Monitoring, Evaluating and Learning for place-based approaches

A toolkit for the Victorian Public Service

VICTORIA
State Government

Welcome to this collection of practical tools and insights for working with Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) in place-based contexts.

If you are a Victorian public servant designing, procuring, managing, supporting or participating in MEL for place-based approaches, then this toolkit is for you.

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge Aboriginal people as the First Peoples and Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and water on which we all rely. We acknowledge that Aboriginal communities are steeped in traditions and customs, and we respect this. We acknowledge the continuing leadership role of the Aboriginal community in striving to redress inequality and disadvantage and the catastrophic and enduring effects of colonisation.

We have designed this toolkit to answer the key questions we heard from VPS employees on how you can better support effective place-based MEL from within government.

This toolkit will help you get a grounding in core concepts, navigate existing resources and discover emerging approaches. It is not intended to provide a comprehensive or step-by-step guide to implementation.

You don't need to be an expert to use this toolkit, but if you're new to place-based approaches or MEL we suggest you start from the beginning.

You can also click on a link to go directly to the question or topic you're most interested in.

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How and when to use this toolkit

This toolkit has been designed specifically for VPS staff. Whether you are a beginner or interested in deepening your practice, this toolkit can offer you helpful examples, insights and resources.

Who this toolkit is for

This toolkit is for VPS staff who are designing, procuring, managing or participating in monitoring, evaluation and learning approaches in place-based contexts.

It was developed for use by staff with varying degrees of familiarity with place-based approaches and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL).

How to use this toolkit

The toolkit is structured into three sections and can be used in different ways. If you are new to place-based approaches, we recommend you start from the beginning.

The introduction provides an overview of the Victorian Government's definition of place-based approaches and what is unique about designing and implementing MEL processes for place-based approaches.

You can also skip to specific sections based on where you are at in your MEL process or the particular challenges you may be facing. You can go directly to the relevant content by clicking on a link in the table of contents.

Why use this toolkit

This toolkit was developed to respond to the challenges associated with MEL processes for place-based approaches in a VPS context. It is a compilation of resources selected in response to needs and interests expressed by Victorian Government stakeholders who are involved or interested in the MEL practices associated with place-based work.

Where else can I go to learn about MEL in place-based contexts?

There are numerous resources and guidelines for conducting MEL and this toolkit should be used in tandem with the existing guidance and advice.

Several MEL resources have been specifically developed to guide place-based evaluations; the most prominent of these in Australia being the Framework and Toolkit for evaluating place-based delivery approaches.

Additionally, many departments house specialist evaluation units and have developed materials to support those involved in evaluation. The Place-Based Guide also includes valuable guidance to support the development of MEL practice in place-based settings.

Supporting resources are embedded throughout the toolkit, with a full list of resources included in Appendix C.

What's in this toolkit

This isn't a step-by-step guide—instead, sections are structured around the curiosities of VPS colleagues to address challenges specific to working within government and help you navigate the wealth of existing resources.

About the *Introduction to MEL for place-based approaches* section

What this section is: An introduction to MEL in place-based contexts. It covers key concepts including an introduction to place-based approaches, and the value of and challenges involved in doing MEL in place-based contexts.

What this section is not: A comprehensive overview of challenges in this space. All content is particular to the current operating environment within the VPS.

About the *Setting up your approach to MEL in place-based settings* section

What this section is: A set of considerations to support VPS staff when facing key scoping and planning challenges for MEL in place-based contexts—focused on areas where VPS staff have highlighted that additional guidance will be particularly beneficial. This includes information on procuring MEL for a place-based approach.

What this section is not: A comprehensive step-by-step planning tool. Additional resources to support MEL planning and scoping are included within the section.

About the *Doing MEL in place-based settings* section

What this section is: A selection of case studies and guidance that showcase emerging approaches from Australia and internationally.

What this section is not: While it aims to showcase key learnings, this section does not go into enough detail to inform whether approaches are appropriate for particular contexts. Where possible, we have included resources to help you understand whether approaches are applicable to your context.

About the focus on First Nations evaluation in place-based contexts

What this section is: Throughout the document we have included lessons and guidance related to MEL in First Nations contexts. These sections provide an overview of the importance and value of supporting First Nations leadership, participation and ownership at all phases of MEL. They also offer some strategies and examples to support VPS staff to approach MEL with First Nations communities differently. The advice contained in these sections has been prepared by a First Nations MEL specialist.

What this section is not: A comprehensive or representative one-stop-shop for conducting MEL with First Nations communities. The knowledge and approaches of local First Nations peoples, leaders and custodians of knowledge should lead all place-based works and efforts toward monitoring, evaluation and learning.

How this toolkit was developed

To make it relevant and useful, this toolkit was developed collaboratively with place-based experts and practitioners inside and outside of government.

How this toolkit was developed

The toolkit was created as part of the Whole-of-Victorian-Government Place-Based Agenda in late 2021 and 2022. The development process involved:

- *Deep dive* – review of literature and consultation with experts, place-based approaches from across Victoria and VPS staff from across government to understand local and international best practice, as well as the factors unique to the VPS.
- *Iterative development* – building the toolkit from the ground up through engaging with multiple rounds of consultation and feedback and responding to content selection and key messaging from our stakeholders to understand what is resonating and useful.
- *Keeping connection to place* – ensuring key learnings from MEL of place-based approaches were featured in the toolkit.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all who have contributed to the toolkit, particularly:

- The Place-Based Reform team's **Working Together in Place Learning Partners** (five existing place-based initiatives in Victoria) who have generously shared their experiences and exemplary practice.
- Members of the **Place-Based Evaluation Working Group**, including from the Departments of Education (DoE), Families Fairness and Housing (DFFH), Health (DH), Jobs Skills Industry and Regions (DJSIR), Premier and Cabinet (DPC), and the Victorian Public Sector Commission (VPSC). The experiences, expertise and time shared to support the development of the toolkit has been invaluable.
- **Clear Horizon,** who have generously shared their wisdom and resources for evaluating place-based approaches, providing guidance, advice and review throughout the development of the toolkit.
- **Kowa Collaboration** who have contributed content and provided invaluable advice from their experience working in evaluation with First Nations people and communities, including in place-based and community-led contexts. Kowa Collaboration led the development of all First Nations sections in the toolkit.

1. Introduction to MEL for place-based approaches

This section introduces you to MEL in place-based contexts. It covers key concepts including what place-based approaches are, and the value of and challenges involved in doing MEL in place-based contexts.

It dives into core ideas and challenges that you will come across in the current operating environment within the VPS, rather than providing a comprehensive overview of the space.

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How the Victorian Government defines place-based approaches

Why MEL rather than monitoring and evaluation?
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Why does good MEL matter in place-based contexts?
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p.11—
Some of the unique characteristics of place-based work and their implications for MEL

Doing MEL in First Nations context
p.12—
This toolkit's approach to centring First Nations agency and leadership in MEL

What do we mean by place-based approaches?

Working in place is a core part of our work—but across government we do it in different ways. From tailoring large government infrastructure projects to local need, to enabling community-owned initiatives, all these ways of working are equally valuable and can support improved community outcomes.

But when we talk about place-based approaches in this toolkit, we mean initiatives which **target the specific circumstances of a place** and **engage the community and a broad range of local organisations from different sectors as active participants in developing and implementing solutions**.

Because they are driven by local need, **place-based approaches all look different**. They may be initiated by community or by government; they may have started out as place-based or be evolving to a more bottom-up approach over time; they may be a stand-alone initiative or form part of a broader project or suite of measures.

But while they look different depending on their area, **all place-based work requires similar capabilities from government**. Crucially, place-based approaches require government to **take on a partnering and enabling role** and **genuinely share decision-making** about what outcomes matter locally and how they can best be achieved.

For more information see the Victorian Government's Framework for Place-based Approaches (PDF, 7.9 MB).

Click here for a glossary of key terms used in this toolkit.

Monitoring and Evaluation vs Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

What is the difference and why does it matter?

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) traditionally has had a greater focus on serving accountability and transparency purposes whereas **Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)** balances these needs with those of adaptive learning.

Framing this toolkit around MEL acknowledges the critical role that data-driven learning plays in the success of place-based approaches, where an adaptive approach is critical to navigate complexity and the unknown.

Defining MEL

- **MEL** is the systematic approach to the use and collection of data to monitor, evaluate and continuously learn and adapt an initiative throughout its implementation.
- **Monitoring** refers to the routine collection, analysis and use of data, usually internally, to track how an initiative's previously identified activities, outputs and outcomes are progressing.
- **Evaluation** is the systematic process of collecting and synthesising evidence to determine the merit, worth, value or significance of an initiative to inform decision-making.
- **Learning** refers to the translation of findings from data to improve and develop things as they are being implemented.

Click here for a glossary of key terms used in this toolkit.

Why does good MEL matter?

The design and implementation of MEL can have a significant impact on the success of a place-based initiative.

- MEL **can impact on the quality and integrity of the work:**
  - Effective MEL can steer initiatives by determining whether they are on track, whether intended outcomes are being achieved and if any changes or refinements need to be made.
  - Poorly done MEL can lead to adverse outcomes, including creating unnecessary burden or undermining the community-led ethos of the work.
- MEL practices can influence **future funding decisions and policy development by identifying successful work requiring** additional funding or replication.
- Without MEL, there is no evidence that an initiative is **making a difference to the community or of the value of government's investments.**

What's unique about MEL in place-based contexts?

Here we drill into a few of the unique characteristics of place-based work and the implications for how we approach MEL.

Place-based approaches...

Address long-term systemic challenges like entrenched disadvantage

- Take an equity lens to MEL by identifying cohorts who are or are not benefitting from place-based approaches
- Use innovative approaches to show how change is occurring in the short and long term (including systems change)

Elevate community voice

- Government shows up as a partner in MEL to reflect the community-led nature of work
- Reflect community priorities in all steps of design and implementation of MEL

Are always innovating and evolving based on local context

- Enhance focus on collecting data that can inform learning and guide development
- Design and implement MEL in a flexible way to support innovation

MEL within First Nations contexts

This toolkit includes a supplementary thread expressing a richer viewpoint of MEL in First Nations-led, place-based work.

The concepts and methods that are **provided are from the experience and learnings of Kowa staff members.**

The knowledge and approaches of local First Nations peoples, leaders and custodians of knowledge should lead all place-based works and efforts toward monitoring, evaluation and learning.

While the views expressed in these sections are developed with First Nations-led work in mind, they can also be applied more broadly.

The content on doing MEL within First Nations contexts is underpinned by two key ideas.

1. First Nations agency and leadership should be at the centre of MEL implementation and design

This represents a shift away from a deficit approach of 'saving' First Nations communities when approaching place-based work. Such an approach replaces Western evaluative practice and systems thinking with that of First Nations communities, organisations and peoples who are confidently articulating, driving and measuring their own success and using sovereign and decolonised data. Under these conditions, First Nations sovereignty and worldviews can be recognised and centred by all place-based partners.

MEL within First Nations contexts (cont.)

2. Doing MEL in First Nations-led contexts requires a mindset shift

Changes to the technical approach to MEL are not enough. Rather, the role MEL plays in a place-based initiative needs reframing. Just as in the goals of place-based work, the MEL approach must also acknowledge and account for the systemic inequities faced by First Nations communities.

Key additional resources
Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Framework
The Self-Determination Reform Framework
First Nations Cultural Safety Framework (PDF, 4.6 MB).
A more extensive list of resources on MEL within First Nations contexts, including all resources referred to in this Toolkit is found in Appendix C.

2. Setting up your approach to MEL

This section contains guidance, considerations and resources to support you in the planning or set-up of MEL in place-based contexts.

The content should be of use to VPS staff who are involved in MEL in varied ways—be it designing, procuring, implementing or participating in an evaluation.

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First Nations MEL

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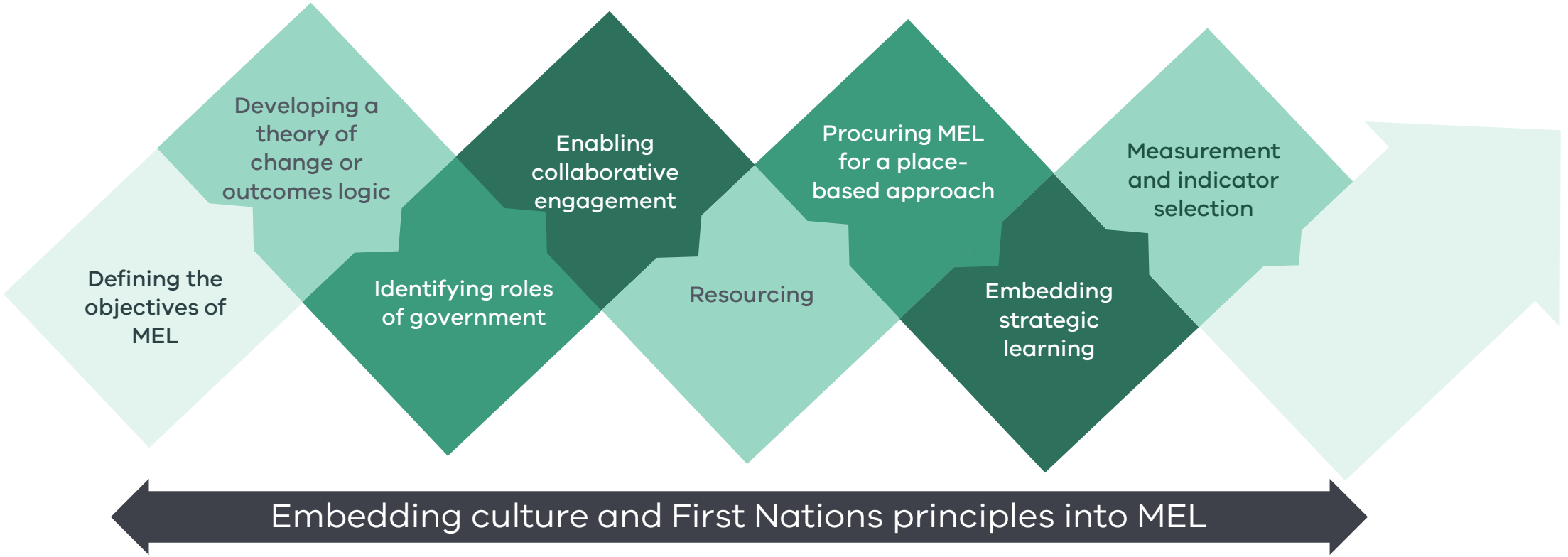
Case studies

p.33 Ngiyang Wayama Data Network on Building Foundations for First Nations Data Sovereignty

p.34 Hands Up Mallee on how principles can help you to plan for effective MEL

Key considerations for planning

The following pages outline checklists and key resources to support MEL planning. The steps covered in this section are not exhaustive and the sequence that they are applied will also depend on where you are at in your MEL journey.



Defining the objectives and priorities for MEL

The first step in scoping MEL is articulating the overall purpose and objectives for Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning. There are often many stakeholders involved in a place-based approach and each group may have different interests when it comes to MEL. Whoever is leading the planning process needs to manage competing objectives and possible trade-offs. You may need spend longer on this step in order to explore and articulate the objectives and priorities for different stakeholder groups.

Key considerations

- [ ] **Consider stakeholders that need to be consulted during the scoping process and their level of involvement**
  A collaborative process will ensure that the MEL objectives and priorities are tailored to the characteristics and priorities specific to the location and its community.
- [ ] **Consider the learning and accountability needs of community stakeholders as well as government**
  Consider if and how government may need to be accountable to the community—this can be a helpful way of ensuring that government are adopting a partnership mindset with MEL.
- [ ] **Consider developing a set of MEL principles**
  Sometimes, in addition to clarifying objectives and priorities, there may be a need to define the approach taken to MEL. Principles can help to articulate the agreed priorities and ways of working. See case study on page 34 for an example of this.

Key resources	
Place-based Evaluation Framework and Toolkit (PDF, 1,318 KB)	The toolkit, developed by Clear Horizon, includes a comprehensive planning tool template. Their Framework features a tool that explains the different aspects that need to be considered when designing your MEL approach.
Department of Health and Human Services Evaluation Guide (PDF, 276 KB)	This guide is designed to support staff planning and commissioning of evaluation and for anyone responsible for program development, implementation or evaluation.
Rainbow Framework	Prepared by Better Evaluation, the framework outlines the key tasks needed for planning any monitoring and evaluation projects

Identifying an evaluation type

Identifying drivers for evaluation is an important step in MEL planning. Whether it be place-based or other contexts, evaluators commonly distinguish between the following evaluation types:

- **formative** for improving implementation and assess appropriateness of interventions in the relevant context in which they are delivered
- **summative** to judge merit or worth of an intervention and assess the extent to which the program contributed to the desired change
- **economic assessments** to assess resourcing and investment and can be undertaken during the formative or summative stages.
- **developmental evaluation** supports adaptive learning in complex and emergent initiatives and can be particularly useful when place-based initiatives are in their infancy or are in periods of high innovation or complexity.

Each evaluation type can play an important role in the evaluation of place-based approaches. The maturity and current priorities of the place-based initiative can be helpful indicators for determining drivers and an approach to evaluation.

The resources shared on the previous page and below, each contain useful guidance on how to define and plan for evaluation. While the (former) Department of Health and Human Services and Better Evaluation resources have not been developed for place-based contexts specifically, the content can still be relevant, as long as you keep in mind key considerations outlined in this document as you go through your planning process.

Further reading

- The (former) Department of Health and Human Services Evaluation Guide (PDF, 276 KB) provides more details on the distinctions between different types of evaluation (see pp.4-5).
- This link provides an introduction to developmental evaluation. More resources can be found in Appendix C.
- More information on the opportunities and challenges for economic assessments on pages 44-46 of this toolkit.
- The Place-based Evaluation Framework and Toolkit (PDF, 1,318 KB) has more detailed information about choosing evaluation types in place-based contexts.

Developing a theory of change or outcomes logic

A theory of change outlines the main elements of an initiative's plan for change and the explicit sequence of events that are expected to bring about change.

A good starting point for developing a place-based theory of change is to identify what the initiative is intending to achieve, including:

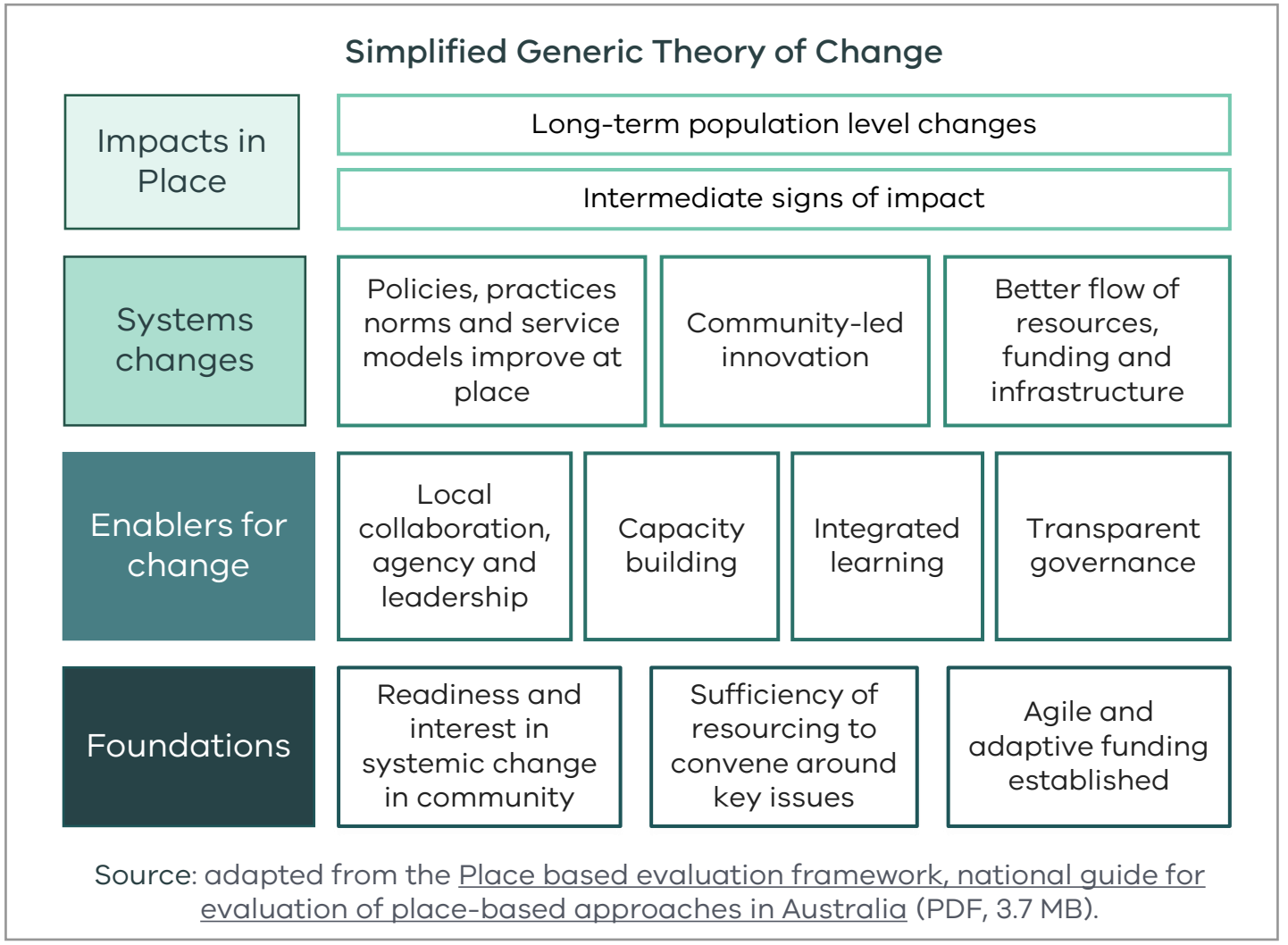
- long-term population-level results, and/or
- changes for individuals, families and communities.

In the formative stages, the actions required to lead to these changes will need to determined.

The diagram to the right, taken from the Federal Government's Place-Based Evaluation Framework, (PDF, 1,318 KB) identifies some commonly understood components of change in place-based contexts. When developing a coherent place-based theory of change that supports effective MEL design and delivery, it is important to:

- clarify the role and relationship between each level of change and
- the connection between the adaptive ways of working and the tangible change on the ground.

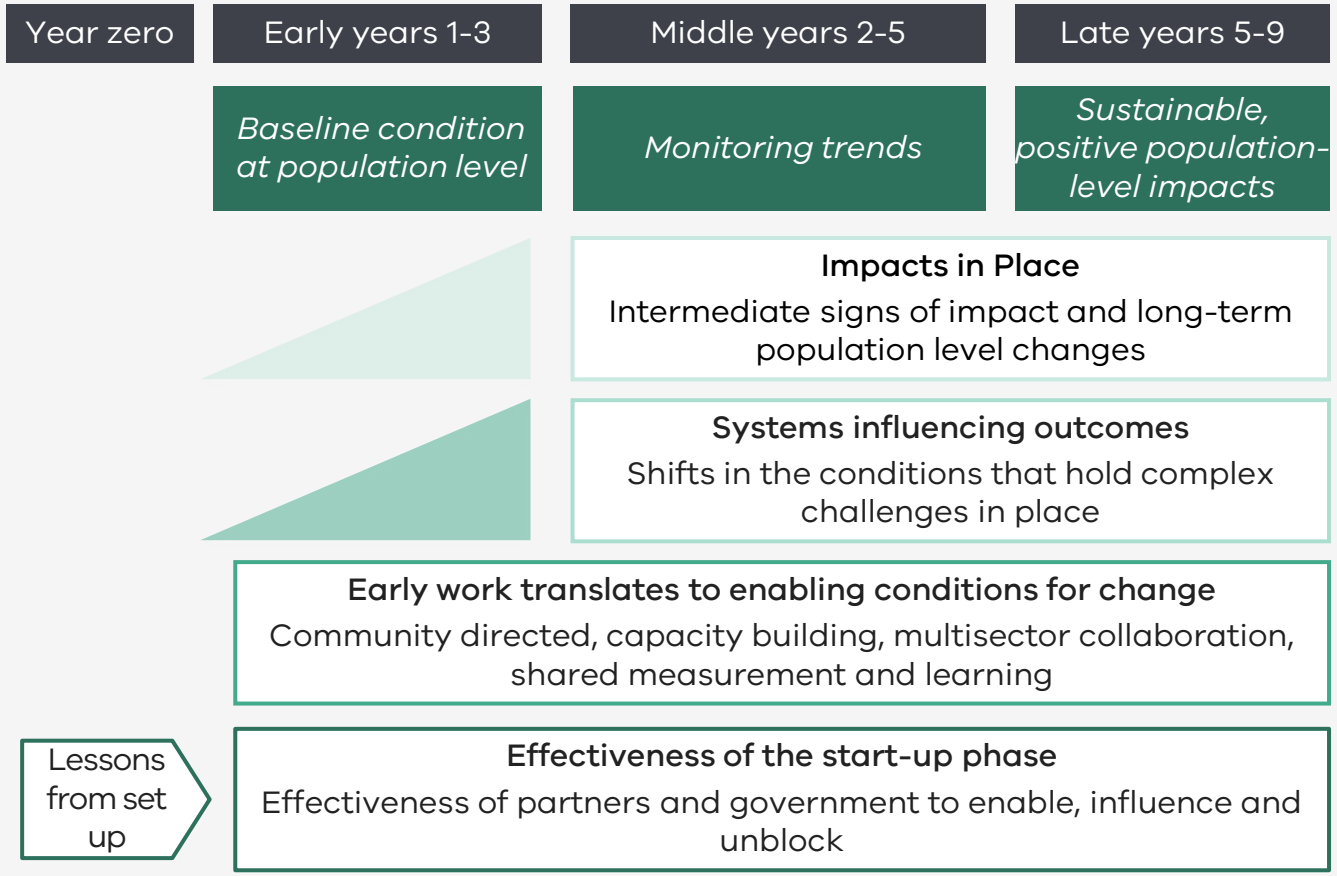
It may be useful to capture particular ways of working in the form of principles that sit alongside your main theory of change. Alternatively, a separate theory of change diagram may be useful to more fully articulate this aspect of the work.



Source: adapted from the Place based evaluation framework, national guide for evaluation of place-based approaches in Australia (PDF, 3.7 MB).

Developing a theory of change or outcomes logic (cont.)

An annotated version of the simplified generic Theory of Change showing how components of the theory can play out over time and possible focus areas for MEL at each time period and outcome level.



Source: adapted from the Place based evaluation framework, national guide for evaluation of place-based approaches in Australia (PDF, 3.7 MB)

Key considerations

- **Consider the contributions of multiple stakeholders and aspects of work in your theory of change**
  Co-developing a theory of change will help to improve stakeholder buy-in and unite partners around a common agenda.
- **Revisit your theory of change frequently**
  Developing a theory of change is an iterative process requiring regular updating as the context of the initiative changes.
- **Consider including phases in the theory of change to capture change at different points in time**
  For example, have a phased theory of change to identify and track progress at appropriate time points.
- **Consider developing theories of change to capture MEL outcomes of sub initiatives that comes under the broader place-based initiative**

Key resources

Guidance on developing a theory of practice	Better Evaluation provides an overview of the different ways that you can present a theory of change.
The Water of Systems Change	FSG in their framework outlines six conditions needed to advance systems change.

Identifying roles of government

In place-based approaches, government is often asked to show up as a genuine partner in place. This means government's role in MEL can be significantly different compared to if they are simply funding or delivering a program or service. Through a MEL governance model, government can share power and decision-making, including by taking a more collaborative approach to setting performance expectations. Equally, MEL in place-based approaches may scrutinise the role of government in enabling or blocking systems change efforts.

Key considerations

- [ ] **Explore how accountability can be meaningfully created through shared learning**

  Shared learning may mean moving beyond a focus on fixed, numeric reporting to government. The need for continuous learning and innovation at the community level should be a key factor in designing approaches to monitoring and learning.

- [ ] **Consider accountability of all partners contributing to change**

  In place-based evaluations, accountability can be a two-way street meaning the role of government—how it funds, how it behaves, may be a central area for investigation in an evaluation. This differs from some traditional evaluation contexts where accountability is one way and top-down.

- [ ] **Determine the level of support required from government based on the maturity and existing MEL capabilities of the initiative**

  The types and levels of support you provide to the initiative will be influenced by other investments and ongoing efforts made in the area and to the initiative. The way you support the initiative also depends on the capacity and flexibility of your department to accommodate the varying needs and capacities of stakeholders.

Key resources	
The Shared Power Principle (PDF, 922 KB)	Developed by the Centre for Public Impact - it provides guidance to governments on power sharing with communities.
Victorian Government Framework for place-based approaches (PDF, 7.9 MB)	Identifies priorities and opportunities for government to better support place-based approaches.

Enabling collaborative engagement

Stakeholder groups involved in place-based approaches differ depending on the place and the local context. It is important that those who are affected by local challenges are active and equal participants in MEL, including in any evaluation or assessment of the outcomes of this work.

Key considerations

- ☐ **Engage stakeholders that reflect the diversity of the community in an appropriate manner**
  Diverse communities include First Nations communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, people with a disability, people of different ages and LGBTIQ+ communities.
- ☐ **Ensure MEL practices and data collection methods are culturally appropriate and accessible**
  It is important to engage with diverse communities from the outset and to ensure adjustments in approach are made so that all are able to participate in the process.
- ☐ **Identify the different levels of experience and skills among stakeholders early in the process to determine their capacity to fully participate in the evaluation**
  You will need to consider providing tailored training so that stakeholders can meaningfully engage in the evaluation.
- ☐ **Build appropriate resolution processes to manage conflict, which is inevitable when working with diverse stakeholders.**
  For example, you could consider the benefits of developing clear principles or memorandums of understanding and ensuring there is adequate enabling infrastructure and governance mechanisms to support collaboration among partners.

Enabling collaborative engagement (cont.)

Diversity and Inclusion in MEL

When working with diverse communities, it is important to find ways for these groups to have agency and genuine representation across various phases of MEL.

Key messages in the First Nations thread of this toolkit can be helpful guides when considering how to engage and work with other diverse community cohorts, including:

- centring agency and leadership in the design and implementation of MEL
- the importance of recognising and responding to cultural context.

Use a range of techniques and engagement methodologies to ensure diverse representation across a cohort of people. While peak bodies are useful organisations to represent common perspectives, they are not representative of every experience and a range of techniques and engagement is needed, particularly when tackling complex and entrenched problems.

Key resources	
The Place-Based Guide (Chapter Three)	Includes guidance on engaging with diverse communities, including First Nations communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, people with a disability, people of different ages, and LGBTIQ+ communities.
Appendix C	Has further resources for conducting evaluation with specific cohorts.

Resourcing

A clear understanding of MEL needs is important in identifying resourcing levels. This includes staff skills, capabilities and time, as well as financial resources—a consideration that is particularly important in participatory and collaborative MEL processes.

Key considerations

- [ ] **Dedicate time to scoping out MEL needs**

  Articulate MEL needs with partners, to assist in identifying if resourcing for MEL is adequate.

- [ ] **Confirm the level of resourcing you have (and what you need to seek) to conduct MEL before putting together a budget**

  If you plan to use participatory methods, you will need to consider resourcing for community capacity building (for example in data analysis, evaluation) so that community partners can meaningfully contribute to monitoring and the evaluation. You may want to consider allocating funds for learning processes as well as for monitoring and evaluation.

- [ ] **Consider factors that are particular to place that may affect resourcing including:**

  - ✓ size of the place-based approach and location (e.g. urban/regional)
  - ✓ priorities that can influence the type of monitoring and evaluation activities and associated costs
  - ✓ staff and partner capabilities to undertake parts of monitoring and evaluation or whether external expertise is needed.

Key resources

For evaluation resourcing, see the levels of resourcing table (pp 30-32), of the National Place-Based Evaluation Framework (PDF, 3.7 MB). It provides an indication of the levels of resourcing needed based on the purpose and scope of evaluation.

Procuring MEL for a place-based approach

A clear understanding of the MEL needs is also an essential first step for procuring high-quality MEL. Identification of these needs will assist government and partners to determine external expertise required and to select proficient suppliers.

Key considerations

☐ **Consider expertise in participatory MEL processes and methods of prospective suppliers**

When assessing capability, consider if the supplier:

- ✓ outlines key practice principles for MEL
- ✓ demonstrates a good understanding of how MEL of place-based approaches differs from programmatic contexts
- ✓ demonstrates knowledge on participatory and community-centric methods/approaches to MEL—for example, interviewing people with lived experience or co-producing with community stakeholders
- ✓ offers an approach for addressing the challenges of contribution/attribution and the long-term timeframes to capture impact
- ✓ demonstrates experience in facilitating learning approaches and reflective practice tools.

☐ **Consider whether several external suppliers are required to meet various MEL needs**

External evaluators may not have specialist skills in all MEL components. Consider whether you need to procure services from several external suppliers to establish and deliver specific components of MEL. Particularly, consider whether learning processes can be established and implemented by place-based partners, without the support of an external supplier. Learning is a key means to support you to test, adapt and scale up.

☐ **Have a degree of flexibility to enable amendments to the contract and account for changes to MEL**

Where possible, consider including opportunities to review the MEL approach at different points in time by building flexibility into longer-term MEL contracts.

Embedding a strategic learning culture and structures into government

When working in partnership with place-based approaches, it is important to embed learning processes into government practices to ensure ongoing improvement and increase the likelihood of achieving desired outcomes. Changes to systems, processes, mindsets and governance structures may be required in order for this work to happen effectively.

Key considerations

- [ ] **Consider when adaptive and strategic learning will be most valuable**

  When scoping and planning MEL, it is important to begin to get a clear sense of when adaptive learning will be helpful, and the processes, capabilities and structures required to support it. This includes considering learning needs within government, across key government partners, and—importantly—with the community.

  Think about useful check points to reflect on progress and opportunities to incorporate lessons into practice, strategy and policy reform.

- [ ] **Consider what's required to foster a supportive learning culture**

  Because they are collaborative and relational, place-based approaches also require a level of readiness from government and community to work together—partners need the right mindsets, skills and resources, or be willing to build them.

  In setting up MEL, government needs to appreciate that listening to and understanding the local community is a fundamental part of partnering with them. This requires intentional work to develop a culture of learning, with openness to sharing data, lessons and failures.

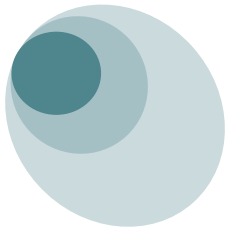
- [ ] **Identify appropriate governance structures to support strategic learning**

  Identifying systems and governance structures is another key planning step to ensure government supports a constructive learning agenda.

  Consider existing governance structures within community and government and identify possible gaps that may present barriers to ensuring learnings are captured and responded to in a timely manner. Ensuring the appropriate level of authorisation is in place in government is a critical step to support an adaptive agenda.

Embedding a strategic learning culture and structures into government (cont.)

Key frameworks	
Triple Loop Learning Framework (PDF, 682 KB)	This framework considers three different levels of learning. It has been adopted in innovative settings to encourage complex problem-solving and enhance performance. The framework can support groups to be clear about what it is they are aiming to learn about.
Building A Strategic Learning and Evaluation System for Your Organisation (FSG)	The five key learning processes identified in this document are Engaging in Reflection, Engaging to Dialogue, Asking Questions, Identifying and Challenging Values, Assumptions and Beliefs, and Seeking Feedback.
The Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Framework and Self-Determination Reform Framework	You can use principles in these frameworks to review practices related to decision-making, influence, control and accountability.

Single loop learning	About adapting to environmental changes through action
Double loop learning	Involves questioning the framing of our actions (including strategy, values and standards, and performance)
Triple loop learning 	Focuses on interrogating the greater purpose of work (including questioning policies, values and the mission or vision)

Measurement and indicator selection

Measurement and/or indicator selection is a key part of rigorous and deliberate MEL practice as it sets the parameters for data collection. A set of agreed upon measures and indicators can help to clarify what to focus on and the sorts of data required.

Data and evidence in place-based contexts

The types of evidence used to track progress with place-based approaches does not align with the commonly accepted evidence hierarchy in government. Indigenous knowledge systems, experiential knowledge and expertise (lived experience), practice-based evidence and qualitative research are examples of evidence types that need to be given greater weight in understanding and measuring the impacts achieved through place-based approaches. Supplementing quantitative measures with these types of data can support a rigorous and fit for purpose approach to MEL, including by identifying contribution towards outcomes, meeting cultural sensitivity consideration, and supporting in-depth learning.

Measurement and indicator selection (cont.)

Key considerations

☐ **Consider data access and feasibility of collection through several lenses**

Place-based approaches often require use of public data, service data, and primary data. When developing measures and approaches data collection, consider:

- ✓ additional resource requirements (including data platforms and systems) to support collection, storage and analysis
- ✓ legal and ethical considerations such as data ownership and sovereignty
- ✓ barriers to accessing data and the role of government in addressing these
- ✓ any arrangements required to ensure PBAs can access and use data in accordance with legislative requirements.

☐ **Ground measures in theory of change and MEL questions**

As in other contexts, developing MEL questions can be a helpful step to ensuring needs are articulated and measurement selection is adequate and is a common planning step in evaluation. Your measures should reflect the current priorities of the initiative, and should link directly to the theory of change.

☐ **Ensure measures align with the evaluation methodology and any accompanying analytical frameworks**

A measure may only signal whether a change has happened, not who or what has influenced this change, or whether it would have happened anyway. Consider which evaluation methods are required to address challenges such as contribution (for example, contribution analysis and performance rubrics)

☐ **Don't choose too many**

Given the many possible areas for measurement, it may be better to start with a moderate set of measures to avoid being overwhelmed. You can then address gaps in measurement as they are realised. To ensure purposeful measurement selection, it can be useful to clearly articulate their relevance to specific monitoring, evaluation and learning needs of key stakeholders over time.

Example measures and indicators

To help you develop effective measures and indicators, we have created a set of example measurement areas and further guidance on developing a measure and indicator set for your place-based approach which you can find at Appendix A. The example measures and indicators are mapped against a theory of change approach over time and cover a range of elements, including enablers, systems influencing outcomes, and impacts in place. The example measures and indicators draw on the evidence of what works in practice, including from place-based approaches within Victoria, nationally and abroad.

You can use these as a starting point to inform your development of measures and indicators in place-based contexts.

Appendix A also includes an indicator bank that can be used for further guidance and inspiration during this important step.

Key resources

Shared measurement	Though not covered in this toolkit, shared measurement is an approach that has gained popularity in Collective Impact approaches.
SMART criteria (PDF, 145 KB)	The SMART criteria offers a framework for assessing the quality of indicator selection, particularly in quantitative contexts.
Evaluating systems change results: An Inquiry Framework (PDF, 862 KB)	The framework provides guidance on the questions that can be asked when assessing systems change efforts and can help with your thinking on what constitutes a 'result' when developing measures.
Place-Based Guide	This guide provides advice, case studies, tools and resources to support the use of data for MEL.

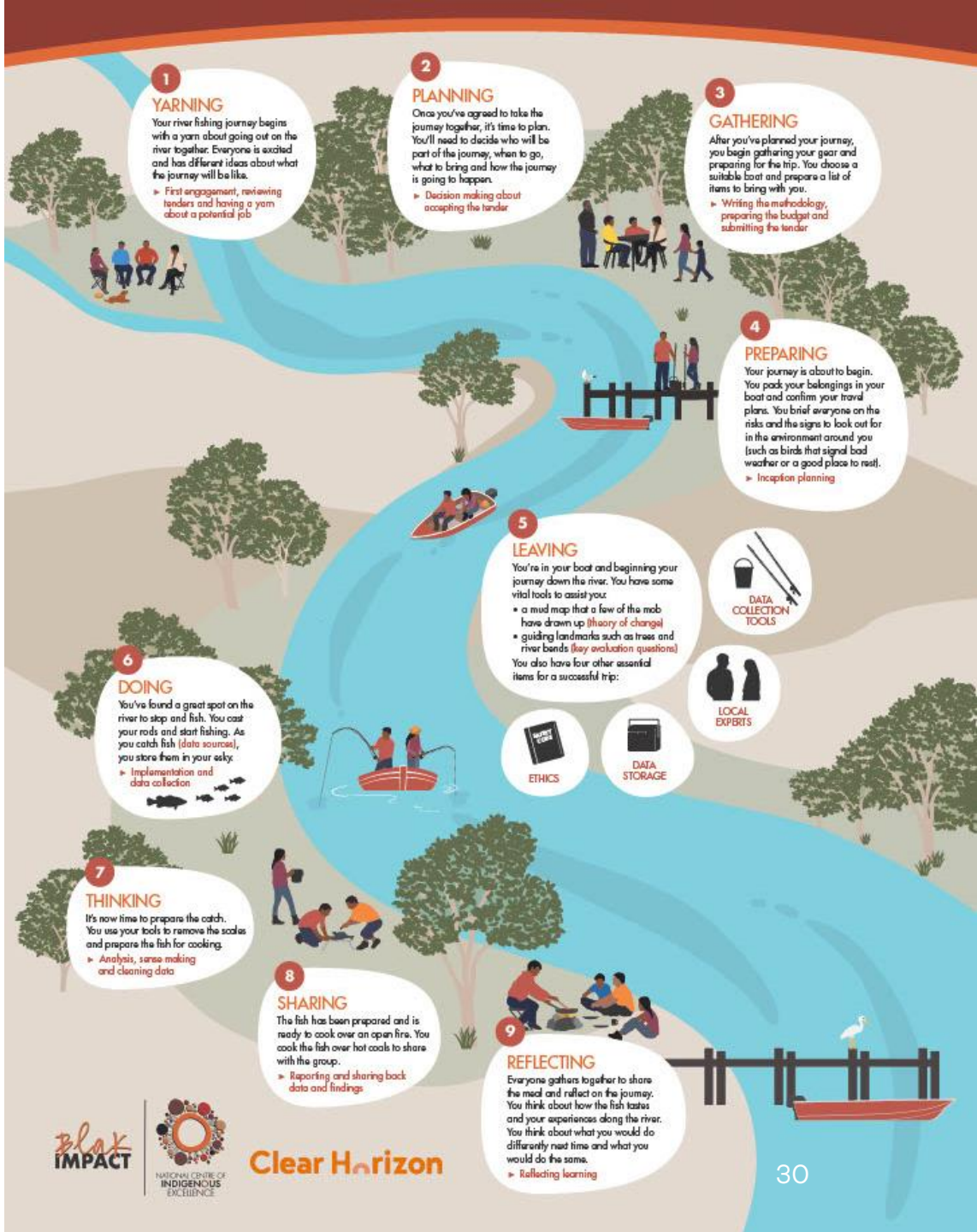
Setting up MEL from First Nations viewpoints

The relationship and connection to Country and place remains fundamental to the identity and way of life of First Nations peoples. MEL in place-based work must be done in a way that strengthens connections between people and Country, through collaborative practices, as a mechanism for shaping and sustaining the shared visions, values and experience of community members.

Culture is critical.

- This involves firstly, and most importantly, centring the worldviews, knowledge and priorities of First Nations partners within MEL and supporting First Nations communities to confidently articulate, drive and measure their own success.
- Contextual factors and cultural considerations must move beyond mere demographic descriptions of communities recognising the historical factors that created power imbalances and inequities for First Nations Communities.
- First Nations leadership and ownership should be embedded across all phases of planning and implementation of MEL.

Pictured right: Key phases of MEL from a First Nations lens



Setting up MEL from First Nations viewpoints (cont.)

When working with First Nations communities, it is important to:

- Recognise the **importance of culture in MEL** as it underpins values, processes, findings and, ultimately, outcomes. It is impossible for MEL to be meaningful to a community if the worldviews that underpin the approach to MEL are not expressly acknowledged and questioned.
- **Understand what data sovereignty means** to the First Nations communities you are working with and how to operationalise it.

Phase	How Culture influences the Work	What that influences
Engaging	▪ How we see, experience, understand an issue/opportunity ▪ How we perceive a particular project ▪ How we view its relevance and importance to us ▪ Whether we feel respected, welcomed and safe to participate in it ▪ Whether we trust it will be done 'the right way' and that our voices will be heard ▪ How we participate in a project, what we share, with whom, how, when	▪ Timeframe ▪ Relevance ▪ Relationship ▪ Respect ▪ Power ▪ Participation
Framing	▪ How we understand/define an issue/opportunity ▪ What we value as being a desirable outcome, what we give primacy or priority to ▪ How we define "the right way" of doing things, how we make decisions	▪ Perception ▪ Priorities ▪ Decision making
Sensemaking	▪ What knowledge we bring and how that is conveyed ▪ What criteria we apply to make decisions or determine success ▪ What forms of evidence we pay (most) attention to ▪ How we explore and test ideas and perspectives ▪ How we manage conflicts and difference	▪ Knowledge ▪ Evidence ▪ Analysis ▪ Interpretation
Communicating	▪ How we convey and share information ▪ What is said, what is not said, by and to whom	▪ Language ▪ Meaning

First Nations approaches to measurement

To be successful, a place-based approach should take the unique characteristics, challenges and hopes of a place and turn them into a shared vision or plan. While a vision and plan provide something tangible for cross-cultural partners to work towards, this fails to acknowledge that the vision rests within the expression and relationships people have with Country and place; and that there may be diverse experiences of Community, and thus approaches to influencing change and measuring change.

Some questions that may be considered by First Nations leaders and place-based partners when identifying measurement areas include:

- What were the things that happened that brought us together?
- Why did we decide that this was important for our Community?
- How would we describe what we are doing in our Community?
- What would we like to achieve?

Truth indicators are a valid and robust form of evidence and measurement that value and amplify the experience of First Nations peoples. Such an approach moves away from dominant culture approaches to research and evaluation, and moves to Traditional First Nations practices of oral, visual, and expressive forms of data. Utilising truth indicators is an opportunity for First Nations peoples to record evidence and share stories about our Culture, heritage, and history with the broader community.

Mayi Kuwayu - Cultural indicators

Mayi Kuwayu is a longitudinal study that surveys a large number of First Nations peoples to examine how culture is linked to health and wellbeing.

It is a First Nations controlled resource that aims to develop national level cultural indicators to inform programs and policies.

Study data may also be accessed by submitting a request to the Mayi Kuwayu Data Governance Committee for consideration.

Planning in practice: **Building Foundations for First Nations Data Sovereignty: Ngiyang Wayama Data Network**

What is this case study about?
A community-led data network which was established to progress data sovereignty for the local Aboriginal community in the Central Coast of NSW.

What learnings does it feature?
The case study describes Ngiyang Wayama's practical approach to data based on a set of outcomes identified in their data strategy for the region.

Why have we included this case study?
To illustrate an example where principles for Aboriginal data sovereignty have been applied to data governance in a process involving government stakeholders.

Where can I find more information to help me apply these tools?
- Ngiyang Wayama Data Network
- OCCAAARS Framework - outlines principles of First Nations data sovereignty.

(See Appendix C for information on the above tools)

OVERVIEW

The Ngiyang Wayama (meaning 'we all come together and talk') Data Network works with the Central Coast Aboriginal community to increase their data literacy skills and confidence with the aim of achieving data sovereignty. The Network developed the *Central Coast Regional Aboriginal Data Strategy* which focuses on the outcomes below:

Identify regional data needs through annual surveys to identify priorities across the region for different cohorts and determining a set of success measures that reflect their priorities

Establish a regional data set by conducting a community data auditing and the development of a shared measurement framework to facilitate better data sharing across partners in the region.

Develop data skills capacity within the region through data fluency training and in doing so, increase awareness of the value of data and gain buy in from the community.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

- Aboriginal data governance and clearly defined principles for Aboriginal data sovereignty should be established within Aboriginal place-based work as a whole, to protect and support all decisions, actions and impacts for Aboriginal peoples, including the way evaluative thinking is held in practice.
- Capacity building and learning for community members is critical and enables them to also gain insights into the workings of government.

Planning in practice:

Guiding principles for MEL – Hands Up Mallee's (HUM) MEL principles

What is this case study about?
This case study is about Hands Up Mallee (HUM), a place-based approach which works in partnership with the community, local service providers, agencies and three levels of government to improve outcomes in the community for 0-25 year olds.

This case study profiles the role and benefits of developing principles for MEL during the design phase of HUM's MEL approach.

It has relevance for those designing MEL in complex contexts and in collaborations with divergent MEL interests.

What tools does it feature?
Outlines a collaborative approach taken to develop MEL principles.

Why did we feature this case study?
The case study has relevance for those designing MEL in complex and collaborative contexts and where there is divergence in MEL interests. By including principle development as a step in MEL planning processes, priorities can be explored and there is an explicit opportunity to collectively agree on an approach to MEL.

OVERVIEW
In 2021, HUM undertook a participatory process with collaborating partners to develop their MEL framework, which will guide learning and improvement and the building of an evidence base of HUM's impact for the next fifteen years.

As part of this, HUM partners developed a set of shared principles and 'lenses' that identify their ways of working and what is important when implementing MEL.

Stakeholders participated in a facilitated co-design process that involved deep listening, iteration, and the weaving together and reconciling of diverse perspectives.

The conversation centred around the question: 'what would good MEL look and feel like?' for their partnership, ambitions, and context. This included considering the 'whole' collaboration as well as the diverse stakeholders and organisations interests and MEL needs.

HUM partners determined that they want MEL to be authentic, relevant, rigorous, and designed to fit available resources. The agreed set of shared MEL principles are shown on the next page.

HUM's MEL principles

Use data and evidence, both numbers and stories, for purpose/ action and to amplify our impact.

Ensure Aboriginal communities and partners are participating and leading, and their rights for self-determination are supported.

A culture of two-way learning for better understanding.

Value and include the diversity of community experiences and perspectives to inform decision-making, learning, and evaluation.

Participatory and creative approaches to build engagement, trust, and agency.

Share data and findings in accessible, timely, and usable ways.

Balance community and funders needs.

Gather data and stories in ethical and respectful ways.

A shared commitment to MEL over the long term

Hands Up Mallee Case Study (cont.)

The principles were then translated into a set of development lenses for their MEL framework. The six important elements of MEL identified were: collaboration; tracking impact; community voice; data storytelling; data sovereignty; and continuous and shared learning.

BENEFITS FOR MEL

The principles and development lenses are a testimony of HUM's shared values and help HUM guide MEL implementation so it is inclusive and draws on multiple knowledge sources. This includes a combination of community voices, data, and research.

In the short-term: the participatory process was valuable for partnership strengthening and influenced the measures, data collection, tools, and learning of their shared MEL approach.

In the longer-term: the defined ways of working and development lenses will help HUM partners navigate the complexities of MEL implementation. They will also provide a way for the collaboration to keep accountable to, and routinely reflect on, the extent to which they are upholding their MEL principles in their social impact efforts.

SUCCESS FACTORS

- Adopting a participatory and iterative approach driven by listening and hands-on design by partners.
- Creating space for open conversations and investing in building MEL capacity and leadership locally through MEL coaching run in parallel to the design process.
- Working together on the MEL principles and lenses required a shift from programmatic and organisational thinking by individuals, to a 'systems' approach and a focus on what was important for MEL as a collaboration and for community.

3. Doing MEL

This section contains a selection of case studies and guidance to introduce you to new MEL approaches and explore how they are being implemented in practice with local communities. While a range of approaches are covered, this section is unlikely to provide enough detail to help you determine whether or not they are appropriate for your particular context. Where possible, additional resources are included to help you better determine what is applicable to your work.

In this section...

Overcoming monitoring challenges

p.38 Latrobe Valley Authority on using an impact log in complex and collaborative environments

Overcoming evaluation challenges

p.41 Logan Together on applying a contribution analysis methodology

p.44 Challenges and opportunities for conducting economic assessments in complex settings

Overcoming learning challenges

p.47 Healthy Communities on using a layered approach to protect cultural knowledge and wisdom

p.48 Go Goldfields on the central role of learning in place-based work

p.50 Community Revitalisation on adopting a learning approach within government

Monitoring Example

Latrobe Valley Authority

Who is this case study about?
This case study is about the Latrobe Valley Authority (LVA); a place-based approach that intentionally partners with the local community to address complex challenges and support economic and social development across the Latrobe Valley. This spotlight focuses on LVA's implementation of an impact log for staff to measure change and see the outcomes of their work.

What tools does it feature?
The case study features an impact log, which is a low-burden monitoring and evaluation tool used to capture reflections and gauge the influence of a program or initiative.

Why has this case study been featured?
The impact log continues to help LVA to record direct responses from the community about their work and map this over time in an efficient manner. It also helps them to capture impact for communication to executive leadership and ministers.

Where can I find more information to help me apply these tools?
- Introduction to impact logs

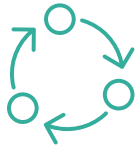
INTRODUCTION
An impact log is a low-burden tool used to collect day-to-day data to capture outcomes as they occur. An impact log works as a simple vessel for organised data. Those submitting data can respond to a few standard questions in a survey or enter data directly into a table (such as on Excel). LVA regularly use an impact log to support their MEL work. Given the complex, wide reaching and collaborative nature of their work, an impact log offers a way of capturing emergent outcomes in real-time, from across their numerous projects and programs.

LVA's impact log is mapped alongside their behaviour and system change framework, which trains staff to think evaluatively and be alert to behaviour change occurring at a high level. LVA staff use this framework to guide their entries. The impact log is incorporated into the day-to-day work of LVA staff and stakeholders, allowing for real-time data and responses to be collected. Although designed to be an internal tool, where possible LVA staff make their entries reflective of community voice, by entering information drawn from conversations with community members and capturing reflections of those in the field.

LVA promotes the impact log by reminding staff about the tool in meetings, and regularly touching base with their funded bodies to share stories of growth and impact.

APPLICATION

The impact log has added value across the following areas for LVA:



Learning and improvement

Able to use the information recorded to inform decisions about their work (enhance what is working well or improve certain practices).

Identify and communicate early signs of change

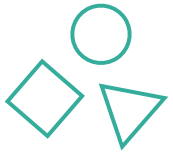
Acts as a central log for stories of change and mindset shifts that can be leveraged for communications purposes as required – including for government stakeholders and the community.

Lay foundations for rigorous evaluation studies down the track

Comprehensive studies can be conducted to substantiate and validate outcomes recorded in the impact log. This analysis can in turn contribute to learning, storytelling and overall accountability.

Capturing community voice

Allows people to share their experiences firsthand, enabling the community to be the storytellers of their own experience.



Coordinating diverse viewpoints

Creates the opportunity to have a central repository for many contributions, including the perspectives of their various partners working in place.

REFLECTION/IMPACT

The impact log has proved to be a rich tool for LVA, allowing them to draw valuable insights about the impacts of their work. Despite this, some challenges have emerged, including:

- **Driving uptake** - Generating momentum for staff to contribute to an impact log can be challenging, as it is an ongoing process, and can require time investment and a level of interpretive effort. One way that LVA has sought to drive uptake is by using innovative ways to prompt staff to access the log, including by developing a QR code that links directly to the survey.
- **Capability and needs-alignment** - In order for impact log entries to be reflective of community voice, staff need to have insight into what is relevant and engaging to community. Building trust and investing in partnership work are two ways to do this, however they both take time. Further to this is the challenge of aligning the needs of those using the tool (LVA staff) with broader evaluation purposes. Questions need to be carefully framed so that they resonate with staff while also supporting evaluation goals and additional training may be required to ensure fidelity of use.
- **Privacy and accessibility** - An impact log can at times collect sensitive information, so good privacy controls are important. Accessibility is also vital, so that staff can easily contribute to and review the log. Finding a platform that is easy to use and accessible across a range of levels, while also meeting government security standards and allowing for detailed analysis to be conducted in the backend, is an ongoing challenge.

LVA IMPACT LOG QUESTIONS

WHY? We often struggle to capture and understand the less tangible impacts and changes associated with the influence of our work

WHAT? A story-based tool that seeks to capture place-based examples of changes across system

HOW? Eyes and ears: record conversations or evidence that suggests that the system may be changing

Which *area(s)* has the impact changed?

1. Innovation (production, processes or services)
2. Knowledge (research or information)
3. Relationships
4. New practices
5. Behaviours or mindsets
6. Resources and assets flow
7. Value/benefit for partners, community or region
8. Organisational structures
9. Policies

What is the *impact*?

(what changed)

How did this *change* happen?

(what contributed to this change)

Level of *contribution*?

1. The change would not have occurred but for the contribution made
2. It played an important role with other contributing factors
3. The change would have occurred anyway

Who *contributed* to this change?

Who *benefits* from the change?

1. Individuals
2. Group/network
3. Organisation/industry
4. Community
5. Region
6. State

Do you have any supporting *evidence*?

Evaluation Example **Contribution Analysis study in Logan Together**

Who is this case study about?
This case study profiles 'contribution analysis' which is the evidence-informed process of verifying that an intervention, way of working or activity has contributed to the outcomes being achieved. Approaches for evaluating contribution range from light to rigorous, and this example is the latter. Contribution analysis plays an important part of measuring social impact—tracking outcomes alone will not provide a strong impact story.

What tools does it feature?
This case study outlines the steps undertaken for a contribution study. The study utilised quantitative and qualitative data, theory of change, contribution assessment and strength of evidence rubrics. The study was undertaken by independent evaluation specialists.

Why has this case study been featured?
It is an example of a rigorous approach to assessing contribution where attribution cannot be ascertained quantitatively.

Where can I find more information to help me apply these tools?
- Introduction to John Mayne's contribution Analysis approach

OVERVIEW

During 2021, the Department of Social Services (DSS) commissioned a contribution analysis on the Community Maternal and Child Health Hubs in Logan ('Hubs'). The study aimed to evaluate the contribution of the Collective Impact practice on the health outcomes achieved.

The Hubs aim to increase access and uptake of care during pregnancy and birth for Logan women and families experiencing vulnerability. They cater for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, Māori and Pacific Island women, young women under 18 years old, culturally diverse women, refugees, and women with significant social risk. The Hubs and the supporting Collective Impact initiative Logan Together are based on the traditional lands of the Yugambeh and Yuggera language speaking peoples in the Logan City area, near Brisbane.

The study was undertaken by Clear Horizon, in close partnership with Logan Together and DSS. The study is one of the first of its kind in the Australian context, and provides a well-evidenced and rigorous assessment of the role of Collective Impact practice.

HOW THE STUDY WAS DONE

The methodology was informed by Mayne's Contribution Analysis and used an inductive case study approach. Determining the causal links between interventions and short, intermediate, and long-term outcomes was based on a process of establishing and evaluating a contribution hypothesis and building an evidence-informed contribution case.

The methodology required first evidencing the outcomes achieved and then investigating the causal links between the ways of working and activities with the results. The key steps included:

1. Developing a contribution hypothesis using a theory of change approach
2. Data collection and reviewing available quantitative and qualitative data
3. Developing an evidence-informed contribution chain and assessing alternative contributing factors
4. Developing and applying rubrics for rating contribution and strength of evidence
5. Conducing verification and triangulation.

BENEFITS

The findings have been useful for DSS and Logan Together to demonstrate the effectiveness and impact of Collective Impact practice. It has helped governments demonstrate the contribution of the Collective Impact practice, which was verified to be an essential condition for the health outcomes being achieved.

The contribution analysis showed that the Hubs, and subsequent outcomes (including clinically significant outcomes for families involved), would not have happened without the Collective Impact practice.

CHALLENGES

One of the challenges of a rigorous contribution analysis is that there are multiple impact pathways by which interventions can influence outcomes, and many variables and complexities in systems change initiatives.

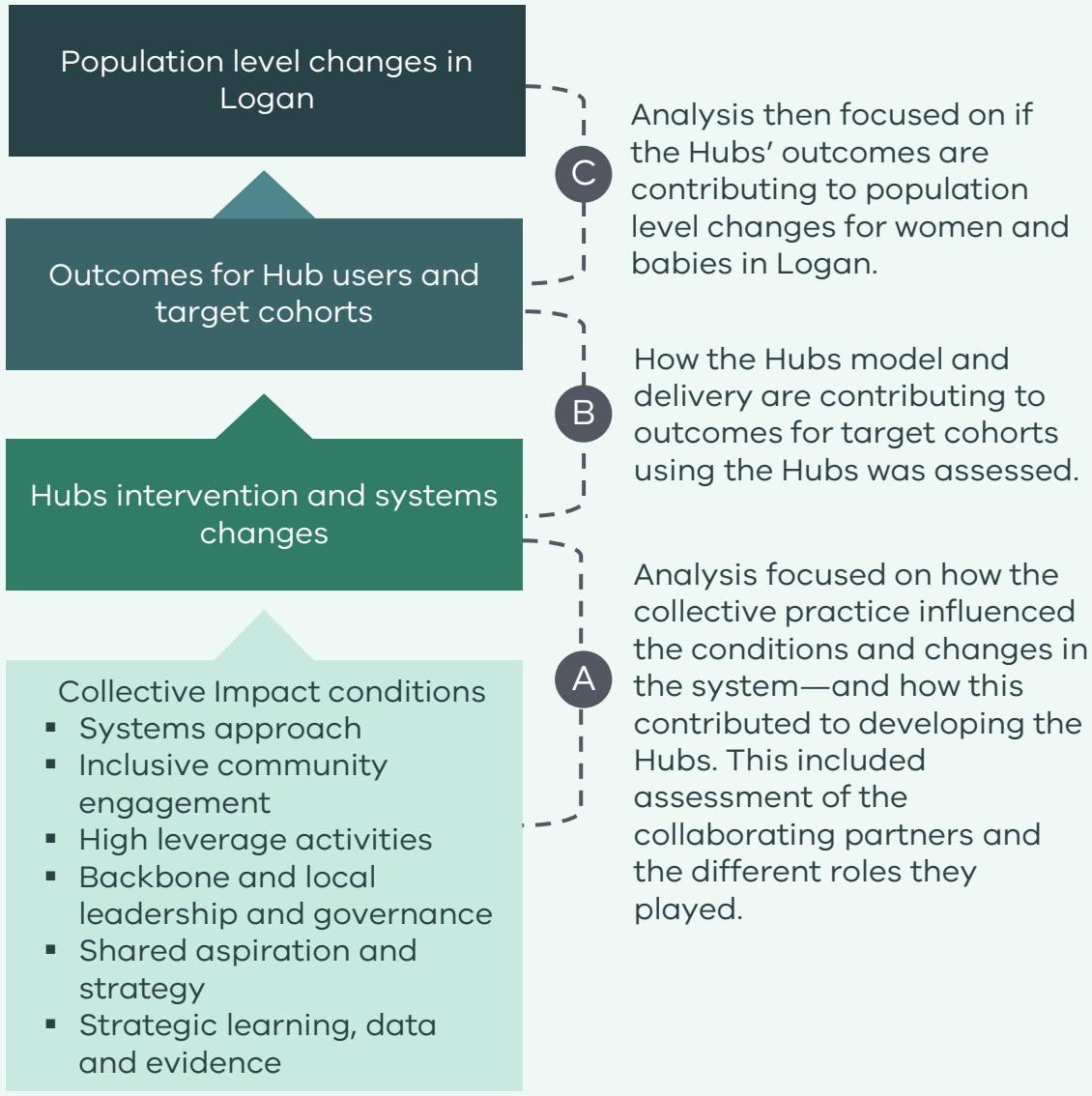
Detailed contribution analysis take time, stakeholder input, and resourcing to ensure rigour and participatory processes. Communicating the contribution case can also be challenging if the causal chain is long and complicated, and when there are many partners involved.

Keep in mind there are other 'lighter touch' contribution analysis tools, such as the 'What else tool', that help make this important methodology feasible and accessible within routine evaluation without the need for specialist skills.

TESTING & VERIFYING CONTRIBUTION

Using the multiple lines of evidence, a 'contribution chain' was developed and tested across different levels of the theory of change. The contribution chain shows the key causal 'links' along the impact pathway for an intervention. The simplified steps to evaluating the contribution for the Community Maternity Hubs is shown below.

The data sources included quantitative metrics available from Queensland Health, population-level datasets provided by Logan Together, and a small sample of key informant interviews and verification workshops. Two evaluative rubrics were used in the methodology, one to define and assess contribution ratings and the other to assess the strength of evidence used to make contribution claims.



Challenges and opportunities for economic assessments in complex settings

This section outlines the commonly used methods for economic assessment and outlines limitations of these methods when applied to place-based contexts. It then introduces an innovative approach to assessing value for money that accounts for some of these limitations and presents a key set of considerations when approaching value assessments in place-based contexts.

Commonly used methods for economic assessments

Economic assessment is the process of identifying, calculating and comparing the costs and benefits of a proposal in order to evaluate its merit, either absolutely or in comparison with alternatives (as defined by DJSIR). All economic methods seek to answer a key question: 'to what extent were outcomes/results of an initiative worth the investment?'

- **Cost Benefit Analysis** (CBA) is a widely used method to estimate all costs involved in an initiative and possible benefits to be derived from that initiative. It could be used to provide as a basis for comparison with other similar initiatives.
- **Cost-Effectiveness Analysis** (CEA) is used as an alternative method to cost-benefit analysis. It is used to examine the relative costs to the outcomes of one or more interventions. CEA is used when there are constraints to assessing monetise benefits.
- **Social Return on Investment** (SROI) (PDF, 1,190 KB) uses a participatory approach to identify benefits, especially those that are intangible (or social factors) and difficult to monetise.

Key take-aways

- All methods have challenges and subjectivities. When aiming to consider/assess value for money, be open to using approaches and methods that can best suit your needs.
- When considering value for money of place-based approaches, assessments need to:
  - accommodate changing contexts with emergent, unpredictable and complex outcomes
  - enable genuine learning with stakeholders throughout implementation
  - recognise that sometimes failure is necessary because there is a level of risk and failure in particular project—need to learn from this.
  - maintain transparency and rigour around how economic judgements/assessments are made
  - involve stakeholders and particularly those who will be affected by evaluation—in the spirit of participatory approaches in PBAs.

Examples of application

Several place-based initiatives have used a mix of qualitative, quantitative and economic methods to determine the extent to which the initiative achieved value for money.

Name of initiative	Economic approach used
Maranguka Justice reinvestment in Bourke, NSW	Conducted an impact assessment to calculate the impact and flow-on effects of key indicators on the justice (e.g. rates of re-offending, court contact) and non-justice systems (e.g. improved education outcomes, government payments).
The Māori and Pacific Education Initiative in New Zealand (PDF, 3.8 MB).	Conducted a value for investment which included tangible (e.g. educational achievement and economic return on investment) and intangible dimensions (e.g. value to families and communities, value in cultural terms) of value.
An economic empowerment program for women in Ligada, Mozambique (PDF, 2.7 MB).	Used a value for money framework (see pp. 58-69) which used a mix of quantitative evidence and qualitative narrative to assess performance. The approach factored intangible values (such as self-worth, quality of life) when measuring impacts.
ActionAid (PDF, 1,678 KB).	Developed an approach driven by participatory methods to assess value for money which involved community members in the assessment if value for money.

Limitations of using purely economic methods

Economic assessments can present some challenges including difficulties in:

- monetising social benefits in a meaningful way and in an environment where benefits are evolving and occurring over a long timeframe
- defining value when there are different perceptions of value held by stakeholders involved in place-based initiatives
- addressing equity in terms of the segments of the population who may not have been impacted by the intervention
- ascribing monetary value to a particular pool of funding can be difficult when outcomes are a result of a collective effort
- supporting learnings on factors that influence the effectiveness of a place-based approach in responding to complex challenges.

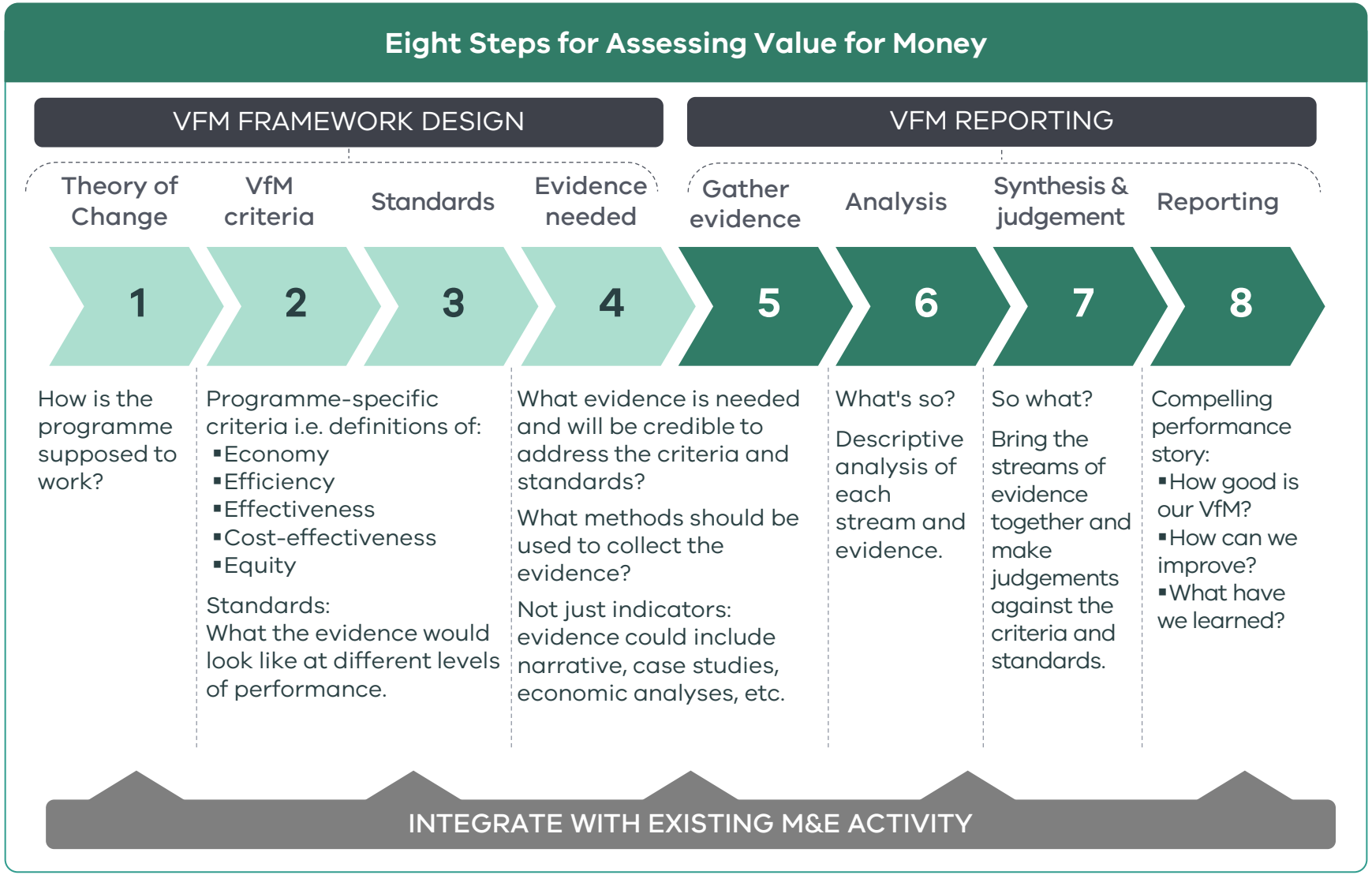
An innovative method for assessing value for money

There are new methods emerging in this space to counter the limitations of mainstream economic methods such as Julian King's Value for Money (VfM) framework which brings more evaluative reasoning in to answer questions about value for money.

The VfM framework encourages the definition of value within the context that is relevant to the stakeholders and uses a process to judge what evidence suggests to reach evaluative conclusions about the economic value of an initiative.

The approach sets out eight steps across the designing, undertaking and reporting of a VfM assessment (see diagram to the right). The approach combines qualitative and quantitative forms of evidence to support a transparent, richer and more nuanced understanding than can be gained from the use of indicators alone.

The VfM framework is embedded within the MEL design for efficiency and to ensure conceptual coherence between VfM assessment and wider MEL work.



Source: OPM's approach to assessing Value for Money (PDF, 2.5 MB) (2018) developed by Julian King and OPM's VfM Working Group

Learning Example:
A layered approach to collective learning and protection of community defined data and knowledge: The Healthy Communities Pilot

First Nations learning and reflection cycles are embedded in Cultures and worldviews. Learning and reflection is conducted all the time, such as over a cuppa, when driving between places or when having a yarn after an event. Place-based work is dynamic and it is vital to reflect on its progress as a collective (in a more formal manner), and to make strategic decisions as to how to progress forward.

The use of truth telling and First Nations tools such as Impact Yarns continue to be centred in learning and reflection. The Impact Yarns tool provides an approach to gathering truth telling, sharing truth telling, layering collective Community voice and then centring First Nations sense-making and sovereignty for local decision-making. This tool covers all aspects of evaluative practice.

The Healthy Communities a pilot focuses on building community and strengthening culture and kinship with the aim of improved health outcomes and behaviours for First Nations communities. The pilot is led by four Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs); Goolum FM Aboriginal Cooperative, Budja Budju Aboriginal Cooperative, Moogji Aboriginal Corporation and Rumbalara Aboriginal Corporation.

The Impact Yarns tool provides an approach to gathering truth telling, sharing truth telling, layering collective Community voice and then centring First Nations sense-making and sovereignty for local decision making. This tool covers all aspects of evaluative practice.

The evaluation of the pilot embeds First Nations sovereignty and truth telling in the evaluation process by using Impact Yarns. Impact Yarns enables staff, project participants and Community to identify the outcomes/changes that they felt were impactful during the pilot. Local Cultural and data governance mechanisms were set up to guide the collective sense-making process and to engage in First Nations thought leadership to identify which Yarns were most impactful and why.

First Nations Data governance also supports and protects the knowledge that was gathered and shared during the evaluation process. This layered approach to data interpretation, governance and decision-making sought to protect Cultural knowledge and wisdom, and ensure that the narrative of Community and First Nations peoples was well authorised and contextualised.

Learning Example **Go Goldfields**

Who is this case study about?
This case study is about the Go Goldfields Every Child Every Chance initiative which is aimed at ensuring every child in Central Goldfields has every opportunity to be safe, healthy, and confident. The case study focuses on the launch of the 'Great Start to School for All Kids' (GSTS) project and the learning and reflection cycles throughout its implementation.

What tools does it feature?
Action-oriented learning workshops.

Why has this case study been featured?
The case study shows learning workshops can be central to place-based approaches. In this example, workshops provide a forum for partners to work collaboratively to understand the key problems that needed to be addressed in the Central Goldfields area. They also provide partners the opportunity to develop a plan that ensures the project responds to community needs and adapts to meet the evolving needs of the community, addressing emerging issues as they are identified during project implementation.

Where can I find more information to help me apply this tool?
- Platform C website includes various resources to support learning approaches.

INTRODUCTION

Go Goldfields is a place-based partnership between state and local government, service providers, and the Central Goldfields community. The Go Goldfields partnership is committed to achieving better outcomes for children and families in the Central Goldfields Shire.

In late 2019, the Go Goldfields partnership reflected on the current environment, the most pressing issues facing the Central Goldfields community, and where collaborative, place-based action would make the biggest impact. As a result, the Go Goldfields Every Child Every Chance (ECEC) initiative was formed.

The ECEC initiative is aimed at ensuring every child in Central Goldfields has every opportunity to be safe, healthy, and confident. The initiative brings partners together around five priority areas to help achieve this outcome. The priority areas include:

- Healthy and Supported Pregnancies
- Confident and Connected Parents
- Safe and Secure Children
- Valued Early Years Education and Care
- A Great Start to School for All Kids.

Each year around 120 children in Central Goldfields Shire transition into their first year of primary school. In 2021, there were six centres across the Shire offering 3- and 4-year-old kindergarten with an additional centre coming online in 2022.

APPLICATION

In September 2021, Go Goldfields facilitated a 'Great Start to School' (GSTS) workshop to launch the work in this priority area. The workshop included a collective reflection on current data and research to inform problem and vision statements for the GSTS Transition Project.

The workshop was attended by 20 stakeholders across allied health, early years education and primary schools. The group identified the following problem statements:

- The system of transition is complicated and vulnerable children and families are not getting the support they need to navigate to progress their children through education
- The service system is not working effectively together to meet the needs of children and their families to support a great start to school.

These problem statements were based on the following challenges:

- high levels of socio-economic disadvantage and vulnerability in families across the Shire
- consistently high number of children starting school with vulnerabilities in their social, emotional, communication, language and physical readiness to start school
- evidence that many children and families need additional support to prepare them for beginning school
- absence of a Shire-wide approach to transition from kinder to school
- uncoordinated and sometimes mismatched communication between schools and kindergartens regarding transition.

Workshop participants overwhelmingly understood the importance of early years education as the foundation for a child's future learning and agreed to the need for a collaborative and coordinated approach to best support families and set children up for success in relation to their learning and development. This was encapsulated in the vision statement:

Schools, early years centres, social support agencies and allied health work collaboratively and effectively together to support families to enable every child and their family to feel prepared and 'ready' for their education journey.

The GSTS Transition Project comprises several components including coaching for early years educators, transition workshops, a governance group and transition plan. These components facilitate engagement and reflection, and build collaborative capability across the Central Goldfields.

The transition workshops facilitate the local service system's reflections on practice and gather learnings gained throughout the implementation of the GSTS Transition Project. Output from the workshops inform the development of the GSTS Transition Plan. The GSTS Transition Plan is endorsed and enabled by the GSTS Governance Group. The GSTS Governance Group acts as a forum for collaborative leadership and decision making to guide the GSTS project delivery, authorise and enable practice developed in the Transition workshops.

REFLECTION/IMPACT

The GSTS initiative is an example of a place-based approach that has embedded learning and reflection cycles into the design and implementation of the projects that form part of the initiative. The learning and reflection cycles embedded within the project components, have ensured that the actions taken as part of the response are informed by the evolving needs of the community and emerging knowledge and issues, identified during the implementation of the GSTS Transition Project.

Learning Example **Community Revitalisation**

What is this case study about?
This case study is about the Community Revitalisation initiative funded by DJSIR and supported by the delivery team within the Inclusive Places.

Community Revitalisation is a place-based approach that operates in seven Victorian communities, bringing together communities, their local leaders and government to design approaches to improve economic inclusion that are responsive to local needs and aspirations.

In particular, the case study focuses on the journey that the team has been on to adopt a learnings approach in their work with Community Revitalisation sites.

What tools does it feature?
It features a learnings-oriented approach which includes a range of reflective practices.

Why has this case study been featured?
The case study provides an example of how a learnings-oriented approach helped to build trust between government and sites by breaking down traditional power dynamics and demonstrating that government is willing to listen. It is therefore highly relevant for a government audience.

INTRODUCTION
Government stakeholders tasked with supporting place-based approaches must take an adaptive approach in order to support the local priorities of place-based approaches.

In the case of Community Revitalisation (CR), the Inclusive Places team in DJSIR plays a key role in the initiative, showing up as a key partner of CR and as an intermediary role between state government and the community. Their range of roles include internal advocacy, capability support, and project management.

The Inclusive Places team has adopted a learnings-oriented approach in their CR work in order to continue to improve the CR initiative and the role of government within it.

APPLICATION
As part of their commitment as learning partners, the Inclusive Places team employ a number of learning processes. These processes support effective implementation of CR and are outlined below:

- Quarterly Learning Forums with all CR sites to support collaborative design and decision-making and drive effective CR delivery—team members co-develop the agenda and are active participants in the forums.
- High frequency team reflections (weekly/fortnightly) within the Inclusive Places team to identify and respond to enablers, challenges and risks.
- Less frequent (monthly/quarterly) reflection points with policy teams and others in DJSIR to connect on-the-ground learnings with policy decisions.

- Evidence-informed expansion of CR and refinement of guiding model—Inclusive Places conducted semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis within their team and with key partners to explore initial learnings. The subsequent establishment of new CR sites was informed by these learnings, while allowing for an iterative review of the theoretical model underpinning CR's systemic focus.
- Participation in peer-to-peer learning forums on a national scale – Inclusive Places participated in online workshops and shared experiences about CR with the Federal Government's Department of Social Services Place-Based branch, ensuring that valuable insights are shared across contexts on a national scale.

REFLECTION/IMPACT

Based on the articulation of challenges and enablers for this work, the team identified the following capabilities, mindsets and resources that support a learnings-based approach:

- dedicated resources that bring learning practises front and centre on a regular basis
- mindset to show up in a different way and relinquish traditional government power
- strong supportive culture that ensures people are emotionally and/or psychologically safe
- being able to work cross-disciplines and translate knowledge and language from the theoretical to practical application
- having the authorisation and level of authority to effectively respond to the needs of communities
- long(er) funding cycles to support relationship development and trust required to effectively learn with sites
- placing a greater importance on the value of lived experience and content knowledge at sites.

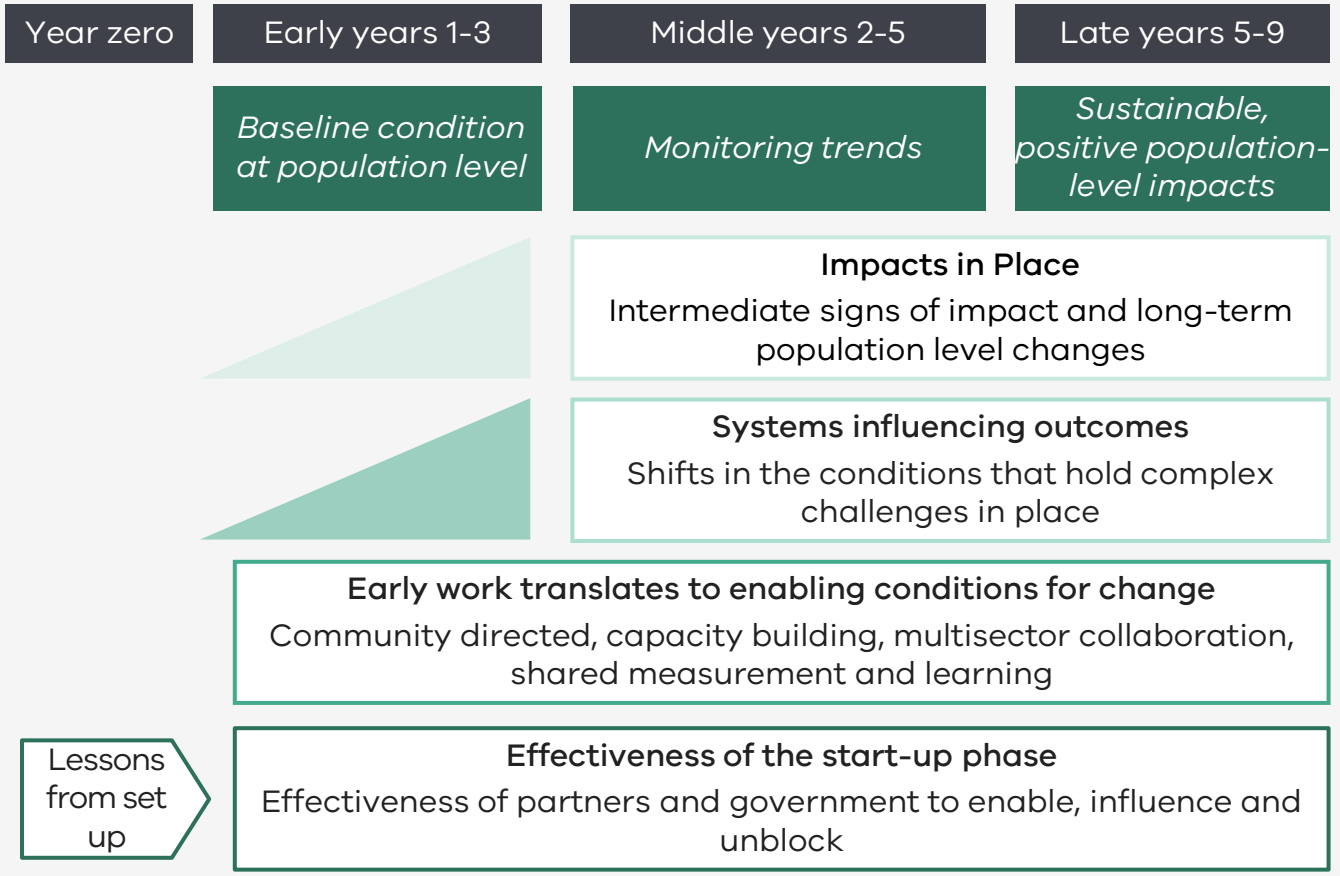
APPENDIX A: EXAMPLE MEASUREMENT AREAS

In the following pages we have provided an example set of measurement areas, organised against levels of a generic place-based theory of change. These measurement areas can be used to inform indicator development in place-based contexts. The indicators included draw on the evidence of what works in practice, including from place-based approaches within Victoria, nationally, and abroad.

While these examples provide a useful basis for developing effective indicators that demonstrate the impact of place-based approaches, the choice, adaptation and number of indicators chosen will depend on the local needs and context and the unique theories of change, as well as the sorts of data that is available for MEL. Furthermore, measurement areas suggested will need to be turned into indicators.

The timeframes ascribed to measurement areas are intended as a rough guide only and refer to the time period that you would expect change to occur in. The timing will vary depending on contextual factors, including the readiness and maturity of the place-based approach. It may also be important to begin measuring outcome areas before change is expected (e.g. by establishing a baseline).

Our example measures align with guidance on how change can occur over time.



Source: adapted from the Place based evaluation framework, national guide for evaluation of place-based approaches in Australia (PDF, 3.7 MB).

Building enablers for change (1+ years)

These measurement areas focus on the critical enablers to do place-based work well.
While it is important to track the progress and health of these critical aspects throughout the initiative, these can be particularly helpful for assessing progress in the formative years—well before any longer term outcomes are expected to occur.

FOCUS	MEASUREMENT AREAS
Coordination governance and partnerships	• Strength/cohesion/health of partnerships (including networking, coordination, cooperation, collaboration and succession planning between governments, service providers and others in community) • Alignment and divergence in articulation of common problem and opportunity across partners • Transparency of governance and alignment of policy agenda to community priorities
Systems understanding and innovation	• Extent place-based ways of working and principles are embedded across community and government • Improvements to understanding of complexities of the work amongst key partners • Improvements in understanding of the system, problem and opportunity across key partners
Enabling infrastructure and resourcing	• Adequacy of technical and operational systems and supports • Adequacy and sustainability of staff resourcing • Accessibility of data • Extent resources are sufficient to tackle known and emerging issues

Systems influencing outcomes (3-5+ years)

When talking about systems change, we mean shifting the conditions that hold complex problems in place, including the explicit (policies, practices and resources), semi-explicit (relationships, connections, and power dynamics) and implicit (mindsets). These often relate to people and institutions beyond the geographically defined boundaries of the place-based initiative.

FOCUS	MEASUREMENT AREAS
Changes to mindsets and attitudes	• Extent the cohort or issue(s) targeted by the place-based initiative is viewed as a priority among system actors • Increased awareness of the place-based initiative's messages/goals among public and key policy stakeholders • Instances of significant shifts in mindsets amongst key actors • New and/or improved quality of engagement, trust, connection, and communication between key system actors
Community agency and activation	• Strengthened systems leadership across the initiative • Increased action taken by champions and breadth of partners' support of an issue (including diversity across community) • Extent that use of power and authority is used differently / extent that community priorities and aspirations direct activities and investment
Structural policy change (funding, service alignment and resourcing)	• New public resources are committed to evidence-informed strategies in the target issue area/system • Public funding is increasingly designed to allow for innovation, experimentation and collaboration in the targeted issue area/system • Improved alignment of policy framing, investments, and coherence of strategy to the long term goals of the approach • Examples of the wider policy settings, systems, infrastructure, and investment influenced by the place-based initiative • Improved alignment or integration of services across the ecosystem

Impacts in place

These measurement areas focus on how the livelihoods and outcomes for target populations/groups may be changing or has already changed as a result of the place-based approach.

FOCUS	MEASUREMENT AREAS
Early and intermediate signs of impact **(3-5+ years)**	Depending on the problem or opportunity being addressed in community, there may be scholarly frameworks and theories that can be used to support the identification of early signs of change (for example, in health, these could be pre-determinants). Additionally, while population level change may still be a while off, you may expect to see positive early impacts for target cohorts e.g. resulting from pilots or high leverage activities with a smaller section of the community. Example measurement areas include: • Changes to social determinants that are known pre-conditions for population change (for example in health, these could be pre-determinants such as accessibility to services, educational attainment and income) • Impacts/outcomes of innovations or high leverage activities from the place-based initiative that are directly attributable to it • Positive early impacts for individuals and families • Local stories of impact and most significant change
Long-term population level changes **(5-9+ years)**	Access to meaningful population level data often requires government to support facilitated access to State and Commonwealth data which should be aligned to Departmental or Whole of Victorian Government Outcomes Frameworks where possible. Example domains include: ▪ Mental health and wellbeing outcomes ▪ Youth detention rates ▪ Secure employment rates ▪ Secure housing rates ▪ School readiness

EXAMPLE INDICATOR BANKS

Name of resource	Description of resource
ARACY NEST	The Nest is Australia's first evidence-based framework for national child and youth wellbeing, (0-24 years), focussed across six wellbeing domains: Loved and Safe, Material Basics, Healthy, Learning, Participating and Positive Sense of Identity and Culture.
Centre for Social Impact's Indicator Engine	A platform to support users to identify outcomes and indicators relevant for their measurement needs in a way that aligns to best-practice by using published sector frameworks or internal organisational frameworks. The platform can also produce and distribute surveys, therefore supporting users from start to finish in identifying the most suitable outcomes and indicators to measure in survey format.
Victorian Population Health Survey	The Victorian Population Health Survey (VPHS) is the cornerstone of population health surveillance. The VPHS collects information at the state, regional and local government area levels about the health and wellbeing of adult Victorians aged 18 years or older.
Closing the Gap	The National Agreement on Closing the Gap has 17 targets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, across the following outcome areas, to enable them to achieve life outcomes equal to all Australians: education, employment, health and wellbeing, justice, safety, housing, land and waters, and languages.
VicHealth partnerships analysis tool	This resource is for organisations entering into or working in a partnership to assess, monitor and maximise its ongoing effectiveness.
Evaluating Systems Change Results: An Inquiry Framework	This paper is designed to give clarity on how to approach the evaluation of systems change and provides three types of results that social innovators and evaluators should consider "mission-critical" to their work.
UK Measurement Framework for Equality and Human Rights	The Measurement Framework is used by the Equality and Human Rights Commission to monitor equality and human rights in Britain. Progress is measured across six domains: education, work, living standards, health, justice and personal security and participation.
Mayi Kuwayu: The National Study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing	The Mayi Kuwayu Study aims to understand how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing is linked to things like connection to country, cultural practices, spirituality and language use. Organisations can apply to use this data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing studies.

APPENDIX B: GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Collective Impact – Collective impact is 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. It is a type of place-based approach.

Community – By 'community' we mean local people and organisations that live, work or operate in a place. This can include local people, businesses, service providers, associations, etc.

Contribution – Assessing contribution involves determining if the program contributed to or helped to cause the observed outcomes. Contribution reflects that in some cases the program is not the only cause of a change, but is part of the cause. In this case, evaluators say that the program contributed to the change.

Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) – A commonly applied method to estimate all costs involved in an initiative and possible benefits to be derived from that initiative. It could be used to provide as a basis for comparison with other similar initiatives.

Cost-Effectiveness Analysis (CEA) – Cost effectiveness relates to a judgement as to whether the same outcome could have been achieved through a less costly program design and is used as an alternative method to cost-benefit analysis. It is used to examine the relative costs to the outcomes of one or more interventions.

Data sovereignty – refers to the right of Indigenous people to exercise ownership over Indigenous Data. Ownership of data can be expressed through the creation, collection, access, analysis, interpretation, management, dissemination and reuse of Indigenous Data.

Developmental evaluation – This type of evaluation supports the development and creation of initiatives. It is useful in innovative, complex and uncertain contexts by real-time feedback to guide decision making and practice.

Evaluation – The systematic process of collecting and synthesising evidence to determine the merit, worth, value or significance of an initiative to inform decision-making.

Evaluation principles – Evaluation principles outline the approach to evaluation that we put forward as being relevant and viable for PBAs.

Effectiveness – The extent to which an initiative or project meets its intended outputs and/or objectives, and/or the extent to which a difference is made. At the level of the purpose described in an entity's corporate framework, for example, is the extent to which the purpose is fulfilled and provides the benefits intended. At the level of an activity, it is the extent to which it makes the intended contribution towards a specific purpose.

GLOSSARY (CONTINUED)

Formative evaluation – Refers to evaluation conducted to inform decisions about improvement. It can provide information on how the program might be developed (for new programs) or improved (for both new and existing programs). It is often done during program implementation to inform ongoing improvement, usually for an internal audience. Formative evaluations use process evaluation, but can also include outcome evaluation.

Impact – The ultimate difference or net benefit made by an intervention (usually longer term). It refers to measures of change that result from the outputs being completed and outcomes being achieved. Compared to the combined outcome of activities contributing to a purpose, impacts are measured over the longer term and in a broader societal context.

Indicator – An indicator is a simple statistic recorded over time to inform people of changing trends.

Learning – the translation of findings from data to improve and develop things as they are being implemented. Strategic and adaptive learning involves the translation of findings from data into action. Data can come in all forms, including monitoring and evaluation data, population indicators, from research studies.

Mixed methods – Research or evaluation that uses both quantitative and qualitative data collection and methods.

Monitoring – Monitoring refers to the routine collection, analysis and use of data, usually internally, to track how an initiative's previously identified activities, outputs and outcomes are progressing.

Participatory evaluation – an approach that involves the stakeholders of a program, initiative or policy in the evaluation process. This involvement can occur at any stage of the evaluation process, from the evaluation design to the data collection and analysis and the reporting of the study.

Place – By 'place' we mean a geographical area that is meaningfully defined for our work.

Place-based approach (PBA) – 'Place-based approaches' target the specific circumstances of a place and engage local people from different sectors as active participants in development and implementation. They can happen without government, but, when we are involved, they require us to share decision-making with community to work collaboratively towards shared outcomes.

Place-based initiative – The program, organisation or group based in the community, working as part of a place-based approach.

Power – By 'power' we mean the ability to control or influence, or be accountable for, decisions and actions that effect an outcome throughout the design, implementation and evaluation of programs or initiatives. The systems and structures that produce or reinforce power are complex and shifting these is difficult.

GLOSSARY (CONTINUED)

Process evaluation – Evaluation focused on improving your understanding of the activities that are delivered as part of a project and assess whether they have been implemented as planned.

Program logic – A visual depiction of the program theory and logic behind how activities lead to outcomes. It is usually represented as a diagram that shows a series of causal relationships between inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts.

Qualitative – Information or observations that emphasises narrative rather than numbers. Qualitative inquiry involves capturing and interpreting the characteristics of something to reveal its larger meaning.

Quantitative – Information represented numerically, including as a number (count), grade, rank, score or proportion. Examples are standardised test scores, average age, the number of grants during a period or the number of clients.

Reporting – To give a spoken or written account of something that one has observed, heard, done, or investigated.

Rubric – An attempt to communicate expectations of quality around a task. In many cases, scoring rubrics are used to define consistent criteria for grading or scoring. Rubrics allow all stakeholders to see the evaluation criteria (which can often be complex and subjective).

Summative evaluation – Refers to evaluation to inform decisions about continuing, terminating or expanding a program. It is often conducted after a program is completed (or well underway) to present an assessment to an external audience. Although summative evaluation generally reports when the program has been running long enough to produce results, it should be initiated during the program design phase.

Outcomes – Clear statements of the targeted changes or results expected from the initiative.

Social Return on Investment (SROI) – uses a participatory approach to identify benefits, especially those that are intangible (or social factors) and difficult to monetise.

Systems change – Systems are composed of multiple components of different types, both tangible and intangible. They include, for example people, resources and services as well relationships, values and perceptions. Systems exist in an environment, have boundaries, exhibit behaviours and are made up of both interdependent and connect parts, causes and effects. Social systems are often complex and involve intractable, or 'wicked' problems.

Theory of change – An explicit theory of how the intervention causes the intended or observed outcomes. The theory includes hypothesised links between (a) the intervention requirements and activities, and (b) the expected outcomes. Theory of change is often used interchangeably with program theory.

Value for money – Value for money is a judgement based on the costs of delivering programs, the effectiveness of the outcomes and the equity of delivery to participants.

APPENDIX C: LIST OF TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Name of resource	Description of resource
Guidance on place-based approaches	
Framework for Place-Based Approaches (PDF, 7.9 MB)	The Victorian Government's Framework for Place-Based Approaches describes a way of thinking about place that will better enable VPS staff to effectively communicate across government.
Place-Based Capability Guide	Developed by the Victorian Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, this guide provides a contemporary, evidence-informed and practical collection of ideas, advice, case studies, tools and resources to support the effective design, implementation and evaluation of place-based approaches.
Funding toolkit	Developed by the Victorian Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, this toolkit brings together existing and new tools and resources that VPS staff and managers can pick up and use when designing new, or managing existing, funding agreements with place-based approaches
What works for place-based approaches in Victoria research report	Prepared by researchers from Jesuit Social Services (JSS) Centre for Just Places, RMIT University and the Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI), this paper identifies the principles, enabling conditions and barriers for the success of place-based approaches. It is complemented with practice learnings from case studies of Victorian place-based initiatives.
Boundary spanning to improve community outcomes	Developed by the Victorian Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, the provides guidance to VPS staff working in collaborative initiatives across government and with community stakeholders and place-based initiatives. The report presents a framework which describes the key supporting conditions required for effective collaboration.

APPENDIX C: LIST OF TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Name of resource	Description of resource
Guidance on MEL for place-based approaches	
Framework and Toolkit for evaluating place-based delivery approaches (2019)	Developed by Clear Horizon for the Federal Department of Social Services, the framework and toolkit supports governments, communities, evaluators and other organisations to build evidence regarding the appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of place-based approaches.
Principles for evaluating systems change	A paper prepared by Mark Cabaj and Tamarack Institute outlines 15 principles to guide the evaluation of systems change efforts. These principles span across the various stages of evaluation: framing, designing, capturing outcomes and learning and accountability.
Evaluating systems change results: An Inquiry Framework (PDF, 862 KB)	The framework can used as guidance when developing a high-level theory of change for capturing population or system level change. It provides guidance on the questions that can be asked when assessing systems change efforts and can help define what constitutes a 'result' when developing a high level theory of change.
The Top 10 Questions: A Guide to Evaluating Place-Based Initiatives	A short, ten-step guide outlining some key considerations for evaluating place-based approaches.
General resources to assist with scoping and planning MEL	
Rainbow Framework	Developed by Better Evaluation, this framework lists the standard criteria to consider when developing an evaluation plan.
Victorian Government specific resources to assist with scoping and planning MEL	
(Former) Victorian Department of Health and Human Services Evaluation Guide (PDF, 276 KB)	Developed by the former Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, provides guidance to support staff planning and commissioning an evaluation.
Crime Prevention Evaluation Toolkit	Developed by the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety, this toolkit offers resources that can be used across different stages of the evaluation process such as planning, managing, measuring changes, etc.

APPENDIX C: LIST OF TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Name of resource	Description of resource
Defining the objectives of MEL	
Evaluability Assessment	Developed by the Juvenile Justice Evaluation Centre, this guide aims to assist with implementing evaluability assessment to ensure that initiatives are ready for evaluation. Although it is written for programmatic contexts and does not consider a developmental approach looking to conduct a program evaluation, the concepts and ideas may help VPS staff to identify considerations for whether certain evaluative approaches are suited to the context of the place-based approach.
Tool - Developing evaluations that are used (PDF, 354 KB)	Short document developed by Tamarack Institute, this short paper outlines key considerations to ensure the useability of evaluation findings.
Guidance on developmental evaluation	
Developmental Evaluation Primer (PDF, 1,037 KB)	A primer developed by Jamie Gamble for the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation. It provides an introduction to developmental evaluation and how to implement it.
Developmental Evaluation	Better Evaluation introduces developmental evaluation and outlines key differences between traditional and developmental evaluation.
Identifying role(s) of government	
The Shared Power Principle (PDF, 922 KB)	The Centre for Public Impact provides guidance to governments on how power can be shared with communities by identifying four patterns of power sharing used by governments around the world to create positive outcomes for communities.

APPENDIX C: LIST OF TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Name of resource	Description of resource
Developing a theory of change or outcomes logic	
Guidance on developing a theory of practice	Better Evaluation provides an overview of the different ways that you can present a theory of change.
The Water of Systems Change	The seminal work by FSG outlining six conditions needed to advance systems change.
'Thinking Big: How to use Theory of Change for Systems Change'	Report by New Philanthropy Capital and Lankelly Chase examining usefulness of theory of change in supporting systems change (2018).
Methodological Brief – Theory of Change	A briefing note commissioned by UNICEF and written by Patricia Rogers summarising the role of theory of change in evaluation, and challenges and considerations for developing quality theories (2014).
Resourcing	
Levels of resourcing table (pp 30-32), National Place-Based Evaluation Framework (PDF, 3.7 MB)	Clear Horizon provides a table with different levels of resourcing based on scope and purpose of evaluation

APPENDIX C: LIST OF TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Name of resource	Description of resource
Engaging with stakeholders	
Spectrum of community led approaches (PDF, 324 KB)	Tamarack Institute provides a list of community-led approaches that can be used for evaluation purposes. This tool can help determine what level of community leadership is most appropriate, and what kind of engagement approaches are needed.
AES First Nations Cultural Safety Framework	Developed by the Australian Evaluation Society, the framework outlines key principles that support culturally safe evaluations, and provides guidance on the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders involved in evaluation
Section 3 on 'Evaluating with Community' (pp.11- 17), National Framework for Place-Based evaluations (PDF, 3.7 MB)	The framework provides key considerations for evaluations involving diverse cohorts and ethical considerations that are relevant across MEL activities.
Practical strategies for culturally competent evaluation (PDF, 706 KB)	Developed by Centres for Diseases Control and Prevention in the U.S.A, the guide highlights the prominent role of culture in evaluation. It is designed for program staff and evaluators and provides important strategies for approaching an evaluation with a critical cultural lens to ensure that evaluation efforts have cultural relevance and generate meaningful findings that stakeholders.
Came et al. (2019), Māori and Pasifika leaders' experiences of government health advisory groups in New Zealand, Kōtuitui: New Zealand, Journal of Social Sciences Online, 14:1, 126-135	This journal article is based is based on a qualitative study that explores the experiences of six Māori and Pasifika leaders on health policy-making advisory committees. It points to the need for deeper engagement and more genuine recognition of the knowledge that First Nations leaders and communities have for addressing inequities in their communities.

APPENDIX C: LIST OF TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Name of resource	Description of resource
Embedding a strategic learning culture and structures into government	
Building a positive evaluation culture: Key considerations for managers in the families and children services sector	This resource provides tips and considerations for managers who wish to build an organisational culture where evidence and evaluation are valued.
Most Significant Learning (MSL)	MSL involves collecting stories to help surface learnings, trigger deep reflection and capture developmental moments in the innovation journey.
Reflection Workshop/Evaluation Parties	A structured large-group workshop that facilitates collaborative sense-making and systemic critical thinking to give meaning to data and emerging knowledge to be able to act on it. Participants can interrogate the evidence and assess performance during the workshop.
Yarning Circle	The Yarning Circle provides a safe space for stakeholders involved in MEL to be heard and to respond. It involves deep listening and encourages respectful and honest interactions between stakeholders, sharing of knowledge and can be used to foster shared accountability.
Additional tools and methods for monitoring and evaluation	
Overview of value and role of rubrics in evaluation and a short paper on the usefulness of rubrics in evaluation	Rubrics can be used in evaluation as an alternative way to establish performance and collectively assess progress against these standards. Rubrics allow all stakeholders to see the evaluation criteria (which can often be complex and subjective).
Addressing attribution through contribution analysis	A paper by John Mayne and published in the Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation, describes the steps necessary to produce a credible contribution story.
Most Significant Change approach (MSC)	Most Significant Change approach involves generating and analysing personal accounts of change and deciding on the significance of these stories.

APPENDIX C: LIST OF TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Name of resource	Description of resource
MEL within First Nations contexts	
The Victorian Government Self-Determination Reform Framework	The framework is intended to guide public service action to enable self-determination in line with government's commitments in the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework (2018-2023)
AES First Nations Cultural Safety Framework (PDF, 4.6 MB)	Developed by the Australian Evaluation Society, the framework outlines key principles, and guidance on the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders involved in evaluation.
OCCAAARRS Framework	Developed by Skye Trudgett, OCCAAARS is a conceptual framework for researching, evaluating and designing Aboriginal programs, initiatives and organisations with Aboriginal data sovereignty and governance as the guiding intent.
Ngaa-bi-nya (Yulang Indigenous Evaluation)	Ngaa-bi-nya is a framework that offers a practical guide for the evaluation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, social and justice programs and may be a helpful scoping tool.
First Nations Ripple Mapping	This tool is for any First Nations collective working toward place-based systems change. The tools seeks to support collectives in identifying progress toward agency and self-determination in collective efforts of change making.
How can evaluation better recognise Indigenous self-determination?	This article by Social Ventures Australia, explores the role of data and evidence of what works in delivering improved outcomes for an with First Nations peoples. It is based on the perspectives of First Nations leaders, evaluators and VPS staff on how evaluation practices need to change so that they are consistent with the right of First Nations self-determination.

APPENDIX C: LIST OF TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Name of resource	Description of resource
MEL within First Nations contexts continued…	
Vaughan et al. (2017), *'Hey, we are the best ones at dealing with our own': embedding a culturally competent program for Maori and Pacific Island children into a mainstream health service in Queensland, Australia*.	The report presents the results of one component of an external evaluation of Good Start Program (GSP), a community-based program for the prevention of chronic disease among Maori and Pacific Island (MPI) communities living in the state of Queensland, Australia. An evaluation of the GSP was undertaken using a mixed methods approach. This paper reports on the qualitative component which used Talanoa, a culturally tailored research methodology.
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