Child-friendly Communities Engagement Framework

Version 1.0

Listening

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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WORKING DOCUMENT

How to use this Framework

This Framework is composed of 4 sections (see Figure 3.1):

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 3.1 shows the potential sequence you may 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.

Each section includes:

- General information and links to existing resources
- Prompts for your 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
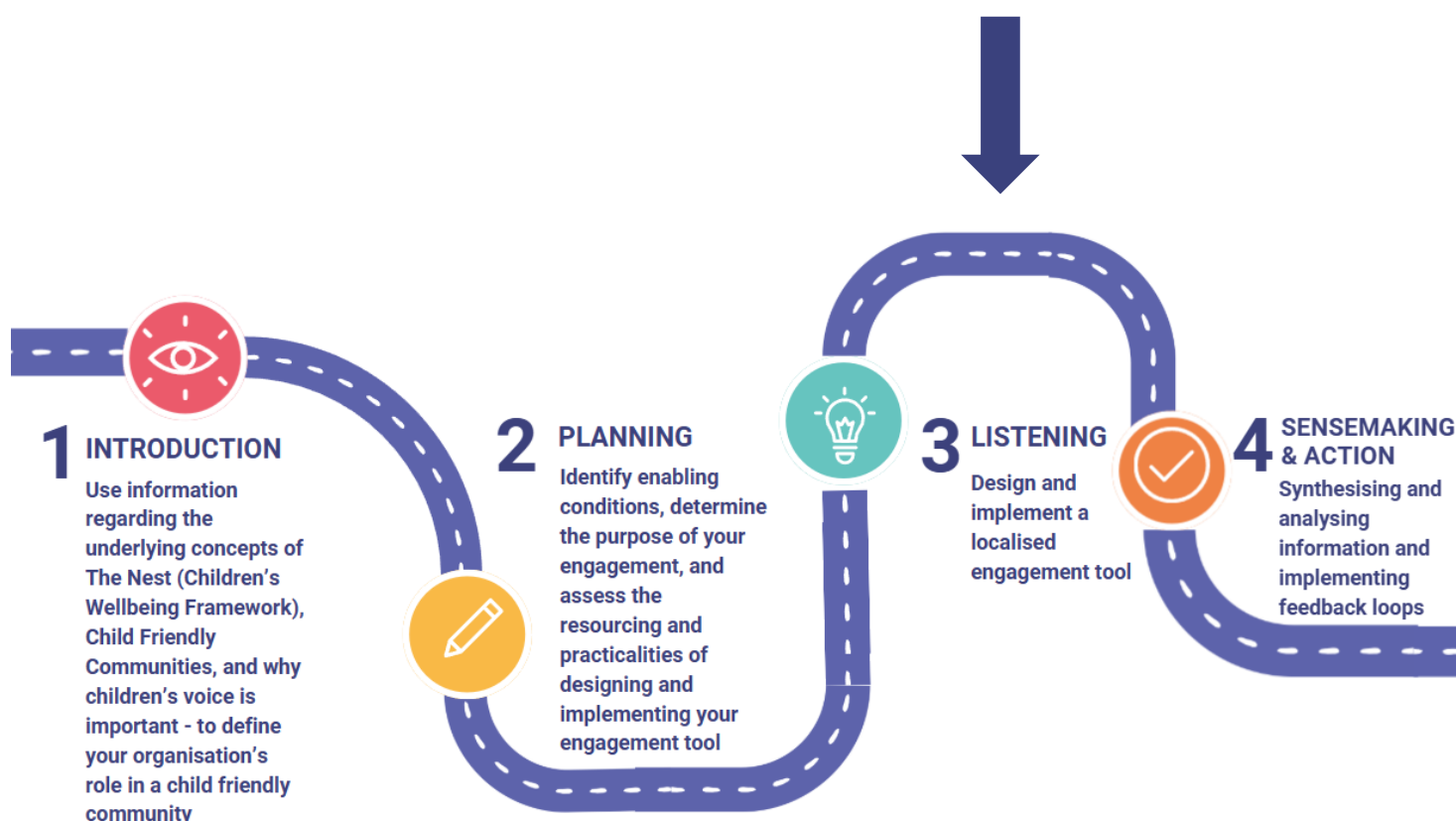
Section 3: Listening

This section outlines the steps for developing and implementing your localised engagement and consultation tool – the stage of 'listening' to children in the engagement and consultation process.

Outcomes

This section (and Appendices A and B) provides you the considerations and resources to:
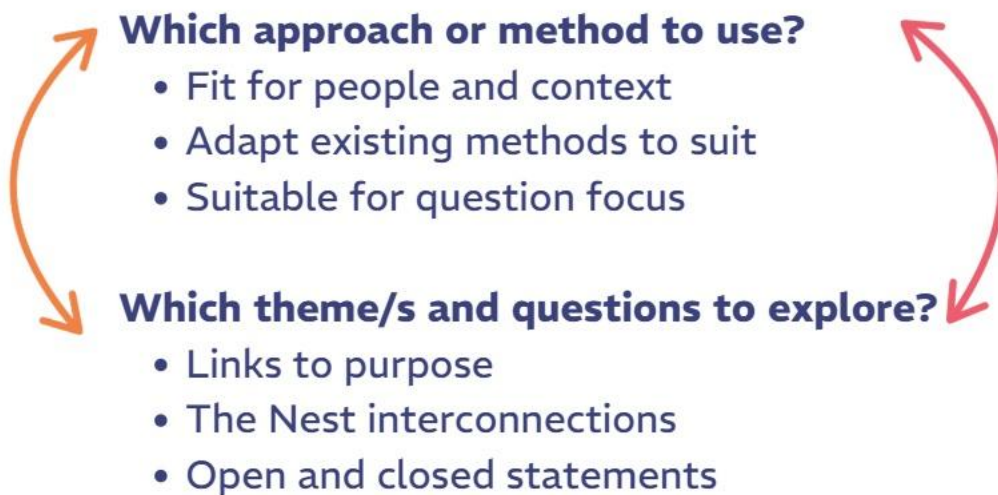
1. Decide on the approach and method to use for your tool
2. Develop the content of your tool regarding the questions to ask and areas to explore with children regarding the extent and nature to which their community is child-friendly
3. Implement your tool

Figure 3.1: Roadmap of Child-friendly Communities Engagement Framework

1 INTRODUCTION

Use information regarding the underlying concepts of The Nest (Children's Wellbeing Framework), Child Friendly Communities, and why children's voice is important - to define your organisation's role in a child friendly community

2 PLANNING

Identify enabling conditions, determine the purpose of your engagement, and assess the resourcing and practicalities of designing and implementing your engagement tool

3 LISTENING

Design and implement a localised engagement tool

4 SENSEMAKING & ACTION

Synthesising and analysing information and implementing feedback loops

4

Step 1: Develop your tool

The first step is to develop your tool. This includes deciding on the approach or method to use, and the content (i.e. questions and topics) to include. Either the method or content might be decided first, or they may be decided in parallel. It really will depend on your context. There is no correct way to sequence this process.

Which approach or method to use?
- Fit for people and context
- Adapt existing methods to suit
- Suitable for question focus

Which theme/s and questions to explore?
- Links to purpose
- The Nest interconnections
- Open and closed statements

Which approach or method to use?

There are **a range of engagement approaches** that can be used when working with children and engagement.

Figure 3.1

The diagram above presents engagement along four dimensions:

Formal ↔ Informal
Engagement can be structured and planned (formal), such as workshops or surveys, or more spontaneous and conversational (informal), like chats during regular activities.

Direct ↔ Indirect
Some engagement involves directly asking children for their views, while other approaches may gather insights through observation or through trusted adults who know the child well.

One-off ↔ Ongoing
Engagement might happen as a single event or be part of a longer-term relationship where children are regularly involved in shaping decisions.

Individual ↔ Group
 Children can be engaged one-on-one or as part of a group, depending on what feels safe, inclusive, and appropriate for the topic and setting.

This Framework is a resource to be used to guide "Direct" approaches to engagement, but using approaches that may exist upon any point of the continuum for other aspects of engagement (see Table 3.1 for examples).

Table 3.1: Approach-types for engaging and consulting with children and young people (See **Appendix B** for examples)

Approach-type	Description	Engagement type	Raw data generated	Conditions of use
Surveys	A language-based method, this involves set questions that the children respond to individually. They can be open-ended (in which the child can write their own response), or closed with the provision of specific response options for them to choose from (e.g. multiple choice). It can also include options to rank or prioritise set responses. Surveys can be provided online, or on paper.	Formal One-off OR Ongoing Individual	Text Categories Numeric ratings	Most appropriate for older primary-school children, and requires reading and writing skills
Interviews/ Focus Groups	Another language-based method, this involves questions asked in person by the researcher/practitioner/facilitator, sometimes with supplementary material (e.g., toys) and/or in a group setting.	Formal OR Informal One-off OR Ongoing Individual OR Group	Text (facilitator notes or transcripts)	For young children, best used with an adult that is known and trusted by the child. To be used among children when there are no verbal communication barriers. May not be appropriate for sensitive topics, particularly in a group setting.
Visual methods	The use of drawings, videos and cameras by children (with photos and videos taken by children to provide their point-of-view of their environment).	Formal OR Informal One-off OR Ongoing Individual OR Group	Static visuals (soft or hard copy) Video files Text (facilitator notes)	When possible, allow the participant to provide an explanation of drawings and visuals created.

Approach-type	Description	Engagement type	Raw data generated	Conditions of use
Creative and playful methods	Asking children to compose, draw, act, photograph, tell a story, plan, or create something new. This is often supplemented by an interview or language-based method.	Formal OR Informal One-off OR Ongoing Individual OR Group	Static visuals (soft or hard copy) Video files Models/ dioramas Text (facilitator notes/reflections and/or participant written text)	Be tailored to the cognitive and physical ability of participants. Need to allow for participant to provide an explanation/interpretation of drawings or creations.

Note: Adapted from Haijes & van Thiel, 2016; Sevon, Mustola, Siippainen, & Vlasov, 2023 (see Noble et. al., 2025).

See also Centre for Community Child Health Voice of the Child Toolkit for more information on these methods, including:

- Interviews
- Surveys
- Art-based Activities
- Photography
- Task-oriented and activity-based methods
- Youth Advisory Groups.

Circling Back

When deciding which method or approach to use for your tool, circle back to the considerations in the Planning Section, specifically:

Purpose

- For ongoing engagement, which approaches would work best to embed into your organisations business as usual activities?

People

- Who needs to be involved in the development? *This may include the people who will be conducting the engagement; who will be using the information gained; and/or who can provide insights about the children to be engaged with, their context and families, the best ways to engage with them, and what follow-up support might be needed*

- Type of approach (see Table 3.1) that would be most appropriate for the children intended to take part in the data *For instance, methods that involve children providing visual rather than written or verbal information may be more appropriate. Considering the age and interests of the children, what methods would they find fun and engaging?*
- 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 consultation/s? *For instance, surveys or group activities may be quicker to undertake compared with one-on-one interviews and activities. The age of children to take part may also be a consideration in terms of how much time it is feasible and ethical to maintain their engagement and receive meaningful responses*
- What type of approach (see Table 3.1) do staff have the skills to undertake?
- What type of approach would provide data in a form that staff would have the time and skills to analyse?

Place

- Where is the consultation/s going to take place? *A survey or an interactive group activity may work best in a large space with many people, however, small focus groups or one-on-one activities may a require quieter, more private setting. Some topics may be inappropriate to ask about in a group setting as opposed to a one-on-one surveys, interviews or discussion.*
- What online options do we have available?
- What approach (see Table 3.1) would provide data in a form that could be safely and conveniently stored? *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?*

- The extent the engagement tool needs to be standardised, or can be adapted each time *For example, do you need to use different methods for different age-groups?*

Content of the tool – What questions to ask children and themes to explore?

The statement and prompts are a guide to the <u>content of</u> and <u>wording used in</u> the engagement and consultation tool and are found in **Appendix A** of this Framework. They are composed of 'broad core statements', 'open statements/prompts' and 'closed statements', mapped to the Nest and the Wellbeing Wheel, specifically to the areas related to Family and Community.

PLEASE NOTE:

The statements and prompts are meant to 'frame' and guide' the content of your tool. It is expected that you may adjust the wording to ensure it meets the needs of the children you are using it with, the purpose of your engagement and consultation, and the approach-type/method that you are using.

It is not expected that you use statements and prompts from all the Nest domains, only those that are related to your purpose and are appropriate to your context.

Some closed and open statements are repeated across domains due to their interconnectedness. It is intended that you only use the statements/prompts in your consultation tool once.

Broad core statements and open statements/prompts

<u>Broad core statements</u> have been developed to reflect overall wellbeing (see Table A.1 in Appendix A), as well as each Nest domain (see Core Open Statements in Tables A.2-A.7 in Appendix A).

They can be used to develop:

- An open-response **survey or interview** question (i.e. a question where the child can provide a written or verbal response),

- a **survey** question with multiple-choice options (with the response options carefully devised, localised and ideally co-designed with children and/or based on existing evidence),

- in an **interview** or discussion guide in either a **one-or-one** or **focus group** setting, or

- used to frame **writing, drawing, storytelling or other creative activities in** either a one-on-one or group setting.

Responses to overarching wellbeing open statements can be organised into the Nest domains.

<u>Open statements/prompts</u> can be used in the same way as broad core statements, but reflect more specific areas of each domain. For this reason

they can also be used as prompts in an interview or discussion guide to questions developed from broad core statements.

Closed statements

The Framework also provides the broad core statements and open statements/prompts as closed statements for each domain. These can be used in a **survey or one-on-one interview** question where the participant selects their response from a written or visual scale (see below). These questions can be used in your tool in conjunction with those developed from broad core statements (but don't have to be).

The following response options can be used (text and visual options):

Strongly disagree	*Disagree*	*Neither agree nor disagree*	*Agree*	*Strongly agree*

Circling Back

When selecting what statements and prompts to use to develop your tool, circle back to the considerations in the Introduction and Planning Sections, specifically:

Purpose
- What questions do we need answered/problem we need to address regarding child-friendly communities?
  - Are the questions and information we collect going to be compared between groups or across timepoints? *If so, using domain-specific closed statements may be the best option, or open-statements that have multiple-choice options; and tools that collect information individually rather than as a group.*
  - Do the broad core statements for general wellbeing (in the context of a child-friendly community) cover the areas we need to know about, or do we need further detail on specific wellbeing areas (i.e. using the domain-specific statements and prompts)? *If your engagement is for monitoring or evaluation, what areas align with your indicators?*
  - Are their specific aspects of each Nest domain we need to know about, or do we 'not know what we don't know'? *If the latter, domain-specific broad and open statements may more*

appropriate than the closed statements if using a survey or interview approach.

- Which wording options (in red in Appendix A) are most appropriate for what we want to know?

People

- Who needs to be involved in the development?
- Wording and topics that would be most appropriate for the children intended to take part in the data
- Topics that may be too sensitive, or not culturally safe to pose.
- What follow-up support or information will be required when raising certain topics?

Place

- 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?*
- The extent the engagement tool needs to be standardised, or can be adapted each time *For example, do you need to pose different questions/explore different topics/use different wording, for different age-groups?*

Reflexive questions

After you have developed your tool, the following reflexive questions can guide your learning and plans for next steps.

- Have you piloted or tested out the tool among a small number of children first? If so, what amendments did you need to make?

- What considerations were most important when considering the approach-type used? To what extent did you consider the interest and enjoyment of the children when deciding?

- To what extent and how are the statements you used in your tool reflect interconnected domains?

Step 2: Implement your tool

Circling back

Once you have developed your tool and are ready to implement it, circle back to the considerations in the Planning Section, specifically:

Purpose

- Will the tool we've developed provide the information we need for our purpose?
- Do we need to reconsider our purpose?

People

- Do we have the right people involved in its use? Do they have the skills and expertise to implement it, do they have trusted relationships with the children to be engaged with?
- Do we have children involved in its development? *This may be particularly important for tools that are going to be used on an ongoing basis across timepoints.*

Place

- Does the venue match the type of approach of the tool? *For example, for one-on-one interviews you will need a quiet, private place. For group focus groups a venue large enough for the number of children involved, and the types of activities you may be doing.*

See Centre for Community Child Health Voice of the Child Toolkit for tips and guides for implementing:
- Interviews
- Surveys
- Art-based Activities
- Photography
- Task-oriented and activity-based methods
- Youth Advisory Groups

See also Section 6 in Children's Voices for tips and advice when engaging with young children, including ways of documenting findings from visual and creative activities.

Reflexive questions

After you have implemented your tool, the following reflexive questions can guide your learning and plans for next steps.

- How did that go, what worked, what didn't?

- Was there any follow-up required?

- What would we do differently next time, specifically around?

    o Content *Would we ask the same questions or use the same statements or prompts? Would we word them differently?*

    o Approach *Would we use the same approach? What adjustments might we make?*

    o Context of implementing it (place and people) *Would we have the same people implementing it? What further capacity or training might be needed? How did the children respond to the tool? Were there any additional topics you would add, or any you would remove? How did the family respond to their child's involvement? Would we conduct it in the same place and time?*

Thinking and Discussion Activities

The following worksheet is designed to help organisations take action with their teams in prompting important discussions and allowing time and space to lay strong foundations of practice before engaging with children. This exercise can assist with internal planning and management to ensure operational factors have been considered.

Exploring questions and methods

WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU WANT TO EXPLORE WITH CHILDREN?	• *What questions would align with your ultimate purpose and use/s of the responses?* • *Do the questions need to be comparable between groups or over time?* • *Which topics may be too sensitive or not culturally safe to pose?*	
WHAT FOLLOW-UP SUPPORT OR INFORMATION WILL BE REQUIRED WHEN RAISING CERTAIN TOPICS?	• *Who do you need to be present, or nearby, in case you need them?* • *Whose contact details do you need to have on hand?* • *How does this relate to your child safeguarding policies?* • *How does this relate to your ethical practice considerations?*	

| WHAT METHODS OR TOOLS MIGHT YOU USE TO HELP YOU EXPLORE THOSE QUESTIONS? | • *Which tool/s are appropriate for the age group you're engaging with?*
 • *Does the tool need to be standardized (used by different people in different places)?*
 • *Which tool/s match the time and capacity you have available?*
 • *Which tool or method would be most enjoyable for children to participate in?*
 • *Which tool or method might have other benefits for the children participating (i.e. learn something new, connect with peers etc.)?* | |