



# Community-Led Planning and Collaboration for Resilience

## A Practice Guide

A guide to working together, growing ideas, building strengths and taking action for what matters most



## Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians and Owners of the lands on which we work and live across Australia.

This report was created by people living on Boonwurrung/Bunurong, Ngambri, Ngunnawal and Wurundjeri Country. It draws on the experience of our Fire to Flourish program, which operates on Bidwell, Brinja-Yuin, Bundjalung, Djiringanj, Gumbaynggirr, Gunaikurnai, Kamilaroi, Monero, Walbunja and Yaegl Country.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and acknowledge the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples. We are committed to collaboration that furthers self-determination and creates a better future for all.



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### Images

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### Disclaimer

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# FOREWORD

WHEN FIRE TO FLOURISH WAS ESTABLISHED after the devastating summer bushfires of 2019–20, we set out with a simple yet powerful belief: that communities are best placed to lead their recovery and shape their future wellbeing and resilience.

Our purpose has always been grounded in enabling local communities to strengthen their resilience to disaster, gathering wisdom where it lives, and supporting communities as they envision futures built on hope, healing, collective strengths and possibility. Viewing recovery as an opportunity to build back better for a flourishing future, our mission has been to develop, test, and scale innovative solutions that enable community-led resilience while addressing entrenched disadvantage. We knew this would be long-term, relational work requiring patience, humility, trust, and a willingness to learn together.

Since then, we've had the privilege of walking alongside four remarkable partner communities in Tenterfield, Clarence Valley, Eurobodalla, and Far East Gippsland. Each is rich in heritage, unique landscapes, and lived experiences. And each has faced repeated and compounding challenges, from catastrophic bushfires, drought and devastating floods, to the isolation of COVID-19 and ongoing social, environmental, and economic uncertainties.

Together, we have witnessed that resilience is so much more than simply 'bouncing back': it's about growing stronger, more connected, and more confident in shaping a shared future, even in the face of disruption.

At the heart of this work are the Fire to Flourish community teams and the many community members whose leadership, creativity, and courage have shaped both our journey and this guide. Together, we have explored what it means to support recovery and resilience in a way that is genuinely local, placing choice and voice firmly with community. Through community-led design, planning and grantmaking,

and local resilience projects, communities have shown how recovery and resilience can be grounded in local strengths, values and creativity, while coming together as a community has strengthened relationships and created new opportunities for collaboration.

Fire to Flourish has been more than a program: it is a living collaboration between community leaders and an interdisciplinary team of researchers, practitioners, and cross-sector partners. This practice guide is born from that collective effort. It distils what we have learned over four years of listening, learning, and creating change, whether by reimagining local infrastructure, strengthening connection and social networks through art, or restoring the environment. It offers practical tools, ideas, and reflections that can be adapted to suit different contexts, whether you are preparing for future challenges or pursuing a shared community vision. Above all, it honours the leadership of community members across our partner regions and the deep impact they have created through their leadership.

I invite you to sit with this guide, adapt it, and bring it to life — whether you're leading your own community through change, supporting others in theirs, or are simply hopeful for what's possible when communities lead the way.

**Professor Briony Rogers, CEO Fire to Flourish**



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**Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.**  
(Margaret Mead)<sup>1</sup>

# Welcome!

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE AND WHO IT IS FOR

This guide is designed for community leaders, local groups, and anyone who wants to work together with their community for their community's benefit. The guide can be used to help plan for the future or address an identified issue, raise funds, support local action, and strengthen what is already strong in the community. Your starting point might be proactive preparation, recovery, renewal, or simply the desire to work together for your community's long-term wellbeing in a more coordinated way.

The guide was co-designed, tested and adapted together with members of diverse communities across Australia to support local groups as they prepare for or recover from disaster or respond to complex social, environmental, or economic changes. It is built on a simple belief: Communities are best placed to understand their own situation and what matters most to them.

Of course, not every challenge can be solved immediately or at the local level. Some challenges might feel too big for your community to take on. But don't be discouraged — there are steps you can take now and you'll be surprised how much can be achieved when people work together. Some issues and actions are within a community's immediate control, while others call for partnerships and longer-term advocacy beyond your local sphere.

This guide will help you identify what can be addressed now, here, and by your community, and where to team up for wider influence, and how to plan strategic steps that can contribute to shifting the larger system of how things work.

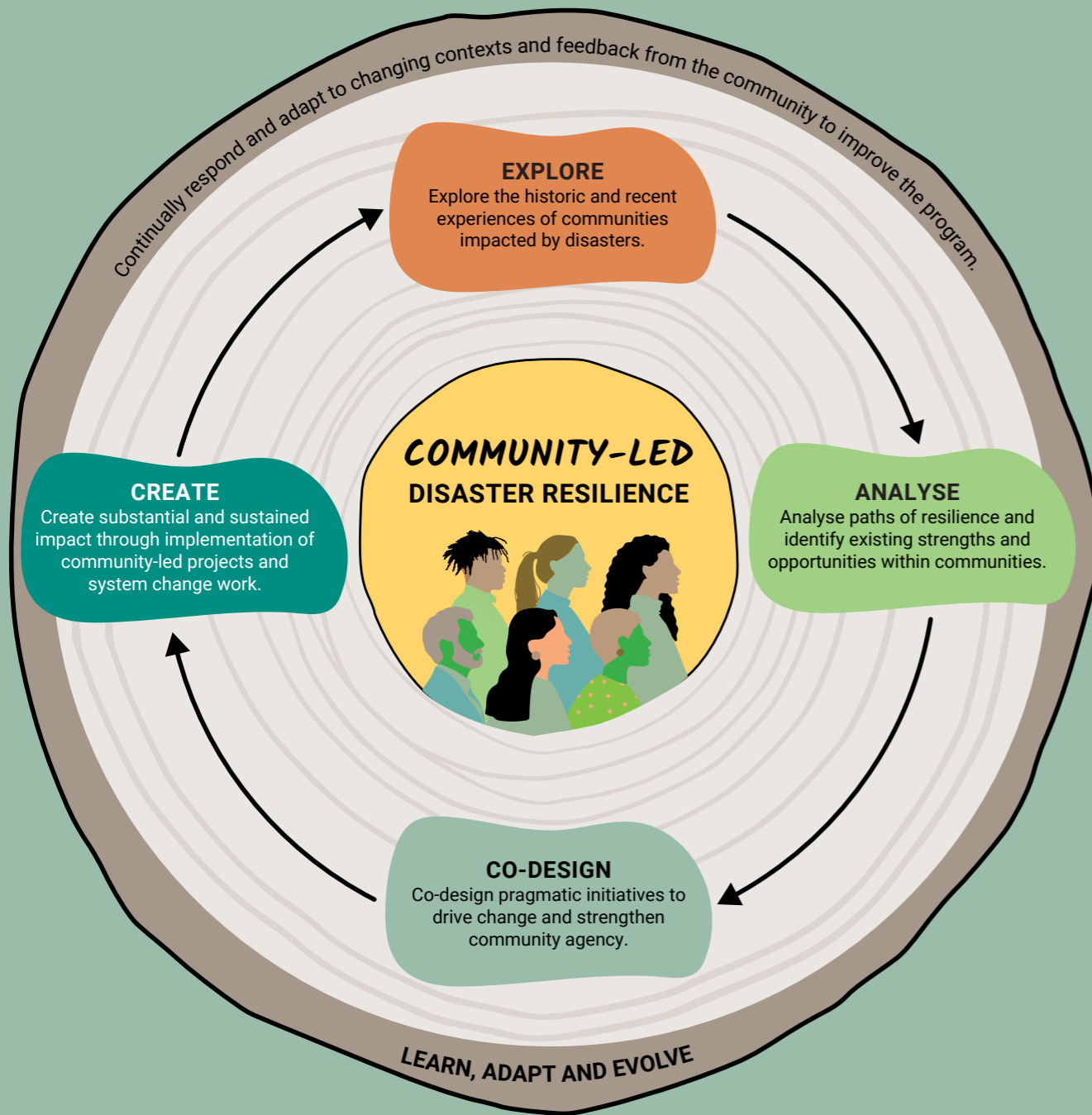
Meaningful change often starts with a small group of people and working together with others can make a real difference.

Rather than offering a fixed set of steps, the guide introduces a flexible, phase-based process that can be adapted to your community's own pace, context, and priorities. Each phase allows for one, two or more meetings or workshops and includes practical tools, activities, and reflection prompts to support conversations, planning, and shared decision-making, especially when different people or organisations bring different roles and perspectives to the table.




While the phases are designed to work as a sequence, your group can choose which outcomes are most relevant to your context and capacity. Each phase has a guiding intention and suggested outcomes that will assist you in deciding what you want to focus on, and the pace you want to work at.

Use this guide in a way that makes sense for your people and your place. Make it your own.

<sup>1</sup>Donald Keys (1982) *Earth at Omega: Passage to Planetization*, Branden Press, Boston, Massachusetts (Epigraph of Chapter VI: The Politics of Consciousness, Page 79)



**A FLEXIBLE GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS, GROUPS AND FACILITATORS TO:**

-  **Support communities and partners to lead planning and strengthen resilience and future wellbeing.**
-  **Help local groups make informed decisions about resources and priorities for action.**
-  **Strengthen relationships, skills and confidence to face challenges and drive positive change together.**

**HOW THIS GUIDE WAS DEVELOPED**

This guide was co-developed by Fire to Flourish and shaped through a 'learning-by-doing', co-design process with communities that had experienced bushfire disasters and other challenges. While the development initially drew on key elements of existing planning frameworks and tools, the structure and activities were co-designed, tested, and adapted by local groups to suit their own needs. This guide was put together by Fire to Flourish to share what was learnt and to help you get started in a way that supports your community's wellbeing and future. While it draws from specific experiences, the guide is flexible so it can be useful in a range of different settings.

**HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE?**

The phases and activities in this guide are flexible and can be adapted to suit your community's capacity, pace, and resources. As a general guide, each phase may take at least one or two gatherings, whether that is a meeting, workshop, or yarning circle. Keep in mind that you may also want to share, test and discuss your outcomes with the wider community to make sure as many voices as possible are heard and included.

You can meet weekly, fortnightly, monthly – whatever works best for your group. The timeline is yours to shape. Just remember: it often takes longer than expected, and that's completely okay. Leave space for the unexpected, and allow time to go slowly when needed – go at the pace of trust and community energy!

Different communities have done this in different ways. Some groups mix in-person and online gatherings to stay flexible. In-person meetings allow for deeper conversations, while online sessions make it easier to include more people, reduce travel, and fit around work and family commitments.

One group held six meetings – one for each phase – spaced out over 12 weeks. Another started with six meetings but extended the process once they got into it, choosing to slow down and take their time. You might want to opt for a shorter planning cycle and the guiding intentions and suggested outcomes have been included to assist you in making that decision.

**ROLES**

These roles are suggestions based on the experience of the Fire to Flourish process pilots. Depending on your context and the size of your community or group, the roles described here might blend together and people might wear different hats, looking after the logistics as well as doing some of the planning or facilitation. Just be mindful not to take on too much by holding too many threads at the same time.

**The Lead Team:** This process works best when it is locally owned and led by a small community-based team (the Lead Team) who can help with the practicalities: organising sessions, inviting people to participate, keep communication flowing, and supporting follow-up to ensure continued community ownership of the process and that everyone feels engaged and included.

**Facilitation:** It is great if someone in your group already has experience with facilitation but it is not essential. You will easily develop your skills along the way, sharing the process with others and learning together about what works. Practical tips, activities and tools for each of the process phases have been assembled in the accompanying 'Toolbox'. This has been linked at the end of this Guide to support you.

**Facilitating with awareness and care**

A facilitator's role is to make space for all voices, especially those who might not usually be heard. This means paying attention not only to what is said, but also to how power, confidence, culture, or experience shape participation. Facilitation is about balancing participation, protecting safety, and creating a sense of shared ownership. Over time, your community can build collective facilitation capacity and awareness so that everyone becomes skilled in holding fair and inclusive conversations.

Some things to be mindful of include:

- **Conscious and unconscious bias:** We all bring assumptions and preferences. Be aware of your own social position and how it may influence whose ideas feel more 'convincing' or 'feasible'.

- **Loudest voices in the room:** Confident or established community members can easily dominate. Actively invite quieter or less represented voices and build pauses into discussions.
- **Influenced decision-making:** Encourage reflection and check whether decisions are being made because they are shared or simply supported by those with influence.
- **Trauma and emotional safety:** Recognise that strong emotions may surface and create space for them without judgement.

Please also refer to the section 'Working with Care' in this Guide.

### The community planning group

These are the people from your wider community who have volunteered to participate in your meetings, shape the discussions and priorities for action, make decisions and connect with their networks to help make this a truly community-owned process, and leverage influence. A good starting size for this group is about 8–12 people – this is a 'sweet spot' that ensures there is reasonable diversity, while keeping the group manageable. Again, this can easily be adapted depending on your circumstances, and range from 5–15 or even more people.

**TIP!** There are pros and cons for having someone from your community do the facilitation:

**Pros: Someone local might...**

- better understand the people, relationships and issues in your community
- be better able to deal carefully and sensitively with local tensions or politics

**Cons: At the same time...**

- Locals might also be a bit too closely involved with your community to be truly independent or impartial
- Someone from a nearby town or community or even further might be a better fit.

**TIP!** Investing in Capacity and Confidence

As your Lead Team and Community Planning Group take on more responsibility, consider what support or training might strengthen your work. Areas that often benefit from additional learning include:

- Trauma-informed practice and community wellbeing
- First Nations cultural awareness and capabilities
- Community governance and shared decision-making
- Grant literacy and transparent funding processes
- Project management
- Understanding local and state government systems and regulations

Building these capabilities not only strengthens your group but also supports long-term community leadership and sustainability. Training can be peer-led, locally hosted, or supported by external partners – whatever fits your context and resources.

### Optional roles

**Deep listeners and note-takers** are helpful roles in working together and could be a (rotating) role for people in the planning group to ensure perspectives and nuances are genuinely heard, keep track of what you are learning and creating, and ensure that key points, decisions, and actions are recorded.

- Take photos of sticky notes, lists and other artefacts you create in your group sessions.
- It can be helpful to write these up as a record for everyone and as a resource to refer to later.

**Coach or Mentor roles**, while not an essential role, help create relationships with people from within or outside your group and could help support and guide you through this process – especially if you're new to this sort of work.

A mentor or coach would ideally be someone skilled at facilitation and experienced with the type of methods suggested here. They could be action researchers, facilitation practitioners or community development specialists, who can help you to design your process, bring ideas for specific activities, debrief after sessions, and be a general sounding board. Depending on your community's situation and needs, you might also consider someone with psychological training.

### Reflecting on roles, intentions and representation

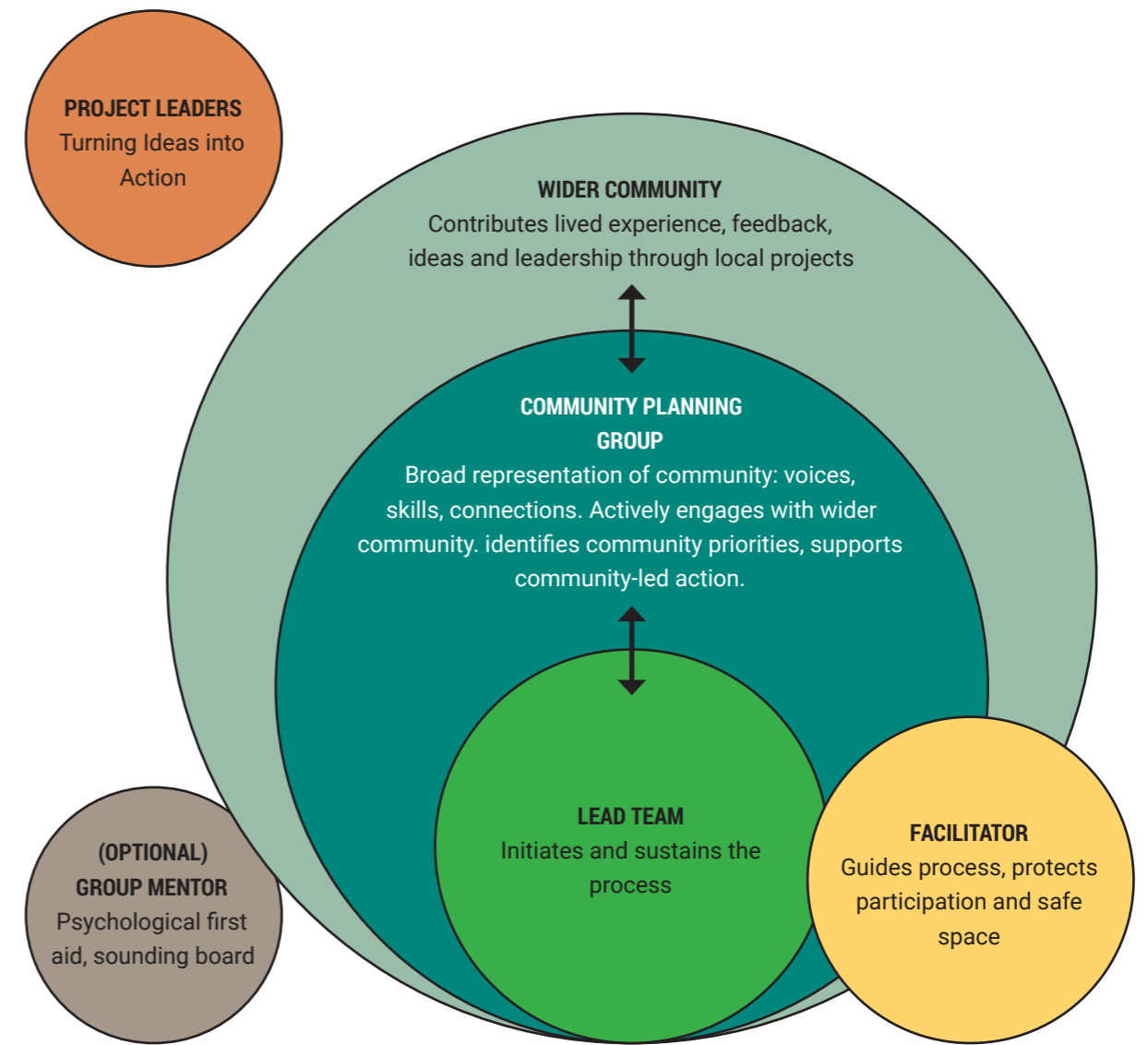
As your Lead Team grows in experience, it's important to regularly reflect on your group's role, composition, and intentions. Ask yourselves:

- Who is best placed to lead on a given issue or project?
- Are you creating opportunities for new or less connected community members to lead?
- Are you holding power or sharing it?

- Do you have clear processes for rotating or stepping back from leadership roles when others are better placed to take the lead?

Being transparent about your intentions and regularly revisiting your purpose helps build trust. It also prevents situations where funding or opportunities circulate among the same group of people.

Facilitators and community partners can help by prompting these reflections and ensuring that leadership opportunities remain open and inclusive.



Architecture for suggested roles

# CORE PRINCIPLES

As your community begins this process, here are some principles that can be valuable to guide your approach. They are a great place to start conversations and help anchor your group in a set of shared values and a purpose that you can revisit throughout the process, though you might choose to adapt and expand them to suit your own context.

## BE COMMUNITY-LED



**Be community-led:** Let the ideas, energy and leadership come from the community. Make sure local voices shape decisions and direction at every step so that the process belongs to the community, not just the organisers.

## FOREGROUND ABORIGINAL WISDOM



**Learn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, doing and being offer powerful guidance for learning and working together, to deeply Care for Country and people. Learn from this wisdom, and from the cultural knowledge of other communities too. Build relationships based on trust, respect and responsibility – and create strong partnerships along the way.

## ADDRESS INEQUITIES AND ENHANCE INCLUSION



**Be inclusive and equitable:** Design your interactions, activities and materials in ways that make it possible for everyone to participate, no matter their background, or how confident they feel. Make it easier for people, including the quiet voices in your community, to have a say and shape their own future.

## BE STRENGTHS-BASED AND TRAUMA-INFORMED



**Build on strengths and be trauma-aware:** Recognise people's lived experience and the strengths already in your community. At the same time, be gentle and patient. Some people may be carrying grief, stress or trauma that can present as anger or strong emotions, especially when sharing their experiences.

## BE HOLISTIC AND IMPACTFUL



**Think big and long-term:** Look at the whole picture of the people, places, Country, histories, law, livelihoods and institutions that shape life in your community, and what's possible for the future. Understand the root causes behind challenges, and work together to identify practical, meaningful steps toward long-lasting sustainable change.

## LEARN, ADAPT, EVOLVE



**Make space to learn and adapt:** Do not be afraid to experiment, and even make mistakes. Try things out, reflect on what works, and adjust as you go. Above all, be mindful of people's background or situation, their skill levels or whether they have specific needs. Always strive to 'do no harm'. This helps build a culture of learning, growth and resilience over time.

# Creating the Right Conditions

Every community is different, and so are the ways that people come together, how they want to share, and participate. Creating the right conditions means being thoughtful about how you invite people, how you make them feel welcome and heard, and how you work together. It is not just about *what* you do — but *how* you do it. This section shares what has been learnt about what matters most when it comes to making the process inclusive, respectful, and grounded in trust and local realities.

## STARTING GENTLY

Every community-led process starts with an idea — but it only really begins when others join in. Getting started can be the hardest part. Begin by taking time to sense where people are at. *Is there energy, interest, and enough capacity to begin something together? Is this the right time, and the right approach?* Start by observing what is happening around you. As your idea starts to take shape, begin to think about how you might reach out widely and gently to invite people into a conversation.

## Different starting points

Communities come together for many reasons: to address a shared concern, pursue opportunities, or prepare for potential challenges. Sometimes the motivation is proactive, aimed at strengthening what already works well. Other times, it's about driving local change for the general benefit of the community, or it might follow significant change or disruption.

Recognising these different starting points helps in choosing the right approach: whether the aim is to spark interest before a crisis or re-engage people who have been through difficult times.

In communities that haven't faced a major disruption or crisis, there may be no strong urgency to plan together. People may be focused on daily demands or assume others will manage any challenges. The value of collective action can seem distant unless it connects to priorities that matter to them. Framing the conversation around local strengths, aspirations, and lived experience — for example, protecting what people value, improving wellbeing, or creating new opportunities — can help bring people to the table and build momentum.

In communities that have experienced disaster or ongoing challenges, the starting point is often different. People may be tired, cautious, apprehensive or still processing recent experiences. They may simply feel over-engaged and over-consulted, with little hope that their voices will be genuinely heard or that anything will change. There may be a lack of trust within the community towards each other, or towards bodies such as government or service agencies, or local councils. It is important to begin with care, patience, humility, and deep listening. People may need time before they feel ready to engage.

Starting gently means recognising where people are at and focusing on building trust, connection, and clarity first. Sometimes, the most important first step is simply showing up, listening well, and asking: *What do you need right now?*

People come with different experiences and energies. Some may be ready to jump in; some may be curious but not yet committed, others might still be making sense of recent events or challenges. It is okay for people to engage in different ways, at different times.

## TIP!

### Things to consider when starting your work:

- **Support connection first:** Create opportunities for people to gather without feeling pressured, and start sharing if and when they feel ready. Sharing food, art, music or simply having a yarn over a cuppa are good ways to connect.
- **Think about different ways people can engage:** in person, by phone, online. Remember to be sensitive to different needs of members, such as accessibility, language, internet requirements, and other time commitments, such as family, carer responsibilities, work or study.
- **Start by listening:** Come with a 'curious' mindset, ready to ask and listen. What do people want to talk about? What are people saying they need? What is already happening? Who is already doing good work quietly in the background?
- **Don't rush:** Timing matters. Sometimes it is not about launching a big process, but checking in and building relationships slowly that lay the foundations for long term change. Move at the speed of trust, acknowledging that this takes time.
- **Respect what has been happening before:** People may be tired of being asked the same questions or having projects start and stop in their communities. Do your homework and perhaps gather some information, plans or tools that have already been developed. Show that you have listened and understood, and know what has been happening for them.
- **Be clear and honest:** Let people know what this process is, what it can and what it cannot offer. Be upfront about how decisions will be made and what support is available. To develop trust, transparency is critical for the process.
- **Make it an open invitation:** Participation should be optional but inclusive and allow people to join at their own pace and in a way that they feel comfortable with.
- **Safe, welcoming and neutral meeting spaces and places are important:** Think about whether a meeting place may not be suitable for some people and what you can do to make sure everyone feels included and heard. For example, meeting at the local volunteer fire brigade or local council buildings might be easy but not everyone might feel comfortable. In particular, consider cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people when choosing a meeting place. If unsure, ask the group where and when would be the best place to meet.



# PEOPLE AND RELATIONSHIPS

## THE LEAD TEAM

Don't try to lead this kind of process alone. Leading community processes can be challenging, and burnout and fatigue are real risks. Make sure your group supports each other by sharing the load, the skills, and the energy. When everyone contributes in their own way, it eases the pressure and builds a more connected and collaborative team.

Sharing the process and working together with others is also a real strength of this way of working, because it allows your group to draw on everybody's strengths and different types of knowledge, understanding and skills.

The Lead Team are those that take the initiative to start a community-led process and support it throughout its duration. These can be local people looking to partner with others to grow a new group, an existing community group (the Show Society; the local mums' group, Landcare group etc.) or a member of the local council genuinely interested in sparking (and supporting) truly community-led action. In any case, if you have picked up this guide, this might be your first step towards establishing the Lead Team.

Take some time to think about who in your community might bring valuable skills, knowledge, or lived experience to support the work. Also ask around, others may have some great examples of people who you haven't yet thought of.

### Look out for people who:

- Have experience in bringing groups together
- Are trusted by different parts of the community
- Bring cultural knowledge or lived experience
- Are good at listening, supporting, and encouraging others
- Have a diversity of life experience, skills and expertise

### You might find support from:

- Local people or community connectors who have experience in facilitating group discussions
- Teachers, youth workers, or neighbourhood centre staff
- Health workers or trauma-informed practitioners
- Elders, leaders, or respected community voices
- Emergency services and local volunteer groups such as brigades or retired specialists
- Specialist facilitators independent of the community

## YOUR COMMUNITY

Every community is uniquely shaped by its people, their relationships, cultures, places and lived experiences. As you use this guide, you may want to pay particular attention to how your process includes and supports different groups within your community. This could mean working closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, actively engaging young people, creating safe spaces for older residents, or those who may not always feel included.

Who are the people and groups who live in your community? Think about:

- Leaders in your community
- People and groups who are often not included in conversations and decisions
- Aboriginal Elders, communities and people from other cultures
- Youth and young adult voices
- People who experience barriers to participation, including on the basis of health, age, mobility, education, language, culture, gender or sexual identity, financial situation, work, study or family responsibilities
- People and groups who have diversity in their lived experience
- The main industries and small businesses in your community

## CASE STUDY

A small group in the community came together after a storm that damaged homes, roads, cars and other infrastructure, leaving the area without power, phone or internet connections for days. In the immediate aftermath, they checked on neighbours, shared supplies, and supported those who were most in need. Some people were still in shock; others were overwhelmed trying to manage clean-up and insurance.

At first, the group met informally – in someone's kitchen, then at the local hall – simply to talk, listen, and make sense of what had happened. Over time, these gatherings turned into a coordinated effort to support recovery and reconnect the community. Together, people mapped local needs and resources, identified who might need extra support and how they could be assisted, and started making simple plans in case something like this happened again.

Nobody in the group had formal facilitation roles or training when they started, but they created space for people to come together, share ideas, and mobilise resources to support each other. That sense of trust and connection became the foundation for healing, recovery and longer-term preparedness, and helped the community feel less alone in facing future challenges.



Once you have built relationships with people and groups in your community, be sure to maintain these relationships over time – keep listening, keep sharing and keep checking in.

## PROJECT LEADERS

Project Leaders are individuals from the community who turn shared priorities into action. Acting on behalf of the community, a community group or organisation, they lead or manage projects that translate collective aspirations into real outcomes, and share learning back into the wider process. They may be part of the Community Planning Group or Lead Team, or new participants bringing fresh ideas and local knowledge.

## YOUR COMMUNITY PLANNING GROUP

The planning group is a small, diverse group of about 8–12 community members who share the commitment to creating shared outcomes for their community. This group are likely people who you and the Lead Team connected with during initial conversations, who expressed an interest in being involved in the process, or were nominated by their cultural group, and

who carry local insights, energy, enthusiasm, and a commitment to working with others towards creating positive change within their community.

The group will meet regularly to help shape the process, plan for their community's future wellbeing and set priorities for action, and reach out through their own networks to ensure the wider community is engaged and informed, and that their perspectives are woven into the process.

## PARTNERS, ALLIES AND OTHER KEY CONNECTIONS AND STAKEHOLDERS

Building strong relationships with others who care about similar issues can amplify your impact. Whether they are already doing related work, have valuable knowledge or resources, or simply need to be kept in the loop, connecting with the right people helps create alignment, avoid duplication, and open up new opportunities.

Good partnerships and having allies in the right places can strengthen your community's voice and influence when it comes to shaping decisions and accessing support.

Importantly, keeping stakeholders informed and engaged early on can help prevent misunderstandings or pushback later. People are more likely to support what they understand and feel a part of.

Similarly, you might feel that a group, an agency or organisation is hard to contact or requires multiple follow-ups. While this may be the case, it might be worth persevering or finding alternative contacts – go gently, involve these groups as early as possible, ask questions to understand where they’re coming from and work together to create a sense of shared ownership of whatever it is you want to address. Sometimes the group you’re trying to contact might just not have the capacity to respond or work with you – and you might need to find another group to work with.

**Think about...**

- People and groups that are already active doing similar work.
- People and groups that could support you in your work.
- People and groups that need to know about your work.
- Organisations that may have existing responsibilities or strong influence in your area of concern.
- People and organisations that may already have funding available, or offer support in securing future funding.

**TIP!** **Thinking ahead – Funding**

You might already have some funding available, or be planning to raise funds later down the track.

Explore early whether anyone in your Community Planning Group has experience in fundraising or grantwriting – or knows someone who does.

You could also start by connecting with a local or regional Community Foundation for advice and support (see Appendix).

The Community Planning Group’s role could then evolve into a community-led decision-making committee that supports and guides local projects.



## WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE SPACES

Where you meet is a fundamental part of building and nurturing trust, respect, and safety. Places and place names carry deep meaning: they may hold memories of belonging, connection, and healing – but also of exclusion, conflict, or violence. Thinking carefully about meeting spaces, and choosing the right setting, shows care and respect for people’s different experiences and wellbeing.

It can make all the difference if you create an environment where everyone in your community feels welcome, valued, and safe to share. That might mean gathering in a local hall, a school, a sports club – wherever people feel most comfortable and at ease.

**Things to consider when choosing or creating safe and inclusive meeting places and spaces:**

- **Ensure you research and learn about a place and its different histories**, before you decide to meet there. Ask yourself: is it neutral, welcoming, and culturally safe for everyone? Remember that places can hold very different meanings for different groups. What feels neutral to some, may carry painful associations for others.

This can include, but is not limited to, histories of colonial violence, exclusion based on sex, gender, or religion, or experiences of bureaucratic control – all of which can shape how safe, comfortable, or welcome people feel, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Where possible, complement your own research by checking in with locals and others about where it feels right to meet. Be open to changing the location if needed: this flexibility shows that you respect and care for the diverse experiences in your community.

- **Meet people where they live.** Are you able to travel to meet people in their own towns and places? Visiting people where they feel at home, and in the spaces that matter to them, sends the powerful message that their opinions matter. Rather than asking them to come to you, you go to them to listen. Meeting them on their turf not only shows respect but also helps people feel more comfortable and, literally, ‘at home’.
- **Accessibility:** Are there any central meeting places that minimise travel for people? Are there accessible spaces for those who may be living with disabilities?
- **The space:** How can you make the space welcoming? Is there room to move around or break into smaller groups? Consider bringing in some items that make the space feel homely and comfortable. Is there a quiet space that group members can go to if they are feeling overwhelmed? Also consider whether the space is heated in the winter and cool in the summer for comfort.
- **Hospitality:** Can you offer food, tea, or a cuppa to help people feel at home? Sweets, like lollies, cake or chocolate can help ‘lift the mood’ when people get tired.

# WORKING WITH CARE

## LANGUAGE MATTERS

Language shapes who feels included or excluded. Some people may speak other languages at home or feel less confident with formal or technical terms. Life experience or professional background also influence how people communicate. For example, local fire brigade or council members might use a different kind of language than other community members. This can be off-putting or confusing for some – while a shared understanding helps build a stronger process. Some extra tips include:

- Use everyday, community-friendly words.
- Stay aware of who's in the room.
- Avoid jargon, abbreviations or technical terms if possible.
- Check in often to make sure everyone feels comfortable, understood, and able to take part.
- When in doubt, ask! Open up a discussion about how the group talks to each other.
- Remain aware of different levels of literacy at all times. Don't assume that everyone can read or write, or feels comfortable letting you know that they struggle understanding.

### TIP! Defining 'Resilience'

The word 'resilience' that's used in this guide means different things to different people. For some, it suggests being hardy and getting on with things, but when you are already dealing with tough challenges, it can feel like the responsibility is being placed on your shoulders.

Others see 'resilience' as a community's ability to come together, draw on strengths, and adapt in uncertain times. In this view, resilience is not about individual grit – it's about people and organisations working together for the wellbeing of all.

This is why it helps to explore and be sensitive to the different meanings that words can carry, and find language that better reflects your shared purpose and values.

## SUPPORT DIFFERENT WAYS OF PARTICIPATING

Not everyone has a computer, internet access, or feels confident using digital tools. Offer printed materials and offline ways to get involved.

Be mindful of different literacy and language needs. Use pictures, stories, maps, or objects to help people share ideas and understand what's happening.

Small group conversations, visuals, and real-life examples (like photos or stories) can make things more engaging and accessible for everyone.

Consider what other accessibility issues people in your community might be facing that could affect their ability to participate and what might be possible solutions.

## CARING FOR YOURSELVES AND EACH OTHER

Creating safe, supportive spaces means looking out for one another and for yourselves. You can also refer to the resource 'Working in Trauma-Informed Ways' in the Toolbox accompanying this Guide.

### Things to consider for working with care:

- **Go at the pace of trust.** Building relationships is important and takes time. It is okay to slow down so that trust can grow.
- **Listen gently.** Sitting with someone's story can feel uncomfortable or difficult, but being a calm, respectful presence can make a big difference. You don't need to have answers – and this might not even be what people are looking for. A simple, 'Thanks for telling me, that sounds really tough', acknowledges what has been shared and shows you care.
- **Work in ways that are culturally safe and locally appropriate.** Every community has its own ways of sharing, working, and deciding. Be guided by them.
- **Remember, all experiences matter.** Offer choice and control, and focus on safety, respect, strength and transparency.

- **Make everyone feel safe and included:** There are some practical tips for how to do this in our Toolbox. Here are some suggestions:
  - » **Consider how the mix of people in the room can influence confidence and participation.** Some people may feel uncomfortable speaking in the presence of certain others; for example, young people may not feel able to speak when Elders are present. Create spaces and processes that make it possible for everyone's voice to be heard.
  - » **Never pressure anyone to contribute.** While it is important that everybody has a voice and feels safe to use it, make sure contributions are invited, not expected. Find other ways for those voices to be heard.
  - » **Give people options.** For example, storytelling can support healing and connection, but it can also bring up painful memories. Not everyone is ready, or wants to share their story, especially if they have not told it before or have had to tell it many times. Create different ways for people to express themselves, through art, photos, mapping, working in pairs or quiet reflection, so everyone feels they can be part of the process in a way that feels safe and right for them.
  - » **Invite a 'neutral bystander' or support person:** Is there someone from the community or outside that people trust and who can provide 'psychological first aid' when needed during meetings or as a follow-up?
  - » **Let people decide when to take breaks.** Remind everyone that it is always okay to step out, pause, or take a moment – and that anybody in the room can call a break if needed. Emotions may arise and that's natural. What matters is people's choice and comfort, not avoiding feelings. Pay attention to how the room feels and be guided by others too. Everyone has different thresholds for when conversations feel intense or emotional, so staying responsive helps create a safe and respectful space.

- **Provide opportunities for creative engagement.** Some people find it easier to think, reflect, or connect when they are not the centre of attention and can keep their hands busy. Drawing, clay work, or cultural practices, like weaving, can help create a calm, welcoming space where people feel more at ease to open up and participate in their own way. You could call on a creative person or artist in our community to guide your group in these activities
- **Check in regularly.** Ask how people are feeling. Are they comfortable and do they feel included? Create time to reflect, talk in pairs, or share in small groups.
- **Know where to turn.** If someone – including yourself – needs more support, have a list of local and free services on hand, such as community health, counselling, or trauma support. Refer to the Trauma-Informed Practice Guide in the Toolbox for free support numbers. You might even invite a counsellor or psychologist to your sessions to build relationships and be on hand when needed.
- **Follow up.** A quiet check-in later on can help someone feel seen and supported. Trust your instincts.
- **Take care of yourself too.** Community work takes energy and care, particularly if you are the person everyone turns to. Listening to difficult stories or having emotional conversations can feel heavy, especially when they resonate with your own experiences.
- **You are not a counsellor.** Your role is to be present and supportive, not to fix things. Make time to rest, talk to someone you trust, and do things that help you feel grounded and allow you to refuel. You do not have to carry it all on your own.
- **Support each other.** You could set up a mentor system for your team and community planners to debrief.
- **Celebrate small wins** to build momentum and motivation.

## LEARNING ALONG THE WAY (AND HOW TO CAPTURE IT)

Learning happens as you go, through conversation, reflection, and shared experience. Capturing what you are learning and creating along the way, through notes, visuals, and photos, can help you track progress, adapt when needed, and come back to useful ideas later.

Sometimes the most valuable insights are not obvious at first. This is why it is helpful to pause regularly, reflect on what is working (and what is not), and keep a simple record of your discussions, decisions, and ideas as you go.

### SOME PRACTICAL WAYS TO SUPPORT LEARNING AND REFLECTION AS YOU GO

- **Set up a shared space** (physical or digital) to store notes, summaries, group reflections, and any materials created by your group. (For example, search: 'How to set up a Google Drive' on the internet)
- **Assign a 'deep listener' and note-taker** during your meeting sessions, or rotate the role, to make sure key points, decisions, and actions are recorded.
- **Use visuals and artefacts:** many activities listed in the Toolbox accompanying this Guide are designed to produce maps, drawings, storyboards, or other materials that help capture your discussions. Alternatively, you can prepare printouts and resources that can help with your planning and activities.
- **Keep copies of all workshop outputs.** Take photos of sticky notes, timelines, and group work artefacts so they can be easily shared and referred to later. It does not need to be too formal, just a record to refer back to.

You might choose to write up a short summary of key discussion points or decisions made to share back with your group. This can be helpful for people who have missed a session as well as anyone interested in your process more generally.

- **Capture feedback from participants after each session:** What worked well? What should be changed next time? Remind them that this is their process and that their feedback is important. This could be a quick whip around the room, or you might want to give them an option to provide feedback anonymously via a Google Form or printed feedback sheet.
- **Reflect and adapt as you go:** As the Lead Team or facilitator, make time to reflect on each session and any feedback you receive. Use what you are learning and hearing to shape the next phase of your process.
- **Keep checking in with the community and planners** – and adapt the process based on what is working or not working. Make sure to create safe avenues for people to express concerns, questions, or disagreements.
- **Share what you are learning** with the wider community, partners, or supporters in ways that make sense for your group. You could set up a facebook group, or send out a regular newsletter.

### ADAPTING THE PROCESS TO YOUR COMMUNITY AND CULTURE: CARING FOR COUNTRY

There's no one-size-fits-all approach. There is great diversity in Aboriginal communities across Australia, each has their own protocols, traditions and governance. What matters most is listening to people and working in ways that reflect the values and strengths of your community, and being intentional about who's involved, how decisions are made, and how people connect with one another throughout the journey.

Here are two examples of how Aboriginal community members shaped and led the process in their regions, embedding local relationships, cultural values and protocols at the heart of both the process and the decision-making. These offer principles and practice insights that may inspire your own approach.

### CARING FOR COUNTRY AND YOUTH



Image: Malara Skarheim

In Clarence Valley, the community team worked closely with Bundjalung, Gumbaynggirr, and Yaegl Nations to design an Aboriginal-led process, whose focus on Caring for Country and Youth emerged from previous and ongoing engagement with communities in the Clarence Valley.

#### Key elements included:

- Face-to-face yarning and the development of an Agreement shaped the process, built trust and ensured Aboriginal self-determination.
- Community forums held on Country across the three Nations, open to all but led by Aboriginal voices.
- Ideas aligned with Caring for Country values and priorities developed in Aboriginal-led planning sessions.
- Support for youth participation and projects that reflected intergenerational learning.
- Applications open to all, with planners supporting project leaders to achieve deeper cultural engagement and partnerships.
- Simplified materials and flexible engagement, including in-person support.
- A strong spirit of collaboration, where planners worked across boundaries and shared ownership of the meetings and process.
- Aboriginal-led governance upheld cultural protocols, honoring who speaks and makes decisions for Country.



## PRINCIPLES & PRACTICE INSIGHTS FOR ABORIGINAL-LED PROCESSES

When working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, take your guidance from local Elders, cultural leaders and knowledge holders to ensure your process is culturally appropriate, community-led, and supports self-determination and local protocols. Ethical conduct requires interaction grounded in good faith, mutual respect, and recognition of cultural values. Responsible engagement with Aboriginal cultural knowledge and expression is essential to ensuring that cultures are maintained, protected, and strengthened for future generations. It is also important to recognise the diversity and complexity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities: protocols, leadership structures, and ways of addressing issues differ across Country, and between urban, rural, and remote contexts.

- **Build relationships first.** If you don't yet have relationships with local Aboriginal people, take time to learn whose Country you're on, listen first, and seek guidance through local cultural organisations or trusted networks (for example, the Local Aboriginal Land Council or other community groups). Begin with humility: listen, learn, and explore gently to find the right pathways for connection.
- **Let deep listening, yarning, and relationships guide the whole process, from beginning to end:** Work at the pace of trust. Deep and ongoing engagement through yarning and nurturing relationships is key to ensuring that the process is culturally safe and addresses Aboriginal priorities.
- **Respect cultural governance:** Start with local Aboriginal leadership and decision-making structures. Understand and honour who speaks for which Country. Be mindful that there are different processes and protocols for working with different communities: sometimes it's ok to reach out directly to local leaders or the community, in other cases, the submission of a more formal request to meet with Elders first is required.
- **Support self-determination:** Aboriginal knowledge is not simply something to pass on from one person to another. It's a relational process that is alive within relationships and connection with culture, people, place, and Country. Create space for these relationships to shape the process.
- **Be flexible:** Cultural obligations take priority. Respect the time and protocols needed.
- **Keep things accessible:** Use plain language, reduce paperwork, and offer in-person support where possible. Be mindful that not everyone has access to the internet, a computer, or phone. Meet face-to-face wherever possible.
- **Work collaboratively and intergenerationally:** Make space for both Elders and young people to lead and learn together.
- **Be mindful that young people may hesitate to speak up in front of Elders.** Sometimes it's easier for them to share their views in separate or informal settings. Create safe and engaging spaces, for example through sports, arts, or storytelling, and work with mentors, or trusted Aboriginal community leaders who can help facilitate these conversations and support young people to speak their minds.
- **Create informal spaces for connection and comfortable silences:** Coming together to be creative, to weave and yarn, or Elders helping kids learn a story, skill or craft, can feel a lot more natural and less formal, making it easier for everyone to participate.
- **Value people's time and contributions through reciprocity:** When people share their time, stories, and knowledge, find ways to give back. This might be through payment, a gift, sharing food, or other gestures that reflect reciprocity and care.
- **Be transparent and accountable:** Go back to community, check in often, and respect what's shared with you.

## OUR COUNTRY IN HEALING HANDS



Eurobodalla Community Meeting

In Eurobodalla, the process was grounded in the Aboriginal-led team's connection to community and Country, and their network of relationships.

*Our Country in Healing Hands* was shaped by Walbunja, Brinja-Yuin and Djiringanj leaders, who came together at a 'First Nations Voices & Leadership in Disaster Resilience Gathering' to ensure that local Aboriginal governance and priorities were embedded from the very beginning.

*Our Country in Healing Hands* reflects the Gathering's vision of healing through culture, community, and Caring for Country.

### Key elements included:

- Guidance from Aboriginal leaders on values, priorities, and how decisions should be made.
- Two-day community forums with project labs, storytelling, and lots of yarning.
- Community Project Mentor roles supported applicants and helped build stronger, more inclusive projects.
- Ideas aligned with Caring for Country values.
- Ongoing conversations about cultural practices such as cultural fire sparked curiosity and learning across the wider community.



# Overview: Process Phases at a Glance

*Trauma-informed co-design*

*Community leadership*

**PHASE 2**  
Starting Your  
Meetings: People  
& Purpose

Strengths, gaps &  
opportunities grounded  
in community stories

**PHASE 4**  
Focusing Your  
Energy: Setting  
Priorities & Moving  
to Action

Ground-truth  
priorities with  
community

Support project  
development &  
applications

Community  
projects

**PHASE 6**  
Doing & Learning,  
& Celebrating!

Review  
applications  
& funding  
decisions

**PHASE 5**  
Planning for Action  
& Decision-Making

Granting  
governance

**PHASE 3**  
Your Community  
in Context:  
People, Patterns  
& Power

Finding the  
'root of the  
problem'

*Learn, adapt, evolve*

**PHASE 1**  
Grounding &  
Connecting, Meet  
People Where  
They Are At

Network  
mapping

Stakeholder  
mapping



# From Connection to Collective Action: Stepping Through the Key Phases

These phases offer a flexible guide to help your group move from early conversations to shared planning and action, one step at a time.

## PHASE 1: GROUNDING AND CONNECTING MEET PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE AT

### GUIDING INTENTION: WHAT IS THIS PHASE ABOUT?

As community leaders or members of a local group getting things started, you play an important role in creating the conditions that make it easier for others to get involved. This begins by taking the time to connect, listen, and understand where people are at. Some may be ready to jump to action, while others might need more time, clarity, or support before they feel comfortable participating.

Having a cuppa and a conversation with a few key community members shows you are genuinely interested in listening, and helps build your understanding of the issues people care about. These informal chats can offer rich background knowledge and help build trust.

There is no 'right way' or 'right place' to be. This early phase is about allowing space for different energies, emotions, and levels of engagement. It is quiet, foundational work. You do not need to do it alone: start with your own connections, go gently, and move at the pace of your community.

### ROLES: WHO IS INVOLVED

This work can be led by the Lead Team, and you might invite other trusted community leaders or connectors to help reach out and involve more people over time.

### TIP!

#### Practical Tips and Activities

- **Start with your own networks.** Reach out to community members, leaders, and groups to hear how people are feeling and what might be needed.
- **But aim for diversity** – do not just rely on your existing connections, and be sure to include 'gatekeepers'.
- **Understand local history and past engagement experiences,** these may influence how people show up.
- **Consider your geographical reach:** How is your community connected to others? Extend the invitation to participate to neighbouring communities, being sure to include lesser heard voices.
- **Choose your format.** Host a cuppa catch-up, a small gathering, or an informal info session – whatever suits your community.
- **Show up at community events** that are already happening (to avoid duplication and the 'new kid on the block' effect).
- **Plan your invitation.** Think about timing, location, and how you will spread the word in ways that feel inclusive.
- **Offer gentle entry points.** Keep the tone relational. This is about connecting and listening.
- **Promote broadly,** using many different channels.





## SUGGESTED OUTCOMES

This first phase is about laying the groundwork. There is no fixed checklist, but here are some signs that you may be ready to start the next part of the process:

- **You have started to map connections and networks.** Who is already active, who else might need to be involved, and how you might reach out to people whose voices are less often heard.
- **You have had some early conversations with people in your community** to build trust, explore what matters, and understand the mood in the community.
- **A small group has formed:** around 8–12 people who are interested in working together and help guide the process. The group may still grow over time.
- **You have found a meeting place** (or a few) that feel comfortable, accessible, and welcoming.
- **You have started shaping your purpose or focus.** Even if still evolving, you have a general sense of the issues or aspirations your group might explore together.
- **You have talked about how you will work together:** how to document things, communicate, support each other, and keep things moving.
- **You feel it is time.** You have built enough momentum, clarity, and connection to start bringing more people into the conversation and planning what happens next.

## PLANNING TOGETHER: TIPS FOR THE LEAD TEAM

- **Meet as a group before reaching out wider.** Take time to talk about your shared purpose, roles, and how you will support each other.
  - » Ensure your team includes diverse skills and is aligned in values and approach.
  - » Invest time in building good team dynamics
  - » Plan logistics and structures well (schedules, resources, technical support).
  - » Consider the support you might need: Do you have someone with facilitation skills, or someone who is good at organising logistics or managing finances if needed?
  - » Be realistic about time and energy: Consider your group's capacity and how you can keep the work sustainable, especially if involvement is voluntary. Be upfront and get group agreement about what commitments are needed and whether or not you are able to provide monetary support.
  - » Start planning how you will document your journey: Decide who is taking notes, who is checking in with people, and how you will keep track of progress and insights.

- **Community maps: Map who you know and who you do not know but need to connect with.** Start with your own local networks and work from there: who is already active in your community, and who is not yet on your map but may be important to include? Use a simple stakeholder mapping matrix or connections template to help you organise your stakeholders (see the Toolbox for activities and templates).
  - » **Include lesser heard voices:** Who are people or groups in your community who do not have many chances to share their views? How could you reach out to them?
  - » **Think about allies or supporters.** Who could be good allies to help you get started and support you along the way — formally or informally?
  - » **Include all groups in your network map and keep them informed:** Even if you are not planning to work with certain groups or organisations, it can be a good idea to keep them informed about what you are doing. You might find support or shared goals in unexpected places. At the very least, keeping others in the loop helps avoid misunderstandings, duplication, or stepping on toes.
- **Make the most of existing resources.** Are there community halls, the pub, libraries, or other meeting places that people would feel comfortable using? What other resources to support community activities are available?
- **Keep refining your purpose and message.** As you listen, keep asking: What is it that you want to do and achieve? Do not worry, your early conversations will help you shape that message and it will keep evolving as you progress.

## PROMPTS FOR REFLECTION, LEARNING, AND ADAPTATION ALONG THE WAY

- Are you inviting people in the right way, at the right time?
- Are you reaching everyone in the community and supporting them to participate?
- What mood or energy are you picking up from the community?
- What do you need to do before you start formally?



**Having a cuppa and a conversation with a few key community members shows you are genuinely interested in listening, and helps build your understanding of the issues people care about.**

### TIP!

#### Things to Keep in Mind

- **People may be time-poor, tired, or feeling over-consulted.** Keep things low-pressure and respectful of people's energy and availability.
- **Try starting where less is happening and support is needed,** if parts of the community feel over-engaged.
- **Some may feel unsure or shy about joining in.** Let them know there is no pressure, they are welcome to just listen.
- **A warm, personal invitation goes a long way.** Reach out in ways that feel friendly and familiar.
- **Start small.** One-on-one chats, a cuppa, or a small gathering can help ease people in.
- **Be curious and listen deeply.** Ask what matters to people, what they would like to strengthen or shift, and what gives them hope.
- **Do not make assumptions** about people in your community, or what might be their motivations or interests.

# PHASE 2: STARTING YOUR MEETINGS

## PEOPLE AND PURPOSE

### GUIDING INTENTION: WHAT IS THIS PHASE ABOUT?

Now that your broader group of community planners has come together, it's time to lay the foundations for your work by developing a shared purpose and vision.

This phase is also about getting to know each other, building trust, and agreeing on how you will work together. It is a chance to explore what brings you

together, and what each of you brings to the table: your hopes for the community, your networks, skills, lived experience, and the energy you are able to contribute.

Taking time for these conversations will help you build strong working relationships and a clear sense of direction.

### TIP! More Tips from Practice – During the Process

#### ✔ Must Do

- Offer community mentoring and support.
- Hold early conversations about conflict of interest, people's values and how they want to work together.
- Use a strength-based approach to facilitate engagement and decision-making.
- Ensure clarity on workshop objectives, processes, and timelines.
- Use local stories, images and maps to make abstract concepts tangible.
- Continue to consider individual and collective access requirements: What will enable them to participate? What might be some barriers (e.g. technology, travel, mobility, literacy? What resources are required to make the work accessible to everyone?)

#### 🕒 Can Do

- Set up a buddy or mentor system for community planners to debrief or chat with.
- Ensure someone from the Lead Team is always available to talk with community planners.
- Begin to identify grant opportunities to fund local action.
- Identify, connect with and support local organisations with the capacity to write grant applications.
- Prepare and display clear visual agendas or print out one-pagers as conversation guides.
- Display your group agreement in each meeting.

#### ✘ Must Not Do

- Avoid pushing ahead when trust or relationships need more time to develop.
- Do not confuse information overload with transparency. Clarity is more important.

### ROLES: WHO IS INVOLVED

#### Lead Team or Facilitator: Things to think about before the meeting

- What time will you start – morning, afternoon or evening?
- How long will the meeting run?
- Who is going to book rooms, organise catering etc?
- Do you need to budget for printing, catering, room bookings? If so, can you get a small grant or local sponsorship to cover your costs?
- Will you hold one meeting in this phase, or a couple?
- What is your back-up plan if things take longer than expected?
- Is everyone on the team clear about their role on the day?
- Who will take notes and help keep track of key points?
- Have you allowed time for post-meeting reflection and follow up?

#### Community Planners:

- Come with an open, curious mindset.
- Be ready to share responsibility for how the process runs.
- Ask questions about your role. Shape it, clarify expectations, and make sure you feel confident about what you are taking on.
- Use your own networks to spread the word and bring more community voices into the conversation.

### SUGGESTED OUTCOMES

- **The group is forming strong foundations** through growing relationships and shared purpose.
- **Developing a shared purpose and vision**, with room to grow as new insights emerge.
- **A group agreement on ways of working**, including how much people want to achieve in each session, how often they want to meet and what is the overall timeframe.

### TIP! Things to Keep in Mind

People might need time to build confidence or trust in the group.

**Start with an icebreaker** or simply get people to talk about something they know really well. Small group chats may help people to open up.

To move forward, it is important to understand the past. Give people space to share what has been hard or missing, but gently guide the conversation toward what is possible, reminding them of their strengths and future visions.

**Be prepared.** While this phase focuses on strengths and shared purpose, difficult memories may surface too. See Working with Care for tips on responding with care.

#### Remember to:

- Listen gently.
- Acknowledge shared experience.
- Remind people they can call for breaks as needed.
- Have extra support.
- Follow up if appropriate.
- Look after yourself.
- Debrief if needed.

- **A network map of people's connections**, skills, and possibilities for allies, supporters and collaborators
- **A plan for connecting with others** in the community and debrief with the groups

### SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

The following pages include some activities to help you get started.

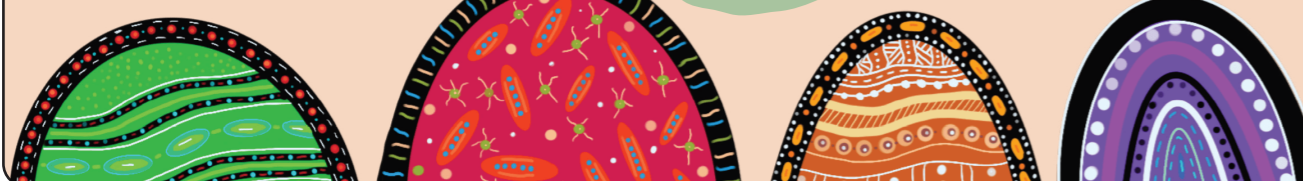
Activity

### ARRIVING IN THE SHARED SPACE – BREAKING THE ICE

Not all the people in your group may have met each other before. Some people might feel more comfortable in groups or meeting people for the first time than others. It's important to give people time to arrive and help them 'break the ice'. You could start by asking everyone their name and one thing they are passionate about. Then the next person repeats what they said before introducing themselves.

Your group might choose to begin outside, grounding yourselves in nature and your place. You could start with movement or a short walk. You can find some suggested ice-breaking activities in the Toolbox section of this guide.

Example of an ice-breaking activity: What does resilience mean to us?



Activity

### A SHARED PURPOSE AND VISION

A shared purpose and vision is what brings your group together – and will hold it together in the long run. If everyone contributes, it becomes a reminder of what matters most to you when working for your community's future, guiding your planning and decision-making together at every step.

But do not assume that everyone is on the same page right from the beginning. People may have different expectations or very different understandings of the issue at hand. Others may not yet have formed firm ideas. In any case, sharing what you are passionate about and listening to others will open your perspective and can be really invigorating.

It is really powerful to see in front of you what you are creating as a group. This map of what is important to you and what you hope to achieve together can be the start of creating your shared vision.

A shared vision describes the future your community wants to create together.

Start by asking:

- Why are you here? What do you hope to achieve together?
- What is the 'problem', challenge or opportunity you want to address?
- Or: what does a strong, healthy and 'resilient' community mean or look like to you?
- How do you want your community to look in 10 or 15 years?
- What are the main themes that make up your visions for a strong community?
- How will you know that you have achieved what you set out to do?

Vision for a resilient Eurobodalla: Country itself as the source of knowledge and wisdom. (image credit Steph Chiu)



- a system to care for Country, guided by Country
- strengthen/weave existing foundations of resilience in community
  - address/dismantle barriers for connect.
  - build allies, work with differences/friction towards common good
- preparedness that is ongoing/regenerative/evolving
- foster learning together + knowledge sharing even through differences



“From the ashes and flooded plains, isolation and scarcity, a vibrant tapestry is woven by the people and land. Prosperity is built by our ideas and creativity to combat the challenges that arise within our home, community and environment, to connect our knowledge and resources for future generations to come.”  
– Community Vision for a Resilient Far East Gippsland

Activity

**GROUP AGREEMENT**

A group agreement is a shared set of guidelines that your group creates to help you work well together. It supports a safe, respectful and productive space, where people's time, ideas, and contributions are valued. Whether your meetings are quite casual or more structured, a group agreement helps keep things on track and ensures everyone feels included.

Establishing principles like Chatham House Rules – where everyone agrees that what is said in this room, stays in this room, so people can share ideas freely without attribution – helps create a safe and respectful space for honest reflection and conversation. Creating a group agreement together builds ownership and shared responsibility for how the group wants to be together. It's everyone's role to help uphold the agreement. You might choose to write it up and display it during meetings, and revisit it occasionally – especially if tensions arise or the group needs a gentle reminder of its shared commitments.

You can also add some really practical agreements around how often and where you meet, expectations around communication between meetings. Consider nominating a chair, deep listener, note taker and/or timekeeper to assist the facilitator and the group.

**TIP!** Your group agreement might include things like:

- Respecting each other's time by committing to the process (attendance) and starting and ending meetings on time
- Listening without interrupting
- Valuing all voices and making space for everyone to contribute
- Keeping what is shared in the group confidential
- Taking shared responsibility for how the group functions
- Practical agreements: how often and where you meet, expectations around communication between meetings
- Debrief if needed.



Activity

**MAPPING YOUR CONNECTIONS AND SKILLS**

Earlier, the Lead Team may have done some initial mapping to identify potential stakeholders, partners, and people who needed to be engaged. That kind of mapping was useful for getting things off the ground.

Now, with a wider group of community members involved in the community planning group, you can build on the early mapping by exploring the community through the planners' own local knowledge and relationships. This helps draw on the lived experience and connections already in the room, and builds a more grounded and inclusive picture of your community.

Try mapping your community through the lens of your own connections and lived experience:

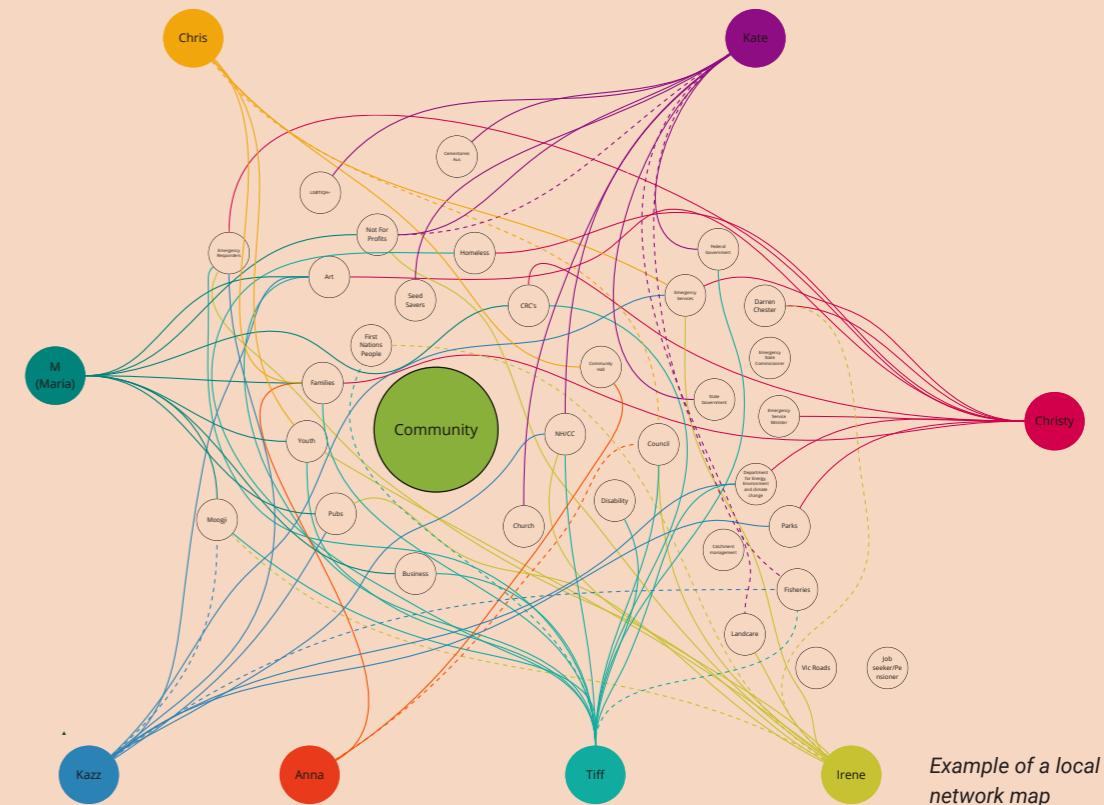
- Who do you know and trust?
- What local groups or organisations are already active?
- Who is often missing from the table? And how might you connect with them?

This kind of mapping helps your group:

- Visualise your group's collective strengths and connections. Seeing these on paper helps people recognise the value of their existing networks and builds confidence in the knowledge and relationships they already bring.
- Identify key local players, potential partners, allies and community connectors.
- Plan how to reach out to the wider community in inclusive and meaningful ways.

Your connections and shared knowledge are the real strength of working as a community. You will find that your group brings together people with all kinds of experiences, jobs, connections, skills, ages and local knowledge. It is not just about who and what each person knows individually, but who and what you know together that matters.

Think of your map of connections as a 'community switchboard'. It helps you to plug into existing networks and connections, see who is missing, and discover new opportunities for collaboration.



Example of a local network map



## Activity

**CONNECTING WITH OTHERS IN THE COMMUNITY**

Once your group has spent time getting to know each other, reflecting, planning, and identifying shared goals, it is time to start connecting with the wider community. While your group may have started small, the aim is to involve people from across the community and to reflect the lived experiences of different age groups, cultures, genders, demographics, capacities and neighbourhoods as much as possible.

This outreach will help you identify which groups or people may still be missing, or are not yet represented in your group. It also helps to build relationships and a shared sense of purpose.

Creating spaces where people feel heard, respected, and involved lays the groundwork for trust and genuine collaboration. Listening to a wide range of voices can deepen understanding of your community's strengths, diversity, and ways of working. It can also reveal different perspectives on the issue or opportunity you're exploring — and help you identify potential roadblocks early on.

There are many ways to build these kinds of connections that can lay the groundwork for ongoing communication: through informal conversations, pop-up stalls, surveys, creative activities, or community gatherings. Regular updates, open invitations, and simple ways to stay in touch (like noticeboards, social media, or community newsletters) can help keep people connected and engaged over time.

What matters most is creating genuine opportunities for people to share in ways that feel safe, inclusive, and meaningful, and that strengthen a sense of community ownership and collaboration.

When planning your community outreach, be sure that everyone in the planning group feels comfortable talking to people about the work. Adjust your format accordingly: You could go out in pairs; you could organise small yarning groups

in your neighbourhood; or you could try to reach out by setting up an information stall at the next community event, or organising your own.

You could draft a short script that the planning group can use when reaching out to your community. Here are some ideas:

- Let people know what your group is doing and why.
- Ask others what they see as their community's strengths.
- Ask what matters most to them in their daily lives and in times of stress or change.
- Look back: when your community was faced with challenges in the past, what happened? How did the community respond? What were support gaps or other things that were learnt from this experience?
- Invite ideas about what could help the community feel stronger, more connected, and better supported.
- Learn to read 'between the lines': sometimes a wish for an ice cream shop is really a wish for a place where people can connect and that they 'own'.

Consider that you're also trying to capture the quieter voices: people who might not usually speak up or who haven't shared their experiences with anyone yet. Some may find it easier to talk in a one-on-one setting, but these conversations can sometimes bring up difficult memories or emotions.

Plan ahead to make sure everyone is supported. Think about who in your group feels confident to have these kinds of conversations, and make sure you have support options in place, such as through your local bush nursing centre, medical clinic, or community health service. It's equally important to look after yourself when engaging in sensitive conversations; check in with others, debrief afterwards, and draw on psychological first aid principles when needed.

**TIP!****Practical Tips and Things to Keep in Mind**

- **Use your community 'switchboard' (the network map the group made earlier)** to start planning your community outreach. Who is best placed to talk to whom? How can you reach the 'hard to reach'?
- **Safety (physical and emotional) first!** Make sure everyone feels comfortable to reach out, is prepared for potentially tricky conversations, and has support and an opportunity to debrief with other members of the planning or organising groups.
- **Do your homework and recognise what has happened before.** Prior experiences with groups and activities can lead to frustration and engagement fatigue. Nobody wants to repeat themselves. What is different about your group that might get people to engage with you?
- **One-on-one or small group conversations:** Sometimes having a personal connection might make it easier to have a chat or for people to share more comfortably. Do this only if you feel comfortable to do so, and be mindful that stories and conversations can bring up distressing memories. (Refer to section Caring for Yourself and Each Other.)
- **Community events and forums** can contribute to building connections and help you reach a lot of people at once, while creating a space that allows people to contribute as much or as little as they like. If there is a community event already happening, you could consider setting up a stall — or organise your own event.
- **A creative example for collecting up community strengths, future hopes and ideas is the 'Leaves' activity:** At a community event, prepare a picture of a tree and ask everyone to write what they value about their community, strengths on post-its or actual leaves.

**PLANNING TOGETHER: TIPS FOR THE LEAD TEAM**

It is time to start planning your first workshop or meeting. Here are some tips to get you started:

- **Use a planning checklist** to make sure all the basics are covered (e.g. venue, seating, food, drinks, materials, technology).
  - » *Pro tip: always bring a spare extension cord when working in a new space!*
- **Choose tools and activities that suit a range of learning styles** (e.g. visual, verbal, hands-on, quiet reflection)
- **Plan for accessibility:** Consider language needs, cultural safety, physical access, transport, and dietary requirements.
- **Make space for quieter voices:** Use small group discussions, one-on-one chats, or written contributions to support participation.
- **Managing conflict:** Talk as a group about how you will manage disagreement or tension if it arises: Don't shy away from difference. Respectful conversations about differing views can lead to powerful insights and shared understanding.
- **Emotional support:** Consider inviting someone trained in mental health and wellbeing support to assist the Lead Team and be available to community planners during and between sessions, especially when the topics discussed are complex or sensitive.

**PROMPTS FOR REFLECTION, LEARNING, AND ADAPTATION ALONG THE WAY**

- Do people feel comfortable to ask questions, speak and share?
- (How) are you capturing what is important to them?
- What can you do to keep this a safe and strong space?
- Does everybody feel confident that they understand their role and what lies ahead?
- Does everybody have a plan and feel confident to reach out to the wider community?

# PHASE 3: YOUR COMMUNITY IN CONTEXT

## PEOPLE, PATTERNS AND POWER (SYSTEMS-THINKING)

### GUIDING INTENTION: WHAT IS THIS PHASE ABOUT?

Now that you have connected as a group, and started reaching out across your wider community, it is time to step back and look at the bigger picture: the people and relationships that shape your community's everyday life, and how to strengthen what already works.

This phase invites you to explore how different elements, like people, places, services, decision-making, power, and the local economy, interact and influence one another. Exploring how these dynamics play out in your local context can help uncover strengths, make sense of challenges, and spark ideas for collective action.

This phase is also about digging beneath the surface. Many issues and opportunities are visible, but often, the real causes and patterns lie deeply embedded in relationships, history, structures, and assumptions. By using simple models and drawing on what you have already heard, your group can begin to map these dynamics, uncover barriers and risks, and identify where meaningful change could take place.

### ROLES: WHO IS INVOLVED

#### For the Lead Team or Facilitator:

- Allow time for everyone to arrive back in the group space.
- Check in: how do people feel about their community outreach?
- Consider having a counsellor or support person present to assist with any difficult emotions that may arise.
- Think about how you want to facilitate the sharing of stories or insights that planners have gathered when connecting with their wider community. Allow time for breaks or individual people stepping out if needed.

#### Community Planning Group:

- Be ready to share stories, insights or examples gathered from your community conversations
- Focus on the strengths, gaps, and opportunities when recounting what you've heard
- Support the group to stay grounded in what matters to the broader community
- Share creative ideas for how to engage the wider community (e.g. events, art walls)

#### SUGGESTED OUTCOMES

##### Improved understanding of how communities work:

- A shared understanding of the domains that shape your community: the people, places, landscapes, power and local economies
- A visual or written map of local strengths, gaps, risks and barriers
- A stronger sense of how stakeholders and communities are interconnected
- Insight into how current and future work can enable broader change
- Recognition of cross-domain strengths and how they fit together

##### Insights about your community:

- A clearer picture of what makes the community strong across the five key areas or domains of community life
- Clear themes drawn from community stories and lived experience
- Greater clarity on who is already active, who holds knowledge or influence, and where collaboration can grow
- Increased awareness of current risks and potential future challenges



**TIP!**

#### Practical Tips and Things to Keep in Mind

- Allow time for personal reflection before group sharing.
- Allow time to return to the 'group space'.
  - » Check-in: How is everyone feeling after connecting with the wider community?
  - » Agree on how you would like to share back what you have heard from your community conversations.
  - » Do you want to add any themes to your 'vision map'?
  - » You could share key strengths and gaps you have heard about – to use in your discussions

**Historical tensions:** Old rifts may resurface in group settings. It's not your job to resolve them, but be mindful of how they may affect the group dynamic.

**Trust matters:** Be aware of any trust issues – within the group or with local agencies or government. These can shape how people show up and participate.

**Expert input:** Technical experts can add real value – when the group is ready. Connect early with local experts (like rangers, brigade captains, ecologists, or local leaders) to build trust and brief them well on the group's goals and dynamics.

#### Opportunities for future action:

- Identified opportunities for collective action and improved outcomes
- Early ideas for priority areas, future projects and potential partnerships
- A refined shared vision for a stronger, more resilient community
- A positive starting point for work planning and community action
- A stronger foundation for shared decision-making and ongoing collaboration

#### SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Over the page are some activities that you could choose to help you build a deeper picture of your community over time, how events and issues connect and affect each other.

Activity

**A TIMELINE OF LOCAL EVENTS**

You can use the timeline to share back what you have heard when talking to members of the wider community. It can go as far back as you decide, and include important events you have heard about in your conversations and how they affected your community. Take note of your community's strengths and resources as they emerge from stories and the timeline and include them in your list of community strengths

This exercise will help you understand how the past connects to the future of your community, how people in your community have responded to challenges in the past and what might be persistent gaps and issues that present as barriers to your community's ability to draw on these resources.

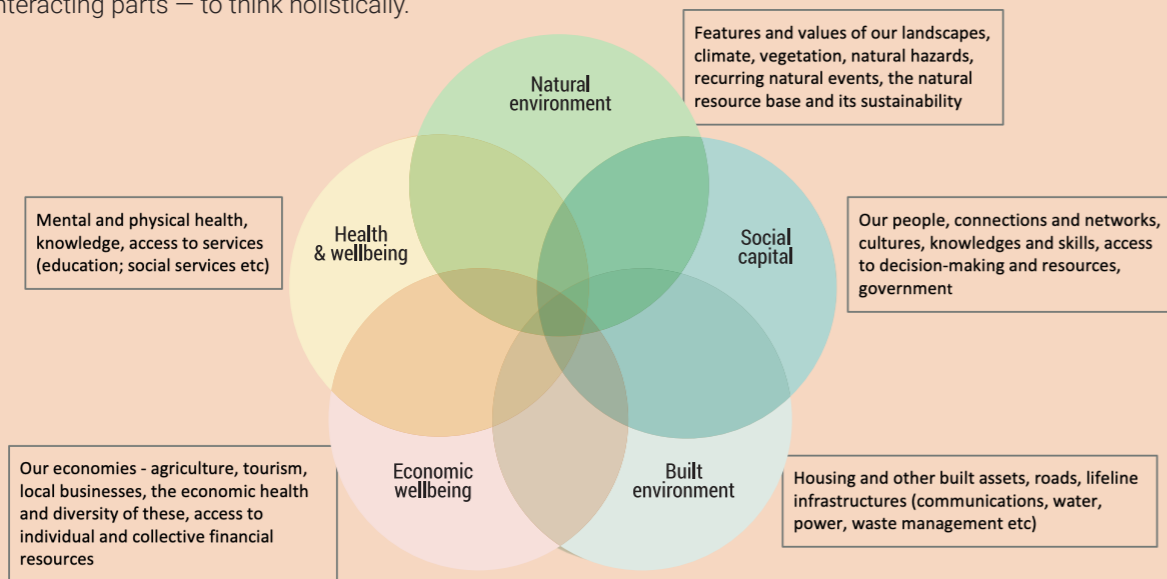
Activity

**MAP STRENGTHS, GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS YOUR COMMUNITY**

Your local community is made up of interconnected domains or resources (the system): people and places, built and natural environments, services, rules and regulations, relationships, livelihoods, businesses, and more. Breaking the whole down into these parts can help you understand each area more clearly, reveal their connections, and see how strengths or gaps in one domain can influence outcomes in others.

The idea is not to be working or thinking in silos but rather, to think of the complex whole with different interacting parts – to think holistically.

From your own discussions, and the stories and insights you have collected when talking to your community, you can now build a shared understanding of your community across the five domains that make up your community. By working together to map what is strong, what is missing, and what is possible across your community, you continue to refine your collective vision by getting a better picture of your community's needs and strengths.



Activity

**EXPLORING CONNECTIONS**

As you are mapping the strengths, challenges, gaps, and opportunities, take note of how they are connected across your community. For example, are there gaps or issues in one (or more) domain that could be addressed by mobilising your community's strengths in another domain? Thinking this way may help you identify themes and opportunities for when you start identifying where you want to prioritise your actions.

For example, a strong local arts community (social domain) can help address economic challenges by creating public art trails, markets, or cultural events that attract visitors, encourage them to stop in town, and support local businesses. This builds pride and identity while also generating new opportunities for tourism and employment.

**DIGGING DEEPER – BEYOND THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG TO THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM**

Taking time to look beneath the surface of an issue can help uncover its root causes and the factors that keep a problem in place. This kind of reflection helps you move beyond quick fixes and develop solutions that are realistic, strategic, and have long-term effects.

Simple tools like the **Root of the Problem Tree** and the **Iceberg Model** (overpage) can support this process. These activities help you unpack complex issues by identifying hidden causes, underlying patterns, and assumptions that underpin the visible symptoms or problems. They can also clarify what can be addressed locally through a community-led project and what might need longer-term action or working in partnership with others. By using these tools, your group can focus time, energy, and resources where they will make the biggest difference and lay the groundwork for long-term, meaningful change.



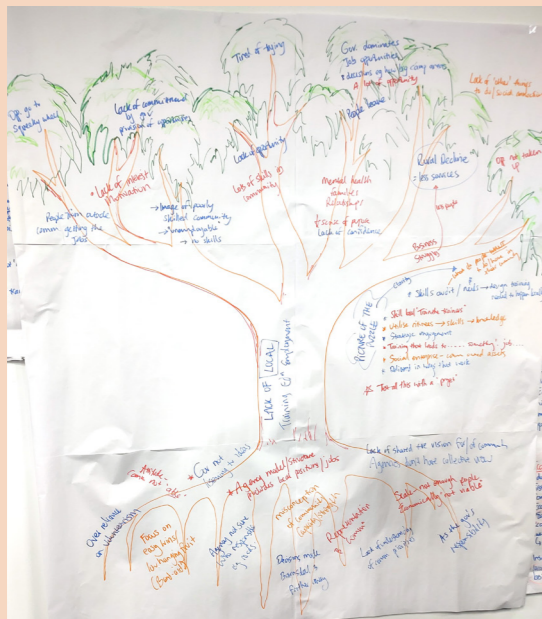
Activity

**THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM TREE**

The Root of the Problem Tree is a thinking activity that broadens participants' thinking about the elements of a problem, who may be able to address what elements and how. This discussion may also prompt some additional questions or help identify knowledge gaps – consider who might be the local experts you can ask or invite to learn more about an issue or opportunity that interests you.

You can run this activity as a group – focusing on one or two key issues – or in small groups to work on a range of different issues you have identified. Whatever you do, having as many different perspectives and insights involved as possible will assist you in building a rich picture of underlying root causes as well as the effects of issues and opportunities across your community.

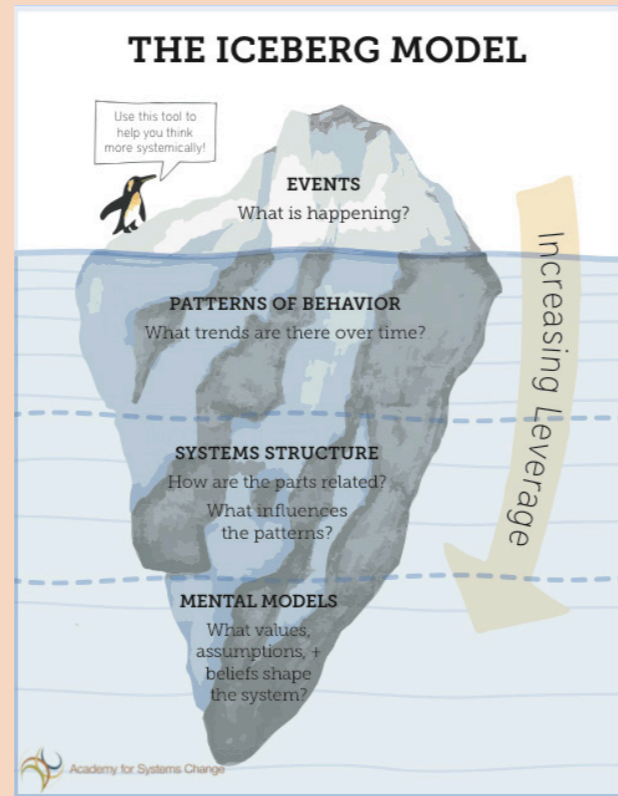
This activity is a great opportunity to listen and work together, expanding on each other's ideas and honouring all contributions.



Root of the Problem Tree; Source: [learningtogive.org](http://learningtogive.org)

Activity

**THE ICEBERG MODEL OF CHANGE**



The Iceberg model offers another way to understand dynamics and interconnections within your community and beyond. The idea is similar to the Root of the Problem Tree: the visible event, problem or issue is often just 'the tip of the iceberg'. Most of the iceberg itself sits out of sight, beneath the water, and this is the most important part. Using the iceberg model helps us identify the root causes of problems, which we often miss if we focus only on events.

Gaining a better understanding of how things work together and relate to each other can help you focus your energy not just on what needs to change, but also on how to make those changes sustainable and lasting.

Image: Academy for Systems Change  
Link: [donellameadows.org/systems-thinking-resources](http://donellameadows.org/systems-thinking-resources)

**Unintended consequences of a surface fix:**

**Situation:** After repeated flooding, a community builds higher levees and floodwalls along the river.

**Surface fix:** This reduces flooding in the short term but people continue to build homes and critical infrastructure in flood-prone areas. When a major flood eventually breaches the wall, the damage is devastating.

**Looking deeper:** When communities and planners reflect, they realise:

- The levees and floodwalls gave a false sense of security, encouraging more development in risky areas.
- Local land use decisions did not consider the natural behaviour of the river or the impact of climate change.
- Land in the floodplain is cheap and there are few options for lower-income residents to live in safer places.

**Root cause approach:** Working together, the community, council, and planners:

- Rethink land use zoning to limit new development in high-risk areas.
- Create buy-back or relocation options for vulnerable households.
- Restore wetlands and natural floodplains to give the river space to overflow safely.
- Include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge of river systems and flood patterns in planning.

**Outcome:** Flood risk is reduced not just by engineering solutions, but by addressing how land is used, who is vulnerable and most at risk, and how decisions are made.

**Example of a surface fix versus a root cause fix:**

**Situation:** A local park has become unsafe, particularly at night.

**Surface fix:** The community asks the council to install more lights in the park but after the lights go in, people still do not feel safe and continue to avoid some areas.

**Looking deeper:** When the community looks beneath the surface, they realise that:

- There are few local youth activities or safe gathering spaces in the neighbourhood, so the park has become a hangout and hotspot for unsafe behaviour.
- The design of the park makes some areas hard to see or access.

**Root cause approach:** Instead of just adding lights, or increasing security patrols, the community works with council, local services, and young people to:

- Support local youth programs and mentorship.
- Co-design safer public spaces by improving visibility and community presence in the area (e.g. community gardens, pop-up art projects).

**Outcome:** Safety improves not just because of better lighting, but because the community addressed underlying causes: isolation, lack of youth engagement, and poor urban design.

Activity

**IDENTIFYING EARLY PRIORITIES AND TESTING THEM WITH YOUR COMMUNITY**

Now that you have mapped what is under the surface, and explored root causes and effects of the challenges in your community, you can begin to identify themes and patterns that hold those challenges in place – and what you can do to address some of these issues.

This activity is a starting point to finding a set of shared priorities that address the areas and challenges that feel most important to act on. The priorities you set now will not be final: the aim is to create an initial list of meaningful and important themes that you can share, test, expand, and refine with your wider community.

Look for patterns and ideas that connect, grouping needs, opportunities, or concerns that emerge in your conversations. Reflect on what matters most right now:

- Which issues feel urgent or would have made a difference during past disruptions?
- What could help you prepare better for future challenges?
- Where is there real potential for change, whether through local action or by partnering with others?

These reflections will help you name and organise your emerging priorities. This could be small steps, local actions or longer term strategic plans. Cast your net widely, you will be returning to this list in the next phase.

Activity

**TESTING YOUR PRIORITIES WITH YOUR COMMUNITY**

Before moving forward, take your list of priorities back out to the wider community. This is a chance to deepen the conversation and check if your draft priorities resonate, make sense, and feel right for others too.

Plan your community conversations similarly to your first outreach. This can be another community event, small group conversations, one-on-one yarns, or even a short survey. Make it easy to respond and go with what works best for you and your community right now.

**Keep it simple.** Use plain language and be upfront: ‘Here’s what we’ve heard so far – does this reflect your experience? What’s missing?’

**Use your networks.** Encourage participants to check in with their own groups: youth networks, sports clubs, faith communities, school mums, Elders, colleagues.

**Look for energy and gaps.** Pay attention to what sparks energy or emotion – and what does not.

**PLANNING TOGETHER: TIPS FOR THE LEAD TEAM**

- Bring printed maps, sticky notes, markers – visuals help!
- Use small breakout groups so everyone can speak
- Document insights clearly – photos, posters, and summaries people can revisit.
- Encourage storytelling from multiple perspectives, not just dominant ones.
- Make sure you are prepared, and bring extra materials if needed.

**PROMPTS FOR REFLECTION, LEARNING, AND ADAPTATION ALONG THE WAY**

- What patterns are you seeing?
- Are you being honest about the tough stuff as well as the strengths?
- Are you getting side-tracked by airing frustrations about things that are not working well?
- What is sparking ideas or energy in the room?
- Are you keeping a record of ideas as they arise from our discussions?
- Who have you not yet heard from?

“We aim to empower our communities through initiatives that nurture respect, collaboration and inclusion, embracing a holistic approach, driven by our love of Country – honouring the wisdom of the Elders and knowledge held in the land and waters. We strive to actively engage children and young people by connecting with their passions, breaking down barriers and supporting their wellbeing and learning pathways.”

– Caring for Country and Youth Vision, on Bundjalung, Gumbaynggirr and Yaegl countries



**TIP!**

**Identifying Funding Opportunities To Help Activities Get Started**

As you begin to set your priorities, now may also be a good time to start exploring possible sources of funding to get you started on some local action.

There are a few avenues you can explore for funding, including:

- **Grants:** Grants are offered by all kinds of organisations, including government (federal, state and local), businesses, philanthropic and interest groups, and community foundations. There are plenty of platforms and resources online that can help you identify grant opportunities that align with your community’s goals and priorities.
- **Crowdfunding:** You can also raise money through donations-based crowdfunding, using platforms such as GoFundMe and others. You can find resources online to help you set up your campaign, things to be aware of, such as fees charged, as well as marketing tips to help your campaign reach as many people as possible.

**Questions to keep in mind are:**

- Is there a Community Foundation in your area?
- Are there any available grant opportunities at your local council? Or at the state or federal level?
- Are there any other organisations who manage or can help facilitate community grants?
- What are the timelines for applications?
- Who in your community has experience with applying for funding or starting a crowdfunding campaign and can offer support of guidance?

## PHASE 4: FOCUSING YOUR ENERGY

### SETTING PRIORITIES AND MOVING TO ACTION

#### GUIDING INTENTION: WHAT IS THIS PHASE ABOUT?

This phase is about bringing it all together and looking ahead. Using the insights and community input you have gathered and shared, now you can decide together what matters most and where to focus your collective energy.

That means settling on a clear, achievable set of priorities for action, while still keeping the bigger picture and long-term vision in mind.

It is also a good time for gathering ideas about what actions could help address these priorities, who might be great partners to involve, and what resources or support you might need. This might include starting to explore ways to raise funds or apply for funding to bring your ideas to life.

The goal here is not to have everything figured out – it is to take focused, practical steps that are grounded in community direction and ready to grow.

#### ROLES: WHO IS INVOLVED

##### The Lead Team:

- **Facilitate decision-making:** Support the group to develop a way to reach agreements on priorities, decision making and how to work collaboratively. This should be assisted by using inclusive and transparent processes such as community impact mapping or short and long term planning.
- **Aim for consensus – it's important that everyone feels they can agree on an idea:** It's ok if you cannot agree straight away, you can park your idea and revisit it later or consult with someone if you feel you need more information.
- **Support coordination:** Keep track of key information, including decisions and responsibilities, timelines, documents, discussions, and outputs.

- **Ensure broad input is considered:** Make sure community feedback and support is genuinely shaping the next steps
- **Reflect on feedback:** Help interpret what the community has said – what resonated, what's missing, what's urgent. If needed, support the group in interpreting what they have heard and what this means for the community's needs, hopes and aspirations.
- **Start identifying funding or resourcing opportunities:** Once the agreements have been made on priorities and activities, research and connect with potential supporters, technical matter experts and avenues to help support the projects.

##### Community Planners:

- **Help others to have their voices heard:** Create safe and inclusive spaces where people feel confident to share ideas, connect with others, and contribute meaningfully. Encourage people or local groups to connect with like-minded people.
- **Champion collaboration: Include those who haven't had a chance to be involved yet.** Take time to connect with people who might be missing from the conversation, especially those who are less visible but have important perspectives. Keep the focus on working together as a whole community.
- **Help prioritise and join the dots:** Share perspectives on what feels important, possible, and aligned with the vision
- **Generate ideas:** Contribute your insights to possible actions, partnerships, or small-scale projects that respond to the priorities and needs of the community.

#### SUGGESTED OUTCOMES

- **A refined vision** and clear and agreed set of community priorities for action
- **A shared understanding** of short-term, long-term, or ongoing community action priorities
- **An initial chart or list showing the importance and feasibility of different actions**
- **Agreed roles, behaviours and the process of making decisions** together moving forward, including conflicts of interest. This could include an agreement of how consensus is made in the event there is a divided group.
- **Early ideas for community-led projects**, activities or initiatives that respond to community priorities.
- Think about where **resources, knowledge, skills and funding** might come from. This might include research on potential funding sources or raising money to support community action
- **A plan for next steps**, including who will take the lead, the formation of a core group, and how others can stay involved

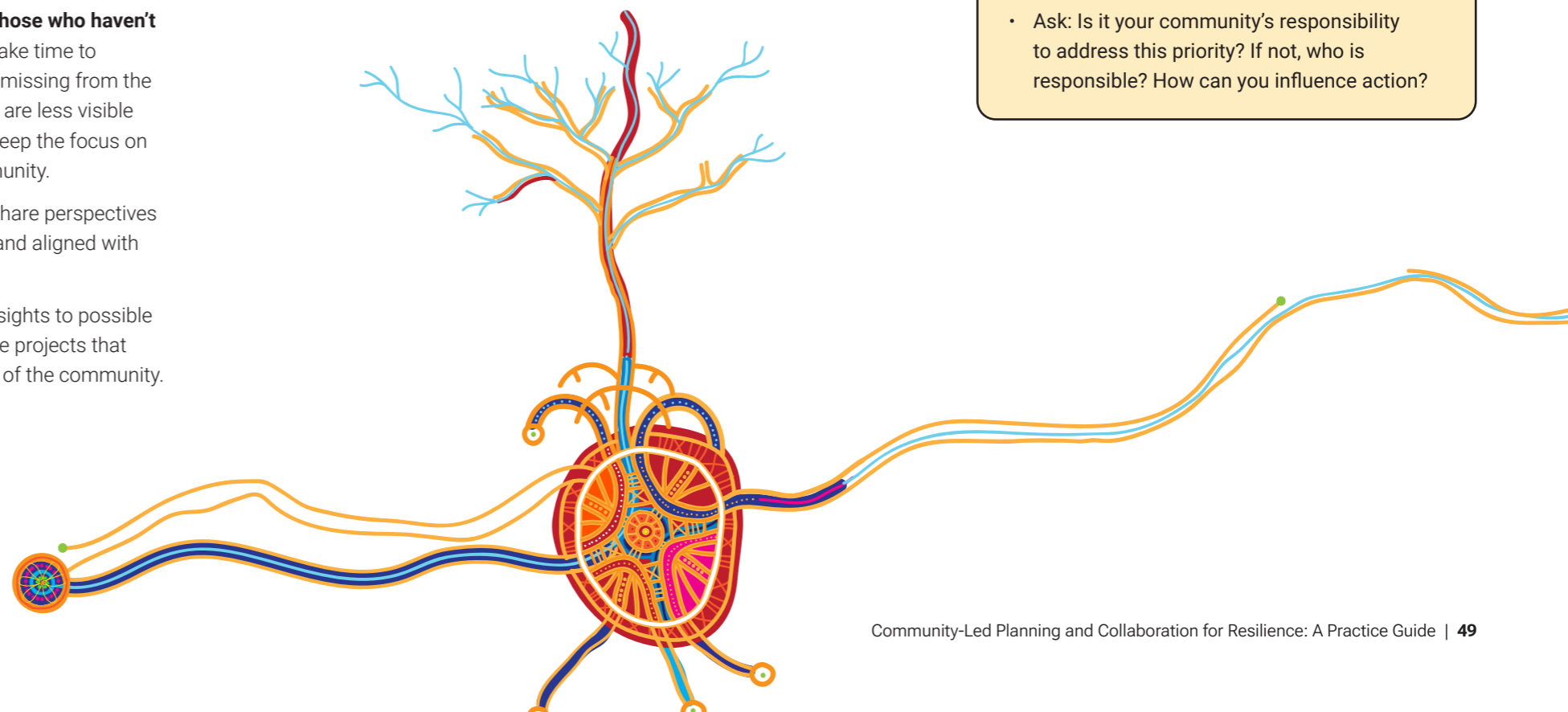
#### SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

The following pages include some activities to help you get started.

#### TIP!

##### Things to Keep in Mind and Practical Tips

- Some people may not feel confident in decision-making; explain tools clearly.
- Use inclusive voting and discussion methods – if there is some contention in the group, it might be helpful to use an anonymous voting method.
- Allow time for discussion when the voting has happened.
- Ensure there is long term flexibility to adapt plans and action when needed.
- Revisit your initial vision and aspirations to help guide decision-making and direction.
- Hold an event like a 'tomorrow party' where the community can do an imagining exercise about the next 5,10, 20years.
- Explore different change ideas – dream big!
- Collect ideas for action as they arise.
- Use simple prioritisation templates or action charts (e.g. short vs long-term, local vs 'higher level' decision-making)
- Use simple tools to help select key priorities (e.g. voting dots, ranking, group discussions)
- Ask: Is it your community's responsibility to address this priority? If not, who is responsible? How can you influence action?



*Activity*

**SHARE WHAT YOU HAVE HEARD AND REVISIT YOUR SHARED VISION**

To help guide your next steps, it's a good idea to revisit your shared vision, which you have drafted in Phase 2. You may have refined your vision along the way — and this is a good moment to ask whether it still reflects what you have heard and learned from each other and your community: Does it still feel right? Do you want to add or modify your vision?

For example, sharing what you heard from your community when testing the group's priorities: What is coming out strong, what does not seem to resonate with your community? Have you missed anything? Are there any surprises? What matters most now? What will move you closer to the future you imagined together?

You can use some of this information in the suggested 'Tomorrow Party' activity.

*Activity*

**HOLD A TOMORROW PARTY**

Imagine your community's future 10 years from now. Your vision has come true and you are celebrating by coming together and holding a gathering like a cocktail party. In small groups at the 'Tomorrow Party', discuss:

- What does it look and feel like?
- What has changed?
- How did you get there?

Consider comparing what you learn in your party discussions with the priority themes you have identified earlier, using the 'Iceberg' or the 'Root of the Problem Tree'.

You might need to take some time to reflect on any new or modified priorities: What themes/areas do they fit under? Or do they need their own new theme?

*Activity*

**SET PRIORITIES FOR ACTION**

Select where and how you want to focus your energy. If your list of priorities is too long, try to reduce it a bit by looking for themes and patterns. Rank them by what you feel is most important to you and your community. You could start simply, by sorting your priorities into 'essential/needs', 'wants' and 'nice to haves'.

A simple priority setting matrix can assist you to create a list of immediate, medium- and long-term priorities, by sorting and selecting each priority along their importance, urgency, feasibility, time-frames, impact etc.

This might include asking who has the capability within the community to address the priority, or where that expertise can come from. Consider the level of influence your group has in addressing each priority. For instance, large infrastructure projects or provision of local services can be driven by strong community advocacy, but responsibility for decisions and implementation ultimately lies with state or other agencies.

If your list is still too long, or you end up with a few priorities that people love but that didn't make it into the top category, consider using a 'popular vote' or 'heart vote' to help further prioritise your list.

**PLANNING TOGETHER: TIPS FOR THE LEAD TEAM**

- **Summarise what you've heard from the community** about what's important to them, to help shape your priority-setting discussions.
- **Gather materials and activities**, for example different decision-making tools that will support group discussion and decision making processes.
- **Make decision-making transparent:** Figure out how to make sure everyone knows the process is transparent. What criteria are you using? What counts as 'important' or 'doable'? How are conflicts going to be resolved?
- **Document decisions transparently**, including why some priorities were chosen over others.
- **Start a draft action list or project register** including who's already involved, will be responsible or could lead on each item.
- **Consider if you might apply for funding to drive certain projects.**
- **Identify early funding or support opportunities**, and share these with the group. Does anyone have experience with fund raising or grant writing grants? Is this a route your group wants to take?

- **Think about when to hold another community forum or meeting.** This can be a good chance to share and test the draft priorities, gather more ideas, involve new voices, and explore next steps together. Make sure to check with the group about the best time and day to meet, so it suits as many people as possible.
- **Support ongoing reflection:** Check in with the quieter voices in your community wherever possible, revisit the group's shared vision, and keep long-term goals in view.

**PROMPTS FOR REFLECTION, LEARNING, AND ADAPTATION ALONG THE WAY**

- Are you focused on what matters to the wider community here?
- Are quieter ideas being heard? How are you giving voice to unheard voices?
- Are you balancing big-picture goals with what's doable?
- Are you considering existing responsibilities? Some of the priorities might be things that council or other agencies are responsible for.
- Have you considered those who will be most directly impacted?

**TIP!**

**The Heart Vote**

Use a Heart Vote to get unstuck when decisions are hard or when great ideas sit in the middle of your list. Each person gets one or two 'heart votes' to show which projects they feel most passionate about (even if those didn't score highest). This gives promising ideas a second chance and highlights projects with strong community energy or potential.

# PHASE 5: PLANNING FOR ACTION AND DECISION-MAKING

## ROLES, RESOURCES AND RELATIONSHIPS

### GUIDING INTENTION: WHAT IS THIS PHASE ABOUT?

This is where your group starts turning your community priorities into real, practical action. You will explore and map out how to move forward on your shared goals: this might be supporting small local projects, or building partnerships and planning action for longer-term change that addresses your priorities.

This phase is also about working out how action will happen: who will be involved, what support or resources are needed, and what decisions need to be made along the way. If you're managing community-owned funds, this is also the time to agree on how decisions and money will be managed fairly and transparently, and how you manage conflicts of interest.

Together, you will begin laying a strong foundation for action that is community-led, inclusive, and ready to grow.

### ROLES: WHO IS INVOLVED

#### The Lead Team:

- **Support clear planning and decision-making:** Help the community planning group move from ideas to action plans, and support them to sort actions into 'Do First / Plan / Delegate' lists.
- **Help connect people, experience and skills:** connect project leads with people who can offer project mentoring or support; or project ideas with groups or organisations that might be interested in making them happen.
- **Help broker partnerships** with other groups, people, stakeholders or organisations
- **Track progress and keep records** of decisions, responsibilities, priorities, and resource needs.
- **Ensure transparency and fairness** in decisions about who does what, intended audience and outcomes and how potential funding may be used.

- **Stay connected to the bigger picture:** keep returning to your shared purpose and long-term vision and don't be afraid to adjust it if things change over time, the key here is to keep it relevant and fresh.

#### Community Planners:

- **Bring local knowledge and experience:** People who know their community well can share what will work in your community and what might not.
- **Support local project ideas:** Create a safe, inclusive space to help people shape their ideas, connect with others, and see how it fits into the bigger picture.
- **Link people and projects:** Use your own connections and those in your network map to connect people who can support each other's ideas.
- **Share practical insight:** Using local knowledge and networks is critical to help identify what's doable, where strengths and resources already exist within the community, and where support, skills, or funding might be needed.
- **Encourage others to get involved:** Help to highlight the relevance and need which will create a sense of excitement, interest, shared ownership and momentum.

#### SUGGESTED OUTCOMES

- **Deeper understanding of the local context,** the key stakeholders, the community priorities and who needs to be involved.
- **A clear pathway** for how your shared priorities will be addressed
- **A list of agreed actions** with roles, responsibilities, and next steps
- **Identification of people, groups or organisations** who want to lead, co-lead, or support specific actions
- **Early ideas for project plans or roadmaps:** Who's doing what? When? What's needed? What already exists?



Avery Brown, Joe Walker, Ken Gordon. Image: Leanne Kelly CVAS

- **Map of key people,** partnerships, stakeholders and collaborators.
- **Identified local partnerships** and relationships to strengthen over time
- **If needed, map out funding strategy:** potential sources, timelines, and responsibilities
- If funding is sought, **shared decisions on how any funds will be held, managed, and distributed**
- **Fair and transparent processes** for making project or financial decisions
- **A growing sense of shared direction and confidence**

#### SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

The following pages include some activities to help you get started.

#### TIP! Things to Keep in Mind

- Make sure tools and templates are simple and visual.
- Pair people up or form small teams for those needing support. Allow flexible timeframes – some ideas take longer to grow.
- Foster a sense of shared responsibility and confidence to move from idea to action
- Don't rush the decision-making process – allow for discussion and reflection so that people are confident in the process.
- But don't try to avoid difference either: Difference, if handled with mutual respect and care, is important to help surface new insights or concerns and make everybody feel heard.
- If you have funding available, write up simple 'calls for project proposals' for others in the community to apply for grants

Activity

**DEVELOP ACTION AND PROJECT PLANS**

Starting with your priority short list, you can now begin planning for actions the group can take immediately or in the medium-term, and those that might need some longer term strategic thinking and action.

Draw on the connections, networks, strengths, and local knowledge that have been gathered over the course of the group’s work together. Think about what already exists in the room and in the community and how these people, skills, expertise, services, resources or relationships could shape the way forward and support the group’s efforts.

It can also be helpful to connect with others outside your group or community to bring in additional knowledge, skills or resources as needed – this creates a great opportunity to create some new relationships and connections that can support your work.

You could appoint ‘project champions’ from within or outside of your group. This might be someone who takes ownership of progressing the project planning, exploring funding options and finding people to work with or take over the project; or they might be managing the project themselves. Whether it is someone with deep knowledge of a particular issue, or just a great local organiser – this phase is about weaving everything together: sharing creative energy, identifying people who can help lead or support specific actions, identifying resources within the community and looking for other ways to keep the momentum going.

The tools in the planning ‘toolbox’ can help you map out actions, what’s next and what is possible, regardless of where the group is focusing. The key is to get started and get moving on actions, beginning to lay the foundations for longer-term change.

Activity

**DISCUSS HOW YOU WANT TO MAKE DECISIONS**

This phase is all about making clear, fair, and transparent decisions together. Now that you have gathered ideas and input from your community, it’s time to decide what priorities, actions or projects to move forward with. Good decision-making builds trust – so it’s important that the process feels open, inclusive, and thoughtful. Some common decision-making techniques, including voting, ranking and group discussions can be found in the Toolbox.

Together, your group can:

- Review what matters most to the community based on earlier conversations
- Agree on how decisions will be made and what criteria you’ll use
- Use tools like voting, ranking, or group discussions to set shared priorities
- Develop a process for managing conflict of interest and being fair and accountable
- Reflect on any biases or gaps, and make space for different perspectives
- Start building a shortlist of projects or actions that are ready to grow



Activity

**COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR COMMUNITY**

**It’s important to keep your community informed and engaged.** The group has already gathered some great ideas and now is a good time to bring more people into the conversation. Inviting others to contribute, connect and collaborate (for example, through local noticeboards, newspaper articles, or social media) can spark new relationships and opportunities.

**Keeping the conversation going helps build and maintain community interest,** support, and a shared sense of ownership. It may take time, but it’s a vital part of building long-term, sustainable momentum for change.

**Don’t be disheartened by disagreement or discontent:** Not everyone in your community will love every idea and that’s fine. Keep going!

**Support people to develop their ideas further.** This could be done by helping create idea posters or mini project plans, using some of the planning

tools in this guide. These can be simple and visual, something that can be shared at gatherings, put up on noticeboards, or talked through with others.

**Consider hosting a community meeting, information session, project fair or showcase,** where people can listen to others ideas, present their own ideas, explore what others are working on, and find collaborators. If you have secured funding or are applying for community grants, you could also put out a simple call for project proposals or support people to develop external grant applications.

**Maintain transparency and visibility across the work by creating a shared project board or information kit.** This can be physical or digital – or both – to help people in your community keep track of what’s happening and what’s coming up, or to reach out for extra support. This is especially helpful if you are managing funds and want to keep things open and accountable.

Activity

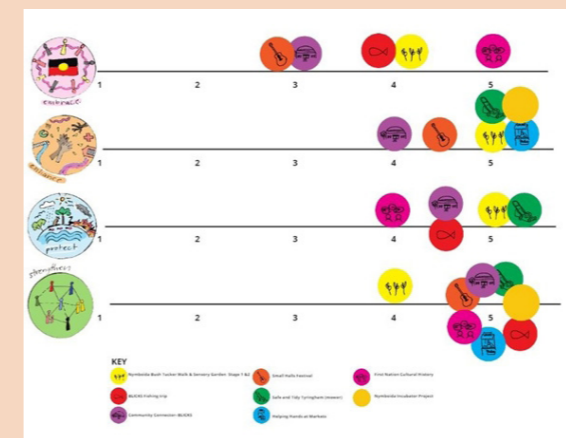
**DECIDE ON DECISION-MAKING CRITERIA**

You have already sorted your priorities, using some simple criteria or guidelines, such as urgency, importance, feasibility. As your group’s ideas and plans develop, your group might want to develop more criteria for what makes an important priority, a good action or a great community project.

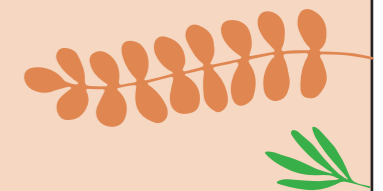
These guidelines help your group make decisions on which ideas or projects to support first. They ensure that decisions are fair, transparent, and focused on what matters most, and will assist you in choosing actions that are feasible and aligned with your community’s goals.

Think of the guidelines or criteria as shared questions you ask about each idea, such as:

- Does this project or idea help you achieve your vision?
- What is the collective community benefit?
- Is it realistic and doable?
- Can you do this yourselves, or will you need help?
- Who will benefit and who might be left out?
- Does this idea or project create any unintended consequences or side effects? (i.e. create new risks or burden for some people of groups)



Example of decision-making criteria and ranking



Activity

## WORKING THROUGH DIFFERENCE

**People will have different opinions.** This is completely normal, and will be very helpful and important for getting the whole picture of what an idea is about. You are bringing together many perspectives, values, and lived experiences. That means differing views or disagreement will happen. What matters most is how you move through it together.

**Try not to avoid conflict or rush past tension.** Instead, see it as a chance to deepen understanding, strengthen trust, and find solutions that work for more people. The goal is not to agree on everything: it is to keep moving forward in ways that feel fair and respectful, and for the benefit of your community.

**Allowing for reflection time** after decisions have been made can help to reduce pressure in the moment and honour different thinking styles.

**TIP!** Use the HEART Vote from your priority setting to help you get unstuck.

**When things get tricky, return to the foundations that you have already built.** Use these as anchors to guide conversations and reset if needed. Aim for collaborative, outcome-focused solutions that support the group to move forward with clarity and care.

- **Your shared vision and purpose:** What are you here to achieve together?
- **Your group agreements:** How did you say you would work together?
- **Your decision-making criteria:** What helps you choose what is fair, practical, and aligned with your goals?

## PLANNING TOGETHER: TIPS FOR THE LEAD TEAM

- **Familiarise yourself with different types of decision-making,** how to explain their pros and cons, and what additional information you think your group might require.
- **Be prepared for different opinions and disagreements** and to help people to work through difference or conflict
- **Offer project mentoring** or partner matching if possible.
- **Document** ideas, decision-making, and resourcing needs clearly.

## PROMPTS FOR REFLECTION, LEARNING, AND ADAPTATION ALONG THE WAY

- Are people feeling supported to take action?
- Do you know what resources or partnerships you will need? Add into purpose/activities: who are key stakeholders and what is their role – who needs to know, who's buy-in do you need etc?
- Are the ideas practical and do they have community support?
- Unsuccessful projects: Why was a particular idea or project not chosen? Can it be modified in some way that might make it a possible future project?

## GOVERNANCE NOTE

*If funding decisions are involved, Planning Group or Lead Team members applying for funding **should declare a conflict of interest** and **step out of decision-making** for that round.*

**TIP!** More Tips from Practice – Decision Making

**Must Do**

- Ensure clarity around roles and expectations
- Maintain a shared understanding of the purpose of the decision-making process.
- Keep the process locally grounded and community-led.
- Make values and decision-making principles explicit and visible during the process.

**Can Do**

- Invite community members to co-create decision-making criteria.
- Use practical tools like a values-criteria matrix to help people reflect on alignment.
- Revisit your group agreement and vision at key points in the process to keep the work on track.
- Provide clear, plain-language versions of documentation and forms..

**Must Not Do**

- Avoid unclear or shifting criteria. It can undermine trust in the process.
- Do not let technical, financial, or risk-related concerns dominate the conversation. Balance is key.
- Avoid leaving people without support when hard decisions or disagreements arise.
- Do not forget to document how decisions were made and why. Transparency builds trust.



East Gippsland team and community

# PHASE 6: DOING AND LEARNING, AND CELEBRATING!

## REFLECTING AND MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

### GUIDING INTENTION: WHAT IS THIS PHASE ABOUT?

In this phase, actions and projects are starting or are already underway, and change is happening. This phase is about supporting action, keeping the momentum going, and creating space for learning, sharing and reflection.

Don't forget to celebrate your progress along the way, whether it's big or small wins! Not every project will follow the same path, and not everything will go to plan. That's okay. The goal here is to stay connected, learn together, and grow your collective capacity as you go.

If you're managing funds or supporting other groups, sustaining your connections is also an important way to track progress, offer support, and plan for what comes next.

This is also the time for reflection on your overall process and for beginning to plan for the long-term sustainability of your work together.

### ROLES: WHO IS INVOLVED

#### The Lead Team:

- Check in with the progress of projects or groups to offer encouragement and troubleshoot challenges
- Help make learning visible: share the wins, lessons, and stories
- Track progress lightly (photos, notes, surveys, feedback)
- Make room for reflection and celebrate milestones
- Stay focused on the long-term vision: what's next, what needs support, what could grow?
- Succession planning: Identify future opportunities, resources, people to take on responsibilities or potential partnerships

#### Community Planners:

- Stay connected with projects and offer local insight or encouragement
- Gather informal feedback and stories from community members
- Reflect on what's working, what feels challenging, and what support might be needed — and who could provide it.
- Share emerging ideas, connections, and community-led wins
- Help others stay connected to the bigger picture

#### SUGGESTED OUTCOMES

- **Ongoing support** or ideas for projects and community-led action
- **Shared stories**, reflections, and visible impact of projects
- **Tools or processes for tracking** progress and learning
- **Stronger relationships** and emerging collaborations
- **Clearer sense of what comes next** (sustainability, scaling, funding)
- **Community members feeling proud**, included, and energised
- **Key learnings captured and shared**, both locally and beyond

#### SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

The following pages include some activities to help you get started.



#### TIP!

#### Things to Keep in Mind

- People process progress differently — use varied ways to check in (talking, writing, showing).
- Create regular moments for reflection — even a short pause makes a difference.
- Host regular check-ins or learning circles (every 6–8 weeks) to discuss what's working, what's tricky, and what's next.
- Share what you've learned widely to help others feel part of the journey.
- Use creative and simple tools — storytelling, photos, feedback boards, or dot voting — to reflect and learn together.
- Document key moments and outcomes to capture your story and track impact.
- Celebrate all progress, not just completed projects.
- Stay flexible — some projects will wrap up, others will evolve.

Activity

**LEARNING CIRCLES**

Host a regular ‘learning circle’ or check-in with groups or projects to get any updates, maintain the connections, share successes and what’s being learned, and to support each other when needed.

**Impact and transparency:** Learning circles are also an excellent way to share progress, and evaluate what impact a project is having in real-time. This can be particularly important when a project has received funding and you need ways to ensure reporting, transparency and accountability regarding the use of resources and progress are up to the requirements.

Activity

**SHARE AND CELEBRATE WITH YOUR WIDER COMMUNITY**

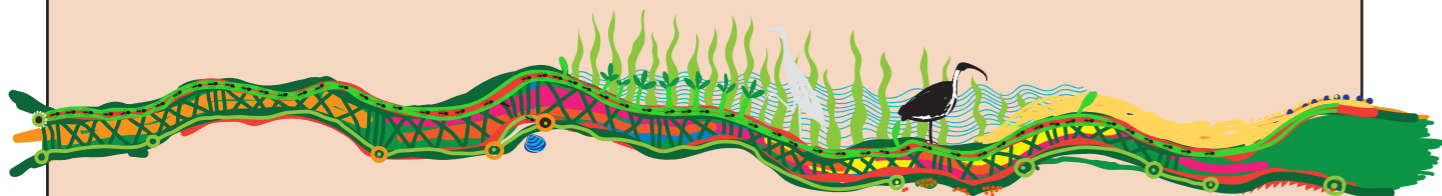
- Mark milestones with informal gatherings, morning teas, posters, or local news stories
- Share outcomes and progress in community spaces, newsletters or social media
- Make time to thank everyone who’s contributed
- Invite others to learn from what you have done. For example, present to Council, run a workshop, hold an exhibition, and share your approach with other groups and communities.

Activity

**TELL THE STORY**

A lot of love – and blood, sweat and tears – goes into planning and carrying out community-based projects. At the end of the day, you will want to be able to share the story of what you have achieved together. Think about how you will tell your story of the work or project and show how it brings benefit and value to the community.

- Think early about what evidence or stories you want to collect
- What does community benefit or value look like for this project?
- How will you show this to others? For example, using photos, quotes, short videos or even a small exhibition?
- Tailor documentation to suit each project and its goals
- Is there another group who might be interested in elevating your story e.g Landcare or the local community foundation?



**PLANNING TOGETHER: TIPS FOR THE LEAD TEAM**

- Set up light-touch tracking tools (e.g. photos, short surveys, shared journals).
- Keep communicating with the wider community and other groups that might be good partners for future projects.
- Keep celebrating small wins too.
- Support groups to think about what comes after the project – do you keep things going? Do you work on something new? Is it time for the group to fold or hand over the baton?

**REFLECT AND PLAN THE NEXT STEPS**

As you come to the end of this phase, take a moment to reflect on the journey so far. Don’t just think of the plans you have made or the tangible actions and projects you might have started - think of the relationships built, the things you have learnt, and the shifts that have taken place in how people come together.

You might explore some of these questions as a group:

- What are you proud of?
- What do you want to do differently next time?
- What have you learnt about our community, our systems, and ourselves?
- What support, funding, or partnerships might you need to keep going?
- What kind of structure or process could help you stay connected and keep the momentum going?
- Are there other voices you still want to include in the work ahead?

These kinds of questions can initiate important conversations and can help clarify whether you want to keep working together, and if so, how you might do that in a way that is sustainable and grounded in your community’s values.

There is no single path forward. Trust that you will find the one that feels right for your place, your people, and your priorities.

**TIP!**

**More Tips from Practice – After the Process**

**✔ Must Do**

- Share outcomes transparently with the wider community. This might include some good stories and also some of the challenges experienced.
- Reflect together on what worked well and what could be improved.
- Capture lessons learnt while the experience is fresh, including highs and lows.
- Acknowledge and thank all those who participated in the process.
- Check in on group dynamics, energy levels, and support needs.
- Stay connected..

**👉 Can Do**

- Share lessons learnt with other communities or organisations doing similar work.
- Celebrate! Host a lunch or informal gathering to mark the effort and outcomes.
- If appropriate, identify opportunities to carry momentum forward (e.g., new initiatives, networks, or collaborations).
- Invite feedback from the broader community to inform the next steps..

**❌ Must Not Do**

- Don’t assume the work is done. Follow-up and sharing is part of the process.
- But also don’t feel pressured to keep meeting once you feel you have achieved everything you set out to do. This is a good time to pause, look at what’s been achieved, and decide together whether to keep going or end things on a high note.
- Avoid letting relationships drop off – sustaining connection matters!
- Do not keep all the knowledge in one place. Make sure others can access what has been learnt.
- Avoid presenting outcomes without context: share the story behind the decisions.
- Do not forget to look after yourself and others. This work can be emotionally and energetically taxing.

# Not an End, But a Beginning

Even though this planning process may be coming to a close, and you and your community have achieved a great deal together — this is not the end of your journey.

In many ways, it is just the beginning: The work you have done — bringing people together, sharing stories, building relationships, creating space for new voices, listening deeply, and mapping priorities for a stronger future — is already contributing to your community's flourishing and resilience. It is shaping a future grounded in self-determination, collective wellbeing and mutual care. That work does not end here. It continues through the conversations you keep having, the actions you take, and the relationships you carry forward.

Some of the ideas you have explored might turn into actions quite quickly, while others may take more time to develop. What matters most is that you have built new connections, opened up possibilities, and taken meaningful steps toward long-term change, together.

As you look ahead, you may choose to establish ongoing structures or governance arrangements, such as setting up a community foundation, establishing a permanent committee, or expanding your network by working with others. This can help carry the work forward and ensure it continues to reflect local values, priorities, and leadership.

Where you go from here is up to you. But every conversation, every collaboration, and every small step contributes to something larger. Your community holds the knowledge, creativity, and strength to shape its own future, and this guide is simply one tool to support that journey.

# Resources

## TOOLBOX

[Here you can find some of the tools](#), activities and suggested templates that are mentioned throughout this guide's phases, and instructions on how to use them. These are meant to provide inspiration and you can adapt them to make them work for you.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Fire to Flourish has produced a range of other resources that might be useful in planning and delivering resilience and grantmaking initiatives. See the Fire to Flourish [website](#) for more details:

## WHERE YOU CAN GO FOR FURTHER SUPPORT

### Fundraising

**Community Foundations** are charitable funds that are established and managed by and for the community. They raise money and offer grants to support local communities to meet their ever-changing needs. Australia has a large network of community foundations that may be able to support you and your community in achieving your goals or priorities. A great first step in exploring funding opportunities is to check if you have a community foundation in your local area. **Community Foundations Australia** (CFA), which is the peak body of the network, provides a map of community foundations [here](#) with contact details.

There are several crowdfunding platforms that you can use to fundraise for your community project, including [MyCause](#), [GiveNow](#), [GoFundraise](#) and [GoFundMe!](#)

There are also platforms that pool grant opportunities in one location. These can be very useful in identifying available grants in your geographical or priority area. Some useful platforms include:

- The Australian Government's [Community Grants Hub](#) (the Hub) offers administrative services and a range of different types of grants.
- [The Grants Hub](#) is a subscription-based platform.

## Non-financial support

The [DisasterWISE Communities Network](#) is a learning network growing a movement of people who are building disaster resilience through self-determination and community-led action. By offering a space for people to connect, learn, and drive real change, DisasterWISE is an enabler for people to build stronger, just and thriving futures.

A range of national and international **non-government organisations** (NGOs) provide non-financial support for local communities. These might include donating time and resources, and supporting on-ground projects, capacity-building, information sharing, networking, and promotion of achievements. NGOs may have a particular thematic focus, such as the environment, Aboriginal culture, disaster recovery, mental health and small business.

**Local fire and all-hazard emergency services** are often volunteer-based and offer training, preparedness and response support in your state and your community. They are also excellent community-based organisations to get involved in.

- [Country Fire Authority](#) (CFA) in Victoria.
- [NSW Rural Fire Service](#) (RFS).
- [South Australian Country Fire Service](#) (CFS).
- [Tasmanian Fire Service](#) (TFS).
- [Volunteer Fire & Rescue Services Association of WA](#) (VFRS).
- [Queensland Fire and Emergency Services](#) (QFES).
- [Northern Territory Fire and Rescue Service](#) (NTFRS)
- [ACT Fire & Rescue](#)
- State Emergency Services (SES) in each state
- Australian Red Cross Emergency Services

**Other statewide agencies** that are invested in working with communities to manage public land, environment and associated risks include:

- Parks Victoria
- National Parks and Wildlife Service (NSW)
- National Parks and Wildlife Service South Australia
- Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service
- Tasmania Parks & Wildlife Service
- Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (WA)
- Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory

**Networks for Community Development** often provide templates, training, advocacy, and connections, for example:

- Australian Neighbourhood Houses & Centres Association (ANHCA) – national voice for neighbourhood and community houses.
- State/Territory neighbourhood house networks (e.g., Neighbourhood Houses Victoria, Linkwest in WA, QCOSS in QLD). These are critical, localised organisations that support and link local communities.
- Volunteering Australia + state volunteering peak bodies – great for recruiting, managing, and training volunteers

**Community-based social and cultural organisations** are also a terrific source of support for collective community resilience efforts. For example:

- Men's Sheds Australia – local hubs for skills, social connection, and small-scale projects.
- CWA (Country Women's Association) – fundraising and advocacy for local needs.
- Multicultural community councils – support inclusion and engagement with CALD communities.
- Local groups – every community has local groups such as mums groups, arts and theatre groups, cultural groups, sporting groups, interest groups, walking / bird watching etc. – the list is endless. These groups often run community and cultural events and fundraising and are welcoming to all members of the community.

# Glossary

## FREQUENTLY USED WORDS AND WHAT WE MEAN BY THEM

**Build Back Better:** An approach to recovery after a disaster that focuses on making things stronger and safer than they were before. It means using the time after a crisis to not only repair buildings and services, but also to improve how a community works together, supports people's livelihoods, and protects the environment — so everyone is better prepared for the future.

**Capacity:** The people, knowledge, skills, relationships, and resources that help a community face challenges, respond to change, and support each other. Capacity can include things like local leaders, strong networks, shared spaces, or past experience, working together during difficult times.

**Caring for Country:** An Aboriginal concept describing the deep, reciprocal relationship between people and the lands, waters, and ecosystems they belong to. It involves looking after Country through cultural, spiritual, and practical care, guided by ancestral laws and knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

**Co-design:** Co-design brings together people with different experiences to help shape ideas, and design solutions, or actions. Everyone's knowledge and input is valued, and the goal is to create better outcomes by working together.

**Community-led:** An approach where local people take the lead in identifying issues, making decisions, and creating solutions. The community owns the process, includes a wide range of voices and works together with others in ways that are respectful, empowering, and locally driven.

**Community resilience:** Resilience is how people, places, Country, law, livelihoods and institutions work together to prepare, respond, adapt, and recover well from disasters, shocks, or big changes — and come out stronger. Community resilience also means using local knowledge, strengths, and relationships to support each other, make decisions together, and take action to shape a positive future, especially in uncertain or changing conditions.

**Cool burn/cultural fire:** A traditional Aboriginal fire management practice using low-intensity, 'cool ' fires, usually lit in the early morning or evening, to gently clear undergrowth without harming soil or canopy. It reduces fuel loads, promotes native regeneration, and reflects cultural Care for Country.

**Country:** Country is the term often used by Aboriginal peoples to describe the lands and waters to which they are connected. The term contains complex ideas about law, place, custom, language, spiritual belief, cultural practice, material sustenance, family and identity. 'Country is everything. It's family, it's life, it's connection' (Jude Barlow, Ngunnawal Elder).<sup>3</sup>

**Social capital:** The web of relationships, trust, and mutual support that connects people and groups. Social capital helps communities work together and take action. It can include: Bonding: close ties between people who are similar (like family or close friends) *Bridging:* connections between different groups (across age, culture, interests, etc.)

*Linking:* relationships between communities and people in positions of power (like government or funders).

**Strengths-based approach:** An approach that focuses on what people and communities already have and builds on their skills, knowledge, relationships, and resources. Instead of focusing only on problems or gaps, it looks at strengths and how to grow them.

**Systems change:** A way of looking at big-picture change. It involves understanding how different people, places, Country, organisations, rules, and power structures interact, and working to shift the deeper conditions that keep problems in place. It is about changing what makes the big picture what it is, not just responding to one issue at a time.

**Trauma:** A strong emotional response to events that threaten safety, such as disasters, violence, colonisation, or ongoing discrimination. Trauma can show up as fear, sadness, anger, withdrawal, or feeling disconnected. Trauma can also be: Intergenerational: passed down through families after war, removal of children, or other historical harms; Cultural: caused by suppression of a group's language, identity, or practices; Intersectional: when racism, gender-based violence, poverty, disability, or other forms of discrimination overlap; Vicarious: the emotional impact of hearing or supporting others through their trauma, which can affect your own wellbeing.

**Trauma-informed approach:** An approach that recognises the many causes and expressions of trauma; creates safe, respectful, and supportive spaces, in which people are active partners in healing and decision-making; builds trust and relationships over time. Seeks to avoid re-traumatising people.

<sup>2</sup> [culturalheritage.org.au/resource/caring-for-our-country-iatsis](https://culturalheritage.org.au/resource/caring-for-our-country-iatsis)

<sup>3</sup> [aiatsis.gov.au/explore/welcome-country#toc-what-is-country](https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/welcome-country#toc-what-is-country)

# FIRE to FLOURISH



Strength through community-led action

Fire to Flourish is a pioneering five year program, working in partnership with communities affected by the 2019/20 Australian bushfire season to trial innovations in community-led disaster resilience

Pathways for scaling the insights, models and tools developed through the program are being created through partnerships with government, philanthropic, not-for-profit and private sector organisations.

Fire to Flourish is led by Monash University and supported by cornerstone philanthropic partners, the Paul Ramsay Foundation and Metal Manufactures Pty Ltd. Additional philanthropic support is provided by the Lowy Foundation.

For more information, go to:  
[firetoflourish.monash](http://firetoflourish.monash)