THE BEHAVIOUR CHANGE COLLABORATIVE

Activating Civic and Community Participation

Abridged Final Report

18 OCTOBER 2026



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- The Minderoo Foundation

Consortium partners

- The Good Shift
- Centre for Public Impact

Local Government Authorities

LGAs and their dedicated teams across community, youth, family, early years, place and culture: Brighton Council, Hume City Council, City of Salisbury, City of Gosnells, Leeton Shire, City of Kwinana.

Subject matter experts and key informants

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And finally, we thank the hundreds of individuals we met in the communities of Brighton, Gosnells, Hume, Kwinana, Leeton and Salisbury. Thank you for welcoming us, spending time with us and trusting us with your experiences and hopes for the future. You were heard.

Report authors

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How to read this report

Below is a quick reference guide to access some of the key elements of the report.

- To understand our **methodological approach** go to **Section 2**
- To understand **how we apply a behavioural lens** to this work, refer to **Sections 2 and 7**
- To read how the **rapid review** of evidence informed the **selection research communities**, go to **Section 3**
- To read a synthesis of the **barriers and enablers of community participation**, go to **Section 5.3**
- Summary of **overarching themes and insights** from the community immersions, go to **Section 6**
- To explore **emerging ideas**, and read our **recommendations**, go to **Sections 7 and 8**

Important note

This document is an abridged version of *Activating Civic and Community Participation, Final Report, April 2026*. The Final Report was a research findings report, written for Minderoo to inform decision making re. ACCP next steps. It was not written or designed for external release, and as a result, it and this abridged version are not in keeping with The BCC's typical external publication design standards.

The detailed deep dives which were included in the Final Report we submitted to Minderoo have been removed from this abridged version. We have done so to protect the communities we engaged with and to ensure that the views of individuals about the communities they live in are not taken out of context.

While the deep dives provided rich and granular detail to the Final Report, we have tried to ensure that the insights gathered are still readily apparent in this abridged version.

About The BCC

Established in 2012, The Behaviour Change Collaborative (The BCC) is a values based social enterprise with offices in Perth and Brisbane. We work collaboratively to affect positive change and create social value in Australia and overseas. We exist to solve one of the most persistent challenges facing governments, communities and organisations – how to create meaningful, lasting change in complex systems.

- We combine behavioural science, social marketing and participatory methods to move beyond surface-level interventions to address the deeper drivers of behaviour.
- We listen before we design, working alongside communities to understand their realities, motivations and constraints.
- We translate evidence into practise, applying robust frameworks, systems thinking and program theory to real-world challenges.
- We design with people, not for them – ensuring solutions are relevant, achievable and owned by those they affect.
- We focus on action, not just insight – delivering practical strategies that can be implemented, scaled and sustained.

Whether working with government, NGOs or philanthropic organisations, our goal is simple – to turn behavioural insights into programs, policies and campaigns that deliver meaningful and positive change to the lives of people and planet.

Our multidisciplinary team and global associate network is a key strength and significant point of difference. We work with numerous community and academic partners – an operating model that ensures we are able to source the right expertise to address specific behavioural or strategic challenges. We provide affordable access to world-leading behaviour change and related subject-matter expertise and ensure the appropriate skill sets are meaningfully engaged on every project.

We have extensive experience working with at-risk populations including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, CaLD communities, people with disability, people living with mental health conditions, migrants, the homeless, those living in regional, rural and remote communities and other disadvantaged and at-risk populations. This, and our demonstrated commitment to ensuring lived experience informs our approach to addressing behavioural challenges, is a key strength of our work.

Our senior team have decades of demonstrable expertise in community engagement, stakeholder consultation, participatory design methods, service improvement, qualitative and quantitative research, needs analysis, process and impact evaluation, behaviour change, communications, social marketing, research and evaluation.

Prior to establishing The BCC, each of our three founders spent decades in leadership roles within non-profits, charities and government. One was awarded an Order of Australia Medal (OAM) in 2021 for a lifetime of service to the community. A service ethos underpins everything we do, and we are proudly profit for purpose.

Influencing Behaviours. Improving Lives.

WA SOCIAL ENTERPRISE COUNCIL

QSEC Queensland Social Enterprise Council

GOOD MARKET APPROVED

Executive summary

Australia is experiencing a sustained decline in social cohesion and civic and community participation, reflected in reduced trust, a weakening sense of belonging, and falling engagement in formal and informal community life. Participation is increasingly fragmented and unevenly distributed across places and populations. The Activating Civic and Community Participation (ACCP) project responds to this challenge by exploring how participation is enabled or constrained at a local, place-based level, and by identifying the most effective roles for philanthropy in strengthening the conditions for connection, belonging and collective action.

The BCC has applied a behavioural lens to understand community participation as a set of observable behaviours shaped by *capability*, *opportunity* and *motivation*. The BCC's contribution focused primarily on community participation, framing it as an outcome in its own right, and a critical precursor to civic participation.

Our work comprised a rapid evidence review, expert interviews, quantitative analysis of over 500 Local Government Areas (LGAs), and deep community immersion research in six selected locations: Brighton (TAS), Salisbury (SA), Hume (VIC), Kwinana (WA), Gosnells (WA) and Leeton (NSW). The research engaged nearly 280 residents, community organisations and local government representatives through interviews, focus groups, ethnographic observation and community workshops.

Key insights

Across all communities, participation was found to be fundamentally relational, not programmatic. People participate when they feel safe, welcome, capable and able to access opportunities that fit within the realities of their lives. Barriers to participation were rarely about *motivation* alone. Rather, they were most often structural and contextual.

Three consistent layers of influence emerged:

1. **Physical, social and demographic context** – including geography, urban design, transport, shared spaces, housing stability and access to facilities.
2. **Basic needs and individual resources** – such as time, income, safety, health, food security, language and confidence.
3. **Accelerators of connection** – including community builders, connectors, shared activities (especially food, children and dogs), and trusted local institutions.

Participation was strongest where people spent more time locally, where there were visible and well-designed third places, and where community connectors actively reduced friction for involvement. Conversely, safety concerns, cost-of-living pressures, fragmented governance, transport barriers and overly complex volunteering or funding systems consistently undermined participation.

The research also highlighted sharp differences by life stage, with participation peaking during early parenthood and retirement, and dropping significantly for working-age adults without young children. In culturally diverse communities, strong bonding within cultural groups often co-existed with weaker bridging across groups, pointing to the importance of intentional intercultural connectors rather than one-off multicultural events.

Behavioural implications

Applying the COM-B model (invented by Susan Michie, Maartje van Stralen and Robert West) revealed that *opportunity* and *capability* are the primary logic gates for participation. Where either is constrained,

participation does not occur, even if *motivation* is present. As a result, the most promising levers for philanthropic investment lie in:

- **Design** – creating and activating places and systems that make connection easy and natural
- **Enablement** – building confidence, skills, navigation support and local capacity
- **Incentivisation** – reducing real and perceived costs of participation

Communication and/or policy related measures were found to be insufficient without these structural supports.

Recommendations

The report recommends a shift away from short-term, program-led interventions toward long-term investment in social infrastructure, community *capability* and governance. Key recommendations include:

- Funding community co-design pre-pilots that build local governance *capability* alongside participatory initiatives
- Investing in community builders and connectors as critical relational infrastructure
- Designing clear participation pathways with low-barrier entry points
- Providing tailored supports for CaLD groups and new arrivals, particularly women
- Re-activating and co-owning place-based infrastructure rather than building new assets
- Treating participation as an outcome of *opportunity* and *capability*, not an invitation
- Supporting intercultural bridges and strengthening local systems through flexible, long-term investment

Our findings suggest that thriving and flourishing communities are not created from the top down. They emerge when people are given permission, space and support to connect, contribute and lead locally, relationally and over time.

1. Background

1.1 Social cohesion, connection and participation

Social cohesion, social connection and community and civic participation are mutually reinforcing elements of healthy communities. Social connection refers to the relationships and sense of belonging people experience with others, which creates the trust and reciprocity that underpin social cohesion. When individuals feel connected, they are more likely to participate in community life and through these interactions, relationships are formed and strengthened. Over time, sustained participation builds shared norms, trust and a sense of collective responsibility, deepening social cohesion at the community or societal level. This socially cohesive environment then makes it easier for new connections to form and lowers barriers to participation, creating a mutually reinforcing cycle in which connection enables participation, participation strengthens cohesion, and cohesion sustains both over time.

Notably, given the interconnected and mutually reinforcing nature of these concepts, it is difficult to interrogate one without exploring the others. It would be counter-intuitive to do so. Consequently, while our primary line of inquiry centred on ways to support greater community participation in local communities, our language is at times used interchangeably.

Australia enjoys a strong tradition of community and civic participation, and relatively high levels of social cohesion. However, in recent years there has been a marked decline in social cohesion and civic participation. Membership in social and community groups fell 13% between 2006 and 2019, and volunteering declined 8% during the same period (ABS, 2019). The Scanlon-Monash Social Cohesion Index has shown a steady decline in cohesion since around 2007, particularly in terms of people's sense of belonging and trust in civics and institutions.

The 'evidence' of disconnection fills our screens, social feeds and everyday conversations. Australia, like many other Western democracies, is experiencing a marked decline in social and community cohesion. Furthermore, the dominant public and social discourse as it pertains to community connection and social cohesion is increasingly divisive – characterised by tribalism, stereotypes and fearmongering.

Social disconnection is characterised by feelings of isolation, disengagement and alienation for other people, and from the community/society as a whole. It may lead to social isolation and loneliness, and in turn poor mental and physical health outcomes. This is particularly true for Indigenous young people (12-25 years) who experience markedly worse mental health outcomes than non-Indigenous peers, and higher levels of psychological distress and mental health illness (89 Degrees East, 2024).

While there is no clear definition of social cohesion, there is consensus in the evidence base that it has multiple dimensions, is a desirable feature of any community or society, and that it is currently deteriorating. In part this project seeks to build individual and community capacity, governance, *capability* and leadership, all of which ultimately enable everyone, and in particular Minderoo's priority populations (children, women and Aboriginal people) to more actively participate in civic life.

A 2016 literature review of 350 sources identified six distinguishable dimensions of social cohesion, namely social relations, identification, orientation towards the common good, shared values, quality of life and (in)equality (Schiefer, 2016). Furthermore, in a socially cohesive state, individuals and communities feel connected, trust others and societal institutions, offer and receive support and there are high levels of social mobility and equality. It is these conditions that the Activating Civic and Community Participation (ACCP) project seeks to promote.

There remain strong pockets of civic engagement on advocacy issues like the environment and social justice. Local community action and informal engagement (eg online communities of interest) isn't typically picked up in national statistics. While Australians are less collectively connected through formal groups than a decade or two ago, people are demonstrating commitment to their communities and causes in new

or informal ways. Australians still show high rates of informal helping and neighbourliness, with 94% saying that can get support from outside their household in a crisis (ABS 2019). There is an argument that participation continues to be rich but is expressed in less visible or structured ways.

Regardless of how dialogues are framed or reality perceived, the weight of evidence and the voice of lived experience suggests the social fabric is deteriorating. But perspective matters. Many Australians live in communities where there are high levels of participation and social cohesion, others do not. People's views and experiences of connection are shaped by myriad factors, but perhaps the most significant influencing variables are the places in which they live, work and play.

1.2 Social cohesion, community participation and behaviour

While the challenge of social disconnection is driven by a range of socio-ecological and structural determinants, activating individuals and communities and co-creating the conditions necessary for active civic participation requires a behaviourally informed approach. While a system shift is required, ultimately participation requires individuals to actively engage in organised and/or formal civic activities. It is, at core, a behavioural challenge.

The decline in active civic participation is a function of several factors. These include a growing distrust in government and civil society, generational factors, apathy and disillusionment, and people's lack of time and resources. This decline in civic participation, coupled with myriad other systemic drivers, has led to increased social disconnection and a similar decrease in social cohesion. While The BCC's role in this project is primarily focused on downstream factors, it should be acknowledged that an individual's decisions to participate or not participate are influenced by the context within which those choices are made.

The Request for Proposal made mention of the 'ecological model' which was developed and refined over time to understand how human development is shaped by the environment in which children live and grow (Bronfenbrenner et al, 2007). **While the entire ecological system influences behavioural decision-making, our main focus will rest on downstream, strength-based enablers of active participation.** Significantly, proper use of The BCC's Behavioural Framework (see Figure 2) ensures these influences are accounted for while still allowing us the freedom to co-design solutions led by the lived experience of those we seek to serve.

Over the course of the project there has been ongoing discussion about the definition, nature and characteristics of civic and community participation. The focus of our research has been community participation, which some view as a necessary pre-curser to civic participation.

1.3 Project description

1.3.1 Project objectives and scope

The project, Activating Civic and Community Participation (ACCP project), is part of a broader undertaking led by The Minderoo Foundation (Minderoo), that seeks to:

- Consolidate a robust evidence base to inform targeted programs aimed at activating civic participation and building social capital and cohesion in Australia
- Identify key systems, systemic barriers and required shifts, along with measurement frameworks, mental models and behaviours, necessary for shifting individuals and communities from passive to active civic participation
- Define impactful roles for philanthropy in driving systems change and addressing Australia's disconnection challenge

- Identify philanthropic strategies, cross-sector partnerships and evidence-based collaborations that have the potential to strengthen social capital, address systemic disconnection and foster civic participation at the community level
- Recommend, identify and/or design scalable activities that will form part of a future mobilisation project (post-delivery)

The ACCP project is being carried out by consortium partners the Centre for Public Impact (CPI), The Good Shift (TGS) and The Behaviour Change Collaborative (The BCC) and led by The Minderoo Foundation. Each partner brings a unique lens and complementary expertise to the project.

The BCC's primary lens is behavioural, noting that behaviours take place within a context and are influenced by system factors as well as individual factors, something that The BCC accounts for in our approach. Collectively, the outputs from the ACCP project will map the key actors, shifts and frameworks needed to foster civic and community participation, and to define the most impactful role(s) for philanthropy.

1.3.2 The BCC's objectives and scope

As noted above, each consortium partner brings unique and complementary strengths to the ACCP project. The BCC brings globally recognised expertise in social marketing and behaviour change, and a demonstrated track record of unpacking behavioural influence to generate actionable insight for impact.

The **primary focus of our research has been to explore the nature of, and enabling conditions for, community participation**.

Defining community participation as a behaviour

The BCC frames increased community participation as a program goal, which is underpinned by myriad sub-behaviours. These sub-behaviours (eg saying hi to a neighbour, joining a local art group) each have their own barriers and enablers, and represent different behavioural expressions of community participation.

The Community Participation – Spectrum of Behaviours (see Figure 1) was developed by The BCC at the completion of our research (see Section 8). It is included here to illustrate that a range of discreet behaviours fall within a community participation spectrum, noting that 'formal volunteering' sits on the cusp between community and civic participation. If the continuum was extended further to the right, we would see behavioural expressions of civic participation (eg lobbying, community advocacy, voting)[1].

For many people, participation is a progression. It requires a first step, and a relevant and individually feasible entry point. Where on the spectrum an individual or group engages in community can be highly person-dependent, influenced by their personality, personal capacity and the available opportunities within the local context in which they live.

Notably, the amount of effort (*motivation*) required of an individual increases from left to right, as does the level of resistance.

Figure 1: Community Participation – Spectrum of Behaviours



[1] An area of future exploration might be to determine if behavioural expressions of community participation are necessary pre-conditions and/or have causal links, to behavioural expressions of civic participation.

Notably, civic participation was explored through our research, though with less rigour than community participation. This decision was made in conjunction with Minderoo and predicated on the understanding that most expressions of civic participation (eg lobbying and voting) were a lesser priority for exploration. Lines of inquiry regarding civic participation were pursued as they arose organically during the research, but our primary focus was on less formal expressions of participation.

Significantly, notwithstanding the clear differentiation between civic and community participation made by The BCC, in this report the terms are used interchangeably due to the overarching framing used by Minderoo and the rest of the consortium.

Additional considerations

In addition to the overarching ACCP project goals, Minderoo asked Consortium partners to include the following considerations when undertaking the work:

1. Focus on early years (0–5-year-olds)
2. Think radically

Regional and remote Aboriginal communities were not included in Minderoo's ACCP project scope, because it was already doing place-based community empowerment work into Aboriginal communities within other work streams.

2. Methodology and application of a behavioural lens

For The BCC, there were three key phases to this stage of the ACCP project, namely:

1. **Evidence review** to inform community selection
2. **Community immersion research** (one week in each of six selected communities)
3. **Community workshops** (return visits to four of the six communities)

2.1 Applying a behavioural lens to project delivery

The BCC's approach recognises and responds to the fact Minderoo's long-range investment goal is to generate increased civic and community participation – ie increase a behaviour usually (but not always) preceded by an individual and/or community mindset and a set of place-based conditions, structural and/or systemic.

Therefore, it was deemed necessary that we seek to understand why some communities, or some community members:

- Opt in/out of civic participation
- Have greater self-efficacy to participate than others
- Value civic participation over others
- Are pre-conditioned or socialised to participate over others

At the core of The BCC's approach was an understanding of behavioural influence, at both an individual and collective community level. Notably, our inquiry-based approach placed emphasis on:

1. Understanding the influences on those less engaged and disengaged in civic participation (who may need unique forms of knowledge, motivation and enablement in order to be activated)
2. Learning from more civically engaged communities and individuals and understanding how they mobilise personal beliefs and attitudes into participatory behaviours

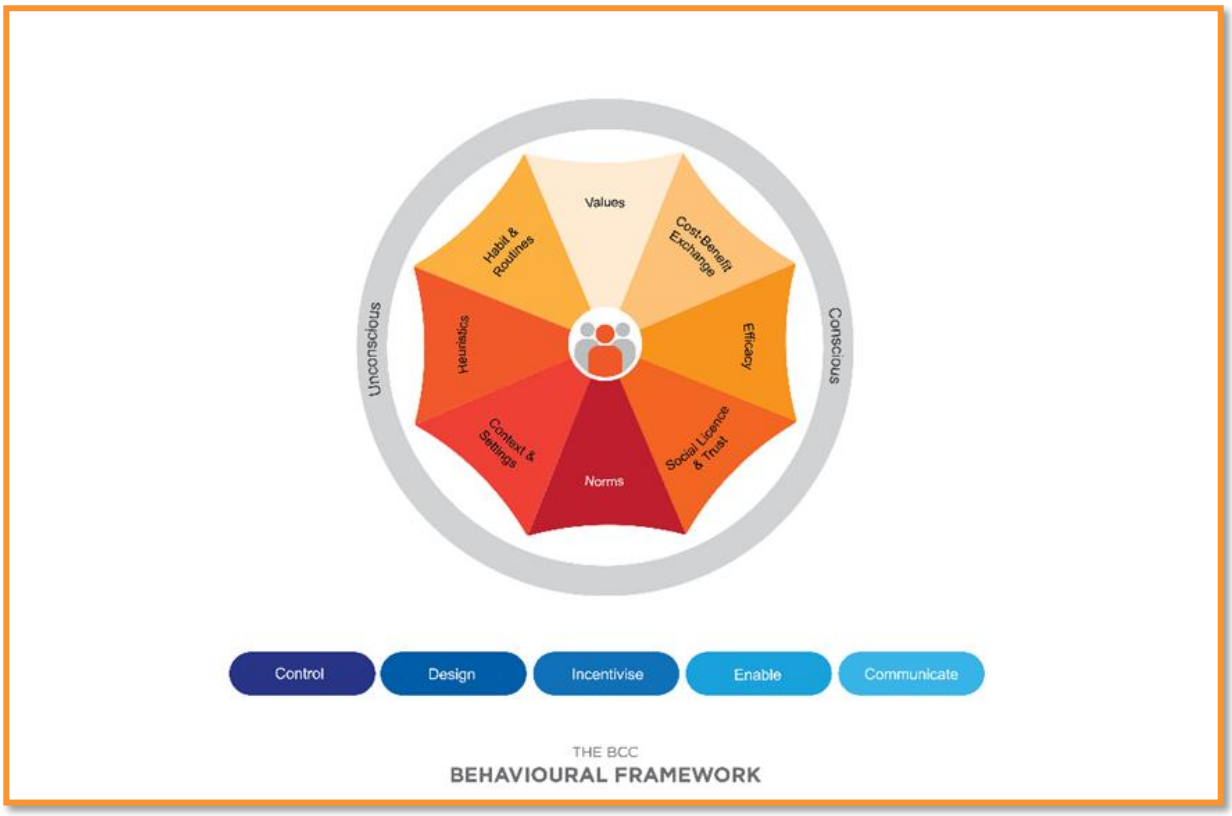
Behavioural influences can inhibit or restrict civic participation behaviours (barriers), or they can be motivating or facilitating (enablers). There are usually a mix of both types of influence at play. A thorough understanding of the interplay between these influences assists with the identification of the right intervention lever activities, programs, policies and supports that are worthy of investment because there is evidence of their ability to facilitate increased civic participation.

The method by which behavioural insights are identified, distilled and reported is as important as the information that results from the process itself. The BCC has used primary research, via community immersions and follow-up workshops with community members and stakeholders, to unpack and understand the behavioural influences and how they vary between and within communities.

The BCC's Behavioural Framework (see Figure 2) was used to guide and shape the lines of inquiry in the primary research, and the triangulation and sense-making of the data that was collected.

The Framework is a compilation of the most widely recognised academic theories of behaviour. It combines thinking from psychology, behavioural economics, sociology and anthropology. It is a diagnostic tool that provides a systematic way to identify all possible psychological, unconscious, environmental and contextual, cultural and emotional influences on the behaviour in question; enabling us to deconstruct their relative weight of influence and understand where the factors intersect.

Figure 2: The BCC's Behavioural Framework



The Framework is assembled in two iterative parts:

1. The diagnostic 'umbrella' (orange and grey)

- Consolidates the relevant theoretical and applied models of behavioural theory, behavioural sciences, anthropology and behavioural economics
- Is assembled so that it supports dual process theory of how the mind works, accounting for both conscious (System 2) and unconscious (System 1) influences on behaviour

2. The behaviour change levers (blue)

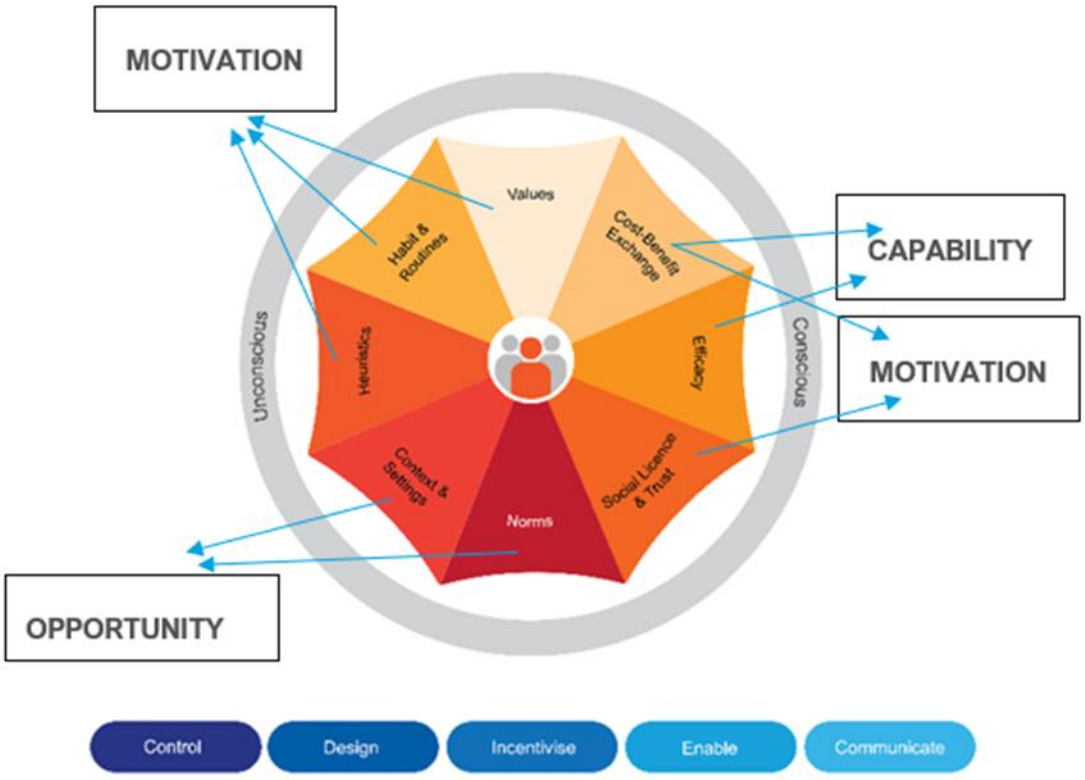
- Enables the identification and prioritisation of opportunities for behaviour change interventions
- Together, the levers form the 'system' or 'ecosystem' in which people live. Systems-thinking, or a systems-approach to behaviour change, recognises and assesses all of the potential influences on the desired behaviour, upstream and downstream and at all levels, across the ecosystem of a person's life

The BCC's Behavioural Framework is closely aligned with another popular behavioural model known as COM-B (Michie et al., 2011) which has some utility for this body of work (see Figure 3). The COM-B model is widely used in the United Kingdom and Europe, and we believe it is useful for this project to think diagnostically through the language of the COM-B components: *capability*, *opportunity* and *motivation*.

- ***Capability*** is an attribute of a person that together with *opportunity* makes a behaviour possible or facilitates it
- ***Opportunity*** is an attribute of an environmental system that together with *capability* makes a behaviour or facilitates it
- ***Motivation*** is an aggregate of mental processes, conscious or unconscious, that prompt and direct behaviour

***Capability* and *opportunity* act as 'logic gates' – if either is closed, for any given individual, the behaviour cannot occur**. When assessing the behaviour over time, or across a group of people, *capability* and *opportunity* are matters of degree that influence the behaviour.

Figure 3: The BCC's Behavioural Framework and COM-B



2.2 Evidence review and interviews for community selection

The main objective of Phase 1 was to use an evidence-led approach to shortlist and select six communities for community immersion research.

The following approaches were taken:

- **Rapid review**
  Starting with a review of journal articles, case studies and research reports on the topic of civic and community participation. Approximately 90 articles were reviewed.
- **In-depth interviews**
  Conducting interviews with key informants from various backgrounds to gather local knowledge, community insights and experiences which would not otherwise be readily available in the literature review. Twelve interviews were conducted to help inform community selection, and a further five interviews were conducted to explore specific themes and case studies of interest.
- **Quantitative data for shortlisting**
  Insights from the rapid review and interviews were used to determine the most appropriate measures to objectively assess over 500 LGAs. Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) was the main source used for shortlisting LGAs. This method and process is discussed in Section 4 of this report.

2.3 Community immersion research

The community immersion research (Phase 2) aims to understand the facilitators and barriers of individuals in participating in their local community. Given the nature of 'community' and this project's focus on geographical place, a mixed-method approach was used to gain a holistic understanding. That is, a combination of focus groups with residents, interviews with local groups/organisations and ethnographical observation all conducted in-situ in local community places and spaces.

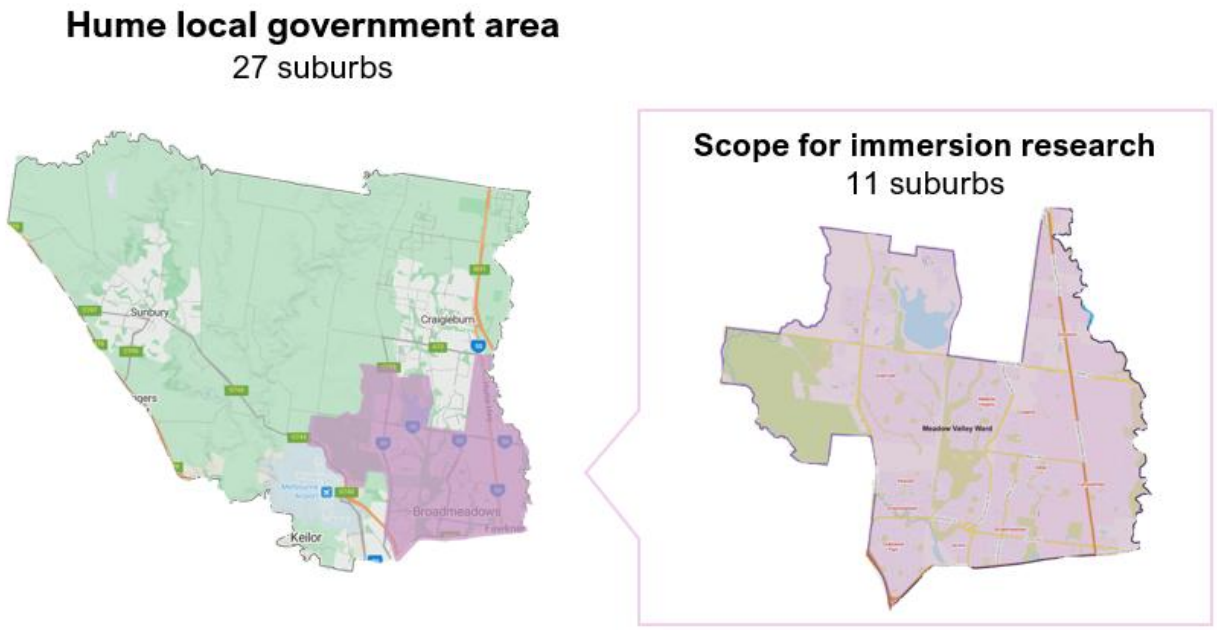
2.3.1 Setting geographical boundaries for some LGAs

The six LGAs selected varied greatly in population size, from 10,000 to over 240,000 people. For larger LGAs (Hume, Gosnells, Salisbury and Kwinana), geographical boundaries were applied to narrow the community of interest as proximity and size are expected to impact community identity. Additionally, a more concise boundary is assumed to be more relevant in the context of place-based philanthropic investment.

This process resulted in selecting neighbouring suburbs within the chosen LGAs. Figure 4 below illustrates the outcome of this process for Hume, Victoria as one example. Appendix 1 comprises the full list of suburbs.



Figure 4: Applying geographical scope for community immersion research – Hume example



2.3.2 Ethnographic observation

The research team travelled to each community across Australia, spending a minimum of five days in each location. For five out of the six locations, the team resided within the LGA of interest to enable in-person observation and immersion in local life. Gosnells (WA) is the only location which the team did not reside in, due its proximity to researchers' homes compared to the remaining locations.

2.3.3 In-depth interviews with local organisations and key informants

Interviews were conducted with 92 representatives from local organisations and groups across the six communities. It is recognised that local groups and organisations can offer a different and in-depth perspective on the community, some of which are critical for providing insight on hard-to-reach groups/individuals such as culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) groups and marginalised members of the community. There was also deliberate effort to engage all six LGAs in recognition of their deep local knowledge of the community's context, strengths and challenges. LGAs play a pivotal role in influencing infrastructure and the conditions for community participation.

Recruitment

Using online search engines and Google Maps, the research team identified and contacted a list of local groups and organisations. The types of organisations included:

- **Local government** – community engagement teams within the relevant local council
- **Religious and cultural** – churches, temples and cultural associations
- **Hobby, sports and leisure** – gyms, sports clubs, community gardens.
- **Community service** – neighbourhood houses, charity stores, Lions club, community volunteers, Police and Community Youth Centres (PCYC)
- **Family and education services** – primary schools, early learning centres

Interview format

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, typically lasting between 30 minutes and 60 minutes. The majority of interviews were conducted at the interviewees place of work for convenience and to allow researchers to observe and gain contextual understanding of places such as community centres, youth centres and school environments. Remaining interviews were held at public places (such as cafes), and some were conducted over the phone/via online video conferencing.

2.3.4 Focus groups with local residents

Group discussions were conducted with a total of 187 local residents across six locations. The team endeavoured to reach a target of 30 to 40 participants for each location. Discussions were held in local community venues such as libraries, community and neighbourhood centres, at different times throughout the day and evening, over four days. In larger communities, group discussions were held in different suburbs across the LGA. Light refreshments were also provided to attendees.

Eligibility criteria

Age and residency were the two main eligibility criteria for participation in the research:

- Being at least 18 years of age
- Residing within the suburb/LGA of interest

Recruitment

A multi-pronged approach was used to recruit local residents, balancing efficiency and inclusivity. There were some variations in recruitment method across locations based on feasibility. For example, in smaller communities such as Brighton and Leeton, participants were mainly recruited via paid social media ads and word-of-mouth/referrals. This is in contrast to the remaining four communities whereby majority of participants were sourced from research agencies/panels.

Overall, five methods were used to recruit local residents:

- **Research agency/panel**

  Research panels comprise people who have signed up to take part in paid research across a variety of topics. Recruitment from this source is managed by third-party research agencies. Demographic and psychographic quotas were set to allow for representation from different groups within the community where feasible. The exact target and quota differs for each community based on its makeup. Quotas are based on variables such as age group, gender identity, cultural group, interaction with children as well as level of community participation and connection. Refer to Appendix A.2.1 for recruitment screening questions.

- **Paid social media ads**

  Customised Expression of Interest (EOI) online forms were promoted on social media via geo-targeted paid ads as well as posts on local community groups. Platforms used were Facebook and Instagram.

- **Promotion via local groups and organisations**

  The BCC team approached community groups and organisations within the area of interest with requests to share posters and information about the research. These include sporting clubs, libraries, charity shops, community service organisations and local councils.

- **Word-of-mouth and referrals**

  Residents who have expressed their interest in the research were also invited to share the EOI form/*opportunity* to partake in group discussions with others in their local community.

- **In-person intercept**



In some communities, The BCC team handed out flyers in public places, inviting community members to sign up to the research.

Focus group format

A minimum of five focus groups were conducted in each of the six communities. Each session lasted 90 minutes and was held on a weekday. Sessions were held at various times of the day (mornings, afternoons and evenings) to accommodate availability and preferences of different demographic groups such as full-time workers, shift workers, retirees and stay-home parents.

Focus groups were held locally within the community of interest for greater ease and accessibility. Venues included community facilities such as local libraries and community centres.

Financial incentives for participation

In line with research best practice, financial incentives were provided to residents who took part in the group discussions, with an expectation of active input into the discussion from all individuals. This is notably different to community consultation sessions whereby attendance is often open to the public, relies on organic engagement from community members and no financial payments are typically offered.

Each participant was provided a physical $100 gift card (eftpos/Mastercard), in recognition of their valuable contribution to the research. The incentive also serves to improve the representation of opinions and viewpoints, and to aid individuals who may not otherwise be able to participate due to time, travel and caregiving costs.

Table 1: Number of participants in community immersion research

Local Government Area	Number of participants	
	Local residents	Community group and organisation representatives
Brighton, Tasmania	38	14
Salisbury, South Australia	37	10
Kwinana, Western Australia	37	23
Gosnells, Western Australia	32	17
Leeton, New South Wales	16	16
Hume, Victoria	27	12
Total	**187**	**92**

2.4 Community workshops and ideation sessions

The third phase of this research focused on validating findings from the initial immersions and exploring potential ideas for fostering community participation. Four (out of the six) communities were selected for this phase. These were Brighton (TAS), Kwinana (WA), Leeton (NSW) and Salisbury (SA).

Given the nature of this phase, selection was based on a number of factors such as:

- Level of community engagement and readiness
- Potential to be a location for future pilots
- Points of difference between each location

Community workshop format

One workshop was conducted per community. The session lasts around three hours, with lunch/refreshments provided to attendees. A $50 gift card (eftpos/Mastercard) was also provided to individuals who were not attending on paid work time.

Community workshop attendance

The community workshops were open to and attended by a mix of local organisations/groups as well as residents. A total 89 people attended the workshops across the four locations, the majority of whom took part in interviews/group discussions as part of the earlier immersion research phase (Phase 2).

Table 2: Community workshop attendance by location

Location	Leeton (NSW)	Kwinana (WA)	Brighton (TAS)	Salisbury (SA)
Number of attendees	18	26	22	23

3. Key themes from evidence review and interviews for community selection

This section focuses on the key insights from the evidence review and in-depth interviews, with an intent to inform the community selection process. It identifies the conditions and factors which were used to classify communities in terms of connection and participation.

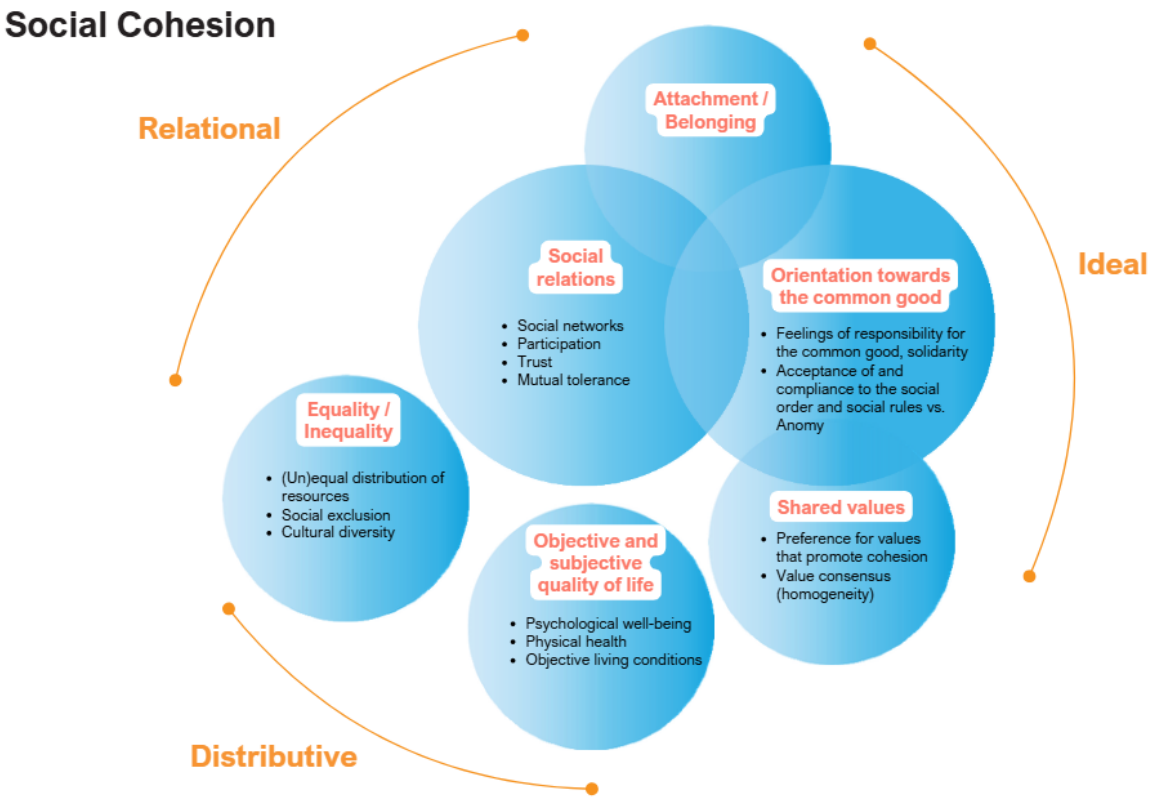
3.1 Social cohesion and community participation

Social cohesion is commonly described as a state of affairs where there are interactions amongst members of the community (people, groups and institutions), featuring "a set of attitudes and norms that includes trust, sense of belonging and willingness to participate" (Chan et al., 2006).

A review of the literature suggests that relationships between community participation and social cohesion are bi-directional (Abrams et al., 2023). For instance, Shamai et al. (2015) found that social cohesion positively influenced residents' active involvement in community management. Another study suggests that having larger social networks can increase likelihood of volunteering due to greater trust (Dawson et. al., 2019). Additionally, numerous researchers have found that participation in the form of volunteering increases cohesion (Abrams et al., 2023) due to reasons such as increased inter-group interactions, inclusivity and greater social relationships (Birdwell et al., 2013).

There is also a third view indicating that participation is one aspect of social cohesion (Schiefer & van der Noll, 2016). Figure 5 below, depicts a comprehensive social cohesion model by Schiefer & van der Noll (2016), based on a review of existing frameworks. This model is multi-dimensional and comprises six aspects – social relations, attachment/belonging, orientation towards common good, shared values, (in)equality and quality of life.

Figure 5: Elements of Social Cohesion (Schiefer & van der Noll, 2016)



The dimension of social relations includes quantity and quality of social networks, level of trust (between people and organisations) and participation/civic engagement. According to the model, participation can take various forms, strengthens social relationships to varying extents within the community. For example, being part of a sports club versus participating in a community-wide protest/demonstration. Each is expected to elicit different levels of unity and togetherness.

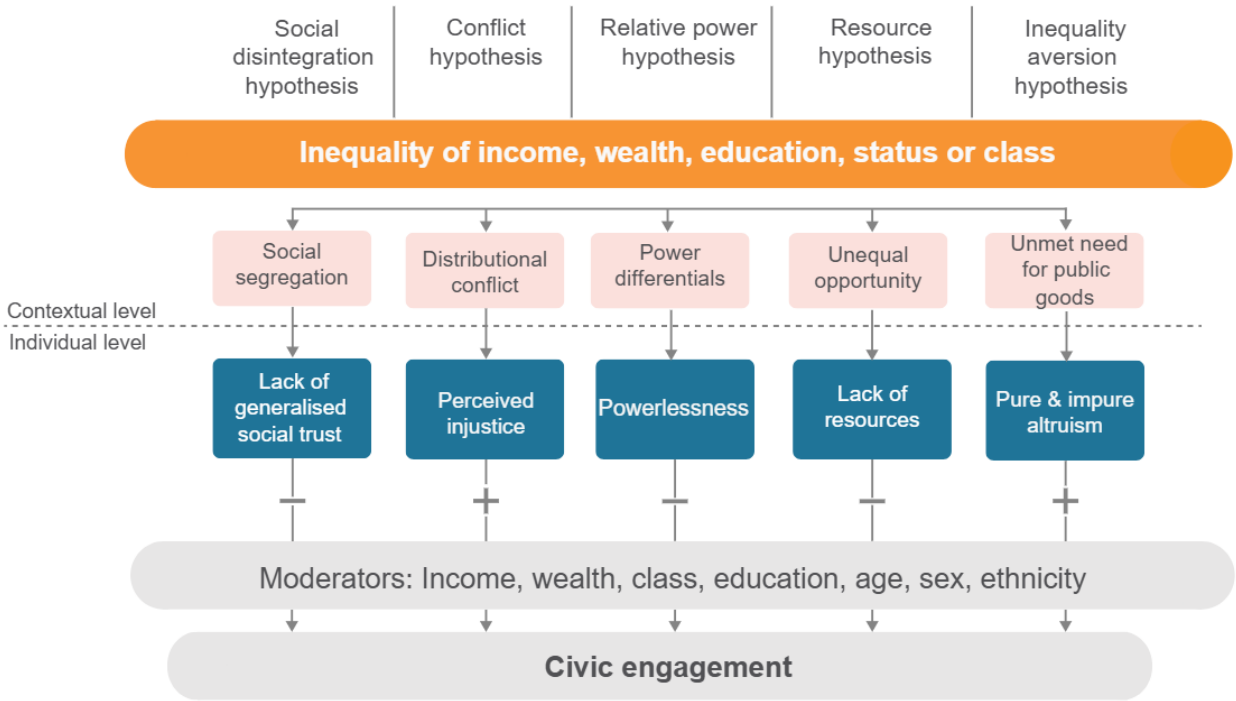
The literature also shows that both social cohesion and participation are key ingredients for a thriving community, supporting people to live lives of meaning and purpose. For these reasons, the components of social cohesion were explored further in both the key informant interviews and literature review.

3.2 Socio-economic factors

Differing perspectives on inequality and participation

There is a wealth of evidence on how socio-economic factors affect civic/community participation, and in different ways (Schiefer & van der Noll, 2016; Schröder & Neumayr, 2023). Figure 6 presents five theories explaining how inequality affects civic engagement and the differing levels of engagement as a result (Schröder & Neumayr, 2023).

Figure 6: Overview of mechanisms explaining effect of inequality on civic engagement



The model above firstly establishes that a single factor such as income could positively or negatively influence the likelihood of participation depending on the circumstances and drivers. For example, a disadvantaged community with lower income might be more connected with one another because they share unmet needs and are motivated to pool together resources to survive. This is explained by the inequality aversion hypothesis (in the model).

Conversely, there is established evidence of people with higher income being more likely to participate in the form of volunteering because they are better positioned to allocate time to unpaid activities (Voorintholt, 2023). A key informant also noted the barriers to volunteering, speaking figuratively: *"I need a certain level of economic ability to do it because I need to pay for the bus and the train to get to the volunteering or I need to pay for the car and the car parking."*

These scenarios are explained by the model's resource hypothesis, which suggests that unequal opportunities result in some individuals are worse off in terms of resources, such as income and education. This might mean prioritising the need to work or working longer hours and thereby having less time for civic engagement. Additionally, having lower education levels could mean having less knowledge in ways to meaningfully engage in community and thereby limiting participation.

Two hypotheses in the model suggest that disadvantaged groups/people are more likely to take action due to shared unmet needs (resulting in altruistic acts), and in the presence of conflict/threat over resource allocation leading to a sense of injustice. For the latter, there might be an increase in engagement as people band together to make change such as a local action group advocating for greater community investment for youth in an area. The remaining three of the five hypotheses predict the inverse, that disadvantaged groups are less likely to be involved due to lack of resources, feeling powerless and lacking trust in social institutions.

These contrasting views are also echoed by different key informants in the in-depth interviews. However, regardless of the direction of impact, all support the view that socio-economic factors have an influence on participation.

Current state of the nation and rising inequity

Research by the Scanlon Research Institute illustrates key differences in perceptions of social cohesion across people in different income groups, housing and employment statuses in Australia (O'Donnell et al., 2024). Renters were significantly more negative in their perception of social fabric, compared to people who owned their homes outright. A similar trend is seen for level of neighbour advantage/disadvantage. Furthermore, of all the factors, a person's financial situation is the biggest indicator of perception. People who are struggling financially had the most negative outlook.

Financial anxiety can also impact mental wellbeing and often reduces people's willingness to engage in recreational activities, even when programs are available. This is especially so when costs are seen as unpredictable or stigmatising (Oncescu et al., 2023). With the rising of cost-of-living and widening inequalities, particularly in the last five years (Davidson et al., 2024), financial circumstances are expected to be a persisting barrier to having connected and thriving communities. For this reason, as well as the potential for philanthropic investment, over half of the key measures used in the community shortlisting process related to socio-economic factors.

3.3 Barriers to belonging

Sense of belonging is another aspect of social cohesion and participation (Schiefer & van der Noll, 2016). It is often described as being part of a group and identifying with them and is related to having a shared trait or interest.

Culture, identity and values

Interestingly, when key informants were probed about examples of cohesive communities/those that are active in participation – they often mention homogenous community locations in which people have similar identities and/or cultures.

"Albany is an incredibly connected participatory community… [They] seemed to have a shared sense of identity as a place… Without a strong sense of identity to a place, it might be a bit harder to see active participation." **– Key informant working with communities**

Within the literature, there are some authors who posit that culturally/ethnically diverse communities are less cohesive due to their differences. Putnam (2000) for example, found that the communities in the United States which were more diverse had lower rates of voting, volunteering and involvement in community projects. An Australian study by McKenna et al. (2018), found that ethnic diversity negatively affected the safety aspect of social cohesion, but not cohesion overall. They found individuals living in highly diverse communities reported feeling less safe than residents living in more homogenous areas.

However, there is another school of thought suggesting that it is more important to have shared values on accepting each other's differences, rather than homogeneity of traits/beliefs (Schiefer & van der Noll, 2016). This notion acknowledges the additional effort required by the community to overcome their differences. Additionally, the same study by McKenna et al. (2018) of third generation Australians noted the benefits on aspects of social cohesion when there were positive interactions with other ethnic groups.

Migrant groups

There is consensus across the research that being new to an area/length of time in a place can impact one's identity and their sense of belonging. This is supported by Australian research showing that newer migrants have a weaker sense of belonging, with people who have lived in Australia for less than 10 years scoring the lowest. Results are higher for those who have lived in the country for 20 or more years, suggesting that belonging grows over time as migrants build and form their social network (O'Donnell et al., 2024).

Key informants working with migrants and minority groups also note the importance of inclusion and having a 'safe space' as a pre-requisite to participation.

A notable quote from a key informant summarises it as:

"When they feel welcome, they come along for the first time. When they feel included, they'll stay. When they feel they belong, they'll contribute." **– Key informant working with refugee and migrant groups**

Additionally, it is these migrant groups who tend to feel more isolated and in need of social connection. A study in Japan also found that volunteering improved the wellbeing of international migrants when social connections are formed in that process (Miller et al., 2020). It is the resulting relationships rather than the act of volunteering which improved their wellbeing.

Age group and generations

Apart from cultural diversity, research by Scanlon also showed key differences in belonging across age groups (O'Donnell et al., 2024). Younger generations (aged 18 to 34) have a significantly lower sense of belonging compared to the Australian average. This is reflective of the social isolation experienced, and could be due to changing social norms, lifestyle and preferences. In contrast, older age groups, particularly those aged 65 years and above, feel the highest levels of belonging.

Significantly, differences across age groups, culture and length of time in a place are aspects explored in the community research.

3.4 Physical environment and shared spaces

The literature, case studies and in-depth interviews highlight the impact of an area's perceived safety, walkability and shared meeting spaces. These have implications for the ability to have both planned and unplanned interactions with neighbours and community members.

Role of shared public spaces

A 'Parks After Dark' program in the US turned parks into vibrant community centres at night, where parks stay open in the evening with free sports and entertainment activities available for community members. The program evaluation found that there was an increased sense of safety amongst the community and a reduction in crime. The program also increased feelings of wellbeing, family togetherness and social cohesion in the area (Pourat et al., 2024).

Urban planning and design

Other research found the role of green spaces encouraged spontaneous social interactions, thereby contributing to improved community ties (Mousavinia, 2024). Additionally, walkability and accessibility to these areas also mattered as it impacts residents' frequency and ability to use them (Yu & Woo, 2023). A

related finding is the proximity to social connections. A qualitative study found a correlation between school location and youth and community connection. There was less connection for youth when their schools are located further away from their neighbourhood due to the lack of *opportunity* to foster ongoing relationships (Fuchs et al., 2024).

With increasingly isolated lifestyles coupled with the design of residential areas, there are also concerns from key informants that the opportunities for unplanned interactions are diminishing. An example is the lack of community hubs and shared spaces in apartments, and the resulting implications considering the growing trend of high density living and the types of people living in apartments. The latter may mean that certain groups of people are limited in their ability to foster connections because of where they live. Other research revealed inequities in who has access to well-maintained public spaces, with affluent neighbourhoods benefiting more than low-income communities (Bressane et al., 2024).

3.5 Other demographic factors

Expanding on previous themes, research shows that time spent in a neighbourhood impacts community connection (Abdallah et al., 2021). For example, the presence of parents, retirees and people working from home were considered more neighbourly. The opposite is true for places with a high proportion of commuters, second homes and transient communities (Abdallah et al., 2021). A key informant also notes the gradual discontinuation of traditional community groups such as Rotary and Lions Clubs, which are currently being run by older groups and without succession.

"A lot of those [community] groups are struggling now because people are so busy and there's so many other things happening in their life… If you have to do an age check, they'd be in their 70's. Often there's just not that new wave of volunteers, active participants and leaders coming through, in the next 10 or 20 years." ***– Key informant working with communities.***

Different demographic groups also face varying challenges to getting involved in their community. For example, research found a significant decline in participation of primary school children in after-school community clubs due to financial constraints, transport barriers and lack of facilities amongst low-income families (Walker et al., 2023).

Key informants also note the nature of technology and digital lifestyles which discourages in-person interactions particularly amongst the younger generation. One informant said: "One of the fascinating pieces of research from the UK says that high internet speeds lead to less community involvement."

Therefore, an area that was explored in the community research is the diversity in age groups, lifestyles and demography. That is, how connection and participation might differ across communities with different demography makeup.

3.6 Opportunities to participate

An overarching theme from informant interviews and the literature is the need to provide opportunities for interaction. Nearly all the key themes discussed above affect these opportunities in some way – whether that is the external environment and what is readily available, or an internal factor relating to their individual *capability*.

In summary, these can be grouped into:

- **Physical environment and infrastructure**

  For example, the presence of green spaces, public spaces and facilities such as parks, libraries and community centres.

- **Community activities**

For example, the presence of grassroot community groups, organised programs and events (Fuchs et al., 2024).

- **Accessibility and 'safe spaces'**

  This ranges from the ability to use and access shared spaces through to perceived safety and feeling welcomed to participate.

- **Individual skills and resources**

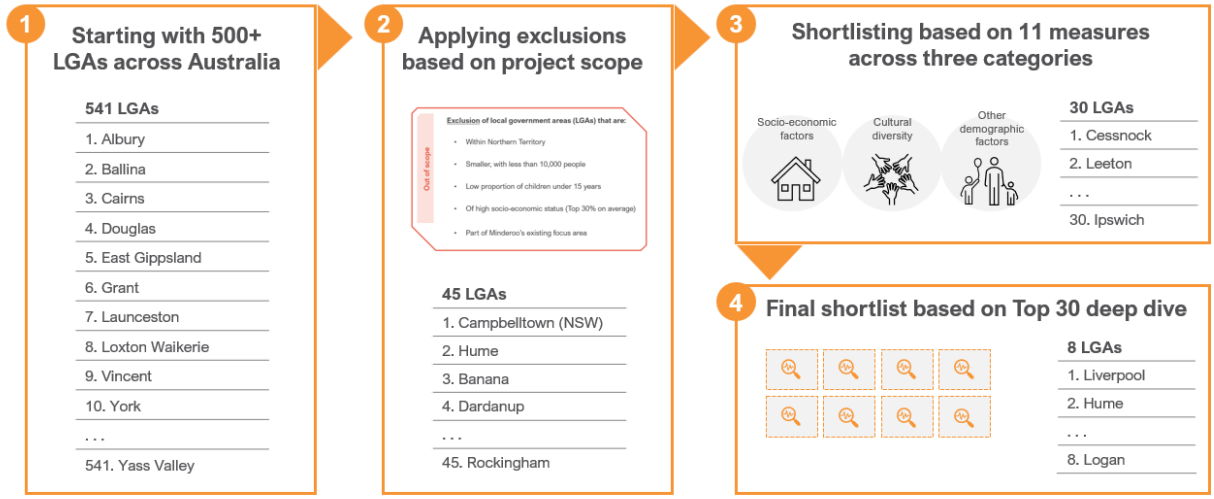
  In the simplest form, an individual requires the time to attend a community event and have the means to travel to the event location. In some instances, having the confidence to take part also matters. An example of this, is migrants with low proficiency in English.

4. Community shortlist and selection process

The key themes from the evidence review and interviews shaped The BCC's development of 11 measures that were used to shortlist the LGAs for community immersion research. Parameters were also applied based on the project's overarching goals to ensure communities most relevant to the research were considered.

The figure below outlines an overview of this process with four key steps. Notably, following the initial shortlisting by The BCC (#4 below), meetings were held with Minderoo's evaluation team to finalise community selections.

Figure 7: Overview of community shortlisting process



4.1 Defining scope of community selection

Whilst the community immersion research aims to understand the barriers and enablers for individuals to participate in their local community, it is important to consider the project's desired end outcomes.

One of the project's goals is to identify 'Where should Minderoo focus for maximum impact in supporting scalable, community-led solutions that align with its strategy and relative advantages?'. This, alongside the context of Minderoo Foundation's vision of 'all children in Australia reach their full potential in thriving communities', led to the development of the following three guiding questions:

1. **Scalable solutions across Australia.** Will the location mix enable understanding of large-scale impact?
2. **Thriving environment for children**. Will the location help us understand the enablers and barriers for families with young children?
3. **Investment opportunities**. Where is philanthropic investment most needed? And which communities would benefit most from it?

These guiding questions along with input from the project funder helped refine the parameters for community selection and resulted in five exclusion criteria listed in table below.

Table 3: Exclusion criteria for community shortlisting

#	Exclusion of local government areas that are:
1	Within the Northern Territory
2	Smaller LGAs, with less than 10,000 people
3	Low proportion of children under 15 years (below 20%)
4	Of higher socio-economic advantage (within top 30%)
5	Part of Minderoo Foundation's existing focus area

The first two exclusion criteria (Northern Territory and LGAs with less than 10,000 residents) were applied to address the project's objective in relation to scalability. Given the qualitative nature of the research and the limited number of communities to be visited, the remaining exclusion criteria were applied to prioritise consideration of communities that aligned with Minderoo's focus on families, on disadvantage, and to complement rather than duplicate current Minderoo focus locations.

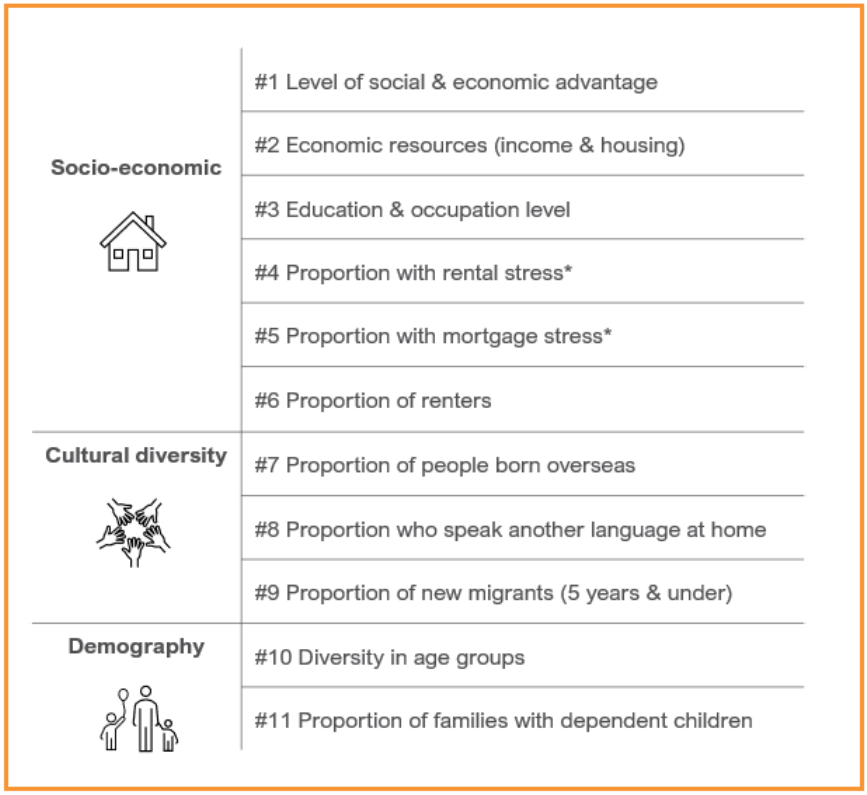
Application of the above screening criteria ensured that research locations selected were places where investment is most needed or could result in the greatest impact. Places with a low proportion of young children and higher economic resources and/or opportunities were therefore excluded.

4.2 Overview of 11 measures used in community shortlist

The evidence review identified socio-economic, demographic and physical environmental factors that can influence the level of community connection and participation. In the absence of quantifiable data which holistically captures levels of community connection and participation, a selection of ABS Census data (from 2021) was used as a proxy for the initial shortlisting process.

A total of 11 assessment variables were chosen, out of an extensive number of variables assessed. They span the categories of socio-economic standing, cultural diversity and other demographic factors.

Figure 8: Measures used for community shortlisting



Determining a threshold for each measure

A percentage threshold was set for each variable/measure and is based on a mix of:

1. Australian population average percentage
2. Figures which capture the top percentiles of LGAs (eg top 10%)

Assigning a score and shortlisting the top 30

LGAs which met any of the 11 measures were given a score – that is, one point for each measure met. Applying this process resulted in 27 LGAs remaining under consideration.

4.3 Deep dive into the top 30 LGAs

The evidence review and interviews indicated the importance of factors such as urban design, quality of infrastructure and presence of community groups, all of which were difficult to quantify due to their qualitative nature and the lack of a central dataset at the individual LGA level.

Secondary desk research was conducted on each LGA to develop a more comprehensive profile of the location and identify its contextual factors and any distinguishing features. This included:

- Identifying the LGAs history and what it is known for
- Understanding its geography, land use and distance from the capital city and service hubs
- Reviewing additional ABS data on main industries, occupation types, cultural makeup, dwelling types and more
- Overlaying insights from key informant interviews such as views/local knowledge on which areas were perceived to be higher versus lower in community connection/participation

4.4 Community selection and mix of LGAs

The shortlist and recommendations were presented to Minderoo Foundation for consideration. The final selection was based mainly on the overall 'mix' of LGAs, ensuring sufficient representation from each measure category. For instance, there were four LGAs selected with above average cultural/ethnic diversity, and two with lower diversity. Whilst there were commonalities for comparability, each LGA is unique in its overall profile.

Table 4: Attribute mix of selected LGAs

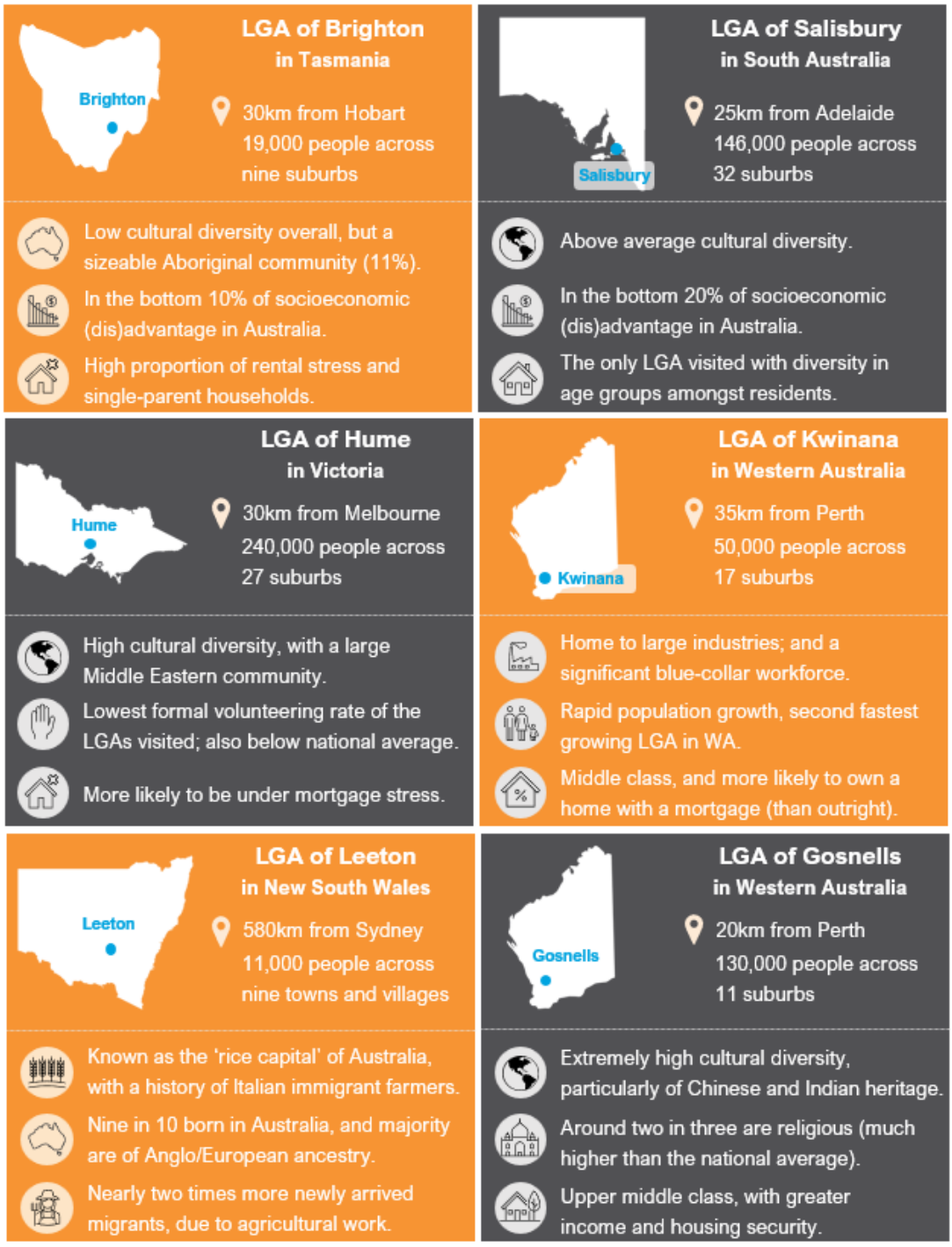
Attribute	Classification of selected LGAs
Location classification	Metropolitan (5 LGAs) ⟷ Regional (1 LGA)
Cultural diversity	Lower (2 LGAs) ⟷ Higher (4 LGAs)
Socio-economic advantage and disadvantage	Lowest (3 LGAs) ⟵ Moderate (3 LGAs) ⟶ Highest
Age group diversity	Lower (4 LGAs) ⟷ Higher (2 LGAs)

The six selected LGAs were Brighton (Tasmania), Hume (Victoria), Salisbury (South Australia), Leeton (New South Wales), Kwinana (Western Australia) and Gosnells (Western Australia).

Brighton and Leeton represent two examples of LGAs that share certain key traits but are vastly different in their overall community profile. Both communities have the lowest proportion of migrants, with less than 12% of residents born overseas (compared to around 28% for the Australian average) (ABS, 2021). However, Leeton is a regional town in New South Wales with a high proportion of the youngest and oldest age groups; and a dominant agricultural industry attracting seasonal migrant workers, which creates a different dynamic in the community as they move through their settlement journey. Brighton on the other hand, is a more stable population in metropolitan Tasmania, with a high proportion of people experiencing housing stress (ABS, 2021).

Figure 9 below illustrates the geographic and demographic profile for each community.

Figure 9: Profiles of selected LGAs Figure caption here



5. Findings from our community research

This section consolidates learnings from all three phases of our research, with particular emphasis on the community immersions and a focus on overall concepts, barriers and enablers.

5.1 Meaning of 'community' and how it is described

The primary focus of community participation in this project is in the context of geographical place. However, it was important to first explore how people define 'community', as it helps deepen the understanding of what contributes to a sense of community and the conditions and factors which foster or erode it.

Across group discussions, community members consistently shared four defining features of what 'community' means to them:

- **People.** Whilst the term 'community' is described in various ways, there is consensus that 'people' are the essence of what makes a community, without which the community ceases to exist.
- **Shared.** A second element is having something in common, which binds people together. This is most often a shared interest, demography and/or geography. For example, a sports club, an online photography group, a church group, a school or workplace.
- **Choice.** Distinct from the geographic proximity of place and neighbours, many described community as the groups they have made a proactive decision to join.
- **Altruism.** A final aspect is the desire to help one another within the community, without expecting gain.

Additionally, for a minority of people, family members were also seen as part of their community. This remark is most prevalent amongst individuals in larger family units.

It was evident at every discussion group that there was no single definition of 'community' – it is multi-layered and self-defined, with an overlapping set of identities. As a result, community participation therefore looks different, depending on which community is activated.

5.2 Related concepts of connection and belonging

There are strong interconnections between the concepts of belonging, connection and feeling part of a community.

Belonging, inclusion and welcoming

Some participants expressed 'belonging' as 'home', when describing their local community. This was largely in relation to feeling comfortable and contented in place. People also felt a greater sense of belonging if they had grown up in the area and as a result experienced a stronger sense of familiarity and assigned meaning to place.

"I grew up on the east coast and feel more connected there than I do here, even though I've lived here for longer. All of my childhood experiences, all of my family are still there… those foundational memories are there. And I just live here." **– Local resident, Gosnells**

For newcomers, an individual's ease and agency (*capability*) to be part of the community matters. In group discussions, some participants acknowledged the role of individual personality traits (such as introversion versus extroversion) and the amount of perceived effort they associated with getting involved. However, participants identified considerable external influence determined by the extent to which a community

accepts newcomers and the conditions that enable new people to be part of it. Some participants mentioned the importance of visual and social cues, such as the treatment of others by community members. Visual signage with simply the word 'welcome' also signals openness, as did the role of official welcomers at events and in public buildings.

"I think in order to feel connected to your community or your neighbourhood, you would hope that your identity is, whether it's your cultural, your language, your sexuality, your gender… That that was respected within your community as well… So you can be who you are, genuinely." **– Local resident, Hume**

Connection to physical place

In some communities, the element of emotional connection to the physical place was identified. Whilst participants expressed this in various forms, it was often related to nature, remnants of life and humanity. It is acknowledged that not everyone felt these emotional states nor expressed this sentiment. However, these are aspects which give people reason to feel connected to a place, thereby contributing to a greater sense of community.

Community pride

Pride in place was another theme evident in certain locations and contributed to a stronger sense of community, and the opposite was true when people did not feel a sense of pride where they live. Sources of pride manifested in both tangible and intangible forms, ranging from the physical environment to the culture of the community. On face value, there are some overlaps with the aspects that contribute to emotional connections to place. If any, a key difference is that pride is tied to identity. It is also often positive and contributes to an area's liveability.

Examples of sources of community pride, as cited by participants:

- Nature and green spaces
- Arts and culture
- History and heritage
- People, the strength in people
- Aligned values

"Some of the events that Hume City hosts and what it celebrates or even the protests that happen, I'm like, oh I'm glad that there are people who I share values with, who care about certain topics. That's something I can be proud of." **– Local resident, Hume**

"I thought back, what would encourage me to get involved or do something different for the community? I think it, to me, it's the place, if I can be proud of the place I'm living in or the area I'm living in." **– Local resident, Brighton**

Participants also indicated that the opposite was true of pride in community, in that a place which is unkempt and appears neglected can dampen community identity and connectedness.

"I'd drive around and there's dumped trolleys all over the place and rubbish. It made me feel like people didn't love where they lived, when I first started coming here." **– Local resident, Hume**

5.3 Summary of enablers and barriers to participation

Community members were invited to reflect on and share the different ways in which they participate in their community. This was followed by a reflective discussion about the factors which both facilitate (enable) and/or inhibit community participation (barriers), speaking for themselves and others they know. The behaviours cited ranged from attending community events, to being part of a sports or arts club, volunteering both informally and formally, and helping a neighbour.

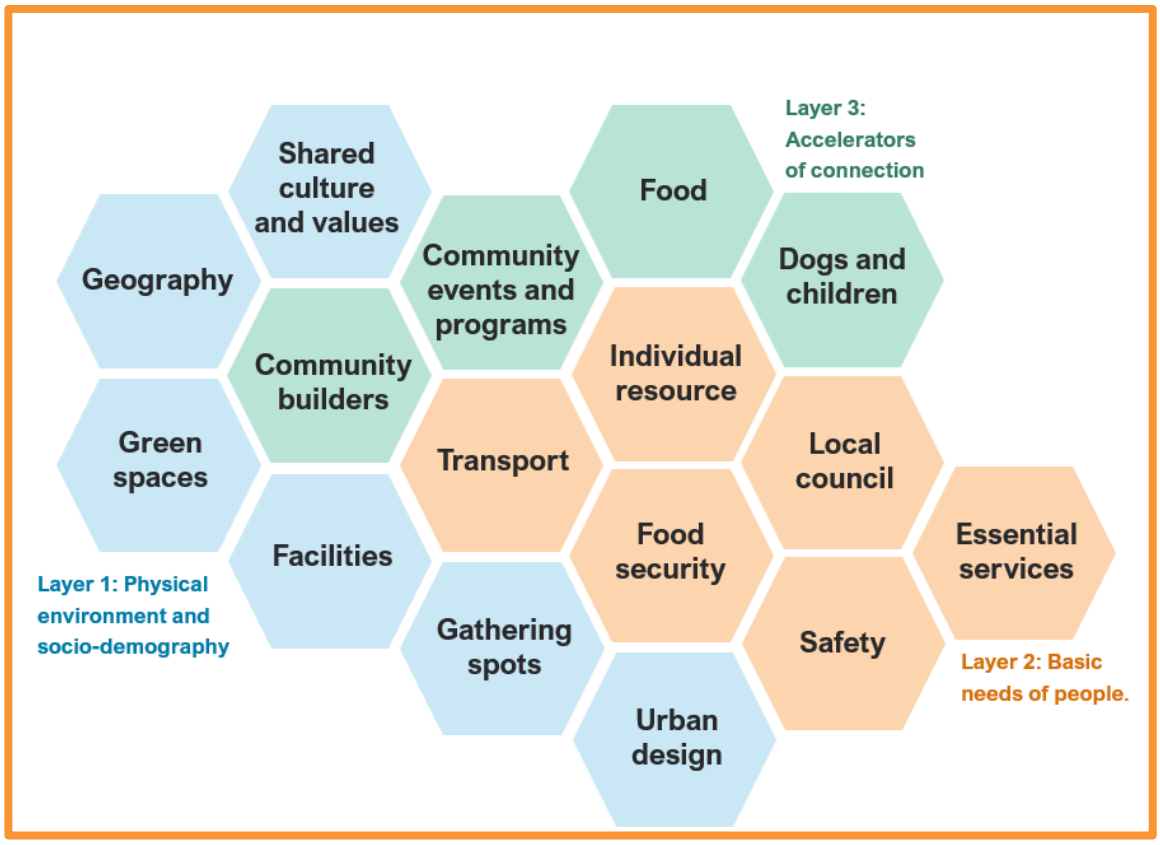
The enablers and barriers that emerged from these discussions can be classified into three layers of influence:

1. A location's physical, geographic and socio-demographic context
2. Basic needs of people
3. Accelerators of connection

Across the six locations visited, it is evident that each community's circumstance, strengths and challenges are unique. This means that an influencing factor such as geography can be a barrier in one community, but an enabler in another. In some areas, there are further nuances such as differences in ease of participating by different segments of people within the community.

This section and Figure 10 (below) aims to illustrate and surface the key *opportunity* and *capability* barriers and enablers of community participation based on the stories and lived experiences of community members across the six locations.

Figure 10: Summary of enablers and barriers to community participation



Layer 1: The physical environment and socio-demography

The first layer of influence largely focuses on the conditions of an area (by chance or by design) that shapes the challenges and opportunities for participation.

- **Geography (*opportunity*)**

  An area's natural landscape, physical environment and the proximity/distance between people and structures shaped the conditions for participation. The specific aspects varied largely across the six communities we investigated.

For example, the LGA of Kwinana is in a geographical position where it lacks an entry point from Perth's major freeway, and there was a common perception (shared by locals) that Kwinana is not a location people drive past or visit by chance. Rather, people who spend time in Kwinana are (mostly) there by choice and intent. This, coupled with the design of clustered suburbs, has strengthened Kwinana's community identity and along with it a sense of connection and pride that elevated the value many residents placed on living there.

In contrast, people who live in the more rural parts of the LGA of Brighton, where they are more geographically distant from neighbours and rarely bump into those that live around them, felt far less connected to their community, having to go significantly out of their way to feel a sense of belonging.

The LGA of Leeton is another example where geography has created more opportunities for community interaction. It is a small agricultural town in regional New South Wales, located over 350km from the next capital city. There are employment opportunities and a vibrant town centre, enticing the majority of people to work and live in the community. These circumstances and Leeton's smaller population size has therefore enabled greater opportunities for interaction and repeat encounters with the same people within the community.

- **Green spaces (*opportunity*)**

  Green spaces in the form of natural bushland, parks and rivers, as well as built forms such as ovals and outdoor parks and nature playgrounds have dual benefits to community. Research participants affirmed repeatedly, irrespective of immersion location, what the literature asserts about the positive role of nature in helping people form an emotional connection to the physical place. Numerous other research has also proven individual health benefits from spending time in nature (White et al., 2019; Jimenez et al., 2021).

  In the immersion research, participants consistently identified the presence or absence of usable green and outdoor spaces as limiting or enabling community connection, with the land itself and with other people in their neighbourhoods. Participants frequently spoke of the enabling role that built and curated forms of green space – such as outdoor parks, shared BBQ areas, walking trails, adventure playgrounds and common 'green square' – did play or could play in fostering opportunities to bump into, interact and connect with others. This wish was amplified in locations with larger ethnic migrant populations (such as Salisbury and Brighton), where some cultural groups preferred to socialise and interact in outdoor spaces particularly for larger group meals, celebrations and extended family gatherings.

  Green spaces were also valued by immersion participants because they enable the forming of new community interaction opportunities such as park runs and the hosting of large community events. In group discussions, these spaces were especially important for parents with young children and people who enjoy outdoor fitness activities.

  Participants particularly recognised the influence of green spaces through a deficit lens, noting particular suburbs in their area that lacked sharable green spaces and attributing this to the absence of spontaneous intermingling and as a barrier to neighbourly connection. In contrast, Kwinana residents expressed a shared value of connection to each other through their natural landscape and felt blessed with an abundance of bushland and natural green spaces for the community to connect and interact.

- **Urban design (*opportunity*)**

  The design features and physical infrastructure of suburbs and the spaces within them are highly determinant of community connection, particularly unplanned and spontaneous connection with others. Factors such as the availability and quality of footpaths and dog-walking tracks and trails, access to and entry points for parks and playgrounds, shared use facilities in parks such as cooking and eating areas, the presence of outdoor sitting areas and communal gathering and

bumping spaces, all facilitate opportunities for connecting with others. Communities that had purposefully designed bumping spaces for this to occur, such as Medina Green in Kwinana and the John Street precinct in Salisbury, reported elevated experiences of intermingling and community connection.

- **Facilities (*opportunity*)**

  As well as having places to meet and mix outdoors, it was evident across the immersions that the presence or absence of indoor intermingling facilities also impacted opportunities for community interaction and connection. The provision and maintenance of community and neighbourhood centres; libraries, playgroups, community gardens, cafes, meeting hubs; youth centres and youth hub facilities; sports clubs and recreation centres all enabled individuals to elevate their level of participation in their community.

  For example, the City of Salisbury has invested in significant infrastructure to create a Community Hub building in its main city precinct, with the intention of facilitating community interaction and connection through the co-location of services. The Community Hub combines a library and café with education and study facilities, meeting rooms, and council administration services for residents and rate payers. Additionally, the Council supports the operation of more localised suburban neighbourhood centres, community gardens and additional library facilities to enable neighbourhood residents to connect more locally. Similarly, the City of Kwinana has recognised the role that infrastructure can play in connecting their community and has plans to invest significantly in an infrastructure project that will see the joining up of four disconnected community spaces in the town centre – the shopping centre, library hub, the recreation centre and the council administration building.

  The level of local government investment in public facilities, particularly in maintenance and enhancements, also contributed to a sense of community pride amongst participants in all immersion locations, as well as shaping their likelihood to venture out into shared spaces such as shopping centres, parks and neighbourhood gathering spots for safety reasons. Poor lighting in communal areas such as footpaths and car parks, and public facilities that were not well maintained contributed to a reluctance to go out after dark, which was for many residents the only *opportunity* in their week for connecting with others.

  "I spent six months overseas in the UK. And just like we have cafe culture (in the city), they have pub culture. Every weekend they're at the pub or they're watching the sports as a community, everyone gathers to watch something or do something together. Whereas we don't have that." **– Local resident, Hume**

  "We have work and we have home, but it's that third place which I had when I was a kid. Like I would do like cadets and you always go to the park with your friends." **– Local resident, Hume**

- **Shared culture and values (*capability*)**

  Differences in culture, values and background naturally results in varied viewpoints and norms. Conflict arises in the absence of a shared understanding and empathy and overcoming differences result in a thriving community. Contrasting extremes were seen in the immersion research.

Layer 2: The basic needs of people

The second layer focuses on the individual, whether their most basic needs (such as safety and housing) are met and if they have what is needed to participate in community.

- **Individual resource (*capability*)**

  Across the communities, individual time and finances were significant barriers to participation. Limited financial resources also impacted one's ability to travel to a location if not within walking



distance, and to access critical services. Other factors such as confidence and language are common barriers amongst new migrants particularly refugees and those of older age groups.

"If I wanted to do say, or boxing or like a sport . . . there's a bit of financial barrier to enter those sort of clubs and things." **– Local resident, Hume**

"A lot of community costs money. For example, I've got a little pony that lives in the valley, which is great, but it's a very expensive way of being part of a community for my child." ***– Local resident, Hume***

- **Food insecurity (*opportunity)***

  Participating residents and stakeholders who run services such as neighbourhood centres, as well as local council staff, all reported a recent increase in food insecurity in pockets of each community that we visited. This kind of poverty impacted community connection in different ways:

  - In Hume, community members came together regularly to attend a community kitchen offering, where their shared meal experience fostered connection and belonging as rich as the meal itself.
  - In contrast, in Salisbury North, the neighbourhood centre reported stories of some residents being unable to attend the community kitchen meal because they could not afford the cost of the transport to attend.
  - In Kwinana, the Zone youth centre provides meal preparation skills training together with free meals for hungry teenagers, but often receives requests for basic staple ingredients to take home for the rest of the family.
  - In Brighton, a new initiative – a pop-up night café for teens – is being trialled as a way of providing a toastie and hot chocolate meal for young people in local neighbourhoods.

  Community grocery shops and food hubs offering significantly discounted food items were also thriving in Brighton and Leeton.

- **Essential services *(opportunity)***

  Essential services such as health, family and community, and education are part of one's basic needs and determines life pathways. The lack of access to these services impacts the health and wellbeing of community members, subsequently impacting their ability to be involved in community.

- **Local council *(opportunity)***

  In each of the communities that we visited, the potential of the role of the local council to enable community participation and connection was evident.

  - Councils that had invested in staff with knowledge and skills in community development oversaw communities that were far more ready for investment in participation projects. This was clearly exemplified in the City of Kwinana where strong and trusting collaborative relationships were evident between council and residents, and between different cultural groups and council. Evidence of readiness was also apparent in Brighton, where the council had more recently invested in staff with community development expertise which had paved the way for a community connection and participation investment.
  - Community participation was also shaped by a council's shift in mindset from one of services provision to community enablement. Some councils were more locked into a role that prioritised the delivery of social and community services (resourced with family and social services expertise), whereas other councils had moved to a community development practice.
  - Shaped by its over-representation of refugees and migrants, the City of Salisbury was the only council in our research that had adopted an intercultural perspective, deliberately pivoting away

from the term multicultural, and adopting a ten-year strategic plan towards becoming a flourishing intercultural city. The strategic leadership of council was evidenced as shaping the awareness, attitudes and experiences of both those recently arriving and those receiving new migrants, and the role that both perspectives play in enabling cohesive intermingling and connection in the city.

- A council's financial and philosophical support for local neighbourhood and community centres was another shaping influence on community participation. In locations where councils facilitated the viability of local community centres to do community development work more autonomously saw creative, strengths-based approaches in action that focused on growing the *capability* of local residents to be connected participants in their community. This was highly evident through the work of the Morella Community Centre (Salisbury) and their community connections program, and a recognition of the need to often first focus on pre-connection skills of marginalised residents before attempting community participation programs.
- A council's approach to marketing and communications also directly shaped residents' awareness of opportunities for connection and participation. Many residents lamented that they were unaware of particular events or initiatives in their area because they were not on the right social media platforms and their council no longer used traditional forms of communication such as newspapers, paper newsletters and notice boards.

- **Transport *(opportunity)***

  The means to get around is a critical factor for community involvement, particularly for areas with low walkability. In some communities such as Brighton, there is lack of public transport coupled with low car ownership, severely limiting access to participation opportunities for residents. Some communities were over-represented with people without a drivers' license, and this limited their ability to be a participant in community connection, as well as attend school, and/or health and community services which were often located a great distance from their local community (eg Brighton and Kwinana).

- **Safety (*capability*)**

  Across all communities, safety is a pre-requisite to participation and encompasses both physical and psychological safety. On one level, seeing a vandalised park detracts from a 'sense of community' and discourages its use. On the extreme end, fear for personal safety stops people from using essential services such as public transport.

Layer 3: Accelerators of connection (enablers)

The third layer is dubbed 'accelerators of connection' because the presence of these often results in elevated community interaction or involvement at both the individual and group level.

- **Community builders *(capability)***

  Community builders and connectors are critical to activating and strengthening community participation. They are individuals who work in a person-centred way to bring people together, often in the form of organising activities, building relationships and helping people grow. They can be in paid or volunteer roles and be in any type of group/organisation within the local community. This ranges from being in a grassroots community group to being part of a local council team.

  In each of the community immersions we saw evidence of successful community building through the work of community connectors, most notably in Salisbury (at the Morella Community Centre) and Kwinana (at Wellard, through the Befriend organisation). All were working in a restricted capacity, frustrated by the limitations placed on them by insufficient resources and felt that increases in investment in their work would lead to elevated community participation amongst many citizens and residents.

A hybrid version of the community connection concept being implemented at the Morella Community Centre in Salisbury extended into the realm of community connection 'spotters' – people capable of identifying others in local neighbourhoods that had unrealised potential through skills or character, but were not at a point of being ready to connect with others. Through empowering individuals to see their own strengths and skills, elevating their self-concept of who they are and re-imagining their place in community, individuals developed a readiness for connection with others and participation in local community skill sharing programs and projects.

Another form of a community connector program operating in Beaconsfield, WA was highlighted by the City of Kwinana as having potential for adoption in their community. The Neighbourhood Village Project (NVP) (https://nvp.community/) is a low cost 10-week guided program that builds interconnected networks of neighbours over a small geographic precinct of several streets.

- **Community events, festivals and programs *(opportunity)***

  These activities create *opportunities* for people to get together with others that they know and don't know. There is value in both large community events and celebrations, and smaller street gatherings or interest-based groups. Local councils and community groups/organisations often play a central role in organising these, as well as offering small grants to encourage individual community members to connect with their neighbours, often by sharing meals, baked goods or gardening assistance. Grants such as these were regarded as effective in helping to overcome the barriers of initial introductions to neighbours and deepen social relationships.

  It was noted by some immersion participants that participation in council hosted events does not usually facilitate intermingling that broadens one's connections because they offer a more passive form of connection, as events are often attended by residents with family or friends and remain in their 'in' groups.

- **Food (*opportunity*)**

  In nearly all communities visited, food brought people together for various reasons. In some locations, food insecurity was a motivator to attend events with free food. In areas with highly diverse cultures, food was a way to positively introduce/learn about another culture. The act of sharing a meal also facilitated social connections.

  "We do things like food swaps with neighbours. A lot of my neighbours don't speak English. Some of them are in housing commission, some are refugees. We all eat very different food and stuff, but we tend to share bits of groceries or cooking around and leave it on each other's doorsteps." **– Local resident, Hume**

  "We don't speak, communicate through many means because we have language barriers, but we share food. And it's grown to create a feeling of safety amongst neighbours. Which is really nice." **– Local resident, Salisbury**

- **Dogs and children as social facilitators (*opportunity*)**

  A common theme emerging in almost every discussion group with residents across all six communities was the value of having either a dog or/and children for facilitating connection with others in local neighbourhoods and beyond. In both cases, the presence of a dog or a child acted as a social lubricant, facilitating interaction with strangers, particularly unplanned interactions which often became familiar acquaintances through repeat interactions over time (on dog walk trails, or at playgrounds for example). Dog parks are also a common place of social interaction with others, connecting over their pets regardless of background, age and race.

  Additionally, having children fosters parent interaction through places such as play groups, library story time, daycare, school and playgrounds.

"Having children forces you to go out and be social and do things you probably wouldn't do. Which aren't bad once you're actually doing it." **– Local resident, Gosnells**

5.4 Types of participation

The group discussions explored ways in which people got involved and participated in their local community. One of the tasks required participants to recall a time when they got together with others in the community and describe their feelings from the activity.

The activities can be grouped into six categories, each of which can have varying levels of participation and impact to (1) the individual and (2) the sense of community. For example, large community events such as a multicultural festival that attracts a few hundred people fosters a sense of community on a large scale. However, it is typically a more passive form of participation. In contrast, being part of a local volunteering group is a form of active participation with opportunities for deeper connections but has less reach given the number of people involved.

Table 5: Categories of participation

Category	Examples	Type of participation	Motivation
Large community events	Multicultural fair, Fringe show, lights show	Low	Happiness
Sports, hobby and interest groups	Book club, park run, cricket club, art group	Medium	Personal growth, connection, belonging
Religious, cultural groups	Church, Chinese Association	High	Personal growth, connection, belonging, meaning and purpose
Smaller events and gatherings	Local street party, BBQ with neighbours	Medium	Connection
Community groups	Lions Club, community garden	High	Connection, meaning and purpose
Demographic, life stage groups	Men's Shed, playgroup	High	Connection
Local volunteering	Neighbourhood Watch	High	Meaning and purpose

Each type of activity had its benefits and limitations. In some communities visited, the dominance of certain activities in the absence of others limited participation of certain individuals based on their needs, ability and interest. In addition to considering a community's needs, it is generally beneficial to have a diversity of activities that:

- Foster a sense of community and group identity
- Instil community pride
- Facilitate awareness and familiarity of faces
- Enable social interactions and relationships
- Allow people to contribute to the community in their own way

A new ‘default’ system

Across group discussions, community members reflect on the ‘old days’ and how societal norms and circumstances have changed. They reminisce about attitudes towards community and interactions with people, where there is now less desire, and less need, to interact. This is driven by systemic factors such as capitalism, widening social and economic inequality and advancement in technology. The latter, creating lasting impact on ways of communication and societal expectations and behaviours.

5.4.1 Capitalism and its impact on societal norms, design and systemic issues

At its core, capitalism focuses on individual interests, rather than society as a whole. It is a system that promotes competition and rewards individuals based on their own efforts and ability. For most organisations, it means prioritising profits over sustainability and outcome. For government, it can mean designing for efficiency and productivity rather than social impact.

“People are losing that sense of the third space and getting it back is really hard. Capitalism tells you that you need to work and disregard community.” **– Local resident, Hume**

Individualism and its rise in Australia

Australia is known to value individualism over collectivism (Hofstede, 2001; The Culture Factor, 2024). Recent research suggests this trend strengthening, with less seeing the importance of community (O’Donnell et al., 2024). Additionally, participants in highly connected communities often cite experiences of the tendency of people in less connected communities to avoid social contact and regard interactions with strangers as foreign/outside the norm. More broadly, this tendency and rising social norm goes against the very nature of ‘community’. At a local level, familiarity of faces and people contributes to ‘sense of community’.

“It's a different generation too . . . if we were to throw a party years ago, even when we first moved in there, you invite your neighbours, we're having a party Christmas, you’re welcome to come along.” **– Local resident, Salisbury**

A thought-provoking piece by Miller (2015) (below) notes that whilst individualism has become dominant, Australian Aboriginal cultures continue to practise and value collectivist approaches. It proposes the notion of balancing individualistic and collective values, learning and gaining knowledge from the two realms. The latter and the Indigenous approach quoted below, appears to embody the essence of ‘community’, ‘place’ and how people (including non-Aboriginal Australians) connect with it.

“Within the way of thinking of Aboriginal Australians, there continues a strong connection to land and community, and this is even more the case as one travels from metropolitan areas to more rural and remote communities. An attitude pervades these communities that they share this land with all its inhabitants, including animals, rocks, plants and trees, water and earth. The land is regarded as precious and there is a spiritual connection to the land.” (Miller, 2015).

Economics and work

Capitalism creates conditions that promote a materialistic society and social norms around the need for continual growth and constant upgrades (Kennedy, 2016). This, coupled with the cost-of-living crisis and widening inequity is necessitating more dual-income families and the need for some individuals to work more hours on average (Davidson et al., 2024). Key informant interviews and the community research echo this sentiment, citing the time it takes away from community life.

“You don't really have time now to socialise with your neighbours. We used to speak to 'em over the fence. We don't do that because everyone's working now. I only get to see my neighbours when I take the bins out.” **– Local resident, Salisbury**

Technology, communication and devices

There was an overwhelming consensus on the impact of technology and greater 'screen time' reducing social interactions and in-person conversations. This is seen to reduce sense of community as people have more avenues to keep to themselves and avoid interactions. Parents and youth workers also note the drastic shift in children and youth, with greater technology use and less personal interactions/interest in other activities.

Productivity and technology

Technological advancements coupled with capitalist values has enabled the acceleration of productivity and efficiency in everyday life. For example, the shift in the retail and services industry to self-service where customers need not interact with a human (Beck, 2022). In group discussions, participants reminisce the times when everyday life involved knowing a local shopkeeper because of conversations, interactions and familiarity over time. Self-service technology is also seeing an uptick in take-up in the hospitality sector, as more restaurants adopt online ordering systems for dine-in customers (Square, 2025). This poses another example of the loss of human interaction.

"The high focus on economic productivity, for almost 40 years in Australia now has really demolished that sense of community in many places." **– Key informant**

Safety

Across interviews and group discussions, there is acknowledgement around heightened safety fears and a new norm of being vigilant by default. This shift has notably impacted social norms such as children being taught not to speak to strangers.

Heightened awareness of safety has also moulded other aspects of life. For example, the changing design of homes to have higher, more private fencing and fully enclosed garages. These features enhance home security but limit the opportunities for interacting with neighbours.

In addition to perceptions of safety, other research has also demonstrated the impact of the rise in crime and erosion of trust amongst neighbours (Kawachi & Berkman, 2000), and willingness to interact with one another (Bjornstrom et al., 2013).

"I was on the train in Perth actually listening to the announcements and every announcement is negative… every message was about society is untrustworthy. There wasn't any messages saying shake hands with the person next to you, get to know them and see if they're OK . . . we've almost developed the suspicion of community." **– Key informant**

Urban design

Capitalist values also shape the design of areas and places which prioritise profit and efficiency, at the cost of liveability and factors which foster community. For example, developers may prioritise space for housing units over communal spaces and place less investment in well-designed parks which are key for social interactions.

". . . that's the style of housing we're starting to go down . . . there's no open space where people go outside." **– Local resident, Salisbury**

5.5 Hope

Hope, in the context of community participation, is closely tied to response efficacy – the belief that individual or collective effort can meaningfully influence local conditions and create positive change. A sense of hope is tied to a sense of optimism and confidence in the promise that participation does lead to claimed benefits, rewards or improvements.

The ACCP research highlights that collective efficacy, and individual response efficacy strengthens when communities are given permission, space and support to connect, contribute and lead in ways that are

relational, inclusive and place based. When people experience environments where safety, trust and shared purpose are nurtured, hope becomes a practical, lived force that motivates action.

Conversely, barriers such as a lack of individual capability or outdated governance structures, competition for resources, and overly complex systems can erode both hope and the belief that a community's efforts matter. Ultimately, collective efficacy grows where communities see evidence that their individual or joint actions can shift outcomes, making hope both a driver and product of community participation.

5.6 Time in community

Consistent with the evidence review, the amount of time spent locally affects an individual's sense of community. At its core, the lack of physical presence in an area means less *opportunity* to interact with others and feel connected to place. The latter has been supported by other research on place attachment, described as a sense of familiarity, homeliness and a connection to both human and non-human aspects of a place (Zahnow, 2023). Such attachment occurs over a period of time, through experiences with a physical area and has impacts on one's memories, emotions and behaviours. The latter translates to a greater tendency of engaging in community and pro-social activities as people feel a greater sense of belonging, safety and trust (Fard & Paydar, 2024).

Time in community is distinct from an individual's time as a resource, though related and bearing a similar impact. It can be influenced by location of school/work, choice and accessibility, work status and housing tenure.

Work and school

Across group discussions, the majority of employed participants work outside of their home community. Whilst time as a resource is a major barrier to community involvement, some participants described their workplace as their community, given the amount of time spent there. In contrast, the minority of participants who work where they live, tend to feel more connected locally. This was most prominent in the LGAs of Gosnells, Kwinana and Leeton.

"I work in the community, and I know a lot of families because of that. I feel part of that bigger community. It is doing your part in that community, what you can do in that area, and making use of the services in your community. So, it supports each other." **– Local resident, Gosnells**

Similar observations are noted when it comes to school location and leisure activities. Participants who travel out of their suburb/area for leisure and hobby activities tend to feel less connected locally. In some instances, parents' choice of sending their children to a school outside their community reflects the perceived quality of local schools.

"I really don't like the schools we've got in town. In terms of [my daughter's] community, it's all outside of our area because we travel outside of the area to go to kinder." **– Local resident, Hume**

Choice and accessibility

The ability to choose where one attends/participates in an activity is a noteworthy factor. It highlights the advantage which some individuals have over others and is particularly relevant in areas which may have a lack of infrastructure, facility or avenue for community participation. A resident in Hume for instance, practices yoga and play sports outside of their community partly because it is not available locally.

"I've personally found I seek that food space outside of my community. I practice yoga in a completely different area. I do other sports in a different area. One because it's not available in my community. And two. I just prefer to leave the community." **– Local resident, Hume**

Tenure in community

Residential stability is shown to have an impact on community participation (McCabe, 2013). This was also seen in the immersion research, whereby short-term rentals and transience limits people's ability to

connect and build long term relationships. Some residents (who are also homeowners) share examples of short-lived relationships with neighbours who are tenants.

Importantly, the opposite is also seen in group discussions where residents speak of friendships built with neighbours over the years.

"Rental markets at the moment, a lot of people are coming and going quite often. You talk and get connected with your neighbour and try and form some sort of friendship, but within a year or so they're gone and then restart again. It just seems to be continuous, so it's hard to have long lasting neighbours that you have a good connection with, that you trust to come over for dinner." **– Local resident, Gosnells**

5.7 Level of connection by life stage

Consistent with other research (O'Donnell, 2024; Fuchs, 2024), the group discussions revealed a difference in one's level of connection to community depending on their stage of life, with some life stages characterised by greater connection than others. This s largely driven by availability of time, resources, life priorities and natural connection opportunities accompanying the life stage but of course can be elevated by other contextual factors.

"When you're a single, when you're a couple, and when you [have] kids, the community changes. We're talking about running groups and everything. Once you have kids, that community changes 'cause you're looking at all the things that you want to do as a family." **– Local resident, Hume**

Each of the immersion communities provided connection and participation opportunities for young children and youth through the presence of early childhood programs, parent help and support centres, baby story time, play groups, pre-kindergarten connection programs, after school youth centres and youth development and wellbeing programs.

Through these opportunities many parents of young children found emotional and practical support through their connection networks with other parents and with early childhood and learning professionals, as did older youth through accessing formal youth programs at youth centres and informal youth connection spaces. Examples included informal parent drop-in sessions and more formal Launching into Learning (LIL) programs at Tagarilia Child and Family Learning Centre and Family Space in Brighton, and Zone Youth Space in Kwinana. Early childhood professionals and stakeholders indicated the value of such programs in identifying and connecting with families of young children who are otherwise not known to the community until kindergarten, when they often present with significantly delayed developmental milestones.

Parents of older (school age) children spoke of a significant transition for their own connection and support networks when their youngest child started school, when they no longer had access to the nurturing and supportive early childhood networks that they had come to depend on. Parents and teachers characterised the transition as a new life stage of significant disconnection, compared to their early years' experiences. This was exacerbated in communities of high unemployment, where the connection 'gap' was not filled by new employment networks, and instead characterised by hours and hours of loneliness and isolation.

Similarly, parents of high and post-school aged children and older adults with non-dependent children shared stories of how community connection had become more challenging when they transitioned to this next life stage and the enabling role of their children's social and sport activities and clubs fell away. Again, the sense of isolation and disconnection was exacerbated for people who already lived more remotely, without close neighbours, or in high-density housing where they felt unsafe. For many people in this life stage, still working full time and considering themselves time poor, having a dog to walk became their only *opportunity* to feel included in their community and mingle with others.

"In this town, if you have a young child or a dog, you're right." **– Local resident, Salisbury**



"What is there for me, that I can do as a 50-year-old lady with grown up kids, that's outside of work hours, there is nothing." **– Local resident, Brighton**

"A dog park is a shared space, with shared values, so it's a safe space to start a conversation" **– Local resident, Brighton**

"And that's where I being retired for six years, went, you know what, there's a lot more here. I started looking and I get all the newsletters; you can become involved in a lot of things. Their senior stuff is really great, it's not just that there's Mary Carroll Park, but I put my name down for the dental check and it is all free. They have a lot of stuff that is actually really good to be able to go and get checked up and then know whether I need to follow something up. There's so many little things on their website that you go into one, it's like a rabbit hole and you can find so many things. There's a lot going on here. Okay, I didn't realise there so much, but now I do." **– Local resident, Gosnells**

"It's funny because I've only recently retired, a few weeks. The hard thing for me is I'm now just starting that journey, to find out what is around me. I've literally only just started the journey to get to know my community." **– Local resident, Gosnells**

The importance of interventions at each life stage

Parent disconnection, isolation and disengagement in children's learning and development was a real concern for primary school professionals in Brighton (as well as other communities). There was a strong appetite for developing the school community (people and place) to reconnect 'lost' parents to the school and to each other.

5.8 Cross-cultural connection and interculturalism

In-group social activities including within one's culture are known to have its benefits. This extends to refugees and migrant groups who often have less existing social networks (Song et al., 2025). The community immersion research revealed that connection is often high within individual cultural groups. However, these groups are not always connected to their local community in the same way. It poses the question of whether interacting across different cultural groups is beneficial. This is a topic explored in group discussions.

Overall, there is consensus from community members on the benefits of interacting with people from different cultures as it offers new perspectives and allows them to learn something new. This is supported by other research showing that cross-cultural collaboration and cultural diversity boosts creativity and innovation of ideas (Hayati et al., 2025).

Interestingly, an Australian study by Song et al. (2025) found that whilst engagement with co-ethnic groups is important for health and wellbeing of refugees at the three-to-five-year mark post arrival, neighbourly interactions within the local community was the most significant predictor of welfare throughout their resettlement journey.

"Moving up to the north, I knew nothing about most cultures. I knew nothing about most religions. And you come up here and, try this food at work and speak to these people. The more diversity you get, the more knowledge you get. And the more knowledge you get, the more connected you can all be." **– Local resident, Hume**

Through the community and stakeholder conversations about cross-cultural connection several themes emerged.

The arrived and the receiving

In communities characterised by significant multiculturalism, such as Salisbury, dissonance was evident between the intentions and expectations of both those recently arrived in a community and those who had lived there for a long time.

Many long-term residents (the receiving) expressed a high degree of empathy and *motivation* to welcome and connect with recently arrived migrants, but this was accompanied by a lack of knowledge and confidence (*capability*) of how to do so in a culturally appropriate way. Residents shared stories of having attempted to welcome or include newcomers, through words, body language and eye contact, only to be rejected or ignored. At the same time, recently arrived participants expressed confusion and surprise at the ways that long term residents had behaved toward them, unaccustomed to welcoming cues such as these.

"Things that they've talked about with social norms as well, just that that's definitely, um, a big thing to get used to and to confront. You know, the smiling on the street, the women in less clothing, the way that men and women interact, women in roles of authority and over men, um, all of that kind of stuff definitely takes a fair bit of time, even down to simple things like romantic couples who hold hands and display affection in public, which is completely the opposite to many parts of the world where we are from." **– Local resident, Salisbury**

Fear of offending was often the motivator for a lack of welcoming behaviour on the part of 'receiving' residents, coupled with insufficient support to respond to the changing cultural landscape.

"And so that's where I get a bit stuck 'cause I don't want to pry, I don't know what the background is. I don't understand visas. I don't understand any of that. I met a lady recently at a food outreach and she explained to me about how hard it is because she's here on a study visa." **– Local resident, Salisbury**

"I'm so glad I was born here. I feel so grateful and I feel so lucky to not have experienced those things and I dunno what questions to ask you. So, I think that may be how people are, and the religious differences too . . . like the dress is different. People feel threatened by that and they shouldn't." **– Local resident, Salisbury**

The cultural disconnect in welcoming and inclusive micro-behaviours emerged as a significant *opportunity* for project investment.

Impact of housing by placement versus choice

Living in an area, or even part of a suburb by placement (government housing) rather than by choice can create artificial communities and/or disrupt the cultural status quo which is challenging to the 'receiving' longer term residents. While not exclusively experienced in inter-cultural communities, the reliance of such groups on social and government housing meant that many ethnic families arrive in a community that is not necessarily of their choosing.

In many other cases where ethnic families choose one community of residence over another, often it is socio economic factors that drive choice, and/or the presence of an existing group of the same culture, both of which discourage intermingling and connection with the wider community.

From multiculturalism to interculturalism

The City of Salisbury is one of only three accredited intercultural cities in Australia, and the only one in South Australia. Responding to its high ethnic population (1/3 residents are born overseas, and 70% of all South Australian refugees settle in Salisbury or Playford), Salisbury has adopted a ten-year Intercultural Strategic Plan. The city aspires to being a flourishing intercultural city, where thriving is through intermingling between the arriving and the receiving communities, rather than a multicultural city where people thrive in ethnic bubbles.

The progression from multiculturalism to interculturalism is characterised by a transition from passive acceptance of different cultures to fostering strong cross-cultural relationships in a cohesive community of First Nations people, people born in Australia and migrants. Examples of how the City of Salisbury is putting interculturalism into practice include the provision of intercultural swimming lessons for adults (including a cultural bathers shop and culturally safe spaces for women to mix and change), an

intercultural jobs expo, and the encouragement of the wearing of cultural dress which increases feelings of cultural safety for people of other cultures also.

5.9 Digital connection

Australians have experienced a major transformation in the nature of connection and community participation as more people have moved online. This is consistent with global trends that have seen formal community (civic) engagement falling. Some argue that participation hasn't vanished or even declined. Rather, it continues to be rich but is expressed in less visible ways, such as online forums, gaming communities, social pages and chat groups. The extent to which these connections add value to the lives of individuals and communities remains to be quantified, but there is no causal relationship showing that digital media use directly leads to declines in community participation or social cohesion.

Digital and social media have become central to the way in which many community members discover, coordinate and access opportunities to participate. They have significantly influenced the patterns of connection and participation in the communities we visited and have provided opportunities and barriers to connection.

The opportunities to connect and build relationships with others online afforded to some groups were considerable. However, most people we engaged with did not see digitally based connection as a substitute for the relational, place-based in person, trust building interactions that underpin connection and cohesion.

Digital and social media are now the dominant channels for sharing information about community events, activities and services. For those who have access, these channels serve to signpost and/or increase awareness of community activities. But while digital channels can motivate people to engage, sustained participation emerges from the establishment of relationships, local norms and repeated in-person interactions.

In the City of Gosnells, in communities with active online networks, people appreciated the convenient communication but still valued physical meeting spaces. Libraries and parks were valued gathering places, even for those who were actively engaged on community Facebook pages. This mirrors feedback we received from other communities and suggests digital organising is useful for information sharing and coordination (for those with access), but real-world infrastructure remains crucial.

Overall, digital media has led to a substitution effect, in that some forms of connection and engagement have declined and others have increased. Time-use displacement from face-to-face local engagement to digital media use was reported by many of the individuals we spoke with, but at the same time, digital tools have led to lower participation 'costs' for others. That said, digital media does tend to thin out the community and expand thinner, looser networks. The number of connections people have may increase, but the quality of those connections aren't generally as 'high' as face-to-face connections.

5.10 Governance

Governance was consistently flagged as a key issue in need of change by key informants and community stakeholders, and more often than not, it was raised unprompted. There is widespread agreement that existing governance structures are not fit for purpose and are predicated on outdated and overly complex models. Tensions between community-led governance structures and external and/or backbone models were frequently cited by key informants.

Governance determines who holds power and how decisions get made. It is the system through which authority is exercised, accountability enacted and risks managed. It includes ethics, compliance, stewardship, structures and processes that shape how organisations, and communities, function. This matters because for many, participation is only meaningful when communities have real authority over



decision authority[2]. The weight of evidence also suggests that funding and governance cannot be separated.

Ownership and/or a degree of control over governance structures determines whether a community member's civic participation is worthwhile. When institutions retain governance control, communities may feel like passengers which reduces community and civic engagement. Conversely, when communities design (or co-design) governance mechanisms themselves, ownership and *motivation* to engage increases dramatically (refer Recommendation 8.2 – Community Co-Design).

Another key challenge to be addressed is the tension between enabling community creativity and ownership and ensuring that funds provided to communities are properly and responsibly managed. While some stakeholders we spoke to, such as Leeton Connect, had successfully employed a governance structure to manage large-scale philanthropic investment, the majority of stakeholders we spoke to acknowledge their organisation and/or community lacked the necessary structures to administer large sums.

It is also clear that different contexts require different governance structures, a point that further evidences the need for tailored, context specific models. Research participants expressed a desire for flexibility with funding processes, especially since there can be unanticipated issues and 'curve balls'.

We also heard from many community group representatives that they do not apply for funding because the application process is too complicated and/or because there is a perception that only certain groups in the community will be successful. All communities we visited reported that funding is typically won by a small number of well resourced, established organisations. As a result, smaller local groups choose not to apply. They don't believe they can win funding in what is a competitive local funding landscape.

"I know previously in the past when it's come to funding, certain providers would get more than others and then they would miss out. And then that it would cause a bit of conflict within the community stakeholders' engagement . . . Like we don't need to be fighting about who does what." **– Community stakeholder**

In most cases small organisations don't have the skills or capacity in-house to complete 'complex' grant applications, and/or acquittals. There is also a universal perception that the amount of administrative time needed to apply and acquit grant funding is not proportionate to the amount of funding available.

"The very places community members value and invest their time aren't seen as 'suitable' for community investment." – *Luke van der Beeke*

[2] While the need for greater community authority and agency was consistently voiced by those we engaged with (IDI's, community stakeholders and most focus group participants) we also heard that many (perhaps the majority of community members) would like to see said agency held and exercised by others.



6. Emerging concepts

The emerging concepts outlined in this section speak to emerging themes and potential lines of inquiry that may benefit from further exploration by Minderoo, the consortium (potentially at the weaving) and the wider network of partners.

6.1 Thriving, flourishing and social cohesion

The BCC became increasingly interested in the notion of 'thriving' as the ACCP project progressed, due in large part to the fact that Minderoo's vision, and language used by other established players in the space, consistently use the term. What are the attributes of a thriving community? Is it context specific? And in what way does a thriving community differ from a community that is vibrant or flourishing? Can a community be highly socially cohesive, but not thriving or flourishing?

Thriving and flourishing describe positive outcomes, but flourishing implies that a community has reached an optimal state, where-as thriving suggests that a community is doing well and growing strongly. In a thriving community, residents have access to the resources and opportunities they need to grow and succeed. Thriving communities possess the necessary pre-conditions for people to be healthy, educated, safe and economically stable. Thriving communities tick all the *capability* related boxes in COM-B.

The idea of a flourishing community adds an extra layer and speaks to holistic wellbeing and a collective sense of fulfilment. A flourishing community has a positive sense of social cohesion and 'community spirit'. In a flourishing community everyone has a role and it embraces diversity of people.

Interestingly, the weight of evidence gathered during The BCC's component of the research suggests that disadvantaged communities exhibit stronger internal cohesion and mutual support than affluent ones. Key drivers include:

- History of a shared struggle or pride
- Local champions willing to act
- Higher levels of relational, face-to-face engagement
- Necessity – reliance on others when services are scarce

The process of placemaking can be a powerful tool to help communities thrive and flourish. Blending improved physical design with social connection and economic *opportunity* supports thriving, while fostering a sense of belonging and community identity for everyone, including previously excluded populations, may support communities to flourish.

Several attributes of a cohesive community can be present in place, without that community necessarily thriving or flourishing. During our depth interviews, interviewees gave examples of socially cohesive communities (eg Jurien Bay and Bridgetown in WA) that are characterised by attributes such as the strong social networks, shared norms and values, strong local connections, mutual support and a sense of belonging. However, these communities are also homogeneous and therefore lack inter-generational and/or intercultural diversity.

In some communities there was exceptional examples of intergenerational connection, enabled in part by place and space as well as the people who facilitated the exchanges that took part within them. Examples included the Medina Aboriginal Cultural Centre in Kwinana and the Leeton community as a whole.

From the immersions in each community emerged stories that illustrated:

- Leadership in and through conflict and crisis
- Role modelling, civic values and passing down history
- Each person has a role in community and something to offer at each life stage

A final note. The words ‘thriving’ and ‘flourishing’ are expressions that are rooted in the natural world. They reinforce a commonly held motif that communities are a living entity. Communities often form organically, not around systems and structures. Yet it is many of these traditional governance structures that have had an adverse impact on community health and population wellbeing. It is notable that in nature nothing grows from the top-down.

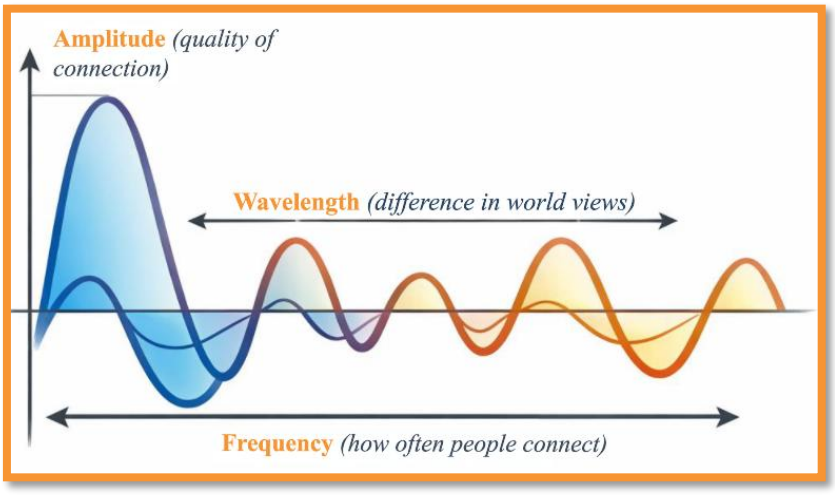
There are opportunities to further explore this theme, and ways in which this form of connection can be fostered with intent.

6.2 Frequency, amplitude and wavelength

During the ACCP project, metaphors were commonly used to build on emerging concepts and ideas. Many of them drew on the sciences, especially quantum mechanics and physics. As our exploration of connection gathered pace, it became clear that connection is a multidimensional concept that people experience, and value, differently. The quality and frequency of connection matters, and there is also a temporal element – sense of belonging increases over time.

Below is a Metaphorical Map of Social Connection that provides a conceptual lens through which to consider the nature, tone and resonance of people’s connections within and between communities. The thinking applies to digital and physical communities and connection points.

Figure 11: Metaphorical Map of Social Connection



Frequency refers to how often people connect over time. High frequency interactions might be daily or regular and might include interactions with close friends, partners and work colleagues. Low frequency interactions occur less often and might include connections with old friends or relatives. Significantly, high frequency of interaction(s) doesn’t predict the quality or tonality of the connection. People can have a high frequency of connection and still feel disconnected.

The quality of connection, and perhaps then the most valuable measure in terms of individual health and wellbeing, is expressed in this model as **amplitude**. In scientific terms, amplitude speaks to signal strength and the energy carried by the waveform. Mapping this to connection, amplitude refers to the emotional depth and quality of interaction between two people. High amplitude connections might include ‘deep and meaningful’ conversations, a strong emotional connection and associated impacts, noting that impact can

be positive (love, trust) or negative (conflict, anger). Low amplitude connections lack emotional depth and might be characterised by polite exchanges and transactional or habitual communication.

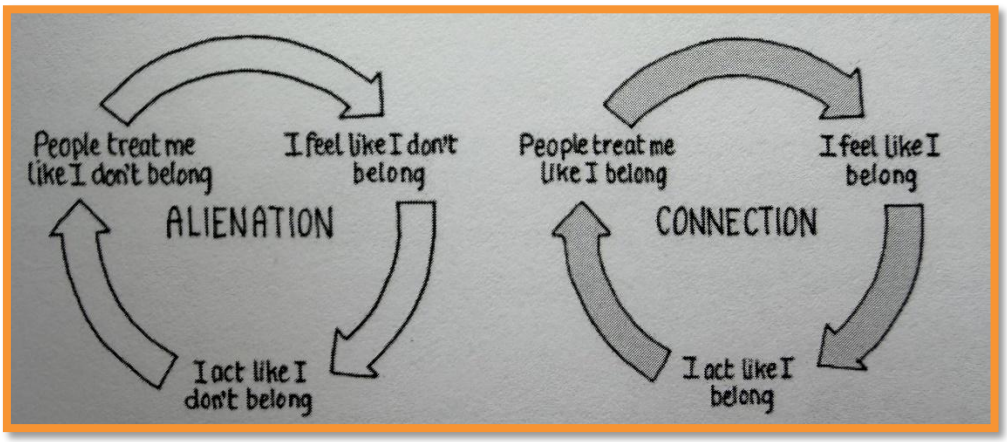
Given declining social cohesion, **wavelength** is perhaps the most interesting component of the model in that it speaks to how far apart people are with respect to their world views, values and lived experiences. Short wavelengths might exist between people who share cultural identities, a similar political persuasion or are members of a particular generation. Conversely, long wavelengths exist between people in different life stages, with different priorities. Misalignment is more likely.

While the frequency and number of connections for some groups (eg young people) is increasing, the quality (amplitude) of interaction is falling. For others, such as older generations and new migrants, frequency of connection is the most significant barrier to participation and a sense of belonging.

Furthermore, increases in the polarisation of world views across the political and social spectrum, has seen wavelengths between individuals and groups increase over time. This manifests as tribalism, polarisation and ultimately, decoupling.

A related feature of declining social cohesion (low frequency, long waveforms) is the reported decline in people's sense of belonging. This is of particular concern in communities with high levels of diversity where a sense of belonging is needed to guard against feelings of alienation. The Cycle of Belonging (Muirhead, 2019) illustrates this point.

Figure 12: The Cycle of Belonging



Connection is the antidote to alienation. It fosters a sense of belonging, which in turn leads to action, such as engaging in community and civic life.

6.3 Radical governance

What if governance was framed as a system for enabling, rather than constraining, community participation?

Current governance systems (at all levels) are structurally misaligned with how participation, connection, trust and capacity form within communities. Key stakeholders consistently described governance as programmatic, risk-averse, deficit-based and perhaps most significantly, organised around institutions rather than relationships. Where participation does exist at noteworthy levels, it occurs despite the presence of formal governance, not because of it.

Radical governance requires changes to the fundamental nature of existing governance systems and structures. Radical governance does not necessarily mean less governance. It speaks to the need for a fundamentally different governing logic that shifts from control to stewardship.

Research participants consistently stated that participation only occurs when people feel emotionally safe, socially recognised and not judged. In the absence of safety, *opportunity* does not translate into participation. And safety is produced locally, relationally and over time. For these reasons, governance must move from consultation-based to trust-building, a shift supported by funding and legitimising relational infrastructure such as community connectors and, where necessary, trusted intermediaries.

Existing governance tends to crowd out community and individual agency by 'doing to' rather than 'doing for'. We consistently heard narratives and critiques of:

- Services being delivered into communities (top-down)
- Programs and services being designed elsewhere that were not fit for purpose
- Short-term pilots that didn't hand over control to community
- Grant writing fatigue felt by grass-roots organisations and volunteers
- Square peg, round hole grants where the conditions attached to grants do not match grass-roots needs

As a function of the above, active community members disengage, frustration builds and dependency grows. Current systems unintentionally professionalise participation and 'turn people into clients'. Radical governance would see this shift with governance being re-framed as creating permission and space for residents and communities to identify their own priorities, and formulate their own solutions, to existing local challenges. This might be achieved by a clear shift to community-initiated action rather than pre-defined interventions and reframing how we think about accountability – moving from accountability for what was delivered, to what capacity now exists.

We heard that 'scale' is the enemy of participation and that participation is strongest at local level and when grounded in purpose. While governance currently emphasises scale, standardisation and uniformity, participation is local, contextual and messy. Radical governance would see decision-making rights, accountability and power at the smallest viable scale, and an acceptance that 'messiness' is a feature of a healthy governance system, not a failure.

Leadership is a necessary component of effective governance. But current approaches do not adequately recognise there are multiple forms of leadership legitimacy, and that at a local level, leadership is socially conferred rather than structurally assigned. Radical governance would allow space for leadership to emerge in place, rather than be appointed elsewhere. It would also allow for the creation of roles that are temporary, more task-based and earned through contribution and community standing.

In social marketing, a common piece of advice for those looking to encourage voluntary behavioural change is to 'make it fun, easy and popular'. Participation declines when compliance burdens are high (or insurmountable), engagement feels bureaucratic and prescribed roles are regimented and long-term. A radical approach to governance would see governance itself become more fun, meaningful and socially rewarding. Radical governance systems could be designed for *motivation* first, management second.

"People need a hand up, not a handout."

7. Making sense of the evidence

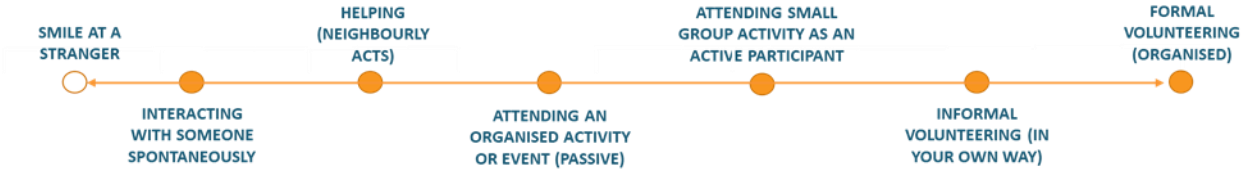
7.1 Identifying influences on community participation behaviours

Activities designed to increase civic and community participation are most effective when they are grounded in a clearly specified participation behaviour, rather than treated as a diffuse or broad goal. As we uncovered in our community immersion research and desk research, community participation encompasses a wide spectrum of observable actions (behaviours), each shaped by distinct *motivations, capabilities* and *opportunities*, including social norms and structural constraints. When the target behaviour is well defined[3], project designers can focus on the specific behavioural barriers and enablers at play and select intervention levers that are proportionate and relevant to that behaviour.

In contrast, broad or non-specific approaches risk relying on generic awareness or engagement tactics that fail to address the real reasons people opt in or out of participation. Behaviourally grounded projects enable sharper diagnosis, clearer outcomes and stronger causal links between investment and impact, increasing the likelihood that participation is not only initiated, but sustained over time.

While this project has focused on civic and community participation as a category of behaviour, for the purposes of our analysis, we identified a range of common community participation sub-behaviours (see Figure 1, repeated below), selected to illustrate the breadth of community participation experiences shared by immersion participants, which ranged on a continuum of effort and commitment, from one-off spontaneous connecting behaviours to formal and planned community participation.

Community Participation – Spectrum of Behaviours



Each sub-behaviour was analysed against the COM-B model and The BCC's Behavioural Framework, thematically coding the qualitative data from the six community immersions into the model's domains of influence. The analysis was firstly conducted on four sub-behaviours, with a fifth and sixth sub-behaviour subsequently added in order achieve confidence in the pattern of identified levers of influence (below).

7.2 Aligning influences with behaviour change opportunities (levers)

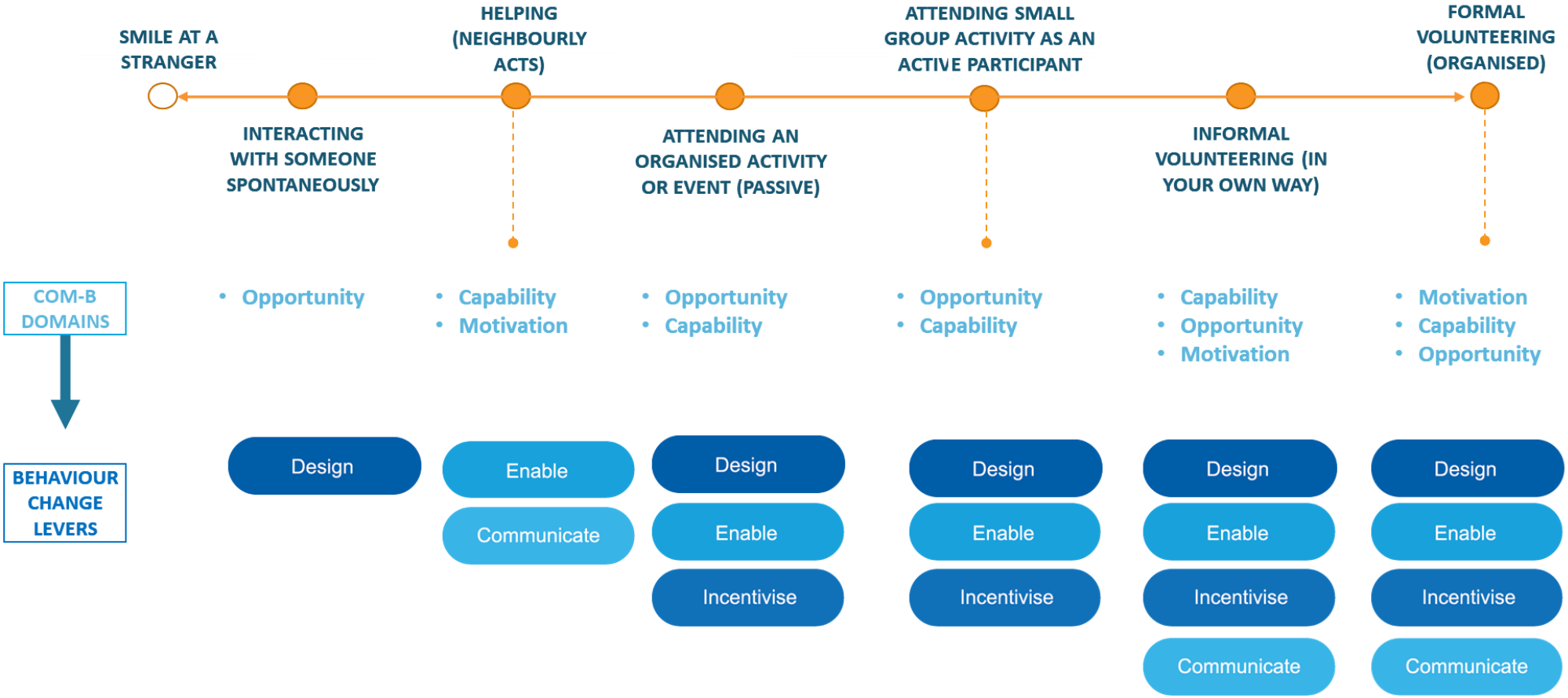
In The BCC's model there are five main system levers available to achieve individual and population-wide behaviour change. These levers are drawn from the ecosystem in which individuals and communities live their lives and represent the different types of policy and project opportunities. Rarely is a single lever, on its own, sufficient to achieve sustained behaviour change.

The behaviour spectrum used for the analysis is populated with the domains of influence and corresponding levers for investment in the diagram overleaf and framed into recommendations at Section 9.

[3] The BCC defines a behaviour as (1) an observable action, (2) by a specific person or group, (3) in a specific context, place, time and setting.

Figure 13: Mapping of community participation behaviours against behaviour change levers

The analysis map indicates that for the ACCP project, opportunities to elevate participation concentrate in the levers of design (addressing *opportunity*), incentivisation (addressing *opportunity* and *capability*) and enablement (addressing *capability*). While the data also indicates a role for communication (by addressing *motivational* barriers), we have not included this lever in our recommendations as it is not the intended focus for the project's next steps.



We conclude that the priority activity areas for Minderoo to progress investment should be in the broad areas of:

1. **Enablement** – to address *capability* barriers, such as poor self-efficacy, build *capability*, capacity and confidence. This might take forms such as education and knowledge transfer, training and skill recognition and skill building, practical assistance and support, and removing equity and access barriers.
2. **Incentivisation** – to address *opportunity* and *capability* barriers, so as to re-organise perceived or real costs in favour of the benefits of participation. This might take forms such as inducements such as free meals or events, discounts, free trials etc. The provision of 'free stuff' was a significant door-opener to attendance and repeat participation for many.
3. **Design** – to address *opportunity* barriers by creating places and spaces in a local environmental system that facilitate planned and spontaneous connection, intermingling and participation in community life.
4. **Communication** – to amplify existing *motivations* and mindsets that value community service through informal and formal volunteering and neighbourly acts. This might be a lower investment priority for Minderoo.

Through the community immersion process, over 150 wide-ranging ideas for facilitating community participation were generated. This list comprised ideas that community members had done themselves, and/or would like to see happen in their community. This list was then narrowed down by Minderoo and The BCC to 40 ideas that were taken back to communities as part of the return community shaping workshops.

The 40 ideas taken back to communities are listed overleaf (see Table 6), coded under the behaviour change lever they best align to. Notably, an idea may align with more than one lever, depending on how it translates into practice. The ideas in bold represent a top preference ranking, indicating they were ranked in the top five by at least one community. A more detailed explanation of how each of the ideas was presented at the community workshops is found at Section 2.4.



Table 6: List of community participation ideas, coded by behaviour change levers

DESIGN ⟷		INCENTIVISE ⟷	ENABLE
Park After Dark		**Volunteer fund**	**Community bus/passenger network**
Helping Hands		**Community fund**	**Community connectors**
Community Spaces		Community investment fund	**Community buddy program**
Youth spotters & connectors program		Community-owned assets	**Storytime with grandparents and elders**
Outdoor spaces for different cultural needs		Regular neighbourhood dinners	**First stop accommodation**
Park meet and greet		Neighbourhood Fun Day	Parents volunteering with children
Community kitchen		Funding retirees to complete childcare certification	Nourishing meals program
Community barter & trade			Public transport buddy
Spaces for parents			AI-supported community decisions
Library as a social hub			Community buddy program
Intercultural kitchen			Welcome projects (eg intercultural meals)
Street by Street	Neighbourhood Village Project		
Street tradition	Pop up café with rotating community chef		
Bumping spaces	Community Game Jams		
Conversation Zone	Community kitchen		
'Dead zone'	Spaces for parents		
Community trading	Library as a social hub		

8. Recommendations

8.1 Treat participation as an outcome of *opportunity* and/or *capability*

Capability and *opportunity* act as 'participation gates'; if either is closed, for any given individual, the behaviour cannot occur. When assessing the behaviour over time, or across a group of people, *capability* and *opportunity* are matters of degree that influence the behaviour.

While *capability* and *motivation* are necessary conditions for community participation, a lack of *opportunity* to participate was the most prominent barrier for most residents we spoke to during our community immersions. A lack of *opportunity* is most often anchored in structural barriers such as:

- A lack of walkability or mixed-use spaces
- Cost of living pressures resulting in a lack of available funds/time
- A lack of anchor institutions
- Urban design barriers

Therefore, if Minderoo wishes to invest in low SES communities, we recommend funding activities that reduce structural barriers to participation. A place-based approach through which communities themselves are meaningfully engaged in problem-definition and solutioning is a given.

Psychological barriers and a lack of personal agency or skills were the most common *capability* barriers. We therefore recommend funding organisations (or creating the conditions necessary) to deliver relational, non-programmatic social scaffolding. This might in part be achieved by:

- Supporting communities to develop incremental milestones that build confidence, readiness and routine.
- Pre-connection and participation skill and *capability* building. For example, investing in local programs that recognise and share existing skills amongst residents, helping residents to read a bus timetable and travel on public transport alone, or teaching them the social cues and skills they need to engage.

The implication here is that philanthropy should view participation as an outcome of *capability and opportunity*, rather than an invitation.

8.2 Community pre-pilots (co-design)

We recommend that Minderoo fund a proposed community co-design pre-pilot that seeks to co-design a governance structure and process, in two of the six immersion sites, as well as selecting and further developing through co-design local ideas generated through the ACCP project to date.

This approach is comprised of five stages:

1. Evaluation design
2. Guardrails and community onboarding
3. Co-design of process
4. Selection and co-design of ideas
5. Active pilot



Please refer to the full proposal, Co-Design Funding Request from 1 December 2025, for a full account of the proposed approach and considerations in relation to community onboarding, non-negotiables and guardrails.

8.3 Fund social infrastructure

Social infrastructure refers to the places, institutions, relationships and systems that create the conditions for social interaction, connection and collective wellbeing. It is a key determinant of whether people feel able, willing and motivated to participate in community life. Community participation is fundamentally relational and is rooted in trust, reciprocity, safety and the extent to which people identify with others.

Social infrastructure provides the spaces, networks and support systems that enable people to connect, participate and ultimately achieve a sense of belonging to the communities in which they live.

Physical infrastructure	Social infrastructure
Roads, bridges and utilities	Schools, libraries, community hubs
Focus on movement, transport and delivery	Focus on people and relationships
Typically designed to support economic activity	Supports social and community engagement

Our community immersions confirmed the academic evidence suggesting that participation is fundamentally relational, not programmatic. Areas where we found higher levels of participation typically had consistency in terms of people and institutions, rather than one-off events or projects.

As a priority, we recommend funding the following social infrastructure initiatives:

1. Local community builders or connectors (examples include Befriend, Town Teams and Leeton's Multicultural Support Group) to build hyper-local connections and support residents to start groups, welcome new arrivals, link new arrivals and encourage and support local participatory acts.
2. Adoption and scaling of the Neighbourhood Village Project (see Case Study 10.1) in the pilot community of Kwinana (at the request of the City council) and/or Salisbury.
3. In addition, long term investment in anchoring institutions should be encouraged, especially those for which government isn't already responsible (ie libraries and schools). Community hub spaces with co-located services, access and way-paths that facilitate intermingling and both indoor and outdoor bumping places are critical social infrastructure that foster belonging and participation.

8.4 Design for a spectrum of participation entry points

For many people, participation is a progression. It requires a first step, and a relevant and individually feasible entry point. The participation spectrum (Figure 1, Section 1.3.2) refers to the different ways in which individuals or groups can engage with community initiatives. Where on the spectrum an individual or group engages in community can be highly person-dependent, influenced by their personality, personal capacity and the available opportunities within the local context in which they live.

This recommendation recognises that:

- Many people need participation entry points that feel matched to their personal capacity at any given point in time.
- Entry points differ across the life course and socio-economic circumstances.
- For many people, small efforts of community participation can lead to greater efforts, broadening of effort (involvement) and progression from community into civic participation, but this is not the case for all.

Establishing what the participation spectrum looks like, for individual local communities, ensuring that it offers a range of entry points matched to peoples' interest and capacity, as well as opportunities for progression to higher levels of participation 'effort' and involvement is important.

8.5 Provide tailored CaLD supports and intercultural bridges

People from CaLD backgrounds, new arrivals, migrants and refugees face strong barriers to participation including language barriers, confidence, safety, cultural norms, transport and childcare. Bridging the participation gap for these groups goes beyond the remit and *capability* of settlement services. Attention is required to foster the *capability* and attitudes of the receiving community members as well as those arriving.

There are several recommended pathways that sit under this theme.

8.5.1 For CaLD groups and new arrivals

Several ideas surfaced and/or were identified during the research, including:

- Women-only or culturally specific on-ramps
- Buddy systems
- Starter environments
- Culturally responsive programming

Examples of the above include Community Hubs, neighbourhood/community centre activities, CaLD women's advisory groups (eg Logan model), multi-lingual newcomer welcome kits and community navigation/guidance.

8.5.2 A role for intercultural connectors

We suggest that Minderoo continues to explore how best to help communities establish intercultural connectors who help communities interact across cultural boundaries. The approach requires intercultural facilitation and mediation, not just events. This might work at individual or family level. For example, a newly arriving family has access to a connector as part of their settlement process.

Facilitators should be identified and supported in place and ideally be existing members of one or more local communities. While events are enjoyed by local residents and councils, and do have value, we recommend prioritising initiatives that support locally based connectors to broker connection between different groups (especially culturally and faith-based). Initiatives that bring groups together around shared interests (eg sport, cooking, skills and youth projects) would be well supported by most of the local communities we engaged with.

8.6 Invest in place-based infrastructure (co-owned)

Each of the communities visited by The BCC consistently stressed the absence of readily accessible, co-owned, always (or conveniently) open spaces.

In most of the communities we visited there were public spaces (eg parks, playgrounds) that were not fully utilised by local residents. Reasons for this varied but were typically tied to a lack of perceived safety or where the space was located in relation to public transport links and residential housing.

Rather than investing a large amount of capital in new physical infrastructure, a locally driven approach to identifying public spaces suitable for re-activation is recommended. Once identified, communities could then be encouraged to ideate activation activities, and/or select from existing proven activation activities, such as:

- Evening and weekend programming – walking groups, outdoor movies, bands, family activities
- Design considerations – especially in relation to safety. Lighting at the public space and on main routes to the venue, clean amenities, etc
- Price barriers – provide free or low-cost activities
- Place-based experimentation – trial different ideas (generated by community members)

Where new place-based infrastructure is warranted, consider options such as community-controlled community hubs, and invest in long-term leasing and shared community facilities that by their nature engender community participation.

8.7 Remove barriers to innate capacity by identifying and removing introduced blocks

The world we experience today is an outcome of what we have done in the past. As this relates to the ACCP project, there is an argument that social progress has led to retrogression in some aspects of social cohesion and participation[4].

Conversations around community participation are typically framed in terms of what needs to be done to build connection and/or capacity. The emphasis tends to be on what well intentioned actors can do or create to support higher levels of connection. This may include significant investments of time and funding to infrastructure and programs that inadvertently create barriers and blocks to connection.

The overwhelming majority of people have an innate capacity and desire to connect with others. Barriers to connection are most often external to self, introduced by structures, systems and processes that have overcomplicated and overwhelmed many Australians who, if left to their own devices, might otherwise connect more regularly and more meaningfully.

There are various mechanisms through which barriers might be identified, but perhaps the most worthy of consideration is retrospective analysis. Historical perspectives can be harnessed to shape thinking about future progress. What historical events, decision and/or activities have created the conditions that we now seek to remedy?

We recommend focusing on institutional and governance related blocks and barriers that have contributed to reduced *opportunity*, *motivation* and/or *capability* for citizens to engage in place-based contexts. Minderoo could choose to apply a broader lens and consider system shifts in such an analysis, but given The BCC's primary area of focus, our recommendation is anchored firmly in place.

> Historical perspectives, through retrospective analysis, could shed light on how some aspects of progress may be constraining community participation and reducing social cohesion.

Additional themes to explore within this recommendation include the extent to which philanthropy and others need to divest rather than invest, and re-create the space needed for communities to thrive on their own.

8.8 Strengthen local systems

Strengthening local systems (communities) helps build people's *capacity*, *opportunity* and *motivation* to participate in their own communities. It improves participation because it addresses all three necessary

[4] There is a bigger piece of work here exploring the extent to which human progress (evolution) will inevitably lead to social disconnection, at least in the ways we currently understand connection.



conditions for a behaviour to take place (COM-B). The approach is also aligned with Minderoo's commitment to working in place and may take various forms.

Key principles for systems investment include:

- **Long-term, flexible investment** – ideally 10-20 years to build lasting social capital
- **Support for backbone organisations and grassroots initiatives** – possibly hybrid where some funding is provided to the backbone organisation, with some micro-grants available to local groups
- **Fund capacity, not just projects** – invest in leadership development, community builders, volunteer support, experimentation and learning
- **Co-design –** meaningful engagement with local community members to identify local priorities

The most effective approaches recognise the complexity of different communities, harness their strengths, reduce barriers and create conditions for everyone (who wants to) to connect and contribute.

Another key aspect of strengthening local systems is effective leadership. Traditional approaches to leadership are not as effective as they once were, and certainly not when it comes to building social cohesion in place. Effective leadership is relational, distributed and focused on effective facilitation, not control.

System strengthening isn't just about structure and infrastructure. There is a *motivational* aspect that needs to be seeded and/or nurtured within local systems that make participation personally rewarding. System strengthening includes helping people see that they can contribute and often builds micro-successes into behavioural chains that create momentum. Highlighting local stories of agency and normalising action, not just attendance (active versus passive participation) is also recommended.

There is also a cultural aspect, in that systems are shaped by norms, narratives and a collective sense of identity. Identifying and amplifying narratives that speak to belonging, shared identity, interdependence and celebrate diversity in all its forms should be supported by external system actors.

Communities thrive when local actors have the necessary skills and *capabilities* to effectively manage and operate within the local system. Investing in people, not just places, services or infrastructure, is a critically important element that supports community participation. These might include:

- Organising skills
- Facilitating skills
- Conflict navigation
- Event activation and management
- Social confidence
- Advocacy *capability*
- Bridge building/mediation

Table 7: System strengthening framework (based on our research)

Social infrastructure	**Governance and institutions**	**Motivation and norms**
Capabilities and skills	**Investment and funding**	**Culture and identity**

The BCC also notes that pilots to trial and test system strengthening measures should adopt a learning, rather than evaluation, mindset. To strengthen systems, and to do so in a way that truly builds place-based

capacity, learning loops, reflective practice and feedback from community members (not just community leaders/representatives) is critical.

8.9 Digital connection is hybrid social infrastructure

Digital connection should not be treated as a standalone solution or substitute for place-based participation. Rather, it should be invested in as a form of hybrid social infrastructure that is tightly integrated with physical spaces, community connectors and basic supports that shape people's capacity to participate.

As with all other forms of behavioural engagement, digital inclusion can only succeed when *opportunity* (access) and *capability* (skills, confidence and trust) are present. Notably, where either is missing, digital channels can unintentionally deepen exclusion rather than reduce it.

Access and *opportunity* barriers mirror existing structural inequalities identified in this report and include the cost of devices, geographic isolation and administrative complexity (where participation requires the navigation of online forms and systems that assume time, literacy and confidence). *Capability* barriers such as low digital literacy, language barriers and fear or mistrust of online spaces also serve to block participation.

We recommend funding digital connectors, in much the same way investment is made in community connectors – long term, relational and community embedded. Consideration could also be given to establishing hybrid participation pathways that allow people to move seamlessly between in-person and digital engagement options.

Artificial intelligence did not emerge in the research as a key theme, nor were there any specific references made to it by community members. However, we believe that AI will contribute to shaping the next phase of community connection, whether it is planned for or not. It presents various risks and opportunities to place-making and community connection and so we suggest adopting a *people + AI* approach and giving explicit, ethical consideration of AI's impact in this space.



9. Case studies

9.1 The Neighbourhood Village Project

The Neighbourhood Village Project (NVP) is a community-building initiative designed to help people transform their immediate neighbourhoods into more connected, supportive 'village-like' communities. It typically runs as a structured program (around six months) where participants receive guidance, mentorship and peer support to actively engage with neighbours – through activities like doorknocking, hosting gatherings and creating shared spaces or traditions. The core idea is to counter social isolation by rebuilding local relationships and fostering a sense of belonging, shifting neighbourhoods from collections of houses into active, interconnected communities.

The NVP has demonstrated that small, grassroots actions can lead to meaningful social change. Participants have organised street events, created community gardens, coordinated local art projects and established regular social rituals that strengthen trust and cooperation among neighbours. More broadly, this aligns with a growing body of community-led placemaking work showing that empowering residents can reach thousands of people, build local leadership and improve wellbeing outcomes by reducing loneliness and increasing civic participation. The NVP model emphasises sustainability – not through infrastructure alone, but through ongoing relationships and shared responsibility among residents.

Examples can be seen in both Australia and the United States. In Perth, participants have organised neighbourhood activities that bring residents together regularly through small street gatherings, initiating projects that encourage ongoing interaction and mutual support and empower residents to take small, intentional steps that contribute to a more connected and resilient community.

Similar community-led initiatives across Australia (such as Village Hubs and neighbourhood connection programs) have focused on reducing social isolation and strengthening local support networks. In the United States, NVP participants in cities like Chicago, Phoenix and Boulder have facilitated street gatherings, public art projects and collaborative problem-solving (such as wildfire preparedness), demonstrating how the model adapts to different urban contexts. Across both countries, the project shows that intentional, people-led efforts can recreate the social cohesion traditionally associated with 'villages' within modern urban environments.

The City of Kwinana LGA Place Team expressed interest in piloting the NVP in their suburbs.



Images of the NVP sourced from www.westbeacybunch.com

9.2 Parks After Dark by Los Angeles County

Background

Parks After Dark (PAD) is a program by the Los Angeles County which transforms local parks into centralised hubs for the community where there are arts, culture, sports and social activities. Originally intended to reduce gang violence in the area (as a primary goal), it later evolved to be part of a broader strategy to build resilient communities. This includes goals to increase social cohesion, promote physical activity, support youth/senior engagement and improve access to services.

Figure 14: Parks After Dark – Activities and posters (Pourat et al., 2024; Los Angeles County, 2022)



Images sourced from Parks After Dark Evaluation Report 2023 and Los Angeles County.

How it works

- Identifying suitable local parks based on community needs, suburb-level data, park capacity and community readiness/partnerships
- Making relevant physical infrastructure upgrades such as lighting and toilets at the park(s)
- Cross-agency collaboration between local councils, government departments and community organisations, with each contributing to the program/event in some way
- Community-driven and informed activities for the program. This might mean different types of activities at each park ranging from 'Art in the Park', 'Movies in the Park', face painting to healthy cooking classes, walking clubs and dodgeball

Relevance

Whilst developed in the United States, the PAD concept has the potential to be scaled across Australia with localised customisations. The program was independently evaluated and proven to enhance community wellbeing, reduce crime and strengthen engagement across age groups (Pourat et al., 2024).

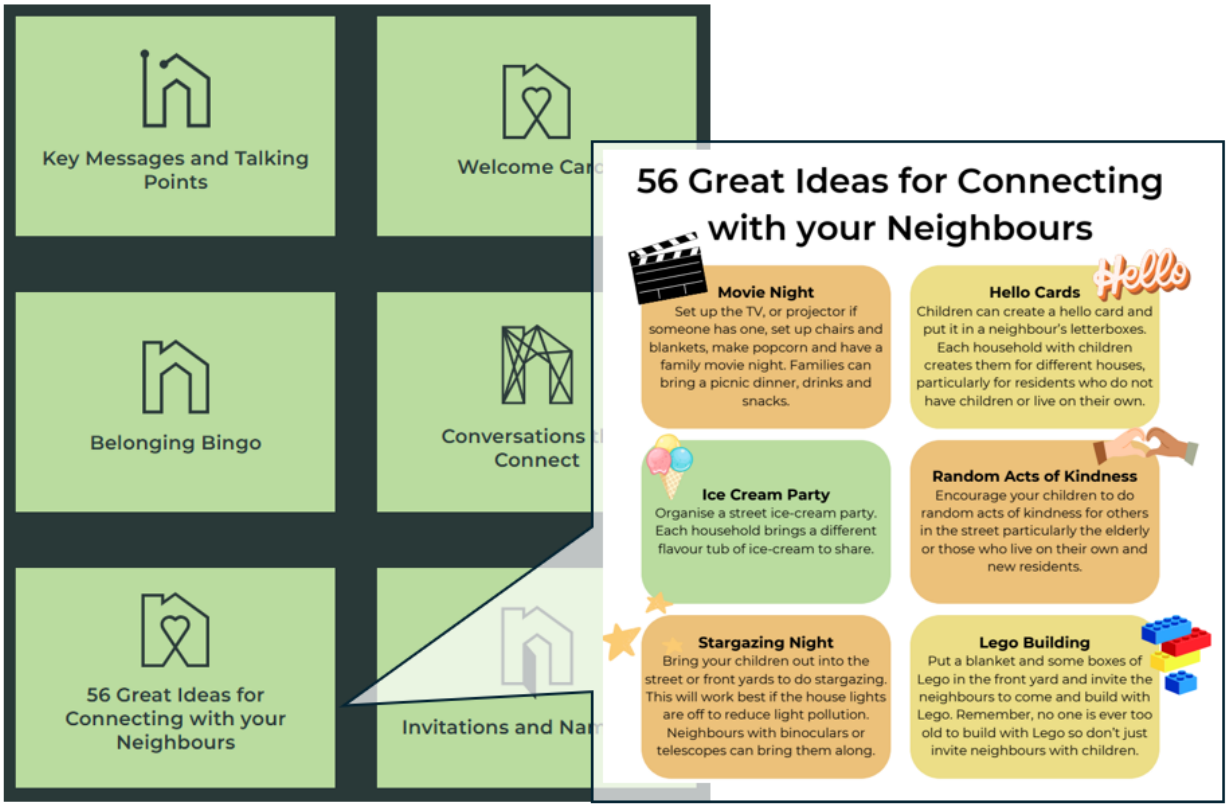
Survey data show its ability to improve access to recreational opportunities, particularly for families with limited resources (Pourat et al., 2024).

9.3 Neighbour Day campaign by Relationships Australia

Background

Neighbour Day began in Melbourne in 2003 as a community initiative encouraging residents to check in on older neighbours (Beilby et al., 2023). It later evolved into 'Neighbours Every Day', a national, year-round campaign focusing on small, daily neighbourly acts to foster a sense of belonging and build inclusive communities. Championed by Relationships Australia, the team provides resources and supports organisations and local government to promote everyday behaviours that create social connection and relationships.

Figure 15: Neighbours Every Day campaign – Example of resources



Snippet of Neighbours Every Day campaign resources and '56 great ideas' sourced from Relationships Australia.

Relevance and impact

Neighbours are hyperlocal and can be an immediate starting point to establishing 'community'.

The Neighbours Every Day campaign is rooted in shifting the norm through small, routine behaviours, which is highly relevant given this research's findings on the 'new default' way of being, deviating from the collective and community. The campaign itself also offers reason and permission for people to interact.

An evaluation of the campaign showed it successfully increased neighbourhood identification, social cohesion and greater social networks amongst individuals who participated in it (Cruwys et al., 2022). During the 2020 pandemic, it also acted as a protective factor against the impacts of stress and isolation (Cruwys et al., 2022). Additional research also found it highly cost effective as a health intervention to reduce loneliness and its expected costs to the healthcare system (Beilby et al., 2023). In its base case

scenario, the program costs $16.95 for each individual, but is expected to divert $1,171.69 per person in healthcare costs (Beilby et al., 2023).

Scalability

The campaign model also demonstrates an example of scalability across the country. Relationships Australia is the custodian providing resources and reason for action but relies on local communities and organisations to make change. It also enables partners to adapt how they activate the campaign and ability to choose approaches which resonate best with the local community.

9.4 List of community programs and initiatives of interest

Table 8 below outlines additional community programs and initiatives identified from the community immersion research across the six locations visited. These are programs which are seen as either innovative, unique or comprising elements which do well in fostering community participation.

Table 8: Community programs and initiatives of interest

#	Case study name and description
1	**Intercultural Kitchen at Morella Community Centre** The outdoor cultural kitchen at Morella Community Centre is a dedicated community space designed to encourage learning, connection and cultural exchange through food. It uniquely features traditional cooktops from different cultures, such as a tandoor oven, pizza oven and charcoal grill. **Why it's relevant:** Leveraging food as a connector, it is an example of enabling cross-cultural connection and appreciation.
2	**'Brighton Alive' community forum by Brighton Council** Brighton Alive is a monthly public forum attended by local organisations and community to collaborate, share information as well as be informed and consulted on community matters. **Why it's relevant:** It gives voice to local residents and presents an accessible way to be involved due to its 'open-to-all' approach without red tape for participation. It is also an open platform for service providers, community organisations and local council to work together and listen to local perspectives.
3	**Leeton Connect** Leeton Connect is a peak body and central hub for charities and non-profit organisations within the Leeton area. It facilitates collaboration between non-profits and provides relevant training/workshops for operating and managing a non-profit (eg grant writing, volunteer recruitment, community engagement and succession planning). **Why it's relevant:** It is uniquely dedicated to supporting and building capacity of grassroots and community organisations, which is critical for the sustainability of such groups in the face of their decline across the nation.
4	**Leeton Jumpstart Inc.** Run wholly by volunteers, Leeton JumpStart supports local residents facing crisis by providing financial aid for those impacted by sickness, accident, tragedy or death.

	Why it's relevant: Its support funds are for any life situations (from medical bills to food/groceries, purchase of medical equipment and transport cost) and are not limited to categories. This level of openness and flexibility is often what is called for and lacking amongst disadvantaged communities.
5	**WinterFest in Brighton, by The kutalay-na Collective and Material Institute** WinterFest is an award-winning community event aimed at bringing people together, featuring a free communal feast, live music, Aboriginal dancing, performances by local youth, arts and craft and kids' activities. **Why it's relevant:** Interviews and conversations with locals illustrate the value and importance of such a community-wide event and the incorporation of food, music, art and activities for everyone. The event is also a source of community pride.
6	**24 Carrot Gardens program by Material Institute** 24 Carrot Gardens works with schools to create kitchen gardens on school grounds, teaching children the seed-to-plate approach. Children learn to grow, cook and enjoy healthy produce through hands-on, creative and sustainability-focused activities. **Why it's relevant:** In addition to addressing the challenges of low food literacy and access to nutritious food, the program is place-based, focusses on individual community needs and incorporates elements of beauty, sustainability and art which sparks inquiry and inspires learning. Interviews with local informants reveal the success of the program, and its positive impact was also reported in an independent evaluation by the University of Tasmania.
7	**Neighbourhood dinner at Dallas Neighbourhood House** Dallas Neighbourhood House is a community centre in Hume, Victoria. Its neighbourhood dinner initiative is an open invitation to community members to share a sit-down meal, for a small fee of $2 per person. **Why it's relevant:** The weekly dinner speaks to the community's needs (with significant food insecurity) and was a welcoming place for connection and social interaction. During the immersion research, there was observation of people from different cultural backgrounds coming together. It is another example of how sharing a meal fosters interactions, and food providing adequate reason for people to be present.
8	**'Community Hubs' in Hume as part of National Community Hubs Program** 'Community Hubs' are located in select primary schools as part of a national place-based program to build social cohesion and connection within culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Hub coordinators facilitate activities such as sewing workshops, English lessons and capacity building opportunities to help parents/carers with settling into the community and build pathways to volunteering and employment. **Why it's relevant:** Whilst part of an established national program, the value of the Community Hubs (visited in Hume) to social connection were evident, especially amongst new migrant mothers and carers where schools were a safe space.
9	**Pop Up Community Lounge by Befriend in Wellard (Kwinana)** Pop-Up Community Lounges are weekly drop-in spaces at local community centres where residents can enjoy a free cuppa, browse books, play games and connect with others. They

	are hosted by local community builders (in paid roles) who are passionate about community, actively engages community members and strives to inspire others. **Why it's relevant:** In Kwinana, the pop-up lounge concept breathed life into a community centre that had served more as a hireable venue. It brought people together from various backgrounds, with smaller social/interest groups organically formed as a result of the initiative. This is a prominent example of the strength of local 'community builders', even in a paid capacity.
10	**Intercultural Swim Lessons by City of Salisbury** City of Salisbury launched a free Intercultural Water Safety Program offering women-only and mixed-gender sessions to help people, especially those from intercultural backgrounds, build basic swimming and water-safety confidence. It is also hosted at a facility that caters to cultural needs. **Why it's relevant:** The program stems from knowledge that local residents do not have easy access to beaches and new migrants are mostly from countries where swimming is not a popular activity. The act of learning to swim/trait of not being able to swim is therefore a commonality bonding people of various backgrounds together.
11	**Salisbury Youth Market by City of Salisbury** The Salisbury Youth Market showcases local young entrepreneurs with creative stalls, live music, food and a sensory-friendly lounge, offering a vibrant space for emerging talent to share their work, gain experience and connect with the community. **Why it's relevant:** The youth market coupled with entrepreneur workshops and the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach of youth coordinators provides local youth with the opportunity to learn skills and a formal platform to trial their ideas/make it happen. Interviews with local informants note the success of several youth entrepreneurs as a result of the initiatives. Some of them have also become suppliers of products/services for the local council.
12	**Night Cafe by Brighton Council's Youth Team** The Night Café is a weekly youth-led pop-up cafe at a local car park, offering young people a safe, relaxed place to hang out with free toasties, hot drinks, music and activities. Initiated by a local youth champion with the support from community partners, it provides a simple, welcoming space for connection. **Why it's relevant:** The idea stemmed from youth in the local community, and the entire process to realise the idea (with support from local council teams and community partners) is an example of an ABCD approach taken by the Brighton Council.
13	**Salisbury Community Hub by City of Salisbury** The Salisbury Community Hub reimagines the concept of a library as it blends new technology and open spaces with preserved heritage features. It offers bookable community spaces, an indoor café and areas for learning, connection and events, and is trialling having a social worker on site. It has been recognised for its strong sense of place and thoughtful, community-focused design.

	Why it's relevant: The Hub has evolved to suit changes in the community, thus remaining a relevant and valuable space for connection. It serves as a 'third space', a place for interaction and incidental gathering of people from different backgrounds. It also removes stigma from accessing social services.
14	**Tagara Iia Family Space in Brighton** Tagara Iia is a family and child learning centre for parents and carers of children aged zero to five years. There are daily 'drop in and play' sessions, playgroups, programs and specialist support on-site. **Why it's relevant:** The centre operates on a free-for-all approach which makes it an open and welcoming space and is accessible to everyone within the area. It also actively strives to learn from the Aboriginal community to make its space/approach more culturally inclusive.

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Appendix A

A.1 Methodology

A.1.1 Rapid review search statistics

A rapid review of the existing evidence base was undertaken for purposes of informing the community shortlist and selection process. That is, the factors and criteria to consider in deciding which six locations to visit, for the community immersion research. Table below shows the search terms used, and the corresponding number of search results and abstracts reviewed.

Parameters of the search were as follow:

- Published between the years 2000 and 2025.
- Where the search term appears in both the abstract and summary information (unless specified otherwise).
- In the form of books, conference papers, encyclopedia and reference works, government and official publications, reports, working papers, scholarly journals, dissertation and theses.
- Written in the English language.

Table 9: Rapid review search statistics

Search term	Number of search results	Number of abstracts reviewed
Community AND Vibrant	757	12
Community AND Participation	19,850	23
Community AND Connected	36,234	3
Community AND Cohesion	13,338	6
Community AND Participation AND Cohesion	1,522	10
Community AND Participation AND Income	9,199	13
Community AND Participation AND Socioeconomic (all text) AND Enabler (all text) AND Barrier (all text)	306	9
Community AND Volunteer	Data missing	5
Community AND Connected AND Migrant (anywhere)	Data missing	13
'Socio-economic factors' AND 'Community participation'	Data missing	10
'Thriving community' AND Definition	18,100	2

Note: Table above does not reflect/include total number of abstracts reviewed for this project.

A.1.2 Geographical boundaries for community research

Table 10 outlines the list of suburbs of interest for the community immersion research. The LGAs of Brighton and Leeton are the only locations whereby geographical boundaries were not reduced due to their smaller population sizes of under 20,000 people.

Table 10: Suburbs of interest for community immersion research Table caption here

Local government area	Suburbs of interest
Brighton, Tasmania	All suburbs including Bridgewater, Brighton, Dromedary, Gagebrook, Herdsman Cove, Honeywood, Old Beach, Pontville, Tea Tree
Gosnells, Western Australia	Beckenham, Gosnells, Huntingdale, Kenwick, Langford, Maddington, Martin, Thornlie
Hume, Victoria	Attwood, Broadmeadows, Campbellfield, Coolaroo, Dallas, Gladstone Park, Greenvale, Jacana, Meadow Heights, Somerton, Westmeadows
Kwinana, Western Australia	Bertram, Calista, Leda, Orelia, Parmelia, Wellard
Leeton, New South Wales	All towns/villages including Corbie Hill, Cudgel, Gogeldrie, Leeton, Merungle Hill, Murrami, Stanbridge, Whitton, Yanco
Salisbury, South Australia	Brahma Lodge, Salisbury, Salisbury Downs, Salisbury East, Salisbury Heights, Salisbury Plains, Salisbury Park, Salisbury South, Salisbury North

A.1.3 Criteria for Top 30 shortlist

Table 11 outlines the measure and criteria used for shortlisting LGAs. Data for all 11 measures are sourced from the ABS 2021 census.

Using the first measure as an example, LGAs which are within the bottom 20% for social and economic advantage and disadvantage are assigned one point, thereby making it into the top 30 shortlist.

Table 11: Selection criteria for shortlisting LGAs

#	Measure	Scoring criteria	Australian average (ABS, 2021)
1	Level of social and economic advantage and disadvantage[5]	Bottom 20%	N/A
2	Level of access to economic resources (income and housing)[6]	Bottom 20%	N/A

[5] Based on Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD)
[6] Based on Index of Economic Resources (IER).

3	Educational and occupational level[7]	Bottom 20%	N/A
4	Proportion of households with rental stress[8]	40% and above	32%
5	Proportion of households with mortgage stress[9]	20% and above	15%
6	Proportion of renters	50% and above	31%
7	Proportion of people born overseas	40% and above	28%
8	Proportion who speak another language (other than English) at home	40% and above	25%
9	Proportion of new migrants (arrived in Australia less than five years ago)	25% and above	15%
10	Diversity in age groups	Representation from all five age groups*	N/A
11	Proportion of families with dependent children	50% and above	38%

*For example, having representation from all five age groups, as opposed to having much higher (or lower) proportion of a particular age group.

[7] Based on Index of Education and Occupation (IEO)
[8] Households where rental payments are more than 30% of imputed household income
[9] Households where mortgage repayments are more than 30% of imputed household income

A.2 Group discussion outputs

A.2.1 Participant task – Ranking of importance for community participation

Table 12 outlines how five communities ranked the factors which are most important to enable them to participate in their local community. This task was carried out in group discussions and used as prompts for participants to share stories on why some factors might be more versus less important for them, and how content they are with these aspects in their community.

Note: This task was not conducted for group discussions in Brighton due to later evolvements of discussion guide.

Table 12: Factors influencing community participation, by location

Location	Salisbury	Leeton	Kwinana	Gosnells	Hume
Outdoor places	8%	0%	5%	0%	8%
Cohesion	8%	6%	8%	22%	4%
Building	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Events	0%	13%	3%	6%	4%
Safety	35%	44%	43%	63%	58%
People	32%	38%	32%	22%	15%
Transport	5%	6%	3%	0%	4%
Services	3%	6%	5%	0%	4%
Voice	8%	0%	8%	3%	4%

A.3 Idea prioritisation with four communities

A total of 75 ideas were generated based on insights from the research and inspiration from existing community initiatives. 40 were presented and tested across four communities to gauge level of interest, and its potential for being a future pilot initiative. This was conducted via a voting process as part of the community workshops. Participants were prompted to vote for the ideas they would like to see implemented in their community and were given a total of five votes. A limit of one vote per idea was applied to better reflect the preferences of the majority.

Top voted ideas by community

Each community has a slightly varied list of preferred ideas, given their unique circumstances and needs. The biggest differences were between Leeton (in regional NSW) and the remaining three metropolitan communities, where there was least overlap in preferred ideas.

- 25 ideas were ranked in the top 10 of at least one community.
- 13 ideas were ranked in the top 5 of at least one community, the majority of which relates to physical spaces for purposes such as social activities and to aid/support specific groups.

Table 13: Top five ideas across four communities

Idea name and description	Leeton	Kwinana	Brighton	Salisbury
Community bus *For everyone or those who need it most.*	#1		#1	#1
'Park after dark' *Bringing parks to life in the evening – with upgraded facilities and community activities (music, food, exercise classes).*			#2	#3
Helping hands *A place that helps people navigate life, and anything they might need help with- big or small*		#1		#2
Community spaces *Redesign public areas to create 'community spaces', improve walkability, connect isolated places*			#3	#4
Youth spotters and connectors program *Identify and empower young people to be future community connectors.*	#3			#5
Volunteer fund *Funds to pay for volunteer-related expenses – such as transport costs, meal allowance, first aid training.*		#3	#3	
Community connectors *Dedicated individuals with a mission of bringing community together. In either volunteer or paid roles.*	#5			
Community Buddy program	#3			

Local residents sign up to be a 'buddy' and is paired with a newcomer (anyone new to the area) – to help them navigate local life.				
Community fund *Funds ($) for community groups to run events and activities.*		#2		
Storytime with grandparents, elderly Australians and Elders *For the elderly to share their life stories and adventures with children.*			#5	
First stop accommodation *For refugees or anyone who needs immediate housing upon arriving in the community.*	#3			
Outdoor spaces for different cultural needs *Redesign spaces to additionally suit needs of diverse cultural groups and their ways of interaction.*		#4		
Park meet and greet *Open invite to gather at a local park – a way for people to meet their neighbours.*		#4		

A.4 Bank of Ideas

Table 14 comprises of ideas around fostering community participation, generated during the research.

Table 14: Ideas for fostering community participation

Category	Idea	Additional notes
Concept	Volunteering based on interest rather than time	• Challenge dealing with the 'death of traditional volunteering' and declining rates of volunteering.
	Volunteering reimagined: Bank of *opportunity*	• Challenge dealing with declining rates of volunteering, and structures which may limit who can give back. • A way to enable people to give when they have an available window.
	Volunteering reimagined: Focus on what people can give and gain socially (rather than just giving up time)	• NA.
	Spotters and connectors program (youth)	• Identify young people for empowerment through opportunities that elevate self-concept/who they are.

		• Reimagine themselves and their place in community. • Identifying future connectors.
	Living local, working local	• Challenge around empty neighbourhoods, less time spent in their own community and building connections elsewhere. • Encourage individuals to work they live to strengthen their sense of community.
	Hosting after-school events and activities at school	• Challenge with accessibility issues with children not being able to attend activities in locations outside of school grounds.
	Migrant and refugee settlement support	• Existing connectors' program in Leeton. Seeking funds for 'first stop accommodation'.
	Community-owned assets - cafes, gardens	• Owned and run. Can be beyond cafés and gardens. Key idea focuses on what the 'ownership' elicits within community.
Replication	Volunteering - Parents with children	• An uncommon existing concept.
	Travelling nurses	• To address lack of health centres.
	Playgroups/ Mothers group	• To address the lack of *opportunity* for parents to connect and the absence of coordinated Mothers groups.
	Outdoor buddy seats	• Placed at public spaces such as bus stops to encourage conversation.
	Clinical and support services targeting men	• Customising timing, content and tone to improve accessibility and resonance with males.
	Playground fences for toddlers	• NA.
	Nourishing meals program	• Teaching parents to make healthy lunches for their children.
	Urban farm (social enterprise)	• For example, North Fremantle members get food, education, circular waste, food boxes, etc.
	Neighbourhood village project	• 10-week program with 50 to 200 houses involved. Funds to train organisers to make it happen.

	Community connectors program	• Enabling champions in community. • Explore paid vs volunteer/community-led. • Trial various models, comparing and contrasting in each place, eg Morella vs Befriend.
	Community skills share	• Building confidence to share skills, develop pre-connection skills amongst those with lower capacity, eg confidence through language, learning how to socialise.
	Toy library – community owned and run	• NA.
	Public art – different cultures	• NA.
	Purpose-built outdoor gathering spaces (CaLD)	• Many cultures prefer to socialise in outdoor settings including after dark.
	Neighbourhood fun day	• Funding for community connection activities, eg verge makeovers, street BBQs.
	Intercultural swimming lessons for adults	• NA.
	Child-free programs for parents	• Stressful school holidays.
	Community bus/passenger network, for first timers	• This is a feature from an existing support program.
	Welcome projects (eg intercultural lunches and dinners)	• Connection over food.
	Health hub and connections to key facilities in town centre	• Council provision of land, source funding to develop health hub and connection of key places within the area.
	Spaces for parents to connect	• A place that both parents and children can find enjoyable, acknowledging parents' mental health.
	New public realm infrastructure – redesigning spaces that develop	• For example, Medina carpark greenspace.

	connections and links isolated spaces	
	Intercultural kitchen	• Eg Morella. • Different cooktops.
	Community kitchen (social enterprise)	• Linked to urban farms and parent cooking sessions. • Can be used to run commercial meal preparation training/certificates. • Kwinana example includes parents staying after kindergarten drop off to make school lunches.
	Park meet and greet	• Open invitation to everyone in the suburb, gathering at a local park as an *opportunity* to meet your neighbour. Example from Neighbourhood Watch program in City of Gosnells.
	Community investment fund	• No-interest loan for impact investment (gap funding).
	Family/community hubs in known 'safe spaces'	• Eg existing community hub model in schools. • Programs in schools for parents and carers.
	Community trading	• Exchange of goods and services in a community market rather than dollars. • Facilitates a different nature of connection. This is about what the act elicits.
	Volunteer/ community fund	• Funding to support volunteers' basic costs, eg obtaining police clearance, transport/travel, meal allowance, etc. • Reducing cost barriers to community groups who want to run events/activities.
	'Helping hands' holistic support hub	• Examples include the jumpstart model and Banksia gardens. • Challenge amongst vulnerable groups with a need for support around navigating life.
	Letterbox drop card series	• Prompts and nudges for neighbourly connections.
	Local human library	• Regular initiative at a local library. A way for residents to meet and have conversations with others, learn about their life stories. There could be a 'theme' for the month/grouped by genre.
	Community notice boards	• Some people miss out on volunteering and participating in community activities due to lack of

		information or access to information. Noticeboards can be done via social media and/or physical boards within parks and shopping centres.
	Community competition	• Brings community together and facilitates healthy competition. Eg best cake or best jam.
	Free local community fitness groups	• Walking club/run club, yoga in the park.
	Display of teddy bears in front yard	• Choosing a visual act as a sign of community for whatever reason/purpose.
	'Bin Art Day' – community event to paint bins	• Activity where community comes together to do something. • Fosters sense of connection.
	Lighting	• Improving safety, increasing foot traffic, social interaction, enhancing vibrancy of neighbourhoods. • Can also create a social hub/meeting place for people to connect.
	Street traditions	• Part of creating a sense of identity and community. Eg Christmas decorations out every year, Kwinana lolly run.
	Introducing 'play streets'	• Using a quiet residential street for kids (and adults) to play in. This can also be a way for people to connect with their neighbours.
	Inclusive social sporting groups in community	• Anyone in community (all ages, gender) can play.
Revised replication	Street by street	• Neighbours on a street coming together to revitalise their street (eg clean ups, planting, social activities such as sharing food).
	Community café run by locals and daily meals by community chef.	• Can be placed anywhere central in neighbourhood. • Staffed by community members who can learn barista skills and running of the café. • Funds are reinvested in the community and/or café itself. • Rotating meals cooked by a community member. Eg every Tuesday a single meal is on the menu. This meal could be from different cultures and have a story behind it.
	Community buddy program	• For migrants, refugees, and any new community members including those to an area from interstate.

		• Involves local residents signing up to a 'buddy' and getting matched with a new member.
Localised replication	Parks after dark	• Bringing parks to life in the evening. • Level of consistency (eg every weekend in Spring). • Involves upgrading relevant park facilities (eg improve lighting, cleanliness, maintenance, etc). • Has localised programs from exercise classes to concerts. • Encourages people to get to know their neighbours. • Background: program developed within several parks in LA, proven to create safe space, improve cohesion, and health and wellbeing benefits.
	Community game jams	• Immersive event for community members to get together to create a game – https://itch.io/jam/cultural-heritage-game-jam
	Community street art (eg mural, fencing, etc)	• Community coming together to create something to revitalise their street. • Acts as a symbol of 'community pride' and togetherness. • Choosing a form where individual community members are represented in the art in any way.
Amplification	Bumping spaces	• Amending existing facilities and outdoor spaces, especially green spaces.
	Libraries as a social hub	• Potential to transform libraries into a third place – presence of cafes, warm interior, etc.
	Community gardens	• Leverage existing and looking at creating additional programs, cooking meals, etc.
	Community dialogue	• Facilitated community dialogue on various topics. • Aims to build empathy, understanding and sense of commonality.
	Leo club (or equivalent)	• Seeding the next generation. • Challenge around less Lions Clubs and tradition of civic participation. • Aims to encourage children to adopt the mindset of giving back to their community.
Radical	Bike jump track at every corner	• 20 minutes apart, a space on every corner.
Mildly radical	Simple drawing on the ground in public spaces to	• Novelty nudge.



	signify a 'conversation zone'	• Stepping onto the area can signify can open invite to connect/chat with others.
	Regular neighbourhood dinners	• Weekly or bi-weekly dinners that foster connection and are open to all. • Test the value of ongoing events rather than 'one-offs'.
Somewhat innovative	Funding retirees to complete childcare certification	• Shortage of early childhood educators. • *Opportunity* for intergenerational connection.
Mildly innovative	Storytime with grandparents' life stories	• Storytime equivalent, where the elderly share their life stories to kids.
	Gift unlocked with a neighbour	• Providing something that can only be shared with a neighbour/someone in the community. Eg a cafe voucher, free plants.



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