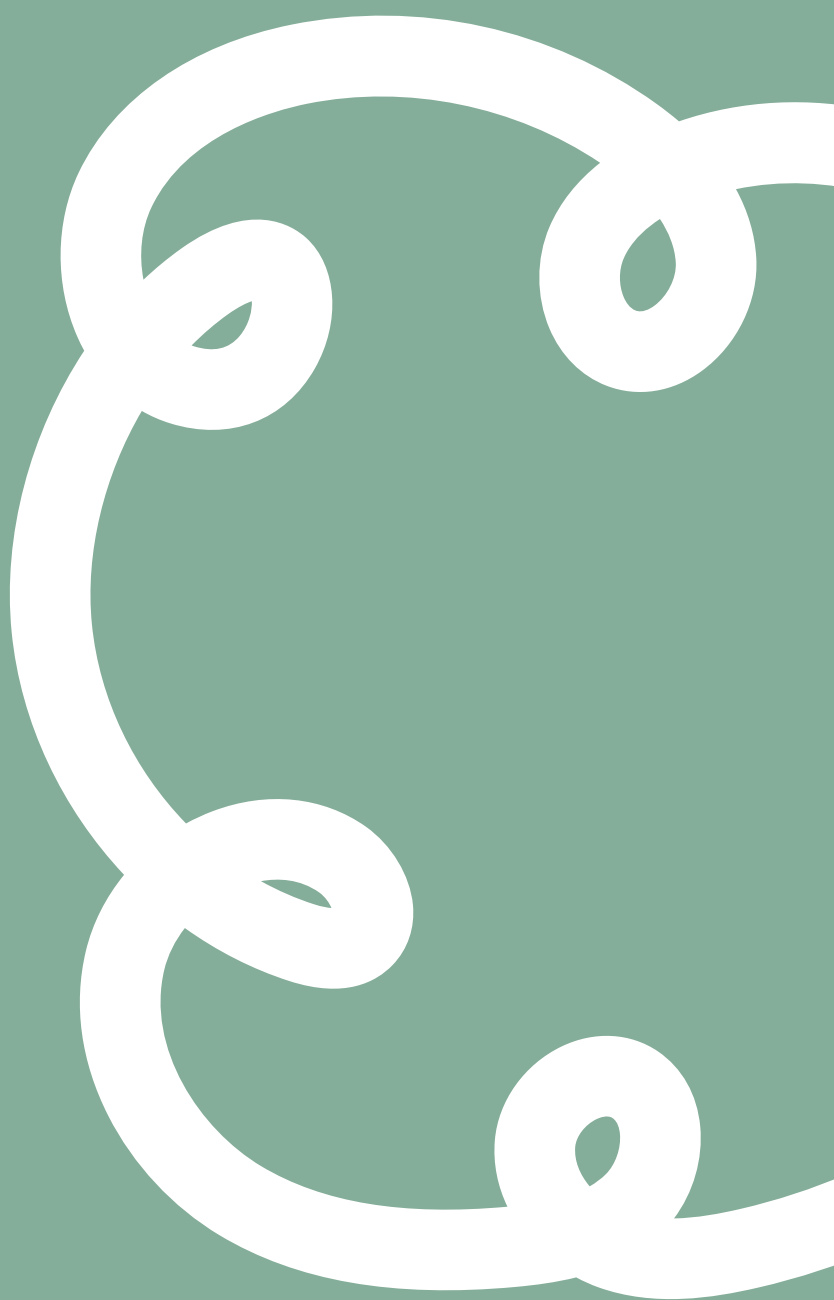


# Toolpack

## **Guiding strategies**



**Our  
Town**

# **Three tools to accompany 'Our Town: Catalysing communities to lead local change'**

After a year of working with rural and regional towns, the Our Town Support Team reflected on what we did, what we learned and what we'd do differently next time.

These tools, for people starting community-led initiatives, were developed to guide our future practice.

With some adaptation, we hope you'll find them useful too.

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## 1 Reflective questions

Prompts to help anyone planning a community-led initiative.

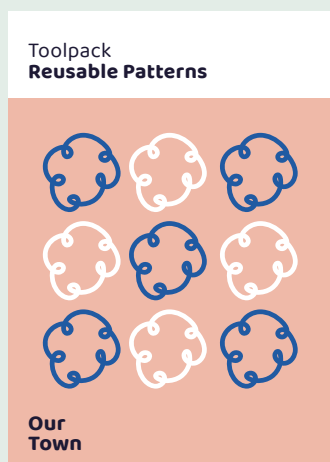
[View questions](#)



## 2 Guiding strategies

A set of principles, and practices to improve the outcomes of community-led initiatives in the early years.

[View guide](#)



## 3 Reusable Patterns

Inspiration for practical strategies based on what we did in Our Town in 2020.

[View patterns](#)

# 2 Guiding strategies

**Principles were key to helping the Our Town Support Team and Town Teams navigate the complexity of their work. Here, we share a set of principles and practices that capture what we think are the most important considerations when initiating community led work. With adaption, they could serve as a basis for planning, evaluation and conflict resolution.**

## Be principled

Use principles to provide an anchor for working in complexity.

### This can lead to;

- Increased coherence between partners, and between partners and communities.
- Accelerated decision making and increased agility.
- More rapid conflict resolution



### At an initiative and community level, this looks like...

Having a short set of principles, that are shared and well understood, to guide practice at all levels.

Principles that relate to:

- The vibe and perspective of the initiative
- Who is involved
- The process that informs decision making
- Who makes decisions

Being able to say what principles are, and what they are not in practice.

Establishing formal and informal routines that cause team members to reflect on their embodiment of the principles.

Making objections to decisions on the basis that they don't align to the principles.

Sharing and refining principles with all stakeholders in the initiative, including communities.

### This is not

Having general principles that apply to part of initiative, eg local teams, but not intermediary or funder.

Imposing principles on communities without them choosing to work with them.

Working without a plan.

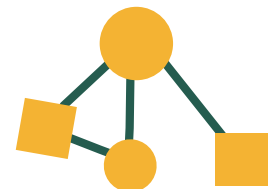
Anchoring around a procedure, or targets, or outcomes, or outputs.

## Distribute and grow power

Support intentional transitions of money, decision making, knowledge and capability.

### This can lead to;

- Increased self-determination by communities
- Increased agility and responsiveness at an initiative level.
- Increased relevance of initiative to communities.



At an initiative level this looks like...	At a community level this looks like...
<p>Enabling communities to opt into a program.</p> <p>Planned transitions in financial control.</p> <p>Planned transitions in decision making responsibility.</p> <p>Building capabilities in communities through a frontstage / backstage approach.</p> <p>Building community members into initiative decision making e.g. grant allocations.</p> <p>Taking time to build relationships between delivery partners.</p> <p>Partners taking responsibility for the whole.</p> <p>Recognising multiple hierarchies of knowledge, experience and power.</p>	<p>Community teams to discover for themselves the situation in their own community.</p> <p>Community teams develop competencies in</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Community-led organisation</li><li>- Innovation</li><li>- Specialist expertise (eg mental wellbeing)</li></ul> <p>Allowing towns time and creating opportunities to build their teams, and build trust in their teams.</p> <p>Building community teams in networked models.</p> <p>Connecting towns with towns as a network of mutual and practical support and learning.</p> <p>Building the number of people connected into the local initiative.</p>
<p><b>This is not</b> </p> <p>Initiative teams selecting in specific communities on their behalf.</p> <p>Maintaining a static power dynamic for the length of the program.</p> <p>Giving power to locally based orgs where decision making is not informed by diversity of lived experience.</p> <p>Limiting restrictions on who and what can be funded eg requiring orgs.</p>	<p><b>This is not</b> </p> <p>Communities becoming professionals or versions of the support team.</p> <p>Every town taking the same role, or expecting the town to take up roles of support team.</p> <p>Communities responding to demanding needs of the funder because their funding depends on it.</p> <p>One role, or one team design fits all communities.</p>

## 2 Guiding strategies

### Innovate to learn together

Embrace collaborative innovation.

#### This can lead to:

- Increased community understanding of the current situation
- Increased community ownership of ideas and actions
- Adaptive responses that stay relevant to the context.
- Higher-potential strategy – a focus on actual, rather than assumed issues.
- Accelerated learning and enhanced risk mitigation



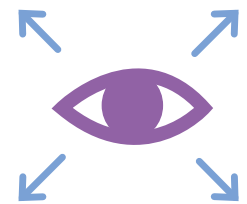
At an initiative level this looks like...	At a community level this looks like...
<p>Naming assumptions and unanswered questions about the systems you are working to transform.</p> <p>Naming assumptions and unanswered questions about the initiative design.</p> <p>Testing assumptions about the initiative design with communities, and through learning from best practice and research evidence.</p> <p>Building in developmental evaluation approaches to supercharge learning.</p> <p>Continually reflecting adapting and evolving based on community needs and insights into what works (eg from literature or other contexts).</p> <p><b>This is not</b> </p> <p>Tying everything down and managing to milestones without question.</p> <p>Designing a program without insight into community needs, wants and preferences.</p>	<p>Building community capability for social innovation; the capability to work through staged processes of discovery, invention and implementation.</p> <p>Supporting communities to discover the current situation in their towns.</p> <p>Learning from other people in your community – from research, from history and from other community led initiatives.</p> <p>Communities naming assumptions and unanswered questions about current situation and preferred future state across communities.</p> <p>Community members transforming their own understanding of their community.</p> <p>Communities testing assumptions through qualitative research, research evidence and prototyping.</p> <p>Communities developing an approach that draws on what's worked before, yet meets the unique needs of their context.</p> <p>Testing assumptions through discussion and prototyping.</p> <p><b>This is not</b> </p> <p>Starting with a presumed solution without being willing to revisit those assumptions.</p> <p>Professionals outside the community leading the process in communities.</p>

## Take a systemic perspective

See the big picture and take the long view to give the best chance of prompting transformational change.

### This can lead to:

- Organisations make their most meaningful contribution to change
- Community responses grounded in a full range of evidence
- Community responses grounded in long term transformational ambition
- Change efforts focused on high-potential leverage points



At an initiative level this looks like...	At a community level this looks like...
<p>Identifying and working with 'systems of outcomes' rather than formal service systems (eg systems of learning rather than schools)</p> <p>Taking time to understand the current state of the system and then identifying unique roles in relation to that, e.g. ability to make long term funding to the community.</p> <p>Securing long term investment in outcomes (or working towards that)</p> <p>Identifying the unique contributions the funder and towns can make to the system at local, state and national levels.</p> <p><b>This is not</b> </p> <p>Short term commitment of funds without intention to support longer term funding.</p> <p>Delivering on funder interests without a thorough understanding of the existing system and their relation to it.</p> <p>Giving power to locally based orgs where decision making is not informed by diversity of lived experience.</p> <p>Limiting restrictions on who and what can be funded eg requiring orgs.</p>	<p>Equipping communities to see the big picture in their locality by bringing together:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- the diversity of lived experience perspectives</li><li>- data</li><li>- research evidence</li><li>- historical perspective</li></ul> <p>Equipping communities to imagine alternative futures by drawing on their imagination and inspirational practice.</p> <p>Getting to root causes.</p> <p><b>This is not</b> </p> <p>Confusing any 'service system' for systems that create outcomes.</p> <p>Meeting the needs of the service system only.</p> <p>Overwhelming communities with information.</p> <p>An ambition for incremental improvement only.</p> <p>One role, or one team design fits all communities.</p>

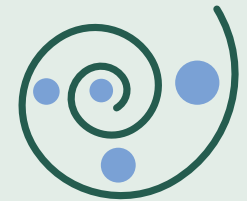
## 2 Guiding strategies

### Actively include people

Engaging with the full diversity of communities, and the full diversity within those communities.

#### This can lead to:

- Enhanced equity
- More representative leadership
- Increased number of people engaged in community leadership
- Improved decision making through consideration of a wider range of views.



At an initiative level this looks like...	At a community level this looks like...
<p>Allowing communities to make an informed choice to opt into the initiative.</p> <p>Submission processes that allow people to submit in a format of their choice.</p> <p>Out of hours working and coaching to allow community members to maintain their employment.</p> <p>Using plain language.</p> <p>Initiative level decision-making panels that include community members</p> <p>Initiative teams modelling inclusive practices - including use of pronouns, design of engagements, facilitation approach and culturally appropriate working.</p>	<p>Building the capability of communities to engage under-represented groups and individuals in community decision making.</p> <p>Including community members with opposing views in community teams.</p> <p>Deliberately building opposing views into teams and creating space for constructive conflict.</p> <p>Building cultural competency to support more effective inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander peoples in teams.</p> <p>Creating safe, yet brave, spaces for dialogue.</p> <p>Using pronouns.</p> <p>Acknowledging country and land.</p>
<p><b>This is not</b> </p> <p>Assuming existing community groups represent the actual diversity of the community.</p> <p>Application or selection processes that mark down poorly written or 'non professional' applications.</p> <p>Application/selection processes that make it easier for the initiative team, but harder for communities.</p> <p>Applications process that get communities to do the work professionals could do.</p>	<p><b>This is not...</b></p> <p>Everybody doing everything.</p> <p>Halting all work because the initial team does not represent the full diversity of the community.</p>




## Leave only good behind

Embrace healthy and developmental work cultures and processes so that people are able to give their best over time.

### This can lead to:

- Reduction and improved management of stress
- Reduced turnover – people are able to sustain roles over time
- Higher quality thinking, and greater creativity
- Increased value for communities that participate in any stage of the process



At an initiative level this looks like...	At a community level this looks like...
<p>Competitive processes where everyone leaves with a 'prize' that enables them to further their outcome.</p> <p>Creating value for participants at every stage of the process.</p> <p>Senior leaders acting with compassion towards community struggles.</p> <p>Explicit conversations about workloads and expectations for teams, and changing timelines if needed.</p> <p>Making considered changes to plans based on the needs of communities.</p> <p><b>This is not</b> </p> <p>Causing undue stress eg through arbitrary timelines set to meet funder needs not community needs.</p> <p>Senior leaders making untimely demands on teams or towns eg to make a particular objective.</p> <p>Entirely stress free work.</p> <p>Changing things just because they would work better for the initiatives, without considering the knock on for communities.</p>	<p>Embracing non-typical leadership models that allow community members to step forward and step back depending on personal circumstance.</p> <p>Trauma informed approaches to co-design and capability building.</p> <p><b>This is not...</b></p> <p>Communities unduly stressed to meet the needs of funders.</p> <p>Putting responsibility on a few shoulders in town teams.</p> <p>Overloading community leaders that were already overloaded.</p> <p>The participation burden being greater than the lasting value to communities.</p>

# Our Town

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