

Analysis paper

Building a capable and equitable workforce for place-based initiatives

What is equitable contribution and influence in the context of place-based change?

PLACE comprehensively mapped around 150 training programs available nationally that are aligned to the 6 key skills required for effective place-based work.

The main aim of this work was to identify relevant training that can strengthen the place-based workforce's capacity to apply subsidiarity, accountability and partnership¹ at the local level. This paper presents an analysis and summary of the findings.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to present the gaps, barriers and policy implications identified in this analysis. The recommendations are relevant for government, funders, education and training providers, and system stewards working to strengthen the capability, equity and sustainability of the place-based workforce.

1. Context

PLACE has identified 6 key skills and related competencies as essential for community-led change and place-based work. They are:

Key skill	Competencies
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relational leadership• Adaptive leadership
Deep listening and analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tools and methods for place-based work (e.g. Theory of Change or Program Logic)• Social Return on Investment
Stakeholder analysis and engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Systems thinking/big picture• Listening and facilitation skills• Unpacking data to influence program design, policy and advocacy
Co-design	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trauma-informed approaches• Child-safe approaches
Effective project and program management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cross-sector collaboration• Co-design principles• Data sovereignty
Use of data and evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collecting and sharing data with communities

PLACE mapped training across Australia, from workshops to post-graduate programs, to understand availability of training in line with PLACE's 6 key skills and competencies. We also looked at accessibility and alignment with [place-based learning principles and enablers](#).

2. Key findings

A. Fragmented training landscape

The current training environment for place-based work is fragmented, with no coordinated national system to recognise skills, standardise credentials, or guide workforce development. While some key skills (such as leadership and project management) have accredited pathways, most key place-based skills – including deep listening, co-design, systems thinking and community-led practice – rely on non-accredited, inconsistent training options. This creates a patchwork of courses that do not form a coherent learning or career pathway.

There is no shared national framework for recognising micro-credentials, lived experience or cross-sector competencies, leaving workers without clear signals about what training ‘counts’ and employers without consistent ways to assess capability.

Funding pathways are equally inconsistent; accredited courses attract subsidies, while most place-based skills training does not. This limits access for smaller organisations, low-income workers, and regional or remote communities.

Without coordinated standards, recognition pathways or aligned funding levers, workers must navigate a confusing landscape with limited mobility, unclear progression and uneven access to culturally grounded or community-led training.

This impacts national efforts to grow the place-based workforce.

B. Gaps in supply

Training is abundant in some areas (leadership, project management, stakeholder engagement, use of data and evidence) and not in others (deep listening, co-design). Expanding the supply of training in deep listening and co-design would help to amplify place-based work.

Training often lacks grounding in cultural competence, child safety, trauma-informed practice and community-led governance. First Nations-led and culturally grounded training exists but is limited in scale and availability.

Integrated care is a type of training that equips healthcare professionals with the skills to provide seamless, person-centred care by breaking down silos. It is useful in place-based work to amplify cross-sector collaboration. It is a known gap in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector (identified by Brotherhood of St Laurence), despite high demand in intersecting sectors such as aged care, cultural competency, digital literacy and health, as well as disability and early childhood.

Deep listening and facilitation are two place-based competencies that benefit from simultaneous learning. We were unable to locate, however, any training that explicitly covers both skills. Although programs exist for these skills individually, none integrate both in a single course.

C. Inequitable access to training

Training availability varies significantly by location, with remote and regional communities facing additional barriers due to limited in-person options and digital inclusion issues.

Cost is a major barrier, even with State/Territory subsidies. People from lower socio-economic backgrounds and place-based initiatives with smaller budgets often find it difficult to access training.

Time commitments (ranging from hours for a workshop to multi-year higher education qualifications) disproportionately affect people with caring responsibilities or low incomes. Providing time off work to train is often challenging for smaller organisations that are understaffed and work to tight budgets.

Most of the training assumes baseline language, literacy, numeracy and digital (LLND) skills but these are not guaranteed in many communities. Lack of foundational skills limits pathways to training and subsequently employment.

Inequitable access to technology across Australia impacts access to training for different cohorts. Digital inclusion may be related to difficulty accessing networks, the costs of devices or data, or limited skills and literacies. This mostly impacts those in remote areas and with lower levels of education (Australian Digital Inclusion Index, 2025).ⁱ

3. Policy and practice implications

Policy settings should prioritise co-designed or community-led training and embed child-safety, trauma-informed approaches and cultural safety standards across all training and workforce development initiatives.

Training the Australian Public Service (APS) in co-design and deep listening and facilitation skills will enhance confidence and capability in place-based work and bridge the gap between community and government.

Education and training development strategies for place-based initiatives must include: targeted subsidies, flexible delivery models, equitable access through digital infrastructure development and LLND skills pathways as part of capability building for place-based initiatives (PBIs).

Recommended next steps for government, funders and enablers:

1. Incentivise or commission new training products that fill gaps such as:

- Culturally grounded, cross-sector training programs including integrated care training
- Training in co-design
- Facilitation and deep listening programs
- Training of Trainers (ToT) models and champions to scale capability nationally

2. Invest in equitable access to training

- Expand subsidies for micro-credentials aligned to the PLACE skills framework
- Fund regional delivery, mobile training hubs and hybrid models
- Support digital inclusion (connectivity, devices, digital literacy)
- Add AI literacy relevant to place-based work (e.g. understanding capabilities, limitations and ethical considerations of common AI tools) as a foundational skill alongside LLND
- Pilot regional workforce capability hubs

3. Integrate place-based capability in policy systems backed by community-led evidence

- Embed place-based workforce capability into existing policy frameworks (e.g. Closing the Gap, Stronger Places, Stronger People, Jobs and Skills Australia)
- Support evaluation and data systems that reflect community priorities and sovereignty

4. National workforce strategy

PLACE is developing a national workforce strategy for place-based work that will create coherence through shared understanding of capability frameworks and recognition pathways.

A coordinated national workforce strategy will:

- Recognise place-based work as a distinct workforce
- Define core skills, competencies and learning pathways
- Align funding, training and policy levers across jurisdictions

There is a role for everyone in place-based work to support the implementation of a national workforce strategy:

- **Grow local leadership and lived experience pathways** – nurture emerging leaders from amongst peers, people with lived experience, young people, First Nations and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities to build a locally rooted pipeline of workers.
- **Act as local learning hubs** – champion cross-sector collaboration, create space for reflective practice, host workshops, training and site visits to share knowledge and expertise.
- **Broker relationships between community, government, training providers and industry** – help each other understand what's working and what isn't. Advocate for culturally grounded and accessible training.
- **Model the change you seek** – create enabling conditions⁵ at workplaces so that skills acquired through training or lived experience can be put into practice.

Conclusion

A strong, equitable and culturally grounded place-based workforce is essential for community-led change and place-based work. While the training landscape offers some diverse training options for place-based work, it is fragmented, with significant access and equity barriers. A national workforce strategy – co-designed with communities and practitioners – offers a pathway to build capability at scale and support subsidiarity, accountability and partnership in action. Everyone has a role to play in shaping the future of communities across Australia.

¹ Subsidiarity – decisions are made as close as possible to the people they affect.
Accountability – systems are responsible and answerable to communities.
Partnership – change is built through collaboration not command.

² Accredited training in Australia refers to nationally recognised training that meets the standards set by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) or a state regulator (WA and Victoria have a state-based regulator). Accredited training is part of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system and aligns with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). It must address a genuine industry, enterprise, educational or community need not already covered by existing training packages.

It results in a nationally recognised qualification or Statement of Attainment and can only be delivered by a Registered Training Organisation (RTO).

Accreditation matters because it ensures quality and consistency across Australia and provides formal recognitions for skills and knowledge.

Additionally, those completing accredited training may be eligible for government subsidies, Austudy/Abstudy, and employers may access financial support through a range of incentives including apprenticeships and traineeships.

Accredited – nationally recognised, quality assured, competency-based and regulated.

Non-accredited – useful for professional development but not nationally recognised and does not lead to an AQF qualification.

³ Integrated care training equips healthcare professionals with the skills to provide seamless, person-centered care by breaking down silos between health, social, and community services, focusing on coordinated, collaborative, and efficient support that addresses a person's whole needs, especially for those with complex conditions. It trains teams to work together, share information, and involve patients and carers in planning, ensuring better patient experience and outcomes across different settings.

⁴ Subsidised VET by State and Territory: Smart and Skilled funding NSW, Skills First VIC, Jobs and Skills WA, Fee-Free TAFE QLD/NT/TAS, Skills SA, Skilled Capital program ACT.

ⁱ As per the Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2025, around one in five (20.6%) Australians are excluded and roughly one in ten (9.2%) are highly excluded from accessing digital technology. Rates of exclusion are much higher for those who did not complete secondary school (54.5%), public housing residents (45.2%) and First Nations people (40.9%). Gaps between capital cities and the rest of Australia remain significant, with digital inclusion scores trending downwards with remoteness. Priority needs are evident in Tasmania, South Australia and Queensland, where Access, Affordability and Digital Ability scores sit below the national average. The Northern Territory continues to face significant access challenges. Across all jurisdictions, inner-metropolitan areas score highly, while remote and very remote Local Government Areas (LGAs) record the lowest scores.

⁵ Key learning enablers – Time, Trust, Togetherness, Trial, Tools and Truth