

EQUITY ECONOMICS
AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS PTY LTD

Where are we?

Placed-based approaches to tackling community challenges in Australia & the role of ACE providers

Community Colleges Australia Conference

October 2023

Key points today

1. Place-based and community-led approaches are critical to Australia's future
2. The ACE sector already embodies much of this thinking and faces many similar challenges to others doing this work
3. Evolving place-based frameworks and tools may be able to help the ACE sector better demonstrate its value
4. A more explicit place-based agenda could play an important part of building ACE Futures



*Courtesy of the Paul Ramsay Foundation
Where are we: Placed-based approaches to tackling community challenges in Australia*

Defining place-based approaches

- Place-based work brings together local leaders and organisations to address **the needs and specific circumstances of a place in designing services and initiatives**, often focusing on tackling locational disadvantage, social and economic disruption and creating pathways for people across the life-course.
- This work exists across First Nations community development, early childhood, youth transitions, education, employment, natural disaster adaptation and many other areas.
- There is a spectrum of place-based work:

Place-based Activity

Initiatives that aim to tailor policies, programs and/or investments to the specific circumstances of a place and its people

Place-based Approaches

Collaborative, long-term approaches to build thriving communities delivered in a location. The approach is characterised by shared design, stewardship, and accountability for outcomes and impacts across many agencies and partners

Why are they important?

1. Central to First Nations empowerment and Closing the Gap.
2. Required to address locational disadvantage, social and economic exclusion and poverty that often has specific (as well as broader) drivers and solutions.
3. Critical to respond to the growing diversity of regions across Australia and social, economic and environmental disruption.
4. Offer a way to reset relationships and restore trust with people and communities.
5. Growing evidence they can work to empower communities and achieve sustained results (e.g. research showing improvements in Australian Early Childhood Development Index results for children from key place-based initiatives).



Children learning at Gujaga child care centre.

Place-based approaches are a critical complement to broad-based programs

Universal or broad-based programs can be **good at**:

- Setting out universal entitlements – e.g. school education and employment benefits.
- Establishing broad consistent principles, policies and systems.
- Sharing evidence and practice across multiple locations.
- Attracting significant resources.

But they can **struggle with**:

- Understanding what will practically work in a community – specific needs, strengths, local players and joining up with what else is already going on.
- Empowering people and communities to bring their social capital to the table and work on community-led solutions and opportunities.
- Incorporating evidence of what works on the ground
- Providing the flexibility, adaptability and local knowledge essential for ensuring initiatives are well designed and accessible to the people they are meant to be helping

These are the things place-based approaches are good at!

ACE Sector already embodies a lot of this thinking...



And it faces some of the same challenges as other place-based community sectors

- Rules and system settings are often built for larger providers working across multiple regions (e.g. TAFE and for-profit providers).
- Often, there is a lack of understanding of what relationship and partner building takes in communities.
- Can be seen by some as 'ad on' not key pillar of service delivery.
- Building familiarity when the work is complex – *what do you do?*
- Aggregating evidence of impact.
- Working with people with the highest needs.
- Sustained resourcing.



Courtesy of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation

How can place-based frameworks help?

1. Provide a common language for talking about place-based approaches – what is it we do?
2. Help identify common design elements and strengthen practice

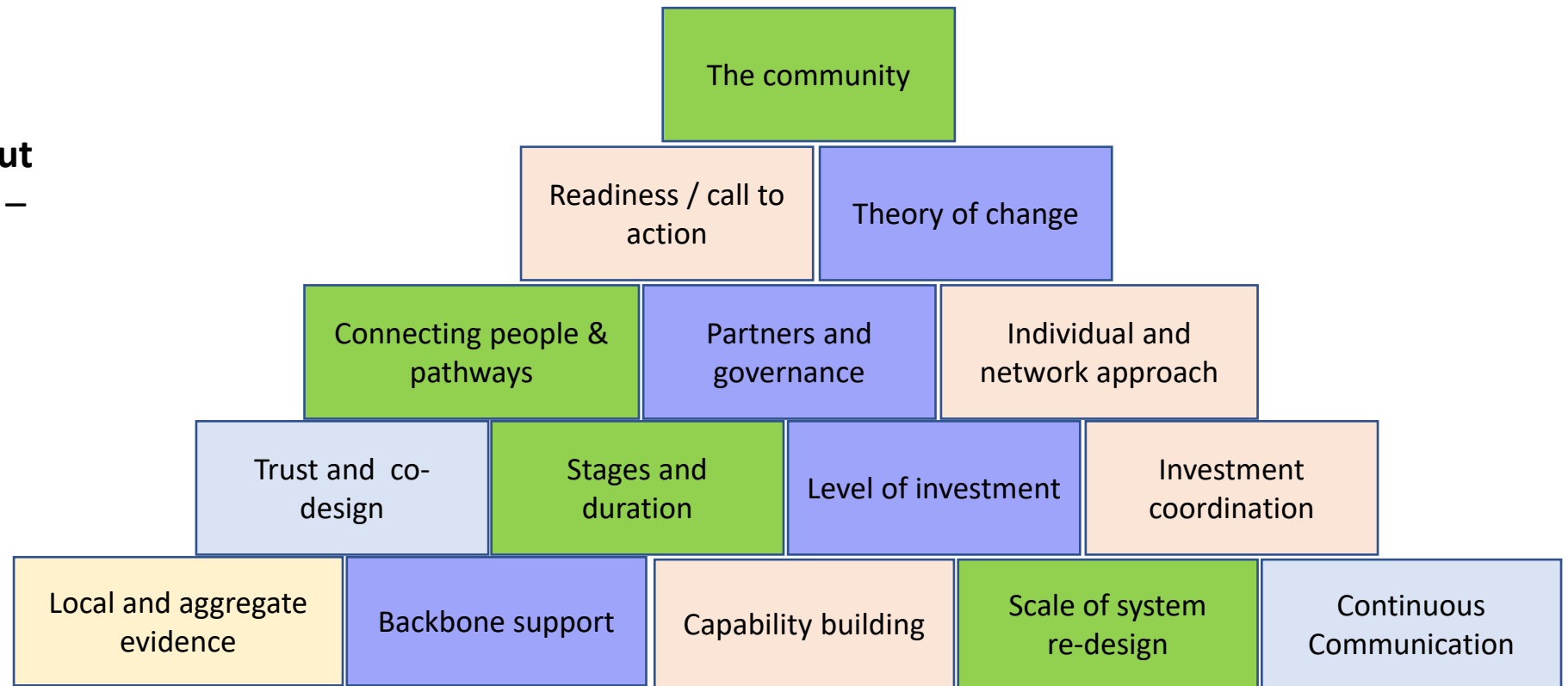


Figure 1: Common design elements for place-based approaches

What else can they offer?

- 3. Offer suggestions for demonstrating impact** – increased robust evidence and rigour around both impact and cost-effectiveness over time.
- 4. Way to join with others to build broader momentum** – call to elevate place-based work to sit alongside universal and broad-based programs as a key vehicle for the delivery of investment in communities and reform program and finance structures.

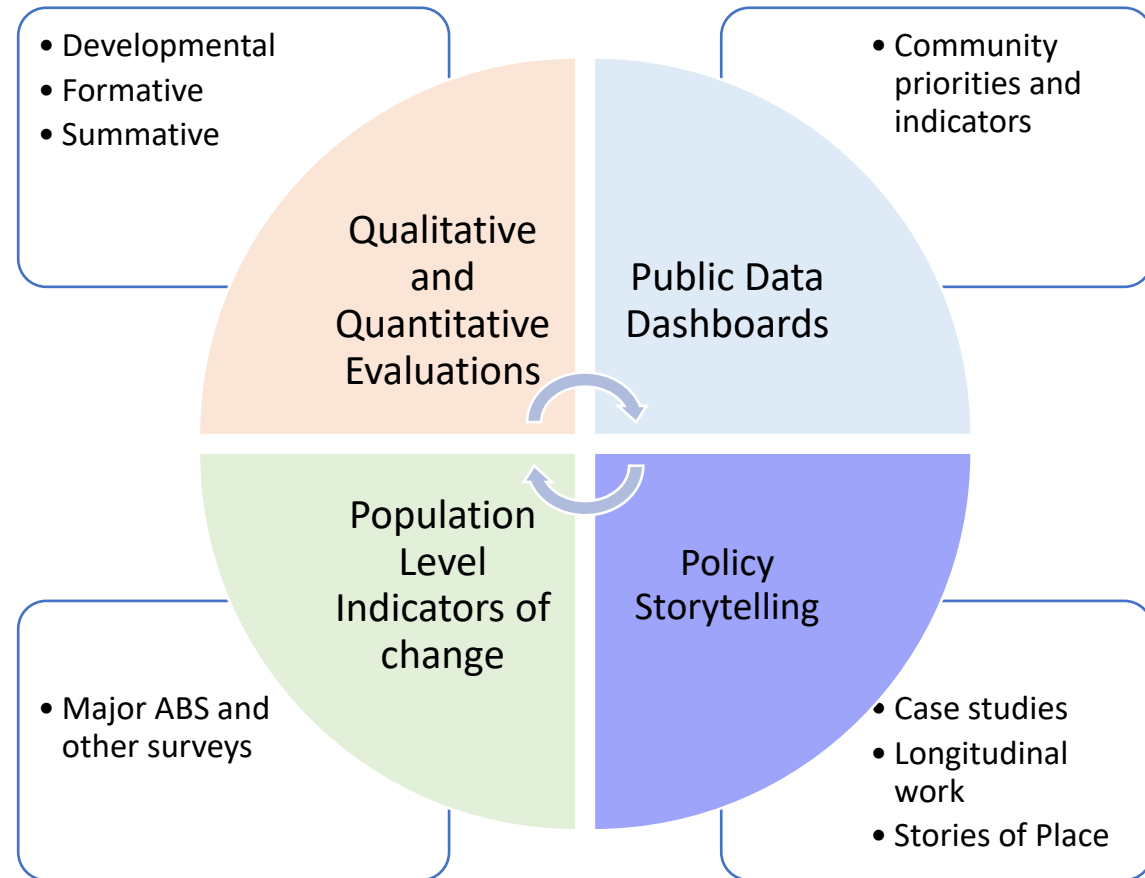


Figure 2: Demonstrating impact – but be realistic and do not setting the bar too high!

Building ACE Futures

Some thoughts to leave you with:

- **Power of people and communities** – we will need fast community-driven responses to disruption that prioritises relationships and connections.
- **Who else is investing in place around you?** Can you join up with them for broader place-based strategies? Why? Why not? (e.g., other education providers, health and community services).
- **Invest in demonstrating what you are doing** – as individual organisations and collectively – stories and data are essential to this work.
- **Play to strengths** – for example big players are often not very good at understanding local pathways – community organisations can be good at it.



Courtesy of Community Colleges Australia website

Further information

- You can find the report at: <https://www.equityeconomics.com.au/report-archive/place-based-approaches-to-tackling-community-challenges-in-australia>
- If you have any further thoughts, questions or to send comments and feedback, please email me on andra.putnis@equityeconomics.com.au

Thank you for the discussion & all the work you do