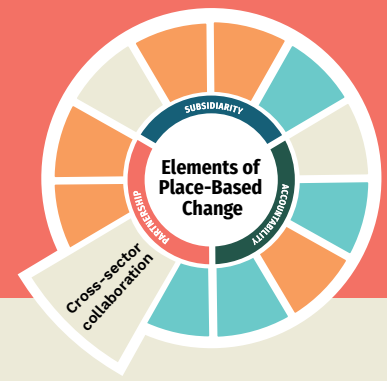**Partnership:** Complex challenges can't be solved by one actor alone. Place-based change brings together governments, service providers, funders and communities to work collaboratively, across siloes, sectors and timeframes. To be effective, these partnerships must be grounded in trust, reciprocity and shared purpose.

3.2 Cross-sector collaboration

Governments, funders, service providers and communities work together to break down siloes and align efforts.

What is cross-sector collaboration in the context of place-based change

Cross-sector collaboration is the coming together of different stakeholders, such as governments, funders, service providers and communities, in a complementary way to address a shared understanding of complex and layered challenges. The stakeholders involved in a place-based initiative will vary according to context; however, community leadership is essential. Without community input, cross-sector collaboration is likely to be unsustainable.

Cross-sector collaborations often begin through informal relationships and activities between individuals from different organisations who share a commitment to making systems work better for the people they work with. Over time, these informal collaborations can evolve into a more explicit arrangement between organisations and the local community. Formalising an agreement to work together is what makes cross-sector collaboration an enabling structure for place-

based change, as it supports partnerships between community and other stakeholders.

Cross-sector collaboration consists of the following aspects:

- **Partnerships add value** – a strong reason for cross-sector collaboration is that it increases the possibility of achieving outcomes that are unachieveable through the actions of a single agency.

- **A shared vision and purpose** – stakeholders work together to develop a shared understanding of the problem, the change being sought and how each can contribute.

- **Plays to the strengths of different stakeholders** – cross-sector collaboration is that it brings together different perspectives, networks and resources to a common challenge. Valuing the strengths and assets of different partners in the community can contribute to the sustainability of efforts, relationships and available resources.

Where it differs from models such as coordination, cooperation and co-location is the emphasis on shared purpose. These other models can be useful for sharing information, avoiding duplication of services, or accessing a broader population, but they do not require a commitment to a common purpose for change at multiple levels.

Why cross-sector collaboration is important in place-based change

Place-based collaborations are built on the understanding that entrenched, complex challenges being experienced by communities cannot be solved by a single organisation. These issues are multilayered and interconnected, involving many agencies, institutions and organisations that individuals and communities engage with at different points.

Exploring challenges and solutions from diverse perspectives fosters a shared, nuanced understanding of both problems and opportunities. Collaboration across sectors enables both individuals and

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organisations to expand their networks. This unlocks new pathways for communities to pursue their priorities.

Cross-sector collaboration represents a shift from siloed approaches where individuals and communities can slip through cracks. By working together, collaborators can distribute responsibility and leverage resources, reducing the burden on a single agency. Different stakeholders will have different resources — financial, social or organisational — that they may be able to draw on to bring about the desired change. By using complementary assets, partners can more effectively address challenges related to change within the community.

Despite its benefits, cross-sector collaboration can be hindered by differing organisational cultures, historical relationships, inadequate resourcing and power imbalances. Mindset and operational shifts are needed to accept and put aside differences and build the trust needed to work together effectively toward a shared goal. When these conditions are met, collaboration produces more coordinated, inclusive and enduring solutions within complex systems.

Key takeaways

- **Work with community at the centre**

  Cross-sector collaboration works best when community voices sit alongside those of services, funders and policymakers. Making space for local knowledge and lived experience ensures actions stay grounded in what matters most to people and place.

- **Build on complementarity**

  Cross-sector collaboration should focus on what can be achieved together that cannot be achieved individually. This collective approach is what creates a common vision and purpose.

- **Invest in relationships and coordination**

  Cross-sector collaboration takes time, trust and consistent effort. Investing in facilitation, relationship building, and structures that keep people connected – such as coordinating agencies or shared governance – helps sustain collaboration over the long term.

- **Learn together and stay accountable**

  Regularly tracking progress, reflecting on what's working and sharing lessons helps build confidence in the partnership and ensures collective accountability for results.

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