

# Addressing the 'Wicked' Problems Beyond the Silos: Examining the Relationship Between Joined-Up Integration and Community Localism

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## Abstract<sup>1</sup>

Many of us who work in the field of community development, community building, community planning and community engagement have often expressed frustration at trying to navigate governmental departmentalism, or silos. As workers, sometimes employed by government ourselves, we have found working with multiple levels of bureaucracy challenging — especially in terms of understanding different hierarchical reporting structures, funding regimes and accountability requirements, not to mention the confusion added with the addition of multiple levels of government. While streamlining government has been addressed through such measures as creation of mega departments and integrated IT systems, what happens when government sets out to work outside departmentalism by working directly with community — or, in the jargon of the day, to undertake 'joined-up' government or integrated governance through a community place-based approach?

This paper explores the relationship, within a democratic system, between joined-up government responses to local social, economic and environmental issues and community localism. The specific case study examined is the Community Building Initiative in Victoria, Australia, a Victorian Government initiative, which explicitly linked integrated governance and community building. Resulting governmental shifts in language, practice and systems are examined. These findings are derived from a limited quantitative survey of government employees involved in the initiative and follow-up qualitative interviews, with supplemental international fieldwork in the United Kingdom and the United States. Key areas explored in the paper include: notions of causality, particularly around increased expectations of community engagement; policy discourse analysis and the centrality of definitions of 'process' and 'working together'; bureaucratic barriers, particularly around differing funding rounds and requirements and a culture of competing agendas; and partially met community expectations of increased and timely government response to articulated need. Of note is that many of those involved in the initiative already demonstrated both language and practice shifts prior to their involvement. Key systemic shifts

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<sup>1</sup> Given the ongoing status of the PhD research, an expanded abstract is supplied rather than a full paper for publication.

included new accountability arrangements and some pooled funding, although several respondents questioned the sustainability of these shifts.

As we move toward the increasing acknowledgment of the role of multiple actors within post-bureaucratic, twenty-first century governance (e.g. Pierre 2000; Kooiman 2003), our ability to understand and document cases becomes vital (e.g. Hajer and Wagenaar 2003). The paper concludes with suggested policy responses to community engagement within the context of joined-up government, particularly the importance of governmental sustainability and initiative mainstreaming. Only in this way can the community mobilisation and effort required of community building be effective.

### **Keywords**

Community building, integrated governance, joined-up

### **References**

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