



Social Impact in the Regions 2026 Place-Based Research Forum 2026 Conference Communique

Outputs from the place-based research forum at Social Impact in the Regions, Stanthorpe, 4 September 2026.

Report collated by Chad Renando, released 27 October 2026

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1.0 Overview

All work in regions is inherently “place-based”, and some form of research is integrated into all place-based work. As such, place-based research is an important part of any conversation about social impact in regions. This conversation is not just the remit of traditional research institutions of universities, think tanks, and consultancies. Custodians of the conversation include those conducting the research, those contributing models and platforms for research, those benefiting and commissioning the research, and most importantly those who are the subjects of the research.

It is with this framing in mind that a Place-Based Research Forum was held on Day 3 of Social Impact in the Regions in Stanthorpe, Queensland, on 4 September 2026.

Prior to the Forum, a post in July on the Australian Place-based Change Substack titled *“Place-based research needs better roads”* provided an invitation and context for the conversation. This was followed by an online survey and a virtual meeting in August, written up in a Substack post *“What to consider before a conversation on place-based research”*. The posts are copied into the appendix of this paper.

The Forum was also informed by a pre-event survey, completed by 10 respondents, and was followed by an online meeting in August to review the results. Participants in the online meeting suggested opening the forum with a straw definition, identifying the variables that make definitions differ, and agreeing on the range of views.

The Forum was held on the third and final Day of the Social Impact in the Regions conference at Stanthorpe State High School. The day had two streams. One stream was an ‘Unconference’ format led by Futures Isle with the youth cohort, where delegates selected session ideas proposed on the day and over the previous days at the conference. The second stream was the dedicated Place-Based Research Forum that focused exclusively on the research involved in place-based practice.

Fifty-six people attended the Forum in the morning and 45 signed in. The session was facilitated by Chad Renando and co-facilitated by Werner Vogels. Following a combined engagement for all Day attendees, the place-based forum was held from 10:30am to 3:00pm.

Time	Session
10:30	Opening and Acknowledgement of Country
10:35 to 11:30	Introductions, reflections and a straw definition
11:30 to 12:30	Small groups of six to eight people on the definition
12:30 to 12:50	Report-backs from seven groups
13:45 to 15:00	Challenges, ethics and next steps (about 15 people)

The room included neighbourhood houses and community centres, community foundations, place-based initiatives and their backbone organisations, philanthropy, national networks, a policy think tank, universities, state and local government, a primary health network, consultancies, social

enterprise and impact investment, schools, regional media, and youth, health and aged care services. People came from regional Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria, and from national organisations. Several community members attended with support from FRRR's Investing in Rural Community Futures program. Contributors are listed before the appendices.

Attendees also came with different experience levels and perspectives on place-based research. Some were actively involved in place-based research, while others were the recipients of research or provided platforms or tools for research.

In the post-conference survey, 32 respondents said they attended the forum. Of these, 23 said they received a lot or significant value from it.



Place-Based Research Forum 2026 | Conference Communique



Executive Summary

A conversation about how research connects with regions, people and place.

The Place-Based Research Forum was held at Social Impact in the Regions in Stanthorpe on 4 September 2026. Fifty-six people attended the morning sessions. A pre-event survey and August online meeting helped shape the discussion.

1 Expectations

Why people came

- Learning:** Learn about place-based research.
- Application:** Apply learning in their programs and communities.
- Scaling:** Hear what works in other communities and how insights might transfer.

Opportunity

- Ongoing professional development
- Link research to practice
- Structures to share outcomes

2 Considerations

Areas to consider	Opportunity
• Meaning of "place-based"	Reference document
• Methods and empowered communities	Document methods and models
• Measurement	Shared knowledge base
• Inclusion, diversity, and boundary-spanning	Map gaps
• External factors	Link research to external factors

3 Defining place-based research

Testing the strawman

"Development that happens with people in a geographic remit."

Variables – place is defined...

- By the people there
- As parts of the whole
- By the purpose and context
- By the research environment
- As geographic and face to face
- As everything on country
- As development that happens on a geographic boundary

4 Challenges

Key issues raised

Trust and community load	Community networks carry repeated, often unpaid research demands, sometimes without access to findings.
Ownership and protection of data	Questions of custodianship, access, privacy and risks to people sharing their stories.
Accountable research	Research should respond to place, be transparent and build on existing evidence and gaps.
Language and connected development	"Research" can alienate; stronger links between community, social and economic development are needed.

5 Opportunities

Potential responses

Stronger partnerships	Clear agreements on relationships and sharing findings.
Data stewardship	Clarify access, protection and custodianship.
Case studies and evidence	Share what works and identify gaps.
Training and knowledge exchange	Build capacity and accessible practice.
Connecting development	Investigate community, social and economic links.
Research into decisions	Use findings to inform practice and policy.

6 Next steps

Participants' suggestions for the next 12 months

1. Continue work towards a definition
2. See research in action
3. Map organisations' roles and purpose
4. Develop case studies and evidence
5. Share good practice and training
6. Build community-led partnerships
7. Translate research into decisions and policy
8. Clarify where each group fits

Feedback

23 of 32 post-conference survey respondents attending the forum reported a lot or significant value.

Organiser commitments

Circulate report for feedback; monthly webinars; consider a 2027 symposium.

Place-Based Research Forum 2026: What We Heard | Draft for participant review

2.0 Themes

2.1 From the introductions – Motivations and expectations

Participants were invited to introduce themselves and share what brought them into the room. The themes below are based on their responses, captured in full in the Appendix of this report. Each theme includes an opportunity for the next 12 months. These are suggestions identified after the Forum and not developed in the room.



Expectations

Expectations from a conversation about place-based research came from three integrated perspectives - those in the room to learn, those looking for application in their programs and projects, and those looking to scale insights into other communities.

Learning

Many came into the room to learn from others and learn more about both place-based approaches and research in general. Participants came from working in regional communities as well as directly

engaging in research. The intersection of the two concepts of place-based and research provides an invitation for those wanting to learn more.

- “I’m here to learn from the experts in the room today and deepen my understanding of research.”

Opportunity for the next 12 months: Offer ongoing professional development and shared learning on place-based research, such as the monthly webinars committed to at the forum.

Application

More than an academic exercise, people came with a desire to see how place-based research practically applies to their local community and their programs. This highlights the need for translation of place-based research in the social sciences.

- “How do we actually get the research part of place-based to inform the program?”

Opportunity for the next 12 months: Link place-based research conversations to practical uses, with examples relevant to practitioners, policymakers, funders and community members.

Scaling

Beyond application in their own community, participants wanted to hear what was working in other communities and how their research efforts might apply in other communities. Once research has been applied, there is opportunity to see how the research might be applied in other communities and contexts.

- “What does it look like in other communities and how do I find those communities that [our model] can work, and then also make sure that the community is able to adapt it to what their needs are.”

Opportunity for the next 12 months: Create structured ways to share outcomes and insights from one community with others, including how to adapt them to local needs.

Considerations

In their introductions, participants also included points to consider in place-based research.

The meaning of “Place-based”

Participants shared their personal reflections on the concept of ‘place-based’, which included the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of place-based work and different experience levels with research from initial understanding to practice.

- “Place-based is a new term [I’m] learning about. We are government-funded, so I’m just really curious what place-based means to our program.”

Opportunity for the next 12 months: Develop an agreed reference document that sets out place-based concepts and terms for use by community, government and funders.

Methods and empowered communities

The introductions highlighted a blending of the methods of place-based research, including empowerment versus extraction approaches, consultation fatigue, and the necessary social infrastructure to support research.

- “I’m really interested in how research methodology or how academics work with community, and how that research empowers community to then translate for themselves, and not disempower them, or to be used by academics.”

Opportunity for the next 12 months: Set out the difference between what place-based research is and how it is done, and document preferred methods for different purposes, including methods that empower communities and avoid repeat consultation.

Measurement

Research is inherently related to measurement and data, prompting reflections on what is measured and the related tools and instruments.

- “Particularly interested in how we measure the invisible, and how we put some things around that to demonstrate that if you invest in the social infrastructure for places, do the work, and we can get upwards to scale.”

Opportunity for the next 12 months: Build a shared knowledge base for place-based measurement, covering methods, tools and datasets.

Inclusion, diversity, and boundary-spanning

A separate theme emerged related to ensuring all voices are represented in research and the opportunities for boundary-spanning across demographics, sectors, regions, and domains of community and economic development.

- “I’m really interested in evaluation and research in local communities and how organisations partner up and collaborate around that because there can be cross-sector work happening, but not all sectors are involved.”

Opportunity for the next 12 months: Map who takes part in place-based research and who is missing across sectors, regions, and community and economic development, and invite those missing into the next conversations.

External factors

Place-based research also considers and is applied to external factors impacting a community, including industry, natural disasters, and investment structures.

- “We are a place-based organisation, but the place is often shaped by so many external factors. How do we understand? We need information data to understand how we should respond when all these external factors are coming. They could be disasters, they could be renewable companies, they could be something we don't know about yet.”

Opportunity for the next 12 months: Build a repository that links research to the external factors affecting communities, such as industry change, disasters and investment structures.

2.2 From the small groups – Defining place-based research

After the introductions, the session put forward a straw definition for the groups to test:

- “Place-based” is development that happens with people in a geographic remit. The definition focuses on what place-based is, as compared to how it is done.

The conversation acknowledged that the groups would not arrive at a definition in the time allowed, and the groups were asked to find the variables behind the different views.

People formed groups of six to eight. One person from each group then reported back and were asked about “the substance, the wrestling, the tension, and where did you land?”

What each group reported



Place is defined by the people there

A group emphasised place being defined by the community, including the geographic boundaries of the region. The role of place-based researchers being to listen, learn, and provide value with the frames inherent to researchers.

- “You can nurture them. You can guide them. They know what they know. You don't know what they know. You're there to learn from them. They'll teach you. You've then got your frames that you can offer to them to help them improve and create their place of balance.”

Place defined as parts of the whole

A group raised the notion that place is defined by what is seen as much as what is not seen, that it is the interconnected whole of the various parts.

- “We decided that [place-based] is about the Venn diagram of our community ... everybody wanting to be distinct but connected. So we don’t want to lose our identity by having to be part of a whole.”

Place defined by the purpose and context

A group shared how the definition of place-based depends on the purpose or context of those providing the definition. Like viewing through the lens of a kaleidoscope or the different identities a person has in their family, professional, or community roles, the definition of place can be contextual.

- “A place to me, well, when I’m at home, I’m a mum and a wife ... And that’s my place ... when I’m at work ... that’s my place ... when I’m in the street and I’m with my friends ... that’s my place.”

Place defined by the research environment, and research is defined by the project

A group reflected that what might be considered place by those doing place-based research depends on the research parameters. This opened the conversation to the concept of virtual ‘place’, while the scope of the conversation in the room emphasised geographic place.

- “The place for us is the environment in which we are researching, but the research is defined by the project’s parameters and what we’re actually looking at within that place.”

Place is geographic and face to face

A group emphasised that place and face-to-face are intrinsically connected and necessary for an understanding of the geographic boundaries.

- “... all people from different areas ... we all came together for a collective understanding. So we put down that face-to-face happens with a collective understanding of the geographic area.”

Place is everything on country

A group with input from First Nations reflected that place is everything that happens on country, including the stories, histories, values, and beliefs.

- “[A First Nations member of our group] ... said, ‘Listening to you and everything you’ve said can be captured under everything on country.’”

Place-based is development that happens in a geographic boundary

A group reinforced the initial definition, with an emphasis on boundaries established based on the interaction of people with the land.

- “We focused on keeping it high level, the way you framed it. So we actually just dug into your definition and just added the elements that everyone has said. It’s development that happens [in] a geographic boundary as defined.”

Variables across the groups

The insights from the collective identified variables on how place is defined:

- **Defined by the people in the place (Groups 1, 4)**
“It’s determined by the people that are in there.” (Group 1)
- **Defined by power, voice and participation (Group 2)**
“Community voice being elevated to be heard by decision makers ...” (Group 2)
- **Defined by boundaries, physical or virtual (Groups 3, 4, 5, 7)**
“A place might not always be a physical geographical location. It could be an online gaming space.” (Group 4)
- **Defined by country, history and identity (Groups 1, 2, 6)**
“Everything on country, the people, the stories, the histories, the values, the beliefs.” (Group 6)
- **Defined by purpose, context and perspective (Groups 3, 4, 6)**
“If the purpose isn’t defined for the research for that place, then we’re just going to be lost ...” (Group 3)

2.3 Challenges and Opportunities

With the Forum on Day 3 of the conference, a large portion of the attendees needed to travel home after the noon break. About 15 people stayed for the afternoon session.

The afternoon discussion focused on challenges and opportunities with place-based research and next steps. Four themes emerged from the conversation:

- **Trust and the load on community:** Community organisations are asked to open their networks to researchers and then may not have access to the findings. Participants proposed agreements that set out how the relationship will work and how results will be shared.

“It’s like what you’ve just traded on our relationship, which is good because we are trustworthy. But now we don’t have access to that. We don’t have the impact, and now we can’t do anything again because of this. And then if we are a little bit asking questions, we’re treated like we should be grateful that people are coming ...”

- **Ownership and protection of data:** Research requires data and produces data, which has value and can have unintended consequences. There can be questions as to individuals and organisations that own the data and are the custodians of the data - who controls data about a community, who decides who gets access, and how to protect people who share their stories?

“Access to the data that is gathered. The data is about the community. It is the communities. They need to be able to access it, and then it also needs to be accessed by government, by business, by random others, for the benefit of the community, not to use and abuse the community. And I don’t know how you put those guardrails in ...”

- **Accountable research that builds on what is known:** Research can be driven by external organisations as well as local communities. This raises questions as to how research is accountable to the originating place and people, if there is clarity in the method, and if it builds on earlier research and known gaps.

“Any research, place-based research, needs to be accountable to the place. I’m really taking away the importance of research being locally responsive and shaped by those community priorities. And again, it needs to be accessible to the people it concerns or involves ... and that it’s mutually beneficial. The researcher gets something interesting, and the community gets something interesting and valuable.”

- **Language and links across community, social and economic development:** The word “research” can put people off. Participants saw value in research on how community development and economic development connect.

“Sometimes I hear the word research and I shut down and I think oh no, I get this impostor syndrome. But actually, hearing things like storytelling and reframing these concepts in a way that’s quite accessible and easy to understand, I think, is important.”

3.0 What's next

For the next 12 months, participants suggested:

- keep working towards a definition;
- see place-based research in action;
- map the roles and purpose of organisations;
- develop case studies and evidence;
- share best practice and training;
- set up research partnerships led by community;
- turn research into decisions and policy; and
- help each group see where it fits.

The organisers committed to circulating this report to participants for feedback before it is published, running monthly webinars on place-based research, and considering a place-based research symposium in 2027.

Contributors

The forum was facilitated by Chad Renando (Ready Communities) and Werner Vogels. The 52 people below took part on the day. They are listed in alphabetical order by first name, with their organisation where known.

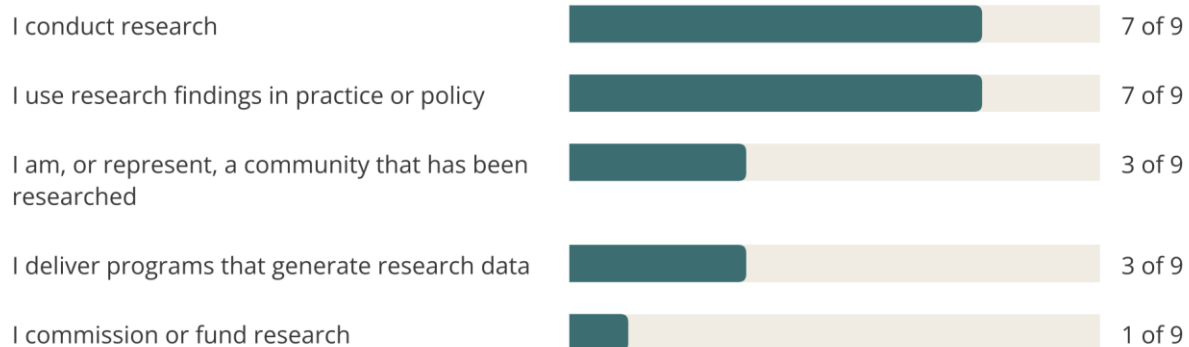
Name	Organisation
Adrian Story	Dalby Chamber of Commerce
Alison Mobbs	Queensland Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning
Amy Wilson	Darling Downs and West Moreton PHN
Andy Hamilton	Human Nature
Bonnie Myers	Anglicare Victoria
Bronwyn Hogan	FRRR
Bronwyn Taylor	Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Manufacturing and Regional and Rural Development
Bruce Burt	Dalby State High School
Carolyn Ardler	FRRR
Chris Storey	
Christelle Withers-Mayne	Graham House
Courtney Tepper	Mallee Family Care
Des Schroder	
Eula Rohan	ARACY
Gail Easton	Gail Force Consulting
Geoff Woolcock	Edmund Rice Education Australia Flexible Schools
Indianna Cue	Mission Australia
Jacki Steel	Queensland Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation
Jasmine Siggs	MyNaviCare
Jo Kemp	FRRR
Joel Johnston	Inland Rail
Kat Lynn	The Soup Box
Kathryn Geels	Kowa Collaboration
Kay Richardson	The Big Feed
Kelly Aitken	
Kelly Burstow	Outback Futures
Kim Wiringi-Hudson	Mission Australia
Kristi Mansfield	Seer Data
Laura Eadie	Institute for Regional Futures, University of Newcastle

Name	Organisation
Lavinia Hutchison	Regionall
Leon Ward	Southern Downs Regional Council
Lillian Akeroyd	Southern Downs Regional Council
Louise Judge	Chinchilla Community Centre
Lynda Hay	South Burnett CTC
Marls Righarts	FRRR
Meg Price	FRRR
Melinda Jones	
Meredith Papavasiliou	Greater Whitsunday Communities
Monique Carson	
Natasha Brimblecombe	
Remo Ostini	ANU Rural Clinical School
Ryan Martin	Centre for Policy Development
Sam Refshauge	Plan C
Sarah Marlor	PLACE Australia
Sarina Kelly	Swan Hill Neighbourhood House
Shakti Lade	
Steph Chiu	Eurobodalla Community Support Network
Tessa Cummins	Ethicol
Tia Lancaster	Rosewood and District Support Centre
Tom Dawkins	
Ursula Tunks	Mend and Make Do Crew
Wim Lindstrom	University of Southern Queensland

Appendix A: Pre-conference survey

The pre-conference survey provided opportunity for input prior to the Forum and for input by those unable to attend the Forum. The survey was completed by 10 respondents. While the response rate was low at 10 respondents, the feedback informed the design of the Forum and aligns with sentiment shared in the Forum. With low response rates, the de-identified qualitative responses have not been themed and provided in full.

About you



Areas of interest

Function

Program structures, funding approaches, governance, evaluation



Theory

Paradigms and theoretical underpinnings, research methods



Conditions

Decarbonisation, diversification, sector development, regional decline, disaster response and recovery



Research practice

Translation and impact, ethics, data custodianship



Value frames

Poverty, youth, climate, circular economy, regenerative development



Proposed definition and inclusion

A definition was proposed that place-based is *'any development work within a geographic boundary involving local people and assets'*. The survey asked 'What does this definition get right, and what does it miss?'

"I think this is a solid overarching definition. I think a key controversy will be the word 'involving'. There is such a wide spectrum to how involved local people and assets are during place-based work. On the one hand, organisations need to start somewhere and build their way up to genuine collaboration and power sharing. On the other hand, I think it is important to be careful not to water down the definition of place-based work and allow organisations to get away with tokenistic and bare minimum approaches (unless it is because they are still learning, as mentioned)."

"Definition of development is unclear and has different meanings to different people, times and projects."

"Geographical boundary and local are not clearly defined. Could this mean state/regional? To effectively measure place-based development this needs to be reduced to a narrower definition of location/local."

"Does not provide scope for Commons, that can also be defined as a social practice of governing a resource."

"The cultural importance of the land, waters and wildlife is missing."

"Sounds good."

"Nothing to add."

What should count as place-based research and what should not?

"I think rather than what is in and out, it is more a matter of what research has a place-based element and how substantial is that element."

"Research designed by the region in some way, even if not delivered by the region."

"LGA/Suburb/Town or lower level data sets. Not state/national or larger regional data sets."

"Working with community for the benefit of community."

"The real estate that comprises a university grounds and buildings has the complexity of a city suburb ... it is PLACE."

"Not place-based: projects that span multiple jurisdictions and treat all places the same; desktop-only research with no engagement with the place; work that ignores existing local knowledge and assets from earlier, now-defunded work. It should be community-led data and research; should operationalise First Nations Data Sovereignty and Governance, including data repatriation; and should treat data as a community-owned research asset."

Strengths and Challenges

In your view, what are strengths and challenges in place-based research?

Strengths

"Pockets of workforce development that is place-based i.e. Local data collectors, researchers. Building of local capacity to gather one's own data. Increase in awareness of Indigenous Data Sovereignty. Also the centring of lived experience - I have observed this has changed over the years."

"More data is becoming available at an LGA or lower level and there is a shift towards exploring social/community impacts/opportunities outside of only economic measures."

"I think the nature of place-based research means it does a good job of shaping and being shaped by practice."

"Where projects are working in partnership with community organisations / people to improve, strengthen or create positive change."

"Generally can be replicated in other regions."

"Communities have shown they can collect, own and safely manage their own data. Networks are bridging community and academic stakeholders. Technology with data governance, First Nations Data Sovereignty and Governance, and AI assurance can enable a commons for community intelligence."

Challenges

"Researchers need to be careful that they create the right social conditions to conduct place research to ensure that it does not come across as extractive. This is a challenge especially for First Nations groups and other minority groups who do not have much equity in these processes."

"Not enough of it! Still done to and for the regions."

"State governments controlling the flow of available data and measuring top down instead of bottom up."

"Helping those outside of our space understand that the research methods used in place-based research are methodologically valid."

"Ensuring that you work in partnership, takes time to develop trust and should be inclusive and shouldn't be rushed."

"Changes in climate patterns will cause hiatus for certain conduits in places that can't cope with density, heat, precipitation load, coastal erosion etc."

"State data custodians are not part of the DATA Act, so there is no central process to request data. Access is often restricted to government, universities and ACCOs, leaving place-based initiatives without a university partner unable to obtain data. Some custodians have cost-recovery or legal-entity requirements that block communities without budgets. ARC grants favour university research over community-led and owned research, and grant contracts can restrict exploring the community's real areas of interest."

Involvement and current roles

For the forum on place-based research who needs to be around the table? What existing events, networks, and programs do we need to connect with?

Who needs to be around the table

"PLACE Australia. Representatives of some of the communities involved in place-based research. First Nations leaders."

"Research centre directors working with regional rural and remote communities and agencies, Community representatives and place-based organisations, First Nations people."

"Social impact/community leadership orgs, ED professionals, industry bodies at a local/regional level, local councils, business chambers."

"Community leaders, universities etc."

"Depends on every region."

Existing events, networks and programs

"Changefest (organised by Collaboration for Impact)."

"The work of CERC at Federation University has examples of place-based research."

"Economic Development Australia [contact named], Australian Regional Tourism [contact named]."

"RMIT - the Living University regenerative grounds maintenance."

Appendix B: Pre-conference webinar outcomes

A webinar was held in August before the conference to review the survey results and inform the Forum in September. Participants in the online meeting reflected on the survey results and added their insights for implications for the forum.

Proposing a definition of “place-based”

The survey feedback on the definition was echoed in the room. A shared definition would need to be raised early. The risk raised was that without a common starting point, the forum could spend its time defining terms rather than progressing. Given the time available, it was considered better to open with a straw-person definition than a blank page, use a session to identify the variables that make definitions differ, and agree on the range rather than force a single version.

A related question was whether the definition should build in how the research is done. Place-based research can be defined neutrally by geographic scope and still be top-down or extractive in practice. It was discussed whether ‘how’ place-based research is done, including an expectation that work be co-designed and cooperative, belongs inside the definition or sits alongside it as good practice.

Defining geographic scope

The survey noted that the geographic boundary and the meaning of local are not clearly defined and could range from a nation or state down to a local government area, town or precinct. In the room, experience was shared of place-based work ranging from a single street to a whole city centre, where the useful test was whether the boundary made sense to the people inside it. It was considered that the forum could reference existing constructs such as Functional Economic Regions (FERs) and accept a workable range of scales rather than fix a single size, while recognising that smaller scopes are generally easier to define and work with than larger ones.

How to ensure the right people are in the room

The survey highlighted the need to get the right people into the room and flagged cost as a common barrier. This raised a conversation about the cost of regional participation, described as a ‘regional tax’, and about who wears it. It was noted that an event organiser cannot absorb the full cost and remain sustainable, so practical options include sponsorship and subsidies for some attendees, alongside digital and social participation, such as the pre-session itself and a screen in the room. It was acknowledged that a lower-cost digital option carries a trade-off, in that it may draw people away from the in-person experience, while in-person connection matters most at the start of this work. The group considered focusing on making the outcomes accessible to those who cannot attend and the use of hybrid participation to widen the conversation over time rather than treating the day as the only opportunity to contribute.

Positioning the forum

It was discussed that the forum should add to the work already happening rather than compete with it, including the national peak bodies and networks active in this space. The intent is to understand what is already underway, contribute where there is value, and stay open to where

conversations are held elsewhere. The number of people raising questions or pointing to gaps was taken as a signal that useful work remains. It was also considered that the value should accumulate across the year through connected conversations, rather than requiring everyone to be in one room at one time.

Ensuring expected outcomes are defined

Alongside the definition, clear outcomes were seen as important to keep the day productive. It was considered that some proposed outcomes should be set out in advance for those in the room to shape and build on, rather than leaving the group to start from nothing. A recurring point was to focus on what the group can control and influence rather than trying to do everything at once, and to identify one or two things to progress over the next 12 months. Part of the intended outcome is simply knowing who else is having this conversation and making that visible, so the forum functions as one data point in an ongoing effort rather than a single event.

Further topics to explore

Additional comments that can be explored at the forum include:

First Nations data Sovereignty

It was raised that First Nations data sovereignty and governance are central to place-based work in the current Australian context, with reference to community-controlled organisations, Closing the Gap Priority Reform Four¹, and community-led data and research approaches. It was considered that First Nations organisations should be invited to contribute in person, online or through the survey, and that existing relationships could be used to extend those invitations. Cost was noted as a particular barrier, which again points to online participation as one route to inclusion.

The commons of data and knowledge

It was raised that institutional knowledge is often lost when funding for a place-based service ends, and that communities can be over-researched as the same ground is covered repeatedly. It was discussed that organisations doing place-based work together generate significant research and evaluation that is rarely shared once funding stops, and that this knowledge could be treated as a shared commons so communities, funders, and service providers can build on what already works. It was noted that a commons raises its own questions, including open sourcing, governance and assurance, and whether it is controlled or open, and that this is a substantial area of work in its own right.

Directions for the forum

Preparing for the forum at the Social Impact in the Regions conference, some of the points the participants encouraged considering include:

¹ Priority Reform Four - Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level
<https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/national-agreement-closing-the-gap/6-priority-reform-areas/four>

- Open with a straw-person definition of place-based research to advance the conversation, identify the variables that might make definitions different, and agree on the range rather than a single definition.
- Set out proposed outcomes in advance for those in the room to shape and build on.
- Make participation as inclusive as possible, using sponsorship, subsidy and online options to reduce the effect of the regional cost barrier.
- Invite First Nations organisations to contribute in person, online or through the survey.
- Focus on what the group can control and influence rather than trying to do everything, and identify one or two things to progress over the next 12 months.
- Treat the forum as one data point in an ongoing conversation, with the survey, this session and later conversations all feeding into other efforts and keep the discussion visible and public.

Appendix C: What participants said

C1 From the introductions – Motivations and expectations

The quotes below are from the transcript of the recording. Each bullet is one person, and a person can appear under more than one heading. Names, organisations and places have been removed. Words in square brackets were added for clarity, and ... marks words left out.

Expectations

Learning

- “This is actually a totally new lens ... There’s lots of things that I’m still learning and curious about.”
- “We always talk about the place. People have an idea of it, but I don’t. Coming here to actually really learn what we’ve been talking about.”
- “Really exciting to do stuff in the place, in the moment. So really keen to know more about how other people do [it].”
- “I’ve done some ongoing learning journey in the space, looking to learn more.”
- “I’m keen to expand my knowledge and be able to articulate it better.”
- “I’m here to absorb everything from you guys.”
- “I’m here to learn from the experts in the room today and deepen my understanding of research.”
- “I just joined, so I just want to get knowledge and understand how.”
- “I’m here to learn and absorb. I’m like an information sponge, so everything that people are saying, I’m quietly bringing it in and then pushing it back out ...”
- “Wanting to know ... the language, the questions. I’m very new to this, never done this sort of thing before, so just want to do right by the project here.”
- “I’m really just here today to understand what place-based research is and how I can use that in my role ... I just want to hear what everyone’s things are and learn from everyone who’s been in it, new to it, or still learning the ways.”
- “Basically, I’m here to learn, figure out what I don’t know, and then take that back to [my town] and share it.”
- “My interest today is under the mantra of ‘If you don’t know, you don’t know.’”
- “I’m here once again as a complete blank sheet to learn from everyone else.”
- “[I put] my hand up for anything to do with learning from others around their perspectives on place-based initiatives.”
- “... just absorb everyone’s experience and information to hopefully improve things.”

- “We are really excited as a foundation that’s built on local grassroots volunteers to see how we could step into this space and become part of the conversation and become part of the information.”
- “Really fortunate to be sitting in a room of collective information. I have a lot of knowledge, but am open to gaining even more knowledge in that space.”
- “I am really interested in the collective wisdom that is in this room. I think it’s pretty powerful when you get a group of people together that have had a local lived experience and you come together to co-design something.”

Application

- “... everything we do is around our place, our local community. So that’s what piqued my interest.”
- “Basically here to see what I can do ... The community is really important, and that’s where I was born and bred. What can I do? How can I learn how to do that?”
- “For me, place-based is my passion. It’s my community. It’s my life line.”
- “How do we actually get the research part of place-based to inform the program?”
- “My role is linking research with real world problems. I am keen to understand what the place based needs are.”
- “I really am interested in how the research then gets translated ...”
- “I’m here to learn a bit more about how we can do that better and how that research can be translated. How we can use it ...”
- “Because we’re granting into place-based, community-led projects, we really need to know how to evaluate our impact in the place.”
- “I’m currently doing a project that’s involved some in-depth interviews with long-term residents in the community ... I’m here to try and find out how I then manage that information as data, and then I want to try and use it to shift the dialogue in the community.”
- “How do I expand, use the data? What questions do I actually have to start asking?”
- “What I’m here today [for] is to understand place-based research and the place that it has in ... measuring the invisible. Understanding what those metrics are and how they can be then used to find practical, real-world solutions ...”
- “That next interplay between where my strength lies in that consultation engagement pillar and how that aligns with and how it gets value added through the research and [data], which is not my strength.”
- “And then how we translate that into identifying both needs and advocating for resources, services ...”

- “... needing people that can help me immediately to implement and deploy solutions to businesses and people that are imminent to lose their jobs and their businesses ... So it’s a bit of an SOS to anyone that’s interested in mining renewables, the impacts that they have.”

Scaling

- “I’m here because there’s a lot of demand for the service that we deliver, and I want to make sure if we set up new locations, we’re doing it with the best knowledge of that new place that we can.”
- “What does it look like in other communities and how do I find those communities that [our model] can work, and then also make sure that the community is able to adapt it to what their needs are.”
- “... how we as an alliance can learn and then share that story for other places across the country for them to learn from us and for us to learn how to adapt and change that from there.”
- “Anything I can learn that can help amplify and share with those communities would be amazing.”
- “We’re kind of looking at how can we support other communities to have something like what we do, and how to do that in a way that supports the sovereignty and individuality of those communities, whilst maintaining the fidelity of the model that we know what works and what doesn’t work in those spaces.”
- “A key thing that we need to do with this next strategy is see whether we can ruralise our place-based approach.”

Considerations

The meaning of “Place-based”

- “How can we get all different kinds of parties to take up the concept and take it up in a more genuine way and try to avoid it becoming too tokenistic ... [too] much of a buzzword.”
- “Place-based is a new term [I’m] learning about. We are government-funded, so I’m just really curious what place-based means to our program.”
- “I’m trying to understand the language that we need to start to use ... [From a] community advocate point of view, it’s different to what I need when I’m talking to different levels of government and grants and all that sort of thing.”
- “I realised I was a community leader, and realised that it’s not a term that many people realise that they are ... people using this term slightly differently to how I interpret and use it.”
- “We had place based planning supposedly going right back into the probably 90s ... but really never really. I don’t think we ever really saw what the issue was ... Really, we never solved that when I was in government. Really, never. We played with it, we talked about it, we went to people’s homes, groups ...”

Methods and empowered communities

- “I’m really interested in how research methodology or how academics work with community, and how that research empowers community to then translate for themselves, and not disempower them, or to be used by academics.”
- “The evaluation that we conduct is really around storytelling ... how [this] research can bolster that and be prepared to be less extractive and unkind to the communities and really help them to tell this story as well, in place to celebrate and to have a sense of pride in place.”
- “... in a really engaging way that we can use it and we can be empowered to understand and actually become part of the process ...”
- “Our core model is that we don’t know. We won’t pretend to know from our perch what any other community needs. Instead of acting like the typical impact investors who know and get to decide, we’re building tools in the hands of the community ...”
- “Valuable community knowledge and research is scattered across reports, evaluations, consultations, strategies, videos ... that sit in everyone’s shared drives. And then when projects end or staff move on, this knowledge can be difficult to find. And it’s actually a community asset. And that repeated community consultation, loss of institutional knowledge, duplication of effort, decisions being made without access to existing evidence, is actually causing major mistrust ... There was a Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry this year into community consultation practices ... One of the key findings was that repetitive consultation ... creates fatigue, distrust, and disengagement ... so that research doesn’t have to be redone, and the community can define who gets access to all this rich information.”
- “How do you bring actual research to regions that don’t have structures?”
- “... testing different ways that you can build a program that can be flexible enough for it to be region led and towards the aspirations of that community ... how do we connect those communities, connect those dot connectors, to be more effective and to build their own professional development and capacity and not for them to have to rely on us funding it.”

Measurement

- “Particularly interested in how we measure the invisible, and how we put some things around that to demonstrate that if you invest in the social infrastructure for places, do the work, and we can get upwards to scale.”
- “When we were doing the [arts] program, I was in the main street with a dear friend ... And he goes, ‘You can feel the buzz,’ and I said, ‘Yeah, you can.’ I thought it was just me that was feeling this buzz of the community spirit coming alive. And it was from the work that was happening in that community. How do you capture that?”

- “What’s interesting to me is measuring what matters, but not for us to do that. For democratic and participatory, community-led approaches to a community to measure what matters to them ... So how do you really democratise and make it inclusive and put the tools, the simple tools, in the hands of the community so that they are measuring what matters to them, so they can do sense making, they can do learning for their own places and initiatives ...”
- “Looking very much at how we can engage our community to get the right sort of data. I think there’s a lot of ... just running surveys ... and have very minimal uptake of gathering that information. How do we go about doing that?”

Inclusion, diversity, and boundary-spanning

- “I’m here out of curiosity around what kind of research exists in terms of what can be transferred and where that is, but also asking the question about whether that is appropriate. ... Where are the gaps? What are the voices that are being heard? Or how do I ask the right question to get the right answer? ... We have a lot of stories. We could give you a whole profile of a whole lot of things, but that’s from our own bias, perspective, of how we’re engaging, interacting, the relationships we have in our region and in those spaces, and where we might be framing that feedback in a way where we’re delivering services so that people feel comfortable to respond ... what we might need to develop to get a true voice of representation ... So when you are doing it, is it actually reflective?”
- “[I] work ... in aged care, which no one’s even mentioned here, so I’m quite passionate about [it].”
- “Food can absolutely determine and be very much part of the conversation around place ... regions are actually defined by their food, by their agriculture, and by their culture, and also food is a cultural marker.”
- “While there’s similarities ... those communities are all different and have their unique priorities and visions.”
- “There’s so many aspects to [the project], from heritage, indigenous, the flora, fauna, all of that, and then just community enjoyment ...”
- “I have been fiercely passionate about recognising and identifying the diversity that is across rural Australia. It’s not just one area ...”
- “We know it works in certain communities of certain size and in certain assets. We don’t know. It’s untested whether this similar kind of core model works in progressively more rural and remote communities. ... Being from a national organisation, what’s the national learning and infrastructure that can enable hyperlocal place-based work?”
- “I’m really interested in evaluation and research in local communities and how organisations partner up and collaborate around that because there can be cross-sector work happening, but not all sectors are involved.”

- “What I am interested in is the relationships that connect it, that bring it to life, the opportunities and the challenges that creates ...”
- “... really looking at resilience of hyperlocal, community-driven organisations.”
- “Part of the work that I do is around helping them to understand small steps that they take within their communities create a larger footprint for them up into creating change in place-based movements as well.”
- “I’m really curious to inquire and find out more about how community development and regional development and the social impact of that intersect with economic development.”
- “My day is spent thinking about gross regional product and how to create industries, but I do see a very strong connection with the purpose of why would I grow the economy in this place is all about how do we keep people here, have more opportunities, more jobs, and ultimately a better place to live.”
- “... be able to bring together the social and the community aspects so that you are delivering that in tandem with economic and liveability aspects all in one place.”

External factors

- “We are a place-based organisation, but the place is often shaped by so many external factors. How do we understand? We need information data to understand how we should respond when all these external factors are coming. They could be disasters, they could be renewable companies, they could be something we don’t know about yet.”
- “My own community ... I believe is in a crisis ... how you get these issues back up the chain ... our largest open cut coal mine ... in our community, is closing in four years. Our power station has closed ... And then how we navigate political warfare at the same time. And at the end of the day, there’s people’s jobs and lives ... And how national and global conversations impact small towns ...”
- “What I kept seeing through those programs is how hard it was for those companies to then find the capital and support ... they needed to grow ... [Impact investment] essentially is not very good at supporting anything that they didn’t already know how to support. Anything that doesn’t fit the mould, which tends to be at the early stage tech-enabled startups founded by white men, and at the latter stage construction and renewables projects at the kind of seven-figure range, and there’s almost nothing in between.”

C2 From the small groups – Defining place-based research

The quotes below are from the transcript of the report-backs. Groups are numbered in the order they reported, and each quote is the reporter speaking for their group. Names have been removed. Words in square brackets were added for clarity, and ... marks words left out.

What each group reported

Place is defined by the people there

- “We’ll start with go there not knowing anything ... Don’t go with an assumption that you think you know what they need, because they know their area better than we do.”
- “Who has come before us, and who’s coming next? What have we learned from those that have been there before us, and what can we open a space for and a place for those that are coming next, so that they can then shape their place around them as well.”
- “Who is in that place? Who’s actually in there? And it was also not restricted to a geographical boundary. Don’t define it by that existing boundary. It’s determined by the people that are in there. So that’s what becomes place.”
- “You can nurture them. You can guide them. They know what they know. You don’t know what they know. You’re there to learn from them. They’ll teach you. You’ve then got your frames that you can offer to them to help them improve and create their place of balance.”

Place defined as parts of the whole

- “We decided that [place-based] is about the Venn diagram of our community ... everybody wanting to be distinct but connected. So we don’t want to lose our identity by having to be part of a whole.”
- “Sometimes defining what it’s not can be as powerful as trying to define what it is. So don’t try and be everything to everyone.”
- “It’s about breaking down the barriers to participation and respecting each other’s choices and contribution. So the power and power balances or imbalances are things that will impact on the place-based. In those, you’ve got to build trust and take time to build trust ...”
- “Getting people to turn up is a huge challenge. And it’s always the same people. Or did they burn out? Or do they not turn up?”
- “... community voice being elevated to be heard by decision makers, and this is about making life better for everyone. How do you capture and share that voice?”
- “... frameworks and that lots exist and apply, but it does take time for a community to find those, apply those, and bend them to their will.”
- “We use lots of words like homegrown, grassroots, community-led, and empowered, and that sometimes you may have a changing population and that can change that culture.”

Place defined by the purpose and context

- “The concept of the definition was the concept of a system making connections in relation to each purpose of community and social impact.”
- “People want to get together and they want to create, but it doesn’t mean it’s a place. It doesn’t mean it’s an actual physical spot. But in saying that, you’ve got neighbourhood houses and community houses that are a physical space ... people know where to go. They can connect.”
- “A place to me, well, when I’m at home, I’m a mum and a wife ... And that’s my place ... when I’m at work ... that’s my place ... when I’m in the street and I’m with my friends ... that’s my place.”
- “Even using the metaphor of a kaleidoscope, wherever you turn it, it’s how that feels, especially at different angles.”
- “If the purpose isn’t defined for the research for that place, then we’re just going to be lost, and we’re not going to know how that place-based work can play out. It does come down to really defining that context because context is so important.”
- “I drew a number, number six. Someone might see that as a number nine ... So even though each different perspective matters, it’s finding out what it originally [was] ... where did it originate?”

Place defined by the research environment, and research is defined by the project

- “A place is defined by the project and the project [is] determined by the group.”
- “It’s not only a geographical location. It’s not just one place because one place may have an impact on other surrounding communities. And again, a place might not always be a physical geographical location. It could be an online gaming space.”
- “We also talked about the need for boundaries and parameters for the research to be comparable and useful ... the parameters and the boundaries are set on the project and the research, not around the definition of place.”
- “The place for us is the environment in which we are researching, but the research is defined by the project’s parameters and what we’re actually looking at within that place.”

Place is geographic and face to face

- “... all people from different areas ... we all came together for a collective understanding. So we put down that face-to-face happens with a collective understanding of the geographic area.”

Place is everything on country

- “We’re a little bit left of centre. We had a multitude of conversations.”
- “Actually, defining something with so many variables, inputs, perspectives. We spoke about the broad spectrum of stakeholders, industries, that make up the community.”

- “We still spoke about the importance of the stories of the past, the current state, the future aspirations. And then also the values, the beliefs of that place.”
- “[A First Nations member of our group] ... said, ‘Listening to you and everything you’ve said can be captured under everything on country.’”
- “Everything on country, the people, the stories, the histories, the values, the beliefs.”

Place-based is development that happens in a geographic boundary

- “We focused on keeping it high level, the way you framed it. So we actually just dug into your definition and just added the elements that everyone has said. It’s development that happens [in] a geographic boundary as defined.”
- “We discussed land and country and water catchment and how boundaries are defined as opposed to natural geographic features.”

Variables across the groups

Defined by the people in the place (Groups 1, 4)

- “It’s determined by the people that are in there.” (Group 1)
- “A place is defined by the project and the project [is] determined by the group.” (Group 4)
- “Go there not knowing anything ...” (Group 1)
- “They know what they know. You don’t know what they know. You’re there to learn from them.” (Group 1)

Defined by power, voice and participation (Group 2)

- “Community voice being elevated to be heard by decision makers ...” (Group 2)
- “The power and power balances or imbalances are things that will impact on the place-based.” (Group 2)
- “Take time to build trust ...” (Group 2)
- “It’s always the same people.” (Group 2)

Defined by boundaries, physical or virtual (Groups 3, 4, 5, 7)

- “Land and country and water catchment and how boundaries are defined ...” (Group 7)
- “Face-to-face happens with a collective understanding of the geographic area.” (Group 5)
- “One place may have an impact on other surrounding communities.” (Group 4)
- “It doesn’t mean it’s an actual physical spot.” (Group 3)
- “A place might not always be a physical geographical location. It could be an online gaming space.” (Group 4)

Defined by country, history and identity (Groups 1, 2, 6)

- “Everything on country, the people, the stories, the histories, the values, the beliefs.” (Group 6)
- “Who has come before us, and who’s coming next?” (Group 1)
- “The stories of the past, the current state, the future aspirations.” (Group 6)
- “Everybody wanting to be distinct but connected.” (Group 2)
- “Sometimes defining what it’s not can be as powerful as trying to define what it is.” (Group 2)

Defined by purpose, context and perspective (Groups 3, 4, 6)

- “If the purpose isn’t defined for the research for that place, then we’re just going to be lost ...” (Group 3)
- “The research is defined by the project’s parameters ...” (Group 4)
- “A kaleidoscope, wherever you turn it, it’s how that feels, especially at different angles.” (Group 3)
- “Someone might see that as a number nine ...” (Group 3)
- “Defining something with so many variables, inputs, perspectives ...” (Group 6)

Reflections from the facilitators

After the report-backs, the co-facilitator and the facilitator responded.

- **Co-facilitator:** “It’s always collective. It has input from a collective of sorts, whether it’s community, whether it’s industry, whether multiple groups ... [Whose] voice are we missing, and do we then go and reach out purposefully to get that voice in so we understand what the place is?”
- **Facilitator:** “This is a particular conversation we’re hosting here, which we facilitate, and people will enter based on self-nomination. And there are other people that can be those voices out of community to meet with community in different ways ...”
- **Facilitator:** “My definition of what place-based is cannot be separated from how, no matter how much we try to respect that.”
- **Facilitator:** “The purpose for this conversation this morning and into this afternoon is simply to say, what are different lenses, what are the variables? We’re going to publish that, and then let everybody unpack that, disagree with it ...”

C3 Challenges and Opportunities

With the Forum on Day 3 of the conference and the conference in region, a large portion of the attendees needed to travel home after the noon break. About 15 people stayed for the afternoon session. The facilitator opened it with a question about research infrastructure:

- **Facilitator:** "... wanting to understand how we build better research infrastructure. Now, if I want to do research in a community from the outside, we need somebody inside the community to sponsor us in to give social licence."
- **Facilitator:** "What would it look like if instead of researchers coming in and extracting, they would be the people who are the custodians of the information get paid for the infrastructure?"

The first half of the session was an open discussion. The second half went around the room for reflections on the day and suggestions for the next 12 months. Challenges, opportunities and reflections are below. Suggestions for the next 12 months are under Next steps.

The quotes are from the AI transcript of the session. The transcript does not reliably separate speakers, so each bullet is one passage and a person can appear more than once. Names, organisations and places have been removed. Words in square brackets were added for clarity, and ... marks words left out. Quotes from the facilitators are labelled.

What participants raised

Trust and the load on community

Challenges

- "One of the issues can be when you are the trusted connector in community, where you have lots of asks. Of people coming in with, can we please have your mailing list? Can we please get you to invite these people to this event? But we're not particularly going to tell you what it's going to be, what the outcome is going to be, or where it's going to go. They're trading on our relationship and trust, and then they want complete licence to do what they want with it, but with no accountability or follow-up ..."
- "It's like what you've just traded on our relationship, which is good because we are trustworthy. But now we don't have access to that. We don't have the impact, and now we can't do anything again because of this. And then if we are a little bit asking questions, we're treated like we should be grateful that people are coming ..."
- "We got asked to make all the events happen with no additional resources ... But then they created all of these things on times, days, or locations that we know don't necessarily work for the community, asking us to do all the work to make everyone show up, and then not necessarily any access to the information that they've come up with."
- "... we don't feel like we can now go back to community for a period of time to gather the information. But we don't have any access to any of those things."

- “Some of these people have travelled [because we asked on behalf of others] because they are invested in community still, but they don’t live there anymore. They travelled an hour and a half to be there ... and they asked to just fill this survey in, and that’s it.”
- “Sometimes people are already being asked by other people, and don’t know about it. And if you’re going and asking the same thing, that’s wasting their time as well.”
- “If you’re paying for a story or research, then that is whether that’s ethical or not, or whether you’re going to get authentic data. It does complicate things, and who gets paid for what?”
- “... something similar to the concept of cultural load, might be helpful ... Whenever a community organisation is being asked to do something that is not for business ... Not all landing on the same people.”

Opportunities

- “It’s one thing to have the conversation, but you need an agreement of some sort to document how that relationship is going to operate and how you’re going to share the outcome of it. So once you identify who those key stakeholders are, you need to then identify how they want to be communicated with ...”
- “We’ll help you to scope it ... And we set certain parameters ... and we set a brief if you like with them ... So it’s like, get really clear ... and saying no, stand hard.”
- “So those agreements, those parameters, what being afraid, being not afraid to say no ... And that’s the shift of power that you’ll have, and you’ll see a difference.”

Ownership and protection of data

Challenges

- “None of these things belong to me or our centre, and who am I to say whether, if I’m given four opportunities, which one they should have access to? That’s making me a gatekeeper ... I unofficially have somebody’s phone number or email address for a different purpose. In data control or management, what does that mean? Legally, if I’m selling that as a product to you, what are my legal obligations?”
- “If you found out that your friend sold your number for them to do something, do they profit? How would that go down in the community?”
- “There are certain questions or things that we won’t roll out because ... our clients that may rely on us for their food. If we go ask them, ‘Hey, what do you think about us as a service?’, they’re not going to go, ‘Oh, you suck’ ... and that in itself can be really damaging to individuals that are in a really vulnerable position.”
- “If someone sits down and shares a genuine part of the community, those people could be very easily identified ... So the vulnerability of like, yes, that story or quote could be really important, but if that’s only available to everybody as a source of information, then what position are you putting that individual in? And where is your responsibility to protect that person?”

- “Access to the data that is gathered. The data is about the community. It is the communities. They need to be able to access it, and then it also needs to be accessed by government, by business, by random others, for the benefit of the community, not to use and abuse the community. And I don’t know how you put those guardrails in ...”
- “Making sure that the community is genuinely captured, not a slice of the community, or who knows someone in the community ... The community, not the guide’s friends.”
- “How many clients do you serve? From one centre to another, what a client is defined as ... So even when you have a shared understanding of what a person or service or type is, the actual interpretation of that data isn’t consistent.”

Opportunities

- **Facilitator:** “... I now use language around who is the custodian, which has a certain duty of care, and we need certain principles, we need a shared understanding, and what does that look like?”

Accountable research that builds on what is known

Challenges

- “You end up in your own little bubble, and sometimes people seem to be recreating things everywhere ...”

Opportunities

- “Any research, place-based research, needs to be accountable to the place. I’m really taking away the importance of research being locally responsive and shaped by those community priorities. And again, it needs to be accessible to the people it concerns or involves ... and that it’s mutually beneficial. The researcher gets something interesting, and the community gets something interesting and valuable.”
- “Transparency immediately changed the relationship between the room and the facilitators, knowing that we’re all shaping together. So I think being really clear about the method, the vision, that can really help.”
- “Rather than getting all the data, I heard it was more important to make sure you get those personal stories ... But what does good look like to that community? Because what looks good to us may not be the same good to them.”
- “I’d love to be able to check assumptions and make sure that what we’re delivering is actually what we think we’re delivering or that is needed. And I guess having ways to do that where it’s not just people without the skills trying to do it as well.”
- “With research, you don’t want to just research the same things that have been researched. You want to iterate on what’s there and continue to evolve, but also look at where the gaps are in that research.”

- “... if we knew what reports or research are being done, or with additional resources that could potentially roll out in the region strategically to ensure that it fills the gaps that we need to know, or where it’s appropriate to do that.”

Language and links across community, social and economic development

Challenges

- “Sometimes I hear the word research and I shut down and I think oh no, I get this impostor syndrome. But actually, hearing things like storytelling and reframing these concepts in a way that’s quite accessible and easy to understand, I think, is important.”
- “What’s the difference between grassroots and place-based? And this language I think is quite interesting.”

Opportunities

- “I came here to find out how community development intersects with economic development. I think there’s a big piece of value that we can get from research into that. How that increased visibility can actually increase investability as well.”
- “I didn’t think that I actually belonged here. I was really hesitant to come, but I really see that social impact and community development have a big intersection. They also have pieces on the edge, and they’re going to influence each other.”

Reflections on the day

- “I’ve just learned a lot about what it actually means ... although we haven’t got a definition, we’re still a little bit closer because we’ve had the discussion.”
- “That’s the beauty of place; it’s as complex as it is simple.”
- “Someone earlier today said, ‘There’s always a trajectory of place.’ So that’s going to be my big takeaway.”
- “One thing I will take away is actually the power of volunteers.”
- “I’m no longer afraid of the word research.”

C4 Next steps

In the second half of the session, each person was asked what they would like to see over the next 12 months:

What participants suggested

Keep working towards a definition

- “It’s possibly having another conversation to look over what we’ve got and then condense it or combine it or actually put all of those ideas together to start working down to a more, like, smaller option of ideas ... to start actually getting into what we actually think the definition is ...”

See place-based research in action

- "... and then further along from that, possibly seeing it in action ... possibly allowing people that come to see some of that place-based research being put into action and seeing how you do it, and possibly if there's other people doing a similar thing, how they do it ..."
- "I would love ... to actually find out how every person who's already doing research is doing the research ... It'd be very fascinating to look at all the doings and actually maybe get scaffolding around what the themes are."
- "From a perspective of being in a community where we're guiding people to do place-based work, they don't know what it looks like in action ... Because people are already doing it, but they don't know they're doing it."

Mapping

- "The second thing I think would be helpful is mapping the roles of different types of organisations. Those who are on the ground doing grassroots stuff ..."
- "... maybe like community mapping, but the broad community of change makers across the state, and like you've walked around where the funding's sitting, so people they can reach out to and connect."
- "I do like the idea of the mapping because I think I might be at a certain period of my journey right now, and the relevance of networking is not right now, but I know it will be in the future."
- "If there was somewhere collecting and organising the information around what the purpose we each work for, what drives us, some kind of mapping of purpose would be great."

Case studies and evidence

- "It occurs to me we need to have sort of like a little case study sort of series, best practice stuff ... something like that which also talks about the data coming out of it ... So what are you doing it for? How do you know you made a change?"

Best practice and training

- "... so that best practice stuff and some training for people that are rolling out things because damage can be caused to people."

Research partnerships led by community

- "I'm curious ... how our community could be involved in a journey where we can learn along the way. A participatory type exploration ... I'm curious about how any research or [place-based] research might be interested in coming on a journey with us to explore that ..."

From research to decisions and policy

- “How to be inclusive. How to establish the hierarchies of the community to know where our resources are, and how to translate our research into development in the community. How to share the content not only locally but maybe to different places ... And then from all of that, how do we influence change higher up the stream into government changes, law changes, or whatever we might be able to do.”
- “How communities then ensure that there is an understanding of that social impact of economic development, and the measures and communication channels for that ... how do we translate that research into informed decision-making and policy? ... that’s the evidence you need to argue for policy change or funding.”

Knowing where each group fits

- “Where is our position? Within a wider ... ecosystem of place-based stuff that’s happening in Australia. Where are we best focused? ... What I start with is what’s your end goal? What’s your blue sky vision? And what are the things you need to do in order to get there? ... What role do we play?”
- “You need to have a structure of a business side, a volunteers side, and a community side more than anything. So you gotta try to work on the structure of that to make it all combined, and we all understand what it all means as well.”

What the organisers committed to

The session closed with the facilitators’ commitments and hopes:

- **Facilitator:** “White paper outputs, like literally the outputs of our conversation, themed up. Here’s what they said, with as little interpretation as possible ... It will be published to you first, based on your emails. You’ll have it for a few days. By which you can give feedback ... and then we will publish.”
- **Facilitator:** “... then we will add our opinion of saying here’s things we think that need to be done from our position as [Ready Communities] as an actor in the system. And here’s what we will do to help facilitate that with monthly webinars about place-based research.”
- **Facilitator:** “... with the intent next year in whatever region we’re in, to then be able to say, do we want to have a place-based research symposium, maybe a longer, more intentional conversation ...”
- **Co-facilitator:** “What I would like to see next is some story of change for the group or groups that might fall out of this. What is it that they want to see happen in their groups, in their gatherings? That will then feed into what is next for that particular group or for that topic.”

Appendix D: Feedback on Day 3

The post-conference survey asked people who attended Day 3 to rate the value they received from each Day 3 activity and invited further reflections on the day. Day 3 had two streams: the Unconference sessions with the youth cohort, and the Place-based Research Forum.

The survey had 94 respondents to 24 September 2026. Of these, 59 said they attended Day 3 and 55 answered the Day 3 question. 32 attended the forum and 37 attended Unconference sessions.

Day 3 Unconference sessions (37 attended)



Not at all 1, A little 8, Somewhat 1, A lot 16, Significant 11

Day 3 Place-based Research Forum (32 attended)



Not at all 0, A little 4, Somewhat 5, A lot 12, Significant 11

■ Not at all ■ A little ■ Somewhat ■ A lot ■ Significant

Question: "Rate the value you received from each Day 3 activity you attended." 55 of the 59 people who attended Day 3 answered. Did not attend: Unconference sessions 18, Place-based Research Forum 23. Post-conference survey, responses to 24 September 2026.

All comments on Day 3 are below, grouped by the activity the person attended. Comments from other questions that mention the forum or Day 3 follow. Names and organisations have been removed. Words in square brackets were added, ... marks words left out, and spelling has been corrected.

Reflections on Day 3

From people who attended the Place-based Research Forum (17 comments)

- "Really enjoyed the place based research forum. The collective knowledge in the room was exceptional!!!! Really inspiring stuff. Thank you"
- "I think the idea of a research project like [the facilitator] started - had real potential - maybe starting this in the day one workshops - and working on it through the conference workshops - would utilise the enormous talent in the conference to best effect - there was more time needed on Friday. The huge turn up shows the topic and approach is sought after"
- "The Day 3 mini-summit was a standout for me. Its participatory format allowed for more depth and honest discussion about how research happens with communities. I particularly valued the focus on local knowledge, cultural authority, data custodianship and the responsibility attached to asking people for their time, stories and connections. The discussion made clear that research should leave something useful with the place, rather than extracting information for a report that communities may never see again."

- “Having a formal paper as an outcome of the event is very powerful and enables the outcomes to be shared and built on”
- “The Place-Based Research Forum was an interesting discussion, although unfortunately I had to leave before the session concluded due to the long journey back to Victoria, so I didn’t hear the final outcome of the forum. I found the discussion around what makes research genuinely place-based thought-provoking, particularly the importance of local knowledge, stories, conversations and data, and the need to avoid making assumptions about a community. The questions around who is asking the questions, whose knowledge counts, how communities are involved and what happens with the information collected were particularly relevant. As I had to leave before the conclusion, I didn’t come away with a single clear takeaway at the time. I would be interested in seeing the outcomes of the forum and the resulting communique, as I think this could provide a useful framework for thinking about how [our organisation] approaches community consultation, local knowledge and evidence in our own place-based work.”
- “Great all round”
- “The place-based forum was great, but I do wish we got into it quicker and earlier in the morning for people that had to leave to catch a flight. Especially since we were 3 hours away from Brisbane. At the same time, I acknowledge that it is each delegate’s responsibility to choose a flight time that suits their interests.”
- “I loved Day 3... Real value in working with people, coming up with ideas, bouncing insights and tangible outputs off each other and anticipating ongoing contribution and progress”
- “The session Friday was really valuable - it was a shame to leave before it finished on the Friday. The conversation that [the facilitators were] facilitating was really useful. It would’ve been good to have this earlier in the program.”
- “The discussions in the research forum were very profound and still have me pondering.”
- “...Keen to stay across where this leads.”
- “I would have preferred to spend 3 days on this research forum. Not 1/2 day. The delegates in the room were highly relevant to my work.”

Comments from other questions

The question each comment came from is shown in brackets: best part (“What do you feel was the best part of your experience at #SIITR26?”), even better (“What would have made your experience at #SIITR26 even better?”), apply (“How might this apply to your work in the next 12 months?”) and pressing need (“What is the most pressing need or opportunity in your work?”).

About the Place-based Research Forum

- “day 3 place based research forum” (best part)
- “Connecting with other delegates. Day 3 morning research forum.” (best part)

- “The people I met, without a doubt. What an amazing, thoughtful, generous group of people ... The conference caught my eye because of the place based research forum and it did not disappoint. I hope we can keep the work we started there going.” (best part)
- “I’ll follow up those folk who turned up to the research forum who have a presence in towns/regions where our [schools] are operating” (apply)
- “... The discussions on community research and data custodianship also reinforced the need to avoid repeating questions communities have already answered, and to make sure knowledge gathered through engagement remains accessible to the people who contributed it.” (apply)
- “Mapping networks, kicking off campaigns and writing White paper on place-based” (pressing need)

Appendix E: Before the Forum

Previous post: The case for a Place-Based Research conversation

Prior to the forum, the case for a place-based research conversation was published in a July post on the Australian Place-based Change Substack titled “Place-based research needs better roads”². The article provided a context for place-based research, a proposal for improved place-based research infrastructure, and an invitation to the Forum in September. The article is included below:

Definitions and taxonomy

What do we mean by place-based?

The terms place-based and placemaking have steadily and significantly increased³ in both popular searches and academic research over the past ten years. In 2024, Ready Communities mapped programs considered place-based⁴, highlighting the diversity across regions, funding models, and areas of impact.

But the term’s popularity comes with risk. At a recent conference on place-based development, a practitioner shared her story of receiving a grant notification congratulating her on being awarded funding as “a place-based program”. She shared that she had not previously identified with the term and, while she would accept the funding, she felt a label had now been applied that may not fit how she worked. The sentiment was echoed by others at the table, who commented on the confusion about what did and did not fit into the category of ‘place-based’.

In simple terms, place-based can be considered as “any development work within a geographic boundary involving local people and assets”. This definition does not prescribe what type of development is done or for how long. It also does not dictate the method used or the quality of the approach - being extractive or inclusive, top-down or bottom-up, and perceived as good or bad from the perspectives of funders, program providers, and community members.

An additional criterion was mentioned by economist Kim Houghton at the 2025 Social Impact in the Regions conference: if a program claims to be place-based, it should vary from place to place. Place-based is, by definition, inherent to a place. While each place may share commonalities, each is also unique.

What do we mean by research?

Research is any study that produces new knowledge and whose outcomes can be used for learning and change. Those involved in research form a broad church, including universities, consultancies, intermediaries, data platforms, think tanks, industry bodies, and government agencies.

² Renando (2026). <https://chadrenando.substack.com/p/place-based-research-needs-better>

³ Renando (2025). Systems approaches to place-based development: A 'yes/and' conversation? <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/systems-approaches-place-based-development-yesand-chad-renando-o6jhc/>

⁴ Renando (2024). A map of place-based and ecosystem-building frameworks in Australia <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/map-place-based-ecosystem-building-frameworks-chad-renando-peebc/>

Each research source comes with strengths in outcomes and capabilities, as well as challenges related to bias and execution speed. A challenge that applies across the research field, particularly in Australia, is translating research into practical application on the ground. Where that research does have an impact, it can be difficult to have that impact at scale. There can also be challenges in aligning research outcomes in a collective voice.

A taxonomy of place-based research

Place-based research is a broad topic. To help make sense of the field, we consider a taxonomy of how place-based research is applied. This is not definitive, and others can contribute to the conversation with a more detailed literature review on the topic.

Function - research on the function of place-based development

Research on the functions of place-based development examines how place-based work is carried out. Topics can include program structures, funding approaches, governance, and evaluation. Other areas to study include approaches, such as top-down or bottom-up, or institution-led or community-led perspectives.

Theory - the paradigm and theoretical underpinning of place-based research

Research looks at concepts behind and that support place-based development, such as supporting theories and paradigms - core-periphery, systems theory, complexity, critical realism, collective impact, appreciative inquiry, participatory action research, relational and Indigenous ways of knowing, and more. This can also include investigations into the research approach itself, such as qualitative and quantitative methods, as well as the use of case studies, surveys, interviews, and observations.

Conditions - research on community conditions and focus

Research explores conditions in community and the focus of research, such as transitions from decarbonisation, economic diversification, sector development, regional decline, or disaster response and recovery. Other research can adopt an ideological and normative perspective, seeking to understand community conditions of poverty, youth, climate impacts, the circular economy, and regenerative development.

Research Practice - the practice of research

Self-referential research into the practice of place-based research, including translation effectiveness and impact, ethics, and data custodianship.

Integration

The four segments are integrated and not exclusive. Like the regional context it studies, place-based research requires diverse and, at times, competing views to provoke refinements to what is understood as true.

Like any map, a taxonomy is in constant refinement based on emerging insights informed by the communities who are the custodians of the knowledge.

Acknowledging critiques and a need for research infrastructure

We need to be open about critiques of place-based research as a constant reminder in co-designing the way forward.

With place-based research, regions can become the object of attention, with their stories and data extracted for the benefit of those outside the communities. In the relationship between funders and researchers, communities can be the most valuable aspect yet receive the least value from the engagement. Community wisdom is then repackaged and sold back to them.

Institutions with a mandate to conduct regional research are often based in metro cities outside the community. Regional engagement is at arm's length and intermittent, lasting only for the funding cycle or social media opportunities. Research can be seen as happening 'to' or 'at' regions.

Turning this around, place-based research can be driven by regions, with local communities as custodians of their own data and participants in how their story is shared. The region becomes the custodian of essential research infrastructure for research outcomes. External institutions are invited to participate in shared outcomes and may even pay for the use of local infrastructure essential to research outputs.

In practical terms, we consider this "infrastructure" as the lanes of a road that facilitate flow from one side to the other.

The first lane connects research to **challenges and needs in a region**. Institutional research priorities can be downstream of funding and determined by researcher interests, making them disconnected from the actual challenges on the ground. There is a need to connect research to the communities' lived experiences.

A second lane includes **primary research by program providers**. Each program, platform, and methodology generates its own data, observations, and insights across years and communities. Research into processes and outcomes can be shared more widely and with greater rigour for more rapid collective learning.

A third lane of research provides **access to regions for students and emerging practitioners**. There need to be pathways for emerging researchers to sit in the passenger seat on long drives, help set up the room for a facilitation, and share a cuppa for the first time hearing stories around a kitchen table. They then need to be able to unpack the meaning of the experience with those who came before.

A fourth lane provides **access for external research collaborations**. At any given time, there may be a dozen engagements happening in the region, including community consultations, primary academic research, paid consultancies, and government policy inputs. Each one can seem to build an engagement pipeline and contribute to consultation fatigue. A collaborative approach can align expectations, leverage shared community resources, and support greater collective impact from the research results.

Infrastructure lane five connects information and research **region-to-region**. The relationship between research and regions can be seen as a hub-and-spoke model, limiting translation and

sharing across multiple regions. Like a metro-focused rail system, spoke-to-spoke models can be more difficult, slower, and more costly. There needs to be better solutions for region-to-region sharing and knowledge translation.

An invitation to a place-based research forum

I look forward to reviewing this further at the Social Impact in the Regions conference in Stanthorpe, with a dedicated forum on day 3 dedicated to place-based research. This will be a conversation to co-create a potential wider research symposium in 2027.

At the forum, we will consider:

- A working definition of place-based research and topics within the scope - what's in, what's out, and who needs to be around the table.
- The current state of place-based research in Australia - who is involved, what is working, and what are the challenges.
- The future opportunities for the field of place-based research - what would make the 2027 Place-based Research Symposium at Social Impact in the Regions have the most impact.

If this is something of interest to you and you are involved in place-based research - from a university, a consultancy, a think tank, a government department, or a community – please contribute.