



Reflections from ChangeFest National Convenors

As ChangeFest evolves, so must its roles and relationships

As national convenors of ChangeFest, we have been meeting regularly since the festival in Palmerston in 2021. We have been reflecting deeply on the purpose of ChangeFest and whether the current structure of national and local convenors best serves this movement's growth, sustainability and impact. We have taken advice from ChangeFest participants, supporters and critics. We have reviewed the original purpose of ChangeFest and its evolution over time with the ChangeFest Statement as our anchor. We share these reflections to open a conversation with the national movement about what structure, processes and relationships can best serve the ChangeFest vision and purpose.

ChangeFest is a movement celebrating place-based, community-led change. The principles, vision and actions of this movement are captured in the [ChangeFest Statement](#). The Statement recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the First Peoples of this country and that any movement of change must recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and the ChangeFest statements to create a better future for all Australians.

The ChangeFest statement, like the movement itself, is a growing and evolving expression of purpose. That evolution has been reflected in changes to the Statement over time and steered by participants at successive ChangeFest events. Since 2018 ChangeFest events have moved across the country, with local convening handed from one community to the next: from the lands of the Yugambah and the Yuggera people in Logan (2018), to those of the Darug people in Mt Druitt (2019), to the Larrakia nation in Palmerston (2021).

Alongside this local convening, a group of national convenors have stewarded the ChangeFest movement. In 2020, [Health Justice Australia](#), [Kowa](#), the [National Centre for Indigenous Excellence](#) (NCIE) and [La Trobe University](#) joined [Collaboration for Impact](#) (who have held this role since the beginning of ChangeFest) as national convenors. Most of these organisations continue in this role today (NCIE ceased in 2022).

While different roles have been held over time, there are some broad trends in how the work of ChangeFest has been resourced. Local convenors have provided cultural custodianship, hosted events and passed the stewardship of ChangeFest from one community to the next. National convenors have been responsible for implementing the vision and principles of the ChangeFest, contributing to co-design of the program and its delivery, supporting relationships between successive ChangeFest hosts, holding relationships with government and philanthropic funders and taking responsibility for evaluation, and logistics such as insurance and guarantee for suppliers.

As National Convenors we remain excited by the promise of ChangeFest and committed to its work. But we see a disconnect between the purpose of ChangeFest and the structure that currently operates. This is evident in the work and role of the national convenors, but these dynamics reflect wider systemic challenges. Just as we work to shift the concentration of power between governments and the communities they represent, so too the dynamics of ChangeFest need to work differently in the service of local leadership for change - our shared project.

Collectively, the national convenors are committed to ChangeFest's vision for changing our systems and our culture through local leadership and empowering Australia's First Nations. We see learning as critical to achieve this vision. Yet ChangeFest's learning agenda is unclear, from the purpose of the sessions in event programming; to the formal evaluation completed after each event. Continual learning requires the capture, sharing and translation of knowledge across the ChangeFest movement over time.

The meaning of 'community' and 'leadership' and how they are enabled is another example of disconnect. The ChangeFest Statement calls for shared leadership. This means strong leadership from Indigenous and other community members in local events and leading the movement nationally, in partnership with allies. Yet as the movement has grown, ChangeFest's structure at the local and national levels has undermined relationships, roles and ways of working. This has eroded the strength of ties across the movement and its continuing momentum.

It is our collective view that the structure of ChangeFest needs to change to better reflect the principles of shared leadership: drawing on principles of co-design; giving greater prominence to leadership by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and enabling learning to drive place-based change.

We have ideas about how to bring the local leadership of ChangeFest into its national convening and stewardship. We are committed to supporting this conversation with the movement and to adapting how we work and share power as part of the change process. But this is not a decision for us alone. It needs the input and authority of the ChangeFest community, including local convenors past, present and future.

We have begun to have these conversations with future hosts of ChangeFest in nipaluna (2023) and with the community of the Latji Latji nation (2024). Now, we share this reflection to open the conversation with our friends and colleagues in the broader ChangeFest movement.

What are your observations and insights of how the ChangeFest principles are centred in the ChangeFest movement? What role would you and your wider community or organisation like to play?

We are committed to further learning and reflection in support of the change we think is needed to support ChangeFest's vision. And we invite responses and further contributions from the ChangeFest movement, via the comments section here or by getting in touch with any or all of us at the contact details below.

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