



# REPORT ON THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESEARCHERS FORUM 14/15 December 2011

## 1. Purpose of this Report

This report documents the processes, outcomes and recommendations of the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG) Local Government Researchers Forum held at the University of Technology, Sydney on 14 and 15 December 2011. It is designed to assist ACELG by providing feedback for consideration as well as ideas in planning for future events.

## 2. Introduction and Background

ACELG is funded to enhance professionalism and skills in local government, showcase innovation and best practice, and facilitate better-informed policy debates. The research conducted by ACELG and its partners is intended to generate discussion and policy debate about current and emerging issues, and a range of opportunities are taken to assist in achieving this outcome, including the organisation of dedicated forums for local government researchers.

The first local government researchers forum was held in Canberra in March 2010 with about 30 researchers attending. The forum identified the range of research being undertaken in universities and professional associations throughout Australia, and recommendations from this forum included the establishment of a Research Advisory Committee (RAC) to provide ACELG with support for developing collaborative research, ensuring that current research meets the needs of the sector, and developing programs that would ensure longer term research activity and capacity building. A further recommendation was that the forum be an annual event, in particular as a vehicle of sharing the outcomes of ACELG research.

The aim of the 2011 researchers forum was to bring researchers together from across Australia to share current knowledge and research, and to identify research needs for local government policy formulation into the future. It was organised by the ACELG Secretariat with the support of the ACELG's Research Advisory Committee, ACELG Program Coordinators and the UTS Centre for Local Government.

## 3. Forum Overview

More than 40 papers were presented on the broad theme of '**Local Governance in Transition**' (Attachment 1), with topics including:

- Metropolitan and community governance
- Leadership development
- Regional collaboration and shared services
- Local government finance
- Workforce development
- Climate change
- Rural-remote and Indigenous local government.

The forum brought together more than 100 practitioners and academics representing local and state governments, universities in all states and territories and New Zealand, and professional associations. Some PhD students and specialist consultants were also in attendance. - The ACELG Secretariat provided a dedicated resource for the organisation of the event (see Attachment 3 - *Planning and Resourcing the Forum*).

Forum presentations were divided into three streams: 'Transition Governance', 'Communities in Transition', and 'Environments in Transition'. Contributions were extremely diverse with over half of the 41 papers from academics/PhD students, and the remainder from local government practitioners, ACELG associates, representatives from state and federal government, and representatives from professional associations. ACELG supported research featured in 12 of the presentations, commensurate with its role in commissioning and supporting new research. Reflection sessions held throughout the forum also enabled the final session to bring together the outcomes of the presentations and generate discussion.

In addition to the presentations and reflection sessions, the program also included a light-hearted and lively debate on the proposition that 'Researchers are from Venus, local government is from Mars: Politics, not evidence, shapes policy'. Melissa Gibbs (ACELG) and Tim Robinson (Fairfield Council, New South Wales), who spoke in the negative, managed to sway the audience who had originally agreed with Greg Hoffman (Local Government Association Queensland) and John Martin (La Trobe University) that politics shapes policy. Erica Bell (University of Tasmania) ably chaired the session.


## 4. Opening Session

Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) Professor Attila Brungs welcomed participants:

*I'm delighted to welcome you all to this important research forum, and in particular to welcome you to UTS. We were very pleasantly surprised at the strength of the response to our invitation to attend and contribute. Presentation of over 40 papers makes this a very significant occasion. The Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government has been operating now for just over two years. Graham Sansom will give you more detail on its role and programs in just a minute. This is ACELG's second research forum. Its theme of 'Local Governance in Transition' highlights the current demands on local government in Australia in all areas of governance. Papers will cover new approaches to local governance and community engagement; governance challenges for rural, remote and Indigenous councils; structural reform and financing options; workforce challenges in the context of demographic change; and sustainable environmental management.*

*An important part of my job is, of course, to enhance the contribution of research here at UTS, and to achieve greater recognition of our efforts. In some ways that means competing with other universities, but collaboration is also an essential part of what we do. So it's very gratifying that so many of you have joined us to share knowledge and ideas over the next two days. UTS is very proud to be one of the lead partners in ACELG. For the past 20 years UTS has been home to what is now the largest and oldest Centre for Local Government in Australia – and quite possibly the southern hemisphere! That centre has thrived on partnerships with other educational institutions and with key organisations in local government – both here in Australia and internationally.*

*So when the federal government sought bids to establish and run an Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government, it was only natural that UTS would want to take the lead in*



*putting together a consortium, and that the consortium would include both universities and practitioners. Great credit also goes to my predecessor, Prof Sue Rowley, for so strongly backing that initiative. Two years down the track, we're delighted with the results.*

*ACELG has clearly demonstrated the importance of research and of evidence-based policy and practice. Sound applied research is essential for local government to play a constructive role in policy debates and in addressing emerging national agendas. Prior to ACELG local government was quite poorly resourced to do this. At the same time, the number and scope of papers to be presented over the next two days shows that in fact there has been a lot of valuable research taking place in a wide variety of settings – in academia, in government agencies, in local councils, in the private sector and elsewhere. The problem is that for the most part it has not amounted to a coherent body of work.*

*Therefore a major challenge for ACELG over the next few years will be to draw together that diverse research, and to do whatever it can to fill gaps and boost the research effort even more. In particular, it's vital that we encourage younger and new researchers to take an interest in local government. That will be something for discussion tomorrow. The opportunities are immense: a \$30 billion per annum sector, 170,000 employees, highly professionalised, and involved to varying degrees in nearly all the key issues facing Australia over coming decades.*

Professor Graham Sansom, Director of ACELG then outlined the importance of research in the overall ACELG program:

*For those of you not familiar with the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government or ACELG, it is a consortium and a truly unique collaboration of universities and professional associations. The consortium includes the largest dedicated Centre for Local Government in Australia (here at UTS); the University of Canberra; local government's two largest professional institutes – Local Government Managers Australia and the Institute of Public Works Engineering Australia; and the Australia and New Zealand School of Government. ACELG's Board also includes the President of the Australian Local Government Association.*

*The Centre's mandate is to enhance professionalism and skills in local government, showcase innovation and best practice, and facilitate a better-informed policy debate around key issues. Therefore ACELG's activities are grouped into six program areas:*

- *Research and policy foresight*
- *Innovation and better practice*
- *Governance and strategic leadership*
- *Organisation capacity building*
- *Rural-remote and Indigenous Local Government*
- *Workforce development.*

*This forum is focused on transition and how local government needs to respond, and is responding to changes and forces in its operating environment – changes in governance, demographic change, issues for rural and remote areas, climate change and so on. These are all critical national issues where local governments can make a contribution and must make a contribution by working with their communities as well as with state and federal governments. We also must focus attention on changing relationships between local governments and their communities, and on political leadership. We need to invest in our current leaders and foster*

*and develop those aspiring to leadership roles. But we also need to rethink political structures to cope with the changing environment.*

*If we don't look ahead we are doomed to failure. We need to equip ourselves and adjust to cope with change. It is our task as researchers to enable local government to look ahead – this is reflected in our use of the term 'research and policy foresight'. Later in 2012 ACELG has a mid term review and we will be considering how well as an organisation we are adjusting and adapting to the changing local government environment. This forum will and your discussion of research issues will provide valuable food for thought.*

Professor Mark Evans, Director of the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) Institute for Governance provided a keynote address on 'Being a local government leader in an Australia of regions'. In this address he spoke of his survey of local government leaders in Australia and New Zealand, which educed 10 key goals for future local governance:


- 1. Safeguard public sector legitimacy and community values*
- 2. Create a clear strategic vision for the community*
- 3. Win the trust of local citizens*
- 4. Manage complex processes of change*
- 5. Build strong working relationships with citizens*
- 6. Solve critical governance issues from climate change to the representation of women*
- 7. Deliver innovative and effective citizen-centred services*
- 8. Be equal partners in governance*
- 9. Lead with personal and professional integrity*
- 10. Set the agenda of local government reform.*

He argued that local governance requires a new approach to localism, which he defined as 'the devolution of power and resources away from central control and towards frontline managers, local democratic structures, local institutions and local communities, within an agreed framework of Commonwealth and state minimum standards'.

Austin Ley, Manager of City Research at the City of Melbourne, gave a historical view of how research had been integrated into the work of the City of Melbourne over the last 12 years. He said that pre-2000 his research team provided council with data, whereas now they synthesise a vast range of knowledge for the integrated planning and service delivery processes of Council, and work across all aspects of Council's activities. They have also established outward-looking research and knowledge networks with a range of university, government and community partners. Austin summed up his paper with the following comments:

*We are working across council to identify existing connections and potential opportunities to work and partner with external research agencies and institutions, including the universities. Again the emphasis is on collaboration, facilitation and integration. We are not attempting to 'take over' or have sole responsibility for all research or knowledge activities across Council. We are facilitating other areas activities, looking for ways to value add and build our research resources through partnerships.*

*We have been working with other Councils and State government. We are also developing work integrated learning opportunities to encourage all areas of Council to tap into under and post graduate student resources. We have been collaborating with the other capital cities on some projects, but this is intermittent. Through the Council of Capital Cities Lord Mayors we have attempted to undertake projects of common interest. The difficulty is that*



*these projects tend to be imposed on an already substantial work program and depend on the sustained commitment of one or two individuals.*

*Another major lesson we have learned is that establishing a local government research resource requires a strong commitment from the organisation. This commitment stems from a fundamental belief in the value of research. It also requires the appointment of enthusiastic and dedicated staff members who have a broad collaborative approach.*

*Finally, on the basis of the previous two items. I'd like to propose the next steps we might take in this forum to develop local government research and consider some opportunities for practitioner involvement and collaboration. My ultimate desire is to have Local Government Research as a recognised discipline which is resourced appropriately.*

*Firstly I think we need to start by identifying the need for Local Government research and build the case for appropriate resources to meet this need. We need undertake a research project to understand how research is currently being conducted across councils.*

*As I discussed earlier, I'm not advocating that all councils duplicate the City of Melbourne research model. In some instances a separate research resource may be appropriate, other might be better with a collective approach. Each approach will have different implications for practitioner engagement.*

*To start this process we need to examine what the current situation is. I have no doubt that many councils will be struggling to perform their basic functions and would perhaps consider research a 'luxury'. Perhaps these Councils are in fact those that have the greatest need, for practitioners to assist them to present a case to State and Federal governments for additional resources.*

*Another group of councils will be undertaking research to a greater or lesser degree with what I would characterise as a 'disbursed' approach. I would argue that, from the City of Melbourne's experience, these activities can be undertaken far more efficiently and effectively using a collective or consolidated approach. As I discussed earlier the benefits we identified by doing this include:*

- *eliminating duplications,*
- *ensure consistencies in methodologies quality control and consistency in budget and resources*
- *ensure projects are aligned to corporate goals and objectives, don't just serve single interests and produce multiple benefits*
- *are timed to ensure results can be acted upon, and*
- *build an information base.*

*There is an opportunity for practitioners to become involved and collaborate on a project to recognising and identifying research activities across council and to establish the case for a collective or consolidated approach and determine appropriate models of delivery. These might involve groups of councils working together with universities and/or research institutes. We need to build a knowledge base that can be shared across councils.*

*Another opportunity for practitioner involvement is to continue to advocate for the principle of 'Unlocking data'. To identify areas where data and information is being collected for single purposes, which, with a bit of thought can provide information for multiple purposes.*

*We also need to somehow make supporting local government of benefit to university researchers. This might involve lobbying for change that will enable academics to be rewarded for collaborating with Local Government, by encouraging results-based research is recognised and rewarded as an alternative to the present system based on the generation of publications. Work integrated learning provides one opportunity. Recognising Local Government research as a discipline in its own right might also assist this cause. Perhaps this forum could resolve to prepare a submission to Productivity Commission on the above and seek funding to embark on an exercise to really understand Local Governments research needs.*

*In summing up I consider the key lessons we have learned which will assist practitioner involvement with local government are:*

- *build trust, look to establish ongoing partnerships*
- *collaboration and facilitation*
- *relevance and timeliness*
- *add value, don't create additional work*
- *consider how an information base for local government might be created.*

## 5. Concluding Presentation after Participant Discussion

Professor Mark Evans addressed the question 'What should a reflexive research program on future local governance look like?'

In this discussion he outlined the issues and challenges of such a local government research program:

- a. The need to conceptualise change
- b. Respond to, and helping local government cope with change
- c. Driving/rethinking change as collaborator of first resort
- d. Communicating change to communities
- e. Building an evidence base for action.

### A. Conceptualising Change

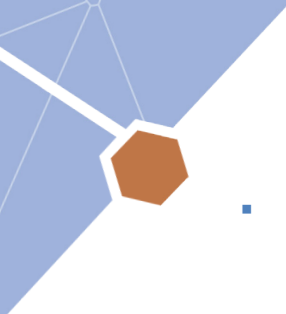
#### Explanatory concepts

- What concepts best capture and make sense of the role (real and potential) of local government in processes of social and political change?
- Do we need a common idiom for managing change?
- How does globalisation influence change in local government?
- We need to consider localism in an Australia of regions
- We also need to consider: governance theories, regulation theory, complexity theory and competition state theory.

#### Operational concepts

- What concepts can enhance the quality of local government practice?
- What concepts can enhance the strategic management of local government?
- Public value/best value/social return on investment/triple-quadruple bottom-line evaluation



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- We need to define our use of terminology: the enabling local state, collaborative governance, subsidiarity, social capital/cohesion/inclusion/exclusion/resilience, design thinking, sustainability and liveability.

## **B. Requirements for responding to/coping with change**

- Adaptive/facilitative leadership
- Aligning local-regional/local-commonwealth agendas
- Clarifying roles and responsibilities of local government in the system of local governance
- Clarifying roles and responsibilities of CEOs, Mayors, and those in the positions of executive leadership
- Cost containment innovations (postcode tests)
- Independent revenue raising initiatives and use of taxation principles
- Structural adjustment in communities experiencing stress, including effective service implementation and risk management.

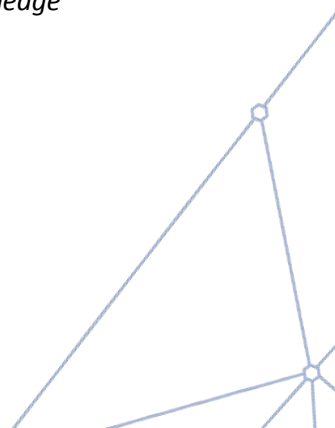
## **C. Local government research needs to drive/rethink change using collaboration based on:**

- Citizen-centric governance
- Use of social media
- Strategies to ensure liveability
- Collaborative modes of governance (accessing local resources)
- Place-based delivery
- Life-cycle transition management
- Innovation and experimentation linked to council/community priorities
- Connecting the above – ‘joining the dots’.

## **D. Local government research in communicating change must use:**

- The language of reform
- Social media
- Change visualisation techniques
- *Nudging*
- Questioning of assumptions
- Long term futures research
- *Horizon scanning*.

## **E. Local government research must be built on an evidence base to support informed decision-making, using:**

- Rigorous methods
  - Large and open quantitative data sets
  - Strong qualitative data sets
  - Repositories of knowledge on what works, for example the *Innovation and Knowledge exchange network* (IKEN)
  - Local council research compendiums
  - Testing of behavioural assumptions through sophisticated measurement
  - Annotated bibliographies on local government studies
  - Building of (inter) disciplinary identity for local government studies
  - Broad methods of disseminating lessons and key findings.
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## 6. Participant Discussion of Forum Themes

(also see Attachment 4 - Results from Evaluation Survey)

**Note:** The following comments were made by forum participants in the context of discussing particular papers presented at the forum. They do not necessarily reflect the views of forum organisers.

### Governance

- There is a need to continue to build the evidence base for reform.
- Our research questions need to keep in mind the target audience.
- Is the current value proposition strong enough for local governments to take on innovation?
- Changes in local government structure will follow strategy, and the current strategy in Australia for local government reform is unclear.
- Facilitating discussion about reform within communities is a real and necessary skill required by local government.
- What does localism mean in the Australian context? And what does localism mean in the context of regionalism?
- What is the 'state' of research in the Australian local government sector? Is it time for an update without losing the memory of previous research?
- Reform roles and responsibilities between levels of government need to be defined so that funding is commensurate with the activity/service.
- How in practice do we build the capacity for Australian councils to shift from provider/regulator/expert/governing authority to leading organisations which genuinely empower communities and facilitate local democracy? How do we foster true collaboration with residents and agencies alike to deliver what our communities are asking for? What are the elements of good community governance and how do we get there? How do we use the pressures on local government for reform as a catalyst?
- What effect does engagement really have on local communities and local councils? We need to measure the success of community engagement.
- Do we need to influence the National Curriculum to teach students about current issues for local government.

### Regional Collaboration and Shared Services

- An approach to reform is required, one that recognises not all councils are uniform in reform capacity, and that this divide may broaden if it is not taken into account. Therefore, diversity in approach to structural reform is essential.
- There is no magic population number for economies of scope/scale in the consideration of amalgamation, instead this depends on the nature of change and how change happens.
- Research into working across council and community boundaries is required.

### Local Government Finance

- Research into how councils can save money is required.
- Financial assistance to local government from independent sources of revenue derived from principles of taxation is required.
- There are knowledge gaps in rating principles and research is needed into policy issues (eg balance capacity to pay and benefits), and the disconnect between ratings policy and practice, e.g. when does a service fee become a tax?



- Research into the legal capacity of local government as an entrepreneur.
- Research into other countries/models regarding how local government can raise its own taxes, especially for councils with no ability to source revenue, is required.
- Research is required into how best to present the benefits of land tax as a good source of revenue, given that there is often a culture of dread of land tax in the community.

### Leadership Development

- The current research leaves unexplored territory in leadership issues, however there is existing information to learn from, e.g. *Learning from Auckland* - emergence of leadership.
- The issue of the relationship between the mayor and senior executives is about ethical theory in the workplace, but is not named as such.

### Workforce Development

- Despite a growing percentage of women employed in the local government sector, women are underrepresented in management and leadership roles
- We need to improve the image of the sector to attract new employees.

### Rural-remote and Indigenous councils

- Financial Sustainability is the key issue in the face of significant challenges, e.g. debilitating impacts of rate capping/conditional rating.
- A robust research methodology that also identifies limitations is required for policy relevance.
- There exists a need to empower local government to say 'no' to some service provision, and also a need to address the burden of compliance and distortions on expenditure for councils.
- The funding model needs to be addressed, e.g. FAGs supplement for RRI councils and the structure of FAGs.

### Communicating

#### Social media

- There exists a need to research the ways local governments are using social media and examples of best practice.
- Does social media fit into business as usual, or do we need to change community engagement approaches? Also, within the above context and complexities, what are the issues around the democratic process of engagement: legal/privacy, and who pays for it etc.
- Develop a framework for use of social media, and for the use of *Big data* and *Open data*.
- Research is required into the digital divide across demographics and inherent barriers (complexity and challenges) to engagement, e.g. language barriers and cultural sensitivities.
- Encourage innovation and use of social media through experimentation as a first step, e.g. engaging hard-to-reach groups.
- There needs to be a list of local government apps to share, e.g. smart phone ready local government websites.
- Lessons from the Gold Coast *BOLD Futures* research paper suggest that social media needs to be complimented by face to face meetings.



## Broadband

- Local government has to be a lead player getting ready for the National Broadband Network (NBN).
- Areas not covered by fibre optics (i.e. areas serviced by satellite) are not being adequately addressed in terms of options, e.g. privately laid fibre optics through corporate partnerships like mining companies.
- Local government digital economy strategies should be linked with comprehensive consultation with communities.
- NBN could piggy-back on to other services or existing infrastructure through partnerships.
- For sparsely populated local government areas, how will they reconcile equity as part of business cases?
- Councils need to incorporate digital strategies into their own services.

## Environment

- Environmental issues are complex and require tools, information and leadership in policy formation.
- Environmental risk assessment requires a complex web of information management, e.g. risk governance and measuring quality of capital.
- Local government needs a framework for integrated waste management (should be called 'materials' not waste)
- There needs to be consensus on what sustainability means for local government, in a social, environmental and commercial context.
- There needs to be research into the impact of the resource extraction industry on local government.

## Measuring Governance

- What data is available and how do we link this to areas of potential reform?
- There is a need to address data gaps and explore opportunities to collaborate with the data collection operations of other agencies, e.g. the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).
- Local government needs to be aware of available data sets and how they can be accessed.
- Demographic statistics contained in different data sets can tell a lot about communities.
- Census for land use provides opportunities for service planning, emergency management and community renewal, e.g. currently in use in Melbourne and City of Port Philip, and soon to be used in Sydney and Adelaide.

# Attachment 1. Forum Program

Day 1

9.30–9.45am	<b>Welcome Professor Attila Brungs Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) UTS</b>		
9.45–10.45am	<i>Introduction Local Governance in Transition: an overview</i> Graham Sansom and Mark Evans; <i>Local Government Research: Future Directions &amp; Practitioner Involvement</i> ; Austin Ley City of Melbourne		
10.45–11.15am	<b>Morning Tea</b>		
	Stream 1: Transition Governance, Lvl 6-Large Room	Stream 2: People in Transition, Lvl 6-Nurses Room	Stream 3: Environments in Transition, Lvl 6-Small Room
11.15–1.00pm	<p><b>Transition Governance</b> <i>A Fresh Look at Municipal Consolidation in Australia</i> Chris Aulich, University of Canberra</p> <p><i>Sustainability and the Social Contract with Australia's Country Towns: Local Governance in Transition?</i> John Martin, LaTrobe University</p> <p><i>Divided by a continent – different approaches to local government reform and the prospects for regional organisations of councils in NSW and Western Australia</i> Alex Gooding, Gooding Davies Consultancy PL/ACELG Associate</p>	<p><b>Community Engagement</b> <i>Local Government and Community Engagement in Australia</i> Jade Herriman, UTS Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF)</p> <p><i>Meeting Challenges through Empowered, Deliberative Participation: A case study of a WA regional local government</i> Rob Weymouth, Western Australian Local Government Association</p> <p><i>Evolution of Community Governance: Building on What Works</i> Peter McKinlay Auckland University of Technology NZ</p>	<p><b>Liveability</b> <i>Options for a local government framework for measuring liveability</i> Ruth Goldsmith, Penrith City Council</p> <p><i>Connectivity, Sustainability, Flexibility and Accessibility – Indicators for Liveable Rural and Remote Communities, A Liveable Communities Assessment of Gunnedah Shire</i> Rosemary Pollock, Hunter New England Local Health District _Population Health</p> <p><i>Health Impact Assessment in a Local Government Context</i> Patrick Harris for Mackay Public Health Unit</p>
1.00–1.50pm	<b>Lunch</b>		
1.50–3.30	<p><b>Sharing services and Finance in transition</b> <i>Rating policy – an ad hoc or principled balancing act?</i> Shane Sody, Local Government Association of SA</p> <p><i>Regional performance: the leadership difference</i> Amanda Spalding, Darrell Hair Associates; Alison Dalziel, Dalziel Strategy and Performance</p> <p><i>Legal and Governance Models for Shared Services in Local Government</i> David Somerville, NM Consulting/ACELG Associate</p>	<p><b>Workforce in Transition</b> <i>Location as a factor in Gender Equity in Local Government</i> Karen Purser, ACELG</p> <p><i>Learning in Local Government</i> Sarah Artist and Geraldine O'Connor, UTS Centre for Local Government</p> <p><i>South Australian Local Government Workforce Planning Project</i> Sandy Semmens, Local Government Association of SA</p>	<p><b>Climate Change &amp; Transition Governance</b> <i>Climate change governance by local councils</i> Heather Zeppel University of Southern Queensland;</p> <p><i>Strategic planning for collaborative practice: the potential for inter-organisational cooperation to overcome constraints to climate adaptation</i> Lorraine Bates, CSIRO</p> <p><i>Foreseeing and managing the health risks of climate change: a translational pilot project for local government</i> Erica Bell, University of Tasmania</p>
3.30–4.00pm	<b>Afternoon Tea</b>		
4.00–5.10pm	<p><b>Local/State Reform Governance</b> <i>Collaborative Governance and Metropolitan Planning in South East Queensland</i> John Abbott, John Abbott Planning</p> <p><i>Collaborative reform process between state and local government: the Victorian Councils Reforming Business Program</i> Leighton Vivian, Department of Planning and Community Development Victoria</p>	<p><b>Cultures of Transition</b> <i>Building the capacity for local government innovation</i> Mark Evans, University of Canberra</p> <p><i>Current perceptions and trends of local government as an employer of choice</i> Jennifer Fredericks, Logan City Council</p>	<p><b>Governance</b> <i>Impacts of the Local Government Reform Process</i> Philip Willis, UTS ISF</p> <p><i>Responding to the challenges of collaboration: developing an innovative research partnership between local government and global university</i> Richie Howitt, Macquarie University and John Neish, Ryde Council</p>
5.10–6.00pm	<b>Transition Themes Day 1 - Mark Evans to facilitate</b>		
6.00–7.00pm	<b>COCKTAILS</b>		

## Day 2

	Stream 1: Transition Governance, Lvl 7-Aerial Function Centre	Stream 2: Communities in Transition, Lvl 6-Large Room	Stream 3: Environments in Transition, Lvl 6-Small Room
8.30-10.10am	<p><b>Rural, Remote, Indigenous Local Government</b></p> <p><i>Local government service delivery to remote Indigenous communities: funding and service delivery model design</i> Michael Limerick, ACELG Associate and Robyn Morris, Edith Cowan University</p> <p><i>Roles and expectations of rural-remote and indigenous councils</i> Alan Morton, Morton Consulting Services</p> <p><i>Who Defines 'Sustainability'? Perspectives on the recent transition from Community Councils to Regional Shires in the Northern Territory</i> Thomas Michel, Roper Gulf Shire Council</p>	<p><b>Community Engagement</b></p> <p><i>The UK Transition Network and Community Governance: A discussion paper for Australian Local Government</i> Hazel Storey, The Storey Agency/UTS:CLG Associate</p> <p><i>Winning Positive Community Outcomes Through Good Governance of Stakeholder Relationships: The Case of the City of Melville, Western Australia</i> Raymond de Silva, City of Melville Council</p> <p><i>Citizen Participation and Murray Darling Basin Futures – Better Practice Design</i> Mark Evans, University of Canberra</p>	<p><b>Environments in Transition</b></p> <p><i>Delivering improved climate change projections to NSW Councils</i> Erin Roger, Office of Environment and Heritage NSW</p> <p><i>Visualising the complex web of a locality's environmental risk governance</i> Dick Osborn PhD Researcher, Australian National University</p> <p><i>Local Government and Landfill Futures</i> Anna Gero and Dustin Moore UTS ISF</p>
10.10-10.40am	<b>Morning Tea</b>		
10.40-12.10pm	<p><b>Leadership in Transition</b></p> <p><i>Local political leadership in transition: lessons from the new Auckland Council</i> Christine Cheyne, Massey University NZ</p> <p><i>Leadership in Australian Local Government Reform: Institutional and Ethical Approaches</i> Bligh Grant, University of New England</p> <p><i>Political Management Leadership in Australian Local Government</i> John Martin, Latrobe University/Chris Aulich, University of Canberra</p>	<p><b>Communicating in Transition</b></p> <p><i>Local Government and the National Broadband: How the Sector is Preparing to Capture the Benefits</i> Ian Tiley, University of New England</p> <p><i>Engaging City Futures: Social Media Success Factors</i> Colin Russo, Gold Coast City Council</p> <p><i>From Extension to Engagement – Application and Use of Social Media to Enhance Local Government Performance</i> Anne Howard, University of Canberra</p>	<p><b>Measuring Governance</b></p> <p><i>Demographics and local government</i> Lisa Conolly, Australian Bureau of Statistics</p> <p><i>Measuring Liveability: the contribution of a Census of Land Use and Employment</i> Austin Ley, City Of Melbourne and Serryn Eagleson, Department of Planning and Community Development, Victoria</p>
12.10-1pm	<b>Transition Themes Day 2 Facilitated session – Chris Aulich</b> Jones Room Aerial Function Centre		
1.00-1.40pm	<b>Lunch</b>		
1.40-2.30pm	<p>Research Debate Chair: Erica Bell FOR: John Martin and Greg Hoffman AGAINST: Melissa Gibbs and Tim Robinson Aerial Function Centre Jones Room</p>	<p>'Researchers are from Venus, local government is from Mars: politics, not evidence, shapes policy'</p>	
2.30-3.00pm	<p>Research Futures and wrap up Graham Sansom and Mark Evans</p>	<p>What is the future of local government research? How do we encourage practitioner involvement?</p>	

## Attachment 2. Organisations Represented

- Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government
- Auckland University of Technology
- Australian Bureau of Statistics
- Australian Local Government Association
- Australian National University
- Australian Services Union
- Charles Darwin University
- City of Baywater
- City of Melbourne
- City of Melville Council
- City of Ryde
- City of Sydney
- Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
- Dalziel Strategy and Performance
- Darrell Hair Associates
- Deloitte
- Department of Local Government (WA)
- Department of Local Government and Planning (QLD)
- Department of Premier and Cabinet
- Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government
- EcoSTEPS
- Edith Cowan University
- Eurobodalla Shire Council
- Fairfield Council
- Gold Coast City Council
- Gooding Davies Consultancy Pty Ltd / ACELG Associate
- Hunter New England Local Health Network
- Institute of Public Works Engineering Australia
- John Abbott Planning
- La Trobe University
- Lake Macquarie City Council
- Local Government Association of the Northern Territory
- Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW
- Local Government Association of Queensland
- Local Government Association of South Australia
- Local Government Association of Tasmania
- Local Government Managers Australia
- Local Government Victoria Department of Planning and Community Development
- Logan City Council
- Mackay Public Health Unit
- Macquarie University
- Maroondah City Council
- Massey University (New Zealand)
- Morton Consulting Services
- North Sydney Council
- Northbridge Management Consulting
- Northern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils
- NSW Office of Environment and Heritage
- Penrith City Council
- Roper Gulf Shire Council
- Rural Fire Service
- Ryde Council
- Serpentine Jarrahdale Shire
- SGS Economics and Planning Pty Ltd
- Story Agency
- Strathfield Council
- Sutherland Shire Council
- University of Canberra
- University of New England
- University of Southern Queensland
- University of Tasmania
- Urbis
- UTS Centre for Local Government
- UTS Institute for Sustainable Futures
- Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development
- Waverley Council
- Western Australian Local Government Association
- Wingecarribee Shire Council
- Wollongong Council

## Attachment 3. Planning and Resourcing the Forum

ACELG did not have a rigid view about how the forum would be structured and therefore made a wide call for papers so that the format could evolve based on participant's interests. However this process was based on the knowledge that the following would likely be of interest to participants:

1. concurrent workshops for practitioners to present and peer review research
2. a presentation from a high capacity Council, e.g. City of Sydney, Brisbane City Council
3. a panel of experienced researchers for a session addressing what makes *good* research
4. a presentation from a state or national agency/department.

Penny Finlay (an experienced public service practitioner) was appointed on a short term contract (18 hours per week for six months) to assist ACELG deliver on research commitments for 2011 - including the organisation of this event.

The **ACELG secretariat** provided guidance with Stefanie Pillora as Manager of ACELG's Research and Policy Foresight program providing leadership in determining how the forum would deliver on research goals, and Chris Watterson, in his role as project assistant, having a major role in logistics.

The **Research Advisory Committee (RAC)** members played an important role in the planning and staging of the forum. The RAC were consulted in program meetings at both the initial planning stages and just prior to the event on the forum's purpose and program.

The ACELG Secretariat drew on the expertise of the RAC and the UTS Centre for Local Government (CLG) to provide facilitators for the forum sessions, guiding discussion and reflection sessions and supporting the speakers.

### Call for Papers and Response

The call for papers for the researchers forum was sent on 22 August 2011 asking for abstracts on the broad theme of 'Local Governance in Transition'. The planned forum was to reflect and deepen the multifaceted approach of current and proposed research (with ACELG supported research featuring in the program) with anticipated topics including:


- Metropolitan and community governance
- Leadership development
- Regional collaboration and shared services
- Local government finance
- Workforce development
- Climate change
- Rural-remote and Indigenous local government
- Others.

The call to papers requested:

1. An abstract of about 600 words which summarised original, unpublished English language papers of about 6,000 words in length;
2. a blend of 'academic' research papers and scholarly contributions by practitioners, including the involvement of young or new researchers with an interest in local government.

There were 44 responses to the call for papers which were then assessed using a blind peer review process.





Six members of the RAC were involved in assisting the ACELG Secretariat in reviewing abstracts. The review was a two stage 'blind' process with two RAC members, undertaking an initial assessment based on the following criteria.

1. Abstract indicates good quality research
2. Fits the Forum's themes or could be adapted
3. Had practitioner involvement and/or relevance
4. Challenges current thinking and contributes to innovation in policy and practice.

The ACELG Secretariat then confirmed this assessment. The second stage of the review took place by teleconference with five RAC members, all of whom had read 'blind' the abstracts.

Recommendations were made about the inclusion, exclusion and revision of abstracts to determine those accepted to go through to presentation at the forum. Most submitted abstracts papers were accepted.

RAC members discussed the format of the forum. Two areas were identified as gaps in the program – demographic change and leadership. Two researchers known to the RAC were asked to develop papers in these areas. Other RAC discussion included the development of a debate regarding the role of research. Erica Bell undertook the development of this aspect of the program with the aim of having a light-hearted discussion at the forum's close on how research influences policy and practice in local government.

Researchers were asked to focus their presentation on two questions: What is known about this subject? What does this paper add? Where research projects were in-progress, authors were asked to supply discussion of early interim findings, conclusions and recommendations, wherever possible.

Successful researchers had about 11 weeks to finalise their presentation and paper. They were advised that their papers would appear on the ACELG website as forum proceedings and in the ACELG digital library. The papers provide the proceedings of the forum, and as such were never intended to be peer-reviewed as might be expected in a traditional academic conference. Selected papers would also be published as part of ACELG's Working Papers series, and promoted through the Centre's Innovation and Knowledge Exchange Network.

## Attachment 4. Feedback from Forum

**Note:** The following comments were made by forum survey respondents. They do not necessarily reflect the views of forum organisers.

Following the forum, ACELG sent a request to the over 100 participants for feedback. 33 participants completed the survey.

**The first question asked participants to nominate which sessions they attended. The most highly attended sessions were:**

- *Transition Governance*
- *Community Engagement*
- *Climate Change and Transition Governance* and *Local/State Reform Governance* sessions.

**Participants ranked the sessions that they found most beneficial:**

- *Community Engagement* (stream 2 session 1) was the most beneficial session;
- *Workforce in Transition* and *Communicating in Transition* equal second most beneficial session;
- *Local/State Reform Governance* and *Day 1 Reflection* session third most beneficial sessions.

**Feedback on why the sessions were beneficial:**


The quality of the presentations was commented on by most respondents. While a range of topics were singled out, *Community Engagement*, *Communicating in Transition* and *Workforce in Transition* sessions rating particularly highly in terms of usefulness to the workplace. Others reflected on the usefulness of the content for their research and teaching work. The emphasis on learnings from practical experience, and the practitioner input was especially appreciated.

The concluding wrap up session was also mentioned as an effective means of gauging the overall themes that emerged throughout the forum, encouraging new thinking on current research, and prompting thought on areas for future research. The research papers were highly regarded, both in terms of quality and relevance to the interests of the forum delegates.

Most respondents noted the interaction between participants was as strength of the forum as a whole, with opportunities for networking and making contacts, sharing experience and having ones views challenged, and research dissemination all regarded favourably.

**Participants were asked to suggest other formats for disseminating research and building research capacity. The responses are summarised below:**

Most respondents spoke favourably of the current format, as it drew on research and researchers across all states (and also New Zealand) and covered a diverse range of topics. Feedback as to the future format of the forum was a little more mixed, with some calling for the continuation of a national event that covers an diverse mix of local government focus areas, while other called for smaller state-based events, possibly around particular themes, to encourage more people from regional councils to attend. There was a general consensus that a national events.



Ideas for regional (state based) forums were further fleshed out in the feedback, in particular as a complementary strategy to the proposed national forum. State-based forums were seen to provide the opportunity to focus on research of significance to particular states, in the context of their unique challenges and legislative frameworks. It was also felt that state-based forums would maximise participation and potentially bring senior management and elected members into the research loop. Networking between a state-based forum and other state-based local government organisations was suggested, as was a publication which could assist in furthering the of dissemination of findings.

Given that distance is often a limiting factor in the participation by local government staff in such events, feedback on the possibilities for a web-based research forum was also sought. The compatibility of the current presentation format and online tools such as *webinars* was articulated, as was the potential for an increased use of social media. The possibility of existing ACELG websites such as [www.acelg.org.au](http://www.acelg.org.au), the *Local Government Researchers Network* ([www.lgresearch.net.au](http://www.lgresearch.net.au)), and the *Local Government Innovation and Knowledge Exchange Network* ([www.iken.net.au](http://www.iken.net.au)) were also cited as mechanisms that could fill some of the gaps.

Other ideas for building research capacity in the sector included: research support for practitioners, e.g. through partnerships with ACELG or universities; identifying gaps in local government research; an online network where researchers can share their work; holding research forums in other locations; and encouraging universities to engage with local governments.

### **Participant responses when asked about the most pressing issues for research in local government are summarised below:**

#### **Governance and community engagement**

- Better understanding and use of the significant body of prior research under Comm auspices: ACIR, LGDP, NRLGLM, LGMC Secretariat Task Forces etc. the value/impact of community consultation on LG service delivery shared research and information on governance, growth, and management.
- Challenging the orthodoxy of governance and consultation.
- The ways to encourage citizen engagement and the new technologies are vital and impact on so many areas, including my own area of liveability.
- Evolving role of LG in collaborative governance.
- Meaningful community engagement, which LG's have successfully implemented their community consultation strategies and processes into actual outcomes, demonstrated experiences of where community is driving service delivery and projects.
- Governance and leadership.
- Leadership, consolidation and community engagement.
- Relationship between councils and regional/metro governance, strategic capacity and local government, social media in local government, use of demographic and other statistics in local government.
- Intergovernmental relations, especially for rural-remote councils.
- New governance models not as part of "business as usual" and climate change/ resilience of local communities.
- Engagement, Sustainable development, Governance.
- Governance structures, community engagement and involvement should change officer and elected member thinking about the role that the community should/could play in their local authority.
- Rural and remote indigenous issues and community engagement practice.

- Leadership, climate change, funding, relations with higher levels of govt seems to be the 'opening' of local government, the shift in governance and our future role if the constitution is changed. How will we step up to the mark?
- Engaging meaningfully with the community and ensuring that there is sufficient access to empirical data to help with planning and decision making.
- Leadership between Councillors and the CEO and Councils and their respective communities.

### Finance

- Options for achieving financial sustainability for the local government sector Consolidation models. Efficiency programs.
- Impacts that councils may have on climate change. Financially sustainable resources need to be determined and nurtured.
- The most pressing issue for LG is that we need to start acting more like a corporate body so we can be competitive and produce high quality services. We should be the leader in the community and private industry should be looking to us for advice, not the other way 'round.

### Social media

- Social media is the future channel of communication.
- Use of new online media in community engagement and local democracy.
- Social media opportunities for local government reform, to 'do business differently'.
- Opportunities related to broadband for linking rural and remote locations.
- Use of new ICT especially for community engagement.

### Research in general

General comments were also made about the future needs of local government research, including: the building of relationships between researchers, practitioners and policy makers sharing a common language and purpose; increased engagement with researchers at other levels of government; greater visibility of research in the operation of local government; greater appreciation of how local government research fits into other academic fields such as political science and business ethics; greater recognition of practitioners, both in terms of their role in, and internalisation of, research; and consulting with people in local government, who aren't involved in research, about their needs.

### Comments were made about practitioner involvement, the nature of the abstracts, and ways that presentations could be improved

The need for recognition of the importance of practitioners to the research process was again articulated in several of the concluding comments, with two forum participants citing the value of having more practitioners to balance out the academic element and provide some on-the-ground knowledge at such forums. A sturdy working relationship between practitioners and academics was also identified as a key ingredient in continued improvement in the sector, with such forums seen as a good tool for facilitating this.

Some opportunities for future forums included having a larger youth contingent to increase the diversity of views, greater inclusion of social media for participation and feedback, opening each session with a brief description of the research field before going into the content, and a greater articulation by the presenters of the data and research methods that underlie their work.