





Front Cover Image: The j (the junction) Noosa Youth & Community Centre, QLD  
Aperture Architectural Photography-Brisbane. Architects: Middap and Ditchfield Pty Ltd-Noosa

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byron bay community & cultural centre



grange community centre

belconnen community centre

redfern community house

mawson centre



blacktown leisure centre

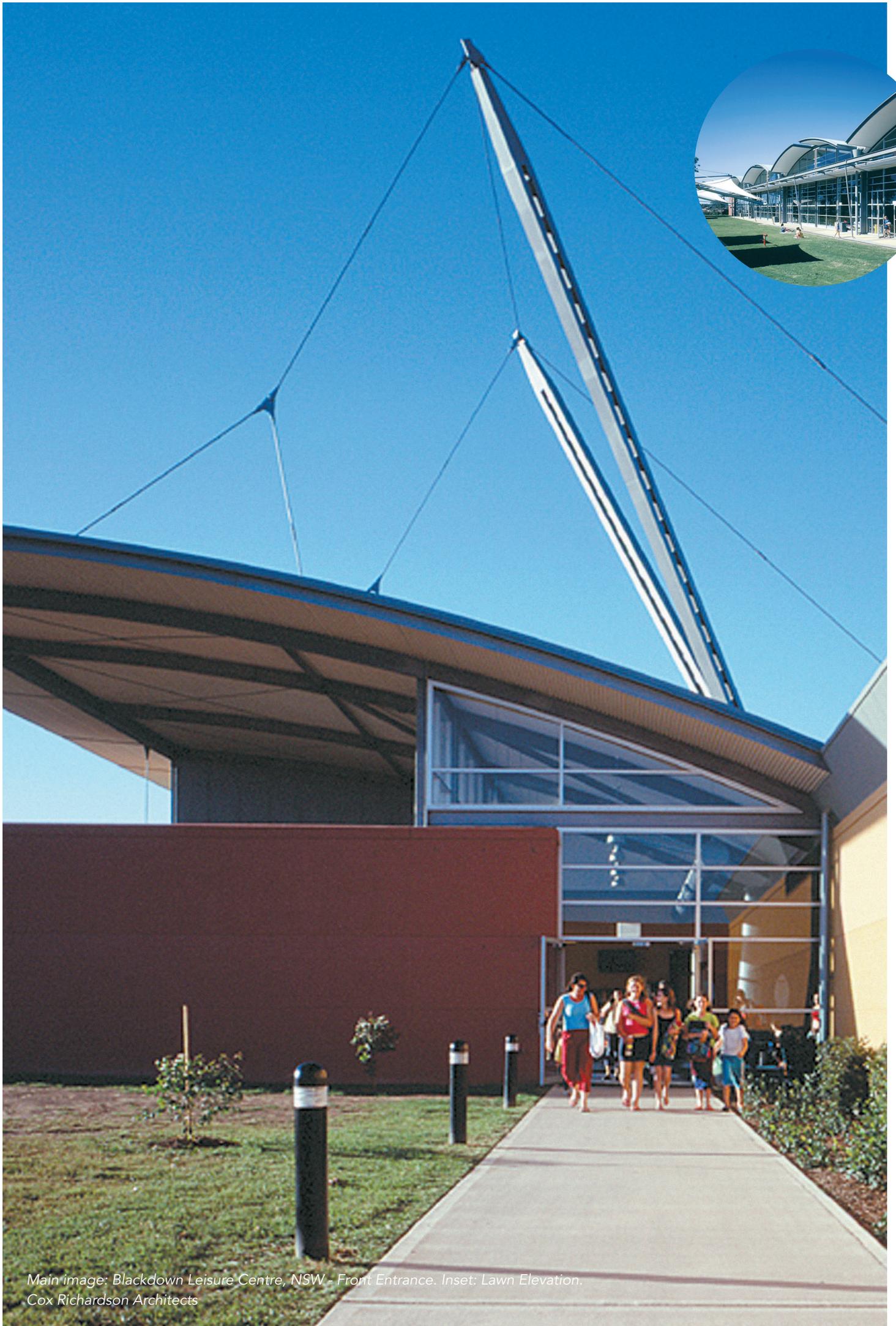


pathways learning and leisure centre

noosa youth and community centre

the j (the junction)





Main image: Blackdown Leisure Centre, NSW - Front Entrance. Inset: Lawn Elevation.  
Cox Richardson Architects

# 1.0 about the guidelines

## 1.1 Purpose of this document

These guidelines have been prepared by Landcom to increase understanding about what makes a successful community centre and to provide guidance about the different issues to consider when planning new community centres.

The guidelines are not intended to be prescriptive. They canvass a number of possible approaches to the planning, design, delivery and operation of community centres. Rather than a set of rigid requirements, they aim to highlight a number of important considerations and to act as a practical and constructive resource to help in planning and delivery.

As a tool for Landcom development staff, development partners, local government and other stakeholders, they contain information about what makes a successful community centre and provide practical steps for consideration in planning, designing and operating these facilities.

For future updates of the Community Centre Guidelines and Ideas Bank please see [www.landcom.com.au/community](http://www.landcom.com.au/community).

## 1.2 How the guidelines were developed

These guidelines were developed from input at a workshop organised by Landcom in April 2007. The workshop brought together a group of social planners, community development workers, community facilities managers, development managers and others involved in the planning for, and operation of, community centres. Their collective experience and expertise form the basis of the guidelines.

Landcom also commissioned consultants to source examples of innovative community centres from throughout Australia to be used as an Ideas Bank.

## 1.3 What is a community centre?

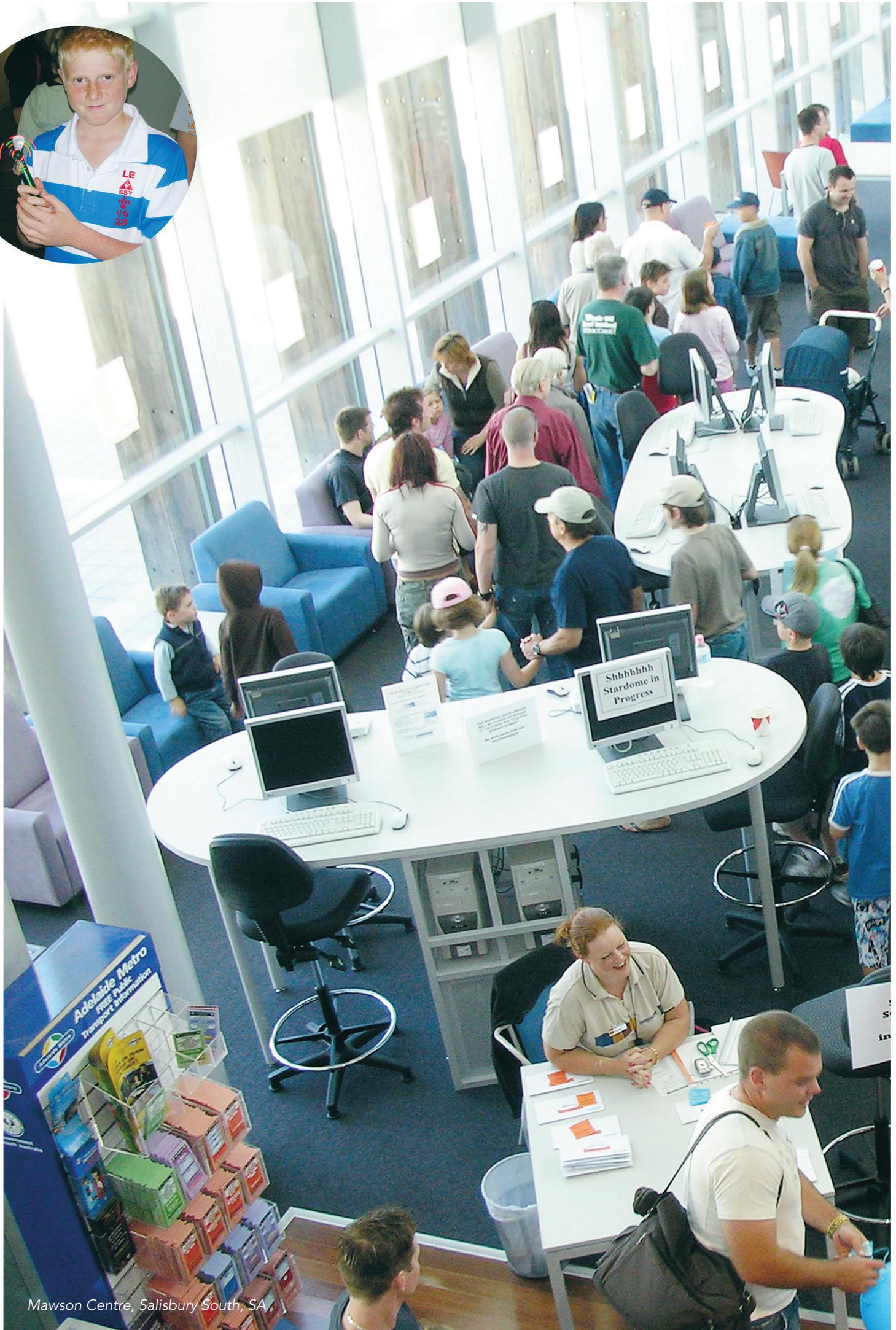
Community centres range from small community halls and meeting rooms available for use by the community to large multipurpose centres that incorporate a wide range of services and facilities. As these guidelines are intended to be applied in a wide variety of community settings, the definition of community centres used here is a broad one, and refers to: *publicly owned facilities that provide space for local organisations and community groups to meet, and for a range of social programs, services and activities which address the social needs of a community.*

These guidelines are not intended to cover club houses and other similar facilities provided under Community Title, or that have restricted membership.

A community centre may provide:

- General community use space for meetings, activities or events.
- A base for the delivery of local community services and programs.
- Particular services, programs and activities for specific target groups, such as young people or older people.
- Space for hire for private functions.
- Specialist facilities providing a particular focus on recreation, arts, cultural activity, learning or social support.
- A number of these functions within a single centre.

Despite the numerous models and diversity of uses, the essence of community centres is that they support the development of socially sustainable communities by providing physical spaces to help address the social needs of a community.



Mawson Centre, Salisbury South, SA

# 2.0 overall principles for successful community centres

## 2.1 Address community needs and promote social outcomes

- A community centre should address the social needs of the particular community in which it is located in order to contribute to residents' and workers' health, wellbeing and quality of life.
- Programs, activities and services offered should respond to the needs and interests of the people that live and work around it.
- Programs, services and activities should foster long term social benefits for the community.
- The planning and design of a community centre should reflect the potential programs, activities and services envisaged.

## 2.2 Provide a range of community services, activities and programs

- Successful community centres should be well used, both day and night, throughout the week and weekend. This requires a range of activities that provide for the needs of a variety of user groups.
- Centres that are designed to be multi-purpose are generally better able to accommodate diverse groups and uses.
- A mix of uses helps to ensure that a centre is not labelled as a particular 'type' of facility or available only for a particular target group, and that it is perceived as a facility available for the whole community.

## 2.3 Contribute to the public domain and sense of place

- Community centres can act as important focal points and gathering places and provide important public spaces for a community.
- Whether a large, iconic building, or a smaller, more intimate place, a strong connection between a community centre, its users and the broader community can mean that the building is seen as a reflection of local culture and an intrinsic part of that community.



Landcom Project: Park Central, Campbelltown NSW



Swimming Facilities at Blacktown Leisure Centre, NSW

## 2.4 Adopt sustainable funding, management and maintenance arrangements

- Sustainable funding, management and maintenance arrangements ensure that community centres will be both financially viable and responsive to community needs in the future.
- Funding sources for management and maintenance of centres need to be identified at the outset to ensure centres will be sustainable for the long term.
- Strategies for community involvement and resourcing and support for management structures and staffing are other factors important to long term sustainability.

## 2.5 Ensure equitable access

- As public facilities, community centres need to be welcoming and accessible to people of all ages, cultural backgrounds, abilities, income levels and interests. This principle should be embodied in the design, activities, programs, hiring policies and management of the centre.
- Centres should have equitable access for people with high social needs.

- Activities and spaces need to be affordable for local residents and community organisations.
- Facilities need to be safe for all users.

## 2.6 Support community cohesion

- Community centres have the potential to bring a variety of people with different circumstances and backgrounds together to build community cohesion.
- Community centres should facilitate social interaction between different groups in a community and help to nurture and develop networks, linkages and cooperation.

## 2.7 Develop a strong local profile

- Successful community centres are well known in the community and recognised widely as a source of information and support.
- A strong local profile is important to ensure that there is high community awareness of what the centre does.
- Services provided at community centres need to be promoted and marketed to the local community to ensure high levels of community usage.

## 2.8 Involve the community

- Successful community centres involve the local community in planning, design and delivery.
- Providing opportunities for local people to be involved in the life of their community, and to develop and use civic skills, are important functions of community centres.
- There may also be opportunities for local people to participate in centre management, as well as planning activities and daily operation.

## 2.9 Work collaboratively

- Successful community centres are managed collaboratively with government, local community groups, organisations, services, and others to ensure the social needs of the area are identified and met.
- Collaboration should occur at the planning, design and delivery stages of a new community centre.
- Collaboration also involves consultation and co-ordination to encourage the equitable sharing of space, open and participatory management, partnerships with other facilities and services and community outreach activities.
- Community centres are part of a network of facilities which together meet a range of community needs.



Redfern Community Centre, NSW

## 2.10 Promote physical integration

- Successful community centres are positioned to integrate with other uses and services. Effective utilisation can be maximised by locating community centres with or near schools, shops, public transport or other community facilities such as libraries.
- By positioning a community centre within a hub of activity, the centre can help to create a true focal point for a community. Its useability is also improved when a range of services are situated together in a convenient location.
- Potential impacts such as noise and privacy need to be carefully considered.

## 2.11 Ensure flexibility and adaptability

- Successful community centres are designed to be flexible and adaptable in order to meet changing community needs and expectations.
- Community needs and expectations will change over time. Community centres that are too rigid or fixed in their purpose and programs will soon become redundant as local communities change.
- Flexibility and adaptability are critical in ensuring that community centres remain sustainable and responsive in the future.

## 2.12 Ensure integrated planning

- Successful community centres involve the integration of planning, design, delivery and operational processes. These factors are dealt with separately in these guidelines, but in practice they need to be considered interdependently.

The following sections focus on how to implement these principles and the factors and options that help lead to these outcomes.

# 3.0 planning a community centre



## Why this is important

Successful community centres require rigorous and thoughtful planning of a range of issues affecting the future role, function, funding, size and location of the facility. While it is important to learn from the lessons of other areas, the planning process requires careful consideration of specific local community needs and issues and the ways in which the centre might provide positive and long term benefit for its host community. Factors to consider in planning a community centre are outlined below. These need to be thought about in an integrated, rather than sequential, way.

*Blacktown Leisure Centre, NSW*

## 3.1 Identify local social needs and desired social outcomes

Community centres should be tailored to the social needs of the community they will serve. Replicating a standard model from elsewhere is unlikely to adequately meet the particular needs of the local area.

### Key tasks include:

- Determine the age, lifestyle, cultural and socio-economic characteristics of different groups within the population and their likely interests, expectations and preferences with regard to community activities, programs and services.
- Identify groups with high needs or who are experiencing particular social isolation or disadvantage that might be addressed through community centre activities, programs and services.
- Consider the needs of workers and visitors to the area.
- Determine priority needs and the social outcomes and benefits that the centre will aim to achieve.
- Identify whether the need is for a centre with a broad generalist or specialist focus, for instance a particular focus on recreation and young people, or cultural activity, or providing services for disadvantaged groups.
- Consider the availability of other community facilities in the district. It may be appropriate to expand or upgrade an existing facility nearby, rather than build a new one.
- Aim to complement, rather than duplicate, community centres in adjacent areas to help create an integrated network of centres that offer different opportunities.
- Consider other government and non-government agencies which may be able to provide services from the centre.
- Consider opportunities to enhance community integration with adjoining areas or benefit the wider community. This may involve placing centres outside the bounds of new development where appropriate.

#### Practical considerations include:

- Undertake local consultation and research to understand social needs.
- Use and link into local government social plans and strategic plans.
- Consult with other centres' management, government agencies and other organisations and service providers to ensure a collaborative and coordinated approach to planning and delivery.

### 3.2 Consider funding, ownership and partnership arrangements

While Section 94 contributions remain the most common source of capital funding for community centres in NSW, they alone may not yield sufficient funds to build the size and type of facilities sometimes required to meet contemporary community expectations. Other sources of funding may need to be secured.

#### Key tasks include:

- Identify funding sources and consider additional or alternative sources of funding such as government grants or council funding.
- Investigate partnerships with government agencies and other organisations that may be considering building facilities in the area – for example schools, TAFEs/universities, community health centres or not for profit organisations with assets such as Police Citizens Youth Clubs.
- Identify who will own and manage the centre, especially if partnership arrangements are involved.
- Consider developer or planning agreements as an alternative to Section 94 contributions in order to provide additional flexibility, including early delivery and funding for community programs and/or community development workers.
- Consider providing income-generating space for complementary services such as cafes, professional offices, business services and/or government agencies to assist in offsetting management and maintenance costs.



*The j (the junction) Noosa Youth & Community Centre, QLD*



*The j (the junction) Noosa Youth & Community Centre, QLD*

**Practical considerations include:**

- When calculating the costs and benefits of community centres, social outcomes of community centres should be part of the analysis.
- Partnership opportunities should be assessed in relation to the principles for successful community centres, including flexibility for change and contribution to community life and identity.
- Sustainable financing for community centres may include a range of funding strategies.
- Balanced business models that include the full range of community facilities and a range of financing strategies may mean that, although not all centres can be ‘cost neutral’, some costs can be recovered across the full portfolio of facilities.
- Building and ongoing recurrent costs need to be carefully managed. Determine the broad capital and recurrent budget and include in the design brief.

**3.3 Determine size and scale**

When it comes to community centres, one size does not fit all. There is no minimum or standard sized catchment population that triggers a requirement for a community centre and no ideal scale or size for a facility. Community centres are provided for catchment populations of varying sizes, ranging from as small as 3-4,000 people in

some areas, up to district or sub-regional level facilities for populations of 40-50,000. They may comprise a simple hall or a large complex with multiple staff and extensive programs.

Whatever the scale of the facility, the principles underlying successful centres highlighted in Section 2 should be addressed.

**Key tasks include:**

- Consider what other facilities and services exist in the local government area and any council policies and benchmarks regarding population thresholds and catchments.
- Consider the distribution, utilisation and management of existing community centres and other facilities in the surrounding area.
- Consider whether the principles and objectives outlined in Section 2 might be best addressed by providing a larger, multipurpose community centre for a larger population catchment. Larger facilities can provide a variety of higher quality and more specialist facilities to meet contemporary expectations and can increase opportunities to base services with staff in the centre, thereby increasing activity and utilisation.
- Consider whether small, unstaffed centres for small population catchments will be able to satisfy

the principles and criteria outlined in Section 2. Small, stand alone centres for local neighbourhood populations may have limited utilisation and flexibility. There may also be security problems and less capacity for staffing. Management and maintenance issues can also be difficult with smaller facilities because of their limited size and utilisation.

- Despite the above shortcomings, there will be circumstances where a small, unstaffed centre, where appropriately located, designed and integrated with other activities and surrounding uses, best provides for local community needs.
- Consider the advantages and disadvantages of making a community centre part of a larger complex linked with recreation, cultural, library or civic facilities.

**Practical considerations include:**

- Finding the right balance between larger district and local community centres will require consideration of the local community's unique needs for community space and likely demand for different sorts of activities and services.
- It also requires consideration of physical features such as geographical barriers and transport patterns that will influence access to centres, and community identity.
- Consider if the social needs of the community can best be met by expanding an existing centre in an adjacent area to create a bigger centre with better facilities rather than establishing another small local centre.
- Take a holistic view of the full range of community facilities (community, recreation, cultural, libraries) across the whole area, whether that be a local government area or development precinct.



*Blacktown Leisure Centre, NSW*

### 3.4 Identify location

To be well utilised and serve identified social needs, community centres need to be accessible and visible. Community centres should be located so that they:

- Are central to their catchment area and provide equitable access to all potential users. It is important to remember that the catchment area does not necessarily correspond with development area/local government boundaries.
- Are accessible by public transport (i.e. public transport stops within 400 metres walking distance).
- Have good pedestrian and cycling connections.
- Are on a main street with ground floor street frontage for optimum visibility and accessibility.
- Are clustered with other facilities, such as shops, schools and public libraries to promote convenient access and help create a focal point for community activity.
- Are not sited to conflict with neighbouring uses.
- Have room to expand and adapt as needs change.
- Are near open space, to allow for related outdoor activities and community events, such as festivals and markets, where possible and appropriate.
- Are near sporting, recreation and leisure facilities, to create a health and activity focus, where possible and appropriate.

**Practical considerations include:**

- Make decisions about the location of community centres in master planning processes to optimise integration.
- Maximise synergies with other activity generating uses such as shops, schools and public transport.
- By locating centres with other activities, personal safety and building security are maximised through casual surveillance and high levels of utilisation, particularly at night.

# 4.0 design and delivery



## Why this is important

While planning issues such as size, scale and location are critical to creating successful community centres, how centres are designed and delivered is equally important. When planning for new or growing communities, we have a unique opportunity to maximise the potential social benefits of a community centre by ensuring its design:

- Enables the centre to respond to community needs.
- Strengthens its presence in the community.
- Is functional and practical.
- Promotes the efficient use of resources and effective delivery of services.

*Castle Grand: Castle Hill Community Centre, NSW*

## 4.1 Consider the functional and design features

Community centres should:

- Be appealing, attractive and quality buildings, that contribute to civic pride and the character and identity of a place.
- Consider symbolism that communicates history, community values and future aspirations, expressed through public art and architectural elements.
- Be easily identified and known by the community as a public facility for community use.
- Enable passers-by to see what happens inside the centre and what it is used for.
- Provide a range of spaces suitable for a variety of activities and user groups.
- Provide multi-purpose spaces capable of being configured into different sizes and for different activities.
- Allow for concurrent activities by different user groups.
- Be designed so that different functional areas can enhance social interaction, but also minimise potential conflict associated with privacy and noise impacts.
- Provide a safe and secure environment, especially for night users (incorporating crime prevention through environmental design principles).
- Be designed to be flexible and adaptable to meet changing user requirements.
- Include spaces designed to reflect the desired uses of the centre. These might include, for example, kitchens capable of use for private functions, facilities to support creative activities or performing arts or office space for service providers.
- Be designed for the life cycle groups likely to use the centre now and in the future and provide facilities appropriate to their needs (e.g. nappy change areas, children's play areas, "youth friendly" spaces, or features for older people with limited mobility).

- Have the ability to lock down different components to provide managed access at nights or on weekends.
- Have the potential for separate entry/exit points for particular facilities, such as youth activities room.
- Provide direct access from activity rooms to adjoining outdoor areas for children's play and social events.
- Incorporate energy and water efficient design principles and promote sustainable use of materials including waste minimisation.
- Incorporate universal design principles to ensure the centre is fully accessible as per Australian Standard 1428.
- Include adequate space for storage that allows for different user groups' equipment to be secured when not in use.
- Have adequate parking, including parking for a community bus and bicycles, within safe walking distance and which is well lit at night.
- Have high quality broadband access.
- Provide safe drop off/pick up areas and pedestrian access for centre users.

**Practical considerations include:**

- Involve existing community centre users (residents and service providers) as well as potential partners in the design process.
- Consider how the centre will be managed and integrate this into the design process.
- Consider design features and finishes that will minimise graffiti and vandalism.
- Consider noise from user groups and traffic which may impact on neighbours.
- Consider future maintenance demands and design to minimise these.
- Emphasise flexibility and adaptability in the centre's design.
- Require application of Four Star or higher Green Star Rating or Five Star Rating under the Australian Building Greenhouse Rating (ABGR) scheme.
- Consider opportunities for renewable energy including photovoltaics, solar panels and gas boosted solar hot water systems.
- Consider use of high efficiency appliances.
- Consider use of grey water for toilet flushing and other uses.
- Consider use of water efficient plumbing fixtures including dual flush toilets and AAA rated taps.



Castle Grand: Castle Hill Community Centre, NSW

## 4.2 Co-locate with other facilities where appropriate

Co-location involves shared or joint use of facilities and often the integrated delivery of some services. Opportunities and advantages of co-locating community centres with related facilities such as schools, libraries, recreation centres, child care facilities and community health centres need to be considered in the planning and design of community centres.

### Co-location enables:

- Pooling of resources to provide better facilities.
- The concentration of compatible services and facilities to create a community focal point.
- Improved access and safety for users who can access a range of services at a single location.
- More integrated and innovative delivery of services.
- More efficient use of land, for instance through shared, rather than separate, parking areas.

### Issues to consider in co-locating facilities include:

- Arrangements for financing, ownership, management, governance and maintenance of shared spaces will impact on the success of the centre and its capacity to respond to changing demands, particularly where multiple agencies are involved.
- Ensuring appropriate and ongoing community access to shared facilities has been found to be an issue in some co-located facilities.
- Extensive negotiations and preparation and documentation of agreements are required between co-locating partners to ensure the benefits of co-location are realised in practice.

### Practical considerations include:

- Identify and negotiate early with potential co-location partners.
- Look for co-location partners that will enhance the operation of the community centre. Libraries are good examples as they attract large numbers of community members, offer a range of compatible activities, are accessible and are staffed regularly.
- If joint use (for example having a community centre on school grounds) seems like it may be difficult to achieve, then locating facilities next to each other is another option that offers many of the same community benefits, without the ownership and management issues.
- Utilise the learning experiences of others when entering into agreements about co-location.

## 4.3 Consider timing of delivery

### Issues to consider include:

- Community centres should be provided in the early stages of a new development. This helps ensure that new residents are connected with necessary services and that social networks and support structures can be initiated from the outset.
- As the population grows and needs evolve, community centres need to respond to the changing demographic profile of the area.

### Practical considerations include:

- Consider opportunities for planning agreements and works-in-kind arrangements that can specify the timing of provision of the community centre and ensure early delivery.
- If early provision is difficult, consider the staged building of the facility, which can be added to as the community grows.
- Consider ways to monitor the changing needs of the population, through community consultation and resident involvement in planning and programming activities.



Mawson Centre, SA

# 5.0 operating a community centre



## Why this is important

Providing a well located and designed building does not in itself guarantee that a community centre will be successful in achieving the desired social outcomes. A variety of operational factors are critical to ensuring that the centre serves the community well and becomes a dynamic place for people to use.

*Debbie & Abbey Borgia Community Recreation Centre, NSW*

### 5.1 Provide a diversity of programs, services and activities

So that community centres can serve the whole community, a diverse range of programs, services and activities are required. These need to respond to the specific needs of the community and social outcomes identified.

Practical ways to encourage high levels of use and a variety of activities include:

- Fund staff to identify community needs and organise and deliver programs, services and activities.
- Establish and support a local resident management group to activate the centre.
- Provide support and encouragement for voluntary resident involvement.
- Develop hiring and fee policies which promote equitable and affordable access for a variety of groups and ensure that the centre is not monopolised by single groups or interests.
- Provide seed funding for community initiatives that will support the development of programs, services and activities.

- Identify outreach and sessional services which can be delivered at the centre.
- Have a local organisation or service agency located within the centre that can initiate activities and services.
- Prepare a services plan/business plan for the centre.
- Consider partnerships with other local services and community organisations for the development and delivery of services, activities and programs.

### 5.2 Encourage staffing of centres

Successful community centres often have regular staff to initiate and support activities. Staff can also be important in ensuring there is a good mix of activities and the centre is not monopolised by particular interest groups. They are also often critical in developing and supporting services and programs for high need target groups to enhance the social benefit of the centre.

Staffing of community centres has been an ongoing difficulty, given the very limited availability of government funding for community development. While capital funds are available through Section 94



Blacktown Leisure Centre, NSW

developer contributions, recurrent funds for staff have not been available through this mechanism. As a result, facilities may be built, but not effectively operated.

**Options for staffing of community centres include:**

- Secure recurrent funding for community development workers for a specified period through planning agreements negotiated with developers/delivery partners.
- Encourage the local council to employ staff to manage/program centre operations. Particularly in larger council-owned centres that provide multiple functions and user-pays activities, councils may provide staff to run activities and manage the centre.
- Accommodate a local funded community organisation with a broad community development focus in the centre.
- Apply for funding for a range of projects which may support community programs operating from the centre.
- Design the centre to provide office accommodation for local services. In return, service staff can take on centre management and programming roles and/or use centre meeting/activity rooms for services and programs.
- Incorporate income generating activities with income used to employ staff. Income generators may include fee-paying courses, business sponsorship, and rental from leasing space to businesses/government (such as cafes, complementary professional offices and/or government departments).

**Practical considerations include:**

- Local organisations or services to be based in the centre can be selected by seeking expressions of interest (EOI) from existing groups in the area. This provides a transparent process that avoids perceptions of bias or favouritism.
- Contracts with local organisations or services accommodated in the centre need to ensure the centre remains a public facility with a broad range of activities directed at meeting the social needs of the area.
- Careful negotiation of roles and responsibilities is required to ensure that a community centre does not become identified with a particular service or tainted with a particular image and lose its broad community appeal.
- Performance measures that cover policy objectives such as access for all target groups can be written into the EOI documentation.
- Whilst accommodating a service within a community centre may not provide broad community development functions, it does ensure that the centre is open and active and that core activities and/or programs are being provided.

### 5.3 Develop sustainable management, maintenance and policy arrangements

Many community centres are run by community based volunteer management committees, while others are managed directly by councils or by the local organisations which occupy them as part of a tenancy arrangement.

In developing sustainable management and maintenance arrangements for community centres, a number of models may be adopted.

#### Issues to consider include:

- Ensure management arrangements are adequately resourced with appropriately skilled people capable of managing the centre effectively for the long term.
- Consider the sources of income likely to be derived from centre activities that may be available for management and maintenance of the centre. These may include regular income from user fees, hire charges, rent from sub-tenants or commercial income generating activities, such as operating cafes or running monthly markets.
- Balance the need for recurrent funding streams with considerations of affordability and equitable access for all target groups.
- Ensure the centre can be kept clean and well-maintained, as presentation and public image are critical for the centre to be well utilised. Employed staff and management committees should be welcoming and representative of the community in which the centre is located.

- Ensure centre hiring, allocation and events policies promote fair and equitable access and support the social benefits expected.
- Ensure social benefits of centres can be monitored and reported on by setting and measuring performance targets.
- Consider the strengths and weaknesses of establishing community management committees comprising volunteers from the local community. While this model promotes greater levels of community involvement and ownership of a centre and helps build community capacity, it may be difficult in some areas to attract and retain volunteers with the necessary skills and expertise to manage the centre.
- Consider the strengths and weaknesses of a Council employed manager. While this helps ensure effective day-to-day management and may be the only option in new areas where volunteers and community organisations are not present, it lacks some of the community involvement benefits of other models. It may also rely on the centre being operated as a major commercial enterprise, with the cost of management offset by user charges and commercial activities.
- Consider the strengths and weaknesses of management by a community organisation or service provider as a tenant of the centre. As discussed above, while this model can ensure a regular presence at the centre, potential disadvantages are that centres can become identified with particular organisations and associated with their type of service, and may not appear accessible to the broader community.



Byron Bay Community and Cultural Centre, NSW

# moving forward



Whatever the size, location, model or management of a community centre, the objectives and principles outlined in these guidelines should be addressed. These provide guidance on the 'big picture' issues that need to be considered in planning and delivering successful community centres.

Successful community centres result from the right combination of a number of inter-woven factors that reflect the needs and circumstances of their local community. These guidelines highlight that there is no single or simple recipe for success, but rather a variety of approaches which need to be assessed in planning for and delivering community centres. We hope that these guidelines provide useful criteria for evaluating these options and help to ensure that new community centres are able to achieve best practice outcomes.

The attached CD-ROM includes case studies of 13 community centres around Australia.

The centres were chosen because they are examples of innovative approaches with good social outcomes.

# acknowledgements and ideas bank CD-ROM

Thank you to the individuals and organisations that have helped Landcom with this work.

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