

# 8

## ENGAGEMENT

### Introduction

Complex problems in social policy are, almost by definition, multifactorial. That is, many social problems arise as the result of the interplay of multiple discrete and sometimes reinforcing factors. For instance, the collaborations investigated for this book came into being because key policy actors recognised that the problems they sought to address could not be ameliorated by one organisation or discipline acting on its own.

For example:

- Offenders re-entering the community on completion of a custodial sentence require articulated supports from a range of sources to obtain accommodation, find employment, access mental health services, get help with addiction or gambling and re-establish connections with their families and communities, among other possible needs.
- Community preparedness for bushfires, floods, extreme weather events and other hazards hinges on having clear, well-understood protocols for the coordination and deployment of community assets, including volunteer firefighters, emergency management authorities, police, state emergency services, energy providers, financial institutions, landowners, local businesses, local councils, schools, hospitals and many others.
- Reducing the incidence of childhood obesity requires local governments, businesses, schools, community health workers, primary healthcare workers, local sporting associations and citizens (among others) to work together towards a set of common goals utilising a coherent framework for action and impact.

- Violence against women and children cannot be tackled at a societal level unless governments, key social institutions, civil society organisations, researchers and community leaders can reach a broad consensus about the major contributors to gendered violence, the required actions and coherent multidisciplinary practice frameworks.
- At-risk children and families depend on teachers, school principals, primary healthcare providers, community mental health professionals, social workers, police, the courts, community leaders and others working together within a broadly agreed understanding of the nature and scope of the problem, and with a shared commitment to coordinated action.

For each of our cases, successful collaboration depends on the willingness of partners—including individuals, community groups and organisations—to:

1. commit resources (for example, people, time, expertise, facilities and money)
2. ensure that their respective authorising and management systems support (or at least do not impede) collaborative endeavour.

With respect to the latter, it is important to bear in mind that each organisation has:

1. its own operating logic, founding story and mission
2. a distinct administrative history and an organisational culture shaped by that history
3. operating systems designed to serve its core business and governance requirements
4. unique stakeholder relationships framed around its core purposes.

With respect to the last point, it is important to understand that successful collaboration depends on earning the trust, confidence and support of multiple internal and external stakeholders who bring diverse interests, perspectives, perceptions, sensitivities and power relations to the table.

## Engagement strategies

The collaborations studied used a variety of formal and informal processes to engage with stakeholders.

**Table 8.1 Engagement strategies**

Collaboration	Principal engagement strategies
Change the Story	The national framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children was informed by extensive consultations undertaken around the country with researchers, practitioners and policymakers—from community and non-governmental organisations, services and networks to government agencies at all levels.
Community-Based Emergency Management	The reform of Victoria's emergency management arrangements was built on a public conversation about three seminal documents: the 2011 <i>Green Paper: Towards a More Disaster Resilient and Safer Victoria</i> , the 2012 <i>White Paper: Victorian Emergency Management Reform</i> and a 2017 discussion paper, <i>Resilient Recovery</i> , which proposed a Resilient Recovery Model intended to empower communities, government, agencies and businesses to plan for and achieve recovery outcomes.
WHO STOPS	<p>WHO STOPS involves a facilitated community engagement process in which local leaders bring people together to: create an agreed systems map of childhood obesity causes for a community; identify intervention opportunities through leveraging the dynamic aspects of the system; and convert these understandings into community-built, systems-oriented action plans.</p> <p>Local backbone groups based in Portland and Hamilton, Victoria, engage with a wide range of external stakeholders, including health practitioners, primary healthcare providers, local government, schools, clubs and local associations and businesses, to raise awareness of the causes of and contributors to childhood obesity, and to stimulate community responses to the problem and encourage population-level behaviour change.</p>
Throughcare	<p>The Extended Throughcare Governance Group, co-chaired by the CEO of ACT Corrective Services and a representative of the Australian Capital Territory's community sector, was established to oversee the implementation of the initiative.</p> <p>The co-chairing model was intended to encourage the community sector to take a primary role as a partner and has had the effect of encouraging strong community buy-in as well as helping to make the program more responsive to the diverse needs of its client base.</p> <p>The governance group was the primary forum in which community-sector views were brought to the table for discussion and action. The model relied more on informal caucusing among stakeholders than on any formal engagement strategy. One government group member conceded that engagement occurred primarily at an organisational level, and not directly with prisoners themselves.</p>

Collaboration	Principal engagement strategies
Children's Teams	The Children's Action Plan flows from: a 2011 green paper probing community views about the adequacy of responses to the needs of vulnerable children and families; a 2012 white paper that set out the New Zealand Government's commitment to establish local Children's Teams that would bring together professionals to assess the needs of vulnerable children using a common assessment approach and, where required, form a joined-up intervention plan; and a 2015 expert panel that identified a number of structural and systemic deficiencies with the delivery of services for vulnerable children and their families. Public consultations in the formative stages of the action plan were undertaken in various parts of the country, and the feedback from these conferred legitimacy on the government's actions. Since their establishment, Children's Teams Local Governance Groups—consisting of senior managers from core service delivery agencies and, where appropriate, other key partners such as non-governmental organisations, <i>iwi</i> (tribes) and local government representatives—have provided the primary interface for community engagement.

## Collaboration practice

Head (2008: 739) notes that much of the literature on collaborative networks focuses on good processes using the lens of 'practice' knowledge. Head identifies eight process and relationship issues that are likely to be critical for the success of networked governance arrangements:

1. Aligning the perspectives of different kinds of stakeholder groups and, in so doing, managing diversity and making good use of diverse skills.
2. Eliciting a strong political mandate to find acceptable solutions to the problem and to fund the strategies arising from joint efforts.
3. Focusing on local capacity-building, especially in relation to local and regional initiatives.
4. Building trust through a confidence-building process (noting that trust is rarely a starting point but is 'earned').
5. Cultivating a learning orientation that enables the collaborative entity to develop and review common goals, adjust strategies in the light of experience, build long-term relationships, avoid a culture of blame, provide sufficient time for processes to work and learn to deal with the dual identity of participants (as members of the collaborative entity and as representatives of their employing organisations).
6. Adopting clear rules for decision-making, governance and accountabilities for key tasks.

7. Encouraging and nurturing skills in bridging and linking among the sectoral stakeholder groups.
8. Leadership capabilities including ‘bridging’ skills (linking to external resources), ‘mobilising’ skills (making best use of existing assets and strengths), ‘persuasive’ skills (selling and marketing the benefits and strategic opportunities) and ‘adaptive’ skills (the capacity to deal with changing contexts and challenges, such as changing expectations and aspirations, turnover of membership, and reform fatigue) (Head 2008: 739–41).

## Collaboration process

Emerson et al. (2012) suggest that collaborative practice comprises three process components:

1. Principled engagement, which encompasses the four process elements of discovery, definition, deliberation and determination.
2. Shared motivation, which consists of trust, mutual understanding, internal legitimacy and shared commitment.
3. Capacity for joint action, consisting of procedural and institutional arrangements, leadership, knowledge and resources (Emerson et al. 2012: 20).

### Principled engagement

The process of ‘principled engagement’ is one in which ‘people with differing content, relational, and identity goals work across their respective institutional, sectoral, or jurisdictional boundaries to solve problems, resolve conflicts, or create value’ (Emerson et al. 2012: 10). Principled engagement enables partners to ‘develop a shared sense of purpose and a shared theory of action for achieving that purpose’ through the application of four basic process elements:

1. Discovery, which refers to ‘the revealing of individual and shared interests, concerns, and values, as well as to the identification and analysis of relevant and significant information and its implications’.
2. Definition, which refers to ‘continuous efforts to build shared meaning by articulating common purpose and objectives; agreeing on the concepts and terminology participants will use to describe and discuss problems and opportunities; clarifying and adjusting tasks and expectations of one another; and setting forth shared criteria with which to assess information and alternatives’.

3. Deliberation, in which a safe space is provided for '[h]ard conversations, constructive self-assertion, asking and answering challenging questions, and expressing honest disagreements'.
4. Determination, in the form of procedural decisions about operational matters or implementation, and substantive determinations concerning the outputs or end products of collaboration (Emerson et al. 2012: 10–11).

### Shared motivation

'Shared motivation' is defined as 'a self-reinforcing cycle consisting of four elements: mutual trust, understanding, internal legitimacy, and commitment' (Emerson et al. 2012: 13). Trust 'happens over time as parties work together, get to know each other, and prove to each other that they are reasonable, predictable, and dependable' and has been found to be 'instrumental in reducing transaction costs, improving investments and stability in relations, and stimulating learning, knowledge exchange, and innovation' (Emerson et al. 2012: 13). Trust 'generates mutual understanding, which in turn generates legitimacy and finally commitment' (Emerson et al. 2012: 13).

According to Emerson et al. (2012: 14), 'mutual understanding' refers to the ability to understand and respect the positions and interests of others in ways that confirm that participants in a collective endeavour are 'trustworthy and credible with compatible and interdependent interests'. Mutual understanding 'legitimises and motivates ongoing collaboration' and leads to 'shared commitment' (Emerson et al. 2012: 14).

### Capacity for joint action

Collaborative governance requires the generation of 'new capacity for joint action that did not exist before and sustain or grow that capacity for the duration of the shared purpose' (Emerson et al. 2012: 14). Emerson et al. (2012: 14) conceptualise the capacity for joint action as the combination of procedural and institutional arrangements, leadership, knowledge and resources.

## Ten propositions for principled engagement

Emerson et al. (2012) summarise their findings in the form of 10 propositions.

- **Proposition One:** One or more of the drivers of leadership, consequential incentives, interdependence or uncertainty are necessary for a collaborative governance regime (CGR) to begin. The more drivers that are present and recognised by participants, the more likely it is a CGR will be initiated (Emerson et al. 2012: 10).
- **Proposition Two:** Principled engagement is generated and sustained by the interactive processes of discovery, definition, deliberation and determination. The effectiveness of principled engagement is determined, in part, by the quality of these interactive processes (Emerson et al. 2012: 13).
- **Proposition Three:** Repeated quality interactions through principled engagement will help foster trust, mutual understanding, internal legitimacy and shared commitment, thereby generating and sustaining shared motivation (Emerson et al. 2012: 14).
- **Proposition Four:** Once generated, shared motivation will enhance and help sustain principled engagement and vice versa in a 'virtuous cycle' (Emerson et al. 2012: 14).
- **Proposition Five:** Principled engagement and shared motivation will stimulate the development of institutional arrangements, leadership, knowledge and resources, thereby generating and sustaining capacity for joint action (Emerson et al. 2012: 15).
- **Proposition Six:** The necessary levels for the four elements of capacity for joint action are determined by the CGR's purpose, shared theory of action and targeted outcomes (Emerson et al. 2012: 15).
- **Proposition Seven:** The quality and extent of collaborative dynamics depend on the productive and self-reinforcing interactions among principled engagement, shared motivation and the capacity for joint action (Emerson et al. 2012: 17).
- **Proposition Eight:** Collaborative actions are more likely to be implemented if: 1) a shared theory of action is identified explicitly among the collaboration partners, and 2) the collaborative dynamics function to generate the needed capacity for joint action (Emerson et al. 2012: 18).

- **Proposition Nine:** The impacts resulting from collaborative action are likely to be closer to the targeted outcomes with fewer unintended negative consequences when they are specified and derived from a shared theory of action during collaborative dynamics (Emerson et al. 2012: 18).
- **Proposition Ten:** CGRs will be more sustainable over time when they adapt to the nature and level of impacts resulting from their joint actions (Emerson et al. 2012: 19).

## What the cases tell us

As might be expected, each of our cases exhibited contextually unique features. Importantly, all of the cases evidenced important commonalities from which we might draw a number of generalisable ‘lessons’.

## It is all about relationships

Interviewees across all cases spoke about the importance of relationships—and relationship-building—as the bedrock of effective collaboration. Constructive relationships—interpersonal and interorganisational—are the precursors of trust, credibility and legitimacy. For many working on the front line, the interpersonal takes precedence over the interorganisational:

It comes down to individual personalities and people type. I know because I worked on the front line for a very long time. But, if I needed something done, I knew who to pick up the phone and talk to and who would move the mountains for me and who wouldn't. (Senior official, Children's Action Plan Directorate)

And, when it comes to earning the trust of external stakeholders, connectedness to local communities is a distinct advantage:

Part of the primary operating mechanism or principle is, if you don't have a relationship then you can't earn the trust. So, you've got to work through it. You've got to grow the relationship to then earn the trust to then get the social licence. I think that's why 99 times out of 100 having someone that's local but with credibility is quite important. (Whangarei Children's Team)

## Respectful conversations

A consistent element in each of the cases examined for this study is the capacity for leaders to engage in respectful conversations with a wide range of stakeholders about the purpose of the collaboration. Such conversations are not simply about informing, but also about eliciting information and soliciting views and about demonstrating a capacity to listen and give weight to people's opinions (see also Chapter 7). These conversations can be a catalyst for the reframing of issues and the articulation of new solutions and approaches. One interviewee from New Zealand emphasised that it is imperative to 'listen louder':

Listen louder, because you can't go into a collaboration with preconceived ideas about how other people might work, how other organisations might work. You have to learn that and understand that through experience. So, if there's only one thing I say, it's 'listen louder'. You need to understand it before you can start passing judgement and before you can start influencing.

## Internal and external stakeholders

The 'relational' element of collaboration cannot be understated: like any relationship or set of relationships, things generally go better when participants have some understanding and tolerance of the motivations, world views and needs of all who have an interest or 'stakeholding' in the core purposes and operations of the collaboration.

*Internal stakeholders* might include the following:

1. People who are accountable for partner organisations' performance, such as the executive or board, who need to be kept aware of relational, financial, legal, reputational or political risks that might arise from collaborative action.
2. People responsible for administering a partner organisation's programs and services (that is, output activities), especially where they are responsible for the delivery of services (including contracted service provision) to people, groups or communities directly affected by collaborative action.
3. People within partner organisations who are accountable for specific corporate support functions (for example, input activities such as human resource management, branding and communications, information

management, financial reporting, occupational health and safety, professional standards and statutory obligations) that might come into conflict with some of the operational aspects of collaborative action.

*External stakeholders* might include the following:

1. Professional associations, unions or accreditation bodies that might have an interest in the potential implications for their members of collaborative action.
2. Communities in which collaborative action occurs, and which might be affected in some way (including local government, residents' groups, community associations or other localised interest groups).
3. Peak organisations, industry associations, advocacy groups or other representative bodies that claim to represent the interests of the groups or communities that are the focus of collaborative action.
4. Policy communities (in government, civil society or academia) that are curators/holders/mediators of knowledge about the particular problems or issues that are the focus of collaborative action.

Constructive engagement with both internal and external stakeholders around the rationale for collaboration is an essential element in any collaboration strategy. It helps to:

- reduce institutional and stakeholder resistance
- ensure adequate resourcing
- maintain the support of authorisers.

## **Middle-management resistance**

Organisational collaboration partners often focus their engagement efforts outwardly in an attempt to persuade and reassure external stakeholders, leading them to overlook various internal stakeholders on whose goodwill and cooperation collaboration sometimes depends. A major barrier to effective collaboration is the prevailing incentives that discourage the kinds of trust and relationship-building on which collaboration rests. Those tasked with making collaboration happen should not blithely assume that executive-level authorisation necessarily means that all personnel within the organisation—particularly those exercising key 'gatekeeper' functions—are on board.

In those cases where collaboration has its origins in policy decisions promulgated by agency leadership in partner organisations, and implementation rests largely with frontline officers/workers, it has been observed that mid-tier managers can be a source of resistance because the incentive structures under which they operate tend to reward fidelity to operational protocols rather than risk-taking. Typically, such resistance was described in terms of territoriality—mid-tier managers protecting their ‘turf’. What is particularly interesting is that collaboration partners report encountering resistance from mid-tier bureaucrats within their own organisations in spite of unambiguous executive-level support for collaboration.

It is at this level, perhaps, where the dominant incentive structures reward territoriality, conservatism, risk aversion and excessive focus on outputs—all qualities that militate against genuine collaboration. It cannot be assumed that understanding or support for collaborative approaches exists at all levels within partner organisations; whereas communication strategies around collaboration tend to focus on external audiences, it is possible that internal messaging tends to be neglected:

We’ve had management buy-in, once we get the leadership buy-in. Then to implement it at an organisational level, what we are seeing is there needs to be that next level middle-management buy-in. Otherwise you’re going to hit roadblocks and it stalls. And they’re some of the challenges that we’re coming across at the moment.  
(WHO STOPS, GenR8 Change)

## **Champions and influencers**

Collaboration champions (within partner organisations) and influencers (within affected communities) can play an important role by championing the purpose, aims and methods of the collaboration and, in so doing, leveraging internal and external support. In the main, these are people who are capable of exercising influence within their organisations and constituencies and who are also supportive of the collaboration. The ‘soft diplomacy’ exercised by champions—in part, by sharing good news stories and celebrating achievements—should not be underestimated (see Chapter 3).

## Expert facilitation

Some of the cases—Change the Story, WHO STOPS and CBEM—have taken advantage of expert third-party facilitation in the early stages of their establishment to help the parties to arrive at a shared understanding of the problem and a shared vision of the way forward. Facilitation helps to break down barriers, establish commonalities, address differences and create trust in shared endeavour:

There's a mammoth range of views in the community about it and lots of people arguing—fighting—about things. We said: 'Hold on.' We convened a town hall meeting. We had maybe 130 people—no agencies, just people. We had it facilitated so that everybody got a chance to say what they thought about it and everybody else got a chance to hear that. And I think in lots of ways that was a good proof point to the groups in the community that, 'Hey, these guys mean what they're saying. They're just facilitating rather than trying to take decisions or lead.' (CBEM, Anglesea, Victoria)

To some degree, other cases have also relied on individuals exercising a brokerage role to bring parties to the table and to assist the collaboration team in its communications with external stakeholders (thereby building legitimacy).

## Establishing trust and legitimacy

Authenticity is critical in winning the trust and cooperation of stakeholders and in demonstrating legitimacy and earning a licence to collaborate. Being local is not sufficient on its own. A number of interviewees emphasised the importance of authenticity—illustrated by the following account of the consultation process underpinning Change the Story:

I think authenticity had to sit at the core of it, because otherwise the whole thing would crumble. You can't speak to this audience and that audience using language that is common to both and [that] brings in difficult theories and framings for some people without there being authenticity at the core of the process, the consultation, the partnership. That's tough stuff; it's not something you can necessarily articulate and say, 'This is how you do it' ... I think process wise, you can say this is what makes co-design different from just going out and doing it prior to your consultation, but I also think a big part of it is a willingness to participate in a process that is a partnership approach rather than a power dynamic.

In another setting, a former Children's Action Plan (CAP) official remarked on the esteem in which local Children's Team leaders are held and the trust accorded to them in their local communities as important factors in the success of teams in Rotorua and Gisborne:

That's what it was all predicated on: genuine, authentic, open-minded. But also the passion and the commitment—absolutely wanting to make the difference for the community. Community-minded people that wanted the best for their community and the children and families in it. Those aspects you'd rate 10 out of 10 in those two communities. They are just very evident, and that's what's important that they can teach the others. What did they do to get that? It wasn't just saying it will happen; they showed it. They demonstrated it. Their actions every day showed that. They went the extra mile all the time.

Another interviewee—again with regard to the implementation of regional Children's Teams—observed the importance of 'soft conversations' with stakeholders, and emphasised the importance of starting the conversation early while accepting that people might join the conversation at different stages:

A lot of that sitting around and talking and building [the team] and spending a lot of time before that Children's Team came together was a good way to actually get everybody to get along. You'd see it, people that had come from the start that were going along, that had turned up to every meeting, that were really buying into it by the end against some people that came in, say, three-quarters of the way through and had missed all of that soft conversation that you have that gets everybody on the same page. They had missed all of that, and then they're suddenly like, 'Why are we doing it this way?' That was very frustrating. There was quite a bit of that. If you didn't make sure that you had everybody on board right at the beginning, you lost something later on, especially if they were someone important or noisy or something.

Trust-building forms an integral part of building collaborative ways of working. In general, trust-building needs to be led and, in general, it might be expected that in any collaboration there will be a lead entity. The lead entity need not always be the organisation with the largest financial exposure; it is perfectly possible for collaborations to be led by entities that have a perceived legitimacy or moral authority that exceeds

their financial investment. And, in fact, it is possible that such a delegation might enhance, overall, the perceived legitimacy of the collaboration among affected communities of interest.

Three of the cases in particular—Change the Story, Children’s Teams and WHO STOPS—emphasised the importance of utilising analytics to aid ‘sense-making’. This was particularly important in making the case for a collaborative approach, authorising the deployment of assets and resources, building trust and support among varied stakeholders and gaining legitimacy. In the case of WHO STOPS, the involvement of researchers from Deakin University added considerable weight by conferring authority and legitimacy on key messages about obesity.

## Final observations

Top-down ‘command’ systems no longer hold sway in modern public sector management. Indeed, they have not held sway for some time, although it must be said that practice has been slow to follow theory. Sicilia et al. (2016) observe that public managers are obliged to listen to service users and affected community groups, to mobilise collective resources and knowledge in the public interest and to nurture coproductive behaviours. This is good advice in general, especially in the context of collaborative approaches to complex social problems.

Our aim in this text is to offer practitioners a pathway from ‘platitudes’ to impact. What does it mean, in practice, to listen to service users and communities of interest? How, in practice, do we mobilise resources and knowledge in the public interest? And how do we nurture coproductive behaviours?

The cases from this study offer useful lessons:

1. **Change the Story** involved three organisations working together in the family and domestic violence space to develop a coherent, evidence-based national practice framework. Our Watch, VicHealth and Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS) first reached a consensus on an agenda for action that included the comprehensive mapping of the peer-reviewed literature, the identification of and engagement with expert communities and open and robust consultations with government agencies, community

sector organisations, practitioner communities and advocacy groups around the country. This initiative demonstrated strong ‘listening’ with both service users and communities of interest. Change the Story explicitly sought to mobilise resources and knowledge in the public interest. The proposed framework had a strong evidential base; it was subjected to thorough expert review, and the final proposals were effectively communicated to diverse audiences. In so doing, Change the Story not only earned broad trust and buy-in, it also served to enlist the support of diverse communities of interest for the adoption of the framework by state and territory governments—thus amounting to a form of coproduction.

2. Victoria’s **CBEM** initiative is one product of a long period of soul-searching, public dialogue and institutional reform following natural disasters in that state that caused significant loss of life, extensive damage to private property and public infrastructure and enormous personal and collective trauma for survivors and communities. A new government entity, Emergency Management Victoria (EMV), was established to work with communities, government, agencies and business to ‘strengthen their capacity to withstand, plan for, respond to and recover from emergencies’.<sup>1</sup> CBEM operates by working with local organisations and community leaders to facilitate the crafting of locally led strategies to instil community resilience and build effective and sustainable relationships involving a range of community actors.
3. **WHO STOPS** is a collaboration between the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services and Deakin University. At the time of interviews, WHO STOPS provided oversight of two local collaborations, SEA Change (based in the coastal town of Portland) and GenR8 Change (based in the inland town of Hamilton). The two local initiatives are linked via the involvement of the Southern Grampians and Glenelg Primary Care Partnership. WHO STOPS aims to strengthen existing community capacity and confer community ownership on efforts to prevent childhood obesity (Allender et al. 2016). This occurred through a facilitated community engagement process led by researchers from Deakin University involving the provision of intensive training and support oriented around strengthening community leadership, workforce development, resources, partners, networks and intelligence.

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<sup>1</sup> See Emergency Management Victoria’s website: [www.emv.vic.gov.au/about-us/what-we-do/our-role](http://www.emv.vic.gov.au/about-us/what-we-do/our-role).

4. In New Zealand, the establishment of **Children's Teams** followed a similar trajectory. The Children's Action Plan (CAP) differed in the degree to which the process was government-led and formalised by the establishment of a government directorate comprising staff seconded from relevant ministries and agencies. The process entailed the production of a green paper and a white paper, which provided a platform for community consultations (or *hui*) throughout the country. As with Change the Story, the CAP was evidenced-based and the case for the creation of Children's Teams was made to agencies, unions, local government, professional groups, practitioners, civil society organisations and, in communities where Māori form a significant proportion of affected families, Māori community leaders. In communities such as Rotorua, Whangarei and Gisborne, local governance—or backbone—groups formed to brainstorm and implement the Children's Team model. Although the ideal of coproduction was somewhat challenged by occasional tensions with the directorate based in Wellington around what the local backbone group perceived to be an undue level of 'prescription', in the main, the Children's Teams in these locales can be said to be genuinely 'locally led'.

Our findings suggest that stakeholder engagement around collaboration differs from conventional approaches to engagement around policy or programmatic choices facing government. Whereas much government-led consultation centres on communicating and gaining public support for the substance of policy proposals or government initiatives, engagement around collaboration is much more about finding common ground in relation to the framing of problems, the identification of practicable solutions and obtaining a shared commitment to action. It is far less about 'box ticking' and is more about nurturing and sustaining an ongoing conversation that leads to impactful action.

## Practice considerations

1. Identify all organisational, community and individual relationships that are to some degree important to the collaboration. Try to characterise the nature of those relationships—for example, are they constructive or adversarial? Comprehensively map the ‘ecosystem’ in which the collaboration needs to operate.
2. Who are the internal and external stakeholders who need to be ‘brought into the tent’? Remember, stakeholders can be organisations, individuals or communities of interest. Within organisations, what functional or business lines need to be on side?
3. Think hard about the core messages at the heart of the collaboration; test assumptions and consider all sources of evidence that support or challenge the collaboration’s central value proposition.
4. Work hard to have respectful conversations. Think carefully about what respectful conversations look like. Identify sources of available knowledge and/or expertise that might be used to inform or guide an effective and consistent communication strategy.
5. Identify potential sources of middle-management resistance. Which core business functions within partner organisations are key to the operational success of the collaboration? For example, key players in communications, marketing, branding, legal, finance or human relations might need to be brought on board with the aims of the consultation. What strategies are available to gain the cooperation and/or support of these key gatekeepers?
6. Who are the potential collaboration champions in partner organisations? What avenues are available to enlist their support? Are they sufficiently well placed and well regarded, both in their organisations and externally? What opportunities exist to bring them into conversations with internal and external stakeholders?
7. Are there external influencers who might be enlisted to help promote the aims of the collaboration and build support among a wide range of stakeholders? These might include community leaders, leaders in civil society or business and others with a positive public profile and the capacity to reach multiple stakeholder audiences.
8. Consider the potential benefits of using an expert third-party facilitator to assist with the tasks of communication and building trust. This might be a private consultant or someone from an academic institution who has a professional interest in the objects of the collaboration, or it might be someone drawn from a community sector/civil society organisation who has standing within the relevant communities of interest.
9. It is important that any person acting in a facilitation role is seen to be impartial. Moreover, the facilitator must be capable of earning the respect of participants and stakeholders as well as being able to respond constructively to any disagreements or conflicts that might arise.

10. If engaging a consultant to perform this role, it will be necessary to confirm the availability of funds for the purpose (and, in this regard, it might be necessary to equitably share the costs between collaboration partners to ensure equal ownership of the process). It would also be advisable for collaboration partners to come to a consensus view about the brief provided to the facilitator and to ensure the brief is authorised by the executive of each partner organisation.

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