

Are we missing the point? Evaluating the value of collaboration

Dr Nic Vogelpoel & Dr Cameron Willis

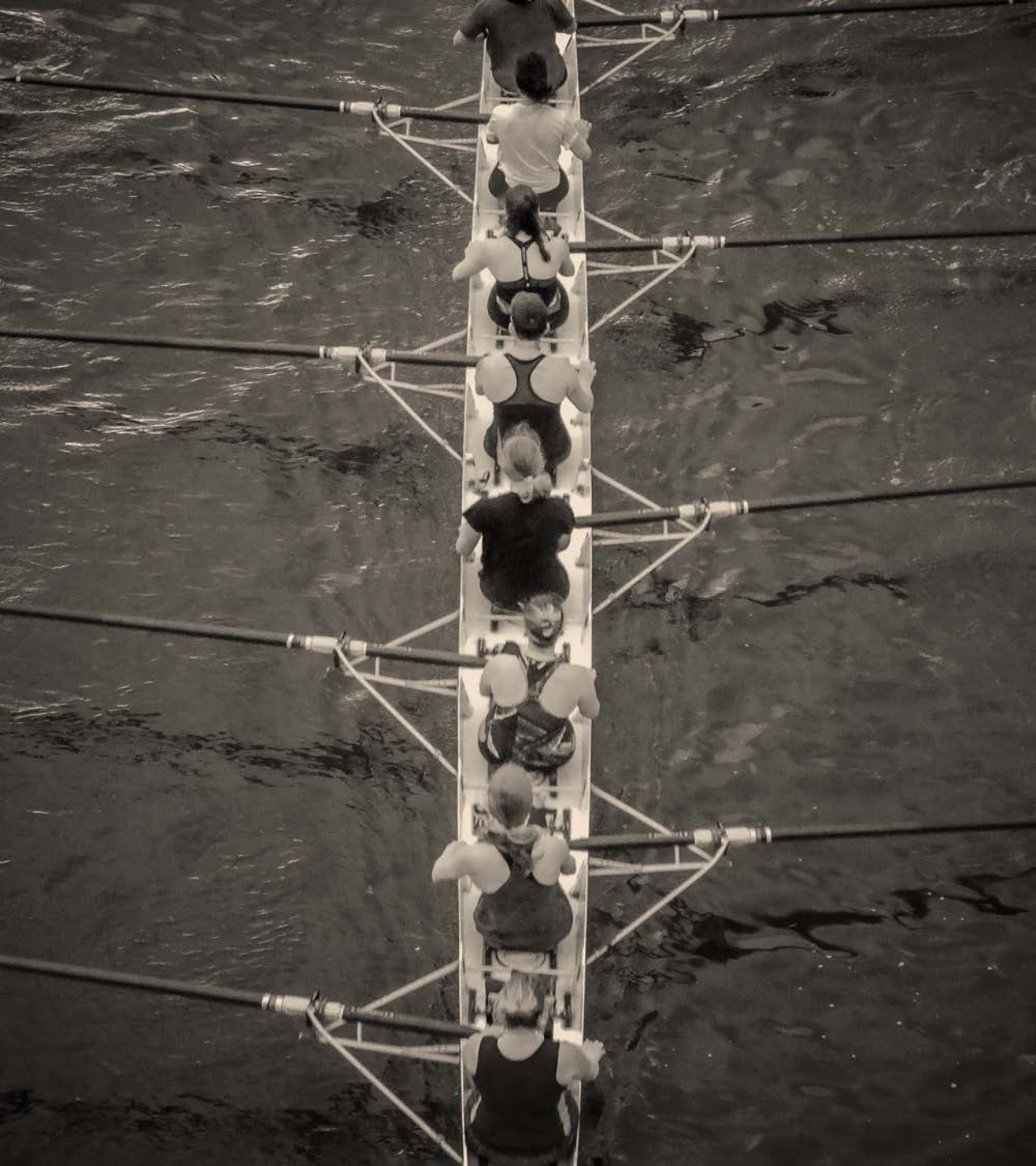
Day Four Projects

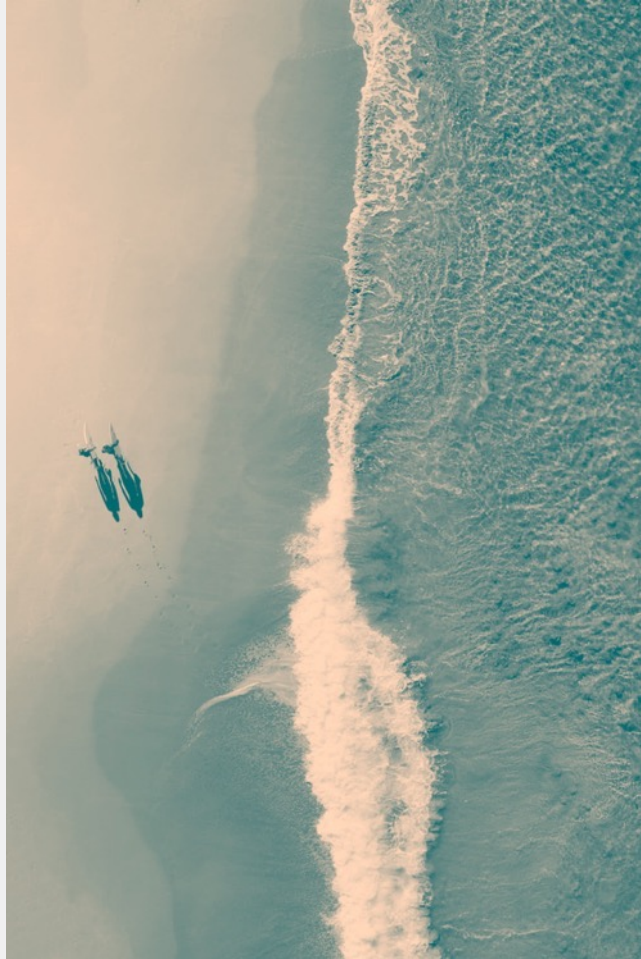
E: info@dayfourprojects.com

W: www.dayfourprojects.com

AES Annual Conference

Brisbane 27th September 2023





Acknowledgement of Country

In the spirit of reconciliation Day Four Projects acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.





01. What is collaboration, and why do it?

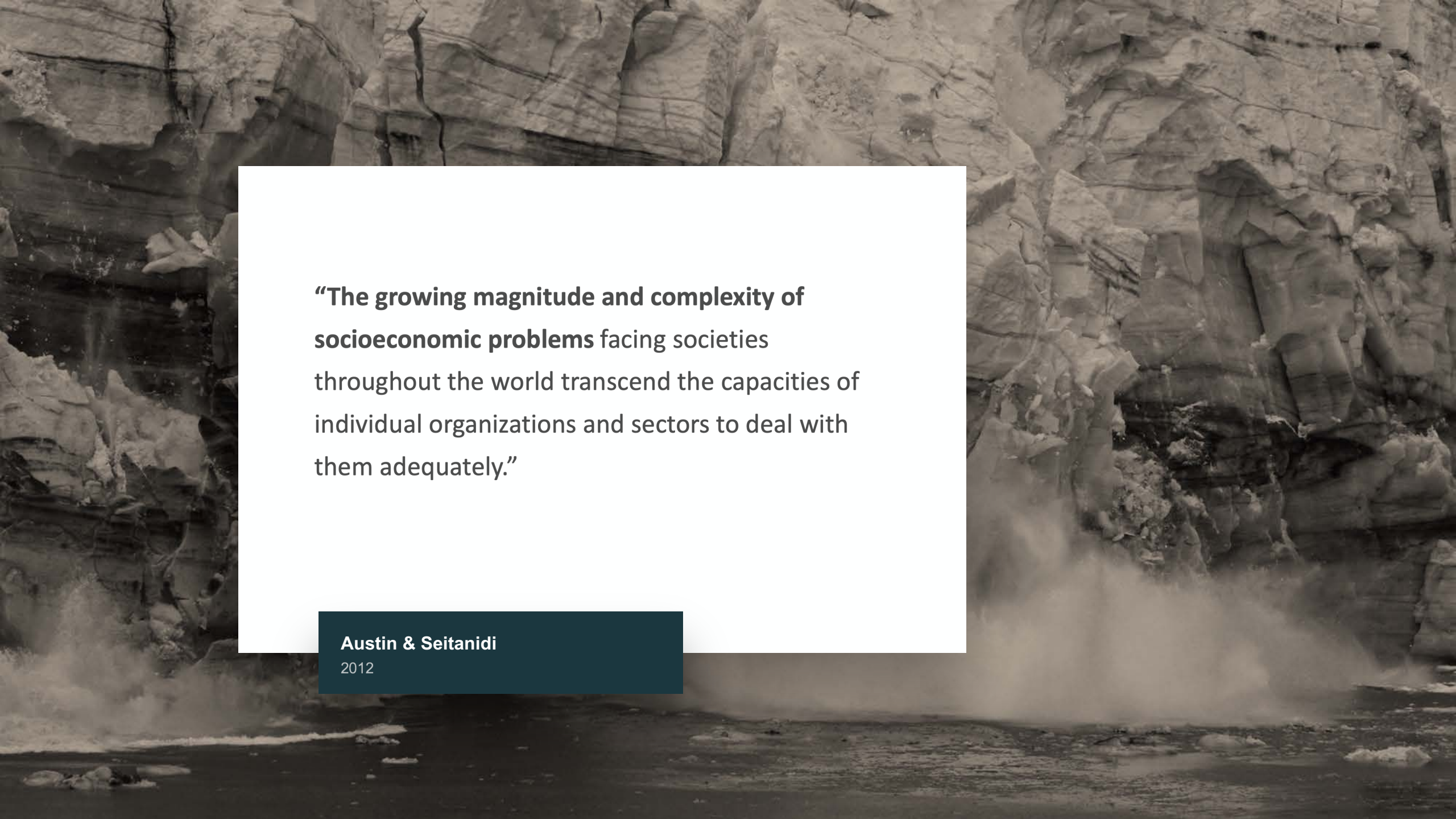
02. How evaluations might miss the point of collaborations

03. Insights from practice

04. Suggestions for the future

What is collaboration, and why do it?





“The growing magnitude and complexity of socioeconomic problems facing societies throughout the world transcend the capacities of individual organizations and sectors to deal with them adequately.”

Austin & Seitanidi

2012

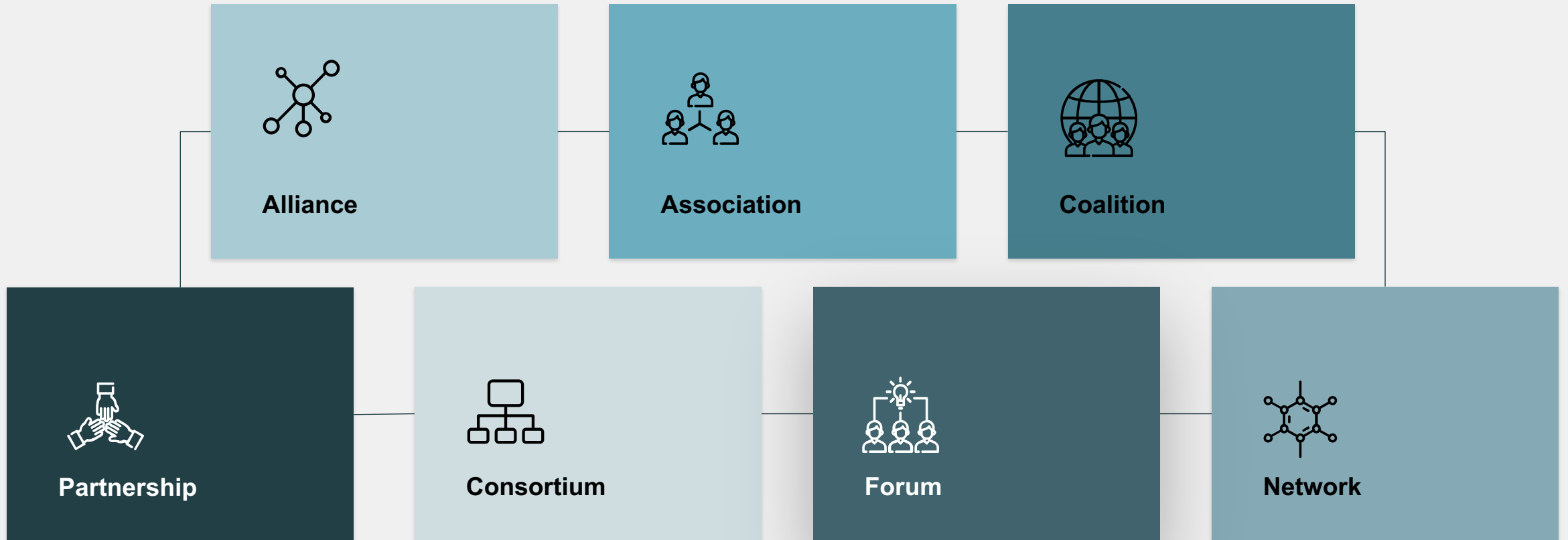


“Types” of collaboration

Multiple ‘typologies’ to describe collaboration:

1. Structural models
2. Members and purposes
3. Collaborative functions

Typology 1: Structural models



Typology 2: Members and purposes

Members

- **Public - private partnerships** – typically government driven outsourcing arrangements
- **Multi-stakeholder** - global / national / local - issue or project-based partnerships
- **Single sector** – cross-organisational partnerships from the same sector
- **Internal partnerships** – for example, collaboration across different government departments

Purposes

- **Policy partnerships** – multi-stakeholder engagement in policy-making or scrutiny
- **Consultative** – on-going multi-stakeholder enquiries into key and / or controversial issues
- **Capacity-building** – partnerships designed to build skills, capabilities and / or resilience
- **Learning / research** – partnering specifically for knowledge generation / dissemination purposes

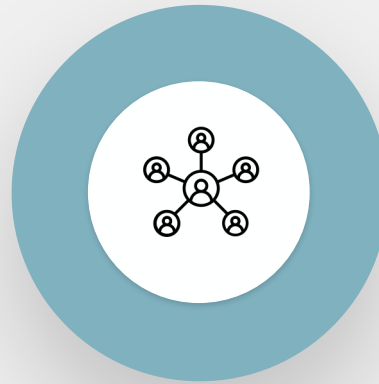
Typology 3: Partnership functions



Leverage and Exchange

Partnerships that exchange resources to achieve their own strategic aims.

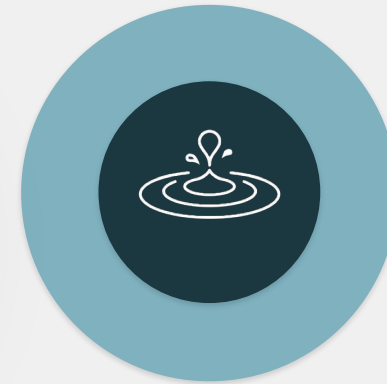
Often transactional, reciprocal exchange of resources.



Combine and Integrate

Two or more organizations combining complementary resources to achieve a shared goal.

Co-generation, mutual accountability, creating new approaches.



Transform

Organizations tackling a complex challenge, and seeking to change the systems that underlie it.

Multiple players, unique and complementary resource exchange, new and emergent approaches.

Why Collaborate

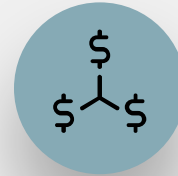
The Collaborative Advantage*

A shared commitment to, and belief, that more can be achieved together than by working alone. The collaborative advantage acknowledges that a collaboration needs to generate gains for each collaborator, as well as generate something new – something that is beyond what any one actor could achieve by working alone.



Effectiveness

Collaborations can result in more effective efforts to address a pressing problem.



Efficiency

Collaborations, when done well, can result in improved use of resources (financial or otherwise) to deliver outcomes.



Reach

Different collaborators bring different skills and talents: through this exchange, our efforts can reach more people, in more places.



Risk

Strong and effective collaborations allow risk to be shared among parties: a strong motivator for some to join collaborations in the first instance. Collaborations also allow new, different and greater risks to be taken.

Missing the point: three challenges in evaluating collaboration





1. Evaluations often miss the complexity of collaboration
2. Evaluations often miss the processes of collaborating
3. Evaluations often miss a connection to learning



Missing the *complexity* of collaborations

- **Looking for traditional cause and effect relationships:** influencing policy, practice, relationships and mental models is often the focus of many collaborations, which they influence through complex, non-linear pathways.
- **Failing to account for unanticipated or emergent results:** the results of many 'transformative' collaborations may not be known at the start. Rigid adherence to fixed frameworks will fail to capture this.
- **Failing to consider the long-time horizons** that many collaborative initiatives are working towards: the outcomes for many collaborations will take years (sometimes more) to accrue. This is at odds with funding and evaluation cycles that seek evidence of impact.

Missing the *processes* of collaboration

- **Valuing product over process:** a tendency to value the outputs, products or materials a collaboration generates, rather than the quality of processes that are needed to do so, and that set a collaborative up for success
- **Failing to consider the conditions necessary for good collaboration:** shared goals, shared resources, shared authority, shared accountability, whole-system engagement, communication flows, adaptive capacity, and an authorising environment
- **Foregrounding shared outcomes, at the expense of individual outcomes:** placing value only on the shared outcomes that a collaboration may generate, which risks losing the individual value that collaborators need to gain from their experience.





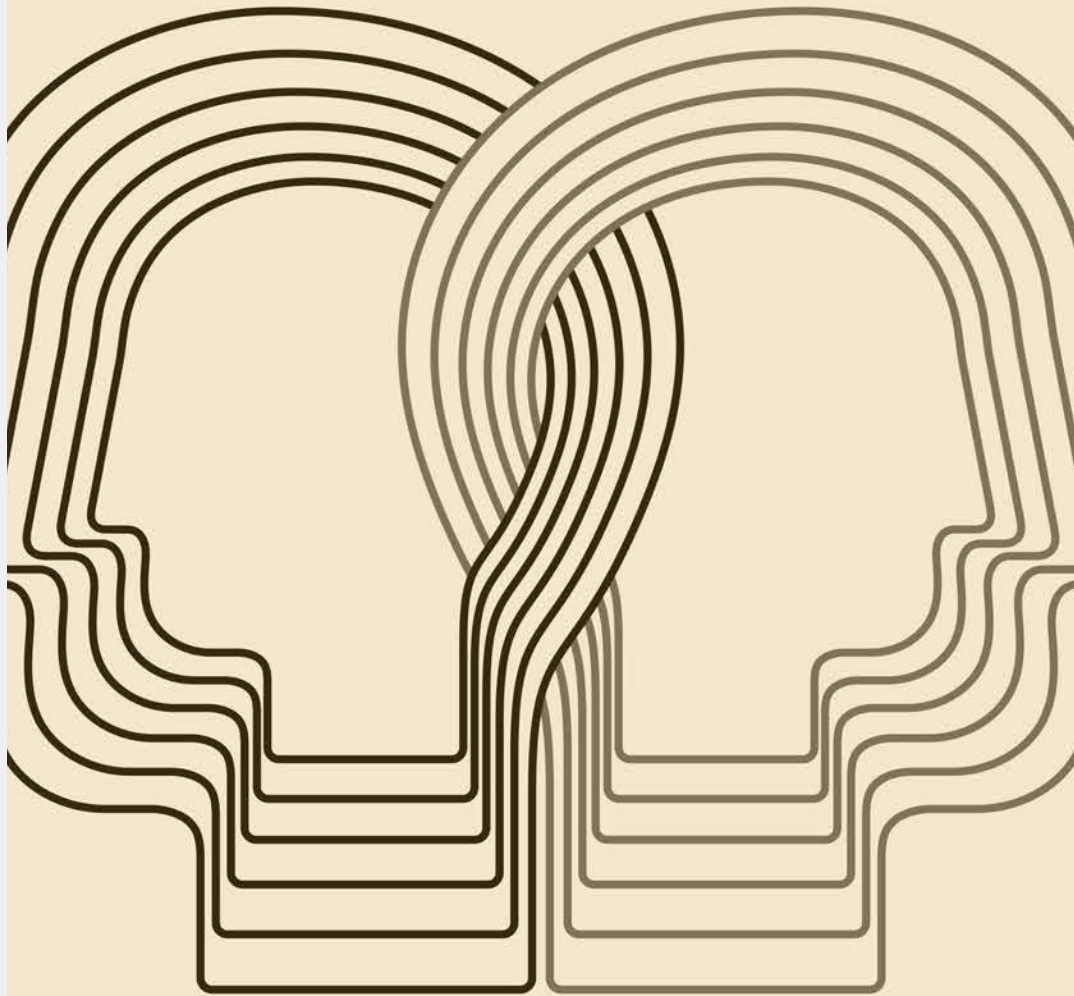
Missing the *opportunity to connect* evaluation with learning

- **Reporting requirements that count the wrong things:** funder or donor reporting processes that focus on the number of workshop attendees, the number of articles generated, the amount of leveraged funding - miss the point of collaborative processes and outcomes
- **Tick box partnership health checks:** partnership health checks completed in silos, and never shared – stifling the ability of partners to learn, challenge, grow and adapt
- **False learning cultures:** internal cultures that appear to foster collaborative principles, but which are dominated by command and control, hierarchy and risk-aversion – which diminish learning opportunities for all



How might we respond to these challenges?





Two examples from practice

Examples of collaborations that are responding to these challenges in their learning and evaluation approach:

- Are attempting to understand the **complexity** of collaborative work
- Are focused on **outcomes** of collaboration, as well as the **conditions** for good collaboration
- Are connecting **evaluation** with **learning and improvement**

Two examples to explore:

- The Australian Global Health Alliance
- The Innovation Hub (Australian Volunteers Program and The Australian Centre for Social Innovation)



Stronger together

Mapping the Global Health Community

A report commissioned by the
Australian Global Health Alliance
July 2023

The Australian Global Health Alliance (AGHA)

The Alliance is the member-based peak body for Australian global health organisations, with a mandate to strengthen the global health ecosystem through national and global connections, partnerships, research, and innovation, promoting best practices in global health, and advocacy.

Five action areas:

- Convene
- Advocate
- Increase access to knowledge
- Mobilise resources
- Shifting power in global health

The Alliance's learning agenda has included a specific focus on

- What does the network of global health actors look like in our region?
- Where does the Alliance fit within this network?
- What can the Alliance do to foster a strong and vibrant network?

AGHA's approach to learning & evaluation

A network analysis

Snowball approach, beginning with Alliance Members

Online network survey based around 5 domains

Key informant interviews to more deeply understand the nature of relationships, the role and position of the Alliance, potential value add of Alliance to global health actors.

Insights

A highly diverse network of stakeholders, including a small number of highly connected actors

Strong desire for greater connectivity and opportunities for collaboration

Deriving significant value in a collective voice offered by the Alliance- both globally and domestically

Implications

Reinforced the need for coordinated advocacy, led by the Alliance

Highlighted the importance of the Alliance in facilitating connections and collaboration

Prompting the Alliance to build on and increase the diversity of members

Highlighted opportunities for new members (e.g. delivery organisations)

Prompting the Alliance to consider its role and connectivity to the broader global health context



Partnership Review

Prepared by Dr Nic Vogelpoel and Dr Cameron Willis
Day Four Projects
April 2022

The Innovation Hub – Australian Volunteers Program

The Australian Volunteers Programs supports skilled Australian volunteers to undertake assignments in partner countries. Through a partnership with The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI), the program has established an Innovation Hub, which is exploring new and novel volunteering models and modes.

The Innovation Hub aims to

- Create a portfolio of innovation investments
- Increase the impact of the program and volunteers
- Build and shape new ideas that inspire others to engage

The Innovation Hub's approach to learning and evaluation has focused on:

- The outcomes of the Hub and the value of innovations, and,
- The quality and contribution of the partnership between the program and TACSI to deliver these outcomes

The Innovation Hub's approach to learning and evaluation

Partnership Assessment

Key Informant Interviews

Artefact Reviews

Collaborative Health Assessment Tool
(survey)

Interactive group-based reflection
sessions

Insights

A strong and vibrant partnership
delivering value for both partners

Strong foundations, including: mutual
trust, resource reciprocity, similar risk
appetites between partners, nurturing
relationships, permission to learn, a
culture of fun and creativity (i.e.
conditions for partnering)

Leading to a partnership that is
generating innovations that have
potential to spread across the
organisation (i.e. **outcomes** from the
partnership)

Implications

Good foundations for ongoing
collaboration – enabling conditions for
innovation

A chance to revisit and chart a new
shared direction for the partnership,
including roles and responsibilities for
each partner

Recognition of the conditions required
for effective collaboration, and
foregrounding actions to strengthen
these as well as fostering innovation

Connected to a learning agenda for
both partners.

Considerations for the future



Three areas for action

1. Seek to understand the complexity of collaborations

How are relationships changing and evolving within this collaboration?

What are the pathways by which this collaboration is influencing outcomes of interest?

What is unexpected or surprising about these outcomes?

Consider: Network analyses, Contribution Analyses, Most significant change, Outcomes Mapping

2. Advocate for the importance of process and product

What shared and individual outcomes does the collaboration seek to deliver?

How might these outcomes be delivered?

What are the conditions needed to live the principles of good collaboration? How will we know they exist?

How can we celebrate and build on our successes?

Consider: Partnership Health Checks, Theory of Change, Appreciative Inquiry

3. Support partnerships, and partners, to ask the difficult questions

Is this partnership generating value for all?

Are we all living our agreed principles and values?

Are we creating the conditions necessary for learning and improvement?

Consider: Realist evaluation, Systemic Inquiry, Appreciative Inquiry, a culture of inquiry and learning

Thank you

Typology 1: Structural models



Alliance

A relationship among people, groups or states that have joined together for mutual benefit and / or to achieve some common purpose, whether there is an explicit agreement between them or not



Association

An organisation of people with a common purpose that has a formal structure



Coalition

A form of alliance, especially a temporary one, between persons, factions and / or states

Typology 1 (cont.)



Partnership

An ongoing working relationship between people or organisations where risks and benefits are shared.



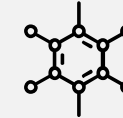
Consortium

A combination of institutions working together in order to undertake operations that require larger-scale resources / capital.



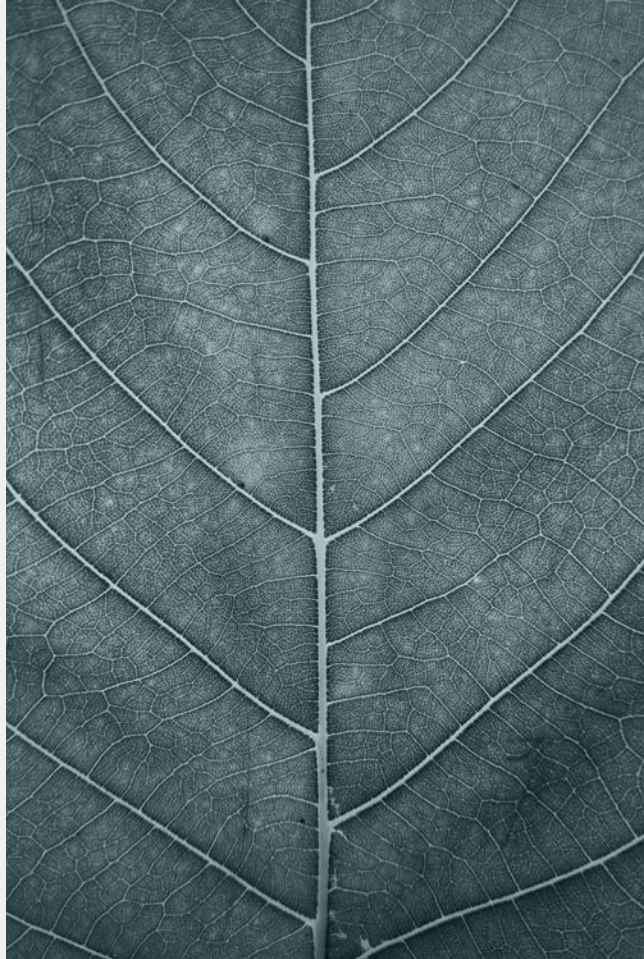
Forum

A place of assembly for people to meet for the discussion of questions of public interest.



Network

Any netlike combination of filaments, lines, veins, passages or the like.



Evaluating and Learning: Save the Children Australia - Southeast Asia Innovation Partnerships

The Innovation Awards are designed to "foster stronger collaboration, experimentation, and informed risk-taking, focusing on developing new models that benefit children" through funding projects across the Asia program portfolio.

Objectives of the evaluation

1. Document how SCA/SCI operationalised the Innovation Awards across an innovation conceptual framework and engaged the wider innovation ecosystem.
2. Identify the Innovation Awards planning, design and delivery components that influenced effectiveness.
3. Provide 'innovation', 'scale', and 'scaling' operational lessons for SCA/SCI and implementing partners.
4. Identify opportunities for the Innovation Awards portfolio to 'scale' and/or 'sustainably scale'.

Example process evaluation questions

1. What steps were taken to design the overall initiative, and the innovations within it?
2. What factors led to these design decisions?
3. What were the successes and challenges of these design processes?
4. What steps were taken to implement the overall initiative, and the innovations within it?
5. What factors influenced these implementation approaches?
6. What successes and challenges were encountered during the implementation of the overall initiative and innovations?

An approach to learning about the partnerships

A process evaluation

Within Case Analyses – context-sensitive exploration and documentation of scaling-up experiences;

Cross Case Analysis – comparing and contrasting scaling-up experiences within the contexts of SCA, Save the Children International, and the broader innovation ecosystem, to generate a principled-based understanding of scaling innovations.

Insights

The awards have enabled teams to focus on **complex innovations** in complex settings.

Provided insights into the effectiveness of innovations, but not on scalability.

Skills in partnering are essential for developing and implementing these kinds of initiatives.

Demonstrated the challenges and enablers of good collaboration, and the value of principled based approaches

Implications

A process evaluation, has allowed partners to document what was done, what worked, as well as learn from these experiences

Insights point to opportunities for designing and implementing new partnerships, and strengthening existing ones

Reaffirmed the value of investing in trust-based relationships and the importance (and processes) of building these.

Confirmed the need to focus on scalability from the outset.