

Evaluation of the Neighbourhood Centres initiative

The Neighbourhood Centre evaluation project

The Queensland Government is undertaking an independent evaluation of the Neighbourhood Centres initiative as part of the 2022-23 budget outcomes to increase funding to Neighbourhood Centres.

The Neighbourhood Centre initiative enables a diverse network of community-led and place-based organisations to build vibrant, inclusive, and cohesive communities. Neighbourhood Centres funded under the initiative integrate knowledge, investment, and action to build community inclusion and cohesion, and advocate for locally led responses to community issues. As trusted public spaces, Neighbourhood Centres provide inclusive and respectful places for people to connect, belong, participate and be supported.

In March 2024, the Queensland Government commissioned the Queensland Government Statistician's Office (QGSO) to undertake this work.

The evaluation will be completed by April 2027 and provide the government with information needed to better understand the initiative and its impact on Queensland communities.

About QGSO

QGSO provides an evidence base for government policy and decision-making through surveys, evaluation and statistical analysis. The office collects and protects official statistics under the *Statistical Returns Act 1896*. This legislation strengthens the ability to collect and protect confidential information.

QGSO developed and maintains the Queensland Government Program Evaluation Guidelines. The evaluation team provides advice on evaluation and conducts program evaluation and performance measurement projects. QGSO also conducts multiple large-scale surveys on behalf of the Queensland Government every year.

Objectives and scope of the Neighbourhood Centres evaluation

The evaluation objectives are to:

- describe the role of Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland following the 2022-23 funding uplift
- describe the role of the Queensland Government in supporting Neighbourhood Centres (both in terms of operating and facility support), with consideration given to the role of other levels of government and the non-government sector
- assess the effectiveness of the Queensland Government investment in the Neighbourhood Centres initiative in terms of maximising outcomes and impacts.

The evaluation will focus on activities funded under the Neighbourhood Centres initiative from 2022-23 onwards. This includes Neighbourhood Centres service delivery and infrastructure, Community Connect and Neighbourhood Centres Queensland. The evaluation will reflect on the initiative as a whole. It will not consider the performance or contract compliance of any individual centre.

The Neighbourhood Centre initiative is funded through a recurrent government allocation, including the funding increase committed in 2022-23. It is not the intent of this evaluation to consider the ongoing nature of this funding or current funding levels. The Queensland Government remains committed to appropriately funding the Neighbourhood Centre initiative.



Program logic and performance measurement framework

To understand Neighbourhood Centres, QGSO has reviewed documents about the initiative, as well as Australian and international research. This informed a conceptual program logic model, which visualises how the Neighbourhood Centres initiative achieves outcomes.

The program logic model identifies the inputs and key activities of Neighbourhood Centres, linking them to expected short term outcomes and long-term impacts. The pathways between inputs and outcomes are likely to be varied, non-linear, dynamic and challenging to measure.

The evaluation has developed performance measurement framework to address the evaluation questions. This framework creates indicators for outcomes and impacts identified in the program logic model.

Evaluation design and methods

The evaluation will apply program theory, realist evaluation and contribution analysis approaches where possible. It will combine primary and secondary quantitative and qualitative research methods. The evaluation team will engage with a wide range of stakeholder groups over the course of the evaluation to enhance its validity, credibility, and usefulness.

QGSO works with the Queensland Government's Community Services Commissioning area, which manages the Neighbourhood Centre initiative, to manage the project and coordinate stakeholder engagement. The team will aim to minimise the burden on stakeholders and minimise duplication of effort. Where possible, information that others have already collected will be analysed. This includes funding information and performance reporting that Neighbourhood Centres provide to the department in accordance with contractual requirements.

Where there are information gaps, new information will be collected. This will be through surveys, interviews and consultations with community members, Neighbourhood Centres operators and participants, and other key stakeholders.

The evaluation will bring together themes from across communities and the broader community services system. It will illustrate themes with case studies where possible.

Evaluation principles

A range of principles underpin the Neighbourhood Centres evaluation including respect for the rights, privacy, dignity, and entitlements of those involved in the evaluation. This includes ensuring cultural sensitivity, obtaining informed consent for participating in our research, and maintaining data confidentiality.

Evaluation phases

The evaluation will take place in two phases as described below.

1. Early implementation data collection (November 2024 to November 2025)
 - This will focus on the role and function of Neighbourhood Centres following the funding uplift.
 - It will consider the funding for operations, infrastructure, and other non-financial support provided by the Queensland Government, other levels of government, and non-government organisations.
2. Effectiveness evaluation (December 2025 to April 2027)
 - This will focus on the effectiveness of the initiative in terms of outcomes and impacts.
 - It will build on the early implementation data collected.
 - It will examine how the initiative interacts with other funding and services to bring about outcomes.



Data collection in 2025

A range of surveys to support the evaluation are planned for 2025. More detailed information will be provided to Neighbourhood Centres before these commence.

Community surveys (February / March 2025)

This survey will take place in the local area of Neighbourhood Centres to explore the community value of the Neighbourhood Centres initiative. A random selection of residents will be invited to complete the survey.

Surveys of Neighbourhood Centres (proposed for March / April 2025)

This survey will invite all Neighbourhood Centres staff and board members to reflect on the role of their centres in the community.

Surveys of people who participate (including volunteers) at a Neighbourhood Centre (proposed for March / April 2025)

This survey will seek to understand who participates and benefits from Neighbourhood Centres. This survey is subject to resource availability and may take place in the later phase of the evaluation process.

How to be involved

Stakeholders are encouraged to complete surveys or participate in interviews when invited to do so. This information will be kept strictly confidential. All data will be combined into themes and will not identify any individual respondent.

Stakeholders can also contribute by promoting community and participant surveys using the content provided by the evaluation team.

Further information

Neighbourhood Centres initiative evaluation

For more information about the Neighbourhood Centres evaluation visit:

<https://www.qgso.qld.gov.au/evaluations/neighbourhood-centres>

Or email: NCEval@treasury.qld.gov.au

Neighbourhood Centres initiative

For more information about the Neighbourhood Centres initiative please visit

<https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/service-industries-professionals/service-industries/community-services/neighbourhood-centres-providers>

Or email: NCCcommittee@chde.qld.gov.au

Queensland Government Statistician's Office

For more information about QGSO, please visit <https://www.qgso.qld.gov.au/about-qgso/overview-queensland-government-statisticians-office>

For more information about the Queensland Government Program Evaluation Guidelines please visit <https://www.treasury.qld.gov.au/queenslands-economy/evaluating-government-programs/>