



# STRONGER TOGETHER

Collaborative Governance for Regional Development

Discussion Paper

June 2026

## ABOUT THE REGIONAL AUSTRALIA INSTITUTE

The Regional Australia Institute (RAI) is the nation's first and only independent think-tank dedicated to empowering Australia's regions. We are a not-for-profit organisation that undertakes research to inform, educate and activate our rural and regional communities.

RAI celebrates 15 years in 2026. We are proud of the vast array of research, data, and detailed insights the RAI has provided into many of the significant issues and challenges facing regional Australia. The work of the Institute is made possible through research partnerships with Federal and State governments, the national Regions Rising event series, regional consultancy projects, membership, and philanthropic funding.

In 2022, the RAI launched the [\*Regionalisation Ambition 2032 - A Framework to Rebalance the Nation\*](#). The Ambition is a 10-year plan for regional Australia that seeks balanced growth across our nation's regional towns and cities. It outlines key targets, actions and benefits that will contribute to building prosperous regional communities, and a stronger Australia.

The RAI exists so that decision-makers at all levels of government, not-for-profits, industry, and community have the information they need to ensure the best outcomes for regional Australia. By replacing myths and stereotypes with facts and knowledge, the RAI seeks to build a more inclusive, unified, and prosperous future for all Australians.

**We care about the regions, because when our regions are strong, Australia is strong.**

## DISCLAIMER AND COPYRIGHT

This discussion paper translates and analyses findings of research to enable an informed public discussion of regional issues in Australia. It is intended to assist people to think about their perspectives, assumptions and understanding of regional issues. No responsibility is accepted by RAI Limited, its Board, or its funders for the accuracy of the advice provided or for the quality of advice or decisions made by others based on the information presented in this publication.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

The RAI acknowledges Traditional Owners throughout Australia and the continuing connections to land, waters, and community. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and extend that respect to all traditional custodians of this land.

## FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This discussion paper was funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts.

## REFERENCE

This paper can be referenced as: Regional Australia Institute, Stronger Together, Collaborative Governance for Regional Development, Discussion Paper. (2026), Canberra.

## **METHODOLOGY AND AI DECLARATION**

The discussion paper was developed by the RAI Research and Policy team drawing from a combination of desktop research, stakeholder consultation and participant interviews. Artificial intelligence (AI) tools including Microsoft CoPilot and Claude, were used to assist with information gathering, summarising and improving clarity and structure in this paper. Content generated by AI was reviewed and edited by RAI research team staff, who remain accountable for all content in the paper.

## **CONTACTS AND FURTHER INFORMATION**

**P.** 02 6260 3733

**E.** [info@regionalaustralia.org.au](mailto:info@regionalaustralia.org.au)

Further information can be found at:

[www.regionalaustralia.org.au](http://www.regionalaustralia.org.au)

## CONTENTS

Contents .....	4
Introduction .....	5
What is collaborative governance? .....	5
Evolution of collaborative governance in Australia.....	8
Key issues for collaborative governance models .....	10
Model 1: Community-led place-based impact initiatives.....	11
Model 2: Self-determination and co-governance .....	13
Model 3: Multi-level governance and regional city deals .....	14
Model 4: Regional Development organisations .....	15
Questions for discussion.....	18
References .....	19

## INTRODUCTION

Collaborative governance models describe the delivery of traditional government functions that involve both government and non-government parties. They are well suited to supporting collaborative and place-based approaches to regional development and service delivery across regional, rural, and remote Australia.

Collaborative governance is a coordination and decision-making model in which government and non-government actors work together toward a shared purpose. In Australia and internationally, it is increasingly used to address complex, place-based challenges that cut across jurisdictions and sectors. These approaches sit on a spectrum of delivery models involving different levels of information sharing, joint program design, coordination, decision-making, service delivery, and governance across organisations.

This discussion paper has been drafted to inform a webinar on the use of collaborative governance models in regional development policy and practice hosted by the Regional Australia Institute in June 2026. The paper and webinar examine the current use of place-based collaborative governance models in regional Australia, where social and economic challenges often exceed the capacity of any one organisation or level of government to address alone. It considers the benefits, success factors, and challenges to collaborative governance and how these models could be applied more broadly in regional contexts.

Current examples of collaborative governance considered by the paper and webinar are: community-led place-based impact initiatives, such as Gladstone Region Together (GRT) in Queensland; self-determination and co-operative governance models between government and Aboriginal communities, such as Maranguka and the Safe, Smart, Strong Strategy in Bourke, NSW; multi-government funding arrangements such as regional city deals; and the involvement of regional leaders and stakeholders in the work of regional development organisations, including Regional Development Australia committees and their state-based equivalent organisations.

While these models help coordinate local action and align community priorities with government strategies, the influence of non-government actors and the effectiveness of the models vary. By considering leading practices, barriers, enablers, strengths, and challenges from experience in Australia and internationally the paper and webinar aim to identify lessons for success and inform the effective use of collaborative governance principles in regional development policy and practice.

## WHAT IS COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE?

### Definition

An important foundational text for defining collaborative governance is Chris Ansell and Alison Gash's 2008 paper *Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice*, which characterises collaborative governance as:

“A governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets.” (Ansell and Gash 2008: 544)

Ansell and Gash contrast collaborative governance models with managerial models (where public agencies make decisions unilaterally or through closed decision processes) and adversarial models (where stakeholder groups bargain and compete rather than collaborate) in their differing approaches to policy making and implementation.

This is why ‘governance’ is also a central proposition of the model, which refers to the rules that guide collective decision making by government and non-government parties.

### **Key criteria**

Ansell and Gash’s concept of collaborative governance requires six criteria to be met, beginning with a shared goal and the establishment of a ‘forum’ between government and non-government parties:

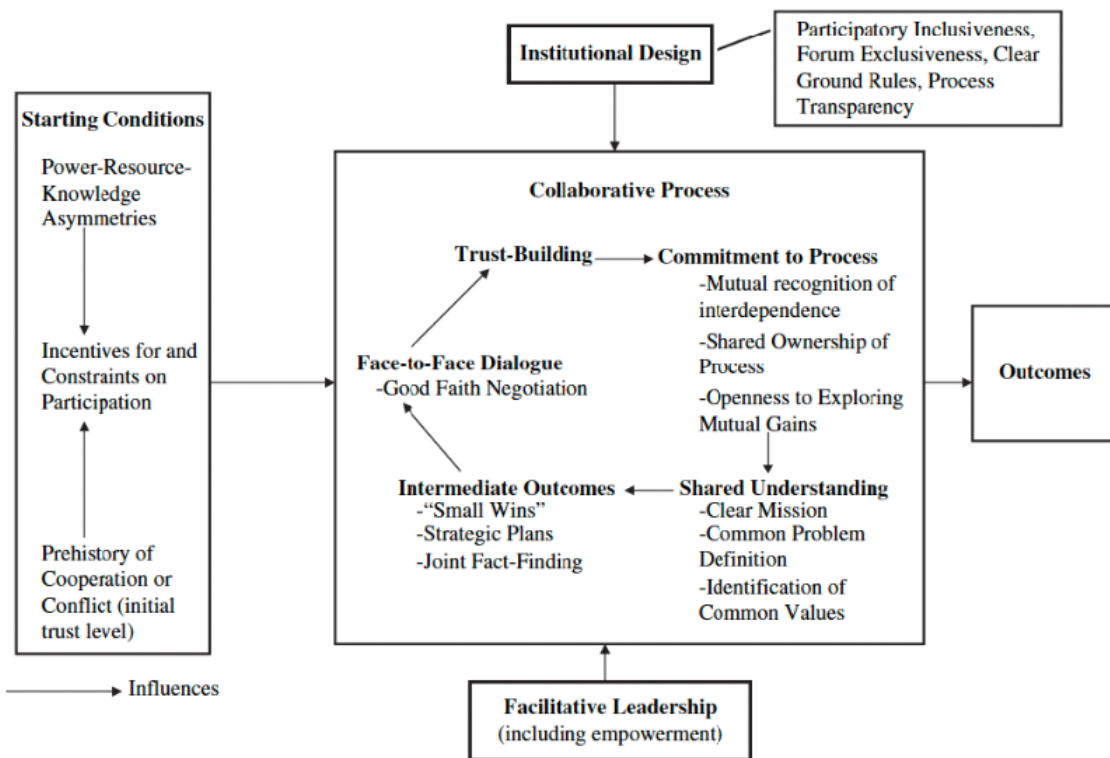
- The forum is initiated by public agencies or institutions
- Participants in the forum include non-state actors
- Participants engage directly in decision making and are not merely ‘consulted’ by public agencies
- The forum is formally organised and meets collectively
- The forum aims to make decisions by consensus (even if consensus is not achieved in practice)
- The focus of collaboration is on public policy or public management. (Ansell and Gash 2008: 544)

Other researchers have highlighted the importance of collaborative governance for achieving public policy outcomes that would not otherwise be possible (Emerson et al.) and that it’s the power-sharing elements of collaborative governance that make it different to other forms of engagement (Bates and Smyth 2022).

### **Collaborative governance model**

Ansell and Gash provide a model of collaborative governance that sets out the key elements in terms of starting conditions, institutional design, facilitative leadership, collaborative process, and outcomes (Figure 1).

Figure 1: A Model of collaborative governance (Ansell and Gash, 2008)



Source: Replicated from Ansell and Gash (2008: Fig.1)

- **Starting conditions** - Ansell and Gash describe two different starting points for collaboration. The first is a situation where stakeholders have a history of division over a challenging local issue. The second, stakeholders have a shared vision to achieve a goal and a history of collaboration. The initial context, particularly prior conflict, or cooperation, along with stakeholder incentives to participate and existing power and resource imbalances, shape levels of trust and motivation for entering the collaboration.
- **Facilitative leadership** - leadership is required to convene actors, manage power imbalances, and sustain constructive engagement by facilitating dialogue and building trust among participants.
- **Institutional design** - the rules, procedures, and structures governing the collaboration, for example, inclusiveness, transparency, and clear ground rules which provide legitimacy and enable fair and effective participation.
- **The collaborative process** - collaboration unfolds through iterative cycles of face-to-face dialogue, trust-building, commitment, shared understanding, and “small wins” that reinforce cooperation over time.
- **Outcomes** - emerge as intermediate and results of the process, where successful collaboration generates mutually valued outputs and strengthens capacity for ongoing cooperation.

### ANZSOG project on co-governance and trust

The Australian and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG)’s recent project on ‘co-governance and trust in government’ examined methods to operationalise and implement co-governance, a term used interchangeably with collaborative governance.

An initial scoping study for the project (Smith and Bates 2023) identified that cooperative governance involves sharing power between the public sector and civil society with that power recognised and acknowledged by all participants in its various forms, such as decision-making, resources, information, and knowledge. It observed that collaborative governance models are better suited to addressing policy challenges where they will produce better policy outcomes (e.g. for challenging policy issues that cross multiple domains and require multiple parties to work together) and where it is considered appropriate for communities to have power over policy development and implementation.

The follow up ANZSOG report *Co-Governance – Working Better Together* (2026) assessed three co-operative governance case studies that highlighted the importance of trust between the parties and that trust-building is an iterative and ongoing process. The interaction of trust and power was found to be of critical importance to facilitating cooperation and shared responsibility within co-operative governance models and requires settings that “prioritise participatory processes, ensure accountability, and embed mechanisms for equitable power sharing.”

The ANZSOG project produced a guide to co-governance for public officials and community members, which included practical guidance on when to consider co-governance, how to design and implement co-governance, enabling factors to consider and outputs and outcomes from co-governance (Bates et al 2025).

## **EVOLUTION OF COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE IN AUSTRALIA**

The use of collaboration at scale as a distinct approach to policy design and delivery between governments, and between government and non-government actors, is a recent development in Australian public policy.

Australia’s Federation at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was built on a system of separate responsibilities and collaboration was not a priority of early governments. Postwar initiatives such as the Snowy Hydro-Electric Scheme saw increasing coordination and collaboration involving multiple governments. Natural resource management was an area of early multi-party collaboration through the Landcare movement and subsequent national program in the 1980s which brought together government, community, and landholders to address land degradation and promote sustainable land and water management. National economic reform in the 1980s and 1990s was underpinned by intergovernmental agreements and a shift to contract management and purchaser-provider systems that increased engagement and collaboration in service delivery across the public and private sectors. In the 2000s, collaboration models further evolved between governments, within government and with private sector agents, based on the realisation that effective outcomes required working across institutions. (Wanna 2008, Guerin 2026)

An ANZSOG conference on collaborative governance in 2007, captured in *Collaborative Governance New Era ANZSOG 2008*, examined the emergence of collaboration as a shift in public policy from hierarchical and market-based models toward networked governance involving governments, community organisations, and the private sector. The contributions to the conference highlighted the opportunities and challenges of “collaboration.” On the positive side, the conference discussed how collaboration improves policy design, service integration, and stakeholder legitimacy, particularly for complex, cross-cutting problems. On the negative side, it was raised that collaboration is inherently difficult, resource-intensive, and can be undermined by conflicting

objectives, unclear accountability, and power imbalances. In summary, the conference underscored that successful collaboration depends on trust, leadership, clear roles, and capacity-building, while cautioning that the promise of collaboration does not always match its practical implementation (Wanna and O’Flynn 2008).

Recent experience has seen Australian governments support the implementation of models of collaborative governance in policy making and they have become an important model for place-based regional development. Place-based initiatives that have emerged across regional Australia incorporating collaborative governance principles, and which are profiled in further detail below, include: community-led place-based impact initiatives (otherwise known as ‘collective impact’ initiatives); co-governance arrangements; city and regional deals, and the ongoing work of Australia’s place-based regional development organisations. Examples of these collaborative governance models in practice are presented later in this paper.

These initiatives adopt the core collaborative governance principles of government and non-government collaboration and shared decision making or authority (in the case of co-operative governance models).

#### *Government policy*

Two examples of government policy supporting collaborative governance models are the Australian government’s *Stronger Places, Stronger People* (SPSP) initiative and Victorian government’s *Place-based Guide* (2000).

SPSP is a 10-year, community-led place-based impact initiative funded by the Australian Government (with \$35 million in the first phase to 2024 and a further \$64 million committed to 2029), in partnership with state/territory governments and philanthropic organisations. SPSP funds local backbone organisations to facilitate local planning and strategy development, engagement, measurement and evaluation, joint decision making and governance. It operates in 10 demonstration communities across Australia, aiming to disrupt intergenerational disadvantage by supporting locally tailored, evidence-driven solutions. The 10 communities are almost entirely located in regional Australia: Logan, Rockhampton and Gladstone in Queensland, Bourke and the Macleay Valley (including Kempsey) in New South Wales, Mildura in Victoria, Burnie in Tasmania, the Far West Region of South Australia (including Ceduna), the Barkly Region (including Tennant Creek) and Gove Peninsula in the Northern Territory.

PLACE Australia was established in 2024 with government and philanthropic funding to support and promote place-based approaches and community-led change.

The Victorian government’s *Place Based Guide* (2023) provides practical advice for policy makers and practitioners, referring to governance as “the structures, processes and relationships that enable work to be organised and decisions to be made. Collaborative governance describes the cooperation between various stakeholders to plan, implement and monitor the place-based initiative.” The VPS Guide notes that each place-based initiative will require a unique governance structure but that common elements of collaborative governance models typically include a backbone organisation, strategic governance group, and an operational governance group.

- Backbone organisation - the backbone organisation plays a critical role advancing the overall vision and strategy for the initiative, aligning activities and resources, stakeholder communications, monitoring and measuring progress and securing and managing

resources and funding. The backbone organisation can be a standalone organisation or a nested team within a partner organisation.

- Strategic governance group - a decision-making body responsible for the overall direction and strategy of the place-based approach.
- Operational governance group - subcommittees or action teams that implement initiatives and report to the strategic group.

Key considerations for success set out in the VPS Guide are:

- Time and resources are required to build strong and effective governance and “to properly engage with stakeholders to develop a shared understanding of the challenges and a common agenda”
- Build governance structures on existing mechanisms and relationships, where possible, and consider “local history, relationships and power dynamics within and between the sector and the community.”
- Balance flexibility in governance arrangements with set processes, and enable changes in governance where initiatives are not meeting their objectives
- Ensure diverse representation of local stakeholder organisations in the governance structure, and that individuals have the appropriate level of authority and knowledge within each representative organisation.
- Aboriginal self-governance requires inclusion of the principles of self-determination, where Aboriginal people are decision makers, and where the governance structure is representative of the community as determined through engagement with existing Aboriginal governance groups and local elders.

## KEY ISSUES FOR COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE MODELS

This paper considers four types of place-based collaborative governance models in regional Australia where government and non-government parties work together to solve complex local public policy problems:

- **Community-led, place-based impact initiatives models** e.g. Gladstone Region Together in Queensland
- Aboriginal **self-determination and co-operative governance** models e.g. Maranguka and the Safe, Smart and Strong Strategy, Bourke NSW
- **Multi-level governance and collaborative governance** e.g. Launceston City Deal
- **Regional development organisations and collaboration with non-government parties** e.g. Regional Partnerships (Victoria), Regional Development Australia Committees and Regional Development Commissions (WA).

The models are discussed in more detail below. All the models adopt the key principles of collaborative governance involving collaboration between government and non-government parties and collective decision making. The models also adopt a place-based approach to regional development and service delivery.

The collaborative governance models featured in the case studies demonstrate significant strengths, barriers, and ongoing challenges.

Australian experience suggests collaborative models are particularly effective at:

- addressing complex, place-specific social challenges where standardised programmes have failed,
- building local trust, leadership, and cross-sector networks, and
- enabling more tailored, contextual solutions.

A key strength is their ability to bring together government, community, industry, and service providers to deliver place-based, community-led solutions, improving coordination, legitimacy, and alignment across stakeholders while enabling more innovative and effective responses to complex issues.

These models often benefit from structured governance arrangements, such as agreements, leadership groups, and backbone organisations, which help maintain focus and support implementation, alongside strong evidence of improved service delivery, economic outcomes, and social impacts in some cases.

However, reviews of collaborative governance point to the challenges of fragmentation, with many promising collaborative initiatives confined to a limited number of sites, with uncertain pathways to wider adoption. Place based guides stress that each initiative must be tailored to local context, which increases effectiveness locally but makes simple replication difficult; scaling requires investing in enabling conditions (leadership, relationships, mindsets, capability) rather than copying structures alone.

Another challenge is Australia's federal structure and overlapping Commonwealth, state and local responsibilities which make it difficult to create a clear regional tier with stable mandates and resources. Fragmented government systems and capacity constraints in regional areas can further constrain collaboration. Difficulties can arise in measuring and demonstrating outcomes due to inconsistent evaluation frameworks.

Short funding cycles, changing national priorities and reliance on specific champions or intermediaries (such as backbone organisations) further impede the long-term scaling and institutionalisation of collaborative models, even when local results are positive.

Maintaining coordination across diverse stakeholders, balancing power between government and community actors, and ensuring transparency and accountability over time remain complex and resource-intensive tasks.

Collectively, the case studies highlight that while collaborative governance offers a powerful framework for addressing regional disadvantage and driving place-based development, long-term success depends on overcoming systemic funding, governance, and evaluation challenges while sustaining trust and alignment across partners.

## **MODEL 1: COMMUNITY-LED PLACE-BASED IMPACT INITIATIVES**

### **Gladstone Region engaging in action Together**

#### **Overview**

Gladstone Region engaging in action Together (GRT) is a Stronger Places, Stronger People initiative based on a community-led, place-based impact model operating in the Gladstone local government area in Central Queensland.

Community-led place-based impact initiatives (otherwise known as ‘collective impact’) are a form of collaborative governance where stakeholders collaborate across sectors to address complex social issues in local communities (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017). GRT uses a community-led place-based impact initiatives model to deal with disadvantage and create better futures for children and families (Australian Government Department of Social Services 2021). The initiative focuses particularly on children from pre-birth to school age, recognising that investment in early years delivers lasting community benefits.

Government partners, including the Australian Government (through SPSP), Queensland Government, and Gladstone Regional Council, provide funding, backbone support, and policy engagement. Non-government partners include social service organisations, industry (notably Rio Tinto), health providers, and community members. A Leadership Group influences policy and funding decisions and supports a collective, strengths-based, community development approach while measuring progress and managing expectations for community-led change.

### **Outcomes and Achievements**

Working groups focused on integrated service delivery led to increased visibility of sector providers and resolution of at least two service gaps where clients were connected to lesser-known services they would not otherwise have accessed. Trauma-informed training enabled for 42 sector stakeholders in 2022 returned positive post-event feedback on both practitioner and client outcomes (Gladstone Region Wellbeing 2023: 10). A Gladstone Region Wellbeing Data Hub has been set up as a community-owned resource to watch progress, and a community-designed Wellbeing Action Plan guides collective priorities (Gladstone Region Community 2022).

### **Success Factors and Challenges**

Community members have highlighted the value of backbone support in keeping the initiative on track, noting that the complexity of the work makes it easy to lose focus, and that having the right support empowers partners to keep a shared vision. The community-led place-based impact initiatives model has enabled cross-sector collaboration that was previously fragmented, and industry partnerships (such as with Rio Tinto) have brought added resourcing to address skills shortages in the social services sector (Gladstone Region Wellbeing 2023: 3).

Conversations with human service sector stakeholders revealed a fear of sharing information about challenges or capacity limitations with government partners, driven by concern that visibility of shortcomings could result in lost funding, limiting the trust and shared accountability needed to find solutions together. Prior to SPSP, the complexity of intersecting disadvantage issues often landed in the "too hard basket," with service providers stretched to crisis point responding to immediate demand rather than addressing root causes (Gladstone Region Wellbeing Strategy 2023: 11).

GRT is focused on reducing the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage at its root cause rather than continuing to treat symptoms, requiring open minds, creativity, innovation, and the courage to use trial and error along the way. In November 2024, the first Gladstone Region Wellbeing Evaluation Workshop was held, with the Data and Evaluation Working Group developing key evaluation questions to measure whether the initiative has improved wellbeing, and whether that impact is effective, sufficient, sustainable, and enduring. The initiative is still in its formative stages of proving population-level impact, with sustained government investment and genuine trust-building between government and community identified as critical to long-term success (Gladstone Region Together 2025).

## MODEL 2: SELF-DETERMINATION AND CO-GOVERNANCE

### Bourke – Maranguka Safe, Smart, Strong Strategy

#### Overview

Maranguka – meaning 'caring for others' in the Ngemba language – is a model of Aboriginal community self-governance guided by the Bourke Tribal Council in New South Wales. It is a community-led, place-based, data-driven approach to improve outcomes for children, young people, and families, with the urgency for change centred on reducing offending and increasing community safety. The community strategy is titled *Growing Our Kids Up Safe, Smart and Strong* (Maranguka Community Hub 2025).

The governance structure is anchored by the Bourke Tribal Council and strengthened by the Maranguka Cross Sector Government Implementation Group and Cross Sector Leadership Executives, which enable coordination between diverse entities including government agencies, non-government organisations, and philanthropic partners through structured meetings and targeted sub-groups (Li et al. 2025: 4). High-level political and bureaucratic support from Ministerial Champions and Executive Sponsors is an important enabler, helping to overcome systemic barriers and secure political buy-ins. Philanthropic seed funding from the Dusseldorp Forum and Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation supported early establishment, while the Australian Government and NSW Government subsequently provided ongoing funding to 2029 under the SPSP initiative (Australian Government Department of Social Services 2021).

#### Outcomes and Achievements

Every morning the Maranguka team facilitates a daily check-in at the Hub that brings together a variety of public and community service providers, including police, PCYC (a youth charity), youth services, and family and domestic violence services, creating a central accountability mechanism measured day to day (Li et al. 2025: 16). Maranguka has demonstrated that better outcomes for children and families are achieved when the community is in the driver's seat, becoming an example to all levels of government and other communities nationally. Cultural authority embedded in the Bourke Tribal Council has been a defining strength in sustaining commitment and alignment across the system (Li et al. 2025: 17).

In 2013, the Bourke community in north-west New South Wales partnered with Just Reinvest NSW to develop a 'proof of concept' for justice reinvestment in Australia (Just Reinvest NSW 2013). The 2018 KPMG Impact Assessment documented striking results across three domains: family strength, with a 23% reduction in police-recorded domestic violence; youth development, with a 31% increase in Year 12 retention rates and a 38% reduction in charges across the top five juvenile offence categories (KPMG 2018). KPMG confirmed savings of \$3.1 million generated by the collaborative efforts in 2017, approximately two-thirds in justice savings and one-third in broader economic impact to the region. A 72% reduction in youth crime rates year-on-year has also been recorded through local crime statistics (Maranguka and Just Reinvest NSW 2021).

#### Success Factors and Challenges

The initial phase of the Maranguka project centred around community leadership as the foundation of fair and inclusive governance. From 2013-2015 the project formed the Bourke Tribal Council, Just Reinvest NSW, and the Backbone Team of the Maranguka Community Hub (Li et al: 14). From 2015-2020, with structural changes towards multi-sectoral collaboration, Maranguka's leaders have called on governments to dismantle the systemic barriers that impede community-led self-determination, challenging partners to focus on a strategy developed by the local community and to respect the Cultural Authority of the Bourke Tribal Council. Short-term funding cycles, the difficulty of translating cohort-level gains into broader population-level outcomes, and the deep-seated legacy of disconnected, government-led service delivery remain ongoing structural barriers.

ANZSOG's *Maranguka – A Study Based on Publicly Available Evidence* (2025) found that Maranguka exemplifies a transformative approach to collaborative governance, redefining power dynamics, strengthening trust, and fostering alignment between community, government, and non-government stakeholders, while its culturally anchored governance framework has achieved significant social outcomes and driven systemic change (Li et al. 2025: 51). Maranguka stands as Australia's most cited example that genuine First Nations-led co-governance, backed by sustained cross-sector commitment, can achieve measurable, cost-effective community transformation.

## **MODEL 3: MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE AND REGIONAL CITY DEALS**

### **Launceston City Deal**

#### **Overview**

The Launceston City Deal is a ten-year agreement signed in April 2017 between the Australian and Tasmanian Governments and the City of Launceston, aimed at shaping the city's future, creating jobs, and generating economic growth by positioning Launceston as one of Australia's most liveable and innovative regional cities, with growing incomes and falling levels of disadvantage. The Deal stands for a \$509 million investment spanning education, employment, city planning, housing, digital innovation, and sustainability (Australian Government Department of Infrastructure 2017; City of Launceston 2020).

The City Deal brings together the Australian Government, the Tasmanian Government, and the City of Launceston with local institutions, businesses, and the community, providing common objectives across levels of government, infrastructure investment linked to broader reform, and changes to planning and governance arrangements to deliver enduring benefits. An Executive Board – co-chaired by the Australian Government Department of Infrastructure and the Tasmanian Office of the Coordinator-General and including the University of Tasmania (UTAS) and City of Launceston – oversees delivery and is advised by a Community and Business Advisory Group (CBAG). Non-government partners include industry bodies, local businesses, and community stakeholders involved in co-design processes.

#### **Outcomes and Achievements**

By the Three-Year Implementation Review, 15 of the 33 original commitments had been completed, and the review found the City Deal had successfully aligned all three levels of government toward effective delivery and positive regional impact (Tasmanian Government 2020). The centrepiece achievement is the UTAS campus relocation: three new buildings were completed at the Inveresk

campus — the Library and Student Experience Building (2022), River's Edge (2023), and The Shed (late 2024), with around 4,000 students expected at the new campus from early 2025, working toward a target of 10,000 by 2032 (University of Tasmania 2024). Other achievements include \$95 million invested in Tamar Estuary health, a live smart traffic management system in the CBD, and over 600 Internet of Things education kits delivered to local schools.

### **Success Factors and Challenges**

The Inveresk campus has won multiple prestigious awards, including the 2023 and 2024 PIA Awards for Planning Excellence, and has been cited as a compelling model for urban renewal projects blending education, sustainability, and heritage (Planning Institute of Australia, 2024). The first annual progress report highlighted the benefits of effective collaboration between all levels of government and the local community, driving local jobs and investment (Tasmanian Government 2018; City of Launceston 2018). The co-design approach — with over 150 individuals contributing to building design — has been a noted strength.

Councillors have raised frustrations about a lack of transparency when projects stall, with one councillor noting that when progress is not occurring, the public needs clearer explanations as to why (City of Launceston 2024). Some projects, including the Launceston Transport Strategy and Urban Waterway Health Management Program, had not progressed as expected. The Australian Government also informed the council that no further formal reviews of the City Deal implementation would be conducted, limiting accountability mechanisms. Short-term council leadership instability, including an interim CEO period, also affected delivery momentum.

The cessation of formal implementation reviews and gaps in public transparency point to the ongoing challenge of sustaining accountability across a ten-year, multi-government arrangement.

The establishment of the CBAG provided a structured mechanism for community and business input into implementation. The three-year implementation review found the CBAG played an important role advising the Executive Board on risks and opportunities and recommended a wider membership and increased role for CBAG in reporting and evaluating city deal initiatives. There was a finding that the governance structure would benefit from increased engagement between the Executive Board, CBAG and business.

These findings and recommendations support the case for multi-government place-based deals to improve transparency and deepen collaboration by embedding non-government partners more directly in agenda-setting, decision-making, and co-investment processes (Australian Government 2020; Tasmanian Government 2020).

## **MODEL 4: REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATIONS**

### **Regional Development Australia Committees, Victoria's Regional Partnerships and Regional Development Commissions (WA)**

#### **Overview**

Regional development organisations across Australia operate as structured, place-based governance mechanisms that connect government with community, industry, and local

stakeholders. While differing in institutional form, the three organisations chosen for this case study, Regional Development Australia (RDA) committees, Victoria's Regional Partnerships, and Western Australia's Regional Development Commissions (RDCs), share a common purpose to provide regionally grounded advice, coordinate investment priorities, and strengthen local economic and social outcomes.

RDAs are a national network of advisory committees established by the Australian Government (Australian Government Department of Infrastructure 2023). Victoria's Regional Partnerships are formal community–government advisory bodies within Regional Development Victoria (Government of Victoria 2016), while WA's RDCs are statutory authorities with formal governance and planning responsibilities established under legislation (Western Australian Government 1993).

Across all three models, regional development organisations act as intermediaries between governments and regions, translating local priorities into policy and program responses, while aligning regional initiatives with broader state and national frameworks.

### **Outcomes and Achievements**

Collectively, regional development organisations have contributed to improved alignment between government investment and local priorities, while strengthening the visibility of regional issues within policy processes.

RDAs have supported regional economic development by facilitating investment, promoting innovation, and providing local intelligence to inform Australian Government and state policy design (Regional Development Australia 2022). Similarly, Victoria's Regional Partnerships have influenced government decision-making through formal advice and consultation processes, contributing to targeted funding outcomes (e.g. infrastructure, community programs, digital connectivity) and structural reforms such as the establishment of roles like the Cross Border Commissioner (Regional Development Victoria 2021).

WA's RDCs demonstrate a more formalised planning and investment role, developing regional blueprints and strategic plans and assessing project proposals against economic and social criteria. Through mechanisms such as the Regional Economic Development Grants program, RDCs contribute to project prioritisation and funding recommendations aligned with state development objectives (Western Australian Regional Development Trust 2019).

Across jurisdictions, these models have strengthened place-based approaches, improved coordination across portfolios, and embedded regional perspectives into government decision-making.

### **Success Factors and Challenges**

Several common strengths underpin the effectiveness of regional development organisations. The organisations draw on members or partners with strong regional connections, enabling them to provide grounded insights and build community trust and helping to align local priorities with government funding programs and policy frameworks. The models emphasise tailored responses to regional conditions, with mechanisms (e.g. regional assemblies, blueprints, advisory networks) designed to capture diverse local perspectives. The organisations have endured across economic and political cycles as a sustained commitment to structured regional community engagement.

Regional development organisations face several consistent constraints. RDAs and Regional Partnerships operate primarily as advisory bodies without formal decision-making or regulatory powers, while even statutory RDCs often rely on state agencies for delivery (Beer et al. 2022). Performance can differ significantly across regions depending on leadership, staffing, and access to technical expertise, particularly in smaller or remote areas. A recurring challenge is translating regional advice into government action, with limited direct control over funding or program delivery constraining impact.

Regional development organisations represent an important institutional form of collaborative governance in Australia, characterised by structured engagement between governments and regional stakeholders. They play a critical role in articulating regional priorities, informing policy, and supporting place-based investment.

However, while they are designed to amplify regional voice and coordination, they lack the authority and resources to independently drive outcomes, which is a deliberate design feature. As a result, their long-term impact depends on how effectively governments respond to their advice and integrate regional priorities into decision-making. Strengthening these models to deliver improved outcomes for regions might include clearer accountability mechanisms, more stable resourcing, and improved alignment between advisory functions and delivery systems and outcomes.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Collaborative governance is not a single model but a suite of approaches that can help regional Australia respond to complex, cross-sector challenges that no one institution can address alone. The case studies show that these models can improve coordination, strengthen local legitimacy, and produce more tailored and durable responses to place-based issues when government, community, industry, and service providers share responsibility for decision making and outcomes.

For regional policy, the central question is where collaborative governance can complement conventional approaches to add the greatest value and what conditions are needed for it to succeed. To become a more established feature of regional development and service delivery and grow collaboration at scale will require investment in capabilities, relationships, and governance settings.

- Where can collaborative governance add the most value in regional and remote Australia?
- What would it take to expand community-led place-based impact initiatives across regional and remote Australia?
- How can self-determination and co-governance models improve outcomes for First Nations communities and support Closing the Gap?
- How can regional and city deals better involve non-government partners in setting priorities and delivering outcomes?
- How can regional development organisations strengthen non-government participation in priority setting and decision-making?
- What capability, evidence and resourcing gaps must be addressed to enable wider use of collaborative governance models?

## REFERENCES

- Ansell, Chris, and Alison Gash. 2008. "Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 18 (4): 543–571. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mum032>.
- Australian Government Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities. 2017. *The Launceston City Deal*. Canberra: Department of Infrastructure.
- Australian Government Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, and the Arts. 2023. *Regional Development Australia Charter*. Canberra: Department of Infrastructure.
- Australian Government Department of Social Services. 2021. *Stronger Places, Stronger People Strategy, and Implementation Framework*. Canberra: Department of Social Services.
- Australian Government, Tasmanian Government, and City of Launceston. 2018. *Launceston City Deal: Annual Progress Report 2018*. Canberra: Department of Infrastructure.
- Australian Government and Tasmanian Government. 2020. *Launceston City Deal: Three-Year Implementation Review*. Canberra and Hobart: Joint Commonwealth and Tasmanian Government Printer.
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2017. *Children's Headline Indicators*. Cat. no. PHE 216. Canberra: AIHW.
- Bates, Shona, Fiona Haigh, Bingquin Li, Ilan Katz and Miri Raven. 2025. *Co- Governance – Working Better Together: The Final of ANZSOG's Project on Co-Governance and Trust in Government*. ANZSOG Research Insights No. 47. Melbourne: ANZSOG.
- Bates, S., Haigh, F., Li, B., Katz, I., and Raven, M. (2025). *Co-governance – A Guide: Practical Guidance from ANZSOG's Project on Co-Governance and Trust in Government*. Melbourne: Australia and New Zealand School of Government, September 2025.
- Beer, Andrew, Fiona Haslam McKenzie, Tayanah O'Donnell, and Alaric Maude. 2022. "Regional Policy and Governance in Australia: Assessing the Advisory Versus Statutory Models." *Journal of Australian Political Economy* 89 (2): 145–168.
- City of Launceston. 2024. *Ordinary Council Meeting Minutes*. Launceston: City of Launceston, May.
- Emerson, Kirk, Tina Nabatchi, and Stephen Balogh. 2012. "An Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 22 (1): 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mur011>.
- Gladstone Region Community. 2022. "Gladstone Region Wellbeing Action Plan Designed and Endorsed by the Gladstone Region Community (2022)." [https://www.gladstoneregiontogether.org.au/files/ugd/1cf02a\\_95b4ebda9b9c4eb49a67e4079ac64675.pdf](https://www.gladstoneregiontogether.org.au/files/ugd/1cf02a_95b4ebda9b9c4eb49a67e4079ac64675.pdf).
- Gladstone Region Together. 2025. "Tracking Progress: Data and Evaluation Working Group Kicks-off Wellbeing Review." Gladstone Region Together. July 16, 2025. <https://www.gladstoneregiontogether.org.au/post/tracking-progress-data-and-evaluation-working-group-kicks-off-wellbeing-review>.
- Gladstone Region Wellbeing. 2024. *Wellbeing UMEL Strategy: Measurement Framework*. Gladstone Region Together. September 2024.
- Gladstone Region Wellbeing. 2023. *Our Journey Story*. Gladstone Region Together.
- Gladstone Region Wellbeing. 2023. *Data Report*. Gladstone Region Together.

Just Reinvest NSW. 2013. *Justice Reinvestment in Bourke: Preliminary Proposal*. Sydney: Just Reinvest NSW.

KPMG. 2018. *Maranguka Justice Reinvestment Project: Impact Assessment*. Sydney: KPMG Australia.

Li, Bingqin, Ilan Katzand Miri Raven. 2025. *Maranguka – A Study Based on Publicly Available Evidence: A Case Study for ANSZOG’s Project on Co-Governance and Trust in Government*. ANSZOG Research Insights No. 50. Melbourne: Australia and New Zealand School of Government.

Maranguka and Just Reinvest NSW. 2021. *Bourke Data Dashboard: Local Crime Statistics and Community Progress Report*. Bourke: Maranguka Hub.

Maranguka Community Hub. 2025. “About Us.” Maranguka Community Hub. 2025. <https://maranguka.org.au/>.

O’Flynn, Janine, and John Wanna. 2008. *Collaborative Governance: A New Era of Public Policy in Australia?* ANU Press.

Planning Institute of Australia. 2024. "National Awards for Planning Excellence: 2023–2024 Winners Showcase." *Planning Insights Magazine*, March.

Regional Development Australia (RDA). 2022. *National Network Impact Report 2021–2022*. Canberra: RDA Secretariat.

Regional Development Victoria. 2021. *Regional Partnerships: Outcomes and Structural Impacts Report*. Melbourne: Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions.

Smyth, Ciara, and Shona Bates. 2023. *Would Adopting More Co-Governance Arrangements with Communities Build Public Trust? A Scoping Study*. ANSZOG Research Insights No. 28. Melbourne: Australia and New Zealand School of Government, April.

State Government of Victoria. 2016. *Establishing Victoria's Regional Partnerships: Framework and Guidelines*. Melbourne: Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources.

Turlough Guerin (2026). Governance and funding of Landcare for catchment management in Australia—insights for the future, *Critical Insights in Agriculture*, 1:1, 2576407, DOI: 10.1080/29932106.2025.2576407

University of Tasmania. 2024. *Inveresk Campus Transformation Project: Final Stage Construction and Student Transition Report*. Hobart: University of Tasmania Infrastructure Group.

Victoria State Government. 2023. *Place-Based Approaches: A Guide for the Victorian Public Service*. <https://www.vic.gov.au/place-based-approaches-guide>.

Western Australian Government. 1993. *Regional Development Commissions Act 1993*. Perth: Parliamentary Counsel's Office.

Western Australian Regional Development Trust. 2019. *Review of the Functions and Effectiveness of Regional Development Commissions*. Perth: Minister for Regional Development.