NATIONAL INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS AGENCY INDIGENOUS VOICE CO-DESIGN PROCESS

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"DON'T DO ANYTHING FOR ME WITHOUT ME."

—CARNARVON COMMUNITY CONSULTATION
SESSION SUMMARY, APRIL 2021

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INTRODUCTION

In Australia, like in Canada, the Indigenous people are a minority constituting less than 3% of the population. Because of that, the Indigenous people have been underrepresented in policy and law-making. The problem was put on the political agenda bluntly in the early 2010s.

A series of inquiries by official bodies, followed by public consultations, culminated in the idea of the Indigenous Voice, which was endorsed in 2017. By the Voice, it is meant a representative body through which the Indigenous peoples can engage in decision-making that affected their rights.

But what exactly should the Voice be? Who is to speak and who is to listen? What are the powers of the Voice and where should they be entrenched?

To address these questions, in 2019, the Australian Government launched a special design-driven policy-making process, labeled as the Indigenous Voice co-design.

"THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE HAVE BEEN UNDERREPRESENTED IN POLICY AND LAW-MAKING."

WHAT IS A POLICY CO-DESIGN?

Co-design draws on established traditions of participatory design which embrace various forms of citizens' involvement in the public sector.

However, co-design goes far beyond seeking feedback from target groups to high-level engagement. For example, public hearings on a ready-made solution are a form of public engagement, but they do not amount to a collaboration or a partnership, as shown in Figure 1.
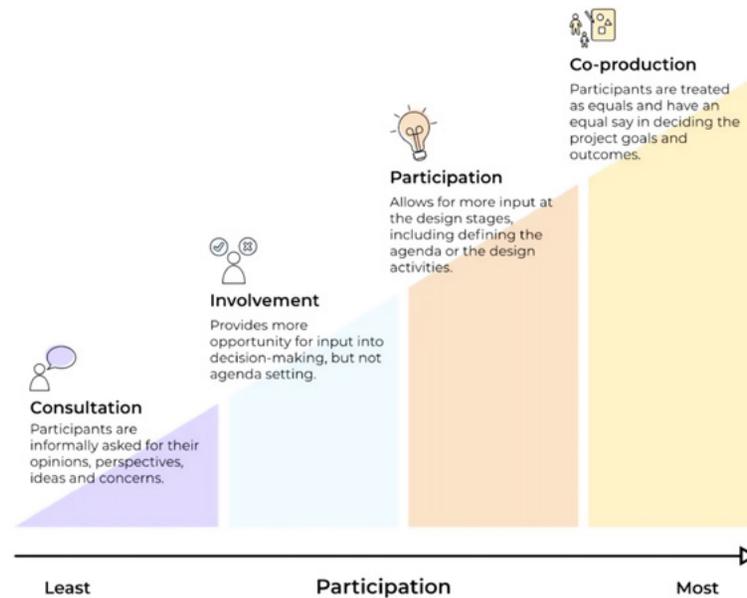

Co-production
Participants are treated as equals and have an equal say in deciding the project goals and outcomes.

Participation
Allows for more input at the design stages, including defining the agenda or the design activities.

Involvement
Provides more opportunity for input into decision-making, but not agenda setting.

Consultation
Participants are informally asked for their opinions, perspectives, ideas and concerns.

Least   **Participation**   Most

Figure 1. The Stages of Co-Design
Source: The difference between co-design and participatory design

This approach relies on creative methodologies to foster innovation. It finds its application in tackling complex problems that lack clear definition and require citizen involvement for problem framing.
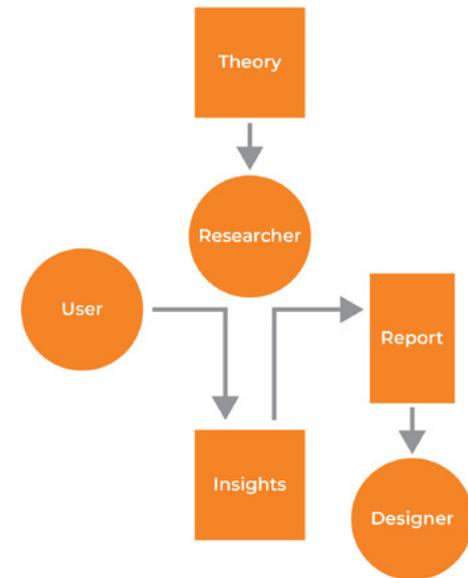
Under this methodology, citizens are not mere participants in the design process; they are empowered to make decisions and take ownership of the outcomes. This elevated role of stakeholders sets co-design apart from traditional human-centered design. While human-centered design focuses on designing for citizens, co-design emphasizes designing with them.

This strategy revolves around citizen engagement, granting them both decision-making authority and a sense of ownership. In contrast to conventional design, where a designated designer or a team of experts typically leads the process, this framework considers everyone involved as experts in their own right, thus fostering inclusivity and equality within the design team. Figure 2 outlines this open, co-creative approach ensures that policies are crafted to align with people's needs and experiences.

This design thinking method represents one of the most intricate aspects of design thinking, as it aspires to shape the entire governance system, transcending mere public service delivery.

The essence of policy co-design lies in recognizing marginalized communities not as a burden but as a creative force, capable of shaping their own futures. In this context, co-design emerges as a means for achieving justice through design.
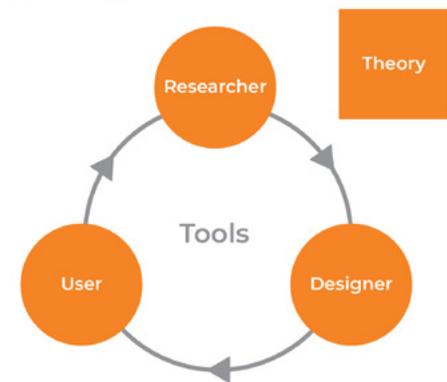

Figure 2. Roles In The Design Process—Classical Verses Co-Design

THE BENEFITS OF CO-DESIGN

DEFINE

Co-design enriches the evidence base of policy. It gives an accurate insight into the problems that need to be addressed in policy. It also helps better understand which means would effectively address those problems.

IDEATE.

The innovative and imaginative aspects of co-design stimulates idea generation, particularly beneficial when dealing with complex issues lacking straightforward solutions.

CREATE

Through entrusting citizens with ownership of policymaking outcomes, co-design establishes a collaborative and trust-based relationship between the government and communities. This, in turn, fosters greater public endorsement of a policy and streamlines its implementation.

"CO-DESIGN ESTABLISHES A COLLABORATIVE AND TRUST-BASED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES"

DESIGN COMPETENCIES

PARTICIPATORY MINDSET VS. EXPERT MINDSET

In co-design, it is assumed that everyone is creative, and that every person is an expert in their own lived experiences. Policy experts' specific knowledge of the subject matter is important, but peoples' experience is important as well. A shift in the locus of responsibility and control is needed to achieve true shared decision-making. Figure 3 demonstrates how these unique expertises work together.

CO-DESIGN TOOLBOX

From a practical perspective, co-design is a set of practical tools that support the traditional deliberative process. Different methods help reveal non-verbal, holistic, intuitive, or emotional knowledge, from policy mapping to game plays. Service design approaches are adapted to the peculiarities of policy design. Not only public servants themselves need to be equipped with a design toolbox.

EDUCATOR AND FACILITATOR

Public servants need to achieve a shift in their expert mindset, build strategic patience and master the co-design toolbox with the help of a skilled designer.

The citizens also need access to the support and capacities that allow them to effectively engage in the co-design process.

In some cases, a designer would also play the role of facilitator of communication between policy experts, communities and stakeholders.

Figure 3. The Stages of Co-Design
Concept Source: Getting Started with Policy Co-design, British Council

INDIGENOUS VOICE CO-DESIGN METHODOLOGY

OVERVIEW

According to the iterative nature of design, the Indigenous Voice co-design process was broken into stages.

In the preliminary stage, the objective of creating the Voice was envisioned, and the policy intent was drafted.

The first stage of the co-design process itself was the work of co-design groups which resulted in the policy blueprint, or Interim Report.

In the second stage of the co-design process, massive consultations with communities were held. The feedback from people allowed co-design groups to refine their findings in the Interim Report and provide the Final Report, or the policy white paper, to the Australian Government.

CO-DESIGN GROUPS

Stage one of the process, spanning January to October 2020, saw 52 Australians from across the country come together in three co-design groups to develop proposals for the Indigenous Voice. Figure 4 illustrates what these groups may look like. Two co-design groups focused on local and regional, and national levels of the Voice, respectively. The Senior Advisory Group provided overarching guidance and feedback. The co-design members were appointed by the Government on a non-partisan basis, according to the criteria of cultural leadership and expertise in Indigenous advocacy.
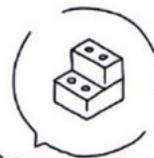

Implement and Learn
Are we 'biodegrading' as conveners?
What messages are we getting, and how do we learn from them?

Build the Conditions
Are we the right people for this work?
Is it needed? What's in it for others?
Who are we working with?
What matters to them? Who can take part?

Test and Refine
What appears promising in the context?

Immerse and Align
Should we be doing this?
What do we already know?
Who should we partner with?
Where are the gaps??

Design
How do we build on what is already strong??

Discover
What is happening in the context?
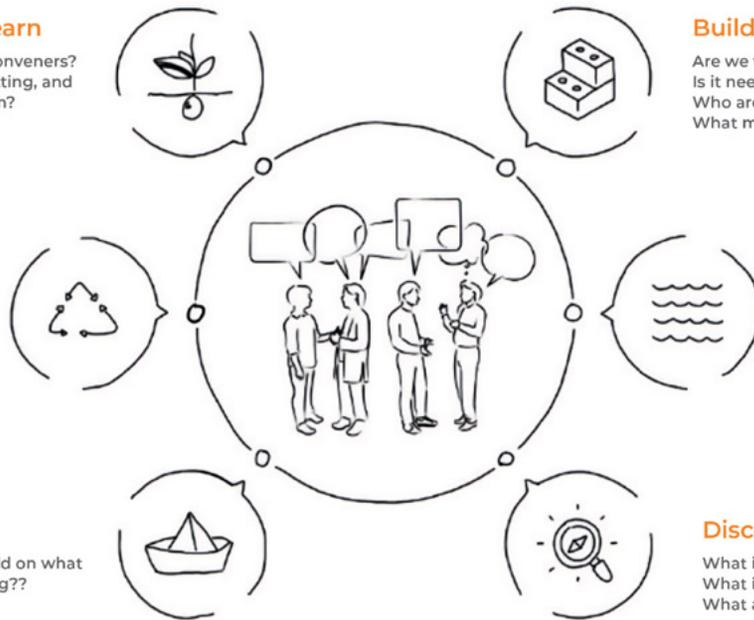What is already strong?
What are people longing for?

Figure 4. A Co-Design Process
Source: Beyond Sticky Notes, KA McKercher

The majority of the co-design members were Indigenous people. Within the co-design groups, Indigenous members collaborated with policy experts who represented the state and discussed their own lived experiences and analysis of current and historical models of Indigenous representation, as well as traditional policy evidence presented by policy experts.

In addition to the co-design groups, a Senior Officials Group was assigned to represent the regional and local authorities and to oversee the co-design process from each jurisdiction's perspective. Thus, collaboration was held inside the groups as well as between them.

Collaborative elements of the process at this stage included a combination of group discussions, one-on-one pre- and post-meeting discussions, and individual written contributions. In between full meetings of each co-design group, several smaller working groups met to consider particular topics in further detail. Each group had autonomy in defining its policy principles and procedure.

The Government provided secretarial and otherwise support to co-design groups. $ 7,3 million was allocated in the budget for the co-design process.

The structured, yet unrestrained, facilitated dialogue between co-design members allowed for deliberation of all contradicting views. As a result, the co-design members agreed on several options for the Voice design, which were ready to be presented to the communities.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Shared decision-making

Unlike traditional public consultations, the consultation stage in the co-design process was to retrieve people's opinions on several options, rather than on a ready-made solution.

Partnership takes time

Essential co-design requirements are meticulous planning and giving the communities enough time for thoughtful consideration of discussion materials. Therefore, the plan for stage two was outlined in the Interim Report, and the whole consultation process took four months, from December 2020 to March 2021.

Demystifying complex issues by design

To support public engagement, a number of materials were prepared, like discussion papers, online materials and printouts, video and audio materials in English, Indigenous and other languages.

To make proposals on the Voice accessible and interesting to people, the co-design process used non-verbal forms of communication, especially infographics in posters and fact sheets.

For the co-design members and local leaders to support discussions in the communities, a facilitator pack was provided, including a conversation guide and a presentation template.

This link provides an example of a youth-focused flyer summarizing detail from interim report : Indigenous Voice Co-design Process Final Report

Increasing awareness

What is different about co-design in comparison with ordinary public consultation, is that special effort is being put to ensure that community engagement is not a "tick box exercise" for public officials. In co-design, the government really wants to hear from citizens.

To increase public awareness, the information about upcoming engagement activities was advertised broadly through the Voice website, radio, local media outlets, social media, educational institutions, notice boards and community leaders.

Co-design members promoted the avenues to provide feedback on the Voice proposals through various media, including more than 40 interviews.

Diverse avenues for dialogue between the state and the people

Offering many ways for people to express themselves is essential for the co-design project. Co-design doesn't rely only on writing, slideshows, and reports. Visual, kinaesthetic and oral approaches are as much important, as they facilitate self-discovery and move people from meeting participants to active partners.

In the Indigenous Voice co-design process, several mechanisms were used to reach audiences, including—

> ► Facilitated discussions.
>
> There were 115 community sessions in 67 locations across Australia with 2607 participants, 95 % of whom were Indigenous people. These sessions enabled people to hear directly from co-design members about the Voice proposals and to have genuine conversations about how the proposals might work in practice.

Figure 6. Public Consultation And Engagement
Source: Indigenous Voice Co-design Process Final Report

Sessions were planned and organized with consideration of logistics, weather and other conditions that affect community involvement. What is most important, session planning was respectful of local cultural protocols. For example, in some Indigenous communities, separate sessions were conducted for men and women.

Also, there were 124 stakeholder meetings with 1280 participants. These were organized to hear from selected individuals, peak bodies and organizations.

Discussions were facilitated by the co-design members and formally documented to help revise proposals from the communities.

▶ Webinars, 13 in total with 1486 participants.

▶ Submission through the website, 2978 in total.

Submissions were open to everyone, including citizens, businesses, academic institutions, not-for-profit organizations, and state bodies.

According to the open policy-making principles, the submissions were publicly available on the Voice website.

▶ Survey—1127 survey responses were submitted and analyzed.

▶ Freestyle.

To invoke design thinking, people were encouraged to make creative input, like artwork or storytelling, either as a submission or as a part of a real-time discussion on social media.

Prototype and test

The feedback from consultation sessions was a form of testing the Interim report viewed as a policy prototype.

Reaching an agreement

The co-design members met regularly to monitor the consultation stage. Upon its accomplishment, they considered the feedback and deliberated the final proposal. On each issue, the co-design groups came to either a consensus or a clear majority view.

Building public service design capacity

To develop the cross-cultural capability of public servants, the special framework called the Footprints was applied. The Footprint is a self-directed learning program that supported staff to build and strengthen their knowledge and understanding of Indigenous cultures and peoples to effectively engage with them.

The user-centric approach was built into the learning experiences which varied from seminars and quizzes to discussion groups to secondments—small co-design projects where public servants could engage with Indigenous peoples to contribute to Indigenous-led initiatives.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the co-design process, a Final Report was delivered to the Australian Government. It set out the design of the Voice on national, regional, and local levels in great detail.

The richness of communication in co-design groups, between them, and between them and communities and stakeholders, helped to clarify the structure and the functions of the proposed bodies. It also allowed to melt the ice of distrust in Indigenous people's attitudes toward the state.

The final proposal itself enshrined the principles of co-design. For instance, the communities should have determined the implementation pace and governance structures for the Local and Regional Voices. Moreover, it was decided that the target of the Voice should be shared decision-making. One framework for such collaboration could be a partnership table between the government and the Voice.

Co-design doesn't mean that government can always deliver community's expectations. But it helps to make clear what are these expectations and how can the government address them in the best possible way.

"CO-DESIGN DOESN'T MEAN THAT GOVERNMENT CAN ALWAYS DELIVER COMMUNITY'S EXPECTATIONS. BUT IT HELPS TO MAKE CLEAR WHAT ARE THESE EXPECTATIONS AND HOW CAN THE GOVERNMENT ADDRESS THEM IN THE BEST POSSIBLE WAY."

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DEDICATED TO DESIGN THINKING METHODOLOGIES AND PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF WHAT CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED

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WHAT WE DO

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