



Request for Proposal

Development of Cairns South Communities of Focus MEL plan

Issue Date: 20/02/2026

Respond by: 5.00 pm (AEST) 11th March 2026

1. RFP Purpose

Mission Australia (MA) seeks to engage a skilled and experienced organisation or individual to collaboratively design a local Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Plan for our place-based Communities of Focus Initiative in Cairns South. **The individual will be based locally in Cairns/ Queensland.**

2. About Us

Mission Australia is a national non-denominational Christian organisation, with more than 160 years' experience in standing together with Australians in need on their journey to independence. Our evidence-based, client-centred community services are focused on our goal of ending homelessness and ensure people and communities in need can thrive.

In 2024-25, we supported 1471,552 people in Australia through 494 community services and 4,876 social and affordable homes, thanks to the work of 2,584 staff and 1,078 volunteers. Our programs and services include programs targeting homelessness; services providing integrated family support; parenting programs; early childhood education; mental health services; residential drug and alcohol programs; youth programs; access to safe and secure housing; and programs to build capacity, resilience and opportunity for local communities.

3. About Communities of Focus (COF)

3.1 Background

Mission Australia (MA) believes postcodes should never limit outcomes, and that tailored community-led approaches are needed for long-term positive change. MA's Strengthening Communities Framework outlines the organisation's commitment and vision that 'Communities are connected, inclusive, healthy, resilient and thriving.' This vision is operationalised through individual support, place-based initiatives, integrated models of housing support, and targeted strengthening communities' initiatives.

As part of the 20-25 Strategy, MA committed to working alongside five communities across Australia using a community-led, place-based approach through the establishment of the **Communities of Focus (COF)** initiative. The approach built upon the Strengthening Communities Framework to work deeper in selected communities with an evidence-informed strategy, long-term targeted investment, and resourcing from MA as backbone support.

Place-based, community-led work is an emerging approach aimed at stimulating collective action to break down systematic drivers of entrenched disadvantage in defined geographic locations, which are not adequately addressed through current service and system responses. It proposes that by working differently and stepping away from traditional models of service delivery, communities can develop local solutions and lead place-based change.

The aim of COF is to work differently and step away from traditional models of service delivery, to support communities to develop local solutions and lead place-based change. It:

- Works across funding and program boundaries to partner with local people, community leaders, services, government, community groups and churches, through a place-based systems change approach.
- Brings together evidence and experience from Collective Impact and Systems Thinking.

As part of our COF initiative MA Works as the backbone to coordinate activity, develop a common visions and agenda, build community capacity and stimulate place-based innovation to catalyse sustainable change.

Since 2020, **four** COFs have been established in Cairns South QLD; City of Gosnells WA; Meekatharra WA; and Whyalla SA.

3.2 Cairns South COF

Cairns South was the first COF to be launched in 2020. It has made a long-term commitment to work collectively to improve outcomes for **children, young people and their families**. When it was first established, a new Cairns South Coalition had been formed a few months prior, led by local leaders and community members. This involved a central Steering Committee connected to and informed by collaborative working clusters (CWCs or ‘clusters’). The introduction of COF enabled a small backbone team to provide support to CST, and an opportunity to refine the approach and leverage renewed commitment, with the community-led movement being rebranded to **Cairns South Together (CST)**.

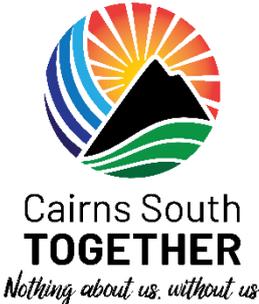
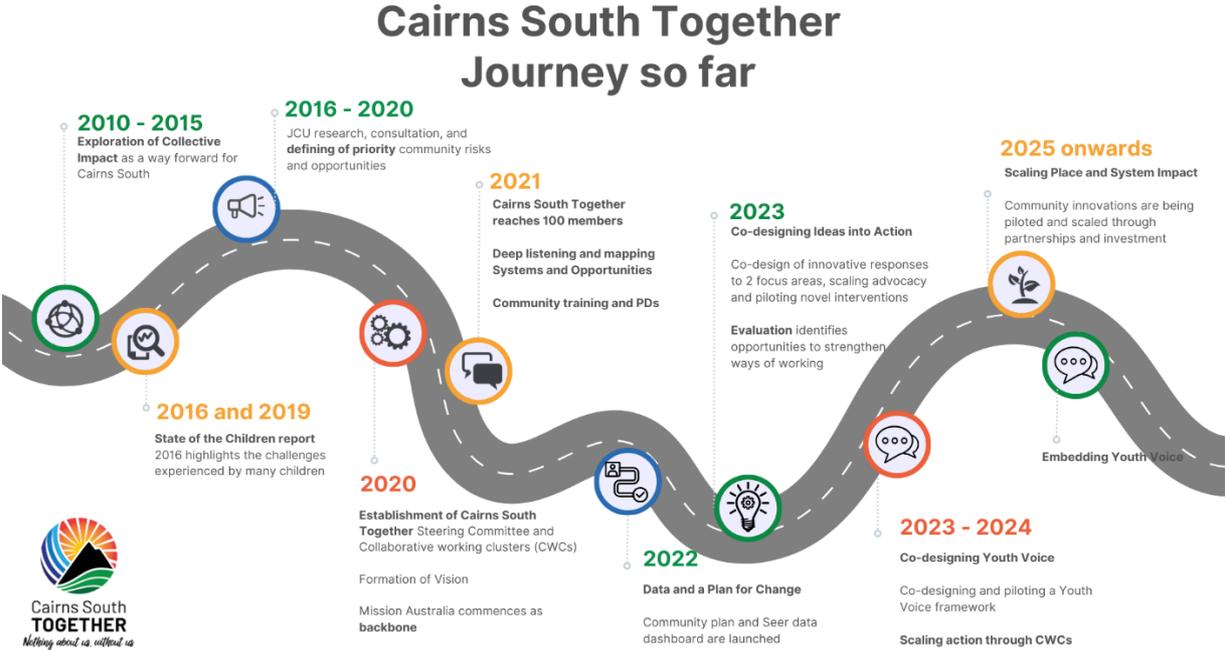


Figure 1: Cairns South Journey



3.1 COF Evaluation Framework

In 2020, MA's Centre for Evidence and Insights, in collaboration with COF and Strengthening Communities stakeholders, developed an overarching 10-year evaluation strategy. The objectives of the strategy were to:

- Ensure that the COF initiative was accountable to internal and external stakeholders by producing credible evidence of effective processes, outcomes and long-term community impact.
- Build an evidence base and share knowledge to inform ongoing COF design, development and scaling across communities.
- Establish sustainable and continuous monitoring, learning and reflective processes that are used to enhance, improve and develop the COF initiative.
- Build the evaluation knowledge and skills of COF stakeholders and communities to design and implement **localised MEL** activities and use evaluation data to inform planning, implementation, decision-making and adaptations.

The evaluation strategy also recognised the importance of setting clear expectations about the type and pace of change expected across the COF Operating Model phases.

This was particularly important given the **long-term investment in local communities. For example, depending on community goals and focus areas it may take up to 10 years to see any tangible or sustainable population or community level outcomes.**

A high-level COF Evaluation Framework was developed to guide discussions about evidence and impact, manage expectations, balance the need for localised and national data, and incorporate the existing Strengthening Communities Outcomes Framework.

Following an evaluation of the COF model in 2025, this is now being updated.

4. About the Project

Mission Australia seeks to engage a skilled and experienced organisation or individual to collaboratively design a local Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) plan for Cairns South COF/CST that is grounded in place-based evaluation principles. The successful applicant is expected to work closely with the local backbone team and CST steering committee to build their capacity and understanding of the role of MEL in place-based change. They will also work closely with a Project Reference Group, who will provide oversight and feedback on the approach used and alignment to the National Evaluation framework. **The individual will be based locally in Cairns/Queensland.**

4.1 Project Objectives

The objectives are to:

- Lead the design of a high-quality localised Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning plan, that aligns to the national evaluation framework and is suitable for a Place-based initiative.
- Take a collaborative co-design approach at all stages of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning design.
- Build local capacity in Place-based Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning to support staff and community leadership to effectively understand and value all parts of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning approach.
- Contribute to the development of new or improved systems, processes and tools that enable collection of local data that demonstrates progress towards outcomes.

The consultant will be required to develop a detailed project plan.

4.2 Scope of the work

The Project is expected to commence in March 2026 and be completed by June 2026. The MEL plan should include:

- **Clear Theory of Change (Place-Specific):** Articulates how change is expected to happen in Cairns South
- **Multi-Level Measurement Framework:** A strong framework to measure change at multiple levels at individual, relational, community, systems and structural levels.
- **Developmental and Adaptive Learning Approach**
- **Mixed Methods and approach to capture Community Voice**
- **Development of new measurement tools and approaches**
- **Cultural and ethical considerations**
- **Timeframes**

4.3 Deliverables and timeframes

The timeframe for completing the project is March 2026 to June 2026. The specific deliverables required are outlined in bold under the key phases of Mission Australia’s Evaluation Management approach.

Evaluation Stage	Key tasks and deliverables
Manage	a. Commencement of the contract.
Plan	b. Initiation meeting with the Project Reference Group to provide an overview of the initiative, including MEL activities and challenges to date, briefing on the National Evaluation Framework and establish shared ways of working. c. Develop a Project Plan including co-design approach, timeframes and stakeholder engagement.
Design	d. Review existing and planned data collection systems, procedures and templates to support the local MEL. e. Work closely with the Project reference group and Steering committee to co-design a MEL plan. f. As part of the design process, build local capacity in MEL to establish a shared understanding of MEL, co-develop a clear theory of change, embed learning and reflection and increase data literacy. g. Identify and test suitable tools and processes needed to implement the MEL.
Validate	h. Facilitate a face-to-face Validation Workshop , around 1 month before the final MEL framework is submitted, with the Project Reference Group and/or local CST Steering committee to present the framework and tools and ensure local understanding and buy-in of proposed MEL Framework and activities.
Report	i. Produce a high quality and succinct Final MEL plan which clearly articulates the approach to capture change at multiple levels (people, relationships, systems, and place), supports continuous learning, and reflects the complexity and long timeframes of place-based work with associated tools and processes.

4.4 Budget

An indicative budget of **\$25,000** (excl. GST) is available.

5. Your response

Please provide a short proposal, or covering letter, and CV **by 5:00 pm (AEST) 11th March 2026** outlining your experience and capacity to complete the project.

Criteria for the proposal:

Criteria	Description
Content knowledge	Demonstrated knowledge of community-led place-based approaches including systems change
MEL experience	Previous experience in designing and implementing a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Frameworks , preferably for a place-based initiative and the use of developmental evaluation
Capacity building	Previous experience in building the capacity of teams and community (preferably in MEL) using informal and formal approaches
Collaboration	Demonstrated experience working and collaborating effectively with others, ensuring key stakeholders are involved, sharing information and ensuring people are kept informed of progress, changes and issues.
Flexibility	Experience in dealing with the ambiguity and complexity of local community-led place-based work

The above criteria will be used to compare and evaluate all applicants. A shortlist of Applicants will be invited for a virtual interview.

Please also provide

- Capacity to deliver to the timeframes and milestones listed above.
- A quotation with the breakdown of costs for each deliverable/milestone.
- Overview of insurances held by the provider.
- Key contact for the proposal – name, position, telephone, and email address; and
- An example of previous work and two referees.

Selection of the successful applicant will be subject to negotiation and execution of a contract by Mission Australia.

All enquiries and submitted proposals should be sent by email to:

Tracey Delaney

Evaluation Specialist

Centre for Evidence & Insights, Mission Australia

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