

# Australia Forum



**A centre for significant events, meetings  
and dialogue in the nation's capital.**  
The home of democratic dialogue.

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## Foreword

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As we prepare Australians for the dynamic opportunities and challenges ahead new forms of engagement will be needed. Australia's best future will be shaped through dialogue – and through facilities and technologies that are enabling, democratic and globally connected.

Capital cities around the world are embracing the 21st century need for high quality secure venues catering for international dialogue, trade and significant national events. These are important elements of national infrastructure and the positioning of capitals. Centres of this nature are also the learning hubs of the future – pivotal places in terms of economic development and knowledge transfer from research institutions.

Perhaps more importantly our vision is for the Australia Forum to be the home of democratic dialogue, a national institution for all Australians. There will be new ways of giving voice to Australians in metropolitan, regional and remote communities, and fostering national conversation.

Digital communications and other technological advances are rapidly changing the very nature of conversation, dialogue and

meeting practice. And yet, face to face meetings and dialogue will only increase – due, in part, to the new opportunities and relationships enabled by technology. Knowledge exchange is a major driver for social and economic development.

The benefits of this new institution as both a physical and virtual centre are very clear. Our extensive international research has identified how new opportunities for Australia would be created through the design of a multi-hub network. The Forum would reach across the nation, and at the same time become a leading centre in South East Asia.

The time has come – for a truly national forum – one that will meet the future needs of Australia and Australians themselves. It will be the Australia Forum.

**Professor Peter Shergold AC**  
Chair  
Australia Forum Steering Committee

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The Australia Forum is a project initiated by the Canberra Business Council  
with the support of the ACT Government



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# Australia Forum Steering Committee

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**Professor Peter Shergold ac (Chair)**  
Macquarie Group Foundation Professor,  
Centre for Social Impact, UNSW  
Chancellor, University of Western Sydney

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**Dr Dawn Casey**  
Director, Powerhouse Museum and formerly  
Director, National Museum of Australia

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**Professor Ian Chubb ac**  
Former Vice Chancellor, Australian National University

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**General Peter Cosgrove ac, mc**  
Chair of the Australia War Memorial Council

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**Ms Virginia Haussegger**  
ABC News presenter, journalist and writer

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**Mr Rupert Myer am**  
Chairman of the National Gallery of Australia

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The Australian Forum Scoping Study was commissioned by Canberra Business Council, with the support of the ACT Government. Many other partnering organisations provided financial and practical support. The Study was overseen by the Australia Forum Steering Committee, who also commissioned other associated research.

For further information go to  
[www.australiaforum.com.au](http://www.australiaforum.com.au)



Top: Professor Peter Shergold Chair of the Australia Forum Steering Committee  
Above: The initial Australia Forum Steering Committee meeting

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# 1 Background

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“We are drawn together by the desire to create in Canberra a forum for public discourse, a centre of democratic dialogue.”

— Professor Peter Shergold, Chair, Australia Forum Steering Committee

The development of an international quality meeting venue has long been recognised as an important need for the National Capital.

Over several years Canberra Business Council, with the support of many partnering organisations advocated the need for a comprehensive scoping study.

In March 2010 a group of eminent Australians were invited to join the Australia Forum Scoping Study to oversight investigations into the need, benefit and scope of a new world class institution, which was to be *“a forum for significant meetings, dialogue, cultural events, and other occasions of national importance”*.

Following an international procurement process Ernst & Young and Cox Architects were appointed to complete a comprehensive Scoping Study for the Australia Forum. That study is now complete.

In parallel, the Steering Committee conducted extensive international research of its own, developing a deep understanding of current and future directions in democratic dialogue. The Committee has also investigated the impact of technology changes on dialogue, meeting practice and knowledge exchange. Arising from this work there are important opportunities for citizen engagement and how national conversations are conducted, as well as for education and commerce. The Steering Committee has been supported by a project Reference Group and a series of academic and professional advisors.

This overview report presents key findings of the Australia Forum Scoping Study (2011) and the research of the Australia Forum Steering Committee.

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## 2 Introduction

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### Vision

#### **Australia Forum**

The home of democratic dialogue

The Australia Forum will be a world-class institution that caters for significant meetings, dialogue, cultural events and other occasions of national importance appropriately held in the Capital.

The Australia Forum will also be an unparalleled world class meeting place, the most secure in Australia, featuring a high quality international centre of dialogue, capable of hosting meetings of the people of Australia as well as meetings of world leaders. The Australia Forum will provide an international meeting centre tailored to the needs and character of our nation, and of a standard comparable to those in other international centres.

The Australia Forum will be an asset for the people of Australia. A place to come together to celebrate, be inspired, encouraged or entertained, or to learn and creatively look to the future. A vehicle for important dialogue and Australia's big conversations. The forum will be a special place, both physical and virtual, for Australians to listen, speak and connect with others.

It would also provide a world class centre for significant national and international meetings.

The Forum should become a national institution... in the family of national institutions in the capital.



Kuala Lumpur





Parliament House. Image provided by Australian Capital Tourism

## The important role of National Institutions

Canberra's national institutions highlight our achievements and champion our values as a nation. In doing so, they bind the Federation and elevate our national aspirations. Parliament House – and Old Parliament House before it – symbolise Australia's unswerving commitment to participatory democracy.

The collections of our great institutions – including the Australian War Memorial, the National Gallery of Australia, the National Museum of Australia, the National Library, Museum of Australian Democracy, National Archives, Royal Australian Mint, National Film and Sound Archive, Questacon, Australian Institute of Sport, and National Portrait Gallery – conserve and nurture the national memory. In these places, millions of Australians gather each year to commemorate and celebrate our efforts in war and peace. Places of fun, as well as of learning, they reflect the richness of our lives, history and culture. They hold a mirror to Australia. The Australia Forum would complement these institutions.



"The framework for representative government has served Australia well. However it's become ever more apparent that here, as in other modern democracies, levels of civic engagement are falling and trust in politicians is at a low ebb. Democracy is based upon an implicit contract between the state and its citizens: the state offers security and protection, the citizen returns loyalty. Yet there is a growing disconnect between the state and its citizens, driven by a view that in-between the trips to the ballot-box access to governments is dominated by those lobbyists and advocates with the resources or influence to wield political power. We suffer a 'democratic deficit' in which people feel unable to contribute effectively to the active agenda of governments."

*Professor Peter Shergold  
Chair, Australia Forum Steering Committee*

As the investigations of the Scoping Study progressed the project vision developed and evolved, particularly in terms of the need to foster democratic dialogue.

## Investing in National Dialogue

Australia does need a venue of the scale, security and design that is appropriate for the capital and nation's important role in international affairs.

Equally, Australia needs a forum that provides a focal point for important national conversations – a forum that will foster new forms of democratic dialogue.

As Governments around the world strive to meet the new and emerging challenges – challenges of unprecedented complexity and risk – social media and other new technologies are providing new opportunities for communication. A key challenge, whether for concerned citizens or government, is how to achieve meaningful and enduring citizen engagement in today's world.



Dialogue is a respectful free-flowing but structured conversation among a diverse group of people who bring different life experiences and viewpoints to the table. It is a conversation that involves learning and working together to understand different points of view. Dialogue is not debate – you cannot ‘win’ a dialogue. While dialogue searches for common ground, it does not mean that all differences disappear. However dialogue encourages us to be open to the possibility of learning new ways to think about public issues.

*Australian Centre for Dialogue*



## Embracing New Technologies

The web allows new kinds of citizen input which would have been unthinkable a generation ago. There are already existing techniques, that can be delivered on-line, to enable ‘public conversations’ to inform ‘everyday democracy’. There are innovative forms of deliberative decision-making which can provide policymakers with much better information on public preferences. The application of new technology to public engagement opens up many possibilities.

The Australia Forum will embrace the technological infrastructure that can give greater voice to democratic dialogue. The Australia Forum would have a reach far beyond Canberra, through a state of the art multi-hub network linking all activities within the Forum to key regional locations.

During conferences it will be possible for public meetings to be held across multiple locations by using networked technologies. The Australia Forum, far from being a single venue, would sit at the centre of a network of participation.





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## 3 Scoping Study Outcomes

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The Australia Forum Scoping Study has set out a series of important findings and conclusions including the following:

### Market Analysis

- ▶ international demand for “face-to-face” meetings and events has continued to increase solidly in the face of various global crises and increasing competition from the electronic media. Between 1999 and 2009, the number of international association meetings held globally increased at a compound annual growth rate of 6.5%. There is a positive industry outlook.
- ▶ substantial unmet demand for national and international meetings exists in Canberra.
- ▶ in response to increasing international and national demand, there has been a continued expansion in the supply of event venues, both overseas and in Australia. There is an increasing trend towards iconic venues with well-designed multifunctional facilities. Such centres can have a significant placemaking role, and very positive impact on a city’s profile.

### Assessing Demand

Recent industry-wide international research<sup>1</sup> has identified several factors that will drive the demand for major meetings and events eg venues will need to have the latest technologies to facilitate networking between delegates attending the event and to expand the virtual network with other event venues.

While the potential to increase business tourism is recognised, the focus and the value proposition for meetings and events is increasingly shifting to the key role that they can play in “knowledge exchange” and economic development.

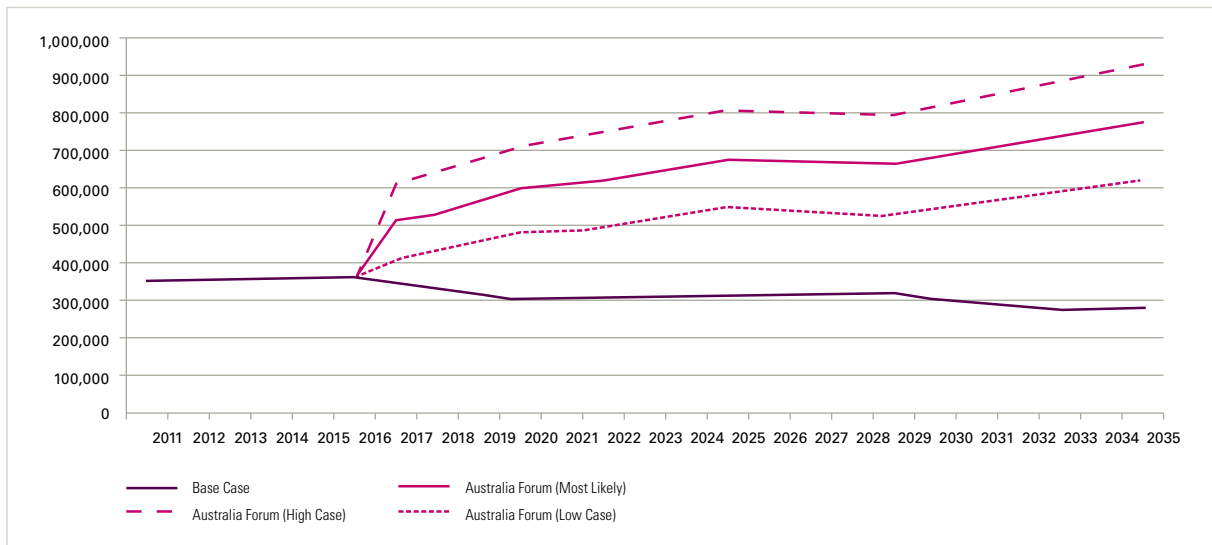
The scoping study surveys have also found that:

- ▶ large meetings of international and national importance, such as CHOGM and the G20 cannot be held in Canberra due to the lack of a sufficiently large, high quality, secure venue that can be locked down without disrupting the city, as well as a lack of sufficient accommodation of a suitably high standard;
- ▶ a range of other identified governmental meetings (in trade, defence and other sectors), could or would be held in Canberra if appropriate facilities were available;
- ▶ many associations and corporates are not currently considering Canberra as a potential destination due to the current lack of an appropriate venue, particularly events attracting more than 250 delegates;
- ▶ most government agencies, associations, and corporates would seek to hold additional events in the National Capital if more suitable facilities were available: ie over 90% of surveyed professional conference organisers (PCOs), and over 70% of associations;
- ▶ there is likely to be a significant increase in the demand for events from both the Federal Government and the corporate sector.

The demand projections for the Australia Forum and a base case (do nothing) option are outlined in the figure below.

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<sup>1</sup> “Convention 2020 – the future of meetings, venues and destinations” (2010), for International Conference and Congress Association, IMEX and Fast Future Research



Projected number of attendee days under the Base Case option and Australia Forum option

## Policy Benefits

The Australian Forum Scoping Study identifies a range of policy interests and benefits for both the Australian and ACT Governments:

### Federal

- › International relations
- › Governmental meetings
- › Innovation and collaboration
- › Trade
- › Education and research
- › National engagement and dialogue

### Territory

- › Economic Development
- › City development
- › Business Tourism
- › Community assets

## Functional Requirements

Drawing on the demand analysis and international research, the scoping study identified a series of functional requirements for the Forum:

- › An “iconic” design that is at least commensurate with the quality of the Capital’s other major national institutions;
- › Specialised security arrangements, design features and services required for the Australia Forum to host international dignitaries;

- › An ‘International Centre of Dialogue’ (2,500 sqm) to cater for important “meetings in the round” (e.g. government meetings such as CHOGM and G20 meetings, as well as other specialised forums);
- › High quality “exhibition” areas (8,000 sqm minimum with expansion to 12,000 sqm) with the multifunctional capacity to serve large scale government events, exhibitions, conferences and other functions;
- › Outstanding multimedia services and other technologies to facilitate high level communication between delegates, conference organisers and presenters. A multi-hub network will link Australia Forum with other centres in Australia and overseas. An interactive decision theatre would also be included in the Centre for Dialogue. The proposed business model would provide for continuous re-investment in cutting edge technologies to sustain that advantage.
- › Core facilities required to cater to the needs of the more traditional business events market, including:
  - a plenary hall (3,000 sqm), capable of holding 3,000 people and divisible into four; two 250 sqm theatrettes, together capable of another 500 delegates;
  - a ballroom (1,500 sqm), divisible into four, together with a banqueting room (1,800 sqm); numerous break- out rooms;
  - media centre and support services;
  - parking for 600-1200 cars;
  - a continuous bus transport system connecting delegates to their hotels and the CBD;
  - on site retail outlets (e.g. restaurants, bars); and
  - an on-site 350 to 400 bed hotel providing 5 star and 4 star accommodation with a high ratio of suites.







## Design Concepts

In order to explore the potential of various sites to satisfy the project's functional requirements, and prepare project costings, a series of design concepts were prepared. These are initial designs only, and may vary from the scheme which is ultimately advanced. Further planning work would be carried out prior to public consultation.

However, the initial designs for the Lake Front site present a potential scheme of high quality, and demonstrate the excellent potential of the site. A range of important public benefits could also be delivered through this solution such as the wide pedestrian promenade, landbridges over Parkes Way, and an attractive lakeside public square.

## How much would it cost?

The estimated capital cost of the Australia Forum (Lake Front site) is **\$327.6m** in today's dollars, or \$367.9m in 2014/15 dollars. (A lower cost first stage development option of approximately \$250m would also be achievable).

Supporting public infrastructure was costed at \$53.5m.

The Scoping Study has also provided a series of estimated operational budgets and cashflows for the Forum. The Net Present Value cost of the project, taking account of revenue streams, was assessed as being \$240.7m.

The Study identifies a strong business case for investment in the Australia Forum.



## 5 The Next Steps

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In the short term, the next stage of project development would involve further planning work by government for:

- ▶ associated development and infrastructure envisaged in the West Basin precinct
- ▶ design development for the Australia Forum
- ▶ consultations; followed by
- ▶ development of implementation models and governance arrangements

With continued momentum it is anticipated that the Australia Forum project could be 'implementation ready' in approximately two-three years time.

In parallel with these activities the Australia Forum Steering Committee and partnering organisations intend continuing their work in relation to democratic dialogue and the practice of national conversations. A demonstration project will also be carried out.

The Australian and ACT governments are both long term stakeholders in the Australia Forum and it is envisaged that the project would ultimately involve both governments.

For further information go to [www.australiaforum.com.au](http://www.australiaforum.com.au)



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