

# DEMONSTRATE YOUR IMPACT!

The realities of evaluating social outcomes under outcome-focused funding frameworks

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# PURPOSE OF PRESENTATION

- Discuss some **practical challenges** for social work organisations and practitioners in adhering to outcomes-focused funding frameworks, using the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) as a case study.
- Suggest some possible **alternative ways forward**, which seek to alleviate some (but not all!) of these challenges.



# OUTCOME-FOCUSED FUNDING

- Neoliberal focus on outsourcing social services to third sector (trust that the market can deliver improved efficiency).
- Public sector: New Public Management (NPM) focus on contracting for efficiency and effectiveness –
  - *performance management (outputs)*
  - *performance budgeting (outputs)*
  - *outcomes-focused funding (outcomes; impacts)*



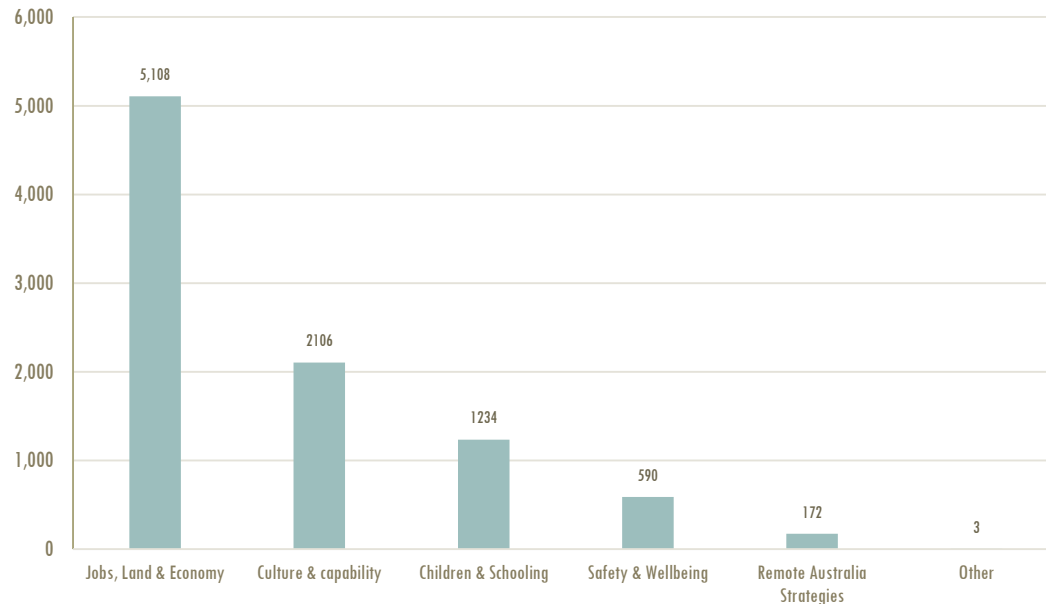
# OUTCOME-FOCUSED FUNDING: IAS

- IAS was introduced on 1 July 2014; consolidated funding previously provided through multiple government departments into a central funding pool, administered by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPM&C).
- Funding is administered via five funding streams:
  1. Jobs, Land & Economy
  2. Culture & Capability
  3. Children & Schooling
  4. Safety & Wellbeing
  5. Remote Australia Strategies
- IAS priorities fit snugly into the Closing the Gap targets (COAG 2008), though these are being revised.

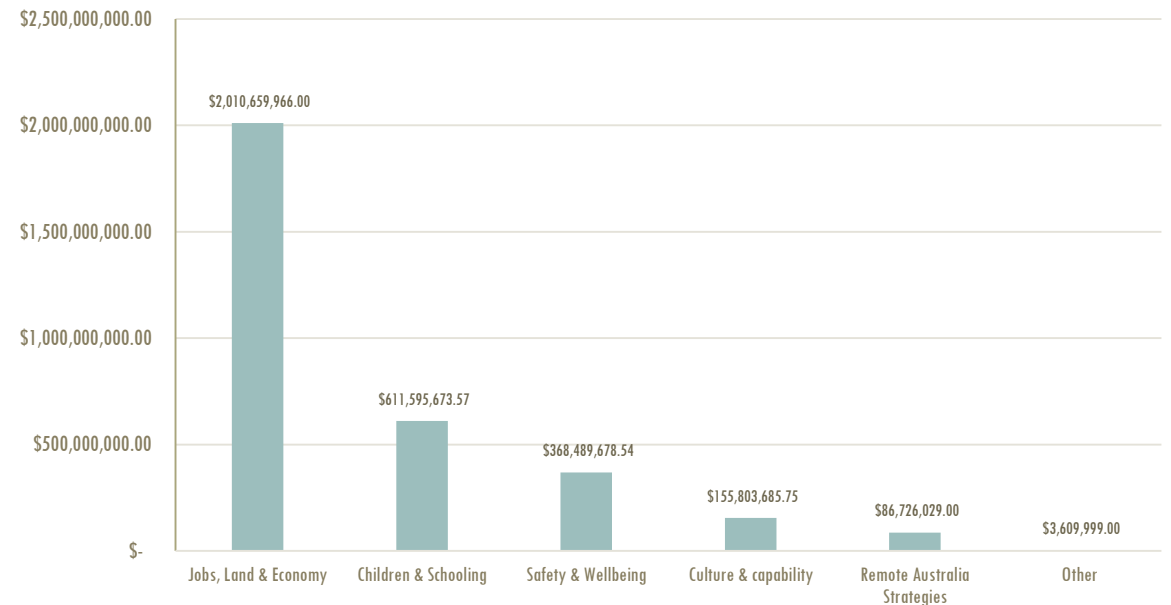
# OUTCOME-FOCUSED FUNDING: IAS

- Total of 9,213 different applications awarded a total of \$3.24b funding under IAS to date...

No. of grants administered via each stream,  
1 July 2014 to 14 June 2019



Value of grants administered via each stream,  
1 July 2014 to 14 June 2019



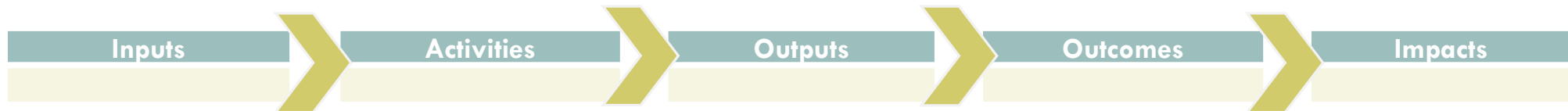
**Note:** Calculated by the author, based on data extracted from the DPM&C IAS grant-reporting database, as at 14 June 2019. In these data, extensions on previously awarded amounts are counted as separate grants.

# OUTCOME-FOCUSED FUNDING: IAS

- There have been a number of criticisms levelled at the IAS and similar frameworks (e.g. Closing the Gap), including that:
  - they are **top-down, non-consultative and assimilationist** (e.g. Bielefield, 2014; Brueckner et al., 2016; Fogarty et al., 2017; Bulloch and Fogarty, 2016);
  - they have **disguised funding cuts** to Indigenous programs and **undermined Indigenous organisations** by initially attaching no value to their involvement/leadership (O’Faircheallaigh, 2018);
  - outcomes-focused approaches like the IAS are **unsupported by strong evidence** (e.g. Victoria Aboriginal Child Care Agency 2016; NACCHO 2016) and the IAS itself is not subject to rigorous evaluation (Breen and Coote 2019).
- Today, I want to focus on the *practical* challenges of implementing the IAS, particularly:
  - Non-linear outcomes
  - Measures and time
  - Hybrid outcomes
- *Caveat: This is not exhaustive, but (hopefully!) illustrative...*

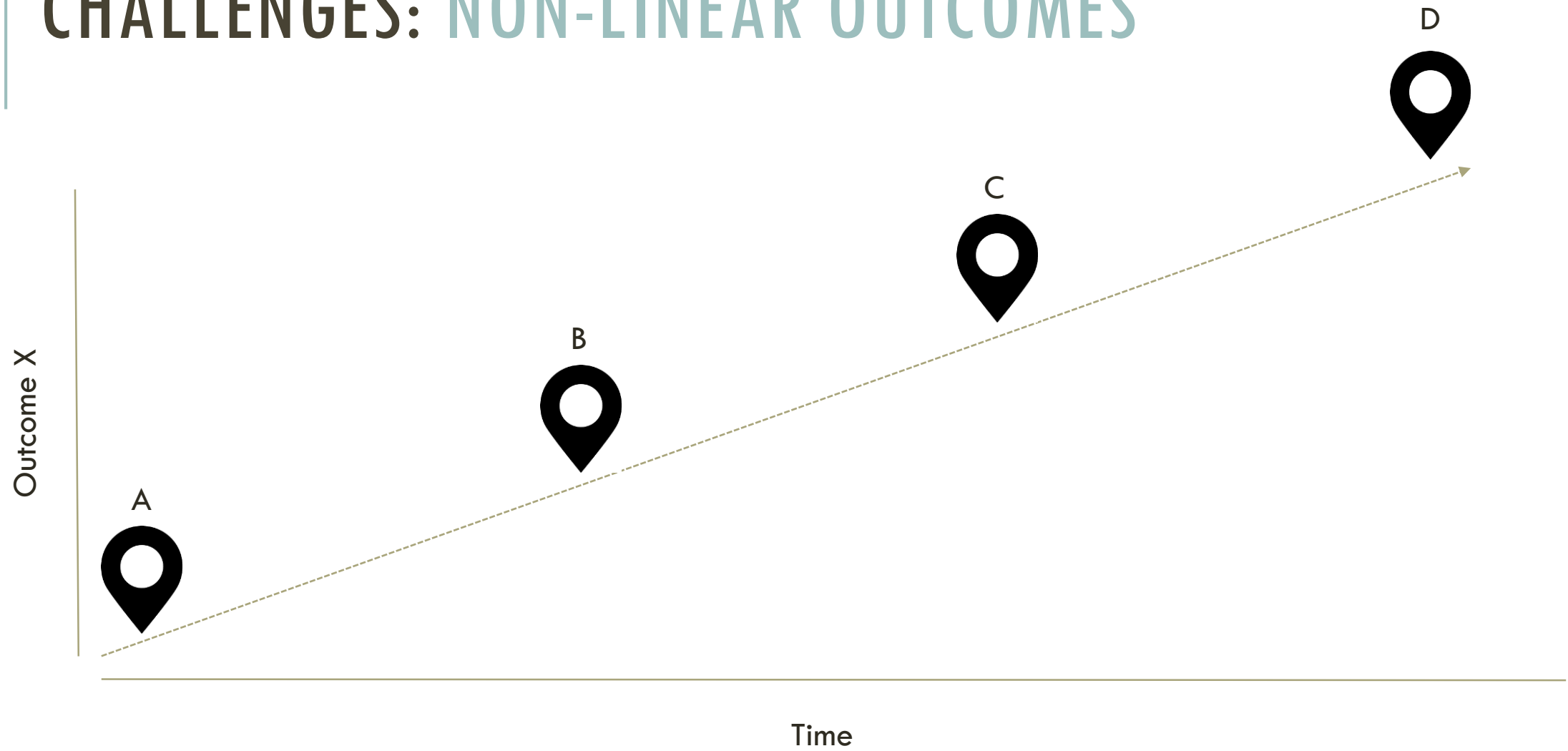
# CHALLENGES: NON-LINEAR OUTCOMES

- **Programme logics** are an evaluator's best friend; they clearly map out the logic behind social programmes/interventions. In theory,  $A+B = C$ , but...



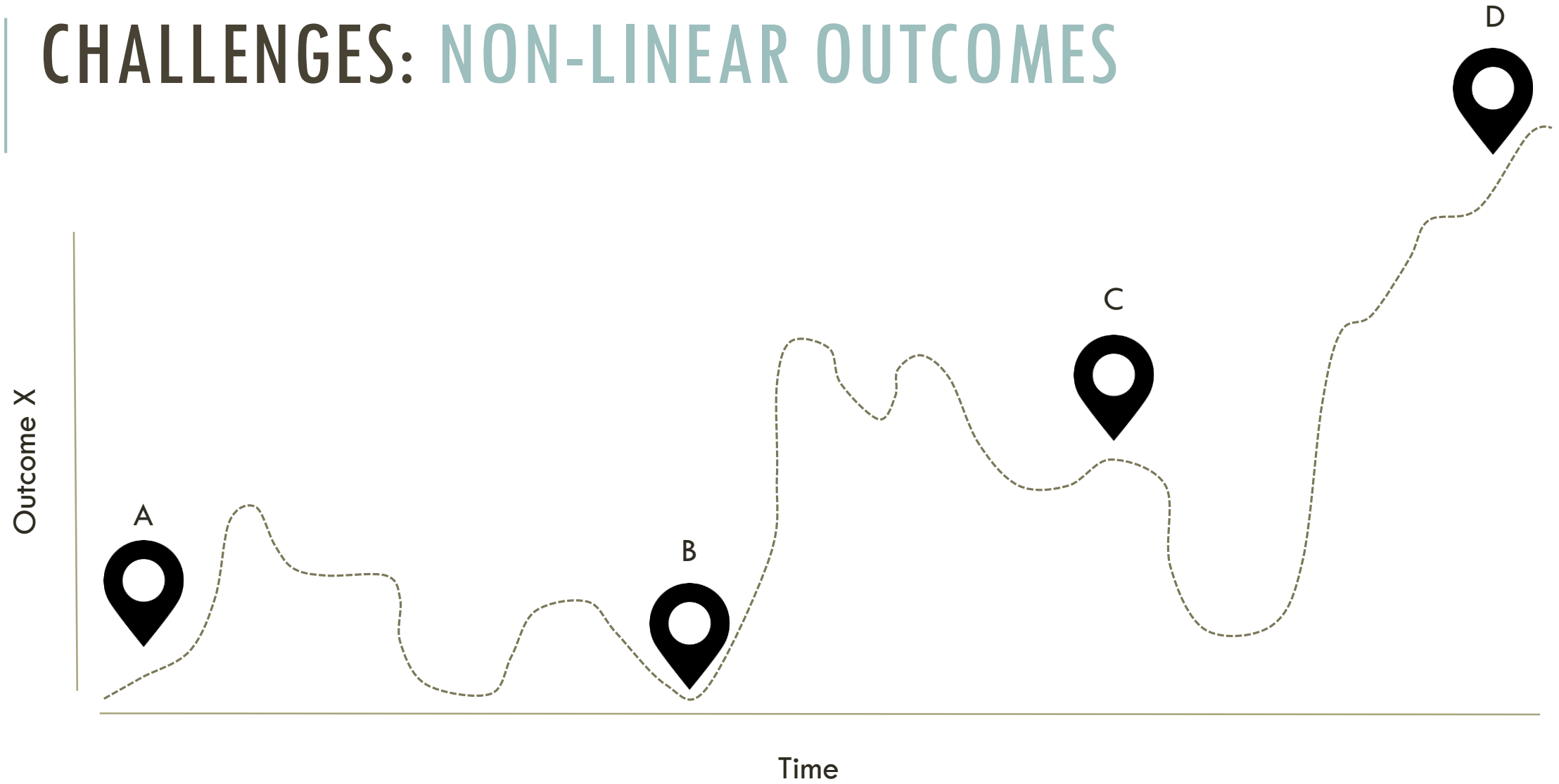
- Peoples' lives & experiences of social programmes/interventions can rarely be pigeonholed into these neat little boxes.
  - May include unforeseen results that are beyond the scope of the program logic and thus, not measured.
  - Results identified in the program logic may not align with what individuals and/or communities perceive as important.
- Often times, “The real outcome of a social policy intervention – the meaning of any change to that person – can only be understood in relation to the complexity of their lives” (Lowe 2013, 213).

# CHALLENGES: NON-LINEAR OUTCOMES

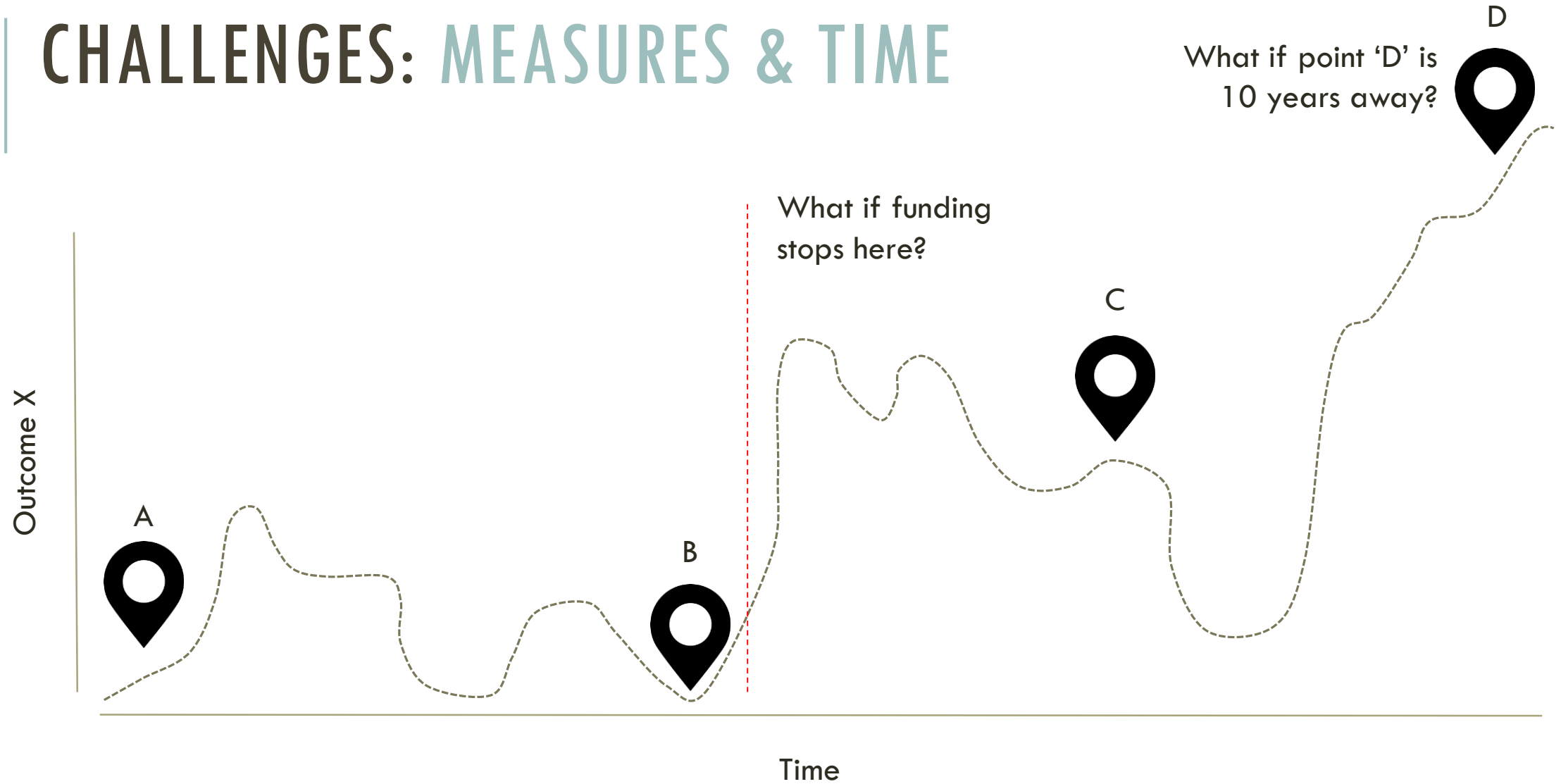




# CHALLENGES: NON-LINEAR OUTCOMES



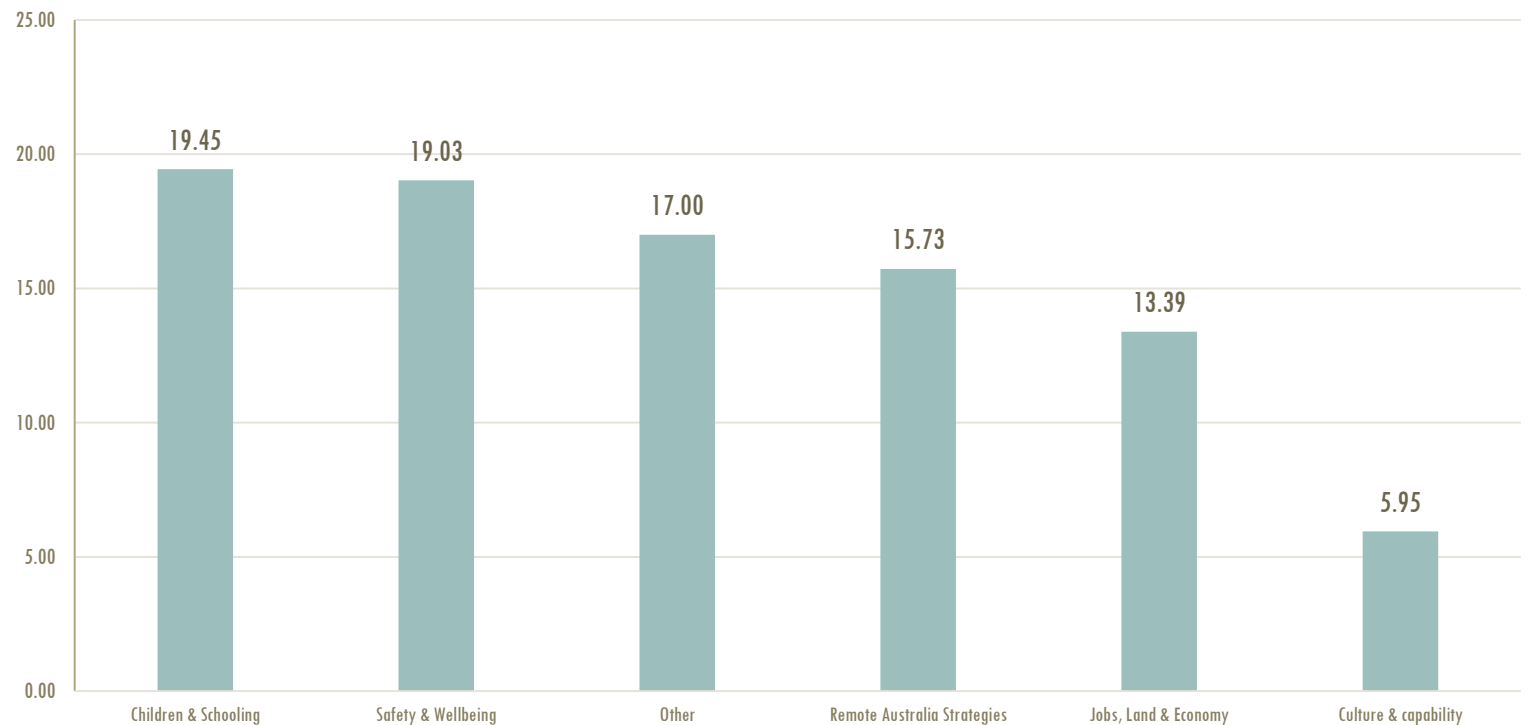
# CHALLENGES: MEASURES & TIME



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- Of all grants awarded under the IAS from 2014-2019, average term was 12.1 months
- Upper average of 19.45 months (Children & Schooling) and lower average of 5.95 months (Culture & Capability)
- Social change takes time, and service providers and social workers need some level of security...

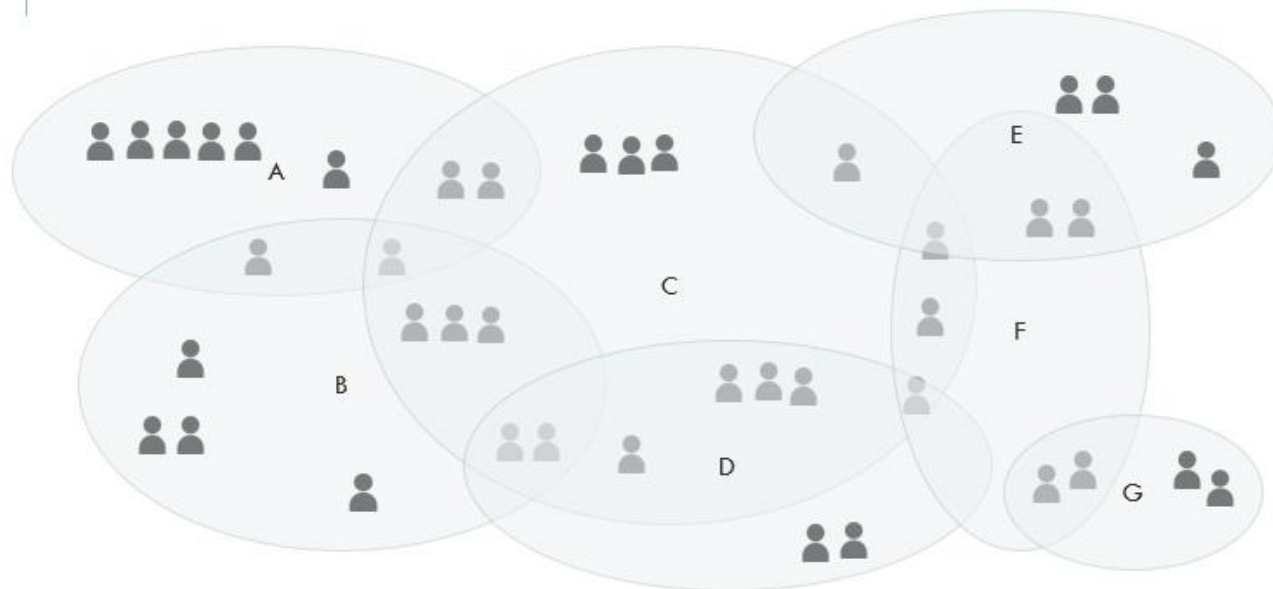
Average term of IAS grants administered via each stream, 1 July 2014 to 14 June 2019



*Note: Calculated by the author, based on data extracted from the DPM&C IAS grant-reporting database, as at 14 June 2019. In these data, extensions on previously awarded amounts are counted as separate grants.*

# CHALLENGES: HYBRID OUTCOMES

- In remote communities in particular, small populations
- Programme saturation (Hudson, 2017; Staines & Moran, 2019; WA DPM&C, 2014)
- ‘Treated’ with multiple interventions
- Addressing the counterfactual?



*“At any one time, there is likely to be a myriad of interventions affecting the Indigenous population... If another Indigenous community is used as the counterfactual, it is certainly the case that the ‘control’ group is also treated – just with a different set of policies and programmes...”*

*Therefore, standard evaluation techniques provide only an estimate of the marginal difference between one set of interventions and another set, many (indeed most) of which is overlap. This is almost never the estimate we want...” (Cobb-Clark, 2009, 86)*

# SUMMARY: RENDERING TECHNICAL & INCREASING RISK

- The IAS involves the ‘**rendering technical**’ of often complex circumstances of social disadvantage and re-imagining of complex poverty as an ‘intelligible field’ with defined boundaries that can be easily diagnosed and addressed in simplistic and technical terms (Li 2007, 7).
- The IAS also devolves a significant amount of evaluative work to service delivery organisations, which must grapple with the many challenges of undertaking research & evaluation where the stakes of failure are extremely high. **The reality is that programme providers must demonstrate their impact, or else potentially lose their funding.**
- How can this be better balanced?

# FUTURE APPROACHES: WAYS THROUGH THE REEDS?



- A return to key principles of empowering Indigenous communities to *frame* what success looks like, and define how to get there.

*“...Indigenous social policy should be evaluated in the context of self-determination and empowerment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.” (Malezer 2012, 69)*

- Lead with the ‘place’, not the programme... For instance, through collective impact and other jurisdictionally-bound approaches to enable the prioritisation of community governance and decisionmaking.
- The science wars continue...
  - *We cannot assume that positivist approaches will give us the results we need. The application of ‘hard science’ methods to social science questions is not always fruitful, helpful and certainly not always valid!*
  - *Need for a mix of positivist and constructivist approaches. Qualitative methods, such as fiscal ethnographies (Porter and Watts, 2017) and case-study research can help us to map and understand individual trajectories through programmes, as well as collecting richer data that might help us to improve programmes over time (Marston and Watts, 2003).*

# FUTURE APPROACHES: WAYS THROUGH THE REEDS?



- Firmness of outcome targets based on 'fuzziness' of intervention? (Ter Bogt, Van Helden and Van Der Kolk, 2015)



## Fuzzy

- New and innovative interventions
- Little to no existing evidence base
- 'Trial' or 'pilot' approaches
- Outcomes able to be fuzzy
- 'Safe fail' contracting to support iterative development
- Constructivist approaches to understand trajectories (e.g. narrative inquiry)

## Clear

- Tried and tested interventions
- Strong existing evidence base
- Move beyond trial/pilot model
- Outcomes clearly known and set
- Performance-management approach more justified
- Positivist approaches *may* be useful in assessing outcomes (e.g. psychometrics)

# SUMMARY

- Ultimately, the IAS (like other outcomes-focused frameworks) poses many difficulties for service delivery organisations – particularly those working in remote settings. Organisations must demonstrate their impact (!), or else lose their funding.
- There is a need to rethink the ‘partnership’ approach of the IAS to ensure *actual empowerment...*
- There may also be other ways of thinking about the contracting environment that enable fuzzier interventions to construct outcomes as they go...



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