



Australian
Human Rights
Commission

Building social cohesion in our communities

A SUMMARY OF THE ONLINE RESOURCE
FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT • 2015





About this resource

Building social cohesion in our communities is an interactive online resource to support local governments to build strong, socially cohesive communities.

It aims to help local governments to:

- Understand their communities and measure social cohesion
- Engage their communities and build partnerships between key stakeholders
- Prevent and respond to incidents of racism or conflict between groups
- Strategically plan for the needs of their communities now and into the future
- Monitor, evaluate and share outcomes.

The online resource is structured around **five elements for social cohesion**. It features case studies from local governments around Australia, tips for implementing good practice at the local level and links to further resources.

The online resource is available at www.acelg.org.au/socialcohesion

Why is social cohesion important for local government?

Social cohesion refers to positive social relationships – it is the bond or ‘glue’ that binds people.¹ A socially cohesive society is one which works towards the wellbeing of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalisation, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility.²

Compared to other countries, Australia has a remarkable degree of social cohesion given its diversity. However, maintaining this cohesion can be a challenge.

Rapid social change, particularly in growth areas, can result in disharmony between newly arrived groups and established communities. Social tensions in the wider community can also play out at the local level.

Local governments are at the centre of this ever-changing environment. They know and understand their communities better than any other level of government. They deliver economic, environmental and social outcomes across a range of areas which affect community cohesion. As such, they are well placed to implement initiatives to reap the benefits of stronger, more resilient and productive communities.



Get your local government ready



Good practice involves local government making a commitment to build social cohesion and then implementing the policies and processes to support this.

Key steps	What this means
Measure social cohesion	Establish a measure or benchmark such as the Scanlon-Monash Index
Commit to social cohesion as a priority	Use strategic planning to align policies, actions and performance indicators
Assess readiness and build capacity	Assess: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roles and responsibilities for social cohesion • Recruitment policies and processes • The existing capacity of elected members and staff
Embed social cohesion objectives in organisational policies and processes	Include areas such as policy, organisational culture, standards and protocols, planning, systems, communications and training

Measure social cohesion using the Scanlon-Monash Index

The Scanlon-Monash Index can be used either in its entirety or by using one or more domain (especially belonging, acceptance and rejection, legitimacy, and worth) to measure social cohesion.



Checklist to audit current policies and procedures

Use the checklist in the online resource to conduct an audit of policies and procedures to ensure they support social cohesion objectives.

Examples of good practice in local government

City of Sydney, NSW – Uses a Community Wellbeing Indicators Framework to measure progress towards social cohesion

City of Fremantle, Western Australia – Elected decision-makers initiated an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment target as part of an Indigenous Employment Policy and Indigenous Employment Action Plan

City of Greater Dandenong, Victoria – Established a Community Safety Advisory Committee to improve safety in public spaces





Engage the community to understand the issues

Local governments need to understand their communities and where there is potential for tensions to arise between different groups.

Key steps	What this means
Know the community	Understand the characteristics of the people who live and work in the area and if and how this might change over time
Engage the community	Identify existing or potential areas for development and build on current strengths
Be representative and inclusive	Ensure all voices are heard
Identify the issues	Determine whether there are, or whether there is potential for, tensions which could undermine social cohesion

Templates to assess and understand the community

Use the templates in the online resource to:

- Map your community and assess its demographic diversity. This template can be used internally or as part of discussions with the community.
- Uncover potential issues which may cause conflict now or in the future. This template can be used in focus groups, included in a manual or used in a phone or online survey.



Examples of good practice in local government

City of Greater Geraldton, Western Australia – Engaged diverse and remote communities to ensure inclusion and build social cohesion as part of a deliberative democracy process

Logan City Council, Queensland – Worked in partnership with Queensland Rugby Union to keep young people at school and use sport to build meaningful and more cohesive relationships between Pacific Islander communities and other cultural groups

City of Charles Sturt, South Australia – Has a Cultural Diversity Policy and a website with customised tools which can be used to undertake cultural and demographic mapping of the region's diversity

Canterbury City Council, NSW – Has an Advocacy in Community Services Policy to ensure that vulnerable people within the community have access to information about Council services and opportunities





Build long term partnerships



Building social cohesion requires strong partnerships with business, community groups, the police, other local agencies and local governments.

Key steps	What this means
Identify potential partners across a range of sectors	Understand which partners could help build social cohesion now and in the future
Engage partners	Develop a strategy for making initial contact then building relationships
Work with partners to identify issues, show leadership and take action	Create collaborative working relationships to respond to issues of concern to the community
Ensure partnerships exist for the long term	Keep track of changes in personnel and nurture relationships formally and informally over time

Establishing long term partnerships

Local government experience shows:

- Establishing and maintaining effective partnerships requires a long term commitment
- Keep track of changes in personnel in stakeholder agencies – partnerships thrive on person-to-person contact
- Strong partnerships also need organisational commitment to ensure longevity.



Examples of good practice in local government

Rural City of Murray Bridge, South Australia – Participates in the Murraylands Multicultural Migration and Settlement Committee which provides interagency support for new arrivals

Hindmarsh Shire, Victoria – Worked with a local employer to increase access to jobs for the Karen community

City of Greater Bendigo, Victoria – Supported establishment of the Bendigo Interfaith Council to increase acceptance of different religions given the changing profile of the community





Take place-based, targeted action

Actions to build social cohesion need a local focus and should meet the specific needs of the community.

Key steps	What this means
Build the capacity of the community	Empower the community to participate in planning and implementing activities
Be prepared	Work with partners to develop a plan which can be quickly activated if necessary to respond to a situation
Be targeted	Learn from others but tailor programs to meet specific needs
Engage young people	Enable young people to feel connected to their community and provide safe spaces for them to interact
Support bystander action	Develop or use existing programs to support bystanders to safely and effectively respond to racism
Develop media and communications	Use multiple media and different types of targeted messaging to build social cohesion

Resources to support bystander action against racism

- **Australian Human Rights Commission:** Adapt the *Tips for Bystanders* to use with your community. See: <https://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au/what-can-you-do/speakup>
- **VicHealth:** *Choosing to act: Bystander action to prevent race-based discrimination and support cultural diversity in the Victorian community.* See: www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/search/bystander-discrimination
- **Queensland Anti-Discrimination Commission:** *A Bystander Guide.* See: www.youtube.com/watch?v=H2Y2JyeSfll



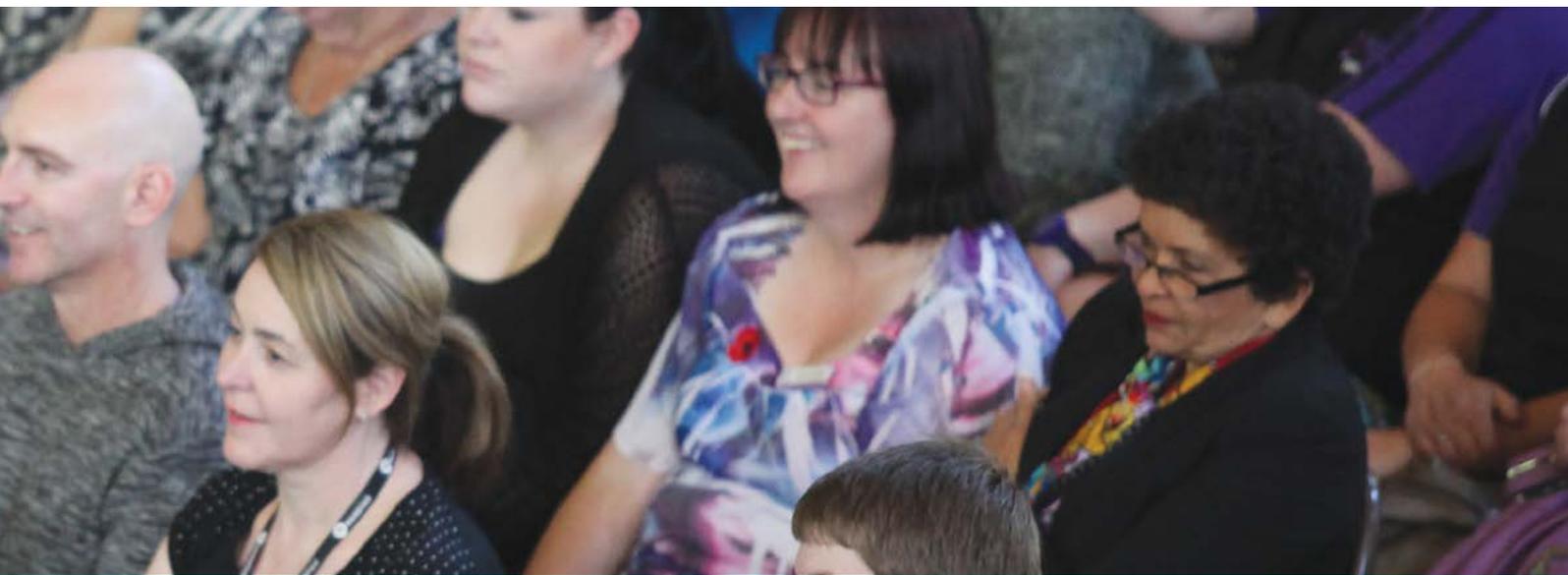
Examples of good practice in local government

Parramatta City Council, NSW – Has a dedicated Community Capacity Building Team

Shire of Katanning, Western Australia – Has targeted programs aimed at engaging young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

City of Darebin, Victoria – Launched a Say No to Racism training package with a manual and DVD for the community to address racism via bystander action





Evaluate and share outcomes

Local governments should evaluate their social cohesion efforts to ensure resources are allocated efficiently and effectively.

Key steps	What this means
Develop an evaluation framework	Work with the community to identify how to measure the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of actions
Collect evaluation data	Consider what data will be appropriate to support the evaluation objectives
Review the outcomes achieved	Draw conclusions about whether, and how, social cohesion was improved in your area as a result of your actions
Share experiences	Help others learn from your experiences in terms of the process and the outcomes

Collecting evaluation data

Consider what sources can provide data, including:

- Community surveys (about attitudes towards different cultures, experiences of racism)
- Audits of policies and procedures
- Focus groups with specific communities or organisations
- Key informant interviews with community leaders.



Examples of good practice in local government

City of Stirling, Western Australia – Evaluated its social cohesion programs to identify success factors for future projects

Brimbank City Council, Victoria – Obtained formal feedback from participants in its program to encourage participation in civic and community life by people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities

VicHealth's Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity (LEAD) program – Identified recommendations for programs to build social cohesion in diverse communities



The ***Building social cohesion in our communities*** online resource was developed by the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government for the Australian Human Rights Commission under the National Anti-Racism Strategy.

The online resource is available at www.ancelg.org.au/socialcohesion

ACELG is creating a community of practice around social cohesion and would welcome any local government case studies.

Please submit them at: social.cohesion@ancelg.org.au



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Endnotes

1 Cloete, P. & Kotze, F. (2009). *Concept paper on social cohesion/inclusion in local integrated development plans*. Department of Social Development, Republic of South Africa. Available at: www.presidentaward.imprivedev.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Social-Cohesion-Final-Draftcorrect-IDP-DSD.pdf

2 OECD (2011). *Perspectives on Global Development 2012: Social Cohesion in a Shifting World: Executive Summary*. Available at: www.oecd.org/site/devpgd2012/49067839.pdf