

Community Engagement On-The-Run



A brief guide to strengths-based
community engagement for community
resource and neighbourhood centres.



Community Engagement On-The-Run... Why this Guide?

Centres engage their communities every day: through conversations with centre volunteers and program participants, community events, formal evaluation processes, and a host of engagement processes such as community conversations and asset mapping projects. The creative practice of community engagement represents a collective 'asset' of our community and neighbourhood centre network.

It's also true that many centres would like to feel better equipped in the realm of engagement. Community engagement is not only a growing community expectation, but also an increasingly important aspect of funding applications and tenders. There is also increasing pressure and need to partner with stakeholders within and beyond the community, and identifying skills in the related field of stakeholder engagement is becoming an increasingly necessary capability in centre life.

Community Engagement On-The-Run is designed to assist Centres to incorporate community engagement into everyday activities, as well as special events and at the same time, to take practical steps toward the CoDesign of services and programs.



The CoDesign for Thriving Communities project was made possible through a Department of Finance capacity building grant.



This booklet, along with the accompanying downloadable resources, offers a brief introduction to using strengths-based frameworks, such as appreciative inquiry and asset-based community development, in engaging with our own organisations, our communities and wider stakeholders.

It forms part of Linkwest's CoDesign for Thriving Communities project resources.

Enjoy!

Cover:

The new nature-based playground at Yangebup Family Centre is due in large part to the enthusiasm of the CoDesign team, pictured.



Linkwest CoDesign Conversation Cafe gave participants the opportunity to reflect on the opportunities and challenges facing the sector.

Introduction

Strengths-based community engagement practices are fundamental to the everyday life of community resource and neighbourhood centres. Whether formally or informally, centres engage their communities in all kinds of positive ways, working together to create greater community wellbeing for all.

This booklet outlines ten steps to take in engaging communities from a strengths-based perspective. At the same time it helps to enable everyday engagements to form part of a 'CoDesign' process for your centre.

Engagement toward CoDesign is increasingly valued by funders and communities alike.

These resources have been developed in consultation with, and in response to requests from, neighbourhood and community centres in WA. The resources aim to:

- enrich capabilities in community and stakeholder engagement,
- enable Centres to build on community engagement strengths, and
- enable Centres to move towards the CoDesign of programs and service models.

These resources introduce ways to use approaches such as asset-based community development, appreciative inquiry, and an action learning mindset to enable Centres to build relationships and community in every aspect of engagement activity.

This booklet outlines ten key steps in engaging communities. There are more resources, including templates and tips to support the steps in this booklet, on the ABCD of Thriving Communities website:
www.abcdofthrivingcommunities.com

We'd love your feedback – let us know how you go!



I.

Know Your Own Story

Strengths-based approaches call us to discover, connect and mobilise our strengths and assets in service of capitalising on opportunities, co-creating the futures we aspire to, and dealing with challenges. In engaging with your community and wider stakeholders, it's important to know who you are as an organisation. Having a clear sense of organisational identity, including your strengths, values, and aspirations, will help in defining who your community and wider stakeholders are, and the ways you wish to approach them.

Engaging others is easier in a team – at best, community engagement really is a whole-of organisation effort. Inquiring 'appreciatively' into the strengths and interests of individuals in your organisation, as well as whole-of-team interests and capacities, can assist in engaging organisational strengths to engage and build community strengths and assets.

So to start with you could:



- Gather your core team for community engagement at your Centre (this could include Committee members or other volunteers where appropriate)
- Create an organisational asset map
- Define some action learning goals for the team as a whole and (self-defined!) learning goals or interests for team members



You will find additional resources to help with this engagement step at the ABCD of Thriving Communities website
www.abcdofthrivingcommunities.com/resources



- › [Creating_a_Team.pdf](#)
- › [Organisational_Asset_Map.pdf](#)
- › [Action_Planning.pdf](#)



2.

Know Your Community

As a Centre, your organisation exists as part of the wider whole of your community and other stakeholders. Creating a stakeholder map is a useful process and tool in defining your community and stakeholders. It enables you to focus on who you are in relation to the groups, organisations and individuals that make up your organisational network.

Stakeholder mapping is an ongoing process, as the organisations and groups we are in relationship with shift and change – so it needs regular updates! It will also change slightly for each specific engagement project or event that you undertake, depending on your purpose and partners for each unique process.

The stakeholder map is a great basis for creating a Relationship Building Strategy, for identifying gaps in community relationships, and for determining who to engage with in any particular activity according to the purpose of each engagement.

Don't leave home without one!



You will find additional resources to help with this engagement step at the ABCD of Thriving Communities website
www.abcdofthrivingcommunities.com/resources



› [Stakeholder_Map.pdf](#)



The bike track at Southlake Ottey Centre – a major drawcard and focal point for engaging youth in the CoDesign process.

3.

Community Engagement Action Plan

Before launching into specific engagements with your community, take the time to look at the bigger community engagement picture for your Centre. It can make a huge difference in the effective use of your resources.

In most Centres, staff constantly engage with their communities in all kinds of ways – from drop-in conversations to busy-bees; to surveys; to educational programs; and every kind of activity. It's great to look at ways in which you may be able to build some small extra steps into what you already do, to add engagement 'value' for little cost!

This also means that you will be able to plan your targeted or 'special events' as part of an overall engagement strategy, knowing where to place your energy and resources to achieve the outcomes that may not be covered in your existing activities.

You'll also be able to look at how this Community Engagement plan fits in with and contributes to your Strategic Plan.

You will find additional resources to help with this engagement step at the ABCD of Thriving Communities website
www.abcdofthrivingcommunities.com/resources



- › [Community_Engagement.pdf](#)
- › [Community_Engagement_Strategy.pdf](#)



4.

Plan Your Community Event or Process



Ok, it's time to hone in on a specific engagement event or process. Centres are amazing at running events – you could say it's a collective 'strength' or asset. Community conversations, neighbourhood barbecues, quiz nights, festivals, book launches, volunteer morning teas, community markets, community garden celebrations – if you can think of a community event, a Centre in WA has probably planned, promoted, run, evaluated and celebrated its success!

Documenting, connecting up, and relating the ways in which events and processes contribute to engagement and wider centre outcomes is one area in which many Centres have asked for support to strengthen their engagement practices.

Creating an Action Planning Map for each activity, and using Project Landscaping process to engage everyone involved in the planning of the activity, can both contribute to creating projects that build community, capture data, and feed forward into strengthening organisational development.



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www.abcdofthrivingcommunities.com/resources



> [Action_Planning.pdf](#)

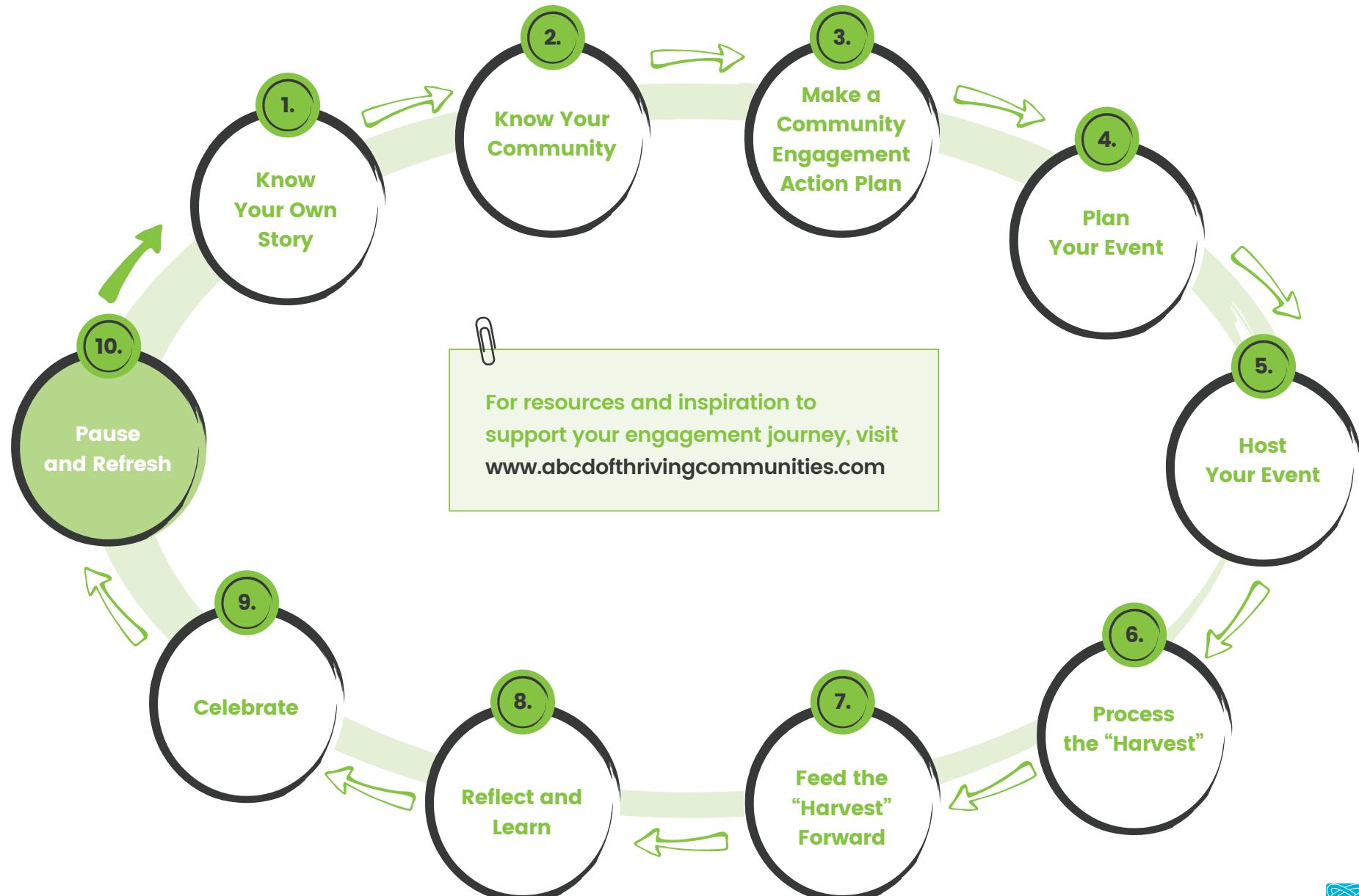


The CoDesign for Thriving Communities session at Linkwest Belonging Conference 2017 was both hands-on and practical.



CoDesign for Thriving Communities
 Maximising your Centre's potential through community collaboration and engagement

10 Steps to Community Engagement



5.

Host the Event or Process

An event or process might include anything from a community barbecue, formalising the collation of informal everyday engagements with Centre users or community members, a community conversation or a full scale community asset mapping event. Have a look at the CoDesign at Kalannie CRC video on the website for an example of what one Centre has done in this area.

Whatever your activity, if it's part of your Centre engagement strategy it's important to focus on at least three aspects of the event itself:

- a) **hosting the event**, making sure that participants have everything they need to feel welcome, take part in the event and contribute in the ways they are being invited to. Hosting considerations include everything from food and drink to tables and chairs, stationery and other props to invite written input. To invite everyone's best input, the facilitation and process structure must be fit for purpose.
- b) '**capturing**' the data, including the 'story' of the event. This is an important part of engagement for centres – capturing learnings, data and stories enables community input to be fed forward into shaping your Centre and also fed back to participants and the wider community, building relationships and community in the process. A way of describing this aspect of the event is the 'harvest' of the event. The event harvest includes 'artifacts' such as documentation of collective processes – for example, participant data such as brainstorms or conversation mind-maps, as well as photos and videos. Other tangible 'harvests' Centres often collect include evaluations, participant lists and contact details etc. All of these harvest documentations are planned and created to serve the purposes of the engagement and its forward movement. Make sure to **plan in advance** how you will collect the data and capture the story of your event!
- c) **relationship building as a primary goal**, ensuring that there are multiple ways in which participant contact, welcome, inclusion, input and ongoing connection are being cared for. It is good practice to create relationship building goals not only for ongoing Centre practice but for each specific engagement or project. Another way of describing this aspect of an engagement project is as part of the 'intangible harvest' of the project.



Running an asset mapping event is one way to engage your community. Ways to asset map are limited only by your imagination. You'll find inspiration, tools and templates to assist you with planning and running a community asset mapping event on the website.

Contact Linkwest if you are interested in being part of our ABCD of Community Engagement training opportunities.

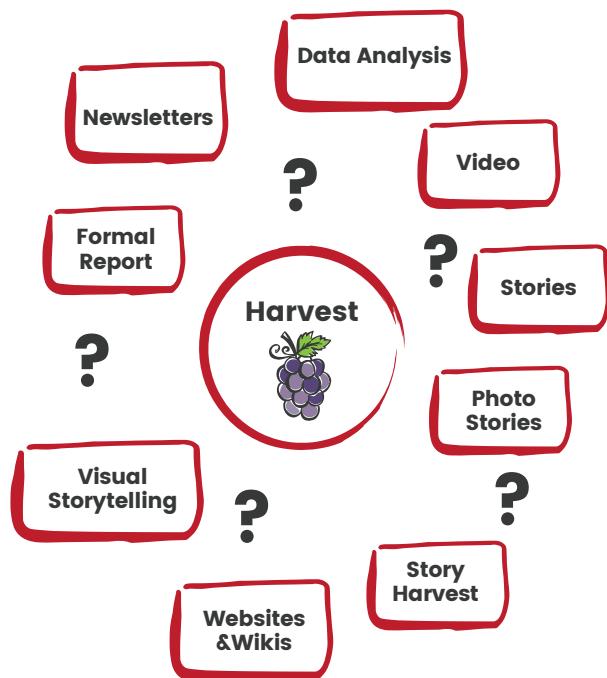


6. Process your “Harvest”

Time to collate your engagement data and story elements, and make sense of it all. Depending on what you have done, you may have mountains of butchers paper to input and analyse ... or survey results to input and crunch ... new contacts to integrate into your relationship building strategy... photos and videos to edit and upload... evaluations to process... reports to create...

This is the time to create a rich (and organised) bank of material that you can draw from in feeding back into the organisational development of your centre, as well sharing it more widely as part of building relationships in your wider community and stakeholder groups.

As with any aspect of engagement, it is good practice to involve others in this process. It's a great opportunity to enlist the energies and interests of team members and volunteers.



You will find additional resources to help with this engagement step at the ABCD of Thriving Communities website
www.abcdofthrivingcommunities.com/resources



› 10_Tips_Harvest.pdf



7.

Feed the “Harvest” Forward

This step is an opportunity to take forward action in service of the two main goals of your engagement project: to feed your findings and learnings back in to your organisation, and to use the harvest to continue to build relationship with and amongst your community and stakeholders.

Feeding data back in to your organisation could include inputting survey data in to statistical records, creating and sharing reports on different aspects of the event for different parts of the organisation, considering specific ways in which the results of the process or event may affect and shape future events, processes, or the evolution of your organisation or service model.

Feeding forward to your community and wider stakeholders is an important part of respecting the contribution of all participants. It is also an opportunity to continue to build relationship. Depending on your event and/or process, this may involve sending a copy of survey results with thanks for participation, articles in newsletters, photo stories, blogs, social media posts, and more ... this is a key opportunity to carry forward the story of your organisation and the value you place on relationships with and for your community.



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> [Community_to be the best it can be.pdf](#)



8.

Reflect and Learn

With your event complete, harvest processed, and results fed into wider structures where they will feed a thriving future organisation and community, it's time to reflect on the process as a whole.

Gather your core team, shut the doors, switch the phones for a couple of hours, and bring together community engagement learnings from the whole process. This is an important opportunity to focus on what the team has learnt individually and as a whole, looking back at the action learning goals created at the beginning of the project.

Using an Appreciative Inquiry lens can assist in using this as positive team building opportunity – a chance to reflect together in a relaxed environment on individual, team and organisational learning.

Reflect and Learn

Action Reflection Questions

1. What did we do? (Outputs)
2. What happened as a result of what we did? (Outcomes)
3. What went well?
4. What was challenging? Anything troubling or concerning?
5. Anything surprising, unexpected, awesome or amazing?
6. What did we learn?
7. What's possible now? What are our bright ideas?
(How can we improve or adjust our plan based on what we now know?)
8. What questions should we be asking as we move forward?
9. Personal learning goals update?
10. Team and/or organisational learning goals update?



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www.abcdofthrivingcommunities.com/resources



› [Reflection.pdf](#)





Everyone, no matter the age, benefits from Yangebup Family Centre's CoDesign approach.

9. Celebrate



Time to celebrate your achievements! Depending on the scale of your engagement and your resources, including time constraints, this could be anything from a dedicated morning tea with the team to a large scale volunteer thank-you event. Celebration and volunteer appreciation is another strength of Centres – make the most of it and do it your way!

This is another opportunity to strengthen and thank teams, participants, volunteers ... celebrations of achievements, successes, learnings and simply rising to challenges are a key aspect of building relationships and generating and maintaining connection and goodwill.



10. Pause and Reflect

... even just for a moment! While this is obviously optional, it's so easy to get caught up in the ongoing rush of Centre life and engagement ... perhaps the conclusion of this engagement process might be a good time for that holiday? Or is it more a time for a micro-break... a day off, an afternoon bush walk, a trip to the movies or booking in for that massage at last.

Engagement is often intense work, and it pays to take a break, enabling a refreshed perspective for the next round.

And if you feel like it, contact us and tell us about your engagement experience ... we'd love to hear your story!

CoDesign for Thriving Communities:

Maximising your Centre's potential through collaboration and engagement.

Through the CoDesign for Thriving Communities project, Linkwest has been responding to Centre requests for opportunities to enrich capabilities in relation to community and stakeholder engagement.

CoDesign in the context of community resource and neighbourhood centres means the engagement of communities and stakeholders in the development and evolution of programs and service models. It represents a sea change in thinking, and a movement toward increasing participant and community input into the life of Centres and the kinds of things they offer.

The shift to CoDesign thinking is a slow process, requiring not only ever-increasing engagement of communities but also changes in funding models to enable flexibility in the ways Centres can design and deliver action toward desired community outcomes.

This shift is occurring alongside another change within the community sector, from a focus on community 'needs' to focusing on community strengths and assets. These shifts both involve the development of funding models that have the ability to incorporate the aspirations and strengths of dynamic communities into their design and accountability processes.

Through the CoDesign for Thriving Communities project, Linkwest has been working with partner centres to design resources to help centres expand their capabilities in community engagement. The project and its resources engage a strengths-based lens to ensure that centres can maintain and grow a community-building focus in everything they do.

**Find out more about the CoDesign Project at
www.abcdofthrivingcommunities.com**



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Linkwest

Linkwest is the peak body for neighbourhood centres in Western Australia. Linkwest's mission is to support neighbourhood centres to develop vibrant, inclusive and connected communities,