

Building the Australia We Want

**A National Conversation to shape the
Australia of tomorrow, today**

Discussion Paper



December 2025

We, Foundations for Tomorrow, acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Country and waterways on which we operate, and for which our livelihoods depend. We pay respect to Elders both past and present; we honour the resilience and strength embodied across generations of First Nations communities who have fought for their rights, their cultures and for self-determination. We also acknowledge those who tirelessly strive to protect, preserve and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, leaving a profound legacy for future generations of Elders and leaders.

We recognise that sovereignty was never ceded.

We affirm that this always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

As an organisation committed to shaping a better future for Australia, we pledge to work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, embracing self-determination, social justice, sustainability, equality and reconciliation. We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are diverse, with deep-rooted histories and rich cultures that continue to thrive despite past injustices. We deeply honour the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities, and we strive to amplify their sacred wisdom, knowledge and expertise as we work collaboratively to pave the way for future generations.

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Executive Summary

The National Conversation on Building the Australia We Want is a bold, large-scale, citizen-centered initiative designed to bring people together across generations, regions, and experiences to explore what matters most and co-create shared ambitions for our nation. Harnessing the wisdom, energy, and imagination of all Australians, a National Conversation has the ability to transform civic participation into a national asset that builds trust, strengthens democracy, and generates the momentum for long-term, shared progress.

This Discussion Paper, a high-transparency preliminary draft to be shaped by open and collaborative consultation and published in final form in early 2026, seeks to provide a profoundly collaborative, pragmatic and targeted approach to a National Conversation for the Australia we want.

Australia faces a critical moment. Around the world, democracy is under strain, and there are mounting signs that Australia is not immune. Without renewed mechanisms for democratic participation, ambition becomes politically risky and long-term reforms unsustainable.

Across multiple jurisdictions overseas, democratic institutions are weakening while authoritarian models gain traction. Polarisation is deepening, while digital technologies are amplifying misinformation and social division. Public discourse has fractured, and policymaking is increasingly short-term and reactive. Australia is not exempt from these symptoms of democratic decline.

Trust in institutions is declining, civic participation is waning, and fragmented policy agendas prevent coherent national progress on long-term challenges like climate change, housing and productivity. Electoral cycles reward short-term politics, while complex reforms are deferred. Policrastination, the avoidance of difficult, long-term decisions, has become systemic. Our national identity, anchored in First Nations history, British settlement and multicultural evolution, remains deeply contested. The result is a nation struggling to move from being “lucky” to being deliberate.

These pressures are visible in widening generational, regional, and social divides. The absence of inclusive dialogue and underrepresentation of diverse voices in Australia’s policy development undermines legitimacy for ambitious long-term reforms. To move forward, we must consciously define what kind of nation we aspire to be. Strengthening democracy requires more than institutional repair. It depends on building the civic mandate and strategic headroom for bold, long-term reform. By reconnecting citizens to decision-making through inclusive, structured dialogue, Australia can generate the legitimacy and shared purpose needed to break the feedback loops that disadvantage future generations.

International experience demonstrates that well-designed national dialogues involving large-scale citizen participation can serve as robust contributions to building a shared sense of direction for the future and overcoming stagnation.

- **Wales** embedded citizen-defined wellbeing goals into law through national dialogue.
- **Singapore** rebuilt its social compact and defined its next chapter through a process of co-created policy reform.
- **Finland, Ireland, and Canada** institutionalised participatory methods that bridge divides and sustain long-term change.
- Digital models, such as **Taiwan's** vTaiwan, show how technology can scale inclusion without sacrificing depth.

These examples illustrate the power of National Conversations to embed public participation into policy design.

A National Conversation offers a structured, large-scale process to bring citizens together across generations, regions, and experiences. Designed as a deliberate intervention in democratic renewal, not a symbolic exercise, such a process has the potential to support:

1. **A Mandate for Bold, Long-Term Reform** by generating a co-created public mandate that legitimises ambition.
2. **Enhanced Protection Against Regression** by embedding shared values that endure beyond political cycles.
3. **Rebuilt Trust** through transparent links between public input and policy outcomes.
4. **Strengthened Civic Literacy** by equipping Australians to engage meaningfully in shaping the nation's future.
5. **Surfacing Of Community Priorities** that inform more responsive and equitable policy.
6. **Stronger National Cohesion** by creating a shared narrative of purpose and belonging.
7. **Embedment of Long-Term Accountability** through new institutional frameworks for intergenerational equity.
8. **Renewal Of Cultural Confidence** by redefining Australia as a deliberate, forward-looking democracy.

From the early 1990s work on citizenship and progress, to the Australian National Development Index (ANDI) initiative of the 2010s, and most recently the Centre for Policy

Development's 2024 paper, *A National Conversation on Measuring What Matters in Australia*, Australians have long recognised the need to define “the Australia we want.”

Furthermore, the concept of a National Conversation is not new. Leading advocates, academics and political leaders have been championing the merits of such an initiative for decades. However, these ambitions have historically faced the same challenges that too often preclude progress: funding strain, misalignment of political and organisational agendas, and short-term incentives.

A successful National Conversation must build with, not over, the efforts already attempted or underway. It should engage, amplify, and nourish existing networks, campaigns, and community relationships. Success will not be measured by ownership, but by partnership, and the degree to which diverse groups see themselves reflected, strengthened, and connected through the process.

Anchored in the inclusive development of a Shared Inquiry Framework intended to ensure coherence, inclusivity, and efficiency across the National Conversation, the Discussion Paper tests this approach to allow for a clear and coordinated approach while allowing for local variation and creativity.

Key elements of the Paper include:

- **Shared Inquiry Framework:** The Shared Inquiry Framework (SIF) is the backbone of the National Conversation, guiding both the model's collaborative development and its ultimate implementation at scale. It provides a coherent structure that enables a diverse network of partners, communities and institutions to work together while retaining the flexibility needed for local adaptation, cultural responsiveness and creativity. Throughout 2026, the preliminary SIF will be tested through pilots and prototypes before becoming the final SIF that underpins the final National Conversation model, finalised in 2027. In its complete form, the SIF brings together three core elements:
 - **Inquiry guide:** The guiding questions that shape how Australians explore their values, aspirations, priorities and long-term concerns.
 - **Methods:** The tools, engagement methods and analytic approaches that allow contributions to be captured, processed and synthesised across diverse contexts in a coherent way.
 - **Output scope:** The early conceptual selection of a policy device that can translate insights from the National Conversation into practical action, providing a civic mandate for bold reform and supporting long-term governance decision-making.

- **Shared Learnings:** Transparent, inclusive documentation capturing findings, tensions, and recommendations, representing the diversity of perspectives rather than enforcing formal consensus. These outputs would build a national knowledge base for ongoing reflection and policy development.

For Australia, civic technology could enable inclusive participation through multiple low-barrier and creative channels:

- **Voice memos via WhatsApp or SMS:** Allowing everyday Australians to contribute in their own words.
- **Short videos under a national hashtag:** Building social momentum and creating a living archive of citizen voices.
- **Drawings and letters from children:** “Postcards of Our Future” displayed publicly to include young voices.
- **Music, art, poetry, and storytelling:** Reflecting Australia’s cultural diversity and civic creativity.
- **Handwritten notes at community venues:** Libraries, town halls, and cultural centres as trusted points for contribution.
- **Interactive local events and workshops:** Deep, facilitated discussions fostering understanding and community belonging.
- **Micro-engagements in daily life:** Polls in service apps or retail checkouts integrating civic reflection into routine interactions.
- **Traditional surveys and written submissions:** Ensuring data representativeness and policy robustness through mixed-method input.

In the interest of transparency and profound collaboration, this Discussion Paper shows our work to date, and still in progress. It forms the starting blocks for further, deeper and richer conversations about how we might work towards rebuilding our democracy through a National Conversation.

This inclusive and hybrid model ensures participation is open to all Australians. Australia’s democratic resilience depends on its ability to listen, deliberate, and act together. The current landscape demands renewal grounded in inclusion, transparency, and shared vision. A National Conversation offers the foundation for rebuilding trust, strengthening institutions, and shaping a deliberate Australia, one that defines its future not by luck, but by deliberate design.

This Discussion Paper reflects the extensive breadth and ambition of this initiative. This report has been updated in December 2025 to reflect updates to the Shared Inquiry Framework and governance for a collaborative model. The Final Report, to be released in early 2026, will draw together the elements of this process that are most robustly developed and suitably informed by stakeholder engagement and emerging evidence.

At this stage, we have intentionally maintained an expansive approach to enable a systems thinking approach and comprehensive exploration across the breadth of issues under consideration. However, recognising the importance of depth and clarity, some themes introduced here may be expanded into subsequent policy briefs to allow for more detailed examination. This approach seeks to balance the strategic imperative for timely progress with the essential need for nuance and thoughtful engagement with complexity.

1. *Unsticking the Future*

The National Conversation as a Strategic Imperative

The **National Conversation on Building the Australia We Want** is a large-scale, creative, and collaborative dialogue inviting Australians from all walks of life to imagine and shape the nation's future together. Through meaningful, multi-modal participation it meets people where they are, fitting into busy lives while making engagement deeply mutual, inspiring, and impactful for all involved.

The Problem: Democracy Under Strain in an Era of Global Disruption

Around the world, political unrest, social fractures, and escalating conflicts are playing out in ways that feel deeply unsettling.¹ From democratic backsliding to rising authoritarianism, from deepening polarisation to open hostility, the global landscape is marked by instability and division.² Watching these dynamics unfold internationally is a stark reminder that the strength of our own democracy and social fabric cannot be taken for granted.

Democratic institutions are weakening across multiple jurisdictions, authoritarian governance models are gaining ground, and societal polarisation is intensifying.³ From the erosion of electoral integrity to the breakdown of social cohesion, the international environment is characterised by fragmentation and systemic stress.⁴

Within this context, even advanced democracies face a crisis of adaptability. Public trust in core institutions has declined markedly, civic engagement is diminishing, and policy formation has long reflected electoral cycles rather than long-term planning.⁵ The digital revolution has accelerated this deterioration. Social media platforms and algorithmic content distribution have fragmented public discourse, amplified misinformation, and incentivised antagonism over deliberation.⁶ The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence and other transformative technologies now threatens to outpace the regulatory and governance capacity of existing democratic frameworks.⁷

The Structural Challenge: Policrastination as a Democratic Byproduct in Australia

These governance failures reflect a structural vulnerability inherent to democratic systems. Electoral accountability, competitive politics, leadership turnover, and media scrutiny, the very mechanisms that make democracy resilient and responsive, simultaneously generate systematic pressure toward short-term decision-making. This phenomenon, termed

"policrastination," represents the systematic deferral of difficult policy choices beyond electoral cycles.

Electoral timeframes create accountability but constrain planning horizons to three to five years, making policies with longer implementation periods politically hazardous.⁸ Competitive politics can drive policy innovation but also incentivises opposition parties to differentiate themselves by repudiating incumbent priorities, undermining policy continuity across governments. Leadership turnover mitigates risks of authoritarian consolidation but can create implementation uncertainty. Media dynamics can reward policy announcements over sustained implementation, providing maximum coverage for new initiatives but minimal attention to completion.

The consequence is profound as critical challenges including climate adaptation, infrastructure investment, housing affordability, and demographic transition are systematically deferred to future electoral cycles, where they become exponentially more expensive, complex, and politically intractable.⁹ Policrastination operates as democracy's structural corrosion, gradually compromising systemic capacity to address long-term challenges regardless of individual leaders' intentions or capabilities.

Compounding Global Risks

Simultaneously, the strategic environment is becoming less stable and more contested. The weakening of multilateral consensus on climate mitigation, the resurgence of strategic competition among major powers, and the emergence of potentially transformative technologies converge to create compounding systemic risks.¹⁰ The policy challenges facing democratic governments are no longer incremental, they are existential in nature.

Protective features of Australian society

While geopolitical tensions, climate change, populism and the adverse impacts of the globalised economic system are features of life in the 21st century that have significant impacts in Australia, there are many protective features of Australian society and governance that should not be overlooked as we seek to build a healthier, more equitable and sustainable society.

Australia is considered one of the leading western democracies in the world. While there are challenges around sentiment of the dominance of the two parties, democratic participation thanks to compulsory voting remains high.¹¹ Where the 'protective power of democracy' is somewhat strained, the independent electoral commission acts as a crucial safeguard of electoral integrity and is trusted by Australian voters.¹²

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports the majority of Australians trust public services and key institutions like the healthcare system and the police.¹³ Indeed both major political parties support the social contract of the social safety net and continuation of key social welfare programs including free healthcare, free education, Medicare and superannuation. The Australian Government itself oversees significant resources spent on understanding and addressing welfare of people living in Australia.¹⁴

There have been some troubling declines in rates of feelings of safety, social cohesion demonstrated through trust in others, access to justice and attitudes towards multiculturalism and diversity remain steady.¹⁵

While not an exhaustive list, these protective features of Australian society – democracy, trust in institutions and each other, functional institutions for welfare and wellbeing – all provide important examples of where Australia is able to withstand compounding global risks.

The Imperative for Proactive Institutional Reform

In this context, democratic renewal is a strategic imperative requiring deliberate institutional intervention and cross-sectoral collaboration. Understanding these challenges as a natural byproduct of democratic processes creates a profound responsibility for political leadership across the ideological spectrum.

The Problem: A Fragmented Australian Landscape

These global patterns of democratic strain are manifesting concretely in Australia's political and social landscape. The structural dynamics of policrastination, declining institutional trust, and fragmenting civic discourse are producing observable vulnerabilities that threaten Australia's capacity for effective long-term governance:

- **Growing community, generational and regional divides:** placing strain on Australia's traditionally strong social fabric and shared identity.¹⁶
- **Chronic policrastination:** the consistent deferral of necessary long-term decisions, making the future more expensive, unequal, and harder to shape.¹⁷
- **Lack of civic engagement and shared dialogue:** making ambition politically risky, and leaving promising reforms vulnerable to abandonment at each election.¹⁸
- **Fragmentation of agendas across portfolios and sectors:** siloed efforts across health, housing, climate, Indigenous recognition, and economic transition make systemic progress challenging.¹⁹

- **Underrepresentation of diverse voices:** policy discussions often exclude voices from rural, remote, marginalised, and disengaged communities, leading to an incomplete picture of public priorities.²⁰

We can no longer rely on top-down fixes or ad-hoc reform. Enduring change requires legitimacy. In turn, legitimacy must be built through shared principles, inclusive processes, and public ownership of our national direction.

A National Conversation

A National Conversation is a large-scale, structured engagement that brings everyday citizens together across generations, regions, and lived experiences to explore what matters most, reflect on national direction, and shape collective ambitions for the future.

Australia’s democracy, civic engagement, and social cohesion are under threat.²¹ A National Conversation can unlock progress where reform is politically stuck: it can shift reform from being politically untouchable to being publicly owned. They reduce risk, increase legitimacy, and create shared accountability for bold decisions.

A National Conversation is a strategic intervention, backed by global examples, that can shift political dynamics, improve policy outcomes, and build durable public legitimacy.²² Investing in a National Conversation will allow us to break free from the ‘wait and see’ mentality and move decisively toward collective progress and unlocks:

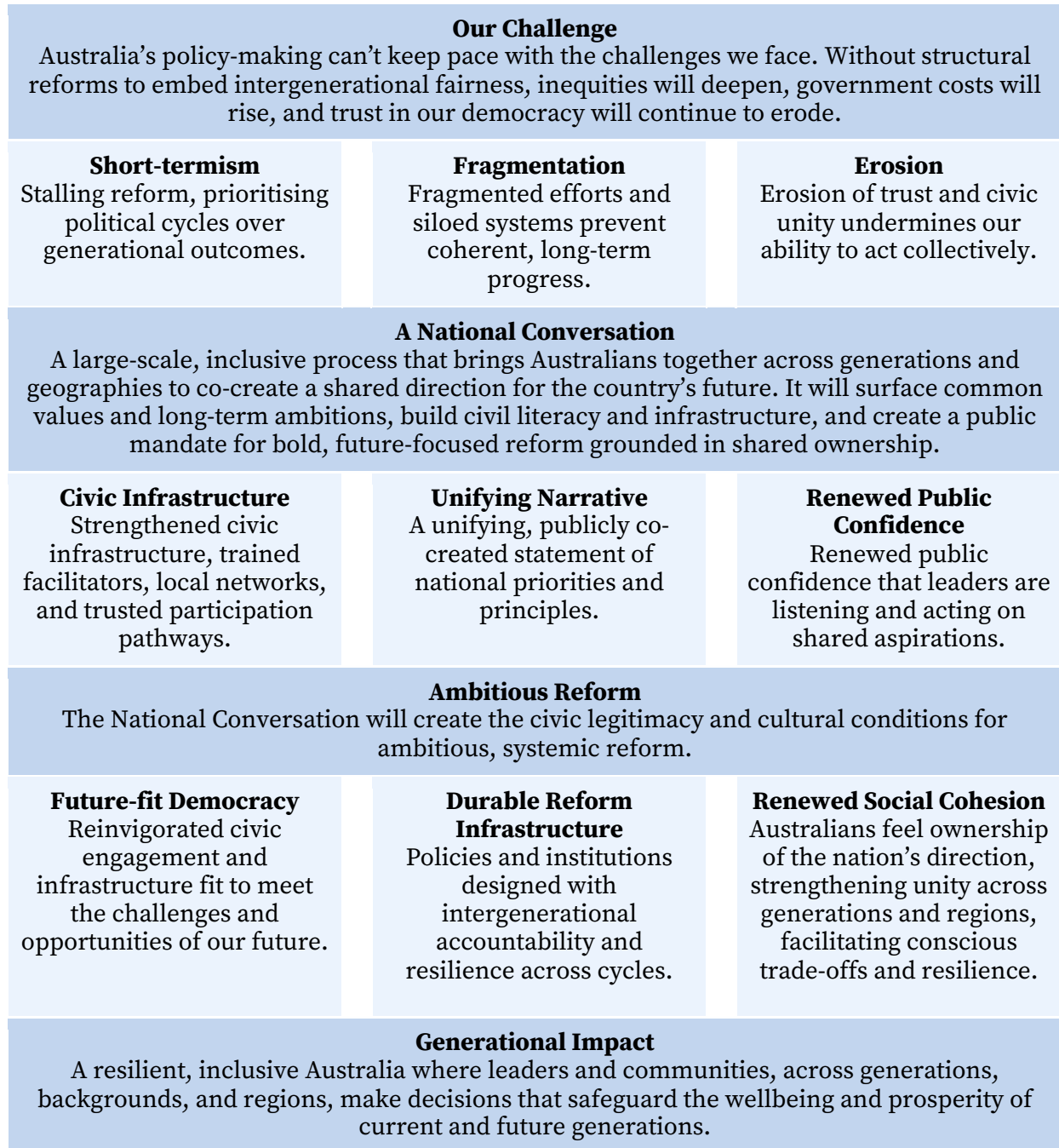
1. **A Mandate for Bold, Long-Term Reform:** Provides political and institutional leaders with the legitimacy to act ambitiously, backed by a co-created public mandate that strengthens durability and reduces political risk.
2. **Enhanced Protection Against Policy Regression:** By initiating a culture of public co-ownership of policy development, a National Conversation can support future policies to be more resilient to political cycles and backsliding, and ensure they are anchored in shared values with enduring public support.
3. **Trust Through Transparency and Ownership:** By enabling shared ownership over policy development and demonstrating visible follow-through, a National Conversation can strengthen trust in institutions.
4. **Civic Engagement and Democratic Literacy:** The process of engaging citizens in a large-scale National Consultation ensures people become equipped with the tools, language, and confidence to navigate complexity, engage in policy conversations, and participate meaningfully in shaping our future.

5. **Enriched Understanding of Community Needs:** The broad conversations enabled by a National Conversation can surface unanticipated priorities and support their embedment in policy development. This in turn ensures policies comprehensively reflect community needs and values.
6. **Public Participation, Dialogue, and Co-Creation:** National Conversations enable collective visioning, bridge divides, and generate legitimacy from the ground up.
7. **Institutional and Policy Architecture:** National Conversations provide the mandate and foundation for building institutions and policies that embed long-termism, accountability, and intergenerational equity into their architecture.
8. **Cultural and Narrative Infrastructure:** National Conversations cultivate a renewed sense of shared identity, civic agency, and national direction.

Theory of Change

Figure 1: Theory of Change for the National Conversation

Shows how the National Conversation builds public trust and legitimacy, enabling durable reform and intergenerational impact.



Questions for Further Exploration & Discussion

- How can the National Conversation best balance hope and realism, fostering belief in a better future without ignoring the current challenges Australians face?
- What should be the unifying message or purpose that distinguishes the National Conversation from past consultations?
- What framing best conveys that this is not another consultation but a national act of renewal?
- Does the current theory of change clearly show how civic dialogue leads to tangible institutional reform? What's missing?
- What kinds of evidence or outputs (values, goals, civic indicators) would make the theory of change credible to both government and the public? (*Applicable to this section and Section 4. 'A National Mandate for the Future'*)

2. Localisation

An Australian National Conversation

We recognise that there is no single model we can simply copy and paste. While international examples, such as the Welsh model, offer valuable insights, Australia's path must be distinctly our own, rooted in our unique socio-cultural fabric, shaped by our shared yet complex history, and responsive to the diversity of our people and places. A meaningful National Conversation must be hyper-localised, reflecting the lived realities of communities across our vast country and creating space for every voice to help define a deliberate and united future.

Australia's national identity can be seen to be made up of three distinct stories: First Nations Australia, British settlement, and recent multicultural Australia.²³ It is evident that Australia has struggled with crafting a contemporary shared national identity.

Australia's referendum on an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice in 2023 was intended to bring people together, but it became overshadowed by misinformation, disinformation, and racism, ultimately deepening divisions and straining an already fragile social fabric.²⁴

Australia is one of the most diverse and multicultural societies, nearly half of all Australians (48.2%) have at least one parent born overseas, and 27.6% of the population report a birthplace

overseas themselves.²⁵ This highlights a nation built on cultural variety, where people from many cultures and backgrounds contribute to Australia's rich and dynamic social fabric.

There are also clear distinctions between urban and regional (or rural) areas. The combined population of Australia's capital cities was 18.42 million, growing by 2.4% in the 2023-24 year with regional Australia's (outside those capital city areas) population being around 9.91 million, with growth of about 1.3%.²⁶ Australia's capital cities (urban areas) have a younger median age of around 36.9 years, whereas the rest of Australia (regional and rural areas) has a notably higher median age of 42.0 years.²⁷ Different population groups across urban and regional Australia have different priorities. Generally, urban Australians tend to be more diverse and progressive in outlook, driven by high levels of migration, cultural mixing and vibrant labour markets.²⁸ Meanwhile, regional and rural Australia often retains stronger emphasis on traditional values such as agriculture, resource-based industries, local infrastructure, and environmental issues specific to dispersed communities.

Acknowledging this diversity and difference across different groups will be crucial in crafting a conversation that resonates with each audience and suitably captures their ambitions for the future.

Since Donald Horne first called Australia the "Lucky Country, run mainly by second-rate people who share its luck" in 1964, Australia's prosperity has come to be seen as shaped by chance and abundance of natural resources rather than deliberate design.²⁹ The implications of this criticism still echo widely today. While Australia abounds in good fortune, its leaders lack ambition and have become used to coasting on our luck, rather than developing robust policy ideas. To move beyond this accidental luck, we need to become a deliberate Australia, one that consciously defines its identity, invests in education and inclusion, confronts difficult histories, and intentionally shapes a sustainable, forward-looking future.

Australian Case Study: Aspirations for our nation - a conversation with Australians about progress

Australian Bureau of Statistics conducts first National Conversation

Between 2010 and 2012, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) conducted Australia's first National Conversation on wellbeing, progress and aspirations for our nation.³⁰ The consultation asked a simple, yet complex, question: 'Is life in Australia getting better?'

Building on the Measures of Australia's Progress (MAP) framework in 2002, the process sought out to test whether the framework still reflected what Australians valued most.³¹ Since its inception, MAP had aimed to connect economic outcomes with social and environmental ones, evolving over time as evidence and community sentiment shifted.

The National Conversation was guided by an Expert Advisory Group including senior ABS and Treasury leaders, alongside representatives from business, community, research and government sectors. Consultation took place through multiple channels including; workshops, submissions, surveys, and community forums, as well as a structured engagement model. Thousands of individuals and organisations contributed their perspectives, generating one of the most comprehensive national dialogues on wellbeing ever undertaken in Australia.

Although the MAP program was later discontinued due to budget constraints, a legacy has endured. The initiative influenced how wellbeing and programs are measured in Australia and internationally, shaping approaches to evidence-based policy design and public accountability.

This model demonstrated how national, inclusive dialogue can align public institutions with community values by embedding citizen perspectives in long term policy frameworks and strengthening the legitimacy of government decision-making.

Consultation feedback was iteratively reviewed and further consultation activities conducted as needed. Overall, the conversation took almost three years to complete with the participation of thousands of organisations and individuals across Australian society.

While shortly after the consultation the MAP was de-funded due to budgetary constraints, the legacy of the ABS work continues and has had significant influence on national and international processes for measuring wellbeing, designing policy, and improving outcomes.

The Key to Deliver on Ambitious Reform

Today's complex challenges, climate disruption, demographic shifts, geopolitical tension, declining trust in institutions, are impeding on the government's ability to continue delivering an ambitious agenda and will demand deeper public engagement to sustain reform

momentum. Delivering lasting impact requires embedding the interests of future generations into every decision, ensuring policies are judged not only by short-term benefit but by their enduring contribution to future-fit Australia's social, economic, and environmental wellbeing. It also requires an engaged public, who share the vision for the government's agenda and endorse its approach.

Australians consistently express strong support for structural reform, yet many feel disconnected from the process.

A National Conversation can help shift the tone, foster common ground and invite all people living in Australia to shape the future, not just react to it.

This complements existing dialogue efforts such as the Economic Reform Dialogue, Jobs and Skills Summit, and the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce, by extending engagement beyond sectoral or thematic silos.

Bolstering Our Democracy

Australia's democracy is strong but under strain. Around the world, representative systems are struggling to keep pace with complexity, polarisation, and public distrust, and similar patterns are evident in Australia. Increasing affective polarisation is undermining social cohesion and trust.³² Declining voter turnout, lowest levels of civic education and the spread of mis- and disinformation are further eroding confidence in institutions and decision-making.³³

Scholars and practitioners argue that strengthening democracy now requires more than institutional reform; it requires renewing the way citizens participate in shaping national direction. Around the world, new approaches to participation are augmenting traditional democratic structures with deliberation, structured dialogue that helps people consider evidence, reflect on diverse perspectives, and find common ground on complex public issues.³⁴

Australian Case Study: Civic engagement in local strategic vision

NSW Local Government Community Strategic Plans

Under the NSW Government's Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework, every council must work with its community to develop a Community Strategic Plan (CSP): the highest-level plan setting out a shared vision for the next ten years or more.³⁵ The plan is explicitly described as the community's plan, not the council's, and is developed through broad, inclusive engagement processes supported by the NSW Office of Local Government.

Camden Council's CSP (2025–2040) demonstrates this principle in practice.³⁶ Over several months, the Council engaged residents, local businesses, and community groups through surveys, workshops, and pop-up events to co-design the long-term direction for the region. More than 1,700 people contributed to shaping priorities around liveability, sustainability, opportunity, and belonging.

The result is a plan that reflects the collective aspirations of the Camden community and provides a clear framework for decision-making across government, business, and civil society. It connects community input directly to delivery programs, operational plans, and performance reporting, ensuring accountability and transparency over time.³⁷ Whilst there may be areas where this engagement could have been broader, and more inclusive it highlights an intentional shift towards involving civil society in government decisions.

This model exemplifies participatory democracy in Australia: a structured process that embeds public voice in long-term strategic planning, links vision to implementation, and strengthens local legitimacy by making community members co-authors of their future.

To bolster our democracy, we must help citizens move from passive spectators to active participants.

An engaged public benefits not only our communities but our policy and decision makers. While they may not always lead directly to legislative change, they support implementation, agenda-setting, and institutional learning.³⁸ They help public authorities make difficult decisions, gather a wide range of ideas, and build trust between governments and citizens.³⁹

Engaging deeply with all citizens works best to address complex, values-driven issues, precisely the kinds of long-term challenges Australia faces.⁴⁰ This highlights that when people are given time, information, and respect, they are capable of making reasoned, forward-looking judgements that improve democratic outcomes.

The National Conversation builds on this evidence and extends it to a national scale. It draws on key principles of; representation, inclusion, reflection, and shared ownership, to reconnect Australians with decision-making and strengthen the legitimacy of reform. By enabling diverse voices to be heard and acted upon, it bolsters trust, cohesion, and civic confidence.

In doing so, the National Conversation shifts the dial and begins our journey to renew Australia’s democratic culture: making participation meaningful, building legitimacy for long-term decisions, and ensuring that our democracy is resilient, inclusive, and fit for the future.

Case Study: ATSIC and the Cost of Late Collaboration

Exploratory case study: to be refined through further consultation

When the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was abolished in 2005, Australia dismantled not only its primary, and longest running, Indigenous representative body but also the bridge that had connected First Nations voices with national decision-making for nearly fifteen years since its establishment in 1990.⁴¹ The decision, made with minimal consultation, created “worrying gaps...and challenges that are yet to be grappled with adequately or appropriately” in Indigenous representation.⁴² The years that followed saw a succession of government and community initiatives that were varied in their longevity, and in the extent to which they enabled Indigenous leadership.

Based on stakeholder consultations, it appears that in the aftermath, two parallel processes began.

1. First Nations-led dialogues, engaging First Nations Peoples across the country to ask communities what a new representative structure should look like.
2. Civil society and government forums pursued their own agendas on reconciliation and national identity.

Consultation insights indicate that the two tracks evolved separately, without adequate early alignment on purpose or definitions. The delayed and, arguably, retrofitted integration of these conversations has been credited with underlying misalignment and disunity that went on to be insurmountable during the 2023 Voice referendum.

A Slow Rebuild Without Shared Stewardship

In 2004, the government established the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OPIC), originally situated within the then Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, to supersede ATSIC, and eventually created the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) in 2019.⁴³ Both bodies centralised policy control on Indigenous Affairs within government, but neither offered the kind of independent Indigenous representation that had been provided by ATSIC.

After extensive consultations, the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples was established in 2009 as the peak independent representative body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, representing a powerful act of self-determination.⁴⁴ But it was built without strong allyship from civil society. While thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participated in its formation, few non-Indigenous Australians were aware of this process.

When government funding was later withdrawn, the Congress had limited external support to sustain it.⁴⁵ It ceased operating in 2019, and this loss was met with little public protest.⁴⁶ This revealed a hard truth: without shared stewardship, Indigenous institutions remain vulnerable to political whim.

The Ripple Effects: From Congress to the Voice

In parallel to these developments, the Gillard government established the expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition in 2010, initiating what was in effect, a National Conversation on how First Nations Peoples should be formally recognised.⁴⁷ The subsequent Kirribilli dialogue in 2015 and the Referendum Council's regional dialogues (2016-17) culminated in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, which called for a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament and a Makarrata Commission for treaty and truth-telling.⁴⁸

When Indigenous leaders issued the Uluru Statement from the Heart in 2017, calling for a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament, it reflected years of Indigenous-led consensus-building.⁴⁹ Yet once again, civil society and government had been moving in parallel, focused on minimalist constitutional recognition, allowing further fragmentation in the support base for ambitious reform.⁵⁰

By the time the two visions met, the gulf was too wide to bridge. Political partisanship was made possible through a lack of unification across the potential support base, and when the referendum finally reached voters in 2023, public understanding and trust had never caught up.⁵¹ Misperceptions about the Voice echoed the old misunderstandings about ATSIC, and misinformation gained traction in the absence of shared understanding.

The Lesson: Definitional Co-Leadership from Day One

The ATSIC experience and its aftermath show that 'co-design' is not enough if it comes too late, even when the intentions remain to "ensure the maximum participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples".⁵² True partnership requires what might better be called definitional co-leadership, an agreement from the outset on *what success means, who defines it, and how it will be shared.*

The series of policy experiments between 2005 and 2023 (OPIC, Congress, NIAA, and ultimately the Uluru process and Voice referendum), illustrate the continuing challenges of sustaining Indigenous representation in the absence of shared authorship and bipartisan support.⁵³

Had First Nations leaders and civil society partners built this shared foundation in the 2000s, Australia might have entered the Voice referendum with decades of trust and mutual understanding already in place. Instead, each generation has had to start again, rebuilding dialogue, trust, and institutions from the ground up.

The cost of failing to collaborate early is not just institutional collapse or referendum defeat, it is the loss of continuity in collective purpose. To avoid repeating history, future national initiatives must begin not with consultation, but with shared authorship.

Questions for Further Exploration & Discussion

- *What makes engagement feel genuinely “local” and owned by communities rather than externally imposed, while also maintaining relevance to a national agenda?*
- *How should local conversations connect upward to the national synthesis? (Also relevant to Section 8, ‘Civic Technology Mapping’)*
- *How can we embed the process in everyday institutions, such as schools, councils, libraries, service agencies, where trust already exists?*
- *How do we ensure First Nations leadership and truth-telling are embedded from the outset, not added later as symbolic steps?*
- *What lessons can we take from ATSIIC about shared ownership, timing, and the consequences of late collaboration?*
- *What roles should local government, regional networks, and youth-led organisations play in anchoring this process?*
- *How do we measure “local legitimacy” in ways that policymakers and communities both trust?*

3. International Insights

International Case Studies

Looking abroad, the international examples of National Conversations highlight that success is about more than just scale or aspiration. Effectiveness hinges on a careful mix of deliberation quality, legitimacy, inclusivity and policy impact. Successful processes consistently pair inclusive and representative participation with carefully designed deliberation methods, transparent and visible communication and clear pathways to influence policy outcomes. They cultivate trust not just through who is included but through how citizen contributions are acknowledged, iterated upon and institutionally embedded.

For Australia, the key insight from international examples is a National Conversation that is designed as a deliberate intervention in democratic practice, not a symbolic gesture. It requires a careful blend of rigorous process design, inclusive participation, forward-looking framing and institutional integration. When these elements converge, national civic dialogue can become a sustained force for generational reform, social cohesion and long-term political stability.

- **Wales, The Wales We Want (2014–2015):** A year-long, government-led National Conversation that directly informed the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015*, embedding citizen-defined wellbeing goals into law.⁵⁴ The process demonstrated how structured, locally facilitated dialogue can translate public values into legislative outcomes, institutionalising long-term accountability and intergenerational responsibility.⁵⁵
- **New Zealand Wellbeing Framework (2023):** A co-designed, bicultural wellbeing framework developed through partnership between government, Māori, and communities to transform Aotearoa New Zealand’s mental health and wellbeing system.⁵⁶ It bridges Māori and non-Māori worldviews to embed shared outcomes of safety, dignity, connection, resilience, and purpose, institutionalising a holistic, inclusive approach to wellbeing governance and social trust.⁵⁷
- **Singapore, Forward Singapore (2022–2023):** A government-led but citizen-centred process engaging over 200,000 Singaporeans to refresh the nation’s social compact and co-create a roadmap for future development.⁵⁸ It linked civic dialogue directly to policy reform and institutional change, showing how participatory governance can strengthen trust, align national values with economic strategy, and embed co-creation into public policy.⁵⁹
- **Finland, Suomi 100: The 100 Year Dialogue (2017):** A decentralised, civic-driven national reflection involving 800,000 participants through 5,000 projects celebrating Finland’s centenary under the theme “Together”.⁶⁰ It combined celebration and dialogue to strengthen social cohesion, resulting in the institutionalisation of the *Timeout* facilitation method, and a permanent foundation supporting democratic dialogue and civic trust.⁶¹
- **Canada, Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2008–2015):** A survivor-led national truth-telling and civic education process documenting the history and legacy of residential schools, culminating in a Final Report containing 94 Calls to Action for systemic reform.⁶² The Commission reshaped national consciousness around reconciliation, created enduring civic and educational structures, and highlighted the importance of accountability and follow-through in restorative national dialogues.
- **Ireland, Citizens’ Assemblies and Constitutional Convention (2012–2021):** A structured series of citizen-led deliberations addressing socially divisive constitutional issues, including marriage equality, abortion, and climate change.⁶³ The assemblies demonstrated how informed, transparent, and independently facilitated citizen deliberation can drive democratic renewal, build consensus on polarising issues, and lead directly to legislative and constitutional reform.⁶⁴
- **Iceland, National Forum (2010):** A citizen-led constitutional dialogue convening 950 randomly selected Icelanders after the 2008 financial crisis to rebuild democratic legitimacy and co-draft a new constitution.⁶⁵ Although the draft was never enacted, it became a global symbol of participatory constitutionalism, highlighting how civic-led deliberation can restore trust and shape long-term reform movements.

- **Taiwan, vTaiwan (2014–present):** A digital civic-tech platform combining online tools like *Pol.is* with in-person dialogue to enable mass-scale, transparent, and consensus-based policy deliberation.⁶⁶ By influencing over 80% of policy issues discussed, including fintech and ride-sharing laws, vTaiwan shows how digital innovation can scale participation while maintaining depth, transparency, and policy impact.⁶⁷
- **Chile, Citizens' Dialogues and #TuConstitución (2015–2016):** A nationwide civic process engaging over 200,000 citizens in shaping a new constitution through local assemblies and online platforms.⁶⁸ While its legislative outcomes were limited, it transformed expectations of participatory democracy and demonstrated both the potential and risks of citizen-led constitutional reform in politically polarised contexts.⁶⁹
- **European Union, Citizens' Panel on Intergenerational Fairness (2025):** A 150-person deliberative panel representing all 27 EU member states,⁷⁰ designed to inform the EU Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness.⁷¹ The initiative exemplifies how citizen panels can directly shape strategic policymaking, embedding intergenerational perspectives into governance and offering a model for linking civic input to formal institutional frameworks.
- **Norway, Institutionalised Long-Term Dialogue:** A permanent national framework embedding intergenerational perspectives into governance through parliamentary processes like their Ombudsman for Children, long-term planning forums such as their Forum for Development and Environment, the Open Government Partnership and Norwegian Citizens Panel (active since 2013), and most recently their Citizens Assembly for the Future.⁷² Norway's model shows how enduring civic infrastructure and cross-sectoral dialogue can sustain intergenerational equity and long-term policy coherence without relying on one-off National Conversations.⁷³

Further detail on international case studies is available at www.thenationalconvo.org

Scale: More Than Just Numbers

International experiences demonstrate that there is no single 'right' scale for National Conversations. Rather, scale depends on a considered balance between depth and breadth, as well as on the broader objective of citizen engagement. Some processes have focused on smaller groups of citizens selected for representation, enabling deep and considered deliberation on a subject of public interest. Others, in contrast, have aimed to incorporate as many voices as possible, reaching tens or even hundreds of thousands of participants. Increasingly, however, the most effective National Conversations have sought to combine these approaches, pairing broad, open engagement with instances of focused deliberation.

The OECD has documented how smaller, representative "mini-publics" can generate depth and legitimacy,⁷⁴ with Ireland's Constitutional Convention and Citizens' Assemblies offering perhaps the most cited examples of this: panels of around 100 randomly selected citizens

convened to deliberate on socially divisive and politically stalled issues such as abortion, gender equality and climate change.⁷⁵ These small-scale processes garnered political attention not because of their size, but rather their representativeness, the transparency of deliberation and quality of their outcomes.

On the other hand, broad participatory exercises such as Singapore's ForwardSG National Conversation and Chile's Citizens' Dialogues highlight the importance of breadth and visibility. Singapore's exercise, which engaged over 200,000 citizens through surveys, digital platforms and roadshows,⁷⁶ underscores the effect of inclusivity. Similarly, Chile's constitutional cabildos, which reached nearly 220,000 people across 2015-2016 and a further 154,000 between 2019 and 2021,⁷⁷ demonstrates how an emphasis on openness and self-selection can empower large-scale citizen engagement and create legitimacy just through sheer reach.

Among the international experiences, hybrid models illustrate how reach and richness can be combined. For example, Taiwan's vTaiwan platform allowed large numbers of citizens to engage online in shaping proposals, before narrowing to smaller, focused facilitation groups to deliberate on specific policy questions.⁷⁸ Likewise, Iceland's constitutional process effectively paired large one-day forums of 1500 citizens,⁷⁹ followed by a smaller elected council to draft proposals,⁸⁰ achieving both public visibility and deliberative quality. These examples show that scale can be reached over time rather than in a single moment. The OECD too, emphasises the value of cumulative, layered engagement over one-off exercises in institutionalising participation as civic infrastructure.⁸¹

For Australia, the lesson to be drawn from international experiences is that a National Conversation should be designed not as a singular event but as the beginning of an ongoing dialogue. Small and representative groups can augment a broader participatory process, enhancing the quality and meaningfulness of citizens' participation, while large participatory channels can ensure that Australians across diverse communities, territories and backgrounds feel included. In practice, this might look like thousands to tens of thousands of direct self-selected citizen engagements, complemented by mini-publics of 100-200 citizens to achieve the deliberative richness and credibility required to address complex issues. Ultimately, the real benchmark for success won't be headline numbers, but instead whether Australians perceive the process as meaningful, connective and inclusive.

In the Australian context, scale is about more than raw numbers. It is about fostering a sense of national belonging and hope for our future, ensuring that no Australian is left behind and building robust civic infrastructure that facilitates the ability for Australians to have an ongoing say in decision-making. By pairing breadth and depth, Australia has an opportunity to nurture hope and connection, while laying the foundations for a more cohesive and inclusive future.

International Case Studies: Methods & Scale

Table 1: Scale and Methods of International National Conversations

Jurisdiction	Methods	Scale	Per Capita Equivalent in Australia
Wales - Wales We Want Process (2014-2015)	Future Champions	150	1,296.06
	Participants (~)	7,000	60,482.62
Singapore - Forward Singapore (2022-2023)	Total	200,000	912,270.13
	Participating in partnerships and engagement sessions	35,000	159,647.27
	Surveys, roadshows and digital platforms	165,000	752,622.86
Ireland - Constitutional Convention & Citizens' Assembly (2012-2021)	Constitutional Convention (2012-2014)	100	511.84
	Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change (2016-2018)	100	511.84
	Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality (2019-2021)	100	511.84
Iceland - National Forum & Constitutional Council (2010)	National Forum 2009 (citizens)	1500	102,086.73
	National Constitutional Meeting 2010 (citizens)	950	64,654.93
	Constitutional Council (members)	25	1,701.45
Taiwan - vTaiwan (2014)	Mailing list (citizens)	200,000	235,760.91
	Uber case	4,000	4,715.22
Chile - Citizens' Dialogues and Constitutional Conventions	Constitutional Process (2015-2016) (participants)	218,689	304,757.66
	Cabildos & Local Assemblies (2019-2021) (participants)	154,541	215,363.16
	Constitutional Process (2023): members on Constitutional Council	50	69.68
	Citizens engaged in wider participation mechanisms	269,684	375,822.59

Further detail on international case studies is available at www.thenationalconvo.org

Questions for Further Exploration & Discussion

- How might we balance the depth of Finland’s civic model with the policy influence of Wales’ approach?
- What are the right markers of “scale” in Australia, participation numbers, geographic spread, media reach, or trust indicators?
- How do we design for depth, inclusion, and follow-through rather than just participation metrics?
- What follow-through or legacy mechanisms (e.g. Wales’ Commissioner, Finland’s Timeout Foundation) could be replicated within the Australian context?
- What risks from international examples must we avoid?
- How might Australia’s National Conversation contribute to global democratic innovation?

4. A National Mandate for the Future

Pending further consultation: *Translating public dialogue into enduring policy direction*

Questions for Further Exploration & Discussion

- *What core purpose should the flagship artefact or policy device (process output) serve for Australian citizens, advocates, policymakers, public servants and business leaders? Should it prioritise inspiration, legitimacy, accountability, and/or long-term direction?*
- *What are the essential ingredients for translating public participation into political traction?*
- *Which artefact structure feels most appropriate and achievable for Australia? And, what development process would be required to set this up for success?*
- *What would make people trust this output as something that genuinely reflects public will?*
- *Should the artefact include formal mechanisms for government response or legislative recognition?*
- *How can we prevent the artefact from becoming technocratic or overly institutional?*
- *Which international precedents (Wales, Singapore, Finland, Ireland) offer the most relevant lessons for both design and sustainability?*
- *How can Australia avoid the pitfalls seen in other models, such as example overly partisan ownership, or symbolic outputs without policy traction (some vision and values-based approaches)?*
- *What process will ensure the artefact remains active and not static, such as periodic renewal, mandated review, or institutional embedding? What symbolic or civic mechanisms (e.g. annual Future Generations Statement, public renewal process) would keep the mandate alive between election cycles?*
- *How can the artefact create visible feedback loops, showing how public input informs action and how progress is tracked?*

5. *The Australian Opportunity*

Pending further consultation: *Unique opportunities for Australian implementation*

Questions for Further Exploration & Discussion

- *What are the unique Australian strengths and opportunities that can elevate the Australian National Conversation as leading practice?*
- *How do we frame this initiative as a hopeful, future-facing project after a divisive referendum period?*
- *What combination of civic and political leadership would maximise momentum without risking partisanship?*

6. Shared Inquiry Framework

The Shared Inquiry Framework (SIF) is the backbone of the National Conversation, guiding both the model's collaborative development and its ultimate implementation at scale. It provides a coherent structure that enables a diverse network of partners, communities and institutions to work together while retaining the flexibility needed for local adaptation, cultural responsiveness and creativity. This ensures a resource-wise and scalable approach where partners align with shared questions, principles and methods while contributing their own strengths and perspectives.

Through this coordinated approach, the SIF creates strategic coherence and distributed ownership. It supports meaningful engagement across varied contexts and generates insights that genuinely reflect Australia's diversity. Throughout 2026, the preliminary SIF will be tested through pilots and prototypes before becoming the final SIF that underpins the final National Conversation model, finalised in 2027.

In its complete form, the SIF brings together three core elements:

1. **Inquiry guide:** The guiding questions that shape how Australians explore their values, aspirations, priorities and long-term concerns.
2. **Methods:** The tools, engagement methods and analytic approaches that allow contributions to be captured, processed and synthesised across diverse contexts in a coherent way.
3. **Output scope:** The early conceptual selection of a policy device that can translate insights from the National Conversation into practical action, providing a civic mandate for bold reform and supporting long-term governance decision-making.

Together, these elements create a clear pathway from local experience to national insight. They ensure that the National Conversation not only reflects what matters to Australians but also produces a trusted mandate, a shared sense of direction for the country's future, and a practical device to support long-term decision-making.

The SIF presented in this draft is a **Preliminary** Shared Inquiry Framework. Its purpose is to guide early prototyping and piloting, remaining flexible enough to evolve through real-world partner input and community engagement

Development Pathway for the SIF

Stage	Date	Key Activities	Intended Outputs
Preliminary SIF	Dec '25 – Feb '26	Establish a clear, workable SIF by defining its intent, scope, guiding questions and early methodological direction.	A preliminary SIF is ready for prototyping.
SIF Launched for Testing	March '26	Publicly launch the National Conversation Development Lab, including the preliminary SIF, release of the Building the Australia We Want report, and commencing partner onboarding ahead of piloting.	A SIF ready for coordinated piloting.
Pilot & Prototyping of the SIF (Input, Methods & Systems and Output/Device)			
Phase 1: Engagement Pilots <i>(Questions and methods across contexts)</i>	March – Dec '26	Test the preliminary SIF across diverse communities by trialling storytelling, surveys, multimedia and creative formats; refining facilitation and accessibility approaches; and capturing lessons to strengthen questions, methods and guidance.	A validated, refined and evidence-informed prototype.
Phase 2: Methods Prototyping <i>(Testing methods & systems)</i>	March – Dec '26	Develop and refine practical engagement mediums by designing and testing digital, in-person and creative submission pathways; prototyping tools for surveys, storytelling and dialogue; assessing accessibility and usability; and incorporating partner feedback that focuses on trade-offs and responsibilities.	A validated suite of engagement tools and methodological guidance, ready for refinement within the 2027 model.
Phase 3: Policy Device Prototyping <i>(Scoping the desired output)</i>	March – Dec '26	Identify the type of policy device needed for long-term decision making by testing early concepts, consulting with government and sector experts, exploring design requirements and trialling use cases to shape an early model.	A preliminary policy device model with clear functional requirements and feasible design options.
Final Model Development (Synthesis and Maturation)	Jan – June '27	Synthesise 2026 insights, partner feedback and prototype learnings to refine questions, methods, standards and systems; develop public-facing materials; stress-test the model; and finalise the SIF for adoption.	A final SIF ready for national adoption, with robust questions, methods and standards to inform the long-term policy device.

Phase 1 | Establishing a shared direction

The guiding questions that shape how Australians explore their values, aspirations, priorities and long-term concerns.

1.1 Broad Scoping: Understanding What Matters Most	1.2 Deepening the Conversation: Shaping Shared Vision and Direction
<p>Context Required: Very low. Anyone can answer based on personal experience.</p> <p>Engagement Modes: High-scale survey, public campaigns, community touchpoints, quick digital tools.</p> <p>Scale & depth: High scale, low depth.</p>	<p>Context Required: Moderate. Participants benefit from reflection and facilitated dialogue.</p> <p>Engagement Modes: Richer consultative processes, such as immersive workshops and future visioning sessions. Medium scale, medium depth.</p> <p>Scale & depth: Moderate scale, moderate depth.</p>
<p>What kind of Australia do you want to live in?</p>	<p>What values and principles guide how you make choices for your future?</p>
	<p>What does Australia represent today to you that you would like others to enjoy?</p>
	<p>What do we need to change or prioritise now to build the kind of country you want to live in?</p>
	<p>Whose voices and experiences are missing, and how can we ensure they help shape this vision and future direction?</p>
<p>What future do you want for Australia, for yourself, your children, and generations to come?</p>	<p>What do you want for Australia in 20 or 30 years' time?</p>
	<p>What should be protected or held onto to give future generations the best start?</p>
	<p>What should we do differently today to secure that future?</p>
<p>What matters most for Australia's future, and how can we shape it together?</p>	<p>What do you want life in Australia to feel like in 2030, 2050 or 2100?</p>
	<p>How can we ensure decisions today reflect what matters most to people across the country?</p>
	<p>What responsibilities do we share in shaping that future?</p>

	What shared hopes or values could unite us across generations and communities?
How can we create an Australia that is fair, sustainable, and thriving for everyone, now and in the future?	What would fairness and opportunity look like in tomorrow's Australia?
	What changes are needed to make your community stronger and more resilient?
	How do you think we should balance meeting today's needs with caring for the generations ahead?
How should Australia make decisions for the long term, especially when trade-offs are involved?	When tough choices need to be made, what principles or values do you think should guide Australia's leaders?
	How should we balance meeting today's needs with caring for future generations?
	What are the big questions Australia needs to explore to build a strong and fair future?

Phase 1 methods for prototyping

Suitable to support the spectrum of large-scale, low-context as well as enriched local dialogues to provide the foundational insights at scale for the National Conversation.

Method	Depth	Reach	Commentary
Voice memos or messages via WhatsApp or SMS	Low	Medium	Highly accessible and authentic, particularly for those less comfortable writing or without internet access. Limited analysis potential without structured prompts.
Short videos under a shared national hashtag	Medium	High	Builds visibility and momentum online, engaging younger demographics and influencers. Less inclusive for those without digital literacy or social media access.
Drawings and letters from children (“Postcards of Our Future”)	Medium	Low-Medium	Creative and symbolic, offering intergenerational perspective and emotional resonance. Requires facilitation through schools or community spaces for broader reach.
Music, artwork, poetry, and storytelling	Medium	Low	Deep cultural expression capturing identity, emotion, and values. High richness but requires curation and community partnerships to ensure representativeness.
Handwritten notes collected at community consultations	Medium	Low	Builds local trust and tangible participation in physical spaces. Depth depends on facilitation quality; transcription adds operational load.
Interactive local events and immersive workshops	High	Medium	Deepest insight and dialogue, ideal for deliberation and co-creation. Resource-intensive, so best used in a sampling or pilot approach.
Micro-engagements in everyday life (polls at checkouts, service points, apps)	Low	High	Extremely scalable and inclusive for mass participation, though low depth and limited narrative richness. Useful for trend-spotting and validation of broader findings.

Phase 2 | Exploring trade-offs, responsibilities and tensions

This phase moves beyond identifying aspirations to understanding responsibility, compromise, and the structural supports needed to sustain long-term decision making. This approach enables the broad ambitions of Phase 1 to be developed to inform a robust and practical policy device that can be both trusted and endorsed by citizens, and also practical and meaningfully supportive for government and public service leaders. The insights generated in this phase provide the design brief and legitimacy foundation for Phase 3, where these principles are translated into a concrete policy device capable of guiding long-term governance and sustaining wellbeing for people and the planet.

2. Exploring Trade-offs, Responsibilities and Tensions

Purpose: Conducted once a shared sense of national direction is emerging, this phase deepens understanding of Australia's priorities and the choices required to realise them. It explores how Australians believe long-term decisions should be made, what trade-offs they are willing to accept, and the structural support needed to overcome short-termism and advance the wellbeing of people and the planet.

Focus: Moves from identifying aspirations to examining responsibility, compromise, and design requirements for a long-term policy device that can be trusted by citizens and used meaningfully by government and public service leaders. It centres on how to embed long-term thinking that sustains social, economic, and environmental wellbeing across generations.

Context Required: High. Participants receive briefings and structured materials to reflect meaningfully, supported by skilled facilitation, scenario tools, and contextual framing.

Engagement Modes: Facilitated small-group sessions, paired dialogues, and scenario testing exercises designed to surface

- When Australia faces competing priorities, what principles should guide how we choose between them?
- What trade-offs do you think Australia may need to consider to build a fair, sustainable and thriving future?
- How should we balance short-term needs with long-term goals when they are in tension?
- What responsibilities do communities, governments and individuals share in making decisions that affect future generations?
- Where do you see the biggest tensions between what we value now and what future generations might need, and how should we navigate these tensions?
- What should Australia be willing to let go of in order to secure a stronger future?

principles, priorities, and tensions rather than single-issue policy positions.

Scale and Depth: Lower scale (up to 50 participants per session), high depth. Focused on generating insight and coherence, not consensus or broad representation.

- When goals conflict, what matters most to protect or prioritise?

Experience: Immersive and reflective sessions blending storytelling, scenario exploration, and systems thinking to reveal shared priorities, tensions, and patterns of reasoning about how to achieve enduring wellbeing for people and planet.

Outputs: A synthesis of guiding principles and design implications for long-term governance, defining what Australians are willing to trade, protect, or prioritise, and informing the prototype design of the National Conversation policy device centred on intergenerational and planetary wellbeing.

Intended Outcome: To translate the shared hopes and values from Phase 1 into actionable insights and design parameters that strengthen Australia's capacity to make decisions supporting sustained wellbeing for people, communities, and the natural world, building legitimacy, coherence, and direction for the next phase: developing and testing the policy device.

Phase 3 | Translating public voice into a long-term policy device

Purpose

To develop the final policy device by translating national insights into a clear, trusted and practical tool for long-term decision making. This phase will build directly on the policy device concept identified by the (for example, whether the device should take the form of a Social Compact, National Strategy, Governance Framework or other long-term mechanism).

Process

Using the SIF, the national synthesis and the preliminary device concept, this phase:

- refines and tests the preferred device type
- designs the structure, functions and guidance needed to support long-term decisions
- ensures the device reflects public values, shared aspirations and trade-off insights
- tests usability and legitimacy with government, public service leaders and community partners
- clarifies how the device will help leaders focus on long-term outcomes and resist short-term pressures
- develops clear public-facing materials explaining the device and how it reflects what Australians contributed

Output

A fully developed policy device grounded in public voice, endorsed through expert and community testing, and ready for government consideration as a practical mechanism to guide long-term governance.

Language preferences and considerations:

- Use “future generations” rather than “intergenerational” for accessibility.
- Take caution with overemphasis on the future or futures to ensure a sense of relevance and resonance for the present-day experience of everyday Australians.
- Should be easily understood by everyday Australians and avoid potentially divisive phrases.
- Explicitly include migrants and people not yet born in Australia.
- Avoid abstract framings like “*what it means to be Australian*” as the headline focus.
- Emphasise hope, inclusivity, and action through plain language.

Questions for Further Exploration & Discussion

- *How might partner organisations align their own work under a SIF while retaining autonomy?*
- *How can the SIF support both large-scale data collection and deep local dialogue?*
- *How can we ensure framing language resonates across diverse audiences, not academic or activist in tone, while also maintaining enough uniformity for shared analysis?*
- *How do we frame the National Conversation so it connects to everyday life, not as an abstract civic exercise, but something that affects families, work, and community wellbeing?*
- *How can we include futures thinking (next 25 years, next generation) without making it feel distant or academic?*
- *What framing risks should we avoid (e.g. technocratic, partisan, or moralising language)?*
- *What legal and ethical standards must be embedded into the design of the SIF?*
- *Should the SIF include dedicated “streams” (e.g. Youth Inquiry, First Nations Inquiry, Regional Inquiry) with tailored questions feeding into the shared synthesis?*
- *Who should be responsible for interpreting and synthesising insights: independent analysts, partner coalitions, or a co-authoring panel? How can technology support transparent synthesis without over-automating interpretation? (Also relevant to Section 8, ‘Civic Technology Mapping’.*
- *What outputs should the synthesis produce at each stage (e.g. periodic public summaries, dashboards, local reports)?*
- *Would a single national question be powerful enough, or do we need a constellation of guiding questions under a shared banner?*
- *How will the SIF feed directly into the final artefact (e.g. the Compact, Mandate, or National Strategy)?*
- *How should we capture learning and adapt the SIF across phases or iterations?*

7. A Model for Collaboration

Preliminary Ideation

Rethinking How We Build a National Conversation

The call for a National Conversation has echoed across Australian civic life for decades. From the early 1990s work on citizenship and progress, to the Australian National Development Index (ANDI) initiative of the 2010s, and most recently the Centre for Policy Development’s (CPD) 2024 paper *A National Conversation on Measuring What Matters in Australia*, Australians have long recognised the need to come together to define “the Australia we want.”⁸²

Each of these initiatives reflects a deep and consistent desire to build national coherence around shared values and wellbeing, to measure and plan progress based not only on economic outputs but on what genuinely matters to people and communities. Despite compelling advocacy, these efforts have often been constrained by fragmented infrastructure, limited coordination, and insufficient institutional support.

To be drafted: *Analysis of the Barriers That Precluded Previous Progress, Dr Geoffrey Woolcock*

Today’s context demands that we do things differently. The National Conversation must be collaborative by design, capable of connecting existing initiatives, leveraging trusted networks, and leaving a legacy of enduring civic infrastructure. It also must be situated within an authorising environment to demand action. It must reflect the insight shared by CPD, that “lasting change is more likely if people, institutions, and governments go on the journey together”.⁸³

Learning from Two Decades of Civic Innovation

Shared Lessons and Innovations:

1. **The Hub & Spoke Model:** Drawing on CPD’s 2024 National Conversation on Measuring What Matters paper, the hub-and-spoke model offers a practical blueprint for national engagement.⁸⁴ It combines central coordination with local delivery through trusted organisations, ensuring consistency while empowering communities to lead in ways that suit their context. By leveraging existing networks, First Nations groups, councils, community services, and youth organisations, the model builds on trust, avoids duplication, and ensures genuine inclusion. It is cost-efficient, flexible, and representative, turning Australia’s diverse civic landscape into an asset rather than a

barrier. This proven structure will anchor the National Conversation’s collaborative model, balancing national coherence with local ownership to create a process that is authentic, scalable, and enduring.

2. **The Australian National Development Index (ANDI)** pioneered a comprehensive, multi-platform approach to national engagement that provides a strong foundation for the Shared Inquiry Framework guiding the National Conversation. ANDI [proposed](#) mobilising a broad network of partner organisations to host diverse participation platforms, from national surveys and focus groups to community conversations, youth interviews, educational programs, and digital engagement, all centred on the question, “*What kind of Australia do we want?*” Designed to include Australians often excluded from public debate, particularly those in remote or marginalised communities, the model allows for inclusivity and robustness of insights by facilitating truly comprehensive engagement across communities and generations.
3. **The 2017 Australia reMADE survey** conducted a nationwide engagement process designed to capture the hopes and aspirations of everyday Australians.⁸⁵ Centered on the question, “If you could wake up in the Australia of your dreams, what would it look like?”, the initiative gathered voices from hundreds of participants across diverse communities through conversations, workshops, and storytelling. Remarkably, the findings revealed that Australians share strikingly similar hopes for their collective future, values grounded in fairness, care, equality, and belonging. By focusing on what unites rather than divides, the process modelled an inclusive, vision-driven approach to civic dialogue that continues to inform contemporary frameworks for participatory National Conversations.

To be further developed through consultation

The Collaborative Model

A National Conversation will only succeed if it builds with, not over, the efforts already underway. This model will only succeed if we disrupt a culture that lacks true collaboration. This initiative is designed to engage, amplify, and nourish existing networks, campaigns, and community relationships across the country. Success will not be measured by ownership but by the depth of partnership and the extent to which diverse groups see themselves reflected, strengthened, and connected through the process.

By weaving together the energy of all Australians it becomes a shared platform for us to define and deliver the future together.

The collaborative model for the National Conversation is designed to activate, rather than replace, Australia’s existing civic infrastructure. It is defined by three interlocking mechanisms:

1. **The Shared Inquiry Framework:** a unifying structure that aligns diverse conversations around common questions, values, and outcomes, while leaving room for local voice and creativity. This ensures coherence without centralisation.
2. **Leveraging Trusted Networks:** working through the institutions and relationships that communities already trust. The model engages civic and community organisations, youth networks, local governments, faith groups, and professional associations, ensuring access, credibility, and cultural safety.
3. **Building Enduring Civic Infrastructure:** every collaborative activity leaves behind public resources: digital platforms, data, training, and facilitation capacity that will continue to strengthen democratic participation long after the project concludes.

This approach, echoing CPD’s “hub and spoke” recommendation, is resource-efficient, trust-based, and inclusive. It builds on existing partnerships and relationships rather than duplicating them, ensuring that investment strengthens rather than fragments the civic ecosystem.

Why Collaboration Matters

Australia’s civic landscape is rich but disconnected. Many organisations have championed national dialogue, yet their efforts have been siloed and short-lived. ANDI’s work on wellbeing indicators and CPD’s contemporary leadership in Measuring What Matters both demonstrate a broad public appetite for long-term, values-led engagement, but also the systemic challenges of translating that engagement into durable policy and democratic practice.

This collaborative model directly addresses these challenges by:

- **Pooling resources and expertise** across sectors to deliver scale in a constrained funding environment.
- **Embedding delivery within trusted networks**, improving reach, inclusion, and legitimacy.
- **Mitigating fragmentation and duplication**, which have historically undermined civic efforts.
- **Front-loading strategic challenges**, such as inclusion, governance, and continuity, rather than leaving them to later project stages.

- **Reducing politicisation** by weaving multiple voices into a distributed, cross-sectoral framework that outlasts political cycles.

This approach transforms civic engagement from a series of projects into an ongoing architecture of collaboration, a national platform that binds together public, private, and community actors through shared purpose and inquiry.

Non-Negotiables for Impact

We recognise that doing this poorly would be worse than not doing it at all. A weak, under-resourced, or poorly framed National Conversation risks eroding public trust, adding to consultation fatigue, and diverting attention and resources from other essential priorities. To warrant being done, it must be done well. The following conditions form our go-no-go criteria to ensure the process is worthy of its ambition and of the Australian public it seeks to serve.

Honouring First Nations Leadership

The National Conversation sits within a complex post-referendum landscape, where conversations about Australia's history, identity, and shared future are deeply intertwined with the ongoing impacts of colonisation and the harm felt in the wake of the referendum outcome.

We are committed to ensuring this project proceeds only if it can make a valuable contribution to all Australians, including First Nations peoples, without compounding harm or marginalisation.

Foundations for Tomorrow will undertake a dedicated discovery process with First Nations leaders and knowledge holders to understand the risks, opportunities, and cultural obligations associated with this project.

If the consensus arising from these conversations is that the National Conversation risks causing further harm, marginalising First Nations experiences, then this project will not proceed.

An Adequately Resourced National Conversation

A National Conversation must be suitably resourced to achieve both scale and inclusivity in order to deliver the authorising environment needed for ambitious long-term reform.

Proceeding with a partially resourced or diluted version would risk undermining trust, diminishing impact, and weakening the very cause it seeks to promote.

Part of the work of the Lab will be to determine the resourcing requirements, and to galvanise support toward meeting them. If the necessary conditions cannot be secured, the National Conversation will not be advanced to avoid exhaustion of political and civic will, or wasteful expenditure of resources without being able to deliver on the desired outcome.

Community and Collaboration Driven

While Foundations for Tomorrow will convene, steward, and design the National Conversation, it must be delivered through deep partnership with those who hold local knowledge, connection, and trust.

This includes community groups, cultural organisations, youth networks, local agencies, and civil society actors across the country. Their leadership and relationships are essential to ensuring the National Conversation reflects the diversity of experiences, stories, and aspirations across communities.

Government Engagement that Respects the Public's Contribution

For the National Conversation to have legitimacy and a pathway to impact, government must be meaningfully engaged throughout. The Lab Governance Council will prioritise developing an engagement strategy that seeks endorsement, partnership, or clearly articulated support from government, ensuring that the insights and outputs of the process have the highest possible chance of being adopted and acted upon.

Proposed Leadership Structure

Table 2: *Outline of the proposed leadership model for the National Conversation Development Lab.*

Role	Who
Lab Secretariat & Lead Convenor <i>(Foundations for Tomorrow)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Lead strategic coordination and operational delivery● Maintain alignment with vision, objectives, and guiding principles● Facilitate collaboration and documentation across all partners
Lab Governance Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Provide strategic direction, operational implementation resourcing and oversight● Actively advance the project through individual and/or organisational contributions● Endorse key priorities, frameworks, and funding decisions● Defend the project's integrity and neutrality
Core Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Contribute to the design, piloting, and testing of models● Consistent participation and contribution to working group activities and outputs● Champion the initiative within their networks

<p>Expert Advisory Network</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide specialised insight from academia, public service, and philanthropy ● Advise on governance integrity, evaluation, and methodological rigour ● Review outputs and provide forward-looking recommendations ● Ensure alignment with broader evidence base and sector best practice
<p>Community Network</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Align local initiatives with the Shared Inquiry Framework ● Participate in open engagement opportunities ● Share learnings and stories from local adaptation ● Voluntary contributions to implementation

A Foundation for the Future

The collaborative model outlined here is more than a governance mechanism, it is a structural innovation in democratic renewal. It transforms consultation into shared inquiry, ensuring that Australia’s collective future is shaped not by isolated institutions but by an ongoing partnership between citizens, civil society, and government.

By harnessing existing networks, aligning with policy frameworks like *Measuring What Matters*, and embedding civic infrastructure that lasts, this model addresses both the root causes and symptoms of democratic fragmentation: short-termism, duplication, and polarisation.

The National Conversation will not only deliver an inclusive process, it will leave behind the scaffolding of a resilient, values-led democracy capable of continuous listening, learning, and adaptation. It will complete the work begun by ANDI, extended by CPD, and now realised through a coordinated, future-focused national collaboration.

Questions for Further Exploration & Discussion

- *Which governance model best balances trust and traction?*
- *What are the roles and accountabilities of key actors (FFT, partner organisations, government, communities)?*
- *How can we make collaboration practical, with shared tools, data standards, and decision protocols?*
- *How do we avoid coalition fatigue and keep partnerships energised over time?*
- *How can we ensure that youth and First Nations voices hold real power within the collaborative structure, not just representation?*
- *What criteria must be met before scaling from pilot to full rollout?*

8. Civic Technology Mapping

Further detail on civic technology mapping and the design rationale are available at www.thenationalconvo.org

Consultation Reimagined: From Deterrent to Connection

Traditional consultation processes have become a deterrent to ongoing civic engagement, creating cycles that actively discourage the very connection they aim to foster. Technology can enable **a fundamental shift from extractive consultation to ongoing connection** between people and their political representatives. This reimagined approach creates:

1. **Continuous Relationship Building:** Rather than episodic consultation, technology platforms can facilitate ongoing connection where citizens can contribute thoughts, ask questions, and provide insights as issues evolve, and representatives can share updates, ask follow-up questions, and seek input on implementation challenges.
2. **Natural & Accessible Communication Modes:** People can contribute through voice messages while walking their dog, share photos of local issues, collaborate on community artwork expressing shared hopes, or participate in neighbourhood video discussions. This makes engagement feel natural and accessible rather than bureaucratic.
3. **Visible Impact Tracking:** Real-time dashboards can show how community input influences specific decisions, with clear trails from citizen contributions to policy outcomes. When someone submits an idea, they can see how it connects with others' thoughts and where it fits into emerging policy directions.
4. **Cultural Responsiveness:** Communities can engage in culturally sensitive and appropriate ways. Whether it's Indigenous yarning circles that are digitally transcribed, multilingual video submissions, or community art projects that express collective aspirations, technology provides an avenue for citizens to engage in ways that align with their cultural protocols and practices.
5. **Mutual Learning:** Rather than one-way government-led community consultations, technology can facilitate genuine two-way learning where representatives share their constraints and challenges, and citizens contribute ongoing problem-solving support.
6. **Elevation of Diverse Expertise:** Digital platforms can support the elevation of different types of knowledge, from technical expertise to cultural wisdom and creative vision, all of which contribute essential insights to building a more enriched shared direction.

This reimagined approach transforms consultation from something that happens *to* people into something that happens *with* people, building a foundation for sustained civic connection and shared ownership of our national direction.

What Makes Democratic Technology Work

International Precedents: Trust-building through Digital Technology

International examples demonstrate that thoughtfully designed civic technology can increase trust, participation, and policy responsiveness.

These successes share common elements: transparent governance processes, clear connections between input and outcomes, hybrid online-offline design, and sustained institutional commitment beyond individual political cycles.

The nations below show what is possible when technology is woven into democratic practice:

- **Taiwan's vTaiwan and Join platforms** encourage digital democratic consultation through the use of online deliberation tools to crowdsource consensus on issues and influence government decision-making.⁸⁶ These tools exemplify how civic technology can render policymaking more collaborative and transparent,⁸⁷ with a high (80%) success rate of actual policy change.⁸⁸
- **Estonia's e-democracy tools** have made participation accessible and built long-term trust in government through making 99% of its essential public services accessible online.⁸⁹ Initiatives such as the national e-ID platform, X-Road and i-Voting platforms allow secure digital signature, voting and open data sharing, reducing administrative burden and fiscal spending for the government, whilst encouraging high levels of civic digital engagement.⁹⁰
- **India's MyGov Corona Whatsapp Chatbot** demonstrates how integration with popular messaging platforms can fight pandemic-related misinformation and serve citizens at scale.⁹¹ The MyGov Corona Helpdesk was launched in 2020 and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic processed over 41 million conversations.⁹² It is an AI-powered chatbot integrated with Whatsapp which successfully demonstrated how AI chatbots can strengthen trust and government-citizen crisis response.⁹³
- **Ukraine's Diia Mobile App** is another example of a popular government e-service portal and mobile app with open access to 14 legal documents and over 25 state services.⁹⁴ Used by over 22 million users in 4 years,⁹⁵ Ukraine became the first in the E-Participation Index,⁹⁶ reflecting Diia's ability to streamline citizen services amidst civil disruption and war.
- **Brazil's Open Transparency Portal** is one of the world's largest open data initiatives.⁹⁷ It aggregates vast, granular public datasets on government spending, contracts, salaries, and social programs and makes them accessible to citizens, journalists, and civil society. It processes and publishes over 40 million new records each month and records an average of 7.5 million page views per month in recent years.⁹⁸ Again, another

successful global case study of open data translating to real public, civic value and engagement.

These examples demonstrate that technology, when thoughtfully designed, can **increase public trust, build a sense of belonging and enable collective voice in the design of policy**. These are the very outcomes Australia seeks from its policymaking process. More details can be seen in the Appendix on each case study.

A Bold Vision: A Technology-Enabled National Conversation

A bold vision for what a National Conversation in Australia could look like, includes:

1. **Voice memos via WhatsApp or SMS:** Quick, low-barrier audio contributions where people speak in their own words. This format captures authentic, everyday voices, including from those less confident with written forms.
2. **Short videos under a shared national hashtag:** A way for individuals and groups to express priorities visually and personally, while building social momentum online. This could create a living archive of citizen voices.
3. **Drawings and letters from children:** Simple, creative contributions like “Postcards of Our Future”. These could be displayed publicly, as in Wales’ *The Wales We Want*, making young voices visible in the national story.
4. **Music, artwork, poetry and storytelling:** Community-led cultural contributions, reflecting Australia’s diversity. This enables storytelling and art to become central to the process of democratic and identity renewal.
5. **Handwritten notes collected at community consultations:** Local libraries, town halls, and cultural centres could provide drop-boxes for written reflections, building trust and accessibility for those not online.
6. **Interactive local events and immersive workshops:** In-depth, facilitated group dialogues and experiences in community halls, schools, or workplaces. These settings enable deeper engagement and localisation, fostering respectful exchange and nourishing community belonging.
7. **Micro-engagements in everyday life:** Quick polls embedded in retail checkouts, service points, or public transport apps (e.g., Woolworths, Australia Post, Opal card readers). A simple way to reach millions, building inclusivity into daily routines.
8. **Traditional written submissions and surveys:** Robust surveys and structured submissions would ensure statistically representative input and policy relevance. This combination of qualitative and quantitative data provides a richness of insights to support future policy development and serve as a baselining activity for more innovative inputs.

A Human-AI Partnership Model for Democratic Analysis

AI offers several capabilities for enhancing the quality of a National Conversation enabled by civic technology.

AI capabilities should focus on scale and pattern recognition, utilising:

- Natural language processing to identify themes across thousands of submissions
- Sentiment analysis to understand the emotional resonance of different issues
- Multimedia processing to extract insights from videos, images, and audio submissions
- Real-time synthesis to provide feedback to participants about emerging themes

On the other hand, human oversight remains essential for:

- Interpreting the meaning and significance of identified patterns
- Ensuring cultural context and nuance are preserved
- Making value judgments about how to weight different types of contributions
- Maintaining accountability for the democratic legitimacy of the process

The challenge isn't choosing between human insight and technological efficiency, it's designing systems where AI **augments rather than replaces** human judgment in democratic processes. This partnership model requires explicit governance structures to regulate who controls the algorithms and what happens to the data they extract, how biases are identified and corrected, and how privacy protections work across multimedia submissions. Notwithstanding the crucial role technology can play in synthesising and analysing citizen input, the final output of the conversation must remain human-led. Technology provides scale and efficiency, but human oversight ensures **nuance, empathy, and trustworthiness** in the final asset delivered to government and the public.

To explore: the management of synthesis, sensemaking and analysis processes, particularly around issues such as the weighting of responses.

A Practical Summary of Product Requirements

This section represents early thinking on the requirements for the technological infrastructure for a National Conversation

A well-known technology product is built on a clear backbone that defines its purpose, core features, expected functionality, and user interactions. This foundation ensures alignment

between business and technology teams, clarifies what to build and how to build it, and most importantly, enables the focus to remain on who the product is being built for.

The requirements outlined below do not adhere to a specific technology stack but give guidance on the core features of a democratic technology system to support multimedia analysis on a National Conversation scale.

An exploratory mapping of features for civic infrastructure to support a National Conversation and ongoing mechanisms for connection between Government and the Australian people. The intent of this section is to spark discussion but contextual collaborative design and architectural support will be required to design, implement and realise a successful digital product or platform.

Table 3: National Conversation Multimedia Analysis Democratic Technology System Requirements

Feature	Requirements	Questions
Multimodal Multi-Channel Input	Multimodal Multi-Channel Input: Accepts text, voice memos, video, images, artwork, and survey data from web, SMS, messaging apps, social platforms, and physical submissions (digitised as needed)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the formats of media we'll accept and parameters i.e., Photos .jpg/png less than 300MB? • How should we store different formats of media - is there conversion required?
Data Analysis with AI capability	<p>Data processing: Use natural language processing to extract themes, sentiment, and trends from varied media types; must include human oversight to preserve context and nuance and avoid algorithmic bias</p> <p>Culturally Responsive and Inclusive Design: Enables voice, video, and creative submissions; supports multiple languages; and is optimised for neurodiverse and culturally diverse users</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the benefits of AI integration? • What is the common data to be extracted from different media types? What impact metrics do these build to and represent? • How do we design for diversity - neurodiversity, language and cultural diversity etc.?

<p>Data Privacy, Security and Verification</p>	<p>Privacy, Security, and Verification Layer: Data sovereignty by design; robust privacy protocols for every channel; verification/authenticity checking to prevent synthetic or malicious input.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What data are we collecting that is potentially PII (Personal Identifiable Information)? • How do we align with data privacy laws and best practice? • What are the cybersecurity measures we have in place to protect participant data and prevent synthetic or malicious input? • What does verification look like for different users? • How do we enforce privacy protocols and signals for every multimodal channel?
<p>Hybrid Participation Infrastructure (Online/offline capability)</p>	<p>Community nodes (libraries, community centers) act as local tech-supported "bridges" ensuring accessibility; platform enables both online and facilitated offline contributions to converge meaningfully.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are our core users and where can we support 'tech-bridges' to ensure accessibility?
<p>Integration with Democratic Systems</p>	<p>Integration and Federation Engine: Connects outputs securely with government systems (parliamentary submissions, public reporting, policy dashboards) and enables local-federal-civil society collaboration.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What government systems do we need to connect to, to enable local-federal-civil-society collaboration? • In what format does the data need to be presented and integrated with said systems?
<p>Impact Reporting</p>	<p>Real-Time Dashboards: Track and display how contributions influence decisions, making impact visible to participants and policymakers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key metrics we need to distill from various multimodel inputs to curate meaningful impact reporting on success? • What reporting mechanisms should there be?

Transparency by Design	The system discloses both its analytical processes (input weighting, synthesis) and decision-impact pathways to participants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do we need to disclose (based on legislation and core values of our proposition) to participants as they input data?
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To explore: *The data stewardship model and existing structures, such as ethics committees, which can be leveraged for data access and oversight.*

Questions for Further Exploration & Discussion

- *What technological infrastructure and data stewardship model (and/or architectural design) can Australia establish to enable a secure, inclusive, and enduring platform for national civic participation, one that treats public input as a shared democratic asset, safeguards privacy and cultural rights, and remains transparent, trusted, and adaptable across governments and generations?*
- *What are the ethical and legal parameters that must be adhered to and what governance, policy and infrastructure would be required to protect the rights and interests of those who participate, particularly within a collaborative data collection model?*
- *Where will data be hosted and stored to satisfy Australian data sovereignty while enabling secure research access and reproducible analysis?*
- *What explicit “political transition protocol” will guarantee continuity, data custody, and public reporting when governments change?*
- *Which decisions stay human by design, and where can automation be safely used without dulling democratic judgement and empathy?*
- *What levels of identity assurance are required for different participation modes – from anonymous ideas to verified constituency input, and how will we prevent coordinated brigading or synthetic media?*
- *How will we verify provenance of offline inputs that are later digitised, without deterring participation from vulnerable groups?*
- *Which specific “tech-bridges” (libraries, schools, migrant centres) will be equipped as local ingestion points, and what minimum kit and staffing do they need?*
- *What technology governance structures and independent oversight need to be in place to inform platform development and operation? Should these be underpinned by national AI, security and data privacy guidelines and relevant legislation (e.g., Privacy Act 1988)?*
- *How do we co-design a robust success metric framework which effectively showcases the impact of incorporating democratic technology in a National Conversation?*

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*This Discussion Paper was also informed by the collaborative inputs of attendees at the **2025 National Forum on Australia’s Wellbeing**.*

Foundations for Tomorrow acknowledges that, at present, the diversity of representation within this group could be improved. Rectifying this is an ongoing priority and we invite everyone to be a part of this process.

10. Annexes

Further information is available at www.thenationalconvo.org, including the following annexes:

1. International Case Studies
2. National Conversation Analysis:
 - a. Policy Artefact
 - b. Scale & Methods
3. Workshop 1 Briefing (Preliminary Mapping)
4. Workshop 1 Summary
5. Wellbeing Forum Collaborative Session Summary
6. Literature Review: Australian Identity
7. Civic Technology Mapping & Rationale

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