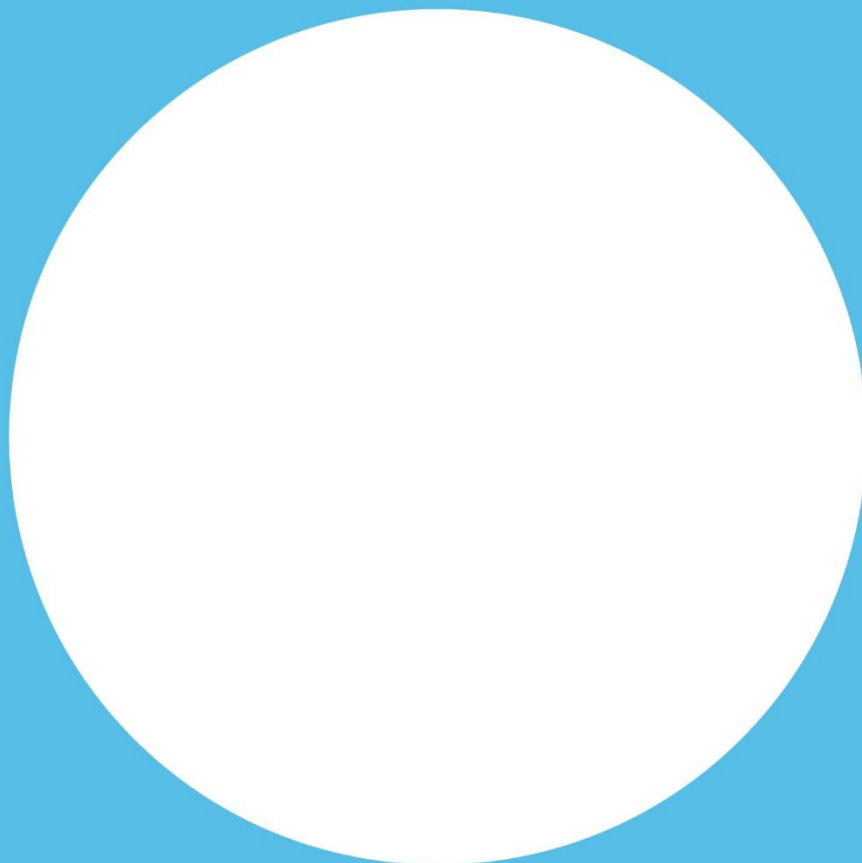


Helping local government
build stronger communities.



2026-27 Annual Business Plan Strategic Research Priorities

**Local Government Research and Development
Scheme**

The LGA Board of Directors adopted this plan on Thursday 23 July 2026.

About the Annual Business Plan

This Annual Business Plan has been prepared in accordance with the Local Government Research and Development Scheme [Memorandum of Understanding](#)¹ between the Treasurer and LGA.

The purpose of the Annual Business Plan is to identify and articulate the annual Strategic Research Priorities for the Local Government Research & Development Scheme (LGR&DS/the Scheme) for the 2026-27 grant round. The Annual Business Plan should be read together with the LGR&DS Grant Guidelines.

LGA has identified the following three Strategic Research Priorities for the 2026-27 LGR&DS grant round, aligned with and informed by [LGA's Strategic Plan](#) and with a focus on innovative ideas and solutions that address sector-wide issues.

- **Financial Sustainability of South Australian Councils**
- **Strengthening the Capacity of Councils**
- **Data and Knowledge Pooling and Insight**

¹ [Local Government Research & Development Scheme | LGA South Australia](#)

Strategic Research Priorities

The 2026-27 Strategic Research Priorities provide guidance for funding projects that benefit South Australian councils and their communities. The 2026-27 research priorities closely align with [LGA's Strategic Plan](#).

Pillar 1: Advocacy and partnerships	
1.1	Deliver high-impact advocacy by leveraging research, sector knowledge and relationships
1.2	Build local government's influence by fostering awareness, partnerships and participation
Pillar 2: Services and Collaboration	
2.1	Develop opt-in shared service and collaborative solutions
2.2	Facilitate collaboration and shared knowledge across the sector
Pillar 3: Leadership, culture and capability	
3.1	Build leadership capability, deliver sector workforce initiatives and address critical skills
3.2	Provide training, advice and resources to build skills and capacity
3.3	Strengthen shared values, culture and governance to improve council effectiveness
Pillar 4: Innovation and technology	
4.1	Build sector foresight capability to anticipate risks and opportunities.
4.2	Advance innovation, research and digital capability
4.3	Strengthen digital transformation through artificial intelligence, data and emerging technologies
Pillar 5: Operational Excellence	
5.1	Strengthen member engagement and representation
5.2	Build organisational capacity and capability to drive excellence and adaptability
5.3	Modernise systems to improve service delivery.

In 2026-27 the LGR&DS is seeking:

- Innovative ideas to deliver solutions that address sector-wide issues aligned with the 2026-27 Strategic Research Priorities.
- New ideas that deliver projects to elevate and strengthen local government in South Australia

Financial Sustainability of South Australian Councils

Innovative solutions and collaborative ideas to improve service efficiency, strengthen the delivery of council services, and develop the capacity and capability of council resources for the benefit of South Australian communities.

Background

Financial sustainability is a major risk for local government in South Australia. Councils are managing a range of services with rising costs, ageing infrastructure, and growing community expectations within a constrained and uneven revenue base across the state.

These pressures increase the risk of asset renewal gaps, maintenance backlogs, reduced community service levels, and future rate rises.

Opportunity

There is no single main reason councils become unsustainable, nor is there a single solution. We are seeking innovative and practical solutions to strengthen local government financial sustainability.

Areas of interest include:

- Diversifying revenue streams and collaborating to lead new initiatives for the benefit of the sector.
- Improved services and productivity, including methods to link service standards to cost, redesign services, reduce avoidable demand and improve productivity.
- Solutions to funding and managing asset renewal, including lifecycle funding and approaches to close renewal gaps, and tools to communicate trade-offs to communities.
- Scalable shared-service options, governance models, and business cases tailored to metro and regional contexts.
- Risk management and climate resilience, including options to reduce risk pricing and integrating climate adaptation into council long-term financial plans, asset management plans, and service planning.

Strengthening the Capacity of Councils

Innovative solutions and practical ideas to strengthen governance, capability, leadership and transparency across councils, and improve community confidence and engagement.

Background

Councils are operating in an increasingly complex environment, with greater community expectations, more demanding governance requirements, and ongoing workforce and leadership challenges.

Strong capability across elected members, governance systems and community engagement is essential to support sound decision-making, build trust and confidence, and help councils deliver sustainable outcomes for their communities.

Opportunity

There is an opportunity to identify practical and scalable approaches that strengthen council capability, support elected members, improve governance and transparency, and foster stronger relationships between councils and their communities.

Areas of interest include:

- Practical steps to strengthen governance frameworks, improve transparency, and support better long-term decision-making.
- Initiatives to attract and retain elected members with effective civic leadership skills and community representation.
- Initiatives to support elected members to build the skills and capability needed for effective civic leadership.
- Innovative approaches to strengthen collaboration and working relationships among elected members, mayors and council employees for the benefit of their communities.
- Approaches that improve how councils connect with communities, communicate decisions and involve residents in long-term planning and trade-offs.

Data and Knowledge Pooling and Insight

Innovative ideas to leverage sector knowledge, expertise, data and artificial intelligence to inform strategy, action and direction across a range of sector-wide issues.

Background

Local government generates and relies on significant volumes of information, data and practical knowledge, but these insights are often dispersed across councils, systems and teams.

Better pooling of knowledge and data, together with increased council capability to leverage and benefit from technologies, can help councils identify emerging issues, improve evidence-based decision-making, reduce duplication, and support more consistent and coordinated responses to shared challenges across the sector.

Opportunity

There is an opportunity to develop practical ways for councils to share information, draw stronger insights from data, and build collective knowledge that supports better planning, strategy and service delivery. Projects in this area could strengthen evidence-based decision-making, improve access to comparable information, and help the sector respond more effectively to common issues and emerging trends.

Areas of interest include:

- Approaches to improve access to comparable data, support benchmarking and help councils identify trends, risks and opportunities.
- Practical ways to capture and share sector knowledge, lessons learned and good practice across councils.
- Tools and methods that help councils turn data and evidence into clearer strategic direction, planning and decision-making.
- Approaches that improve the sector's ability to detect emerging challenges, understand future trends and respond proactively.
- Practical applications of AI to improve analysis, forecasting, knowledge discovery and service planning, with appropriate governance, transparency and risk management.