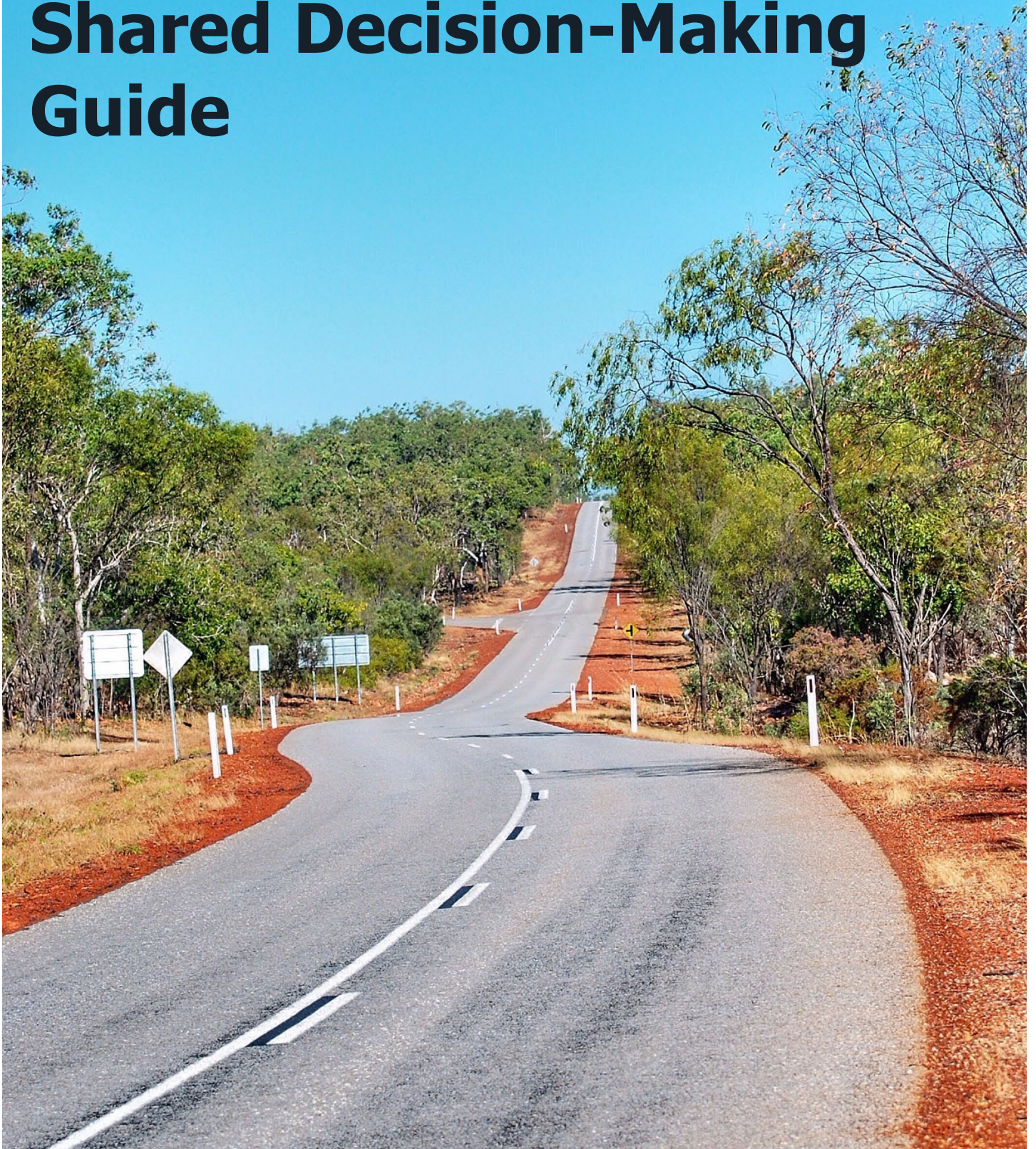




Australian Government

# Australian Public Service Shared Decision-Making Guide



## Acknowledgement of Country

The Australian Government acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, water, culture and community. We pay our respects to the Elders both past and present.

**Artwork:** Reconciliation Journeys.  
© Commonwealth of Australia 2026

ISBN: 978-1-921975-43-1

DSS product number: DSS3602.11.25



This publication is available for your use under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode) licence, with the exception of the Commonwealth Coat of Arms, Australian Government logo, photographs, images, third party materials, materials protected by a trademark, signatures and where otherwise stated. The full licence terms are available from [creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode).



Use of this material under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode) licence requires you to attribute the work (but not in any way that suggests that the Australian Government endorses you or your use of the work).

### Material used 'as supplied'

Provided you have not modified or transformed material in this publication in any way including, for example, by changing the text; calculating percentage changes; graphing or charting data; or deriving new statistics from published statistics – use the following attribution: Source: The Commonwealth of Australia.

### Derivative material

If you have modified or transformed material in this publication or derived new material from those in this publication in any way, use the following attribution: Based on Commonwealth of Australia data.

### Other material or rights in this publication

The terms under which the Coat of Arms can be used are set out on the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet website (see [www.pmc.gov.au/government/commonwealth-coat-arms](http://www.pmc.gov.au/government/commonwealth-coat-arms)).

Cover image licensed by Envato.

### Other uses

Inquiries regarding this licence or any other use of this document are welcome. Please contact: Branch Manager, Communication Services Branch, Department of Social Services. Phone: 1300 653 227. Email: [communication@dss.gov.au](mailto:communication@dss.gov.au)

---

# Contents

Introduction .....	4
About this guide .....	6
What is shared decision-making .....	7
Why shared decision-making .....	9
How to get started – important pre-conditions .....	11
Types of decision-making .....	13
Shared decision-making principles.....	19
Principle 1: Shared intent .....	20
Principle 2: Authority .....	21
Principle 3: Mutual responsibility .....	23
Principle 4: Two-way learning .....	24
Principle 5: Evidence-informed.....	26
Principle 6: Adaptability.....	27
Key considerations for sharing decisions within the APS .....	29
Useful information .....	33

---

# Introduction

Shared decision-making supports community members to have a genuine say and contribute to solutions on the issues that directly affect them. It's a partnership tool which enables representatives of local communities, whose perspectives may not otherwise be heard by government, to be involved in the design and delivery of policies and programs to better address community need. This means shared decision-making is a tangible way to increase the productivity of existing government investment, by tailoring more effective, inclusive and responsive services that address the unique circumstances faced within a community.

Shared decision-making can build on and strengthen genuine partnerships between the Australian Government, community partners and communities. This guide describes three types of shared decision-making between communities and government:

- strategic shared decision-making, to inform and influence priority setting, policy development and coordination across government
- operational shared decision-making, to inform and share decisions on the development, implementation and/or evaluation of policies and programs, or other government expenditure
- devolved shared decision-making, empowering local communities to undertake planning or investment within pre-agreed guidelines.

Shared decision-making has become increasingly important in government policy and decision making in recent years. This has been largely driven by the advocacy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as well as the Australian Government's commitment to partnership and shared decision-making in the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#) and other First Nations partnerships, such as through the commitment to [Empowered Communities](#).

This guide complements these efforts and aims to inform shared decision-making practice across all place-based partnerships across all communities. It has been developed to support the Australian Public Service (APS) to understand what shared decision-making means within a government context, the opportunities it presents to put community members at the centre of decisions that are made about them, and how it might be applied when working with communities and community partners.

It also links to the [APS Reform Agenda](#) being led by the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) to improve the way the APS puts people and business at the centre of policy, implementation and delivery. It should be read alongside the [Charter of Partnerships and Engagement](#). For additional guidance and advice for working with First Nations communities, the [APSC First Nations Partnership Playbook](#) should also be read.

The guide also supports the [Community Sector Grants Engagement Framework](#), designed to strengthen the relationship with the community sector through sustainable practices which improve outcomes for individuals, families and communities.

This guide should be considered a living document. The ways people use the guide will evolve in response to new ideas, perspectives and lessons learned.

## **Acknowledgements**

The information in this guide is based on research of, and engagement with, current approaches to shared decision-making with governments across Australia. It has been developed and tested through consultation with a range of stakeholders, including from the APS, other levels of government, place-based initiative stakeholders, the community sector including First Nations leaders, philanthropy and community leaders. Thank you to everyone who contributed ideas or input.

---

# About this guide

## Audience

This guide is for APS employees, particularly program and policy makers, managers, officers and decision makers working in, or looking to build and establish, shared decision-making arrangements. It may also be used as a resource by other stakeholders, such as community organisations, to understand what shared decision-making means within the frameworks of the APS.

## Purpose

This guide will help you understand what it means to share decisions when working with communities within an APS context.

Every shared decision-making arrangement will be different depending on the focus and purpose of the arrangement. In each situation, further work will be required to define and agree which decisions can be shared with partners, which cannot, and suggested processes for doing so. This guide provides advice on what should be considered but does not provide a checklist of activities or actions.

This guide will help you:

- understand the benefits and opportunities of shared decision-making, and when it may be an appropriate tool
- understand the different types of shared decision-making in the APS context
- explore examples of what shared decision-making can look like in practice
- find further resources to help develop targeted models of shared decision-making.

# What is shared decision-making

The APS undertakes a range of engagement approaches to inform government decision-making on the development, implementation and evaluation of policies and programs. These include engaging with advisory bodies, undertaking community engagement or seeking submissions on proposed reforms. Sometimes, engagement approaches can evolve and lead to partnership approaches, where there is a clear primary stakeholder/s with the authority to work more closely with government, such as an established community governance group.

While shared decision-making does not always require formal partnership arrangements, it is often used as a practical mechanism to identify and progress the intent of a partnership. It brings external partners and government into the decision-making process to jointly address shared issues, progress shared opportunities and share the risks and associated outcomes.

Opportunities for shared decision-making can be identified and initiated by community partners or government. It works best when decisions need to be informed by different and specific types of knowledge and expertise, such as community members who understand a community's needs and circumstances. Finding common ground on the issues and recommended solutions is important.

Shared decision-making moves away from internally focused decision-making within the APS and instead focuses on building relationships and sharing the direction, opportunities, solutions, challenges and risks with other parties to place them at the centre of the work with government.

The authorising environment to work in this way needs to be clear, including who should be engaged in the decision-making process and their authority, including cultural or community authority, to make the decisions. Authority to share decision-making must exist, including clarity on who should be engaged in the process.

This authority should recognise from the start that outcomes of a shared decision-making process may not be the same as a decision made by government alone.

## Shared decision-making definition

Shared decision-making can mean different things to different people. For consistency the [APS Guide to Working in Place](#) defines shared decision-making as:

*An act or process of communication between two or more parties who share information to determine a shared vision and work together to address it. The decisions are made with most or all parties playing a defined role in the decision-making process.*

*In place-based work, shared decision-making often has a dual purpose of empowering communities and achieving better decisions because it involves those most affected.*

*There are specific expectations that apply to this term in the First Nations policy context, under the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#). In some instances, shared decision-making can mean government, communities and other stakeholders make shared decisions on recommendations for a delegate to consider. This can be necessary to meet legislative or other government requirements.*

## A note about enabling environments

All government decision-making is governed by a range of legislative and other decision-making frameworks that provide the scope and the limits for decision-making and defines the roles and responsibilities of Ministers and the APS.

The [\*Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013\*](#) (PGPA Act) sets out the responsibilities of Commonwealth officials and the APS system of governance and accountability for the use of public resources.

The responsibility for some decisions cannot be shared with external partners because the legislation specifies who is to be the decision-maker and what considerations are to be taken into account for a given decision.

Decision-makers are encouraged to engage in a meaningful way with those impacted by government decisions and support

collaborative decision-making. Shared decision-making within the bounds of legislative limitations means public servants can share their role in the development of recommendations through a shared process, even if each step is not equally shared.

In addition, at the beginning of a shared decision-making process the decision-maker may agree to ascribe a formal weighting to each partners' recommendation within the final decision-making process, in the case that agreement cannot be reached between parties. This can ensure all perspectives are genuinely considered, and the resulting outcome can be shared, even if the final decision cannot be shared due to the relevant legislative framework. It is important to clearly articulate the boundaries of shared decision-making at the outset of the process.

More information can be found at **Key considerations for sharing decisions within the APS.**

# Why shared decision-making

## The benefits of shared decision-making

Traditional decision-making processes in which government makes unilateral decisions are often an efficient way for government to make decisions. But more often, when issues that impact marginalised communities, particularly those with entrenched disadvantage are complex, well established or interconnected, government needs to work differently to find the right solution. When communities are ready, shared decision-making can be the most effective approach to address complex or entrenched issues.

There are many benefits for communities and for government sharing the decision-making process, including:

- building tangible mechanisms to support community empowerment agendas and giving community members a say in day-to-day issues that affect their lives
- building trust in the decision-making process and sharing buy-in to any recommended outcomes
- increasing productivity through:
  - better reflecting the aspirations and needs of communities in decisions, in turn increasing the effectiveness and sustainability of government investment
  - innovative thinking and transforming place-based ways of working by reducing duplication, better aligning funding and services with community priorities and needs and improving the way services are delivered on-the-ground in communities
- addressing the underlying drivers of complex issues through a shared process

- sharing responsibility of the solution, risks and outcomes
- improved policy outcomes from diverse perspectives that lead to better problem solving.

Arrangements should recognise, value and appropriately resource the community skills, knowledge and insights needed for meaningful participation. This may include incorporating funding that enables communities to engage fully and on their own terms.

## Need for shared decision-making

Assessing the need for shared decision-making at the start ensures that decisions shared with community partners will result in better outcomes for communities.

In its Joint Decision-Making process, Empowered Communities (EC) uses three tests, based on its reform principles of Empowerment, Development and Productivity, when assessing whether an existing program or service should be continued or changed or when co-designing a new policy or program for introduction (see case study below for more detail on the EC tests and approach).

For government officials assessing whether to use shared decision-making as the mechanism for designing and delivering a new policy, program or service at the start, the three EC reform tests would provide a useful frame for that assessment.

## Examples in practice

### Empowered Communities Joint Decision Making

EC Joint Decision Making (JDM) brings Indigenous people in EC regions into shared

decision-making processes with government so decisions:

- better meet the needs of Indigenous people on-the-ground in EC Regions
- reduce waste and duplication
- increasingly align with Indigenous priorities in the region, including as set out in Development Agendas/Plans
- otherwise support the EC Policy of Indigenous Empowerment.

The principle of subsidiary lies at the heart of the EC Policy of Empowerment and means that authority to decide and act should rest at the closest level possible to the people or organisations the decision or action is designed to serve. It is focussed on enabling individuals, families and local communities to build capabilities needed to escape disadvantage, e.g. through education and work.

EC has made tangible progress in implementing empowering and productive ways of working through JDM which involves (non-fixed) panels of Indigenous people in EC regions in decision making that would ordinarily be made by government/s alone. The community panels come together with government at a Partnership Table.

EC designed three simple tests, based on its reform principles of Empowerment, Development and Productivity, that are used in the EC JDM process to provide a frame for government and community partners through which to assess programs, services, policies or funding to ensure the best outcomes for Indigenous people on the ground.

**Empowerment:** Is what is proposed consistent with the Indigenous Empowerment Policy?

All parties should assess whether the initiative genuinely supports individual, family and/or community agency and self-determination, and

there is a genuine opportunity to shift decision-making responsibilities closer to those affected. A service or program should be empowering and not disempowering for the service user and should not create an unnecessary passive dependence on that service or program. There needs to be a genuine commitment by government to develop, support and empower parties to influence and share decisions on matters that affect them.

**Development:** Is what is proposed supported by the international lessons of development?

Shared decision-making should be grounded in the foundational needs and aspirations of Indigenous people in communities. All parties should consider whether the shared decision-making opportunity genuinely supports family and individual development, considering the lessons of international development practice, by addressing local priorities and building long-term capability.

**Productivity:** Is what is proposed the most productive use of available resources and opportunities?

Maximising the collective effort and resources to address place-based community need is critical to creating lasting change. Shared decision-making should deliver tangible, sustainable outcomes that create value for communities and government. A primary focus should be achieving greater productivity and effectiveness from existing government funding and resources in communities. Making the most productive use of available resources and opportunities will have the benefit of empowering community members in decision-making and provide a means for redirecting duplicative or ineffective resources to support the economic and social development goals of a community.

# How to get started – important pre-conditions

The following pre-conditions highlight the key success factors that should be in place before undertaking a shared decision-making process. If the pre-conditions are not in place, it might be better to consider other forms of collaborative engagement which may lead to future shared decision-making and partnership.

## Trust between partners

While formal partnership agreements help to set the authorising environment and opportunity for shared decision-making arrangements, effective processes require an ongoing relational approach that values the knowledge and experience of the other partner as well as trust and commitment to achieving a shared outcome. This is particularly relevant if you are using shared decision making to jointly tackle difficult reform issues, as is often the case in areas of entrenched disadvantage. Ongoing investment in maintaining, building and adjusting the relationship over time contributes to sustaining trust long term.

Shared decision-making can look different at different levels of partnership maturity and may only be appropriate when each partner has clarified their own priorities. Over time, ambition on what is shared may grow from discrete decisions on activities or projects to broader strategic planning between partners.

## Shared mutual interest

Shared decision-making works best when there is a clear shared interest or value in working together to improve a situation. Each partner may have their own priorities, but it's important to take the time to understand where these overlap and where potential opportunities exist. Misalignment of priorities can negatively impact the shared decision-making process as well as impact

future collaboration and trust between partners.

## Cultural competency

Working with diverse communities requires an investment in cultural competency and capability building before engaging in a working relationship within a community. This includes taking a trauma informed approach, recognising the strengths, values and lived experiences of First Nations peoples, as well as people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, LGBTQIA+ communities, people living with a disability and women, amongst other groups. This requires an understanding of the local, historical, cultural and geographic context in which they work to embed high-quality, meaningful approaches to promote cultural safety.

## Clarity on authorising environment

Being clear on the parameters of the authorising environment creates an opportunity to shape expectations for all parties and to be fully informed when deciding if shared decision-making is the right option. This can extend across multiple levels of government and require cultural or community authority considerations as well. All parties must clarify the level and scope of decision-making authority required to achieve the shared intent, to ensure that they want to participate, and that those with the required authority can participate. Early and clear support from senior executive and the responsible Minister should be sought before proceeding into any discussions on shared decision-making. Including clarity on the necessary internal briefing processes required to support arrangements as they progress.

## Examples in practice

### Aboriginal Water Entitlements Program

In the Murray–Darling Basin, water holds a deep cultural connection to Country. However, the impacts of colonisation have affected these communities' access to water. First Nations people control less than 0.2 percent of water entitlements.

The Aboriginal Water Entitlements Program is an initiative that addresses these impacts and empowers First Nations people by returning control over water entitlements back to them and embedding Cultural, social, economic, environmental, and spiritual values into water purchasing, holding and management. The program addresses historical injustices such as Aqua Nullius and supports First Nations self-determination through community-led decision-making.

The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water shares responsibility with Murray-Darling Basin First Nations people in the Advisory Group and Directorate through an interim co-governance model.

The Advisory Group exercises cultural authority by leading the development of water purchasing policies and frameworks, while the Directorate, in collaboration with the Department, makes water purchasing decisions in accordance with legal requirements.

This interim co-governance approach strengthens mutual understanding between First Nations leaders and APS partners. It supports culturally competent water governance and lays the foundation for the enduring water holding mechanism that is to be co-designed with Murray Darling—Basin First Nations Peoples.

### National Disability Data Asset

The co-governance of the National Disability Data Asset (NDDA) is an example of Australian governments' sharing decision making with the disability community. The NDDA is inclusively co-governed through the NDDA Council (the Council) which consists of 12 members, from the Australian, state and territory governments, disability/data experts and members of the disability community.

The Council is co-chaired by one government member and one community member. The co-chairs support an environment which encourages collaboration, respectful exploration of differences and a willingness to compromise where needed to work towards the shared vision. The purpose of the Council is to:

- make sure the NDDA is being used only for purposes that align with the expectations of people with disability in alignment with the [NDDA Charter](#)
- oversee the compliance of the NDDA safeguards that protect people's data
- build trust in the NDDA with the disability community
- provide recommendations on the strategic direction of the NDDA to the [Disability Reform Ministerial Council](#) (DRMC).

The Council's shared vision, is that 'the NDDA provides trusted insights into the diverse experiences of people with disability to support the transformation of law, policy, systems and practice and continuous improvement in disability support.' The Council has shown that genuine, inclusive co-governance takes time. For the disability community to share responsibility for decisions they need to be involved early and have genuine opportunities to shape development and outcomes.

# Types of decision-making

Shared decisions can be used from policy ideas through design, development, implementation to delivery for new programs and modifications to existing ones. This guide has identified three types of shared decision-making by the APS: **strategic**, **operational** and **devolved**.

Strategic and operational shared decision-making aim to involve community perspectives and expertise within government decision-making processes and are generally undertaken within a partnership arrangement. Devolved decision-making supports external groups to share decisions and implementation that contribute to an issue or outcome defined by government and usually do not require a formal partnership agreement with government but do require funded providers to share decisions with relevant community members.

Each shared decision-making arrangement may span multiple or all types within one arrangement or be focused on one specific type. Approaches may change and evolve over time as the expectations and ambition of partners build and grow together. Regardless of the type of shared decision-making arrangement, allowing and actively planning for sufficient time and resourcing to meaningfully engage in this way of working is important.

## Strategic

Sharing strategic decisions that influence the governments agenda by identifying shared priorities, policy development or coordinating policy implementation.

## Operational

Sharing recommendations with government to inform decisions on the development, implementation or evaluation of programs and grants.

## Devolved

Devolving decision-making, where there is an opportunity to empower local communities to undertake planning and/or investment decisions within clear parameters.

*Strategic shared decision-making* approaches can help to identify shared issues or priorities, create a space for community partners to bring forward policy reform ideas, support more holistic policy analysis or build consensus on potential solutions.

*Operational shared decision-making* models can support more effective program design and implementation, by bringing in community perspectives to program and grant development, funding decisions, implementation and evaluation processes.

*Devolved shared decision-making* may be an appropriate element of a program designed to enable community voice through design, implementation and evaluation.

Other influences on the types of decisions shared and the roles and responsibilities of parties within the decision-making process can be:

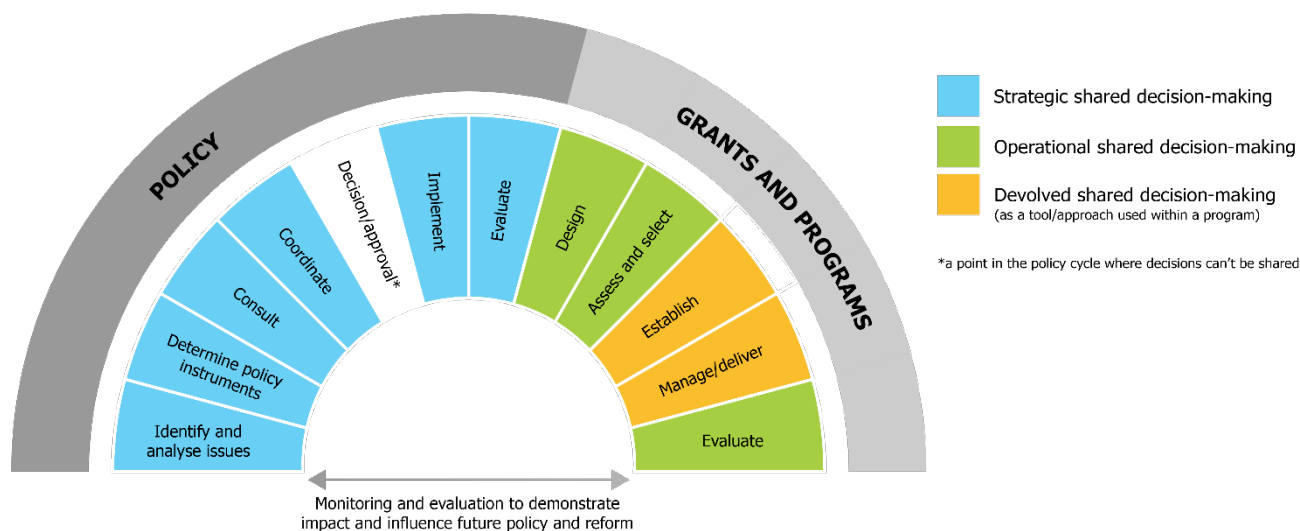
- Maturity or evolution of the relationship and the focus areas of the community and partners.
- The authorising environment for a particular policy or initiative.
- Whether a shared decision-making process is a one-off or ongoing.

## Shared decision-making through policy and program cycles

The different types of shared decision-making may be more relevant at different points in the policy and program cycles. While the below diagram is a useful guide, it is important to remember that there is no one size fits all approach, and flexibility may be needed when identifying the types of decisions being shared and recommendations made.

Along the program and policy cycles, shared decision-making can occur through sharing the process, responsibilities, risk, opportunities and recommendations for decisions.

Sometimes elements of shared decision-making may also sit outside of these cycles, such as the negotiation and agreement of strategic or policy partnerships.



## Strategic shared decision-making

Strategic shared decision-making is largely undertaken within the policy cycle. While strategic shared decision-making can be the least structured, it is generally supported by strong, established governance structures. It is often focused on identifying and progressing shared longer-term outcomes that are not tied to one specific government-funded program or activity and may span multiple portfolios due to the unique and complex nature of an issue.

Strategic shared decision-making recognises that there is a requirement for government to work alongside external parties when defining and addressing complex and entrenched issues to address systemic barriers and community priorities. Shared priorities or issues may be raised by either the government or community partner.

How you might apply **strategic shared decision-making**

- Share strategic planning processes to identify shared priorities and opportunities within communities and across government to progress a shared agenda, including sharing risk and bringing all interested parties to the table together.
- Share the development of policies, strategies or frameworks through shared identification of issues, engagement, policy analysis or the development of new policies or strategies for consideration by Ministers or other decision-makers. For instance, this might include community partners bringing forward policy reforms where there is a shared intent.
- Convene the broader policy or service delivery system around an agreed priority, including sector-based, or regional planning approaches. For instance, convening all responsible stakeholders around the shared priority of youth engagement to align service delivery.

#### Key considerations when undertaking **strategic shared decision-making**

- Strategic shared decision-making benefits from a clear authorising environment, such as formal partnership arrangements. Building trust and setting clear expectations are important pre-conditions to manage the ambiguity of this kind of work.
- Strategic shared decision-making may be used to inform and strengthen decisions of government (such as new policies or programs), while other types of decision-making may be focused on the decisions required to implement a strategic decision that has already been made. While the Cabinet Handbook promotes the need to consult externally, it is important to manage expectations by clarifying early what can and cannot be shared, and timeframes.
- When strategic shared decision-making influences national reforms, a broader range of perspectives may need to be involved to capture all perspectives. This could involve forming advisory groups with community representatives, including those on the ground, as well as peak or other organisations.

### **Operational shared decision-making**

Operational shared decision-making is a more common practice within the program or grants cycle. It tends to be a more structured approach to sharing decisions, and refers to the development, implementation, evaluation and incremental reform, of specific programs or grants.

Because government decision-making on funded programs is governed by responsibilities and accountabilities set out under legislative frameworks such as the PGPA Act, many operational shared decision-making processes focus on the development of shared recommendations to Ministers or their delegates, whose decision-making authority is defined in legislation. Within these arrangements, reaching agreement on recommendations is an important success factor.

Operational shared decision-making tends to be time-limited or focussed on repeatable processes, addressing a specific stage within a grant or program's lifecycle. They may be a tool or mechanism within a broader partnership agreement, to help progress an agreed priority.

#### How you might apply **operational shared decision-making**

- Share the design, and/or assessment and selection of programs or service delivery, to provide a shared recommendation to the delegate. For instance, co-development of Grant Opportunity Guidelines or shared assessment panels.
- Share the evaluation of programs or service delivery, including decisions on future funding, program design or commissioning.

- Working alongside partners to develop performance indicators and collect data which informs decision making and future policy reforms. As an example, qualitative data such as case studies can inform policy changes.

#### Key considerations when undertaking **operational shared decision-making**

- The scope of operational shared decision-making must be established well ahead of the decision-making process. This includes identifying opportunities at the design stage, to provide maximum opportunity to share the design of programs.
- Clear roles and responsibilities, governance mechanisms and transparency on what decisions can and cannot be shared need to be clearly agreed early, to define the scope of the process.
- In some cases, delegated responsibilities under financial frameworks, like the PGPA Act and the Commonwealth Grant Rules and Principles 2024, means a delegated decision-making responsibility cannot be shared or outsourced to external partners but decisions are informed by shared recommendations. Because decision-makers must be satisfied that inputs to their decision meet legislative requirements, knowledge of these requirements need to be shared transparently with all partners.

### **Devolved decision-making**

Devolved decision-making is usually limited to a specific outcome area already defined by government through an earlier decision-making process that may or may not have been shared. It is most effective when it is clear what the specific outcome to be achieved is, but the implementation of the program requires decisions to be shared by the funded organisation with those impacted to ensure resources are appropriately targeted. In this case, a third party may be engaged to support devolved decision-making within a specified scope of authority.

While the other types of shared decision-making set out how government may share its role, devolved decision-making refers to a specific government decision to enable a defined scope of decision-making to be managed by parties outside of government. Formal partnership arrangements between government and stakeholders are not needed for devolved decision-making, but third parties may have formal arrangements with community governance groups.

#### How you might apply **devolved decision-making**

- Fund an organisation to undertake a priority setting process or other community-led planning processes. For instance, fund a community partner within a place-based partnership to support the development of a local change agenda and commit to align investment with the priorities agreed in the planning.
- Fund an external provider to administer a brokerage or other devolved funding mechanism where there is a clear role for shared decision-making with community representatives.
- Design a program that requires community decision-making on the priorities and specific activities to be undertaken as part of the funded program. For instance, the design of a program that requires a community-led planning process to identify community need, and the selection of pre-determined activities from a menu of options that respond to that need.

#### Key considerations when undertaking **devolved decision-making**

- Devolved decision-making is usually limited to a specific outcome area already defined by government through an earlier decision-making process.
- While devolved decision-making means that decisions can be made closer to those impacted, it also transfers some of the risks and responsibilities that come with this decision-making to an external group.
- Decisions may still need some degree of validation from government. For instance, that a process has met the requirements set out in a funding agreement or that risks have been appropriately managed. This step needs to be documented in any decision-making process.
- The decision-making process itself requires time and resourcing.

## Examples in practice

### Partnerships for Local Action and Community Empowerment (PLACE)

[PLACE](#) is a collaboration between government and philanthropy, designed to build national infrastructure that strengthens community-led initiatives. The partnership focuses on enabling long-term, system-level change.

PLACE was developed through shared strategic planning, where the Commonwealth and five philanthropic partners identified a shared priority of supporting communities to shape and lead place-based initiatives. The shared decision-making processes aimed to demonstrate how government and philanthropic partners could work together to co-fund a national entity designed to strengthen community capacity to participate in place-based work.

Through the [Investment Dialogue for Australia's Children](#) (IDAC), all partners worked within a clear authorising environment, which supported sensitive negotiations that informed budget processes and investment decision by both the Australian Government and philanthropic partners. This collaborative process built on trust, shared risk and open engagement gave all partners a role in designing how PLACE is governed.

The partnership demonstrated how partners can align around a shared vision to progress long-term outcomes, addressing entrenched social issues. Now established, PLACE is a key partner with government in supporting community-led initiatives and place-based work. This will help communities lead solutions in more coordinated and sustainable ways.

### Empowered Communities: Barang Regional Alliance

The [Barang Regional Alliance](#), a coalition of seven local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), is the backbone organisation for Empowered Communities in the Central Coast of NSW. The Alliance has structured and repeatable processes that inform the design and implementation of specific programs aligned to community priorities.

Barang leads the development of a Regional Development Agenda, informed by annual community and youth surveys, which identify local priorities about health and wellbeing, cultural connections, family support and economic independence. These community-informed priorities shape the design of targeted initiatives such as the ['gili-dhi muru'](#) (Youth Empowerment Program) and ['yagunda baranggu'](#) (Connected Beginnings).

Barang works with the Commonwealth and state government partners to design programs and provide shared recommendations at the design, implementation and evaluation stages of the program lifecycle. This partnership has supported Barang to deliver a shift in family wellbeing and youth empowerment across the Central Coast, with: 13+ families supported to successfully avoid separation after a child removal notice had been issued - saving over \$6m in costs to government, 22 families homed through the Aboriginal Homes Together program, a 56% increase in Year 12 attainment since 2016 and youth being actively supported into work or further education opportunities a 64% increase in tertiary qualification held by Indigenous community members.

---

# Shared decision-making principles

The following principles have been developed to support the APS when considering or designing shared decision-making arrangements. Once pre-conditions have been established, these principles guide what to consider and what actions to take that might support a successful shared decision-making model. The six principles should be viewed together as all are applicable across the different types of shared decision-making.

This section explores each of the principles in detail, listing tangible actions that can be taken at an individual, initiative, and agency level. Each principle describes both systems and enabling actions as well as the behaviours and mindsets required to work in this way.

## Principles for shared decision-making

### **Shared intent**

A shared vision to work towards a mutually beneficial outcome for impacted communities, and the APS.

### **Authority**

Clarity on the authorising environment and a shared understanding of the decision-making parameters.

### **Mutual responsibility**

All parties take responsibility for the success of the shared decision-making arrangement, including clarity and transparency on the process and its outcomes.

### **Two-way learning**

A shared commitment to two-way learning, strong monitoring and evaluation and being responsive, adaptive and open to innovation.

### **Evidence-informed**

All meaningful data and evidence is shared transparently and proactively between parties to inform decision-making.

### **Adaptability**

A genuine commitment to do things differently and learn as you go, fostering an environment to challenge assumptions and adapt as needed.

# Principle 1: Shared intent

A shared vision to work towards a mutually beneficial outcome for impacted communities, and the APS.

## What is shared intent

Shared priorities and purpose exist between parties, including a shared focus on achieving agreed outcomes towards a longer-term vision and goal. This is the foundation to build a strong shared decision-making arrangement. There is transparency and understanding on what can and cannot be shared, and why, within the relationship.

The scope and importance of the work and intent must be agreed and documented.

## Actions you can take

### At an individual level

- Invest time in building and maintaining relationships to understand and clarify the intent and perspectives of those closest to the outcomes.
- Understand community needs and broader government priorities and identify how the purpose of the shared decision-making arrangements aligns, including any gaps and opportunities for two-way learning.
- Develop a shared language between parties to define the problem and solutions or initiative, ensuring a mutual understanding.

### At an initiative level

- Invest in resourcing and time to support community partners to undertake planning processes, as a basis for shared strategic planning.
- Also look for opportunities to align government priorities with community

priorities that have already been identified in local development agendas and/or investment plans.

- Identify opportunities for shared decision-making early, and be honest, transparent and realistic about the scope of shared decisions. This includes being upfront about any limitations on what can and cannot be shared.
- Document shared purpose clearly, meaningfully and agreed by all parties.
- Identify other agencies or stakeholders who have a shared intent and look for opportunities for collaboration.
- Understand existing government and community work in place to ensure new initiatives align with current efforts.

### At an agency or government level

- Use whole of government coordination mechanisms, such as interdepartmental committees or cross-jurisdictional arrangements, to influence and build buy-in of other relevant stakeholders, including states and territories.
- Identify opportunities for alignment with strategic priorities in departmental corporate plan processes, community priorities and other government's strategic priorities.
- Build internal capability to support shared decision-making through training, resources and systems that adequately enable staff to work in partnership with community.

## Principle 2: Authority

Clarity on the authorising environment and a shared understanding of the decision-making parameters.

### What is authority

There is a clear authority to progress the shared vision in the way that has been agreed. This includes a shared understanding of any legislative or other parameters and who the responsible decision-makers are. Each party must seek the appropriate authority to participate before commencing.

Authority can be multilayered and can refer to authority that sits within the community, including cultural or community authority, or any level of government. Buy-in is also established from all impacted stakeholders.

### Actions you can take

#### At an individual level

- Understand and clarify the scope of authority you have to make decisions, and who has the authority to make the final decision (i.e. who holds a relevant delegation) and communicate it clearly. Be transparent about any limitations in your authority that exist.
- Provide regular updates to managers, building buy-in for decisions at their level of delegation.
- Make sure you have a good understanding of APS administrative and decision-making frameworks and your responsibilities as a public servant.

#### At an initiative level

- Seek authority through early buy-in from Minister and agency executive, including to

clarify risk appetite, including areas for negotiation.

- Document agreements that outline decision-making roles and risk mitigation strategies, including those for shared risks.
- Ensure program guidelines enable shared decision making and have been co-designed with community members wherever possible.
- Consider opportunities to use pooled funding arrangements or cross government partnerships tables where more than one agency or level of government is trying to achieve outcomes in a policy area or sector.
- Ensure APS staff and external partners participating in the shared decision-making process have the appropriate authority to participate and the delegations to make decisions. This includes clarifying cultural and community authority.
- Understand the distinct roles of Commonwealth, state and local governments in decision-making.

#### At an agency or government level

- Review agency delegations to clarify internal authority to ensure appropriate decision-makers at the table.
- Provide clear and accessible guidance to all staff and partners on financial and decision-making delegations and risk escalation processes.
- Support clear authorising environments through enabling systems such as partnership practices, policies, systems and guidance.

## Examples in practice

### National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness (NASHH)

The [NASHH](#) is a national agreement that helps to highlight shared intent. Under the NASHH, the Commonwealth Government is providing \$9.3 billion over 5 years from 1 July 2024 to state and territory governments. This funding helps people who are experiencing, or are at risk of, homelessness and supports the effective operation of Australia's social housing and homelessness services sectors.

The NASHH enshrines direct and tangible action not just for, but with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The section in the NASHH on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was developed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and reinforces all governments' commitment to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, including Priority Reforms.

The Department of Social Services and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Association co-designed this section and sought consultation and advice from the Housing Policy Partnership, which was established under Priority Reform One through the Joint Council on Closing the Gap. This set an agreed vision to work together and collectively recognises the need to address the disproportionate housing inequality that affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### Safe and Supported

The [Safe and Supported Partnership Agreement](#) (the Partnership) is a strategic partnership that shows authority. The partnership is a commitment between the Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group (Leadership Group) and all Australian governments on implementing Safe and Supported: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031.

The Partnership ensures decisions impacting First Nations children and young people are made through genuine partnership and provides a clear authorising environment, alongside the National Agreement to Closing the Gap, to engage in shared decision-making. Under the Partnership, decisions are shared through governance structures which oversee the implementation of the two Safe and Supported First Action Plans and accompanying Monitoring and Evaluation Strategies. Governance structures include representatives and co-chairs from government and the Leadership Group, which comprises First Nations leaders who are experts in the safety and wellbeing of First Nations children, families and communities.

The Partnership includes a commitment to shared decision-making by consensus, where the voices of First Nations representatives hold as much weight as those of governments. Government representatives from all jurisdictions meet with the Leadership Group at a Ministerial level, a secretary level and at a senior government officials' level. This ensures that decisions are made with decision-makers with appropriate levels of authority.

# Principle 3: Mutual responsibility

All parties take responsibility for the success of the shared decision-making arrangement including clarity and transparency on the process and its outcomes.

## What is mutual responsibility

Mutual responsibility is key to building trust, ensuring that all parties have a vested interest in the decisions, actions and outcomes of the shared decision-making process.

In practice, this means agreeing clear ways of working up front, including the process for sharing decisions and the roles and responsibilities of each party that are respected through the process.

All parties should also consider how their internal systems and processes support shared decision-making, and if internal enabling reforms need to be considered.

## Actions you can take

### At an individual level

- Allow time and space to build consensus and be open to compromise when needed.
- Encourage and support external parties to develop and contribute to the planning and shaping of processes through their own ways of working.
- Understand and actively challenge your own unconscious bias and assumptions.
- Take accountability for the relationship and outcomes as an APS steward within the process.

### At an initiative level

- Document agreed ways of working, including policies and procedures that clearly set out roles and responsibilities, conflict of interest processes, decision-making models, risk tolerance and escalation and accountabilities of each party. This includes what to do when a consensus cannot be reached.
- Ensure governance arrangements describe how outcomes are shared with impacted stakeholders.
- Design flexibility into funding agreements, such as using milestones or outcomes-based reporting to document agreed models, noting shared risks and opportunities that come from these arrangements.
- Recognise and build on existing roles and strengths from government and community to improve future initiatives.

### At an agency or government level

- Invest in community governance structures and provide material support to build capacity and/or capability of communities to partner.
- Provide internal guidance on how shared decision-making can be incorporated into agency decision-making processes and embedded into enabling reforms.
- Integrate performance indicators about shared-responsibility processes into corporate governance accountability and reporting mechanisms

# Principle 4: Two-way learning

A shared commitment to two-way learning, strong monitoring and evaluation, and being responsive, adaptive and open to innovation.

## What is two-way learning

Two-way learning means partners learn from each other, with lessons captured to inform broader practice.

Shared decision-making values collaboration and a shared learning mindset, which acknowledges that effective decision-making requires multiple perspectives.

Two-way learning supports shared decision-making by being open to new ideas and solutions, beyond what government may consider through traditional decision-making processes. If done in real time, two-way knowledge sharing can result in more agile decision making so activities can pivot as needed based on real-time results being seen on-the-ground as the project rolls out.

## Actions you can take

### At an individual level

- Take ownership of mistakes and learn from them.
- Actively listen, and seek opportunities to understand diverse views, knowledge and experiences.
- Be transparent and share your own knowledge of government context.

- Take a trauma informed approach that is sensitive to individuals lived experiences and cultural backgrounds.

### At an initiative level

- Learn from past and current government efforts to work in place, within the community you are working. Ensure learnings inform design of new arrangements.
- Invest in monitoring and evaluation activities from the planning stage and design these in collaboration with external partners where possible.
- Adjust approaches when learnings have been identified.
- Document and actively share learnings in a way that can enable systemic change, when barriers or limitations have been identified.

### At an agency or government level

- Invest in capability building at all levels, ensure APS level staff have the knowledge, skills and cultural competency to engage in respectful partnerships. This can also include providing staff opportunities to be skilled in trauma informed care.
- Support senior executive staff to strengthen their understanding of good partnership practice and shared decision-making, including cultural capability training.
- Support whole of agency relationships with community partners, building trust through a consistent and transparent approach, ensuring there is visible commitment through in-person connection, on the ground with communities where possible.
- Encourage monitoring and evaluation across all policies and programs.

## Examples in practice

### The Indigenous Skills and Employment Program (ISEP)

[ISEP](#) supported First Nations communities by funding locally designed employment and training initiatives. ISEP operated as a two-stage competitive grant process where organisations initially applied for seed funding and successful applicants engaged with local communities to design their projects which were then considered for funding. The program demonstrates how shared decision-making between the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) and Empowered Communities (EC) can be embedded throughout both the grant lifecycle, as well as the delivery of the program.

To ensure transparency, roles and responsibilities were defined for program delivery, management of conflict of interest and mechanisms for escalation when agreement cannot be met. Agreed ways of working were formalised in the Terms of Reference and guidance materials outlining the process. EC backbone teams assessed the applications for their regions and submitted recommendations along with NIAA assessments at Joint Panel meetings to make shared funding recommendations. Where agreement was not reached, both assessments were referred to the delegate for final consideration.

This structure demonstrates how mutual responsibility integrated into a flexible and well-defined process enables better outcomes in shared decision-making arrangements. It strengthens First Nations people's ownership of the decisions that affect them. ISEP enabled 8 Empowered Communities backbones to support the grant process in their local area.

### Communities for Children Facilitating Partners (CfC FP)

[CfC FP](#) is a national program funded by the Commonwealth Government that supports place-based approaches to improve early childhood development and wellbeing through local coordination.

In Port Augusta, South Australia, Uniting Care SA is the CfC FP. Under the Stronger ACCOs, Stronger Families initiative, Uniting Care SA partnered with Kornar Winmil Yunti (KWY) to support culturally safe service delivery in the local child and family sector. Both partners acknowledge that meaningful collaboration requires trust, patience and honesty as well as a shared understanding of the partnership's end goal.

To strengthen this initiative, the partners identified spending time on-country and truth telling as tools to build trust and share knowledge. This approach shifts learning out of formal settings and into a space where relationships, context and culture inform local decision-making. The approach also aligns with the aims of the partnership to increase Aboriginal led decision-making and build cultural competency.

Key outcomes of the partnership have included agreement to and execution of sharing the FP role in Port Augusta; a commitment to broader partnership opportunities with mutual benefit including sharing resources, workforce and tender opportunities; and renewed commitments to developing relationships with ACCOs and non-ACCOs doing similar work across Australia.

# Principle 5: Evidence-informed

All meaningful data and evidence is shared transparently and proactively between parties to inform decision-making.

## What is evidence-informed

All parties commit to transparent and responsible collection and sharing of qualitative and quantitative data and value different forms of evidence, including research, practice insights and lived experience.

Parties use this data to inform each stage of the decision-making process, including priority setting, decision making and monitoring and evaluation. This includes support for all parties to build their data literacy capability.

This means that all data that informs one party's position is understood by all parties.

## Actions you can take

### At an individual level

- Value evidence and data from government and community partners, acknowledging and respecting any limitations and restrictions on data sharing that may exist.
- Where possible, share all relevant information with partners, as well as initiate discussions to promote and enable a shared understanding.
- Commit to work towards improved data sharing arrangements, if appropriate.
- Seek out, acknowledge and respect different perspectives which might challenge assumptions.

### At an initiative level

- Commit to transparently share all relevant evidence and data, ensuring all parties have access to the same data and information.

Where information can't be shared, be transparent and explain why.

- Jointly consider the focus and impact of existing programs or activities in a community, to inform the design of new initiatives and identify potential interested stakeholders.
- Agree early on how qualitative and quantitative data will be used to support or inform decision-making, what data already exists and what data will need to be collected through monitoring and evaluation practice.
- Draw on existing evidence, programs and activities to inform the design and focus of shared decision-making efforts.

### At an agency or government level

- Identify opportunities for qualitative data and community-based evidence to inform policy and program reform.
- Invest in data literacy of APS staff and community partners.
- Invest in data governance systems that can be shared and transparent.
- Make data and evidence publicly available for transparency and to promote shared accountability.
- Implement best practice guidance such as the Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data.
- Align data sharing efforts with Priority Reform Four of the National Agreement.

# Principle 6: Adaptability

A genuine commitment to do things differently and learn as you go, fostering an environment to challenge assumptions and adapt when needed.

## What is adaptability

Shared decision-making is a different approach to traditional ways of government decision-making. Often, either government or community are working in this way for the first time and are required to learn while doing.

Open and transparent communication, and trust, can take time. Committing to share decision-making means working through issues and challenges together, using the structures and processes that have been co-developed.

## Actions you can take

### At an individual level

- Recognise that a key outcome of shared decision-making is sharing the process towards reaching a consensus.
- Proactively support a growth mindset, with all parties shifting from a 'we can't because' to a 'we can if' approach to issues or barriers identified through the decision-making approach.
- Approach shared decision-making processes with an open mind, receptive to learning new ways of working.

### At an initiative level

- Develop mechanisms for ongoing reflection to ensure intent and actions operate within the authorising environment reflecting the priorities of all parties over time and adjusting where needed.

- Proactively build community understanding of APS processes and APS understanding of community processes to allow for adaptability.
- Create opportunities for reflection that are integrated into the shared decision-making process to inform continuous improvement and inform adaptation in real-time so activities can pivot to deliver the best outcomes during the implementation phase.
- Ensure baselines are captured and recorded to help demonstrate the impact of shared decision-making arrangements or identify if they're not working, allowing consideration of a new approach when required.
- Build flexibility into shared arrangements or agreements that can evolve throughout the relationship, including clauses for periodic reviews or adjustments.

### At an agency or government level

- Support initiative-level feedback loops to inform design of agency enabling systems to respond to needs.
- Provide training and resources for APS staff to build their confidence in working flexibly and within ambiguity, supporting adaptive leadership practices. Leveraging APSC Academy content for all APS staff.
- Enable a culture of sharing challenges, decisions and solutions.

## Examples in practice

### SKA-Low Project

The [SKA-Low Project](#) is the Australian component of the international Square Kilometre Array Observatory (SKAO), established to operate the world's most powerful radio astronomy facility. The Wajarri Yamaji are the Traditional Owners of, and hold native title over, the lands where the SKA-Low project is located. The Wajarri Yamaji give their consent to SKA-Low, formalised through the Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) and Project Agreement.

The Wajarri Yamaji are the Traditional Owners of, and hold native title over, the lands where the SKA-Low project is located – Inyarrimanha Ilgari Bundara, CSIRO's Murchison Radio-astronomy Observatory. The Wajarri Yamaji Aboriginal Corporation (WYAC) has partnered with the Department of Industry, Science and Resources and CSIRO to coordinate efforts and support project construction and operations.

Decision-making is shared through the Liaison Committee and Heritage Protection Committee (HPC), both established by the Project Agreement, and an Industry Opportunities working group. Broad project activities are discussed in the Liaison Committee meetings. In the HPC, the Wajarri Yamaji lead decisions on cultural heritage and are advised of the cultural heritage data held, and the security measures in place to protect that information.

The Industry Opportunities working group shares information on project employment and business opportunities and Wajarri training and education needs, for the economic benefit of Wajarri Yamaji.

### Improving Multidisciplinary Responses (IMR) Program

The [IMR Program](#) was established to centre First Nations cultural knowledge, frameworks and responses in the way services are designed and delivered, to better meet the needs of First Nations children and families with multiple and complex needs. The program was designed in partnership with the Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group (Leadership Group) to support First Nations people's self-determination in the design of community-led initiatives.

A Shared Decision-Making Framework was co-developed and agreed with the Leadership Group. This Framework sets out how First Nations people would genuinely share in decision-making throughout the design, selection, implementation and evaluation phases of the program.

Working in partnership meant there was a need to be open to new ways of working and be ready to listen and respond to the needs of community. Due to this, during the program design phase there was a change of direction in the grant opportunity guidelines reflecting the adaptable nature of the shared decision-making process. DSS changed the way it engages with its First Nations stakeholders and potential grant applicants to allow for informal and conversational platforms. This included offering interviews through the grant process to provide additional support and an opportunity for clarification on the scope of applications.

# Key considerations for sharing decisions within the APS

Confidently identifying opportunities for shared decision-making within and outside the APS, and effectively supporting these processes, requires a strong understanding of the roles and responsibilities of public servants.

The APS is governed by a range of legislation, policy and processes, establishing clear obligations in relation to accountability for public resources. These requirements provide the authorising environment for public servants, to identify what can and cannot be part of a shared decision-making process.

It's important to recognise that not all decisions can, or will need to be shared but many can be made collaboratively through shared intent, a mutual understanding and inclusive processes. APS staff engaging in shared decision-making should invest time into building trusted and respectful collaborative relationships with key stakeholders. APS staff should also build their capability and knowledge on administrative decision-making.

This section set out how APS obligations under the APS Values, Employment Principles, and Code of Conduct can be considered within a shared decision-making context.

## APS Values

All APS employees and agency heads are held to the highest standards of integrity and conduct, as set out in the [APS Values, Employment Principles, and Code of Conduct](#). These requirements maintain trust in the integrity and professionalism of the APS and its employees, including in their exercise of authority when meeting government objectives.

Among other things, the APS Code of Conduct includes requirements relating to the proper use of Commonwealth resources; declaring conflicts of interest and avoiding improper use of inside information or position; and maintaining appropriate confidentiality of information.

The APS Values include Accountable, Respectful, Ethical, and Stewardship, which are particularly important when working within shared decision-making arrangements. Upholding these Values includes treating all people with dignity and recognising that all people have value; following through on commitments made; being open to scrutiny and being transparent in decision-making; and reflecting on and learning from past experience and institutional knowledge, including through robust evaluation, to inform operations, advice, and decisions.

Further information about the application of the Values, Employment Principles, and Code of Conduct can be found in the APSC's guidance, [APS Values and Code of Conduct in Practice](#), and [Stewardship guidance](#).

## Conflict of Interest

APS employees must take reasonable steps to avoid any conflict of interest (real or apparent) in connection with their employment and to disclose details of any material personal interest (section 13(7) of the Public Service Act). They must also ensure external partners follow required conflict of interest processes. Declaring personal material interests and managing these interests once they have been assessed to be an actual or perceived conflict, enables transparency, maintains trust and ultimately supports integrity in collaborative

partnerships. Shared decision-making arrangements will require strict and transparent declaration and management of perceived or actual conflicts of interest in line with legislative requirements, ensuring APS staff and external parties are never in a situation where they could, or could reasonably be perceived to, make improper use of their knowledge or positions.

Within a shared decision-making arrangement, parties should explicitly agree processes for declaring and managing actual or perceived conflicts of interest, within their agreed governance structures.

## Probity

The PGPA Act enforces the need for ethical and transparent conduct through documentation, fair processes and internal frameworks. The 'Mutual Responsibility' principle is particularly important to address probity issues within shared decision-making. Declaring and managing actual and perceived conflicts of interest is fundamental to probity, and agencies should ensure they have clear, transparent and well documented processes to declare and manage conflicts of interest.

In small communities, probity risks may relate to the multiple role's community members may play within governance structures and community-controlled service providers. Transparent documentation helps to manage the associated risks that cannot be avoided.

## Cabinet confidentiality

APS employees must balance the need to transparently share information with confidentiality of classified information. [The Cabinet Handbook](#) promotes the need to consult with a range of stakeholders, including

community groups, when developing Cabinet Submissions.

The [Budget Process Operating Rules](#) (BPORs) highlight the importance of full and early consultation between all affected entities when developing proposals (Rule 4).

Ensuring that advice and decision-making is informed through consultation is also key to the identification of measurable outcomes and assists with providing an evidence base within submissions. When bound by cabinet confidentiality, all are required to adhere to confidentiality arrangements.

## Shared risk

Shared risks are those risks extending beyond a single entity which require a collaborative effort of shared oversight and management. These include risks that extend across entities and may involve other sectors or jurisdictions.

The management of shared risks should be agreed by all parties involved. Accountability and responsibility for the management of these risks should be identified and accepted by those best positioned to manage them.

Risk Management Guidance is available for shared risks as well as other risk management guidance relating to shared decision-making.<sup>1</sup>

## Commonwealth Grant Rules and Principles (CGRP)

While you need to be aware of your obligations under the PGPA Act, CGRPs and other legislative requirements, the CGRPs are largely principles based. The nine key principles of grants administration (that you must have regard to) provide flexibility in how you can work together with stakeholders to administer grants and achieve policy outcomes. The key

---

<sup>1</sup> RMG 211 – Element 6: Shared Risks | Department of Finance

principle of Collaboration and Partnership notes officials should engage with government and non-government stakeholders to ensure grant design and administration is effective and tailored to ensure the objectives of the funding can be met.

When undertaking grants administration, you can:

- engage with community stakeholders before you design a grant round to understand the issues and identify the opportunities where decision making can be shared
- work with local communities and stakeholders to agree on the local priorities and objectives
- collaborate with local communities and stakeholders to design a grant round or program focussed on achieving outcomes that address identified problems
- develop draft grant opportunity guidelines in collaboration with local communities and stakeholders to ensure the grant has been designed to meet local needs
- engage local experts to convene joint decision-making panels to assess grant applications and make recommendations
- engage local experts in assessing effectiveness of grants.

The CGRPs note accountable authorities should develop a positive risk culture within their entities, supported by appropriate frameworks and processes.

You should engage with risk and consider how you can manage risks to harness the potential benefits.

## Examples in practice

### Closing the Gap Outcomes and Evidence Fund

The [Closing the Gap Outcomes and Evidence Fund](#) supports the co-design, delivery and evaluation of community-led initiatives to contribute to Closing the Gap Targets 12 (reducing overrepresentation in out-of-home care) and 13 (reducing the rate family violence). The Fund operates across eight sites involving shared decision-making between the Commonwealth Government, local Community Panels and Empowered Communities (EC) regions.

Given the multiple responsibilities of local panel members, Department of Social Services engaged an independent probity advisor to ensure actual or perceived conflicts were appropriately managed. This included establishing standardised conflict of interest policies and register and required all panel members to sign a Deed of Confidentiality. Where conflicts were found, independent Selection Advisory Panels supported additional assessments of project proposals. Through the Fund, community panels have worked with applicants to:

- identify community needs and priorities,
- co-design projects for their community; and
- make recommendations to Government about which projects will best deliver against the Closing the Gap targets of reducing family violence and the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in out-of-home care.

Successful service providers in EC regions will be supported throughout the life of their projects with capacity building support initiatives provided by the local EC backbone organisation in their region.

### Early Childhood Care and Development Policy (ECCDPP)

The [ECCDPP](#) is a shared decision-making mechanism supporting reforms to achieve Closing the Gap targets. The Partnership provides recommendations to the Joint Council regarding policy, legislation, operations and expenditure.

A probity framework guides the work of the Department of Education and SNAICC as co-chairs and co-secretariats of the ECCDPP.

The framework sets clear governance arrangements to ensure fairness, integrity and transparent conduct, particularly, for members who may be involved in developing initiatives that their own organisations may implement.

Members are to identify early on whether their organisation is likely to participate in delivery and are required to sign a Deed of Confidentiality. All identified conflicts are documented by the co-chairs. To assist the management of conflicts, internal firewalls are in place within organisations to ensure the teams working on ECCDPP are separate to the teams working on related business. Where confidentiality is breached, co-chairs will seek legal, or probity advice as required.

---

## Useful information

### **Australian Public Service Guide to Working in Place**

The [APS Guide to Working in Place](#) aims to strengthen the understanding and awareness of APS officials to apply good practice ways for working in place.

### **First Nations Partnership Playbook**

The [First Nations Partnership Playbook](#) provides the APS with practical guidance and best-practice examples on working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

### **PGPA legislation, associated instruments and policies**

The [Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013](#) establishes a coherent system of governance and accountability for public resources, with an emphasis on planning, performance and reporting.

### **National Agreement on Closing the Gap**

The objective of the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#) is to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and governments to work together to overcome the inequality experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and achieve life outcomes equal to all Australians. Under Priority Reform One, parties committed to building and strengthening structures that empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to share decision-making authority with governments to accelerate policy and place-based progress against Closing the Gap.

### **Empowered Communities Design Report (2015)**

Established in 2013, Empowered Communities represents Indigenous leaders from ten regions around Australia who have joined forces to drive a common reform agenda for Indigenous empowerment. In 2015 the [Empowered Communities Peoples Design Report](#) was submitted to government which articulates the Empowered Communities vision and proposes a range of transformational policy reforms to support the priorities of Indigenous empowerment, development and productivity.

### **Australian Government Charter of Partnerships and Engagement: Good Practice Guidance (2024)**

The [Charter of Partnerships and Engagement](#) provides guidance on how to partner and engage effectively. It sets out the behaviours for improving the way the APS puts people and business at the centre of policy, services and delivery.

### **National Indigenous Australians Agency: Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data**

The NIAA [Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data – Practical guidance for the Australian Public Service](#) guides the APS on how to build strong governance over Indigenous data holdings held by the Commonwealth.

## **Australian Public Service Academy**

The [Australian Public Service Academy](#) is an online hub of learning and development resources for the APS workforce, including resources on a [cultural capability hub](#), building relationships and engagement, adaptive leadership and using data.

## **Australian Public Service Commission**

The Australian Public Service Commission provides further information and guidance on a range of areas that support shared decision-making such as the [APS Values and Code of Conduct in practice](#), and [Stewardship guidance](#). As well as the [Ethics Advisory Service](#) for queries about APS integrity requirements and ethical decision-making.

## **Department of Finance**

The Australian Government, Department of Finance provides further information and guidance on a range of areas that support shared decision-making such as risk management, including [Shared Risks](#) and the [PGPA legislation](#).

## **Cabinet and budget processes**

The Treasury provides further guidance on the implementation of the budget process as outlined in the [Budget Process Operating Rules](#).