

# Summary report of 2018–24 evaluation findings synthesis for the NYEB

Louise Mooney and Eliza Cotton

## Key points

### **HEADLINE FINDING 1: NYEB capability, especially support to prioritise, plan and strengthen place-based action, is being built through the Enabling Organisation (EO).**

All evaluations discuss the important capability-building role of the EO, predominately focusing on what is required for the NYEB to function and progress. There is less evidence from evaluations on how well the EO is currently performing these functions. This could be explored further in future evaluations.

### **HEADLINE FINDING 2: The NYEB governance structures are enabling collaboration between stakeholders that can strengthen place-based employment systems.**

Evaluations of the NYEB suggest that the governance structures are enabling collaboration with community organisations, employers and young people and are strengthening as the initiative matures.

### **HEADLINE FINDING 3: A place-to-population focus is a priority for the NYEB to ensure that local-to-national feedback loops inform national reform.**

Evaluations found that taking a local-to-national approach was a priority for all NYEB stakeholders. While challenges to the effectiveness of this approach exist, the governance model was often able to provide a useful local-to-national feedback loop.

### **HEADLINE FINDING 4: Building evidence should be prioritised to facilitate learning and strengthen NYEB operations and outcomes.**

Only one evaluation explicitly referred to 'creating and building evidence' within the NYEB. As of 2024 this is one of the NYEB's key practice approaches and, as such, is an area that requires further development. This will ensure that systematic learning processes are in place to make sense of data, capture outcomes, value storytelling, translate and share knowledge, contribute to feedback loops and evaluations, monitor progress and use lessons learnt to adapt to conditions as they unfold.

## Background

The **National Youth Employment Body (NYEB)** initiative aims to support young people to access equitable opportunities for decent and meaningful work. Since the NYEB's inception in 2018, the **Brotherhood of St. Laurence (BSL)** has conducted several evaluations and facilitated an external evaluation of the initiative through its role as the **Enabling Organisation (EO)**. These evaluations represent input from more than 195 stakeholder engagements, which have contributed to learning and evolution of the initiative.

## The research

This report provides a synthesis of the findings from six evaluation reports between 2018-2024 and suggests ways in which they should inform future strategic, operational and evaluative processes to further the NYEB mission to *drive systems change to enable young people to have decent and meaningful careers while supporting the needs of employers and local communities.*

The key questions asked:

1. What were the key milestones and phases of the NYEB's development, including high-level internal and external drivers?
2. What developmental and outcomes evaluations have taken place at each phase of the NYEB, what was the methodology, what have been the key findings for the model, practice and outcomes, and how were they shared with stakeholders?

## HEADLINE FINDING 1: **NYEB capability – especially support to prioritise, plan and strengthen place-based action – is being built through the Enabling Organisation**

**All evaluations discuss the important capability-building role of the EO, predominately focusing on what is required for the NYEB to function and progress. There is less evidence from evaluations on how well the EO is currently performing these functions. This could be explored further in future evaluations.**

The core functions and requirements of the EO documented in the evaluations are: building capability, strengthening understandings of commitment to and focus on the initiative's mission, and supporting collaboration.

Building capability was identified in evaluations as a necessary support that the EO provides to **Community Investment Committees (CICs)**. The evaluations noted that the EO supported the capability of CICs by providing strategic and administrative support; driving intentional collaboration, partnerships and network building; and understanding and connecting CIC activity to broader policy contexts. All evaluations cited the importance of the capability and relationship-building roles that the EO plays. It was also noted in evaluations that at times the EO has to balance facilitative leadership and the autonomy of **Lead Partner Organisations (LP)** when aligning local action to a shared ambition.

The evaluations found that small, action-oriented CICs with diverse memberships – including representation from employers, industry, skills and training providers, young people and government decision-makers – best enabled people to learn from each other. Additionally, the EO should continue to build the capability of all CIC members and provide opportunities for them to connect their work to broader policy contexts through **National Governance Groups (NGGs)**.

Four evaluations highlighted the importance of the EO and NYEB model<sup>1</sup> in achieving BSL's systemic change agenda. The EO and NYEB model enabled a local-to-national approach to informing national policy and influencing change (detailed further under Headline Finding 2). The 2022 external evaluation highlights that more effort could be placed across the NYEB to strengthen collaboration and reduce duplication of other place-based initiatives and systems-change approaches to amplify rather than dampen the impact of any initiative in a region. However, it also found that the NYEB had a greater focus on the long-term career development of young people than the most similar, equivalent employment model (the Local Jobs Program), which suggests that upholding the commitment to the NYEB mission has merit.

## HEADLINE FINDING 2: **The NYEB governance structures are enabling collaboration between stakeholders that can strengthen place-based employment systems**

**Evaluations of the NYEB suggest that the governance structures in place are enabling collaboration with community organisations, employers and young people and are strengthening as the initiative matures.**

Elements that were identified as particularly effective include:

- The EO is successfully building the capabilities of LPs to play a critical role in strengthening the stakeholder relationships necessary to advance the systemic change agenda of the NYEB.
- When LPs and CIC Coordinators lead action-focused CICs with diverse representation, and with the active involvement and support of government, employers and young people, capabilities and networks are strengthened.

All evaluations had a strong focus on understanding the implementation and effectiveness of the NYEB collaborative governance model. This includes engagement with CICs, employers and young people (as detailed below).

<sup>1</sup> The NYEB model refers to: the Enabling Organisation (EO), place to population – local to national approach; interlinked governance structures including Community Investment Committees (CICs), employers and young people; and national policy reform.

## Community Investment Committees

The synthesis found a range of enablers for CICs' effectiveness and progression towards the NYEB mission. Most importantly, this

1. included diverse membership that includes young people, employers and government representatives;
2. is driven by a capable LP (CIC Coordinator and supported by senior level staff) who helps facilitate action-based projects and
3. is utilising local data and knowledge to identify solutions to youth unemployment.

When these enablers are in place, the findings from across the NYEB evaluations suggest that collaboration between training providers, employers, government and community stakeholders strengthens, existing place-based efforts are enhanced and duplication is avoided. In contrast, when evaluation respondents felt that CICs were not representative, collaborative, action-focused or informed by local data and knowledge, it was more challenging to make progress and achieve outcomes.

## Employers

Employers in the NYEB governance structure are often champions for building pathways to youth employment and supporting the national policy reform agenda. Ensuring that the NYEB activates and engages with employers to build champions who value and invest in the skills and capabilities of young people, is essential to the success of the initiative. Evaluations have identified challenges to creating employer champions, such as a low understanding of the structural barriers to youth employment, as well as a focus on hiring quickly and efficiently rather than recruitment processes informed by evidence of best practice that are more collaborative and accessible. When these challenges are addressed, positive employment outcomes can be achieved. For example, when employers utilise the Compass tool providing place-based data on young people and education, training and the labour market to design fit-for-purpose solutions, this informs recruitment practices and training pathways.

## Young people

The role young people can and should play in both the governance and activities of the NYEB has evolved over the life of the initiative. Early evaluations of the NYEB identified the need for greater and more meaningful representation of young people in the NYEB National Governance Groups, including CICs. They also suggested that strengthened involvement of young people including a more active and formal role in co-designing solutions and contributing to advocacy and influencing efforts. The establishment of the Youth Crew, as part of enabling the voice of young people within the governance structure, is an example of a promising step towards more meaningful representation. The role of the Youth Crew reference group and recent plans to formalise this as a Youth Advisory Board should continue to be supported, developed and amplified.

### HEADLINE FINDING 3:

## **A place-to-population focus is a priority for the NYEB to ensure that local-to-national feedback loops inform national reform**

**Evaluations found that the place-to-population approach was a priority for all NYEB stakeholders. While challenges to the effectiveness of this approach exist, the governance model was often able to provide a useful local-to-national feedback loop.**

This was achieved through:

- valuing local knowledge and creating space for local voices at the national policy level within the NYEB governance structure (e.g. facilitating local-to-national feedback)
- prioritising advancing national policy reform and influence
- increasing awareness of and emphasis on local issues by government.

And challenged by:

- inconsistent representation in NYEB governance structures across all levels of government, particularly from Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In July 2022 DESE was split into the Department of Education and the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR).

- lack of clarity and agreement with DESE regarding their role within the NYEB model and systemic change
- CIC government representatives often lacking the authorising capacity to genuinely engage in policy influencing.

Despite these challenges there have been important advocacy efforts made. The 2021 Outcomes Evaluation reported that CIC members perceived an increase in access to policymakers and increased awareness among government actors in support of systemic change for youth employment issues. Evaluations in 2022 also found NYEB efforts had contributed to increased government emphasis on reform in local contexts.<sup>3</sup> For example, local advocacy efforts to align training opportunities to local infrastructure in Shoalhaven resulted in improved links between workers and employers, enhancing access for young people to learning and work.

#### HEADLINE FINDING 4:

### **Building evidence should be prioritised to facilitate learning and strengthen NYEB operations and outcomes**

**Only one evaluation explicitly referred to 'creating and building evidence' within the NYEB. As of 2024 this is one of the NYEB's key practice approaches and, as such, is an area that requires further development.** This will ensure that systematic learning processes are in place to make sense of data, capture outcomes, value storytelling, translate and share knowledge, contribute to feedback loops and evaluations, monitor progress and use lessons learnt to adapt to conditions as they unfold.

Reflecting this, the synthesis authors suggest the following for future evidence building:

- specifically gathering further evidence of outcomes as the model matures

<sup>3</sup> ARTD Consultants NYEB Evaluation, August 2022.

- developing an overarching Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning framework that articulates how progress against the NYEB's mission (as articulated in the 2024–27 Theory of Change) will be assessed, shared and used to inform future work across the NYEB
- increasing the focus on young people both in terms of engagement in the NYEB model and in evidence-building processes themselves
- ensuring broad participation by all stakeholders in evidence-building processes, by focusing on all or most sites in the NYEB and providing a range of opportunities for stakeholders to participate
- providing greater clarity for funders and external stakeholders about the ambition of the NYEB and how that will be measured to assess progress, beyond prescriptive measures such as numbers of jobs for young people.

## Conclusion

Analysis of evaluation findings indicates that the initiative has the right governance structures in place to activate and build the capability of key stakeholders, including government, employers, education and training providers, lead partner organisations and young people, to achieve outcomes towards the NYEB's mission. Evidence of achievements and outcomes is building across the NYEB, however, there is more work to be done to ensure that evidence is fully captured and used to strengthen operations and outcomes over the next two-to-three years and beyond.

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