

**GROW**



G21 Region  
Opportunities  
for Work

# Evidence to Support the Theory of Change for GROW's Business Plan

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## Theory of Change

GROW acknowledges and recognises that persistent locational disadvantage is a complex problem. The issues are often multi-causal, multi-sectoral, involving a myriad of stakeholders and enmeshed dimensions. There are no singular, silver-bullet answers. Addressing disadvantage takes time, resourcing and cross-sectoral engagement. It requires a systems perspective, and the willingness to learn through action as the starting point for improving outcomes.

The starting point for GROW's Theory of Change is the Australian and international research that indicates that employment offers critical pathways out of disadvantage. Therefore, GROW recognises that understanding the gaps and opportunities that exist for generating and targeting employment (ie. creating a jobs bias towards more disadvantaged communities) at a systemic level is a critical part of addressing disadvantage. GROW's methods for generating and targeting employment will focus on:

- Embedding social procurement policy and practice so that contracts issued in the region incorporate training and employment;
- Increasing investment and other supports to strengthen and grow small to medium enterprises and employment; and
- Expanding existing brokerage approaches and investigating additional brokerage models for sustainable pathways between job seekers and employers.

A primary assumption of GROW's approach is that poverty and disadvantage is mediated by place (specifically, the target areas within G21) and, conversely, that place is a locus for improving the socio-economic opportunities of both individuals and communities.

GROW's Theory of Change starts from the premise that addressing complex issues requires collaborative and collective action across all sectors. GROW also recognises that collective action requires collective tracking and measurement, and that such measurement should inform and help to shape learning and action over time. This document briefly explains the logic that underpins this theory of change and then presents an evidence review relevant to the assumptions embedded within it.

## An Adaptive Approach

A theory of change aims to describe how a program or project works; what its key components are, what its outcomes are, and how it achieves these outcomes. Theories of

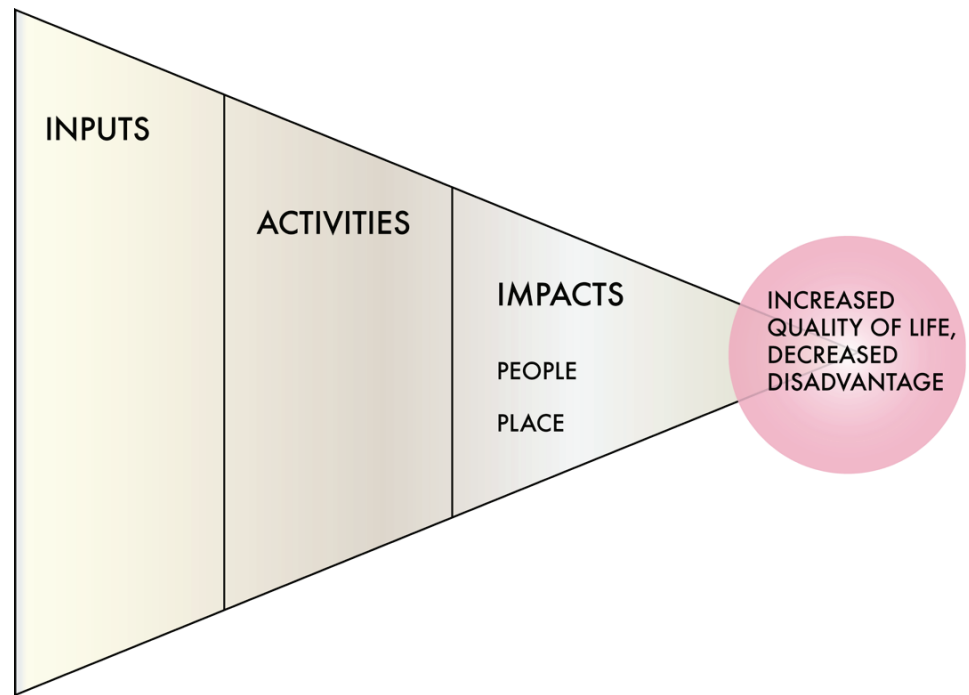


Figure 1: Elements of Program Logic

change - sometimes represented through program logics - are useful for ensuring that all stakeholders have a shared understanding of the program upon which an evaluation framework can be built. A theory of change seeks to explain how and why change occurs, while a logic model illustrates the components - including inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes - of a program or initiative and the relationships between them. A program logic model can be used to operationalize and visualize how a theory of change is at work within a given program or initiative (see Figure 1).

It should be noted that, while program logic helps to uncover the links between project activities and impacts, there are debate as to whether program logic models suit complex problems. A complex problem has multiple factors that interrelate in such a way that precise delineation of the causes and solutions is not possible. In these situations there is not a defined way to execute strategies, and leadership in this context requires local adaptation and strong reflective processes so that new initiatives and constantly monitored to assess their impact on the prevailing context.

The challenge with using program logics with such problems is in their application. People can become too rigid in their application of the model and not adapt as circumstances change. To ensure outcomes are improved and sustained, the logic will need to be reflected upon and strategies will need to be

constantly revised and updated as global, national, state, and local circumstances change.

## Evidence that informs the GROW theory of change

### Place-based socioeconomic disadvantage and its effects

Global market restructuring and the increased mobility of people, information and resources since the 1990s have produced spatial concentrations of economic activity that result in socio-economic inequalities mediated by place. People residing in socioeconomically disadvantaged locations are at risk of poorer health and wellbeing outcomes (Larsen, 2007)<sup>2</sup>. It is indicated that 'place-based' approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of communities can have a positive impact in areas such as physical or mental health and also on other indirect determinants of health (DHHS, 2012). Residing in disadvantaged neighbourhood areas can be associated with: diminished access to education; decreased employment opportunities; decreased exposure to health promotion discourse present in wider society and the impeding effects of social prejudice and stigmas about experiences of disadvantage (DHHS, 2012).

Existing evidence indicates that successful place-based approaches facilitate community participation, leadership and ownership

based approaches is often 'community economic development', which promotes economic participation in local business, community enterprise, education and training (Larsen, 2007). Economic participation has also been used as an outcome indicator in state government initiatives targeted at addressing poverty and disadvantage (QCOSS, 2013). Increasing economic participation is implicated as a key to addressing disadvantage amongst within particularly disadvantaged demographic groups (COAG, 2009). Thus, another core assumption of the GROW approach is that economic participation has a significant effect on the wellbeing of individuals, households and communities.

**The social determinants and effects of unemployment on individuals**

As Schmitz (2011) discusses, negative associations between health and unemployment are well documented. In this context, health is not limited to an absence of physical disease, but is defined holistically, as an individual's capacity to be a fully functioning member of society (Willis et al., 2006). Puig-Barachina et al. (2011) have indicated that unemployment is an important social determinant of health inequalities. It has been indicated that a majority of unemployed people experience psychological distress, and that employment has both direct and indirect effects on wellbeing, with direct effects being increased material security and indirect effects relating to time structure, improved self-efficacy and improved self-esteem (Jahoda, 1992).

In a recent meta-analysis, Paul and Moser (2009) found a causal relationship between unemployment and poorer mental health outcomes. Gender was also implicated as a moderating variable, with the difference in mental health amongst unemployed men found to be consistently higher than amongst unemployed women. Indications of the moderating influence of gender have been corroborated by Puig -Barrachina et al. (2011) who reported a stronger negative association between unemployment and health amongst male manual workers, as well as single-mothers and female sole income earners. Scutella and Wooden (2008) have also corroborated existing findings, reporting a negative relationship between unemployment and health.

Present literature has discussed the challenging nature of transition from unemployment into paid employment (McCollum, 2012). For example, some individuals remain in a perpetual and distressing cycle between employment and welfare benefits, without ever being able to access permanent and secure employment (McCollum, 2012). Such challenges may be amplified by the stigma associated with unemployment or being a welfare benefit

recipient. For example, Ali, Fall, and Hoffman (2013) have reported that many Americans fear a loss or decrease of social status as a result of unemployment. In summary, the evidence suggests that a variety of social, cultural and individual factors are likely to interact to mediate and/or moderate the successful or unsuccessful transition from unemployment back into the labour force.

An unemployed person may also be a victim of domestic violence, a member of a dominant cultural group, a member of an ethnic minority, a war trauma survivor or a carer of a complex needs child. As a result of interactions between these various categories of disadvantage, people from some groups are more likely than others to experience transgenerational trauma and lifetime disparities in educational and health outcomes. To understand unemployment, research must look beyond the immediate experience of unemployment to explore other intersecting factors.

As de Graaf-Zijl, van den Berg and Heyma (2011) discuss, transitions from unemployment to regular work are often preceded by transitions to temporary employment. In this context, temporary work is positioned as a stepping stone. As such, the role of temporary work as a pathway to eventual permanent employment is conceived of as the stepping-stone effect. Although it was reported that previously unemployed people who were currently engaged in temporary work were less likely than unemployed people to accept permanent work, after approximately 1.5 years of temporary work, the transition from temporary work to permanent work is greater than that from unemployment to permanent work (de Graaf-Zijl et al., 2011). This indicates that although people may initially be reluctant to leave a temporary position for a different, permanent role (perhaps due to perceived job security in their existing temporary position),

temporary work is more likely to lead to future permanent employment than unemployment.

While de Graaf et al. (2011) have indicated that temporary employment is a stepping stone to permanent employment, Tannous and Smith (2012) have discussed the potential for volunteering to increase paid-employment prospects for unemployed individuals. Both job service providers and job-seekers reported that volunteering was important in the role of facilitating the transition from unemployment into the paid labour market (Tannous & Smith, 2012).

**Economic participation and diversification and place**

Increasing economic diversity within places has been identified as critical to successful regional development in a global era (Barca, McCann, & Rodríguez-Pose, 2012) and as a mechanism for ensuring resilience of places at both household and community levels (Bristow, 2010). A recent meta-evaluation of place-based development in the UK (Sissons et al. 2014) finds that employment growth has a substantial impact on the alleviation of poverty where:

- Employment opportunities occur within the places most affected by socio-economic disadvantage;
- Employment opportunities are diverse and not characterised by low paid high risk work; and
- There is a suitable match between skills profiles and industry demands within affected areas.

A further assumption of the GROW approach is that coordination of resources and enabling infrastructure is required to improve socio-economic outcomes for people in target areas.

There is a substantial evidence-base to suggest that socio-economic disadvantage both

Organisational	Systems and Processes	Personal Competencies
Governance	Adjusted	Nurturing
Fit-for-purpose	Performance measurement and evaluation	Group work skills
Management	Accountability process	Negotiation skills (interest based)
Across boundaries	HR approaches	Political savvy
Driving Leadership	Culture of working together	Process analysis
Dispersed & process catalyst		Listening, learning and linking

Table 1: Features of Effective Collaboration  
Source: Keast and Mandell 2012, p. 17



informs and is informed by inequitable access in place to social services, transport and financial services (Kirby & Kaneda, 2005; Vinson et al., 2007; Vinson & Jesuit Social Services Ignatius Centre, 2004). This suggests that resource coordination and development of infrastructure that improves access to services and employment hubs is an important feature of redressing place-disadvantage.

With regard to working together, the concept – or brand – of collective impact is relatively new. However, there is a great deal of empirical evidence related to earlier forms of cross-sector collaboration, such as area-based initiatives in the UK and comprehensive community initiatives in the United States. Available research evidence suggests that effective collaboration is underpinned by organisational, systemic and process factors, as well as personal competencies of those collaborating. These factors are summarised in Table One.

Finally, G21 is aware that GROW will only be as effective as its ability to document, learn from and improve its responses through processes of evaluation, reflection and refinement. Considerations related to effective evaluative approaches are outlined below.

## Place-based evaluation approaches: general considerations

Place-based approaches to redressing socio-economic disadvantage are not new, and past efforts have been the subject of extensive evaluations in a number of countries. Recent reviews of effective evaluation of place-based development initiatives find that a number of principles should inform evaluation approaches:

- Evaluation instruments, methods and data competent to capture 'soft' outputs related to capacity building and collaboration processes (Burnstein & Tolley 2011);
- Evaluation instruments and methods competent to document and assess long-term outcomes (Burnstein & Tolley 2011);
- Sampling methods and data collection that allow for assessing changes for both people and places, recognising that displacement (eg through gentrification) or voluntary movement out of places (eg due to new educational or employment opportunities) may occur (Nichols 2013);
- Systems-based thinking that accommodates collective learning and reflection rather than narrow attributions of causality to individual actors within the place-based initiative (Burnstein & Tolley 2011); and
- Documentation of and learning about unintended consequences (positive and negative) as part of dialogue and

- reflection with stakeholders (Sridharan 2011)

### Place-based approaches and evaluation of employment outcomes

This section examines two place-based approaches addressing disadvantage in order to help inform the evaluation approach taken for the GROW initiative. Place or settings-based interventions offer an opportunity to address the structural and cultural elements that contribute to disadvantage. The two approaches reviewed are the UK area based approaches to addressing employment (amongst other elements of disadvantage) and the neighbourhood renewal program in Victoria which again addressed a wide range of elements to improve community wellbeing indicators. The review briefly comments on the elements of the intervention and findings, but focuses mainly on the evaluation methodology used and some of the limitations of these methodologies.

#### Neighbourhood Renewal Victoria

While process evaluations rather than outcome evaluations are common in healthy city-type interventions (de Leeuw, 2009), the neighbourhood renewal program in Victoria focused on impact and outcome measures (Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, 2008). There were nineteen sites chosen around Victoria, which were selected based on a profile of multiple indicators of disadvantage. A mix of rural and urban communities were selected and the intervention ran over various times from 2002 onwards. The intervention model combined government investment together with community development strategies (Klein, 2004). The theory of change was that this partnership between community, service agencies, and government would result in increased community engagement and more effective allocation of resources to improve community wellbeing outcomes (Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, 2008). Thirty eight indicators were used to measure progress against six key objectives. These objectives covered improvement in housing, community pride, employment, health and wellbeing, personal safety and crime, and access to services.

Most of the indicators were measured through the use of a community survey which included 90 questions many of which were drawn from existing population health surveys such as Victorian Population Health Survey, Community Indicators Victoria, Community Strengthening Survey and the Local Safety Survey (Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, 2008). The survey findings in this report are from the surveys conducted at years 2 and years 4-5 (which represented the half way point of the eight-year intervention for each established project). Locally trained volunteers conducted face-to-face interviews of 300 residents in

each project area. For control comparison the survey was adapted to be administered by telephone and data was collected from 2850 randomly selected individuals from ten census collection districts proximate to the Neighbourhood Renewal area.

These administrative data sources were also analysed as part of the evaluation:

- public housing turnover, vacancy, and acceptance rates
- crime rates
- child protection notifications and substantiations
- literacy, numeracy, absenteeism and transitions from Year 12
- employment rates and further education qualifications.

For employment, there was a 4% decrease in unemployment rate for Neighbourhood Renewal residents to 13% and a 2% decrease in the gap between the unemployment rate of Neighbourhood Renewal residents compared to the state average measures (Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, 2008). There was no change overall though in the percentage of residents in employment.

Kelaher et al. (2010) conducted some analysis of the health outcome data that has relevance for the GROW project. In the community surveys they asked participants whether or not they had taken part in one of the neighbourhood renewal activities. Overall there was no change in self perceived health status over time for both NR residents overall and the control group. However, when analysis was split between those involved in NR activities and those living in NR but not involved in any activity there was a difference. The health status and life satisfaction of those involved did improve over time. There was some interesting discussion about the implications for evaluation of placed based programs. Placed based initiatives such as these have produced mixed findings about whether they are effective in changing community wellbeing indicators. This could be for either implementation reasons or methodological reasons. This research demonstrates that some measure of reach is important in understanding the outcomes of the initiative. And as commented upon it highlights what value should be placed on such initiatives. While outcomes for the whole population are often sought and measured against, perhaps a more realistic expectation is that there will be improvement for those directly involved in any place based initiative.

#### Evaluation of UK Employment Policies since 1997

A report by Griggs et al. (2008) analysed some of the outcomes of various employment policies and other policies aimed at reducing disadvantage. Specifically focusing on the employment section of their report, they analysed what they termed person centred

policies versus place based policies. Person centred policies included reforms to welfare aimed at encouraging long term unemployed into the workforce. This included training, support, and changes to welfare funding and taxation to ensure that people would not be financially disadvantaged if moving off welfare support. Certain policies were designed for specific population groups such as young people, single parents, and people with a disability. Placed based programs focused on establishment of local networks and tailoring services to specific needs. In certain jurisdictions they were provided with government funding. There was variation in implementation with some placed based approaches focusing specifically on employment, some focusing specifically on particular groups, and other areas tackling a range of disadvantage indicators.

The authors of the report commented that comparison between the policies was very challenging (Griggs et al., 2008). Different outcome indicators were used, the time of when the intervention took place and its length of duration differed, and the groups being targeted varied. They commented that the results for place based were more promising overall than person centred programs but were very cautious in interpreting any significant meaning from this comparison. There were differences in effectiveness between the person centred policies but again they emphasised caution with interpretation. Those addressing the needs of single parents and people with a disability were found to be more effective than those addressing the other groups which was suggested as a factor related to the motivations of the participants rather than the policy per se.

A number of evaluation issues were commented upon which has implications for the GROW project. All policies were measured against reduced use of welfare and/or labour market entry (Griggs et al., 2008). The changes did not neatly correlate across these two measures. Thus for some policies the changes observed for reduced welfare were greater than the gains made in employment and for other policies the reverse situation. Particular context issues related to use of welfare for different groups were provided for these discrepancies in findings. For the GROW project following both use of welfare payments for residents within an area could be important and various indicators of employment would be helpful. Tracking the location of employees who fill new jobs may be interesting but it will not be possible from this analysis to determine if there is a reduction in the number of long term unemployed. This could simply indicate people already in employment changing jobs. Following welfare payments has the attraction of being able to track individuals if they change location. Potentially receiving job

training and skills support could increase their employability for a job located elsewhere and they move location during the intervention time period.

Counterfactual control groups (either population groups or areas) were used for analysis (Griggs et al., 2008). The use of a counterfactual design was particularly important given the context of national falls in employment. The GROW project will need to use some kind of comparison trend line against which to compare progress. Length of time to measure progress was also considered very important with some evaluations only given less than a year to demonstrate change which was insufficient time.

One of the issues commented upon by both Kelaher et al. (2010) and Griggs et al. (2008) was the challenge of developing a theory of change within placed based initiatives due to their local variation, requirement of local flexibility and adaptation, and paucity of process data. Kelaher et al. (2010) emphasised at a minimum for the collection of reach data. With simple interventions, attention is given to program fidelity (e.g. of product, content or form) (Carroll et al., 2007). In complex interventions, it has been argued that researchers ought to concentrate on fidelity of process (Bond & Butler; Hawe, Shiell, & Riley, 2009; Leykum, Pugh, Lanham, Harmon, & McDaniel, 2009). For the GROW project this may include organisational capacity, innovation, partnership development, and level of adaptation, as process indicators. While as a single case study there is not the same challenge of finding consistent indicators relative to a multi-site intervention, basing process indicators on activity type output indicators alone may involve a risk of discouraging innovation and adaptation. Having a combination of program and process indicators may be helpful for the GROW project.

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