

Policy alignments

Advice for schools as community hubs (SaCH)

In a nutshell

SaCH inhabit complex policy environments that cross jurisdictions and funding agencies. Seek early insights into stakeholder policies to guide your hub's development and monitor policy updates that may impact your resourcing and operations. Through regular, meaningful **engagement with policymakers**, you can advocate for policy change and foster ongoing support for your SaCH.

What is policy?

Policies are values-based guidelines for the decisions and actions of a government or organisation. A policy document usually states an objective and defines a procedure/s to achieve matching outcomes.

Why does it matter?

Government policy is the foundation for law.

Governments create public policies to address issues that they, lobbyists, and/or voters prioritise. Policy guides the writing of any bill presented to the Australian Parliament. If passed, a bill becomes an Act of Parliament (i.e., law) that is administered by government departments or local councils. To ensure that

your SaCH meets all **legal responsibilities**, seek advice from these administrators as you become 'more than a school'.

Policy is also the basis for SaCH funding.

Policy alignment (i.e., shared objectives, processes, and intended outcomes) with governments or other organisations will help your SaCH secure grants, investment, or partnerships.

Clear organisational policy is essential for good governance of your SaCH – refer to the '[Leadership and governance](#)' advice sheet in this series.

Photo: Hymba Yumba Independent School, Queensland



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.



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Building
Connections
Schools as Community Hubs

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Brace for policy collisions

SaCH exist at the **intersection of portfolios** including urban planning, infrastructure, education, health and community development, so policy can impact SaCH from many angles.

Interested policymakers may include local, state and federal governments, and private sector partners and stakeholders.

Some of these intersecting policies can influence the initial design and development of your SaCH while others shape day-to-day operations.

Expect imperfection

It's nice to imagine that policies are always thoroughly researched and logical, but because humans develop them, policies are never perfect and can be messy, confusing, abstract, absurd, or 'mix, meld, grate and contradict' (Stephen J. Ball, UK policy scholar).

Some policies are enacted top-down, others are developed collaboratively from the ground up. Policies can fall stagnant, evolve gradually or change suddenly.

Seek guides and make friends

It's challenging to engage with multiple agendas, determine which policies your SaCH must follow, and stay alert to policy updates. You could spend days on online research and still be unsure that you are implementing all relevant policies correctly.

If you **build relationships** with the policymakers, then policy becomes much more tangible, navigable, and helpful. You'll quickly learn which policies are prioritised, which are adhered to, and which are dormant or due for change.

Identify the key people in relevant organisations and request a briefing or conversation over coffee to explore policies related to your SaCH. The local council is a good place to start. Other potential SaCH partners – e.g., community health service providers – should also be able to explain which policies influence their work.

Begin informally, develop understanding and trust through several conversations, then explore a partnership with common goals. If you find at least one potential partner, you could set up a working group to develop the **policy framework** for your SaCH.

Photo: Marist College, Bendigo by Y2 Architecture





Respect the planning process

To build a long-term, productive partnership with your local council, take an interest in their strategic plans and planning processes. Councils generally follow a four-year planning cycle, as well as producing decadal strategic plans. They also have emergency management plans, which are becoming more important with the increasing frequency of natural disasters.

It's helpful to understand where the council is in their planning cycle and how this could affect the development of your SaCH.



Case study: Working with Children

Working with Children Checks (WWCCs) exemplify how policies can have multiple tiers. In addition to the National Standards for WWCCs, each state's education department has a policy for implementing the standards. Furthermore, each school will have its own policy for administering WWCCs.

Photo: Rebecca Colless

Case study: NSW policy

The NSW Department of Education encourages the community to use school facilities for appropriate purposes when they are not required by the school or the department. This is backed-up with a suite of policies and guidelines, to inform schools operations.

Source: [Using School Facilities](#)

Photo: CathWest Innovation College salon (open to the public), NSW.



Want to learn more?

- *Policy for Schools as Community Hubs: Insights into a Fragmented Environment* by Robert Polglase, Ian McShane and Benjamin Cleveland in [Schools as Community Hubs: Building 'more than a school' for community benefit](#) (2023)