

# ENGAGEMENT IN PLACE-BASED CO-DESIGN

## How to use this tool

Use this Tool when designing an approach to Co-Design in the development of a place-based initiative, particularly one involving a wide range of partners, a degree of complexity in the issues being addressed, and a commitment to continuing Co-Design into the implementation of the initiative.

Tackling entrenched disadvantage or severe social problems (or even a specific challenge like improving child development outcomes) in a particular location typically involves a long term strategy including such elements as environmental scanning, service planning, service integration, information sharing, data linkage, collective impact approaches and significant new investment.

A key element in the success of any such initiative will be the extent to which the local community itself identifies and prioritises the issues before committing to shared responsibility for addressing them. Shared responsibility, owning both the problem and the solutions, is a pre-requisite for the Co-Design of the program logic or service models required to tackle more complex local issues.

This will be most effectively achieved if the community is involved from the beginning.

Multiple strategies will be required to tap into the expertise, knowledge and strengths of the community. Initially this engagement should be an exploration of the readiness of the community to begin to tackle the issues they face.

For example, is there an awareness that there is a problem? Is there an appetite for tackling the problem? Are there community champions who could lead some of the local actions (the 'small steps') that will need to be taken to begin the process?

If the answer to these questions is 'No', then the community may not be ready to engage in Co-Design and other local community capacity-building approaches will be needed before they are ready.

Successful engagement at this stage needs to be where the people are. For example, meeting young mothers at playgroup, talking to young people at sporting or community youth facilities or through schools, or running a focus group with seniors at the bowling club.

Engagement can also be online. Using social media to generate a conversation about how to meet the needs of the community is at least hypothetically possible. Local press can also help with promoting this engagement.

If sufficient interest is apparent then a pool of potential community participants will have been identified through these processes. They can then be invited to be part of a more formal (but necessarily still community based) process to Co-Design an approach with local community organisations, local government, State Government agencies and others.

## PLACE-BASED CO-DESIGN CASE STUDY

The project started with surveys of community members, service providers, community groups and industry leaders. Over 500 people contributed through surveys, focus groups and stakeholder meetings. Their advice helped shape the foundations for the work and began deeper community engagement work.

The project hosts a number of community conversations by visiting playgroups, Pram Jam and Storytime at libraries, day care centres and schools. It also joined events for National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day and Children's Week and other local events.

Venues for meetings have alternated between the local governments involved, ensuring that there is equal access to stakeholders from both locations.

In order to facilitate decision making, information is provided to all stakeholders before the meetings. This assists in making sure that decisions are made quickly and without too much discussion around background information. If a consensus is not reached on a decision, a working group will be formed to discuss the decision on a deeper level. Other times, only more detail is required and provided out of session and decisions will be made via email.

Community engagement processes set up in the initial environmental scanning and local system level planning will form the basis for ongoing development of the place-based initiative, so it is important to get these processes right in the early stages.

Place-based initiatives differ from more straightforward procurement processes in that the Co-Design phase does not have a clear start and end date, so it may be necessary to establish a range of governance mechanisms to oversee and implement the initiative. For example, the case study cited above has three main elements to its governance:

- ▶ a Joint Commissioning Committee made up of senior government, non-government and corporate officers to provide leadership, act as champions for the initiative and be single conduit for funding
- ▶ a Joint Leadership Team (made up of representatives of the two local governments involved, community sector service delivery organisations, State and Commonwealth government agencies, local industry, investors and potentially families) is the primary operational decision making body
- ▶ an Auspicing Organisation which holds the funds and employs the operational team.

The governance arrangements will vary from place to place but the key point is that the initial engagement and relationship-building at the start of the planning stage will set the scene for the ongoing collaboration required.

## ADVICE FROM A PLACE-BASED CO-DESIGN INITIATIVE

1. Leave your logos and egos at the door
2. Community engagement and participation is not an optional extra. Community should be embedded in your decision-making and governance. Have community workshops, they are your most effective resource
3. Get financial support early, and shared commitment and willingness to work in new ways
4. The auspicing body doesn't need to comprise specialists in the field, it needs to be able to manage the money and hold the space for decision-making around financial and legal matters
5. Having challenges to focus on helps get the work done, build relationships and trust and work towards results. When you get stuck ask yourself: Is it power? Is it time? Is it resources?
6. Alignment of values will help you get through the tough times and be prepared to learn from others and learn as you go
7. Share leadership and share the load. Come prepared to share your power
8. Come prepared to give up long held views or ways of doing things
9. If you can't effect the change needed, identify who can and get them to the table and get out of the way
10. Manage expectations early. Be clear on what you are actually doing
11. Everyone expects to be at the table but that isn't always possible. Be clear on who the key players are so that you have the right people making the right decisions
12. Don't wait to start. Sometimes just starting the conversations will allow you to start achieving your goals and objectives
13. Don't over think it!