



# A summary

Place-based approaches for community change – QCROSS' guide and toolkit

## Introduction

When working with communities across Queensland, QCOSS heard from practitioners there was a need to build shared understandings around what ‘place-based approaches’ are and provide an example framework for what a place-based approach might look like.

*Place-based approaches for community change – QCOSS’ guide and toolkit* aims to do just that. It was designed share how QCOSS works in place, offer some of our learnings from working in place, and bring together resources for practitioners.

This summary provides the key ideas within the guide and toolkit. The full toolkit can be found [at the QCOSS website \(https://www.qcoss.org.au/place-based-toolkit\)](https://www.qcoss.org.au/place-based-toolkit).

## So what is ‘place-based’ anyway?

There are many ways of working in a ‘place-based’ way. Place-based *work generally* involves a focus on local needs, local solutions, and the unique attributes of a place.

Several areas of policy and practice have adopted a place-based focus, including efforts to build neighbourhood cohesion; to improve facilities, the built environment, and economic opportunities in a region; to tailor operational structures and services to centre on regional or local perspectives; and innovative service structures that integrate or collocate services in localised areas. Community development has long held a focus on local needs and strengths and the importance and uniqueness of place.

*Place-based approaches*, also known as area-based initiatives or interventions, are a specific form of place-based work with a long history of innovation in Australia and overseas<sup>1</sup>.

Place-based approaches are collaborative endeavours that seek to create systemic change by bringing together efforts across the community to work towards shared long-term outcomes. Place-based approaches have been used to address community need by harnessing the vision, resources and opportunities of community.

## Why work on a place-based approach?

Place-based approaches foster strong community partnerships, place-based planning and action, and flexible systems and responses. They employ systems thinking, which create opportunities for novel, collaborative efforts cross-community, cross-sector and cross-governments. They seek to embed devolved decision-making and support public service innovation, and enable civic empowerment, participation and discourse in communities where citizens may be despondent and disengaged.

<sup>1</sup> For a brief history of some Australian place-based approaches see Moore, et al (2014, p. 10), and Reddel (2017, p. 9)

Place-based approaches can bring about meaningful change in communities, through:

- identifying systemic and place-related causes of social issues
- developing a shared vision
- promoting social inclusion and overcoming social division
- ensuring government policy, systems, programs and services are driven by the aspirations and needs of the local community and environment
- increasing motivation for change
- generating diverse and innovative solutions and alternative ways of thinking and working
- embedding evidence-based, outcomes-focussed approaches and a cycle of learning to monitor impacts
- maximising mix and distribution of resources available in community
- building leadership, capacity and resilience in the community
- developing integration across the service sector
- building partnerships and integrated responses across levels of government and between government and community
- involving industry in influencing social impacts, and creating suitable or value-based work in the community.

## Common features and principles

Place-based approaches tend to have the following features:

- a focus on the local level
- a shared, long-term vision and commitment to outcomes
- working differently together across the community
- collaborative governance at a local level
- broad engagement with the community
- experimentation, prototyping, and action learning



Place-based approaches can range from small, locally resourced efforts, through to large actions involving multiple levels of government, business and community sectors. Place-based collective impact initiatives are examples of place-based approaches at the more intensive end of a continuum.

When working on place-based approaches, QCOSS draws on the following principles:

- engaging with traditional custodians, Elders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- being citizen-led
- being inclusive
- being asset based and strength focused
- committing to place
- taking care to do no harm





## QCROSS' Place-Based Action Plan

A fundamental focus of QCROSS work is supporting place-based approaches which build local connections, community capacity, and drive real change.

Given our unique position in Queensland, QCROSS has articulated our role in place-based approaches through our Place-Based Action Plan. The plan articulates four roles:

- **Doing** – working directly with communities to support place-based approaches and civic leadership
- **Learning** – building Queensland's collective knowledge base relating to place-based approaches
- **Changing** – facilitating systems development and changes which better support place-based approaches across Queensland
- **Leading** – bringing together key influencers to plan, collaborate and enable place-based approaches across Queensland

QCROSS is working on supporting a range of place-based work and place-based approaches around Queensland. Current initiatives include engaging the community around vision and priorities, and developing local citizen leadership through the Changing Lives, Changing Communities initiative; supporting place-based approaches, including developing a shared community vision, local plans and local governance, and in the *Strengthening our place* in Capricornia (Rockhampton) and Fraser Coast; and supporting a community of practitioners working on developing place-based approaches through the Queensland Place-Based Community of Practice.

Place-based approaches involve co-commitment and co-investment from a range of stakeholders. QCOSS has received funding support from the Department of Communities, Disability Service and Seniors, the Queensland Family and Child Commission, the Queensland Mental Health Commission, among others.

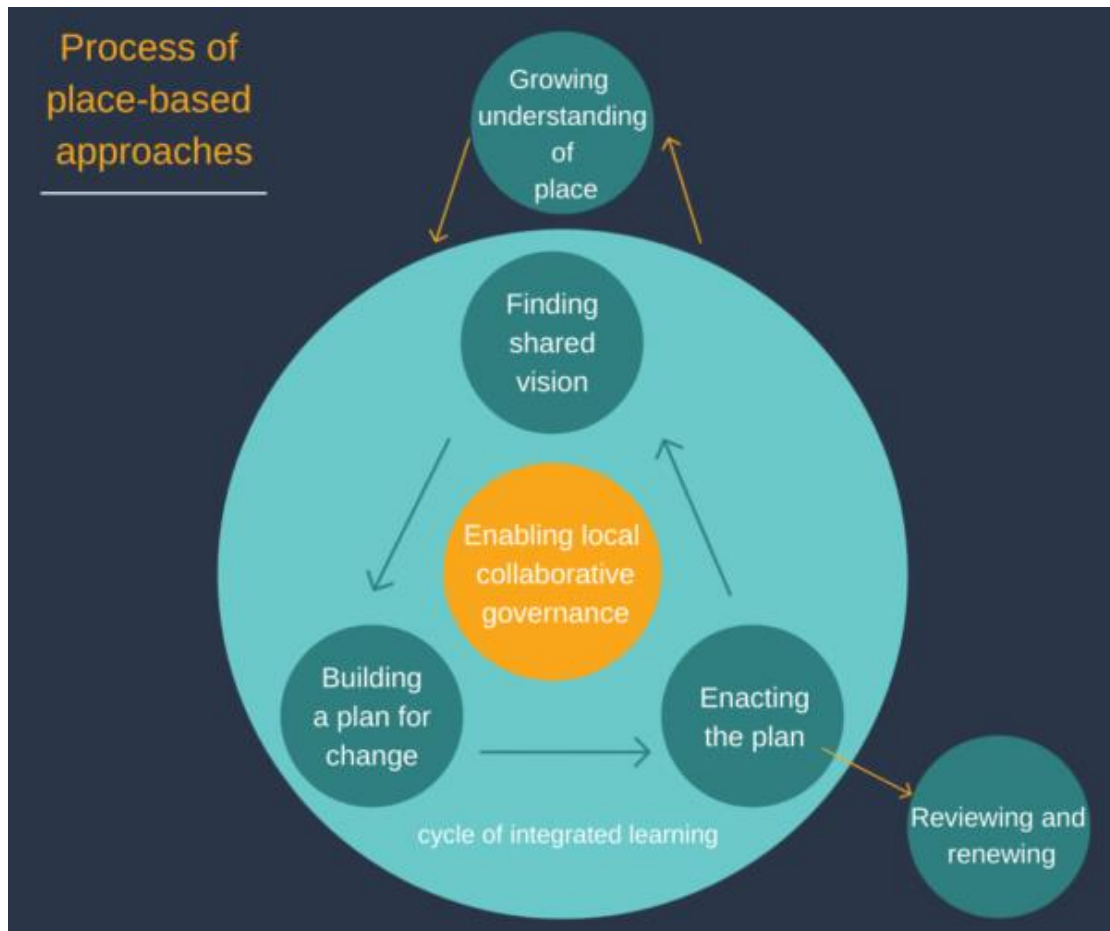


## Process of place-based approaches

Place-based approaches can exist on a continuum, from small, low intensity approaches with a specific focus, through to high level integrated place-based collective impact initiatives. Place-based approaches range in terms of the scope of the focus of the approach, the breadth of stakeholders involved, and the length of time and resourcing required.

Place-based approaches involve understanding the needs of people in place and using a mix of engagement approaches and governance structures tailored to the local context.

In general, developing a place-based approach involves several phases. These 'phases' do not necessarily follow each other in a linear fashion - rather it may be necessary to re-scope, review plans and evaluate at multiple points.



## 1 Growing understanding of place

The first phase of developing a place-based approach involves assessing community readiness and scope, mapping the community, and starting initial engagement with key stakeholders.

This phase also involves assessing whether the community is ready and willing to support a place-based approach. Understanding is not finite or time-limited – meaning that understanding will continue to grow over the life of the place-based approach. It is nevertheless useful to pause and collect as much information as possible before deciding to continue with the approach.

## 2 Finding shared vision

The purpose of this phase is to host open conversations in place, ensuring social diversity and a participatory framework. The community comes together to identify issues, generate a shared understanding of the systemic factors that have led us to where we are now, and agree upon a shared vision for the future.

## 3 Building a plan for change

This part of developing a place-based approach involves processes which generate ideas for innovative solutions, and create a plan to reach shared outcomes. Community members develop a collaborative plan (e.g. a Community Action Plan) which outlines shared vision and outcomes, resources, governance mechanisms, projects that contribute to achieve the vision, targets and measurements, and evaluation approaches. This first plan could include some prototype or pilot projects that will enable the group to test out some of the ideas, and through their implementation, refine the collaboration and build trust within the group.

## 4 Enabling local collaborative governance

Local collaborative governance is a key feature of place-based approaches. It ensures that systems are driven by local people in place and involves establishing inclusive leadership structures with multiple levels of influence, and capacity building communities to lead systemic changes.

## 5 Enacting the plan

Because every community is different, the process of enacting your plan will also be different. Once a place-based plan of action plan is in place, implementation may include identification of available resources - both within the community and outside; sourcing of resources including funding; establishment of project teams; and thinking about data and story you can collect to measure performance and impact. It is important to maintain momentum, document and share the work regularly, and reflect and celebrate along the way.

## 6 Reviewing and renewing

Place-based approaches often do not have a distinct end – while the facilitation of a formal place-based approach might conclude, the new ways of working, enhanced relationships, improved outcomes and even potentially the developed structures may continue. For this reason, we consider this later stage to be a time to review and renew the process.

## Access the full guide and toolkit

See the *Place-based approaches for community change – QCOSS' guide and toolkit* online here: <https://www.qcoss.org.au/contents-page-for-place-based-approach-and-toolkit/>



## References

- Moore, T., McHugh-Dillon, H., Bull, K., Fry, R., Laidlaw, B., & West, S. (2014). *The evidence: what we know about place-based approaches to support children's wellbeing*. Melbourne, Vic: Murdoch Childrens Research Institute and the Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Community Child Health. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/1AhrbXk>
- Reddel, T. (2017). Belling the Cat – Commissioning for outcomes and evaluating place-based initiatives. *aes17 International Evaluation Conference*. Department of Social Services. Retrieved from <https://www.aes.asn.au/images/stories/files/conferences/2017/40KathrynMandla.pdf>