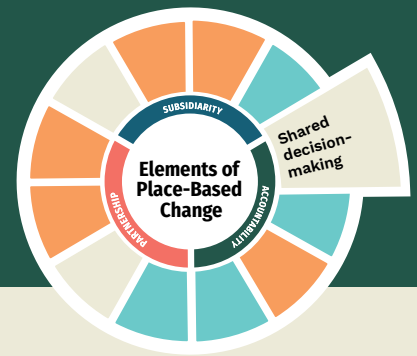**Accountability:** Communities must be able to hold systems and services to account. This requires more than consultation. It means building governance structures that embed community voice and oversight in decision-making, ensure transparency in how resources are used, and create shared responsibility for outcomes.

2.1 Shared decision-making

Local communities have meaningful authority over the design, delivery and adaptation of services and supports. Power is held locally, not just consulted locally.

What is shared decision-making in the context of place-based change?

Shared decision-making is a structure that enables local communities to have genuine authority over identifying priorities, and the design, delivery and ongoing adaptation of systems and services in their communities. Shared decision-making is about ensuring communities not only influence the decisions that affect them, but are able to influence the ongoing cycle of implementation, improvement and course correction.

Shared decision-making requires transparent, inclusive governance structures that help formalise how partners interact and make decisions. These structures will look different in each place, depending on context, scale and diversity of stakeholders. The level of community participation will evolve over time, shifting from consultative models to community-governed structures.

Simple structures that support communities to build their participation in shared decision-making include:

- Community led-steering committees
- cross sector working groups
- governance tables

These structures will evolve as partnerships mature, along with the processes and practices that support shared decision making.

For many government agencies, funders and service providers, shared decision-making requires shifts in mindset and practice, moving away from directing initiatives to enabling and authorising community-led agendas.

Government and funders can support shared decision-making by realigning policy, collaboration agreements and reporting frameworks to centre local priorities and foster shared accountability.

Sustaining community participation in shared decision-making processes requires stable and flexible funding. It requires allocating resources to build community shared decision-making capacity. This can include leadership development programs, governance training and financial recognition of the contribution of community members. Intermediary organisations can help coordinate community participation in shared decision-making, working to foster direct involvement rather than 'represent' the community.

Why shared decision-making is important for place-based change

Shared decision-making is central to place-based change because it strengthens a community's capacity to shape their own lives and environments. When local people drive decisions, deficit-based programmatic responses are replaced by strengths-based, local solutions that build confidence, strong social connections and a sense of belonging.

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Local shared decision-making structures deepen collaboration and shared accountability across partners, evolve transactional community engagement into longer-term relational partnerships, and create genuine shifts in power.

For governments and funders, supporting community participation in shared decision-making builds legitimacy and trust in policy and service systems. Over time, community participation can transform the way change happens, moving from programs delivered to communities, toward solutions designed with and by them, grounded in the priorities, values and aspirations of place.

Key takeaways

- **Start with community priorities, not programs**

  Understand community-identified needs and aspirations before setting the direction for investment, design and delivery.

- **Build shared decision-making progressively**

  Establish phased pathways, where community authority over decision-making, governance responsibilities and resource control are gradually transferred as local capabilities grow.

- **Align systems and funding with local decision-making**

  Funders, partners and service providers should create an authorising environment so communities can carry out their priorities.

- **Invest in local capability and leadership**

  Strengthen the foundations for shared decision-making by funding core staff costs, leadership development, governance training and employment pathways.

- **Embed two-way accountability and learning**

  Design monitoring, evaluation and learning systems where communities have oversight over the data being generated and how it is interpreted.

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