

*Stronger Places, Stronger  
People, Understanding,  
Measurement, Evaluation, and  
Learning (U-MEL) Strategy*

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# Acknowledgements

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In 2018-19, the Queensland Government Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors (DCDSS), the Department of Social Services (DSS) and Logan Together commissioned a project to develop an evaluation framework to guide stakeholders on how to evaluate place-based initiatives.

Evaluation consulting firm Clear Horizon led the development of the framework in partnership with The Australian Centre for Social Innovation, Collaboration for Impact and the Community Services Industry Association. Importantly, the framework was co-designed with over 100 people and organisations who contributed their ideas, feedback and expertise in evaluation and implementation of place-based approaches in Australia and internationally.

The resulting products – the Place-based Evaluation Framework (Dart, 2018) and the Logan Together MEL strategy (Barkley, 2018) – provide the foundation for this document. The *Stronger Places, Stronger People* Understanding, Measuring, Evaluation, and Learning Strategy builds extensively on the Logan Together Strategy, and we are grateful to Clear Horizon for their ideas and feedback on this and other aspects of the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* initiative.

# 1. Executive Summary

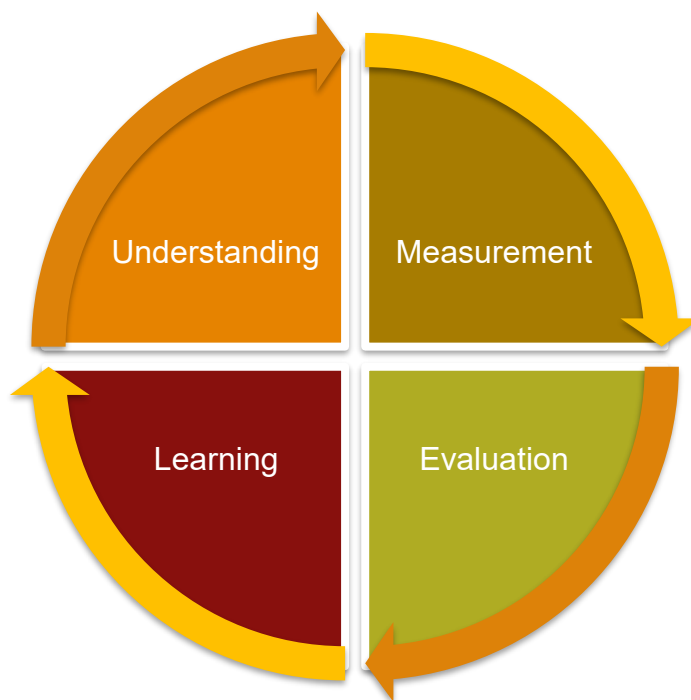
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This document presents the high-level strategy for the Understanding, Measurement, Evaluation, and Learning (U-MEL) processes of the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* initiative. The aim is to provide an approach that helps all parties improve the model as it is implemented, capture knowledge, understand, and measure progress, and be accountable to the community, partners and government. “Understanding” has been added as one of the four components as there are significant benefits for communities, governments, and other partners in gaining a shared understanding of communities.

*Stronger Places, Stronger People* is an Australian Government initiative supporting place-based collective impact methodology in partnership with ten Australian communities and state and territory governments. The initiative seeks to demonstrate that place-based collective impact practice can create better outcomes for children and their families and disrupt disadvantage in participating communities over time. This approach requires a robust U-Mel to support evidence-based implementation and to test impact.

This U-MEL Strategy covers the overall initiative and the implementation of the place-based collective impact *Stronger Places, Stronger People* model in ten communities. Each participating *Stronger Places, Stronger People* community will be supported to develop their own U-MEL plan to translate this strategy into an operational plan.

The four components of the U-MEL are interdependent and continuous. Specific processes, tools, and resources are attached to each element to support implementation on the ground.



**Figure 1. The four U-MEL components**

**The *Stronger Places, Stronger People* U-MEL contains:**

- Key Definitions
- Scope and Approach of the U-MEL
- Elements of a successful U-MEL
- Mapping Change using:
  - Theory of Change levels
  - Six Conditions of Change
  - Stages of Change
- Assumptions of *Stronger Places, Stronger People*
- The Inquiry Framework – Key Evaluation Questions
- Understanding
- Measurement
- Evaluation
- Learning
- Operationalising the U-MEL at the community and initiative levels.

The U-MEL strategy is aligned with the minimum evaluation standards set out in the *Place-based Evaluation Framework* and draws upon theory, processes, and tools from this framework.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* U-MEL strategy is to embed:

- **Knowledge:** to collect qualitative and quantitative data and evidence to contribute to building the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* evidence-base and the body of knowledge about collective impact and its ability to achieve improved population level outcomes.
- **Improvement:** to provide timely information and data from Learning to support decision-making and implementation of the Community Strategies and Plans of Action, and to refine the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* model.
- **Accountability:** to keep *Stronger Places, Stronger People* accountable regarding progress and achievements to local communities, governance groups, governments, other partners, and the broader community. This includes measuring and reporting progress towards outcomes, as well as quality of work and learnings.
- **Movement building:** to bring partners together to share evidence to promote understanding, learning, and collaboration as a way to build community

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<sup>1</sup> Dart (2018) *Place-based Evaluation Framework: A national guide for evaluation of place-based approaches*, report, commissioned by Queensland Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors, and the Australian Government of Social Services.

connection and engagement around the shared vision articulated in the Community Strategy.

*Stronger Places, Stronger People* has an overarching Theory of Change model spanning three levels:

- i. The conditions to enable systems change;
- ii. System impacts; and
- iii. Desired population level impacts.

Seven aligned key evaluation questions frame the U-MEL inquiry framework and form the questions that ultimately need answering in the evaluations.

**Key Evaluation questions for *Stronger Places, Stronger People*:**

1. What are the starting conditions in communities, and the goals and strategies to achieve collective impact?
2. To what extent were the foundational elements of the model implemented as intended; what new elements emerged; and what was learned?
3. To what extent did *Stronger Places, Stronger People* help strengthen the conditions that support systems change?
4. What changed in the system because of the collective impact work?
5. What were the early instances of impacts for individuals, families, and micro-communities?
6. What were the population-level impact for children, youth, families, and communities as a result of *Stronger Places, Stronger People*?
7. What was learned about the efficacy and relative value of the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* model in building better futures for children and families?

This is a shared framework, guiding work at both the initiative and community level. An important aspect of the U-MEL strategy is to support participating communities to lead on their own Understanding, Measurement, Evaluation, and Learning activities. Communities will be supported to develop their Community Plans and Plans of Action containing their own U-MEL processes to meet their community needs, whilst also sharing some of this information with the other partners to enable initiative-level measurement and evaluation.

It is worth acknowledging there is a balance to be achieved with this U-MEL strategy. It seeks to maximise rigour and consistency across the initiative to ensure evidence-informed practice and to evaluate effectiveness, whilst supporting community agency and the expertise of community leaders and members in their own place. *Stronger Places, Stronger People* is committed to engaging in the sometimes challenging process of community-led collective impact to achieve this balance.

This document is written for *Stronger Places, Stronger People* partners and people assisting with the U-MEL processes and will be accompanied by an overarching

U-MEL Implementation Plan to support the U-MEL activities at the initiative and community levels.

## 2. Introduction

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### *About Stronger Places, Stronger People*

The *Stronger Places, Stronger People* initiative was formally announced by the Minister for Social Services, the Hon Paul Fletcher MP, on 22 November 2018. The Minister announced \$35 million over five years from 2019-20 to 2023-24 to support the initiative. State and territory governments will match backbone funding with cash and in-kind investment.

*Stronger Places, Stronger People* is a “place-based” “collective impact” approach (see *Key Definitions*, pages 7-9) and a partnership between the Australian Government, communities, state and territory governments, and other partners, and facilitated by the Department of Social Services on behalf of the Australian Government. It is delivered through collaboration and co-investment with state and territory governments, philanthropy, and other investors, researchers, social services, and most importantly, with ten local communities.

### **The Policy Challenge**

Australia is a wealthy country boasting one of the highest performing economies in the world. Despite this prosperity, some places in Australia are marked by growing inequality. Many people in these communities feel isolated from one another, are unable to find meaningful work, and experience hardship and stress on a daily basis. Children living in these communities do not have access to the same opportunities as children living elsewhere in Australia.

For the past 40 years, governments have designed social policies and invested in programs to try and lift individuals or cohorts of people toward self-sufficiency, good health, safety and wellbeing. Longitudinal studies, such as Dropping off the Edge have tracked population level outcomes in communities experiencing entrenched disadvantage and suggest current policy settings and program interventions are not enabling the progress governments and communities seek.

Most experts agree that no single policy, government department, organisation or program can solve the complex and interconnected problems facing people living in communities where poverty and disadvantage is concentrated. They argue that solutions that offer most promise will be achieved through an integrated policy and investment approach, implemented through locally-tailored, evidence-driven solutions to local problems in partnership with local people.

### **The Response**

The *Stronger Places, Stronger People* initiative responds to this challenge through a place-based collective impact model that combines locally-led social change with government-led policy reform. Collective impact drives a staged and structured long-term methodology to solving complex social problems. It makes collaboration work across governments, business, philanthropy, not-for-profit organisations,

community groups and local citizens – all of whom have a key stake in the problems – to achieve significant and lasting change.

*Stronger Places, Stronger People* communities use the collective wisdom of stakeholders, share power and devolve decision-making to the community level, and have a local authorised governance group which is reflective of the diversity of the community organising and acting in the best interests of their children and families.

Government partners support communities to lead the work locally and meet communities where they are at. Communities build on what already exists – whether this be their approach to action planning and implementation, their understanding, measurement, evaluation and learning systems, or existing cross-sector forums.

## Goal and Objective

The goal of *Stronger Places, Stronger People* is to interrupt poverty and disadvantage in 10 demonstration communities across Australia through partnering with leaders, communities, local organisations, policy makers, and funders to create better outcomes for children growing up in these communities.

The objective is to demonstrate improved wellbeing for children and their families living in a *Stronger Places, Stronger People* community, achieved through the implementation of a place-based collective impact methodology that includes policy, funding, and systems reform. This objective can be broken down to individual, community, and systems level outcomes:

- At the *individual* level - children and their families live well, have the opportunity to thrive, have strong connections to family and culture, and reach their potential.
- At the *community* level - communities are prosperous, safe, inclusive, and community members are connected and their voice is heard.
- At the *systems* level - communities are empowered with data, evidence, and resources to affect structural change and make sound decisions that include community members in the co-design of services that match community need and context.

## About the U-MEL Strategy

The U-MEL strategy provides the general approach and scope of work relating to U-MEL at both the aggregated initiative and community levels. Communities will be supported to develop their own U-MEL plans to operationalise this strategy and guide their understanding, measurement, evaluation, and learning activities for local community and governance groups.

The aim of the U-MEL strategy is to provide a flexible and durable framework for:

- Improving the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* model and implementation
- Capturing knowledge and learnings generated during implementation
- Identifying progress and outcome measures associated with the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* model against the Theory of Change
- Ensuring accountability to the community, partners, funders and governance groups.

## Key audiences for this U-MEL Strategy

The primary audiences for this document are partner communities, the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, members of the National Leadership Group governing this initiative, and other organisations partnering in the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* initiative.

The secondary audience have a broader interest in the findings - business, philanthropy, the higher education and community services sector, peaks, researchers, practitioners, and communities of practice.

## Key definitions

### Understanding, Measurement, Evaluation, and Learning (U-MEL)

This U-MEL combines *Understanding, Measurement, Evaluation, and Learning* into an integrated system. It is an iterative process, flowing from one element to another in a continuous feedback loop.

#### Understanding -

Shared understanding of a community's current situation and desired future state provides a strong foundation for positive change. This 'understanding' will be supported by the collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data supporting evidence-informed, community-led planning. Included is analysis of a wide range of public data, community conversations, service mapping, exploration of systemic policy and system enablers and barriers and research supporting innovation. The work of the *Understanding* element establishes the direction and priorities of each Community Strategy. At the community level, this work is done by community members supported by the Local Backbone team. At the initiative level, people from governments, business, philanthropic partners and consultants work to understand the system and model elements. Understanding ensures an iterative process, with a feedback loop from design to evaluation.

#### Measurement -

The ongoing collection of quantitative and qualitative performance data against both initiative and community selected outcomes to track progress in the communities at three levels of change and to guide community-led decision-making about priorities and responses. Three levels of progress will be measured:

- i. Progress is measured by communities against the **6 Conditions of Change** using a tailored "progress mapping tool" and associated data collection methods.
- ii. **System level impacts**, such as better alignment of services with the community strategy are tracked by communities using a mix of exploratory, qualitative and quantitative techniques. It includes methods such as outcomes harvesting and impact case studies. System level impacts will also be tracked at the initiative level.

- iii. **Population level changes** for children, youth, and families will be measured annually by communities and at the initiative level. Communities will select outcomes and indicators to be articulated in each Community Strategy. Four of these indicators will come from the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* Indicator Bank. At the initiative level, the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* Indicator Bank will be used measure population change aggregated from the 10 communities.

### **Evaluation -**

Evidence about activities, characteristics, and outcomes of the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* approach to answer questions about the success and achievement of the goal and objectives of the initiative. Evaluation studies will be conducted on three occasions:

- i. Continuous qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the implementation and impact of the model at annual Learning Circles and partner conferences.
- ii. A mid-term evaluation incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods at both the community and initiative level.
- iii. A 5-year impact report to evaluate the contribution of *Stronger Places, Stronger People* to change using “process tracing”, impact and implementation evaluation and cost-benefit analysis.

Forms of continuous evaluation methods will also be used by communities to assess progress through the Measurement and Learning elements.

### **Learning -**

Uses data and evidence to inform strategy, practice, and delivery adaptation, learning is critical to the continuous improvement of *Stronger Places, Stronger People* and occurs in three main ways:

- i. The annual Learning Circle for each community and for government
- ii. The use of the Most Significant Learning tool (MSL) to encourage people to share and document learnings about key assumptions throughout implementation
- iii. Cross-community learning through community of practice networks, cross community participation in Learning Circles and all-partner events.

### **Place-based Approach (PBAs) -**

*“are collaborative, long-term approaches responding to complex problems delivered in a defined geographic location. This approach is ideally characterised by partnering and shared design, shared stewardship, and shared accountability for outcomes and impacts”.*<sup>2</sup>

Generally, PBAs are a response to complex, interrelated or challenging issues, including social issues impacting those experiencing, or at risk of, disadvantage, or for natural disasters.

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<sup>2</sup> Dart (2018) [Place-based Evaluation Framework](#).

## Collective Impact -

*Stronger Places, Stronger People* uses a collective impact methodology which is a community led movement to achieve large-scale social change. It utilises broad and inclusive community engagement which provides a framework and resources to address entrenched social issues such as poverty and disadvantage. A shared vision, locally developed strategy and plan of action are informed by deep collaboration, and the use of data, shared measurement, and evidence-informed decision making processes.

## 3. Scope and approach of the U-MEL Strategy

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### The approach

The *Stronger Places, Stronger People* U-MEL strategy sits underneath the overarching Place-based Evaluation Framework, developed as a guide for evaluating place-based delivery approaches in Australia.<sup>3</sup> This framework sets out six key components: core principles for evaluating place-based delivery; a theory of change for mapping short, medium, and long-term outcomes; planning steps; a conceptual framework for understanding the dimensions of place-based evaluation, a toolkit of resources, methods, and templates for data collection and analysis; and key evaluation questions.

### The evaluands (the things to be evaluated)

This strategy evaluates two related areas of action:

1. **The impact** (short, medium, and long-term) in the 10 communities, including reforming systems such as policies, programs, service design, contracting arrangements and the resulting impacts on children, families and communities (Theory of Change, levels 3-5).
2. **The implementation of the initiative** will be evaluated, including the method and process used to implement the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* place-based collective impact model in the 10 communities.

### U-MEL sub-plans for communities

Each community will be supported through Backbone team and capacity building funding, and support from the initiative to develop their own U-MEL plan to respond to local priorities and actions and to guide the *Understanding, Measurement, Evaluation, and Learning* processes at the community level. Data captured in communities will be aggregated into the initiative-level U-MEL.

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<sup>3</sup> Dart 2018, [Place-based Evaluation Framework](#).

## What would a successful U-MEL look like?

The Stronger Places, Stronger People U-MEL will:

- Enables rigorous evaluation of the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* model, structures and implementation
- Enables communities to articulate their own outcomes and 'own' their data to strengthen their decision-making and planning
- Supports communities to implement strategies to improve the wellbeing of their members, including First Nation peoples
- Is culturally appropriate and safe
- Recommends strategies to address gaps and unintended negative impacts, and to capitalise on success
- Is flexible enough to accommodate the emergent nature of collective impact work
- Is strengths-focused
- Is practical, user-friendly, and accessible for a broad audience
- Is feasible, relevant for communities, achievable, and helps manage expectations
- Creates an understanding of why and how things change
- Builds on U-MEL work already done in communities
- Is ethical and adheres to the principles of data sovereignty (see **U-MEL Annex**)

## 4. Mapping Change using the U-MEL

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The *Stronger Places, Stronger People* initiative aims to assist communities to bring about positive change for children, youth, and families. Change in communities proceeds through stages and is influenced by several factors.

Change for *Stronger Places, Stronger People* is mapped by the following:

- a. *Five Stages of Change*
- b. *Theory of Change levels*
- c. *Six Conditions of Change*

### a. Five Stages of Social Change

Experts in collective impact<sup>4</sup> agree that social change movements using a collective impact method evolve over a series of phases.

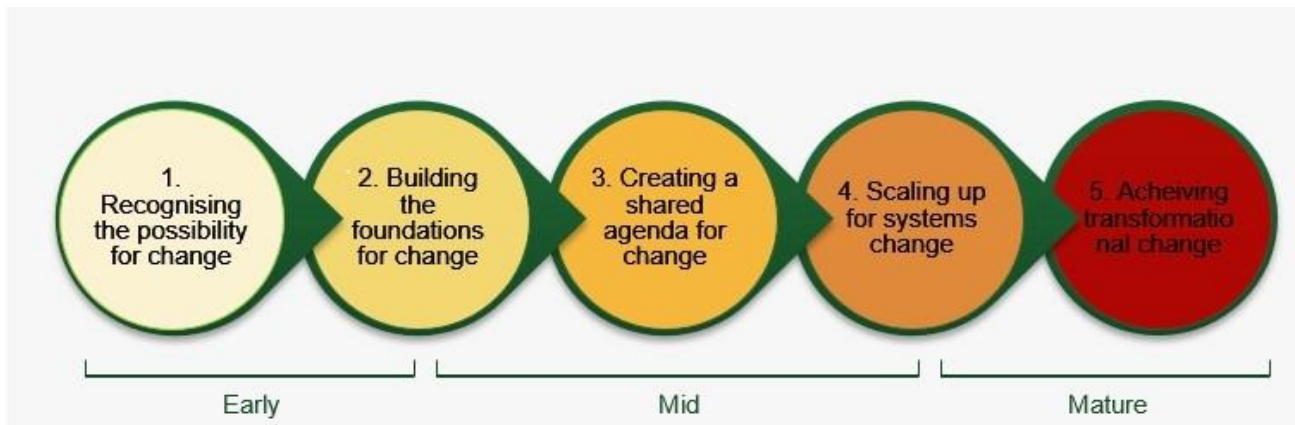
*Stronger Places, Stronger People* has been guided by Collaboration for Impact's 'Collaborative Change Cycle',<sup>5</sup> which articulates the phases and stages of an effective collaborative change process. These are not mutually exclusive and communities can be in different phases for different conditions (e.g. they may be well

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<sup>4</sup> Tamarack Institute, Canada, The Harwood Institute, United States, and Collaboration for Impact, Australia

<sup>5</sup> Collaboration for Impact Collaborative Change Cycle, access at [Platform C](#)

advanced in community engagement, but less advanced in policy and system reform). The phases are not linear and communities may move ‘forward’ and ‘backward’ over time.



**Figure 2. Phases of social change and collective impact.**

### **1. Recognising the possibility for change**

Trust is low between community, government, service providers, and other institutions. There is a catalyst for change inspiring people to talk about the need for change and to become aware of the problem. From this emerging context, a local champion or voice emerges and there is a building sense of urgency that things can be different.

### **2. Building the foundations of change**

A small group of people are actively working towards change while the status quo remains in place. There are pockets of people and organisations who are open to new ways of working together. From this building context, a backbone organisation emerges and begins to take up the community engagement and convening role.

### **3. Creating a shared agenda for change**

An agreement is brokered about what to focus on and people understand and articulate the issue, who is impacted, how, and why. From this community strategy, there is agreement about the conditions and practice guides for working together and this work gains momentum.

### **4. Scaling up for systems change**

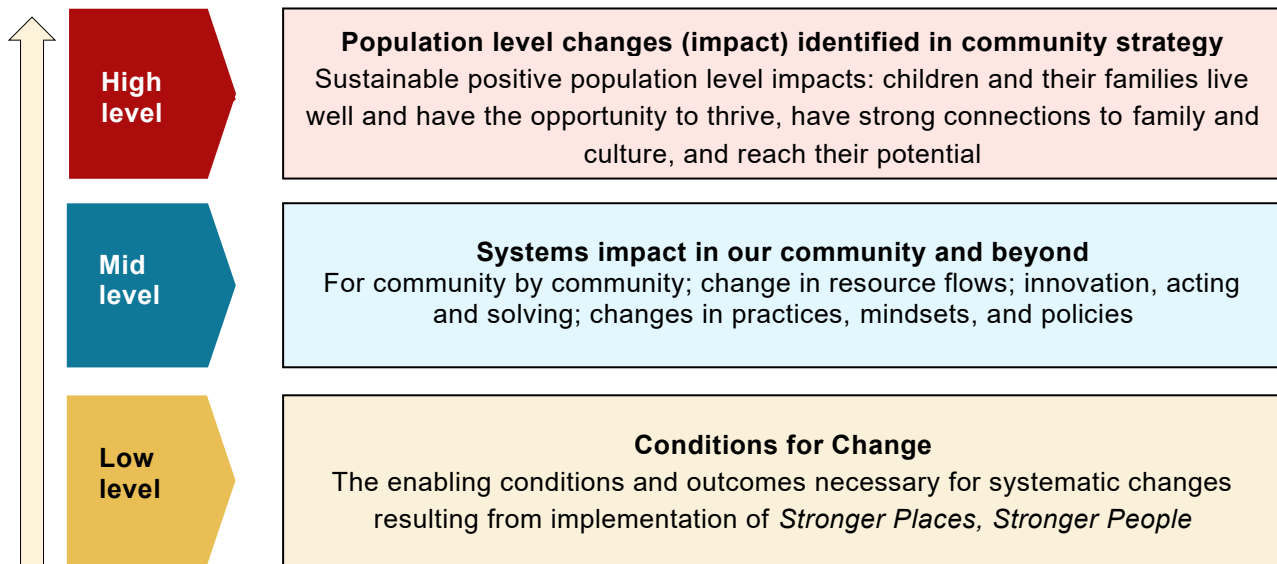
The community strategy gets traction and authority and the shared purpose keeps the collaboration on track. From this maturing context, a new narrative emerges across the community and stories about the work are communicated, seen and valued.

### **5. Achieving transformational change**

The collaboration has stabilised into a new state where there is constant hope and belief in the collaboration’s ability to tackle more complex change to achieve a shared agenda. From this mature context, a new narrative about the community emerges and there is excitement about ‘what could be’.

## b. Theory of Change

The *Stronger Places, Stronger People* Theory of Change is based on the place-based Theory of Change provided in the Place-based Evaluation Framework.<sup>6</sup> There is dependency between the three levels and how the low and mid-level changes must occur before high level population change will ensue. The low level conditions for change create the environment for mid-level systems change to be made in each community, which then flow onto high level population effects, resulting in better outcomes for children and their families.



**Fig 3. Overview of Theory of Change at the Community Level**

Experts in social science recognise that no single program or organisation can solve complex social issues faced by many communities. The collective impact methodology is designed to achieve large-scale change by forging partnerships across government, community, not-for-profit, business, and philanthropic sectors to identify shared aims and processes to create 'collective impact', including community-led vision and processes, more strategic use of resources, and cohesive community service systems.

Best practice encourages us to think about how we will 'shift the system that is holding the problem in place' to embed sustainable impacts. For this reason, the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* U-MEL strategy includes systems impacts (mid-level theory of change) and the enabling conditions (low level theory of change).

In practice, the Theory of Change process and pathways do not always progress upwards in a straight line, but are often cyclical and sometimes messy, reflecting the organic nature of collective impact work.

<sup>6</sup> [Place-based Evaluation Framework](#) was developed internally and tested with stakeholders in February 2019 at a series of workshops with representatives from state and territory governments, philanthropic organisations, Backbone leads, and experts in collective impact.

## The Theory of Change in detail

A more detailed theory of change (see **Figure 4**) captures the important elements of each level and demonstrates how results of the low level conditions and mid-level systems impacts flow upwards to create change at the high population level.

**Low Level Inputs and Enabling Conditions** (green/brown): starts with investment inputs at the bottom of the diagram. Building partnerships and resourcing Backbone teams and local leadership establishes the beginning conditions for change.

The ochre brown level describes the conditions required to influence systems change. These enabling conditions are aligned with the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* model which will lead to improvements in the population outcomes for children, youth, and families. The output of the partners, activities, and ways-of-working described in the conditions include the development of a Community Strategy informed by evidence and learning and co-designed through genuine community engagement. The delivery of the Strategy will be coordinated by the Backbone team and through collaboration with multi-sector partners who align their efforts to 'high leverage' activities<sup>7</sup> that will make the most difference, as defined in the Community Strategy.

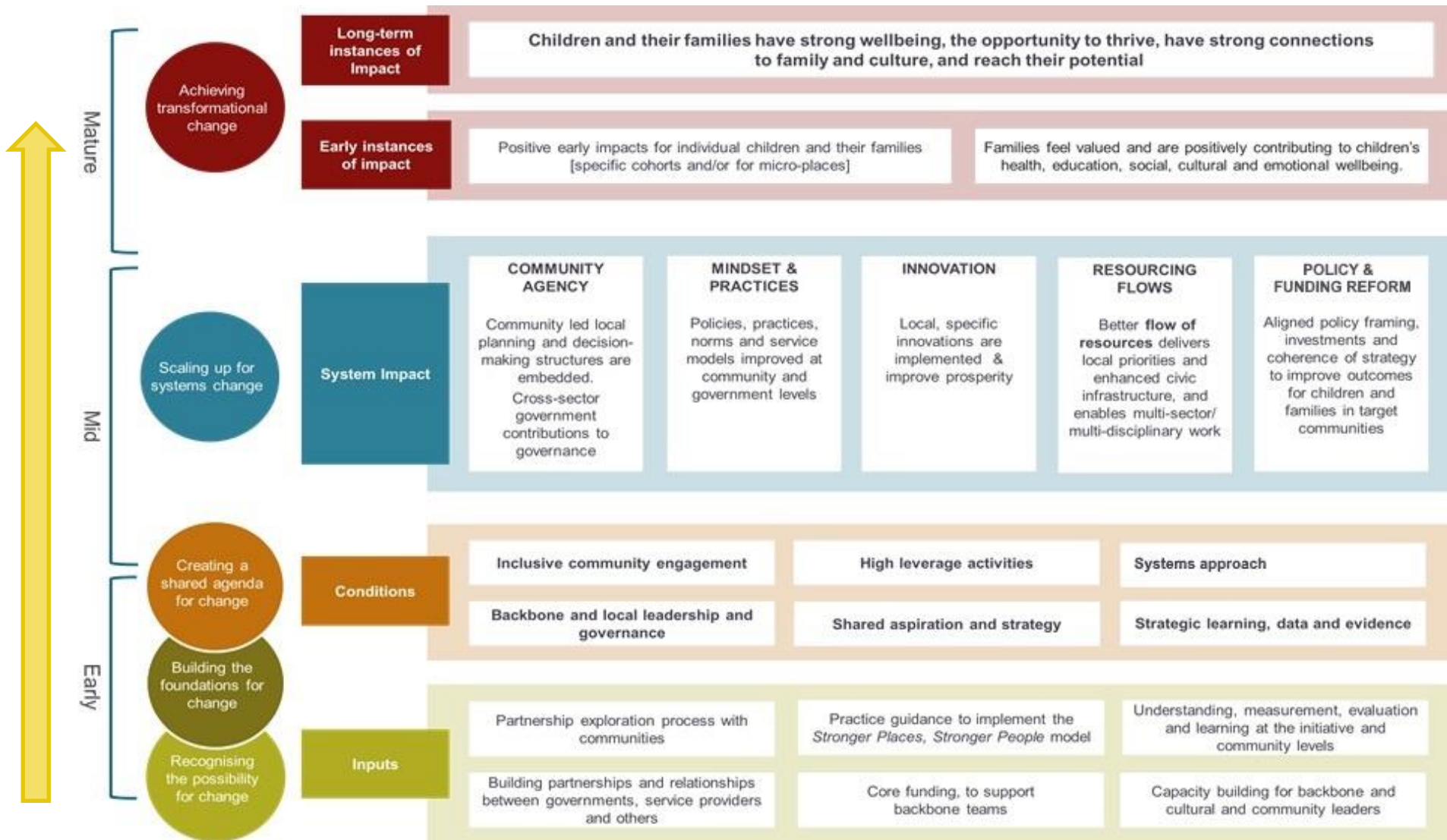
**Mid Systems Level** (blue): describes the types of systems impact we expect to see as a result of having the conditions in place. *Stronger Places, Stronger People* has an explicit focus on systems-level change. At this level there is an opportunity for communities, non-government organisations, and governments to all influence system changes through this initiative.

**High Population Level** (red): The red level shows impacts for children youth, families and communities *as a result of the implementation of system reform*, as articulated in the Community Strategy. Importantly, the theory proposes that population level impacts may not be observed for some time (many years), but there may be early impacts for smaller numbers of individuals, families, or micro-communities.

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<sup>7</sup> High leverage activities are those that achieve the strongest, most positive impact and return on investment in a community.

Figure 4. Theory of change for the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* initiative



## c. Six Conditions of Change

To test whether the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* model builds better futures for children and families, the implementation of a set of conditions that support collective impact is required.<sup>8</sup> These ‘conditions’ constitute the low level theory of change.

### **Condition 1: Inclusive community engagement**

All members of community, including residents, local and cultural leaders, service providers, businesses, governments and funders, are continuously engaged and given opportunities to contribute to the shared aspiration and the development and implementation of the Community’s Strategy and Action Plan.

Community members are actively engaged in defining local opportunities and problems, designing solutions, and helping to produce and deliver local actions identified in the Community Strategy. Communication with the community is continuous, formal and informal and is tailored to the why, how, what, and when of the Community Strategy.

### **Condition 2: Backbone team, Local Leadership and governance**

A Backbone team is established to lead and facilitate collective impact practice. The Backbone team enables and supports the broader collective effort, including inclusive community engagement, the development and implementation of the community’s Strategy and Action plan, and the collection and analysis of data, measurement, and evaluation. The Backbone team is sector-neutral, unaligned with a service provider or sector-specific organisation, and has authority from, and reports to the Local Leadership Group and community.

The Local Leadership Group is a locally defined group holding cultural and community authority, trust, and credibility, representing people who live and work in and with the community. This will typically be cultural and community leaders and may include residents, service providers, government and business representatives, philanthropists, and other funders. Where the Local Leadership Group is made up of only local and cultural leaders, a parallel governance arrangement will support contributions from service providers, governments and business representatives, philanthropists and other funders.

Local working groups support the Local Leadership Group and Backbone team to engage and implement the community’s Strategy and Action plan to effect change through coordination and collaboration. The establishment of these groups will be guided by the Local Leadership Group and formed around key themes of action and/or life-course stages.

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<sup>8</sup> Cabaj and Weaver, 2016

### **Condition 3: High leverage activities**

Time, effort, and resources are invested into activities that offer the greatest opportunity for results (i.e. high output relative to input). This includes activities and projects that better utilise existing resources, programs, and investments, such as service alignment, reducing service duplication and unproductive service delivery models, and adopting evidence-informed innovative local solutions.

### **Condition 4: Shared aspiration and strategy**

A *Community Strategy*<sup>1</sup> is developed to guide the community's vision for change, with a plan of action stepping out the way to achieve that vision. The Community Strategy reflects the aspirations of the community as a whole, gathered through inclusive engagement, using data and evidence to determine where to focus effort. The Strategy is informed by the life-course approach and seeks to improve the wellbeing of children and their families.

### **Condition 5: Systems approach**

All partners, including community, service providers, and governments, work together to ensure that systems, policies, funding, and programs are better coordinated, minimise duplication, and are aligned with the community's Strategy and Action Plan. This includes adjusting and changing systems, policies, and funding, and working better within and across organisations and departments to benefit the community and deliver local outcomes.

This condition enables funding and systems reform, including better coordinated and targeted investments, local decision making and commissioning to directly support the community's Strategy and priorities.

### **Condition 6: Strategic learning, data and evidence**

Communities and their partners are committed to learning and adapting. Data, research, evidence, and community voice underpin the Community Strategy and Action Plan and inform all decision-making processes. Communities continuously use data to understand, measure, evaluate, and learn from their experiences in developing and implementing the community's Strategy and Action Plan.

Local governance structures and the backbone team adopt a continuous learning approach, sharing learnings openly with their community and with partners and other communities in the initiative. Backbone teams meet the *Stronger Places, Stronger People Understanding, Measurement, Evaluation and Learning* requirements to drive process and outcome improvements.

## Underlying Assumptions

Collective impact work comes with assumptions and external factors that influence the nature and progress of change. Although these are not explicitly articulated in the Theory of Change, they can have a significant impact upon the implementation of the model if they are not met.

Assumptions of *Stronger Places, Stronger People* include:

- a. The current service and funding systems are not working to significantly reduce disadvantage and increase wellbeing of children, youth, and families in disadvantaged communities. *Stronger Places, Stronger People* offers a more effective approach to achieving to achieving positive change
- b. \$35 million of Australian Government funding is available over five years
- c. States and territories will match funding in their communities
- d. The *Stronger Places, Stronger People* model will evolve
- e. Community-led change will be the greatest change
- f. Communities will want to partner with state and territory and the Australian governments
- g. Collective impact will be practiced in each community.

## 5. The Inquiry framework

Consistent with the minimum standards for evaluating place-based approaches, a set of key evaluation questions (KEQs) crystallise the purpose of the U-MEL strategy and ask the ‘big questions’ we want answered at the initiative level. Ultimately they will help us tell the story of progress of the whole *Stronger Places, Stronger People* initiative across the 5-year time frame. Table 1 shows the initiative level KEQs (in bold) and sub-questions (bulleted), organised according to the Theory of Change.

**Table 1. Key evaluation questions for *Stronger Places, Stronger People*.**

Learning about the implementation of the model		
<b>1. What are the starting conditions, the goals, and key strategies to achieve our collective work?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is the starting situation in each of the 10 communities in terms of demographics, assets, trends and challenges and services?</li> <li>What is the starting situation for service delivery across the initiative?</li> </ul>	<i>Relevant for early stage communities or to fill gaps in more established communities</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is the desired future state for each community?</li> <li>What is the desired future state for how governments work together for collective action across the initiative?</li> </ul>	<i>Relevant for the overall initiative as a benchmark and to describe the implementing context</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How might we solve challenges at the community level?</li> <li>How might we solve policy challenges at the whole of initiative level?</li> </ul>	

<p><b>2. To what extent were the foundational elements of the model implemented as intended; what new elements emerged and what was learned?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What was done, and who was engaged to help communities become more ready to drive change?</li> </ul>	<p><b>(see U-MEL Annex, Minimum Standards for Communities and Government)</b> <i>Relevant for the mid and final evaluations</i></p> <p><i>This also contributes to answering question 6.</i></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent did partners become more willing to collaborate, trust, learn and adapt as a result of the approach taken?</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent were Backbone teams established/strengthened and provided with sufficient resources?</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How effective was the practice guidance and support provided in helping community, governments, and others understand the <i>Stronger Places, Stronger People</i> model? What changes to the guidance are needed?</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How sufficient was the funding, resources, and capacity building support to implement the model?</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent did the U-MEL support and Learning Circles prove helpful and support learning?</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What external factors affected implementation?</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent were the <i>Stronger Places, Stronger People</i> minimum standards for partnership implemented?</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What changes were made to the model and what did we learn about how to design and implement this model?</li> </ul>	

**Progress in establishing conditions for change**

<p><b>3. To what extent did <i>Stronger Places, Stronger People</i> help strengthen the conditions of systems change?</b></p>	<p><b>Condition 1: Inclusive Community Engagement</b> What progress was been made in terms inclusive community engagement? What progress has been made in embedding social and racial equity?</p>	<p><i>Relevant for year 2 onwards.</i></p> <p><i>Using the Progress Mapping Tool, each community will address the KEQs to feed into the annual Learning Circles. The first report from each community will form their benchmark.</i></p> <p><i>These reports will be rolled up to produce a report at the whole of initiative level and will feed into the government Learning Circle.</i></p>
	<p><b>Condition 2: Backbone Team, Local Leadership and Governance</b> What progress has been made in establishing/ strengthening a transparent governance structure, representative of those with a stake in social change and a Backbone team to support a Community Strategy and Action Plan based on data, measurement, and evaluation?</p>	
	<p><b>Condition 3: High Leverage Activities</b> What progress was made in terms of all partners working to align investments to maximise impacts for the community?</p>	
	<p><b>Condition 4: Shared Aspiration and Strategy</b> What progress has been made in terms of aligning the community around the opportunities to be strengthened and the problems to be solved?</p>	

	<p><b>Condition 5: Systems Approach</b></p> <p>What progress has been made to ensure that systems, policies, funding, and programs are better coordinated and targeted to meet community need and aligned with the Community Strategy and Action Plan?</p>	
	<p><b>Condition 6: Use of Strategic Learning, Data, and Evidence</b></p> <p>What progress was made in establishing or strengthening a culture where strategic learning, data, and evaluation drive process and outcome improvements?</p>	
<b>Learning about systems impacts</b>		
<p><b>4. What is changing in the system because of the collaborative work?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How have partner mindsets (community, government, and others) changed over time? And what were the enabling, hindering factors?</li> </ul>	<p><i>Relevant for mature communities on an annual basis.</i></p> <p><i>All communities will answer KEQs for the mid-term co-evaluation.</i></p> <p><i>Data will be aggregated from the Learning Circles and mid-term community level co-evaluations to provide answers at the whole-of initiative level</i></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent did community agency<sup>9</sup> increase? And what were the enabling, hindering factors?</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent was there a change in the effectiveness of spending and flows of resources, and how did this effect services on offer in the community? And what were the enabling, hindering factors?</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent did practices and services improve as experienced by community? And what were the enabling, hindering factors?</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In what ways have state/territory and Commonwealth policy and communities beyond <i>Stronger Places, Stronger People</i> been influenced? What were the enabling or hindering factors?</li> </ul>	
<b>Capturing instances of impact (at smaller scales)</b>		
<p><b>5. What is the early evidence of impacts for individuals, families, or micro-communities?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What early, or small scale, expected and unexpected results emerged from activities, pilots; high leverage activities<sup>10</sup> or changes in the system?</li> </ul>	<p><i>Relevant for mature communities implementing pilots, high leverage, and/or social innovation projects.</i></p> <p><i>Communities will document data from the beginning as benchmark and include impacts in their Annual Report.</i></p> <p><i>Impacts to be included mid evaluation.</i></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are we learning about the how to catalyse positive change for families using social innovation?</li> </ul>	

<sup>9</sup> Community agency refers to a community's capability of achieving change or action when needed.

<sup>10</sup> High leverage activities are those that achieve a strong, positive impact and return on investment.

Measuring longer term impacts		
<b>6. What are the population-level impacts for individuals, families and communities?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What impacts were there for children, youth, families, and communities at the population level, (against selected outcome domains, indicators and targets) since the start of the initiative?</li> <li>• What is the contribution of the <i>Stronger Places, Stronger People</i> initiative to these impacts?</li> </ul>	<i>Baseline data will be collected by each community with targets and reported against in each Annual Report, mid and 5 year evaluation.</i>
Learning about, and determining the applicability and value of the model itself		
<b>7. What was learned about the efficacy of <i>Stronger Places, Stronger People</i> model in achieving positive outcomes for children and families?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In which communities did the model show the most and least promise?</li> <li>• What were the key differences in community attributes and/or stages of readiness that influenced success?</li> <li>• What were the key features of the model that influenced success?</li> <li>• What were the key learnings for Commonwealth Government and partners about supporting this type of model?</li> <li>• What is the value for money of taking this model as compared with a siloed programmatic approach?</li> </ul>	<i>Relevant for the mid and 5-year evaluation</i>

## How the questions will be applied and answered at the community level

All *Stronger Places, Stronger People* communities will develop a U-MEL plan incorporating the KEQs. They will be required to address KEQs 1 initially, then 4, 5, and 6 as part of the annual Learning Circle and Annual Reporting. Communities will also address KEQs 2 - 7 at the mid-term and 5-year evaluations and will be encouraged to add a small number of context-specific key evaluation questions to ensure the evaluations meet their needs.

Communities will be supported to develop, measure and track progress against the KEQs they select. How the questions will be applied and answered at the community level is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: How KEQs will be answered at the community level**

KEQs	When addressed	Data Sources
<b>Question 1.</b> What are the starting conditions, and what are the goals of our collective effort and how might be achieve them?	At the community level this sub-question will be addressed in the Exploration Phase with the Understanding actions before a shared agenda or community strategy has been developed.	Initial community data collection and Community Profile.  Community conversations will occur at the community level.  Service mapping may happen for each community to inform their Understanding phase.  Other Understanding work may be needed to understand systemic barriers and to ideate / prototype new solutions in more mature communities.

KEQs	When addressed	Data Sources
		<p>The Backbone team will collect routine quantitative data against their U-MEL plan as evidence and to inform the partnership process “Progress Mapping tool” and annual Learning Circle. To be documented in the community’s Annual Report.</p> <p>Benchmark will be taken from the first report.</p> <p><b>Qualitative Data:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community conversations to understand community aspirations and what is important to different community members.</li> </ul> <p><b>Quantitative data:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public data for each community (this may be accessed through data platforms).</li> <li>• Service mapping data to understand existing services and assets.</li> <li>• Additional analysis of public data to understand systemic barriers and to develop/trial new solutions in more mature communities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Question 2:</b> To what extent were the foundational elements of the model implemented as intended; what new elements emerged, and what was learned?</p>		<p>Criteria contained in Community minimum requirements for partnership (see <b>Annex 2</b>)</p> <p>Information collected from communities at mid and 5 year evaluation.</p> <p>Benchmark will be measured from starting conditions.</p>
<p><b>Question 3:</b> To what extent did Stronger Places, Stronger People help strengthen the conditions?</p>	<p>This question is addressed annually by each community throughout the life of the initiative. Each year communities will select 2-4 of the conditions to focus on and choose the aligned sub- KEQs as a focus for their annual Learning Circle and report.</p>	<p>The Backbone team will collect routine data and stories against their U-MEL plan as evidence for the annual Progress Mapping Tool and Learning Circle work. Benchmark will be taken from the first report from each community.</p> <p><b>Qualitative data</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collection of <a href="#">Most Significant Change</a> (MSC) stories to understand change in mindsets</li> <li>• Collection of Most Significant Learning (MSL) narratives, to capture developmental moments.</li> </ul> <p><b>Quantitative data:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measuring collaboration health through a survey instrument (<a href="#">CHAT</a> tool).</li> <li>• Measuring number of people reached and quality of engagement activities.</li> </ul>

KEQs	When addressed	Data Sources
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collecting data on the number of agencies collaborating and the nature of collaboration.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Question 4</b></p> <p>What is changing in the system because of the collaborative work?</p> <p><b>Question 5</b></p> <p>What is the early evidence of impacts for individuals, families or micro-communities?</p>	<p>Communities will address these KEQ questions as part of the mid-term evaluation, collecting data about systems changes, such as MSC throughout the year.</p> <p>They may choose any sub-questions or develop their own.</p>	<p>Communities will track these KEQs throughout the year to add to the Learning Circle and Annual Report for that year. Benchmark will be the first report from each community.</p> <p>Evaluation reports of any pilots conducted at the community level should also be used as a data source.</p> <p><b>Qualitative methods:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MSC to capture changes in mind-sets and sense of agency.</li> <li>Power analysis to assess changes in power (e.g. CHAT tool).</li> <li><a href="#">Outcome harvesting</a> &amp; contribution analysis to capture policy changes (e.g. What Else tool)</li> <li>MSC to discover and document valued changes for individuals or cohorts or micro-communities.</li> </ul> <p><b>Quantitative methods:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analysis of changes in funding flows</li> <li>Quantitative indicators to track any relevant changes in the service system e.g. provision of services.</li> <li>Records kept on number of “instances of positive, valued impact from MSC and other qualitative data.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Questions 6, 7</b></p> <p>What are the population-level impacts for individuals, families and communities?</p> <p>What was learned about the efficacy of Stronger Places, Stronger People model in creating positive outcomes for children and families?</p>	<p>Answered through a 5-year summative evaluation report at the community level.</p> <p>This will be conducted by external evaluators selected by the community.</p>	<p>Communities will track population level impacts with their own outcomes and indicator frameworks, including the 4 indicators selected from the <i>Stronger Places, Stronger People</i> Indicator Bank and include these in their annual Learning Circle and Report.</p> <p>Benchmark will be taken when tracking in a community begins.</p> <p>These KEQs will also be used for the mid and 5-year evaluations.</p> <p><b>Qualitative methods</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contribution analysis to use various type of evidence (including synthetic controls and quantitative data) to understand the contribution story.</li> </ul> <p><b>Quantitative methods:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annual analysis and reporting against agreed population level outcomes (using community data sets) against the life-course.</li> <li>Creation of a “synthetic controls” that can be used to understand whether these changes were attributable to the place-based approach.</li> </ul>

## How the questions will be answered at the initiative level

All seven evaluation questions will be answered at the initiative level. The questions will be answered by aggregating evidence from community level as well as through additional data collection and analysis. The questions will be divided up and answered at different stages of the initiative. Table 2 illustrates when each question will be addressed by the community and the main sources of data. More detail is provided in the Evaluation section.

**Table 4: How each KEQ will be answered at the initiative level**

KEQs	When addressed	Main sources of data
<p><b>Question 1.</b> What are the starting conditions, and what are the goals of our collective effort and how might we achieve them?</p>	<p>At the initiative level, this question will be answered by examining cross-community challenges in service provision and service integration. This will feed into the mid and 5 year evaluations.</p>	<p>This question is mostly drawn from community level qualitative and quantitative data, but will include government starting conditions as well.</p> <p>At the initiative level, an aggregate baseline report will be developed to describe the differences between the 10 communities. This would draw on data collected in communities and would include: Stages of readiness using the Progress Mapping tool); goals of each community initiative, and baseline data for the key quantitative indicators.</p>
<p><b>Question 2:</b> To what extent were the foundational elements of the model implemented as intended; what new elements emerged and what was learned?</p>	<p>The sub-evaluation questions will be answered through Annual Learning Circle and Partner Conference in 2020 and in the Mid-evaluation in 2022.</p>	<p><b>(see Annex, Minimum Standards for Communities and Government)</b></p> <p>Data collected as part of implementation of the initiative.</p> <p>Data gathered from Govt. Learning Circle.</p>
<p><b>Question 3:</b> To what extent did <i>Stronger Places, Stronger People</i> help strengthen the enablers of systems change in different communities?</p>	<p>This question is addressed annually throughout the initiative. The data will be synthesised in a cross-community annual report against all the sub-evaluation questions drawing patterns and learnings about the differences across communities.</p>	<p>Data aggregated up from community level annual Learning Circles and reports.</p> <p>Data gathered from Govt. Learning Circle.</p>
<p><b>Questions 4, 5</b></p>		<p>Data aggregated up from community data and reports:</p>

KEQs	When addressed	Main sources of data
<p>What is changing in the system because of the collaborative work?</p> <p>What is the early evidence of impacts for individuals, families or micro-communities?</p>	<p>Answered through an initiative level mid-term evaluation. This will be facilitated by the initiative level U-MEL contractor.</p>	<p>evaluation reports; pilot evaluation reports; and annual reports.</p> <p>Primary data and stories gathered at the initiative level concerning any changes in mind-set, practice or policy at state and commonwealth government levels.</p>
<p><b>Questions 6, 7</b></p> <p>What were the attributable population-level impacts for individuals, families and communities?</p> <p>What was learned about the efficacy of <i>Stronger Places, Stronger People</i> model in building stronger futures for children and families?</p>	<p>Answered in the mid and 5-year evaluations.</p> <p>This will be conducted by external evaluation contractor(s).</p>	<p>Data aggregated up from community annual reports and U-MEL systems.</p> <p>Data compiled from agreed indicators and compared with baseline across each community and controls.</p> <p>Use of quasi-experimental approach such as synthetic studies to strengthen the veracity of causal claims.</p> <p>Process tracing study conducted at initiative level to understand which aspects of the model were key to success (<a href="#">What Else test</a>).</p> <p>Value for money analysis to understand the value and any cost savings of using place-based approaches.</p>

## 6. Understanding

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### **Overview of Understanding**

**Definition:** the collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative evidence to support planning and design.

**Three aspects:**

- i. Understanding the current state of the community.
- ii. Understanding the desired future state of the community.
- iii. Understanding and exploring approaches to move from the current state into the future state.

**Community Level Actions:**

- Analysis of community data (insights, public data, mapping, etc.)
- Examination of cross-community service provision and integration
- Documentation of Community Strategy

**Initiative Level Actions:**

- Data collection and analysis at aggregate community level
- Analysis of trends, systemic enablers and barriers

**Tools:**

- Data sets on each community (e.g. Community Profile)
- Service system stocktake template
- [Community conversations](#)
- Cross-community service provision and integration analysis
- Annual Process Evaluation Report

Understanding refers to the collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative evidence to support planning and design. Understanding of a community enables an evidence-informed, strategic approach to collective impact and includes three aspects:

- i. *Understanding the current state*
- ii. *Understanding the desired future state*
- iii. *Understanding and exploring approaches to move from the current state into the future state.*

At the community level, planning and design will include the development of the Community Strategy, co-design and planning around strengths or challenges. Resources for Understanding include insights from:

- analysis of public data on a wide range of indicators
- community conversations
- service mapping and research to support design
- innovation and testing new things.

It is useful to visually represent these findings using dashboards, infographics and other creative documentation.

The Understanding element of U-MEL relates to Question 1 in the KEQ inquiry framework. Table 4 represents who is answering the question, and the possible data sources.

**Table 2: Inquiry table and data sources for Understanding**

Question	Which Level	Data source
<b>Question 1.</b>		Community data is collected.
a. <b>What are the starting conditions;</b>	<u>At the community level</u> this question will be answered through the work of the Local Backbone team.	Analysis done across communities to understand key aspects, including similarities and differences.
b. <b>What are the goals of our collective effort;</b>	<u>At the initiative level</u> , examine cross-community challenges in service provision and integration. This information will feed into the mid evaluation.	Community conversations at the community level by Local Leadership Groups and trends aggregated across communities.  Service mapping of the community by the Local Backbone teams
c. <b>How might we achieve them?</b>		Trends aggregated and interpreted at the cross-community level at the mid evaluation.  National level analysis to understand systemic enablers and barriers in policy, cohesiveness of services, and how government operate in communities.

## Context indicators

Examining a broad range of community data sets will provide comprehensive insight into the community contexts, especially for communities in the early stages of exploring the possibilities of change. This will help mobilise collective effort and sharpen the focus on what needs to change. Indicators from community data sets can be selected by communities to measure progress and impact.

## 7. Measurement

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### **Overview of Measurement**

**Definition:** Shared measurement is a core condition for change in collective impact and involves tracking population and system level progress against shared goals and outcomes.

Three levels of Measurement:

- a. Measuring progress in strengthening the Conditions of Change
- b. Measuring systems level impacts
- c. Measuring population outcomes

### **Community Level Actions:**

- Track progress of the Conditions for Change
- Track system level impacts
- Track population level outcomes

### **Initiative Level Actions:**

- Track progress of the Conditions for Change
- Track system level impacts
- Track population level outcomes

### **Tools:**

- [Outcomes harvesting](#)
- [Most Significant Change Technique](#) (MSC)
- Progress Mapping tool
- Learning Circle
- [Collaborative Health Assessment Tool](#) (CHAT)
- *Stronger Places, Stronger People* Data Bank
- Locally defined outcomes and indicator framework

Shared measurement involves collecting data and measuring results consistently with quantitative indicators at the community level and across all partners.

At the initiative level, shared measurement will occur by aggregating results from the across all 10 communities to track overall progress to get a whole *Stronger Places, Stronger People* map of progress.

At the community level, shared measurement refers to the collection and analysis of indicators that reflect the community's unique aspirations, priorities, and target actions to build stronger futures for local children and families. These indicators are 'shared' in that the community *collectively* agrees that they represent a valid and reliable way of demonstrating progress against outcomes. Measurement will be done by the Local Backbone Team.

**Measurement in *Stronger Places, Stronger People* has 3 levels:**

- a. *Measuring progress in strengthening the Conditions of Change***
- b. *Measuring systems level impacts***
- c. *Measuring population outcomes***

## a. Measuring progress in strengthening the Conditions of Change

Measuring the progress of the six low-level Conditions of Change<sup>11</sup> supports the implementation of the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* collective impact model by:

- Assisting communities and partners to focus their efforts on the important job of setting up or strengthening the systems change conditions;
- Helping us understand progress and diagnose any lack of progress in the early years of implementation. This is particularly important for those communities who are recently starting their collective impact journey;
- Being a core aspect of our ‘contribution analysis’ approach and assisting us to know how well the model was implemented and whether it contributed to longer term outcomes.

Improvements in the ‘Conditions for Change’ flow into improvements in the community systems and ultimately result in positive changes for children, families and the overall community.

### Core tools for measuring the Conditions of Change

- *Progress Mapping tool*
- [Collaborative Health Assessment Tool \(CHAT\)](#)
- *Annual Learning Circle*

	Description of the tool	Use
<b>Progress Mapping tool</b>	This will measure progress towards strengthening the Conditions of Change. The tool provides a qualitative rubric for each of the practices against 5 phases of readiness to lead systems change.	Each community will assess which level they are currently at and set select 2-4 progress markers drawn from the 6 conditions that are relevant to them for that year (expressed as “What would success look like”). Success is measured by progress made against selected progress markers. Then communities are encouraged to and identify 1-3 goals (in the form of “what success would look like”) for the following year.
<b>Collaborative Health Assessment Tool - CHAT<sup>12</sup></b>	CHAT is an online survey tool that can be used as a card sorting exercise, paper survey, or online tool by the Local Leadership Group and a broader range of involved partners and community members about how you are travelling against most of the Conditions of Change.	Annual. This exercise would be completed early in the <i>Stronger Places, Stronger People</i> process as part of the Partnership Exploration Process, U-MEL planning, or first Annual Learning Circle to provide a baseline and then annually as part of

<sup>11</sup> See page 15-16 of this document for the full list of the low level Conditions for Change

<sup>12</sup> Centre for Social Impact, Collaboration for Impact, UNSW, (2017) CHAT

	Description of the tool	Use
		the community Learning Circle and included in Annual Report.
<b>Annual Learning Circles</b>	1-2 day facilitated Learning Circle where progress is reviewed in an evidence-based and collaborative manner. Backbone teams bring data to the workshop to analyse progress using the Progress Mapping tool.	<p>Each year, each community will hold an Annual Learning Circle.</p> <p>The Progress Mapping tool will also be used to plan for the coming year. Each year the community will nominate 2-4 areas to focus effort for the next year. They will express these focus area as “what success looks like”. In the subsequent year communities will review their progress against this nominated annual goals. At the same time, they can review the sufficiency of evidence, and consider how to strengthen their U-MEL.</p> <p>A member from another <i>Stronger Places, Stronger People</i> community could be invited to join the review process to encourage cross-community learning.</p>

## b. Measuring system level impacts

In collective impact work, it is important to pay attention to changes in the cultural, political, economic, and social systems in which the community operates. This includes changes in mindsets, community agency<sup>13</sup>; in flows of resources; and in practices and policy. Things that ‘hold the problem in place’ need to be tracked and addressed. The Place-based Evaluation Framework<sup>14</sup> provides a range of tools for measuring these systemic changes.

The *Stronger Places, Stronger People* Theory of Change sets out five elements related to the mid-level systems change:

- Community Agency
- Mindset and practices
- Innovation
- Resourcing flows
- Policy and funding reform

These system-level impacts will be measured:

- i. As part of the Community Strategy and Community Action Plans, communities will develop their own Theory of Change including mid-level systems impacts. Selecting from their Theory of Change, communities will nominate 1-3

<sup>13</sup> Community agency refers to the capability to achieve change or action when needed

<sup>14</sup> Dart (2018) [Place-based Evaluation Framework](#)



outcomes about systems impact as progress markers. Progress towards these markers will be incorporated into the annual Learning Circle and at the mid and end stage evaluations.

**Tools:** [Most Significant Change Technique](#) (MSC) and/or [Outcomes Harvesting](#), and System outcomes and indicators framework, annually by the Local Backbone team.

- ii. Mid-tem evaluation. Progress against the Community Plan and Annual Reports will be used to evaluate systems impact as part of the mid-term co-evaluation.

**Tools:** [Most Significant Change Technique](#) (MSC) and [Outcomes harvesting](#) and tools at mid and end state evaluations.

- iii. System outcomes and indicators set will be developed in conjunction with communities to measure system impacts e.g. availability, accessibility, and use of services.

	Description of the tool	Use
<a href="#">Outcomes harvesting</a>  <sup>15</sup>	A multistep inductive evidence gathering process that first collects evidence of what has changed, and then working backwards, determines whether and how an intervention contributed to these changes through a detailed and intensive evidence gathering process, which could include qualitative and/or quantitative data.	Used for innovative efforts where you have a high level of uncertainty about what outcomes might occur and/or where you want to capture both intended and unintended outcomes, positive or negative.
<a href="#">Most Significant Change</a> 	MSC is a form of participatory measurement and evaluation. It is good at capturing changes such as mindset shifts.	Involves stakeholders collecting stories about significant change directly from families and individuals. It is participatory because many project stakeholders are involved both in deciding the sorts of change to be recorded and in analysing the data.
System Level Indicators	A consistent set of indicators to measure system level change using the SPSP Theory of Change and minimum partner requirements.	Collection of data against indicators (to be developed).

<sup>15</sup> The circles represent the degree of difficulty, with 1 being relatively basic to 3 needing specialist evaluation skills.

## c. Measuring population change

Quantitative population level indicators will be used in two ways to measure the impact of *Stronger Places, Stronger People* in communities:

- i. **Initiative level consistent indicators** – the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* Indicator Bank, based on ARACY’s The Nest outcomes framework is a set of around 30 indicators collected and analysed at an aggregated initiative level to measure change.
- ii. **Community-selected outcomes, indicators, and targets** – collected and analysed by the Local Backbone teams. These should be included in the Community Strategy and reflect the work that is planned and used to monitor progress. A sub-set of any four indicators selected from the Data Bank are to be included by communities for evaluation purposes.

### i. Initiative level consistent indicators

A set of overarching child, youth, family, and community population level indicators will measure the aggregated effectiveness of the initiative (see **U-MEL Annex**). These indicators align to the aim and objective of *Stronger Places, Stronger People* to improve the wellbeing of children, youth, families, and communities, and will show where population change has occurred as a result of the initiative. The data will be drawn from a range of sets including publicly available data, Australian Government payments and service data, and state and territory service data. The contribution of data from the Australian government and partnering states and territories is critical in measuring the initiative impact and in empowering communities to measure their own progress. Data-sharing agreements will be drawn up between the Australian and state and territory governments to ensure this data is made available to communities. The indicator set is developmental and will be reviewed for relevance and accessibility at the mid and end stage evaluations.

The process for developing the indicators will be:

- a. The Department of Social Services developed a set of around 30 robust population indicators – the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* Data Bank.
- b. Community, state and territory, and other partners were consulted to verify the relevance, availability, and cultural appropriateness of the indicators and to each select a set of four from the Data Bank against which each community will report.
- c. The full set of indicators forms part of the impact evaluation process and will be made available for communities to draw upon for their own Community Plans, should they wish.
- d. Review indicator set for relevant and accessibility at mid and end stage evaluations.

### ii. Community-selected outcomes, indicators, and targets

To measure population progress at the community level, communities will be supported to develop their own Community Plans, with an outcomes and indicators set that aligns to the priorities identified in their Plan. The outcomes and indicators will be meaningful to each local community and reflect their vision and definition for child, youth, family, and community wellbeing.

Within this set, four indicators will come from the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* Data Bank to allow for evaluation across the initiative.

For at least five of the community indicators, communities will be encouraged to develop quantitative targets that define the extent of change desired and expected by the completion of five and 10 years. These indicators will be measured at the beginning of the initiative to provide a baseline/benchmark, and then annually by the Local Backbone teams who will report progress and trends at the Learning Circles and Annual Reports.

## 8. Evaluation

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### **Overview of Evaluation**

**Definition:** the “systematic collection of information about activities, characteristics, and outcomes...to make judgments, improve effectiveness and inform decisions about future activities.”<sup>1</sup> It involves answering questions about the effectiveness of *Stronger Places, Stronger People* using evidence from the community level and additional data studies.

**Community Level Actions:**

- Collated Understand, Measurement, and Learning data
- Participation in the mid and five year evaluations

**Initiative Level Actions:**

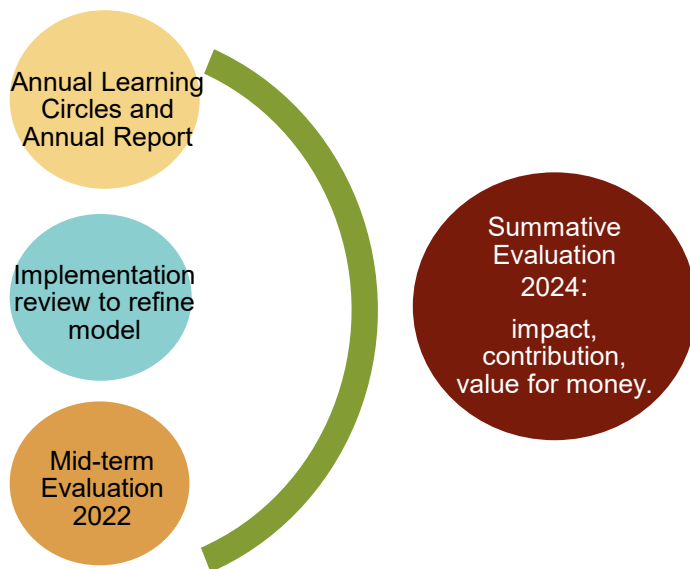
- Collated Understand, Measurement, and Learning data
- Organisation of, and participation in the mid and five year evaluations

**Tools:**

- Learning Circles and Reports
- [Most Significant Change](#), [Outcomes Harvesting](#), Process Tracing [What Else Tool](#),
- Implementation review in the 2020 Partner workshop
- Mid evaluation
- Five year Impact evaluation

**The Evaluation component includes:**

- i. annual Learning Circles and Reports
- ii. Implementation review of the model in the 2020 Partner workshop;
- iii. a Mid-term evaluation in 2022; and a
- iv. Five-year summative evaluation in 2024.



**Figure 7. Stronger Places, Stronger People evaluations**

Since multiple factors are likely to cause change in a community, the *contribution* of the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* initiative to population level change will be measured. Direct attribution to change is considered more difficult to determine when there are many factors involved, as with collective impact approaches<sup>16</sup>. Key Evaluation Questions 1-7 (see pages 18-19) will be answered in the evaluations.

**Table 3: The Stronger Places, Stronger People Evaluation timetable**

Type of evaluation		KEQ	When	Level
<b>Implementation review</b>	A review of the foundational elements of the model and implementation process so far. To be conducted at the Partner Workshop involving all partners.	1, 2,3,4	June 2020	Initiative
<b>Annual Learning Process evaluation</b>	An annual reflection as part of the Learning Circle of achievement against the minimum partnership requirements, Conditions for Systems Change, and population level outcomes. Community Annual Reports, plus a synthesis report for the whole initiative.	2-6	Annually	Each community + Initiative level

<sup>16</sup> Dart (2018) [Place-based Evaluation Framework](#)

Type of evaluation		KEQ	When	Level
<b>Mid evaluation</b>	Mid-term evaluation, using a co-evaluation technique to seek out early instances of impact and systems changes and implementation of the model across the 10 communities, plus a cross-community learning synthesis.	1-7	Jan-June 2022	Each community + Initiative level
<b>Impact evaluation</b>	<p>A five-year impact and contribution analysis, utilising using “process tracing” and value for money analysis to tell us if the model works to interrupt disadvantage, which aspects were the most effective.</p> <p>Each community produces a five-year report card for changes in high level and service system indicators and key learnings.</p> <p>Local Backbone teams will report on this contribution, combined with MSC or <a href="#">outcomes harvesting</a> which has its own contribution analysis built in.</p>	1-7	Jan-June 2024	Each Community + Initiative level

## 9. Learning

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### **Overview of Learning**

**Definition:** Learning is a crucial feature of *Stronger Places, Stronger People* and its U-MEL strategy. Given the exploratory and innovative nature of this initiative, there will be many lessons and a continual need to adapt while retaining the core, evidence-informed elements. The initiative and all the partners will be in a constant state of learning and applying the learnings to achieve the best outcomes.

#### **Community Level Actions:**

- Annual Learning Circles and Reports
- Partner conferences
- Measurement and Evaluation activities

#### **Initiative Level Actions:**

- Annual Learning Circles and Report
- Partner conferences
- Measurement and Evaluation activities

#### **Tools:**

- Most Significant Learning Tool
- Clear Horizon Academy
- Platform C
- Key Evaluation Questions

### Learning at all levels

There are several features of the U-MEL strategy that facilitate learning:

- Annual Learning Circles for each community, and for government partners;
- Peer learning mechanisms:
  - representatives from one *Stronger Places, Stronger People* community participate in the Learning Circle of another community;
  - [Platform C](#) - an online platform to encourage sharing between communities on theme specific topics will be established.
  - All people involved in U-MEL activities will be invited to join a community of practice and have access to the online Clear Horizon Academy – a new platform specifically for U-MEL.
- Partner workshops to share learnings across all 10 communities
- Most Significant Learning tool to capture developmental points at the annual Learning Circles and reported in the Annual Reports.
- Learning embedded into the Key Evaluation Questions and annual reporting.

## 10. Operationalising the U-MEL Strategy

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### Operationalising the U-MEL at the community level

An operational U-MEL plan will be co-developed with each community specifying the U-MEL requirements and resourcing to support each community to undertake the Understanding, Measurement, Evaluation, and Learning activities of *Stronger Places, Stronger People*. Particular requirements will be worked out with each community according to their stage of establishment and needs. For communities in the earlier stages, a tailored 'Understanding' aspect of U-MEL including access and interpretation of data and support to conduct community conversations may be most relevant. More established communities may wish to focus on 'Measurement', 'Evaluation', and 'Learning'.

Guidance documents will also be provided to assist communities and Local Backbone teams to prepare for the annual Learning Circles and Annual Reports, as well as tailored tool kits and on-line learning on key evaluation methods to be accessed through [Platform C](#) and the [Clear Horizon Academy](#).

## U-MEL Milestones and standards for communities

Each community will be required to meet U-MEL standards and milestones throughout their establishment and sustainment.

### All communities will develop/participate in:

- A Community Strategy and Action Plan identifying the shared aspirations of the community.
- A community outcomes and indicators framework including:
  - at least 4 **population indicators** drawn from the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* Data Bank and other outcomes and indicators identified by the community in their Plan.
  - Develop/nominate at least 2 **community specific medium and long term targets**. Targets are based on the goals in the Community Action Plan.
  - Agree on annual goals every year as part of the Learning Circle.
- A community version of the Theory of Change covering mid-level (systems impacts) and high-level (desired impacts for families and community) changes included in the Community Action Plan.
- A co-designed and shared U-MEL plan for work of the whole 'collective' with key evaluation questions aligned to KEQs 3-7. Communities can nominate/select their own sub-questions and add in more KEQs as desired.
- Continual collection of **data and stories** against the U-MEL plan to feed into the annual Learning Circle.
- A governance group, such as the Local Leadership Group, who oversee the U-MEL work and data sovereignty
- Commitment to building U-MEL capacity locally, including use of the U-MEL tools and processes.
- Participation in Annual Learning Circles (both for the community and attending other community's Circle)
- Production of an Annual Report post-Learning Circle
- Agreement to participate in a Mid-term co-evaluation (2022) and Impact evaluation (2024).

## Operationalising the U-MEL at the initiative level

To operationalise the U-MEL plan at the whole-of-initiative level, several components are necessary, including:

1. A *Stronger Places, Stronger People* Data Bank is set of initiative level consistent indicator with technical notes for how each indicator is measured and 5-year and 10-year targets that will be used to help measure the effectiveness of the overall initiative.
2. Terms of Reference for conducting the government Learning Circle - including who will attend and how it will run. The first Learning Circle will ideally occur after the communities have conducted their first Learning Circles and will form an element of the base line.
3. Terms of Reference for community Learning Circles - including who will attend this event and how it would run. The first Learning Circle will occur in 2019-20, and will form an element of the base line. This will need to be refined after the first ones are held, to incorporate learnings.
4. A plan for the Mid-term Co-evaluation in 2022 to ensure sufficient data is accessible.
5. A plan for the Impact evaluation (2024).
6. A resourcing plan for how the initiative level U-MEL work will be supported, including:
  - Collating data for the Annual Reports at the initiative level
  - Developing guidance and a toolkit for community U-MELs
  - Developing guidance and a toolkit for tracking changes in government policy and practice
  - Collating data and stories for the Mid-term evaluation at the initiative level, as well as guiding and facilitating the process
  - Preparing the ground-work for the Impact evaluation.

## Accompanying Documents

1. ***Stronger Places, Stronger People* U-MEL Implementation Plan**
2. ***Stronger Places, Stronger People* U-MEL Toolkit**
3. **U-MEL Annex**
4. [\*Place-based Evaluation Framework\*](#)