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Tuesday January 24th, 2012

Welcome to Excellence in Brief



Welcome to ACELG 2012. We're planning another very busy year of research, projects, education and training programs and other events, and look forward once again to working with many of our colleagues in local government and related organisations.

2011 was highly productive. By the end of the year around 40 major projects or reports had been completed or were well under way and will be finished in early 2012. More information on a number of those projects is provided later in this newsletter. Highlights included the annual workforce Development Forum, completion of a draft national Local Government Workforce Strategy and practice note on Long Term Financial Planning, the inaugural ACELG-ANZSOG Excellence in Local Government Leadership program, launch of the Graduate Certificate in Local Government Leadership in NSW and the Northern Territory, and the national Researchers Forum held in December.

2012 will see the compilation and publication of a series of national minimum data sets on various aspects of local government, the launch of the National Assessment Framework for asset and financial management, another series of research projects, ongoing development of IKEN (Information and Knowledge Exchange Network), the second Excellence in Local Government Leadership program, further expansion of the Advancing Leadership and Learning in Local Government initiatives, completion of a draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Employment in Local Government strategy, and much more.

Please share some of your time, energy and experience with us.

Graham Sansom
Director

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2011 Researchers Forum



Over 100 local government researchers from Australia and New Zealand participated in ACELG's second Research Forum, held at the University of Technology, Sydney, on 14 and 15 December.

The Forum's theme was 'Local Governance in Transition' and featured papers from universities, Councils, State Government departments, research consultants and PhD students.

The papers broadly covered new approaches to local governance and community engagement, governance challenges for rural, remote and indigenous councils, structural reform and financing options, workforce challenges in the context of demographic change, and responses to making the physical environment more sustainable.

Professor Attila Brungs, UTS Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President (Research) said: "Research is a priority to support evidence-based policy formulation, promote informed debate on key policy issues. It enables local government to play a constructive role in informing and addressing national agendas as the Australian federation evolves. Prior to ACELG local government had been poorly resourced to do this."

ACELG Director Professor Graham Sansom added: "We wanted to bring researchers and practitioners together so that local government focused research is a 'solid value' proposition for the sector – councils, associations and other organisations – and is relevant to places, communities and local agendas."



UTS Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) Professor Attila Brungs giving the opening address and welcome to country.



Professor Mark Evans presenting at a session.

One of the highlights of the Forum was a (light-hearted) debate on whether 'politics' or 'research' was more influential in shaping local government policy. The debate Chair, Erica Bell put the proposition that: "Researchers are from Venus, local government is from Mars: Politics, not evidence, shapes policy". John Martin and Greg Hoffman argued for the affirmative, and Melissa Gibbs and Tim Robinson presented the counter view. Of course both positions are inextricably linked but the debate highlighted key 'realities' that can arise when shaping and implementing local government policy.

Presentations, papers and other resources (including audio from the debate) will be available on the ACELG website in early February. The Forum program can be viewed [here](#).

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Future Focus on Local Government Regions

The Northern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (NSROC) has collaborated with ACELG on a study comparing the structures, operations and activities of various Regional Organisations of Councils (ROCs) in New South Wales and similar groups in Western Australia. The report outlines the variety of ROCs (or council alliances) in the two States and suggests some future directions, including the greater use of ROCs by State and Federal Governments as an important channel for regional



funding and consultation and as a mechanism to enhance local government performance.

The report is timely, especially for NSW councils, as the NSW Government is asking councils to explore greater usage of ROCs. Currently these organisations advocate for councils across regions and run shared services and regional projects on councils' behalf. Carolynne James, NSROC Executive Director, said: "It is important to understand what the 17 ROCs do across NSW, how they operate, and the value they can provide to councils, to communities, and to regions."

The analysis is important for understanding the function of ROCs and their relationships between local councils and different levels of government. ROCs have a varied impact around Australia; some ROCs have led to major reforms including council consolidation, while in other circumstances they have enhanced their member councils' capacity and performance.

NSROC and ACELG jointly funded the project which was undertaken by Gooding Davies Consultancy Pty Ltd. The report includes recommendations to explore appropriate legal and business structures for ROCs that allow for more efficient business operations, and how ROCs could provide a greater regional consultation function. Download the report on the [ACELG website](#) or from NSROC's website: www.nsroc.com.au.

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Community Engagement Research

The Research and Policy Foresight program has completed significant work over the past few months on community engagement and community governance themes, including:

- *Community Engagement and Local Government in Australia;*
- *Community Engagement Resources for Local Government: An Annotated Bibliography;*
- *The UK Transition Network and Community Governance; and*
- *Local Government and Community Governance: Building on What Works*



ACELG staff held a consultation in November to discuss research findings with local government practitioners and look at the implications for practice. The event was hosted by the City of Melbourne and included participants from councils and the local government organisations, MAV, VLGA and LGAT. The final reports will be available on the ACELG website.

Follow this [link](#) to view the papers listed above, plus news and other key research and policy documents produced in 2011.

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Learning in Local Government



Through its 'Learning in Local Government' project, ACELG seeks to make further education and learning in local government more accessible nationally, as well as and strategically relevant in view of contemporary challenges and themes faced by the sector. Recent developments include:

- The LGMA Management Challenge will now be a subject in the Graduate Certificate in Local Government Leadership, a university postgraduate program developed by ACELG and the Centre for Local Government at the University of Technology, Sydney. This means Challenge participants can now have the option of gaining entry to post-graduate study. View the news items [here](#).
- ACELG leadership subjects have been adapted into Edith Cowan University's Graduate Certificate in Leadership program, and the UTS Graduate Certificate is being run through Charles Darwin University in the Northern Territory with NT government support (more information [here](#)). ACELG Partner, UTS -CLG ran a Leadership Skills course in Alice Springs in December, and 'New Perspectives in Local Government Leadership' is scheduled for Perth early next year. Programs in Tasmania and South Australia are planned for 2012.
- An [eLearning Portal](#) is now available via ACELG's IKEN site. It provides an online platform for the exchange of ideas, experiences and resources around eLearning in local government across Australia. The site features:
 - Listings of existing eLearning programs and initiatives in local government across Australia and internationally
 - Web-based solutions and technologies for eLearning including tools, software, applications, services, devices and websites
- A summary document 'eLearning in Local Government' is available [here](#).
- A review of councillor training is underway that explores the scope of available programs for elected representatives each State and Territory. Research and interviews have been undertaken with local government associations, RTOs, educational institutions, professional associations, and government agencies, and the findings will be released shortly.

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Workforce Strategy

ACELG partner, LGMA (National) will soon release a National Workforce Strategy following comment and feedback from the sector. The implementation of priority projects from this work will then be determined at the 2012 Workforce Development Forum to be held in April. Other news from this area of ACELG's work includes:

- The development of a 'Managing Local Government's Mature Talent' strategy (plus report), planned for the first quarter of 2012; and
- The progression of demonstration projects related to the Indigenous Employment in Local Government strategy (more information [here](#)).

For further information about these initiatives contact [Angela Zivkovic](#), Project Manager - Local Government Practice Unit, LGMA National.

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Rural-Remote and Indigenous Councils

Findings from a project undertaken for the Rural-Remote and Indigenous Local Government program will soon be released. Called 'Roles and



expectations of rural-remote and indigenous councils', the research is part of an overall strategy to identify key steps in building the capacity of small rural-remote and Indigenous councils across Australia – and especially in the north – to deliver adequate and appropriate local government services to their communities.

The research reviews the revenue and expenditure patterns of 70 remote-rural and indigenous councils across Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland. It also examines the diversity in roles, functions and capacity across the group of councils, along with differences in functional priorities of individual councils which reflect geography, demography and economic circumstances. More about the Rural-Remote and Indigenous Local Government program can be found [here](#).

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Long Term Financial Planning

ACELG partner, the Institute of Public Works Engineering Australia (IPWEA) has now completed preparation of a practice note on Long Term Financial Planning. This project was funded by the federal government through the Local Government Reform Fund (LGRF). Several inquiries into local government have highlighted the need for improved financial planning as an essential step towards ensuring that councils remain sustainable and capable of delivering adequate local services. At the same time, most state governments now require some form of medium-long term financial plan. The practice note provides a generic framework for meeting this challenge. It has already been road-tested as part of the LGRF rollout in NSW.

For further information contact [Leon Patterson](#), Program Coordinator at IPWEA.

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IPWEA Launches New Communities of Practice



ACELG partner, the Institute of Public Works Engineering Australia (IPWEA) has launched a new 'Communities of Practice' website. The site enables professional networking across a range of areas including Asset Management, Fleet Management, Climate Change, Parks Management, and Road Safety. Each theme has its own 'Community of Practice' made up of people with an interest in that topic, contacts, a discussion forum, library, and events section.

Another feature of the site is 'Ask Your Mates Open Forum' where more general questions might be asked related to IPWEA's areas of concern.

To view the new site or more information about it, visit <http://www.ipwea.org.au>.

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Other News

- Local Government Briefing – with Dominic Campbell: Over 60 senior research and Council staff visited ACELG at UTS to hear Dominic Campbell (UK) discuss local government innovation and how emerging technologies are creating better places. A presentation and audio file is available from [here](#).
- 2012 National Awards for Local Government: The National Awards for Local Government recognise, reward and promote the innovative work of local governments across Australia. The Awards are run by the Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government. View [this link](#) for more detail (entries close 17 February).

- Gender Equity: The [50:50 Vision Program](#) is progressing with over 150 councils participating in the program to date. Six councils have now received silver awards. Contact [Karen Purser](#), Program Coordinator, 50:50 Vision-Councils for Gender Equity.
- New edition of the ***Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance***: The latest (double) edition of the *Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance* is now available and features evaluation and commentary from the most recent Commonwealth Local Government Conference held in the UK this year. Steve Martin and Alison Brown of Cardiff University were Guest Editors. View the journal [here](#).

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Further news about ACELG's work can be found at the ACELG website and at each program page.

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