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Research Report

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Facilitating Professional
Engagement with Planning Research

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Report Contents:

Introduction

The context for this project is the limited connectivity between applied planning research and professional planning practice. The planning profession, by its very nature, is continually developing plans, policies and strategies to guide place-based management and development. An assumption guiding the research is that sound evidence is useful if not essential to inform good planning practice. This assumption does not hold for all planning practice - statutory planning and other policy implementation activities are, for example, largely informed by existing policy frameworks. However, in most strategic planning or policy development contexts (including statutory reform), an argument for the relevance of an evidence base can be made. While not all research aims to directly inform practice – such as research of a conceptual or theoretical nature – there is a significant amount of applied urban research produced that has discernible implications for policy and practice.

Unfortunately, much of the research base that could inform and improve professional planning practice is difficult to access. There are also other barriers to knowledge exchange, including limited professional engagement with research outputs; and limited or poorly tailored research outputs for a professional audience. This project aims to provide recommendations on how to better connect Australian urban planning practice to the evidence base within urban planning research outputs. To do so the project explores barriers to, and opportunities for, better connecting professional planning practice with applied planning research.

Recent research suggests limitations in practitioner engagement with and understanding of research. Krizek *et al* (2009) found that although planning practitioners rely on many different sources of knowledge, the role of research within these sources of decision-making knowledge is limited and poorly defined. 'Rule of thumb' and practice examples dominate. Specific examples of this lack of engagement and understanding include Hockey, Phillips & Walford (2013), who found limited planning practitioner awareness of the implications of an aging population despite the evidence base; and Grant and Manuel (2011), who found that despite strong evidence linking obesity rates to land-use policy, planners showed limited knowledge of the connection between their decision-making and public health outcomes. Both argue for the need for greater professional understanding of the existing evidence base. Mulley & Reedy (2013) recently reported on barriers to the transfer of transport research findings into policy in Australia. They found that senior policy stakeholders consider evidence based research on a regular basis, but that government reports were ranked the most highly as regular sources of information. Barriers to the use of academic research in transport planning included lack of time; excess of information; and poor dissemination and communication of research. Both Mulley & Reedy (2013) and Krizek *et al* (2009) found that a real or perceived lack of relevance of research can also be a barrier to its use in policy.

Viewed generously, the perception of a lack of relevance of planning research may be in part a function of the format in which research is disseminated. Researchers in academic institutions face drivers that focus their publishing attention on academic journals. Such journals are rarely accessed by professionals, as they are contained in fee-for-access databases, and are often written in ways that make distilling practical and localised implications difficult. There is also a wealth of practical and applied planning research that remains unpublished or under exposed. A further problematic dimension of research relevance stems from the high political profile of many planning issues. Planning practice is highly political and largely reactive, with strategic policies increasingly political documents that dismiss conflict and imply consensus (Allmendinger and Haughton 2012). In such contexts the role for evidence based decision-making is far from clear.

In exploring the relationship between urban research and planning practice in the United Kingdom, Durning (2004:435) wondered whether planning academics and planning practitioners constitute "two tribes or a community of practice". Even a cursory assessment shows that the groups involved in potential information exchange around planning research

operate within very different spaces. Policy makers are typically focused on one place and time and are accountable to the public and to notions of fairness and decisiveness. Academic researchers, by contrast, commonly compare across places and times, and are accountable to notions of rigour and accuracy. It is sometimes difficult to see how empirical research of this nature is relevant to a specific context. A practitioner may read about inclusionary zoning practices in one country, for example, but not find it immediately obvious how this might be relevant to their area of practice. The scope of the practitioner is their own location – now - and to an extent, next.

A further tension exists for researchers between an interest in keeping closer in contact with practitioners, and discomfort concerning the goals and scholarly integrity of practice-oriented work (Durning 2004).There are risks to the integrity and scope of academic research if it is tailored too closely to the needs of practice. While critics suggest that evidence based *policy* may employ narrow definitions of evidence, and be used to justify rather than examine decisions, evidence based *practice* has recently been positioned in planning theory somewhat differently (Krizek *et al* 2009). Evidence based practice seeks to find a role for research within practice, and is conceived of as a "middle ground between very narrowly scientific conceptions of evidence…and very broad views that merely rationalize advocacy positions" (p460). Evidence based practice can directly inform how planners do their work.

This report documents the results from an empirical investigation into research in practice, as well as a proposal for a web based information exchange service to better connect applied planning research to practitioners. The empirical work is comprised of three elements: first, a desktop review of existing opportunities for information exchange in the planning sector and of best practice examples of information exchange from related sectors; second, interviews with 14 planning professionals and academics; and third, a focus group conducted with seven planning professionals. The report provides both insight into current practice and recommendations for improved research-to-practice knowledge transfer. The report has four substantive sections: the first documents the research approach; the second presents the results from the desktop review, interviews and focus group; the third documents the research findings; and the final section outlines a proposal for a web based information exchange platform to facilitate research-to-practice knowledge transfer.

Research Approach

Desktop review

The purpose of the desktop review was to establish the nature of the information gap(s) in urban planning research information exchange; document strengths and weaknesses of existing information exchange vehicles; and to recommend potential attributes and functionalities for an urban planning focused research-to-practice information exchange.

We developed a list of sites to review based on our own knowledge of the field; sites mentioned in interviews; and Google searching of keywords. The desktop review considered 38 websites.

We examined existing examples of information exchange related to the planning profession and some best practice examples of research-to-practice websites from related fields. However, the bulk of planning information on the internet is comprised of local practice news and general opinion. The features of these types of information sites are discussed - particularly as these appear to be a key source for many planners.

We developed a review template (see table 1) for documenting each site. The full list of websites reviewed is shown in Table 2. We identified strengths, weaknesses and gaps; summarised key functionalities and attributes; and also noted who the sites were maintained by and their intended audience.

Table 1: Desktop review data recording fields

Name
Web link(s)
Who runs it?
What is it? (General description of topic and approach)
Describe information (links; docs; text; tools etc.)
Opportunities for interaction (discussion boards; comment fields; email list; sign up)
Who is it for? (target audience)
How we found it. (initial list; snowball; google; lead)
Comments. (note strengths, weaknesses, gaps, currency, etc.)

Table 2: List of sources reviewed

Name	Source type	Information focus
RMIT Centre for Urban Research	Academic	Research
UNSW City Futures	Academic	Research
RePlan (email list)	Academic	Research
Griffith	Academic	Research-to-practice
The Atlantic Cities (blog)	Commercial media	News, analysis, opinion
Planetizen	Commercial media	Practice
Planning Matters (email subscription)	Government (policy)	Practice
Productivity Commission	Government (research)	Research (government)
Major Cities Unit (part of Dept. of Infrastructure and Regional Development)	Government (research)	Research (government)
CSIRO	Government (research)	Research (government)
Urban and Regional Research (Vic)	Government (research)	Research (government)
Australian Homelessness Clearinghouse	Government (research)	Research-to-practice
Wikipedia	Independent media	Information
The Urbanist (Blog)	Independent media	News, analysis, opinion
Junkee(blog)	Independent media	News, analysis, opinion
Vodafail (blog/protest point)	Independent media	News, analysis, opinion
Rudi.net (resource forum)	Joint academia and peak body	Research-to-practice
RUAF Foundation (Resource Centres on Urban Agriculture and Food Security)	Joint academia and peak body	Research-to-practice
Clearwater	Joint academia and peak body	Research-to-practice
Homemods	Joint academia and peak body	Research-to-practice
Wellesley Institute	Other - independent institute	Research-to-practice
SCP Clearinghouse	Other - UN	Research-to-practice
Victorian Planning Reports	Private	Practice
Urbis (company)	Private	Practice
Sterow (blog)	Private	Practice
Victorian Planning and Environmental Law Association (VPELA)	Professional peak body	Practice
Planning Institute of Australia (National)	Professional peak body	Practice
Mainstreet Australia	Professional peak body	Practice
Planning Resource UK	Professional peak body	Practice
UDIA	Professional peak body	Practice, policy opinion
UDIA (Victoria)	Professional peak body	Practice, policy opinion
Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV)	Professional peak body	Practice, policy opinion
Social Services Research Group (SSRG)	Professional peak body	Research-to-practice
Royal Town Planning Institute (UK)	Professional peak body	Research-to-practice
Grattan Institute	Research institute	Research-to-practice
Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI)	Research institute	Research-to-practice
Institute of Public Affairs (IPA)	Think tank / lobby	Policy opinion
The Australia Institute (think tank)	Think tank / lobby	Policy opinion

Interviews and focus group

The purpose of the interviews was to engage with potential research contributors and end users to understand the existing practice of professional engagement with planning research; and to inform the appropriate purpose, scope, structure and content of an urban planning focused information exchange. Interviewees were sourced via our extended professional networks. The key criteria specified when seeking potential interviewees were as follows:

- Users: professional planners who are in positions where rigorous and well summarised research might help their work.

- Contributors: researchers whose outputs are of specific relevance to professional planners working in policy development in local and state government.

Respondents included local government planners, private sector planners, state government planners, and planning academics. Several respondents had professional experience across both categories, as shown in the full list of the 14 anonymised interviewees in Table 3.

The interviews were semi structured, with slightly differing questions for contributors and users. The questions related to the respondents' practice and the extent to which they were aware of and use, or would like to use, planning research. They were asked about what sources they currently use; barriers to the use of research in practice; and then more specifically about the usefulness and required functionalities of any new initiative to link planning research to practice. Interviews were up to an hour in length. See appendix 1 for interview schedules (used as guides in interviews).

Table 3: List of interviewees

Code	Position	Content producer		Content users			
		Academic	Professional	State Gov.	Local Gov.	Consultant	Peak body
G1	Manager, Housing Research		XX	XX			
G2	Researcher		XX	XX			
G3	Senior Strategic Planning			XX		X	
P1	Senior Planning Adviser						XX
P2	Director					XX	X
P3	Planning Coordinator		X	X	XX		
P4	Manager, City Research		XX		X		
P5	Director		XX			XX	
P6	Associate / Practice Leader		X			XX	
P7	Coordinator Strategic Planning				XX		
P8	Principal Urban Planner	X			XX		X
R1	Research Fellow	XX					
R2	Professor	XX					
R3	Professor	XX					

xx = significant professional role
x = secondary or significant past professional role

A focus group was conducted following the interviews to test key interview findings in a group setting. The focus group consisted of seven professionals along with two researchers (Hurley and Taylor) – see table 4. Focus group members were selected from the researchers' professional networks, with a focus on local government planners; along with professionals who had experience within a number of different sectors within the planning profession. The focus group members were provided with a briefing paper prior to the discussion (see appendix 2). The discussion went for 90 minutes and was semi-structured, based on a set of topic areas drawn from the desktop review and interview findings (see appendix 3).

Table 4: List of focus group members

Focus group participant	State Gov.	Local Gov.	Consultant	Academic	Peak body
FG1		xx			
FG2	x	xx			x
FG3	X	XX			
FG4		XX	X		
FG5			XX		xx
FG6	X			XX	
FG7	X	XX		X	x

xx = significant professional role
x = secondary professional role

Results

Results: Desktop review of information exchange

Information sources
The desktop review of planning information exchange, and other examples of research-to-practice information exchange, considered 38 example websites. Table 5 summarises the type, focus, scope and research focus of the websites reviewed. Through the desktop review, some basic distinctions between the natures of different sources become more apparent. Firstly, planning related information available on the web can comprise:

- Data on the urban environment (e.g. house price data).

- Empirical research and analysis of the urban environment, related data, planning policy, or some relationship between these e.g. analysis of price impact of housing policy; experience of housing stress).

- Practice advice on legal and policy frameworks (e.g. practice notes on using development contributions).

- Policy and policy innovation (e.g. local housing strategy).

- Projects, outcomes, innovations (e.g. information on an affordable housing development).

- Opinion, interpretation, summary or reporting of any of the above (e.g. blogs, media reports).

This information is presented by a variety of provider groups. The groups involved in information exchange around planning research and practice operate within very different spaces and have different uses for planning related information. The sources of information on planning issues and their characteristics include:

- Academic researchers: expectation of rigour; comparative (comparisons across time, between different locations, using different perspectives); importance placed on understanding context; no easy answers; open to criticism but not directly accountable to the public; motivated by 'a need to know'; performance measured by academic journal publications.

- Policy makers: expectations of fairness; focused on one place and one time (here and now); necessary to make decisions; accountable to public and public perceptions; access research on a 'need to know basis'; rarely have access to academic journals.

- Private practitioners: judged on outcomes; competing with other practices for business; focus on knowing 'the rules' of the planning framework; typically engage with research only when client requires.

- Government practitioners: peer-to-peer networking, sharing 'best practice'.

- Peak bodies and lobbyists: representing a particular viewpoint; and in doing so make selective use of research

- Media, bloggers, commercial: value placed on exposure and dissemination, offering focus and immediacy.

Given these different sources, there is significant competition for attention in research-to-practice information exchange. In sourcing information online, the onus is placed on the user to filter and focus material. Considerable effort tends therefore to be exerted by websites to draw user attention and to establish credibility. A prevalence of 'practice' update websites, and opinion based sources, is apparent. Academic research does not commonly feature on information websites - although specialised research-to-practice sites are increasingly attempting to increase the exposure of such research. 'Research' is therefore in heavy

competition with other information sources. The main vehicles for information for planning practitioners are:

- Practice exchange sites. These are strong within the planning profession and describe what is happening in the overarching legal and policy framework that planners operate within. Examples include Planning Institute of Australia (PIA), the Victorian Planning and Environmental Law Association (VPELA), Victorian Planning Reports, Planning Resource UK, Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV).

- Government summaries of material. Examples include the Productivity Commission, Major Cities Unit, Urban and Regional Research (Vic), Planning Matters (Vic).

- The positions of lobbyists and think tanks on urban issues. Example websites include the Urban Development Institute of Australia (UDIA), Institute of Public Affairs, Real Estate Institute

- Media coverage of the latest issues and associated data about the urban environment; including coverage of public opinion on those issues.

The specific space where research being undertaken on planning issues – generating comparative, empirically based knowledge – is made digestible to practice, however, occupies a very small space in internet based information exchange.

Research-to-practice sites

Research-to-practice websites seek to overcome practical barriers to information exchange between empirical research and planning practice. Research-to-practice information is a specialist space occupied not often by academics, but by various services that seek to:

- Remove the cost and access barrier of academic journals.

- Remove or very quickly explain the background, context, and general concepts that lead to research questions.

- Interpret the relevance of comparative research (from other places, times, professions) for a particular context.

- Remove the time and decisions involved in finding research material.

- Make the material interesting and accessible to practitioners.

- Give clear advice on the implications of research for planning practice.

Research, at least in principle, entails adding to a body of knowledge. Research also tends to raise more questions than answers, whereas practitioners tend to have to make clear decisions. Communication of research typically either walks the reader through the research process, or assumes the reader is already familiar with it. For a practitioner discovering a new issue, for example housing affordability, it is unlikely that the practitioner will have time to read a 200 page report on the background to the issue. If they do not read the background to the issue, there is a danger that they will not understand the contribution the research makes. Research-to-practice information is often concerned with trying to facilitate practitioner engagement by condensing and making more accessible the traditional outcomes of research. The space of giving clear advice is a gap that research-to-practice websites attempt to occupy.

There are not many research-to-practice vehicles in the planning space in Australia. Examples of research-to-practice sites include:

- AHURI: funding and publications of housing and urban research, particularly its Research and Policy Briefings

- Grattan institute: producing publically available research reports

- The Conversation: academic perspective pieces on 'hot' issues, encourages researchers to distil the relevance of the research into short pieces
- The Urbanist (blog): reads and provides interpretation of reports, data
- Atlantic Cities: reads and provides interpretation; picks 'hot' and 'top' stories

There are several better examples of research-to-practice from overseas. The best practice examples of research-to-practice websites for planning identified include:

- Royal Town Planning Institute UK – research exchange (UK)
- Wellesley Institute (Canada)
- Planetizen (US)

Features of best practice sites include:

- Organisation of resources by topic (a small number of key themes and issues, e.g. "green infrastructure", "rural", "economic inequality").
- Resources 'tagged' by location, use type, publication type.
- Searchable database of resources.
- Browsable information by theme.
- Front page of news and updates. Sometimes this isn't actually 'news' but it is presented in a way that allows 'discovery'.
- Sign-up for email updates.
- Downloadable "knowledge" and "backgrounder" guides to issues and information.
- Opinion and filtering services: making information usable to practitioners.
- Up to date practice news to bring in practitioners (e.g. policy changes, new reports).

Research-to-practice websites, although somewhat effortless in appearance, are clearly resource intensive – the implications of which are discussed in the later part of this report. It is not sufficient to put information 'out there' and expect practitioners to read and interpret it. Summarising research is resource intensive, which is one potential reason why large organisations are typically those undertaking this task.

Table 5: Summary of desktop review sources by type, focus, scope, and research content

Name	Source type	Information focus	Geographical scope	Own research	Research links	Main content
RMIT Centre for Urban Research	Academic	Research	General	Yes	No	People and links to publications
UNSW City Futures	Academic	Research	Australia	Yes	Some	Links to research, some issues papers and reports
RePlan (email list)	Academic	Research	General	No	Yes - news	Alerts
Griffith Urban Research Program	Academic	Research-to-practice	Australia	Yes	Yes - synthesis	Links to research, issues papers and reports, guides
The Atlantic Cities (blog)	Commercial media	News, analysis, opinion	USA focused	No	Yes - synthesis and response	Articles
Planetizen	Commercial media	Practice	General / USA	No	Yes - synthesis and response	Alerts, summaries, opinion
Planning Matters (email subscription)	Government (policy)	Practice	Victoria	No	No	Practice alerts
Productivity Commission	Government (research)	Research (government)	Australia	Some - synthesis of data, reports	No	Reports
Major Cities Unit (Federal Gov.)	Government (research)	Research (government)	Australia	Some - synthesis of data, reports	No	Reports
CSIRO	Government (research)	Research (government)	General	Yes	Yes	Research summaries, reports
Urban and Regional Research (Vic)	Government (research)	Research (government)	Victoria	Yes - summaries of data	No	Data summaries, background reports
Australian Homelessness Clearinghouse	Government (research)	Research-to-practice	Australia and general	Some	Yes	Reports, summaries, news, resources
Wikipedia	Independent media	Information	General	No	Yes - synthesis (sometimes)	Information
The Urbanist (Blog)	Independent media	News, analysis, opinion	Local and/or general	No	Yes - synthesis and response	Articles
Junkee(blog)	Independent media	News, analysis, opinion	General	No	Some - opinion	Articles
Vodafail (blog/protest point)	Independent media	News, analysis, opinion	Australia	No	No	News, contact, background
Rudi.net (resource forum)	Joint academia and peak body	Research-to-practice	General / UK	No	Yes	Database, background, summaries
Resource Centres on Urban Agriculture and Food Security	Joint academia and peak body	Research-to-practice	General	No	Yes	Database, background, summaries

Clearwater	Joint academia and peak body	Research-to-practice	General	No	Yes	Database, background, summaries
Homemods	Joint academia and peak body	Research-to-practice	General	No	Yes - synthesis of	Advice, practice notes, links, backgrounders
Wellesley Institute	Other - independent institute	Research-to-practice	Canada	Yes	Yes - synthesis and response	Reports, summaries, links, news, response
SCP Clearinghouse	Other - UN	Research-to-practice	General	No	Yes	Database, background, summaries
Victorian Planning Reports	Private	Practice	Victoria	Some - synthesis of themes	No	Database
Urbis (company)	Private	Practice	Australia	Some - strategic use of	No	Projects, alerts
Sterow (blog)	Private	Practice	Victoria	No	Yes - synthesis and response	Alerts, summaries, opinion
Victorian Planning and Environmental Law Association (VPELA)	Professional peak body	Practice	Victoria	No	No	Contact point, practice alerts
Planning Institute of Australia (National)	Professional peak body	Practice	Australia	No	Some - strategic use of	Contact point, background, submissions
Mainstreet Australia	Professional peak body	Practice	Australia	No	Some - news	Contact point, alerts
Planning Resource UK	Professional peak body	Practice	UK	No	No	Practice news, background, summaries
UDIA	Professional peak body	Practice, policy opinion	Australia	No	Some - strategic use of	Contact point, alerts, advocacy reports
UDIA (Victoria)	Professional peak body	Practice, policy opinion	Victoria	No	Some - strategic use of	Contact point, alerts, advocacy reports
Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV)	Professional peak body	Practice, policy opinion	Victoria	No	No	Contact point, advocacy
Social Services Research Group	Professional peak body	Research-to-practice	UK	No	Yes	Alerts, links, summaries
Royal Town Planning Institute (UK)	Professional peak body	Research-to-practice	UK	Some	Yes	Practice alerts, news, summaries, research links
Grattan Institute	Research institute	Research-to-practice	Australia	Yes	No	Reports
AHURI	Research institute	Research-to-practice	Australia and general	Yes - a lot of	Some	Reports, summaries, events, library
Institute of Public Affairs (IPA)	Think tank / lobby	Policy opinion	Australia	Some - strategic use of	Some - strategic use of	Reports and submissions
The Australia Institute	Think tank / lobby	Policy opinion	Australia	Some - strategic use of	Some - strategic use of	Reports, alerts, advocacy reports

Results: Interviews

This section reports the key results from the 14 interviews with professionals and academics. The results are grouped into five themes:

1. Engaging with research
2. Barriers to professional engagement with research
3. Key topics and sources of research
4. Key lessons for potential portal
5. Level of support

Engaging with research

There was general agreement that professionals did not regularly engage with applied planning research. Respondents generally felt that across the profession the most utilised means for accessing knowledge were professional networks and professional publications (magazines, newsletters, email circulars). The view was that professional planners tend to focus more on recent similar examples, accepted 'knowledge', and the views of 'experts', wherein experts tend to be those who have produced the recent examples. Decisions, therefore, are more typically based on experience and general views on 'what seems to work', rather than on research.

However, nearly all respondents valued research. Many mentioned concerns that planning does not make enough use of research evidence in decision-making; while all saw the importance of engaging with research to maintain professional knowledge and competence. One respondent highlighted the 'values based' element of planning, believing that professionals should not feel the need to feign that something is evidence based when it isn't. He suggested the idea of three types of planning: evidence based, values based, and community based.

There was discussion about the particular circumstances that would make accessing research material more likely. The view was that research is often not directly useful in applied policy development and in applications where responding to local contexts and statutory controls is the primary concern. However, research is considered more useful in instances where policy innovation is called for and practitioners need to understand the extent of knowledge and evidence around a particular issue; and where there is no excepted practice/knowledge. It was noted that some projects will specifically include 'literature review' in the brief.

Research is also more broadly useful in helping professionals frame issues when engaging with communities and local councils. In this case it is about helping practitioners form a strong understanding of the existing debates and evidence. It reflects an understanding that planners are often attempting to facilitate change and dealing with entrenched perceptions and social norms.

Emerging from the interview responses it is clear that two forms of engagement are being discussed. One is about being helped to be kept up to date with debates in an ongoing basis. This points to the importance of succinct summaries of topics (potentially emailed to membership lists) and links through to a substantive database of research. Quality and credibility is important in this role. The other form is a practitioner starting with a particular issue or problem, often the more 'left field' or 'cutting edge' questions, and wanting to find a body of material to inform their work. The important issues here are about knowing where to look, and being able to find accessible and relevant material. In this role there is still considerable importance in having summaries of research outputs to cut through dense material.

It was evident from responses that much of the research-informed work of local government is being outsourced to a particular set of consultants. There are some research-intensive

consultancies that focus on synthesising/tailoring academic knowledge and perspectives to government clients.

Respondents discussed a range of sources they turn to for research, including:

- Blogs (e.g. Planetizen)

- Email circulars (e.g. VEPLA)

- AHURI outputs (mainly the policy briefings), although knowledge of AHURI appears very limited in the profession. One respondent who was very engaged with planning research had only recently discovered AHURI and was 'amazed' by the relevance to his work.

- Academic journals, in particular Urban Policy and Research and Australian Planner (although access is a big problem).

- Recent graduates, as they are often seen as being best connected to recent research and researching techniques.

Barriers to professional engagement with research

It is clear from responses that there is a significant level of scepticism of research amongst professionals. Most respondents reported this scepticism in the third person: as being evident in their colleagues, although some was also evident in respondents themselves. Respondents saw this scepticism as a barrier to the use of research. Researchers are often characterised within the profession as "problematic nay-sayers"; while research is cast as too "up in the sky" and "irrelevant to what practitioners do".

Generally the respondents themselves offered a more constructive articulation of this view of research as often not being relevant to practitioners; expressed as the importance of tailoring research outputs for professional uptake. The challenge for researchers who seek to reach a practitioner audience it is to make research relevant and engaging.

Another related barrier expressed by respondents was the limited skill set amongst some professionals to understand and respond to research contributions. For example, direct consumption of academic outputs can be difficult even if it is ostensibly available. One respondent who produced research and often worked with government professionals discussed the need to "walk them through" the material.

Nearly all respondents mentioned the practical barriers of limited time and inaccessible material. Professionals do not have the time to conduct broad searches and digest large amounts of material. Much of the material is hidden behind pay walls or hard to find.

Another barrier discussed was that of the culture within the planning profession with regards to research. A number of respondents suggested there is a culture of 'accepted knowledge' and not of staying abreast of current knowledge and best practice. Respondents also highlighted the tendency for selective engagement with research in order to support an existing argument or political decision. As one expressed: "governments hate being well informed, it makes the decision making that much more difficult".

There is also evidence of a narrow conception of what research is, and what it is for. Research can be seen as only represented by "hard data", with a view that the process driven or political aspects of planning practice, such as community engagement, were unrelated to research outputs. There is also limited knowledge amongst practitioners about key bodies of research that exist (e.g. AHURI reports).

Key topics and sources of research

When asked about the means of organising planning research content for easy access, most respondents (quite reasonably) could not offer an immediate and specific answer. However, they viewed website structure and database indexing and tagging as very important as a means to help users get through the information overload problem. There was a general feeling that there were many potential topics, and many different ways of organising them. Some of the specific suggestions from respondents included:

- Regional Planning; Peri-urban issues; Land-use planning; Transport Planning; Housing and issues of Density.

- High rise buildings, affordable housing.

- Wind turbines as an example of policy basis with poor research support.

- Emerging areas like Gaming and Liquor licencing.

- Relationship between density and resident concerns about behaviour and criminality, and also social health.

- Green building costs; social housing and social inclusion; and sustainable transport and its implications - for example parking.

Other suggestions related to particular tags that might be applied to database records, such as the location of the research, or the particular spatial relevance of the research (e.g. to Victorian councils; or Peri-urban councils).

Some respondents pointed to other examples of "slicing and dicing" planning related topics as potential sources to help identify relevant topics.

- Department of Transport Planning and Local Infrastructure (DTPLI) structure for advisory and practice notes.

- Victorian Planning Reports (has 100 or more headings, but is typically organised at 2-3 levels).

- A combination of Australian Research Council sub-discipline codes ('Field Of Research' cotes), thematic streams from the State of Australian Cities Conference (SOAC), and chapters of the Planning Institute of Australian (PIA).

Synthesising and rationalising these different sources from a research-driven perspective could result in a functional topic structure.

A number of respondents highlighted existing bodies of research material that would be ideal to host on a centralised research portal. There is the huge body of work that exists with the SOAC papers. In one respondents view this should be the starting point for any facilitation of accessibility to planning research for practitioners. However, there has been some investment in making this happen in the past. Other key potential sources are publically available research reports and issues papers form from research institutions.

Key lessons for potential portal

The research has highlighted that the research-to-practice gap is not necessarily a gap that can be filled easily. Significant barriers exist to the exchange of information between research and practice - including time; capacity; and policy issues requiring immediate responses. Research is not easily digestible and there is some scepticism about its relevance. These barriers make it harder for research informed decision-making in practice. It tends instead to push practitioners down the track of engaging consultants or relying on the knowledge of colleagues. Making research available is one thing; but other more fundamental issues of credibility, clarity, relevance and translation would need to be addressed to communicate research to planning practice.

A key message coming from respondents is that there needs to be careful attention paid to the nature of research communication. In the context of research-to-practice exchange this covered a number of key elements:

- There must be a clear communication of the credibility of research, for example the importance of distinguishing peer-reviewed material from other material. It would be important to avoid a 'soup' that does not distinguish by merit.

- There is a need to be very mindful of the target audience and material must be audience focused. Avoid featuring any and all academic planning research, as there is a risk of getting a bad reaction from practitioners. If the key aim of the research is bridging the gap between research and practice, then there is a need to overtly respond to the way research is perceived by practitioners. Focus on outputs that are interesting/relevant/digestible for practitioners. Practitioner input in the operation of the resource would be very useful here.

- There should be a clear hierarchy of detail in content. As outlined by one respondent: "catchy informative titles; "bite sized" pieces, identifying "hot" issues; clear succinct summaries of findings and policy implications; and then links through to detailed research for those who are interested. This allows the time-poor user to decide whether something is of value"

- Curating of content and editorial contribution. There was significant comment on the value of deliberate curating of the content and of quality editorial content to 'frame' important topics and new research outputs. This would help tailor content to the target audience.

One of the most strongly supported functional elements was that of a regular email circular on research. Regular email circulars were seen as a good way to put relevant information in front of a time-poor audience; and to keep your audience engaged with your service. A variety of specific comments were made regarding such a service:

- Should be fortnightly, monthly or bi-monthly. More than fortnightly is too frequent, less than bi-monthly is to infrequent.

- Could highlight recent research outputs and also have a section that focuses on a particular topic each issue (covering relevant research from the database).

- Should be succinct with engaging summaries, and with the ability to follow up (click through) on detailed research.

- Would need to have a strong editorial oversight and a clear communication of the credibility or credentials of material.

- Would have to be formatted in an engaging way.

One respondent suggested the ability for policy makers to input into the issue focus of such research digests would be a great functionality.

A number of other comments were made regarding specific site functionality, including:

- Website must be twitter friendly, with users able to easily share content via twitter (see http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/ for an example of best practice).

- Ability to actively manage content based on user statistics.

- Access to the researcher's contact details and profile.

- Consider including 'best practice' policy/plan/program examples from the profession.

- The ability to easily find examples (or even comparison) from other jurisdictions on a particular issue would be very useful.

- User ability to comment on or rate content was of little interest (poor take up and poor content resulting).

One of the key issues discussed by respondents was that of partnerships. For any service to be used it needs to be linked in with key partner organisations in the profession and 'owned' by professionals. Most mentioned here was PIA. In particular respondents highlighted the potential to link with PIA publications (such as the state based magazines) as an entry point to more detailed research hosted on a portal. Others organisations mentioned included Victorian Environment and Planning Law Association; the SOAC Network; AHURI; Australian Local Government Association (and state based affiliates); and State Government Planning Departments.

Level of support for portal

All respondents expressed support for the concept of a database and web-portal for applied planning research. Some expressed strong outright support, while others provided qualifiers (reflected in the results above). Many stressed the importance of improving the evidence base in planning practice and that this is linked to professional credibility. One respondent highlighted that there is commercial value inherent in knowledge summary services.

A clear implication of the interview results is that there is a definite service gap; and a clear benefit in filling that gap. What is also clear is that a poorly thought out service would miss the target audience and have little impact. However, a quality service, with a strong partnership and engagement strategy, would have the potential to significantly improve the use of applied planning research in practice.

Results: Focus Group

The focus group discussion with 7 planning professional confirmed many of the themes identified through the interviews. The following outlines the particular contribution of the focus group on 6 key issues.

Politics and planning practice

A central theme of the focus group was that participants discussed the difficulties of working within a political space. Some participants expressed concern about what they consider the secrecy and risk aversion of local and state governments. One participant was concerned about the 'cherry picking' of planning research – suggesting that leaving out research based evidence reflects poorly on planning decisions:

> "It is much easier for them [decision makers] to ignore a report or data that is not supportive of their case, because there is so little awareness of research that no-one says 'hang on, you're ignoring this study'. At the moment there are advisory committees coming with no literature review and no connection with any kind of empirical data or research or analysis and nobody even thinks to say 'that's weird'".

Given this dynamic, it was considered that "people that do proper research in the departments are very marginalised". Being politically risk averse means that planners are limited in their capacity to take on new ideas. Participants suggested that large bodies of internal research are left out of decisions – 'a big hole' – because the implications are undesirable. A participant pointed to the secrecy about information and research: with the critique that "you only have to look at Plan Melbourne. There's a whole set of answers they've already decided on, and they're working backwards from that. They're not interested in doing research".

The importance of catering to political decision makers in local government was highlighted. A local government planner commented that "as a planner, my client is my councillors. I have a brand new market every 3 years." Planning is considered much more politically charged and politically consuming than the other functions of local government in particular. Conversely, another participant argued that although planners work in a politicised environment, and this constrains work, that there is still plenty of scope for communicating research even if its ideas do not get implemented. Examples of areas where research has been 'too hard' to have any impact were mentioned as liquor licensing, coastal inundation, and dwelling supply. Participants had differing views as to whether research is still 'of value' if it ultimately does not influence a decision.

Another focus group participant said that even in the case of beleaguered statutory planners "there is a hunger" for research. The focus group overall showed strong support for the concept of a research-to-practice portal, but with in-depth discussion of potential barriers.

Practical barriers

As with the interviews, practical barriers such as limited time; and the cost, length and language of research outputs were highlighted in the focus group as barriers to research engagement. It was noted that it is very difficult to work out what researchers at universities are working on. A participant pointed to issues of academic language, length, and presentation:

> "It is difficult to decipher and figure out what academics are talking about even in terms of language. Especially in planning, we're so used to the language of glossy dumbed down magazines for general public".

The lack of this audience focus in academic language can "intimidate professionals". Some participants had differing attitudes to research given that they are part time students and, when studying on the side, retrieving knowledge with a university log-in is much easier. Time

was a common theme, with one participant describing statutory planners as being "in the trenches with the bullets over their head and don't necessarily get to this stuff".

The 'sausage factory' analogy of time pressured outputs and standardised processes was picked up on by several focus group participants. Planners have many other duties and little time or 'headspace' for new information or even for reading. A consultant planner highlighted the limited time given for literature reviews – often projects allow "a maximum 2 days for background research, whereas realistically 15 days is needed".

Research exchange examples

Focus group participants gave examples of their current professional engagement with research. These were similar to interview responses and included The Conversation; The Urbanist; AHURI; The Grattan Institute; and Planning News which sometimes contains summaries of academic research.

Some sources were valued because they engage readers even if they are not issues they are specifically interested in – "it creates continued inquiry, and I think that's the most important thing". AHURI was mentioned several times as a good example of digestible research, particularly the research and policy bulletins. However, the housing focus and proliferation of reports "on the one issue" means AHURI is not always relevant to planners.

An additional source suggested in the focus group was the UK Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE). The participants felt that this organisation released relevant and insightful reports on the role of design in urban planning in easy to read formats. Government funding for CABE ceased in 2011 and it now exists as part of the non-profit Design Council (http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-services/built-environment). The site continues to highlight the value of urban design: a feature of interest to practitioners.

Public forums and opinion pieces were mentioned as important for broadening interest in planning issues. Participants named planning researchers with a media profile whose work is much better known and understood. One implication is that academic work is more influential through the media rather than through academic publications; although it is against academic publications that researcher's performance is typically measured.

Suggested functional inclusions for a portal

Most focus group participants agreed that it would be useful to be able to tap into research in a suitable format to facilitate information exchange. One argued that a research-to-practice exercise that facilitated grater knowledge of research findings would "make it much harder for decision makers to 'cherry pick' what is politically convenient".

Several focus group participants suggested using practice 'issues' to drive research. There were two values seen to this – firstly, keeping "up to date with issues that are about to come and hit us" and secondly for researchers in "finding out what people are wanting to know about". Although this idea came up in interviews and in the focus group, some participants however cautioned that there is some danger of diminishing the rigour ('dumbing down') of the academic world by having it driven by practice orientation.

Participants agreed there is value to the approach of picking themes and current 'hot' issues. Many focus group participants argued that an email circular is important for planners as they are less likely to look at a website. This came with a proviso that information curating needs to be effective to compete for practitioners' attention. Some email lists do this poorly and some do it well. Participants concurred that it is important to have a grab, a headline and a by-line. However, "quality is important, or you literally end up in the spam folder". One suggestion was including testimonials of successful research-to-practice translation. Case studies of research and practice, that walk practitioners through the process, are considered useful because any change to practice has to demonstrate its value.

More engaging forms of communication than emails were also stressed, including podcasts, videos, and Twitter feeds. Twitter was suggested as useful simply because of the short length and concise information. Several participants pointed to the value of conference papers and presentations – as these already have their key information picked out and condensed, making them easy to digest. Searchability by locational relevance and topic were stressed.

Partnerships and resourcing

The focus group touched on some specific questions of partnerships and resourcing that would be necessary for any information exchange site. PIA, MAV, and Planning Panels Victoria were suggested partner organisations. Participants indicated that the involvement of a planning peak body in the interface would be crucial to its dissemination and success.

The valuable potential resource of students and professional volunteers, as with PIA magazine, was also discussed by focus group participants. Participants had the expectation that as with existing professional publications, the presentation and research contributions to a portal would be driven by a community of professional interest rather than on purely commercial resources.

Suggested topics for research exchange

Practitioners have a demand for analysis that is meaningful, integrated, and that makes rigorous connections between policy and outcomes. The focus group participants had many examples of policy and practice areas that would benefit from research based knowledge exchange. These included buffer zones for unwanted land uses; public open space; housing supply; housing affordability; urban design; pedestrian behaviour; Environmentally Sustainable Design; the design of regulation; private practices like covenants; demographic change; soft infrastructure ratios; liquor licensing; and gambling and social impacts. Focus group participants did not have an immediate idea of how to organise this type of material; but did emphasise that there is a range of topics on which planning practitioners would value access to appropriately collated research material.

Findings and implications

Finding	Implication
There is a plethora of planning-relevant information available across multiple websites and agencies, which is frequently mixed in with other issue domains.	• Any new endeavour would need to meet a clear and well defined gap in the existing space.
There is no specific planning research exchange site in Australia; but some good examples overseas.	• There is definitely a gap, but filling it would require targeted resources to address. • There are opportunities to learn from international examples (notably the RTPI, CABE, Wellesley Institute).
Practitioners regularly engage with a range of information sources such as blogs, email circulars and popular media to keep up to date on relevant urban debates.	• Academic research is largely absent from this engagement with information.
Planners have good formal and informal information-sharing practices. Formal practices include industry magazines, policy based email circulars. Informal practices comprise strong networks of sharing, often facilitated by peak body network events.	• Capacity and networks for sharing exist. There would be value in integrating the dissemination of research outputs with the existing communities of practice and information exchange (as with RTPI website). • A research exchange portal is unlikely to achieve desirable uptake without some sort of partnership with existing professional networks. For example, PIA and state branches; AGLA and state branches; state planning departments; other peak bodies such as UDIA and the Property Council, HIA.
Professional planners have a culture when tackling new problems of looking to existing examples of practice; of engaging 'experts' – generally based on their practical experience; and basing practice on accepted practical norms.	• The demand for information and answers in planning decisions is met by other kinds of information (e.g. news, lobby groups, practice updates) or by private consultancies, or by received wisdom and experience. In the face of these professional norms, significant effort is required if evidenced based research is to have greater impact on planning practice. There is a need to highlight the value that evidence based research brings to practice - that it can uncover new knowledge, and that it brings comparative findings from across jurisdictional and temporal differences, rather than continually referencing existing and past practice.

Finding	Implication
Planners operate in a political environment in which there is often limited scope for research knowledge to inform decision making.	• The democratic and participatory role of planning is a fundamental consideration with regards the potential translation of research into practice. Practitioners need access to research evidence that can assist them in their roles within a political process. • In this political environment, appropriately presented research can be a useful tool for engaging with decision makers and with members of the public. • There is a need to demonstrate the value of evidence based research in decision making.
Professional planners are too busy focusing on their own practice framework and political pressures to connect with research.	• You cannot just 'give' or 'put out' information: there is a need for targeted, succinct, and digestible information to overcome time pressures.
Some professional planners lack the skills or knowledge to access and use research outputs. This includes some misconceptions about what research is and what it can be used for.	• Any research-to-practice portal would inevitably communicate only with a minority of the planning profession. However this does not mean the service would not be important, given strong interest from engaged practitioners. • There is a potential role for an information exchange vehicle to help increase professional capacity around understanding research.
Professionals show a significant level of scepticism about research. If the key aim is bridging the gap between research and practice, then need to overtly respond to the way research is perceived by practitioners.	• A research portal would need to contain content that is audience focused. This would require an editorial function to ensure material is interesting, relevant, and digestible for practitioners. • There is a need to explain and highlight the value of research findings. • The inclusion of 'featured' and hot topics needs to be framed by issues of practical relevance. • Input from engaged professionals to any editorial process would be useful.
Professional planners often seek out targeted accessible information in relation to a specific problem or task they are addressing.	• A research database would need to be logically indexed; and have detailed tagging of records. A portal would need to have good search functionality. • Each database record needs to have a succinct summaries, findings and policy implications, notes on local specific relevance.

Finding	Implication
Professional planners are interested in keeping up to date with the latest developments in their field. They often need to understand the extent of knowledge and evidence around a particular issue, particularly when policy innovation is called for and is cases where there is public debate.	• There is a role for research digests that bring together and summarise existing research outputs on a topic basis. • The organisation of research material needs to allow for discovery based on meaningful themes to allow exploration. Research needs to presented in succinct, practice focused summaries, with the opportunity to then access the detailed publications underpinning the research. There are some good potential examples to learn from in the planning space.
Professionals want to be able to explore information in thematic areas. However, there are many ways this could be done, and no clear steer from respondents, although there were many suggestions of specific topics of interest.	• A separate piece of work should determine a useful method for organising the resources. This would involve drawing on existing relevant thematic structures in planning practice such as PIA chapters; and professionally focused conference streams.
There is a need for source material to have a clear indication of credibility and quality.	• There must be a clear communication of the credibility of research, for example the importance of distinguishing peer-reviewed material from other material. • It would be desirable for editorial oversight of material to ensure quality and relevance, especially with any material featuring prominently.
A regular 'push out' services such as an email circular was viewed as being extremely important to facilitate ongoing practitioner engagement, but this would need to be done well - or will be ignored as spam.	• Particular care should be taken in the preparation of regular email push-out services. Items need to have catchy informative titles; be "bite sized" pieces, identify "hot" issues; and to offer clear succinct summaries of findings and policy implications. This allows the time-poor user to decide whether something is of value. Links should then be offered through to detailed research for those who are interested.
Practitioners place value on sites that give specific examples of research used in practice, and the value it adds.	• Include examples and profiles of 'best practice' uses of research where possible. • Consider use of testimonials and 'featured' success stories
There is interest in practitioners being able to inform practice-based research agendas.	• There is some scope to offer a research request service in response to specific interests.
Respondents identified several key bodies of research work that would be important to make available through a research-to-practice service.	• There would be a requirement to source and catalogue appropriate existing public research material including conferences papers (SOAC in particular) and working papers from relevant research centres.

Finding	Implication
Well designed and professional web-sites are more likely to maintain engagement	• Website should be twitter friendly, with users able to easily share content via twitter (see http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/ for an example of best practice). • Site management should include content user and Google Analytic statistics in order to track how users are navigating the site and which materials are popular.
Some practitioners desire easy access to information on the researchers involved in research outputs including their contact details and profiles.	• Consider linking materials through to planning researcher profiles in Australia to allow the public/practitioners easier knowledge of what universities are doing.
Summarising research and linking comparative empirical research to specific locations and issues is a skill and a service.	• There are significant ongoing resource implications with many of the findings. • There is the potential to utilise academic and professional volunteers as well as university students to minimise costs.

Proposal for a web-based information exchange service:

This section outlines a proposal for a web based portal for planning information exchange. Based on the findings outlined above the proposal is framed by the following objectives:

- Deliver a research-to-practice vehicle to connect quality, relevant, applied planning research to planning practitioners in local governments, state government and private practice.

- Build and manage a database of publically available research outputs that are indexed and coded to increase usefulness and accessibility for end users.

- Build and manage a web-portal to facilitate ease of access to database records, with clear research and policy themes; featured 'hot-topics' and latest research; and good searchability.

- Establish an ongoing administrative and editorial process to ensure content is well organised, of high standard and relevant and useful to end users.

- Establish ongoing bridging service to facilitate research uptake in practice via an email circular that features research snapshots and topic digests that are end user focused.

To achieve these objectives we have identified seven areas for attention which form the basis of this proposal for delivering a web-based information exchange service.
- Management / Administration

- Partnership building

- Database development

- Web interface development

- Sourcing content

- Bridging Service

- Marketing

Within these seven areas we have identified important feature components, and indicated their level of priority (essential, high, medium) – see table 6. We have also indicated the nature and extent of resources that would be required for development and ongoing management and administration in terms of person hours. Consideration of the resources required for legal and technical elements are beyond the scope of this report. A summary of indicative management and administration costs is provided in table 7.

It is important to note that this proposal represents a step towards delivering an information exchange service: it provides proof of concept in terms of a market gap; detail in terms of essential and desired functionality; recommendations on the process required to deliver the service; and indicative resource implications. It is not, however, a detailed business plan; and thus cannot make explicit recommendations on whether or not to invest in the development of such a service, or the nature of such investment. The research findings have highlighted that there is a gap in this type of planning information exchange in Australia, and interest in improved communication both from potential users and from research providers. However, the findings also give a sense of the practical and professional barriers between planning research and practice. Addressing these barriers would require significant resources and a clear strategy, the scale of which may not justify the pursuit of a research exchange portal.

Table 6: Elements of proposal for web-based information exchange service

Area	Component	Priority	Indicative Resourcing
Management / administration	• Service would require manager/administrator role(s) in the establishment and for ongoing delivery.	**Essential**	*Detailed in components below*
	• Establish and manage an editorial board with representatives from academia and practice. • Editorial board member involvement would be primarily an online moderation role of the various functions of the manager/administrator. • Requires terms of reference and editorial guidelines.	**Essential**	Manager/administrator: • Development phase – 5 days • Ongoing - 1hr per week Various board members: volunteer basis
	• Establish legal parameters of service elements and organisation.	**Essential**	*Beyond the scope of this report*
Partnership building	• Build and maintain partnerships with key professional organisations (in particular PIA (including state offices) and ALGA (and state affiliates)); to help connect with end users and create professional buy-in.	**Essential**	Manager/administrator: • Development phase – 5 days • Ongoing - 1hr per week
	• Liaise with key professional organisations to draw on advice regarding tailoring service to end users.	Medium	Manager/administrator: • Ongoing - 1hr per week
	• Build and maintain partnerships with key research organisations to facilitate ongoing provision of research content for the service.	High	Manager/administrator: • Ongoing - 1hr per week
	• Build partnerships with key research and professional organisations with a view to develop formal partnerships to co-fund, develop and run the service.	Medium	Manager/administrator: • Development phase – 3 days • Note: would require person with significant partnership development and business skills.
Database development	• Build a searchable, thematically tagged/indexed database to host applied planning research. • Database fields likely to include: Title; keywords; tags (topic; jurisdictional relevance, etc.); full research file (pdf); condensed summary; key findings; policy implications.	**Essential**	*Beyond the scope of this report*

Web interface development	• Build website interface which facilitates user access to the database which is searchable, thematically presented.	**Essential**	*Beyond the scope of this report*
	• Develop thematic structure and navigation of website that is end user focused. Likely to include: Issues themes (to be developed); 'featured research'; 'latest research'; 'most viewed/downloaded'.	**Essential**	Manager/administrator: • Development phase – 5 days • Ongoing - 1hr per week Editorial board members: steering and advice on volunteer basis
	• Establish online form for research providers to submit research.	**Essential**	*Beyond the scope of this report*
	• Establish ability for users to download 'project data-sheets' based on database fields.	Medium	*Beyond the scope of this report*
	• Establish higher order functionality for shareability via twitter and other services.	High	*Beyond the scope of this report*
	• Establish ability of users to submit suggestions for future research agendas.	Medium	*Beyond the scope of this report*
Sourcing and managing content	• Collect and process a baseline of publically available research to populate database – limited scope of 100 high value documents.	**Essential**	Manager/administrator: • Development phase – 10 days Editorial board members: steering and advice on volunteer basis
	• Collect and process a baseline of publically available research to populate database – extended scope of 300-400 documents.	Medium	Manager/administrator: • Development phase – 20 days Editorial board members: steering and advice on volunteer basis
	• Establish and maintain a database of potential contributors (senior/relevant academics, research institutes and centres; etc.).	High	Manager/administrator: • Development phase – 2 days • Ongoing – 1 hr. per week
	• Review submissions for quality, appropriateness, and user focus; and for required level of detail against data base fields.	**Essential**	Manager/administrator: • Ongoing - 2hrs per week

			Editorial board members: steering and advice on volunteer basis
Bridging service	• Establish and maintain a subscription database of users.	**Essential**	Manager/administrator: • Ongoing - 1hr per week
	• Produce email circular (suggest bi-monthly).	**Essential**	Manager/administrator: • Ongoing - 1hr per week
	• Produce regular 'featured research' summaries and/or hot-topic summaries for dissemination via website and email circular.	**Essential**	Manager/administrator: • Ongoing - 2hrs per week Editorial board members: steering and advice on volunteer basis
Marketing	• Grow subscription database by directly contacting potential end users.	high	Manager/administrator: • Ongoing - 1hr per week
	• Establish and maintain service profile via professional networking and communicating through key avenues such as practitioner conferences and peak body events.	high	Manager/administrator: • Ongoing - 1hrs per week

Table 7 - Indicative cost for management and administration (based on components in table 6)

			Indicative cost
Essential components	Development phase, 25 days = 200 hours	$50/hr.	$10,000
	Ongoing, 9 hrs. per week = 468 hrs. per year	$50/hr.	$23,400 per year
All components	Development phase, 50 days = 400 hours	$50/hr.	$20,000
	Ongoing, 14 hrs. per week = 728 hrs. per year	$50/hr.	$36,400 per year

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Appendix 1 – interview questions

<u>**Project:**</u>

"Facilitating professional engagement with planning research"

<u>**Research Aim:**</u>

This project seeks to better connect professional planning practice with applied planning research. The primary outcome of the research will be a proposal for options for online platforms to facilitate this engagement. To inform the proposal the scoping study project will conduct a review of existing opportunities for information exchange in the planning sector; and best practice examples from related sectors. We will use focus groups and interviews with planning professionals and academics to inform the proposal.

<u>**Interview Objectives:**</u>

The interviews and focus groups will engage with the producers and potential users of applied planning research: including local government planners, private sector planners, state government planners, and planning academics. The questions concern the participants' professional practice and the extent to which they are aware of and use, or would like to use, planning research. Participants will also be asked their awareness and opinions of existing web services for information exchange.

<u>**Interview Questions – Audience**</u>

1. How do you find out about current planning practice, knowledge and innovation?
2. What specific sources of information do you use to inform your planning practice?
3. Who in your organisation are most likely to access, or would most benefit from, applied planning research findings.
4. Could you give any examples of how you currently use research (e.g. academic or government) in your workplace? (For example, in preparing policy or strategies).
5. What are some of the main topics or questions that your professional work engages with that would benefit from applied palling research? (For example, housing, cycling infrastructure, residential development)
6. What, if anything, do you think would make research more accessible to you and your organisation?
7. Following our discussion regarding the use of applied planning research in planning practice, what is you view on the need/utility of a dedicated database/web-interface that facilitates easier access to planning research by practitioners.
   - a) strong support
   - b) qualified support
   - c) not sure
   - d) not a priority

   Comment:

8. List the key thematic areas/topics that you would like to see used to organise such a database.
9. Of the following functionality respond with either important, not sure, not important
- Download full research output
- Abstract/summary
- list of key findings
- list of key implications for policy
- Author contact details
- Ability to post user comments
- Ability to easily share (email/like/etc.)
- Ability to rate (e.g. out of 5)

Comment: other functionality?

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Interview Questions – Contributors

1. What kinds of forums do you use to share your research findings? For example, academic journals, working papers.
2. Do you ever use open-access or web forums for sharing or discussing your research findings?
3. Are you ever approached by planning practitioners about your research, or about your area of expertise? How do you deal with such approaches?
4. Could you articulate the specific policy implications of your research?
5. Have you had experiences where your research has been used effectively to support policy development?
6. Have you had any experiences where you felt that your research was not as recognised in policy development as you would have liked?
7. What are some of the main topics or questions that your academic research engages with that would be relevant to planning practitioners?
10. Following our discussion regarding the use of applied planning research in planning practice, what is you view on the need/utility of a dedicated database/web-interface that facilitates easier access to planning research by practitioners.
    a) strong support
    b) qualified support
    c) not sure
    d) not a priority
    Comment:

11. List the key thematic areas/topics that you would like to see used to organise such a database.

12. Of the following functionality respond with either important, not sure, not important- Download full research output
- Abstract/summary
- list of key findings
- list of key implications for policy
- Author contact details
- Ability to post user comments
- Ability to easily share (email/like/etc.)
- Ability to rate (e.g. out of 5)
Comment: other functionality?

Appendix 2 – focus group briefing paper.

Facilitating professional engagement with planning research

Discussion points from website review:

- The web era places the onus on information consumers to choose and filter material. This means effort is exerted to attract attention and exert credibility. Academic research generally sits outside this space, behind pay walls and at a slower pace. It is not competitive with other information sources including information from practice, experience, opinion, or lobby groups.
- Easiest planning information to access on the web is:
    - Practice exchange: changes to the legal framework, latest policies, latest decisions. "What others are doing"
    - Government summaries
    - Strategic synthesis from lobby groups
    - Opinion and criticism
- Some barriers between research and practice are unavoidably built in: comparative versus focused views (over time, space versus specific interest in here and now); level of background information required; accountability (rigour versus fairness); decisiveness (no easy answers versus required decisions).
- Other practical barriers: time, pay wall of copyrighted journals, lack of connection between comparative empirical knowledge and local situation. Perceived lack of relevance.
- Research-to-practice sites are emerging. These require special effort to overcome practical barriers to information exchange between empirical research and planning practice. Research-to-practice information is a specialist space occupied not often by academics, but by various services that seek to: remove cost or time requirements, summarise background material, interpret local relevance, and give clear advice.
- Key features of research-to-practice sites include: structure by topic, tagging, searchable database of resources, backgrounder and 'advice' summaries, front page news and updates allowing 'discovery', rigorous opinion and interpretation (expensive but valued), up to date practice news, ability to select local content.

Best practice sites:

- RTPI planning research exchange: http://www.rtpi.org.uk/knowledge/research/ and http://www.rtpi.org.uk/
- Wellesley Institute: http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/
- AHURI: http://www.ahuri.edu.au/

Discussion points from interviews:

Engaging with research
- Limited engagement from practitioners, due to barriers and reality of applied, locally situated activities.
- Tend to engage with new knowledge via networks, existing examples from practice, and 'expert' input.
- However, many practitioners would like to engage with (relevant) research; and see the need for a stronger evidence base in planning practice. Research particularly

relevant where policy innovation is called for; and for keeping up to date with new knowledge.
- Two forms of engagement: one is about being helped to be kept up to date with debates in an ongoing basis, requiring information to be 'pushed' to audience; the other is about providing a reliable, relevant, accessible source for practitioners to head to when they have a problem that could be informed by research findings.

Barriers to professional engagement with research
- There is a significant level of scepticism of research amongst professionals. There is a need for researchers to tailor research and research outputs to meet practitioner needs.
- There is limited capacity (skills and time) amongst professional to interpret and adapt research to local needs.
- Research publications can be hard to find and are often behind pay walls.
- Not a strong culture in the planning profession of keeping up to date with developments in applied planning research.
- There is limited knowledge of key bodies of research (e.g. AHURI) and some confusion about the extent of research that exist (e.g. view that research is limited to 'hard' data).

Key lessons for potential portal
- There is a definite service gap and a clear benefit in filling that gap. But not worth doing poorly.
  - Must contain clear, credible, relevant, accessible information.
  - Must be audience focused – directly applicable to planning practice.
  - hierarchy of detail is important, so users can get key messages and drill deeper if interested.
  - Curating of content valuable to ensure audience focus.
- Email circular with a digest of latest 'feature' research and perhaps a key topic would be highly valued. Must be succinct and audience focused.
- Partnerships seen as critical to reach professionals and create sense of ownership.

For Discussion:

Consider the summary of findings above. Would you support them? Are there any that should be questioned? Are there any that are of greater importance?

Further questions for discussion:

- How do you access planning information – would you categorise it as 'practice' or 'research', as local or comparative?
- Do you / would you visit the example web-sites, or sites like them?
- Can you give examples of effective or ineffective communication between research and practice? Consider subjects of research; and methods of research communication.

Appendix 3 – focus group discussion outline.

Facilitating professional engagement with planning research
Focus group November 19th

Outline:

1. Round the table introductions.
2. *Distribute consent forms.*
3. *Project introduction.*
   - Distribute briefing paper and discuss
4. Website review. Explain method and then initial results
   - Invite comment and discussion
5. Interviews. Explain method and then initial results
   - Invite comment and discussion
6. Show best practice sites:
   a. RTPI planning research exchange: http://www.rtpi.org.uk/knowledge/research/ and http://www.rtpi.org.uk/
   b. Wellesley Institute: http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/
   c. AHURI: http://www.ahuri.edu.au/
   - Invite comment and discussion
7. Further discussion:
   - How do you think research differs from practice?
   - How do you access planning information – would you categorise it as 'practice' or 'research', as local or comparative?
   - Do you / would you visit the example web-sites, or sites like them?
   - Can you give examples of effective or ineffective communication between research and practice? Consider subjects of research; and methods of research communication.