



Community Sector Public consultation
Community Cohesion Branch
Department of Social Services
71 Athllon Drive
Greenway ACT 2900

By email: CSAGSecretariat@dss.gov.au

6 November 2023

A Stronger, More Diverse and independent Community Sector

I write to you on behalf of The Possibility Partnership, a growing multi-partner, sector-led collaboration between not-for-profit community service organisations, government, philanthropy and business.

We commend the Australian Government on the release of the *A stronger, more diverse and independent community sector Issues Paper*. This consultation process is a welcome recognition of the importance of the community sector in contributing to individual wellbeing and to flourishing communities.

The Issues Paper rightly recognises the importance of meaningful working partnerships between the sector and government. We strongly support this ambition and believe that it is central to creating a cycle of knowledge sharing and continuous improvement which connects the understanding of local communities and providers with higher-level policy, program and resourcing decision making.

We also strongly endorse the recognition within the *Issues Paper* that people are experts in their own lives and policies and programs should be co-produced alongside people with relevant lived experiences. This recognition is critical to creating a system which is informed by the voices of people whose lives are most impacted by policy and program design and reform. This is especially important in regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, given the persistent disproportion between indigenous and non-indigenous outcomes.

We believe that this *Issues Paper* presents an opportunity to fundamentally rethink how engagement occurs between all players in the human service system, including the Australian Government, other governments, community sector organisations, researchers, place-based organisations and the individuals and families who we all seek to support.

Current practices tend to emphasise submissions and one-sided conversations. These favour direct participation by a relatively narrow range of stakeholders, principally professionals working in relatively large organisations which have the capability to engage in formal and abstract processes. To this extent, they tend to exclude both community members and place-based organisations which hold the local knowledge and expertise which is essential to building more effective programs, policies and systems.

In other words, current practices disfavour the type of partnership the Issues Paper itself acknowledges as desirable.

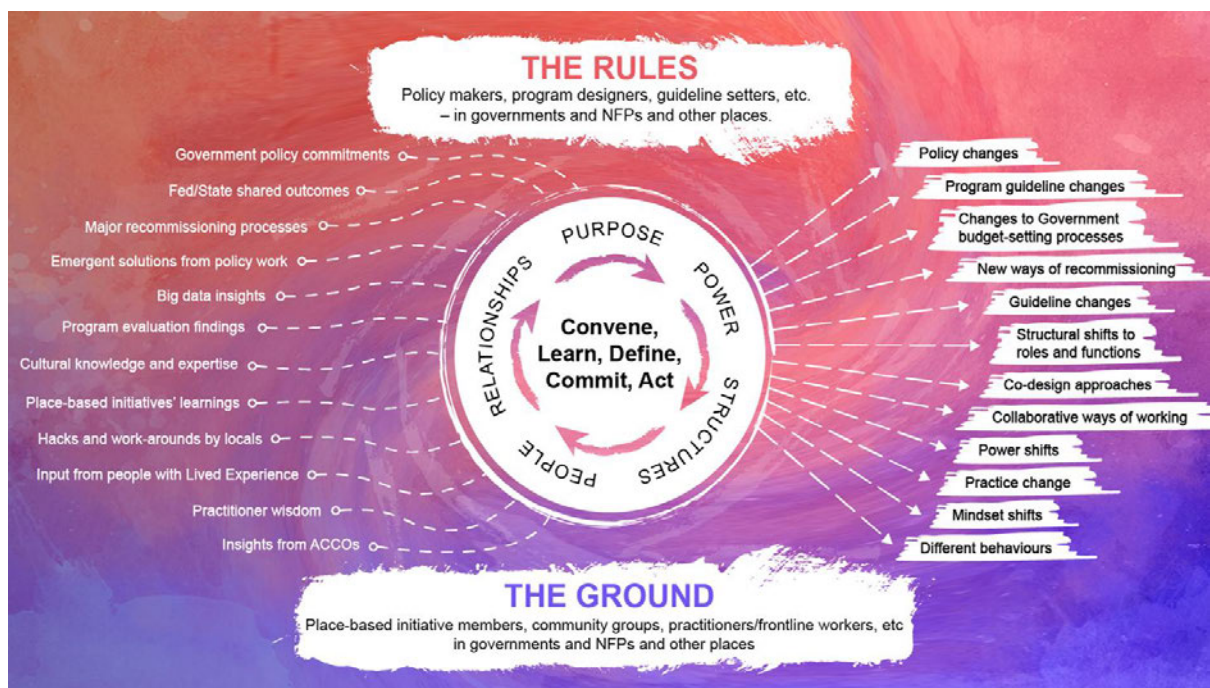
There is a fundamental disconnect between what happens “on the Ground” and what happens “in the Rules” which cannot be resolved through ad-hoc consultation.

This disconnect often means great results from local actors (place-based initiative members, community groups, service users, practitioners and frontline workers) are not absorbed into business-as-usual design and practices at the point where policies, rules and guidelines are made. Similarly, policy innovations from actors at the Rules level (policy makers, program designers and guideline setters) aren't translated effectively into day-to-day local-level practice changes.

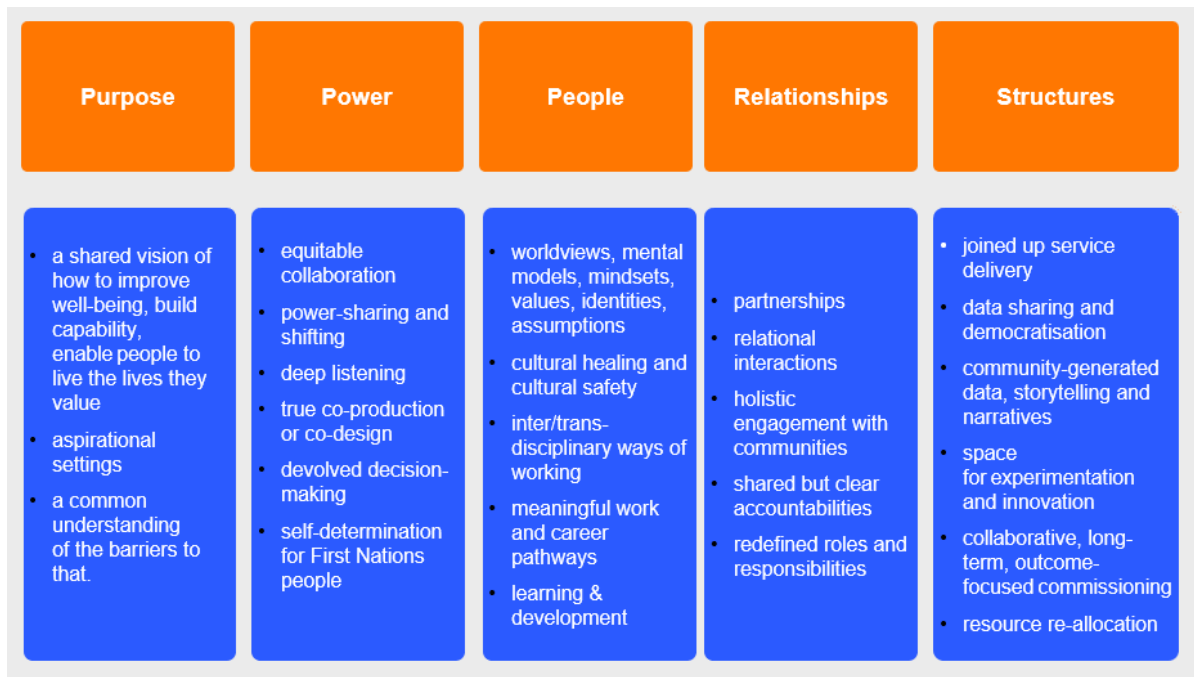
As a result, these two parts of the systems are unable to work and learn from each other to deliver better outcomes, innovation, and long-term change.

The opportunity we have before us is to connect what's happening on the Ground and what's happening at the Rules level in new ways. To convene people from Federal Government agencies, the community sector and others based on deep listening, co-producing solutions and driving action.

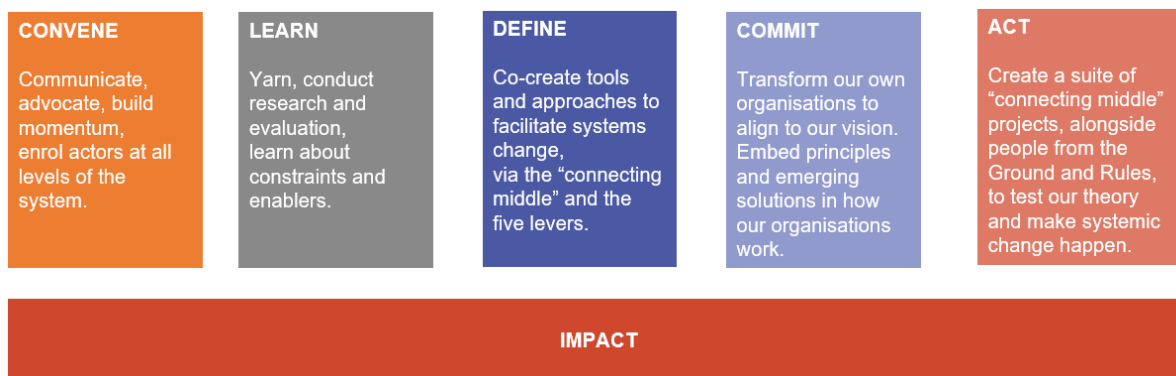
The results will be a suite of changes to mindsets, relationships, power dynamics, shared purposes and structures that harness what’s already in the system to shape more effective policies, programs and solutions to entrenched disadvantage. We refer to this as “the connecting middle.”



Drawing on previous research and consultations, our approach relies on a framework built around the following five levers to understand and change complex social systems.



The Australian Government has an opportunity, through the Issues Paper process, to partner with the community services sector in a fundamentally different way to the present. The Possibility Partnership is now progressing to action through a suite of place-based and project-based work, through the strategy below:



In summary, by adopting the approach outlined above, the Government has the opportunity to work with the sector to transform the human services system and intentionally drive a program of significant social change to make a real difference to the lives of people experiencing disadvantage.

The Possibility Partnership's proposed approach has been supportively received in discussions with senior members of the Department of Social Services, the Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet and other Federal agencies.

We extend an invitation to members of DSS' Community Cohesion Branch to receive more information and discuss the thinking behind our approach, and the way in which we apply it. Please do not hesitate to contact my Executive Assistant at [REDACTED] to arrange such a discussion.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Convenor
The Possibility Partnership

54 reasons

benevolent SOCIETY

 Brotherhood of St Laurence
Working for an Australia free of poverty

foyerfoundation

LIFE
WITHOUT
BARRIERS

MISSION
AUSTRALIA

morgan &
co

 The Smith
Family

Uniting

 Wesley
MISSION