

Collaboration Health Assessment Tool

CHAT SURVEY



WESTERN DOWNS FUTURES

Connected Communities, Growing Together and Alive with Opportunities



SUMMARY REPORT | MAY 2025

WHY CHAT?

Western Downs Futures is a place-based initiative led by community and industry and enabled by government. Western Downs Futures has four priority area working groups collaborating on housing, education, employment, and health. As well as an industry collaborative of energy development stakeholders. After two years of developing the governance structures and processes, and one year of standing up those structures, there needed to be a simple way of evaluating the health of our collaboration.

The Collaboration Health Assessment Tool (CHAT) was developed by the Centre for Social Impact (CSI) and Collaboration for Impact (CFI) as an online diagnostic tool for organisations to assess the “health” of their collaborative relationships. It is an evidence based tool that can help collaborators understand how well they work together now, and in the future as their collaboration matures.

The CHAT survey will be assessed annually to develop benchmarks to assess our progress, and address areas for improvement, and ultimately achieve social impact.

SURVEY OVERVIEW

Responses collected in May 2025

Total respondents: 27

Survey tool: Collaboration Health Assessment Tool (CHAT)

Purpose: To assess the health of the Western Downs Futures collaboration





Highest Scoring Areas:

These reflect the strongest elements of the collaboration within Western Downs Futures

| Survey Item | Avg. Score (out of 5) |
|--|-----------------------|
| Community needs inform our collaboration's responses | 4.19 |
| Partners understand why collaboration is required to address the problem | 4.15 |
| The collaboration reviews and shares its findings | 4.04 |
| Collaboration members trust one another | 3.93 |
| Safe environment for discussing disagreement/conflict | 3.93 |

Our Strengths:

Our highest scoring areas celebrate a strong foundation of trust, shared purpose, and community responsiveness within the collaboration.

The highest score came from how well the collaboration is informed by community needs, demonstrating a clear commitment to being grounded in local context.

Partners expressed a strong grasp of why collaboration is essential for addressing complex challenges, which reflects a mature collective mindset and readiness for systems-level work.

High scores for mutual trust and having a safe environment to address conflict indicate that relationships are respectful and psychologically safe - critical ingredients for sustaining collaboration during challenging times.

The high score for reviewing and sharing findings suggests a learning culture is present, where partners value reflection and integrate that into the work.

Together, these strengths indicate that Western Downs Futures has established a relationally strong and community-focused initiative. This creates a solid foundation from which to address adaptive and technical systems challenges moving forward.

Lowest Scoring Areas:

These areas signal potential for improvement:

| Survey Item | Avg. Score (out of 5) |
|--|-----------------------|
| Sufficient funds to sustain operations for next two years | 2.93 |
| Partners responsibility areas are clear and understood | 3.26 |
| Separate funding for collaboration coordination | 3.3 |
| Access to required data | 3.33 |
| Involvement of affected community members in the collaboration | 3.33 |
| External communication strategy to help achieve our goals | 3.37 |
| Partners have sufficient authority to commit their organisation to decisions | 3.41 |

Our Weaknesses:

The lowest scoring areas suggest that while the collaboration is strong in values and relationships, there are structural and resource-related challenges that may impact its long-term effectiveness.

Respondents expressed concern about the ability to maintain operations over the next two years due to limited funding and lack of dedicated financial resources for the backbone coordination. The relatively low score for separate funding for coordination also implies that critical backbone functions may be under-supported, affecting the collaboration's ability to function cohesively.

A lower score on clearly defined partner responsibilities indicates uncertainty of member roles, which can lead to duplication, inefficiencies or disengagement.

Limited access to relevant data may hinder evidence-based decision-making and learning, particularly in a place-based initiative reliant on shared information.

The score for inclusion of those affected by the issue suggests that more intentional strategies are needed to elevate the voice and leadership of community members, particularly those with lived experience.

These insights point to the need for structural investments and more inclusive practices to match the strong relational and strategic foundations in place.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

On the 28 May 2025, Western Downs Futures held its second Working Group Forum, where we analysed the results from the inaugural CHAT Survey. Members were invited to discuss how we should address four of the lowest scoring areas, voted as the most important. In no particular order, the suggested actions designed by those members are outlined in summary below.

Source funding to sustain collaboration operations for two years:

- Secure funding to sustain the initiative beyond April 2026, addressing a key risk to its continuity
- Pursue incorporation of Western Downs Futures as a separate legal entity to enable access to a wider range of financial opportunities and to establish corporate financial memberships.
- Ensure future funding strategies prioritise equity of outcomes across the Western Downs region.
- Explore Regional Benefit Funds from the renewable energy transition as a potential source to fund Backbone staff wages.
- Apply for program delivery grants with a model that includes a percentage allocation to management/administrative costs.

A diverse funding strategy incorporating contributions from corporates, philanthropy, social impact, government grants, community benefit funds, and sponsorships should be developed.

Develop an external communications strategy to help achieve our goals:

Develop and implement a community engagement strategy to inform, involve, and inspire buy-in from key stakeholders, which will:

- Celebrate and share success stories widely to build momentum, trust, and support.
- Target communications to specific audiences, including internal working group members and external stakeholders such as community groups, local businesses, all levels of government, and diverse community members (youth, seniors, First Nations).
- Coordinate engagement efforts with partners, to reduce fatigue and improve efficiency
- Tailor messaging and channels to suit different audiences, ensuring the right message reaches the right people at the right time via the appropriate media.
- Monitor and address misinformation, even if the mitigation strategy is still unclear.
- Acknowledge capacity limitations, and advocate for funding to support communication and engagement workloads.
- Clearly distinguish Western Downs Futures from Council operations in all communications to strengthen its identity as an independent initiative.

Clarify each partner's area of responsibility:

Western Downs Futures has created a new governance Handbook which outlines roles and responsibilities, as well as a decision-making framework. It may be worthwhile holding a governance deep dive with working group members and the leadership to clarify roles.

The suggested actions from the Working Group Forum are as follows:

- Clarify and document each partner's area of responsibility, including their role, contribution and scope of influence.
- Define the purpose and expectations for meeting participation, ensuring each member understands what they bring to the table.
- Assess whether the right people are involved, and identify any gaps in representation or expertise.
- Establish a transparent process for selecting members and filling roles based on the needs of the initiative.
- Define decision-making processes, including who makes decisions and how consensus is reached.
- Create and maintain a live directory of members and a flowchart of roles and responsibilities to support ongoing collaboration, orientation, and information sharing.

Have a system in place to evaluate how our collaboration is performing:

To systematically evaluate and monitor the performance, health, and outcomes of the Western Downs Futures collaboration, we need to evaluate:

- Collaboration Health: How well are we working together? Is trust, communication, structures and processes improving over time?
- Network Strength: Who is part of our collaboration? How are they connected? Who is missing?
- Participation and Engagement: Are working groups active and engaged? Who is attending and how often?
- Outcomes and Impact: What changes are our collaboration and working groups driving in the community? Are we meeting our goals?

An evaluation framework is suggested to support the engagement of an evaluation partner.

