



# EVOLVING RESEARCH IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT (COUNCILS)

CURRENT TRENDS AND COMMON  
MISTAKES

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 newfocus

# Industry Overview



Having been involved in social and government/local government research for more than 23 years, **newfocus** has seen a number of significant transformations in social, market and community engagement research.

Research requirements are evolving at a faster pace and becoming more complex.

**newfocus** has recently conducted a review of industry research carried out in the local government sector and has identified a number of “caution” points for local governments and evolving methodologies.

# What Local Government (Councils) Request from Research Agencies

The spectrum of research needs is evolving with a number of new demands requiring new methodologies:

## Traditional research

Annual community/resident surveys measuring key KPI's:

- Overall performance
- Importance of services and satisfaction with their delivery

Community consultations

## Evolving initiatives

- Shift towards more strategic implementation and communication of survey results across different departments
- Increased measurement of staff performance relating to council service delivery to residents
- **Increased benchmarking of performance against other councils**

More strategic community consultations relating to:

- change management
- branding
- pre-testing of marketing communications

Need for more reliable  
**quantitative benchmarking**

Increasing use of  
**qualitative methodologies**  
and insights

Research scope

Shift in methodology

# Quantitative Benchmarking Against Other Councils

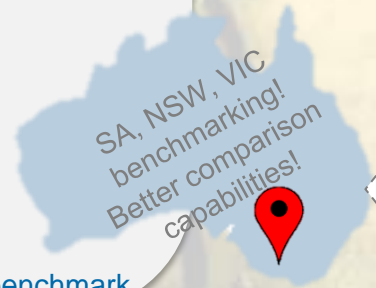
While performance needs to be consistently monitored, it is important to use up-to-date and reliable methodologies to carry out strategic performance comparisons



**newfocus** has been conducting research in Australia for more than 23 years and has accumulated a wealth of historical data, including an extensive database of publicly available benchmarks.

As a result, we are offering a service which allows clients to:

- Compare councils' performance over time
- Provide benchmarking across multiple KPI measurements, as well as measures around:
  - ✓ Satisfaction with council performance
  - ✓ Value for money
  - ✓ Support of local businesses
  - ✓ Communication
  - ✓ Performance of elected members
  - ✓ Customer service
- Customise benchmarking based on location:
  - Metro, regional, as well as SA, NSW & VIC combination benchmark



Regional or metro metrics

# Most common mistakes in quantitative local government research:

## Word of caution

- Reliance on **resident panels** as a means to engage with the community in a faster and more cost effective way

Our experience shows that panel members are not only more informed, but also more engaged with councils. Hence, relying solely on panels might provide biased and misleading insights to councils. This methodology therefore needs to be supplemented by a representative sample of the community.

- Relying on **in-house research**

Our review of industry practices showed that reliance on internal research resources, affected outcomes, and compromised scales, types of questions asked and created bias. Council's need experienced qualified researchers to provide sound insights using sound research methodologies.

- Use of **unbalanced scales** which skew towards positively worded items

The use of unbalanced scales is a common occurrence which unintentionally creates bias and positively skewed results, thus providing unreliable data to key decision makers.

# Appropriate use of Quantitative Methodologies

The right use of quantitative methodologies will eliminate common mistakes made around bias, skewed results, comprimisation of scales and questions asked

**newfocus** provide reports to summarise current performance to past, and undertake in-depth analysis of the drivers of overall satisfaction within councils, providing indicators to areas of priority.

A number of reports are undertaken depending on needs which are conducted within our in-house CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) facility and through online 24/7 reporting and integrative dashboards

- **Annual Community Surveys**
- **Resident Satisfaction Surveys**
- **Customer Experience Testing**
  - Face to face surveys
  - Follow-up online surveys after contact
  - Follow-up telephone surveys after contact



# Innovative Qualitative Research

Despite an increase in use of focus groups and qualitative research in general, this type of research enquiry is more sophisticated - requiring expert knowledge and experienced moderators to investigate community attitudes and behaviours, but also the use of innovative research techniques to keep up with evolving consumer trends.

newfocus prides itself on being at the forefront of innovative technologies offering a range of techniques to increase the depth and strength of strategic insights to facilitate communication of research findings

- **Videos** of main themes (storytelling)
- **Pre-tasks** (collages, timelines)
- **Pen portraits**
- **Ethnography** (observations)
- **Product/Service clinics**
- **Community sessions**



**Make the most of your qualitative research!**

# Where to next?

We would like to take this opportunity to introduce our team to you. We would be delighted to meet with you to discuss your current approach and needs. Our dedicated research team would be more than happy to share some of those experiences with you.



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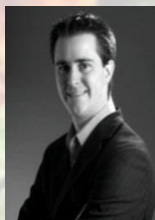
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## **Graham Bean, Managing Director**

One of the original founders of newfocus, Graham has worked extensively in business, industry and with the public sector at all levels and in all aspects of research including qualitative and quantitative methodologies for more than 20 years.

Graham specialises in developing large scale strategic research programs to establish, measure and evaluate all aspects of the marketing mix. Graham has been involved with, or personally managed, over 800 market research projects.



## **Craig Frost, General Manager/Senior Consultant**

Craig is a highly experienced strategic researcher, having extensive experience working with utility companies. An experienced professional qualitative and quantitative market researcher, and having worked as both a buyer and supplier of research, Craig specialises in developing research with implementation in mind. His strengths are in consulting with organisations on how they can achieve their business objectives using research and other consultation processes.



# About newfocus

*newfocus has built an enviable **reputation** through its commitment to **quality and strategic research** that delivers **clarity and insight**. For 23 years newfocus has been offering strategic market and social research and consulting services to commercial, government and not for profit organisations throughout Australia and overseas.*

Our business is established on traditional values of **high quality, rapid turnaround** and value for money, coupled with a sound reputation for the **best in client service and reliability**.

With substantial experience across both commercial and government sectors, we offer all of the market and social research methodologies with the ability to **incorporate innovative research solutions**.

Arguably the best in the industry, our team are **highly trained** and come from a broad range of disciplines and backgrounds. We are friendly, passionate and client focused, having the ability to synthesize data and produce reports that impart wisdom and understanding in a personal way.



# THANK YOU



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