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Now-Future-How

Insights from testing a holistic model for community-led approaches to disaster resilience



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Custodians and Owners of all the lands on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Elders of the past, present and those being nurtured and acknowledge the sovereignty of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples. We are committed to collaboration that furthers self-determination and creates a better future for all.

- We acknowledge in particular the following lands on which this report was developed:
- The lands of the Gumbaynggirr, which stretch from the Nambucca River in the south to around the Clarence River in the north and the Great Dividing Range in the west.
- The lands of the Bundjalung, which extend from Grafton on the Clarence River in the south to the Logan River in the north and inland as far as the Great Dividing Range at Tenterfield and Warwick.
- The lands of the Gadigal, which stretch along the southern side of Port Jackson (Sydney Harbour) from South Head to around what is now known as Petersham, where TACSI Sydney is based.
- The lands of the Kaurna of the Adelaide Plains and the Peramangk peoples of the Adelaide Hills, where TACSI Adelaide is based.
- The lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong of the Kulin Nation where Monash University is based.



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TACSI is committed to working alongside community changemakers and system stakeholders to develop resilient and regenerative futures for Australian communities. In this work we have been deepening the capabilities of community members to lead change in fire-affected communities experiencing inequities.

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Key terms and definitions

Co-design circle: In this context, a small, diverse convenings of community members committed to imagining new ways of strengthening resilience, building capability, connecting and learning alongside each other and collectively making decisions for the benefit of their community.

Co-designer: In this context, a community member who has opted into the program who uses co-designing strategies and ideas alongside other community members.

Community-led: A process, decision, or action designed and made by a group of people for themselves.

Holistic resilience: A planning process that supports community members to envisage multidimensional recovery and resilience efforts that strengthen social capital and community wellbeing.

Inequity: A lack of justice or fairness that is tied to unjust societal conditions which perpetuate the imbalance of opportunities in a society. Inequities can be related to race, gender, sexuality, ability, as well as socioeconomic, geographical, health, and wellbeing.

Now-Future-How: The model developed by TACSI and fire-affected communities that seeks to test and learn how to create equity for fire-affected places; it brings community members together to collectively lead, plan, invest in, and build resilient, regenerative futures.

Participatory granting: A process of collective decision making where community members decide the way funds are distributed in the community.

Social capital: The features of social organisations, such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit (Putnam, 1994). Bonding, bridging, and linking social capital are key in the adaptive capacity of a community to withstand disaster. (Aldridge 2012; Azad & Pritchard, 2023).

Thrive: To prosper in spite of challenges; adapting positively, enhancing wellbeing and leveraging challenges as opportunities to foster sustained, positive growth.

Trauma: Trauma is an event or process which overwhelms the individual, family or community, and the ability to cope in mind, body, soul, spirit (Atkinson, 2002).

Cultural trauma: A 'discursive process, resulting from extreme violence and exposing the deep emotional base that grounds individual and collective identity, cultural trauma is both an articulation/representation of this emotional grounding and at the same time a working-through, a searching attempt at collective repair' (Eyerman, 2012).

Intergenerational trauma: Trauma that is passed between generations both vicariously and through prolonged exposure to stressors, leading to a cycle of trauma that is left unaddressed (Darwin et al., 2023).

Historical trauma: A complex and collective trauma experienced over time and across generations by a group of people who share an identity, affiliation, or circumstance (Mohatt et al., 2014).

Collective trauma: Trauma affecting groups of people, often resulting from catastrophic events that shatter societal fabric (Gordon, 2004a; Gordon, 2004b; Hirschberger, 2018; Storozhuk et al., 2023).

Trauma-informed: Approaches that acknowledge the event, experience, and effects of trauma.

Introduction

From Kerry Jones, Director of Systems Initiatives, The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI) and Former Community Executive, Fire to Flourish Program (2021–2023)

“This is an exciting social experiment, based in the Clarence Valley, with a small group of enablers representing their communities, exploring new ways to help communities recover in times of disaster and grow resilience to cope better both in good times and with the disasters of the future in our nature hoods and across the whole valley.

We are part of a five-year project that grows as it goes. More enablers and more LGAs will join the co-designer family. We will drop off at some stage, but our story will continue... wiser, more ready and better for the whole experience. The co-designers are part of a bigger Fire to Flourish team – Elders, researchers, facilitators, designers, social innovators, leaders, funders, visionaries.

More than a funding program, the deep change lives in the process, guided by the principles... the stories... the garden of ideas... leading to but not centred on participatory grantmaking.”

–Cate, Clarence Valley co-designer.

I am excited to present the learning in this report, drawn from a 24-week experiment in Clarence Valley. Led by The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI) as part of Monash University’s Fire to Flourish program, this project builds on TACSI’s 15 years of experience helping communities shape their own futures.

For me, the work we’ve done with Clarence Valley – and the learning it generated – paints a powerful picture of how Australia could choose to respond to the compounding disasters faced by communities. It demonstrates that by weaving stronger social fabrics, embedding equity, and grounding our efforts in place-based wisdom, we have the opportunity to create more resilient and regenerative futures for generations to come.

Together, with community members like Cate, TACSI developed and tested the Now-Future-How model, designed to support disaster-affected communities in leading their own recovery and resilience journeys. The approach responds to opportunities and gaps in support that many communities, like those in Clarence Valley, experienced following the Summer Fires of 2019/20.

Our findings are not meant to replace the excellent work already being done in disaster resilience, but rather to complement and strengthen it.

The Now-Future-How approach demonstrates how:

- Building **cultural safety and connecting to Country** are vital first steps in resilience-building.
- Grounding resilience processes in a set of **guiding principles and capabilities** helps sustain community participation and shifts how community members understand their role and their community’s potential.
- Blending **resilience planning with participatory granting** (often siloed activities) avoids the frustration of planning-without-granting or the waste of granting-without-planning.

- A greater **diversity of leaders** can be uncovered and supported to collectively lead community focused work, easing the burden on over-committed leaders while strengthening local leadership capacity.
- Working alongside communities to **balance external support with community-led actions** proves far more effective in long term self-determination than imposing external solutions.
- Community members have deep understanding into the complex systems shaping their experience on the ground. This was illustrated by Clarence Valley co-designers who developed **over 30 ideas for systemic change**, including change to emergency responses and national level resilience building activities.

We invite you to explore and adapt these learnings, and consider how they might apply in your own context. As this knowledge has deep roots in the lived experiences and wisdom of community members, we ask that this is acknowledged in ongoing uses and encourage you to share your learning in return.

SECTION 1

Piloting a holistic model for catalysing community-led approaches to disaster resilience

This section shares the origin, purpose, elements, and lessons gained through piloting the Now-Future-How model.

CATALYSING COMMUNITY-LED APPROACHES TO DISASTER RESILIENCE

“I thought it was going to be this big, resource hungry thing that we had to feed. You know, we had to go and find all this stuff and shovelling into the machine and crunch it up and spit it out the other side. And as it turns out, it’s all about us.” – Ross, Clarence Valley co-designer.

“This deeper change does not start with improvement of what is existing, but rather asks a bigger question about what is needed now to flourish. This is work that must grapple with power, the legacy issues of who is left out and, critically, creates a narrative that links everyday practice to a transformative vision.” – Hillary Cottam on implementing Radical Help (2021).

Australian communities are today grappling with the impacts of compounding crises that highlight the limitations of traditional government and agency-led responses to address intersecting challenges, which include entrenched inequities, disasters, biodiversity loss, and economic stagnation.

Following the Summer Fires of 2019/20, Fire to Flourish sought to understand from fire-affected community members what it would take to enable community-led approaches to disaster resilience in places experiencing both fire and inequity. In these design conversations, we heard that a holistic approach was needed to address whole-of-community barriers to resilience, such as structural inequality, compounding trauma, and limited opportunities for strengthening local capabilities.

The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI) co-designed the Now-Future-How process alongside leaders of fire-affected communities, First Nations peoples, experts in collective trauma and collaborative learning, and resilience system stakeholders. The approach proposes that strengthening innovation capability in community ecosystems can facilitate transformative change that strengthens disaster resilience, deepens relationships, respects and evolves with Country, and seeds equitable futures.

Purpose and aims of the model

The Now-Future-How model is designed to support communities to thrive through disasters by strengthening community-led resilience. It aims to create equity for fire-affected communities, enabling them to lead, imagine, invest in, and craft resilient, regenerative futures. The model focuses on building capabilities for testing and learning both new and traditional processes for community-led action.

What the model enables

The model enables communities to explore and implement ways to enhance resilience that are rooted in local knowledge and systems-informed practices; to learn what it takes to create equity for fire-affected communities in their place. It facilitates holistic conversations about resilience, diversification of social

connections, and sustained action for community transformation. Additionally, the model supports the integration of resilience planning, network learning, and participatory granting to build local governance and foster a culture of collaborative decision-making.

How the model achieves outcomes

The model achieves its outcomes through a novel integration of resilience planning, network learning, and participatory granting to build local governance, diversify social connections and foster a culture of collaborative decision-making. In the model, community members work alongside social innovators, funders, and resilience stakeholders to strengthen a unique set of capabilities for community-led action towards resilient, regenerative futures. The model foregrounds local and First Nations knowledge, engages unheard voices, and supports networked community change. By integrating these elements, the model helps communities build resilience through collaborative learning, future-oriented thinking, and collective decision-making, ultimately leading to sustainable community-led transformation.

Elements of the model

Guiding principles: Foundational values that guide the model's application and ensure alignment with community needs and goals.

Capabilities: A unique set of capabilities for strengthening community-led action towards resilient, regenerative futures.

Adaptive innovation cycle: Structured and adaptable stages of innovation that allow for iterative testing, learning and pausing as needed by community.

Community innovation methods: Inclusive, participatory approaches such as co-design circles, network learning, and participatory granting, which involve community members in decision-making processes.

THE ORIGINS OF THE NOW-FUTURE-HOW MODEL

During conversations with communities and ecosystem stakeholders impacted by the Summer Fires of 2019/20, we learned that there was a significant lack of support focused on equity and long-term transformation. The Now-Future-How model was seeded at this time to address that lack of support.

Community members named consistent barriers to their resilience efforts. These included:

- **structural inequities**, including systemic racism, dependency building, and top-down supports,
- **compounding dimensions of trauma**, including cultural, intergenerational, historical and collective,
- **limited local opportunities** to learn through doing and develop problem-solving capabilities,
- **competitive granting processes and conditional funding ‘buckets’** that amplified gaps in support, discouraged collaboration and entrenched existing inequities in communities.

To counterbalance these factors, we heard a holistic resilience¹ process was needed to surface new ways for communities to reimagine resilience, self-organise around strengths, and mobilise towards desired futures. In response, we proposed an assemblage of *trauma-informed and interconnected elements* that could:

- **enable community-led decision-making and adaptive learning** through *guiding principles*,
- **respect the breadth, depth, and diversity of community experience** through *co-design circles* focused on *holistic resilience planning* and *capability building*,
- **strengthen social capital and create opportunity for collective problem-solving** through *network learning*,
- **explore alternative ways for distributing funding** through *participatory granting*,
- **support community members to come together safely and bravely** through *groundwork*.

The combination of these elements was to become the Now-Future-How model.

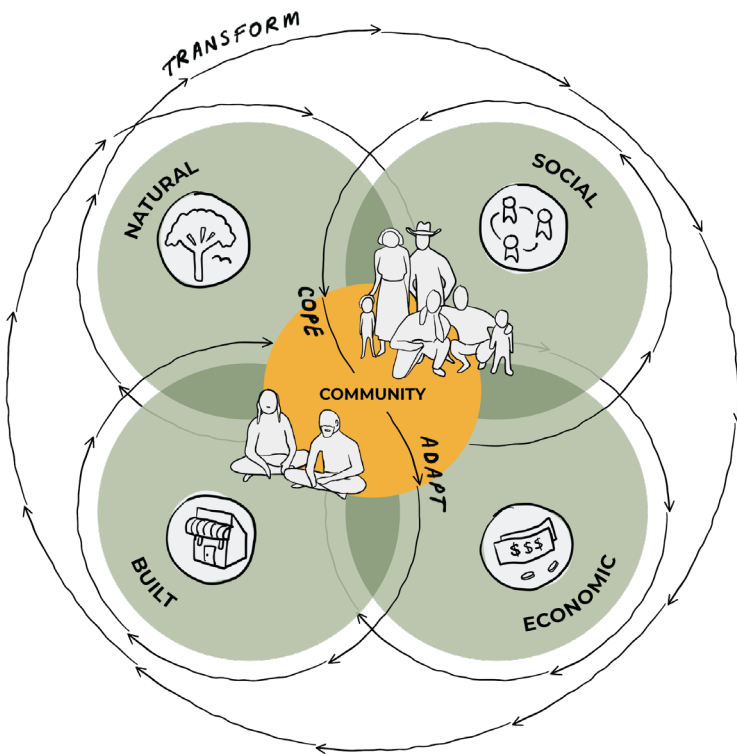


Image: Holistic resilience narrative developed for the Now-Future-How model.

¹ The holistic resilience narrative developed for the Now-Future-How model brings together lessons in community-led recovery and resilience learnt in New Zealand through their holistic recovery model (Norman, 2006), in Victoria by community-led recovery committees following the Black Saturday Fires (McAllan et al., 2001), and by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples, including evidence presented to the 2019/20 bushfires Royal Commission (Williamson, 2020) and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing framework (Gee et al., 2014).

Testing the approach

Underpinning early design conversations was a strength-based approach: convening people in trauma-informed and healing experiences with a focus on relationships, imagination and seeding ideas to action. Our approach was developed in consultation with TACSI's Aboriginal Lead Aunty Vickey Charles, collective trauma expert Dr Rob Gordon, and adaptive learning expert Dr Toby Lowe. Various resilience system stakeholders were also consulted during this time, including: government agencies, emergency services, local and regional authorities, and not-for-profit organisations² engaged in frontline recovery services. Seeing its value in engaging community members, we then iterated and extended the approach to become a practical methodology not only for researching with communities, but also catalysing change alongside them.

This became the first iteration of the Now-Future-How model and was tested in small workshops with fire-affected community members in late 2020.

Piloting the expanded model

The second iteration of the model tested its elements alongside four communities through the Fire to Flourish program in partnership with Monash University from 2021–2023. Section two of this report shares stories from the pilot of the expanded model in Clarence Valley. In 2021, Clarence Valley was in a position to test the model, with seven intentionally diverse co-designers participating and making a significant contribution to the model shared in this report. The pilot navigated COVID-19 lockdowns, as well as the February 2022 floods in the Northern Rivers.

Model design

Throughout these phases of work, we learnt that beyond recovery, there are a number of things that need to change in order for diverse communities to thrive through disasters and into regenerative futures. The Now-Future-How model is a holistic capability building process that surfaces new ways for communities to reimagine resilience, self-organise around strengths and mobilise towards desired futures. Shown on the following page and detailed further in the following section, the model's novel combination of interacting elements catalyse the conditions for community members to lead their own change.

² Specifically, Resilience NSW, Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, National Bushfire Recovery Agency, NSW Office of Emergency Management, Department of Regional NSW, Department of Regional Development, the Independent Planning Commission NSW, Local Government NSW, Red Cross, Save the Children, NSW Aboriginal Lands Council (southern zone), Katungal Aboriginal Health Service, SANE, Blackdog Institute, Royal Far West, Foundation for Regional Recovery and Renewal, and Lifeline.

THE NOW-FUTURE-HOW MODEL: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO COMMUNITY-LED DISASTER RESILIENCE

<p>Vision: Building community capacity to share and connect stories from the past and present, create equitable visions for the future, and take real steps to make those visions happen.</p>
<p>Purpose: Community members coming together to learn how to create equity for fire-affected places, by leading, planning, investing in, and building resilient, regenerative futures.</p>
<p>Principles (See section)</p>
<p>That guide the process: <i>Foreground Aboriginal wisdom; Community-led; Healing; Holistic; and Imagination.</i></p>
<p>Capabilities (See section)</p>
<p>That co-designers are supported to strengthen: <i>Cultural safety; Holistic thinking; Network learning; Social innovation; and Community-led action.</i></p>
<p>Adaptive Innovation Cycle (See section)</p>
<p>That creates adaptive phases for communities to move through without being directive or restrictive, and that leads to the creation of stories for change, a future vision, an ecosystem of ideas and prioritised, funded projects to action. These phases are: <i>Groundwork, Now, Future, and How.</i></p>
<p>Community Innovation Methods (See section)</p>
<p>That adapts existing social innovation methods to counterbalance factors affecting communities capacity to reimagine resilience, self-organise around strengths, and mobilise towards desired futures. There are four interdependent elements: <i>Co-design circles, Network learning, Holistic resilience planning, and Participatory granting.</i></p>
<p>The intended outcomes of the process is to bring planning and granting together in such a way that practical actions can be undertaken now that are connected to long-term visions for community.</p>
<p>The broad goal of the model is to foster community capabilities that address inequity, strengthen social capital, and develop community-led approaches to disaster resilience.</p>

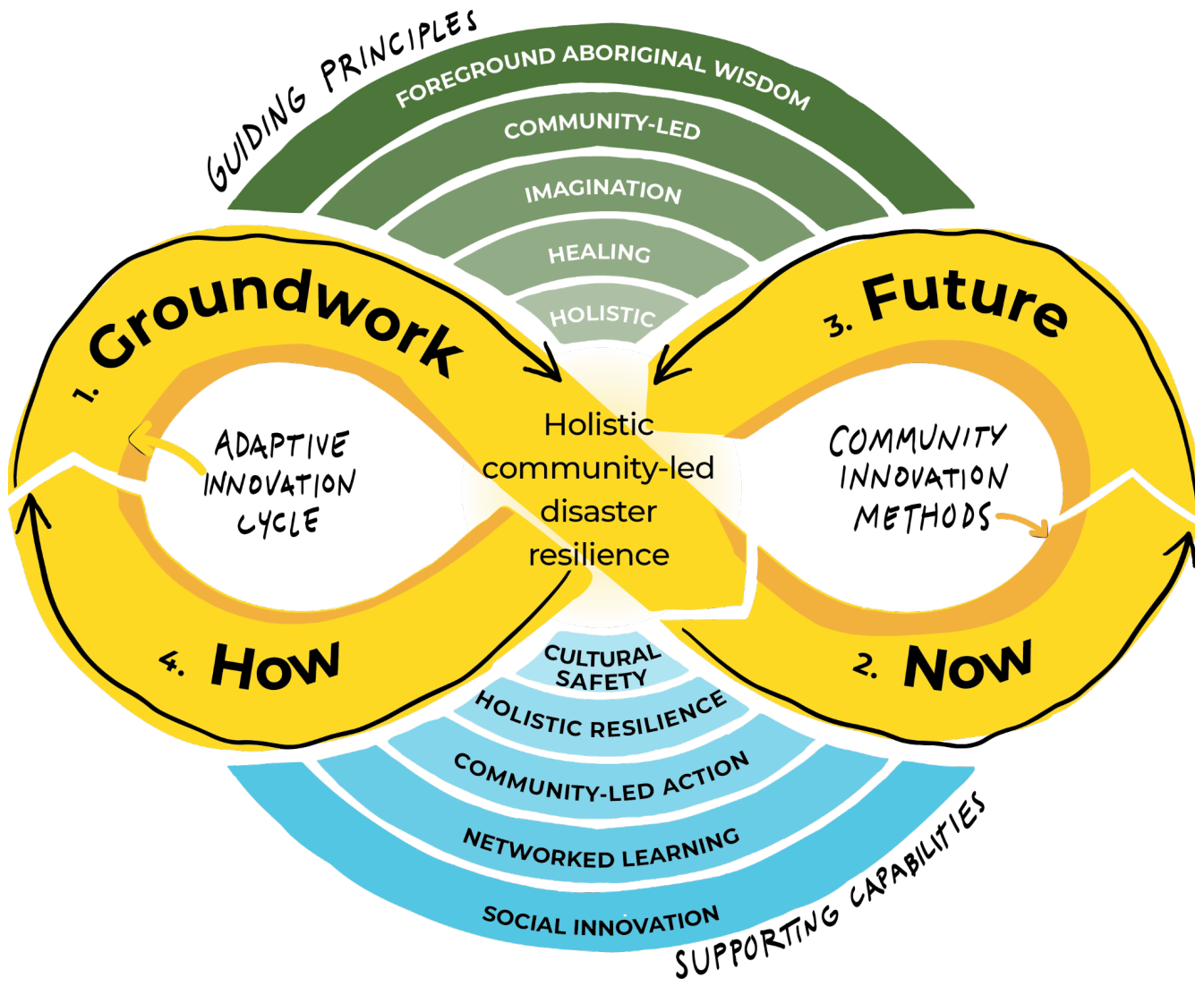


Image: the Now-Future-How model elements

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

“The reality is that those principles really do guide you. You don’t realise that until you start pulling things together and you say, ‘Well, hang on, that doesn’t fit with that principle.’ And then you sort of tweak it a different way. And all of a sudden it does.” – Ross, Clarence Valley co-designer.



We believe community-led approaches to disaster resilience need to be guided by five interconnected principles:

- **Foreground Aboriginal Wisdom:** Prioritising active partnership with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples, respecting cultural wisdom and connection to Country.
- **Community-led:** Practising community-led approaches that ensure equity and shared prosperity through diverse leadership, and collective visions and projects.
- **Healing:** Being aware of trauma and seeking to amplify healing practices to generate new social capital for communities.
- **Holistic:** Practising ways to see the big picture, connect the dots, and strengthen the whole person, the whole community, and regenerate living systems.
- **Imagination:** Encouraging creativity, hope, curiosity, and imagining the big ‘what ifs’ that lead to resilient futures.

The practice of having an explicit set of principles helps provide an anchor through community complexity.³ In use, principles act as a compass for everyone involved in the process from the capabilities we strengthen to the strategies, practices, and decisions we make. For example, principles can provide a shared reference point to collectively shape decisions, constructively challenge the decisions of others, or act as an aligned intent that enables adaptation and a framework for evaluation. They also help keep us grounded in our shared purpose of creating equity for fire-affected places.

Below we detail the five principles and what we have learned about how they can inform community-led resilience practices.

³ We’ve written more about the benefits of following a principle-based approach in complexity in [‘Our Town - Catalysing Community Led change’](#).

Foreground Aboriginal Wisdom

“We’ve been kind of drowning in this type of challenge and frustration for a long time. We were asking people to look around to understand how Country’s getting sicker. And so even just to have this conversation right now with this group of people is something that we haven’t been able to do. And now I’m here with you. It’s this progress that’s happening. Even from the ritual, from when we first begin and everyone Acknowledges Country, that doesn’t happen much at all elsewhere.” – Kaleesha, Clarence Valley co-designer.

This principle prioritises active collaboration and partnership with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples. It acknowledges that First Nations communities in Australia are disproportionately affected by bushfire and experience systemic racism in response, recovery, and resilience efforts (Wahlquist, 2020; Williamson, 2020). Approaches that foreground Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander wisdom recognise and lean into Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities’ long histories of innovation, systems thinking, problem solving, and resilience that non-Aboriginal people can learn from, while respecting data sovereignty and cultural Intellectual Property. We developed ways for practising this principle through the lens of ‘Respect, Connect, Reflect, Direct’ (Yunkaporta, 2019).

✦ Always start here

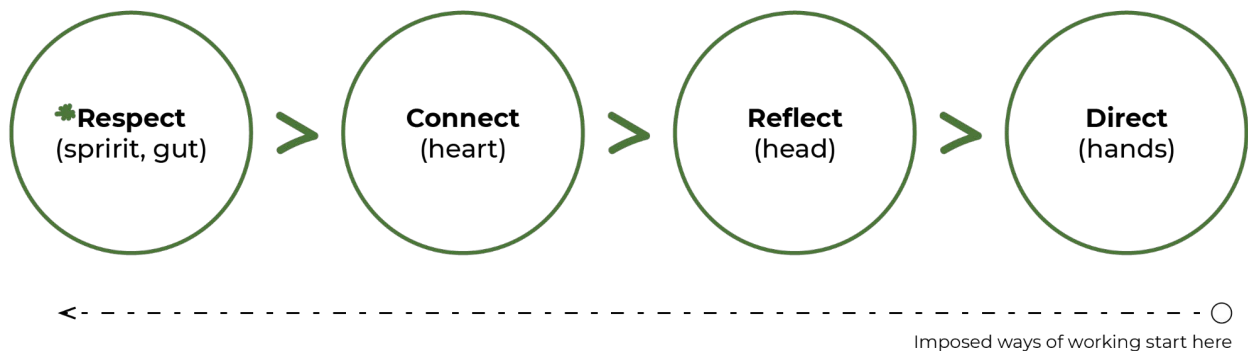


Image: Respect, Connect, Reflect, Direct (Adapted from Yunkaporta, 2019).

In practice, this principle means:

- Observing Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander engagement processes and design protocol. For example, [Indigenous Design Charter](#) (Kennedy, Kelly, Greenaway, & Martin, 2018), [Storywork](#) (Archibald et al., 2019), [Yarning with a Purpose](#) (Aunty Vickey Charles, TACSI, 2019), [Dialogue/Yarning Circles](#) (Sheehan, 2011), [Data Sovereignty](#) and [Right of Reply](#) (Indigenous Archives Collective, 2019), and [Engaging with Country](#) (Hromek, 2020).
- Acknowledging Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Traditional Owners and lands at every convening.
- Prioritising Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander wisdom with all community members from first conversation and through all engagements.
- Being in deep conversation with First Nations community members around diversity, composition, and growth of co-design groups.
- Weaving place-sourced practices throughout the process with community. For example, [On Country Learning](#) (Moran, Harrington & Sheehan, 2018), [Cultural Burning](#) (Costello, 2017), [Dadirri](#) deep listening (Miriam-Rose Foundation), Ungunmerr, 1988; We-Ali, 2019), [Decolonising Methodologies](#) (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999), and [Designing on/with Country](#) (Hromek, GANSW, 2020).
- Surfacing gaps in team capability and nurturing cultural competency to work alongside First Nations ways of being, knowing and doing, including ways of learning, facilitating and coming together.
- Travelling to communities to meet Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Custodians and Elders to understand on-the-ground experiences that may not have been documented in formal reporting.

Community-led

“I have been having these conversations for over 20 years. Sometimes it gets very complicated, easy to get wrong, I haven’t known what to do. The only thing that has come close to feeling right is what we are doing, which is connecting.” – Laena, Clarence Valley co-designer.

“A lot of us don’t see ourselves as victims of the situation that’s happened; we consider ourselves as changemakers. One of the interesting things for me is that being a co-designer gives you a great opportunity to listen and think. To listen carefully and think deeply about some of the things that pass us by when we’re in the middle of the ‘doing’.” – Cate, Clarence Valley co-designer.

This principle prioritises the right of every person to contribute to decisions that affect their lives. “Community-led approaches are already regarded as the optimal approach to sustainable disaster recovery, fostering self-reliance and self-determination within affected communities” (Dibley et al., 2019; Olshansky, 2005 in Gibbs et.al, 2021). Community-led practices are particularly effective in building resilience as they enhance the collective capacity to respond to and recover from disaster, ensuring that those most affected are at the forefront of decision making and implementation. In action, this looks like community members working together to create and achieve locally owned visions, projects, infrastructures, and goals, leading to strengthened social capital and cultivating a sense of ownership over community futures. We built on the [Spectrum of Community-led Approaches to Change](#) (Attygalle, 2020) to help understand different approaches to community-led change: community shaped, community informed, community driven, and community owned.

In practice this principle means:

- Surfacing the many roles being played by community members and distributing actions across multiple people.
- Ensuring non-community team members are clear on the role of outsiders, including centring the voices of those directly impacted by the process, and showing up as a facilitator not an expert or as a guest invited on the community’s terms. For example, [Design Justice Principles](#) (Costanza-Chock, 2020).
- Being transparent that being ‘community led’ is a spectrum, and clear on why the process with community is happening and enable community-led data. For example, [Community-Led Development Analytic Framework](#) (The Movement for Community-Led Development)
- Diversifying relations between leaders, enabling connection outside of pre-existing organisational structures. For example, [Principles-Based Decision Making](#) (Kessler, 2016).
- Supporting community leaders to deepen networks and increase collaboration, enables people to maximise sharing, adopting, and adapting of effective and novel community-led resilience efforts.
- Recognising the valuable, specialised, and expert contribution made by people with lived experience by paying them for participation and/or providing employment.
- Paying attention to power dynamics and ensuring facilitators are supporting a process, but not making decisions. For example, [Co-production](#) (Roper, Grey & Cadogan, 2018) and [Power Equaliser Cards](#) (TACSI).
- Adopting participatory approaches to grant allocation, like participatory granting. For example, [Participatory Philanthropy](#) (Evans 2015) and [Deciding Together](#) (Gibson 2018).
- Focusing on and starting with strengths to then problem solve together (Russel, 2016). For example, [Appreciative Inquiry](#) (AI Commons, 2021).
- Building individual and group capabilities to collectively lead.

Healing

“One of the things that we found by going through this TACSI process is that it really helped our mental health. Following on from that, emotionally it helped to bring aspect to a position of resilience within the community. Because once you hear all those stories, it just breaks you after a while. And I know that that’s happening now with people with the floods.” – Ross, Clarence Valley co-designer.

“There’s just so much trauma in community... I’m so happy to see that this is not just a trauma-informed process, but a healing-informed process.” – Hayley, Clarence Valley co-designer.

“I’m a person in recovery. I lost everything in the fires, and I was like, ‘My goodness, am I really in a space to be able to do this?’ And I really did feel a little bit out of depth. And I felt incredibly supported. And the facilitators always just allowed me to come at my own pace when and where I could. And the whole thing has been an incredibly supportive environment.” – Pamela, Clarence Valley co-designer.

This principle reframes ‘trauma’ as an opportunity to heal, transforming resilience narratives through storywork⁴ (Archibald, 2001). It sees community assets as the foundation of resilience and recentres culture and identity as core features of community wellbeing (Christmas-Rouse, Jones & Venable-Thomas, 2020). In action, healing approaches aim to restore diverse social fabrics following a disaster by reweaving participation in community culture, identity, health and wellbeing (Gordon, 2004b). We found it helpful to focus on being aware, responsive, and generative in working with this principle.

In practice, this principle means:

- Adopting storywork as an engagement practice to acknowledge trauma that exists in the community and creating space to enrich alternative stories to live by. For example, [Collective Narrative Practice](#) (Denborough, 2012), [Dadirri](#) deep listening (Miriam-Rose Foundation), Ungunmerr, 1988; We-Ali, 2019), and [Participatory Narrative Inquiry](#) (Kurtz, 2014).
- Creating a wellbeing kit with resources, strategies, and connections to local mental health workers. For example, [Social And Emotional Wellbeing Framework](#) (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017).
- Acknowledging that healing is a nonlinear process and that triggers can arise throughout, guided by trauma-informed frameworks. For example, [Power Threat Meaning Framework](#) (Johnstone et al., 2018), [Trauma-Informed Co-Design](#) (McKercher, 2020), and [Social Fabric Recovery Strategies](#) (Gordon, 2004b).
- Be aware of individual and community transgenerational trauma. For example, [Addressing Individual and Community Transgenerational Trauma](#) (Atkinson et al., 2014), [Cultural Reinvigoration](#) (Halloran, 2004), and the [Social Determinants Of Health](#) (World Health Organization, 2021).
- Holding individual and group check-ins, including calls between convenings, and guiding the group through mindful pauses that prioritise mind-body connection. For example, [Oral histories and Breath and Body Work](#) (Christmas-Rouse et.al, 2020).
- Being open to shifting the agenda to accommodate emergent conversations. For example, [Emergent Strategy](#) (Brown, 2017).
- Taking time to celebrate both moments and milestones, such as acknowledging the bravery of co-designers when sharing vulnerability, and celebrating the completion of phases. For example, [Building to Heal: A framework for holistic Community Development](#) (Christmas-Rouse et al., 2020).

⁴ This term was presented by Jo-ann Archibald Q’um Q’um Xiem, author of *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*, and speaks to “how stories engage us as listeners and learners to think deeply and to reflect on our actions and reactions ... I call this pedagogy storywork because the engagement of story, storyteller, and listener created a synergy for making meaning through the story and making one work to obtain meaning and understanding.”

Holistic

“For Aboriginal people – Gumbaynggirr people – our sense of time is different. It’s not like the Western sense of time. Holistic approaches include also thinking about future generations and everything that we do is with responsibility to future generations as well. So, I think about holistic approaches as being ones that transcend time, and then going across to inclusion, I thought about acknowledging every person, acknowledging their roles and the ones that come up.” – Kaleesha, Clarence Valley co-designer.

“It is a relief to look at the bigger picture. In my professional practice, the focus is on short-term projects with tangible public outcomes. Increasing my awareness of the bigger picture is clarifying that focus of the short-term projects.” – Laena, Clarence Valley co-designer.

This principle acknowledges complexity and encourages making sense of the world by looking at how everything connects and fits together, rather than just focusing on individual parts. It prioritises strengthening disaster resilience in relation to the greater wholes of community or place. In practice, social processes are used to bring together diverse stakeholders to experiment, learn through doing, and develop adaptive strategies that see complexity as part of both the challenge and the opportunity. We found it important for this principle to engage systems thinking to map the whole picture, enabling the whole person, the whole community, and the whole resilience cycle.

In practice, this principle means:

- Seeing potential across the natural, social, built, and economic environments. For example, [Holistic Framework For Disaster Recovery](#) (Norman, 2006).
- Understanding resilience as something that weaves through many aspects of place and community life, working with everything in relation to the other. For example, [Fire Country](#) (Steffensen, 2020).
- Taking a systems-thinking approach - a social process that focuses on identifying high leverage strategies to get to a preferred future. For example, [Socio-technical Transitions Theory](#) (Fraser, 2020), [Waters for Systems Change](#) (Kania, Kramer & Senge, 2018), [Theory U](#), (Sharmer, 2009), and [Regenerative Systems Thinking](#) (Mang & Reed, 2012)
- Embracing deep time and long-term thinking, using protocols for agents in a complex system, how to practise innovation as an ancestor, and five minds. For example, [Sand Talk](#) (Yunkaporta, 2019)
- Co-designers working with their communities' stories and lived experiences of resilience across multiple perspectives to make sense of resilience now, community preferences for the future, and how to make better decisions to get there. For example, [Futuring](#) (Dunne & Raby, 2013), the [Innovation Portfolio](#) (Burkett, as cited in Seppälä, 2021), [Big/thick Data Approach](#) (Wang, 2016), [Human Learning Systems](#) (Lowe et al., 2020), and the [Network Weaver Handbook](#) (Holley, 2012).

Imagination

“I love it that you’ve taken me into the ‘what ifs’ and I’ve felt a process in myself change with that.” – Hayley, Clarence Valley co-designer.

“Even if it starts small, we are interested in creating steppingstones to bigger ‘what ifs’ moving towards deeper outcomes for our communities and generations to come.” – Pamela, Clarence Valley co-designer.

“Imagination is absolutely critical to the quality of our lives. Our imagination enables us to leave our routine everyday existence by fantasising about travel, food, sex, falling in love, or having the last word – all the things that make life interesting. Imagination gives us the opportunity to envision new possibilities – it is an essential launchpad for making our hopes come true. It fires our creativity, relieves our boredom, alleviates our pain, enhances our pleasure, and enriches our most intimate relationships.” – Bessel Van der Kolk, 2014.

This principle encourages people to shift from holding tightly to preconceived ideas, to being curious about emergent potential and collaboration. People experiencing trauma often lose capacity to imagine their way out of a situation, because they lose their creative thinking ability (Turnbull, 2012). A hopeful, future-focused frame opens creative thinking and a sense of possibility and also encourages participation from people who are put off by ‘disaster language’. We found it helpful when working with this principle to work with: curiosity, play, and speculation; generation and creativity; and learning by doing.

In practice, this principle means:

- A structured, emergent process for crafting ideas - using the phases of Now-Future-How to develop and fund ideas.
- Time given to free-flowing discussion from which ideas emerge. See, for example, *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).
- Multiple stages of refining ideas, including time to creatively rethink ideas. For example, [TACSI Idea Generation Pack](#) (TACSI, 2018).
- Providing inspiration to co-designers to fuel ideas – local and international – from across the holistic domains (natural, social, built, economic). For example, [Collective Imagination: A Playbook](#) (Robinson, 2021) and the [Long Time Academy](#) (Saltmarshe 2021).
- Development of an imaginative futures game called ‘What if’ that uses opportunities defined in the ‘now’ to tell stories about preferred futures. For example, [What If](#) (Hopkins, 2019), [Searching for Neverland](#) (Polifroni, 2018), [Social Presencing Theatre](#) (Hayashi, 2021), the [Theatre for Living](#) (Diamond, 2018), and [Games for Actors and Non-Actors](#) (Boal, 2005).
- Supporting co-designers to engage with a diversity of people outside of their usual networks to create new ideas through imaginative games.
- The articulation of a hopeful future vision that was used to guide ideation and investment. For example, [Design Futuring](#) (Fry, 2018).

CAPABILITIES

The Now-Future-How model focuses on developing capabilities that tackle factors hindering community-led resilience and that foster collective capacity to thrive through change over the long term.



The unique set of capabilities needed are:

- **Cultural safety:** Enabling diverse peoples to innovate together and collective capacity for meaningful, long lasting cross-cultural relationships.
- **Community-led action:** Mobilising local ways of being, knowing, and doing, and collective capacity to self-organise around strengths.
- **Holistic resilience:** Seeing interconnections across multiple aspects of resilience and strengthening collective capacity to create regenerative futures.
- **Network learning:** Increasing social capital, movement building, and collective capacity to weave knowledge across complex local-to-national networks.
- **Social innovation:** Addressing challenges through social ends and means, and collective capacity to experiment with new ways for old problems, and vice versa.

Transformational change requires unique sets of capabilities that are not always recognised as strengths in communities. Research indicates that disasters disrupt social systems and force immediate, sometimes detrimental actions, leading to cycles of social bonding and debonding that impact long-term psychological and social functioning (Gordon, 2004a; 2004b). To build and sustain long term resilience, we therefore need continuous capability strengthening to counter these effects (Verity, 2007). It's therefore essential to have ongoing processes that enhance communities' ability to lead resilience efforts.

The Now-Future-How approach to capability building is strengths based, and focuses on building new connections in communities through collective and collaborative processes. In combination, these diverse capabilities and connections equip communities with the capacity to lead their way through challenging times.

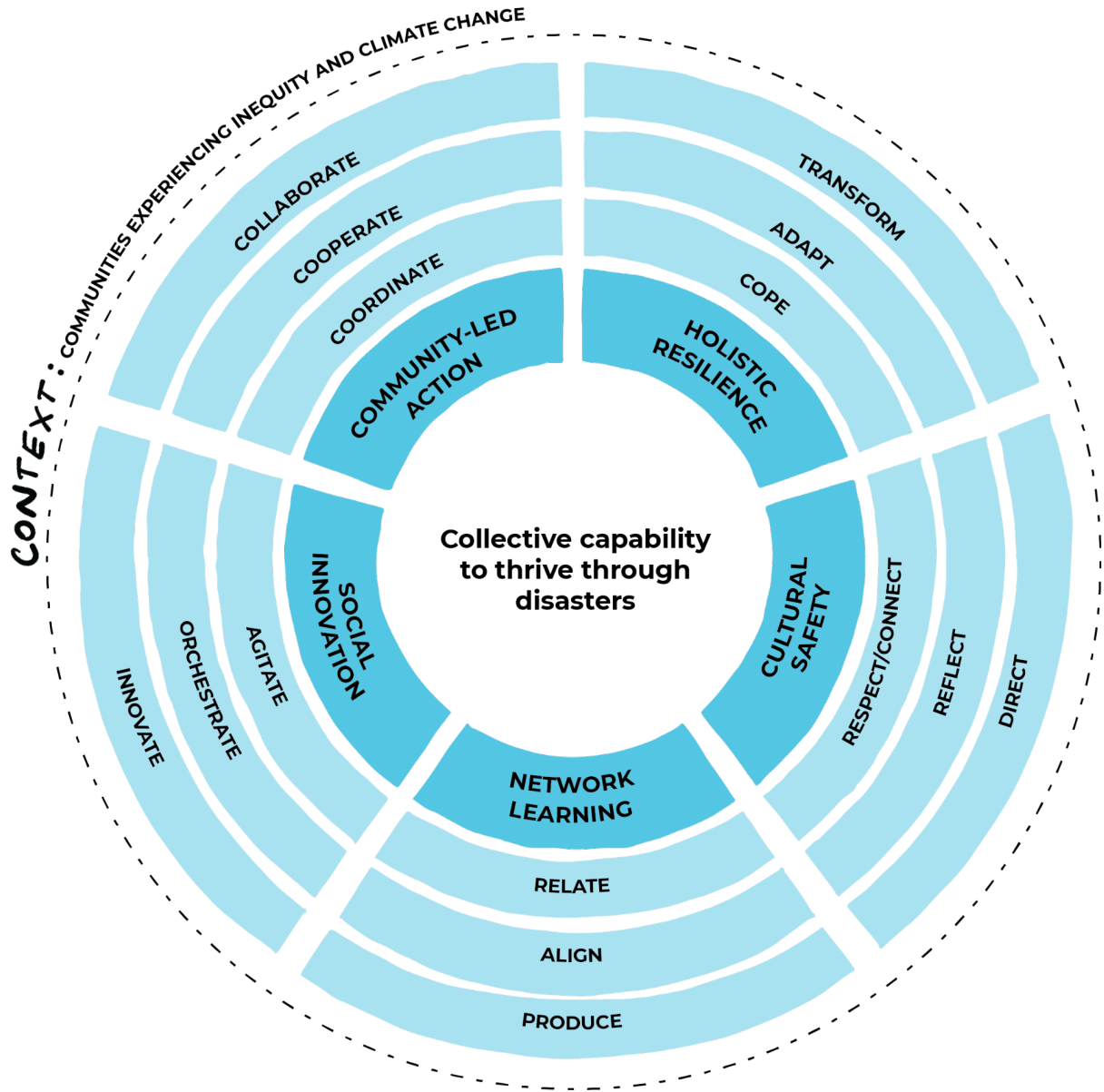


Image: Now-Future-How capabilities.

Below we detail the set of capabilities identified through the pilot of the Now-Future-How model.

Cultural safety	Community-led action	Holistic resilience	Network learning	Social innovation
<p>Enabling diverse peoples to innovate together. Building collective capacity for meaningful, long lasting cross-cultural relationships:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect cultural differences and the existing resilience of communities. • Connect by establishing strong relationships and routines. • Reflect as part of a group and collectively establish a shared body of knowledge to inform what you will do. • Direct by acting on shared knowledge in ways that are negotiated by all. <p>Drawn from Yunkaporta (2019).</p>	<p>Mobilising around local ways of being, knowing, doing, and valuing. Building collective capacity to self-organise around strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate and organise for community strengths, assets, and current influence to influence decision-making processes. • Cooperate and mobilise community to bring diverse voices into decision making, including people with lived experience, First Nations Peoples, and people from culturally and linguistically backgrounds. • Collaborate to develop collective decision-making processes and practices that build on local strengths. <p>Adapted from Weaver (2021).</p>	<p>Seeing interconnections across multiple aspects of resilience. Building collective capacity to create regenerative futures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cope by employing social and emotional strategies to absorb shocks, surface trauma, and resolve through restorative processes. • Adapt by employing pragmatic strategies to identify assets, leverage available resources, and self-organise amid changing conditions. • Transform by employing strategies for creative, holistic and systemic change, often occurring over a longer time period. <p>Adapted from Keck and Sakdapolrak (2013).</p>	<p>Increasing social capital, movement building. Building collective capacity to weave knowledge across local-national networks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relate by creating strong relationships between members to allow them to exchange information easily and to learn as a result. • Align by building on connections, helping to create and share a set of ideas, goals, and strategies, allowing more efficient exchange of information and coordination. • Produce by fostering collective action by members to form innovative practices, public policy proposals, and other outputs for social impact, resulting in increased civic participation and diversified social capital. <p>Adapted from Plastrik et al. (2014).</p>	<p>Addressing challenges through social ends and means. Building collective capacity to experiment with new ways for old problems, and vice versa:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agitate by bringing the challenges of specific individuals or groups to the forefront of public awareness. • Orchestrate by creating actionable solutions to address these challenges. • Innovate by coordinating action across groups, organisations, and sectors to scale the proposed solution. <p>Adapted from Battilana and Kimsey (2017).</p>

ADAPTIVE INNOVATION CYCLE

“One of the strengths of this particular space is having structures and pathways and processes to undertake this hard work, which is learning and adapting.” – Kaleesha, Clarence Valley co-designer.



The Now-Future-How model adapts existing social innovation processes to take account of the interdependence of community and Country experiencing complex trauma. It moves through four phases:

- **Groundwork:** which involves connecting with community, forming a co-design circle, and building group roles and relationships
- **Now:** which focuses on stories of strengths and challenges in the past and currently
- **Future:** which focuses on imagining preferred futures through story, and
- **How:** which develops projects for change and allocates funding to projects through participatory granting.

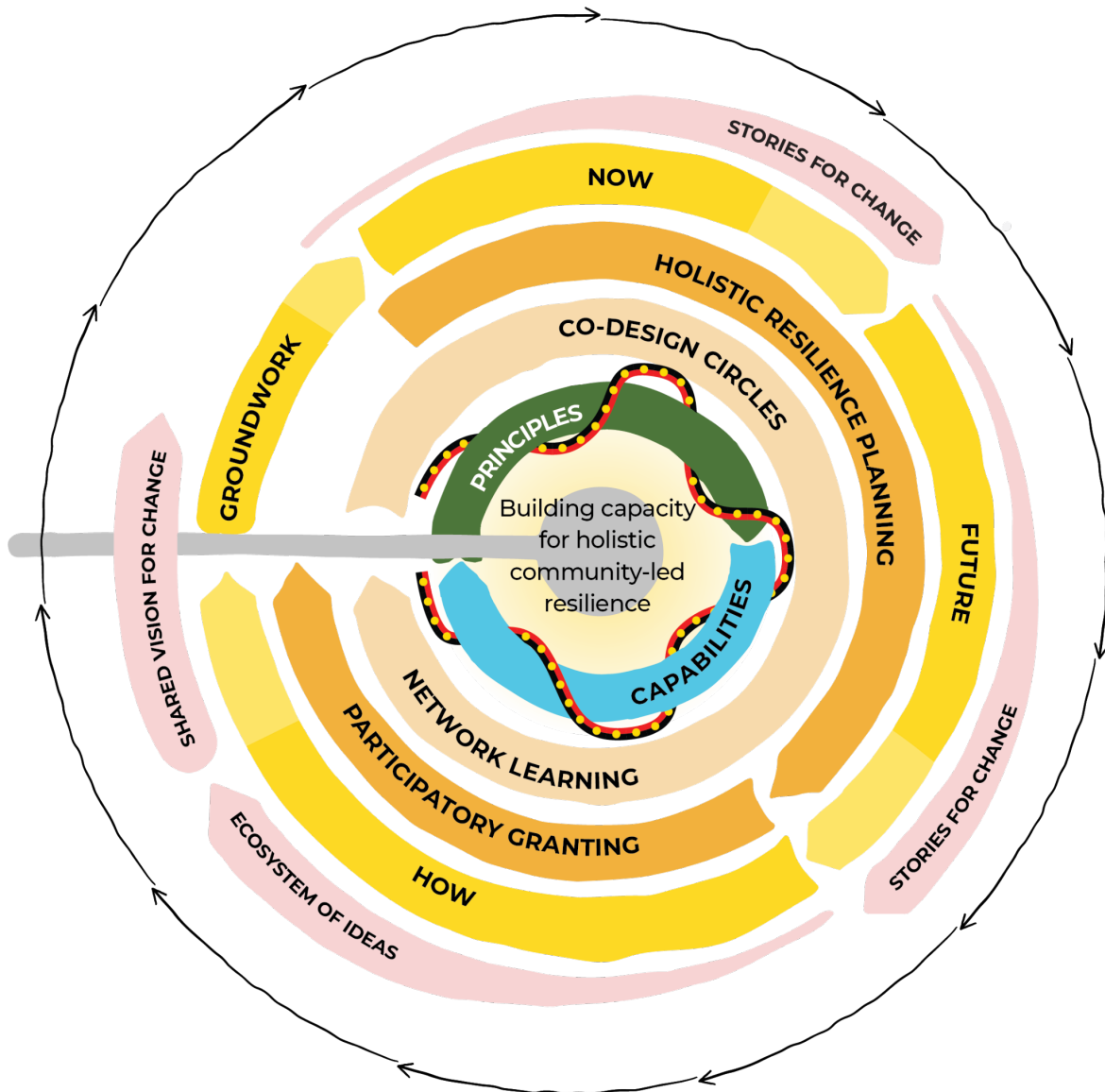


Image: Now-Future-How innovation process overview.

These phases create a cycle for co-designers to move through without being directive or restrictive. The phases allow for flexibility and adaptiveness and are designed to support people to tell and hear stories of the past and present, move to future visions and then take tangible steps to make those visions a reality:

One cycle of the process builds to a point where co-designers have identified stories for change, refined a vision for resilience, and funded an ecosystem of ideas through participatory granting.

Over multiple cycles, each vision is then carried into the next cycle, providing a starting point for future co-designers to build on.

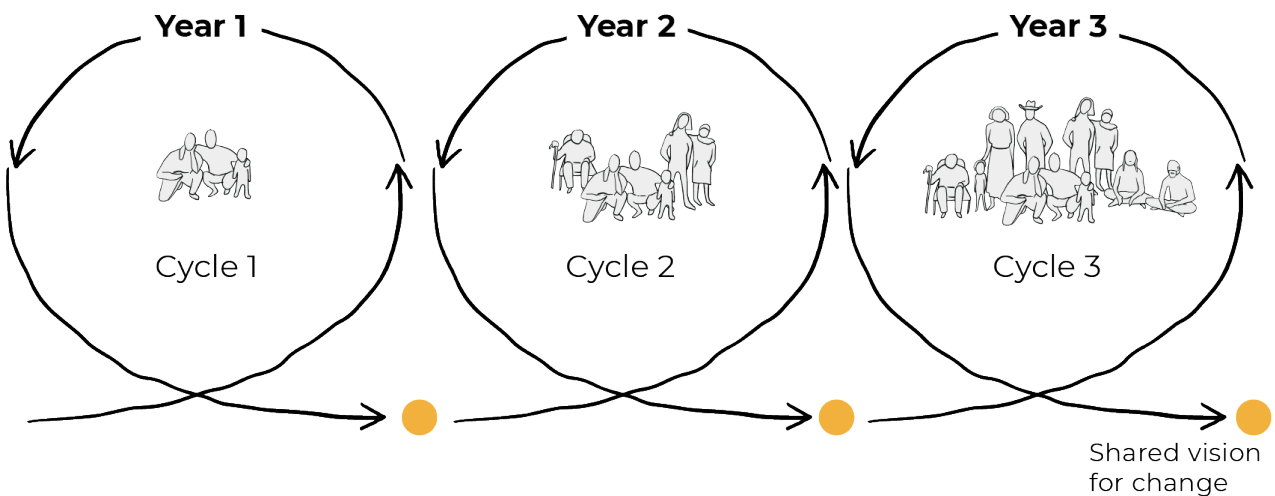


Image: the Now-Future-How over yearly cycles

The following details the four phases of the Now-Future-How innovation process. Each phase includes a summary of its focus and things to expect from the phase.

Groundwork: forming roles and relationships

This phase is all about building relationships, recruiting participants, and laying the foundation for **building cultural safety, working with principles, and framing holistic resilience**.

Things to expect in this phase:

- Prioritising alignment with principles and building group trust to ensure members are comfortable sharing concerns, commitments, and clarity of purpose.
- Outputs include a well-formed co-design circle, group commitments, and an aligned set of guiding principles.
- Once participants have opted-in; the 'groundwork' phase is an invitation to listen deeply, and to get to know one another and the convening team.

Now: self-organising around strengths

This phase focuses on **identifying community strengths**, sharing **collective narratives**, and exploring **opportunities for change**. It helps co-designers make sense of their past, their roles, and their potential for positive change.

Things to expect in this phase:

- Storying 'what was and what is' across social, economic, built and natural systems.
- Mapping community roles and engaging broader perspectives through conversation and visual mapping.
- Working with broad data to relate local stories to the wider system context.
- Outputs include 'stories of now' and project ideas for strengthening resilience in the short-medium term.

Future: generating vision for change

This phase shifts the focus from the present to **imagining potential collective futures**. Co-designers engage in activities that inspire **big-picture thinking** and **creativity**.

Things to expect in this phase:

- Engaging with collective imagination through activities like 'what if' scenarios, backcasting, and seeding an ecosystem of ideas.
- Navigating the challenge of moving from present concerns to future possibilities.
- Experiencing openness and joy through collective future thinking and generative imagination.
- Outputs include stories for change, and project ideas for strengthening resilience in the medium-to-long term.

How: crafting ideas to action and investing in the future

This phase focuses on taking ideas from **concept to action**, forming a **strategic plan** for implementing change and **allocating resources** to bring these ideas to life through participatory granting.

Things to expect in this phase:

- Collective decision-making activities, such as evaluating the ecosystem of ideas from different perspectives, defining criteria, and prioritising ideas.
- Co-proposing, co-pitching, co-refining, and co-deciding on ideas to fund collectively.
- Outputs include a shared vision for change and an agreed-upon allocation of funds to best achieve the group's vision

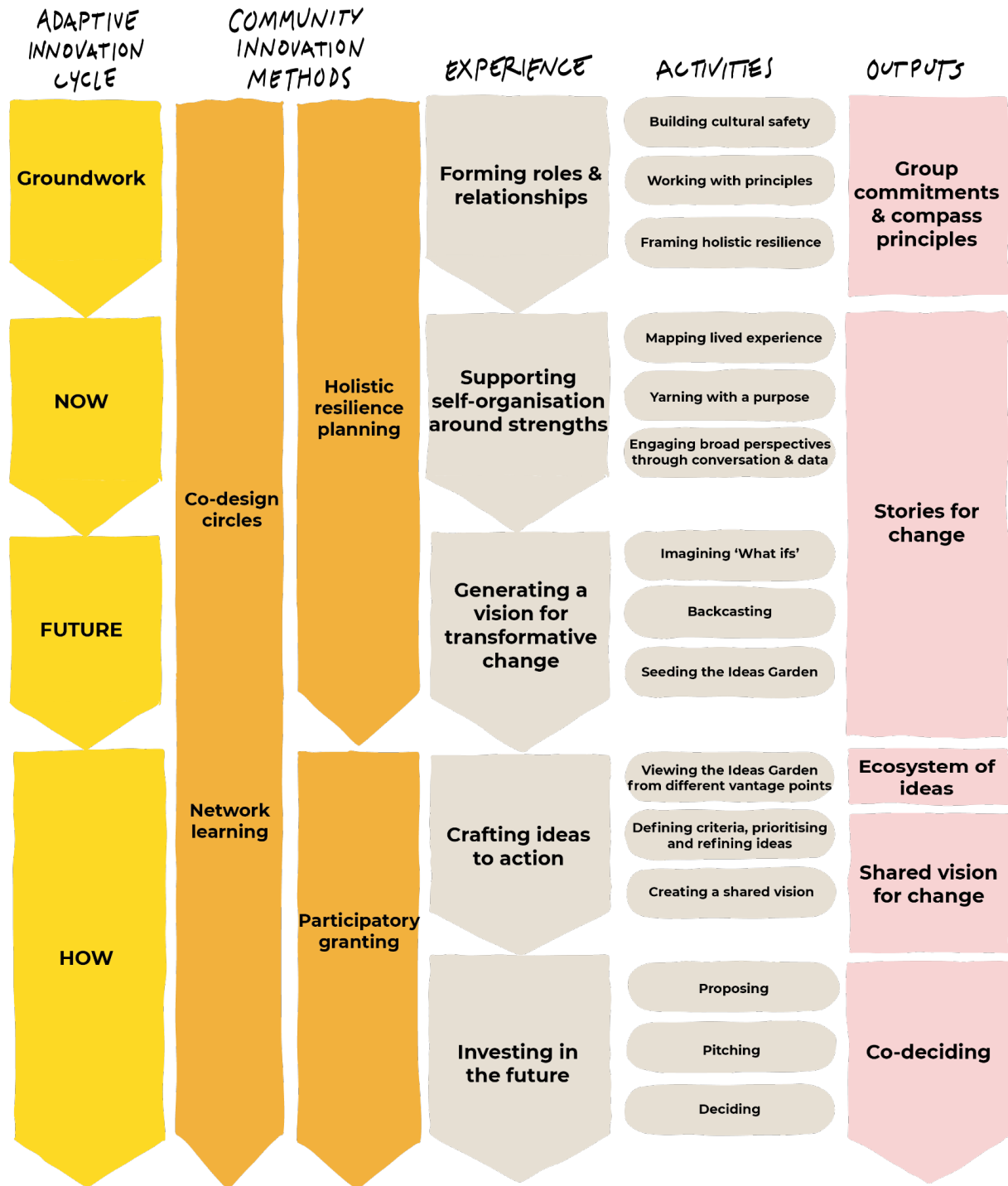
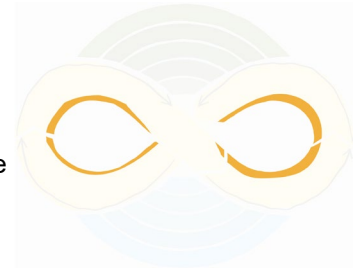


Image: Now-Future-How phases, experience, activities and outputs.

COMMUNITY INNOVATION METHODS

The Now-Future-How model adapts existing social innovation methods to counterbalance factors affecting communities capacity to reimagine resilience, self-organise around strengths, and mobilise towards desired futures. There are four interdependent elements:



- **Co-design circles:** support small, diverse convenings of community members committed to imagining new ways of strengthening resilience, building capability, connecting and learning alongside each other and collectively making decisions for the benefit of community.
- **Holistic resilience:** supports the co-design circle to respect the breadth, depth, and diversity of community experience and see the many perspectives of resilience efforts that strengthen social capital and community wellbeing across the built, social, ecological, and economic domains.
- **Participatory granting:** supports the co-design circle to explore alternative ways for distributing funding to transformational projects that emerge through the process.
- **Network learning:** creates the conditions for co-designers across co-design circles to share challenges with each other, problem-solve, produce collaborative projects, and draw on expertise beyond their co-design circle.

Below we detail the four community innovation methods of the Now Future How Model.

Co-design circles⁵

“It’s been fantastic to come into your worlds and meet each of you.” – Hayley, Clarence Valley co-designer.

“You don’t get many chances to sit with a group of people and really create the future. I’ve really loved that. I am a bit scared of what’s in front of me... It all seems a little bit full on, but you’ve all sat there and got through it or are getting through it or living it. And that’s been a fine example to me, to understand that it is just a timeline, and this is where I am now, and I won’t be here forever. It’ll get better.” – Cate, Clarence Valley co-designer.

Co-design circles support small, diverse convenings of community members committed to imagining new ways of strengthening resilience, building capability, connecting and learning alongside each other and collectively making decisions for the benefit of community.

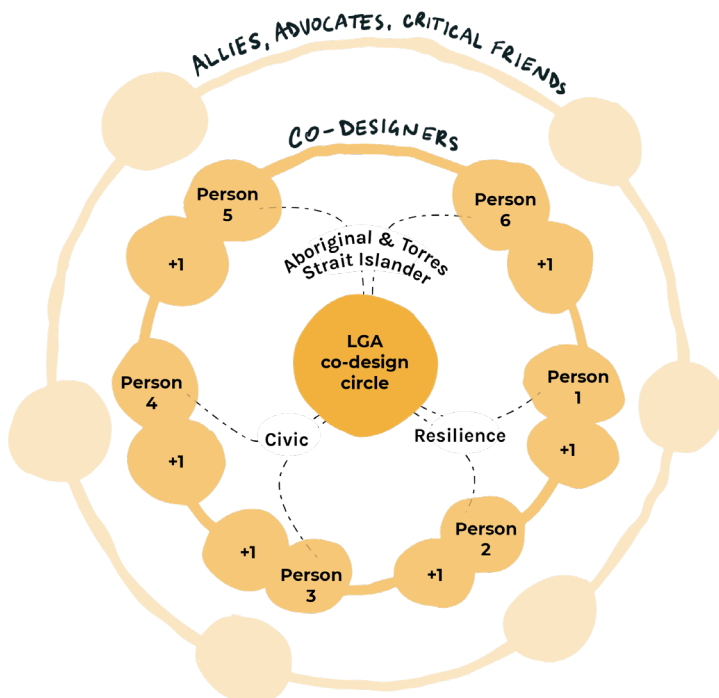


Image: This shows the make-up of co-design circles.

“Co-designing means that as a group of people... together... we devised and designed a garden of ideas.” – Cate, Clarence Valley co-designer.

Forming a co-design circle. Twelve co-designers are considered ideal to take into account the need to provide holistic and diverse views, quality group experiences online, and to prioritise trust, intimacy, and social connection (McKercher, 2020). Diverse pathways for connecting with potential co-designers are activated through civic, First Nations and resilience partners during the groundwork phase. An outer ring of allies, advocates, and critical friends that can be called in by co-designers to support their process is also formed.

⁵ The co-design circle method builds on TACSI’s insight supporting communities to bring about change through self-determined and inclusive innovation approaches led by communities. See [Our Town Initiative](#) and the [Regional Innovators Network](#).

Connections to potential co-designers are made through diverse ‘warm contacts’ following a snowball recruitment method (Naderifar, Goli & Ghaljaie, 2017). To identify potential participants, key characteristics can be used, as well as alignment to the principles of the program.

Inviting in twosies. During initial conversations, participants are asked to think about who they would invite as their ‘twosie’ from the community – someone they already know who would support them throughout the co-design process. This trauma-informed approach to convening groups allows participants to feel supported by a trusted companion, rather than entering the process without established relationships. This method fosters a sense of safety and belonging, which is essential for meaningful engagement and collaboration in trauma-informed co-design circles. For more information on twosies, see the [Network Weaver Handbook](#) (Holley, 2012).

Convening a co-design circle. The role of a convening team enables the whole process to run smoothly, stay responsive and emergent, and for community members to concentrate on community and decision making during circle convenings. Some communities in recovery we worked with expressed facing internal challenges with relationships and leaders. At times, an outside facilitator was helpful to create a neutral space for people to come together.

Storywork and Yarning with a Purpose. Our convening processes are guided by the methodologies of storywork (Archibald et al., 2019) and of ‘yarning with a purpose’, developed by TACSI’s Aboriginal Lead and Cultural Adviser Aunty Vickey Charles, which centres on the practice of storytelling to enable collective and shared purpose (Charles, 2019). Both practices are founded on making meaning and shaping decisions through informal conversations, story, deep listening, and relationships, in comparison to more transactional or tool-based research approaches.

In both methods, storytelling is the main method of sharing. It was helpful to have phases that define the types of yarning co-designers will have across time so that they can anchor into the process. For example, ‘Now’ was for current challenges and strengths, ‘Future’ was for big thinking yarns, and ‘How’ was for action-oriented yarns. A collection of stories and maps drawn from co-designers’ shared lived experiences were drawn together throughout the process using visual facilitation.

In practice, **co-design circles** mean:

- Recruiting using relational methods, such as a snowballing approach, to identify community members that are doing recovery work at a grassroots level. For example, snowball sampling (Naderifar et al., 2017) and [Beyond Sticky Notes](#) (McKercher, 2020).
- Identifying potential co-designers through diverse pathways and being less prescriptive about what ‘credentials’ co-designers have, instead focusing on key characteristics.
- Explaining the principles, key characteristics, convening rhythm, and commitment for potential co-designers so they can make an informed decision to opt in or not.
- Ensuring co-designers are remunerated for their participation in the process. For example, [Beyond Sticky Notes](#) (McKercher, 2020).
- Providing an option to opt in to the process as a ‘twosie’. For example, the [Network Weaver Handbook](#) (Holley, 2012) and ‘us-two’ in [Sand Talk](#) (Yunkaporta, 2019).
- Including an outer ring of allies, advocates, and critical friends that could be called in by co-designers to support their process.
- Drawing on facilitation methods specific for First Nations peoples and communities. For example, [First Nations Facilitation](#) (Howlett, 1993), [Yarning with a Purpose](#) (Charles, 2019), [Decolonising Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology](#) (Archibald et al., 2019), and [Dadirri](#) (Ungunmerr, 1988).

- Drawing on diverse engagement methods and visual facilitation including avoiding 'town hall' process, where often only the loudest voices are heard. For example, [Liberating Structures](#) (McCandless & Lipmanowicz, 2014) and [Theory U](#) (Scharmer, 2009).
- Being aware of how trauma can show up in group processes. For example, [Trauma Trails](#), [The Value of Deep Listening](#) (Atkinson 2002; 2013; 2017), [Model Of Care For Co-Design](#) (McKercher, 2020).
- Being aware of group stages of development and how they change as relationships form and the process continues. For example, [Tuckman's Stages Of Group Development](#) (Tuckman, 1965).

Holistic resilience planning

“Our approach to perceived community issues has permanently changed to a more holistic view incorporating the compass principles across the natural, social, built and economic environments.” – Ross and Faye, Clarence Valley co-designers, [Fire to Flourish Annual Report](#).

Holistic resilience planning emphasises both the importance of community social capital and a systems view on long term resilience, which can enable a holistic community vision built from many perspectives. Building a vision from many perspectives is important for equity because communities are complex ecosystems that face challenges across multiple aspects of life simultaneously, including natural disasters. Life in a community does not happen in isolation. If not addressed holistically, responding to one challenge risks entrenching another.

A holistic narrative on community-led recovery and resilience. A holistic resilience narrative enables community members to see how holistic resilience comes to life and is experienced in their communities. It also builds capacity to continue to explore ways to cope, adapt, and transform through compounding challenges. Holistic perspectives support community members to respect the breadth, depth, and diversity of community experience and see the many possibilities for resilience efforts that strengthen social capital and community wellbeing across the built, social, ecological, and economic domains.

Drawing out community social capital. Making tangible connections between people’s lived experience of resilience, their relationships and their strengths across **natural, social, built, and economic** environments enriches a holistic understanding of communities potential. Planning for strengthening existing social capital and diversifying connections expands potential for long term thriving.

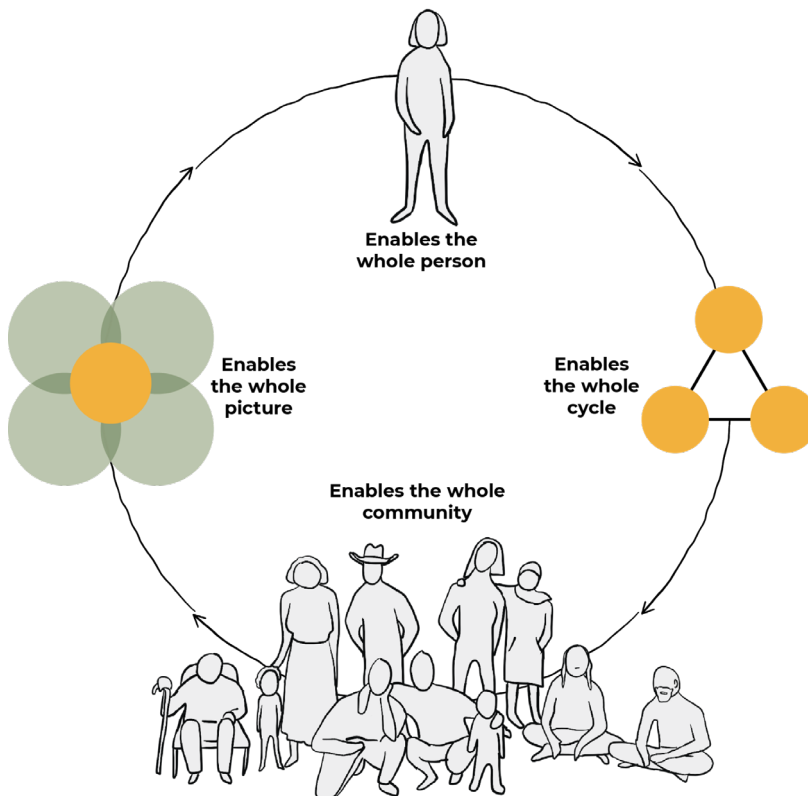


Image: holistic resilience enabling whole person, communities, systems “... the Indigenous knowledge system is holistic and connected to the wellbeing of everything” (Steffensen, 2020).

Taking a systems view on long term resilience. Seeing community as an adaptive ecosystem of support that enables the whole person, the whole resilience cycle, the whole community, and the whole system picture (TACSI, 2020) in turn enables a holistic perspective on community wellbeing. Further, a non-linear perspective on time enables deeptime thinking (McGrath, 2020), including when exploring the resilience cycles of prevent - prepare - respond - recover, ensuring we are always holding long-term thinking in short-term actions. This system's view on community wellbeing, together with a non-linear perspective on time, foregrounds First Nations approaches to community wellbeing in which “cultural practices based on the responsibility to look after the natural resources are part of a process for supporting life” (Steffensen, 2020).

In practice **holistic resilience planning** means:

- Acknowledging that communities already hold deep lived experience and expertise on recovery and resilience.
- Prioritising and centring Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander voices as the experts in resilience
- Seeing how everything is connected using Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander ways of thinking and the holistic domains to tell stories about what resilience looks like now.
- Considering both the macro and micro perspective by seeing the present in stories and broad data, defining a future vision, and the stepping stones to get there.
- Holding long-term thinking in short term actions by co-creating shared community visions that look beyond the short term.
- Acknowledging risk and resilience language can be problematic for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples, who have long histories of stewardship of Country.
- Bringing people together around shared goals of resilience in the face of future disasters.
- Use the five capitals for regenerative development (Mang & Haggard 2016) as a starting place to map the strengths and potential of place. For example, see how the [Five Capitals For Regenerative Development](#) are used by the Regenesi Group.

Participatory granting

“You don’t often get to do something really big. We are taking on an endeavour that’s a big change in the thinking of how recovery money is distributed, how grants are made, but it’s more than the story of the money. It’s a story of community. It’s about creative thought processes and working together... a blossoming of ideas and a nurturing of ideas.” – Cate, Clarence Valley co-designer.

Participatory granting⁶ is a process of collective decision making where community members make decisions about the way funds are distributed in community. In participatory granting, decision making is passed to people most impacted by the funding (which can include the applicants themselves).

Exploring alternative ways to distribute resilience funding in communities is important from an equity perspective because traditional approaches to granting, in which decisions are typically made outside the community in a top–down way, can intentionally and unintentionally:

- Entrench inequity: conditional funding can amplify and create new ‘gaps’ in support, for example, trauma-affected community members can miss out on funding due to time restrictions or complex rules around where and how money can be spent.
- Promote local competition over collective thinking and action: applicants compete for allocations, submit individual projects, and have no visibility of other submissions (Gibson, 2017; Gibson, 2018; Wairimu et al., 2019).
- Limit agency, inhibit self-determination, and restrict access: top–down decision making perpetuates paternalistic systems, promotes dependency, and limits participation, for example, by requiring certain kinds of formal entities to apply.

In practice **participatory granting** means:

- Devolving decision making from facilitators and funders. For example, [Plymouth Octopus Project](#), [Participatory Philanthropy](#) (Evans 2015), and [A Whole New World Funding Commissioning in Complexity](#) (Lowe, 2017).
- Building trusting, collaborative relationships and a shared language.
- Creating small moments of collective decision making throughout the process.
- Prioritising collaborative projects based on shared visions.
- Seeing individual ideas as part of an ecosystem of potential actions.
- Supporting co-designers to run participatory granting activities through neutral facilitation.
- Creating space for co-designers to plan the decision-making process together
- Presenting ideas in a range of ways and in multiple rounds, and continuing to refine ideas throughout the process.
- Surfacing and acknowledging vested interests early in the process.
- Valuing vested interests by creating two pools of funding: a pool of assured funding for co-designers’ individual projects and a pool for collective projects.
- Discussing grant terms that suit the nature of applicants’ practices and positions (e.g., is it possible to have more than the standard one year to spend the money).

⁶ Participatory granting is an umbrella term which encompasses a range of models that aim to re-balance power relations in the field of philanthropy (Evans, 2015). It opens new ways to build agency, trust, transparency, and accountability within the granting process, and can increase the impact of funding in communities (Conversation with Toby Lowe, 2020; 2021; Gibson, 2018).

Network learning

“It seems like when you deal with a network, you have all these similar people with similar thoughts and views. And there's a lot of solace in that. There's a lot of support in that... some of that stuff really picks you up. We're sort of getting inspired again. And it all comes from networking and it's quite unusual that we can't get that same vibe out of our community, they're all good people in our community, they'll do anything to help you, but it's a different issue. I don't know why, but it's just different.” – Ross, Clarence Valley co-designer.

Network learning is about creating the conditions for community co-designers to come together, to cultivate shared purpose, to share challenges, and produce collaborative projects. Its broad goal is to contribute towards building new social capital by both diversifying social connections and enriching them.

Our research suggests that fire-affected communities build informal networks across boundaries, sharing learnings and experiences of community-led recovery. For example, Ash Wednesday, Black Saturday, the Canberra Fires and the Tathra bushfire-affected communities developed informed fundraising and governance approaches in Cobargo, which then informed the approach of a Facebook Group in Bermagui. The existence of these informal networks demonstrates that there is an unmet need for communities to be supported, to connect to one another, and learn through the lived experience of others in order to support them to build agency in community-led recovery. This formed the context of testing in Clarence Valley and network learning across co-designers and circles in the Fire to Flourish program.

Network learning has a role in weaving knowledge across places to build social capital on local-to-national scales. This contrasts with traditional ways of doing recovery and resilience work, which rely on external agents to bring guidance and insight to the community. Formalising this method supports deep transformation in communities and the capability to bring lived experience from communities to the system to influence change.

In practice, **network learning** means:

- Increasing [linking, bridging and bonding connections](#) by creating space to exchange stories and become aware of diverse approaches in different contexts, as shown, for example, in the [Network Weaver Handbook](#) (Holley 2012).
- Understand each participant hopes to 'give and get' to foster reciprocal learning and value exchange. For example, [Connecting to Change the World](#) (Plastik et al. 2014)
- Amplifying the flow of information through online engagement platforms (e.g., a hub, website, or Wiki) that host community teams' processes and materials as they develop.
- Decentralising power by actively encouraging self-organisation, adaptive learning, and problem solving.
- Fostering participant agency to take adaptive action in response to changing contexts.
- Facilitating for emergence, holding space for generative conflict, and consensus building. For example, [White paper: Building networks for systemic impact](#) (TACSI, 2024), [Theory U](#) (Scharmer, 2009).
- Encouraging participants and funders to engage with dynamic methods of learning and sharing. For example, [Complex Reciprocity](#) (Holley, 2018).
- Starting small with existing networks in other contexts, then creating opportunities for community networks to identify shared goals and visions and form working groups to progress ideas.

SUMMARY OF MODEL ELEMENTS

Principles				
Foreground Aboriginal wisdom	Community-led	Holistic	Healing	Imagination
Prioritising active partnership with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples, respecting cultural wisdom, and connection to Country.	Practising community-led approaches that ensure equity and shared prosperity through healthy leadership, and collective visions and projects.	Practising ways to see the big picture, connect the dots, and strengthen the whole person, the whole community, and regenerate healthy systems.	Being aware of trauma and seeking to amplify healing practices to generate new social capital for healthy communities.	Encouraging creativity, hope, curiosity, and imagining the big 'what ifs' that lead to healthy futures.
Capabilities				
Cultural safety	Community-led action	Holistic resilience	Networked learning	Social innovation
Enabling diverse peoples to innovate together and collective capacity for meaningful, long lasting cross-cultural relationships.	Mobilising local ways of being, knowing, and doing, and collective capacity to self-organise around strengths.	Seeing interconnections across multiple aspects of resilience and strengthening collective capacity to create regenerative futures.	Increasing social capital, movement building, and collective capacity to weave knowledge across complex local-to-national networks.	Addressing challenges through social ends and means, and collective capacity to experiment with new ways for old problems, and vice versa.
Adaptive Innovation Cycle				
Groundwork	Now	Future	How	
Connecting with community, forming a co-design circle, and building group roles and relationships	Focuses on stories of strengths and challenges in the past and currently.	Focuses on imagining preferred futures through story	Develops projects for change and allocates funding to projects through participatory granting.	
Innovation Methods				
Co-design circles	Holistic resilience planning	Participatory granting	Network learning	
Support small, diverse convenings of community members committed to imagining new ways of strengthening resilience, building capability, connecting and learning alongside each other and collectively making decisions for the benefit of community.	Supports the co-design circle to see many perspectives of resilience efforts that strengthen social capital and community wellbeing across the built, social, ecological, and economic domains.	Supports the co-design circle to allocate funds to transformational projects that emerge through the process.	Creates the conditions for co-designers across co-design circles to share challenges with each other, produce collaborative projects, and draw on expertise beyond their co-design circle.	

Table: Summary of model elements

COMMUNITY-LED APPROACHES TO DISASTER RESILIENCE AMIDST FIRE AND INEQUITY: LESSONS LEARNT PILOTING THE NOW-FUTURE-HOW MODEL

Lesson 1: The keystone of any form of resilience is reconciliation and allyship.

Reconciliation and allyship are foundational for resilience within communities. Communities that are actively and genuinely doing the work of bringing Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander ways of being, knowing, and doing into their shared spaces are drawing on deep knowledge and wisdom that benefits everyone. Embracing these cultural connections not only enhances community potential but also fosters a transformative and holistic approach to resilience planning.

Recognising gaps in cultural capability and fostering authentic cultural safety are essential for genuine community-led resilience.

Lesson 2: Holistic perspectives are needed for communities that are healing from trauma generated by social, economic, and natural forces.

Communities living with disaster and crisis face compounding trauma from social, economic, and natural forces, and addressing this trauma requires a holistic approach to healing. Life does not happen in a silo, and neither should resilience efforts. Supporting communities to build cultural awareness and safety, starting with a connection to Country, is crucial for resilience. Regular, meaningful interactions enable co-designers to engage in conversations that can facilitate deeper understanding and healing with self, community, and place.

Building and maintaining genuine relationships is critical, as it allows co-designers to move beyond repetitive conversations and start to address and heal the root causes of trauma with the right referral pathways as needed.

Lesson 3: Tapping into community-led imagination can nurture existing potential.

Hope and imagination are powerful tools for communities to unlock new possibilities and take collaborative action towards a future they envision together. Designing engaging tools and communications provides opportunities to build these visions in more creative and playful ways. Combining holistic thinking, imagination, play, and resilience planning that leads to participatory granting can prevent planning becoming a tick-box activity and cultivates greater community-led innovation.

By grounding imagination activities in guiding principles and mindsets, community members can engage deeply and shift their understanding of their potential, leading to greater capacity to see beyond their individual perspectives and unlock the creative potential that already exists in their community.

Lesson 4: Being community-led means balancing external support with community-identified actions.

Working alongside communities to support them in leading their own change is more effective in the long term than imposing external solutions. This requires time, often beyond established timelines, for community members to come to their own unique understandings of the process and what it means to them, recognising and responding to their unique needs and learning styles. Convening approaches, such as co-design circles, twosies, and peer-to-peer learning, can support community-led activities while addressing the cycle of

burnout for local leaders. By fostering a culture of self-organisation and continuous connection to both close and broad networks, communities can also identify missing voices and broaden engagement, strengthen old relationships, form new ones, and adapt proposals to better meet their needs.

Lesson 5: Taking a lateral approach to leadership can support a diversity of perspectives and future leaders to step forward.

Working as a community network and supporting a culture of stepping in and out of roles can cultivate a diverse network of leaders that can be elevated and supported, strengthening and distributing local leadership to build capacity without overburdening existing leaders. Approaches like the twosie method and intergenerational leadership opportunities foster inclusivity and can mitigate leader burnout that occurs when the onus is placed on an individual or small group of local leaders. s continually enhance each other's skills through networked collaboration, facilitating the free exchange of information, resources, and skills. This lateral approach to leadership not only diversifies perspectives but also ensures that leadership is regenerative and resilient in times of crisis.

Lesson 6: Principles-based practices unlock place-based ingenuity and collaborative capacity to take action towards equitable futures.

Principles-based practices can encourage communities to see their strengths, facilitate learning exchanges, and connect across different experiences, promoting organic growth and resilience. These practices support the growing emphasis on place-based and community-led approaches nationally, and can help communities to strengthen their collaborative capabilities to take action towards equitable futures.

There are opportunities to utilise principles-based practices to grow community-led innovation, imagination, and change practices without overcomplicating involvement or placing undue burden on community.

Lesson 7: Genuine shared decision making and determination of fund allocation reshapes how recovery and resilience happens in place.

Participatory granting processes that prioritise genuine, shared decision making can reshape how community-led activities are prioritised and how locally held funds are distributed. Flexibility and adaptation are key; the process must meet applicants where they are, offering diverse interaction styles and accommodating varying levels of commitment to the process. Supporting thinking that draws on the diverse voices in communities, especially when money is involved, supports co-designers' work and surfaces vested interests before they become problematic. In participatory granting, supporting 'safe-enough' spaces for raising concerns is crucial to create the conditions for effective decision making. Opportunities to continue to streamline the distribution of funds through community foundations or trusts ensure that resources are raised, received, and distributed efficiently, directly supporting community-led resilience and recovery efforts.

Lesson 8: Long-term recovery and resilience building is complex and nonlinear.

Piloting the model has taught us that long-term recovery and resilience building is a complex, non-linear process. Community-led resilience processes are influenced by unique local and systemic factors that either impede or enhance their capacity to lead and self-determine resilience. These processes differ from how government, institutions, and formal emergency response systems view resilience. While formal systems often see resilience as risk mitigation, community-led perspectives see resilience as holistic and relational, spanning from the individual to the whole community through natural and human systems. Understanding and integrating these perspectives is crucial for effective, regenerative resilience building.

Lesson 9: The power and value of bringing planning and granting together.

The Now-Future-How approach integrates holistic resilience planning and participatory granting. This is a valuable pairing that has been designed for the context of communities experiencing fire and inequity but which has valuable learnings for applications in other contexts. The planning process supports a group to align around a shared vision and participatory granting then allows the community to move beyond the plan to resource tangible projects that build resilience and provide a foundation for transformation. This overcomes a common community frustration of ‘all talk and no action’ or, to put it another way, ‘planning without granting’.

Combining planning and granting reduces the potential waste of granting without planning but also protects the development of the less tangible aspects of systems change that are easy to overlook and undervalue in a competitive granting round, such as: activities that build social capital, develop movements for collective action, support collective decision making, build capability, and reinvest in local economic systems.

SECTION 2

Stories from Clarence Valley

ABOUT CLARENCE VALLEY LGA

In 2020, the Clarence Valley Local Government Area (LGA) was identified as one of four focus communities for the Fire to Flourish program. The identification of the focus communities was informed by a quantitative analysis led by Monash University⁷, and following this, Clarence Valley was selected to be a pilot location to test the Now-Future-How model.

The Traditional Custodians of the Clarence Valley area are the Bundjalung, Gumbaynggirr, and Yaegl Nations. Clarence Valley encompasses 10,440 square kilometres, a significant proportion of which is national park, state forest, and other nature reserves. Forestry, agriculture and grazing, fishing, and tourism are important industries in this region. Recent population growth has been concentrated along the coast, although Grafton remains the regional centre.

Key demographics of Clarence Valley include:

- A population of 54,115 (ABS, 2021).
- A median age of 49, compared to 39 state-wide (ABS, 2021).
- 8.1% of the population identify as Aboriginal, compared with the New South Wales average of 3.4% (ABS, 2021).
- Between 1994 and 2017 there were 18 Native Title claims. Six determined that Native Title exists for the Western Bundjalung Peoples, the Yaegl Peoples, and the Bandjalang Peoples (National Native Title Tribunal, 2021).
- 6,151 sq km burned (59% of the total land area in Clarence Valley) in the 2019–2020 Fires. See map (National Bushfire Recovery Agency, 2021).

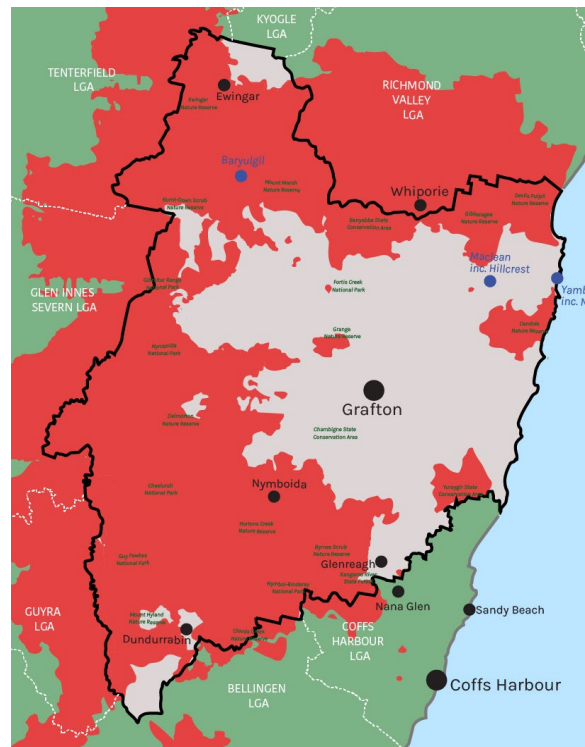


Image: Clarence Valley lands burned during the 2019-2020 Fires.

⁷ This took into account characteristics such as the extent of fire impact, disadvantage index results and the proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples living in the LGA.

THE CO-DESIGNERS

The Clarence Valley co-designers are from different parts of Clarence Valley LGA. The majority come from small communities bordering neighbouring council areas that were significantly affected by the 2019–2020 bushfires. These communities were close to large areas of national park and state forests yet were far from local services and resources, which tend to be centralised to more populous areas.



Kaleesha, Gumbaynggirr Country

Kaleesha is a Gumbaynggirr, Dunghutti and Kulkalgal woman who works in language ecology and revitalisation. She has worked with many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Communities – in law, policy, strategy, governance, environmental management, and cultural education. She has recently worked on the establishment of the Gumbaynggirr Giingana Freedom School, local Aboriginal land management boards, Ngiyambandigay Wajaarr Aboriginal Corporation, Cangai Creek Aboriginal Corporation, and the Grafton Ngerrie Local Aboriginal Land Council.



Ross, Glenreagh, Gumbaynggirr Country

Ross has an extensive background in public service and community relations. He worked as a forestry ranger and national parks operations coordinator. He is active in a number of local volunteer groups, including the Orara Valley Lions Club, Glenreagh Mountain Railway, Glenreagh Progress Association, Glenreagh Timber Festival, and Glenreagh HeartStart. In the aftermath of the 2019/20 bushfires, Ross and his wife Faye were instrumental in supporting Glenreagh and the surrounding area to fill out recovery grant applications by opening their lounge room and facilitating conversations.



Faye, Glenreagh, Gumbaynggirr Country

Faye has an extensive background in public service and community relations. She has worked as a student nurse, in clerical positions, and as a management accountant/administrator. She is active in a number of local volunteer groups, including the Orara Valley Lions Club, Glenreagh Mountain Railway, Glenreagh Progress Association, Glenreagh Timber Festival, and Glenreagh HeartStart. In the aftermath of the 2019/20 bushfires, Faye and her husband Ross were instrumental in supporting Glenreagh and the surrounding area to fill out recovery grant applications by opening their lounge room and facilitating conversations.



Cate, Whiporie, Bundjalung Country

Cate is an eco-educationalist and the creative producer and writer of dirtgirlworld and Get Grubby TV. She takes sustainability off the screen and into the real world with a suite of highly successful projects and programs that are changing the world. Cate’s community is still struggling to re-establish itself following the fires and recent floods. There is an unconscious anger about missing out on funding and underlying fear of the future, which the pandemic has magnified.



Laena, Nymboida, Gumbaynggirr Country

Laena is the heart and hands of her community in Nymboida. She is focused and thorough, flexible and adaptive, growing and moving and profoundly loving. Laena lost everything physical in the fires. She has been rebuilding and sharing her progress, showing that resilience is a living art form and a daily practice. She believes that the gold in Nymboida is the people – people who already work in the community with a shared vision and have done so for generations. People who can, and do, inspire others to work together collaboratively.



Pamela, Nymboida, Gumbaynggirr Country

Pamela is a long-term Nymboida resident and is a professional visual artist and community arts worker. Pamela lost her studio, horticultural enterprises, and significant property infrastructure in the 2019/20 bushfires. She is worried for community leaders who have put their own lives aside to assist recovery and are now facing burnout. She believes there is unresolved trauma in community that is directly affecting other people and leading to differences of opinion as to the best way forward.

Hayley, Ewingar, Bundjalung Country



Hayley has worked as a law lecturer, researcher, and author. After the 2002 bushfire destroyed her partner's Ewingar farm, Hayley moved there. She learned how to fight fires, chair the local RFS brigade, work cattle, and shovel manure. She learned that living in a small community is an art. Her debut memoir, *Untethered*, was published in 2020. The 2019 bushfires struck Ewingar while Hayley was undergoing chemotherapy for ovarian cancer. In the intermediate aftermath, Hayley facilitated community and RFS meetings, sought funding for the Ewingar Rising benefit music festival, and facilitated a community process that ensured funds raised were fairly and safely distributed by Rotary in line with the community's views. Since 2020, Hayley has obtained funding and facilitated communications and creative recovery projects to strengthen the community's social cohesion and connectedness.

MAPPING STRENGTHS AND EXPERIENCE

The Clarence Valley co-designers mapped their collective lived experience holistically across social, natural, economic, and built domains. This holistic lens supported them to build trust and understanding of each other, and build their understanding of the strengths and assets they had within the group.

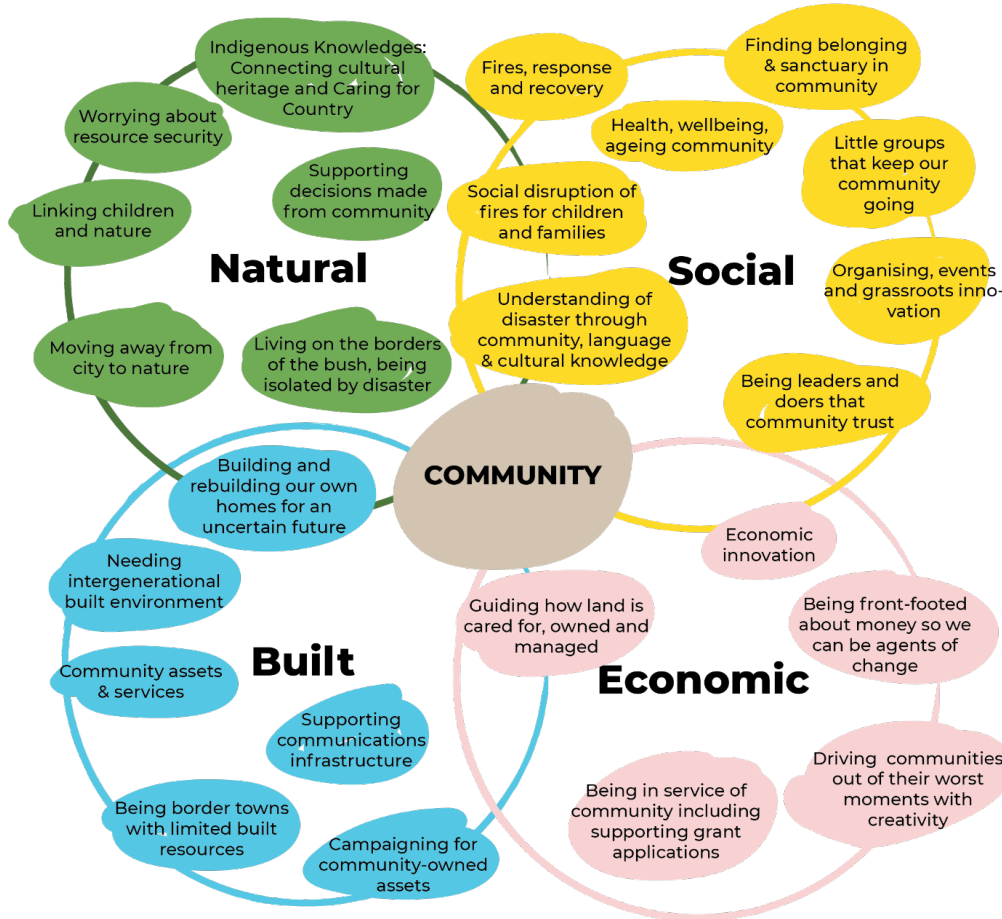


Image: Diversity of co-designer experiences, mapped against the domains of holistic resilience.

STORY THEMES FROM CLARENCE VALLEY

Co-designers were supported to identify a number of recurring themes, or 'stories for change', that would inform the generation of future visions and ideas for participatory granting.

Theme 1: Fire as a changemaker

Co-designers witnessed the power of coming together in the aftermath of the fires when people collectively rose to the challenges their communities faced. However, the social capital of these communities have been disrupted, restored, and ruptured again through bushfires, floods, and COVID-19. Our conversations unearthed the following:

- Social capital has been low and collaborative networks have not been sustained.
- Diverse connections within and across communities are lacking due to COVID-19 interruptions.
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples are missing from planning and decision making, and non-Aboriginal peoples are uncertain how to include them.
- Networks are tender and fragile post-disaster
- It is challenging to have difficult conversations about 'change' in communities – some people just want to return to the way things were.

Big question co-designers were holding: If fire is a maker and a changemaker that can knit us together or tear us apart, how do we enable conditions for change that draw us together?

From this perspective, change is about: Redefining our relationship with fire; building on how a community can come together during recovery; and learning from experience about how to rebuild for an uncertain future.

Theme 2: Activating people to participate

COVID-19 policies have increased isolation, restricted access to community assets, increased hesitancy to get together face to face, and increased divisions around vaccination. Communities are increasingly reluctant and sometimes fearful to connect. Our conversations unearthed the following:

- There is a generational gap between older and young people when it comes to volunteering.
- People are overburdened, time poor, lacking resources, and tired, so the capacity for participation is low.
- Granting processes are often exhausting and applying for grants and implementing projects reduces the joy of creating these projects.
- Volunteers need to be better supported, skilled, and have their confidence boosted.
- Organisers worry that efforts to increase participation might further exclude, divide, or fracture the community in the current climate.
- Organisers consider how to bring people together safely during a time like the COVID-19 pandemic, especially considering the needs of vulnerable people in communities, including Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples.
- Communities ask what participation is about – bringing more money for groups and protecting the status quo? Or is it about a bigger picture of recovery, celebration, the healing of a town, and honouring its culture?
- Participation seems transactional in unbalanced ways – there is too much give and not enough 'get' for community members leading projects.

Big question co-designers were holding: If the aim is big change that reimagines communities, how do we activate more people to participate?

From this perspective, change is about: Using creativity to stimulate new conversations, connections, and opportunities for action; fostering collective action by focusing on the big picture; turning the conversation about community assets on its head; and getting towns to love themselves again.

Theme 3: Creating connections to Country and heritage

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Clarence Valley are concerned about Country getting sicker. There is a genuine desire from many non-Aboriginal people to understand and deepen their relationship with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples, knowledge, and practices; and there is also a fear of the tensions this will bring up, and whom to talk to without offending cultural protocols. Our conversations unearthed the following:

- COVID-19 has challenged how Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples stay connected and resilient.
- The capacity of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander leaders is stretched across many community roles, especially young leaders who are highly committed and often poorly consulted by non-Aboriginal organisations.
- There is a desire to share knowledge of Country and culture from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples, especially from young Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander leaders.
- There is limited connection between Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal people and their cultural context or significance of place.
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples see ecology holistically, whereas non-Aboriginal often tend to separate ecology into parts.
- Non-Aboriginal people often lack the cultural awareness and confidence to engage in meaningful dialogue about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander land management practices, despite wanting to engage.

Big question co-designers were holding: If connecting to Country can transform mindsets, wellbeing, and land practices, how do we find the courage and capability to connect, learn and heal?

From this perspective, change is about: Being honest about why we are here and strengthening capability for reconciliation in community; learning how to read Country and care for Country; respecting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander custodianship and cultural revitalisation; weaving multiple stories of people, place, and Country.

Theme 4: Learning across generations

Disaster recovery and resilience has mainly been led by adults and Elders in communities, but children and young people are passionate about change and have valuable contributions to offer. Our conversations unearthed the following:

- Children are posing big questions about the 'death' of people and the planet and parents often are not equipped to answer them.
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples have sophisticated systems for sharing knowledge and passing knowledge through generations.
- Non-Aboriginal families want to know more about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander culture.
- Families want permission and support to be positive and courageous to put new things on the table.
- Young people have ample future-oriented contributions but few have the opportunity to play a leadership role in communities.
- People enjoy intergenerational opportunities.

Big question co-designers were holding: If children, young people, and Elders have wisdom that can create positive change for future generations, how are we nurturing, learning and connecting across generations?

From this perspective, change is about: Overcoming judgement and giving permission to be positive and courageous together; thinking beyond our generation and creating systems to pass knowledge forward; bringing multigenerational voices together to create alternative futures.

Theme 5: Seeding and leading change

Community changemakers are holding their own emotional and pragmatic needs while also holding the needs of communities who have experienced trauma. In healing, we are emphasising the importance of 'how' –cc ccc how as leaders we can connect, communicate, and listen to each other. Our conversations unearthed the following:

- Many community cultures place the burden of leading communities on a single person rather than fostering ways of collectively leading in the community.
- Communities are ready for a new type of conversation, but to do that people need to feel safe to speak their truth.
- Leaders often have to lay low in order to ease tensions, but the tensions still exist when they return and the cycle continues.
- Community changemakers do not feel they can take time out from community work.
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander ways of being are rooted in deep listening to Elders and Country and non-Aboriginal peoples can learn from these models.

Big question co-designers were holding: If deep listening can heal our communities, how will we (the community) lead our resilience in the future?

From this perspective, change is about: Learning to listen, communicate, heal and act together; building collective capacity to imagine, connect and decide; supporting collective and individual wellbeing in small, isolated communities.

CLARENCE VALLEY'S FUTURE VISION

We are a group of community members from the Clarence Valley, on Bundjalung, Gumbaynggirr, and Yaegl country. We have lived experience of recovery following the 2019/20 bushfires and recent floods, and have all been involved in leading community-based resilience work. With this experience we bring a vision for community-led recovery and resilience building in our community.

Our lived experience has taught us to think holistically. We have come to understand how the past, present, and future all happen at once and inform each other, and how the natural, built, social and economic health of our communities all weave together to pave our way to resilience. We have learned, too, how important it is to build on the stories of resilience that already exist in our community, and that if we do not consider Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples' wisdom and needs, we all lose.

Our priorities across Now-Future-How

NOW: Cultural change

We work on local concrete cultural change initiatives that take small steps towards giant leaps. Our priorities are engaging inclusively in the community in ways that enhance dignity, respect, consent, and building stronger relationships with children and young people to enrich community connections.

FUTURE: Thinking generationally

We aim to be ground breaking, innovative, and focused on leaving a legacy of gob-smackingly audacious activity. Our priorities are imagination, vision, and planning for real change that gives us alignment together and informs our activities in the How phase.

HOW: Scalable and impactful

We look to small ideas that can be scaled up and emphasise projects with pathways to change. Our priorities are funding community-developed projects that support recovery and resilience to get off the ground and strategic projects that help communities develop ideas and increase passion, capability, and capacity.

PARTICIPATORY GRANTING

Co-designers presented 11 short-term ideas and four long-term ideas. The co-designers collectively decided that the long-term ideas were beyond the reach of the \$100,000 granting available and they were eager that these big ideas be taken up by community members involved in future processes, as well as researchers, partners, funders, and other communities.

Eleven short-term ideas

Project name	Description	Funding
The Ally Project	Commission welcome and cultural activities for the three Clarence Valley festivals: Ewingar Rising, Glenreagh Timber Festival, and the Nymboida Camp Oven Festival.	\$13,000
Back to basics	Research and development of an association or co-operative organisation that community groups can join as members to receive the benefits of a group approach to common fees and charges, such as insurance costs.	\$5,000
Burning Poets	Promote and run four community lantern-making workshops, facilitate creative exchange and sharing stories between two communities.	\$3,500
Clarence "LIVES"	Local Innovative Volunteer Essential Support (LIVES). Research the declining volunteer trends in community and co-design a pilot program.	\$10,000
Connecting a Community by UHF	Purchase of UHF base stations, aerials, and power packs to be situated strategically within the Ewingar community.	\$5,000
Nymboida Plant Fairs	Assist the rebuilding of gardens and support community fabric by utilising local growers' market as distribution point.	\$8,500
Learning to Care for Country	Provide opportunities to learn about how the oldest culture cares for Country.	Not funded in this round
Learning from the Rebuilders	Collect stories and images from locals about how they changed their building and maintenance practices after bushfires.	\$15,000
ReSeed	Creating local seed libraries across the valley, connected by a travelling seed library.	\$10,000
Resilience Centre Blueprint	Investigate requirements for community-led initial disaster response.	\$10,000
Sustainable Community Enterprise	To help with marketing Nymboida Camping and Canoeing.	\$20,000

Four long-term ideas

Walking together

What if we create a movement for caring for Country, where Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal community members walk together, exchange knowledge and practice, and join in collective action to build resilience in the Clarence Valley?

This movement would foreground Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander wisdom by planting a strong collection of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander seeds in the ideas garden, funding these ideas, and supporting a movement of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander-led recovery and resilience building. This movement will also include stage two of the Ally project.

Regional network of resilience hubs

What if we built a network of resilience hubs across the region, where community leaders could connect and share knowledge, practice, and resources?

Regional resilience leadership gatherings could bring together representatives from super local hubs to share ideas, build reconciliation, advance policy, raise awareness, celebrate, heal, and launch participatory grant-making programs.

Movement of creative recovery

What if we built a suite of creative recovery projects that moved across the Clarence Valley? These would be run by people with lived experience of disaster.

Through this we would build a community of creative recovery leaders and bring greater awareness to the role of creative practice within community recovery and resilience work, valuing its role in improving mental health, building social cohesion, and connecting people to place.

Eventually, creative recovery becomes a standard part of disaster response, and it is implemented from the beginning.

Regener8

What if we collaborated on a large project that supported children to recover from the experience of fires and to build their resilience? This would also enable them to participate in rebuilding not just their community, but their own mental health and general wellbeing.

We would engage with children, encouraging and helping them to plant trees, grow a pollinator garden, and create a bug hotel... Bringing the good guys back to the naturehood! Local children would help restore the crucial habitat needed for our birds, insects, and wildlife to return home. We would tour this project to many communities, connecting with children and families to seed change across the nation!

REFLECTIONS ON THE PROCESS

Co-designers were supported to reflect on their experience over the Now-Future-How phases using the following question as a prompt:

As a community member involved in resilience building, what has been the most significant shift for you in this process?

“It’s been so interesting how it’s motivated me, particularly in addressing Aboriginal culture in my community arts practice. I now feel encouraged and supported to step out and do proper Acknowledgements. I feel connected with what I am saying when I do so. The deep conversations with Kaleesha and Aunty Vickey have helped me understand what it’s like on the other side of the table if there is no Acknowledgement. An Acknowledgement helps the crossover happen; it sends a signal.” – Pamela, Clarence Valley co-designer.

“The important part of that conversation with Aunty Vickey was so simple, so clear: ‘Go and sit under our tree and then deep listen, Cate.’ As community organisers we are always expecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to rock up to everything we hold, where we want to hold it and when it best suits us to have their say.” – Cate, Clarence Valley co-designer.

“When we started to go to the ‘what-if’ that stopped us thinking about what was happening now and we started focusing on what could happen. And I think that’s where we started to get our resilience back” – Faye, Clarence Valley co-designer.

“I was actually listening a lot more than I’ve ever done before. Holding space a lot more than I’ve ever done before. And that was inspired and actioned through this process. I think what we’ve all learned is that leaders are people who deeply listen. Leaders are people who feel, know, and act on the values and the principles of what they’re doing” – Cate, Clarence Valley co-designer.

“One of the things that really struck me was the variety of approaches to recovery from bushfires and how people think of it in a different way. Like we’re sort of straight in there, boots and all, get some money out to the people. And then you’ve got people like Pamela who says, ‘Let’s just go along and do a workshop and get these people’s minds off all of that stuff and into something creative,’ and how good that can be for people’s recovery and their mental health” – Faye, Clarence Valley co-designer.

“I think I’ve ended up with stronger mental health from this process. Before I started, both Faye and I were working really hard on projects and we were absolutely exhausted, community-led projects really do knock you around.” – Ross, Clarence Valley co-designer.

SECTION 3

Recommendations for next steps

Building on the success of the first live test with Clarence Valley, which spanned 24 weeks and allocated \$100,000 in funding, we see significant potential for scaling the Now-Future-How model to create a runway for other communities to fund and implement community-led resilience projects that are deeply linked to their shared vision for change. Here are our key final learnings that would form part of any future work, funding and agenda setting:

Recommendation 1: Community-led facilitation

To truly embed the model within communities, the next iteration should be facilitated by local teams, including at least one Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander facilitator. By transitioning from external facilitation to community-led, the process becomes more sustainable, culturally safe, and deeply grounded in local contexts, ensuring that the vision and projects reflect the community's unique needs and strengths.

Recommendation 2: Community governed

Future iterations should explore innovative models of long-term local governance that can provide ongoing support for the entire initiative. Creating a governance structure that wraps around community facilitation and the co-design circles ensures continuity, accountability, and sustained impact.

Recommendation 3: Community-led network learning

By sharing their experiences and insights, co-designers can help build a community-led network that supports other communities in their resilience efforts. This network can link communities at various levels and support them to lead national disaster resilience conversations. This collective learning approach will not only enhance project implementation but also influence systems change on a larger scale.

Recommendation 4: More for less

The Clarence Valley pilot provided valuable insights, demonstrating that the model can be refined to run more efficiently and scale to distribute larger amounts of funding. With the process now more developed, we believe future iterations can achieve more with less time and resources, enabling greater impact with significantly larger funding pools.

Recommendation 5: Cyclical rounds of funding

We see potential in adapting the model to support periodic renewal of the community's vision, ongoing funding for new projects, and the inclusion of new participants. Regular convenings and network learning between funding cycles can sustain momentum and ensure continuous project implementation. This cyclical approach will allow co-designers to build on their lived and living experience and refine the participatory granting process, making it even more effective in subsequent rounds.

Recommendation 6: Broader community engagement

The initial testing phase, constrained by COVID-19, limited engagement beyond the immediate co-design circle. Future rounds should engage more broadly within the community, ensuring that the process is inclusive and that a wider range of voices contribute to the vision and projects.

Recommendation 7: More support to implement community projects

To maximise the impact of community-led projects, co-designers should be connected with Fire to Flourish researchers and local partnerships. Providing in-kind support and expertise, especially for larger, more complex projects like placemaking, will ensure these initiatives are fully realised and benefit the community long-term.

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