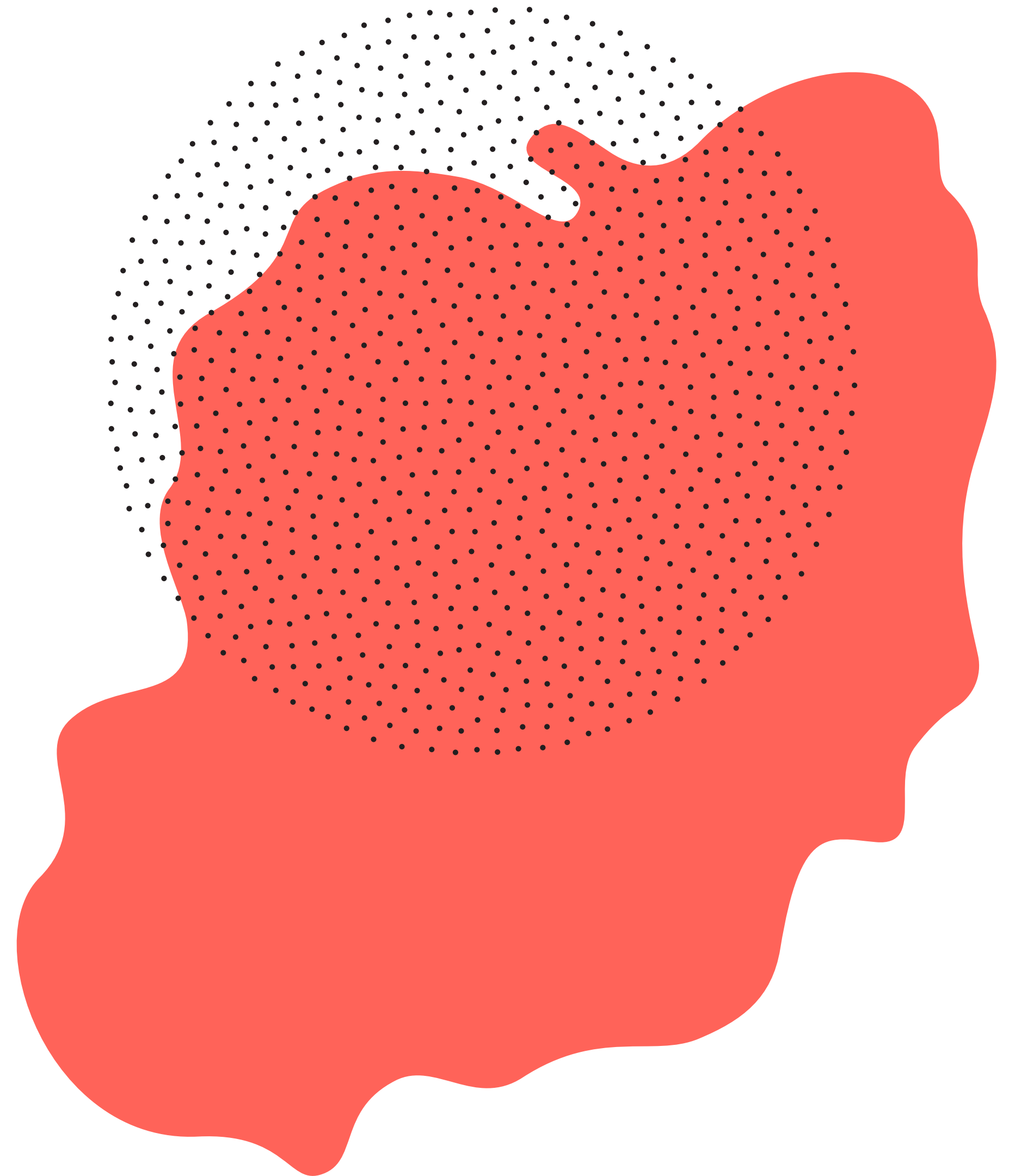# THE SOCIAL IS THE THING
Taking a designerly approach to local government strategic planning and evaluation

Dr Willhemina Wahlin: Principal Design Researcher

I acknowledge the Birpai people who are the traditional custodians of the land on which I live and work, and pay my respects to elders past and present.

Always has been, always will be, Aboriginal land.

THE SOCIAL IS THE THING: OVERVIEW

The Social is the Thing: Taking a Designerly Approach to Local Government Strategic Planning and Evaluation is a research project by Dr Willhemina Wahlin (lead investigator) and Dr Emma Blomkamp (co-investigator).

We have been collaborating with Port Macquarie-Hastings Council in the development of the Cultural Plan 2021-2025. We are now focusing on the evaluation strategy, in collaboration with both PMHC and the Cultural Development Network (CDN).

RESEARCH AIMS

1. Explore **local government approaches** to cultural strategic planning and evaluation.

2. Develop and implement a bespoke framework based on the **Public Policy Design Arc**, **Design Thinking** and **Co-Design principles**.

THE PROJECT ASKS

1. **Are design methods currently being used in regional NSW local governments when engaging with community in developing strategic plans?** If so, which ones? What is unique about them and where do they share benefits and limitations?

2. **How are regional NSW local governments currently monitoring and evaluating their strategic and cultural plans?** How well do these approaches help councils and communities to understand the health, wellbeing and social impacts of local government plans?

3. **Can the framework help to build local government staff and community stakeholder capacity** to develop strategic cultural plans and evaluation?

SITT MODEL

CO-DESIGN
PRINCIPLES

PUBLIC POLICY
DESIGN ARC

1.

2.

3.
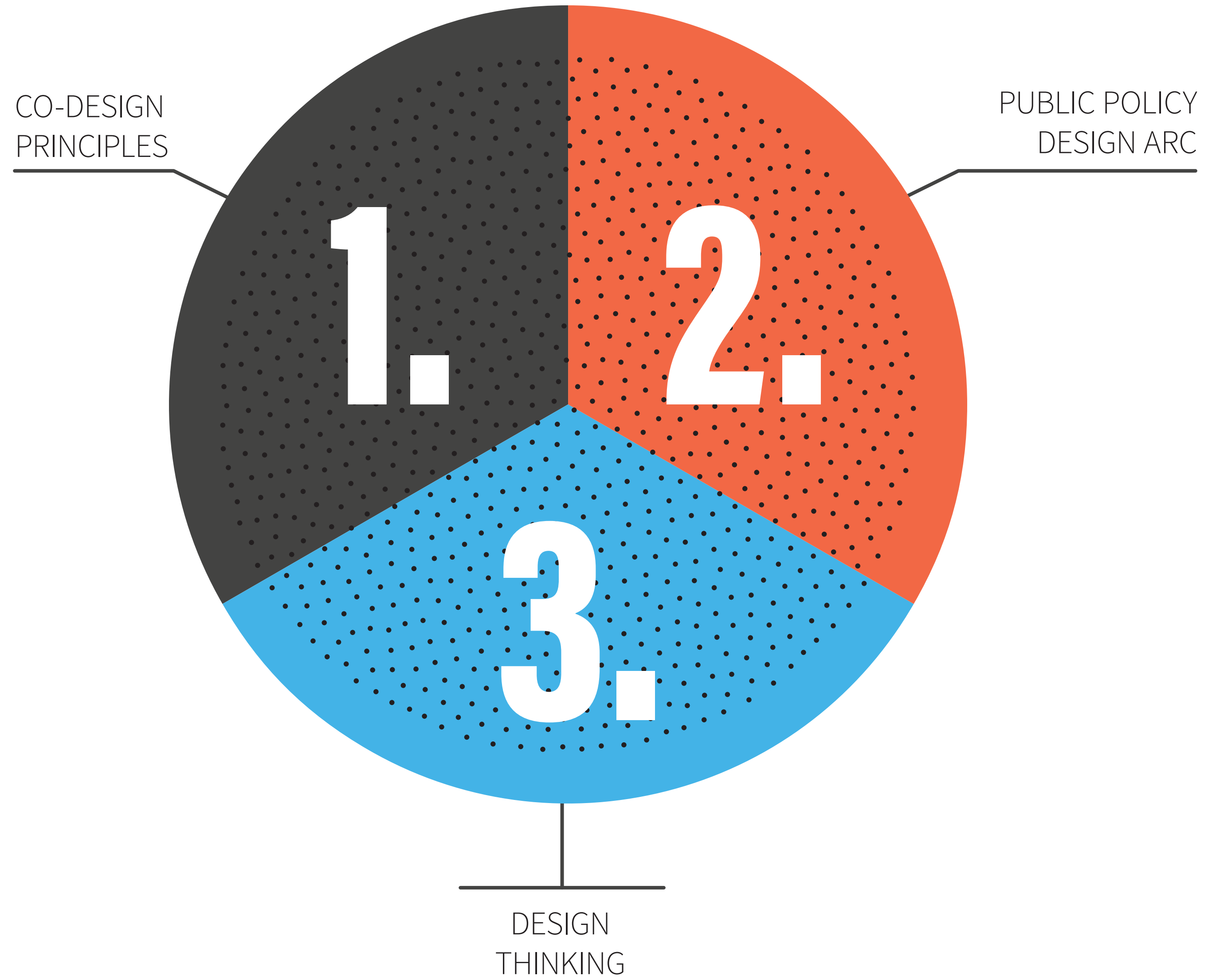
DESIGN
THINKING

FRAMEWORKS FOR STRATEGIC THINKING

3. CO-DESIGN PRINCIPLES[3]

1 **SHARE POWER**

Acknowledge and address the power dynamic that exists in every community engagement context. Share in each stage of the process: research, decision-making, design, delivery and evaluation.

2 **PRIORITISE RELATIONSHIPS**

Co-design is only possible if relationships are built on social connection and trust. "Trust paves the way for conversations where we confront the metaphorical elephant in the room" (McKercher, 2020, p. 14).

3 **USE PARTICIPATORY MEANS**

Provide a range of ways that people can take part and express themselves, including visual, kinaesthetic and oral approaches. For example, sticky notes, paper and markers and digital collaboration tools, in addition to slideshows and written materials diversify how people can learn and contribute.

4 **BUILD CAPACITY**

Provide support and encouragement to adopt new ways of being and doing, learning from others and have people's voices heard. Facilitators move from 'expert' to coach: everyone has something to teach and learn. Lived experience is elevated to the same level as expertise.

Mindsets for Co-design

A mindset is a way of being and thinking rather than a tool or method.

www.beyondstickynotes.com

Elevating the voice and contribution of lived experience

Too often we speak about people, instead of with them. Telling our story often isn't enough. Sometimes we want a seat at the table - we must make more seats available.

Valuing many perspectives

Understanding diverse views helps uncover the systemic causes of issues and overlooked resources within people, families, neighbourhoods, organisations and systems.

Curiosity

Deferring judgement to learn. Asking quality questions and resisting resting in our professional knowledge.

Learning through doing

Learning through doing is a preference for trying things out, over talking about them in meetings. It can move us out of *'planning paralysis'* and at the other end - avoid premature implementation.

Being in the grey

We need to grow our willingness to be uncomfortable, unclear and confused while learning and opportunities emerge.
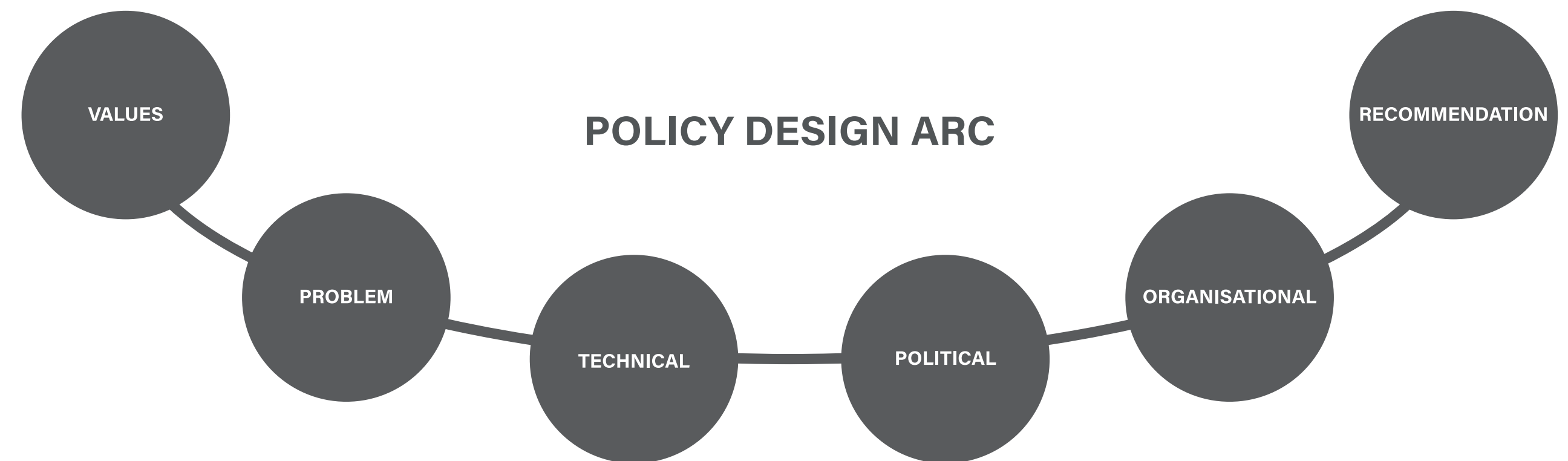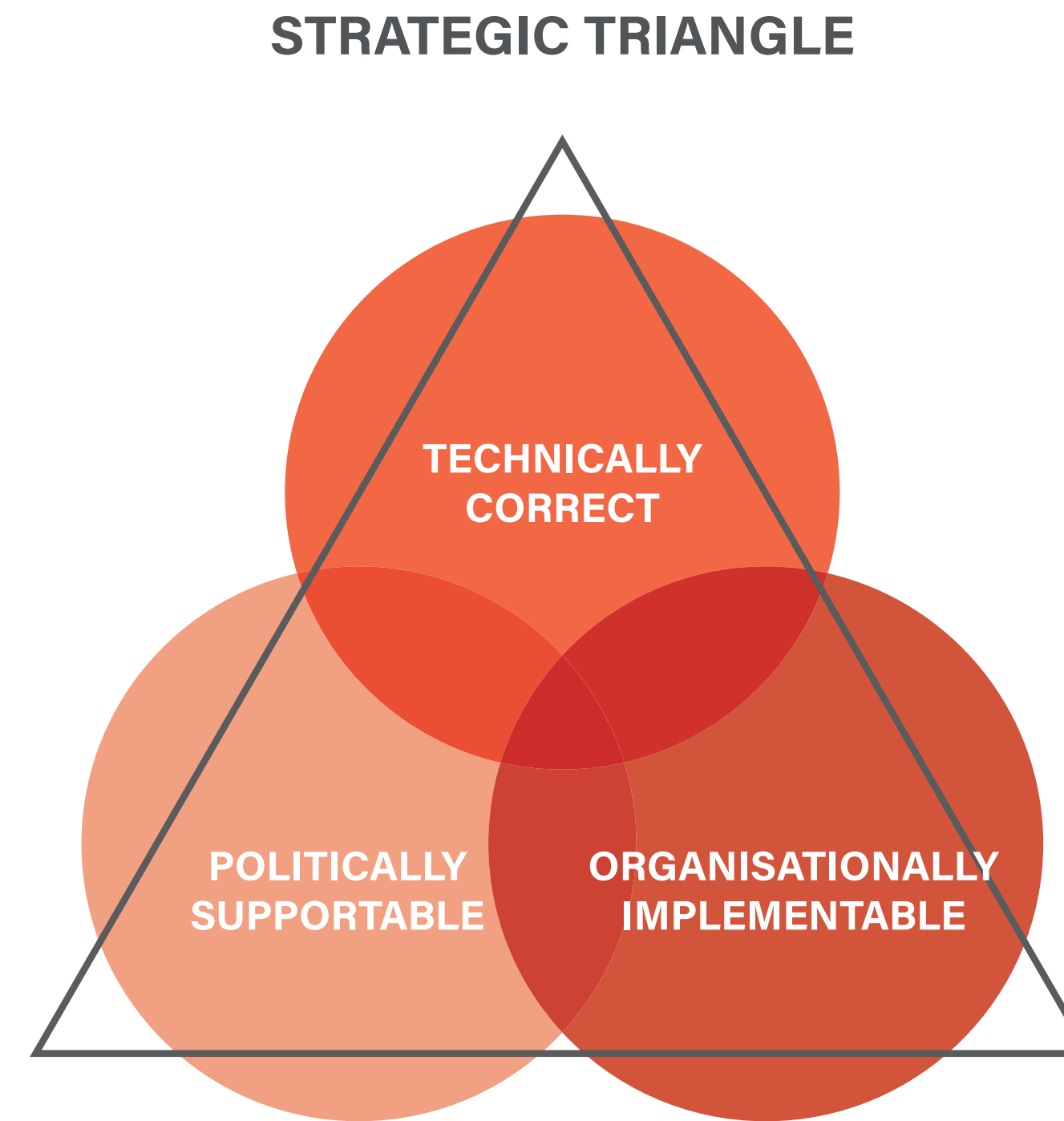
Hospitality

Our capacity to care about and for others, be present and pre-empt other's needs affect the quality of our relationships. There is no Co-design without relationships.

FRAMEWORKS FOR STRATEGIC THINKING
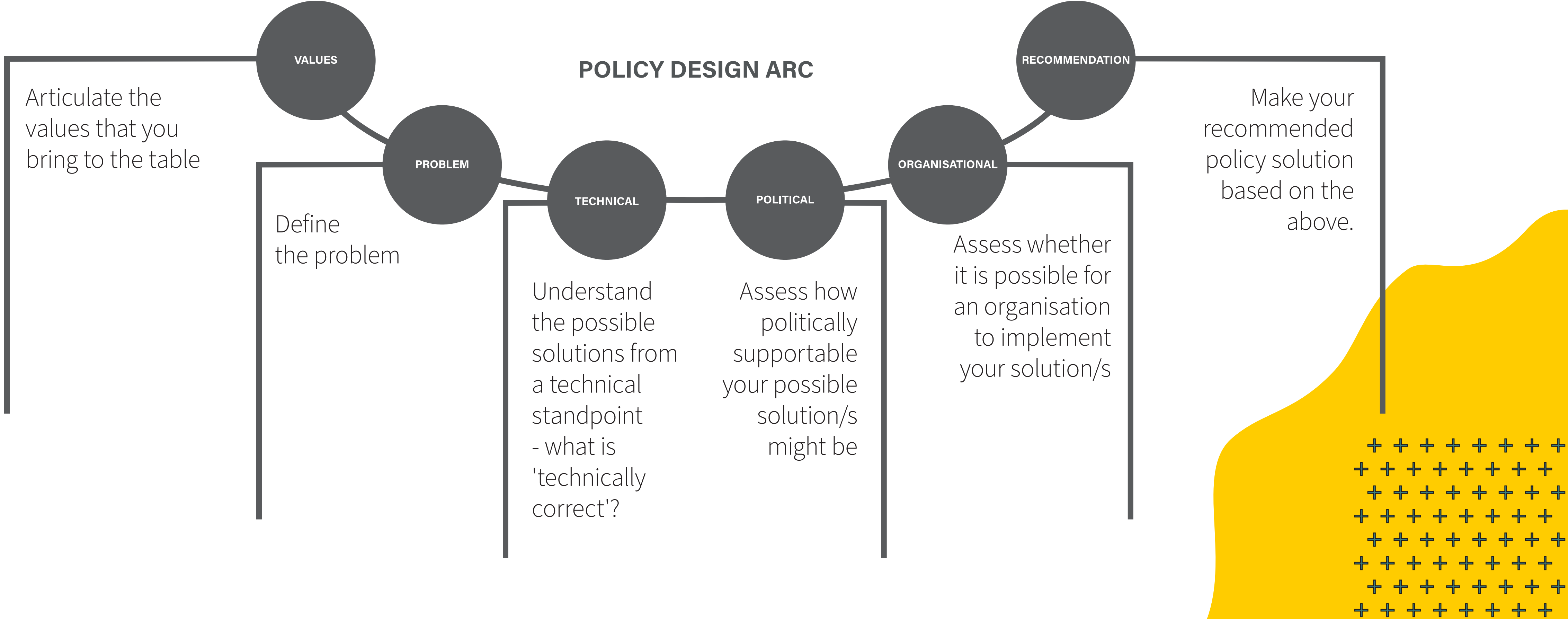
1. PUBLIC POLICY DESIGN ARC[1]

Harvard's Kennedy School of Government has created this model for public policy design.

The 'strategic triangle' that sits above the design arc helps to guide your thinking when considering trade-offs. You're always trying to balance between the three, but it's likely to be uneven. For example, is there political supportability for a solution that might not be organisationally implementable?

STRATEGIC TRIANGLE

TECHNICALLY CORRECT

POLITICALLY SUPPORTABLE

ORGANISATIONALLY IMPLEMENTABLE

POLICY DESIGN ARC

VALUES

PROBLEM

TECHNICAL

POLITICAL

ORGANISATIONAL

RECOMMENDATION

1   THE POLICY DESIGN ARC HAS BEEN DEVELOPED BY HARVARD UNIVERSITY'S KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

At the bottom of the framework are the six stages of the policy design process.

POLICY DESIGN ARC

VALUES

PROBLEM

TECHNICAL

POLITICAL

ORGANISATIONAL

RECOMMENDATION

Articulate the values that you bring to the table

Define the problem

Understand the possible solutions from a technical standpoint - what is 'technically correct'?

Assess how politically supportable your possible solution/s might be

Assess whether it is possible for an organisation to implement your solution/s

Make your recommended policy solution based on the above.

Workshop post-its: VALUES

kindness
inclusiveness
passion
honesty 3
integrity 6
culture
respect 3
genuine
open-minded
professionalism
authenticity 4
communication
truth
spiritual
neveer stop learning
absorb the landscape
keep creating my work
connection
kindness
fairness
human rights
equity
security
creativity
joy 2
inclusion
understood
knowledge
family

Vision: Already has

good
"This reads like a journalist has written a "nice" review of Greater Port Macquarie's culture"
Aspirational (i.e 'international')
Innovative leader of creativity and culture
creativity
"culture and creativity engaging and creating community"
recognition 2
Creative Industries leader
leader 2
Leadership
connection
Innovative 7
voice
Aspires to be 'innovative leader"
Aspirational
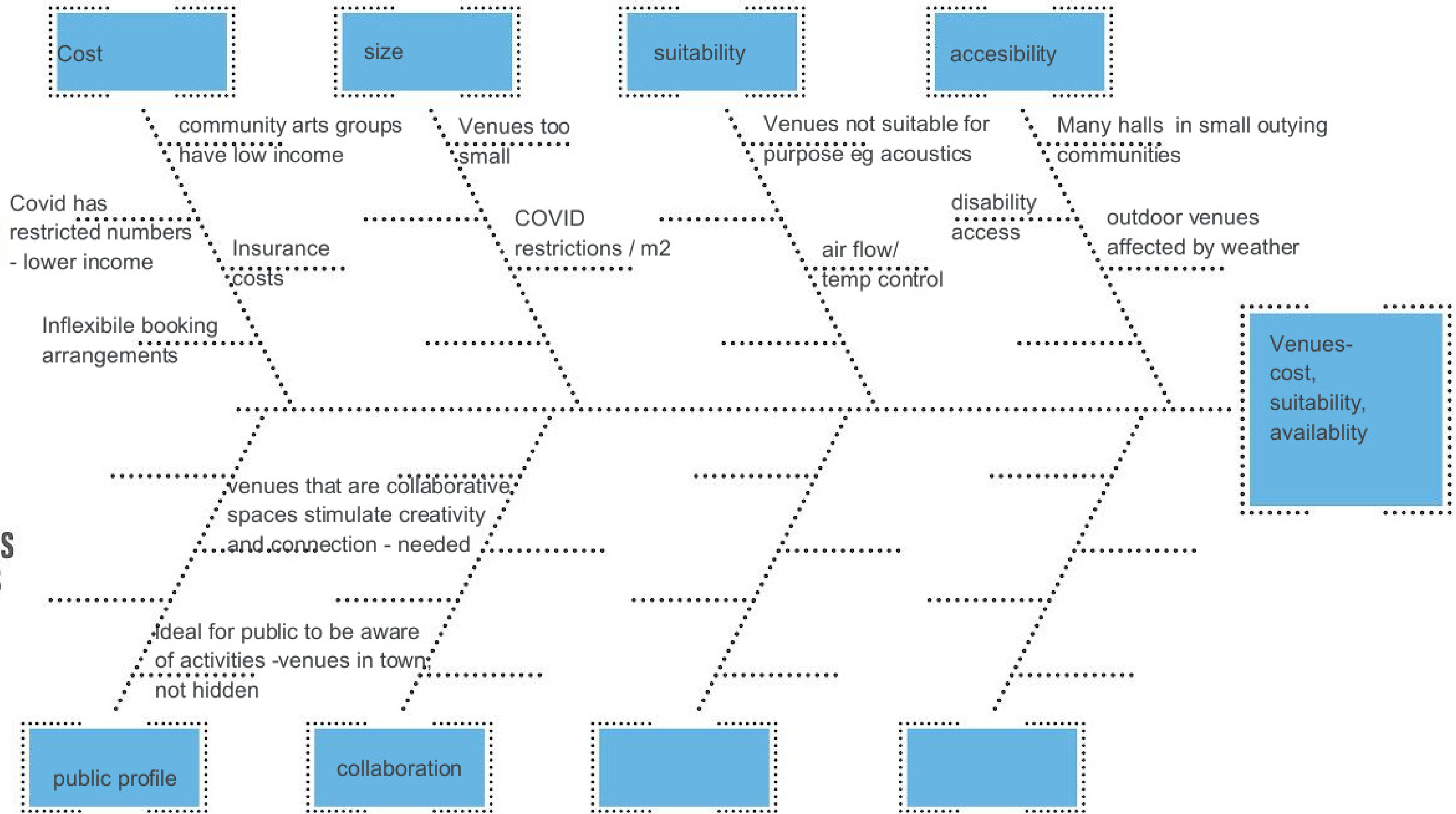Good - broad and has important key words

Vision: Needs

opportunity
First Nations 2
Inclusive
More community focus
Stimulating
Aboriginal culture and input
Valued
Title holder? Who are the innovators?
Sustainable
recognised nationally
Emotive
Values
Sounds Coporate? Needs to be warmer
Soul
Achievable
Community connection
Supported artists & creatives
Opportunities
Creative arts and culture is highly valued by the broader community and visitors
As a vision it is the ultimate 'lag' measure
Community
Engaged community
Culturally rish community
Greater PM? We/Us?
Insight from CEP
Community centred
Internationally?
Facilitating rather than 'leading'
Connecting community to creativity & culture
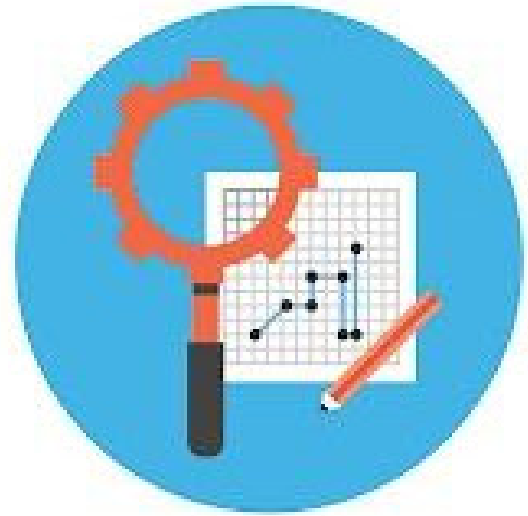All ages
Youth
Diversity
Inclusion
Inclusive

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

IDENTIFY A PROBLEM'S CAUSES AND SUB-CAUSES

P. 6: CEP

Cost

size

suitability

accesibility

community arts groups have low income

Venues too small

Venues not suitable for purpose eg acoustics

Many halls in small outying communities

Covid has restricted numbers - lower income

Insurance costs

COVID restrictions / m2

air flow/ temp control

disability access

outdoor venues affected by weather

Inflexibile booking arrangements

venues that are collaborative spaces stimulate creativity and connection - needed

Venues- cost, suitability, availablity

Ideal for public to be aware of activities -venues in town, not hidden

public profile

collaboration

WHAT PROBLEMS HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED?

Value or Percieved value
Need for more Arts Education

Need for more accessible venues for rehearsal and performance

Need for collaborative spaces
Higher profile for community arts
Greater emphasis needed on social and emotional benefits

FRAMEWORKS FOR STRATEGIC THINKING

2. DESIGN THINKING FRAMEWORK[2]

PRE-DESIGN THINKING:
STATE "VALUES" AS WITH PUBLIC
POLICY DESIGN ARC

STANDARD DESIGN THINKING STEPS

POST-DESIGN THINKING:
REFLECT ON WHAT YOU LEARNED

LOCATE/
STANDPOINT

DISCOVER/
REFLECT/
EMPATHISE

DEFINE

IDEATE
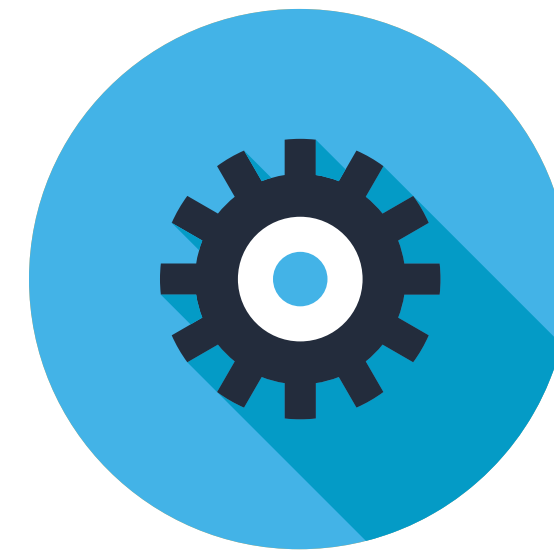
PROTOTYPE

EVALUATE

REFLECT/
EVOLVE

2   SOURCE: MODIFIED DESIGN THINKING METHODOLOGY, THE CREATIVE
CITIZEN PROJECT (WAHLIN, ORCHARD, PAULOVICH & BUHLER, 2020).

HOW MIGHT WE APPROACH THE DRAFTING OF A NEW CULTURAL PLAN?
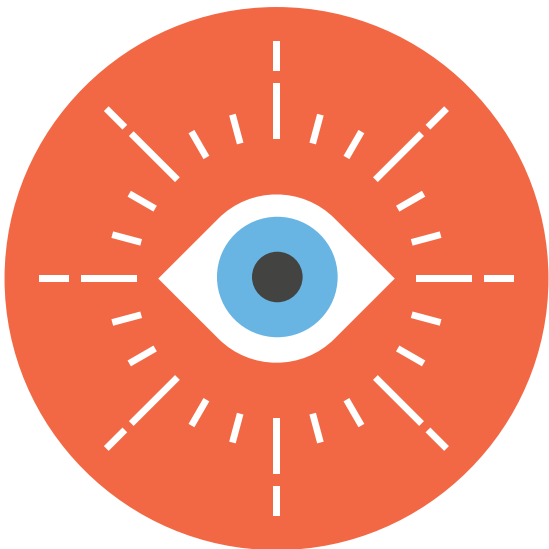
WHAT IS THE VISION?
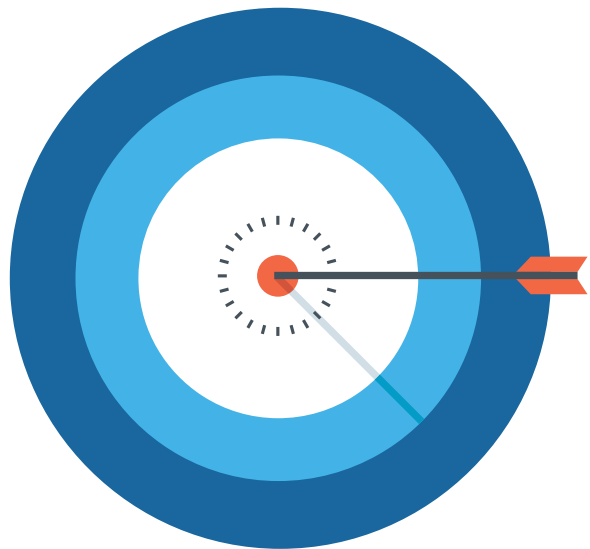
WHAT ARE THE MAIN GOALS?

WHO IS IT FOR?

WHO ARE THE STAKEHOLDERS?

HOW WILL IT BE IMPLEMENTED?
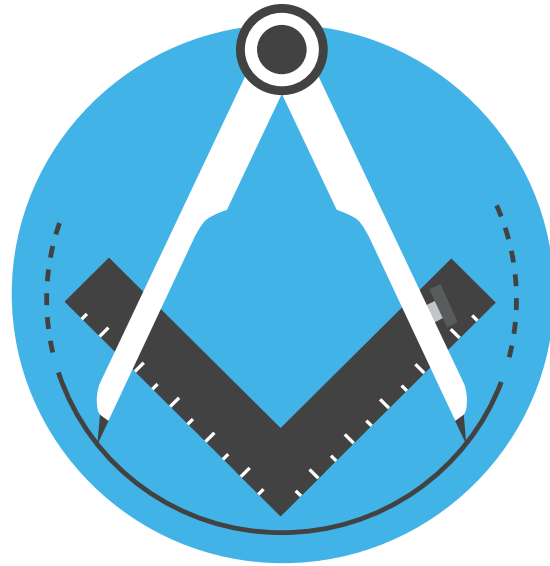
HOW WILL IT BE MEASURED?

The region's creative industries is dominated by sole traders (54%). How might we attract investment from larger creative companies?
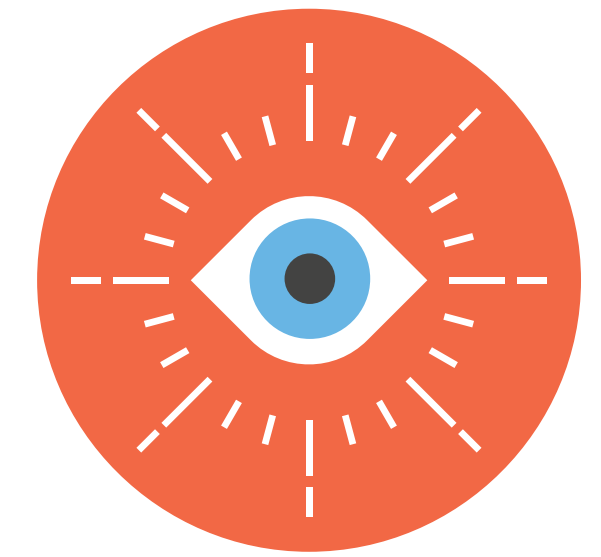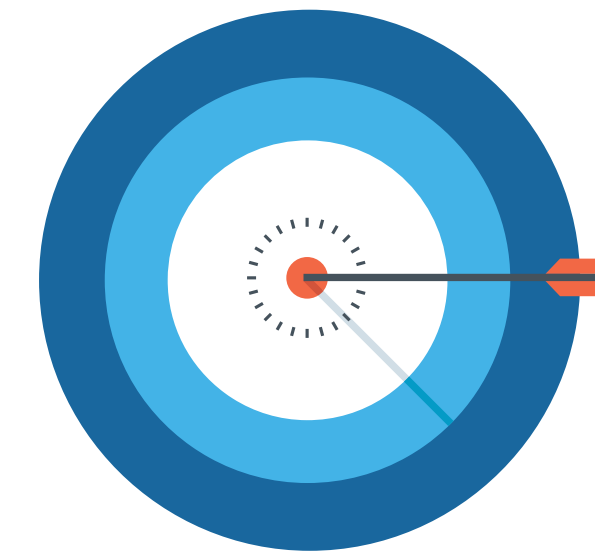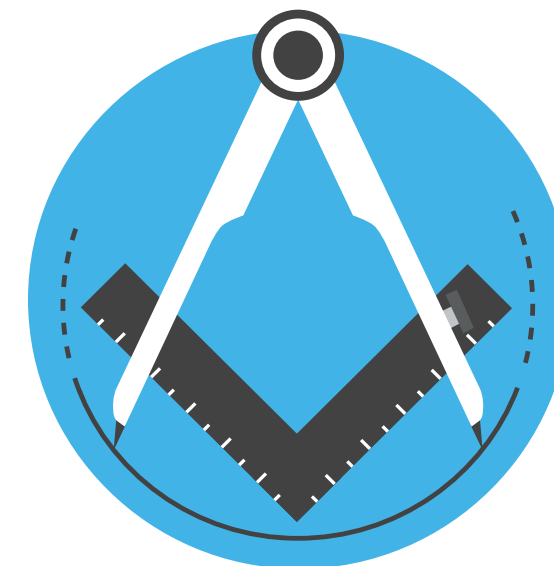
There is significant opportunity for education and skills development: how might we foster this?

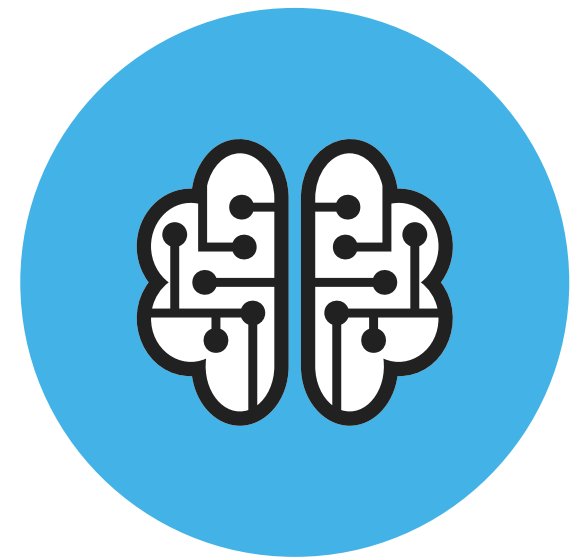How might we encourage more permament use of co-Lab spaces (to foster longer-term collaborations?)

How might we increase representation in the cultural arts and creative industries of Indigenous and non-European members of the community?

THEORY OF CHANGE

THEORY OF CHANGE/ IMPACT MAP

THE PROBLEM

What is the problem we are seeking to address? Why is it important to address it in relation to the broad goal we are trying to acheive? How does this broad goal feed into our vision?

INPUT

IF WE...

start to make these changes, for this purpose

WHAT WE WILL INVEST

ACTIVITY

BY...

the activities we propose to undertake as part of the process, in order to achieve that change

WHAT ACTIVITIES ARE MADE POSSIBLE BY THE INPUT

OUTPUTS

THIS WILL RESULT IN...

the outputs we assume will result from these activities

MEASURABLE, IMMEDIATE OUTPUTS AS A REASULT OF ACTIVITY

OUTCOMES

AND EVENTUALLY...

the outcomes we assume we are likely to see over time

LONGER TERM OUTCOMES THAT ACTIVITIES WILL INFLUENCE

IMPACT

DEEP CHANGE

How have we realised our broad goal and how has this work contributed to the stated vision and the change we wish to see?

WHAT AN ORGANISATION → HAS CONTROL OVER → CAN INFLUENCE → CONTRIBUTES TO

Let's look at the Theory of Change another way.

1. Define the problem. Refine the Vision. State the Goals.
"A" wrote a vision for their organisation that includes the statement: 'a place where all employees are able to enjoy an optimal work/life balance." However, "A" sees that "B" is working too hard and is showing signs of stress. "A" decides to make a small change to see if encouraging one person to take regular breaks outside will encourage others to do the same.

2. Input: Investment
"A" provides "B" with $5 to buy a coffee at a nearby outdoor cafe by the beach.

3. Activity
"B" uses the $5 to buy a coffee at the beach.

Coffee @ the Beach!

4. Output: short-term
"B" sits by the beach, breathes some fresh air, watches the birds and starts to smile.

Ahh...

5. Outcome: long-term
"B" forms a regular habit of taking a break outdoors, reducing stress on a regular basis. Others in the workplace can see the difference it has made, and start to join them. They form a walking group and with support from their employer, walk together three times a week.
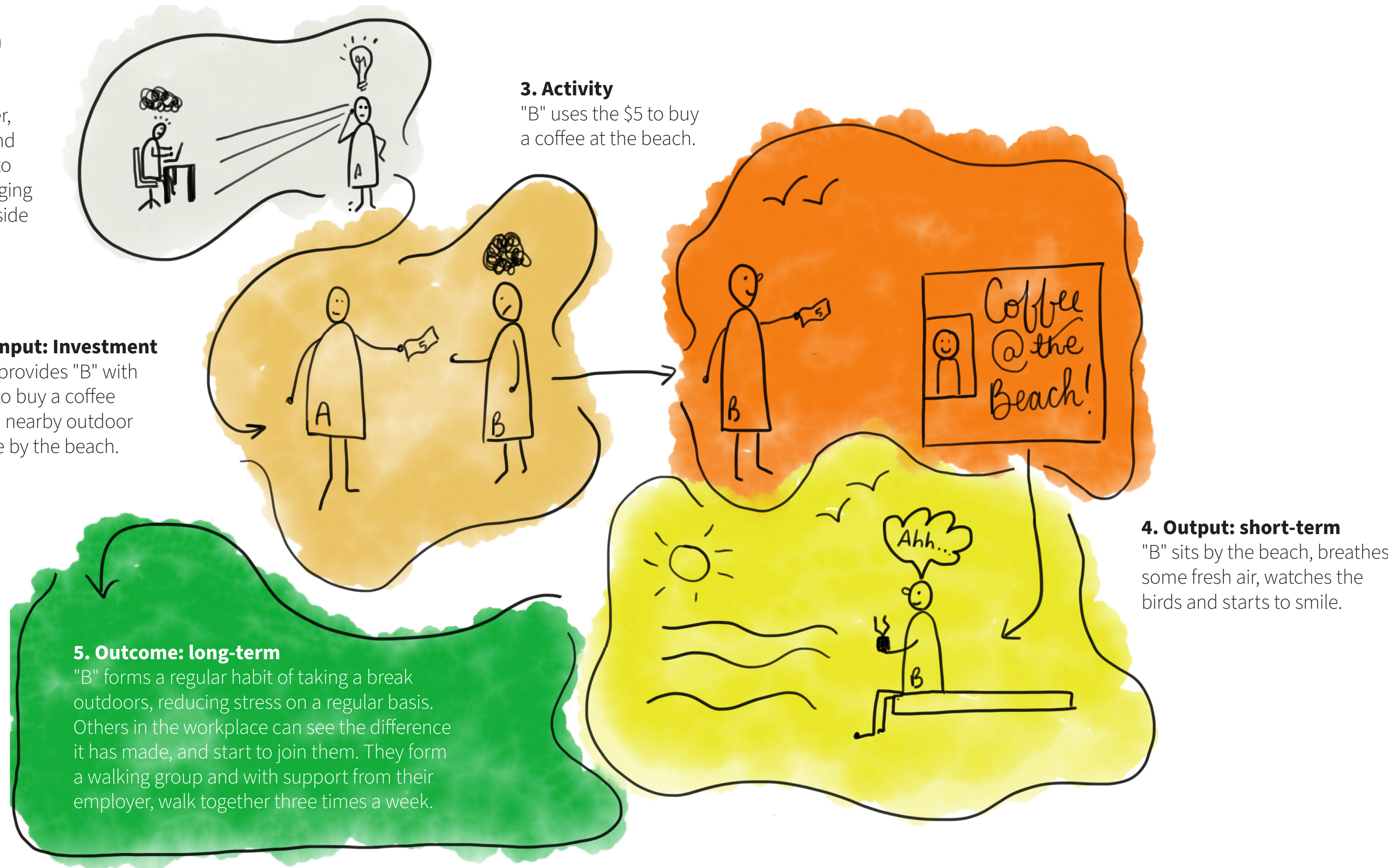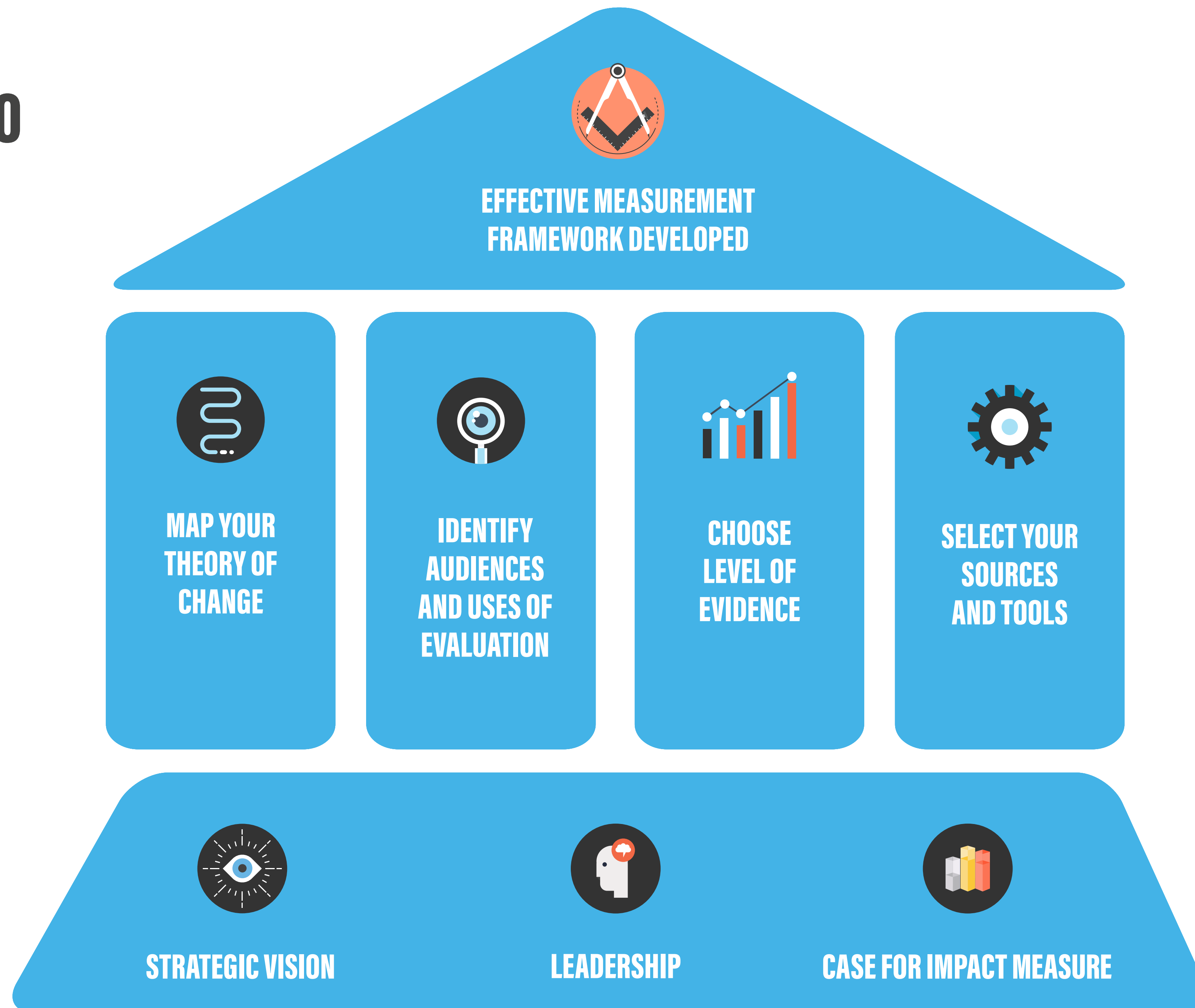
WHAT'S THE IMPACT?

"A"'s original **vision** was to create a business that valued employees' work/life balance. In **identifying the problem** of employee stress and overwork, they made a **goal** to encourage more breaks, especially outside where possible. They invested in an initial, low-cost **input** of $5, to encourage "B" to go the cafe at the beach (**activity**).
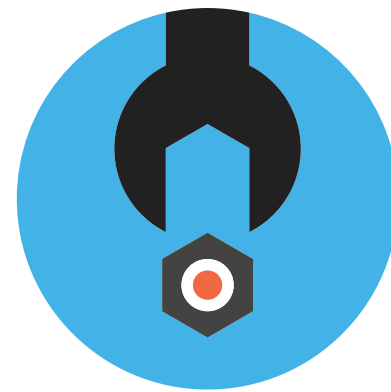
The short-term **output** was "B" destressing by the beach with a coffee. The long-term **outcome** was the encouragement this gave other employees to also take breaks outside. The **impact** of this on the business was that "A" was able to create 'a place where all employees are able to enjoy an optimal work/life balance", bringing us back full-circle to the business' **vision**.

FOUR PILLAR APPROACH TO CREATING AN IMPACT EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Source: Kazimirski and Pritchard (2014) - New Philanthropy Capital (NPC)

EFFECTIVE MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK DEVELOPED

MAP YOUR THEORY OF CHANGE

IDENTIFY AUDIENCES AND USES OF EVALUATION

CHOOSE LEVEL OF EVIDENCE

SELECT YOUR SOURCES AND TOOLS

STRATEGIC VISION

LEADERSHIP

CASE FOR IMPACT MEASURE

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

ONE
Starting with *how* (e.g. data sources/evaluation methods) before clarifying *why* (and *who*). Be pragmatic and strategic in your approach to evaluation.
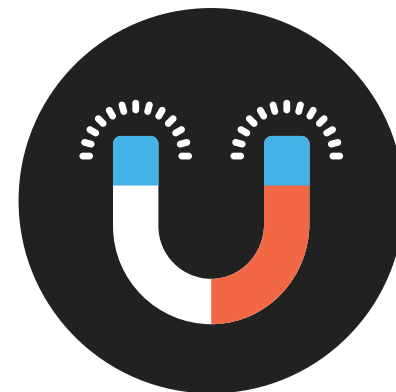
TWO
Trying to measure everything (requires massive resources). Don't create a long 'shopping list' of activities and measures.

THREE
Measuring what's easy, rather than what matters. Avoid focusing on activities over outcomes.

FOUR
Discouraging adaptation in response to changes (e.g. COVID-19, natural disasters) and learning. This can happen is you set targets for activities rather than for goals.

THE PROJECT SO FAR

- The Cultural Plan 2021-2025 was ratified by Port Macquarie-Hastings Council in 2021.

- Parts of the workshop were published with the Cultural Plan as part of Council's reporting on community engagement (appendix B).

- Evaluation strategies are ongoing. Funding from this project has supported a new pilot that brings together an additional six councils from the North Coast region and the Cultural Development Network.