# Community strengths & needs analysis

Advice for schools as community hubs (SaCH)

#### In a nutshell

SaCH vary because they are shaped by different communities. Detailed insights into local community contexts, strengths, needs and priorities should inform SaCH objectives.

Place-based approaches that engage community members and other stakeholders in planning facilities, activities, programs, and services are critical because one size does not fit all.

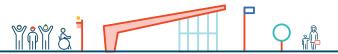


#### **Engage early**

If you decide (D) on the plan for your SaCH behind closed doors with a few colleagues, announce (A) your plan to the community, and defend (D) it against any complaint, then you may spend so much time responding to opponents that implementation will be delayed, forcing you to abandon (A) the plan. Don't DADA!

Instead, **involve the community early** in planning your SaCH, as this:

- is democratic and inclusive the community should have a say in their future and how public funds are spent
- enables clearer vision, more informed decisions and targeted actions (refer to the 'Vision and intentionality' advice sheet in this series)
- provides evidence of community need and support, which is vital for funding applications or partnership proposals
- ensures facilities, activities, programs and services are relevant to the community, increasing use and participation.







Based at The University of Melbourne, Building Connections: Schools as Community Hubs is an Australian Research Council Linkage project that has advanced understanding of how to design, implement and sustain SaCH. Produced by the research team, this advice sheet is part of How to Hub Australia, a suite of resources for policymakers, school leaders, and designers.











#### What to explore

Focusing on community needs or deficits - such as low literacy, poor health, social isolation, or inadequate facilities – can be overwhelming and demoralising, making it hard to address these issues, or even to know where to begin.

Instead, explore community **strengths** as foundations for improvement. Ask local residents what services, activities, and facilities they value, what's working well, and what they would like to improve or add.

In addition, find out which members of the community might be able to assist with development or delivery of your SaCH and invite them to collaborate.

## Think beyond your school

What other infrastructure and organisations exist in your local area? How could you collaborate to enhance education, health,

and social connection? (Refer to the 'Urban planning and design' and 'Partnerships and collaborations' advice sheets.)

## How to gather information and opinions

You could:

- make an inventory or map of existing services or facilities
- measure community use of existing services or facilities
- administer surveys by post / door knocking / street stall / online
- conduct focus groups with invited community representatives
- facilitate public meetings and workshops.

Community priorities and opportunities can shift quickly, so maintain informal contact with community members beyond formal consultations to stay informed.



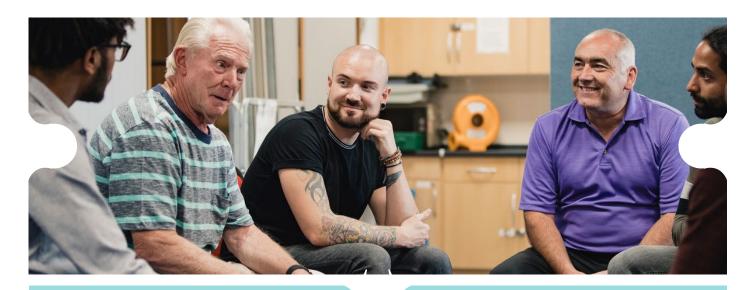




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### Ensure your consultation and collaboration are:

- **timely** start early to allow the community time to consider and provide feedback before any decisions are made
- **inclusive** make it widely accessible (e.g., provide childminding so parents can participate) and use skilled facilitators to encourage input and ensure everyone is heard
- **representative** invite a cross-section of the community with proportional representation of all end-user and stakeholder groups, or use a random sample
- **community-focused** ask people to consider the needs of others, as well as their own
- **interactive and deliberative** avoid 'yes/no' questions; create space for lateral thinking, free expression, and discussion, so people can shape the process as well as their answers
- **flexible** vary the mode of consultation to elicit rich responses from a wide range of people
- **cost-effective** scale the consultation in proportion to the project and find efficient means of communication and feedback
- **productive and meaningful** limit discussion time and create an action plan with majority approval if consensus is not possible
- **transparent** share the results with all participants and stakeholders, using impartial and engaging language, and remain open to feedback and follow-up
- **iterative** seek feedback during project or program implementation to ensure ongoing relevancy and justify continued funding.



#### Want to learn more?

- Get to know your hub families by Community Hubs Australia:
- Pour a Foundation of Knowledge, Chapter 3 in 'Building A Full-Service School'
- Brokering School-community Partnerships: Cross-sector Advocacy and Hard Work by Lynden Lauer, Shirley Watters, Kari Morris and Sandra Griffin in <u>Schools as Community Hubs: Building 'more than a school' for community benefit</u> (2023)