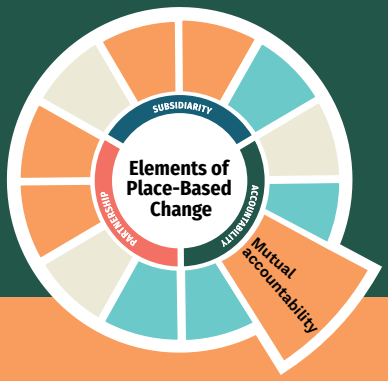
Accountability: Communities must be able to hold systems and services to account. This requires more than consultation. It means building governance structures that embed community voice and oversight in decision-making, ensure transparency in how resources are used, and create shared responsibility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



2.3 Mutual accountability

Responsibility for results is shared between communities, governments, funders and service providers – not pushed onto one actor.

What is mutual accountability in the context of place-based change?

Mutual accountability is a practice that transforms accountability for outcomes from a top-down process into a networked, reciprocal and trust-based system.

Collaborative place-based change efforts are grounded in the knowledge that no single group, organisation or agency can create sustainable change alone. Mutual accountability extends this principle by ensuring that ownership of both actions and outcomes is shared across communities, governments, philanthropy and service systems. It moves partners beyond shared aspiration towards shared work and collective responsibility for results. This creates a culture where stakeholders are accountable to one another and not just upwards to funders or institutions.

Governments and funders play a critical role in enabling mutual accountability by creating conditions that recognise and resource community authority. Aligning the control of resources with shared responsibility for outcomes ensures that communities have both the means and the mandate to drive change. This requires removing structural barriers such as short-term contracts and compliance-heavy reporting, and replacing them with frameworks that prioritise responsiveness, learning and reflection. Long-term and flexible funding, co-commissioning approaches, and investment in community-controlled organisations help sustain capacity and ensure accountability for outcomes is genuinely shared.

The practice of mutual accountability is enabled by shared governance structures that clearly define roles and decision-making authority across partners. Joint decision-making bodies such as community-led steering committees or working groups enhance legitimacy and ensure accountability is collective.

Mutual accountability is enabled by regular reflection processes, co-design sessions, and sharing of data that allow partners to track progress and course-correct together.

Why mutual accountability is important in place-based change

Mutual accountability matters because it strengthens collaboration and has the potential to drive long-term change and shift systems. By sharing ownership of outcomes, partners reduce duplication, build coherence, and ensure that community priorities, rather than institutional mandates, guide decisions.

When accountability is distributed among communities, governments, funders and service providers, community priorities become the shared compass for planning and evaluation, helping shape what is measured. When partners share responsibility for outcomes, they co-define what success looks like, ensuring that indicators and investments reflect local priorities and learning rather than external compliance. This can contribute to more relevant services and targeted programs.

For governments and service providers, this shared approach increases effectiveness and legitimacy. Working alongside communities demonstrates a commitment to transparency, cultural safety and integration, shifting delivery from siloed and reactive to collaborative and preventative. Mutual accountability builds the trust and relational infrastructure that helps sustain place-based change.

Key takeaways

- **Align funding and responsibility**

  Support mutual accountability by matching resources to shared outcomes.

- **Ground accountability in self-determination**

  Recognise communities as rights-holders, not beneficiaries. Honour cultural authority and ensure decision-making processes respect Indigenous governance and other community-led knowledge systems.

- **Model openness and shared learning across all partners**

  Encourage funders, service providers and community leaders to share both successes and challenges. Accountability works best when it fosters a culture of learning, where partners collectively problem-solve and adapt rather than defend or conceal.