From place to population impact

National Youth Employment Body developmental evaluation final report

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Contents

Acknowledgements

Acronyms and abbreviations

AB   Advisory Board

BSL   Brotherhood of St. Laurence

CIC   Community Investment Committee

EO   Enabling Organisation

LJP   Local Jobs Program

LP   Lead Partner

NGGs   National governance groups

NYEB   National Youth Employment Body

Summary

The National Youth Employment Body (NYEB) aims to build a national youth employment ecosystem that connects young people to decent, secure and meaningful work while also meeting the workforce needs of employers and industry in local communities. It holds a long-term ambition to advance local to national practice and policy solutions that build the capabilities of young people and meet the needs of employers and industry in local communities.

In the NYEB, the BSL takes the role of an independent, multidisciplinary 'enabling organisation' (EO) that mobilises research, policy and practice expertise to seed and cultivate systemic change. The EO seeks to build the capacity of existing local employment, education and training networks. A Lead Partner (LP) embedded in each NYEB site works with the EO to assemble and lead a Community Investment Committee (CIC) that brings together local employers, industry representatives, and community and government agencies to consolidate efforts to address youth unemployment.

This developmental evaluation considers the contexts and mechanisms which enable the implementation of the NYEB, and tests how the NYEB's underpinning assumptions operate.

The key assumptions, and implementation learnings, practice recommendations and implications for systemic change work are presented in Table 1:

Table 1: Key research assumptions and findings

Underpinning assumption	Implementation learnings	Practice recommendations	Implications for systemic change
BUILDING CAPACITY IN PLACE			
1. **The EO builds the capacity of community to address youth unemployment** The EO builds the capacity of Lead Partners and CICs with key actors across employment, education, business, community and government sectors to design, invest in and implement evidence-informed employment and training solutions tailored to local place.	**Building the capability of the community to address youth unemployment in place requires: 1) complementary effort among local experts 2) employers committed to responding to local needs 3) young people's formal contribution to place-based solutions.** 1. CICs can successfully work with local, state and federal youth employment initiatives, avoid duplication and enhance existing place-based efforts. 2. COVID disruptions have limited the capacity of some employers to take a leading role in CIC work. Despite this, securing the participation of 'committed' employer champions who hold a structural view of youth unemployment remains vital to the impact of the CICs. 3. The role of young people in CICs could evolve beyond speaking of their lived experiences to a more active and formal role in co-designing solutions and contributing to advocacy and influencing efforts.	Enable young people to become active members of CICs by first listening to their experience, ensuring CICs create opportunities for them to contribute to decision-making and plan meetings to suit young people's schedules. Explore and identify contributions from diverse employers that sit outside a chairing role. For long-term sustainability, strengthen youth involvement and expand it beyond the CICs into all governance structures of the NYEB.	Continue to secure the active participation of employer and government champions willing to advance a change agenda and sign up to a 'higher good'. Seed change by mobilising young people's active participation in NYEB by resourcing young people to be CIC members; resourcing the Lead Partner support of young people; and adapting the change agenda to their contexts, constraints and imperatives.

Underpinning assumption	Implementation learnings	Practice recommendations	Implications for systemic change
PLACE TO POLICY AND POPULATION IMPACT			
2. CICs amplify their local voice to national policy CICs amplify their local voice at the national level to inform responses that address structural barriers in policy, governance, infrastructure and funding.	**While amplifying local initiatives at the national level validates project work driven by the CICs activity, population level impact requires leveraging national level expertise, networks and investment.** Amplification from the local to the national helps validate CIC activity beyond their own region. For NGGs, it provides a grounded understanding of structural problems and possible solutions to youth unemployment. Showcasing successful examples from the same CIC limits other CICs' opportunity to contribute to building a place to population agenda. It also limits the NGGs' capacity to utilise their expertise and networks to address structural barriers in all of the places where CICs are operating. Ensuring that CIC voices influence policy change that reaches a wider population of young people requires the EO to open up opportunities for NGG members to utilise their expertise, networks and investment to convert place-based impact to population level policy impact.	The EO must continue to build the capacity of all CIC members and strive to provide opportunities to all CICs to connect their work to broader policy contexts through the NGGs. Strengthening the local to national impact of the NYEB requires NGGs to have an active role working with all of the CICs.	Both top-down and bottom-up flows of expertise and evidence between CICs and the NGGs are required to impact policy change at multiple levels. Processes and feedback loops between the local and national must be accessible and transparent to all CIC members.

Underpinning assumption	Implementation learnings	Practice recommendations	Implications for systemic change
3. NGGs act upon local knowledge and expertise to drive systemic solutions NGGs act upon timely evidence and practical experience emerging from the CICs to design systemic solutions that address structural challenges that prevent young people's access to decent jobs and that leave employers with ongoing workforce needs.	**Driving systemic solutions requires an EO working in the 'third space' between community and government acting as a catalyst for the development of a coherent policy agenda that cuts across multiple levels of government.** NGGs are a relatively untapped resource in the systemic change ambitions of the NYEB. NGG members are keen to advance systemic change but are often stifled by the limits of their own organisation's remit for change. Addressing a lack of authorising environment for NGG members requires the EO working in a 'third space' between government and the community to enable government stewardship and investment in systemic solutions. Driving systemic solutions in a 'third space' between government and community requires the EO to leverage opportunity and collaboratively work with all three tiers of government to steward change at multiple levels.	Increase state government representation in all CICs, targeting staff who are capable of influencing state level policy change. Continue to seek out local and state interventions and pilots that can seed broader systemic policy reform.	In a changing policy environment, quick program wins can serve as an entry point to broader systemic reform. Build national and state government and departmental champions at levels when policy conditions may not be enabling. Sustain key relationships with federal policymakers during membership changes in NGGs. Lasting change requires strategic relationships with system actors who sit outside the national authorising environment but who can influence government to steward change. This includes mobilising local and state government representatives to model the kind of interventions that can be authorised at scale by national policymakers.

1 Evaluating the NYEB model

The National Youth Employment Body is a coalition of people and organisations invested in addressing youth unemployment through the development of local to national responses that meet the needs of young people and industry alike, and ultimately drive systems change.

Aim of the NYEB

The National Youth Employment (NYEB) aims to build a national youth employment ecosystem that effectively connects young people to decent, secure and meaningful work while also meeting the workforce needs of employers and industry in local communities.

It advances this long-term ambition by **enabling** local to national policy, program and practice development that **builds the capabilities** of young people, communities, VET providers, employers and industry to secure and sustain decent work opportunities.

The NYEB model

Features of the NYEB model include an enabling organisation; a place to population, local to national approach; interlinked governance structures; and a national policy reform component.

The NYEB enabling organisation function

The enabling work or functions of the NYEB is undertaken by BSL's multidisciplinary youth 'Enabling Organisation (EO)'. The EO combines research, evaluation, policy and practice expertise, occupying a 'third space' between community and government to drive regional reform and national social policy. While it shares many of the core functions of backbone organisations (facilitative leadership, etc.) in place-based collective impact initiatives, the EO differs from a backbone organisation in at least four key ways, including its:

- systematic application of guiding ideas and frameworks to the local to national reform agenda

- emphasis on top-down, bottom-up governance mechanisms to drive local to national reform

- local to national policy scope and reach

- broader application of the BSL systemic change methodology.

Place to population, local to national approach

The NYEB model is founded on a 'place to population level approach'. Collaborative community-level innovation and national policymaking are linked through the EO, so that structural challenges impeding local youth employment and employer/industry workforce issues can be addressed. The NYEB endeavours to maximise the impact and sustainability of local employment innovations so they can endure beyond government funding cycles and political disruptions.

Interlinked governance

The place to population level approach of the NYEB is supported by a range of local and national governance structures that interact with one another through intentional bidirectional feedback loops.

At the local level, the NYEB supports the development of Community Investment Committees (CICs). The EO works with a Lead Partner (LP) in each site to build their leadership capacity and establish CICs. Convened by employer champions, and supported by the Lead Partner, the CICs align, harness and enhance the efforts of local industry and employers, employment service providers, community organisation and government to address systemic barriers to youth employment in their communities.

In late 2019, the initial demonstration NYEB CIC sites were established in Logan (Qld), Shoalhaven (NSW), and Adelaide North (SA). Three more sites (YouthWorX, NT; Gold Coast, Qld; and Warrnambool–Moyne, Vic.) were established in 2021. An additional site is currently being established in Eurobodalla (NSW).

At the national level, the NYEB supports seven national governance groups (NGGs) each with specific aims and functions (see *Appendix 1*). National decision-makers are also members of CICs and are involved in other NYEB work, including systemic design workshops which aim to co-design sector-specific policy solutions to youth unemployment.

Policy development

National policy reform is also a key component of the NYEB model, driven by the EO and the governance groups as well as national decision-makers. It may involve singular reforms or systemic change initiatives at the local and/or national level.

Purpose of the developmental evaluation

This developmental evaluation considers all six established CIC sites and their interactions with the NGGs. It aims to understand the NYEB's implementation to inform its future design and scale-up as part of its systemic change ambition.

This developmental evaluation answers the following research questions:

1   What are the contexts and mechanisms that enable implementation of the NYEB?

2   How does the NYEB operationalise its underpinning assumptions[1] and what adaptations to practice and the model are needed?

Table 2 Underpinning assumptions

EO builds the capacity of community to address youth unemployment

The EO builds the capacity of Lead Partners and CICs with key actors across employment, education, business, community and government sectors to design, invest in and implement evidence-informed employment and training solutions tailored to local place.

CICs amplify their local voice to national policy

CICs amplify their local voice at the national level to inform responses that address structural barriers in policy, governance, infrastructure and funding.

NGGs act upon local knowledge and expertise to drive systemic solutions

NGGs act on timely evidence and practical experience emerging from the CICs to design systemic solutions that address:

- misalignment of supply and demand
- misalignment of training and local labour markets
- duplication of youth employment programs and effort
- lack of coherent cross-sector responses to local youth unemployment
- disconnect between schools and industry
- competitive services and funding
- lack of knowledge of available government resources
- infrastructure barriers (e.g. transport).

The developmental evaluation is part of a broader study of the NYEB that includes an outcomes evaluation which will be finalised early in 2023.

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[1] The research questions and underpinning assumptions that this evaluation examines were co-developed by BSL's research and practice teams and informed by findings from the 2020 stage one developmental evaluation, which studied the three initial demonstration sites (Logan, Adelaide North, Shoalhaven).

Stages of the developmental evaluation

Stage one culminated in an interim report *(Developmental evaluation interim report,* 2021) which tested the assumption that the EO builds community capacity to address youth unemployment. Learnings include:

- CICs develop in phases defined by place-based factors rather than set time periods

- Maintaining momentum and effectiveness of a CIC requires supporting employers to take an active role in economic recovery from COVID disruptions.

This report from **stage two** focuses on the operationalisation of all three underpinning assumptions of the NYEB model. It builds on the findings of the interim report by asking the following sub-questions:

- If CIC progress is not determined by time, how can we understand what enables CIC development?

- Are CIC voices amplified in the NGGs? If so, what is the impact of this?

- What enables the design and impact of systemic solutions to youth unemployment?

Report structure

This report begins by grounding the NYEB in relevant literature. It then details the research aims and methodology. Findings of the developmental evaluation follow, presenting what has been learned as the NYEB has developed; the contexts and mechanisms that have shapes implementation; practical recommendations; and systemic implications.

The report concludes by summarising the key learnings of this evaluation and indicating how these will inform the next stage of the research (outcomes evaluation stage two).

2 Setting the NYEB model in the literature

The design of the NYEB model has been informed by scholarship on social change, current best practice for social justice organisations, and evaluations of the strength and weakness of collective action models. From these we identified the need for a model that not only builds communities' capacity to address youth unemployment, but also elevates their local voice to inform national policy so that national actors can collaboratively drive systemic solutions.

The need for a long-term, youth-specific employment response

The current Australian labour market has been shaped by four megatrends: globalisation, climate change, technological change and demographic changes (Balliester & ElsheikhI 2018). In the past three years these trends have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. While these changes impact all those currently in or seeking to enter the workforce, new risks and opportunities are not distributed equally. Young people are finding it difficult to enter the labour market, and for those that do it is often in insecure, low-skill and low-paid work (Mallett & Brown 2018; Brotherhood of St Laurence 2019).

Young people require employment approaches which recognise their circumstances, voice and long-term aspirations. Mainstream, government-funded employment services are often inadequate to foster meaningful long-term career pathways, instead emphasising immediate and short-term employment (Bodsworth 2015).

Introduced as part of COVID recovery, the Local Jobs Program (LJP) is a national government-funded program across 51 employment regions that aims to develop local employment solutions alongside employers and stakeholders 'to move as many people as possible (back) into work or training as quickly as possible' (DESE 2021). While LJP's dual focus on large-scale and local collaboration is encouraging, it leaves gaps that the NYEB, which predates the LJP, aims to address.

Consistent with its broader ambition, the NYEB addresses at least three issues beyond the scope of the LJP. First, the LJP is driven by government rather than community-led. This top-down approach to community development does not maximise the agency and decision-making of local actors; and its ongoing viability is subject to government funding cycles. Second, LJP's focus is on jobseekers in general, and not specific to young people. Third, its ambition is a near-term program response (ending mid-2025), rather than systemic change that can respond to megatrends. This leaves a gap in employment solutions focused on creating long-term systemic change specifically targeted to young people.

Creating meaningful systemic solutions relies on building capacity in place

Traditional top-down or single agency service delivery models are ineffective at addressing the multifaceted complexity of 'wicked' systemic social and economic issues. Their vertical funding, accountability chains and the assignment of clearly defined program tasks to individual agencies prevent them from creating and implementing integrated, holistic responses (Fry 2022; Moore & Fry 2011; Smart 2017). It follows then that siloed top-down government agencies produce fragmented and incoherent services.

While collaborative, bottom-up initiatives show promising results, many still have little significant impact, are short-lived and small-scale (Hudson & Rees 2015; Fry 2022). Bottom-up models that have demonstrated the greatest results and longevity have intentionally allowed for collaboration and diversity in developing the capacity of local actors to make change. Other success factors include prioritising relationship-building and collaboration across sectors, community and government departments on a shared agenda (Moore & Fry 2011; Williams & Spelten 2021); enabling community ownership of initiatives to engender sustainability that can endure beyond policy cycles (Hudson & Rees 2015); an environment that empowers and enables action; an understanding of underlying conditions through community involvement; and having a systemic and policy change ambition (Wolff 2016).

In response to these considerations, the NYEB uses a place-based approach in each facilitated CIC site, both to identify locally tailored interventions capable of addressing interrelated causes and barriers that lead to disadvantage and youth unemployment, and to facilitate capacity building of members.

Mobilising key actors to work collaboratively

A bottom-up approach alone does not substitute for a systemic solution. It is rare for place-based initiatives to create system-level responses: their impact often remains within the region (Fry 2022). The NYEB operates as both a bottom-up and a top-down model, connecting community, service delivery, employers and government at multiple levels (local, state and national) to align efforts and strengths, to identify barriers and create new solutions with a shared agenda (Brown & Cull 2019; McAfee et al. 2015; Fry 2022; Moore & Fry 2011; Smart 2017). In practice, cross-governmental representation is an important element of the NYEB's capacity to co-design holistic solutions and avoid siloed work. Effective partnerships rely on diverse membership, including those who can identify issues and suggest solutions, and those who can provide authority and capacity to implement them (Thornton et al. 2018). However, authority is often not fixed, and can be negotiated (Butcher et al. 2019). The NYEB addresses this by continuously considering and addressing what and who enables an authorising environment, thereby maintaining it despite external change (Andrews, Pritchett & Woolcock 2017).

State and federal governments play an important role in the authorising environment for collaborative initiatives and their outcomes, possessing both resources and decision rights (Fry 2022). However, government involvement must extend beyond single departments to address the multifaceted nature of systemic issues (Moore & West cited in Smart 2017, p. 18; Hudson & Rees 2015). The NYEB's governance structures have diverse membership that enables collaboration across sectors, levels of power and departmental boundaries. Its success in enabling systemic change will depend on both local communities legitimising the value and importance of the approach (Moore & Khagram 2004) and decision-makers providing flexibility with resources, allowing innovation and the ability to respond to community needs and enable a 'safe-to-fail' culture (Graham & Weaver 2016 cited in Smart 2017, p. 19; Andrews, Pritchett & Woolcock 2017; Mouser & Bowers 2017).

Youth voice as an asset

Youth voice builds the capacity of local communities to develop youth-specific solutions (Hudson & Rees 2015; McAfee et al. 2015). Youth engagement is a component essential to the success of the NYEB. The inclusion and elevation of young people's lived experiences supports the NYEB's ability to sustain positive collective change (Christens & Tran Inzeo 2015), avoid inappropriate solutions (Wolff 2016), and build shared understanding which strengthens mutual sense of purpose (McAfee et al. 2015, Christens & Tran Inzeo 2015).

How the NYEB builds capability in place to influence change

The NYEB model is grounded in a theory of change. In an ongoing process, multiple mechanisms align collaborative cross-sectoral efforts across local and national levels, to invest in employment pathways that satisfy the aspirations and capabilities of young people and the needs of local employers, and to remove existing structural barriers.

This process is dependent on five mechanisms:

1 Establishing local CICs to develop cross-sectoral relationships and develop solutions to local barriers to employment
2 An NGG to link place-based youth employment responses to a national policy
3 An EO to connect the local and national, to provide collaborative support, evaluate strategies, research and share key learnings
4 Activating employers to share knowledge, create work entry pathways and promote the benefits of investing in young people, and
5 Youth participation to contribute their insights and experiences to maximise the effectiveness of the model and solutions.

Local-to-national loop

The NYEB's systemic change ambition and place-based approach is supported by a multisectoral and multilevel governance structure. This structure provides a local-to-national feedback loop to elevate local learnings, provide advice on local priorities and align CIC activity with current opportunities for policy and systemic change (Monson-Wilbraham et al. 2020). It recognises that a multi-site approach requires systems which recognise work in place, while scaling up the community approach to facilitate larger systems learning (Blackmore 2010). Evaluating the effectiveness of the governance groups therefore is important to ensure input is being provided and leads to needed adaptations or systemic change work (Fry 2022).

3 Methodology

Adaptive evaluation approach

Developmental evaluation is oriented to nurturing learning, rather than establishing 'best practice' that can inhibit risk-taking (Patton 2010). It is underpinned by an 'adaptive methodology', which is how the BSL develops, designs and tests innovative policies and programs that drive sustained systemic change in complex settings (Hart unpub. 2017) (see *Appendix 2*).

The NYEB model features many moving parts operating in a dynamic policy and political context. It engages multiple stakeholders (business, community and government) to participate across multiple levels (local, state and national) to drive systemic change. The adaptive methodology enables the developmental evaluation to:

- identify how NYEB practices adapt to this complex setting

- inform ongoing adaptation and implementation of the model in a timely manner through regular co-design and evidence-making 'learning loop' meetings bringing together research and practice teams.

A series of practice implications emerged from the interim report (see *Appendix 7* for summary of progress in implementing them).

Data collection

Data was collected through 40 semi-structured interviews with three participant groups: Lead Partner staff (n=14) and other CIC members (n=13); NYEB Advisory Board members (n=7); and Enabling Organisation staff (n=6) (see *Appendix 3* for interview design and process, and *Appendix 4* for participant details). These participant groups were selected so that findings could be triangulated across local, national and EO vantage points. All participants were contacted twice, firstly by phone and then by email to explain the research, and what their participation would entail.

EO staff and NYEB Advisory Board members were interviewed in November and December 2021, followed by Lead Partners and CIC members in February and March 2022, to allow time to assess progress of the three newer CIC sites (see *Appendix 5* for timeline of CIC meeting activity between developmental evaluation stages). A focus group was also conducted with the EO staff late January 2022 to investigate adaptations in practice.

EO interviews

The EO interviews focused on the staff capacity building role in mobilising key actors, supporting community leadership, linking local practice to national policy and systemic change.

National Governance Group interviews

Of the NGGs, the Advisory Board was selected because its function allowed the research team to capture insights across the many components of the NYEB. The National Employers Reference Group was excluded because at the time of data collection, it had not met since stage one of the developmental evaluation. The Community of Interest was excluded as its membership fluctuates with opportunities to focus on targeted policy and advocacy efforts.

NYEB Advisory Board members were asked about their interaction with CIC members, and their role in providing strategic guidance or leveraging opportunities in line with the NYEB's systemic change ambition.

Lead Partner and CIC member interviews

The Lead Partner and CIC members were asked about CIC activity (including action plans) and their progress, the role of the Enabling Organisation in capacity building, and the local to national links formed through the NYEB. The stage of developmental evaluation reported here included CICs in Warrnambool–Moyne, YouthWorX NT, Gold Coast, Logan, Adelaide North and Shoalhaven. Stage two again includes the original three demonstration CICs given the interim finding that CIC progression through the phases had been uneven. The Eurobodalla CIC was not included as it is early in establishment and was yet to meet.

After initial contact the team decided not to pursue interviewing the Adelaide North CIC for this second stage. This was primarily because that CIC had not met formally since June 2021, though active projects continued (see p. 22). Data was collected from this CIC in stage one of the outcomes evaluation (*Outcomes evaluation interim report*, 2021).

Data analysis

Thematic Analysis was the most appropriate method due to its flexibility (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 86). It complimented the evaluation's adaptive methodology, and enabled analysis of data from different participant groups and sampling methods (interviews and a focus group). Interview and focus group transcripts were coded deductively in NVivo, based on constructs drawn from the original construct tables (see *Appendix 3*). Extra areas to code were added as patterns could be grouped into themes. Emerging findings were continually triangulated against evidence from the other participant groups, to present multiple perspectives of key actors involved in the NYEB.

Data saturation was reached when all three participant groups confirmed a finding, and it became apparent that no new information was contributing to learnings. In that case, pertinent lines of questioning were removed from interview schedules to enable more time to be spent investigating other issues.

Quotes have been attributed to participant group type, sector, role or CIC location. To ensure anonymity, we include only one identifying marker.

4 Progress and action since the interim report

In this section we report progress on key components of the NYEB model since the interim report of the developmental evaluation.

CIC implementation progress

The CICs have made considerable progress since the previous interim report (see *Appendix 6* and *Appendix 7*). Across the six CICs there are 117 active members[2]. In the three new sites (Warrnambool–Moyne, Gold Coast and YouthWorX NT), employers and industry representatives make up the largest representation; employer involvement in these CICs has remained consistent (Warrnambool–Moyne) or significantly increased since the *Developmental evaluation interim report* (2021). In the original demonstration sites (Shoalhaven, Logan and Adelaide North) employers remain underrepresented, and work is under way in these CICs to identify and recruit employer champions. In all CICs, the education and training sector is represented, though Warrnambool–Moyne, Logan and Adelaide North CICs could benefit from additional representatives. Community organisations and government are adequately represented on all CICs.

Table 3. Active CIC members by location and sector

| Location	Lead Partner	Employer/ industry	Education/ training	Community organisation	Government	Total
Adelaide North	1	1	1	3	5	11
Logan	4	1	1	3	7	16
Shoalhaven	2	0	3	2	7	14
YouthWorX NT	4	9	6	8	5	32
Gold Coast	2	10	3	3	5	23
Warrnambool–Moyne	4	8	1	4	4	21
Total	17	29	15	23	33	117

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[2] Active CIC members are defined as those who have attended a CIC meeting in the last six months. For Adelaide North CIC, which had not met in that period but had continued its activity, active membership was based on attendance at previous meetings and consultation with the practice team.

CICs progression through developmental phases

When the NYEB was initially designed, indicators were created to understand how CICs develop through phases. In the Establish phase, EO efforts are geared towards assessing LP and CIC member readiness, mobilising these key actors and supporting CICs to share knowledge on place-based needs and opportunities pertinent to youth employment challenges. In the Develop phase, the EO supports CICs to engage in advocacy work and local activities, particularly pilot projects to test innovative CIC designs. In the Sustain phase, the EO provides light-touch support to CICs to upscale their pilot projects and leverage evidence of impact to advocate for broader systemic change. In the Endure phase, the EO steps back, while CICs design, invest in and implement multiple projects to address youth employment, and leverage their practical expertise to influence national decision-making and shape systemic changes.

By March 2022 the CICs are currently operating across the first three phases – Establish, Develop and Sustain – as shown on Figure 1. Evaluation findings support initial expectations that each phase is longer than the previous.

Figure 1 CIC developmental phases
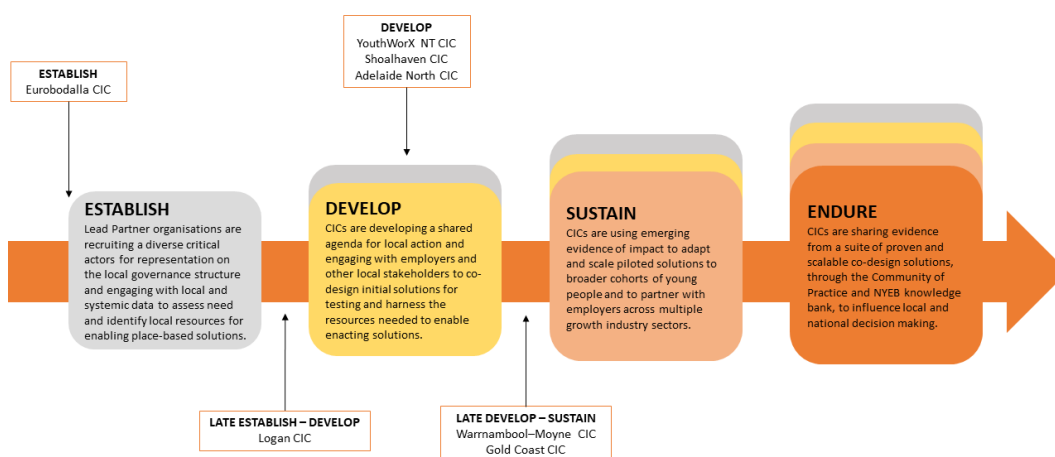
Place-specific disruptions, including COVID-19 lockdowns and natural disasters, continued to shape CICs and their implementation. In particular, COVID disrupted employer engagement and youth involvement, both of which are central to the NYEB model and to aligning supply and demand:

> It's just been really tricky because of COVID. We can't plan and execute everything because once you make a plan, you can't execute it because you can't speak daily with employers, or you can't hold a youth research session and ask them what they want. – Miranda, Lead Partner

> We were impacted very heavily in Logan by flooding, and also through COVID and things like that. A lot of our employer champions and key stakeholders are very much in industries where that has impacted them. – Sophie, Logan

Enablers of CIC development

Evaluation findings indicate common enabling factors of CIC development. These include CIC coordination in the Establish and Develop phases, accountability for participation in action-based collaborative projects, and participation in national NYEB work.

CIC coordination in early phases to mobilise key actors

Progression from Establish phase to Develop phase was enabled by the CIC coordinator role in the YouthWorX NT, Shoalhaven, Warrnambool–Moyne and Gold Coast CICs. Resourcing needs of Lead Partners are higher in early stages of development as more contact is needed with stakeholders to secure their investment and align them with a shared mission to address youth unemployment. CIC coordinators can engage with and mobilise key individuals such as employers between meetings. Resourcing of this role tapers off as the CICs develop, and investment has been secured. The Lead Partner in the Gold Coast, which is in the late Develop to early Sustain phase, successfully integrated the CIC coordinator role within their organisation, demonstrating that Lead Partner willingness to invest in the model can increase as CICs progress.

Participation in a broader systemic change agenda

Progression from Establish to Develop phase was also enabled by Lead Partner and CIC member participation in NYEB activities that link their work to a broader policy ambition. These activities include system design workshops (Warrnambool–Moyne, YouthWorX NT), consultations to develop the Youth Opportunity Compass tool and attendance at the National Employers Reference Group (NERG) (Warrnambool–Moyne, Gold Coast). This allowed the LPs and CIC members to situate their local work within a national systemic change agenda to address youth unemployment. One CIC member explained the intent of the system design workshops:

> We participated in the Entry into Care pilot and in the evaluation for that and the systems design workshops for young people, so the intent of that would be to have some impact nationally around what works for young people around skills, so I think that's one very clear piece of it – Anita, GC

Lead Partner staff from the Gold Coast also attended the NYEB Advisory Board, as well as the Community of Interest. CIC involvement in these NGGs may help them to progress from Develop to Sustain phase as it brings CICs up close to the systemic change ambition and their place in a bigger national policy agenda.

Accountability for participation in collaborative action-based projects

Collaborative projects are also vital for CICs progressing through the Develop phase towards the Sustain phase, as evidenced by the completion of projects in Warrnambool–Moyne and the Gold Coast (see *Appendix 6 and 7*). Such projects can be enabled through enhancing CIC members' sense of responsibility and accountability for actions between meetings. All interviewed CIC members suggested adapting their action plan to ensure actions are delegated, with realistic timeframes, and understood in formats specific to those CICs.

> For me, it's short and sharp. What do you need me to do? When do I need it done by? And how will this outcome bring benefit to our young people and the positive contributions that they make to our city? – Meghan, local government

Substantial redesign of the action plan has begun in the Shoalhaven and Warrnambool–Moyne CICs and will begin across all CICs in following months. Additionally, the EO is currently working with LPs to create monitoring tools such as tracking sheets and spreadsheets to measure and show implementation progress. The EO staff also meet with the LP regularly to clarify and streamline how actions should be progressed in line with CIC goals.

Future progression

CIC progression

CICs were disrupted by new contracts for Transition to Work providers. All Lead Partners faced changes in their TtW jurisdictions. Some providers experienced a complete loss of these contracts, while others are now operating in new locations. TtW providers involved in the NYEB are well placed in community and bring a distinct value to addressing youth employment, through their networks, passion and youth-specific expertise. A change of providers will have a significant impact on place-based work addressing youth employment.

At the time of writing, the EO is planning how the NYEB model will adapt to these changes and continue to focus on young people in spite of possibly reduced access to Transition to Work participants.

> The Community Investment Committee was always bigger than the Transition to Work contract. We now just (aren't) going to be able to rely on having Transition to Work young people – Shawn, Warrnambool–Moyne

NGG progression

For a summary of each NGG and their progress, see *Appendix 1*. As the NYEB model leads to more pilots, the function of some of the NGGs has shifted from a 'guidance role' to active co-design of such initiatives. The EO has driven this shift by encouraging

greater representation of employer champions from the CICs on the National Employers Reference Group (NERG). In one Lead Partner's view, this has resulted in a more action-oriented and purposeful NERG.

Lead Partner interruptions and resourcing

The Adelaide North CIC's lack of meetings evidences how progress can stall when LPs face organisational disruptions and strains on their time. The primary LP staff member, whose strong networks were leveraged to form the CIC, encountered significant resource strain when their organisation had to re-tender for multiple contracts. As this key staff member had no time to organise and facilitate CIC meetings, the Adelaide North had not met since June 2021. To guard against such interruptions in future, CICs might benefit from LPs involving multiple staff members in CIC coordination and management. In this instance, the EO is also considering alternative organisations in the region to co-lead the CIC with the current Lead Partner.

Several CIC projects have continued outside meetings, including a work experience program, a drivers licence program and multiple partnerships. The Adelaide North CIC LP has successfully integrated funding arrangements for CIC projects into their organisation, leveraging money and resources from Transition to Work and other sources. A CIC meeting has now been scheduled for mid-May 2022.

5 Findings: Building capability in place

Headline finding

Building the capability of the community to address youth unemployment in place requires complementary effort among local experts, employers committed to local needs, and young people's formal contribution to place-based solutions.

At the local level, the NYEB aims to build the community's capacity to address youth unemployment by integrating effort across sectors and by designing and implementing evidence-informed employment and training solutions that are tailored to place and disrupt structural barriers to young people's participation in the workforce.

Three key learnings emerge when we examine the NYEB's role in building local capability to address youth unemployment:

1   CICs can successfully work with local, state and federal initiatives, avoid duplication and enhance existing place-based efforts.
2   Employer involvement has fluctuated during COVID-related disruptions and so the expectation that employers take a leading role may not always be realistic. Despite this, securing the participation of 'committed' employer champions who hold a structural view of youth unemployment remains vital.
3   The role of young people in CICs could evolve beyond speaking of their lived experiences to a more active and formal role in co-designing solutions and contributing to advocacy and influencing efforts.

Established CICs enhance the impact of other place-based initiatives

CICs take a place-based approach to integrating youth employment initiatives because the structural causes of youth unemployment differently depending on the resources of that region. Following the implementation of the NYEB model and the CICs, the federal government in 2021 introduced the Local Jobs Program, in which Employment Facilitators work across 51 regions as part of a Local Jobs and Skills Taskforce that plans and funds local recovery projects.

Echoing the work initiated through the CICs in the NYEB, the LJP also recognises the importance of integrating the array of employment initiatives in each region. However, unlike the NYEB, the LJP works in place from a federal authority in a 'top-down' manner, administering funding to drive place-based outcomes. One CIC Lead Partner staff member assesses the LJP as 'not as localised' as the NYEB, which she considers has a stronger focus on the 'end user's opinion'. A further difference sits at the level of ambition: the NYEB aims to shape national policymaking by leveraging local practice and

policy innovation, while the LJP prioritises the matching of local labour supply with demand by connecting local jobseekers to short-term job vacancies.

In spite of these differences, the practice of CIC and the LJP in place shows that they can work in tandem. Both CIC members and Local Jobs Program Employment Facilitators spoke of the mutual benefits of their representation on CICs and the LJP Taskforce. Lead Partners in Shoalhaven, Warrnambool–Moyne, Logan, YouthWorX NT and Gold Coast CICs all sit on their region's LJP Taskforce as youth employment representatives, providing the LJP with updates on CIC activity and with youth employment expertise. LJP Employment Facilitators are members of every CIC except Gold Coast. The facilitators report insights and actions from the CIC back to DESE, while also connecting CICs to relevant funding opportunities.

CIC members show a solid understanding that CICs are designed to harness, rather than duplicate, community effort. They refer to an 'open and transparent' NYEB model that welcomes to the CIC multiple stakeholders who can contribute to their action plan. This includes local economic development initiatives as well as national policies and initiatives like the LJP. At least one LJP facilitator echoed this view.

> Interviewer: Do you think that there is any duplication that happens between the taskforce and the CIC?
>
> A: No … I think there's enhancement. I don't think there's duplication per se. So whilst we might discuss in the taskforce – so we have a local jobs plan, and that local jobs plan is focused on the whole employment region – the taskforce's role is to ensure that the local jobs plan is meeting the requirements of jobseekers in industry. And so, any work that we're doing on the taskforce complements the CIC and vice versa … And that's part of my role too, to make sure that everything that I'm touching and being involved in isn't a duplication so that we can maximise resources and minimise double up in any way. – Jamie, Local Jobs Program

Local expertise and relative autonomy

CICs are able to enhance other place-based initiatives through what one EO staff member refers to as a recognition of the deep local expertise in the CIC and respect for their autonomy. For CICs, representation on the LJP Taskforce allows them to connect CIC activity with the LJP and to make visible the NYEB's change agenda. As CIC members note, when information does not flow as freely (such as with some jobactive providers), fragmentation in the service ecosystem persists.

Employers remain committed to place-based needs

COVID disruptions have added a layer of complexity to the existing challenges of recruiting employers to participate in CICs signalled in the interim report. The initial expectation in the NYEB model was that since employers are central to the CIC, each CIC would be chaired by an employer. Since then, the EO has moved away from mandating employers taking on the chair role. Partly, this is a pragmatic change as during the

COVID pandemic, many employers have been focused on the survival of their businesses and have less time to commit to leading a CIC. In light of this, the EO's attention has shifted to re-examining how employers' contribution to the CIC should be valued.

Identifying employer champions

Over time, the EO and Lead Partners have engaged in shared reflection on how to identify employer champions who can actively contribute to the NYEB's mission of connecting young people to decent and secure work that is valued by business. Key learnings include:

- **Identifying employers from local industries with high demand**. Based upon each CIC's specific action plan, one Lead Partner suggests the importance of having access to a range of employers in the industry where innovation or a trial is taking place.

- **Understanding the capability building function of the CIC and what it can offer employers**. While there is widespread understanding among CIC members that employers are the experts on their business needs, one state government CIC member stressed a wider role for the CIC:

  Working with employers not just … in that consultation as to what they need, but also working with employers to educate around what are those barriers and how to adopt different lenses … that they're bringing into their business. – Victor, state government

  To this end, the Gold Coast Lead Partner views their CIC as having made 'some inroads in the way employers look at young people and recruit young people and realising that they have to actually change what they do to get the best out of young people.' They note a mindset shift, in which employers are not only recognising systemic issues but also their role in addressing them.

- **Making visible the mutual benefits of employer participation in the CIC.** For example, one employer valued how the CIC chair and Lead Partner staff attended their recruitment drives, assisting with 'shortlisting interviews, with presentations and speaking with the young people'. For this employer, the CIC chair and Lead Partner's 'genuine passion' to support young people and employers at the same time was evident when the CIC validated the opinion that employers need young people who are 'ready for work', and showed they were 'concerned with realistic outcomes'.

However, further work is needed to determine the most effective recruitment of employers by size, as some CIC members view larger companies as having more resources to trial structural solutions than smaller businesses which have less capacity to connect their immediate labour shortage needs to structural issues.

Deepening young people's contribution to the CICs

To date, young people's participation in the NYEB's CICs and NGGs has mostly been to speak to their experiences of unemployment and how NYEB-related projects and skilled pathways have supported and broadened their career aspirations. In at least two CICs, young people's participation in the NYEB has progressed beyond sharing their experiences to what Lead Partners consider a more 'proactive' contribution. Young people's recent involvement in the Gold Coast and Warrnambool–Moyne CICs highlights the possibilities of more active youth contributions.

In the Gold Coast, a young person sits on the CIC and has worked closely with other CIC members and the Lead Partner to design an employer toolkit to help onboard young people into the workplace:

> There's toolkits items that we run all of these by the young people before we use them for young people so that we have their buy-in. And they give us their advice and they say, 'What does this mean? I don't even know what you're talking about' or putting it into their language. And having their opinions on the subjects that we're talking about as well. It's really crucial. We sit here talking – we don't know what's going on in the young people's heads and all their different challenges. – Kimberly, Gold Coast

In this case, the Lead Partner later explained that young people's 'opinions' referred to a CIC meeting where the two young people spoke for two and a half hours challenging assumptions made by CIC members, including work environments that were not welcoming to young people and the ineffectiveness of careers events.

The Lead Partner in Gold Coast added that the young person on their CIC was also part of a mental health working group. The CIC had recruited another young person who made an initial contribution but has since been unable to attend due to meetings clashing with work commitments.

In Warrnambool–Moyne, a key project driven through the CIC's action plan has been the production of a video informed by and featuring young people speaking about the many different jobs in the agricultural industry. The Warrnambool–Moyne Lead Partner staff member spoke of two young people who had participated in their TtW program, who took 'ownership' of the initial production of the video. They contributed to the script and sourced their own youth network contacts to contribute to the video. CIC members have since used the video to engage 'other agencies about encouraging young people to look at a dairy program' and it has already yielded positive feedback:

> We have adults (from other agencies) saying – social workers going -– 'I want to work in dairy now'. And it was all because it was co-designed with young people, it was led by young people, we had a really good employer who wanted to work with us, and it gave us a really solid outcome. They came out with this video which is now leading onto a potential Ag pathways course that I've just got out of a meeting with, for getting six

> young people into a six-week experiential course with a local cheese maker and dairy operator. As a result of that on our action plan. – Shawn, Warrnambool–Moyne

Shawn noted that while the video was specific to local industries, it might have wider applicability across the agricultural industry, especially since it involved larger and smaller farmers and those who would usually be considered industry competitors.

From sharing stories to solving for structural challenges

The inclusion of young people on the Gold Coast CIC shows how a supportive CIC environment can shift young people's role beyond invited speakers. The Lead Partner staff member described it as a 'nurturing, uplifting space' that gives the young person 'purpose and value that he's a part of something and … respected by all of the members'. Similarly, the Warrnambool CIC's video project, led by young people, demonstrates how a clear ambition with active projects is effective in engaging young people in a way that benefits all CIC members.

Planning for young people's involvement

Establishing CIC readiness is key for young people's ongoing involvement. This requires specific planning for youth member involvement, collaborative projects that young people can be involved in, and time and effort.

Practical considerations include scheduling CIC meetings at times that fit around young members' work and study hours, with adequate transport available. Where young people are contributing outside their paid employment, they must be adequately compensated.

Enabling Organisation staff indicated that limited resourcing has hindered their ability to work with CICs to build readiness for youth membership and build young people's capacities to attend. For long-term sustainability, youth involvement must be formalised as part of the NYEB, and work to do so is under way, for instance through the Youth Employment Reference Group (see *Appendix 1*).

Practice implications

- Enable young people to become active members of CICs by first listening to their experience, ensuring CICs create supportive environments for them to contribute to decision-making and plan meetings to suit young people's schedules.

- Explore and identify contributions from diverse employers that sit outside a chairing role.

- For long-term sustainability, strengthen youth involvement and expand it beyond the CICs into all governance structures of the NYEB.

Systemic implications

A key principle of the BSL's systemic change methodology is to redistribute power.

> What we know from the systemic change methodology is that we should always be working towards redistributing power, devolving power to people as much as possible to drive things, because it's intrinsically motivating … The trick of that is to work out how to do the enabling function such that people have agency. But they're also resourced to do it in the most effective way. – Florence, EO

While young people are a key target of redistributing power, this work must also fully realise the potential of key stakeholders like employers and even public sector workers to influence change. To this end, 'effectively' resourcing effort that redistributes power through the NYEB has two dimensions:

- seeding change by mobilising young people's active participation in NYEB by resourcing young people to be CIC members; resourcing the Lead Partner support of young people; and adapting the change agenda to their contexts, constraints and imperatives

- securing the active participation of employer and government champions willing to advance a change agenda and sign up to a 'higher good'.

6 Findings: Place to population and policy impact

Converting amplification to policy impact

Headline finding

While amplifying local initiatives at the national level validates project work driven by the CICs, population level impact requires leveraging national level expertise, networks and investment.

A key mechanism for realising the NYEB's ambition for place to population impact is the amplification of local CIC practice up to national policy actors. These policy influencers sit on the NGGs and are situated either in federal government departments or in industry and advocacy groups that work closely with government. Investment in local efforts cannot achieve systems change without work at the national level (Fry 2022). The EO amplifies CICs' local voices at the national level to inform responses that address structural barriers in policy, governance, infrastructure and funding.

For CIC members, amplification from the local to the national helps validate CIC activity beyond their own region. In meetings the Advisory Board receives updates on CICs. For example, Lead Partners from the Gold Coast CIC and young people they work with have provided updates on their employer toolkit and work in the mental health area. The Lead Partner staff described feeling validated by AB members who recognised the importance of the work. They also valued the practical advice from NGG members who could alert them to similar national initiatives, thus avoiding 'reinventing the wheel'.

For AB members, input from the CICs provides a grounded understanding of structural problems and possible solutions to youth unemployment that they can refer to in their work outside the NYEB, reinforcing their personal investment in the AB.

> I learned a lot in that, even in that briefing about what's going on with young people in terms of mental health … Every time I go to meetings there's something that comes out of it that I store away and then I can use somewhere else to help either another organisation or help me understand another concept. – Jill, AB member

> When we see those examples, it has a big effect on everyone around the table to say, 'Right, we know that this place-based work and respect for young people and putting the right connections together locally, it can work'. And we've got to keep trying to work out how to do more of it and what else has to be available to those communities to make the work secure and sustainable. – Rita, AB member

Amplification for population and policy impact

As the local to national is facilitated by the EO there is a tendency to rely on developed CICs as most 'ready' to present their work to NGGs. Relying on successful examples from the same CIC, rather than drawing on the work of all the CICs, may limit two forms of amplification: 1) other CICs' exposure to build a place to population agenda and 2) the NGGs' opportunities to learn from and respond to local experience, drawing on their expertise and networks to address structural barriers.

This can mean that the NGG membership is not fully exploited in advancing the NYEB's place to population ambition:

> When we've had people come and present to the group about specific initiatives that are going on, I think probably in those discussions hopefully we've added some value in terms of advice and suggestions from the group. But specifics in terms of how have we influenced what's happening on the ground, I'm not sure. – Jill, AB member

Pursuing a systemic change agenda through collaborative initiatives requires members who can respond to problems and pursue goals with knowledge of what needs to happen and authority and capacity to action it (Thornton et al. 2018). To fully utilise AB members' expertise and networks in pursuit of systemic change requires a shift in how AB members see their role. This could be made concrete by reporting a balance of highlights as well as challenges, with the latter framed to draw AB members into a practical, problem-solving function:

> I think for the governance groups to be able to effect systemic change, they need to move from just awareness to how they're acting or designing. If people have a specific role in an active way, I think it just changes the way that they engage, rather than just being kind of, 'That's interesting to note'. – Cynthia, EO

Practice implications

- The EO must continue to build the capacity of all CIC members and strive to provide opportunities to all CICs to connect their work to broader policy contexts through the NGGs.

- Strengthening the local to national impact of the NYEB requires NGGs to have an active role working with all of the CICs. For example, the EO could create industry working groups consisting of CIC and NGG members that would allow AB members to provide feedback and assist in the design of CIC initiatives.

Systemic implications

- Both top-down and bottom-up flow of expertise and evidence between CICs and the NGGs are required to impact policy change at multiple levels. Processes and feedback loops that enable grounded insights and expertise from individuals, services and communities to inform key government decision-makers must be accessible and transparent to all CIC members and to all NGG members.

Connecting community and all levels of government for policy impact

Headline finding

Driving systemic solutions requires an EO working in the third space between community and government, enabling a coherent policy agenda that cuts across multiple levels of government.

A core assumption of the NYEB model is that NGGs act on timely evidence and practical experience to design systemic solutions that address the structural causes of youth unemployment. Using a bottom-up, top-down mechanism, the NYEB seeks to elevate local solutions to the policy agenda and apply them widely where appropriate. This section examines the role of the EO in driving this bidirectional change dynamic. Evaluation findings have demonstrated that systemic change needs actors beyond the NGGs to mobilise and take action.

Addressing systemic problems requires an EO working in the third space between community and government. This involves advocating for community, supporting local actors in policy and advocacy work, and working with government. The EO performs a distinct function, holding strong relationships with government and aligning them with community partners to achieve systems change.

> What government can't do is occupy the third space between community and government, and that's what the National Youth Employment Body work does. It speaks into community, leveraging and enabling the community-level actors to really co-design solutions fit for them, as well as speaking up to government and leveraging those government actors, so that there's a top-down bottom-up approach. – Florence, EO

Several CIC members stated that the weight of BSL's policy and advocacy influence, particularly with government, justifies their voluntary involvement in the CIC. Compared with public servants, NGOs like BSL have less direct access to decision-makers, yet they can provide at times a more critical and effective voice. However, government representatives involved in the NYEB often have constraints through their roles and responsibilities and limited authorising environment:

> With the CIC our focus is to be collaborative, to be innovative but then as soon as you step away from that, you're then focused on what it is that your higher-ups are telling you that you need to achieve and what it is that you are and aren't doing, or what it is that you need to focus on. So it would be nice to see the values or the intent of the CIC integrated into government ... We need people there with the authority to be able to advocate strongly up through their channels for that authority around decision-making. – Dana, state government

The authorising environment described here is hierarchical, with compliance possibly valued above collaboration. This is one factor that explains why approaches to tackle youth unemployment remain fragmented even when employment, education and skills departments are connected by name:

> I think one of the issues is a lack of join-up across government departments that have a finger in the youth employment pie. So, even though employment and education skills [have] joined up, there's still not a really effective strategy across those different parts of the department … it's still working in silos even though they're in the same department … I think the [NYEB's] systems thinking workshops and whatever comes out of that will be another method of trying to get that message into government. So, I think relatively successful, but there's still a way to go, but it's partly because of government structures. – Jill, AB member

This interviewee mentions the systemic design workshops that have been led by the EO to identify and design new solutions to long-running structural problems. For instance, new skilled pathways and training models have been a key output from consultations with industry, including transport and logistics and agriculture. However, support from an authorising environment is essential to shift the conditions that will enable population-wide impact:

> If we don't have (government) support, the fact that we've got these pathways that we have established and we have training models that we want to work with across other partners on the committee – it's pretty useless unless we get their support – Frederick, AB member

Participation in the CICs and NGGs of government representatives who hold some influence over policy is critical to the EO fostering an authorising environment.

> If you don't have people authorised to make change, you can end up having a talkfest which does not lead to outcomes. You have good talking, but in the end, you don't realise the ambition that you're actually trying to achieve. – Florence, EO

This is made more difficult by the continually changing roles and delegations of public sector staff. It is an ongoing challenge to secure consistent government representation at NYEB meetings.

Enabling place to policy impact

Shifting policy conditions and the siloed and fragmented structure of government agencies make addressing youth unemployment a complex task. Learning from the progress and ongoing challenges in working in this context, EO staff point to several enabling mechanisms that support the NYEB's change agenda and could help address entrenched barriers to employment:

- ongoing communication with government during times of staff change

- sharing learnings to influence government policy

- working to bring together local, state and national governments

- finding the entry point to change.

Ongoing communication with government during times of staff change

> We have to invest in getting people up to speed and really continuing to communicate to them about the ambition of the work and inviting them into making decisions that are going to assist. – Florence, EO

Sharing learnings to influence government policy

> We're not looking for funding, we are actually just looking to highlight what's working really well. We've got all these really invested employers. The opportunity for us is to influence, not trying to get funding. – Angelica, EO

Working to bring together local, state and national governments

Policy influence through the EO tends to focus on local and national government, with some CIC members reporting greater visibility of the NYEB and CICs at the national rather than state level. State government representation is uneven across the CICs. To create change and address structural barriers, all levels of government must be engaged, otherwise initiatives risk only adding to fragmented and isolated work (Wolff 2016). Sometimes responsibilities are far from clear, as interviewees commented:

> When we've called on our DESE partner, he's in a ping pong situation between state and federal as to where this problem fits. – Tessa, Lead Partner

> The systems that are creating the roadblocks might be state-based, or they might be federally based, or they may be just so entrenched into industry and education systems that you can't unpack them at a local level. So it doesn't mean we won't, but it means it just takes longer, and you need [to engage with] all those vested interests in order to do it. – Lisa, community organisation

However, ambition to join up services is not enough, especially if the mechanism to drive that is primarily through access to funding. It is just as important to establish an enduring policy mechanism that builds capacity for collaboration and joins the dots, without being driven by the promise of funding or the threat of its removal.

Finding the entry-point to change

Top-down policy levers require policy conditions that align with the NYEB's vision for radical reform. As the following AB member describes, state-based tactical policies and programs can be more effective in the absence of favourable national policy settings:

> If you think about VET, for example, the big market reform started in Victoria and then gradually spread and there was collaboration between Spring Street and Canberra and … that gave rise to an alignment.

Practice implications

- Increase state government representation in all CICs, targeting those staff who are capable of influencing state level policy change.

- Continue to seek out local and state interventions and pilots that can seed broader systemic policy reform.

Systemic implications

- The EO must adapt to change to maintain policy impact. With a changing policy environment, the EO must focus on quick program quick wins as an entry-point to broader systemic reform. Small-scale initiatives work to build momentum and to demonstrate the potential of systemic change work to policymakers who may not be pursuing a systemic change agenda.

- Building government and departmental champions at national and state levels when policy conditions may not be enabling. A key principle of the BSL's systemic change work is to 'nurture foundational relationships' (Mallett et al. forthcoming). Building and deepening key relationships, particularly at the federal policymaking level requires ongoing attention to sustain a change agenda despite recent membership changes in the NGGs.

- Lasting change requires strategic relationships with system level actors who sit outside the national authorising environment but who can influence government to steward change. This includes mobilising local and state government representatives to model the kind of interventions that can be authorised at scale by national policymakers.

7 Conclusion

This developmental evaluation of the NYEB includes key learnings relating to the place-based components (CICs), the Enabling Organisation and the national governance groups.

Practice and systemic implications for place-based components (CICs)

- CICs have progressed by adapting and implementing learnings from the interim evaluation, despite disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters.

- CIC development can be enabled by the CIC coordinator role in the Establish and Develop phases, accountability in action-based projects and participation in a broader systemic change agenda.

- CICs can successfully integrate into local, state and federal initiatives, avoid duplication and enhance existing place-based efforts.

- The expectation that employers take a leading (e.g. chairing) role may not be possible given contextual disruptions. The participation of 'committed' employer champions that hold a structural view of youth unemployment remains vital.

- Young people's participation in CICs can develop from sharing their experience and stories towards more formal and active contribution as CIC members.

Practice and systemic implications for the Enabling Organisation

- The EO has a distinct role, operating in the 'third space' between community and government. This involves advocating for community, supporting local actors in policy and advocacy work, and leveraging opportunities with government, to further the NYEB's policy agenda.

Practice and systemic implications for national governance groups

- Strengthening the local to national impact of the NYEB requires NGGs to have an active role working with all of the CICs.

- Both top-down and bottom-up flow of expertise and evidence between CICs and the NGGs are required to impact policy change at multiple levels.

This report contributes to the evidence base for complex 'place to population' initiatives.

Developmental insights about how the NYEB operates are currently being used to inform the outcomes evaluation and its measurement framework. The outcomes study will also need to broaden the scope of the NYEB's targeted impact by including government and stakeholders that sit outside the formal local and national components of the NYEB.

Appendices

Appendix 1: National governance group functions and progress

The **Advisory Board** (AB) provides key advice and strategic oversight to the NYEB. It includes representatives from industry, employment, business, education and training, and federal government. Members have met 15 times since the AB's inception. They have previously met on mental health and skills and training as focus areas. The AB has worked on the National Skills Trial Entry into Care Roles.

The **Community of Interest** (COI) brings together representatives from federal government departments relevant to youth employment to provide a forum to connect knowledge, policy and initiatives from government with NYEB local experiences and evidence of good practice in improving youth employment pathways. The COI is facilitated by the NYEB and coordinated by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, with a rotating membership of government representatives. The COI has met a total of 12 times. Previous meetings have focused on the Local Jobs Program, mental health and foundational skills.

The **National Employers Reference Group** (NERG) harnesses the expertise of employers who are also members or chairs of CICs, providing a platform to share learnings and cross-pollinate solutions. The NERG has met 5 times and provided regional insights on industry and community from an employer's perspective. The first meeting for 2022 gave an opportunity for employer champions from different locations to 'pitch their CIC', providing an overview of the group and their priority actions and projects. Work readiness was highlighted as key to young people's success in the workplace, together with opportunities to thoroughly explore the workplace to understand expectations and opportunities. NERG members also participated regularly in NYEB advocacy and engagement opportunities, featuring in videos and at local engagements with state and federal members of parliament.

The **Youth Employment Reference Group** (YERG) was formed as a result of the system design workshop in September 2021 and has since met 3 times. The YERG connects closely to the Transition to Work Community of Practice National Youth Alliance to share learnings around youth involvement in harnessing community effort in place and at a national level. YERG members have attended all 3 National Youth Alliance meetings since October 2021 and have engaged with National Youth Alliance members and coordinators through online meetings, presentations and panel events. The YERG has expressed an interest in embedding youth expertise in community-led decision-making and offering leadership opportunities earlier on in careers for young people. All YERG members have commitments in work, study, volunteering or caring.

Appendix 2: BSL's adaptive methodology

Figure 2 illustrates BSL's 'Adaptive ARC' in which the NYEB's *Ambition* intersects with the *Realities* of learnings gathered through evaluation, to influence system *Change*. This shows how feedback from the developmental evaluation stimulates program adaptation through the stages of the NYEB's design, collaboration, analysis and dissemination.

Figure 2 BSL adaptive methodology
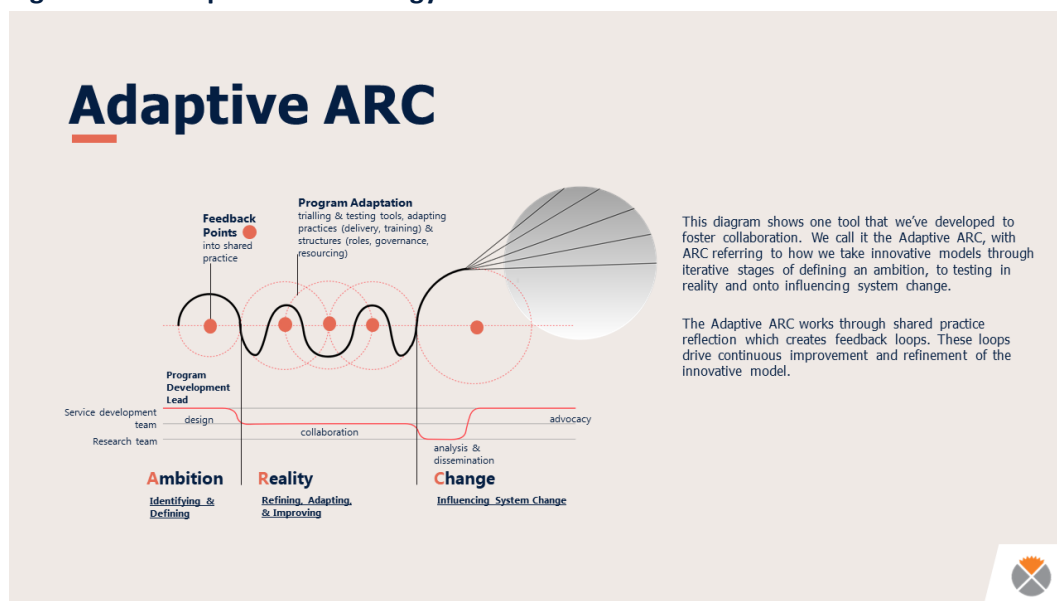
Appendix 3: Interview design and process

For each interview group (EO staff, NYEB Advisory Board members, CIC members and Lead Partners), construct tables were designed, informed by interim developmental findings (see Table 4 for example).

Table 4 Interview structure for CIC and LP members

Core concept	Construct	Interview questions
Background	Time on CIC	When did you join the CIC?
Background	Role/sector	What is your role and how does it relate to youth employment?
Baseline	Structural barriers	What do you think are the main causes of youth unemployment in your region?
Baseline	Action plan	How is your CIC progressing on the action plan? Barriers etc.
Baseline	Collaboration	Can you give me an example of a time when you worked with someone from a different sector to achieve CIC goals?

Core concept	Construct	Interview questions
Capacity building	Collaboration	Do you feel supported to engage collaboratively in the CIC?
Capacity building	Shared purpose	How has BSL or the Lead Partner built a sense of a shared mission in addressing youth unemployment?
Capacity building	Social capital	How have you been connected to people outside the CIC to help achieve CIC goals?
Capacity building	Agency and advocacy	How has the Lead Partner or BSL supported you in advocacy efforts?
Capacity building	Data	Have you been able to access resources such as data and evidence through BSL? E.g. labour market scans?
Capacity building	Capacity building desired	What capacity building or support do you and your CIC need to address youth unemployment?
Local to national	Understanding	What is your understanding of local to national in the NYEB?
Local to national	NGG attendance	Have you had an opportunity to attend a national governance group?
Local to national	NGG participation	If no, are you interested in attending or presenting? If yes, what did you present on? What did you get out of the experience?
Local to national	NGG resources	Have you had access to resources through the NGGs? E.g. funding, programs, expertise or people
Local to national	Policy influence achieved	In what ways has the CIC enabled access to government and policymakers for you and your organisation? For other local stakeholders?
Local to national	Policy influence desired	What role would you like your CIC to play in influencing policy?
Local to national	National to local goals	What do you think is important for your CIC to receive from the NGGs? E.g. influence, expertise, information on funding or programs
Local to national	Local to national goals	Are there any CIC activities you would like to share with the NGGs?

These construct tables informed initial interview questions, and interview schedules were revised in response to early interview data. Verbal consent was recorded prior to the commencement of semi-structured, one-on-one interviews conducted with all participants via Zoom or Teams. All interviews were transcribed by an external transcription service, and then anonymised in line with the project's ethical requirements.

The Enabling Organisation and NYEB AB interviews were conducted concurrently, and emerging findings were discussed among the research team, so that follow-up questions could be added iteratively to interview schedules as needed. The EO and NYEB AB interviews were conducted before the CIC member and Lead Partner interviews, so that findings could further inform the interview schedules for these later interviews.

Appendix 4: Interview participants

Enabling Organisation

The research team interviewed six Enabling Organisation staff. These included two Program Coordinators who work closely with CICs, to provide understandings of practice in the local community as this pertains to the implementation of the NYEB. Four Managers were interviewed who provided a range of insights into local practices working with Lead Partners and CICs, and wide-ranging knowledge of the NYEB, including its national components and systemic change policy strategy. Though BSL operates at the nexus of research, policy and practice, research team members were not interviewed due to their proximity to the evaluation.

National Governance Group members

To represent the NGGs, 7 members of the NYEB Advisory Board were interviewed. These members spanned a variety of sectors including not-for-profit, skills and training, community organisations and employment services. Participants also included a large employer and a government representative.

Lead Partners and CIC members

Among 117 active CIC members including Lead Partners, the research team selected 35 to invite for an interview. CIC member selection was informed by those who had contributed data pertinent to interim findings in stage one, across both the developmental and outcomes evaluations, to enable follow-up and measurement of development through time. A total of 27 interviews were conducted (see Table 5), with an even spread of participants across the Shoalhaven, Logan, YouthWorX NT, Gold Coast and Warrnambool–Moyne CICs. The response rate was 77% of those selected for interview. Among the 27 interviewees, 14 were staff of Lead Partners, also from the five CICs listed.

Table 5 Interviewees from CICs

Lead Partner	Employers and industry	Training/ education	Community organisation	Government	Total
14	4	1	3	5	27

Appendix 5: Timeline of CIC meetings since interim report

Figure 3

Appendix 6: CIC progress

The Adelaide North CIC has 11 active members, including 1 Lead Partner (LP) member. Members are still collaborating and progressing the CIC even though there have been no meetings in the last 6 months due to LP organisational pressures. They have established a Driver Mentor Program supported by NYEB to help young people get their drivers licence. The LP, through CIC connections, is leading a work experience pilot for young people at a local high school and the CIC has been working on pre-employment pathways for recruitment into call centre roles, web development and civil construction.

The YouthWorX NT CIC has 32 active members, including 4 LP members. They are developing a Skills Pathway focusing on employability skills, technical skills pertaining to computer literacy, administration and communication, and healthy workplaces to tailor to various in-demand local industries and roles. It aims to improve young people's work readiness through intensive pre-employment training in transferable skills. As transport is a major barrier to gaining employment in the Northern Territory, YouthWorX NT has applied for a grant to run a program to support young people to get their drivers licence.

The Gold Coast CIC has 23 active members, including 2 LP members and 2 youth members. They have successfully implemented a career-inspiration recruitment model

with employers in two recruitment drives. The model aims to encourage career exploration and prepare young people for employment through career information sessions, youth-led workplace tours and interview practice. A practice guide has been developed for future projects. Two other CIC-led projects are under way: a toolkit for employers to better address young employees' needs and capabilities, and the first pilot of a Mental Health First Aid Awareness Course with an employer.

The Logan CIC has 16 active members, including 4 LP members. The CIC is working closely with local council to support small businesses in providing information sessions to young people and collaborating on their recruitment efforts. They have also developed a program to create career-inspiration videos, led by young people, about hospitality, manufacturing and engineering, pending funding. As transport is a key focus for the CIC, a transport initiative has been designed.

The Shoalhaven CIC has 14 active members, including 2 LP members. Their transport advocacy work includes developing and trialling new bus routes and schedules that connect young people to common shift start times and advocating for local efforts to provide driver training for young people. They are also developing a Skills Pathway with a local registered training organisation and employer network for local digital and events roles, with a pre-employment engagement element focused on wellbeing and mental health recovery through music and performance.

The Warrnambool–Moyne CIC has 21 active members, including 4 LP members and 2 youth members. It has initiated youth-led video production for promoting pathways and roles into dairy farming and is scaling this to a second production. A blueprint for creating videos with youth involvement is under way for application in other industries and CICs nationally. The CIC is also developing an experiential learning program and Skills and Training pathways into aged care and agriculture sectors, with plans to pilot the program this year. The learning program will serve as an engagement strategy and encourage young people to consider local dairy industry roles. They have coordinated an online careers inspiration webinar with employers to promote diverse pathways to young people and there is ongoing collaboration with Neil Porter Legacy to improve local school-to-work transitions.

Appendix 7: Follow-up from the developmental evaluation interim report

Developmental Evaluation Interim Finding	Practice Implications	Adelaide North	YouthWorX NT	Gold Coast	Logan	Shoalhaven	Warrnambool
CIC implementation progress	Strengthen CIC connection to National Governance Groups (NGGs)	PS	NS	C	IP	C	IP
	Establish employers as CIC chairs where appropriate/ready	NS	IP	C	IP	NS	IP
	Prioritise agenda items in CIC meetings that connect CIC activity to NGGs and national influencing opportunities	PS	IP	IP	IP	IP	IP
	Increase young people's participation in CIC	NS	IP	C	IP	IP	C
Leveraging opportunities out of crisis	Support Lead Partner Organisations to identify and recruit local employers that can champion systemic reform beyond their own demand-side needs.	PS	C	C	C	IP	C
	Support Lead Partner Organisations to engage with employer CIC members on an individual basis to maintain their commitment and momentum	PS	C	C	C	C	C
	Clearly connect short-term action plan initiatives to federal and state policies that have a longer term view on aligning youth employment supply and demand issues.	IP	IP	IP	IP	IP	IP
	Involve young people in the CICs to speak about the factors that influence their decisions to pursue work within an industry, (e.g. job sustainability, job security and notions of meaningful work that contributes to their community).	NS	C	C	C	C	C
Converting trustful relationships into place based action	Co-design action plans that have clear indicators of change, and have both near and far-sighted streams of work that can form the basis for national advocacy efforts.	IP	IP	IP	IP	IP	IP
	Adjust CIC standing agenda items to enable time for the EO (through its practice knowledge and research expertise) to validate innovative practices	C	C	C	C	C	C
	EO (through its practice knowledge and research expertise) to create mechanisms to promote these through the NGGs.	IP	C	C	IP	IP	C
Enabling community led solutions	Sharpen understanding of the role of the EO as enabling the LA's autonomy to shape and implement solutions to youth unemployment in their community while also ensuring the CIC's efforts remain aligned to the NYEB's ambition for systemic change.	NS	IP	IP	IP	IP	IP
	Utilise decision making criteria and make space for reflection and input from all CIC members on strategic actions.	NS	IP	C	IP	C	IP

*Interim implications progress was informed by practice expertise and research data including CIC minutes, Action Plans and interviews.

Key: **C** – Completed; **IP** - In Progress; **PS** - Progress Stalled; **NS** - Not Started

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