

The Partnership Inception Tool

The success or failure of partnerships and public consultations depends on clarity in the inception phase. Get the following '6 clarities' right to lay the groundwork for smooth projects with reduced conflict down the track:

- 1) **Clarity of purpose:** Values at stake + outcomes that are measurable.
- 2) **Clarity of the negotiation space:** What's genuinely up for discussion?
- 3) **Clarity of roles and authority:** Who has ultimate decision-making authority, and what is the decision process?
- 4) **Inclusion.** Who are the essential 'stakeholders'.
- 5) **Information and inspiration:** What knowledge and inspirations do the participants need to have in order to deliberate well?
- 6) **Clarity of key language:** Key terms are always packed full of unspoken assumptions. Decode the collaborators' language to prevent fundamental disagreements later on.

I) Clear statement of purpose

a) Motivating values

"The purpose of this workshop is to contribute to:

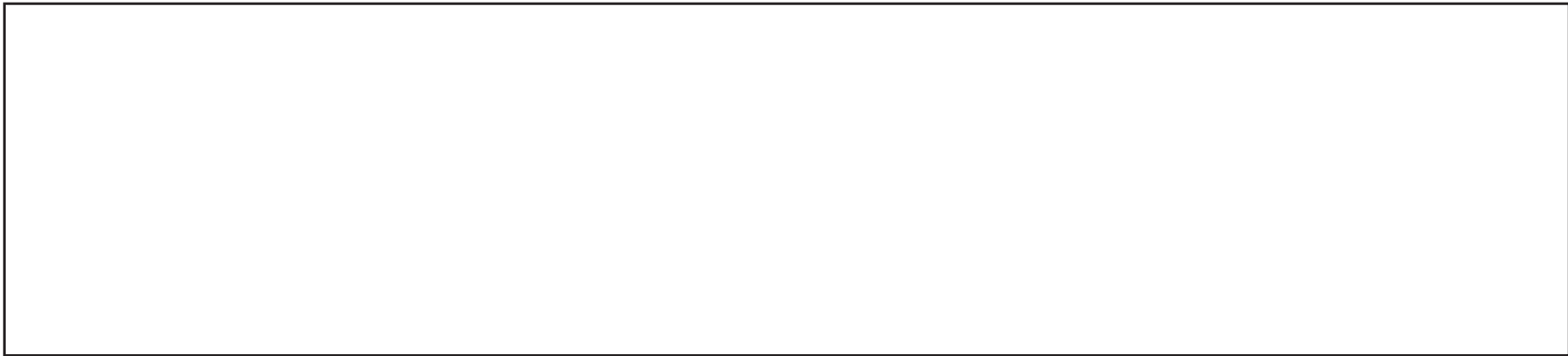


List core public goods / values at stake in this situation e.g. "The wellbeing and happiness of people who live and work here."

Note: Starting with values is a good way to avoid conflict down the track. Values tend to unite, while interests tend to divide.

b) Strategic outcomes

"by contributing to:

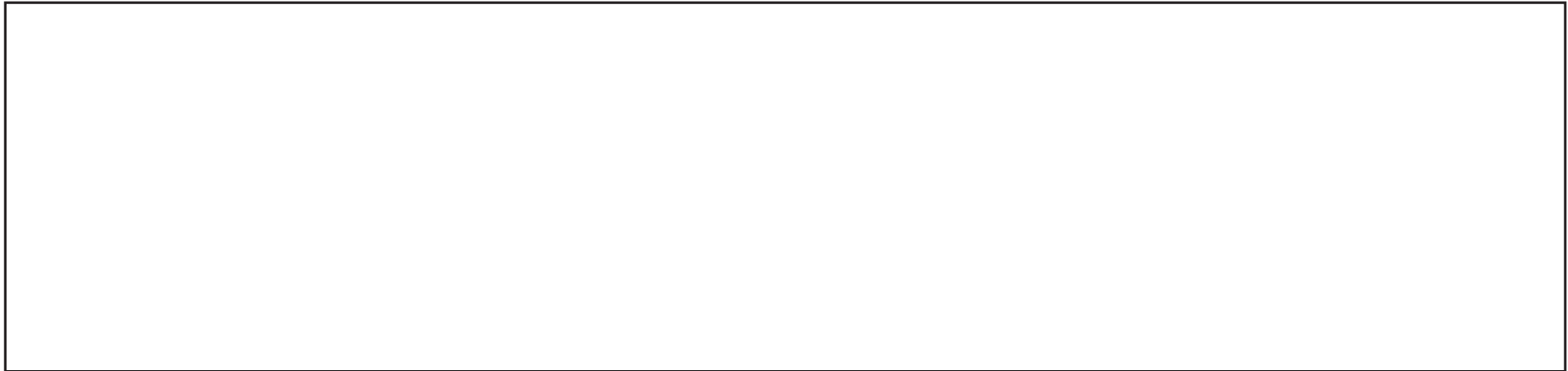


List positive desired outcomes with metrics (where known) e.g "Reducing congestion on arterial roads".

Note: It's good to be rigorous and 'scientific' here, listing metrics if we have them.

c) Immediate output

"by producing:

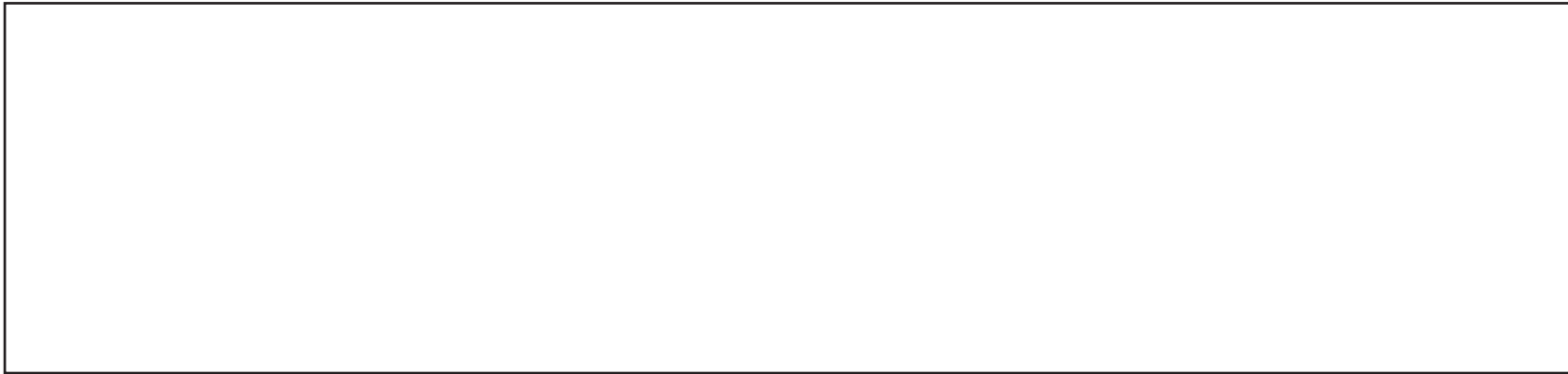


List the output from workshop e.g. "A strategic plan for modal shift."

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d) Who will act on the output?

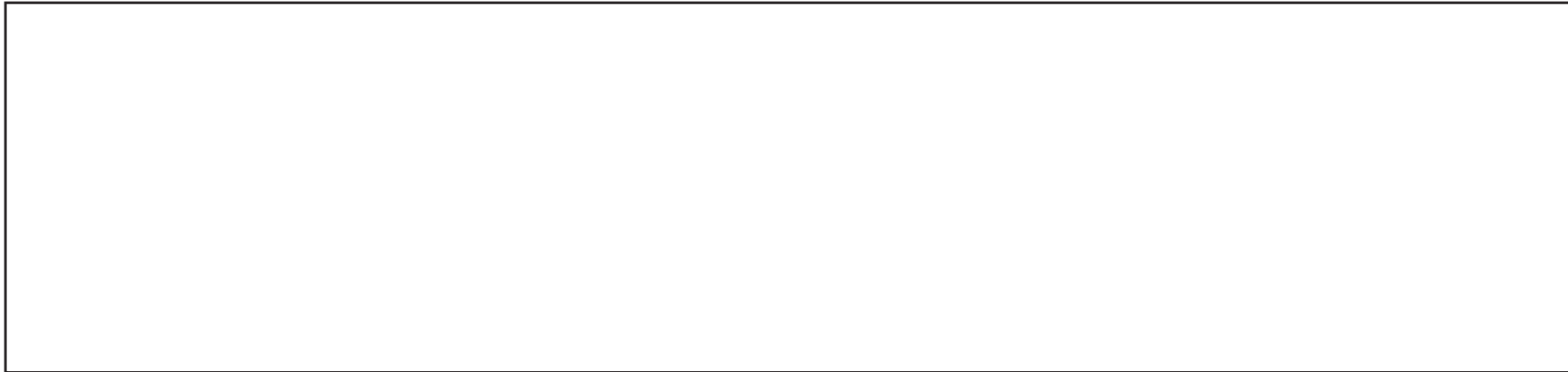
"to be acted on by (who):



List parties responsible for the final decision and implementation
e.g. Department of Transport, Department of Planning, RMS,
Willoughby City Council.

e) The timeframe

"to be acted on (when):



Describe the timeframe for implementation e.g. "over the period 2018-2021".

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2) The negotiation space

Clearly identify significant matters which are outside the scope of this deliberation.



For example:

- polices already set in stone that can't be altered.
- timetable and time span
- available budget
- statutory requirements
- who is the final decision-maker.

Honest disclosure of these "boundary conditions" greatly limits the potential for future conflict.

Note: in cases of a genuine *partnership*, the negotiation space itself has to be negotiated, with disclosure by both parties of their assumptions about what is 'in' and 'out'.

3) The location of authority, and the decision-making process

Who makes the final decisions, and what is the decision-making process (and timetable)?



- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of each partner.
- Confirm the authority level of each collaborator.
- Check: Is there sufficient authority in the room for a meaningful collaboration?

4) WHO will you invite?

Ask: "Whose voices must be heard?" for the best outcome

What is ideal mix of influence, life experience, professional expertise, and local knowledge to solve the problem?

Diversity makes the difference. Aim to have a mix of perspectives and expertise so that no ill-considered assumption can go unchallenged.

Don't be afraid of kooky, left-field thinkers in the group. It's immensely valuable to have someone to shake up others' assumptions.

“Because of social complexity, solving a wicked problem is fundamentally a social process. Having a few brilliant people or the latest project management technology is no longer sufficient.” - APSC p28, quoting Conklin 2006

5) How will you inform and inspire the participants?

Precede any deliberation with a positive and informative briefing for participants. Talks from experts, a slide show, or a research briefing will make all the difference to the positivity and quality of ideas from the event. (The "Rubbish in, rubbish out" rule).

INFORMATION: bring everyone up to speed on basic data about the problem, the strategic environment, and what is known to make a difference.

INSPIRATION: excite people with descriptions of successful projects from around the world. This creates optimism, a sense of possibility, and feedstock for the imagination.

"Every problem has been solved by someone, somewhere." - Bill Clinton



6) Clarity of key terms

Key terms are always drenched in unspoken assumptions. Conflict is often inevitable simply because these words have different meanings for different players.

Before the project begins, sit down with the collaborating partners, list terms that need decoding, and patiently translate them into **plain English**.* This will be extremely valuable for the partners themselves, who often don't appreciate the assumptions behind jargon and 'shop talk'.

* Don't try to get everyone agreeing on the same definitions, just clearly expose the meanings and implications of each party's assumptions. For example, ask them to give examples of what they imagine "accessibility" or "livability" or "sustainability" or "equality" would look like in practice.

