



Child-friendly Communities Engagement Framework

Version 1.0

Planning

Developed by ARACY for the Australian Government
Department of Social Services



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Please note that this resource is a working version for use among Facilitating and Community Partners of the Communities for Children Program (CfC) and is not for general circulation.

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How to use this Framework

This Framework is composed of 4 sections (see Figure 2.1):

1. Introduction – information regarding the underlying concepts of The Nest (Children’s Wellbeing Framework), Child-friendly Communities, and Why Children’s Voice is important
2. **Planning – considerations of the purpose and resourcing of consultations/data collection**
3. Listening – considerations in developing and implementing a localised tool or approach
4. Sensemaking and action– Synthesising and analysing information and data, and implementing feedback loops

It is supported by the following attached Appendices:

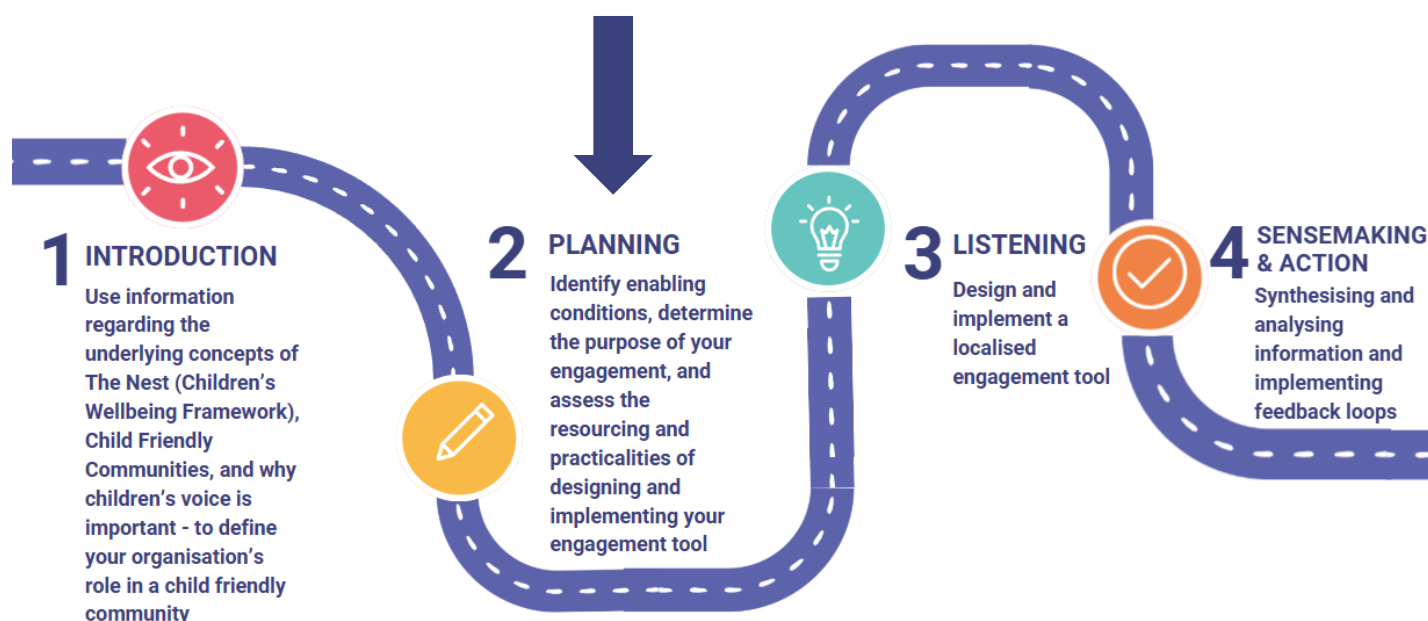
Appendix A: Statement and Prompts relevant to *Section 3: Listening*

Appendix B: Tool Examples relevant to *Section 3: Listening*

Appendix C: Resources and References

Figure 2.1 shows the potential sequence you may use to work through the Framework. The process, however, may not be linear. Users may revisit earlier sections or steps, or jump through certain sections and steps, depending on their circumstances.

Figure 2.1: Roadmap of Child-friendly Communities Engagement Framework



Each section includes:

- General information and links to existing resources
- Prompts for you and/or your team or working group to consider and work through
- Reflexive questions to consider after each step
- Worksheets and ideas for activities to be used in workshops or team meetings

Section 2: Planning

This section outlines the enabling conditions for conducting meaningful engagement and consultation with children, and practical steps for your organisation to undertake before developing and implementing an engagement and consultation tool.

Outcomes

This section guides you to:

1. Gain an understanding of what needs to be in place for your organisation before planning for engaging with children on child-friendly communities.
2. Clearly define the purpose of your engagement and consultation/s.
3. Understand the resources and practicalities that need to be identified and considered.

Before you start...

There are several conditions that are important to have in place before your use of this Framework, or to be developed in parallel.

Use this Table (2.1) to assess whether your organisation has the conditions set up to start planning for consultations and engagement with children.

Enabling conditions

Table 2.1

Condition	Description	Status
Key mindsets - attitudes, beliefs, values	Your organisation and stakeholders value children's voice and agency and recognise it as an area of investment and time (see Key principles below).	Yes/No/ In progress
Organisational buy-in	Your organisation recognises that it has a role in at least some aspects of the ways their community is child-friendly.	Yes/No/ In progress
Training and capacity building	Staff have the experience and skills required to conduct consultations with children and are trusted by participating children and their families (or your organisation is partnered with another that does). See Key principles below.	Yes/No/ In progress
Ongoing learning and action	Your organisation is committed to and invests in learning from engaging with children and sharing their findings with others, and back to the community. They are committed to having children's voices inform their practice and policies.	Yes/No/ In progress
Resources - time, funding, capabilities	Your organisation has the funding and resources to invest the time, and professional development of staff required to fulfil the conditions outlined above (or is partnered with an organisation that does). Your organisation has ethical processes in place to gather informed consent and adhere to confidentiality/privacy considerations of information collected (or is partnered with an organisation that does). See Key principles and guidance on Ethical Practice below.	Yes/No/ In progress

Key principles of engaging with children

All children under the age of 18 have the right to a voice in decisions that affect their lives under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Article 12 of the UNCRC ensures children the right to have their views heard and taken seriously on matters that affect their lives, and adults who work with children must listen to, hear and act on children's views in ways that make sure all the other UNCRC rights are respected.

It is important to ensure the views of pre-verbal, non-speaking and verbal children are listened to, heard and acted on using methods that are in keeping with the developmental stages of early childhood. Adults need to respect all children as individuals with rights, build on children's abilities, interests, experiences, cultures, and backgrounds and take account of additional needs or supports children may need to participate in decision-making as fully as possible.

Key principles that practitioners and organisations should consider when engaging with and consulting children:

- That consultations adhere to the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations and the relevant jurisdiction's child safe regulations and standards.
- Consideration of how child/children are given Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence – following the [Lundy Model of Participation](#) (four elements with a rational chronological order).
- **Any approaches should occur within the context of a trusting relationship established between a child/children and their key worker (e.g. educator, teacher, healthcare practitioner); where key workers are equipped with knowledge and skills to keep children safe and are suitable and supported to work with children.**
- A child/children must feel comfortable, safe and secure.
- Consent is sought from parents and guardians, and assent sought from child/children via age-appropriate methods. Assent from children must be ongoing.
- A child/children must be able to choose to stop being involved in the consultation at any time.
- That the [cultural safety](#) of participating children and their families are ensured.

These Principles are explored further below regarding cultural safety and ethical practice.

Cultural safety

Culture is the foundation of being and belonging. Feeling safe to identify with, learn about, practice and maintain connection with one's culture, is a paramount right for all children. Children should feel positive about, and strong and proud in, their culture and cultural identity.

The historical context of colonisation in Australia and its continued impact on First Nations children and their families highlights the importance of prioritising and ensuring the cultural safety for First Nations children and young people in all contexts, including when engaging in consultations, that they feel proud in their identity and their voice is heard.

"We can't live in the past, but the past lives in us." Dr Charles Perkins, AO (Arrente/Kalkadoon)

See [Cultural Safety and Child Safe Organisations](#) for more detail on cultural safety, and AWCH's [Collaborate and Connect Toolbox](#) for models of engagement, including guidance on intersectional approaches to engagement with young people.

Ethical practice

Community organisations duty of care to children requires a responsibility to ensure that consultations are conducted ethically. Internal policies, procedures and governance mechanisms governing the data collection and consultation with children should be in place before the use of this Framework and the implementation of your engagement and consultations or developed in parallel. This may include (but not limited to):

- Approval/delegation processes
- Informed consent processes for children and their parent/carer
- Child safety processes to assess and address the risk of harm, and to respond to signs of distress or harm during or after consultations
- Processes and procedures to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of data and information collected (including but not limited to data storage and reporting)
- Where relevant, payment or compensation for participation

Existing resources on ethics and consent procedures for consulting with children and young people can be found below (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2

Name	Author	Description	Link
Engaging children and young people in your organisation: A guide to participation in practice	ACYP	A practical guide to engaging children and young people, including consent and ethical considerations.	Click here
Voice of the Child Toolkit	Centre for Community Child Health, MCRI	A practical guide to engaging children and young people, including consent and ethical considerations.	Click here
Engaging children in decision making: A guide for consulting children	Ballarat, Brimbank, Maribyrnong, Melton & Wyndham City Councils, and the Department of Education (Vic)	A practical guide to engaging children and young people, including consent and ethical considerations.	Click here
Citizen Me – consent forms and information sheets	ACYP	Sample consent forms and information sheets for children and parents/carers	Click here
Citizen Me - Report	ACYP	A practical guide to engaging children and young people, including consent and ethical considerations.	Click here
Statement on Consumer and Community Involvement in Health and Medical Research	NHMRC	Provides guidance on consumers and community members involvement in all aspects of health and medical research.	Click here

Name	Author	Description	Link
Ethical Considerations in Quality Assurance and Evaluation Activities	NHMRC	Indicates whether a formal review by HREC is needed.	Click here
National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research	NHMCR	A statement of national standards promoting ethical human research.	Click here
Ethical Research Involving Children	ERIC	An international resource led by Southern Cross University that provides resources and templates for ethical research involving children.	Click here

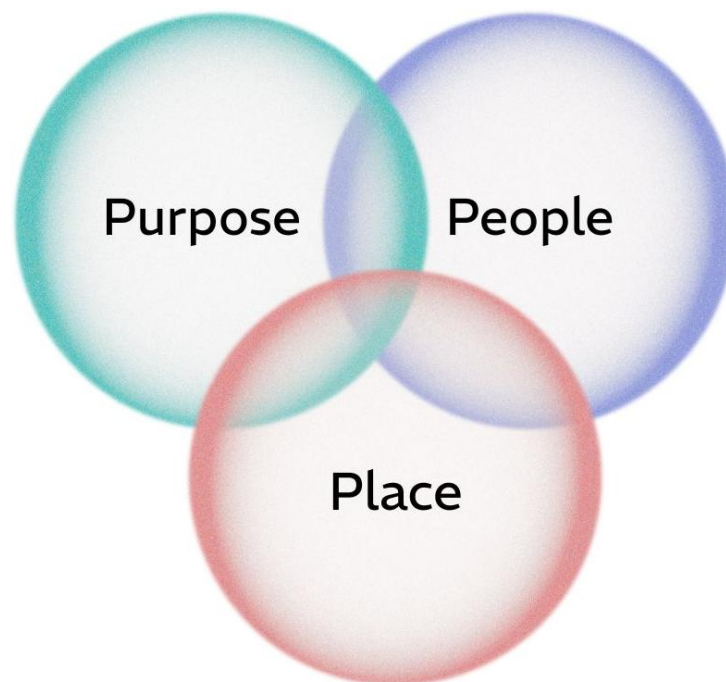
First Steps

Decisions about engaging with children will be shaped by your:

Purpose: What is the purpose of your engagement with children about the extent and nature of their community is child-friendly? What are you going to use the information for?

People: Who is this engagement and consultation to be conducted with, who will decide how it will be done, and who will do it?

Place: Where is/are the consultation/s to take place, and where is the information going to be kept? What are the socio-cultural factors and place-based dynamics that need to be considered?



Step 1: Defining Purpose

What is the purpose of your engagement with children about the extent and nature their community is child-friendly? What are you going to use the information for?

In the development of this Framework, the Working Group identified three key purposes for a child-friendly communities engagement and consultation tool. This includes conducting needs analysis to inform program, strategy and policy design; monitoring and evaluation; and advocacy and collaboration.

Using Table 2.3 below, identify which purpose/s align with your organisation's needs. It may be more than one. What does that tell you about how often you need to use the tool (or versions you may need), and with whom?

**For ongoing engagement and consultations, consider how these can be embedded (or how are may already be embedded) into your organisation's business-as-usual activities.*

Table 2.3

Purpose	Description	Timing and participants
Needs-analysis and design	Informing where to focus efforts and resources, and to aid in decision making. This includes informing program, strategy and policy design and delivery.	<p>A one-off or ongoing consultation* and data collection approach.</p> <p>Include children that, geographically or otherwise, are part of the population or cohort your organisation serves or intends to serve.</p>
Monitoring and Evaluation	Providing information on progress and project successes (impacts), and/or areas of improvement, and further contributing to responsive adaptations by services and programs (tracking and learning from, over time).	<p>A one-off or ongoing consultation* and data collection approaches.</p> <p>Include children that have been involved in the services and programs that you directly or indirectly are involved in delivering.</p>
Advocacy and Collaboration	To be used to highlight areas of change, to inform community engagement and awareness raising, and catalyse collaboration.	<p>A one-off consultation and data collection approach.</p> <p>Can involve a broader group of children in your community, not necessarily the children directly involved in your program or services, or specific cohorts that your organisation serves.</p>

In defining the purpose of your tool, you may also want to:

- Review the consultations and knowledge sharing from children that have already taken place (or are already taking place) within your organisation or externally. Clarify whether further engagement is required, and if so, how can they draw from the findings of previous consultations and information gathering? If not, how can the existing engagement be used to inform outcomes related to child-friendly communities? *This is an important consideration to avoid over-consulting certain groups and populations.*
- Consider any existing internal or external data and information this engagement can further inform or be analysed alongside.
- Consider what engagements with family and community this can sit alongside.

See the Sensemaking and Action Section for more details on using data and information from your consultation tool with other data and information sources.

Circling Back

When defining the purpose of your engagement, circle back to the considerations in the [Introduction Section](#), specifically:

- Your role in ensuring your community is child-friendly. *If your organisations' role is direct and accountable, then perhaps the purpose of the engagement would be monitoring and evaluation. However, if collectively invested, then perhaps the purpose is centred on advocacy and collaboration.*

Step 2: Assessing resources and examining context relating to People

Who is this engagement and consultation to be conducted with, who will decide how it will be done, and who will do it?

Assess your resources and context relating to staff and participants by:

- Identify who needs to be involved in the development of the tool
 - How much time can they dedicate to developing a tool? What support might they need to be involved?
- What follow-up information and support do we need to provide participating children and their families with after we've implemented the tool?
- Consider the age, ability and background of participants
 - What wording, topics and/or type of approach (see Section on Listening) would be most appropriate (and fun and engaging) for the children intended to take part in the engagement according to their developmental, physical and/or emotional needs?
 - What support might they need to take part?
 - What follow-up support or information will be required?
- Determine who is best placed to conduct the engagement and consultations
 - Who has access (e.g. existing connections, organisational and child safety clearance)?
 - Who has the skills and expertise?
 - Who has the trust of the children (and their families) to be consulted with?
- Assess time and capacity (of staff and/or participants)
 - How much time can staff dedicate to engaging with children?
 - How much time is feasible for the children to take part in the engagement and consultations?
 - What type of approach (see Table 3.1 in Listening Section) would provide data in a form that staff would have the time and skills to analyse?
 - What further support or training would be needed for those conducting the consultations?

Circling Back

When assessing the resources and examining context relating to **People**, circle back to the considerations in the Introduction Section, specifically:

- What is the relational aspect of your role in ensuring a child-friendly community (i.e. what other organisations, groups or individuals are you linked to)? *These stakeholders may need to be included in the tool's development.*

Step 3: Assessing resources and examining context in relation to Place

Where is/are the consultation/s to take place, and where is the information going to be kept? What are the socio-cultural factors, and place-based dynamics that need to be considered?

Identify resources and the context regarding 'Place', specifically regarding:

- Venue
 - Where is the consultation/s going to take place?
 - What online options do we have available?
 - What skills are required of staff and participants to utilise online tools?
- Data storage
 - Are you collecting anonymous, identifiable or de-identified information and how are you going to store it? *What identifiable or demographic (i.e. age, gender, cultural background) information will you need to collect? What will be important to know when you are interpreting and analysing this information?*
 - What data forms can we safely and conveniently store? *Are you using hard copies, video, jpg, word or excel/csv files. Do you have secure, password-protected/locked places to keep it? Who will have access to it?*
- Socio-cultural factors and place-based dynamics. Specifically:
 - Topics that may be too sensitive or not culturally safe to pose
 - Who do you need consent and approval from for the children you want to engage with (i.e., parents and guardians, schools etc.)
 - People and groups that need to be part of the sensemaking process and provided with the findings
 - Procedures to be drawn upon for instances of distress or disclosure
 - The form of payment or compensation provided for participation (if provided)
- The extent the engagement tool needs to be standardised, or can be adapted each time (for instance, where the engagement is ongoing or to occur in different places, by or among different people, or at different times)

Reflexive questions

After planning for the development and implementation of your tool, you may want to consider before moving on:

- Who was involved in the planning, and who wasn't?
- What assumptions were made in the planning stage? How can we test these?

Thinking and Discussion Activities

The worksheets below are designed to help organisations take practical steps with their teams by prompting meaningful discussions and creating space to establish strong foundations before engaging with children. These activities support internal planning and management, ensuring that operational considerations are addressed in advance.

Defining Purpose

WHY ARE YOU
ENGAGING WITH
CHILDREN?

WHAT ARE YOU HOPING
TO LEARN OR
UNDERSTAND FROM
THEIR PERSPECTIVE?

HOW DO YOU INTEND
TO USE WHAT YOU
LEARN?

WHAT DECISIONS WILL
THEIR VIEWS INFORM?

Identifying People

WHICH
CHILDREN DO
YOU WANT AND
NEED TO
ENGAGE WITH?

- *Which children are most involved in and/or affected by your program?*
- *Which children could be more involved in and/or affected by your program in future?*
- *Which children do you normally not hear from?*
- *How can you ensure you're hearing diverse voices and perspectives?*

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How old are the children you want to engage with?</i> • <i>How many children do we want to engage with? Why?</i> • <i>Where/ how are those children interacting with the program in your community?</i> 	
WHO MIGHT BE BEST PLACED TO REACH AND ENGAGE WITH THOSE CHILDREN?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Who has existing relationships with them/ engages with them already?</i> • <i>Who has 'cultural authority' in the community around engaging with kids?</i> • <i>Who has the time and capacity to be involved?</i> • <i>Who might we not normally engage with, but that could be really important/ valuable to involve?</i> • <i>Who might we need to partner with to conduct different parts of the process</i> 	

	<p><i>(ie. Identifying children, setting up activity, recording feedback, compiling data, facilitating sense-making etc.)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>What might your role/s be in the process?</i>	
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Identifying People – alternative activity

Guidance

1. Draw child/ children in the centre of the page and write some key descriptors around them (e.g. age, gender/s, cultural background/s, where you normally engage with them)
2. Draw a circle immediately around them and write the people they interact with most often/ have the closest relationships with in the community (in general)
3. Draw another circle around them, and write other people or organisations that those people might interact with
4. Draw connections between the different people on your diagram and identify who you might need to connect with to engage effectively with the children you want to hear from

Planning for Place

WHERE ARE CHILDREN MOST COMFORTABLE TO ENGAGE?	
WHERE IS IT POSSIBLE TO ENGAGE WITH CHILDREN?	
WHAT ARE POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION AND HOW MIGHT YOU OVERCOME THEM?	
WHEN WILL YOU ENGAGE WITH CHILDREN?	