the good shift

Activating Civic and Community Participation

Thematic Summaries Report

March 2026

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Introduction

The Good Shift, in collaboration with the Centre for Public Impact (ANZ) and alongside The Behaviour Change Collaborative, is advising Minderoo Foundation on funding and investment opportunities to strengthen its role in contributing to Australian practices of active civic and community participation. Through the project we have explored key conditions, actors, shifts, strategies, and mental models that enable active community participation, strengthen social capital, and foster positive social connection.

This work responds to growing evidence that many of Australia's most pressing challenges including inequality and democratic strain, climate disruption and gendered disadvantage cannot be addressed through programs or policy alone. They require sustained civic capability: people, communities, and institutions able to act together with agency, trust, and shared purpose.

This document is one of the outputs generated through the project by The Good Shift and provides commentary on six key themes emerging through the work. These themes and the relationships between them are summarised in Figure 1.

Sources of evidence + outputs

The Good Shift's contributions to this project include research, analysis, synthesis and documentation of three strands of evidence:

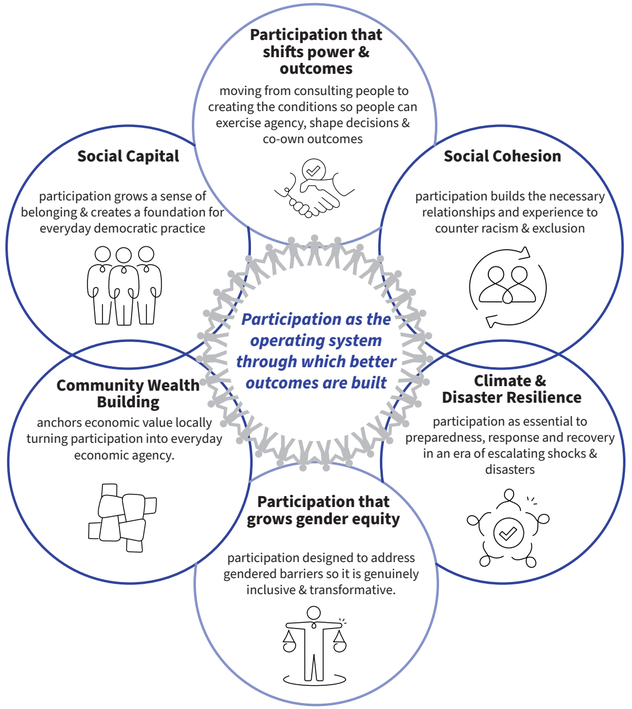
- A ***Literature Review***, which synthesises the extensive and often fragmented evidence on what activates civic and community participation. The review provides the academic foundations for concepts referenced throughout the Thematic Summaries, including participation, social capital, equity and resilience.

- A ***Community Researchers Artefacts Compilation***, which grounds the themes explored in this summary in lived experience and place-based practice. The microcase studies referenced within each thematic summary demonstrate how participation is enacted in real contexts, highlighting both the possibilities and constraints faced by communities leading change.

- This ***Thematic Summaries Report*** which identifies recurring patterns that emerge across interviews and community research in relation to six thematic outcomes. This report then synthesises findings from this grounded evidence, and the literature review to identify Strategic Directions to support progress in relation to each thematic outcome via structurally bold action.

- An ***Investment Opportunity Framework*** has also been developed which builds from these bodies of evidence and others generated by the Centre for Public Impact and The Behaviour Change Collaborative to articulate how philanthropy might invest differently to address priorities identified. The framework sets out practical guidance on funding horizons, governance, power-sharing, evaluation, and learning.

Used in combination, the outputs will support Minderoo Foundation and its partners to move beyond fragmented, project-based interventions towards long-term, place-based investment approaches that strengthen agency, belonging, resilience and equity across Australia.



How participation improves outcomes

Six Themes from across the Evidence

Top 10 Cross-thematic insights

1. Participation is core civic infrastructure, not a peripheral activity.

2. Structural boldness, not performative boldness, drives lasting change.

3. Participation, connectedness, equity, and resilience form a single living system with social and economic benefits.

4. Long-term, relational investment is non-negotiable for structural change.

5. Start with what already exists rather than building new programs, buildings or institutions.

6. Power must shift to communities through control over decisions, assets, and budgets.

7. Community wealth building transforms participation from voice to economic agency.

8. Gender equity requires designing participation to address gendered barriers, not merely including women.

9. Social capital is as critical as physical infrastructure for community wellbeing and disaster resilience.

10. Funders must rewire their own practices, not just fund community change.

Figure 1: How participation improves outcomes.

Contributors who informed these thematic summaries

Community Researchers are trusted locals with lived experience and deep knowledge of their communities. Involving them in fieldwork helps surface insights that mainstream studies often miss, adding nuance, context, and practice-based critique. The five Community Researchers commissioned by The Good Shift to contribute to this project were selected to bring diverse perspectives on how to activate civic and community participation across different contexts.

Community Researchers engaged by The Good Shift were affiliated with the organisations listed in Table 1. The process of engaging Community Researchers is described in Appendix A. The artefacts produced by each of the Community Researchers can be found in the ***Community Researcher Artefacts Compilation.***

Table 1: Community Researcher organisational affiliations

Housing Matters Action Group	Bellingen, NSW
Tatreez Project Collaboration	Logan, QLD
The Good Neighbourhood Project	Norlane, VIC
The Wilderness Collective	Mallacoota, NSW
Youth Advisory Group	Cherbourg, QLD

Interviewees were chosen for the depth of their experience regarding various aspects of participation and engagement, and to reflect a diversity of contexts in which it takes place. The organisations interviewees were affiliated with are listed in Table 2. Additional information about these organisations is included in Appendix B.

Table 2: Organisational affiliations of interviewees

Australian Centre for Rural Entrepreneurship
BeFriend
Castlemaine Community Investment Co-op
Center for Economic Democracy
Centre for Community Capital
ClimateWell + Safer Future
Co-operation Housing WA
DisasterWISE
GenWest
Hastings Commons
Hunter Community Alliance
Individual Practitioner (Australia)
Individual Practitioner (NZ)
Individual Practitioner (USA/Canada)
Inter-Movement Impact Project (USA)
Neighbourhood Centres QLD
Nhill Neighbourhood House Learning Centre
Open Food Network
Parent to Parent QLD
Participatory Budgeting Project (USA)
Peter McKenzie Project
Regen Labs
Tamarack Institute
Think Forward
TSI Auckland Council ‘Buzzly’
VIC Park Collective
Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll) Aotearoa

Six thematic outcomes

To sharpen the focus on the potential and impact of increased civic and community participation, and to identify strategic directions for Minderoo Foundation and others we chose to explore impacts in relation to six thematic outcome areas (see Figure 1).

These six thematic outcomes were chosen because they repeatedly emerged as leverage points across the evidence bases and align closely with Minderoo Foundation's 2030 Strategy to forge a fair future for people and natural ecosystems. Two themes are foundational, relevant to all efforts to grow community participation:

- **Participation that shifts power and outcomes** describes how processes move from consulting people to creating the conditions in which they are able to exercise agency, shape decisions and co-own outcomes; and

- **Participation that grows gender equity** demonstrates how participation must be designed to address gendered barriers if it is to be genuinely inclusive and transformative.

Four focused themes describe how community participation supports outcomes relevant to Minderoo Foundation's priorities:

- **Social capital** explores the relationship between participation, belonging and everyday democratic practice;

- **Community wealth building** extends participation into the economic sphere, showing how ownership, jobs, land and finance can become sites of civic power rather than extraction;

- **Climate and disaster resilience** highlights participation as essential to preparedness, response and recovery in an era of escalating shocks; and

- **Social cohesion** reflects how participation can help to build the necessary relationships and experience to counter racism and exclusion.

Each thematic outcome is explored in the pages that follow. Short summaries are provided outlining how each theme relates to Minderoo Foundation's 2030 Strategy (see Figure 2). Connections are also made between the issues raised in interviews and community research, and the bodies of evidence described in the Literature Review and summarised in a sensemaking framework developed to grapple with diverse bodies of literature (see Figure 3). Strategic Directions are identified to inform both Minderoo's practice and priorities across it's diverse bodies of work and, to support Minderoo's broader field building efforts.

"Most people are not apathetic. . . most people, care very deeply. It's not that they don't care. It's that they don't trust that investing that care, investing that time, will result in any sort of impact."
(RT, Participatory Budgeting Project)

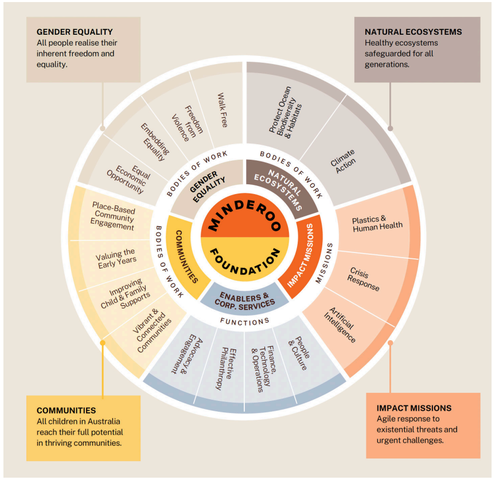


Figure 2: Minderoo Foundation – Focus Areas, Bodies of Work and Complementary Projects

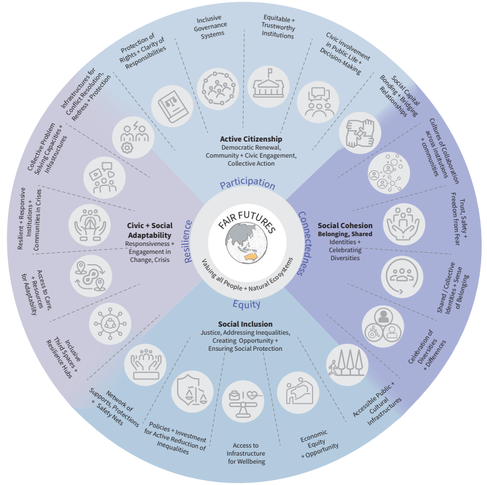


Figure 3: The Good Shift - Sensemaking Framework

Participation that shifts power and outcomes

As explored in the Literature Review, participation that shifts power and outcomes is a foundational theme relevant to all efforts to increase civic and community participation.

What this thematic is about and why it matters now

Participation refers to the act of taking part. Engagement describes the quality and depth of that participation and its consequences for decision making. Meaningful engagement is characterised by shared agenda-setting, real decision-making power, continuity over time and recognition of lived experience as expertise. Participation and engagement shape both institutional practice and everyday life. Everyday participation and engagement is foundational to the healthy families, dynamic cultures, inclusive education, accessible play and nurturing communities that enable children to thrive.

Globally, levels of civic participation and volunteering are under strain. Declining participation and engagement threatens the robustness of democratic processes and undermines everyday systems of care and support. Contemporary understandings of what constitutes meaningful participation are required to address barriers and create opportunities that foster and diversify the agency, co-ownership, and capacity of community members to influence outcomes that matter.

Links to Minderoo Foundation's Focus Areas

Insights from the Participation that shifts power and outcomes thematic summary can inform Minderoo Foundation's work across its entire portfolio of activities, with particularly clear links to the Communities focus area:

- **Communities (Vibrant & Connected Communities) -** Participation processes are core infrastructure supporting vibrant and connected communities.
- **Commuunities** (**Place-Based Community Engagement) -** Place-based participation can help to shift power to local communities enabling them to determine local outcomes and what it will take to achieve them.
- **Communities** (**Improving Child & Family Supports) -** Participatory processes engage families and children in identifying, accessing, and developing the supports that they need.

Links to Literature Review commentary and findings

The Literature Review frames the role of **participation in shifting power and outcomes.** Core themes are summarised below.

- **Participation (active citizenship)**

Participation is an expression of how power is shared, with citizens and communities acting as agents in decisions made by governments, markets, and institutions. Active citizenship goes beyond being informed or consulted to shaping policies,budgets, and governance arrangements, from local initiatives to national reform. Strong participatory structures and hybrid approaches that effectively combine in-person and online opportunities, distribute rather than centralise autonomy, and resource community voice across cycles of problem definition, design, implementation, and evaluation.

- **Connectedness (social cohesion, belonging)**

Participation that shifts power and outcomes helps to build connectedness when it takes the form of ongoing social interaction and shared problem-solving rather than one-off consultations. Structured intergroup practices such as cooperative sport, arts and cultural activities and local dialogue

programs extend people's networks; while third sector and social economy infrastructure facilitate reciprocity, sharing and mutual aid; all of which strengthen social ties, share power, and help tackle shared outcomes. When communities co-design local solutions ownership of outcomes increases. Participation deepens social cohesion and can increase trust between residents and institutions. Done well, participation helps people feel seen and valued, reduces isolation and anxiety, fosters hope and agency, and nurtures a resilient sense of belonging across differences.

- **Equity (social inclusion)**

Participation can both foster equity and be a means of tackling structural injustice. Digital-only engagement can create exclusion, particularly for groups with limited digital access or literacy. It can also improve participation for others (e.g. young people, carers, full-time workers, people in remote communities). Inclusive, hybrid, co-created and properlyresourced engagement enables those most affected by decisions to shape them. This shifts participation from symbolic inclusion to a mechanism for addressing intersecting inequalities and redistributing voice, resources, and protection. Social inclusion is also a precondition: without digital access, time, income and basic security, people struggle to engage. Yet when these barriers are reduced, meaningful participation can expand opportunity, challenge exclusion, and support fairer civic and institutional arrangements.

- **Resilience (civic + social adaptability)**

Resilience is closely tied to how communities participate before, during and after shocks. Civic and community engagement strengthens adaptive and transformative disaster resilience capacities when people collectively develop and mobilise local resources rather than relying solely on technical diaster management plans or external experts. The relationships and networks grown through everyday participation become the channels through which communities can self-organise, improvise, and learn from experience. Inclusive spaces for deliberation, locally rooted leadership and community-driven recovery initiatives draw on lived and place-based knowledge, making responses more equitable , effective, and sustained over time.

Key patterns identified via interviews and community research

Analysis of both interviews and community researcher artefacts reveal the following patterns regarding participation that shifts power and outcomes:

- **Power shifts when participation starts before, not after problems are defined**, **funding criteria set and decisions about potential solutions are made**. When communities help frame the questions and solutions, participation is more likely to generate ownership, legitimacy, and fit-for-context responses.

". . . I've just had the world's best funder in the sense that it's operational, no real strong KPIs. And the groups they fund, they've curated a group of them that they actually support one another, and they actively bring us together twice a year to share knowledge. They encourage us to do shared work projects, which we've very much embraced. So for us, we had the incredible funder who let us get on with it - I don't want to sound arrogant, b ut they saw the expertise we had and wanted us to just do what we thought was best, using our discernment. . . ." (GH, Wellbeing Economy Alliance)

- **Participation changes outcomes when lived experience is recognised as expertise and participation is resourced as work.** Paying and training people and embedding their participation in governance and delivery processes fosters participation. When people are only consulted, engagement is weaker, and power remains institutionalized.

"We've put a really high level of value on people's own personal lived experiences in how they naturally build community in the places that they live in, and in the contexts that they're a part of. And that's been one of the greatest strengths for us organizationally, because it's meant that we've been able to create the opportunity, like the employment opportunity, for people who to already think in this way, and for who this is a natural expression of who they are and a natural part of their way of life.." (NM, BeFriend)

- **Participation that shifts power is built over time, not delivered as an event.** Participation becomes deeper and more durable when people trust that the work they are contributing to will continue and that their involvement will make a difference.

". . . we are largely concerned with . . . actually transforming what civic engagement and what democracy and what participation actually means to people, and bringing the meaning of that participation closer to the levers of power. So when we talk to folks about participatory budgeting the central thesis of it is all about self determination. . And the idea that there are constantly decisions being made in the systems of governance which shape your reality and the realities of your community. And the members of the community who are most impacted by those decisions should be central in those decisions and have direct power over them..." (RT, Participatory Budgeting Project)

- **Shared action (creative, cultural, practical, or taskbased) is a highly effective entry point for participation and shared ownership of outcomes.** Doing things together helps to lower barriers, flatten power dynamics, and enable people who are often excluded from formal engagement to participate on their own terms. Conversation and leadership typically emerge through action, not persuasion.

"Traditional methods of engagement don't really work for young people…They want something that's creative, digital, inclusive and fun ..and genuine and authentic." (JU & DH, Buzzly Initiative)

- **Participation scales through infrastructure and authority.** Power shifts most clearly when people can see what decisions they influence, what resources they control, and how participation changes outcomes, often, with the support of backbone roles that hold the work together.

" . maintaining twice a year Mahi Tahi [a Māori phrase meaning "work together" or "working as one", emphasizing collaboration, collective responsibility, and a shared focus] gatherings - which is quite a big commitment - organic collaboration emerged. So through relationships, groups started working together outside of the Mahi Tahi. And that's probably one of the most powerful things to come out of PMP. . . groups found their own value in working together.." (GS, Peter McKenzie Project)

Strategic Directions

Synthesis of evidence from literature, community research and interviews reveals key strategic directions to **grow participation that shifts power and outcomes** via structurally bold action. These directions are relevant to Minderoo's internal practice and broader field building efforts.

Move from funding engagement outputs to funding ongoing community participation capacity. Resourcing facilitation, coordination, governance training, reflection and leadership development improves participation.	**Shift from "listening better" to changing who decides.** Processes like participatory budgeting, community governed funds and cooperatives enable communities to influence resources and outcomes.
Privilege continuity, trust, and place. Short funding cycles undermine participation that shifts power. Participation deepens when people know the work they're engaged with won't disappear after a pilot or grant cycle.	**Build fair participation economies by resourcing participation as real work.** Paid participation is one strategy that helps to redistribute power and sustain engagement over time.
Replace control and compliance with trust, learning and adaption. Participation works best when it is treated as a learning system rather than a fixed method. This requires feedback loops, shared reflection, and permission to adapt as contexts change. Rigid outcomes, over-prescription and risk aversion weaken participation.	

Illustrative Micro Case Study: Participation that shifts power and outcomes

The Good Neighbourhood Project (Norlane, VIC)

The Good Neighbourhood Project named, distilled, and shared a long-standing, deeply relational way of working in a highly disadvantaged neighbourhood. It reveals that rather than designing time-bound programs or dropping in consultation processes from outside, the work starts with everyday relationships built through places like community cafés, shared meals, neighbourhood hubs and 'bumping spaces' such as Labuan Square. These relationships are core civic infrastructure. They are a precondition for everything else, including surveys and advocacy to improve neighbourhood safety, health and physical activity projects, new enterprises and leadership development.

By contrasting relationship-led practice with traditional engagement, the Norlane project shows how participation shifts when residents, not institutions, define problems and lead solutions. Deep listening and dialogical community development mean issues like unemployment are re-framed through lived experience of challenges such as disability, mental health, caring responsibilities, trauma, rather than seen as simplistic behavioural deficits. This inside-out approach explains why Norlane residents can quickly generate dozens of survey responses on 'hard to reach' topics when asked by trusted neighbours, yet ignore externally designed programs advertised only via flyers or websites.

Case studies of Labuan Square and local safety initiatives demonstrate how this translates into active citizenship. At Labuan Square, the team first rented a shop simply to be present, then asked passers-by what they wanted. A resident-run café, op shop and craft store gradually emerged, alongside markets and community events. Similarly, resident-led consultations with council on redesigning the plaza produced record response rates and a renewed public space co-designed with local artists and the First Nations cooperative. In both examples, neighbours moved from being 'service users' to co-owners of local assets and decision-making.

The project also highlights how building community wealth requires shifting from welfare-oriented, crisis food relief to cooperative, member-run models that treat people as contributors. Earlier experiments with a food co-op and, more recently, the Changemakers program show how local capacity building can seed concrete projects: twilight markets, outdoor cinema, a makers' collective, an Indigenous mural business, expanded urban farming and new shared-housing ideas. These initiatives blend social, cultural, and economic value while keeping control and benefit in the neighbourhood.

Finally, the redevelopment of an old church into a flexible community hub including a kitchen, hall, workshop, garden is positioned not as a service centre but as infrastructure that local people will animate. Through these stories and reflections on its 14 years working in this place, the Norlane project offers a grounded account of what it takes to cultivate genuine community participation and community wealth building: long-term presence, trauma-aware hospitality, resident leadership, and an integrated neighbourhood practice where care, economy and civic life are woven together rather than siloed.

Additional information can be found in the Community Research Artefact Compilation and on the Good Neighbourhood Project website The Good Neighbourhood Project.

Participation that grows gender equity

This theme examines how participation can redistribute voice, resources, and leadership to improve gender equity.

What this thematic is about and why it matters now

Participation is a pathway to gender equity when it redistributes power, resources, and voice. Gender equity strengthens participation by widening who can show up, lead, and decide. Evidence shows that gendered barriers such as requirements to provide unpaid care, economic insecurity, safety concerns, and cultural exclusion suppress participation. Addressing these and other intersectional barriers impacting women from diverse cultural, economic, and social backgrounds is essential to fostering participation that benefits from the knowledges and perspectives of diverse men and women.

Links to Literature Review commentary and findings

The Literature Review identifies how **participation grows gender equity.** Core themes are summarised below.

- **Participation (active citizenship)**

Participation is characterised as not just 'involvement' but as a form of active citizenship: for example, the capacity of women and gender-diverse people to influence decisions in government, markets, and institutions. When participatory processes are properly resourced with time, care, stipends, childcare, translation and trauma-informed facilitation, gender marginalised people can move from being consulted to setting agendas and shaping reforms. Longer-term ngagement that is informed by diverse lived experiences can be supported by feedback loops and genuinely shared decision-making.

Links to Minderoo Foundation's Focus Areas

As part of the framing for this project, Minderoo Foundation expressed an interest in exploring the relationship between gender and participation. Insights from this review that could inform the following bodies of work from the Gender Equality and Communities Focus Areas:

- **Gender Equality** (**Equal Economic Opportunity) -** Participation that grows gender equity creates opportunities for all women, but particularly women and girls from disadvantaged communities to access economic opportunities that boost their economic agency.

- **Gender Equality** (**Embedding Equality)** - Inclusive participation removes barriers that prevent support women, men, boys, and girls, in all their diversity from participating in decisions that affect their lives and supports their equitable participation in civic and community processes.

- **Communities (Improving Child & Family Supports) -** Equitable access to opportunities to participate in community and civic activities requires that responsibilities for child and family care are shared. Engaging diverse voices improves the quality of decision making about policies and services to support families and children.

- **Communities** (**Vibrant & Connected Communities) -** Activating civic and community participation has the potential to transform structures and processes to reflect fairness, care, and shared responsibility, producing more gender-equal, connected, and vibrant communities.

Several projects 'in development' (such as those that are part of the **Economic Dignity** body of work) also link closely to this theme, with the commentary and Insights included below pointing to important design characteristics and the kinds of impact that further resourcing work in these areas could generate.

- **Connectedness (social cohesion, belonging)**

Connectedness is a dynamic process of building trust, belonging and willingness to cooperate. Strong local networks, neighbourhood groups, cultural associations, queer and youth spaces, carers' and parents' groups can reduce isolation and fear, which are closely linked to gendered harms such as violence and poor mental health. Equitable participation that fosters horizontal and vertical connections involves creating conditions where women and gender-diverse people can safely raise concerns with institutional actors, and conflicts about gender norms can be navigated without silencing or backlash.

- **Equity (social inclusion)**

Socio-economic inequality systematically suppresses participation. Economic insecurity, housing precarity, racism, migration status and heavy unpaid care loads limit the capacity of many women and gender-diverse people to take part in formal processes. Informal mutual aid and care work - often carried by women, grandmothers and queer communities - is a central form of civic contribution that tends to be invisible to systems. Recognising and resourcing this as civic labour and fostering legislative and other structural changes are keys to genuine social inclusion. Community wealth building strengthens equity by treating communities as holders of assets (material, social, cultural, political) that can be redistributed and governed for collective wellbeing. Fostering women's participation in community wealth building helps to build durable participation by shifting ownership and control so benefits circulate locally and power changes stick.

- **Resilience (civic + social adaptability)**

Resilience is understood as civic and social adaptability - the capacity of communities to respond, adapt and transform in the face of shocks and long-term stresses. This adaptability relies heavily on civic and community participation, social capital and inclusive leadership, which in practice often rest on the unpaid work of women and gender-diverse people during crises. Both planned and emergent resilience can be strengthened with an explicit gender lens and long-term, place-based investment in women- and queer-led networks, alongside institutional learning that turns gendered experience of crisis into systemic reform.

Key patterns identified via interviews and community research

Analysis of both interviews and community researcher artefacts reveals the following patterns regarding participation that shifts power and outcomes in relation to gender equity:

- **Participation relies on women's care, relationships and volunteering which is often invisible and undervalued.** Gender equity and inclusion improve when women's participation is acknowledged and resourced as core participation infrastructure.

"A community leader is not the person you might see on television or the council website… a community leader invariably is the woman doing the work behind the scenes who people call at one in the morning." (SD, GenWest)

- **Formal participation structures privilege traits often associated with masculine norms** such as confidence, speed and hierarchy and exclude many women, girls and gender-diverse community members, particularly those leading through more facilitative and collaborative processes. Gender equity improves when participation is redesigned to value listening, collaboration, and collective sensemaking rather than performance and dominance.

". . the people that we are trying to support. . . these women that are trying to feed their family . . . they just do not have capacity to be engaging in your discussions about the future food system. . . they're just trying to survive. And the ones who have got capacity, because their life is relatively well off - don't have the kind of real experience of why this is important. . . . We need to be figuring out how we're immediately feeding people with meals that they are getting tonight..." (SH, Open Food Network)

- **Women often build and sustain participation infrastructure but hold less formal power.** Participation strengthens gender equity when it translates women's informal leadership into shared power and authority.

""Encouraging participation is important, but designing for participation is transformative. When civic participation is embedded in governance structures, ownership models and institutional rules, it stops relying on goodwill alone and becomes part of the system itself." (MB, Centre for Community Capital)

- **Women are more likely to participate when engagement is local, flexible, relational and embedded in everyday life.** Equitable participation emerges through belonging and trust rather than compliance with institutional formats or timeframes.

"Our leaders [need to shift so they are] meeting people where they are… because a lot of the feedback channels…aren't accessible to the everyday person." (JB, Think Forward)

- **Intersectional barriers shape who can participate and how.** Gender inequity is compounded by race, class, disability, and migration status. Participation that strengthens gender equality recognises and responds to the diverse lived realities of women and girls.

"[People] don't always feel safe to share their voice and...quite often kept suppressed to keep the status quo... over and over again. So we need diversity and more and different people at the table." (KC, Individual Practitioner)

- **Community Wealth Building creates pathways to gender equity.** By investing in local, relational infrastructure and supporting shared governance and ownership, CWB creates opportunities for equitable participation.

"We give those women proper salaried jobs because they ... deserve it." (SD, Gen-West)

Strategic Directions

Synthesis of evidence from literature, community research and interviews reveals key strategic directions to grow **participation that grows gender equity** via structurally bold action. These directions are relevant to Minderoo's internal practice and broader field building efforts.

Shift structures so that women access authority and resources in addition to participation and informal leadership opportunities.	**Redesign participation processes to prioritise reflection and collaboration.** Gender equity in participation is supported by more relational approaches.
Resource care and participation as core civic infrastructure. Modest economic supports such as stipends, short contracts, peer roles and microenterprises help reduce gendered barriers to participation.	**Invest in relational and place-based participation eco-systems.** Long-term trust, continuity, and belonging are essential conditions for equitable participation and valuable outcomes in their own right.
Apply an intersectional lens to participation design and resourcing. Culturally-safe, place-based participation that responds to intersecting identities and barriers grows gender equity. Creative, culturally grounded practices, women-led making, storytelling and mutual support open gentle but powerful pathways into civic life, particularly for migrant, First Nations and gender-diverse communities.	

Illustrative Micro Case Study: Participation that grows gender equity

Tatreez Project Collaboration (Logan, QLD)

The project brings together Palestinian and other migrant women in Brisbane through a sequence of narrative-based workshops, practical skill-sharing and creative making that culminates in the Forest of Hope Tatreez installation at the Falestine exhibition. Early women's workshops used 'Tree of Life', 'Forest of Life' and 'Storms of Life' narrative therapy activities, plus a co-designed sushi-making session, to help recent arrivals and longer-term residents explore their histories, strengths, everyday challenges and hopes in a safe, women-only space that blended storytelling, art and food. These activities were followed by open Tatreez embroidery workshops, facilitated by a recent arrival from Gaza and supported by a team of women artists, organisers and educators. More than thirty women from different communities stitched traditional Palestinian tree motifs and wrote messages of hope for Palestine. These were assembled into an outdoor installation hanging from an olive tree and exhibited to over 600 hundred visitors at a large public cultural event.

The project offers rich insights into activating community and civic participation that supports gender equity. It shows how low-barrier, culturally rooted activities - embroidery, food preparation, narrative exercises - created the shared presence and informal conversations through which friendships, solidarity and a sense of political voice could grow, especially for women who were newly arrived, caring for children and wary of more overtly 'civic' spaces such as protests. Facilitators deliberately supported relationship-building beyond events through WhatsApp groups and repeat gatherings, and the women's commitment was evident in their finishing Tatreez pieces at home and in their decisions to invite extended family and children into both workshops and exhibition spaces.

The project foregrounds gender: It centres women's leadership – from a Gaza Tatreez teacher to a social worker–wedding planner, theatre director, photographer and peace-leadership facilitator – who repurpose professional skills in facilitation, trauma-informed care, conflict resolution and creative framing for community organising. It also highlighted gendered experiences of Islamophobia, care and settlement, and created intergenerational spaces where grandmothers, mothers and girls could learn from each other and re-negotiate understandings across generations. In doing so, it demonstrated how women-led, creative, culturally grounded practice can strengthen everyday social bonds and open gentle but powerful pathways into community and civic participation, particularly for migrant and Muslim women whose public voices are often constrained by racism, gendered care responsibilities and precarity. An invitation to re-exhibit the work at a community market organised by 'Mums for Palestine' illustrates how gentle cultural organising can flow into more explicitly civic spaces and alliances.

Women described the workshops as spaces of healing, joy and knowledge-sharing where grandmothers, mothers and daughters practice Palestinian heritage together, and re-negotiate generational expectations. Participation is framed not as heroic activism but as everyday, feminised labour of stitching, cooking, caring and storytelling as political acts. In doing so, the project demonstrates how women-led, creative, culturally grounded practice can strengthen everyday social bonds and open gentle but powerful pathways into community and civic participation, particularly for migrant and Muslim women whose public voices are often constrained.

Additional information can be found in the ***Community Researcher Artefact Compilation***.

Social Capital

This theme applies the participation lens to the relational conditions that sustain civic life: trust, connection, belonging and everyday democratic practices.

What this thematic is about and why it matters now

Social capital refers to the trust, relationships and norms that enable collective action. It is both an outcome of participation and a precondition for it. Participation builds social capital by creating repeated opportunities for people to collaborate, volunteer and solve problems together. In this way it improves people's sense of belonging and connection which makes future participation easier and more likely. Social capital underpins democratic health by building the trust required for people to engage in governance and civic life.

Increasing social capital matters because, the trust and familiarity it involves, enables the cooperation and informalleadership that support collective problem solving and action along with confidence in democratic institutions and processes in the face of increasingly complex local and global contexts. Strengthening social capital also creates the conditions that could reduce the growing rates of social isolation and loneliness being reported in communities across Australia and beyond.

Links to Literature Review commentary and findings

The Literature Review identifies connections between **participation and social capital** as summarised below.

- **Participation (active citizenship)**

Higher rates of social capital are associated with lower rates of government corruption and social fragmentation and higher rates of institutional trust, enabled by well-functioning and trustworthy institutions that encourage participation in civic life.

Links to Minderoo Foundation's Focus Areas

This social capital theme links to Minderoo Foundation's Communities and Enablers and Corporate Services bodies of work:

- **Communities (Place-based community engagement)** - While social capital and belonging can both be fostered via participation in online communities, most interviewees, community researchers and authors note that these outcomes are most directly and commonly fostered by in-person participation in local, place-based community networks.

- **Communities (Vibrant and connected communities)** – Social capital both relies upon and helps to support the development and strengthening of vibrant networks and connections within, and between community groups. Participation in these networks can foster feelings of belonging while also facilitating access to the relationships and resources needed to live a good life. Participation also strengthens the trust required to motivate participation in democratic processes.

- **Communities (Valuing the Early Years) –** Fostering civic and community participation by young people has the potential to inform and shape existing early years priorities and programs, as well as opening up opportunities to explore youth-led and intergenerational design of future strategies.

- **Enablers and corporate services (Effective Philanthropy) -** This research identifies opportunities to strengthen civic participation to support the principles that underpin democratic societies.

Civic and community participation are enabled at local and national levels by transparent, inclusive, and collaborative governance processes that: provide accessible civic pathways across cultural and generational groups; value informal leaders and networks; foster equal voice and avoid tokenism.

- **Connectedness (social cohesion, belonging)**

When social capital is distributed in relatively even patterns, it can help build connections between groups via repeated, reciprocal, and collaborative interactions that improve cohesion and collective efficacy. Bonding capital within groups, that is not complemented with bridging or linking capital across groups can result in ethnocentrism, corruption and sectarianism. Participation declines when communities feel unsafe. Safety and trust are built via shared, everyday activities (e.g. participation in sport, arts and cultural and other community activities) enable the development of bridging capital between groups and cultures.

- **Equity (social inclusion)**

Rates of social capital are highest in socially and economically equitable communities. Strengthening social capital is associated with improved health outcomes, including child and family wellbeing. Universal, non-stigmatising programs and accessible and equitable local infrastructure can: reduce inequalities; support development of bonding, bridging and linking capital; foster opportunities for participation; and strengthen trust between community members.

- **Resilience (civic + social adaptability)**

Social capital evidenced by the ability to call upon trusted neighbours and informal networks is the strongest predictor of community safety and recovery from natural disasters. Residents who feel a sense of belonging to a place or community are more likely to help and be helped during natural disasters. Communities with higher rates of bonding and bridging capital are more likely to foster collaborative action between individuals, groups, emergency services and other agencies that supports faster recovery following natural disasters.

Key patterns identified via interviews and community research

Analysis of both interviews and community research artefacts reveals the following patterns linking participation and social capital:

- **Participation that strengthens social capital is grounded in relationships, trust, familiarity, and repeated human interaction.** Social capital emerges through shared experiences such as working on country, gardening, food distribution, mutual aid, co-governance, rather than one-off consultations or formal meetings.

". . .historically, Parent to Parent as a peer organization was predominantly set up ...I think with a $20,000 grant - a group of families... coming together with no...funded supports, essentially. And there was a very strong focus in the organization around planning. So how do we plan for the future, with our family members..." (MA, Parent to Parent QLD)

- **Participation grows belonging and strengthens social capital when people are engaging with others they will continue to live or work alongside.** Locality allows people to see each other and connect repeatedly, to notice contributions and changes and to develop informal accountability processes. Local spaces and assets (e.g. co-working hubs, gardens and cafes) act as ongoing 'relationship containers' and network enablers.

". . .we're not expecting each community builder to be the same as every other community builder, and we're just really encouraging people to focus on their unique gifts and strengths and lean into those and leverage sources of support from others - both within the team and within the local context that they're working in, to be part of the broader network of contributions". (NM, BeFriend)

- **Social capital already exists in communities.** Participation strengthens existing social capital when processes and systems amplify local leadership (including informal leadership) and shared lived experiences. Many initiatives succeed by identifying and resourcing trusted community connectors (often women, elders, peer, and cultural leaders).

". . . one of our catchphrases here is that "belonging precedes belief" ... you really need to belong to something, and then you can start to believe in the vision or the opportunity or the call to action . . ." (WR, Inter-Movement Impact Project)

- **Participation including via volunteer roles deliver significant, and often under-acknowledged returns on investment.** Costs associated with volunteering such as recruitment, training, supervision and insurance are often met by organisations while society benefits from reduced social isolation and increased social capital.

"There has been some discussions on volunteering versus civic participation and whether we need . . .more fluid involvement in a lot of neighbourhood centre activities. But there is a tension [about] insurances…roles .. . needing to be managed … and then training." (CM, Neighbourhood Centres QLD)

Strategic Directions

Synthesis of evidence from literature, community research and interviews reveals key strategic directions to grow participation that strengthens **social capital** via structurally bold action. These directions are relevant to Minderoo's internal practice and broader field building efforts.

Invest in social infrastructure. Local convenors and connectors, infrastructure such as neighbourhood centres and governance bodies provide the 'connective tissue' that grows and sustains social capital between funding cycles and across issues.	**Deepen and strengthen what exists.** Building relationships and trust takes time. Start by looking for opportunities to deepen and strengthen existing social infrastructure, particularly when working with historically marginalized and excluded groups.
Support the development of networks of networks. Social capital scales when local participatory infrastructure is connected horizontally (e.g. via peer networks and learning communities). Investing in participatory ecosystems grows social capital.	**Design participation so people feel needed, welcomed, valued and active.** Flexible, culturally grounded and everyday approaches that align with community rhythms increase the participation and trust needed to build social capital.
Reimagine volunteering as a pathway to social capital. Flexible, task-specific and episodic opportunities to participate via volunteering lower barriers to participation and better suit contemporary lifestyles but require funded 'backbone' support.	

Illustrative Micro Case Study: Social Capital

Youth Advisory Group (Cherbourg, QLD)

Cherbourg is a small Aboriginal community in rural Queensland. This case describes youth-led participation initiatives that emerged in response to local priorities. A NAIDOC Ball jointly planned and delivered as an intergenerational community event demonstrates how community-led initiatives can strengthen connection, belonging and leadership. Young people acted as MCs, set up chairs, welcomed people at the door, and ensured the event ran smoothly. These roles provided visible and meaningful opportunities for youth to participate, building confidence and demonstrating trust in their capabilities. Elders participated as cultural teachers and dancers, reinforcing intergenerational exchange and mutual learning. Volunteers were essential to the success of the night and were proud of their contributions and the fact that the event would not have been possible without them. Families attended together, filling the hall with multiple generations, reinforcing that this was not just a performance or program, but a shared community experience grounded in cultural respect and mutual responsibility.

The Ball is one of several community-led initiatives in Cherbourg, which reinforce participation and self-determination as part of everyday life rather than isolated events. Other initiatives include youth camps that provide space for young people to reset and yarn, creative workshops where participants paint, design, and experiment with new skills, and centropic farming projects that connect young people to food production, land stewardship and economic opportunity. Golden Oldie events ensure elders are respected, visible and included.

The benefits of participation revealed via this case are multi-layered and deeply relational. At a social and emotional level, the NAIDOC Ball fostered reconnection and built trust as young people met elders shared stories and knowledge. This trust helped young people to grow in confidence. Elders expressed pride in seeing young people step forward, take responsibility, and be validated for their contributions, reinforcing the idea that "great things could happen" when young people are supported rather than sidelined. Culturally, the initiatives strengthened pride and identity reflecting a core belief in "many tribes, one community". A strengths-based framing supported a narrative of hope, joy and forward momentum and provided tangible developmental benefits for young people. Through planning and delivery, young people gained practical skills in organisation, communication, and teamwork. Being trusted with real responsibility validated their capacity and encouraged leadership development, demonstrating that participation is considered a pathway to community leadership, rather than a tokenistic engagement exercise. The case also connected participation to longer-term community wellbeing and economic resilience. A centropic farming project, engages young people in growing food for the community, creating local employment and strengthening the local economy. A local social enterprise engages young people in producing goods for sale and operating a store. Through participation in these enterprises, young people learn new skills, take pride in their work and imagine a "big future ahead" for their people.

Ongoing participation is challenged however, by community grief and trauma, including multiple suicides and the loss of loved ones. The case reveals that the absence of dedicated places for grief, healing and reflection has compounded these challenges. The reliance on volunteers, while a source of pride, also highlights the vulnerability of community initiatives that depend heavily on unpaid labour and goodwill. Without ongoing support, resources and trust from external systems, there is a risk that community energy may be difficult to maintain over time.

Additional information can be found in the Community Research Artefact Compilation and on Cherbourg Aboriginal Council website Cherbourg YAG - OPEN for Business - Cherbourg

Community Wealth Building

This theme extends the participation lens into the economic domain, examining how community ownership models, local and social procurement, investment in community-controlled infrastructure, and governance arrangements that embed community decision-making power can become enablers of civic power.

What this thematic is about and why it matters now

Community wealth building (CWB) is a place-based approach that anchors economic value locally through fair work, progressive procurement, community ownership of land and assets, locally rooted finance, and plural forms of ownership. In a time of growing pressure on household and government budgets, CWB is attracting increasing practitioner and investor attention as it activates participation by supporting people to move from being beneficiaries to co-owners, workers, and decision-makers. Participation is embedded in everyday economic life: running cooperatives, governing land trusts, directing pooled funds and shaping local supply chains.

Links to Literature Review commentary and findings

The Literature Review identifies connections between **participation and community wealth building** as outlined below.

- **Participation (active citizenship)**

CWB turns participation from occasional consultation into action embedded in everyday life. When assets, jobs and decision-making power are anchored locally, become coowners, workers, and stewards of local institutions, shaping how land, procurement and services are governed. This deeper involvement builds confidence, capability, and a sense of agency, and improves the legitimacy and quality of decisions made with, rather than for, communities, nurturing a culture of active citizenship over time.

Links to Minderoo Foundation's Focus Areas

The CWB theme links to Minderoo Foundation's Communities and Community Wealth Building focus area as outlined below:

- **Communities (Valuing child & family supports)** – CWB initiatives have the potential to increase the financial assets and economic wellbeing of participating families. Economic wellbeing is a determinant of childhood wellbeing.

- **Communities (Place-Based Community Engagement)** – Place-based community asset ownership and governance models have the potential to improve the social and economic wellbeing of communities by enabling delivery of local services in ways that meet local need and generate local economic impacts.

- **Communities (Vibrant & Connected Communities) -** CWB models (e.g. cooperatives) support enduring community connections via structures and process supporting and at times formalizing collective ownership and decision-making.

- **Gender Equality (Equal Economic Opportunity)** - Minderoo Foundation's approach involves 'backing those who are closest to the problems we seek to solve' and CWB creates opportunities to back citizens and communities as owners and managers of assets and services to spread economic opportunities more equitably across communities.

- **Connectedness (social cohesion, belonging)**

CWB strengthens connectedness by organising shared work around concrete local assets and projects. Cooperative enterprises, community hubs and neighbourhood development vehicles require ongoing collaboration, through which people build everyday trust, reciprocity and mutual recognition. This plays out horizontally between neighbours and groups, and vertically between communities and institutions that share power and resources, creating structured spaces where relationships deepen, conflicts can be mediated, and collaborative cultures can replace zero-sum dynamics.

- **Equity (social inclusion)**

CWB is explicitly concerned with who benefits from economic activity and who holds power over it, directly linking it to equity and social inclusion. By focusing on fair work, just use of land and locally rooted finance, CWB builds on existing mutual aid and informal economies to redistribute opportunity, security and voice towards structurally disadvantaged communities. At thesame time, it reforms institutional practices in procurement, investment, ownership and governance so that inclusion and participation create real pathways for historically excluded groups to shape, own and benefit from local economic life.

- **Resilience (civic + social adaptability)**

CWB supports resilience by embedding economic capacity and decision-making in communities, enabling them to better withstand, adapt to and influence change. Locally owned enterprises, community-controlled land, neighbourhood finance and shared governance act as social and economic infrastructure that can be mobilised in times of stress. By deepening relationships and spreading leadership, CWB strengthens both emergent resilience (the ability of networks to self-organise and improvise) and planned resilience, through stable institutions and long-term strategies that help communities move beyond recovery towards actively reshaping their futures in the face of cascading shocks.

Key patterns identified via interviews and community research

Analysis of both interviews and community research artefacts reveals the following patterns linking participation and CWB:

- **Participation builds wealth when it is tied to economic agency.** When people have a genuine role in shaping assets, enterprises, budgets, land use and investment decisions, potential for co-determination over resources emerges and community wealth can grow.

". . . there's so many massive issues that people are really worried about, and they want to have something that gives them agency. And so food is a really concrete, obvious thing to kind of work in . . . [But] it's extremely difficult to have a business that works over time. Just the economics . . is extremely difficult. .. people work out ways to make it work, because it's their activism in the world. This is their response to the politics . . So it is central to their kind of path in life." (SH, Open Food Network)

- **Community wealth grows through place-based, relational participation.** Participation embedded in local relationships, trusted intermediaries, and everyday community life (e.g. food systems, housing co-ops, Indigenous land stewardship, local enterprise networks) enable jobs and economic value to stay local.

". . . they all came to a meeting we had - it was called a Fellowship meeting. It was an opportunity for this busload of Karens to meet all the leaders in the community and Shire as well . . . and they all came out for that dinner. . . when I look back I think that was the key to the success of it, was involving the community from day one". (JM & KDTH, Nhill Neighbourhood House Learning Centre)

- **Informal and care-based labour underpins wealth creation but is rarely recognised**. Women, migrants, First Nations leaders, volunteers, and community connectors

often do the invisible work that makes participation and local economic activity possible. This unpaid or underpaid labour is essential but structurally undervalued.

"People… come to our conversation saying 'This is the first time I feel valued', so the work we're doing… [is] reparations… This is not charity... investments in community well-being - you're doing social investments here. You're investing to repair the failures of the system, because poverty is a failure of the system.."(JG, Tamarack Institute)

- **Participation strengthens wealth when it converts local knowledge about what is viable, needed, and sustainable into economic pathways.** Where participation translates lived experience into enterprises, jobs, training pathways, or procurement opportunities, economic outcomes are stronger and more durable.

"The enterprise leaders we're engaging with… love the places where they live. They want to see them thrive and flourish… They tend to be community growers." (DP, Regen Labs)

- **Long-term participation is a form of economic infrastructure. CWB depends on sustained participation over time.** Short funding cycles and crisis-driven engagement undermine the accumulation of skills, trust, and assets needed for systemic economic change.

"Don't limit engagement to one off granting, or even to granting. Create community investment vehicles, endow communities and create systems of Community Capital Building. So do this in a long term perspective. . . four key things for philanthropy [to build] ecosystems for this community work - experiment, prototype, co-create and listen. Listen to barriers to impact. Do study things longitudinally" (JE, Individual Practitioner)

Strategic Directions

Synthesis of evidence from literature, community research and interviews reveals key strategic directions to grow participation that supports **community wealth building** via structurally bold action. These directions are relevant to Minderoo's internal practice and broader field building efforts.

Invest in relational infrastructure as economic infrastructure. Investments in community convenors, governance capability, backbone organisations and hubs grow trust, social capital and cultural connections. These are preconditions for fair work, procurement shifts, and shared ownership.	**Shift the focus from 'having a say' to 'having a stake'.** Participation that supports communities to co-own assets, shape investment and funding decisions, and to influence procurement, workforce development and supply chains can help to grow shared economic power.
Resource the invisible labour that enables participation. Paying community leaders and peer workers and resourcing care, facilitation and cultural brokerage reduces reliance on volunteers and helps sustain the participation essential to community wealth building.	**Embed participation inside economic systems.** Participatory enterprise development and cooperative models; food, housing and energy systems; and skills and workforce transitions can all help support tangible wealth outcomes for people and communities.
Use patient, place-based capital, matched to local priorities and timeframes. Long-term investments leveraging blended finance and pooled local capital improve opportunities to support participation in ways that adapt with community rhythms.	**Invest in creative and cultural participation as an economic 'on-ramp'.** Taskbased, cultural and creative activities can provide gateways to skills and enterprise development, leadership development and income circulation when resourced with this intent.

Illustrative Micro Case Study: Community Wealth Building

Housing Matters Action Group (Bellingen, NSW)

Housing Matters Action Group (HMAG) contributed to the ACCP Community Research stream by piloting a creative, relational engagement model that links conversations about housing directly to long-term, community-led solutions. Through the Next Horizon Initiative, a place-based partnership with a progressive philanthropy partner, HMAG is using these engagements to ground a 10-year strategy and the development of the Waterfall Way Community Land Trust (WWCLT) in up-to-date, community-generated evidence. A focus on the 'missing middle' and permanently affordable shared-equity homeownership means participation is not just about consultation, but about shaping pathways into asset-building and secure tenure over time.

A community film night with Bellingen Public School demonstrated how playful, child-centred activities can open space for deeper adult conversations about housing stress. Large collaborative drawings, clay 'homes' and gentle prompts about what home means created a low-pressure, intergenerational environment where families felt safe to talk. Participation was strongest when outreach was led by a local social worker and community development workers with lived experience of housing precarity, who approached parents as peers 'inside the problem' rather than external experts. Their shame-aware, trauma-informed practice, slow pacing and non-expert stance turned brief encounters into rich group conversations, including spontaneous discussions among families about the 'Bellingen Shuffle' of constant rental moves, fear of retaliation from landlords and the impossibility of saving for a deposit. These methods offer ACCP concrete practice insights into how trusted relationships, lived experience and creative formats can activate community and civic participation beyond formal meetings or surveys.

The project also shows how participation must be responsive to local political dynamics. When Council began formally considering the transfer of two parcels of land to WWCLT, HMAG chose not to proceed with further public film nights to avoid any perception of trying to influence the decision. Instead, they redesigned the work as February 2026 focus groups that will test a draft 'Plan on a Page', examine underlying assumptions, and invite residents into more deliberative conversations about priorities and trade-offs. This shift protects trust with councillors and residents while deepening civic engagement in HMAG's long-term strategy and the emerging Community Land Trust.

From a community wealth building perspective, the outreach is doing double work. It surfaces lived experience of housing stress to inform HMAG's organising and advocacy, while also identifying and connecting eligible "missing middle" households into the WWCLT pipeline, strengthening the prospects for the Shire's first community land trust homes. The project exemplifies how progressive, longterm philanthropy can underwrite the relational infrastructure, evidence-building, and governance capability that community wealth building requires, treating local knowledge and trust as core economic assets rather than soft add-ons.

Additional information can be found in the Community Researcher Artefact Compilation and at the Housing Matters website Home | Housing Matters

Climate and Disaster Resilience

This theme examines participation under conditions of shock and stress, showing how local agency, trust and infrastructure shape resilience over time.

What this thematic is about and why it matters now

Participation is central to climate and disaster resilience. Communities are typically the first responders in times of emergency and the long-term stewards of recovery. Locally led action is typically faster, more adaptive and more trauma-aware than externally driven interventions. As the frequency and severity of climate change related disasters increases, the importance of effective and participatory approaches to preparing, responding, recovering, and adapting to climate change and disasters also grows.

Links to Literature Review commentary and findings

The Literature Review identifies connections between **participation and climate and disaster resilience** as summarised below.

• Participation (active citizenship)

Participation strengthens resilience by building social capital, trust, and collective problem-solving capacity before crises occur, enabling communities to respond, adapt and even transform in the face of climate disruption and recurring disasters. Resilience is not only about technical preparedness (“planned resilience”) but also about emergent resilience which relates to the informal networks, local leadership, mutual aid, and community-led action that arise through sustained civic participation. Inclusive participation, especially of those most affected by climate risks improves disaster response and recovery outcomes, reduces inequitable impacts, and supports long-term adaptation.

Links to Minderoo Foundation’s Focus Areas

The Climate and Disaster Resilience theme links to two of Minderoo Foundation’s core focus areas as outlined below.

- **Communities (Place-based community engagement body of work) -** Participatory, place-based, community-led and/or community-informed responses to climate change and natural disasters are helping to address local challenges and improve local community resilience.

- **Natural ecosystems (Climate action body of work)** – Many communities are already takingcollective action to address local climate risks and disasters. Supporting and expanding these efforts has potential to improve responses to compounding ecosystem shocks and stresses.

• Connectedness (social cohesion, belonging)

Connectedness is a foundational condition for climate and disaster resilience, often more decisive than formal plans or physical infrastructure. Strong horizontal ties between people and groups, alongside vertical trust between communities and institutions, enable faster information sharing, mutual aid, and coordinated action during crises, while reducing fear, conflict, and isolation. Communities with high social cohesion are better able to mobilise collective resources, support vulnerable members, and sustain recovery over repeated and compounding climate shocks. Cohesion is evidenced by the capacity to bridge difference, mediate conflict, and act for the common good as climate impacts intensify social stress and inequality.

• Equity (social inclusion)

Unequal access to resources, voice, and assets weakens communities’ ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from climate shocks. Disasters disproportionately harm people already facing socio-economic disadvantage, disability, racialised exclusion, housing insecurity, and asset poverty. Inclusive participation where those most affected by climate risks help define problems, shape decisions, and control resources leads to fairer outcomes and more effective preparedness, response, and recovery outcomes. Community controlled assets (e.g. evacuation hubs) and equitable access to information (e.g. via accessible digital platforms) and social protection enable communities to adapt and transform in the face of recurring climate disasters.

• Resilience (civic + social adaptability)

Effective climate and disaster resilience draws on communities’ capacity to adapt, self-organise, and transform through participation, relationships, and local leadership. Participation supports communities to learn from shocks, respond to uncertainty, and influence the course of environmental and social change. Resilience built through social capital and sustained civic engagement enables rapid coordination, mutual aid, and collective problem-solving during crises. Planned resilience (e.g. emergency plans) is most effective when paired with emergent resilience (e.g. community initiative).

Key patterns identified via interviews and community research

Analysis of interviews and community research artefacts reveals the following patterns linking participation and climate and disaster resilience:

- **Disasters expose and intensify existing inequities.** Climate impacts fall hardest on people already marginalised by language, gender, disability, migration status, poverty, or insecure housing. Recovery systems often privilege those who are confident, English-speaking, digitally connected, or institutionally recognised.

“There are communities everywhere who are not . . . disaster prepared...We know, from the experience of Maribyrnong that you can’t just rely on systems. Social fabric and social connection is what you need in a disaster”. (SD, GenWest)

- **Trust, relationships, and local leaders often matter more than formal systems.** In crises, people often rely neighbours, community organisers, cultural leaders, and trusted intermediaries for immediate support, rather than government or large institutions. Where trust exists pre-disaster, communities mobilise faster and recover more effectively.

“. . . the most resilient communities - and we can define resilience in a bunch of ways - are those that are most connected, and that extends to the community services sector . .. very much reliant on the social fabric of the community and social services sector who are the ones that do the holding, catching, supporting, propping up the throughout difficult times and difficult events”(AH, ClimateWell + Safer Future Consortium)

- **Social capital is as critical as physical infrastructure in promoting responses to and recovery from disasters.** Trusted relationships, shared norms, and informal networks shape who is supported, informed, and mobilised during stressors. Where relationships are strong, communities adapt faster and with less harm. Socially embedded, community-owned assets function as resilience infrastructure.

"I've seen neighbourhood centres work with their communities around preparing… working with different community groups [to identify] who's got the chainsaws, who's got the radios… it's like asset mapping really… but also that long-term recovery too." (CM, Neighbourhood Centres QLD)

- **Cultural and place-based knowledge and practices strengthen adaptive capacity.** Communities, particularly First Nations, rural and neighbourhood networks, have place-based knowledge, relationships, and care practices that enable resilience. Creative, cultural, and shared task-based activities help to rebuild identify, belonging and psychological safety after disasters which supports longterm climate and disaster resilience.

"…being able to say . . .'we're capability partners on delivering this shared outcome'. . ..signifies that, yes, one side needs the auspices - those capabilities to bolster on and strengthen their delivery. But the auspice needs that community group . . as a capability partner, because you can't get access to that country and you can't engage in that community without them." (Independent Practitioner, Australia)

- **Communities rely heavily on unpaid labour during and after crises.** This enables rapid and locally sensitive responses, but creates a significant risk of burnout and longterm vulnerabilities in the absence of structural change.

"People are traumatised, in recovery mode, exhausted and burned out when they step into these roles." (JR, ClimateWell + Safer Future Consortium)

- **Traditional "preparedness" and engagement models fail.** Participatory responses that are sensitive to local trauma, literacies, trust and lived contexts grow resilience. Low rates of participation in externally led recovery processes indicate systems and design failures rather than community apathy.

"At the moment, all disaster funding is tied to specific events, and it's project funding. There's nothing to support neighbourhood centres and even us as a peak body to do ongoing disaster resilience work in communities." (CM, Neighbourhood Centres Qld)

Strategic Directions

Synthesis of evidence from literature, community research and interviews reveals key strategic directions to grow participation that strengthens **climate and disaster resilience** viastructurally bold action. These directions are relevant to Minderoo's internal practice and broader field building efforts.

Invest in local resilience infrastructure. Locally embedded coordination roles that foster relationships before crises, support volunteers during crises, help to sustain learning after crises and can reduce burnout and grow resilience knowledge and leadership.	**Value community-owned spaces as resilience infrastructure.** Accessible and inclusive community hubs, gardens, cultural centres, digital platrforms and enterprises represent multi-purpose climate assets critical to information dissemination, response coordination and post-disaster recovery.
Prioritise and resource lived experience as climate expertise. Facilitation by people who live with the risks, have experienced disasters and understand local barriers shapes contextually sensitive local solutions, builds trust, improves relevance, and increases participation.	**Invest to build adaptive capacities.** Community-led climate adaptation, cultural land management, local food systems, neighbourhood networks and preparedness education (particularly led by First Nations and frontline communities) boost resilience.

Illustrative Micro Case Study: Climate and disaster resiience

The Wilderness Collective (Mallacoota, VIC)

The Wilderness Collective is a compelling model of community-led climate and disaster resilience shaped by local leadership, deep civic participation, and interwoven social, economic, and environmental strategies in Mallacoota, East Gippsland following bushfires in 2019-20. The fires destroyed 123 homes, disrupted the local economy, and intensified existing vulnerabilities such as geographic isolation and demographic ageing. In the days immediately following the fires, recovery began not with government programs, but with local people. The Mallacoota District Recovery Association (MADRA) was formed. Forty-four candidates stood for election to the newly formed community recovery body, with 12 selected. MADRA's economic recovery pillar provided the impetus for what would become the Wilderness Collective with 5 women from 3 generations leading evolving and innovative action to rebuild the economy in ways that focused not only on physical reconstruction but also built a deeper cultural and economic shift towards place-based resilience and local capability.

In 2022, the Wilderness Collective formally incorporated with the purpose of enabling "a life fully lived in Mallacoota" through enterprise support, coworking, community collaboration, training, and digital inclusion. Through volunteer labour, local fundraising, and philanthropic partnership, the group transformed a decrepit building into a solar-powered, debt-free workspace that now functions as an anchor for economic development, knowledge transfer and social connection. A range of civil and civic participation mechanisms have emerged including: The Sanctuary Youth Group which fosters activity, connection, and youth leadership; and Friends of Mallacoota that engages volunteers in habitat restoration, and the development of an Endemic Garden featuring endangered species propagated locally.

Participation has been further enabled by local social enterprises and small businesses providing both social infrastructure and commercial activity; community owned and controlled assets; and collaborative health initiatives that enable community members to work and age in place. Mallacoota demonstrates very high rates of volunteering, with participation (coupled with other supports, such as government funding) delivering profound benefits including:

- the rebuilding of physical and relational infrastructure following the fires and the restoration of habitats
- strengthened community confidence, spirit, social cohesion and belonging
- intergenerational knowledge transfer, recovery efforts supported via 'learning through doing', and enduring local leadership and governance infrastructure to tackle current and future challenges
- establishing a pathway towards economic regeneration and resilience through diversified economic activities and employment, supporting local wealth generation and circulation.

This case shows how local capability exists but is constrained by resourcing and burnout; how long-term, flexible funding for locally led work (such as the three-year runway for the coordinator role) can underpin recovery; how balancing community mission with financial viability is an ongoing struggle; and how small places fall through jurisdictional cracks even as they are held up as 'success stories'. Core to this case, is the importance of multi-year, relationship-based funding for financial sustainability; governance arrangements that balance openness and professional viability; and strategies to build enterprise, workforce and succession pipelines scaffolded by viable housing options in remote communities like Mallacoota focused on community-led climate and disaster resilience.

Additional information can be found in the ***Community Research Artefacts Compilation*** and on The Wilderness Collective website Wilderness Collective – Co-working and biz support in Gippsland and beyond

Social cohesion

Community cohesion, multicultural harmony, and resistance to racism emerge from trust, dignity, shared work, and lived leadership. When communities are trusted and resourced to participate and to lead in ways that fit their context, cohesion is more likely to follow.

What this thematic is about and why it matters now

Social cohesion is a dynamic, relational process influenced by: the quality of social relations, identification and belonging, and an orientation toward the common good. Social cohesion relies on a capacity to cooperate amid diversity, disagreement, and unequal power. Social cohesion is shaped by the extent to which groups in societies can fairly mediate conflict over resources, power, and recognition. It is therefore an urgent priority given the accelerating social and economic stressors, increasing polarization, and declining levels of trust in governments and other institutions. When cohesion weakens, anxiety, grievance, and conflict intensify.

Links to Literature Review commentary and findings

The Literature Review identifies connections between participation and social cohesion as summarised below.

- **Participation (active citizenship)**

Participation is both an expression of cohesion and a mechanism for strengthening it. When people actively participate in shaping their communities and institutions, they develop stronger identification with the collective, greater trust in others and in the government (vertical ties), and increased willingness to cooperate across difference (horizontal ties). Participation without underlying connectedness can fragment into polarisation or exclusion suggesting that inclusive, structured, and equitable forms of participation are essential.

Links to Minderoo Foundation's Focus Areas

This social cohesion thematic links to Minderoo Foundation's Communities and Gender Equality Focus Areas, particularly bodies of work relating to:

- **Communities (Vibrant and connected communities) -** Facilitated participation that is both structured and creative builds relationships across difference, enables shared, local action which is a key foundation for strengthening vibrant and connected communities.

- **Communities (Place-based community engagement) -** Arts-based and other facilitated activities that engage local community members in dialogue across difference have potential support local relationship building and action in place.

- **Gender Equlaity (Freedom from violence) -** Social cohesion builds via participation that diversifies beliefs about the rights of women reduce violence towards women and girls. Culturally-grounded arts and cultural practices can be particularly powerful.

- **Gender Equality (Equal economic opportunity) -** Participation that builds understanding across cultural differences can improve opportunities for women from some cultural groups to participate equally in economic activities.

- **Connectedness (social cohesion belonging)**

Connectedness is the foundational "social glue" of social cohesion which is understood as an ongoing process through which belonging, shared identities, and cooperation for the common good are actively produced in diverse societies. Social cohesion is constituted by connectedness (through social relations, belonging, and orientation to the common good) and sustained by deliberate investment in the infrastructures, practices, and narratives that allow people to collaborate and feel valued across diversity.

- **Equity (social inclusion)**

Social cohesion requires that people feel valued, have fair access to opportunities, and trust that the social and institutional systems work for the well-being of all. Structural inequities constraining economic wellbeing and access to digital and other resources shape who can participate, whose voices are heard, and how effective cohesion-building efforts can be. Without attention to equity, initiatives risk reinforcing existing hierarchies or benefiting only already-connected groups, thereby undermining trust and legitimacy.

- **Resilience (civic + social adaptability)**

Social cohesion - strong relationships, trust, and shared purpose - shapes a societies' capacity to adapt to change,crisis, and shock. When people feel connected, communities can mobilise collective action, cooperate across difference, and sustain trust in institutions during stress such as economic disruption, climate impacts, or pandemics. Resilience depends not only on effective governance, but also on people's agency, belonging, and confidence that others will act fairly. Where cohesion is weak, shocks intensify fear, anger, and polarisation, undermining adaptation; where it is strong, communities absorb disruption, negotiate conflict, and respond constructively.

Key patterns identified via interviews and community research

Analysis of both interviews and community researcher artefacts reveals the following patterns linking **participation and social cohesion:**

- **Community cohesion emerges from long-term, trustbased relationships built through presence, consistency and reciprocity.** Communities are generally willing to engage, but past experiences of extractive consultation, institutional racism and broken promises have eroded trust. Where trust exists, people show up across difference (culture, age, race, class).

". . . we've got this mycelial network, which is a genuine self initiated peer network of organizations like Hastings Commons. . . community asset developers who are doing it for neighbourhood transformation and regenerative futures and social justice and ecological resilience - neighbourhoods as sites for big picture issues and change."
(JS, Hastings Commons)

- **The strongest driver of multicultural harmony is who leads and facilitates the work.** Racism is often embedded in systems of engagement, funding, and decision making. Structural exclusions contribute to the conditions in which grievance, alienation and polarization can grow. When people with lived experience of marginalisation lead engagement, power imbalances, are reduced and "us/them" dynamics disrupted enabling more effective cross-group dialogue.

"People are asked to buy into something that's already been designed, with no flexibility to move. That's not participation."
(Individual Practitioner, Australia)

- **Multicultural harmony and cross-cultural connection result from people doing things together.** Shared activities such as food production, creative practice, and disaster recovery bypass language and literacy barriers, and build dignity through contribution. They also create spaces where joy, grief, pride, and cultural identity can coexist safely.

"It really comes down to leadership on both sides… we were two people that got on well, we're able to problem solve…we didn't take it all on. We delegated it, get everyone involved." (JM & KDTH, Nhill Neighbourhood House Learning Centre)

- **Traditional engagement models unintentionally reproduce racism and exclusion by privileging dominant cultural norms.** Formal meetings, written submissions, English literacy, positioning communities as "problems to be fixed", and ignoring trauma, shame, and historical harm foster disengagement. Nonparticipation in this context can be seen as a design failure. When online and in-person engagement models change, participation via both across diverse groups increases.

"Civic…can sometimes be a word that is understood and applied in ways that are harmful and exclusionary… I am talking about settler colonialism. I am talking about boundaries and borders. I am talking about racialized oppression." (SD, Center for Economic Democracy)

- **Volunteerism is a major source of cohesion, pride, and shared identity, particularly in regional, First Nations, and multicultural communities.** However, over-reliance on unpaid labour creates burnout, leadership bottlenecks, and long-term risk to harmony and continuity. Without resourced "backbone" or anchor roles, even highly cohesive communities become vulnerable to fracture under stress.

". . . what we really need is 10 year revenue grants in neighbourhoods that are starting to flourish in that way that's starting to develop something . . . not tons of money, don't give them £50 million. Give them enough money – but allocate it for 10 years – to be able to keep a few people in post, to be able to take the opportunities that are arising . .. connect to the whole community, do that work of outreach, of sustained community engagement, of finding and pushing forward with the assets – which take ages...." (JS, Hastings Commons).

Strategic Directions

Synthesis of evidence from literature, community research and interviews reveals key strategic directions to strengthen participation that grows **social cohesion** via bold action. These directions are relevant to Minderoo's internal practice and broader field building efforts.

Invest in relationships as core social infrastructure that develops over time and reduces racism and polarization by strengthening horizontal and vertical trust.	**Transform investment and engagement from 'helping them'** to 'we are in this together' by resourcing lived experience leadership and participation as civic work.
Redesign online and in-persona engagement systems to remove structural racism. Building trust between communities and institutions and fostering commitments to the common good has been found to buffer against narratives framing institutions as hostile or illegitimate.	**Commit to long-term, placebased learning and measurement** that includes clear feedback loops and methods for making participation outcomes visible, particularly when engaging communities that have historically been marginalised or racialised.
Anchor cohesion in structured, shared action and facilitated dialogue by supporting cultural practices, arts and storytelling, food and care-based activities that build intergroup contact and understanding. This is often the precursor to collaborative responses to local challenges.	**Foster respectful, community-led processes which address everyday needs** and enable collective contributions. Long-term paid coordination, learning, and care roles reduce burn-out, support intergenerational leadership, and help communities navigate conflict.

Illustrative Micro Case Study: Social Cohesion

Nhill Neighbourhood House Learning Centre (Nhill, VIC)

In 2009, the family-owned Luv-A-Duck business in Nhill needed to fill five vacant roles. At the time, the town's population was declining and local services were dwindling. Seeing an opportunity to attract new residents and strengthen the community, John Millington (then General Manager of Luv-A-Duck) and his wife Margaret travelled to Werribee to present to a group of Karen refugees. Their message focused not only on the available jobs, but also on life in Nhill and the welcome the town could offer.

In January 2010, a busload of Karen community members travelled to Nhill to explore the opportunity, with the first families arriving a fortnight later. Recognising the importance of social cohesion, the town invested significant effort in welcoming and supporting new arrivals, while also addressing the concerns of existing residents. Karen families were introduced through structured connections with local leaders, sports clubs and services, and local community members volunteered as mentors, neighbours and advocates. Interim housing was provided on arrival, and practical support - such as advocacy with banks - helped families transition into long-term housing over time. Local champions helped explain cultural differences, while Karen community leaders played an active role in supporting engagement with local norms.

The Neighbourhood House Learning Centre was instrumental in supporting the new arrivals as they settled in. Practical supports such as English classes, liaison roles within schools and health services, and neighbourhood-based settlement support helped reduce isolation (particularly for the women, as their men-folk were out working) and prevent misunderstandings. The Karen Community Garden was also established as a valued local asset and has expanded over time. It has become a shared space where Karen agricultural knowledge is recognised and celebrated, with seasonal plantings providing a wide variety of fresh produce. Local residents participate alongside new arrivals, strengthening everyday relationships and connection. Options are also being explored to purchase a large commercial building to house and support a diverse mix of local community organisations and faith groups.

Since 2009, around 300 Karen community members have settled in Nhill—close to 10% of the town's population. Karen residents are employed across more than 30 local and regional businesses, including around 50–55 roles at Luv-A-Duck, and have also established Karen-owned enterprises. More than 60 homes in Nhill have been purchased by Karen families, reflecting long-term settlement, economic participation, and direct community wealth building.

The deliberate focus on social cohesion, alongside the active participation of Karen refugees and other local residents, has delivered significant outcomes. Socially, Nhill has seen increased volunteering, revitalised services, stronger bridging social capital, and a renewed sense of community pride. Economically, the resettlement is associated with 156 additional jobs, a stabilisation of population decline, and more than $100 million contributed to the regional economy—supporting business growth beyond Luv-A-Duck. Home ownership, business formation, and sustained settlement have further embedded cohesion, demonstrating how shared participation in work, community life, and local spaces can produce enduring social and economic benefits.

Information on the latest community asset development can be found on Nhill Neighbourhood House Learning Centre website NNHLC:
Nhill Neighbourhood House Learning Centre

Relationships between the thematic outcomes

The six themes are deeply interdependent suggesting that integrated approaches to supporting two or more of these thematic outcomes is likely to deliver cumulative and reinforcing benefits:

- Participation is the mechanism through which social capital is built, community wealth is generated, resilience is strengthened, and gender equity is advanced. Explicitly focusing on participation that shifts power, creates the conditions in which more Australians can benefit from these outcomes.

- Adopting a gender lens advances participation that redistributes power and diversifies the voices and experiences that contribute to decision making which in turn increases the potential for positive outcomes to be realised.

- Acting to strengthen social capital grows the trust and relationships that are foundational to participation in community wealth-building and disaster resilience action. Explicit effort to expand linking and bridging capital helps to improve social cohesion and crossgroup participation.

- Community wealth building provides material foundations – community asset ownership, communitycontrolled infrastructure, community-led governance that make participation sustainable over time.

- Preparedness for, responses to, and recovery from climate and disaster related shocks is underpinned by the active participation of community members. Where high levels of social capital and cohesion exist, climate and disaster resilience are also highest and rates of harm caused by shocks are lowest.

- Levels of social cohesion directly influence how safe people feel and how likely they are to participate. Acting to grow social cohesion has the potential to bolster participation that shifts power and shares outcomes more equitably across groups, and to bolster social capital.

Conclusion

Collectively, these thematic summaries underscore that participation is not an 'add-on' to social outcomes, but rather, the operating system through which communities build capability, resilience, and fairness over time. Across all themes, long-term, place-based, relational approaches outperform short-term, project-based interventions. Bold and evidenced suggestions regarding activating civic and community participation in ways that advance these outcomes are presented in the Investment Opportunity Framework.

"... philanthropy and others in civil society should be working with people to raise expectations about what communities can be. I think that is the job, in fact . . . through participatory approaches, we have higher expectations for what our communities can be. . ."
(JE, Independent Practitioner, Canada/USA)

Appendix A: Process developed by The Good Shift to engage Community Researchers

The Good Shift designed our way of working with Community Researchers to reflect the engagement "process steps" that interviewees told us matter in practice (and that align with our own decades of experience working alongside communities). With TGS acting as the conduit, each researcher received a small, flexible lump-sum budget ($5,000) through Minderoo Foundation and was encouraged to design a project that would add value to work they were already doing, rather than creating something new that would increase already stretched workloads.

To keep administration proportionate, we developed a light-touch Independent Contractor Service Agreement rather than a full, complex contract. This simple template focused on the essentials and avoided getting bogged down in detail. It also invited researchers to be creative about what they would produce, with no expectation of a traditional written report. The agreement supported an iterative approach by asking for an initial plan that could be refined as the work progressed.

We extended our organisational insurance so Community Researchers were covered as independent contractors for their project work. We also provided a highly experienced coach who had extensive experience in activating community and civic participation to support the researchers to scope realistic plans (with a deliberate focus on not taking on too much) and to check in several times over the 2.5-month period. Each check-in was recorded and transcribed, and these "in-process" reflections have been drawn on across all TGS outputs. Capturing perspectives as the work unfolded meant we didn't only hear a polished final account; it also helped researchers stay on track while integrating what they were learning along the way.

". . .the process that you at The Good Shift have used was really an example of what we're suggesting needs to be the way that you work with small communities . . .or groups within communities. That has allowed us our agency and . . .it has produced more than could have been extracted if all the details were set out for us". (TH, The Wilderness Collective)

Appendix B: Brief description of interviewee organisational affiliations

Australian Centre for Rural Entrepreneurship (ACRE), Australia
ACRE is a certified social enterprise working with young people, emerging leaders and rural communities to regenerate local places through social enterprise and entrepreneurship. It runs learning programs, coaching, incubation and consulting that build entrepreneurial mindsets, skills and ecosystems so communities can tackle local problems and create new opportunities. Drawing on long-term fieldwork and the Thrive framework, ACRE maps the conditions for genuinely community-led rejuvenation and tracks what shifts over time. Programs such as Social Enterprise Schools turn active citizenship into something concrete, as students co-design place-based enterprises that engage peers, families and local institutions in shared problem-solving.
BeFriend, Australia (WA)
BeFriend is a Perth-based non-profit dedicated to sparking communities where everyone feels they belong. It runs the Befriend Social Network and placebased projects that support residents to host free, inclusive social groups and neighbourhood initiatives - from hobby clubs to community lounges - across Greater Perth. A team of 'community builders' works alongside hundreds of resident hosts to help people recognise their gifts, build confidence and take responsibility for creating the communities they want to live in. This long-term, relationship-first practice reveals how peer hosting, informal volunteering and locally rooted leadership can turn everyday socialising into meaningful civic and community participation.
Castlemaine Community Investment Co-op, Australia (VIC)
Castlemaine Community Investment Co-operative is a non-distributing, not-for-profit co-op of local residents who collectively purchase and manage profitable properties such as the Hub Castlemaine, moving them from speculative real estate markets into long-term community ownership. This approach keeps wealth circulating locally, supports equitable access to community spaces and services, and strengthens the town's resilience. Through broad-based membership, community debenture investment, one-member-one-vote governance and working groups focused on member benefits, events and the community garden, the co-op is actively testing how grassroots capital raising, clear public 'asks' and diverse volunteer roles can turn local investment into sustained civic participation and stewardship.
Centre for Community Capital, Australia
The Centre for Community Capital (formerly Ethical Fields) partners with communities, councils, governments and funders to design place-based capital systems that put local people at the centre of economic decision-making and community wealth building. Its Place Based Capital programs and tools help places see how different forms of capital are generated, accessed, owned and governed, then rewire those flows to build confidence, agency and selfreliance. By convening learning circles, local anchor institutions and community ownership strategies, the Centre demonstrates how bringing residents directly into capital design and asset governance can spark new forms of civic participation and embed community voice in the local economy.
Center for Economic Democracy, USA
Center for Economic Democracy (CED) is a US movement-building organisation growing community power to transform capitalism into a just, sustainable and democratic economy. It advances economic democracy - communities collectively owning and deciding over land, labour and capital - through popular education, coalition organising, policy change and redirecting capital into solidarity-economy projects such as community land trusts, coops and the Boston Ujima Project. By co-designing pooled funds governed by grassroots leaders, supporting participatory budgeting and coaching local partners in shared governance, CED generates practical evidence of how community-controlled resources, collective decision-making and narrative organising can shift who holds power and how civic participation is practised.

ClimateWell + Safer Future, Australia (NSW)

ClimateWell + Safer Future is a consortium of disaster resilience practitioners collaborating with health, social and community sectors to build climateadaptive futures rooted in the Northern Rivers experience. Safer Future offers training, consulting and implementation support so organisations and communities can design robust systems, practise mindfulness-based preparedness and respond to crises with confidence and care. Through Plan C's Community Carers and Responders network and learning circles, the consortium trains neighbourhood leaders, strengthens social capital and co-designs community-led resilience projects. Its action-research, participatory grant making and advocacy with funders illuminate how local leadership, trustbased funding and care-centred organising turn crisis response into deeper civic and community participation.

Co-operation Housing, Australia (WA)

Kyloring Housing Co-operative is an affordable, resident-developed seniors cohousing community within Witchcliffe Ecovillage near Margaret River, designed for people 55+ and people with disability. It will deliver 25 small, energy-efficient homes and shared facilities that support ageing in place, social connection and mutual care at cost, rather than for developer profit. Owned and governed by its members, Kyloring builds participation from the earliest stages through sociocratic circles, an 'explorer' phase for prospective members, a participation agreement, budgeted community engagement and a dedicated community facilitator. This intentional investment in governance and social infrastructure offers concrete lessons on how cooperative housing can embed deep, long-term civic participation in everyday living.

DisasterWISE, Australia

Disaster WISE is a community-led learning network and emerging not-for-profit that links communities living with disasters so they can exchange knowledge, build relationships and shift how disaster resilience is done. Seeded by the Fire to Flourish program, it supports transformative 'learning by doing' so communities shape recovery, renewal and preparedness on their own terms. Through an online platform, safer-space gatherings, sociocratic governance circles and 'story for purpose' tools, Disaster WISE centres lived experience, self-determination and diverse knowledge systems. In doing so, it shows how peer learning, shared decision-making and community-controlled funds can turn disaster response into ongoing civic engagement and stewardship.

GenWest, Australia (VIC)

GenWest (formerly Women's Health West) is a feminist organisation and family violence service working toward gender equity in Melbourne's west. Alongside crisis and recovery services, counselling and health programs, it leads prevention partnerships on violence, mental health and sexual and reproductive health. Through multilingual health education, climate resilience initiatives and Project Sitara, GenWest co-designs in-language programs with migrant and refugee women, training paid community champions and bicultural workers. These long-standing, community-led partnerships, learning circles and advisory groups highlight how resourcing trusted local women to lead, organise and advocate can build safety, confidence and civic participation before, during and after crises.

Hastings Commons, UK (Hastings)

Hastings Commons is a community-led network of buildings and organisations in the White Rock neighbourhood of Hastings that takes neglected properties into community custody as homes, workspaces and accessible community venues. Anchored by its Community Land Trust and social enterprise developer, it pursues 'regeneration without gentrification' through community ownership and stewardship. On the ground, Hastings Commons uses phased, organic development, public living rooms, courtyards, youth spaces and neighbourhood-wide listening processes to surface what residents value and fear losing. Treating the neighbourhood as a commons, it offers tangible lessons in how community-controlled assets, everyday participation and shared governance can underpin long-term civic engagement and local democracy.

Hunter Community Alliance, Australia (NSW)

Hunter Community Alliance (HCA) is a broad-based, non-partisan coalition of community, union, faith, environmental, ethnic and cultural organisations in the Hunter region dedicated to strengthening civil society and shared power. It builds long-term relationships, leadership and collective leverage so communities can shape decisions about housing, energy transition, services and local wellbeing. Using listening campaigns, storytelling, smallgroup workshops and community organising training grounded in the Industrial Areas Foundation model, HCA helps residents surface shared issues, cocreate demands and negotiate directly with governments and councils. This relational organising approach demonstrates how building power with, not for, people can scale civic participation and public accountability.

Individual Practitioner (JE), USA + Canada

Global thought and practice leader focused on community-to-systems change for regenerative futures, helping communities and institutions experiment with new patterns of collaboration, governance and stewardship that link local action to wider systemic transformation.

individual Practitioner (KC), New Zealand

Grassroots community organiser working primarily with highly marginalised communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. Their practice focuses on building deep relationships, solidarity and local leadership so people who are often excluded from formal processes can shape decisions that affect their lives.

Inter-Movement Impact Project, USA

The Inter-Movement Impact Project (IIP) is a US-based 'movement of many movements' hosted by Mediators Foundation that strengthens a transpartisan pro-democracy ecosystem. It strategically connects leaders and organisations working on civic health, social cohesion, justice and democratic reform by convening generative inter-movement forums, cross-pollinating key gatherings and incubating joint projects. Through initiatives such as Thriving Together US and civic innovation networks, IIP supports state and local civic hubs where residents, organisers and institutions can meet, map 'who's who' and co-design action. Its work shows how connectors, shared stories and common frameworks can weave fragmented efforts into a larger civic fabric and deepen participation across difference.

Neighbourhood Centres QLD, Australia (QLD)

Neighbourhood Centres Queensland (NCQ) is the peak body for over 150 community-led Neighbourhood and Community Centres across the state, advocating for their role as vital social infrastructure. It strengthens sector resourcing and relationships, supports regional networks and produces impact data that demonstrates centres' contributions to connection, prevention and resilience. On the ground, neighbourhood centres act as open, place-based hubs where residents meet across differences, co-design activities, respond to crises and prepare for disasters. By fostering local networks, human libraries, ideas forums and community-led disaster planning - and by exploring shifts from traditional volunteering to broader civic participation - NCQ and its members provide a rich picture of how place-based hubs invite and sustain everyday civic engagement.

Nhill Neighbourhood House Learning Centre, Australia (Nhill, VIC)

The Karen Community of Nhill is a refugee-led community of more than 300 Karen people who have settled in the Wimmera town of Nhill, initially working with Luv-a-Duck and now running businesses, a thriving community garden, enterprises such as FOMO Power and a community house. Their collaboration with the hospital, neighbourhood house and schools has helped revitalise the town's population, services and civic life. From the outset, local leaders have been involved in building shared spaces, rotating garden plots, fundraising and shared decision-making. This living example illustrates how welcoming structures, strong cross-cultural partnerships and peer leadership can anchor new residents in local civic life and reshape a town's future.

Open Food Network, Australia (VIC + global)

Open Food Network Australia is a non-profit stewarding an open-source online marketplace and commons-based infrastructure for fair, transparent short food supply chains and community food enterprises. It provides software, learning resources, research and consulting to help local hubs, co-ops and farmers collaborate, build virtual farmers' markets and grow regenerative local food economies. Through community food enterprise incubators, voucherbased food access pilots and partnerships on community food hubs, OFN co-designs programs with local organisations and documents what enables or constrains participation. Its work highlights how commons-based digital tools, regional food activators and everyday food purchasing can become vehicles for civic participation and shared governance over local food systems.

Parent to Parent QLD, Australia (QLD)

Parent to Parent (P2P) is a Queensland peer-led disability organisation that walks alongside people with disability and their families through resources, advocacy, NDIS plan management, futures planning and peer networks. With a largely lived-experience workforce, P2P co-facilitates workshops, visual storytelling and P.A.T.H. planning with young people, families, schools, hospitals and neighbourhood centres. These place-based processes support people to name goals, map relationships, practise decision-making and connect with local supports, neighbours and institutions. By combining creative planning tools with paid peer roles, P2P shows how peer leadership, storytelling and co-design can open new pathways into civic life and community decision-making for people with disability.

Participatory Budgeting Project, USA

Participatory Budgeting Project (PBP) is a US-based nonprofit that works with communities across the US and Canada to decide together how to spend public money through participatory budgeting (PB). It partners with governments, grassroots groups and funders to design, implement and strengthen PB processes that deepen democracy, build stronger communities and make public budgets more equitable and effective. By coaching local organisers, supporting steering committees and budget delegates, providing stipends and childcare, and resourcing community organisations to host idea-collection events, PBP has built a strong practice base demonstrating how giving residents real power over real money can invite new voices in, increase civic skills and normalise shared decision-making in public life.

Peter McKenzie Project, Aotearoa New Zealand

The Peter McKenzie Project (PMP) is a $17m, 20-year spend-down fund of the J R McKenzie Trust that backs a small 'flotilla' of initiatives addressing the root causes of child and whānau poverty in Aotearoa New Zealand through long-term, experimental systems-change work. Its participatory philanthropy model invites funded Kaikōkiri into strategy, learning and some funding decisions via regular Mahi Tahi hui, softening the boundary between funder and grantee. By resourcing organisers, narrative and economic-systems initiatives and supporting collective projects and shared principles, PMP provides vivid examples of how power-sharing, relationship-centred governance and ecosystems of leaders can foster deeper civic and community participation.

Regen Labs, Australia

Regen Labs is a strategic design and innovation lab operating at the intersection of enterprise, finance and place to grow regenerative, community- and planet-positive economies in regional Australia. It backs 'regen-preneurs' through place-based enterprise cohorts, systems labs such as WEAVE, and the design of catalytic pooled capital, including readiness funds and a Regen Community Investment Fund. By convening regional activators, First Nations leaders, enterprises, governments and philanthropy, Regen Labs helps co-design governance arrangements, funding flows and collaborative projects. This work highlights how investing in nodal conveners and shared investment structures can turn community aspirations into collective action and sustained civic involvement.

Tamarack Institute, Canada

Tamarack Institute is a Canadian charity focused on ending poverty in all its forms by equipping communities with the skills, knowledge and networks needed for systems change. It stewards four Networks for Change - Ending Poverty, Building Belonging, Youth Futures and Climate Transitions - supporting more than 150 place-based collaboratives and thousands of learners through coaching, communities of practice, learning cohorts and practical tools. By centring lived experience, equity and 'seeds of transformation' and co-designing strategies on belonging, climate transitions and youth pathways with local partners, Tamarack demonstrates how relational organising, shared leadership and long-term collaboratives can scale civic participation and communityled change across municipalities.

Think Forward, Australia
Think Forward is a charitable, non-partisan think tank, education and advocacy organisation led by younger Australians that places intergenerational fairness at the heart of economic and tax debates. Through research, policy development and targeted campaigns, it acts as a bridge between Millennials/Gen Z and decision-makers on issues such as housing, tax and wealth inequality. By translating complex economic ideas into relatable stories, using social media and collaborating with creators, Think Forward builds communities of young people around policy questions. Its work reveals how accessible economic education, narrative change and digital organising can invite younger generations into ongoing civic participation and policy influence.
TSI Auckland Council's 'Buzzly' initiative, New Zealand (Auckland)
Buzzly is Auckland Council's digital youth engagement and insights platform, co-created with Datacom, AWS and Mission Ready to close the gap between rangatahi and institutions, particularly Māori, Pasifika and low-income youth. The platform invites 13-24-year-olds to respond to creative online 'challenges' on issues such as climate, transport and elections, offering micro-payments and personalised feedback for every idea. AI-powered analysis turns thousands of youth submissions into practical insight reports for councils, agencies and community partners, while rangatahi ambassadors, school partnerships and site visits build confidence, civic literacy and trust. Buzzly functions as a living lab that shows how incentives, recognition and peer-led design can make civic participation accessible, rewarding and ongoing for young people.
VIC Park Collective, Australia (WA)
Vic Park Collective is a volunteer-run community group in Victoria Park, Perth, that brings residents, businesses and council together to "make Vic Park uniquely awesome" through creative, inclusive and sustainable place-making. It curates street festivals, murals, parklets, Collective Conversations talks, Vic Park Soup micro-grant dinners and the Collective Shed 'library of things', offering low-barrier ways for locals to meet, experiment and lead their own projects. Operating as a flexible platform rather than a formal service provider, with light structures, shared leadership and regular 'shooting the breeze' sessions with council, the Collective shows how fun, resident-led initiatives can nurture ongoing civic imagination, local leadership and participation.
Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll), Aotearoa New Zealand
Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll) Aotearoa is a Te Tiriti-led, non-partisan "think and do" tank reimagining Aotearoa's economy around the wellbeing of people and te taiao, as part of the global Wellbeing Economy Alliance. It collaborates with iwi, communities, councils and government to craft upstream, evidence-informed policies, narratives and tools for a wellbeing economy. Through webinars, book clubs, supporter calls, conferences and a network of elected representatives, WEAll Aotearoa creates spaces where people learn, connect and act together on economic questions. These ladders of engagement and relational organising practices illustrate how economic conversations can become a gateway into civic participation and collective stewardship of the future.