

BACKBONE TEAM PRACTICE GUIDE

*Stronger Places,
Stronger People*

**SPSP
Backbone Teams**
*With support from
Collaboration for Impact*

**Barkly
Regional
Deal**

**BURNIE
WORKS**

**Collaboration
for Impact**



TABLE OF CONTENTS

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We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and their custodianship of the lands on which we operate. We pay our respects to their Ancestors and their descendants, who continue cultural and spiritual connections to Country. We recognise their valuable contributions to Australian and global society.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS			
ABBREVIATIONS			
SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION			
Background	1		45
Why a Backbone Team practice guide?	2		45
What is practice in this context?	3		46
What does a Backbone Team do?	4		50
Who is this practice guide for?	4		53
How is this practice guide structured?	5		
How to use the practice guide	6		
SECTION TWO: BACKBONE TEAM PRACTICES	9		
Practice Area 1: Local leadership in systems change	13		
Practice description	13		
What it looks like	14		
Practice Snapshot: Learning the Macleay	20		
Practice Snapshot: Gladstone Region engaging in action Together	21		
Practice Snapshot: Gladstone Region engaging in action Together	22		
Reflection questions	24		
Practice Area 2: Inclusive community leadership	27		
Practice description	27		
What it looks like	28		
Practice Snapshot: Gladstone Region engaging in action Together	31		
Reflection questions	32		
Practice Area 3: Understanding, measurement, evaluation and learning	35		
Practice description	35		
What it looks like	36		
Practice Snapshot: Burnie Works	41		
Reflection questions	43		
Practice Area 4: Using power for purpose			
Practice description			45
What it looks like			46
Practice Snapshot: Logan Together			50
Reflection questions			53
Practice Area 5: Investment and policy for purpose			
Practice description			55
What it looks like			55
Practice Snapshot: Burnie Works			56
Practice Snapshot: Logan Together			60
Reflection questions			61
Practice Area 6: Governance for purpose			
Practice description			65
What it looks like			65
Reflection questions			66
SECTION THREE: BACKBONE TEAM COMPETENCIES	73		
Skills			75
Attributes or mindsets			78
APPENDICES			
Appendix A: Methodology			81
Appendix B: Notable tools and frameworks			82
			83

ABBREVIATIONS

Backbone GuideSPSP Backbone Team Practice Guide
BBTBackbone Team
DSSAustralian Government Department of Social Services
Government GuideSPSP Government Practice Guide
SPSPStronger Places, Stronger People
U-MELUnderstanding, measurement, evaluation and learning



SECTION ONE

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Stronger Places, Stronger People (SPSP) is a community-led, collective impact initiative¹, stewarded by the Australian Government in partnership with 10 Australian communities and state and territory governments². The goal of SPSP is to disrupt disadvantage in 10 demonstration communities over time and the objective is to demonstrate improved wellbeing for children and their families living in these communities. This is achieved through community-led change that includes policy, funding, and systems reform.

Key to the SPSP initiative is the role and contribution of local Backbone Teams, a central component of the Collective Impact methodology³. In SPSP, each community has a local Backbone Team to support and coordinate the efforts of the community and its partners⁴. The collective experience of SPSP State and Commonwealth government partners is that they are also key to supporting a new way of working⁵.

In 2022, SPSP Backbone Team Leads identified the need to capture and codify the practice of Backbone Teams in delivering community-led, collective impact. Together, they identified key practices for inclusion in a SPSP Backbone Team Practice Guide (the “Backbone Guide”). These practices were explored in further detail through Backbone Team workshops, a literature scan, case studies and practitioner-peer review. Practices have been aligned with key SPSP frameworks – the SPSP Progress Mapping Tool and Collaborative Change Cycle – to support use. Appendix 1 provides further detail about the methodology.

In response to the development of the Backbone Guide, government partners agreed to develop a complementary SPSP Government Practice Guide (the “Government Guide”), which sets out the role and practices of government in supporting community-led, collective impact.

1 Common approaches or frameworks used to describe place-based and community-led change, including community-led collective impact, are discussed in detail here: https://platformc.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/CH_Place-based%26Community-led%20change_Nov22_2.pdf

2 <https://www.dss.gov.au/families-and-children-programs-services/stronger-places-stronger-people>

3 https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact

4 Department of Social Services (DSS), *Stronger Places, Stronger People Model*, 2021.

5 https://platformc.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/SPSP%20Early%20Evidence%20Impact%20Report_20221101%20FINAL_0.pdf

The development of the practice guides has been resourced through the SPSP Leadership Development and Sustainment Strategy.

WHY A BACKBONE TEAM PRACTICE GUIDE?

Existing resources for Backbone Teams, such as the Backbone Starter Guide⁶, describe what Backbone Teams do but not necessarily how they do it, particularly in the Australian context. This practice guide has been developed by leads and representatives of SPSP Backbone Teams to address a gap in the existing literature and provide a valuable and nuanced resource for SPSP Backbone Teams and their supporters.

By capturing reflections on emerging and established practice in community-led, collective impact initiatives from the perspective of SPSP Backbone Teams, the guide aims to:

- Codify practitioner knowledge about key Backbone Team practices, with the expectation that practice will continue to develop and evolve into the future,
- Enable Backbone Team practice reflection, learning and implementation,
- Support understanding and communication of SPSP Backbone Team roles.

It is hoped that this starting point of codification contributes to strengthening the community-led systems change field, allowing others to build on this output and contribute their own experience and knowledge.

⁶ <https://collectiveimpactforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Backbone-Starter-Guide.pdf>

WHAT IS PRACTICE IN THIS CONTEXT?

How you do what you do

This guide outlines the key practices used by SPSP Backbone Teams to implement community-led systems change. It does not detail the range of practices that are utilised by Backbone Teams at different stages of establishment and in different contexts. The intention of this practice guide is to provide an accessible and practical overview of Backbone Team practices that are **most meaningful to make explicit** and align to the SPSP model.

This practice guide captures and codifies knowledge from Backbone Teams operating at varying levels of maturity at a point in time. It is expected that the guide will be updated with new knowledge about practice as the field grows and matures.

WHAT DOES A BACKBONE TEAM DO?

To understand the 'how' of practice, it is necessary to first understand the 'what'. In SPSP, each community has a local Backbone Team to support inclusive community engagement, facilitate and/or coordinate local planning and action, support collaborative decision-making and lead local understanding, measurement, evaluation and learning activities⁷. The sector-neutral Backbone Team is accountable to the community's Local Leadership Group⁸.

Backbone Teams enable community to build a knowledge base so that community needs and aspirations are identified and solutions that will work locally are designed and communicated in a way that everyone involved can understand and take action. They also enlist the support of stakeholders outside of the community to advance change, playing varied roles at a local, regional, state or national level.

⁷ DSS, Stronger Places, Stronger People Model, 2021.

⁸ A Local Leadership Group or Local Leadership Table is the local governance group that holds responsibility for delivery of the local strategy and action plan and management of the Backbone Team. It typically includes community members, government representatives, service providers, philanthropists and other funders.

Backbone Teams realise that for lasting change to occur, communities and partners (e.g. governments, service providers, businesses, philanthropists, universities) need to address the causes - rather than the symptoms - of an issue. In taking a systemic approach, Backbone Teams work with the broader collective effort to challenge and change mental models, power structures, social networks, policies and how money is invested in a community⁹.

WHO IS THIS PRACTICE GUIDE FOR?

This guide is primarily for Backbone Teams working in **community-led collective impact initiatives**. It may also be useful for stakeholders seeking to better understand the role of Backbone Teams in community-led, collective impact, including governments, funders, community members and service providers.

HOW IS THIS PRACTICE GUIDE STRUCTURED?

The practice guide focuses on **six practice areas** relevant for Backbone Teams in community-led collective impact initiatives¹⁰.

Section two of the practice guide provides details of the six practice areas and what they look like at different stages of development. It also provides snapshots of practice and reflection questions linked to each practice area.

Section three provides a high-level summary of the competencies and attributes important for Backbone Teams working in community-led collective impact initiatives. Notable tools and frameworks to deepen practice are provided in Appendix B.

⁹ https://www.fsg.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/The-Water-of-Systems-Change_rc.pdf

¹⁰ The practice areas align with the 'enablers' from the SPSP Progress Mapping Tool, which is used to help community-led partners map their collective progress across different phases of community-led collective impact. At the time of publishing, the tool is not publicly available and is likely to be reviewed.

HOW TO USE THE PRACTICE GUIDE

Notes for all users

- The practice areas and underpinning competencies are a guide, not an exact recipe, for Backbone Teams. Practice will need to be adapted to the unique strengths and context of each community. Backbone Teams are encouraged to consider the parts of this guide that are most relevant and useful to them, rather than view the practices as an exhaustive or prescriptive list.
- As practice can sometimes feel abstract and difficult to define, the guide uses continuums of practice to describe the work, actions and behaviours of Backbone Teams at different phases of development (i.e. getting started, making progress, embedding). Progress, however, is not linear and it is common for some practice areas to be more established than others. The alignment between the continuum of practice used in this guide and the Collaborative Change Cycle¹¹, used within the SPSP Progress Mapping Tool and other system change tools, is shown below in Figure 1.

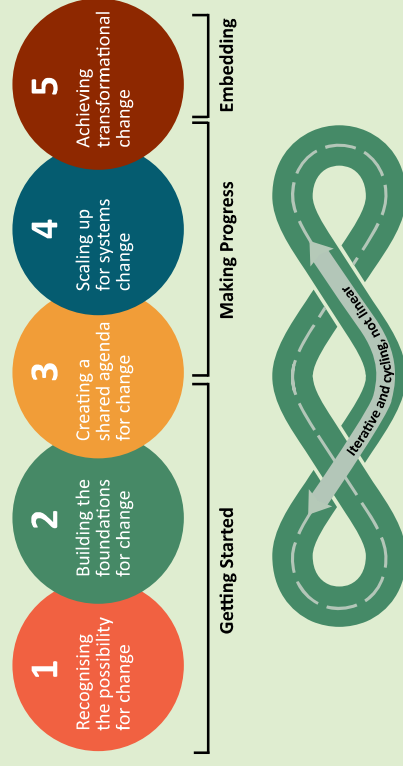


Figure 1: Alignment between the Collaborative Change Cycle and Practice Guide phases (adapted from DSS, 2021)

¹¹ <https://platform.org/change-cycle>.

- Practice areas are overlapping and interconnected. This means some practices appear in multiple practice areas. Any practice repetition or duplication is deliberate and intended to reinforce the importance of the practice.
- It is often the process of pausing, reflecting, sharing and exploring examples of practice that supports practice change. The guide may therefore be helpful for Backbone Teams to use as part of their internal reflection and learning activities; building a shared understanding and language across or within teams, and offering scaffolding for further practice development.
- The Backbone Guide is a learning tool and is not designed to evaluate the performance, progress or effectiveness of Backbone Teams, which is dependent on a range of factors beyond practice.

Notes for SPSP users

- In SPSP, the Backbone Guide is one of several resources supporting implementation. It is designed specifically for Backbone Teams to support reflection, learning and implementation about *how* Backbone Teams do what they do. The Backbone Guide is accompanied by the Government Guide, which sets out the practices of government partners to support community-led, collective impact in each of the practice areas.
- The SPSP Framework, including the SPSP Model¹² and SPSP Progress Mapping tool, outline the work of the broader collective and should be used alongside Annual Learning Circles and the practice guides to inform SPSP implementation.

¹² The SPSP Model outlines six conditions considered necessary to progress and achieve sustained change. They include: inclusive community engagement; local leadership and governance; shared aspiration and strategy; high leverage activities; strategic learning, data and evidence; and a systems approach.

SECTION TWO
BACKBONE TEAM
PRACTICES

OVERVIEW OF PRACTICE AREAS

1 PRACTICE AREA ONE:

LOCAL LEADERSHIP IN SYSTEMS CHANGE

Backbone Teams support local leaders to shift systems to improve outcomes for their community.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

- Build and utilise relationships and trust with and between people, organisations and enterprises.
- Build shared practice for systemic actions, practices and processes across key players.
- Share and translate knowledge to diverse stakeholders to support engagement, understanding and setting and achieving the shared agenda.
- Continually support people, organisations, and enterprises to work together in flexible, agile, community-centred ways.
- Continuously build a shared understanding and approach to systemic barriers and enablers that impact on desired community outcomes.

2 PRACTICE AREA TWO:

INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Backbone Teams work in ways that support diverse community participation and leadership.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

- Build and utilise trusting relationships with community.
- Create brave and inclusive spaces and processes that facilitate collaboration and power sharing with community.
- Support community to step into leadership roles.

3 PRACTICE AREA THREE:

UNDERSTANDING, MEASUREMENT, EVALUATION AND LEARNING (U-MEL)

U-MEL is used to enable community leadership and drive systems change. Backbone Teams work in ways that are strengths-based, acknowledge data sovereignty and value diverse forms of knowledge.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

- Support the development of a community-owned narrative that drives the long-term strategy and ways of working.
- Promote community leadership and ownership of data, including First Nations Data Sovereignty and Governance.
- Develop and implement a framework to support community-led, systems change U-MEL.
- Help build understanding and skills in U-MEL for community-led systems change.
- Help build a culture of learning and evidence-informed decision making.

4

PRACTICE AREA FOUR:

USING POWER FOR PURPOSE

Backbone Teams help to build the conditions and practices of sharing power, accountability and decision-making with community.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

- Develop and support practices and processes that embed the voice of the community including those with lived experience of key issues (lived experience), in decision making and action.
- Support decision makers with formal power to align their efforts to the shared agenda.
- Build transparency about power and its use across the system.
- Foster diversity in deliberation and shared decision making.

5

PRACTICE AREA FIVE:

INVESTMENT AND POLICY FOR PURPOSE

Backbone Teams actively seek to shift investment, policies and accountabilities to align with the community-led change agenda.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

- Build collective advocacy strategies that centre community voice and drive and sustain momentum.
- Engage in influencing and advocacy activities with investors and policy makers.
- Support champions and advocates to influence.
- Strengthen connections to allies to amplify advocacy efforts.

6

PRACTICE AREA SIX:

GOVERNANCE FOR PURPOSE

Backbone Teams support governance structures and processes, resources and partnerships that enable change aligned to the community-led plan.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

- Ensure governance reflects what is needed to hold scope and accountability needed for collective work.
- Ensure there is collective ownership and action.
- Convene sector and systemic partnerships, collaborations and collective efforts.
- Support structures and processes for collective innovation.

LOCAL LEADERSHIP IN SYSTEMS CHANGE

Practice description

In the SPSP context, it is understood that local leadership needs to engage in shifting systems to improve outcomes across the community, including impacting on disadvantage. To enable local leadership in systems change, Backbone Teams:

- Build and utilise relationships and trust with and between people, organisations and enterprises.
- Build shared practice for systemic actions, practices and processes across key players.
- Share and translate knowledge to diverse stakeholders to support engagement, understanding and setting and achieving the shared agenda.
- Continually support people, organisations, and enterprises to work together in flexible, agile, community-centred ways.
- Continuously build a shared understanding and approach to systemic barriers and enablers that impact on desired community outcomes.



WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

BACKBONE PRACTICE:

Build and utilise relationships and trust with and between people, organisations and enterprises.

Behaviours and actions we see when this practice is:

GETTING STARTED	MAKING PROGRESS	EMBEDDING
<p>BBT is mapping and learning about local systems and actors within community, organisations and decision makers (such as government) to understand varied roles, perspectives and focus of efforts.</p> <p>BBT is exploring and reflecting on the dynamics between individuals and organisations.</p> <p>BBT is establishing its legitimacy and/or addressing any fears and concerns by individuals and organisations about a 'new initiative' in the system through active listening and a commitment to not duplicate pre-existing efforts and roles.</p>	<p>BBT and key actors have shared visibility of the system, its actors and the interconnections across organisations, sectors and the community through shared work.</p> <p>BBT and key actors are utilising trust and relationships as it builds though shared actions such as planning, design and testing of new ideas.</p> <p>BBT fosters increased networks, connection and inclusion of people, organisations and enterprises across the system.</p>	<p>BBT supports transparency and communication across the system, and between people and organisations in key action areas.</p> <p>BBT holds ongoing, trusting relationships with a wide range of people and organisations, with constant connection and relationship building to withstand changes in individual personnel.</p> <p>BBT and key actors utilise relationships and trust to avert, discuss and resolve challenges across the system that are impacting on the advancement of the work.</p>

BACKBONE PRACTICE:

Build shared practice for systemic actions, practices and processes across key players.

Behaviours and actions we see when this practice is:

GETTING STARTED	MAKING PROGRESS	EMBEDDING
<p>BBT begins to identify the approaches to understand and shift systems. This is shared across the key actors and organisations in the system.</p> <p>BBT and key actors explore strengths across the system and how these can be utilised to build and expand actions, practices and processes for impact at a systems level.</p>	<p>BBT works with key actors to design and try shared actions, projects or interventions where people and organisations are called on to play a specific role in the work to nudge the system in service of purpose.</p> <p>BBT supports and makes visible key actors and organisations demonstrating leadership in systems approaches, practices, actions and processes.</p> <p>BBT continually supports people and organisations moving into a systemic way of thinking and working.</p> <p>BBT respects those working programmatically and not systemically.</p>	<p>BBT has processes and structures in place for key players and organisations across the system to gain access to continued shared learning and support.</p> <p>BBT ensures key actors and organisations leading systems change have the support, information and tools needed to work with others across the system on behalf of the shared purpose.</p> <p>BBT continually monitors and adapts the systems approaches to the work.</p> <p>BBT team supports key actors to reflect on and effectively communicate learning and changes across the system (note these may be incremental or in response to a crisis). This includes embedding mechanisms to support ongoing reflection, learning and improvement.</p>

BACKBONE PRACTICE:

Share and translate knowledge to diverse stakeholders to support engagement, understanding, and setting and achieving the shared agenda.

Behaviours and actions we see when this practice is:

GETTING STARTED	MAKING PROGRESS	EMBEDDING
<p>BBT is learning about the different perspectives and views of various stakeholders.</p> <p>BBT is appropriately documenting the knowledge it is hearing from different stakeholders, building and sharing a repository/bank of stories and evidence for community and partners.</p>	<p>BBT understands the needs, values and interests of different stakeholders and nuances its communication accordingly.</p> <p>BBT supports the flow of information and knowledge between stakeholders, helping stakeholders see situations or issues from multiple angles.</p> <p>BBT helps to identify and 'join dots' between different stakeholders.</p> <p>There are transparent and agreed ways of collecting, storing and sharing knowledge that is being built.</p>	<p>BBT effectively 'code switches' – changing their language and communication style to match the needs and preferences of diverse stakeholders (e.g. community, services, government, philanthropy, business, researchers).</p> <p>BBTs work with community, connector/navigator roles and partners to shape and deliver accessible messaging that takes into account diversity within the community.</p> <p>Structures and processes are embedded to sustain the exchange of knowledge, 'dot joining', continuous communication and transparency between stakeholders.</p> <p>BBT may continue to play a role in supporting the implementation of these processes.</p>

BACKBONE PRACTICE:

Continually support people, organisations, and enterprises to work together in flexible, agile, community-centred ways.

Behaviours and actions we see when this practice is:

GETTING STARTED	MAKING PROGRESS	EMBEDDING
<p>BBT develops a shared understanding of ways of working that underpin working together for improved social outcomes.</p> <p>BBT supports key actors and organisations to understand flexible, agile community-centred practices and processes.</p> <p>BBT supports community, governments and service providers to understand each other's role and perspective across the system including surfacing and testing assumptions.</p> <p>BBT works with key actors across the system to develop a shared understanding of where there is risk aversion and risk appetite and how this may be in service to the work undertaken together.</p>	<p>BBT continuously supports community, governments and service providers to understand their role in the system and what they can do to align to community priorities.</p> <p>BBT drives and/or supports mechanisms for information sharing and coordination between services, governments and community.</p> <p>BBT encourages and supports individuals/organisations to experiment and try new ideas to build the muscle of collaboration and foster a 'safe to fail' culture for learning.</p> <p>BBT ensures tensions and conflict are managed and held in emotionally safe processes, supporting courageous conversations to address issues impacting on specialist resources/skills as required.</p> <p>BBT helps build understanding of how to challenge current practices and processes as individuals, within organisations and sectors where needed to align efforts to the shared agenda.</p>	<p>Key actors, organisations and enterprises are supported by the BBT to hold the purpose of the work together through documented structures and processes that support systemic action in flexible, agile and community centred ways.</p> <p>BBT supports key actors and organisations across the system to continue to hold practices and processes that support systems change.</p> <p>BBT and key actors renew approaches to systems leadership in response to significant shifts in the system such as loss of a key political advocate or a systems shock such as a flood.</p> <p>Key actors and organisations are incorporating collective approaches into their organisational and other partnership work.</p>

BACKBONE PRACTICE:

Continuously build a shared understanding and approach to systemic barriers and enablers that impact on desired community outcomes.

Behaviours and actions we see when this practice is:

GETTING STARTED	MAKING PROGRESS	EMBEDDING
<p>BBT builds a shared understanding of systemic barriers and enablers for cross sector collaboration to shift outcomes for children and families.</p> <p>BBT works with key actors across the system to build a shared understanding of barriers and enablers for change locally as informed by previous and current examples from across the system (e.g. narrow and/or fixed funding agreements).</p>	<p>BBT works with key actors to identify causal factors for systemic barriers and enablers.</p> <p>BBT works with key actors to determine intervention points and actions that challenge causal factors of barriers and/or utilise enablers, and consider their potential for impact and required resourcing.</p> <p>BBT and key actors try small actions together that challenge barriers and/or maximise enablers.</p>	<p>BBT and key actors work on a diverse range of projects and initiatives that incorporate the learnings in how to identify and work with system barriers and enablers for systems change.</p> <p>Key actors and organisations are incorporating this approach into their organisational and other partnership work.</p>

PRACTICE SNAPSHOT:

Learning the Macleay

This snapshot illuminates an early-staged initiative's practices around building relationships and trust, and supporting organisations and people to work together in flexible, agile and community-centred ways during a period of Sorry Business.

The Backbone Team worked with community and 14 community-based organisations to *share information* to better understand what support people required and what was already happening, monitor the impact of grief and trauma on community and service providers, and align services to best support community healing. This involved establishing frequent check-ins with community and the organisations supporting them over a period of six weeks. It also involved organisations handing over the responsibility of particular tasks (e.g. delivering food/care packages, providing after school activities) to other providers already attending households. The process relied on building a *high degree of trust and respect between organisations* and the established networks and credibility of the Backbone Team with the community organisations.

The action group understood the need to be flexible and *adapt the way services were being delivered* to make space for cultural protocols and respond to current and emerging needs. Families were given the opportunity to identify a preferred organisation to conduct check-ins and streamline services to ensure their experience was positive and not overwhelming. The action group also created an informal space for community (including community organisations) to gather and yarn, and access art therapy activities to support their healing. *Organisations contributed staffing and resources* to jointly deliver the yarnning hubs in multiple locations.

PRACTICE SNAPSHOT:

Gladstone Region engaging in action Together

This snapshot describes how a Backbone Team worked to resolve tension and create dialogue between housing providers and referring service providers who were feeling that their client referrals for housing supports were not being satisfactorily addressed. *Practices that underpin this snapshot are supporting diverse parties to understand each other, leveraging a neutral or independent position, and joining dots across the ecosystem.*

The team began by staging a series of conversations with housing providers and referrers individually to understand their concerns and constraints.

Once the pressure points were identified, and the Backbone Team's understanding of the situation deepened, the Backbone Team supported stakeholders to come together in closed groups to facilitate identification of solutions by first helping to map the referrals process using a factual, non-emotive process and ensure that each stakeholder was on the same page. This process identified stories of challenges and limitations, which were explored once the collaborative activity had settled immediate tensions.

One of the resulting findings was that referred clients unhappy with the solution offered by a housing provider might restrict information about the solution offered, when reporting back outcomes to the referring provider, in hope of a different outcome.

Through the course of the time spent together working on a shared project, providers grew increased understanding of each other's pressures and processes. By default, shared values emerged, in that all stakeholders wished to achieve the best outcome for the client. Challenges related to lack of available housing were more readily understood and accepted and information gaps were acknowledged as being the source of the tension vs a difference of values.

This reduced the tension between housing providers and referring service providers and improved referral pathways, reducing overwhelm, and opened up communication channels and action on resolving housing supply issues.

PRACTICE SNAPSHOT:

Gladstone Region engaging in action Together

Two years into building readiness to work differently together, this mid-stage initiative invited similar sector/providers to come together in small groups to discuss 'their role in creating change' on key topics aligned to community priorities. The approach taken, adopted the same spirit of generosity and humility taken in community engagement, recognising that stakeholders in positions of perceived authority or expertise may also be impacted by feelings of vulnerability, fear of failure, imposter syndrome, fear of exposure and judgement, in sharing their experiences.

The groups were invite-only, closed groups, that allowed existing trust built between the Backbone Team and individual stakeholders to be leveraged, with clear goals and protections in relation to managing community expectations that might be built as a result of the group meeting.

The groups met on specific issues identified within the community action plan, eg:

- industry Social Investment stakeholders met to discuss their role in achieving and aligning to the community agenda;
- government agencies across three levels of government met in relation to influence on the open housing market;
- social sector met to share challenges of existing contract delivery and limitations to providing transparent information on program performance to government partners and funders, that could enable continuous improvements and tailored solutions

Each group followed a similar format in first identifying the willingness to collaborate, the limitations and challenges to collaboration, and the shared goal.

A key success in achieving buy in of the stakeholders, was the leveraging of personal relationships built during early stages of the initiative and personal contact ahead of the draft invitation, sharing the proposed invite list, invitation content and context and providing reassurance about

attendance expectations. The invitation acknowledged some of the risks, including organisation resistance to engage on subjects for which they did not have direct remit, or individual reluctance due to fear of not having the appropriate authority to make decisions or commitments in situ.

Other risks articulated included fear of community or other stakeholder expectations being raised, that participating stakeholders would 'solve the problem' or fund the solution, risk of failure when confronting complex or embedded challenges and fear of judgement or exposure in sharing organisational performance failures.

The result of the approach has been significant engagement and endorsement for others to join the efforts, and ongoing retention of stakeholders who continue to meet focused on outcomes of the shared agenda.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- To what extent does the Backbone Team have visibility and an understanding of how leadership is showing up in the community and across local organisations and enterprises, and how this can be utilised for children and families / the shared agenda?
- What level of visibility and shared understanding is needed across partners/the system to do the work? (e.g. understanding of context, challenge/s, individual and organisational risks, goals and priorities)
What information and process/es might help to build shared understandings?
- Are relationships and trust strong enough to openly acknowledge fears or concerns that might be holding the work back? (e.g. nature of competition between services; service provider fear of sharing contract delivery limitations with government partners)
- Who needs to undertake this work (including design) for the Backbone Team to build understandings, relationships and trust going forward?
- Do we understand the dynamics between individuals and/or organisations that will be invited to come together? Are the spaces safe? Does the context and environment lend itself to being vulnerable and transparent about constraints and self-limitations?
- What and who will benefit from the work?

INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Practice description

Backbone Teams work in ways that bring community together, include and support diverse community voices and enable community leadership of the work. Backbone Team practices that enable inclusive community leadership are:

- Build and utilise trusting relationships with community.
- Create brave and inclusive spaces and processes that facilitate collaboration and power sharing with community.
- Support community to step into leadership roles.



WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

BACKBONE PRACTICE:

Build and utilise trusting relationships with and between community.

Behaviours and actions we see when this practice is:

GETTING STARTED	MAKING PROGRESS	EMBEDDING
<p>BBT is learning about the nuances within community and/or beginning to engage with different parts of community with curiosity, deep listening and a non-judgemental manner.</p> <p>Trust is growing between the BBT and several parts of the community.</p> <p>The BBT understands who/where there may be scepticism, fears or concerns to the BBT and/or the approach in the community and proactively addresses these concerns through active listening and responding to community priorities.</p>	<p>BBT tailors its approach to appropriately engage and respond to the different parts of community and their preferences.</p> <p>BBT communicates authentically, respectfully and continuously with community.</p> <p>BBT works with humility and continues to deepen its relationships with community and draws on these relationships to progress the shared agenda.</p> <p>BBT builds on existing community strengths, skills and resources.</p> <p>BBT fosters increased connection and networks between community members.</p>	<p>BBT sees, hears, values and elevates different community voices in the work, in line with the principle of centring equity.</p> <p>BBT embeds robust mechanisms – including reflection and learning - to support inclusive, continuous, authentic and respectful communication with community.</p> <p>BBT holds deep and trusting relationships across the community, continuously connecting and investing in relationships to withstand changes in individual personnel.</p> <p>BBT adapts to the changing needs and pace of community, understanding when to go fast and slow.</p> <p>Community believes in the BBT and the community-led collective impact / SPSP approach.</p>

BACKBONE PRACTICE:

Create brave and inclusive spaces and processes that facilitate collaboration and power sharing with community.

Behaviours and actions we see when this practice is:

GETTING STARTED	MAKING PROGRESS	EMBEDDING
<p>BBT designs welcoming, inclusive and culturally safe processes and spaces (e.g. workshops, 1:1 conversations, group conversations) in which community feels heard.</p> <p>BBT inquires into the thoughts of others with skill and curiosity.</p> <p>Some parts of the community are not yet turning up or being represented.</p> <p>Some stakeholders don't yet understand the need to change and are running business as usual.</p> <p>Connections between community and stakeholders with formal power are growing and/or strengthening.</p>	<p>BBT frequently reflects on whose voices are engaged, whose voices are missing and who is leading, taking action to centre the principles of equity and community leadership.</p> <p>BBT 'reads the room' to tap into and ignite energy and commitment, and connect people to the work.</p> <p>BBT purposefully surfaces, names and manages tensions and/or conflict and asks uncomfortable questions.</p> <p>Welcoming and inclusive ways of working together have been made explicit and agreed to by community and partners.</p> <p>A diverse group of community members are 'at the table', feeling safe and that their cultural needs are met.</p> <p>Community feels they can join the table (or return to the table) at any time.</p>	<p>Community holds long-term, robust relationships with its partners that withstand changes in individual personnel.</p> <p>Community and partners are skilled in creating brave, inclusive and culturally safe spaces and processes for meaningful dialogue and decision-making.</p> <p>Partners have embedded agreed, welcoming and inclusive ways of working together in their everyday practice (e.g. changed how they run meetings to be inclusive of community needs or preferences). They make community feel safe, heard and valued, they centre community voice, and they affirm community strengths.</p> <p>BBT supports the growth and/or renewal of community partners to ensure everyone who needs to be at the table (for the particular stage of development), is at the table.</p> <p>Community is setting the agenda and driving decision making and solutions.</p> <p>Partners are transparent about their constraints and accountability requirements with community.</p>

BACKBONE PRACTICE:

Support community to step into leadership roles for change.

Behaviours and actions we see when this practice is:

GETTING STARTED	MAKING PROGRESS	EMBEDDING
<p>BBT is building trust and relationships with community and inviting participation into the work.</p> <p>BBT is validating the strengths and expertise of community.</p> <p>BBT is learning about community and partner power dynamics.</p> <p>The BBT team may be the first point of contact for the work and/or stakeholders are seeking the permission of the BBT team.</p> <p>Community looks to the BBT to set the direction and do the work.</p> <p>Some partners appreciate/value community leadership.</p>	<p>BBTs continuously reflect on, 'what is required for community leadership?'. They work with community and partners on barriers to community leadership.</p> <p>BBT is helping build and/or strengthen connections between community and stakeholders with formal power. BBT continues to learn and reflect on power dynamics.</p> <p>Community's confidence to lead the work is increasing.</p> <p>Partners (service providers and government) are re-defining their roles and creating spaces for community members to step into leadership.</p>	<p>BBTs continue to work with community and partners to identify and address barriers to community leadership.</p> <p>Community holds strong relationships/connections with stakeholders with formal power. BBT may help to maintain these connections and/or foster new connections where there is change in stakeholders.</p> <p>People with lived experience are key stakeholders in decision-making processes.</p> <p>Communities are 'in the know': they know who to engage/influence, when and how.</p> <p>Community understands and is accountable for their leadership role.</p> <p>The community authorised Local Leadership Group is the 'go to' for consultation and decision making.</p> <p>Partners have embedded ways of working that enable community to step into leadership roles.</p> <p>Community, BBTs and partners are continuously learning from each other and strengthening their respective capabilities.</p>

PRACTICE SNAPSHOT:

Gladstone Region engaging in action Together

At the beginning of this initiative, the Backbone Team led a process of data collection and sense-making to help build the foundations for collaboration and community-led change, as well as identify a starting point for the work.

Throughout the process, the Backbone Team *built relationships* and encouraged community to engage on the challenges affecting them through *authentic, respectful and ongoing communication* tailored to the needs and preferences of different parts of the community (e.g. Traditional Owner Elders, parents, young people, multicultural community members, people experiencing homelessness, teachers, community groups and sporting clubs).

The Backbone Team started by undertaking a desktop review to understand what was already known from social and economic reports, and to get a sense of the available quantitative data. They then took extensive time to speak to a wide cross-section of the community through one to one and informal small group conversations, *testing if the desktop findings reflected the experience of different parts of the community*. They *listened deeply* and began to weave together experiences, information and data, highlighting and *affirming community strengths and skillsets*.

The Backbone Team then designed a series of workshops, informed by community views about preferred workshop venues, locations, formats and language. The workshops sought to *connect different people across the community*, build a *shared understanding* of the data and develop a *shared community story*. By taking the time to engage community slowly and widely, and by *starting where people were at*, new voices joined the workshops and offered diverse perspectives and experiences.

The *pace and format* of the process, and its commitment to principles such as inclusion, diversity and equity, has built an important foundation for community to step into a different role as a partner/leader of the work alongside government, and develop new ways of working together.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Where are Backbone Teams taking the work versus giving the work back to the community?
- Is the Backbone Team working (or promoting working) in ways that include a whole of community approach?
- Is everyone at the table who needs to be at the table?
- How is the Backbone Team connecting people so that it doesn't become central to the work?
- Does the Backbone Team have the trust required in individual stakeholders to draw out their concerns and worries?
- Does the Backbone Team understand the limitations experienced by individual stakeholders and where the misperception of other stakeholders might exist about their power, authority or capacity?
- Do individual stakeholders understand the role, remit, limitations, challenges of other stakeholders that might be observed as resistance?



PRACTICE AREA THREE:

UNDERSTANDING, MEASUREMENT, EVALUATION AND LEARNING

Practice description

In the SPSP context, U-MEL is used to enable community leadership and drive systems change. U-MEL practices are strengths-based, promote transparency and value diverse forms of knowledge, such as First Nations knowledge, lived experience, research evidence and data. U-MEL is underpinned by a commitment to self-determination, including supporting First Nations and community Data Sovereignty and Governance. To enable U-MEL for community-led, systems change, Backbone Teams:

- Support the development of a community-owned narrative that drives the long-term strategy and ways of working.
- Promote community leadership and ownership of data, including First Nations Data Sovereignty and Governance.
- Develop and implement a framework to support community-led, systems change understanding, measurement, evaluation and learning.
- Help build understanding and skills in U-MEL for community-led systems change.
- Help build a culture of learning and evidence-informed decision making.



WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

BACKBONE PRACTICE:

Support the development of a community-owned narrative that drives the long-term strategy and ways of working.

Behaviours and actions we see when this practice is:

GETTING STARTED	MAKING PROGRESS	EMBEDDING
BBT is engaging with and supporting a process for hearing from the community and different stakeholder groups, including perspectives about community strengths, opportunities and challenges. BBT helps to gather and distil existing knowledge / evidence about community strengths, concerns, challenges. BBT supports a process(es) for hearing from diverse parts of the community (e.g. conversations, forums etc).	BBT supports a process for elevating community voice, developing a shared language and getting 'on the same page' about the case for change (e.g. understanding of community history, shared understanding of community priorities and causal factors). Community is sharing stories to bring others on the journey. Community feels that their voice is heard and applied in ways that address their priorities and preferences.	BBT is supporting community and its partners to grow, own and use knowledge about community aspirations, needs, and priorities. Community owns the narrative/case for change and drives its evolution. Community and partners are integrating different forms of knowledge (stories, quantitative data) to bring others on the journey.

BACKBONE PRACTICE:

Promote community leadership and ownership of data, including First Nations Data Sovereignty and Governance.

Behaviours and actions we see when this practice is:

GETTING STARTED	MAKING PROGRESS	EMBEDDING
BBT helps to build understanding about, and champion, First Nations ways of knowing, being and doing. BBT helps build a commitment to First Nations Data Sovereignty and Governance across community and partners. There may be a history of data collection and/or research feeling extractive to community and focusing on deficits.	BBT supports the development of principles for First Nations Data Sovereignty and Governance. BBT supports the community to make informed decisions about data assets, data use and evaluation and research, aligned to agreed principles. Different sources of knowledge (e.g. data, research, community voices) are increasingly shared with community.	BBT helps to embed practices and processes supporting First Nations Data Sovereignty and Governance. Community has ownership of local data and research (or determines ownership of the data and research). Community determines what data and research is collected, how it is collected and by whom, and how it is used. Community owns and/or controls its own data asset or platform.

BACKBONE PRACTICE:

Develop and implement a framework to support community-led, systems change U-MEL.

Behaviours and actions we see when this practice is:

GETTING STARTED	MAKING PROGRESS	EMBEDDING
<p>BBT is learning about community-led, systems change U-MEL frameworks.</p> <p>Measurement, evaluation and/or learning is fragmented or siloed across stakeholders.</p> <p>Community involvement in U-MEL (e.g. sense-making) may be patchy and/or rushed.</p> <p>There may be different assumptions or views about who gets to define success.</p> <p>There may be low levels of trust to share data with/ between community and partners.</p>	<p>BBT helps community and partners to develop a theory of change and formal measurement, evaluation and learning framework through inclusive and participatory processes.</p> <p>BBT advocates and influences for community's views to define success.</p> <p>Key stakeholders understand U-MEL rhythms and routines, what information is needed and available, and how they are expected to contribute.</p> <p>Partners are sharing data.</p> <p>Data, research, and community voice are brought together for testing and sense-making with community.</p>	<p>Community has ownership of the theory of change, guides the actions to be taken to achieve change and is asking questions – and receiving answers – about progress and impact.</p> <p>Community defines what progress and success looks like, and all are held accountable to this definition.</p> <p>There is widespread understanding of U-MEL rhythms and routines across the system. U-MEL rhythms and routines are becoming faster and are embedded into standard practice / into the work to enable continual improvement.</p> <p>Partners have embedded processes and structures to support continued data sharing, in line with First Nations and Community Data Sovereignty and Governance principles.</p>

BACKBONE PRACTICE:

Help build understanding and skills in U-MEL for community-led systems change.

Behaviours and actions we see when this practice is:

GETTING STARTED	MAKING PROGRESS	EMBEDDING
<p>BBT is helping build understandings of key U-MEL and data concepts and the different forms of knowledge with community and partners.</p> <p>BBT is building its own understanding and skills in U-MEL and data for community-led systems change.</p> <p>One form of knowledge (e.g. quantitative data or stories) may be preferred and/or used exclusively for decision-making by stakeholders.</p> <p>BBT is aware of stakeholder fears, concerns and challenges with data and U-MEL.</p>	<p>BBT is humbly and non-intrusively growing skills in data literacy (qualitative and quantitative) across community and partners, addressing fears, concerns and confidence.</p> <p>A common understanding and short-hand language about key U-MEL and data concepts is emerging between community, BBT and partners.</p> <p>BBT is supporting collective sense-making to inform decisions.</p> <p>Multiple forms of knowledge are used to inform decision-making and practice across stakeholders.</p> <p>Deeply ethical, participatory processes are used to collect data, build trust and buy-in along the way, e.g. community conversations.</p>	<p>Community and partners are confident to engage with, interpret and use data (qualitative and quantitative) to inform decision making and practice. BBT supports the translation of data where appropriate/required.</p> <p>BBT continues to support robust and regular collective sense-making, which build deeper and shared understandings.</p> <p>Different forms of knowledge (data, research, community voice) are valued and integrated to inform decision-making and practice across stakeholders.</p> <p>Deeply ethical, participatory processes continue to be used to sustain trust and buy-in.</p>

BACKBONE PRACTICE:

Foster a commitment to U-MEL and a culture of ongoing learning.

Behaviours and actions we see when this practice is:

GETTING STARTED	MAKING PROGRESS	EMBEDDING
BBTs lay the groundwork for a culture of learning and evidence by modelling and encouraging inclusive, participatory and meaningful reflection and learning processes. BBTs encourage reflection on current ways of working.	BBT supports ongoing reflection, measurement, and improvement, including on agreed ways of working. BBTs help facilitate reflection and learning processes that incorporate different perspectives, including collective sense making.	BBT embeds mechanisms to support ongoing reflection, measurement, learning and improvement (e.g. shared dashboards, community data panels etc). BBT continues to support continuous reflection and learning processes that ensure diverse perspectives are valued and participate in collective sense-making.

PRACTICE SNAPSHOT:

Burnie Works

This snapshot describes how a Backbone Team supported the understanding and learning of parents, community members, schools and service providers in ways that elevated the *lived experience* of the issue and *built community knowledge and leadership* to produce a co-designed solution. It outlines how involving community in a variety of roles – including as knowledge collectors, subject matter experts, sense makers and co-designers - the process built community knowledge and leadership, successfully engaged parents, and strengthened local capability for collective impact.

The process began with the Backbone Team *spotting a pattern* in conversations with community members, which suggested young families may be lacking support once their child/ren started school and they were no longer able to access their local child and family hub. To *explore and test* if this was a broader challenge in the community, the Backbone Team spoke with local service providers, and then engaged trained community knowledge collectors (see Box 1) to interview local parents of children in the middle years (age 6 – 12).

Together, the community knowledge collectors and Backbone Team *co-designed a series of knowledge collection activities*, including forming the questions to ask, where and how to interview parents and how to ensure a feedback loop. They conducted 80 interviews with parents at school drop-off and *heard a variety of stories and perspectives*. The Backbone Team and knowledge collectors then analysed this information and *tested the preliminary findings with parents* through another round of parent interviews.

Alongside parent consultations, the Backbone Team sought the perspective of local schools and service providers, as well as state government representatives from three separate government departments. This was important to gain a better understanding of *strategic and policy directions* in the broader system.

Next, the Backbone Team will facilitate a series of co-design workshops to help parents, community members, schools and service providers *make sense of the findings together and co-design a community-led solution*. This process will also involve providing *training to community members* in co-design.

What is a Community Knowledge Collector?

A Community Knowledge Collector is a person who is interested in their community, the opportunities, and challenges it faces. They help collect information and stories to understand what matters to people in their community. This knowledge is then brought together with other information and data to shape community action and shared decision making.

Why are Community Knowledge Collectors important?

Community Knowledge Collectors are best placed to engage with community. They have the skills to collect people's information safely and respectfully, understand the information they have collected, and then with permission, use this knowledge to create advocacy, action, and change. Without community knowledge the big changes rely on data and experts from outside the community. Community Knowledge Collectors bring community and lived experience of local people into the mix – just as it should be.

How are Community Knowledge Collectors trained and supported?

Community Knowledge Collectors were trained using a place-based learning tool to introduce participants to foundational learning required to foster community change. The Backbone Team partnered with the University of Tasmania to co-design the pathway for Community Knowledge Collectors. The Backbone Team has also played a key role in mentoring and providing other training opportunities for students.

Prior to commencing the Community Knowledge Collectors project, the Backbone Team spent 18 months learning, listening and testing how to best support information collection and shared learning across community focus areas. They brought people together to incubate the idea, design, source funding, manage the project and build community

Box 1: About Community Knowledge Collectors (Source: Burnie Works)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Is there an explicit link between community voice and action?
- To what extent do stakeholders value and use data to inform decisions? Which forms of data are valued – and not valued - by who?
- How can the Backbone Team create a safe space for stakeholders to build their knowledge about data and ask questions without fear or concern of 'losing face'?
- How can the Backbone Team help support shared knowledge and capability amongst stakeholders?

USING POWER FOR PURPOSE

Practice description

Using power for purpose involves understanding and utilising authority and legitimacy in decision making and action to support the community-led agenda. Backbone Team practices that enable the use of power for purpose include:

- Develop and support practices and processes that embed the voice of the community including those with lived experience of key issues (lived experience), in decision making and action.
- Support decision makers with formal power to align their efforts to the shared agenda.
- Build transparency about power and its use across the system.
- Foster diversity in deliberation and shared decision making.



WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

BACKBONE PRACTICE:

Develop and support practices and processes that embed the voice of the community including those with lived experience of key issues in decision making and action.

Behaviours and actions we see when this practice is:

GETTING STARTED	MAKING PROGRESS	EMBEDDING
<p>BBT builds a shared understanding of how the voice of community, including those with lived experience, is currently held across the system including who and what organisations are holding this in their work and how.</p> <p>BBT identifies key service practitioners and organisations across the system who are inviting the community to shape, drive or own the direction of work.</p> <p>BBT understands the interest and readiness for inclusion of community in decision making, including those with lived experience.</p>	<p>BBT and key actors ensure the voice of community and lived experience is held in deliberation including design, planning and implementation.</p> <p>Key community actors, including those with lived experience, are supported and nurtured in how to deliberate and hold their opinions in shared spaces and forums.</p> <p>People and organisations in the broader system are supported and learn together on how to work with community, and those with lived experience, in decision making</p> <p>Structures and processes developed and utilised for community to be included in decision making re co-designed within community and cultural rhythms</p> <p>BBT and other key organisations resource community participation</p> <p>Safety is built for difficult conversations in casual factors impacting on inclusion in decision making such as about racism, patriarchy and homophobia.</p>	<p>BBT ensures key actors in the community, including those with lived experience, are included in key decisions that affect them in ways that are accessible and fit the rhythm of the community.</p> <p>Key actors across the system are supported to work with the BBT to drive systemic change, ensuring that work is fully informed by key community actors and those with lived experience.</p> <p>BBT continuously monitors and renews community key actors and those with lived experience.</p>

BACKBONE PRACTICE:

Support decision makers with formal power to align their efforts to the shared agenda

Behaviours and actions we see when this practice is:

GETTING STARTED	MAKING PROGRESS	EMBEDDING
<p>BBT builds an understanding of existing formal structures and decision-making processes across the system and maps how this is showing up for children and families.</p> <p>With key actors and organisations, the BBT explores how power is being used in the existing system, who has the authority to decide and what actions are being taken.</p> <p>With key actors across the system, the BBT explores who has the legitimacy to act and 'speak on behalf of' Note this will have a community, cultural and organisational lens.</p>	<p>BBT works directly and with key actors across the system and decision makers to support decision makers with formal power to align efforts to identified community needs.</p> <p>Key formal decision makers are invited to participate in key decisions, forums and/or activities and events to add their expertise and influence.</p> <p>Key actors with formal power are invited to formally commit to the local agenda.</p>	<p>BBT and key actors celebrate the contribution of formal decision makers to the collective effort.</p> <p>BBT and key actors embed structures and processes that bring decision makers with formal power together with others across the system, including community and those with lived experience, to inform their decision making</p> <p>BBT ensures the monitoring and renewal of the connection and work of decision makers with formal power, in response to shifts in the system.</p>

BACKBONE PRACTICE:

Build transparency about power and its use across the system.

Behaviours and actions we see when this practice is:

GETTING STARTED	MAKING PROGRESS	EMBEDDING
<p>BBT develops an understanding of who and how power is held in the community, when there has been evidence of change.</p> <p>BBT convenes diverse conversations about power to build a shared understanding of power and how it can be harnessed for a children and families.</p> <p>BBT and key actors map how power is being used across the system in service of improved outcomes for children and families</p>	<p>BBT establishes opportunities and processes to have conversations about power, how it is being applied and what is needed for children and families</p> <p>BBT models how to acknowledge and name up power dynamics in a room.</p> <p>BBT helps create decision-making structures and/or processes that re-balance power between community and partners.</p> <p>BBT facilitates or convenes honest discussions about power dynamics.</p>	<p>Community and partners are aware of and regularly call out or make explicit unequal power dynamics in the room.</p> <p>Community and partners understand how/when they use their power to advocate for the community-led agenda and ensure their use of power aligns with agreed ways of working.</p> <p>BBT supports community and partners are using their personal, positional and collective power for purpose.</p> <p>BBT supports monitoring and renewal of how power is being used across the system and respond to shifts in the system as these occur.</p>

BACKBONE PRACTICE:

Enable diversity in deliberation and shared decision making.

Behaviours and actions we see when this practice is:

GETTING STARTED	MAKING PROGRESS	EMBEDDING
<p>BBT strengthens their shared understanding of First Nations world views and deliberation and decision-making processes and commits to undertaking the work on themselves and with others in the system to be in service and support First Nations peoples.</p> <p>BBT supports the strengthening of capacity across the system in shared deliberation and decision making practices and processes.</p>	<p>BBT is raising awareness of equity issues and equity centred practices.</p> <p>BBT helps facilitate dialogue between stakeholders around inequities and causality.</p> <p>BBT and key actors across the system challenge themselves and others to hold diversity of voices in decision making.</p> <p>BBT supports the connections of First Nations peoples and world views with services and government though structures and processes that a culturally safe and inclusive.</p>	<p>There is open, respectful and ongoing dialogue around inequities relating to race, gender and power imbalances with key actors across the system.</p>

PRACTICE SNAPSHOT:

Logan Together

This case study has been written by the Logan Together Backbone Team in support of the Logan Together movement. The story, information and outcomes of this work belong to the Logan community.

The situation

Five years into its development, Logan Together had established strong regional governance, high levels of credibility and influence, and a network of activated and engaged government and service providers. Whilst new ways of working were well underway, the community, First Nations people of Logan and initiative partners recognised the opportunity to further strengthen community's leadership of the Logan Together movement and establish decision-making practices that were truly shared with community.

The community-organised 'Walking Together for Logan's Children' (WT4LC) initiative emerged at this time, working in ways that centred community leadership and created systems changes across child safety. The initiative modelled how the broader Logan Together movement could strengthen community leadership and generated energy and excitement for change amongst partners.

The practice

Learning from WT4LC, Logan Together stakeholders began re-setting the role of community as leaders through cultural, structural and technical change.

Culture: Across two years, through WT4LC, individuals connected with one another to share their personal stories of trauma and hope and provide ongoing opportunities for truth-telling within deeply cultural settings. Agencies shared data and insights and trust grew to new levels. Together solutions were generated; solutions that were then procured by government and delivered by the 'right' cultural custodians and community leaders.

The Logan Together Leadership Table applied the model of WT4LC more broadly, co-creating and embedding three cultural pillars to underpin every decision: **First Nations First. Children at the Heart. Community-Led.** Significant time was spent defining these pillars and clarifying peer expectations and personal accountabilitys for their application. Personal commitments to the three pillars began each Leadership Table meeting. Reflective practice underpinned each session and ongoing cultural development offerings and frameworks were implemented within the governance of Logan Together and deeply within partner agencies.

Structure: The governance of Logan Together was re-set, emphasising the intersecting and unique responsibilities of Board, Leadership Table and Gnirigomindala Karulbo (First Nations Community Governance). Community membership of the Leadership Table expanded, so that Logan residents represented more than one third of the Table.

The Backbone Team was re-shaped, reduced in size and focussed on employing community members across cultures. The boundaries between the Backbone Team functions and the community blurred so that increasingly, community members were contracted in community hubs to connect closer to the ground. Feedback loops and decision-making opportunities grew to be truly community informed and led. There was a reinforcement that the term 'Logan Together' referred to community and partners, well beyond the Backbone Team alone, and this language shift was critical in heightening community leadership and mutual accountability.

Logan Together moved from exclusively a regional approach, to wrapping support around three focus communities, each with their own local governance and local backbones to strengthen local voice and decision making.

Technical frameworks: The new trust in community, enabled through truth-telling and strengthened relationships, meant that data could be shared in different ways and that community voice and agency were paramount. Bringing these assets together, the community and its partners co-created a refreshed Collective Plan and Roadmap, connecting thousands of voices and quantitative data in meaningful ways across three major events.

Key Logan Together agencies (Communities for Children – Salvation Army and PHN) re-set their own strategic plans, funding terms and parameters to better support community leadership and community-led solutions, fully aligning with the refreshed, community co-created Collective Plan and Roadmap.

An Equity Agreement was developed, guided by Gnirigomindala Karulbo, seeking a commitment from partners to engage in ways that aligned to the three cultural pillars. The Agreement is grounded in First Nations ways of being and knowing, yet is translatable across all cultures. All individuals, partner agencies and contracted parties now document and practise their commitment to this Agreement.

Community leadership became integral to every decision within Logan Together and a decision-making framework of five simple questions was developed to reinforce alignment, keep the focus on outcomes for children, and put community in the driver's seat (see Box 2).

Impact

The cultural, structural and technical changes catalysed a new phase of Logan Together that centred community leadership. In 2023, community identified healing and reconciliation, community leadership development, increased civic participation, and community pride and agency amongst some of the most significant changes achieved by Logan Together.

1. Who has been involved in conversations about the proposal, what has been the process of listening, and over what time period?
2. Where does this proposal fit within our community's plan?
3. How many lives will be better off from this proposal and how will we know?
4. Is this proposal considered to be culturally-safe by Gnirigomindala Karulbo and our Cross-Cultural Leaders group who hold the authority and trust of their communities?
5. Will this proposal be sustainable and offer opportunities for our community members and our community-controlled service sector?

Box 2: Community decision-making framework

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How is the voice of the community being held in decision making?
- How are First Nations world views, deliberation and decision-making practices informing the work?
- How is formal power showing up for children and families across governments, organisations and enterprises?
- Who across the system has the authority and legitimacy to act, influence and/or advocate on behalf of the collective effort for children and families?
- How can the Backbone Team help apply knowledge about power at this time, in our place?

INVESTMENT AND POLICY FOR PURPOSE

Practice description

To achieve the desired community outcomes, investment, policies and accountabilities need to align with the community-led agenda¹³. To enable investment and policy that is flexible, aligned to the community agenda and has a long-term view, Backbone Teams:

- Build collective advocacy strategies that centre community voice and drive and sustain momentum.
- Engage in influencing and advocacy activities with investors and policy makers.
- Support champions and advocates to influence.
- Strengthen connections to allies to amplify advocacy efforts.



WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

BACKBONE PRACTICE:

Build collective advocacy strategies that centre community voice.

Behaviours and actions we see when this practice is:

GETTING STARTED	MAKING PROGRESS	EMBEDDING
<p>BBT is learning about the expertise and interests of community and its partners, and who to turn to build momentum and support on particular issues.</p> <p>BBT helps engage relevant stakeholders and raise awareness or draw attention to particular issues or barriers.</p> <p>BBT is building its authority to represent community and its partners – generating trust in the BBT and a track record of working for and through community.</p>	<p>Community voice informs the advocacy strategy.</p> <p>BBT is helping create a sense of urgency around the issue and rallying cross-system support.</p> <p>BBT is convening partners around a political and/or funding strategy and supporting agreed action.</p> <p>BBT follows up with stakeholders to check if or when action is taken.</p> <p>BBT has trusted relationships with influential stakeholders (e.g. government, community services, universities, etc) and leverages these connections to support community and its partners to influence.</p> <p>BBT continuously reports back to and checks in with community and partners about progress.</p> <p>BBT supports negotiation and dialogue when challenges arise.</p> <p>BBT proactively connects and convenes relevant partners and shares information openly and widely.</p>	<p>Community, partners and the BBT are driving and sustaining momentum on the issue. BBT creates the space for community and/or partners to lead and knows when it is time to drive and when to step back.</p> <p>There is a shared narrative or shared messages about the issue.</p> <p>There is shared ownership of the solution/s by cross-sector stakeholders.</p> <p>BBT helps guide the pace of the collective advocacy, supporting the group to seize opportunities or slow down if the time isn't right.</p> <p>BBT may help attract and/or deploy resources to support collective advocacy.</p>

BACKBONE PRACTICE:

Engage in influencing and advocacy activities with investors and policy makers.

Behaviours and actions we see when this practice is:

GETTING STARTED	MAKING PROGRESS	EMBEDDING
<p>BBT is building credibility and networks with a range of stakeholders.</p> <p>BBT is exploring the level of authority the community wishes to place in the BBT.</p> <p>BBT has a clear understanding of their role – what they can do, can't do, should do, and shouldn't do.</p>	<p>BBT has clarified its authority to influence investors / policy makers and external partners on behalf of community and its partners.</p> <p>BBT holds trusted relationships with particular investors and policy makers.</p> <p>BBT translates community priorities and stories to investors and policy makers.</p> <p>BBT is supporting the leadership table to build connections and relationships with investors and policy makers.</p>	<p>BBT regularly checks its authority to represent community and its partners – knowing when to step up or step away.</p> <p>BBT often steps away to create space for community and partners to influence directly.</p> <p>BBT and the leadership table hold trusted relationships with a range of investors and policy makers.</p> <p>BBT integrates stories and data to present compelling cases and successfully influence investors and policy makers.</p>

BACKBONE PRACTICE:

Support champions and advocates to influence.

Behaviours and actions we see when this practice is:

GETTING STARTED	MAKING PROGRESS	EMBEDDING
<p>BBT is beginning to identify and build relationships with community champions and leaders.</p> <p>Individuals may be asking the BBT for advice about how to influence.</p> <p>Individuals may lack confidence, connections or knowledge to successfully influence.</p> <p>Individuals may feel their views aren't being heard or respected.</p>	<p>BBT helps champions and advocates identify relevant decision makers or walks alongside individuals to support influencing.</p> <p>BBT translates and shares relevant information with champions and advocates to enable them to have the conversation. BBT acts a backup if needed.</p> <p>Community champions are aware of relevant processes (eg policy cycles, decision making processes) to consider how and when to influence or intervene.</p>	<p>Champions and advocates engage with and influence decision makers to advance the agenda.</p> <p>Community champions are at the table, feeling confident and speaking to what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, how it needs to be done and with who.</p>

BACKBONE PRACTICE:

Strengthen connections to allies to amplify advocacy efforts.

Behaviours and actions we see when this practice is:

GETTING STARTED	MAKING PROGRESS	EMBEDDING
<p>BBT is learning about similarly focused initiatives and building relationships and networks.</p>	<p>BBT strengthens and/or makes connections to aligned allies who can provide support on key issues.</p> <p>BBT may facilitate the process of bringing allies together and 'getting on the same page'.</p> <p>BBT helps to build momentum.</p>	<p>BBT helps allies to clarify the common agenda and communication/key messages.</p> <p>Allies are on the same page, supporting each other on agreed priorities with a shared narrative.</p>

PRACTICE SNAPSHOT:

Burnie Works

This snapshot describes how a Backbone Team worked with local service providers, a university, and government to influence investment and advocate for the expansion of a parent-led learning project, which aligned to the community's agenda that all children have the best possible start during the first 1000 days of life.

The Backbone Team had been working in partnership with local services providers around a small parent-led learning project, and with a university focussing on a community health project. The team identified synergies between the two initiatives and supported a partnership process, which led to the development of a written proposal for an expanded parent-led learning project across three communities. The team also supported an evaluation of the original parent-led learning project, to demonstrate its value and help build the case for investment in the approach.

The Backbone Team then *looked for strategic alignment* between the project's demonstrated benefits and state government policies and translated the links to state government parties responsible for decision making. The team advocated for investment in the expanded project through one-on-one conversations, meetings and workshops. Persistence, patience and continuous follow up were important practices, as two years passed between the Backbone Team's first approach to state government and the decision to invest in the project.

Key to the team's success was being able to draw on existing and trusting relationships with state government departments, which had been built over time, and resulted in a high level of credibility.

You can't walk into a room and expect people to take on what you say; you also can't expect people to trust you if they think you have another agenda.

Backbone Team Leader.

The team also drew on their knowledge of how government worked in terms of policy making, investment decisions and authorising

environments. The outcome was an agreement by state government to not only fund the project, but to co-produce the project with community, which will see community co-design and co-govern the project with the support of three government agencies.

PRACTICE SNAPSHOT:

Logan Together

This case study has been written by the Logan Together Backbone Team in support of the Logan Together movement. The story, information and outcomes of this work belong to the Logan community.

The situation

In 2015, maternity care was identified as a key area of focus and action for the Logan community. Logan Together supported a co-design process involving 500 women from diverse backgrounds and over 20 organisations. This saw the Logan Together Backbone Team undertake extensive relationship brokerage, use national and international evidence, and put community at the heart of designing a culturally safe sustainable and highly effective midwife-supported continuity of care model. This snapshot focuses on how the Backbone Team supported strategic, persistent and influential advocacy to draw political attention to the urgency of improving maternal and child health in Logan and garner investment in the model.

The practice

From the outset, the Backbone Team recognised the importance of building a *collective advocacy* effort across partners. The co-development of a program logic for the maternal and child health hub model was a key step in generating *cross-system support and 'one voice'*. The Backbone Team guided the program logic's development, centring the preferences and priorities of community garnered through the co-design process, drawing on existing research and evidence, and bringing together a range of stakeholders to build a *shared understanding* of the 'problem' and shared ownership of the 'solution'.

In turn, the program logic and understandings gained through its development process, provided *clear parameters for the Backbone Team when facilitating conversations and negotiation* on behalf of partners as part of the model's development and costing. The Backbone Team also worked behind the scenes to maintain momentum across and within agencies, facilitating dialogue and negotiation as needed and supporting 'hard conversations' when challenges arose.

To amplify advocacy efforts, the Backbone Team *supported champions and advocates* to engage with government and influence decision makers who could help progress the work. This involved the Backbone Team building the capacity of advocates and champions to effectively engage government, as well as building government's capacity to work alongside community.

The Backbone Team also ensured messaging was aligned and clear, developing background materials which provided a consistent basis for advocacy. Additionally, the Backbone Team helped to create a compelling, evidence-informed case for change by generating and presenting contextual data that highlighted Logan's issues and opportunities in new ways and informed the messaging.

Impact

The collective advocacy by Logan stakeholders secured Queensland Government funding for the model in 2017. By 2018, four community-located Maternal and Child Health Hubs and a complex care service were established in Logan, and by mid-2020, the Hubs had scaled to support close to 1000 women.

In 2018-21, the Maternal and Child Health Hubs achieved a range of statistically significant perinatal outcomes compared to standard care in Logan and plans to scale the model are underway.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- To what extent do advocacy strategies and influencing centre community voice? Who should be presenting the story of this unfolding work?
- Is there a shared understanding of the challenge and the way forward? Is there compelling evidence/knowledge around the issue and solution? How is this being shared / communicated?
- To what extent are the people engaged authorised to make the desired changes?
- Is there sufficient support and investment in building community capacity to lead advocacy efforts?

GOVERNANCE FOR PURPOSE

Practice description

Governance for purpose considers the governance structures and processes, resources (e.g. Backbone Team, activities) and partnerships that enable change aligned to the community-led plan. To enable governance for purpose, Backbone Teams:

- Ensure governance reflects what is needed to hold scope and accountability needed for collective work.
- Ensure there is collective ownership and action.
- Convene sector and systemic partnerships, collaborations and collective efforts.
- Support structures and processes for collective innovation.



WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

BACKBONE PRACTICE:

Ensure governance reflects what is needed to hold scope and accountability needed for collective work.

Behaviours and actions we see when this practice is:

GETTING STARTED	MAKING PROGRESS	EMBEDDING
BBT identifies existing partnership and cross sector initiatives convening for improved outcomes for children and families. BBT identifies and engages key actors and organisations calling for change to improve outcomes for children and families. A small group of key actors and organisations are identified by the BBT to support the initial work of the SPSP initiative.	A diverse leadership table is co-designed with structures and processes that align with the work needed and grows as needed. Governance includes structures and processes that are inclusive of community and those with lived experience. Governance structures and processes are developing with increasing knowledge of First Nations world views and community rhythms.	Co-designed governance structures and processes hold accountability through principle based collaboration or partnership agreements. Governance is reviewed and renewed as needed to ensure alignment of role, functions and membership to purpose.

BACKBONE PRACTICE:

Ensure there is collective ownership and action.

Behaviours and actions we see when this practice is:

GETTING STARTED	MAKING PROGRESS	EMBEDDING
BBT makes visible collective efforts across the community and the broader system BBT works with key actors and organisations to understand the concept of attribution and the impact of collective work. BBT supports key actors and organisations to work together on projects and initiatives that they cannot do alone. Collective stories and narratives are being built for both inward and outward focusing communication about collective efforts and its potential.	BBT convenes and supports partnering and collaboration work practices BBT and key actors reflect together on what collective effort and ownership is and means for the impacts and shared purpose Stories, narrative and data are being communicated within the SPSP initiative and across the system to show collective efforts and what is being achieved BBT models and supports the language of collective effort such as 'we did'.	BBT convenes and supports diverse range of partners and collaborators to own and drive collective action Review and renewal go governance as needed to serve the purpose and in response to systemic shifts and shocks.

BACKBONE PRACTICE:

Convene sector and systemic partnerships, collaborations and collective efforts.

Behaviours and actions we see when this practice is:

GETTING STARTED	MAKING PROGRESS	EMBEDDING
BBT strengthens their capacity to convene diverse actors and organisations across the system BBT work with key actors and organisations to build relationship, trust and credibility.	BBT convenes key actors and organisations to support around building and supporting a shared purpose. BBT convenes diverse people and organisations to deliberate and make decisions together.	BBT is recognised and is called upon actors across the system to convene around complex issues. BBT helps hold partnerships and collaborations accountable to agreed ways of working and the community-led agenda.

BACKBONE PRACTICE:

Support structures and processes for collective innovation.

Behaviours and actions we see when this practice is:

GETTING STARTED	MAKING PROGRESS	EMBEDDING
BBT and key actors identify risk appetite across the system and which actors are innovating and/or open to testing and trying innovative approaches. BBT ensures there is the capacity and capability within the community and the broader system to design, test and learn from innovation projects and activities.	BBT and key actors establish processes for innovation including clear innovation methodology and communication processes. Key actors and organisations work collectively within test-try-learn approaches Learning is held locally within and across the SPSP initiative BBT supports a culture of bravery, trying something new and learn together.	Key actors and organisations are supported by the BBT to lead innovation projects and initiatives. BBT and key actors communicate learning to others across the system.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Is the governance supporting the work needed at this time?
- Is the amount of work and time being spent on governance design and implementation supporting or detracting from the collective effort for change?
- Is the Backbone Team convening the conversations needed to progress the collective work?
- Is there the environment and processes that support systems for innovation across the collective effort?



SECTION THREE
BACKBONE TEAM
COMPETENCIES

Overview

This section provides a starting point for considering the competencies – or the skills and attributes/mindsets – that are important for Backbone Teams in community-led, collective impact initiatives. The competencies reflect important skills and mindsets/attributes needed by the Backbone Team as a whole. In other words, while some competencies (e.g. communication skills) may be relevant to all Backbone Team roles, others (e.g. fund development and management) may be relevant to only particular roles in a Backbone Team.

The competencies draw on reflections from a small working group of SPSP Backbone Leaders and have been verified against findings from recent research¹⁴, which identified critical competencies for Backbone Leaders in the North American context through extensive interviews and a review of seminal grey literature. Competency descriptions are based on research findings¹⁵ and incorporate additional considerations/modifications for the Australian context based on initial SPSP Backbone Team reflections. Further testing and verification with other SPSP Backbone Teams and stakeholders will be required.

¹⁴ Judy Touzin. Building Strong, Sustainable Backbone Leadership: A Field Study of Cross-Sector Organizations, Cambridge, MA: The EdRedesign Lab, 2023. Touzin identified 14 critical competencies, broadly defined as technical skills, qualities and traits. An additional 2 competencies, communication and relationship skills, were described as ‘uber’ competencies, which underpin many of the other competencies.

¹⁵ Ibid

SKILLS

Relationship building and relational intelligence

Ability to establish and leverage strong trusting relationships, requiring self-awareness, empathy and the ability to ensure others feel seen, heard and valued. Also includes the ability to ensure cultural safety and work appropriately and inclusively with First Nations Elders and communities, and culturally and linguistically diverse peoples to promote participation.

Communication skills

Ability to use different forms of communication to, at minimum: compellingly communicate a vision; clearly articulate a strategic direction; tailor communication to different stakeholders; communicate a compelling return on investment; develop and maintain clear and consistent communication structures; be clear, direct, and firm when holding stakeholders accountable to their shared work. Skilled in active or deep listening, listening not only to the words, but to the sentiment and layers hidden behind what someone says, and story telling or being able to use narrative as a way to understand and communicate knowledge.

Policy advocacy

Ability to identify policy barriers and enablers and work with allies to address these barriers and/or amplify enablers. Has political and bureaucratic awareness.

Collaboration and network building

Ability to bring together and support different actors to take collective action towards a shared agenda. Skilled in hosting and creating welcoming spaces in which community feel heard, valued and empowered to lead. Skilled in identifying and managing power dynamics.

Fund development and management

Ability to generate, coordinate and align financial resources to sustain the work.

Project management and organisational skills

Ability to organise and execute work, including goal setting, role clarification, agenda setting, facilitation, data analysis and synthesis.

Strategic thinking

Ability to think strategically about options and support collaborative processes for selecting appropriate, relevant and impactful strategies.

Systems thinking

Ability to see factors influencing the challenge(s) and the connections between these factors. Skilled in supporting stakeholders to see and map a system, including resource flows, stakeholders, interests, different types of capital, power dynamics and relationships.

Visionary

Ability to co-create and compellingly share an aspirational vision that the community seeks to achieve and help others to understand, believe in and work toward.



ATTRIBUTES OR MINDSETS

Community centred

Deep seated belief in the inherent value and dignity of the community, which is reflected in how teams talk about and work alongside the community. Strengths-based: leading from strengths rather than deficits, seeing possibility rather than just problems.

Equity centred

Explicit commitment to realising racial, ethnic and economic equity, paying attention to whose voices are engaged and centred, who leads, how data is disaggregated and shared, and how resources are allocated.

Purpose driven, outcomes focused, data driven

Commitment to focusing on purpose and long-term outcomes. Committed to combining and using all forms of evidence (e.g. research; data; community voice).

Humility

Honouring that community is best positioned to identify solutions to their challenges and awareness that you do not have all the answers. Quick to own mistakes and apologise when appropriate.

Learning orientation

Adopts a growth mindset, is adaptive and committed to continuous learning and improvement. Is curious and reflective and sees setbacks as opportunities for learning and growth.

Resilience, perseverance and tenacity

Capacity to quickly bounce back from difficulties and disappointments while holding the vision of what is possible.



APPENDICES

Appendix A: Methodology

In 2022, SPSP Backbone Team Leads identified the opportunity to work together to codify practice and contribute to the body of evidence articulating how backbone infrastructure enables multi-sector efforts to implement systems change using Collective Impact methodology, consistent with the SPSP Model.

At the National Leadership Gathering in Burnie in August 2022, Backbone Teams' workshoped priorities, needs and functions for consideration in a practice guide. This was followed up by a face-to-face workshop scoping out key practice areas in January 2023. Three virtual workshops were then held in August 2023 to dive deeply into the core practices of each practice area and the required competencies. These practices were refined as a result of written feedback, peer review and review of selected grey literature. Competencies identified in the workshops were analysed against findings from a recent, relevant and credible study investigating Backbone Leader competencies, which drew on similar literature to the literature scan conducted as part of the development of this guide.

Alongside the development of practices and competencies, a series of practice examples were developed through document review and interviews with key informants. Insights about practices and competencies that emerged from these examples were used to finalise content.

While the process of discussing and agreeing practice is a valuable way of reaching shared understanding of, and deepening, the way of working, it is recognised that dialogue about practice was limited to a small cohort of SPSP Backbone Teams. Timeframes and schedules have limited the depth of practice shared and captured in this practice guide.

Appendix B: Notable tools and frameworks

There are various tools and frameworks that can support and deepen SPSP Backbone Team practice. The following frameworks and/or approaches offer a starting point for deepening practice:

- Asset Based Community Development
- Story telling canvas
- Design thinking
- Adaptive leadership
- Art of hosting
- Water of systems change
- Collective impact
- Institute of Public Participation (IAP2)
- Meta-leadership
- Facilitation for Transformation

