CO-DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

For developing an intensive early childhood education and care program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Version 2
April 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The partners acknowledge the Traditional Owners and custodians of the lands and waters now recognised as Australia and pay their respect to the ancestors and Elders of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples past and present.

Charlie Ashby, the Cultural Leader at Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Centre, created the artwork for the model and the program to symbolise the three stages of co-development. We thank Charlie for his creativity and generosity in providing permission to use his artwork within this report. Requests and enquiries concerning the use of the Boori Milumba logo or artwork used across the three stages of co-development should be emailed to manager@cullunghutti.org.au.

Artwork for the figures in this report were created by contemporary artist and teacher, and Cullunghutti board member, Holly Sanders. Holly is a proud Bundjalung woman from the North Coast of New South Wales (NSW) who is currently living on Yuin Country on the South Coast of NSW. Through her artwork, Holly aims to share stories, culture and Country in a contemporary way.

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SNAICC-National Voice for our Children and Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Centre provided the imagery within this report. Do not alter or reproduce imagery without permission from SNAICC.

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INTRODUCTION

About this framework

This framework emerges from a collaborative project to co-develop an evidence-based, intensive, and holistic early childhood education and care program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Centre, Nowra, NSW. Led by SNAICC – National Voice for our Children in partnership with Parkville Institute, Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Centre, and Social Ventures Australia, this project aims to empower children to enter school as confident, capable learners, who are strong in their culture and sense of identity.

It is important to note that this framework wasn't in place at the outset of our project. Instead, it has been crafted as a result of our experiences and informed by extensive research. Recognising the inherent value of a cohesive and practical guide, we sought to fill a crucial gap for others interested in co-development or non-Indigenous organisations engaging in projects working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs).

The framework details the principles, benefits, challenges and processes of co-development, with a distinctive ACCO service-led approach. At its core, this approach privileges the voice and leadership of ACCOs, recognising the deep understanding they have of their communities, including their aspirations, strengths, needs, and the nuanced contexts in which they operate. The co-development process is deeply rooted in the cultural values of ACCOs and their communities. It is our hope that this framework acts as a meaningful guide to those seeking to embark on future co-development projects.

Acknowledgement

The framework draws on the professional and lived experience of project partners, and we extend our gratitude to all individuals and groups involved. We would like to specifically recognise and acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people whose invaluable contributions have shaped this resource. In particular, the cultural authority of SNAICC, the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and the remarkable leadership of Cullunghutti Child and Family Centre Board of Directors, the CEO, service staff and families whose expertise, insights and efforts have played a pivotal role in this project.

Additionally, we acknowledge the insights, guidance and learnings provided by key pieces of literature, such as Burton 2012, WACOSS 2017, and Anderson, Gall, Butler, Ngampromwongse, Hector, Turnbull, Garvey 2023, which have informed and enriched the content of this framework.

What is co-development?

Co-development is a holistic, community-driven approach rooted in shared decision-making, equal partnerships, and a commitment to cultural safety. It signifies a dedication to understanding and reciprocal learning, ensuring close and consistent engagement with local communities to ensure respect, empowerment, and community ownership (Dreise & Mazurski, 2018).

Co-development has emerged and gained traction among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people due to its potential for empowerment and for prioritising the voices and lived experiences of marginalised populations to self-determine and lead efforts to address the issues that they regard as important (Anderson et al. 2023). It aligns closely with co-production, valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, expertise, and priorities to drive improvement in outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families (Bailey et al. 2022).

Project Partners

This co-development project brings together four pivotal partners: two ACCOs, who ensure the cultural backbone and community connection, and two non-Indigenous organisations, who contribute diverse and considerable expertise, experience and resources to support a collaborative and impactful approach.

Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Centre (Cullunghutti) is a registered public benevolent institution charity that has as its mission to be a significant place of importance for Aboriginal children and families to connect, grow, and learn together, reflecting and strengthening Aboriginal identity within the wider community. Cullunghutti has deep knowledge of their community and significant expertise in delivering evidence-based services to improve outcomes for children and families including a not-for-profit early learning service.

Cullunghutti would like to acknowledge the Wadi Wadi Wandanian People, the traditional custodians of the land on which the service is built and the land on which staff, children and their families work and live upon today. We pay our respects to our Elders both past and present for providing us with guidance and sharing their wisdom. We acknowledge our children for they are our future leaders.

SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC) is the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Operating for nearly 40 years, SNAICC has deep knowledge, networks, and expertise on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood development, safety, and wellbeing. SNAICC has an all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board and Council, comprising of representatives from early childhood, child protection and family support services across all Australian jurisdictions.

Parkville Institute is an innovative research and practice institute established as a not-for-profit organisation in 2021. Parkville Institute's key purpose is to improve the life trajectories of young children experiencing significant social disadvantage and family stress through generating robust and balanced research that will advance evidence-informed policy and practice in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector and to grow the capacity and capability of the early childhood workforce. Government and philanthropic funding supports Parkville Institute's work with ECEC service providers and other partners.

Project Partners - continued

Social Ventures Australia (SVA) is a social purpose organisation that works with partners to alleviate disadvantage – towards an Australia where all people and communities thrive. SVA influence systems to deliver better social outcomes for people by learning about what works in communities, helping organisations be more effective, sharing our perspectives and advocating for change.

SVA's Young Children Thriving (**YCT**) program that strives to transform the early childhood development landscape in Australia. Our vision is for an Australia where all children, regardless of where they live or the challenges their families face, have the opportunities and supports they need to thrive.

Research and evaluation partner

Associate Professor Yi-Ping Tseng from the Melbourne Institute, University of Melbourne, will evaluate the Boori Milumba model and the outcomes for children and families in partnership with SNAICC to ensure cultural safety and with Parkville Institute.

Project funders

The Australian Government is funding the research trial of the Boori Milumba model. Additional funding is provided from philanthropic funding partners including the Paul Ramsay Foundation and the Wiggs Family Foundation.

HOW TO USE THIS FRAMEWORK

To facilitate easy navigation, this section offers an overview of what to expect and outlines key components. This will assist you to efficiently access relevant information based on where you are in your co-development journey. Consider the unique context of your project and how this framework can be tailored to address the specific needs and circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Background

Gain insight into the co-development project, historical context of engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and the complexities and diversity inherent in this approach.

Understanding Co-development

Delve into the concept of co-development and its significance. Explore the objectives, benefits and challenges that underpin the co-development approach. This section also outlines six robust, culturally grounded principles essential for guiding co-development approaches and offers practical strategies to promote them.

Stages of Co-development

The framework is structured into three distinct stages to guide you through each stage of the co-development process, from initial engagement and exploration to ideation, testing, implementation, modification, and the celebration of co-development achievements. Each stage is strategically crafted, offering invaluable insights and actionable steps to foster a successful, ACCO-led co-development approach.

1. *Initiation and Alignment:* Lay the groundwork for your project by forming partnerships, identifying community needs, and establishing inclusive governance structures.
2. *Collaborative Exploration and Community Building:* Plan for co-development, engage with communities, and document feedback to ensure inclusivity and transparency.
3. *Implementation, Evaluation, and Celebration:* Test and refine your project, conduct culturally responsive evaluations, and celebrate successes achieved through collaborative efforts.

Discover practical tips within each stage – from selecting appropriate partners and stakeholders to executing engagement strategies and navigating evaluation processes. The Framework provides a comprehensive roadmap for transformative ACCO-led co-development projects.

Conclusion and references

Conclude your exploration with insights, followed by a list of references cited throughout the framework for further reading and exploration.

BACKGROUND

Co-development Project

SNAICC, Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Centre (Cullunghutti), Parkville Institute and Social Ventures Australia (SVA) are collaborating to co-develop, trial, and evaluate an Aboriginal service-led, evidence-informed, intensive, holistic early years education and care (ECEC) program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The project aims to support these children to enter school as confident, capable learners, who are strong in their culture. It also aims to build the evidence base for ethical, effective, culturally responsive programs supporting positive outcomes in early childhood for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, ultimately informing government policy and funding for ACCOs' ECEC programs.

Funded by the Australian Government and philanthropy, the project involves a co-development process aimed at creating a locally grown, culturally grounded, strengths based ECEC model tailored for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, responsive to the specific needs and aspirations of the local community. The project integrates community knowledge, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wisdom, and insights from Parkville Institute's research and practice projects to meet the needs of children facing significant family stress and hardship. Funding is received by Parkville Institute through Service Agreements with government and philanthropy and in turn funding is provided to:

- SNAICC for staffing to support the project.
- Cullunghutti for:
    - staff to participate in the co-development, establishment, and operation of the program;
    - renovation and resourcing, program and administration costs;
    - program operational costs; and
    - resources for professional development, and mentoring.

ACCO early years service providers in New South Wales were invited by the initial three partners (SNAICC, Parkville Institute and Social Ventures Australia), to express interest in co-developing and implementing the new community-led intensive ECEC model. Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Centre was selected based on their strong governance, wisdom, experience, and organisational readiness.

The co-developed program, and its outcomes for children and families, will be evaluated by the Melbourne Institute, University of Melbourne in collaboration with SNAICC, to ensure cultural safety and responsiveness in the design and conduct of the research, and with Parkville Institute.

History of Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Centre

Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Centre is an Aboriginal Community controlled organisation located in Nowra on the South Coast of NSW. It is one of nine Aboriginal Child and Family Centres in the state. Cullunghutti has been operating for 10 years and is a special meeting place for all children and families in the community. The Centre was named by the Elders and represents Cullunghutti mountain reflecting the cultural significance of Country to the traditional custodians of the land.

Cullunghutti prides itself on being a place of belonging for all children, their families, and the Shoalhaven community. The centre is dedicated to all Elders, past and present, for their valuable knowledge, wisdom, and loving care passed on to the Boori's (children) and their families, as well as the community.

Cullunghutti is a special place for children and families to connect, grow, and learn together, reflecting and strengthening Aboriginal identity within the wider community. It brings together a range of early childhood, health, and family support services to improve education, health, wellbeing, and quality of life for Aboriginal children and families.

Context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities

History of Engagement

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural forms and practices have been extraordinarily resilient, providing a robust foundation for communities across Australia. Early interactions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have been marked by a complex history, involving violent conflict, forced dispossession, and protectionist policies that denied basic rights, separated families, and entrenched discrimination and inequalities (Venugopal et al. 2021). These historical challenges, which continue to impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities, have resulted in unresolved trauma and strained relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous institutions and individuals, necessitating a focused effort to build trust and understanding.

Engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people therefore requires a nuanced understanding of this historical context and a recognition of the diversity among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Failure to appreciate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural and value frameworks may hinder successful engagement (Venugopal et al. 2021).

Complexity and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'communities' vary widely – some are geographical settlements, while others are dispersed communities of identity and interest. Family ties and connections to Country are central to communities of identity, often transcending government or jurisdictional boundaries. Within these communities, diverse groups coexist, including traditional owners, individuals with historical and residential ties, returning 'diaspora' members from the stolen generation, and non-Aboriginal residents. Often the mix of people within a community is extremely complex, with different, overlapping rights, interests and needs (Venugopal et al. 2021).

Leadership within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is multifaceted, with ceremonial, organisational, familial, residential, age, and gender dimensions. Identifying the right leaders for engagement depends on the specific context, recognising the complexity inherent in Aboriginal leadership structures (Venugopal et al. 2021).

Context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities

Ongoing impacts of colonisation

Despite the remarkable resilience and cultural strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the enduring impacts of colonisation, marginalisation, social inequality, and racism have significantly affected health and wellbeing outcomes (Anderson et al. 2023).

Health statistics indicate that in 2018, the burden of disease among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was 2.3 times higher than that of non-Indigenous Australians. This health disparity is further underscored by the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience less access to affordable or secure housing, are considerably more likely to live in overcrowded conditions, or to experience homelessness (AIHW 2023). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are ten times more likely to live in out of home care than their non-Indigenous counterparts and are more likely to have had contact with the criminal justice system (AIHW 2023). The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC 2021) also shows that one in three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains, compared to one in five children overall.

These health and wellbeing challenges highlight the urgent need for comprehensive and culturally sensitive and respectful interventions to address the root causes of these disparities and improve the overall health, educational and wellbeing outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The Closing the Gap report (Australian Government 2020) highlights the success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approaches to addressing complex community needs. Genuine partnerships that value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander expertise and lived experience are crucial for achieving equality in life outcomes—a core principle underpinning the co-development approach.

While strides have been made in providing high-quality, culturally appropriate ECEC for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the Closing the Gap report (Australian Government 2024) reveals that the number of children thriving in the early years is worsening. Only 34.3% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are developmentally on track in all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC 2021). Initiatives such as the co-development of an intensive ECEC model for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Nowra is a priority action to help redress the learning and development gaps Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children face.

THE PURPOSE: WHY ADOPT A CO-DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

In this section, the key objectives, benefits, challenges, and risks of adopting a co-development approach are outlined.

Objectives of co-development

1. Foster a shared vision and ownership amongst partners and stakeholders.
2. Ensure collaborative, and culturally safe and responsive, decision-making processes.
3. Embrace multiple perspectives to enrich project communications, actions and outcomes.

What is co-development?

Co-development is an inclusive, participatory, strengths-based approach where community knowledge, expertise and priorities are valued and used to collaboratively develop programs and policy solutions responsive to local needs (Bailey et al. 2022). It is distinct from co-design in that it involves active participation by community throughout the process from idea generation to implementation and dissemination.

Co-development seeks to overcome power imbalances and support equal and shared decision-making. In this case, partners seek to reinforce this with an “ACCO service-led” emphasis to privilege local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice and decision-making. Unlike traditional co-design, co-development goes beyond consultation, creating an empowering environment for genuine collaboration. It empowers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to make decisions regarding children’s development, fostering partnerships that actively contribute to tangible outcomes.

Fundamentally, co-development approaches transform ideas and theoretical frameworks into impactful actions that embrace participatory, strengths-based approaches where Aboriginal knowledge, expertise, and priorities are valued. This process responds to emerging areas of need identified by ACCOs, fostering collaboration where unique knowledge, skills and perspectives are shared (Bailey et al. 2022).

Co-development, with its emphasis on Aboriginal leadership, knowledge systems, beliefs, and practices, represents a departure from bureaucratic and consultative approaches, offering a more successful and sustainable way of working (Venugopal et al. 2021).

Why is co-development important?

Australia's historical colonial context renders co-development processes essential for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. As noted above, historical policies and practices, often misaligned with kinship systems, have contributed to negative effects, including toxic stress, intergenerational trauma, high rates of child removal, and overrepresentation in the justice system (ACECQA, 2022; AIHW, 2022; AHRC, 2020). Effective co-development enables organisations to leverage existing strengths, collaborate, and produce new knowledge to address these challenges (Fleming, Bhonesky, Dutra et al. 2023).

Co-development builds on participatory research methods that recognise and redress power imbalances, valuing diverse forms of knowledge, experience and priorities. It involves active participation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community throughout the process, from idea generation to implementation and dissemination. This ensures that the evidence generated is used to drive tangible improvements in outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families (Bailey et al. 2022).

Co-development of research and interventions with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is critical to ensure that they are culturally safe and responsive to community values, aspirations, strengths and identified needs. When driven by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community priorities, it creates an environment for Aboriginal knowledge and wisdom to shape high-quality, usable research.

Benefits of Co-Development

The benefits of co-development span various dimensions (Burton 2012, Inclusive SA 2024, Mind Australia 2019 and WACOSS 2017):

Shared understanding and advocacy:

Co-development fosters a shared understanding of community aspirations and needs, cultivating a shared vision and collective ownership of solutions among partners. This collaborative approach drives innovation and advocacy for tailored services benefitting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. By amplifying the voices of ACCOs in policy debates, co-development influences impactful reforms and serves as a foundation for national advocacy. Additionally, it generates evidence to support sustainable funding for scale, ensuring long-term success.

Improved cultural competence and responsiveness:

Through co-development, non-Indigenous partners can strengthen their cultural competence and develop relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues. Co-development enables non-Indigenous partners to learn about community values, traditions, stories and histories to help ensure culturally appropriate responses to community needs. Empowering ACCOs strengthens leadership capacities, and promotes independence, community-based governance and local workforce development. By prioritising culturally safe decision-making processes, co-development leads to more accessible, responsive and appropriate services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, positively impacting community perceptions, engagement and outcomes.

Strengthens partnerships and trust:

Co-development builds strategic partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, ACCOs, and non-Indigenous organisations, fostering relational-focused strategies for sustainable impact. This collaborative approach contributes to improved trust in services and systems, fostering optimism within communities. By sharing responsibility and restoring control to communities, co-development shifts power dynamics, leading to more equitable partnerships.

Innovation and knowledge sharing:

Co-development generates collective innovation, fresh thinking, and new ideas by combining the wisdom of lived experience with the experience of professionals. Documenting co-development journeys adds to the evidence base for this collaborative approach, offering insights for future projects. Lessons learned and successful practices provide guidance for adopting a co-development framework, driving continuous improvement and adaptation.

Strengthened outcomes for communities:
Culturally safe and successful outcomes are more likely when programs are developed by, for, and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. These outcomes significantly contribute to project success and positively impact community well-being and resilience.

Challenges and Risks of Co-Development

Despite its advantages, co-development is not without its challenges. These require careful consideration to mitigate and proactively address to ensure the success of co-development and meaningful and positive outcomes for all involved (Burton 2012; Dillon 2021):

- ***Time constraints:*** Co-development may require more time due to inclusive decision-making processes. Juggling small teams with busy and competing workloads poses a challenge, necessitating thoughtful planning and resource considerations within the broader context of the group.
- ***Increased project costs:*** The complexity of increased collaboration and the need for face-to-face meetings, for example, can increase project costs including travel and accommodation expenses, which may pose additional financial challenges.
- ***Managing diverse perspectives:*** Managing diverse perspectives and interests adds complexity to co-development processes.
- ***Power dynamics:*** Balancing different power positions and ensuring equitable decision-making is crucial, balancing representative democracy, participative democracy and professional expertise can be challenging.
- ***Addressing knowledge gaps:*** Co-development involves addressing pre-existing assumptions, knowledge gaps and biases that may influence the process.
- ***Risk of replicating past failures:*** Given that co-development marks a significant shift in long-term ways of working, there is a risk of slipping back into old practices and replicating past failures.
- ***Inadequate resourcing:*** Challenges may arise if resources to conduct co-development are insufficient, such as the absence of appropriate infrastructure or shortfalls in skills and expertise.
- ***Stakeholder relationships:*** Positive or negative stakeholder interactions significantly influence incentives to participate and the potential for successful collaboration.
- ***Clarity of responsibility:*** Without clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and accountability processes, there is a risk of minimising stakeholder responsibilities and reducing clarity in accountability.

- ***Implicit demands:*** Community members experiencing vulnerability may feel pressured to participate in co-development to access services, posing ethical concerns.
- ***Values misalignment:*** Misalignments in organisational values can hinder effective collaboration, particularly for reaching partnership consensus or agreement. This could pose a significant challenge to the success of co-development projects and stall project progression.

These challenges and risks can be reduced and managed with proper adherence to the principles and best practices detailed in this framework with any application of co-development with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

It is important to note that each application of co-development requires a tailored approach that is grounded in the specific needs, characteristics, values and culture of the people and communities involved.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Guiding Principles of Co-Development

While co-development holds the potential to address disparities faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, its application must align with their cultures, values, and worldviews, distinctly privileging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, expertise, and ways of doing (Anderson et al. 2023). To achieve this, robust, culturally grounded principles, and practices are required to guide co-development approaches. Recognising the strengths of ACCOs as the lead and dominant decision maker about Aboriginal business and community needs, non-Indigenous organisations play an important role in walking alongside ACCOs, supporting their capacity to excel (Burton 2012).

Core principles identified by Burton (2012) underpin genuine and successful partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and non-Indigenous service providers. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS 2020) has developed a guide to applying ethical research principles in project design and practice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Anderson et al. (2023) contributed to this body of knowledge through peer reviewed literature and holding collaborative yarning circles to iteratively develop key principles and best practices for co-design with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. This literature forms the foundation and development of the following guiding principles for co-development.

THE SIX GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF CO-DEVELOPMENT
1
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Empowerment and Self-determination
2
Building Trust and Relationships
3
Cultural Respect and Understanding
4
Shared Decision-Making and Collaboration
5
Ethical and Equitable Practices
6
Monitoring, Learning and Adaptation

1 ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER EMPOWERMENT AND SELF-DETERMINATION

Empowering local communities for genuine collaboration.

Enabling self-determination is integral to co-development, aligning partnerships and processes with the aspirations of local communities. This principle emphasises strong Aboriginal leadership and decision-making, ensuring the voices of Aboriginal communities are not only heard but valued and given precedence throughout the process. Empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, recognising existing strengths, and prioritising their leadership is crucial across the co-development journey (Burton 2012; Anderson et al. 2023).

ACCOs and their communities must have agency and control over all aspects of the co-development approach. Their cultural knowledge, skills and models of leadership must be respected and valued as central to the process. Non-Indigenous partners share responsibility for developing cross-cultural partnerships, acknowledging community needs and capacity gaps, and not leaving it to ACCOs or their communities to bridge the differences (Venugopal et al. 2021).

Strategies to promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander empowerment and self-determination:

- Facilitate community-led approaches where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are in positions to actively drive and lead responses to identified challenges.
- Invest in capacity-building opportunities to enhance the strengths and capabilities of ACCOs, based on identified need.
- Establish and strengthen structures that empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in decision-making.
- Accelerate progress against the National Closing the Gap Agreement (Australian Government 2020).
- Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are heard, acknowledged, valued, and acted upon.
- Recognise the leading role of ACCOs in identifying needs and designing and delivering responses.
- Conduct local cultural awareness training for non-Indigenous partners with guidance and advice from ACCO partners.

2 BUILDING TRUST AND RELATIONSHIPS

Investing in sustainable partnerships with openness and honesty.

Central to the success of co-development is a dedicated commitment to developing relationships and building trust. Acknowledging historical mistreatment and past policy failures, it is crucial to invest significant time in establishing trust with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This commitment extends beyond immediate project timelines, requiring long-term relationship commitments and the implementation of resilient structures and systems to ensure sustainability (Burton 2012). Building strong, meaningful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities should commence well before embarking on any co-development project (Anderson et al. 2023). Effective communication, inclusive of community voices throughout the project's lifespan, is also critical.

Strategies to build trust and relationships:

- Allocate substantial time, space and resources to building trust. Both online and in person.
- Agree and commit to working principles characterised by openness, honesty, and transparency.
- Ensure long-term commitments from the outset.
- Establish structures to ensure project sustainability independent of specific staff members.
- Acknowledge historical mistrust to inform the approach to engagement with ACCO partners and their communities.
- Facilitate open and honest discussions.
- Foster clear and consistent two-way communication between stakeholders.

3 CULTURAL RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING

Valuing ACCO perspectives for holistic planning and development.

To achieve genuine co-development, it is imperative to recognise, respect and privilege the diverse perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The strengths of ACCOs in leading culturally appropriate services that respond to community needs must be acknowledged, with every facet deeply rooted in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldviews, and ways of knowing being and doing (Burton 2012).

Non-Indigenous partners must commit to an ongoing journey of developing cultural competency, requiring dedicated self-reflexivity, reframing perceptions, and recognising prevailing privilege and power dynamics. This commitment also involves aligning with the cultural expectations and preferences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities involved (Anderson et al. 2023).

Strategies to develop cultural respect and understanding:

- Build cultural understanding of local community history, beliefs and practices and invest in continuous process of self-education to deepen cultural competence.
- Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, families, ACCO board, and Elders in culturally safe and respectful ways.
- Conduct wide consultations to ensure diverse perspectives are considered.
- Value and respect the rich cultural knowledge, heritage and lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professionals and the community.
- Respect and incorporate cultural practices and protocols, including connections to Country and community.
- Prioritise face-to-face interactions with ACCOs and broader community where possible to foster authentic engagement.
- Allocate significant time and funding for joint consultations and active listening to the community.
- Embrace openness to adapt programs and ensure cultural competency and awareness are reflected in approaches to local cultural nuances.
- Recognise and mitigate continuing impacts of colonisation.
- Acknowledge cultural diversity among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.
- Use culturally appropriate language, branding, design, and communication throughout the project.

4 SHARED DECISION-MAKING AND COLLABORATION

Developing a vision through collaborative commitments.

Co-development requires a collaborative approach and a shared vision dedicated to enhancing long-term wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, and communities. Engaging in shared decision-making acknowledges each party's strengths, networks, and contributions, ensuring that commitments, roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities are clearly defined (Burton 2012).

Inclusive governance structures play a pivotal role in enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, and it is imperative that these structures are led by ACCOs, reflecting their interests and values. An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander understanding of leadership should guide the co-development process, facilitating culturally strong methods of governance, decision making, and collaboration (Burton 2012).

Co-development approaches must be flexible and engaging for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners to lead and actively participate in the process. Fostering and sustaining equitable and collaborative relationships among all partners is central in driving effective co-development processes. Establishing communication channels and conflict resolution processes, formulated by and with community, that maintain trust and support authentic partnerships is imperative (Anderson et al. 2023).

The quality, strength, and equity of partnerships between stakeholders are paramount. Relationships must foster collaboration, two-way learning, and have clear, agreed-upon, and documented processes that ensure transparency and accountability (Anderson et al. 2023).

Strategies for shared decision-making and collaboration:

- Develop a shared vision that aligns with a joint commitment to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.
- Establish clear commitments, roles, responsibilities, decision-making processes, accountabilities and effective planning. Incorporate these into a shared ways of working agreement or Terms of Reference (TOR), evaluating them throughout the co-development process.
- Involve community members in shared decision-making.
- Acknowledge strengths, networks, value, experience and skillsets of each party.
- Work collaboratively to support staff, build capacity and enhance understanding of the local context to achieve best outcomes for all stakeholders.
- Embrace principles of reciprocity, including two-way staff sharing and learning.
- Facilitate and embed flexible and iterative processes.
- Foster collaborative partnerships that promote two-way learning.
- Maintain and sustain regular culturally appropriate communication channels between partners and stakeholders.
- Authentically co-develop project outcomes.

5 ETHICAL AND EQUITABLE PRACTICES

Ensuring fairness and ethical conduct in every aspect of co-development

Ethical and equitable practices should guide every facet of the co-development process. This commitment is not only crucial for the credibility of the project but, more importantly, for the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

Co-development processes should be guided by human rights principles, particularly those outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF 2023) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Australian Human Rights Commission 2007), reflecting a belief that every child deserves to enjoy their inherent rights to dignity, education, protection, and participation in decisions affecting their lives. Co-development prioritises the unique needs and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, respecting and celebrating their cultural identity, language and holistic wellbeing. The approach recognises diverse values, perspectives, interests, and histories, enabling joint learning, decision-making, and a commitment to shared experiences. Recognising and addressing prevailing power dynamics is critical, and partners must actively take steps to shift these dynamics to ensure that the community is in the driving seat (Anderson et al. 2023).

Strategies for ethical and equitable practice:

- Identify and share strengths in supporting children and families, and culturally safe ways of using the evidence and dissemination of findings.
- Recognise and work to correct discrimination and power imbalances.
- Communicate clearly, comprehensively and appropriately with key partners and stakeholders before, during and after the project.
- Value process elements as integral to support and enable co-development and partnership.
- Recognise that non-Indigenous approaches may not be the most appropriate or effective for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and adapt practices and funding accordingly.
- Ensure research is conducted ethically, respecting the rights, wellbeing and cultural safety of participants, adhering to relevant legally mandated codes and guidelines and respecting data sovereignty principles.
- Ensure evaluation strategies are not placing an unfair burden on staff working in the program.

6 MONITORING, LEARNING AND ADAPTATION

Commitment to continuous improvement through collaboration and documentation

True collaboration extends beyond the initial stages of co-development; it involves ongoing, dynamic processes that require adaptability, and a collective dedication to learning and adaptation as needed throughout the co-development journey including implementation and evaluation stages. It is essential to embed monitoring and evaluation throughout the co-development process, using agreed performance indicators that facilitate transparency and accountability to community (Anderson et al. 2023).

Strategies for monitoring, learning and adaptation:

- Use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge to determine and drive research agendas.
- Work collaboratively to establish a system for monitoring and evaluating progress.
- Implement a documentation process to record the co-development journey, capturing feedback and insights on what is working and what is not.
- Regularly review and adapt strategies based on feedback and evolving needs.
- Develop comprehensive risk mitigation and monitoring strategies.
- Commit to continuous learning and ongoing processes of monitoring, assessment and adjustment to grow and improve.
- Respect evolving perspectives, learn from each other, and deeply listen to, acknowledge, and privilege the voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Conduct ethical research and data collection with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to measure impact and align with their perspectives and understandings.
- Embrace flexibility to adapt the project as needed to maximise anticipated outcomes and address factors that may affect or delay the project.
- Establish agreements that can be adapted to respond to arising needs.

STAGES OF CO-DEVELOPMENT

This stage marks the beginning of the co-development journey where the focus is on collectively identifying and framing key issues or problems. This foundational stage involves building a dedicated team and exploring the readiness of the community to address the identified challenges. The key components of this include:

- Developing partnerships
- Identifying issues and community readiness
- Formalising partnerships
- Establishing inclusive governance structures

This stage is focused on fostering a shared understanding of the identified issues, building strong relationships with key stakeholders and engaging with the community to co-develop solutions. The key components of this stage include:

- Planning for co-development
- Engaging with community
- Gathering feedback and documenting outcomes

The final stage of co-development is an opportunity for partners to collaboratively transition from planning to action, evaluating the impact of interventions and celebrating successes. The key components of this stage include:

- Developing an evaluation framework
- Testing, implementing and refining the co-developed program
- Implementing a culturally responsive evaluation
- Celebrating successes

STAGE 1 INITIATION AND ALIGNMENT

In this initial stage, the focus is on collectively identifying and framing the key issue or problem. Building the project team is crucial to plan and prepare for the co-development process effectively. Exploring the readiness of the community to tackle the identified issues is also critical.

Key Steps:
1.1 Partnership development
1.2 Identify issues and community readiness
1.3 Formalise partnerships
1.4 Establish inclusive governance structures

1.1 Partnership Development

- Choose appropriate partners.
- Assess partners against core values checklist.
- Consider if co-development approach is appropriate.

1.2 Identify issues and community readiness

- Explore readiness for co-development.
- Engage with ACCOs.
- Identify issues and opportunities.

1.3 Formalise partnerships

- Develop shared vision.
- Establish timelines.
- Clarify structural aspects.

1.4 Establish inclusive governance structures

- Setup governance systems and structures.
- Ensure partner involvement in decision-making.

STAGE 1 INITIATION AND ALIGNMENT

1.1 Partnership Development

Central to the success of any co-development process is the active engagement of partners who bring unique perspectives, specialised expertise and essential support. Recognising the resource constraints of ACCOs, and the significant cultural load carried by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, highlights the invaluable support provided by non-Indigenous organisations. These organisations offer capacity, ideas, skills and resources responsive to ACCOs' needs. It is crucial to acknowledge the increased workload and responsibilities often placed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders.

Striking a thoughtful balance among partners, who each bring unique strengths while respecting the central role of ACCOs, greatly enhances the success of the co-development process. While non-Indigenous organisations contribute significantly, they cannot replicate the benefits of community-led and culturally appropriate service provision through ACCOs.

Effective partnership brokering becomes pivotal in navigating challenges, aligning diverse interests and ensuring effective communication. Guided by recommendations from Burton (2012), key partners and stakeholders must agree to a set of core values to foster a successful, collaborative and culturally strong approach.

Key Activities:

Choose appropriate partners. •• Assess partners against core values checklist. •• Consider if co-development approach is appropriate.

STAGE 1 INITIATION AND ALIGNMENT

1.1.1 Choose appropriate partners.

A) ACCO Partners:

- Privilege Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners who bring cultural authority, a deep understanding of community needs, and unique ways of knowing, being and doing.
- Formally request, adequately compensate and appropriately recognise ACCOs provision of knowledge, time and expertise (Anderson et al. 2023).
- Ensure inclusion of ACCOs from project inception to establish a genuine partnership that demonstrates respect for their role in the community.

B) Non-Indigenous Organisation:

- Include a non-Indigenous organisation in the partnership who can contribute ideas, skills and resources that are responsive to the needs of ACCOs and their communities.

C) Brokering Partners:

- Dedicate funding and resources for a stakeholder who can facilitate and broker the partnership.
- Value and adequately fund genuine partnership development to create space for generating local, responsive strategies (Burton 2012).

D) Evaluation Partners:

- Decide whether evaluation of the project will be conducted internally, externally or in collaboration, including an assessment on the capacity and resources of ACCOs and other partners to conduct the evaluation.
- Empower ACCOs to play a leadership role in selecting evaluation partners to ensure evaluation is reflecting community priorities and preferences.
- If possible, secure funder's approval of the selected evaluation partner before signing funding agreements.

STAGE 1 INITIATION AND ALIGNMENT

Guiding insights on the value of diverse partners (Burton 2012):

ACCOs play a crucial role because they:

- Are well-known, accepted and attuned to community needs.
- Guide cultural training and facilitate learning experiences.
- Share cultural knowledge and skills.
- Facilitate culturally appropriate community connections.
- Lead the delivery of culturally grounded services.
- Bring unique insights on the delivery of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.
- Bring unique skills, expertise and cultural grounding.

Non-Indigenous organisations can support ACCOs because they:

- Provide diverse expertise, broker partnerships, fundraise, plan for impact at scale and offer backbone support.
- Assist with data collection, develop policies, address capacity gaps and promote the work of ACCOs.
- Build the capacity for ACCOs through training, workforce development, mentoring, governance and sustainable funding.
- Influence policy, advocate with or on behalf of ACCOs, representing on-the-ground realities in higher-level policy discussions.
- Bring different experiences of program development and evaluation strategies.

Figure 1: Role of diverse partners in co-development

STAGE 1 INITIATION AND ALIGNMENT

1.1.2 Assess potential partners against a set of core values.

Use the values checklist in figure 2 below to assess suitability of potential partners.

Core Values Checklist

Empowerment & Collaboration

- ○ Demonstrate commitment to empowering ACCOs for leadership.
- ○ Walk alongside and complement ACCO partners wholeheartedly, providing support without imposing, reducing or overshadowing their role.
- ○ Treat all partners as equal contributors.

Cultural Competency & Respect

- ○ Embrace culturally appropriate ways of working.
- ○ Maintain a high level of cultural competency and respect in individual and organisational practices.
- ○ Recognise and value the unique cultural knowledge and skills of ACCOs.
- ○ Demonstrate awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and cultures.
- ○ Acknowledge the critical contribution of culture, land, and family to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Inclusivity & Active Listening

- ○ Actively listen and incorporate diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.
- ○ Foster an inclusive and collaborative decision-making environment.

Collaborative Mindset & Learning

- ○ Demonstrate a collaborative mindset.
- ○ Commit to ongoing learning from ACCOs, communities and other key partners or stakeholders.

STAGE 1 INITIATION AND ALIGNMENT

Rights, Self-Determination and Cultural Security

- ○ Uphold the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.
- ○ Recognise and respect the fundamental right to self-determination.
- ○ Prioritise cultural security in all approaches to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child safety and wellbeing.
- ○ Commit to shifting power dynamics and putting community in the driver's seat.

Partnership Principles

- ○ Demonstrate ongoing commitment to the partnership, extending beyond project timelines.
- ○ Prioritise shared goals over individual needs.
- ○ Share information openly and transparently without constraints.
- ○ Build partnerships on trust, honesty, and openness.
- ○ Engage in deep listening based on mutual respect.
- ○ Embrace flexibility, recognising that one size does not fit all.
- ○ Allocate sufficient time, resources, and funding.
- ○ Exhibit a collaborative approach to the funding model, and allocation of funding between partners.
- ○ Drive demonstrable improvements in outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.
- ○ Empower local knowledge and community-based collaborative decision-making.

Figure 2: Partner values checklist

STAGE 1 INITIATION AND ALIGNMENT

1.1.3 Consider whether co-development is the appropriate approach.

Assess the suitability of this collaborative approach by responding to the questions below based on your organisation's role.

Questions for non-Indigenous organisations to consider:

SNAICC (2019) has developed a collective impact toolkit for organisations seeking to partner with ACCOs to deliver impactful projects. Consider the following questions when contemplating co-developing solutions with ACCOs:

- Will the co-developed project contribute to positive change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities?
- How will the co-development approach engage with and genuinely respect local values and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldviews?
- What methods will you put in place to ensure inclusive decision-making processes?
- How will people interact with the co-developed project?
- What are your long-term goals and vision for the project? Does that align with needs identified from ACCOs and their communities?
- Which partners will you bring on? How will they help or hinder the project?

STAGE 1 INITIATION AND ALIGNMENT

Questions for ACCOs deciding whether to participate or not:

The questions below, stemming from the WACOSS (2017) co-development toolkit, are designed for community sector organisations contemplating participation in a co-development project:

- Is the co-development relevant to my organisation?
- Are we likely to be delivering the services being developed or is there another role we play?
- Is this 'core business'?
- Can we spare the time? Are we adequately resourced to commit to the project?
- Will it help us grow in directions we want to go?
- Do we have the expertise to add value in the co-development process?
- Will there be advantages or disadvantages to us as a result of participating in the process?
- Is the scope wide enough to make a difference or are we wasting time by participating?
- Is the proposed funding sufficient and sustainable?
- Is there sufficient time for a thorough process to be undertaken?
- Is the co-development brief clear, including a clear statement of what is in scope and what is out of scope for consideration?
- Is there opportunity to contribute to the planning of the co-development process?

STAGE 1 INITIATION AND ALIGNMENT

1.2 Identify issues and community readiness

This stage centres on understanding the community's identification and prioritisation of issues, as well as establishing clear end goals for the project. It involves assessing the community's appetite for collaborative efforts and identifying local champions to lead the process. Engaging the community from the outset is crucial to ensure ownership and a shared understanding of both problems and potential solutions (WACOSS 2017). Using multiple strategies becomes crucial to tap into community expertise, knowledge and strengths. However, it is pivotal to use a multifaceted approach to explore community readiness to address identified issues and achieve the established goals.

ACCOs need assurances that their voice will genuinely be heard, and that co-development efforts will result in tangible benefits for their community (Burton 2012). The success of this stage lies not only in identifying issues and assessing readiness but also in establishing clear goals so that partners and stakeholders understand the purpose of the project and can tailor action plans and strategies accordingly.

Key Activities:

Explore readiness for co-development. •• Engage with ACCOs. •• Identify issues and opportunities.

STAGE 1 INITIATION AND ALIGNMENT

1.2.1 Explore community and organisational readiness for co-development.

- Assess whether the community agrees there is a problem and clarify if there is agreement on the definition, scope and impact of the existing problem.
- Scope the community's appetite to tackle the identified problem (WACOSS 2017).
- Identify possible community champions to lead the co-development process (WACOSS 2017).
- Implement alternative local capacity-building approaches if the community is not fully prepared before engagement becomes viable.

1.2.2 Engage with ACCOs.

- Ensure that the project's possible benefits are described honestly and identified and endorsed by the community, avoiding assumptions by external parties (Anderson et al. 2023)
- Address issues that are important to ACCOs, fostering a collaborative and inclusive approach (Anderson et al. 2023).
- Clearly outline what non-Indigenous organisations can offer and the supports they can provide to align with ACCO needs (Anderson et al. 2023).
- Facilitate regular on-site collaboration at ACCOs to encourage meaningful conversations, shared understanding and demonstrate respect for their pivotal role (Anderson et al. 2023).
- Obtain appropriate cultural and community approvals before commencing the project.

1.2.3 Identify issues and opportunities.

- Empower ACCOs to take the lead in defining, identifying, and framing the issue, and generating possible solutions given their understanding of their community's needs.
- Ensure the partnership is firmly grounded in the objective of improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families (Burton 2012).
- Clearly outline and communicate the benefits for partner involvement.

STAGE 1 INITIATION AND ALIGNMENT

1.3 Formalise partnerships

This stage of co-development focuses on formalising partnerships for effective, purposeful and sustainable collaboration. The focus is on defining clear aims, structures, timelines and commitments. Formalising partnerships helps to provide clarity on commitments, resource allocation and fosters mutual accountability. ACCOs and communities remain key drivers in shaping the project, privileging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and leading successful community-responsive programs (Anderson et al. 2023).

Key Activities:

Develop shared vision. • • Establish timelines. • • Clarify structural aspects.

1.3.1 Develop a shared vision.

- Collaboratively develop a shared vision aimed at enhancing engagement and service access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Burton 2012).

1.3.2 Establish timelines.

- Set timelines that accommodate longer discussions and decision-making processes, aligning with community practices.
- Acknowledge the diverse priorities and responsibilities held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Consult with communities to determine timelines responsive to nuanced contexts impacting project deliverables and task achievements (Anderson et al. 2023).

STAGE 1 INITIATION AND ALIGNMENT

1.3.3 Clarify structural aspects.

- Include structures and systems that promote long-term sustainability beyond the project's lifespan (Burton 2012).
- Develop protocols and agreements that define the purpose, principles, activities, roles, responsibilities, and culturally appropriate conflict resolution (Burton 2012). These mechanisms are vital for navigating any issues or disagreements that may emerge during the co-development process in a culturally sensitive manner.
- Engage in early discussions to clarify who owns and controls the data and intellectual property, championing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives to assessment of outcomes.
- Specify funding relationships, workplans, policies, procedures and frameworks for the collaborative partnership (Burton 2012).
- Dedicate additional planning time for the complex process of developing collaborative contracts and agreements (WACOSS 2017).
- Ensure all parties are involved in the contract negotiation stage, with ACCOs leading to ensure their perspectives are central.
- Clarify scope, aims, decision-making processes and levels of involvement and commitments.
- Formalise partnerships through ways of working guidelines, Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs), partnership agreements, service agreements or other agreed contracts or protocols.
- Facilitate dedicated platforms to negotiate contracts, establish shared goals and embed ACCO perspectives.

STAGE 1 INITIATION AND ALIGNMENT

1.4 Establish inclusive governance structures

This stage is dedicated to setting up governance structures that authentically represent community interests. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders should guide all facets of the process. Examples of possible governance structures could include advisory groups, steering committees, working groups and cultural reference groups (Anderson et al. 2023). The governance mechanisms are vital for overseeing and implementing co-developed projects.

Key Activities:

- Setup governance systems and structures.
- Ensure partner involvement in decision-making.

STAGE 1 INITIATION AND ALIGNMENT

1.4.1 Setup governance systems and structures.

- Develop governance structures that reflect an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander understandings of leadership, fostering culturally appropriate models for guidance, governance and decision-making.

1.4.2 Ensure partner involvement in decision-making processes.

- Ensure ACCOs lead the development of governance systems, ensuring community leadership (Burton 2012).
- Foster broad participation from all partners in establishing governance systems.
- Place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities at the centre of all decision-making and governance processes (WACOSS 2017). This can be achieved, for example, through negotiated agreements and other measures to ensure ACCOs lead the process.
- Collaboratively determine parameters on how decisions are made as a group, acknowledging the distinction between partners with formal agreements and stakeholders invited to provide input at various stages.
- Create space for collaboration and open discussion among partners regarding shared goals, while recognising the varying degrees of influence stakeholders may have in decision-making, determined by the partners on a case-by-case basis.

STAGE 2

COLLABORATIVE EXPLORATION & COMMUNITY BUILDING

The focus of this stage is on developing a shared understanding of the problem, the opportunities, and building relationships with partners and key stakeholders. It's about working collaboratively to develop potential solutions, prioritise ideas and undertake co-development.

Key Steps:
2.1 Planning for co-development.
2.2 Community engagement.
2.3 Feedback and documentation.

2.1 Planning for Co-Development

- Develop workplan with roles and responsibilities.
- Establish co-development team.
- Develop communications strategy.

2.2 Community Engagement

- Create plan for engagement.
- Engage in face-to-face consultations.
- Ensure culturally grounded approach.
- Use flexible and culturally sensitive engagement.
- Encourage networking and relationship building.
- Capture diverse perspectives.
- Develop diverse session structures.

2.3 Feedback and Documentation

- Document outcomes of community consultations.
- Keep community and stakeholders informed.
- Provide opportunities for feedback and recognition.
- Reflect, evaluate and record learnings.

STAGE 2

COLLABORATIVE EXPLORATION & COMMUNITY BUILDING

2.1 Planning for Co-Development

The planning stage lays the foundations for effective co-development, strategically emphasising community engagement, privileging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, wisdom and expertise, and prioritising ACCO-led approaches. The process enhances capacity development, infuses cultural perspectives, empowers communities and promotes ACCOs' leadership in shaping outcomes (Burton 2012). Integral to this stage is the consistent ACCO voice and leadership, deeply embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in identifying issues, designing solutions and evaluating outcomes.

Key Activities:

- Develop workplan with roles and responsibilities.
- Establish co-development team.
- Develop communications strategy.

STAGE 2

COLLABORATIVE EXPLORATION & COMMUNITY BUILDING

2.1.1 Develop a workplan with clear roles and responsibilities.

- Allocate sufficient time for teams to fulfil their co-development responsibilities.
- Establish a common purpose, parameters, high-level outcomes, target groups, service delivery approach, required skills, mechanisms for service provision, relationships, performance indicators, and program and service reporting requirements.
- Distribute the workload and foster collaborative efforts to share responsibilities.
- Identify diverse skillsets to fill staff capacity gaps where necessary.
- Establish two-way learning relationships to ensure reciprocal benefits for both non-Indigenous and ACCO staff.
- Promote mutual mentoring roles to exchange knowledge and skills between organisations.
- Develop flexible and dynamic planning processes responsive to evolving needs.
- Develop a dedicated plan to document and assess the effectiveness of the co-development process (WACOSS 2017).
- Clearly articulate the scope of co-development.
- Ensure strategic representation from each organisation, including multiple individuals who can offer diverse perspectives from both strategic and practical service delivery levels (WACOSS 2017).

2.1.2 Establish a co-development team.

- Establish a dedicated co-development project team that is ACCO-led and supported by adequate resources and shared responsibilities.
- Develop a shared, clear understanding of the co-development scope and intent among all parties within this team (WACOSS 2017).
- Build collective understanding of the issue by engaging stakeholders and learning from lived experiences.

STAGE 2

COLLABORATIVE EXPLORATION & COMMUNITY BUILDING

2.1.3 Develop a communication strategy.

- Establish a communication plan aligned with co-development principles and values.
- Ensure regular, open, clear, and consistent communication.
- Collaboratively establish culturally appropriate communication channels with local community to maintain trust and foster genuine partnerships.
- Incorporate community-level input to ensure the co-development process authentically captures the diverse voices within the community (Anderson et al. 2023).
- Develop a well-structured communications plan, specifying participants to include in consultations, content for invitations and a clear statement of scope (WACOSS 2017).

STAGE 2

COLLABORATIVE EXPLORATION & COMMUNITY BUILDING

2.2 Community engagement

A strategic and culturally grounded approach to community engagement is needed to empower ACCOs to express their vision, needs and perspectives. Fostering a collaborative environment with non-Indigenous organisations in the project can allow them to contribute in culturally appropriate ways (Burton 2012). Initiating an engagement process that encourages active participation and open communication is key to successful co-development.

Below is a set of strategies for a streamlined approach to engagement and generating solutions responsive to community needs (WACOSS 2017, Burton 2012, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission 2020).

Engagement strategies should be appropriate for the scope and scale of the project, encompassing a combination of workshops, focus groups and targeted consultations to ensure inclusivity and diverse representation (WACOSS 2017).

Engage in meaningful community consultations with both the co-development team and the broader community to understand needs and capture diverse perspectives. The ACCO partner should guide the decisions relating to the strategies for facilitating community engagement.

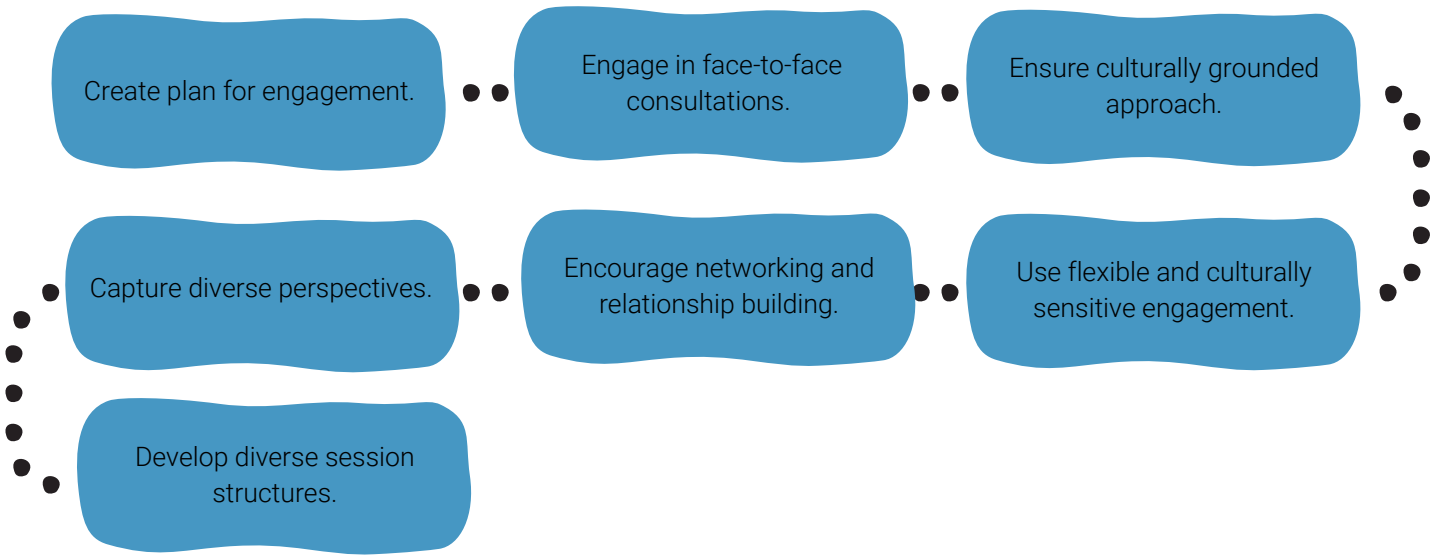
Encourage diverse participation and tap into community strengths and expertise (e.g. facilitate workshops).

STAGE 2

COLLABORATIVE EXPLORATION & COMMUNITY BUILDING

2.2 Community engagement

Key Activities:



2.2.1 Create a comprehensive clear plan for engagement.

- Develop clear expectation and articulate what is in scope (i.e. generating potential solutions and prioritising their development).
- Outline community engagement details, key stakeholders, consultation methods and locations.
- Identify and invite potential stakeholders, and a fit-for-purpose model and engagement strategy.
- Decide on timeframes for workshops and other community engagement strategies.
- Engage an appropriate facilitator who may be from within the group, if it includes a peak body or leading ACCO, and someone to document and organise logistics.
- Consider session structure to maximise the quality of input.
- Be clear about likely barriers to stakeholder participation.

STAGE 2

COLLABORATIVE EXPLORATION & COMMUNITY BUILDING

2.2.2 Engage in face-to-face consultations.

- Ensure a strong and respectful on-site presence at ACCOs.
- Engage in regular face-to-face communication, actively participate in community activities, and conduct consultations at ACCOs to redress power imbalances and minimise potential costs for ACCOs, for example, travel expenses to another destination.

2.2.3 Ensure a culturally grounded approach that promotes self-determination.

- Involve ACCOs and their communities from the outset, including leaders and Elders who can provide information regarding community norms and protocols.
- Ensure consultations are culturally grounded and highlight the lived experiences of ACCOs and their communities.
- Be patient and respect community priorities.
- Empower ACCOs to lead, direct and guide the design and delivery of solutions for issues they have identified as effective for their community.
- Acknowledge that ACCOs can only represent the community to the extent that they consult with them.
- Respect and embed cultural rights and demonstrate commitment to self-determination in practice.
- Recognise the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Strengthen existing culturally appropriate and responsive programs.

STAGE 2

COLLABORATIVE EXPLORATION & COMMUNITY BUILDING

2.2.4 Use flexible and culturally sensitive engagement approaches.

- Invest in significant time and an open, flexible approach based on local and cultural nuances.
- Respect the community's choices about timing, location, and resourcing of consultations.
- Adopt a flexible approach, respecting cultural events and family or work-related responsibilities.
- Conduct consultations that are proportionate to the potential impacts and benefits for community.
- Promote community consultation sessions in culturally appropriate ways.
- Be transparent about how local knowledge and input will be included in decision-making processes.
- Understand and respect local dispute resolution and decision-making processes.

2.2.5 Encourage networking and relationship building.

- Allocate time for networking and relationship building.
- Establish long-term working relationships with communities.

STAGE 2

COLLABORATIVE EXPLORATION & COMMUNITY BUILDING

2.2.6 Develop an inclusive approach to capture diverse perspectives.

- Maintain a sensitive and inclusive approach, acknowledging involvement participants may have had previously in addressing the issue or opportunity.
- Include all relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders, interests and organisations.
- Obtain agreements with communities over the process and desired outcomes.
- Engage and directly interact with ACCOs, community representatives and Elders to facilitate idea-sharing.
- Create a safe environment for collaboratively navigating issues.
- Create a solutions-oriented approach where people feel comfortable to express opinions, propose ideas, voice concerns and address challenges.
- Respect ideas that extend beyond the scope of the co-development, capturing them for consideration in other contexts and future projects.

2.2.7 Develop diverse session structures.

- Incorporate diverse formats and activities, accommodating various styles of visual, verbal and written input.
- Include a variety of indoor and outdoor activities, such as visits on Country with cultural leaders.
- Facilitate focused and interactive sessions where people feel comfortable sharing their views.
- Provide opportunities for small, targeted groups to enhance engagement and ensure active and diverse participation.

STAGE 2

COLLABORATIVE EXPLORATION & COMMUNITY BUILDING

2.3 Feedback and documentation

In the feedback and documentation stage, it is crucial to establish transparent, participatory and respectful processes that capture and acknowledge the outcomes of community consultations. Creating an environment where diverse voices, ideas and opinions are heard, valued and acted upon is critical. This promotes continuous improvement and provides a platform to leverage participant feedback for meaningful and sustainable service delivery improvements. This may extend beyond the immediate scope of co-development but can be respected and preserved for consideration in other contexts (WACOSS 2017, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission 2020).

Key Activities:

2.3.1 Capture and document outcomes of community consultations.

- Develop processes for capturing and sharing the outcomes of community consultations, including participant-generated notes and documentation.
- Document and report a comprehensive record of the co-development process, including outcomes, decision-making processes and rationale for decisions when appropriate.

STAGE 2

COLLABORATIVE EXPLORATION & COMMUNITY BUILDING

2.3.2 Share and keep community and stakeholders informed.

- Reach an agreement with communities on how feedback will be provided after the consultation stage concludes.
- Provide recorded notes and feedback to participants who contributed to co-development process to keep participants informed, engaged and reassured that their voices have been heard, recognised and valued.
- Communicate openly and transparently about the process for handling feedback that cannot be acted upon, ensuring community members understand the reasons behind decisions and fostering continued trust and collaboration.

2.3.3 Provide opportunities for feedback and recognition.

- Allow opportunities for participants to review documentation and provide additional input or corrections.
- Recognise, acknowledge and appreciate the diverse contributions made during the process, reflecting on the value of different opinions and ideas.

2.3.4 Reflect, evaluate, and record learnings.

- Conduct a thorough evaluation of the co-development process, recording and incorporating feedback from participants.
- Undertake an honest assessment of the extent to which co-development added value to the service model and improved the quality of service delivery.
- Distribute learnings from the process to decision-makers, informing the development of future co-development projects.
- Identify effective ways to keep communities informed about developments regarding the specific issue or opportunity.

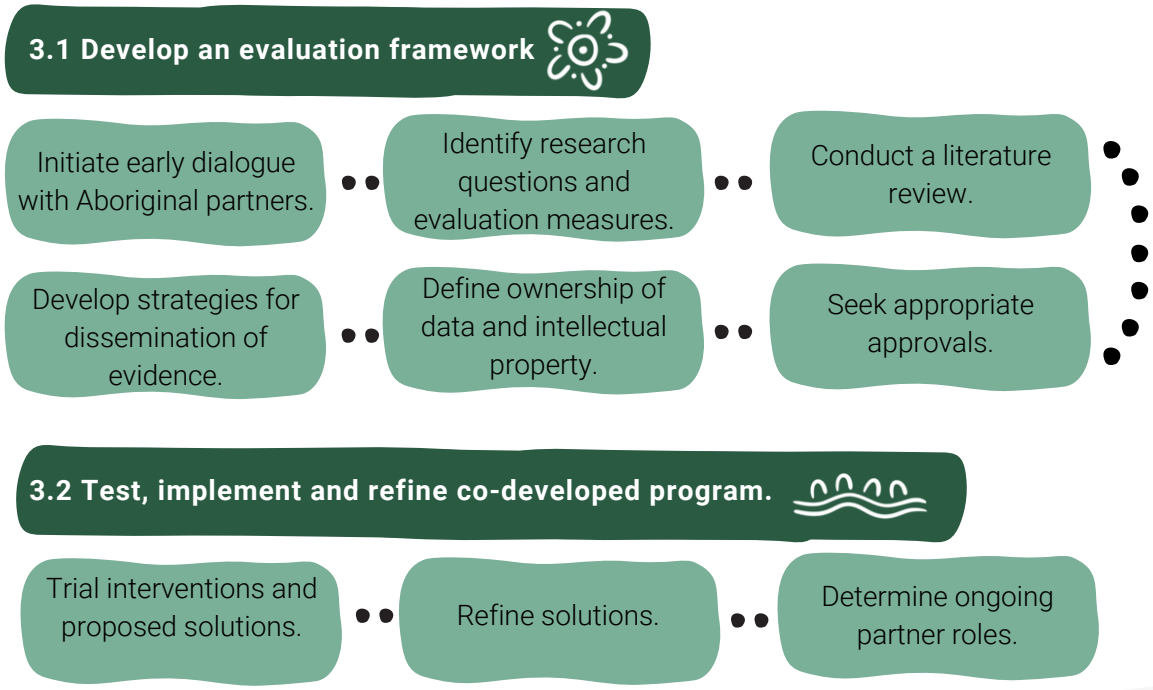
STAGE 3

IMPLEMENTATION, EVALUATION & CELEBRATION

The third and final stage marks the culmination of a collaborative journey, where partners come together to create, test, implement, refine, evaluate and share successes of the co-development process. The foundations established in preceding stages – such as a shared vision, commitment to solutions and identification of barriers and enablers – significantly contributes to the likelihood of success (Metro North Health 2019). Privileging processes that resonate with the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and aligning with their values therefore becomes paramount.

Key Steps:

3.1 Develop an evaluation framework
3.2 Test, implement and refine co-developed program
3.3 Implement culturally responsive evaluation
3.4 Celebrate success



STAGE 3

IMPLEMENTATION, EVALUATION & CELEBRATION

3.3 Implement culturally responsive evaluation

- Conduct evaluation activities.
- Review co-development approach.
- Gather data appropriately.
- Implement regular monitoring mechanisms.

3.4 Celebrate Success

- Launch the program.
- Acknowledge participants.
- Share achievements, outcomes and successes.

STAGE 3

IMPLEMENTATION, EVALUATION & CELEBRATION

3.1 Develop an evaluation framework

This stage involves the design and development of an evaluation framework with open discussions enabling partners to address cultural or other relevant issues throughout the evaluation process. The objective is to create a robust framework to measure progress and generate compelling evidence to use as an advocacy tool to influence policy and drive practical change through knowledge translation. Discussions about an evaluation framework should occur early in the co-development process. Funding partners may require evaluation of certain aspects of the project, the impact of the project on defined outcomes for children and families who participate, or the use of a particular methodology (e.g. quantitative). The integration of data sovereignty principles is central to this process, ensuring that the development and implementation of evaluation activities are culturally responsive and safe.

Key Activities:

- Initiate early dialogue with Aboriginal partners.
- Identify research questions and evaluation measures.
- Conduct a literature review.
- Seek appropriate approvals.
- Define ownership of data and intellectual property.
- Develop strategies for dissemination of evidence.

STAGE 3

IMPLEMENTATION, EVALUATION & CELEBRATION

Data sovereignty

Historically, research endeavours have often been done 'on' rather than 'for' or 'by', Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities (Lowitja Institute 2021).

Indigenous data sovereignty encapsulates the inherent right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations to maintain, control, protect, develop and use data pertaining to their identity and experiences. It outlines how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples' rights, perspectives, values and knowledge are acknowledged and reflected in the collection and use of data and information about them, their communities and their wisdom (Lowitja Institute 2021).

Co-developed research projects should be co-led by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander experts, and the team should include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers. This ensures that the data collected are aligned with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values and frameworks, facilitating an accurate reflection of their stories, knowledge and experiences within research (Lowitja Institute 2021).

A co-developed research approach includes collecting, analysing and reporting on data in a culturally safe manner that respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing. This involves the effective and ethical dissemination of data in a manner that is both respectful and meaningful to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations. It also necessitates negotiation on the sharing of data and recognition of contributions from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, particularly in publications and reports (Lowitja Institute 2021).

Formal agreements safeguarding Indigenous Data Sovereignty should encompass (Lowitja Institute 2021):

- Intellectual property (IP) rights.
- Data collection procedures.
- Retention, access to and management protocols for all research data.
- Mechanisms for actions if the research team fails to fulfil the commitments outlined in the agreement.

These agreements should be understood and endorsed by appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives from the communities and/or organisations involved in the project as part of an evaluation framework guiding the research.

STAGE 3

IMPLEMENTATION, EVALUATION & CELEBRATION

3.1.1 Initiate early dialogue with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners.

- Establish a shared understanding of data sovereignty principles, ensuring significant involvement of all partners, especially ACCOs in the design of the evaluation framework (Burton 2012).
- Foster open communication channels to address cultural considerations and co-develop outcomes.
- Use and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge to determine and drive research agendas, embedding cultural respect and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into the evaluation process (Bailey et al. 2022).

3.1.2 Identify clear research questions and select evaluation measures.

- Define research questions that align with the project's objectives and reflect ACCOs perspectives and priorities.
- Collaboratively select and define measures and indicators of success for co-development, using a mix of outcomes, and qualitative and quantitative measures (Metro North Health 2019; Burton 2012).
- Empower ACCOs to embed culturally strong evaluation methodologies that align with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing. This may include, for example, a focus on qualitative feedback and storytelling strategies (Burton 2012).

3.1.3 Conduct a literature review.

- Review existing literature to inform the research and evaluation process.
- Include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature to ensure cultural relevance and sensitivity.

STAGE 3

IMPLEMENTATION, EVALUATION & CELEBRATION

3.1.4 Seek appropriate approvals.

- Review ethical guidelines and regulations for the project and evaluation activities.
- Assess whether formal ethics approval from a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) is required for the evaluation. Consult the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2023) which incorporates guidelines made in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Act 1992.
- Researchers are required to consult:
  - NHMRC Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders
  - NHMRC Keeping research on track II
  - AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research (2020)
  - A Guide to Applying the AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research (2020)
- If the research involves collecting data from individuals or groups, design recruitment, informed consent and assent processes and data collection methods that embody a respectful and culturally safe experience for participants. This will help to ensure participants fully understand the nature, purpose, risks and benefits of their involvement in the research or co-development project. This includes respecting cultural nuances in the consent process.
- Seek appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific approvals and community-based approvals from relevant bodies, Elders, leaders or other individuals (Anderson et al. 2023).

STAGE 3

IMPLEMENTATION, EVALUATION & CELEBRATION

3.1.5 Define ownership of data and address intellectual property rights.

- Clarify ownership rights and responsibilities regarding data collected during the evaluation.
- Develop agreements or protocols to govern data sharing, access and usage that respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights and sovereignty.

3.1.6 Develop strategies for dissemination of evidence.

- Identify key audience and stakeholders for dissemination efforts.
- Develop communications plan, strategies and materials to share evaluation results.

STAGE 3

IMPLEMENTATION, EVALUATION & CELEBRATION

3.2 Test, implement and refine co-developed program

In this stage, partners commit to executing co-developed programs with a focus on centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the implementation process (Anderson et al. 2023). This is an exciting stage where you will see the benefits of co-development reach the community you have been working with, where meaningful and sustainable change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families can occur (Metro North Health 2019).

Key Activities:

- Trial interventions and proposed solutions.
- Refine solutions.
- Determine ongoing partner roles.

STAGE 3

IMPLEMENTATION, EVALUATION & CELEBRATION

3.2.1 Trial interventions and proposed solutions.

- Ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people play a central role in directing and guiding the implementation of co-developed programs (Anderson et al. 2023).
- Work collaboratively to trial and implement the intervention, incorporating insights from the community engagement processes (WACOSS 2017).
- Establish the process and mechanisms for monitoring the research evaluation during the implementation of the program.

3.2.2 Refine solutions.

- Provide opportunities for the community and key stakeholders to offer feedback on the co-developed program (Metro North Health 2019).
- Commit to continuous improvement processes, establishing a cycle of acting, learning and adapting based on gathered feedback (Metro North Health 2019).

3.2.3 Determine ongoing partner roles.

- Clarify the ongoing roles of project partners once the co-development project is launched, considering the governance structures established during the co-development process.
- Determine the ongoing responsibilities and contributions of each partner to ensure sustained collaboration and support for the program.

STAGE 3

IMPLEMENTATION, EVALUATION & CELEBRATION

3.3 Implement culturally responsive evaluation

The implementation of the evaluation framework focuses on assessing the partnership, co-development processes, and program outcomes to emphasise the significance of collaboration in improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families (Burton 2012). Prioritising data collection and evaluation approaches valued by ACCOs and their communities over Western constructs will better align with community and cultural values and processes, emphasising shared decision-making and showing respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing (Anderson et al. 2023). If the co-development project team decides that funder requirements or advocacy goals require the use of traditional evaluation strategies, the rationale and the cultural safety protocols being implemented can be documented in MOUs and service agreement contracts.

Key Activities:

3.3.1 Conduct evaluation activities.

- Jointly develop reporting requirements, fostering mutual accountability without undue burden (Burton 2012).
- Support ACCOs in building evaluation capacity, including data collection (Burton 2012).
- Use de-colonising methods to inform ethical engagement of community members in research processes (Bailey et al. 2022).

STAGE 3

IMPLEMENTATION, EVALUATION & CELEBRATION

3.3.2 Review co-development approach.

- Formally evaluate the partnership relationship and its translation into service outcomes, considering resources dedicated to development, management and review processes (Burton 2012).
- Evaluate the co-development process, incorporating feedback from participants and assessing how it added value to the service model and improved proposed quality (WACOSS 2017).

3.3.3 Gather data appropriately.

- Involve community and embed practices ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people lead decisions about data collection methods (Anderson et al. 2023).
- Clearly define data sovereignty, ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities own the data and resulting knowledge (Anderson et al. 2023).

3.3.4 Implement regular monitoring mechanisms.

- Develop mechanisms for regular and ongoing monitoring and evaluation activities.
- Conduct fidelity assessment to ensure adherence to evaluation protocols and standards.
- Establish an evaluation working group with key partners and stakeholders to review progress, address emerging issues, and ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation and leadership in the process.

STAGE 3

IMPLEMENTATION, EVALUATION & CELEBRATION

3.4 Celebrate success

This serves as a critical moment to celebrate outcomes and successes of co-development (Metro North Health 2019), closing the loop with the community actively engaged in the process. It goes beyond acknowledgement, offering a platform to express gratitude and recognise the invaluable contributions of all parties involved and their instrumental input in shaping the final program. This helps to affirm the collective effort and prompts reflections on the process to foster a deeper understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement. Celebrating the success provides an opportunity to showcase the tangible benefits derived from the project, but also serves as a catalyst for initiating conversations about what lies ahead, ensuring that the momentum generated by the co-development continues to propel positive change and innovation.

Key Activities:

Launch the program. •• Acknowledge participants. •• Share achievements, outcomes and successes.

3.4.1 Launch the program.

- Host an event to mark the launch of the new program or commemorate other significant milestones (WACOSS 2017).

STAGE 3

IMPLEMENTATION, EVALUATION & CELEBRATION

3.4.2 Acknowledge participants.

- Recognise and appreciate the contributions of all involved in the process, reflecting on the process and lessons learned (Metro North Health 2019).
- Publicly acknowledge participants for example through authorship on project reports and publications, or inviting them to co-present the project outcomes at meetings and forums (Metro North Health 2019).
- Acknowledge partners and funders for their contributions in enabling the project to be co-developed, implemented and evaluated.

3.4.3 Share achievements, outcomes and successes.

- Share the intervention and celebrate the achievements and outcomes with the broader community of stakeholders (Metro North Health 2019). This can be an ongoing process internally throughout the life of the project and then externally at the conclusion of the project with the sector and wider community involvement.
- Explore opportunities to enter the co-development in public or community sector awards for collaboration or innovation (WACOSS 2017).
- Ensure translation of culturally relevant research findings into improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families (Bailey et al. 2022).
- Integrate research findings into policy and planning to effect real change in outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families (Bailey et al. 2022).

CONCLUSION

This framework serves as comprehensive guide for co-development projects. It seeks to apply the transformative power of collective, community-driven approaches that aim to empower and privilege Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Intended for use by others embarking on similar endeavours, it is a dynamic resource that will inevitably evolve and be adapted over time.

The partners behind this framework hope that it serves as a practical tool, facilitating meaningful, culturally embedded and respectful co-development projects between ACCOs and non-Indigenous organisations. By amplifying community voices, the aim is to drive positive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children families and communities.

The framework represents a journey to creating new knowledge, instigating fresh perspectives, and inspiring innovative ways of thinking and working to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander children, families and communities. Additionally, two companion reports are available: one documenting the co-development journey undertaken by the partners, and the other presenting the co-developed model resulting from this collaborative effort. These reports are intended to provide inspiration and guide others undertaking similar projects.

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KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Staff and community members with previous and continued involvement in the co-development and delivery of the Boori Milumba model and the research trial.

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