

**Place-based
Impact
Summit**
15-16 June 2026

**Place-Based
Impact Summit Report**



Table of Contents:

1. Why the Summit was convened	3
2. The agenda	4
3. Who was in the room	4
4. What is core to place-based work?	5
5. What makes impact hard to measure?	5
6. What should we be measuring?	7
7. Can we build a shared approach to impact measurement?	8
8. What can support better measurement?	10
9. The value of coming together and connecting at the Summit	11
10. Connecting with others	12
11. Key takeaways to inform next steps	13
12. Acknowledging the many contributors	14



1. Why the Summit was convened

On 15–16 June 2026, PLACE hosted its inaugural Place-Based Impact Summit, bringing together people working in and alongside place-based initiatives from across Australia.

The Summit was an ambitious invitation to come together from across the place-based ecosystem to start to tackle one of our most significant shared challenges, **“how do we define and use data to measure the impact of place-based approaches in ways that make sense across different communities?”**

In opening the Summit, PLACE CEO Luke Craven reflected on the significance of gathering on Turrbal and Yagara Country, recognising its connection to important milestones in both PLACE’s history and the broader place-based movement. He described the Summit as an opportunity to build on this legacy and advance a more shared and consistent approach to understanding impact. Luke also noted that, despite years of work and experimentation, the challenge of capturing and aggregating evidence of change across diverse communities remains unresolved. He highlighted the importance of bringing together a broad cross-section of the sector, including community leaders, backbone organisations, government, philanthropy, researchers and practitioners to collectively advance this work.

The Summit was intended as a collaborative learning space, where participants could engage as peers, regardless of role or organisational affiliation. Discussions were encouraged to be grounded in principles of community ownership, Indigenous Data Sovereignty and shared learning, with participants invited to openly explore both successes and challenges.

Through a series of interactive panels, workshops, a marketplace session and many table conversations, the Summit sought to draw on the collective wisdom of participants to explore how the progress and change experienced by communities might be better understood and measured.

The Summit also explored whether there is an opportunity to build a shared national story about place-based change, one that helps answer the question: **What is it about taking a place-based approach that contributes to improved outcomes for communities, and how can we demonstrate that difference?**

This report summarises the outputs from the group activities, insights, reflections and feedback from participants. We are grateful to the speakers and participants whose contributions shaped these conversations and acknowledge that this work is ongoing, with much still to learn and explore.





2. The agenda

Across two days, participants engaged with a diverse mix of perspectives from community leaders, place-based practitioners, researchers, evaluators, government representatives, philanthropic funders and intermediaries. The program balanced practical examples from place-based initiatives across Australia with opportunities for collective reflection, hands-on learning and collaborative problem-solving.

Day 1 focused on building a shared understanding of place-based impact. Participants explored what meaningful change looks like in different communities, examined existing measurement approaches, and reflected on the role of power, community ownership and Indigenous Data Sovereignty in determining what is measured and why.



Day 2 shifted towards action, highlighting emerging approaches to measuring impact at scale and exploring the potential for a shared national story of place-based change. Through presentations, marketplace exchanges, facilitated discussions and dedicated sessions on data sovereignty and philanthropy, participants considered what should be measured, how change can be understood across different contexts, and what supports might be needed to strengthen impact measurement practice across the sector.

Throughout the Summit, practical examples and insights from place-based initiatives grounded discussions in lived experience, while participatory sessions enabled attendees to contribute their own perspectives, challenges and ideas. Together, these conversations reinforced both the complexity of measuring place-based change and the value of continued collaboration to advance the field.

3. Who was in the room

The Summit brought together about 300 people working in and alongside place-based initiatives from across Australia, including:

- Community leaders and place-based practitioners
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and organisations
- Government representatives
- Philanthropic funders
- Researchers and evaluators
- Backbone organisations and intermediaries
- Data and measurement specialists
- Universities and research institutions

Participants represented a diverse range of sectors, geographical contexts, including metropolitan, regional, rural and remote communities. To ensure that the perspectives, experiences and insights of those who live and work for place-based change in their communities had a strong presence at the Summit, PLACE established a bursary program to support attendance by representatives of place-based initiatives, particularly those travelling from regional, rural and remote communities.

The breadth of representation, combined with the diversity of roles and experiences in the room, enabled a rich exchange of perspectives on place-based change, collaboration and impact.

In the following pages, we are pleased to share a synthesis of the inputs and insights shared by Summit participants – framed around some of the big questions raised and explored by the group.



4. What is core to place-based work?

“While the language of place-based may be relatively new, the practice itself is not.” Communities have been working in place-based ways for generations, drawing on local knowledge, relationships and leadership to address local challenges.

Participants consistently returned to five interconnected elements that underpin effective place-based work: community leadership, trust and relationships, learning and adaptation, responsiveness to local context, and First Nations self-determination. Together, these elements were seen as critical to creating sustainable change and distinguishing place-based approaches from more traditional, top-down models of intervention.

Community Leadership and Local Decision-Making

Place-based work begins with communities. Local people and organisations help define priorities, shape solutions, and influence decisions that affect their place. Community aspirations and local agency are central to how change occurs. *“Community aspirations drive direction.”*

Relationships, Trust and Collaboration

Trust, relationships, and shared leadership were consistently identified as the foundation of effective place-based work. Participants viewed these as essential conditions that enable communities, organisations and systems to work together to create lasting change.

Learning, Adaptation and Continuous Improvement

Place-based change is rarely linear. Successful initiatives learn as they go, adapting to local conditions, emerging opportunities, and changing community needs. Flexibility and responsiveness are seen as strengths rather than departures from a plan. *“Failure isn’t waste – it feeds what comes next.”*

Working With, Not Despite, Local Context

Every place is unique. Participants emphasised that differences between communities should be recognised and valued, not standardised. People agreed that effective place-based work responds to local strengths, challenges, cultures, and circumstances. At its heart, a place-based approach means staying close to the ground, staying flexible, and guided by local people, not one size fits all.

First Nations Leadership and Self-Determination

First Nations knowledge, leadership and ways of working were viewed as fundamental to place-based practice. Participants highlighted the importance of embedding self-determination, cultural authority and data sovereignty from the outset, rather than treating them as additions or afterthoughts. *“Data sovereignty is an absolute non-negotiable and needs to be central and explicit.”*

5. What makes impact hard to measure?

Measuring what matters

Participants consistently highlighted that the outcomes most central to place-based work these being trust, relationships, community readiness, shared leadership, prevention and backbone capacity, are often the hardest to measure. Many described these as the true drivers of long-term change, yet they remain largely invisible within traditional evaluation frameworks. *“Trust is the outcome people care about most, and yet it is the hardest one to measure.”*

Timeframes don’t align

A recurring challenge was the mismatch between the pace of place-based change and the expectations of funding and reporting systems. Participants noted that meaningful change often emerges slowly, through relationships, trust and local leadership, while funding cycles and performance frameworks typically seek quick, measurable results.



Many references were made to a fundamental time mismatch, with people reflecting that place-based change is slow, generational and cyclical, whilst funding cycles, KPIs and government cadence are short and linear.

Numbers don't tell the whole story

Many participants challenged the idea that quantitative data alone can adequately capture impact. Important changes are often relational, cultural or systemic, and are experienced long before they become visible in population-level statistics. Stories, lived experience and community knowledge were repeatedly identified as essential forms of evidence.

“Stories and lived experience are treated as ‘not data’ yet are often the only valid record of change in relational, emergent work.”

Power shapes measurement

Participants highlighted that decisions about what constitutes success are rarely neutral. Questions of power surfaced throughout the Summit, with many noting that funders and governments often define outcomes, indicators and reporting requirements, while communities have less influence over how success is understood and measured. There was strong interest in recognising community-defined outcomes, measuring shifts in decision-making power and ensuring communities play a greater role in shaping evaluation processes. “Who decides what counts tells us where power sits.”

Fragmented Reporting and Data Systems

The burden created by multiple reporting frameworks, inconsistent measures and inaccessible data was another commonly raised challenge. Participants described significant duplication across funding and reporting requirements, as well as difficulties accessing and using data held by government. “Different funders often hold different, sometimes conflicting KPIs for the same place.”

Capturing Diversity Without Losing Local Meaning

Participants also wrestled with how to create shared approaches to impact measurement without oversimplifying place-based work. While there was interest in learning across communities, there was strong resistance to standardising away local context and diversity. A key challenge identified was finding ways to tell a broader story of place-based impact while preserving what makes each community unique.

PRACTICAL ADVICE FROM THE ROOM # 1

Place-based data and measurement – what works

1. Make impact part of everyday practice
2. Honour stories as real evidence
3. Centre cultural and community authority
4. Build on local capability and continuity
5. Improve how we tell the ‘story of change’
6. Understand and use the data government holds
7. Show early signals, not just long term outcomes
8. Think about ‘place’ at multiple levels
9. Create the conditions for actors across the whole system to shift



6. What should we be measuring?

Trust, Relationships and Readiness

Participants emphasised that trust is both one of the most important outcomes of place-based work and one of the most difficult to measure. There was strong interest in recognising the foundational conditions that enable change, such as trust, relationships, community readiness, governance capability and backbone capacity, as outcomes worthy of measurement in their own right. These elements were consistently described as critical precursors to impact yet are often treated as overheads rather than investments requiring dedicated funding and evaluation.

Power and Agency

Participants expressed a growing desire to measure shifts in power and decision-making within communities and partnerships. Power-sharing and shared leadership were seen not merely as aspirations, but as tangible indicators of change. Suggested measures included tracking who is making decisions, what decisions are being made, and the extent to which decision-makers are accountable to communities.

Systems Responsiveness

A recurring theme was the need to measure how effectively systems respond to community priorities, rather than focusing solely on community-level change. Participants questioned whether sufficient attention is given to assessing the flexibility, responsiveness and accountability of institutions, funders and governments. There was support for developing indicators that capture the willingness of systems to adapt, share power and respond to community needs.

Early Signals of Change

Participants highlighted the importance of recognising and measuring early indicators of progress, rather than relying exclusively on long-term outcomes. Examples included sustained community participation, engagement from new groups such as young people, increased community-led action, and stronger collaboration between local stakeholders. These signals were seen as important evidence that change is underway, even when longer-term impacts have yet to emerge.

PRACTICAL ADVICE FROM THE ROOM # 2

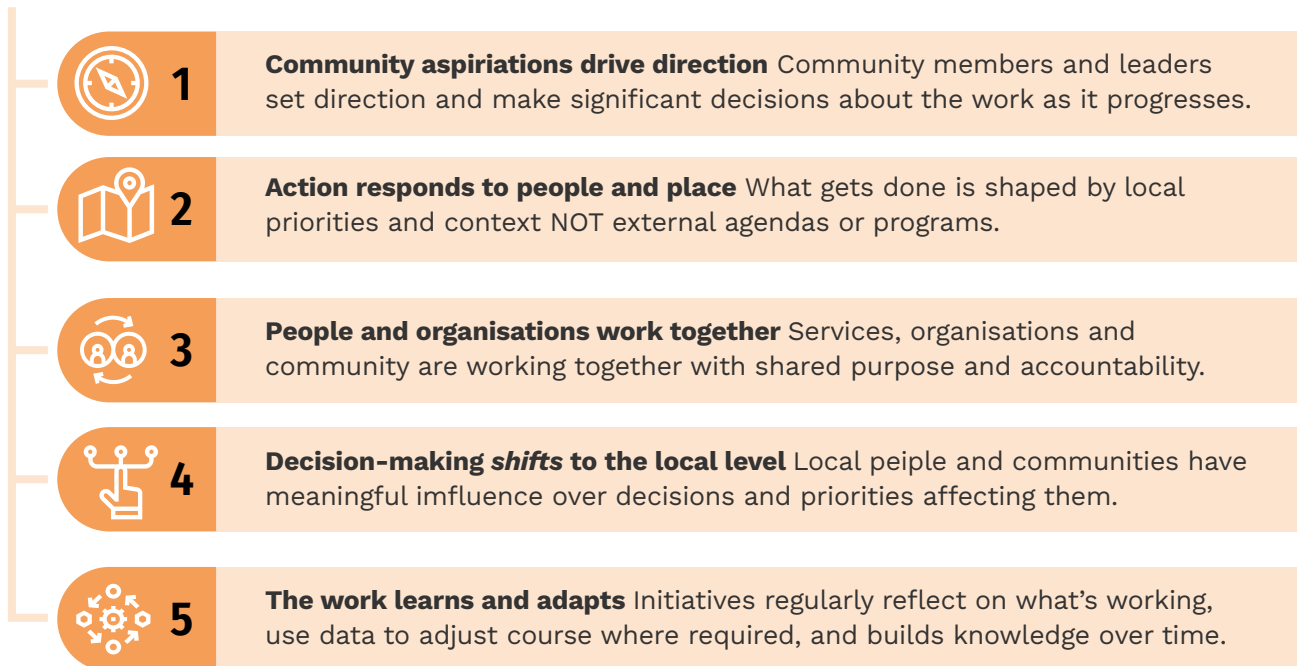
Place-based data and measurement – telltale signs of change

- Community assets are being used more e.g. more events held, sports offered
- Locals are using facilities more (E.g. sports grounds, picnic areas)
- People are coming to events repeatedly
- Teenagers are making an appearance
- Community members are doing things they have not done before
- Community is offering/doing things it hasn't done before
- Community is collaborating differently
- Change is based on community input
- Leveraging relationships that others would not have
- Flexibility and responsiveness
- Challenging people and robust conversations in a meeting



7. Can we build a shared approach to impact measurement?

The five characteristics of place-based change



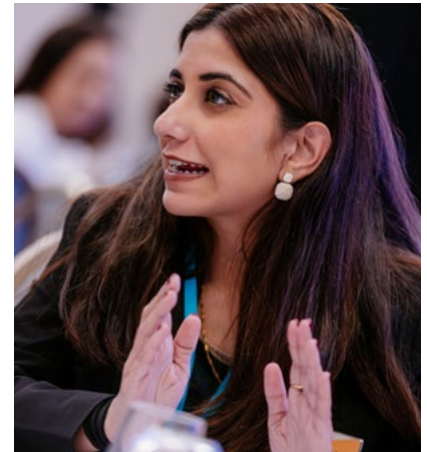
Overall, the strongest message to emerge was that any shared approach should not seek to create a single national metric.

Instead, participants agreed that there is a need for a flexible, community-informed approach that balances consistency with local relevance, values both stories and statistics, measures trust and power alongside outcomes, and helps tell a **stronger collective story about how place-based change happens**.

During one of the sessions at the Summit, PLACE presented its pre-Summit research, which culminated in the development of the **Five Pathways to Impact**. Drawn from a review of place-based initiatives and measurement frameworks, the pathways reflected recurring themes identified across the evidence. Participants were then invited to discuss and vote on whether a shared approach to measurement should be pursued and whether the Five Pathways provided a helpful starting point.

Through this invitation participants expressed strong support for continued exploration of a shared approach to measuring place-based impact, but with important caveats. The overall verdict was consistently described as **“yes, but”**: a shared effort is worth pursuing, provided it strengthens local practice, and reflects the realities of how change happens in communities.

Participants were also not only interested in measuring long-term outcomes. They also



wanted better ways to recognise the conditions and early signals that make change possible. Other insights from participants also included:

Avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach

Participants repeatedly emphasised that every community, initiative and context is different. Any shared approach must be flexible enough to recognise local priorities, cultures, strengths and histories rather than attempting to standardise them.

“Difference isn’t a problem to smooth away; it’s a strength.”

Balancing consistency with flexibility

Many participants saw value in identifying common themes, principles and patterns across places. However, there was concern that a single framework could become overly rigid, top-down or disconnected from local realities, *“A national story works better built bottom-up”*. Participants favoured principles, shared learning and connected stories over highly standardised measures, noting that success looks different in different places and at different stages of development.

Including trust, power and relationships

Trust, relationships and power were repeatedly identified as some of the most important aspects of place-based work, yet participants felt they were underrepresented in existing measurement approaches. Participants noted

that any shared approach should recognise not only outcomes, but also the relational and enabling conditions that make change possible, including trust, shared leadership, community readiness and backbone capacity.

Centring community voice

Communities should play a central role in defining what matters, what success looks like and how impact is measured. There was strong support for ensuring communities are involved from the outset in deciding what gets measured, how it is measured and how findings are interpreted.

Recognising multiple forms of evidence

Participants consistently challenged assumptions that quantitative data is inherently more valuable than qualitative evidence. Stories, lived experience, cultural knowledge and community perspectives were viewed as essential to understanding impact and should complement, rather than compete with, traditional data sources. There was strong support for evaluation approaches that honour both numbers and narratives.

Grounding the Work in First Nations Leadership and Self-Determination

Participants highlighted the need for First Nations knowledge, leadership and data sovereignty to be foundational elements of any shared approach.



8. What can support better measurement?

Participants also shared their insights into what they felt could support better measurement. These insights included:

Build local capability - Invest in data literacy, evaluation skills and community capacity, rather than simply creating more frameworks.

Use mixed evidence - Combine quantitative data with stories, lived experience, community narratives and cultural knowledge.

Improve data sharing - Make government-held data more accessible and useful to communities.



Measure early signals of change - Look beyond long-term outcomes and capture indicators such as growing trust, participation, relationships and community leadership.

Prioritise learning over compliance - Measurement should support reflection, improvement and adaptation, not just reporting requirements.

Strengthen relationships - Trust-building, backbone support and collaboration should be recognised as legitimate areas for investment and measurement.

Not seeing difference as a problem - Ecological thinking has something to teach us here. Difference isn't a problem to smooth away; it's a strength. Sameness and difference are not opposites to be resolved. They can coexist. Diverse ecosystem holds far more resilience than a monoculture ever can.

PRACTICAL ADVICE FROM THE ROOM # 3

Place-based data and measurement – Insights from data dynamos

- Community pays attention to how you show up. Transparency and how you show up matters, before accessing any data.
- Show up not only when you need something
- Evaluation should give us more energy than it takes away
- Make equity a foundation
- Build expectations together, considering everyone's non negotiables
- Offer opportunities to funders to immerse themselves in the work
- Multiple strategies are needed, not just one
- Treat feedback as an opportunity, not a criticism
- Data is everyone's business but not everyone's priority
- Pay collective attention to qualitative data and using it better
- Evaluation and learning get even more important as we move to shared decision making
- Data is a creative science
- Ask yourself, does the community have more say over its data at the end than at the beginning of your working with them?



9. The value of coming together and connecting at the Summit

Coming together - the First Nations yarning circle

Alongside the plenary and workshop program PLACE created a dedicated space for First Nations people to come together in a yarning circle. Held as a self-determined gathering the circle gave Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants room to yarn on their own terms about what place-based impact means from a First Nations standpoint, how data and measurement affect their communities and what they need from the broader sector to work in genuine partnership.

The yarning circle honoured the principle raised throughout the Summit that First Nations knowledge, leadership and data sovereignty must be foundational rather than an afterthought. Rather than speaking about First Nations peoples, the session made space for First Nations peoples to speak for themselves, in a culturally safe setting grounded in relationships, trust and cultural authority.

A network born from the circle

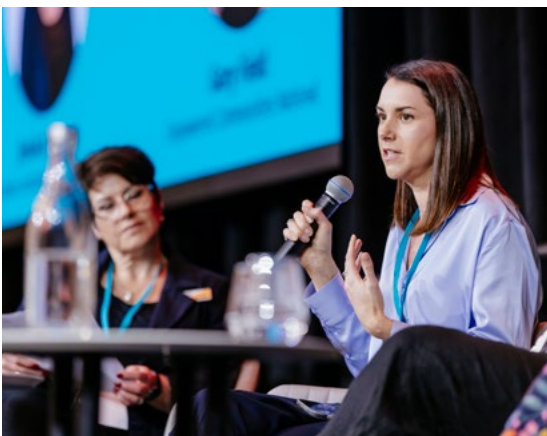
The clearest outcome of the yarning circle was a shared commitment to establish an ongoing network of First Nations people connected through the Summit and beyond. Participants

expressed a strong desire to stay connected, continue the conversation and work together on how impact is defined, measured and owned in their communities. The network is intended to be First Nations led and self-determined, providing a continuing space for shared learning, mutual support and collective voice on place-based measurement and data sovereignty.

Consent and data grounded in IFIPIC

Throughout the yarning circle and in forming the network the process was guided by IFIPIC the Indigenous Free, Prior and Informed Consent process and data collection model of consent. This meant that participation was voluntary and free from pressure that people were fully informed about how anything shared would be used before they took part and that consent was sought in advance and could be revisited or withdrawn at any time. Any information, insights or contact details gathered to form the network were collected only with the explicit, informed consent of those involved and remain under the control of the First Nations participants themselves.

Abiding by IFIPIC put into practice the message heard across the Summit that communities should have more say over their data at the end of a process than at the beginning. It ensured the network was built on a foundation of cultural safety, respect and self-determination and it modelled the kind of consent-based community controlled approach to data that participants called for more broadly.





10. Connecting with others

The strongest theme across all informal and formal feedback was the opportunity to connect with others working in place-based and impact-focused initiatives. Participants valued both planned networking opportunities and informal conversations, describing the Summit as a rare chance to exchange ideas, build relationships and learn from peers facing similar challenges. This was reflected in comments such as,

“Networking with people who have shared passion”,

“Deeper conversations with people I’ve never met before”, and

“Great forum that had a lot of opportunity to discuss impact issues with people from diverse organisations.”

Attendees particularly appreciated practical examples, case studies and opportunities to hear directly from practitioners, funders and others working in place-based initiatives. As one participant noted,

“I really enjoyed hearing about the work, the struggles and the amazing outcomes.”

The philanthropy panel and Amanda Tattersall’s presentation were both of the most consistently praised sessions, with participants noting that they both *“provided great insights.”*

Dialogue and participation mattered. Feedback highlighted the value of interactive formats that enabled people to contribute, reflect and explore ideas together. Table discussions, breakout activities and marketplace conversations were frequently identified as highlights, with participants describing how

“The discussions in my group unlocked a new perspective,” and appreciating the *“nice mix of inputs and group discussion”* and *“thought-provoking activities and questions.”*

While participants generally valued the discussions, participants also expressed interest in moving beyond discussion towards practical collaboration, shared learning and



collective action on impact measurement challenges.

Suggestions for future events included even greater emphasis on embedding lived experience and First Nations perspectives throughout the program, and bringing a broader range of stakeholders into the conversation.

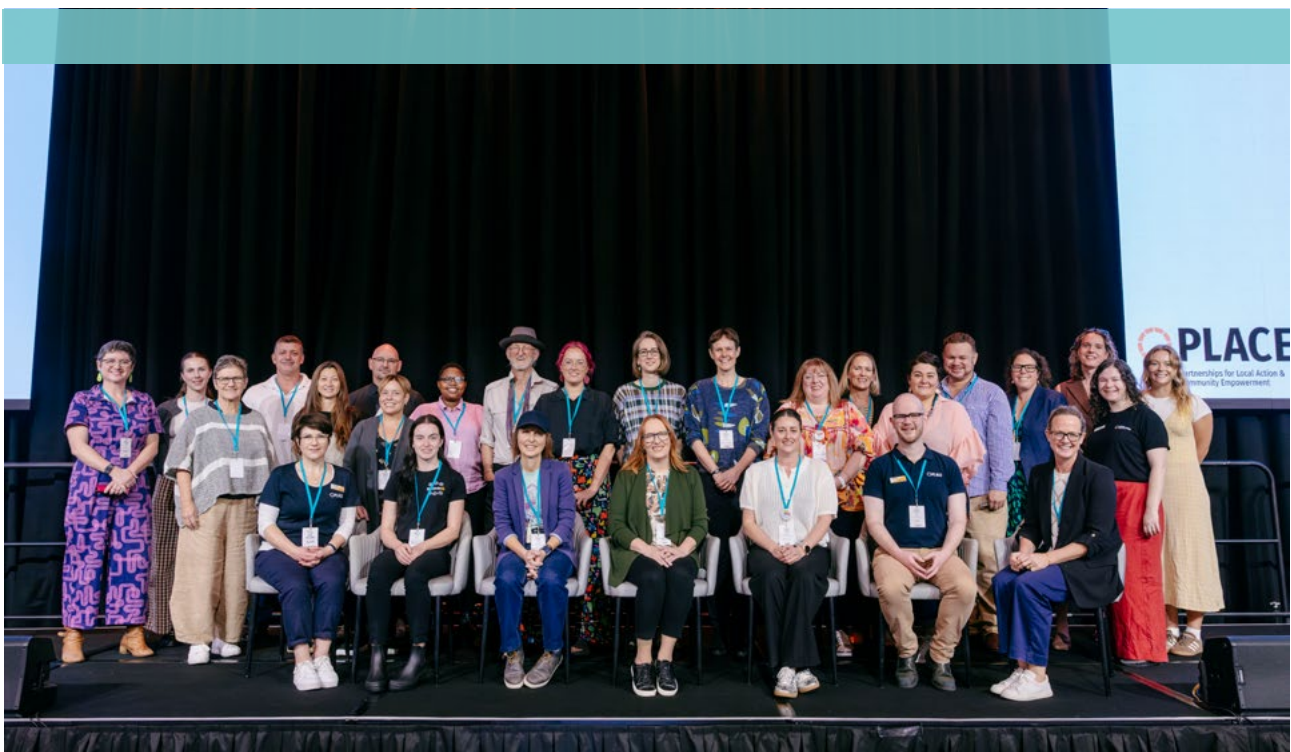
Overall, the summit was widely viewed as a valuable opportunity to strengthen relationships, explore shared challenges and build collective understanding across the place-based sector.

“Thank you for the opportunity to come together, for the fascinating perspectives shared and for building more collective understanding.”



11. Key takeaways to inform next steps

- Place-based work is happening across multiple sectors all across the country, and initiatives are at very different phases of their journey. The Summit was a chance to glimpse the breadth of work being done in this space.
- Terms like “place-based,” “impact,” “community” and “success” have no shared definition. Collective effort could strengthen shared understanding of these phrases but must be grounded in the reality of those doing the work.
- When talking about measurement, we must be explicit about what we are measuring, for whom and by whom. This affects how we define and understand terms.
- The Summit strengthened understanding of the different roles played across the ecosystem, including communities, governments, philanthropy, researchers and intermediaries and highlighted the value of connecting these efforts.
- There is a strong appetite for people across different initiatives and places to connect, learn from each other and hear practical examples. Efforts to enable this are welcomed.
- People are interested in moving beyond discussion towards practical collaboration, shared learning and collective action on impact measurement challenges. This includes people who were not in the room. Ongoing discussions must bring them in. Particularly those with lived experience and from First Nations Organisations.
- Participants are keen to hear from other voices like Government and Philanthropy about their efforts to support measurement that reflects community priorities.
- Participants want more opportunities to stay connected beyond the Summit.





12. Acknowledging the many contributors

We would like to acknowledge and thank our facilitators, Fiona McKenzie and Sarah Rogers from Orange Compass, along with all the panellists and presenters who so generously contributed their wisdom, experience and perspectives. Their willingness to share openly played a vital role in the richness of the conversations and learning that emerged throughout the Summit.

List of speakers:

- AC Care
- Amanda Tattersall
- Alcohol and Drug Foundation
- Australian Centre for Evaluation
- Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS)
- Becoming U – Toormina
- Bourke and District Children's Services (BDCS)
- BurnieWorks
- Cages Foundation
- Cape & Torres Health Commissioning
- Clear Horizon
- Dusseldorp Forum
- Early Years Hubs Network (MCRI)
- Empowered Communities
- EMU Consultancy
- Fire to Flourish (Clarence Valley)
- Fletcher Jones Family Foundations

- Great Barrier Reef Foundation
- Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project
- Hands Up Mallee
- Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa
- Maranguka
- Minderoo
- Mornington Peninsula Foundation
- New School of Arts Neighbourhood Centre
- Our Place
- PLACE Australia
- Queensland Kids Partnership
- Ready Communities
- Resilient Lismore
- Social Justice Reinvestment WA
- The HIVE
- University of Queensland
- YouthWorx NT

Scalable Innovations presentations:

- Australian Institute of Health & Welfare
- Murdoch Children's Research Institute
- Queensland Kids Partnership
- Strengthening Communities Alliance
- University of Adelaide & InfoXchange

Impact Measurement Marketplace:

- Australian Child Youth Wellbeing Atlas – University of WA
- Australian Institute of Family Studies
- Brotherhood of St Laurence
- Clear Horizon
- Impact Lab
- InfoXchange
- Seer Data & Analytics
- Strengthening Communities Alliance