnerships and knowledge-sharing across place-based initiatives, practitioners and other stakeholders.
- To create a platform for driving systemic change with regard to government funding, policies and ways of working.
- To provide new opportunities to drive learning and workforce development in the pursuit of place-based reforms.

The Nexus Centre would be non-government, with bi-partisan support, focused on working with communities and governments at the systems level. It would respect cultural authority, and re-inforce principles of community self-determination while 'working with' in models of co-design. It is not envisaged to replace local authority, ways of working, or duplicate or replicate local place-based initiatives.

Foundational work will initially focus on Commonwealth place-based initiatives (e.g. Stronger Places, Stronger People, Communities for Children Facilitating Partners, Connected Beginnings, Empowered Communities, Stronger Communities for Children and Regional Deals). All of these initiatives align with the department's mission and improve outcomes for families and children. In planning for the Nexus Centre, the foundation partner should consider the potential to include other place-based collaboration work that may be state/territory specific or wholly supported by the private and/or philanthropic sector, as long as the scope remains within the model of place-based collaboration.

Governance

The project will be overseen by a National Leadership Group which is initially anticipated to be the existing SPSP National Leadership Group, with additional members seconded as needed. The SPSP National Leadership Group comprises Commonwealth and state and territory government representatives, community representatives, philanthropy and academia.

Funding

Commonwealth funding totals \$2.5 million to 30 June 2024. It reflects a commitment from the Australian Government to seed the foundation for a Nexus Centre, and is provided on the understanding that further investment will be required for the establishment and ongoing operations of a Nexus Centre. The Commonwealth at this time has not committed any funding beyond June 2024. Any future funding will require future government decisions and may require another grant opportunity or approach to market.

There is potential for the Nexus Centre to become self-funded over time, with initial potential contributions being made to its operations and activities by governments and philanthropic partners. It is expected the foundation partner will actively pursue funding opportunities, partnerships and other options by working with a range of stakeholders.

Proposals from prospective foundation partners that include co-investment in this initial 2022-2024 phase will be welcomed.

A Sustainable Nexus Centre

The Nexus Centre, when established, could deliver on three broad activities.

- **Capacity building** – specific measures and targeted supports that work with and build local leadership within communities such as training, practice skills, coaching and mentoring. This may include, but is not limited to:
 - Developing and delivering training modules and resources in a range of relevant subjects such as leadership, community engagement, project management, data analysis and interpretation etc, with a focus on embedding knowledge within the community (i.e. 'train-the-trainer' models).
 - Foundational support for communities seeking guidance on how to implement collaborative place-based approaches.
 - Providing access to coaching and mentoring to support

- communities and others interested in place-based collaborative approaches, tailored to the particular stage and pace of change (knowledge level, practice and resources) each community is at.
- Developing and maintaining a ‘knowledge centre’ of publically accessible resources and learning tools.
 - **Data and evidence** – specific measures to integrate evidence-informed practice at the heart of a community-led change agenda, and to integrate lived experience, local knowledge and practice –based knowledge into the national evidence base. This may include, but is not limited to:
 - Identifying gaps and priorities in place-based research and commissioning research and evaluation projects to enhance the evidence base and improve place based approaches in Australia.
 - Developing tools and resources to support communities and organisations practicing collective impact to use data and measurement to measure impact, and continuously learn and adapt.
 - Facilitating data access for communities and its dissemination.
 - Ensuring data is framed at the local community level rather than at less granular regional levels and that existing local data initiatives – such as Maranguka’s Palimaa Data Platform³ – are built upon.
 - Data interpretation and analysis, including designing and delivering data use, interpretation and other data capability building activities within communities.
 - Identifying emerging issues and common challenges in and across communities, and working with stakeholders on their resolution.
 - Overarching reporting, monitoring, evaluation and learning within and across communities.
 - **Shared Decision Making** – mechanisms to identify, consolidate, translate and coordinate funding efforts within the community, including:
 - Identifying when government or philanthropic grants come up for renewal and whether they could be redirected to community priorities
 - Identifying fragmented investment by working with communities to stocktake government investments
 - Increasing the capability of communities to identify and work with funders to prioritise strategic investments in the community, and
 - Working with governments and communities to develop shared decision-making models regarding funding approaches.

These functions cannot be delivered in isolation. A genuine partnership approach will be required between communities, governments, service providers, businesses and investors and the Nexus Centre. The Nexus Centre will be expected to build and sustain these relationships.

³ Maranguka has developed the Maranguka Data Platform ‘Palimaa’ as a mechanism for enacting Indigenous Data Sovereignty in Bourke, NSW, and to provide a platform to enable place-based data-driven decision making. For more information visit <https://maranguka.org.au/data-sovereignty/>

Other requirements for foundation partner applicants

The foundation partner must provide suitably skilled and experienced leadership team and personnel to deliver the project requirements.

This includes development of a financial plan with a breakdown of how costs will be allocated across administration, salary and activity budgets. The foundation partner may contribute their own or other sources of funds towards this project.

Payment milestones will align with, but not be limited to, the delivery of the two major areas of focus (foundational infrastructure and the design of the Nexus Centre).

It is expected that the foundation partner will have expertise and credibility in Indigenous cultural knowledge and authority, so that the work on place-based collaboration is able to effectively involve Indigenous communities and leaders engaged in place-based work.