



# KNOWLEDGE CITY

The difference an in-house research team  
made to a council and its community

Discussion Paper

April 2013

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### Discussion Paper

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## Foreword

### John Lavarack

As part of an initiative to explore and encourage links between research and policy inside local government, the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG) recently engaged two people to consider the case of City Research at the City of Melbourne. City Research is a branch of Council that works alongside other branches to add specialist expertise to council-wide research undertakings. Focusing on the story of this research branch, two articles are presented here together as a discussion paper to inform thinking about what role a council can take in research, and how this can change the way a council works. They present complementary views of City Research; one is a journalist's perspective, the other a public servant's.

The journalist's perspective is from Caroline Baum, respected independent commentator and broadcaster. Baum has worked as the founding editor of *Good Reading* magazine, a features editor for *Vogue*, a presenter of ABC TV's popular book show *Between the Lines* as well as Foxtel's *Talking Books*, and as an executive producer with ABC Radio National. She is a regular contributor to national newspapers and magazines and is in demand as a presenter at arts and literary festivals around the country and overseas.<sup>1</sup> In her article, 'Taking the Pulse of the City', Baum takes an interest in how City Research helps to sustain and shape a capital city she experiences as a leading cultural centre. Drawing on interviews with people inside the City of Melbourne, she presents a view of what the role of research is, and how it manifests in the design and adaptability of the City to ever-changing circumstances.

The public servant's perspective is from Austin Ley, Manager of City Research. Ley has led the branch since its inception in 1995 and demonstrates a passion for what he calls the 'discipline of Local Government Research'. His case study traces the development of City Research from its early manifestation as a clustering of research expertise around planning and development issues to its current form, championing Melbourne as a 'Knowledge City'. Ley makes the argument that for local government to be effective in research, it needs to be proactive in setting the agenda with its partners and ensuring the relevance and rigour of its work.

<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://www.carolinebaum.com.au/>



Apart from the direct value of knowing the City Research story itself, the benefit of presenting these perspectives is in their contribution to an ongoing discussion about the offerings of research taking place inside local government, and how knowledge is strengthened when it is seen through multiple 'lenses'. A useful context for this investigation is the large body of literature that has explored the nature of people known as 'insider researchers' – also referred to as 'practitioner researchers'. One comprehensive survey<sup>2</sup> describes practitioner research as 'evaluation, research, development, or more general inquiry that is small-scale, local, grounded, and carried out by professionals who directly deliver ... services'. Importantly, it is research grounded in a purpose: improved practice.

Similar reflections on insider research have been provided by many writers, particularly perspectives on the relationship between insider and 'outsider' researchers such as academics, consultants, advocacy groups and professional associations. An emerging theme is the improved productivity of the practitioner researcher working within organisational constraints, where the research drives the generation and application of innovative knowledge, particularly in an agenda for change.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, organisational boundaries that shut down dialogue between different perspectives can also be the locus of a failure of imagination that would otherwise drive the capacity to adapt to changed circumstances.<sup>4</sup>

From a review of literature focused on the experience of people researching inside non-research organisations, a critical perspective can be distilled. This sees relevance less in distinctions between 'inside' and 'outside', 'practitioner' and 'researcher', and more in systemic ideas of knowledge production. There is a call for innovation of 'new research traditions' based upon holistic views of organisations and the individuals in them.<sup>5</sup>

Writing for the general reader, Baum applies her journalist's lens to City Research, seeking to capture the essence of the program and the benefits it brings in terms of the day-to-day outworking of the City's services and infrastructure. Ley's paper invites the reader on a more detailed investigation of how this capability came about and proposes an agenda for its continued development and dissemination. Together the papers address a number of related questions that lend themselves to an ongoing dialogue of relevance beyond Melbourne:

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<sup>2</sup> Shaw, I. 2005, 'Practitioner research: evidence or critique?', *British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 35, no. 8, pp. 1231-1248.

<sup>3</sup> Martinez-Alier, J., Healy, H., Temper, L., Walter, M., Rodriguez-Labajos, B., Gerber, J-F. & Conde, M. 2011, 'Between science and activism: learning and teaching ecological economics with environmental justice organisations', *Local Environment*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 17-36.

<sup>4</sup> Weick, K. 2006, 'The role of imagination in the organizing of knowledge', *European Journal of Information Systems*, vol. 15, pp. 446-452.

<sup>5</sup> Lee, A. 2001, 'Editorial', *MIS Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. iii-vii.

- What can be learned from the story of City Research? In general, what contribution might an in-house research capacity make to the way a local government conducts its business?
- How would this research capacity evolve and what is needed to develop it?
- What is the scope for developing a 'new research tradition' focused on local government?

Melbourne is a capital city with a global perspective in its overall mission, nevertheless there are many councils across Australia – urban, peri-urban, regional and remote – that may benefit from a similarly focused research capacity. It will be clear from the papers that the approach of City Research should not be considered as directly translatable to other council settings, nevertheless they are presented with a view to adapting and refining the questions listed above for the local government sector as a whole. In particular, a hoped-for conversation will explore ways that ACELG and its partners can take part in this effort to assist councils to 'build research capacity and gain support for applied research which meets local government needs'.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> ACELG 2011, *2011 Annual Report*, Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government, Sydney.



## Taking the Pulse of the City

### Caroline Baum

When Chris Anderson, CEO of TED, the global think-fest, visited Australia earlier this year he described the design of our future cities as the most important question facing us today. By ‘design’, he meant every aspect of what makes up the fabric of a thriving user-friendly metropolis adapting to changes in density, usage, technology and environmental factors.

These factors impact on towns big and small, regional and metropolitan, rural and coastal, and call on all our scientific knowledge and our powers of imagination in the quest for a better quality of life, regardless of demographics.

Councils have a key role in shaping the policies and facilities that define that quality of life through the services they deliver – many of which are often overlooked by the general public.

But to the watchful eye, it’s easy to spot the signature of an enlightened council that is adapting well to change by resourcing research to fine-tune its strategic planning.

The City of Melbourne (CoM) is widely acknowledged as one of the most forward-thinking and progressive councils in Australia. One of its secret weapons is the City Research unit, helmed by Austin Ley and staffed by twelve full time and two temporary project officers.

The unit was established in 1995 following a comprehensive restructure. Its brief is to investigate and analyse every aspect of urban Melbourne, from the basics of infrastructure to the more esoteric aspects of changing patterns of behaviour (busking and levels of street charity fundraising being just two such examples). By adopting a more holistic approach that extends beyond the council’s traditional physical boundaries, the unit has achieved a more comprehensive understanding of the many factors that affect its proud claims to be one of the world’s most liveable cities. It has also equipped the CoM with innovative strategies to bolster its competitive reputation and future-proof it against anticipated threats.

Rather than focus their attention primarily on gathering economic data, CoM has decided to tackle a broader spectrum of sectors.

If the city is a body, the unit’s mission is to provide an ever-updated X-ray of its organs whilst also taking its pulse and monitoring its heartbeat to provide it not only with a clean bill of health but also a program to maintain its fitness and build its resilience over time.

“If the city is a body, the unit’s mission is to provide an ever-updated X-ray of its organs...”

It’s a challenging ambition, given that Melbourne is one of Australia’s fastest growing cities.

Consider this: in 1995 it was estimated that approximately 1,615 people lived in the CBD. Now there are 16,956 while the municipal population of the city has rocketed from 37,830 in 1995 to 100,611 in 2011. Usage of the city today is estimated at 800,000 people per day including visitors, students, workers and residents.

Although primarily intended to generate analysis and data for the Planning Department, the Research Unit also interacts with other departments and streamlines research to avoid duplication.

‘By having a permanent team we’ve been able to abolish the silo mentality that previously existed and ensure continuity and are able to gather a better quality of information’ says Ley, who has worked with the city’s universities on a range of collaborative research projects, reinforcing Melbourne’s identity as a Knowledge City. ‘We want to really emphasise the incredible knowledge wealth of our institutions.’

By implementing a strategy called CLUE (Census of Land Use and Employment) the unit has been able to build up a profile of how land is used or not used as well as providing data on employment. To extend the metaphor of detection implicit in CLUE’s name, the research team operates like forensic investigators developing portfolios in areas such as Retail, Tourism, or the more intriguingly named Urban Forest and Wellbeing Health Indicators.

‘The objective is evidence-based planning across all sectors’ says Ley, ‘so that we can track the effectiveness of our policies and adapt as the city changes. People are constantly re-purposing land for different use and density. We are looking at changing patterns around things like how late people use the city, flow of traffic, how businesses can better capture passing trade, safety issues for pedestrians after dark. Our profile of the city is dynamic.’

### City Research's collaboration with other City of Melbourne branches



Research projects commissioned under [The Urban Forest and Wellbeing Indicators](#) strategy include the installation of microclimatic sensors underneath tree canopies to measure the provision of thermal comfort on streetscapes; development of an Australian version of the American i-Tree Eco tool to attribute dollar values to the environmental benefits of trees; commissioning of aerial thermal images of the city to highlight hot spots contributing to urban heat islands; and developing a palette of tree species that show scenarios.

The role of City Research in this project was to take an existing project that was not delivering what was needed for the area and to 'scope' a new study to determine what was missing and how to get this information. By developing an improved research approach the unit was able to obtain the information it needed to develop its strategy.

**Health Services** is currently undertaking an audit of the all the catering services provided by the CoM at its venues and events, mapping quality and quantity to evaluate service in relation to key criteria outlined in its *Food Policy*. This policy prioritises food security, healthy choices and sustainability, and seeks to encourage a vibrant food economy and a sense of social inclusion, diversity and celebration through its calendar of food related events such as festivals. City Research helped set up the study, and drafted the report and recommendations to update Council's food policy.

Based on research by the same unit, a new street trading policy, adopted in 2011, implements changes to encourage new stalls in the central city and Docklands areas offering fruit, vegetables, flowers and newspapers, and encouraging the presence of food vans.



The **Tourism** unit has undertaken research to evaluate post-visit satisfaction and influence indicating a high likelihood of repeat business, with visitors responding positively to the marketing message to stay more often, spend more and come again. The unit has also profiled visitors to new areas of the city such as the World Trade Centre, Docklands and South Wharf areas with the aim of identifying who is not visiting these areas and why not.

City Research has worked with the Tourism branch to review its whole approach to program evaluation. This has involved understanding how the Tourism sector is performing and the degree of influence and effectiveness of branch services in relation to this sector. Now, instead of undertaking annual surveys, ongoing feedback is being obtained from visitor centres.

Street signage has also been evaluated, resulting in new, more user-friendly signs being installed to link areas such as Docklands to the CBD more effectively. This program will be evaluated again after several months to check on their success.



The **Events** team uses research to benchmark and index its programs so that they can be improved from year to year. Last year at Moomba, the largest cultural event in the country with attendance figures of 1.3 million, they recruited attendee spectators to take part in online evaluative surveys using incentivised questionnaires to elicit information about levels of engagement. They also measured stakeholder,



“The challenge facing cities and towns is adapting to growth and change without compromising the qualities that define their appeal and identity in the first place.”

supplier and sponsor satisfaction. Smartphone GPS technology enabled them to analyse data to calculate how many people came and went from the event precinct and how they used it. This yielded improved demographic information and also identified areas that needed further work.

Similar tools are used throughout the Events unit, supplemented by focus groups and phone surveys so that data is consistent across its portfolio.

Program manager Angela Hoban says: ‘It’s not just about measuring the tangibles but also the intangibles such as civic pride, networking opportunities and the social return on investment for sponsors.’



In the **Retail** branch, research has identified the elements that give Melbourne its distinctive reputation as the premier shopping destination in the country, and examined ways to nurture the unique mix that is so attractive to shoppers. City Research’s role has been primarily to work with the branch to develop longitudinal studies of the city’s retail sector and its performance so that it can understand changes and how to approach them.

Laneways culture has been identified as a signature element of Melbourne, so CoM has opened new laneways to encourage more independent retailers and pop-up shops as well as encouraging retailers to use historic buildings in the CBD and along the refurbished spine of Swanston Street for vertical retail, capitalising on basement and above-awning spaces.

‘We’ve had calls from councils in other cities asking how to do the laneways’ says retail strategist Anastasia Yianni. ‘But the point is that these things happen organically. Our role at council is to nurture and support them. We’ve encouraged the sector to flourish through networking and by introducing small businesses to appropriate leasing agents and by helping to secure permits. We’ve also been pro-active in encouraging vertical retail in above-awning and basement spaces in historic buildings through small business grants to enhance the unique flavour of shopping Melbourne.’

The CoM also provides networking opportunities for retailers through business events and workshops and through close liaison with the Convention Centre, building on research which shows that delegates spend an average of \$800 per day in the city.

Working in conjunction with the Victorian Government and Tourism Victoria, the CoM strategy, supported by City Research has helped bolster the city against the national downturn in retail. Identifying conviviality as a key part of the retail experience has led to policies that support and nurture a mix of complementary businesses, e.g. precincts where boutiques are located alongside bars and cafes. Tying in retail promotion with major events such as l’Oreal Fashion Week and the racing carnival has led to targeted campaigns such as a season of specially-curated shop windows.

The challenge facing towns and cities is adapting to growth and change without compromising the qualities that define their appeal and identity in the first place. By strategically working across the council organisation, City Research has strengthened CoM's pro-active commitment to understanding every aspect of how to improve and enhance functional capacity and building resilience into the fabric of city life, while retaining its character. This makes CoM as prepared for the future as anywhere can hope to be.



## City Research at the City of Melbourne

A case for a coordinated approach to research within the council organisation

**Austin Ley**

### Introduction: The need for an applied research capability in local government

This case study is written as a contribution to a broader dialogue about the place and value of research in Australian local government. It is largely based on the keynote presentation I gave in December 2011 to the Researchers Forum hosted by the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG). In that paper, I made the argument that councils need a research capacity and information base to enable evidence based planning and decision making. I also made a case for the development of a Local Government Research discipline as a key means of strengthening this effort. This research was framed as necessary to local government in order to:

- understand their local areas and communities, enabling informed debate about issues, policies and decisions, not disputes over the sources of facts;
- find the best, most cost effective way to provide services now and in the future;
- be accountable and monitor progress toward goals;
- grow their local economies; and
- build new – or replace old – infrastructure, particularly with respect to Federal and State priorities and funding.

This paper contends that to provide councils with an applied research capacity, there is a need to develop a Local Government Research discipline and knowledge base. While there are many research groups focused on local government – including the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government and its research partners – I propose that there is a benefit to be had from a research agenda being driven from within local government. This proposition stands in contrast to the current situation where research is usually dispersed within a council and generally driven from the outside in, with local government research in the hands of consultants, universities or agencies external to local government organisations. This is a matter of leadership – the recognition that local government is uniquely positioned to make judgements on the best approaches to delivering its services, infrastructure, governance, and those aspects of community life that are captured

**“This is a matter of leadership – the recognition that local government is uniquely positioned to make judgements on the best approaches to delivering its services, infrastructure and governance.”**

under the term ‘public value’. This leadership is arguably only as good as the research and evidence base that supports its decisions and actions.

The City of Melbourne is a case of a local government body that has developed such a research capability, which can provide a model for the sector as a whole.

### **Case study: The City of Melbourne’s experience**

The City of Melbourne, one of over thirty local governments in greater Melbourne, is responsible for an area of 37 square kilometres which includes the Central business district and has 100,000 residents, 16,000 businesses, and 800,000 people using the city each day. The council organisation is effectively a collection of over thirty ‘businesses’ providing hundreds of services. It also has a Research branch, known as City Research, with twelve fulltime staff . By comparison other councils usually don’t have a separate research branch, but rather a number of research professionals working within or alongside strategic planning, corporate planning, economic development, community development, or community engagement branches.

There are vast differences in the circumstances and resources of the 560 plus local governments across Australia, 50 per cent of which serve populations of less than 7,500. While an argument can be made for the benefits of coordinated research, this does not imply a prescriptive approach to structuring that effort. In some circumstances a dedicated research unit may be appropriate, in other situations councils might be better served by adopting a collective approach. Indeed, even in the case of the City of Melbourne, there remain research efforts that do not fall within the scope of City Research – a number of Australian Research Council (ARC) research projects covered under the City’s Arts Strategy being notable examples.<sup>7</sup> The Melbourne’s City Research story has been largely one of organic growth involving an integrated, collaborative approach that can be observed in three development phases:

1. The Strategic Planning phase (1995 – 2000)
2. The Integrated Corporate Research phase (2001 – 2010), and
3. The Knowledge Melbourne phase (2011 to present).

The story is presented here (see Appendix for a summary table), followed by an argument for the development of a new research agenda for local government.

<sup>7</sup> City of Melbourne, 2011, *Arts Strategy 2010-2013*.

[http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/AboutCouncil/PlansandPublications/strategies/Documents/Arts\\_Strategy\\_2010\\_2013.pdf](http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/AboutCouncil/PlansandPublications/strategies/Documents/Arts_Strategy_2010_2013.pdf)



### 1. Strategic Planning phase: 1995 – 2000

The 'Strategic Research' branch, as it was first known, was formed in 1995 after a major council restructure. Victoria was slowly emerging from a severe recession and was nicknamed the 'rust bucket state'. Melbourne was struggling to attract investment and the Council leapt at the opportunity to use the title of 'World's Most Liveable City' based on a two year study conducted by the Population Crisis Committee, a Washington-based research group.<sup>8</sup> The Strategic Research branch was formed to provide an information source and specifically benchmark and monitor Melbourne's liveability and competitiveness.

When the Research branch started in 1995 in the Strategic Planning division, research across the rest of Council was uncoordinated. Each area undertook research in a way that was generally embedded in its own policy or strategy development. The creation of the Research branch established a dedicated resource that had a focus on the City as a whole and demonstrated a range of technical skills. The branch's priorities were determined by asking senior management the following questions:

- What are the key issues facing the municipality and what decisions will need to be made in the next few years?
- What information is needed to address these issues and make these decisions?
- Where is this information expected to come from?

The answers to these questions established the core information required to meet Council's research needs. The next step involved developing a consistent information base that all areas of Council could use. For the City of Melbourne, this information included:

- demographics of the City and its users – including people living in, or travelling to the city
- measures and comparisons of Melbourne's liveability and competitiveness, including: social, cultural and community issues; environmental indicators; economic and business activity; employment; and land use and building activity
- information to support the feasibility of major developments and events, and the ability to measure their impact, for example predicting the impacts of the Crown Entertainment

<sup>8</sup> In 1990 the Population Crisis Committee, a Washington-based research group, released the findings of a two year study conducted as part of its investigation into the rapid growth of cities and living standards. The results suggested that fast population growth accompanies poor living standards, although researchers argued about the causation. The study involved an assessment of cities on ten basic indicators, and tied Melbourne with Montreal and Seattle in first place among the study's 100 biggest cities. Sydney came ninth. The study also found that the lowest ranked cities were in the third world, and they also tended to be those with the fastest population growth. As the population grew rapidly, social services were unable to keep pace. Overcrowding, poor sanitation, pollution, high crime rates and inadequate schooling often resulted.

**“By providing information services to staff across the organisation, the Research branch established a good reputation as the ‘go to’ team regarding research.”**

Complex on the City so that policies and actions could be initiated to minimise the negatives and maximise the positives.

The Research branch also created the following range of reports:

- Melbourne benchmarking and liveability studies and conference series from 1995 -2000, which also formed the goals of the City plans for this period
- CLUE: Census of Land Use and Employment, which initially covered the CBD but was expanded in 2002 to cover the whole municipality
- demographic profiles of residents and suburb profiles.

During this initial phase the Research branch found a number of data sources collected by staff for specific purposes or statutory requirements but not shared with other staff, for instance development and property information. This is suggested as a particularly useful area of investigation that could be undertaken by local government practitioners, i.e. identifying data sources within councils that could be put to greater use.

By providing information services to staff across the organisation, the Research branch established a good reputation as the ‘go to’ team for research. Because we had technical research expertise, other areas of council also began to actively seek our help. Often this help was required when projects were in trouble. In this way we got to know the variety of other research projects that were outsourced and were able to assess the varying degrees of quality to which research was done. This was a crucial approach to winning trust and collaborating with other areas of council, and can be considered as a fundamental principle for undertaking research in the local government sector.

## *2. The Integrated Corporate Research phase: 2001 to 2010*

The key drivers in this phase were the concept of ‘Best Value’ and an organisational efficiency review. Best Value was the term given to ensuring council’s services were provided in the most cost efficient way. It involved first assessing the need for the service and then, if it was required, determining if the service should be provided by the Council itself or outsourced. This process confirmed the need for the Research branch and for this function to be provided internally. It recognised the ‘value added’ by having a resource that focused on providing Council with the key information it required, as well as coordinating and prioritising research to avoid duplication and ensure quality standards were met.

In 2006 Council undertook a major restructure. Again, the value of the Research branch and its functions were confirmed. It was given the additional roles of making its information more widely available to the public and to work in partnership with local universities.

In this phase the Research branch began to identify the extent of duplication of research effort and resources across Council. Its name changed to 'City Research' to better reflect the fact that it supported the whole of Council and not just the Strategic Planning branch. After some difficult negotiations, we were eventually able to establish a corporate research budget that we still administer. By consolidating the research conducted across Council, including surveys and engagement of consultants for all manner of studies, we were able to:

- eliminate duplications across short (one year) to long term (many years) council operations
- ensure consistencies in methodologies over time to facilitate comparisons
- ensure, where possible, that research projects were combined to assist more than just one area and produced multiple benefits
- ensure quality control and consistency in budgets and resources
- ensure that projects were aligned to corporate goals and objectives, not just the interests of a particular area or staff member
- consider timing to eliminate the typical *annual* feedback survey approach, taking into account changes over longer timeframes and actions in response to survey findings that take more than a year to take effect
- ensure surveys were done at appropriate periods of the year, that respondents were not over-surveyed, and that the results were provided when they were needed (still an ongoing challenge)
- document and build a library and information base of research projects
- ensure that raw data was available for further analysis, a point often lost in the past when one area commissioned a survey but received only a report on the findings, not the data upon which these findings were based.

City Research introduced a bidding process for the research budget so that each project proposal could be assessed against specific criteria. Some basic questions were asked, including 'Is this research really necessary?' and 'Can the information be obtained from other sources or methods?' In particular, we applied the 'So what?' test, asking 'What will this research show us and what can we do with the results?'

The emphasis was on collaboration, facilitation and integration. City Research was not attempting to 'take over' or have sole responsibility for all research or knowledge activities across Council. We *facilitated* activities of other areas, looking for ways to add value and build research resources through partnerships. To do this, the City Research was able to offer ISO 20252:2007 accredited expertise in demographics, econometrics, forecasting, benchmarking, and qualitative and quantitative analysis.

In addition, we began to coordinate research projects to deliver results when they were needed. This is still a work in progress. Councils operate on a financial year basis and in Victoria they are elected for a four year term. At the start of the Council's term in office, research tended to focus on understanding issues and had longer lead times. Toward the end of a Council's term, the focus changed to implementation, and measuring progress and timelines were generally shorter. It was important that practitioners understood these timing issues so they could adjust their proposals and program their work accordingly.

City Research endeavoured to build its research information base, streamlining data collection where possible, leveraging existing systems, and focussing more on analysis and synthesis; from data to information to knowledge. Later in this phase City Research began to identify opportunities to work with other organisations, such as other councils and universities. We held the *Unlocking the Data* conference in 2009. The idea of this event was to raise the profile of local government research and emphasise the fact that a lot of information and data is collected by different agencies, but not made available to researchers. The formation of the *Australian Urban Research Information Framework* (AURIN) in 2011 will address many of the issues raised in the conference.

Over the Integrated Corporate Research phase, City Research developed and refined the following range of reports:

- daily population estimates and forecasts (including residents, workers, students, visitors)
- monitoring pedestrian activity
- development activity monitoring
- property watch
- VicCLUE – working with the State Department of Planning & Community development and the Municipal association of Victoria to enable other councils to use our CLUE expertise
- ISO 20252:2007 accreditation to ensure the work met benchmarked quality.



**“In the 21st Century, cities that create and exchange new ideas and developments will drive innovation, economic prosperity and sustainability.”**

### *3. The Knowledge Melbourne phase: 2011 – present*

The key drivers in this phase were the continued desire to work with external organisations and the development of the Knowledge Melbourne program. The City of Melbourne believes that the City’s economy and society will benefit from both promoting and strengthening the shared interests of its knowledge sector. The Knowledge Melbourne program was aimed at understanding Melbourne’s knowledge sector, and how Council can support and work in partnership with it. One of the City of Melbourne’s goals is to ‘Promote Melbourne locally and globally as Australia’s Knowledge Capital and a Global University City’.

In the 21st Century, cities that create and exchange new ideas and developments will drive innovation, economic prosperity and sustainability. These are often referred to as ‘knowledge cities’. Knowledge cities play a fundamental role in knowledge creation, economic growth and development. They are incubators of knowledge and culture, forming a rich and dynamic blend of theory and practice within their boundaries, driven by knowledge workers through the production and sharing of new and innovative products, processes, practices and knowledge creation. Common characteristics of knowledge cities include accessibility, cutting-edge technology, innovation, cultural facilities and services, quality education, as well as world class economic opportunities.

Knowledge Melbourne is an initiative designed to enhance and promote Melbourne’s knowledge sector so that it is more widely appreciated, valued and supported locally, nationally and internationally. The emphasis is on collaboration, facilitation and integration; We want to work with external organisations to generate and share (exchange) information to build knowledge. We are not attempting to have sole responsibility for all research or knowledge activities across Council. This includes:

- Knowledge Week to show the wide variety of knowledge activities being undertaken across the City
- establishing links to external agencies by identifying strategic research opportunities with external partners
- coordinating ARC and other grants.

ARC grants have been (and still tend to be) particularly problematic, at times being proposed at the last minute by universities seeking the City of Melbourne as an industry partner. The three year timing of grants does not always sit comfortably with Council’s budget cycle described earlier. Consequently, City Research seeks to ensure that Council gets value from research grant proposals and activities on an annual basis, and that they deliver practical solutions in addition to meeting

**“This commitment must stem from a fundamental belief in the value of research.”**

their academic objectives. City Research aims to be proactive, rather than passive, by initiating projects to address Council’s needs. This addresses the tendency for local government research to be driven from the outside-in, leading to projects that can often have a less comfortable ‘fit’ with local government priorities and work practices.

City Research continues to work across Council to identify existing connections and potential opportunities to work and partner with external research agencies and institutions, including universities. We have been working with other councils and State government on projects such as Vic CLUE. We are also developing work that fosters learning opportunities by encouraging all areas of Council to tap into under- and post-graduate student resources. This will potentially assist other areas of Council with their projects and align council needs with various course curricula. It is also hoped that this approach will assist with the development of a Local Government Research discipline – something for which I have a particular passion. City Research has already planted the seed of this idea by working with the Australian Bureau of Statistics to design a course titled ‘Introduction to Survey Processes’ which was piloted in 2010 and run twice in 2011. This will increase research awareness, skills and literacy among non-research local government practitioners.

City Research has occasionally collaborated with the other capital cities on projects of common interest, for example through the Council of Capital Cities Lord Mayors. However, in this format it is typically found that these projects are imposed on an already substantial work program, and are contingent on the sustained commitment of one or two key individuals.

Another major lesson City Research has learned is that establishing a Local Government Research resource requires a strong commitment from the organisation. This commitment must stem from a fundamental belief in the value of research. It also requires the appointment of enthusiastic, dedicated and highly skilled staff members who understand how to take a broad collaborative approach.

Over the Knowledge Melbourne phase, City Research developed and refined the following range of reports:

- Future Melbourne monitoring
- pedestrian monitoring and a data visualisation tool
- small area population and employment forecasting models.

### **The next steps proposed: practitioner involvement and collaboration in the development of Local Government Research as a discipline**

The next steps to advancing Local Government Research as a discipline could be to consider some opportunities for practitioner involvement and collaboration. One strategic approach would be to identify the need for Local Government Research and build the case for appropriate resources to meet this need. A research project may need to be undertaken to understand how research is currently being conducted across councils. This is the first opportunity for practitioner involvement.

Not all councils can duplicate the City of Melbourne research model, therefore a 'horses for courses' approach needs to be taken, whereby appropriate research models are developed to meet each council's context and needs. In some instances a separate research resource may be appropriate, others might be better served with a distributed approach, or several councils might be served by one research team. Each approach will have different implications for practitioner engagement.

Many councils will be struggling to perform their basic functions and would perhaps consider research a 'luxury'. Yet the argument, for which this case study presents evidence, is that with councils, as with many organisations in both the public and private sectors, a rigorous research capability is the necessary means to drive strategy and minimise risks by reducing uncertainty.

Other councils will undertake research, to a greater or lesser degree, using a distributed approach. Arguably, from the City of Melbourne's experience, these activities can be undertaken far more efficiently and effectively using a collective or consolidated approach. As outlined earlier, the benefits of this model include:

- eliminating duplication
- ensuring consistencies in methodologies, quality control, and consistency in budget and resources
- ensuring that projects are aligned to corporate goals and objectives and don't just serve single interests, but rather produce multiple benefits
- timing to ensure results can be acted upon
- building an information base.

A project to recognise and identify research activities within councils, establish the case for a collective or consolidated approach, and determine appropriate models of delivery, might involve groups of councils working together with universities and/or research institutes. To facilitate this, a knowledge base needs to be built that can be shared across councils.

Another opportunity for practitioner involvement is to continue advocating for the principle of 'unlocking data'. This will involve identifying areas where data and information is collected for single purposes, which, with a bit of thought, can provide information for multiple purposes.

Supporting local government also needs to be framed and understood as a benefit to university researchers. This might involve lobbying for change that will enable academics to be rewarded for collaborating with local government by encouraging results-based research is recognised and rewarded as an alternative to the present system based on the generation of publications. Work-integrated learning provides one opportunity. Recognising Local Government Research as a discipline in its own right might also assist this cause. An initiative that could be driven by a body such as ACELG – particularly the Local Government Research Network that operates under ACELG's aegis – would be to prepare a submission to the Productivity Commission on this idea of results-based research and seek funding to develop a deeper understanding of the research needs of local government.



## Appendix

Summary of drivers, benefits and resourcing issues for the development of research capability at the City of Melbourne

No.	PHASE	YEARS	DRIVERS	BENEFITS TO STAKEHOLDERS	RESOURCING/OTHER
1	<i>Strategic Planning</i>	1995-2000	<p>Internal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recent major restructure</li> <li>Strategic research capability needed to benchmark liveability and competitiveness</li> </ul> <p>External</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local recession – ‘Rust Bucket State’</li> <li>Population Crisis report: ‘World’s Most Liveable City’</li> </ul>	<p>Internal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address uncoordinated research efforts across Council</li> <li>Develop skills in demographics</li> <li>Develop economic and other data to support decision making for major development</li> </ul> <p>External</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased capability to manage development of Crown Entertainment Complex</li> <li>Improved policies and actions to minimise negatives and maximise positives of major development</li> </ul>	Research team gradually engages other branches and builds reputation as ‘go to’ people for internal capacity for research.
2	<i>Integrated Corporate Research</i>	2001-2010	<p>Internal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Efficiency review and promotion of Best Value</li> <li>Confirm value of research branch to organisation</li> <li>Major restructure in 2006</li> </ul> <p>External</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Unlocking the Data</i> Conference 2009</li> <li>Identified need for unlocking the data collected by different Council agencies</li> </ul>	<p>Internal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Duplication identified and reduced</li> <li>Consolidated research effort – quality control, effective timing</li> <li>Improved management of, and access to data</li> </ul> <p>External</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refined demographic and economic data made available</li> <li>VicCLUE – data made available to State government and other councils</li> </ul>	<p>Corporate research budget established and managed by research unit. Bidding process for research budget.</p> <p>ISO 20252:2007 accreditation achieved.</p>

No.	PHASE	YEARS	DRIVERS	BENEFITS TO STAKEHOLDERS	RESOURCING/OTHER
3	<i>Knowledge Melbourne</i>	2011-now	<p>Internal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to enhance internal research capability to engage external (e.g. university) partners</li> </ul> <p>External</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic research opportunities identified</li> </ul> <p>Internal &amp; External</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge Melbourne program – shared interest in knowledge sector</li> </ul>	<p>Internal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhanced City Research capabilities</li> <li>• Promotion of Melbourne as a Knowledge Capital</li> <li>• Benefits of under- and post-graduate student resources</li> </ul> <p>External</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovation, economic prosperity, sustainability</li> <li>• Strategic research opportunities</li> <li>• Coordination of ARC grants</li> </ul>	<p>Need to ensure optimal benefits to both Council and university interests. Problem of aligning outcomes between longer time frames that university-based research may require compared to Council sponsored research. Importance of aligning Council needs with course curricula priorities</p>

## ABOUT ACELG

ACELG is a unique consortium of universities and professional bodies that have a strong commitment to the advancement of local government. The consortium has a central secretariat based at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS), and includes the UTS Centre for Local Government, the University of Canberra, the Australia and New Zealand School of Government, Local Government Managers Australia and the Institute of Public Works Engineering Australia. In addition, the Centre works with other program partners to provide support in specialist areas and extend the Centre's national reach. These include Charles Darwin University and Edith Cowan University.

## PROGRAM DELIVERY

ACELG's activities are grouped into six program areas:

- Research and Policy Foresight
- Innovation and Best Practice
- Governance and Strategic Leadership
- Organisation Capacity Building
- Rural-Remote and Indigenous Local Government
- Workforce Development.

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