

# Community Collaboration Resource

**Linked in Bankstown**

June 2015



**Arab Council Australia**  
المجلس العربي استراليا

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## Introduction

Linked In Bankstown has been running for the past two years and has engaged a wide range of local organisations to develop a better approach to community collaboration. It is a project funded by the Australian Government Department of Human Services under the *Better Futures, Local Solutions* initiative. An important aspect of the approach has been to practice collaboration in the formulation of the model and training, rather than just developing a paper model. This was achieved through regular leadership forums which took place with local agencies and service providers and several public forums with the community. These groups helped develop both the collaborative process as well as a training program and a community inventory of services, projects and networks.

This collaborative community model is designed to assist members of the Bankstown community use collaboration as a way of understanding, reframing and taking action on difficult issues. It has been designed with the Bankstown community - joining both successful local practices and global best practice in collaborative leadership. It has also been designed to be able to be implemented by any citizen or organisation in Bankstown or elsewhere – so it focuses on being practical rather than complex long lists or theories. While the project came to an end 30 June 2015, commitment to sustaining community collaboration is evident on all fronts.

## Background

Too many approaches to community challenges still rely on “consultation” or a “top-down” approach as inputs to decision-making processes. However, communities are becoming increasingly suspicious of “consultation” and “stakeholder engagement” processes which appear designed to reduce opposition to policies, rather than generate new approaches. It is in this context that the collaborative community model can address our most complex issues, which we will refer to as “adaptive challenges”.

We use the term adaptive challenges because they reflect competing values and new situations the community may never have encountered before. These community challenges are complex, interdependent, multilayered and defy definition. We see the symptoms where things are not working, but the nature of “the problem” is not clear. Issues such as justice, discrimination and equality are examples of adaptive challenges. It is not enough just to fix a problem - progress instead relies on expanding a community’s problem-solving capability or toolbox. That means a focus on learning and experimentation through community engagement, rather than just relying on experts or agencies.

## The Collaborative Community Model



### Community Collaboration Model

<b>WHY</b>	<b>HOW</b>
Purpose - what is at stake? What are you committed to? What would happen if we did nothing?	Who has to do what to make progress? How can you reframe the narrative and what key questions need to be asked?
<b>WHAT</b>	<b>WHERE</b>
What is working/not working/missing? What are the competing values? Why is there resistance? What is progress?	What type of difficult conversations are required? Do different groups need to be engaged in different ways?
<b>WHO</b>	<b>IMPACT</b>
Who are the factions, authorities and your partners? How might you support those experiencing losses?	How will you know if you have made a difference? Is too much burden falling on one person or group?

### Linked In Bankstown in Practice

Collaboration was practiced in the design of the Collaborative Community Model and the format developed in line with community learnings at each stage:

1. **WHY:** A steering group helped frame the purpose which was to strengthen collaborative practice in Bankstown to deal with the most complex adaptive issues and develop a model which would be accessible to all.
2. **WHAT:** Diagnosing the current situation by researching what was already working in Bankstown through questionnaires and interviews, developing a networking resource and holding public forums to identify obstacles to collaboration.
3. **WHO:** Valuing diversity through inviting groups from every sector, including government and the business community, to engage competing perspectives.
4. **HOW:** Building capacity through presenting a four-day Collaborative Leadership training program, several large public forums as well as a series of Collaborative Leadership Forums with a core group.
5. **WHERE:** Identifying where the most need was in the community and which practices promoted or hindered collaboration. A special day on the topical and divisive “Radicalisation” issue was conducted in the context of this Collaborative model, generating new perspectives and potential actions.
6. **IMPACT:** Constantly seeking feedback from groups and individuals in the context of what works, what needs to change and what is missing.

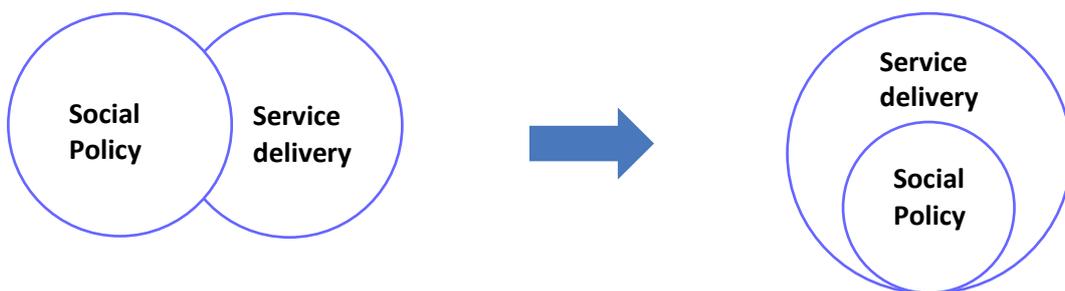
## Strengthening Community Collaboration

Feedback from the Bankstown community suggests that Bankstown is very good at initiating collaborations, especially on a project basis where defined deliverables are required within a set time frame. However, where the issues go beyond projects and deal with longer term challenges such as discrimination, fairness, equality and justice such collaborations have difficulty being sustained for the long-term. A key reason identified through the Bankstown forums is a preoccupation with *“what’s in it for me and my organisation”* which distracts from the real issues and eventually sees a withering away of the collaborative spirit. Similar dynamics are also found in other communities elsewhere. Hence, the purpose of this model is not to start from basics about how to collaborate – there are many agencies already successfully collaborating – but rather to strengthen the sustainability of collaborations which are dealing with difficult longer term challenges.

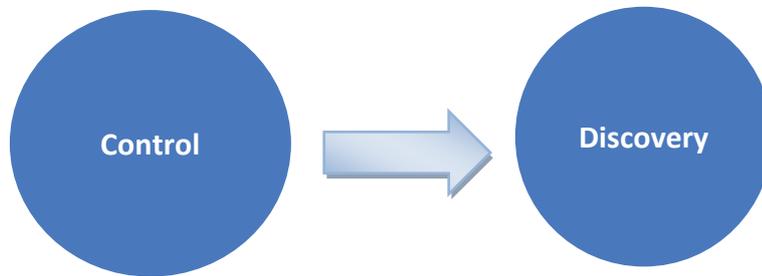
How has the *“what’s in it for me and my organisation”* dynamic come about? Partly, it is an extension of market economic models being applied to complex social issues. Historically, community organisations focused on both service delivery and policy aspects:

- Service delivery was closely tied to economic competitive models focused around core concepts such as efficiency and productivity
- Social policy evolution was more focused around getting groups together to consider new situations through dialogue, discovery and learning

However, many community organisations are now looking at social policy development through a service delivery/competitive lens. This has had a number of unintended consequences, most notably that many organisations are much more focused on competing for grant funding.



A competitive economic model brings with it a whole host of assumptions about how we frame issues. Part of the collaborative challenge is to promote a “Discovery” rather than a “Control” mindset:



DEFAULT	CONTROL	DISCOVERY
Revolves around	Permission	Own initiative
Characteristics	Top-down By invitation Reactive One-way Solution focused Lowers heat on issues Winner – loser	Collaboration and Engagement Inquiry and curiosity Questioning Expanding how we solve problems Partnering Community based
Result	Frustration waiting for authorities to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult</li> <li>• Communicate</li> <li>• Give feedback</li> <li>• Make decisions</li> </ul>	Dynamic engagement through initiating debates around values/policy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building trust</li> <li>• Clarifying purpose</li> <li>• Generating new evidence</li> <li>• Understanding what works locally</li> <li>• Strategically influencing policy</li> </ul>
Theme	Competition based on resources	Collaboration based on expanding capacity
Default	DRIFT - agencies don't even see it – considered normal	TAKES EFFORT – We don't allow control to happen but initiate own actions

There is a difference between dealing with technical business and service delivery issues compared to dealing with complex social and policy issues in the community. Using a competitive model may even limit our capacity to work difficult policy issues which require collaborative learning.



### Framing Challenges

Competitive Service delivery	Complex Social policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building a business</li> <li>• Market competition</li> <li>• Efficiency</li> <li>• Influence - win</li> <li>• Reactive partnerships</li> <li>• Success = resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building community</li> <li>• Collaborative learning</li> <li>• Competing values</li> <li>• Discovery</li> <li>• Proactive networking</li> <li>• Success = evolution</li> </ul>

Excessive focus on a competitive service delivery model results in treating difficult social, cultural and values issues as if they are resources. Thinking like that explains why so many groups are limiting their perspectives to *“what’s in it for me and my organisation”*. Our challenge is to shift this dynamic to instead put the community at the centre of all we do.



So our challenge is not just to solve problems but rather to increase our problem-solving capacity – that is, to improve the way we solve problems. In this context, leadership is characterised in Bankstown as:

- How we push back strategically – keeping true to our values
- Not being “told” what can and cannot be done
- Requiring solidarity and partnerships as pushback can be painful and isolating

Key questions can include:

- Where is the debate on difficult issues currently located in the community sector? Where should it be located?
- Which values are unique to the community sector?
- How do our current practices contribute to the problem of limited collaboration?
- What practical actions can we take to respond to the current situation?

Activities which put the community at the centre of all our work include:



## Leadership – Learning and Experimentation

Leadership in such situations needs to focus on deeply considering issues of identity and community dynamics. Too often in the rush to find solutions, community engagement is reduced to passive “consultative” processes. At worst, groups pursue competing “agendas” and engage in the same stale debates as they try to influence or convince their way to a solution. Instead, community collaboration allows for ownership and engagement in decision-making as a joint learning and experimentation process.

Leadership shares dilemmas with the community, instead of relying on authorities (eg politicians, senior officials etc) to do the work of problem-solving or falsely raising expectations. Exercising leadership even questions assumptions about “how” consultations will be undertaken. For example, in some ethnic communities, relationships are more important than structures, thus requiring a need to both understand and respect different ways of knowing and thinking. It moves away from “expert” and top-down approaches to decision-making and instead locates it in local community values and practices. Work in the Bankstown community identified the following characteristics as critical to engaging different values:

- Take the initiative – not just wait for others
- Aspirations should be part of purpose, not connected to resources
- Seek initiatives from the grass-roots – not just from grants
- Have a bigger strategy – grants are only a part of your strategy
- Frequently address relevance of activities to the community
- Actions based on “learning”
- Reveal contradictions
- Diversity – genuine attempt to engage different perspectives/ views of reality
- Timing – recognise change is often about the long-haul
- Open to discovery - don’t feed pre-framed narratives
- Focus on people, community and identity – not just resources
- Ensure integrity and honesty in discussions and dialogues

Using the Bankstown Community Collaboration model is about exploring what works, what needs to change and what is missing in engaging regions and local communities. The following sections outline the components of the model in more detail.

## Why?

### Purpose

Building clarity of purpose for individuals, groups or organisations and the community means reflecting on what is at stake and the level of commitment people bring to the issue. It should be something meaningful and powerful which gets to the heart of why you are getting involved. Beyond just decision-making or problem-solving, community collaboration is about “learning”.

Too often our purpose aims too low – focused on our organisation, budgets, jobs etc. Instead, collaborations need to encourage big picture commitments – think about the impact on the community if our services were not there. Who would suffer a loss? What might happen to community cohesion and the social capital built up over many years?

For example, in our Linked In Bankstown discussions, there was a realisation that failure to break the cycle of grant-dependency could lead to local services simply becoming sub-contractors to organisations outside the area that had little local knowledge. The result could be applying external solutions which may be inappropriate to the local community. The group concluded that the future of the local community sector was at stake. This was an important motivator for forming new partnerships beyond “*what’s in it for me and my organisation*”.

#### Questions to consider:

- **Individual:** What are you committed to? How far are you willing to go?
- **Group:** Why should we bother collaborating? What are the advantages/disadvantages? What would happen if we were not here?
- **Community:** What is at stake? How serious are these issues? What would happen if we did nothing?

## What?

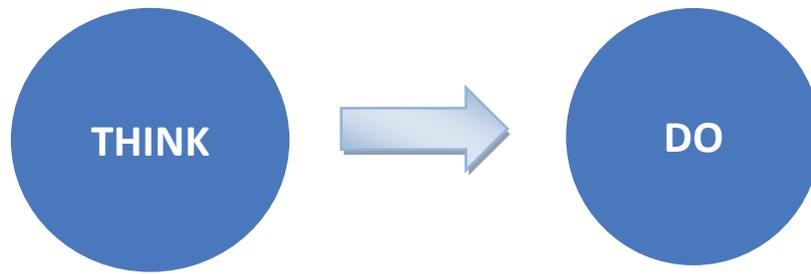
### Type of challenge

There are two types of issues being faced by communities:

1. **Technical:** These are issues where bringing experts and resources together are enough to make progress. It might be around improving a community centre, new infrastructure, setting up processes, establishing a website or providing information. Technical problems can be solved by relying on experts and the solutions require no real change in culture or values. For example, engineers can accurately predict and advise on the necessary structures to support a building or construct a road. Complex computer systems can be devised to process massive information flows. We are familiar with technical problems and our education prepares us in the systematic ways of solving them. To identify technical issues look to plans, strategies, vision statements, organisational structure, rules, regulations, roles and accountabilities.
2. **Adaptive:** These are issues which require shifts in the way people interpret issues and relate to each other. It usually requires a change in culture, mindsets or values – where no one person has the answer. Progress is only made through groups coming together to learn to work in new ways – in the same way that evolution allows plants and animal to adapt to new environments. It requires a deeper understanding of one another’s beliefs, motivations and loyalties without which people are just left pursuing their individual agendas. Social issues around fairness, justice and discrimination are good examples of adaptive issues. Adaptive challenges are tackled in a constantly changing and uncertain environment. Moreover, the learning and experimentation required needs the engagement of the whole organisation or community – not just an external expert or authority. To identify adaptive issues look to values, culture, history, traditions, loyalties, religion or issues which a community finds hard to discuss.

<b>Framing Challenges</b>	
Technical	Adaptive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Known problem/solution</li> <li>• Past experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem is unclear and complex</li> <li>• Solution requires learning and experimentation</li> </ul>

How we frame a problem can be critical to where we put all our energies. That is, how we think about issues affects what action we take:



FRAME	ACTION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About social justice – not religion or politics</li> <li>• What does it mean to be a part of the community?</li> <li>• Commitment to diversity as a way of creating new options for progress</li> <li>• Current language – avoid terms such as “counter-terrorism” and “de-radicalisation”</li> <li>• Why are people feeling disenfranchised?</li> <li>• Anti-social = kids being kids (OK to be angry and different)</li> <li>• Not just a “Muslim” problem – invite others to share the dilemma</li> <li>• How to build trust?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage wide group of partners – Boards, police, Councils, other service providers etc</li> <li>• Move attention away from individuals acting as “spokespersons” or “experts” and instead focus on the “issues”.</li> <li>• Seek evidence and facts – keep asking questions</li> <li>• Draw attention to actions which avoid the real issues (eg technical fixes)</li> <li>• Focus on impact, not agendas</li> <li>• Listen, listen, listen</li> <li>• Engage young people instead of controlling and telling them what to do</li> <li>• Create the spaces for alternative and dissident voices – don’t shut them down</li> </ul>

**Questions to consider:**

- What are technical aspects of the problem and what are the adaptive aspects of the problem?
- What competing “values” are at stake? Discovering this in a community requires enquiry into:
  - The present: What is working, what needs to change or is missing?
  - The future: Where the community wants to be, what their sense of future holds, what are their hopes and aspirations?
- What opportunities might emerge if the issue is successfully addressed?

## Resistance

### **Resisting Reality**

- Denial
- Blame
- Attack
- Scapegoat
- Them and us
- Silencing dissenting voices
- Creating a distraction or diversion

Communities and groups naturally resist attempts to raise difficult adaptive issues. They are concerned it may create too much conflict or heat. We need to be able to identify when this resistance is stopping an issue being progressed so that we can help communities engage in difficult conversations. Examples of resistance include:

- denying a problem exists
- blaming authority or others for not “fixing” the problem
- misplaced loyalties around individuals rather than issues
- attacking leaders or those raising the tough questions
- blaming or scapegoating others
- ignoring dissident voices
- focusing only on technical quick-fix solutions
- running away from those issues that seem too difficult

In Bankstown, the community identified obstacles to collaboration as:



**Questions to consider:**

- What is the resistance or avoidance you see occurring in your organisation or community?
- What aspects of the problem are people avoiding?
- What values might the group hold that are more important than facing the challenge?
- Does your group have the capacity to engage this problem? What else might be needed?

## Resources

Resources are a means to an end, not an end in themselves. Often groups only see resources in the form of grants or money. Most communities are rich in resources which can be tapped to work difficult issues. Such resources include social capital, local knowledge, existing clubs or organisations, supporting agencies, elected officials and key individuals. Doing an asset-map can help identify these rich resources.

For example, the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model is based on relationships and partnerships built on networks of trust and shared norms. It has led to numerous community projects and has been effective in mobilising groups around specific issues. Its core activities are identifying and defining community strengths to meet particular challenges. Its asset based method draws attention to social assets including individual talents and informal networks. Assets in this model can be financial resources but also individual skills and talents, organisations, political connections, buildings and facilities, as well as natural resources. Community mapping is used as a method of identifying these community assets. The ABCD model component parts include:

**Appreciative inquiry:** inquires and analyses the community's past successes as a way of building confidence and inspiring action

**Social capital:** especially associations and relationships

**Community mapping:** identifies and links assets and builds collaborative efforts

**Citizen driven:** sees people as citizens (rather than clients) in development, and promotes how to make local governance more effective and responsive

**Resources:** focuses around supporting the community's agenda rather than driving the agenda

In Bankstown, community consultations identified the following advantages and resources gained as a result of putting the community in the centre of all our work:



**Questions to consider:**

- How do we value our existing networks and relationships?
- What local groups or key individuals can be approached to help with the issue?
- Are we proactive in approaching them to help with our challenge?
- Do we reflect on lessons from the past to inform current actions?

## Who?

### Partners

Partnering for collaboration is about discovering what is actually going on in the community, not only working with people who support you. That means genuinely engaging with those who are opponents or resisting change. Too often we ignore or marginalise these people – instead they need to be embraced. It is important to find out why they oppose what is trying to be achieved. They may have alternative perspectives which have not been considered and which are essential for making progress. Key questions include who will be with you, or against you and why? Think about four types of partners:

#### 1. ISSUE

Those who support you on the challenge. They are interested in the issue and you can work with them in committees or at forums to help keep the focus on the real issues.

#### 2. YOU

Those who support you personally – they can help in ensuring you don't take unnecessary risks. For example, they might advise you to be careful that you don't lose your job or attract excessive criticism.

#### 3. THEM

People often don't want to hear from others who oppose them on an issue. Instead, you need to embrace them, find out why they oppose what you are trying to achieve. They may have new perspectives you may have missed.

#### 4. US

Your own team or group needs to test your ideas and leadership and be engaged in fierce conversations, not be a nice environment of complete agreement.

#### Questions to consider:

- What channels of communication do you use to engage partners?
- Do you really know what your opponents are thinking? Have you tried to find out?
- How could you support those experiencing loss during a period of change?

## Authorities

Authority has an important role in providing stability during times of change. Authority can be formal (a position such as a Director, Chairperson or politician) or informal (through respect or trust regardless of position). Authorities are expected to help give direction to a community, get attention on an issue, resolve conflicts and organise resources. They are very sensitive to the moods of the community as they often have multiple groups coming to them to lobby or for advice. Seeing how an authority (eg a politician) is reacting to a situation can help reveal community reaction to an issue.

However, communities sometimes rely too much on authorities to come up with a solution or answer. Such dependency can stop the community working difficult issues as they wait for the authority to do all the work instead. Alternatively, authorities are ignored or blamed for the situation. Successful collaboration requires understanding both the role and potential of authorities to support change.

### Questions to consider:

- Who are the key formal authorities in your community?
- Who are the informal authorities? What do they represent?
- What clues can these authorities give as to whether the issue is being supported or resisted in the community?
- How is “authority” used in your organisation? Are there any risks of dependency developing?

## How?

### Attention

Capturing the attention of partners, authorities and the community is essential to building collaborative networks and making change. Gaining attention is for the purpose of making progress on the issue, not just getting attention towards your group. Sometimes the promise of a better future is enough to build a commitment to addressing an issue. At other times, highlighting the threat of not collaborating is more effective. Getting the balance right is core to collaboration.

Bankstown forums indicated the following behaviours which can help or hinder in building effective collaborations:

PRINCIPLES for initiating action	
What we will do:	Practices to avoid:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work on behalf of the community</li> <li>• Raise issues</li> <li>• Engage respectfully as equals</li> <li>• Seek community ownership</li> <li>• Be authentic</li> <li>• Sustainable</li> <li>• Beyond grants competition</li> <li>• Take a stand</li> <li>• Focus on community – not individual organisations</li> <li>• United around fierce conversations</li> <li>• Ethical principles</li> <li>• Loyalty – to create a safe space</li> <li>• Bring our expertise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Misuse information</li> <li>• Missing conversations</li> <li>• Not sharing information</li> <li>• Reactive</li> <li>• Seeing engagement as only extra work</li> <li>• Compete on grants</li> <li>• Silos</li> <li>• Lack trust</li> <li>• Talk against each other to create divisions</li> </ul>

#### Questions to consider:

- What drives people to participate and collaborate?
- How can you balance building a positive vision with highlighting potential threats?
- How can you keep the focus on the key issues when other issues start to distract from the main challenge?
- What forums seem the best for raising new issues?
- Could you take up a difficult issue and invite key players?

## Engagement

Although something of a buzz word these days, engagement still has deeper meaning of focusing people around the key issues in order to expand their problem-solving capacity. Extensive research on “localism” shows that locally developed solutions are most effective in the long term. However, often the process by which engagement occurs at a local level limits the effectiveness of collaborative efforts.

Research from around the world suggest the core elements of collaboration can include:



To gain maximum engagement think about whether the community has:

- The resources, capacity and knowledge to participate – is additional training necessary?
- A real interest in the issues – is it ready to be discussed and addressed or do people tend to avoid the issues?
- The forums and opportunities to engage the issues as well as having been invited to be involved?
- A feel that their concerns are being listened to, acknowledged and responded to?

### Questions to consider:

- What in your experience has been the most effective way of engaging people in your area?
- Do community, government or business groups each need to be approached in different ways?
- Are you engaging the community in a way they feel their concerns are being listened to?

## Action

Collaboration is an inclusive process, and designing actions for progress often involves raising sensitive issues between organisations and within the community. Taking action not only raises attention to issues but is also a way to test the reaction to different ideas, statements, engagements and provocations. Smaller experiments can give clues as to how the system will respond and how sensitive it may be to change. Issues need to be “cooked” – too little heat and nothing happens, too much heat and it explodes everywhere. Careful crafting of questions as a way of experimenting is an essential tool of collaborative leadership. This requires laying the groundwork for questioning the assumptions of others and ourselves. The key question is who has to do what to make progress? From the Bankstown forums, people saw the following actions as working:



**Taking Action – What works**

- Keep focus on social justice
- Facts, reality and evidence (or the lack of it)
- Multilevel Strategies
- Ask key orientating questions
- Create the space for conversations
- Build partners
- Reframe the narrative, not be hostage to it
- Challenge instances of labelling of groups or communities

### Questions to consider:

- What experiments could you try that might reveal the best way of engaging the community?
- What key questions need to be asked to create new conversations?
- How could you reframe the existing narrative to create new opportunities for action?

## Asking Questions

Rather than approach issues with solutions, community collaboration relies more on asking questions. However, some questions might actually limit engagement through reducing options. Examples of weak questions include:

- 1) How much does it cost? (making cost the most important consideration limits other possibilities)
- 2) How long will it take? (limits us to short term solutions)
- 3) How do we do it? (assumes there is an answer and someone else has it)
- 4) How do we measure it? (assumes if it can't be measured, it isn't important)
- 5) How do we get other people to change? (is really about control, not discovery)

Instead, we are interested in discovering what is really going on and that means being curious. Questions should be crafted to help begin new conversations by pointing to issues that people are avoiding and raising contradictions. In doing this, it is important to be transparent about your thinking – people should be able to understand how you came to the conclusion you did rather than just see it as “another opinion”. A good structure is to point to something you are seeing or know (evidence/facts) first, then show why it informed your thinking. For example, you could say *“I saw in the last round of grant funding that people didn't talk to each other beforehand. That makes me think they are more interested in funding than forming relationships. Can you see why I would think that?”*. This creates a dialogue around importance of relationships relative to funding. It is different to simply saying *“People aren't cooperating or working together”* which may generated defensive responses rather than opening up new conversations.

### Questions to consider:

- How can we redefine “success” for the community sector - beyond resources?
- What's not working in our sector and how do we respond to it?
- How do we refocus on the bigger picture – beyond survival/fear?

## Where?

### Interaction

Traditional forms of interaction via meetings, workshops and conferences are now being supplemented by social media and online collaboration. Feedback from consultations suggested the location of where collaboration occurs and its timing is critical to success. While both traditional and digital collaborations need to be utilised, it seems people are more open when they get together informally. Key conversations often happen in informal settings over “cups of tea”, in cafes or in cinemas. They also occur in the corridor or carpark after more formal meetings. For Bankstown, relationships based on trust are repeatedly cited as the most important factor in success.

The focus of the interaction is also important. Bankstown forums revealed that the current emphasis on funding issues was crowding out deeper values discussions. People said they wanted to have collaborations “*where the conversation is different*”.

#### Questions to consider:

- Where do people get their information from in Bankstown or in your area?
- What is your experience about the most effective way of building support and trust?
- What sort of interaction would attract your attention and what would you turn up to?
- How can you create a more robust “environment” for difficult conversations?

## Impact – How will I know if I am successful

### Feedback

Collaboration is about continuous learning, so assessing the effectiveness of your action is essential to understanding next steps. Critical to this is a diverse range of feedback mechanisms ranging from your own group to outside organisations such as national bodies, politicians or other authorities. That also includes listening to your opponents (see partnerships on page 16). Misinterpreting feedback as criticism is a common mistake in collaborative endeavours and shuts down potential sources of information and data about how the community is reacting to an issue.

#### Questions to consider:

- How will I know if my actions have been successful?
- What feedback mechanisms will I rely on and how can I expand them?
- How will I distinguish between feedback which is useful data contrasted with feedback which is criticism?
- How can I use feedback to construct better conversations and dialogue?

### Assessment

Agreed ways of assessing progress can be helpful in strengthening collaboration. Such assessment can be associated with specific measurements which may focus on managerial outcomes and outputs. However, it is essential to also take account of how people “feel” at a local level. Importantly, the sense that things are improving, relationships are strengthening and problems are being addressed are indicators of progress.

#### Questions to consider:

- Which elements of the strategy and collaboration would benefit from measurement?
- Which elements are not measurable? How would I know if it is working?

## Renewal

The most difficult issues facing communities are not technical or linear. They are dynamic, which means there is a need to continually assess progress and learning in order to make mid-course corrections. That may mean new approaches, new partnerships and relations, new difficult conversations – but all with the objective of learning and strengthening the collaborative work. Importantly, all the work cannot be left to one individual or small group to do. Collaboration means sharing the work around. Many people take on too much and end up burning out. Make sure everyone takes some time out to recharge.

### Questions to consider:

- Is too much work falling on the shoulders of a small group or individuals?
- Who do I look to for personal support?

## Conclusion

Key aspects of the Bankstown Linked-in Community Collaboration model include:

1. Engage the community to discover:
  - a) The present: What is working, what needs to change or is missing;
  - b) The future: Where they want to be, what their sense of future holds, what are their hopes and aspirations
2. Avoid injecting external solutions and, instead, lead with questions that help the community explore assumptions and reality
3. Reveal contradictions – how does community action or inaction contribute to the continuation of the problems?
4. Re-frame the challenge and empower community to realise that their actions can make a difference

The following is an example of how a group considered the “Radicalisation” issue based on the Community collaborative model in order to explore the difference between perception and facts to reveal new perspectives on the issue.

## Collaborative Leadership Forum Notes - Radicalisation

30 March 2015 @Arab Council Australia

### Summary from a community perspective

The radicalisation of young people is being framed as a problem of *individuals* who are unduly influenced by radical groups and therefore the solutions have been logically limited to countering the effects of those groups. However, the deeper problem comes from the combined stereotypes of “Middle Eastern” and “young” people in Australia. Previously, there was fear of *youth gangs*, now it is framed as the threat of *isolated individuals*. As a result, simply being of Middle Eastern appearance is enough to raise suspicion.

Whole communities are now being demonised – both collectively and individually. The community is treated as if:

1. they “know” who the radicalised young people are and are not telling the authorities
2. they are responsible for radicalisation, the actions of radicals and should be responsible for taking action to counter it.

However, at a community level, services on the ground are not seeing a “crisis” as popularly framed and neither the community nor often families have any forewarning of individual actions. Media interviews with individuals who have left for overseas usually reveal a wide range of mixed motives rarely based solely on religion or culture.

The spill-over of fear of the “radicalised individual” is that many young Arabs feel their communities are unfairly targeted by the government and media. They themselves are feeling marginalised, disenfranchised, profiled and discriminated against. However, youth and community workers report that while there can always be a small number of troubled individuals, most are simply young people like those from other communities looking for a cause and identity. The real issue is how to engage young adolescents who are seeking alternatives to conformity and the status quo – which most adolescents naturally challenge. However, now, it is also tied up with geopolitical issues, religion and community fractures.

The narrative often used by politicians, the government and media feeds fear. Terms such as “counter-terrorism” and “de-radicalisation” build a perception (intentionally or unintentionally) that there is a widespread threat. Instead, greater effort needs to be made to establish and share the facts publically in order to gain a deeper understanding of exactly what threat is being faced and its magnitude. In the absence of evidence-based approaches, perception is treated as if it is reality. Where that perception is constantly repeated as fact it generates negative sentiments towards the community – a constant problem in current media reporting on this issue.

There is a wider need in Australia to re-examine the way in which minorities are treated. As a social justice issue, it means shifting the dynamic from *isolating and demonising* the Arab community to instead *partnering* with the Arab community. That means focusing on solutions which move away from “de-radicalisation” through principles of citizenship and

democratic participation (where the expectation is conformity) to instead build communities that are genuinely *inclusive* and which *value diversity*.

### Competing perspectives

	<b>Politics/Government Media</b>	<b>Arab community</b>
<b>Frames as</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National security</li> <li>• Implied threat/fear</li> <li>• Radical Islam</li> <li>• Arab community as a single entity</li> <li>• Responsibility of the Arab community to counter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alienation / discrimination</li> <li>• Minority politics</li> <li>• Adolescent rebellion</li> <li>• Seeking alternatives – dissatisfaction with status quo</li> <li>• Looking for a cause</li> <li>• Individual mental illness</li> </ul>
<b>Focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change the individuals – especially their behaviours or beliefs</li> <li>• Blame the community and religious institutions</li> <li>• Marginalise Arab community</li> <li>• Lack of engagement with community on the ground</li> <li>• Frame as win/lose dynamic</li> <li>• Suspicion - no sharing of information by ASIO or the police</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build community capacity</li> <li>• Build partnerships</li> <li>• Acknowledge divisions naturally exist within the community</li> <li>• Unknown causes of radicalisation and little evidence that it goes beyond small numbers</li> </ul>
<b>Solution</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Law and order issue</li> <li>• Rules and regulations that control behaviour</li> <li>• Grant programs focused on individuals rather than supporting community</li> <li>• Encourage citizenship and democratic participation</li> <li>• Measurable KPIs</li> <li>• Profiling at borders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Real engagement</li> <li>• Inclusion strategies</li> <li>• Building partnerships between institutions</li> <li>• Explore where the spaces are for adolescents to explore alternatives</li> <li>• Active citizenship that creates better opportunities</li> <li>• Seek evidence on reality of the problem</li> </ul>
<b>Dynamic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear</li> <li>• Mistrust</li> <li>• Divisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Belonging</li> <li>• Respect</li> </ul>

## Stereotypes

<b>Middle eastern background</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arabs = Muslims = terrorists</li> <li>• Values and culture are suspect</li> <li>• Labelled (eg “un-Australian”)</li> <li>• Threat of gangs or dangerous individuals</li> </ul>
<b>Young people</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don’t listen, risky, breach social norms, not grown-up, group behaviour is a threat, reject existing political processes, treated as a problem to be solved</li> <li>• Threat of gangs or the lone troubled individual</li> </ul>

## Default assumptions (Treated as truths – need to be tested)

- There is a current crisis (cf problem)
- The community knows who these individuals are
- Responsibility for an answer is with that community
- The community does not take action because they don’t want to
- A solution or formula can be applied
- Solutions focus on civil society actions not on families
- Politically, the Arab community is a soft target for generating fear in the wider community
- Blame is a dominant dynamic especially of religion and families
- There is a history of demonisation of the community
- History repeats the dynamic of continually isolating this group
- A divisive narrative is now mainstream in Australia - us versus them (tribalism) - this applies to Arabs, Muslims, asylum seekers and indigenous people
- We keep doing the same thing with no evidence that it works
- If we see a young “group” we break it – fear of gangs (and patronising)

## Attention / Action

- Need to create learning spaces and experiment
- Not crisis based – not reactive
- Focus on engaging diversity at a local level
- Engage multiple partners including own organisations, neighbourhoods, religious institutions, schools, our own organisational boards and other areas where we have a “sphere of influence”
- Reframe narrative, not just in public commentary but also at grassroot levels

## Brainstorming questions – missing conversations

- What are the risks?
- How does the politics of fear contribute to the problem/heighten the risk?
- Why is there so much mistrust? Why focus only on young Arabs or young Muslims when the issues are common to youth everywhere? (motivation is not just religious)
- What is the difference between being recruited by ISIS or a sect or a drug gang?
- Where are the spaces where young people can explore alternatives? (University, student groups)
- What does it feel like for young people to not belong, to being demonised?
- Why is race or religion defined as terrorism? ie Arab = Muslim = terrorist
- What role does geopolitics and Australia's foreign policy play in the radicalisation process?
- Is national policy created by lobby groups?
- Do the actions of the Arab communities themselves perpetuate a victim mentality? Why does that happen?

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## Participants in the Linked In Bankstown

The following are organisations and groups that have participated through training, forums and/or Steering Group

- Arab Council Australia (Auspice organisation)
- Afford Employment
- Australian Arab Business Council
- Bankstown City Council
- Bankstown City Credit Union
- Bankstown Community Resource Group
- Bankstown Community Unions
- Bankstown Youth Development Service
- Career Connections
- Chester Hill Neighbourhood Centre
- Chester Hill Men’s Group
- Children Services Bankstown
- Climate Action Network
- Creating Links
- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
- Department of Human Services
- Department of Family and Community Services
- Earth Hour | World Wide Fund for Nature - Australia
- Greenacre Area Community Centre
- Inner South West Community Development Organisation
- Macquarie University
- Melkite Catholic Welfare Association
- Metro Assist (Previously Metro Migrant Resource Centre)
- Multicultural Network (Previously Bankstown Area Multicultural Network)
- Multicultural NSW (Previously Community Relations Commission)
- Navitas
- NSW Education and Communities
- NSW Family and Community Services
- NSW Police Force, Bankstown
- School for Social Entrepreneurs
- Settlement Services International
- Sydney Alliance
- St Vincent de Paul
- State Training Services, Bankstown
- TAFE - Bankstown
- The Benevolent Society
- The Smith Family
- Unfolding Futures
- United Muslim Women’s Association
- University of Western Sydney
- Unions NSW
- Vietnamese Australian Welfare Association
- Western Sydney Community Forum
- Woodville Alliance (Previously Woodville Community Services)



**Arab Council Australia**  
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