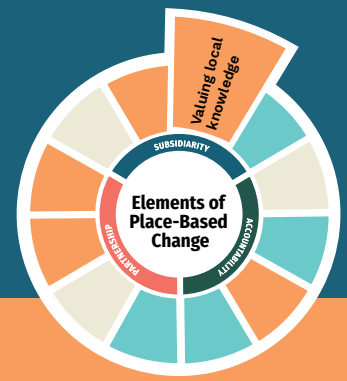


Subsidiarity: Decisions should be made at the most local level possible – where people have the greatest knowledge of context and the strongest stake in the outcomes. In place-based work, this means shifting authority closer to community – giving local leaders, organisations and residents the power to shape the services and systems that affect them.



1.3 Valuing local knowledge

Lived experience and place-based insight are recognised as critical forms of expertise in decision-making.

What is valuing local knowledge in the context of place-based change?

Valuing local knowledge means recognising that lived experience, community insight and cultural authority are legitimate forms of expertise. It shifts decision-making towards subsidiarity by enabling people closest to the issue to shape the responses that affect them.

In practice, valuing local knowledge requires treating such knowledge with the same respect as professional or academic expertise. It means recognising that communities hold deep understanding of local histories, networks and what solutions might work best. This knowledge is sometimes missing from reports or big datasets but is visible through storytelling, yarning, creative practice or community dialogue. Practitioners can demonstrate how they value local knowledge by being flexible about what evidence ‘counts’, acknowledging contributions publicly, remunerating people for their time, and

respecting autonomy over how local knowledge is used.

Remuneration and recognition signal respect and value. Community leaders and organisations often carry multiple responsibilities and frequent requests for input. Payment, resourcing or other forms of support help make participation possible and equitable. Roles such as community connectors or knowledge-collector positions formalise and resource local expertise within place-based work.

Ethical practice also means protecting intellectual and cultural property. For First Nations communities, data sovereignty is central. Local knowledge includes personal information, data, stories, lore and art. Valuing First Nations knowledge means allowing communities to decide for themselves what information is collected, who can access it, and how it is interpreted and shared. Open conversations about purpose, consent and control prevent extractive practices and deficit-based representations that have historically caused harm and

undermined the self-determination of marginalised communities.

Valuing local knowledge is an active practice built through relationships, reciprocity and accountability. By creating structures that recognise, resource and protect community expertise, practitioners ensure that decision-making is both credible and grounded in lived and local experience, making place-based work more responsive, equitable and sustainable.

Why valuing local knowledge is important in place-based change

Valuing local knowledge is essential to effective place-based work because it shapes how systems operate and how partners make decisions together on the ground. When community knowledge and lived experience are recognised as legitimate expertise, decisions become more grounded, actions more responsive, and outcomes more sustainable. It shifts practice from doing to communities toward working with them.



Valuing local knowledge means creating time and structures for it to be practised. This requires flexibility in funding, governance and workforce arrangements so that local insight can inform planning, data gathering and analysis, and decision-making. At a systems level, valuing local knowledge enables collaboration and power sharing. It redistributes influence by ensuring that decisions draw equally on lived experience, cultural authority and technical evidence. Local knowledge brings a historical and grounded understanding about

what is and isn't working, helps to avoid duplication, and increases the likelihood that activities and programs will be utilised and have the desired outcomes because they have been co-designed.

For First Nations communities, valuing Indigenous knowledge systems is central to supporting self-determination and ensuring that work is grounded in culture, language and Country. In other contexts, prioritising the knowledge of people with lived experience of marginalisation – such as migrants, people with disability, or those facing economic disadvantage –

ensures that policies and programs reflect the realities of those most affected by them.

Across all settings, treating local knowledge as equal to technical or institutional expertise helps to dismantle systemic barriers to participation and create culturally safe, inclusive spaces for collaboration. This approach not only strengthens belonging and trust, but also ensures that the design, delivery and evaluation of initiatives are responsive to the diverse strengths and aspirations of each community.

Key takeaways

- **Share decision-making power**

Establish joint leadership structures – such as community councils, partnership boards or cross-sector tables – where governments, funders, services and communities have equal authority. Formalise roles through memorandums of understanding or shared-power agreements so decisions and resources are genuinely co-owned.

- **Resource long-term, flexible engagement**

Provide multi-year and adaptable funding so communities have time to plan, test ideas and learn. Resource participation properly by compensating community members for their expertise and investing in coordination roles that sustain relationships and accountability over time.

- **Recognise and embed community knowledge**

Position community leaders and people with lived experience as key sources of expertise. Draw on local history, relationships and practical know-how to inform design, implementation and evaluation.

- **Build trust through authentic and consistent relationships**

Invest in transparent communication and regular meaningful dialogue between partners. Use shared reflection sessions, feedback loops and visible follow-up on community input to show that contributions are acted on and valued.

- **Create systems for learning and adaptation**

Use continuous learning cycles – plan, act, reflect, adapt – to improve practice and decision-making. Combine quantitative data with community stories, art and experience to understand what's working and where to adjust.

- **Strengthen collaboration capability**

Develop the skills and infrastructure needed to work effectively across boundaries. Support practitioners and community leaders to build facilitation, negotiation and systems-thinking skills so collaboration becomes part of everyday practice, not an add-on.