About the NSW NGO Researchers Forum- *updated February 2023*
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1) History

2008-2017

The NGO Research Forum is believed to have been informally started in 2008 by Mission Australia and The Benevolent Society. By early 2012, venue hosting was being shared by Mission Australia and HREOC/Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC); and in May 2012, NCOSS accepted Mission Australia's offer to take over the convening and secretariat duties. Bi-monthly meetings took place from 2012 to 2017.

Membership and structure

- There were around 100 signed-up members, with 10-30 regular attendees or 'core members'.
- There was no formal structure (i.e. no Terms of Reference, no minute taking, no formal Chair).

  The idea of making the Forum more formal has been discussed but generally not accepted – those who attend liked the informality and the idea of it being a 'safe' discussion place. There are some non-typical members, e.g. HREOC/AHRC and some from universities, but majority are from NGOs.

  We are an informal network of researchers with an unwritten expectation that we work primarily in the NGO sector. There are currently no formal 'membership' requirements, although the group has previously spoken about the possible need for some, so the agenda stays focussed on NGO matters and speakers do not feel inhibited in any way by the presence of government personnel.

  - Notes from May 2012 hand-over to NCOSS

- A small "steering committee" was in place till 2017, primarily composed of NGOs.

Forum meetings

There were generally 'coordinating organisations' for each meeting. The roster included the Australian Human Rights Commission, Alzheimers Australia NSW, BenSoc, YWCA, Baptist Community Services, UnitingCare Burnside, CanTeen, The Community Mental Health Drug and Alcohol Research Network (CMHDARN), among several others.

Topics were varied, with one theme per meeting. Many themes were around Evaluation (capacity-building, Program Logic, Theory of Change, RBA), Research (translating into policy and advocacy, research to practice case studies), and other sessions like 'Measuring our advocacy influence in protecting human rights'.

By 2017, presentations took on a more academic nature, with a calendar showing 4 out of 6 presenters coming from academia (UWS, UTS and USyd).

2018-2020

By 2018, The University of Sydney took on a convening role, with NCOSS hosting the venue.

2021-2022

Emerging intermittently from pandemic lockdowns, NCOSS reached out to The University of Sydney (USyd) School of Education and Social Work regarding jointly reconvening the Forum. Driven by its work in

Community-Led Research (CLR) and of the Neighbourhood Research Hub, USyd formalised a 6-12 month industry fellowship/partnership with NCOSS in order to relaunch the forum.

2023 (present)

NCOSS is the forum's current convenor, with the following sites used to record and maintain information on behalf of over 100 signed-up participants:

- **NSW NGO Researchers Forum** – key info, meeting dates & agenda, recordings & resources, RSVP
- **Expression of Interest (EOI) to speak** - anyone can submit an EOI to present at a forum meeting

2) Current guidelines

The planning workshop in March 2022 yielded thoughts and preferences among approximately 50 participants. NCOSS remains mindful of the following meeting guidelines:

a) Community-Led Research (CLR) is the overarching approach.
b) The top two expressed reasons for participant attendance were *"to hear presentations from NGO researchers about their work"* and *"time to collaborate on ideas for future research".*
c) 'One theme per meeting' was preferred (four themes per year, 3 to 4 presentations within a theme).
d) "Equal time for research presentations AND discussions" was preferred.
e) Speaker presentations could include good practice examples, case studies and capacity-building/'training' format.

Key themes and desired outcomes

a) Connecting and hearing ideas from other NGOs
b) Strengthening the way we analyse and use data
c) Strengthening the way we apply data (to enhance practice and outcomes)
d) Capturing data that communicate impact, or translate into impact
e) Using data for advocacy purposes
f) Generating new research
g) Improving outcomes for beneficiaries/service users
h) Promoting inclusivity (grey research)
i) Addressing workforce and sector issues

Theory of Change (NCOSS draft)

If we use the NGO Researchers Forum as a meeting space to build our capacity around Community-Led Research (CLR)...

...it will enhance the way we use research-informed approaches in our service practice, policies and advocacies...

...which will support the achievement of better outcomes for our local communities and beneficiaries.

Queries about the NSW NGO Researchers Forum to: advocacy@ncoss.org.au (Attn: Rocellita)