

The background of the entire page is a photograph showing two hands, one from the left and one from the right, reaching towards each other. They are holding a bright, glowing white sphere. The lighting is warm, with a strong orange and red glow emanating from the sphere, creating a lens flare effect. The hands are silhouetted against the bright light. The overall mood is one of hope, care, and support.

EVALUATION OF CO- DESIGN PROJECTS

**Prepared for the National
Disability Insurance Agency**

1 January 2025

Clear Horizon

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Dictionary

Acronyms	Description
CAG	Co-design Advisory Group
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
DRCO	Disability Representative Carer Organisation
EWG	Evaluation Working Group
IAC	Independent Advisory Council
IGAP	Information Gathering for Access and Planning
NDIA	National Disability Insurance Agency
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme

Preface

This evaluation was commissioned by the National Disability Insurance Agency Co-design Advisory Group (CAG) as part of our commitment to increasing and improving co-design.

Our membership includes members of the NDIA Independent Advisory Council, senior leaders from Disability Representative and Carer Organisations (DRCOs) and senior officers from the NDIA and Department of Social Services with responsibility for co-design and engagement with the disability community. As a group, we provide strategic advice to the NDIA on its approach to co-design and engagement, exploring lessons learned from implementation and supporting decision making on co-design priorities.

When we first formed in 2021, we agreed to 'learn by doing.' For us this meant progress not perfection. Instead, we sought to encourage and embrace opportunities to trial co-design approaches in different initiatives and projects, with a commitment to reflect and learn as we go.

The six projects considered in this evaluation and findings in this report are reflective of this period and approach. Each of the projects represented significant policy challenges for the NDIS. However, the leadership teams responsible saw opportunities to work collaboratively with the disability community and actively sought ways to include lived experience of disability in their engagement approaches.

There were some significant outcomes; the development and delivery of the NDIA's first Supported Decision Making Policy, the co-design of a widely praised and supported Home and Living Framework and a new approach to working with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse people with disability. Work in other projects was impacted by the independent review of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) announced in 2022. Despite this, work done in partnership continues to inform direction and approaches post the NDIS Review.

In commissioning this evaluation, we wanted to better understand which approaches to co-design had been used, how people had experienced these processes, what factors had made a difference and what lessons there are for the future. The key evaluation questions, developed by the CAG, looked beyond specific stated project outcomes to understand what we can learn from these varied experiences.

In reading this report, we are struck by how much the NDIA's approach to co-design has evolved since 2021. Those interviewed for the evaluation speak of a genuine commitment to co-design by the NDIA, whilst importantly still acknowledging the challenges it has faced and the scale of the journey ahead.

This commitment can be seen most practically in the establishment of the first NDIA Co-design Branch in 2023, which has grown considerably in 2024. The branch now plays an active role in supporting co-design right across the NDIA. It is also reflected in the June 2024 joint statement on co-design, developed collaboratively with the IAC, DRCOs and the Participant Reference Group, and co-signed by the Minister for the NDIS, the Department of Social Services and the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission. It can be seen in the new co-design working groups established to support scheme reform including NDIS legislative changes falling from the NDIS Review. These groups have taken a deliberate and purposeful approach to co-design, partnering with the Office of the Participant Advocate to ensure a real and meaningful voice and experience for people with disability.

The completion of this evaluation and report is a helpful reminder of the co-design journey to date but also how far we have come in our work together. Those who shared their time and experience with the evaluation team were honest about their own experiences and what needed to change. Many are explicit that their experiences, however positive, were often more about consultation and collaboration than true

co-design. Many people expressed disappointment that work done and decisions made in the spirit of co-design did not lead to the changes expected due to decisions made elsewhere.

The disability community has sent a clear and consistent message to governments around the world for many decades: 'nothing about us without us.' In accepting this report, we recognise along with participants in the evaluation, that the NDIA has and is taking steps to make this a reality through its co-design and engagement program of work.

However, we also urge the senior leaders in the Agency to continue to raise the bar. This means finding new and varied ways to work together with the disability community. It means working with expert organisations to reach voices that are not represented in current work. It means having an eye to codesign best practice from other sectors and Government agencies within Australia and internationally. It means finding ways to share power and decision making with the community, not just in discrete projects but in all our work together.

We look forward to working alongside the NDIA to achieve this future together.

Co-design Advisory Group

January 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation looked at the first projects to officially undertake co-design at the NDIA under the new Engagement Framework (2022). It was an empowering opportunity for some participants and led to the creation of some high-quality policies. However, while NDIA staff were highly committed to the process, the projects faced substantial challenges within a limited authorising environment. The NDIA is on a journey to improve their approach to co-design.

What did this evaluation look at?

The NDIA published the Engagement Framework in March 2022 to guide, support and strengthen their engagement with the disability community, which included a commitment to do co-design. This involves working with people with lived experience in the disability community to make decisions regarding how policies, programs, and projects are implemented. The NDIA deliberately set out to use co-design in six large scale projects which ran from early 2022. They were:

- **Information gathering for access and planning**, which sought to better understand experiences with, and opportunities to improve, access and planning for the NDIS.
- **Home and Living Policy Framework**, which intended to inform the way Agency supports NDIS participants to pursue their home and living goals through co-designing future agency practice along with articulating roles and responsibilities in the broader context of housing supports.
- **Supported Decision Making**, which sought to inform the NDIA's supported decision making policy and how NDIA can support community members to make their own decisions.
- **Participant Safety Policy**, which sought to develop a policy to guide the NDIA in supporting participants to think about their own safety to live a life of belonging and citizenship.
- **Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Strategy**, which is the Agency's public commitment to equity for people with disability from CALD backgrounds. This project intended to improve the existing strategy in collaboration with participants, families, carers and sector stakeholders.
- **First Nations Strategy**, which intended to review and update the existing guidelines for circumstances where it is appropriate to pay family members to provide supports to First Nations NDIS participants in remote and very remote settings (without adequate local services).

This evaluation looked across these six projects to investigate the process, outcomes and appropriateness of co-design as it was applied to these projects.

The evaluation comprised a rapid literature review and interviews with 64 participants, including current and former NDIA staff, Disability Representative and Carer organisation representatives, co-design governance representatives, and co-design participants. Two-thirds of the interviewees were co-design participants or identified as having lived experience of disability. The interviews were thematically coded to draw out key findings against the Key Evaluation Questions.

The NDIA has continued to evolve and improve its approach to co-design since these six projects, and the findings and recommendations from this evaluation will further support this effort.

What did this evaluation find?

Process

The most significant finding from the evaluation was that there was a limited authorising environment for co-design, and not enough accountability to implement decisions made through co-design. This meant that decisions agreed through co-design on the individual projects were not always implemented.

This was partly because the scope, purpose and limits (particularly around what can and cannot be co-designed within a legislative framework) of co-design were not clear. This could have been improved with stronger leadership support for co-design and by making greater use of the oversight mechanisms in place, such as the Co-Design Advisory Group.

Another relevant factor was that government priorities and commitments changed with the NDIS Review. As such, some projects were de-prioritised and new projects started.

Interviewed community members expressed that NDIA staff were committed and genuine but lacked experience in co-design. Staff needed more support – particularly to build capability to be part of trauma-informed practice and to work with those who have experienced stigma.

“The people at the Agency are good; they want to do the right thing and are hard workers. There is sincerity and goodwill, but they missed the mark. It leaves people feeling very frustrated. The NDIA staff seemed to experience a sense of self-imposed limits on what was possible” – Community member

Outcomes

Some NDIA staff and participants reported that co-design informed high-quality policies that benefited from the knowledge and experience of participants. It was an empowering experience for some community members, with some participants reporting improved capacity and increased connections.

However, there was inconsistent feedback and generation of outputs across the projects. The delivery of co-design projects and uptake of co-design outputs were affected by projects stopping due to the NDIS review. Trust in the process and the NDIA was damaged when participants felt their contributions did not result in action.

Despite this, participants observed improvements in the way the NDIA engaged with participants and in the delivery of co-design.

“It wasn't perfect, but it was one step in the right direction, and it's been great now to see the evolution of the Agency” – Community member

Appropriateness

This evaluation also sought to explore the concept of appropriateness of co-design at the NDIA. This includes whether co-design is an appropriate approach to decision making at the NDIA, and whether the current approaches to co-design are appropriate to achieve stated aims.

On this last point, we were limited in our ability to consider the appropriateness of co-design at the NDIA as different methodologies were used across the projects. However, on the first point the evaluation showed broad support for co-design at the NDIA. Co-design was seen as appropriate, worthwhile and valuable as part of a broad engagement approach with the community. However, respondents suggested the need for senior leaders to be better connected to decision making processes relating to the co-design work.

“I think that co-design, done properly, is worthwhile... when it is done poorly, it does more damage than good.” – Community member

Conclusion

There is the **potential for co-design** to build trust and strengthen relationships between the NDIA and the community – particularly if it is used where there is a **clear purpose and scope; shared understanding and communication of limits; and capability building for staff and participants**.

However, the Agency needs to contend with the challenge of creating an enabling environment for genuine co-design, with **greater accountability to act on the outcomes of co-design**, in order for people living with a disability to achieve their right to be involved in decisions that impact them.

Summary of recommendations

1. Strengthen accountability mechanisms for co-design processes.
2. Set a clear shared understanding of the scope, purpose and limits of co-design work.
3. Clarify the role of senior leadership and oversight mechanisms in co-design processes.
4. Prioritise projects for co-design that have a clear purpose, scope and limits, as well as sufficient time and support for co-design.
5. Continue to build on and improve approaches to inclusive practice in engagement and co-design.
6. Embed capacity building and support for staff and community members in co-design.
7. Ensure clear feedback loops for participants involved in co-design and engagement.
8. Collaboratively develop a co-design approach and use tools, including the suggested rubric, to increase shared understanding, transparency and accountability.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings from our retrospective evaluation of six co-design projects at the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA or ‘the Agency’) which took a deliberate approach to use co-design under the NDIA’s 2022 Engagement Framework. The aim of the evaluation was to assess the process, outcomes and appropriateness of the early co-design efforts.

The report is structured as follows:

- **Introduction:** this section provides background information on co-design at the NDIA and the six co-design projects that were the focus of this evaluation.
- **Evaluation methodology:** this section provides information on the evaluation approach, methods and limitations.
- **Findings: Process:** this section discusses our findings about how co-design was done at the NDIA.
- **Findings: Outcomes:** this section discusses our findings about what co-design achieved.
- **Findings: Appropriateness:** this section discusses our findings about the appropriateness of the Agency’s approach to co-design and provides some recommendations.
- **Conclusion**

1.1. About the NDIA

The NDIA is an independent statutory body that oversees the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The NDIS is Australia’s first national scheme for people with disability, providing funding directly to individuals. In February 2024, NDIS reported providing services to over 640,000 people.

The Agency seeks to contribute to the independence and social and economic participation of eligible people with disability by managing a financially sustainable NDIS with proper, efficient, and effective use of resources. Its functions are to deliver the NDIS, manage and report on financial sustainability, contribute to the development of the disability sector, build community awareness and facilitate research and data sharing. The Agency has two programs:

- 1) reasonable and necessary supports for participants to improve participant experience and outcomes with a financially sustainable scheme and
- 2) develop a high-performing NDIS for participants.

1.2. Co-design at the NDIA

In March 2022, NDIA published its Engagement Framework, which was developed in close consultation with representatives in the disability sector. The purpose of the Framework is to ensure that the views of people with disability inform decisions made by the Agency. Co-design is one component of the Framework and involves working with people with lived experience in the disability community to make decisions regarding how policies, programs, and projects are implemented. In this Framework, the NDIA explains that co-design should be understood as a broad term that covers different ways of co-working. The NDIA defines co-design as “involves making decisions about the detailed form of an interaction service or policy” (NDIA 2022, p. 6).

The following six co-design projects at the Agency set out to use co-design approaches in their work:

- Information Gathering for Access and Planning
- Home and Living Policy Framework
- Supported Decision-Making Policy
- Participant Safety Policy
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Strategy
- First Nations Strategy

The NDIA established the Co-Design Advisory Group (CAG) to provide strategic advice to the NDIA on the implementation of co-design and engagement processes with the disability community. CAG membership includes senior NDIA and Department of Social Services staff, nominated Disability and Representative Carer Organisations (DRCOs), Council members, and participant advocates.

The NDIA also formed partnerships with Curtin University, Health Policy Analysis, Relationships Australia, People with Disability Australia, National Ethnic Disability Alliance, Cultural Perspectives, First Peoples Disability Network, Purple Orange, and Inclusion Australia.

1.3. The co-design projects

Supported Decision-Making Policy

In 2021, NDIA asked for submissions to a consultation paper called *Supporting You to Make Your Own Decisions*. The community was asked to provide feedback on how the NDIA can improve decision-making experiences and how the NDIA can support community members to make their own decisions. The NDIA received 280 submissions. Participant First led two public information sessions and 16 national online consultation sessions. The consultation paper, *Consultation Summary Report – support for Decision-making*, was published in January 2022. The findings in this report highlighted that several groups were under-represented in giving feedback and informing next steps.

The NDIA engaged Inclusion Australia, the national peak body for intellectual disability, to co-design workshops to engage with some of these groups. This was done in collaboration with a co-facilitator who is also an NDIS participant. Across August to October 2022, the team co-designed, produced and delivered workshops with 33 people including people with an intellectual disability from the LGBTIQ+, First Nations and CALD communities, and people who use alternative forms of communication. The themes emerging from this process included a clearer definition of the term 'supported decision-making', a more nuanced understanding of decision-making as something that takes place on a continuum, and the design and adoption of person-centred approaches.

These workshops contributed to developing the Supported Decision-Making Policy and Implementation Plan, endorsed by the NDIA board in January 2023. The policy and implementation will guide the NDIA on how to support participants to make decisions, provide opportunities to make decisions, and build the knowledge and skills of people with disability to make decisions.

Home and Living Policy Framework

The NDIA commenced the Home and Living Policy co-design process in 2021 to seek perspectives on the draft *Ordinary Life at Home* framework. The team hosted five public general information and feedback sessions across Australia, held individual sessions with 22 community members, hosted seven

focus group sessions and 12 workshops with community members, and solicited further information and feedback through 21 stakeholder meetings and forums. A further 447 people made online submissions.

Community members indicated they wished to see the NDIA take a more active role in improving access to affordable and accessible housing, supporting the introduction of flexible budgets, improving processes for protection from conflicts of interest, and promoting innovative and creative home and living supports.

The project was paused in mid-2023 after the 2023 budget set a focus on Supported Independent Living (SIL) which became the focus of the Reform for Outcomes Home and Living co-design work for the next year. The NDIS Review also made recommendations for reforming home and living policies in the NDIS.

Information Gathering for Access and Planning (IGAP) Policy

In March 2022, the NDIA established the Information Gathering for Access and Planning (IGAP) Steering Committee to provide advice on the IGAP project's co-design approach. Steering committee members included representatives from the Independent Advisory Council (IAC), DRCOs, NDIS participants and government. On the advice of the Steering Committee, the NDIA undertook the following engagement activities from May to September 2022:

- 6 NDIA-led focus groups with 69 community members and their families, hosted by an external facilitator.
- 7 DRCOs completed 30 focus groups with over 200 community members from diverse populations.
- 1,112 people completed an online survey, available to anyone who had undertaken or supported someone through the NDIS access or planning process.

In October and November 2022, the IGAP project held five meetings with health and medical peak bodies to share information about the legislative framework and understand challenges experienced when interacting with NDIS.

To assist in building an evidence base and shared understanding of the problems, the NDIA commissioned the following two research projects:

- A research project that focused on building a conceptual framework and evidence-gathering requirements that arise from the *NDIS Act 2013*. The researchers completed interviews with 26 access staff and 44 planning staff to understand how delegates use information and legislation. A survey was completed with 76 access staff and 538 planning staff. The researchers completed file reviews of 26 NDIS applicants and participants, conducted a literature review, and reviewed NDIA guidelines and procedures.
- A research project that focused on the NDIA's decision-making capabilities for decisions involving clinical, medical and technical complexity.

The IGAP Steering Committee met in December 2022 and used findings from the above engagement activities to draft problem statements, identify potential solutions and vote on the preferred solutions. The problem statements related to the challenges experienced with the cost and burden of NDIS evidence requirements, the adversarial planning processes and the difficulty finding accessible guidance.

Participant Safety Policy

To develop the Participant Safety Policy and Implementation Plan, a Participant Safety Policy Steering Committee was established in March 2002. The Committee oversaw a co-design process and met

formally seven times over nine months. Members were also engaged in small group and out-of-session activities in the final stages of developing the policy and implementation plan.

Principles to inform the Participant Safety Policy and Implementation Plan were then co-designed across virtual and in-person workshops. The NDIA team ran a series of virtual workshops totalling over 75 hours and reached over 210 people from June 2022 to October 2022. Of this group, 40% were NDIS participants, 60% were women, 24% were from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse background, and 10% identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

The team then facilitated 15 individual and small group workshops. These workshops used trauma-informed approaches to create an environment where community members could build rapport and feel comfortable sharing their experiences. Trauma counsellors from Relationships Australia were present at these workshops to provide support.

The co-designed principles were then tested and refined through further consultation. The Team engaged People with Disability Australia (PWDA) to consult with 21 community members from diverse backgrounds to test and refine the co-design Participant Safeguarding Principles. The Team then consulted with members of the disability community on key policy and implementation plan components, meeting with DRCOs, the IAC, the NDIS Mental Health Sector Reference Group, and the Participant Reference Group.

The Participant Safeguarding Policy was released in July 2023. The six principles informing the policy are promoting a safety culture at NDIA, proactive support, responses based on individual circumstances, empowering approaches to manage safety, and recognising the dignity of informed decision-making and risk. Approaches included proactive and individual approaches, building workforce capability and the capability of people with disability to identify, respond to, and manage safeguards and effective corrective measures in response to incidents.

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Strategy

The Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) strategy is NDIA's public commitment to equity for people with disability from CALD backgrounds. NDIA implemented a co-design project between October to December 2021. The team held workshops, focus groups, and one-to-one discussions with community members, DRCOs, carers and organisations working with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) people. These early discovery workshops identified the following themes: many in the community are unaware of the NDIS and what it offers; there is a need for accessible communication; and a need to improve cross-cultural capabilities of NDIS frontline workers.

These themes were then taken to a second round of consultations. On 18 February 2022, the team partnered with the National Ethnic Disability Alliance to host a roundtable to discuss the new strategy; at this roundtable, community members reflected on the themes of the first round of consultation and identified shared goals to inform the new strategy and action plan. The second round of consultation findings identified that providing translations alone does not help community members from CALD backgrounds understand the complexities of navigating the NDIS system. They also reported that NDIA, NDIS, and frontline workers require skills in understanding how to deliver information and services that are culturally appropriate.

The output was a set of themes and agreed goals that would inform the development of the CALD strategy. The draft strategy was presented at a second roundtable held on 24 May 2022; members of the roundtable endorsed the themes and goals of the strategy and discussed approaches to future governance. The CALD Strategy 2024-2028 was released in 2023.

First Nations Strategy

The purpose of this project was to update the existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy, released in 2017. The First Nations team intended to engage in co-design processes to develop the next iteration of the NDIS First Nations engagement strategy. The team established the First Nations Advisory Council, comprised of First Nations community members with disability and disability sector representatives. This Council aimed to advise the NDIA and guide initiatives that improve outcomes for First Nations people with disability. The team entered a formal partnership with the First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN) to begin work on an engagement strategy that would guide the implementation of the planned co-design work.

In late 2023, NDIA established the First Nations Branch, and this co-design work was paused as the Branch was established. In August 2024, a final meeting was held with the First Nations Advisory Council, where the Council moved to establish an Independent Advisory Council First Nations Reference Group to advise the board.

2. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

2.1. About the evaluation

Evaluation purpose and frameworks

The aim of the evaluation was to look back and investigate the process, outcomes, and appropriateness of six co-design projects implemented by the Agency between 2022 and 2023. While the Agency has made several changes and improvements to co-design since those six projects, this evaluation was designed to provide more thorough, structured feedback aimed at refining and guiding the ongoing co-design approach.

The evaluation team worked closely with the NDIA and the CAG to implement the evaluation. The CAG developed the Key Evaluation Questions in collaboration with the evaluation team and provided feedback on the evaluation findings and rubric.

Key Evaluation Questions

The Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs) were designed by the CAG and the Evaluation Working Group (EWG). They are aligned to three evaluation principles: process, outcomes and appropriateness.

Table 1. Key Evaluation Questions

	Key Evaluation Questions
Process (how was co-design done?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For each co-design project and phase, how were the necessary conditions and mindsets for co-design implemented?• What enabled or inhibited the necessary conditions and mindsets for co-design?
Outcomes (what were the benefits of co-design?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To what extent has each co-design project achieved the following outcomes?<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Decisions that are transparent to the disability community key stakeholders.b. A shared understanding amongst key stakeholders of different perspectives, challenges & constraints related to the NDIS.c. A disability community that feels empowered and has confidence and trust in the NDIS.d. A desirable and feasible policy solution for key stakeholders.e. Building of sector capability in co-design approaches.
Appropriateness (was this the right way to do co-design?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To what extent is the approach to co-design in the NDIS appropriate for building trust, strengthening engagement, and improving the relationship between the NDIA and disability community?• To what degree is co-design appropriate to achieve an effective and efficient scheme?• What co-design components are key to an appropriate and effective approach in the NDIS context?

Process and outcomes standards

The evaluation was also informed by a set of standards for evaluating co-design (developed from a rapid literature review by the evaluation team). These standards help to tell us what good co-design looks like.

For each standard, we have considered a key mindset (people's attitudes and beliefs) and condition (something essential for the standard to occur). We have also included the key strategy (plan for doing something) that would enable this standard and the relevant constructs.

Table 2. Process standards informing assessment

Process standard	Mindset	Condition	Strategy	Constructs
Power-sharing	Commitment to power sharing and upholding the rights of people with disability to be involved in decision-making over matters that affect their lives.	Distributive approach	Designing opportunities for diverse groups to engage in shared decision-making with leaders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authorising environment • Leadership • Accountability • Oversight
Transparency	Commitment to being clear and transparent in communications.	Open approach	Explicit and transparent information sharing and decision-making that leads to shared understanding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared understanding • Communication • Capacity building
Relational	Commitment to recognising the inherent dignity and worth of all people.	Participatory approach	Enabling safe and supported participation in co-design processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement • Collaboration • Practice
Equitable	Commitment to equity and diversity	Inclusive approach	Building processes that amplify equitable opportunities for participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships • Approaches • Diversity

Table 3. Outcome standards informing assessment

Outcomes standard	Mindset	Condition	Constructs
Generative	Commitment to upholding decisions made in co-design processes.	Output-focused	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection • Follow-up • Output
Transformative	Commitment to personal, collective, and social change.	Outcomes-focussed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incremental • Holistic • Outcome

2.2. Data collection and sensemaking

Literature review

The evaluation team undertook a rapid literature review during the evaluation planning stage. A total of 38 documents were reviewed (the list of documents reviewed is available in Appendix A).

The literature review focused on:

- The six NDIA co-design projects.
- Best practice in co-design.
- The experience of First Nations and CALD people living with a disability.
- A summary of the NDIA Independent Review.

This review informed the development of the evaluation plan, standards, and interview schedules.

Interviews

The evaluation team designed eight interview guides for the following cohorts: NDIA staff, Participant First, people engaged in co-design governance, external stakeholders, co-design participants, co-design participants from CALD communities, and participants in the First Nations strategy. Each interview guide varied on a central interview question template in Appendix C.

The evaluation team had a purposive sample containing 64 participants, selected to provide diverse perspectives on the co-design projects. The sample included 17 NDIA and ex-NDIA staff, seven representatives from DRCO or other external stakeholders, and five stakeholders engaged in co-design governance. Additionally, 41 interviewees were co-design project participants, which may or may not include being a NDIS participant. Of these, 35 participants were recruited through Participant First while others were engaged via DRCOs. NDIA staff and DRCO interviewees were identified by the EWG members.

In total, the team conducted 43 interviews, including a mix of individual and group sessions, with interviews completed between July and September 2024. A breakdown of interviewee representation across the six co-design projects is included in Appendix B.

Sense-making

Interview data was aggregated and thematically coded against the key evaluation questions and evaluation standards. This was summarised in an evidence table that was provided to the NDIA ahead of the sense-making workshops.

The evaluation team conducted three sense-making workshops with the EWG, the co-design project leads, and the CAG. These workshops allowed key stakeholders to reflect, interrogate and add additional context and nuance to the findings. The evaluation team then drafted the report.

2.3. Limitations

The findings of this evaluation should be considered with the following caveats:

- **Purposive sample of community members**

The evaluation used a purposive sample of 41 community members who participated in the co-design projects. While this provided rich information about their experiences, it is unlikely to represent all the perspectives across all participants in the six projects.

- **Lower than expected sample of NDIA staff**

The evaluation team were unable to reach as many NDIA and ex-NDIA staff who took part in co-design as intended. The causes for this less-than-planned engagement are unclear.

- **Variations in sampling across the co-design projects**

There were significant variations in the number of consultations across the six-co-design projects. The evaluation team could only interview one NDIA staff member engaged in the First Nations co-design project. The co-design project with the most consultations was the home and living project, where the evaluation team conducted 16 interviews with ten staff and stakeholders and ten community members.

- **Risk of being identified**

The sample numbers across most of the co-design projects were small. This had the following implications for the evaluation:

- We concluded that assessing each individual project was undesirable. The disparity in consultations across the projects could result in inadvertently misleading findings. Instead, we focused on themes across the six projects.
- The evaluation team recognised that because of small sample sizes, participants of interviews and focus groups could be at risk of identification if quotes used in this report were attributed to the project that person was engaged with. In response, the team has chosen not to directly attribute quotes to a particular co-design project.

3. FINDINGS: PROCESS

Headline findings

Power-sharing and transparency

- The scope, purpose and limits of co-design were not clear to stakeholders.
- There was a limited authorising environment for co-design, and not enough accountability to implement decisions made through co-design.
- There needed to be stronger leadership support for co-design.
- Oversight mechanisms were in place but could have been strengthened.

Relational and equitable

- Some people felt that the NDIA's attempts at inclusive engagement were tokenistic but that the NDIA is open to learning and improving.
- Staff were committed, collaborative and honest but lacked experience in co-design.
- Staff needed more support, with a particular need to build capability to be part of trauma-informed practice and to work with those who have experienced stigma.
- There was insufficient time to do co-design well.

3.1. In this section

This section examines common themes across the six projects to respond to the following evaluation questions:

- For each co-design project and phase, how were the necessary conditions and mindsets for co-design implemented?
- What enabled or inhibited the necessary conditions and mindsets for co-design?

We examined the interaction between mindsets and conditions against four process standards:

Power-sharing	Transparency	Relational	Equitable
Designing opportunities for diverse groups to engage in shared decision-making with leaders	Explicit and genuine information sharing and decision-making that leads to shared understanding	Enabling safe and supported participation in co-design processes	Building processes that amplify equitable opportunities for participation

3.2. Power-sharing and transparency

What are we looking at here?

Power sharing involves a commitment to upholding the rights of people with disability to be involved in decision-making over matters that affect their lives, through facilitating opportunities for diverse groups to engage in shared decision-making with leaders. Transparency involves explicit and genuine information sharing and decision-making that leads to shared understanding.

The scope, purpose and limits of co-design were not clear

Across the projects, there was not a shared understanding amongst stakeholders on:

- Why co-design was being done (purpose).
- The area or boundaries of what was being co-designed (scope).
- What kinds of decisions can and cannot be co-designed in a statutory body (limits).

Outside of the efforts of the CAG, we did not identify any unifying endeavour to clarify the scope of co-design. Stakeholders provided conflicting definitions of co-design in interviews. This contributed to a challenging authorising environment, which is detailed below.

There was a limited authorising environment for co-design, and not enough accountability to implement decisions made through co-design

There was a pervasive view among interview participants that the NDIA leadership was not accountable to those participating in co-design processes. Many interviewees felt that the lack of accountability meant it was consultation, not co-design.

“Who is involved in the decision-making? If you cannot see the involvement. Then, it is not co-design; it is just consultation.” – Community member

“You know that NDIA is doing all the work in the background, really, and all the designing and then kind of calling it co-design. I think that needs to be acknowledged.” – Community member

“I think there was probably an equal number of NDIA people as there were participants in the co-design. I felt that sometimes the destination was already decided. They were shaping what we were saying, and I felt corralled. When I looked at the final output, I felt it wasn't an authentic co-design. I think there were things they picked up on, and I think there are nuances of our lived experience that the Agency picked up on. There was an influence there, but it wasn't co-design.” – Community member

There was a limited authorising environment for co-design and staff struggled to enable full and equal participation in joint decision making while under the Agency's mandate to implement legislation. Participants identified two key reasons underlying the challenging authorising environment: legislative barriers and the nature of decision-making in government.

Legislative barriers to co-design

The NDIA is bound by a legislative framework that determines the parameters for and legalities of policies. NDIA staff explained that they tried to communicate what was not possible within the current legislative framework in order to improve the transparency of the process. However, partners and community members were often not clear about what could or could not be suggested as a co-designed solution within the bounds of legislation.

“The NDIA will say that they are doing co-design, then they will say they cannot implement the co-design because of legislation.” – Partner

“It boils down to the legislation... If the legislation does or doesn’t allow something, that dictates whether the co-design outcome is a waste of time or not.” – Community member

“We needed to be clearer on the problems we were trying to solve. I think the need for more transparency about the parameters was also an issue. They could have just said: we will not separate housing from support. Then we could have worked with that even if that is not something our organisation supports. It is tough to structure co-design meaningfully and provide the needed outcome. We formed some good relationships with NDIA to talk through these challenges, and they were receptive, noting that they exist within a large bureaucracy.” – Partner

One participant expressed doubt about whether true co-design is achievable within government due to its legislative structure.

“It’s just different with government... basically you can co-design anything you want but it’s only going to work if the Minister agrees with it... I just think that it’s basically impossible to do in a government and [within a] legislative framework, like that’s the problem.” – Community member

Decision-making processes and changing priorities in government

The hierarchical nature of government meant that the results of the co-design process had to go to more senior decision-makers in the NDIA. While NDIA staff who led the projects could use the co-design projects to design policies with community participants, it was beyond their control whether what they had produced would be enacted. This left both staff and community participants feeling that they did not have power in the decision-making process.

The thing about the NDIA in making change is that it needs to go through the whole organisation, from the people engaging with people daily... to the very senior leaders and the CEO. - Partner

You can give ideas for improving things, but it doesn't depend on the team at the meetings. It is at another level that is difficult to reach. These staff can just give them feedback to incorporate the new policies and changes, but in most cases, they can't because the regulation doesn't allow them to implement those changes.” –

Community member

“Most staff have good intentions, but they don't have any control” – Community member

“They did not have the authorising framework. We did not have the buy-in from senior leadership to bring the changes” – NDIA staff member

“The people at the Agency are good; they want to do the right thing and are hard workers. There is sincerity and goodwill, but they missed the mark. It leaves people feeling very frustrated. The NDIA staff seemed to experience a sense of self-imposed limits on what was possible” – Community member

Some stakeholders also reported that the Agency has a history of starting and stopping work on co-design in response to government and political priorities. This was the case with the Home and Living co-design, which were paused as described above. Another participant noted that suggestions made in the IGAP project was not able to be implemented due to the review.

“The IGAP project was badly timed because of the review of the NDIS was taking place... it was a fairly big waste of time” – Community member

There needed to be stronger leadership support for co-design

NDIA staff, partners, and community members reported that visible leadership to guide co-design at the NDIA was inconsistent and sometimes absent. Staff reported that leaders did not communicate a coherent vision for co-design. Some reported that leaders did not appreciate or fully grasp the time and resources required to implement high-quality co-design projects.

“We all operate in a vacuum, and sometimes what we want is not implementable or practical. I think having leadership engage with us to discuss, make decisions, and talk about ideas was helpful. Structured check-ins with the leadership are key, which is not what we had in our co-design. It would be good if you could bring everything to the table and understand the limitations. You could come to a compromise that would give you full co-design capacity. We need to be equal partners in the authorising environment. So, you could come to a compromise that would give you that full co-design capacity rather than kind of working in this space where there's no potential to change any aspect of a big process.” – Community member

Senior leaders did sporadically attend co-design sessions, which NDIA staff explained was helpful as it could bring senior leaders along the journey and allow them to see the work that was going into the co-design process. However, some community members expressed frustration with a perceived lack of commitment and interest where a senior leader only attended for a short time.

Some community members and NDIA leaders were unaware of the implications of power dynamics when participating in co-design. This is unintentional and speaks to the need for community members and NDIA staff at all levels to receive capacity building on co-design, principles of power-sharing, and being power-aware.

“There was a manager in the workshop talking to participants about what kind of decisions we wanted to make and what direction we thought the direction would be. This workshop needs to be independent because people get confused between decision-making and information. When they've already been told what the most senior person in the room thinks, it's very hard when you're a participant and a manager is saying: this is how we see the issues, what we think, and what this document says. It's almost like coaching a witness rather than somebody helping them explain the information. It was very much at the wrong level. It wasn't a deliberate thing. The person doing that was nice; they thought they were giving up their time, and it was a good thing to do. They just completely lacked awareness of that power imbalance. From the participant's point of view, the participant thought it was great; they felt like they were being taken seriously. They're talking to someone senior.” – NDIA staff

Community members and the Agency would benefit from senior leadership with solid knowledge of co-design and appreciation for how power dynamics interact with participatory approaches. Staff and community members leading the co-design work would have benefited from collaboration with a skilled senior leadership who could frame an authorising environment for co-design work.

Oversight mechanisms were in place but could have been strengthened

There were several oversight mechanisms set up to support the co-design projects, including the CAG. At inception, the group considered how co-design should be defined, its purpose, and its scope. However, it is unclear how much influence the CAG had over shaping the approaches to co-design across the projects. The CAG had planned to engage in regular review of the co-design work to foster learning and reflection. Members of this group reported that the group had not met as often as planned and were uncertain regarding the role of the CAG in the future.

Each co-design project also established some type of advisory structure. Four co-design projects established steering committees, the CALD co-design project had an external working group, and the First Nations co-design project established the First Nations Advisory Council.

These groups were typically comprised of NDIA staff, government, partners, members of the Independent Advisory Group, and community members. Several groups instituted a co-chair role, with one chair filled by an NDIA staff member and the second by a community member.

The NDIA staff who assisted these groups shared how they supported community members. Strategies included one-on-one mentoring and support, providing information about the function of the advisory

group, and strengthening understanding of the functions of the Agency. Those in co-chair roles learned about the purpose and function of the role. Staff recounted their efforts to limit NDIA participation in the groups to avoid unintentionally contributing to potentially harmful power dynamics. This reflects a growing awareness and understanding of the many facets of co-design within the NDIA over time.

Some interviewees reported that community members in these committees were coached on what to say in meetings instead of being meaningfully supported to lead processes. Other interview participants also conveyed their view that NDIA often recruits the same community members into these types of roles based on agreeableness and capacity to work in alignment with ways of working in NDIA.

“They're friendly with the people that follow the rules. But for anyone else different, they just sort of avoided them. They would sort of put you to the side if you had something to say.” – Community member

A few interviewees articulated the need for improved management of conflict of interest for community members in advisory and governance roles. As community members become increasingly engaged in the NDIA, their networks and responsibilities expand, and the need to manage conflict of interest disclosure becomes increasingly important.

“When you get involved in these types of things, the conflict of interest needs to be managed well and done in a way that does not make a disability participant feel like they are being policed. At the same time, they need to understand their roles and responsibilities. Accessible documentation that discusses this needs to be available. When I started the co-design project, I felt there should have been conflict of interest forms. Most participants will come in without any conflicts of interest, but as they become more engaged with organisations, potential conflicts of interest could emerge, and they need to go on a form. Asking for these declarations must be well-managed, so we do not alarm people.” – Partner

3.3. Relational and equitable

What do we mean here?

The relational standard considers the commitment to recognising the inherent dignity and worth of all people through enabling safe and supported participation in co-design processes. The equitable standard considers the commitment to equity and diversity through building processes that amplify equitable opportunities for participation.

Having different strategies for recruitment was effective, however it was important to personalise the level of support for each community member

There were different strategies in place for recruiting co-design participants. Some projects partnered with DRCOs and in some cases CAG and IAC members recruited from their networks. This ensured a good fit between the participants and the co-design process. NDIA staff told us that partner organisations were valuable for engaging diverse communities, particularly because these organisations already have relationships and trust established with different communities.

However, stakeholders noted that personalised support needed to be available for community members as they came on board to allow them to participate in the process fully. In the sense-making workshops, NDIA staff shared that they would have liked more time to be able to do this properly.

“Have good onboarding and inductions. Ensure members are supported. You want a good balance of representatives. People with intellectual disability require different support outside. You have to reach out to each member. Ensure people are well-armed and well-prepared for the meetings so the discussion does not default to problems.” – Community member

“Eventually, they provided orientation to help get us up to speed, which was very helpful but not initially provided at the start. That can be a big hazard. There should be onboarding processes that a steering committee develops.” – Community member

Some people felt that the NDIA’s attempts at inclusive engagement were tokenistic but that the NDIA is open to learning and improving

The Agency, community and partners were all clear about the benefit of including diverse voices from the community. However, several participants held the view that attempts at inclusive engagement were poorly implemented or tokenistic.

“I would say that the CALD project so far has seemed to me to be very tokenistic, just so they could tick a box and say, yes, we’ve listened to these people from these communities, but not done anything with it, in terms of communicating other than in big policy documents.” – Community member

A few community members perceived there to be limited engagement with First Nations and people with intellectual disability, although this is likely influenced by the specific projects they were on, with other projects having higher levels of engagement.

It was noted that the NDIA is open to learning and changing some of these practices. Interview participants shared that inclusive engagement might involve reconceptualising how the NDIA might engage with communities, going to where people are and working with partners to design points of contact that work for community.

“Inclusion goes beyond just providing accessibility support. It is about being relational. Every part of the engagement needs to be relational and inclusive. You must meet people where they are at. Meet them under a tree instead of the office. - Governance

Staff were committed, collaborative and honest

Community members shared that their interactions with NDIA staff during the co-design process was often positive.

“Overall, the NDIA team was excellent and easy to work with. Inclusive. The team was approachable. They were certainly good listeners. Took on board suggestions and tips.” – Community member

“So, this was when we had to demonstrate our commitment to co-design and doing it well. I felt, personally, an intense kind of responsibility to do this and to make sure that we did it authentically. That was important to me.” – NDIA staff

Staff lacked experience in co-design and needed more support

However, many NDIA staff had no prior experience or training in co-design or working directly with people with disability. One staff member explained they did not know about available tools.

“A lot of staff has experience in policy or some kind of other project management background, but not necessarily disability, and then they were put into these positions not having prior experience working with people with disability, and they maybe made a lot of assumptions of what that about what they thought people could and couldn't do.” – Community member

“You might be the best policy writer, but coming to have a chat with a person is different. Maybe we need a mentoring program where people with disabilities who work with the department can work with the staff. Need disability awareness training. Learning about ableism. Some of the things they don't realise they are doing and understanding their responsibilities under the human rights law.” – Partner

Staff would have benefited from capacity building to deliver co-design and work with people with disability. It was noted that in some cases DRCO partner organisations were able to directly engage with participants in a way that was more accessible and comfortable.

There needed to be capability-building for trauma-informed practice

The need to build capability to be part of trauma-informed practice and to work with those who have experienced stigma was particularly noted. NDIA staff were tasked with facilitating groups of community members, with some with complex disabilities, histories of abuse, trauma, and neglect, well-earned distrust of disability systems. Staff were not supported to do this, and both NDIA staff and community members were impacted by this.

Some staff also reported a lack of support for their safety in conducting co-design, although it was reported that people had access to counselling during and after events.

“This was a really tricky topic. I didn't appreciate how sensitive it could be. I was quite worried about what my staff had to hear. I had staff in tears. I didn't anticipate it enough to make sure my staff were well. Co-design was new in the Agency then, and we were the people first doing it.” – NDIA staff

“There wasn't a lot of support for my team. I had members of my team hearing about [traumatic] cases; they had never heard about that... We need to consider who is involved and how we support our staff. We were going to ask the participants what safety means to them. Some of my staff are not familiar with that sort of thing. I offered counselling to my staff. The Agency should have a process upfront.” – NDIA staff

Community members who have traumatic histories often experience stigma, and co-design processes need to consider how these groups can be supported to participate in a safe space for both participants and staff. This is a critical set in ensuring the full and equal participation of diverse cohorts of people.

“A lot of people with complex disabilities are labelled as having challenging behaviours, a meaningless term that pushes people out of these sorts of discussions. Most have long institutional histories of abuse and neglect. They are pretty damaged. I wanted them to be involved and bring a different perspective. When you bother to sit and ask the right questions, how they respond and think about and structure responses is almost universally unique. If you can accommodate people, they can contribute to a policy or framework that works for everybody.” – Community member

There were varied views on facilitation across the projects

Some community members felt that their facilitator listened well and was respectful.

“[The facilitator] was kind, and they listened really well and asked questions and worded questions really well.” – Community member

“Right from the get-go, I was impressed. I had not been a fan before. They really listened to what we had to say. It was not tokenistic. It was not like that at all. It was one of the first ones where I thought: ‘they are trying to do something here’. They really did take into consideration what we were saying” – Community member

However, others felt that facilitation was not always skilled, and some community members did not feel they could contribute. Some members felt that dominant people overtook the session, sometimes with irrelevant content. People preferred smaller groups (or splitting into smaller groups) to allow everyone the chance to speak.

“They asked questions that often got sidetracked into a rabbit warren of non-relevance. It was consultation, not co-design... They took half an hour to warm everyone up. They couldn’t moderate. People didn’t understand why they were there. I came away feeling disheartened. I don’t know if what I said was documented.” – Community member

There were also different views on whether the facilitator should be an NDIA staff member or not. For some people, having NDIA staff involved in the facilitation was helpful as they understood the limits of the co-design process.

“We were fortunate to have the policy officer from NDIA as one of the contributing participants. He was able to flush out those key issues systematically. He was familiar with it because each of us experiences our issues through a very particular lens, but he had a very broad view that sort of crossed through all our lenses. We were exceptionally fortunate to have that sort of help to help us talk about things because then it’s like: I forgot about that, or I didn’t think about that. We could relate to what he was saying without explaining everything else. That worked exceptionally well, I thought.” – Community member

Conversely, some participants held the view that facilitation should be external (i.e., not led by NDIA staff) and ideally disability led. This was an approach used by the Supported Decision-Making project who partnered with Inclusion Australia to design and deliver workshops. This approach proved vital in some sessions where participants were more willing to share experiences with a person with disability with experience of the scheme.

This speaks to a need for the facilitator (particularly if they are internal) to be aware of their position, the power they hold and how to position themselves as neutral as far as is possible. Some participants also noted that face-to-face engagement enabled a more power-aware environment.

“You must be very careful about delivery to engage in a power-free situation. I think face-to-face early in the co-design process is essential, and then later, to reinforce it. I don’t think it should be done online, but I understand that members may be unable to participate in face-to-face meetings. I know you have to watch your budget, but when you meet, a rapport is built, and that is essential if there is a disparity of power present in co-design; it will very easily shut down a person with a disability.” – Partner

“Power-sharing conjures up the idea that when you’re in the co-design process, you can have an equal voice irrespective of the status and power perceived by the individuals around the table because they walk in that door in that conceptual room and are equivalents. Power-sharing is that they take the mantle of CEO of NDIS off and become a person to talk to. This is a real feeling and is much more presented when you do face-to-face engagement... when I turned up on the day to face-to-face engagement, all that fell away, and it was like we knew each other, were all on the same page, and were all participating. The power was gone. There was no power sharing because there was no power. We all had a job to do; everyone was engaged and motivated. That’s the brilliance of the co-design process; it allows everybody to feel comfortable and speak.” – Community member

Many community members reported that the concepts and language used were unclear

Many interviewed community members shared that the concepts and language used were unclear and hard to understand, limiting meaningful engagement.

“Early on, it was a bit of a dog’s breakfast. It was kind of like, what are we supposed to say? I recall the documents we were presented with to review had so much jargon. I have a university degree, but it was hard going. It was just quite vague for me. We met three times to review. We sort of brainstormed once, and then we came back to review some, or they did, like a presentation about the results from the last one or something, and then they sort of reviewed some documents. But again, it was very hard to know what to contribute because it was vague.” – Community member

“We didn’t have easy read versions for some people. We probably could have spent the time up front to do work with people to get them in that space and explain things better. We were using some complex language.” – Community member

There was insufficient time to do co-design well

Many stakeholders reported insufficient time for co-design as an end-to-end process and within sessions. Staff reported unrealistic expectations and timelines and expectations for the delivery of the co-design projects, which, when implemented correctly, is highly complex work.

“We were in a pressure cooker basically; we were having to create talking notes for leadership, ensure slide decks were accessible, do the actual work to progress co-design and start drafting policy all at the same time, whilst procuring [DRCO] to do our participant work. It was very stressful, and we were also asking for an extension of time because co-design takes time, and we were not provided that. The policy had to be written and delivered by the end of the year.” – NDIA staff

*“There's a kind of balance between pace and process integrity. We just felt it was important to have some tangible outputs from the work as quickly as possible. And we kept reiterating that. But it's not easy to keep moving at the pace that the Agency would otherwise operate at. We were making accommodations but trying to keep the ball moving up the field; that is just a constant evolutionary, kind of iterative process.”
– NDIA staff*

Participants appreciated being compensated for their time

Being compensated for their time was an important aspect of participating for some interviewees. For some, it provided some (albeit small) additional income and enabled their participation. For others, it meant that their lived experience was valued as professional experience.

“They have to allow people to be paid via invoice or allow the option for them to be paid in that way, and they have to allow for adequate payment. Because if they're not they're not taking what we are saying seriously and they're not treating us as professional people... I want for the NDIA to treat us like professionals because we are. I often feel like they don't treat us like we are professional people.” – Community member

4. FINDINGS: OUTCOMES

Headline findings

- There was inconsistent feedback and generation of outputs across the projects.
- Some NDIA staff and participants reported that co-design led to the creation of high-quality projects with policies that benefited from the knowledge and experience of participants.
- The delivery of co-design projects and uptake of co-design outputs were affected by changing policies and politics.
- Participants have observed improvements in the way NDIA engages with participants and in the delivery of co-design.
- Some participants reported improved capacity and increased connections.

4.1. In this section

This section responds to the following question:

- To what extent has each co-design project achieved the following outcomes?
 - a. Decisions that are transparent to the disability community key stakeholders.
 - b. A shared understanding amongst key stakeholders of different perspectives, challenges & constraints related to the NDIS.
 - c. A disability community that feels empowered and has confidence and trust in the NDIS.
 - d. A desirable and feasible policy solution for key stakeholders.
 - e. Building of sector capability in co-design approaches.

NB. KEQ 3a and 3b were covered under the process findings and 3c is covered in the next section.

We have considered two types of outcomes (from the outcomes standards):

Generative	Transformative
Commitment to upholding decisions made in co-design processes	Commitment to personal, collective, and social change.

4.2. Generative outcomes

What do we mean here?

Generative outcomes are concerned with the outputs of the co-design process and the extent to which decisions made during the co-design processes were upheld.

There was inconsistent feedback and generation of outputs across the projects

Some of the projects came back with products to show the group during the process. However, participants did not always think that what was reflected was the same as what had been discussed.

“In the second focus group session, they had these slides about the outcomes of the last workshop, and it looked like nothing we had discussed. I have no idea where they got that information.” – Community member

“Which stories of ours are used? Our stories are transferred into documents. Our evidence is being lost. We spend time bearing our souls; very little is in the written reports. I wonder why the butcher paper notes are not included in an appendix during these meetings. Does this report reflect the original notes? I’ve rarely seen that happen. Is this co-design? Is this a publicly defensible process?” – Community member

“I wish there were a better feedback system so that they could tell us what they were doing to change and what they would act on based on what was suggested in our meetings. I think that would have given me a better sense of purpose, like an accomplishment, and I am participating and changing things for the better.” – Community member

Staff noted that it was challenging to capture the diversity of views

“There are different views on the policy questions, not just between The Agency and the community but among the people within the NDIA. So, finding a way to demonstrate that you have heard, and it’s not that you’re dismissive of their view but rather that there are differing views. How do we find a way through that is most conducive to us making a good impact? That is hard.” – NDIA staff

Many community members noted there was limited or no follow-up once the co-design project had finished, although staff noted that it would not have been possible to continue with a high level of engagement.

“Once the policy was released, there was not much follow-up... I don’t know how much of it they’re now implementing or whether they care. I would really like to know all this stuff because then I would feel like what we said was valued or listened to during the workshop. But when you do these things and never hear anything back, you wonder if it was worth it. And that may stop me from doing another one of these. I’d like to participate, but will it be worth it? Are they going to listen to me?” – Community member

“My understanding of co-design is that you are in partnership to create something. One focus group is not a co-design partnership for me because there should be a bit of toing and froing. There must be several interactions to have the integrity of a co-design. I just think the fact that we are all very confused about the point of these meetings speaks for itself. This project is quite disorganised, and we do not

understand what happens with the information collected – that has not been communicated to us, and it has been nearly two years.” – Community member

“There must be a point where you loosen the reins and say: let us go away and implement this now for a bit. People got anxious and nervous at that point because they'd been involved and didn't trust it would be implemented well. But aside from employing them all within The Agency and making them responsible, you must have some space to go away and do that and bring people back and say: here's how we went.” – Governance

Some projects resulted in high-quality outputs, but others were affected by changing policies and politics

Some NDIA staff and participants reported that co-design led to the creation of policies that benefited from the knowledge and experience of participants.

“But I can tell you that in our co-design group, with our involvement, NDIA staff got a much deeper perspective on the topic than they probably would have otherwise.” – Community member

Some projects also reported that co-design led to the creation of high-quality pieces of work. One such piece was the Supported Decision-Making Policy and Implementation Plan, endorsed by the NDIA board in January 2023. The policy and implementation will guide NDIA on how to support participants to make decisions, provide opportunities to make decisions, and build the knowledge and skills of people with disability to make decisions.

“[Supported Decision Making] was an exceptional piece of work” – Governance Member

Another policy that was mentioned by participants was the CALD strategy. The co-design output was a set of themes and agreed goals that would inform the development of the CALD strategy. The draft strategy was presented at a roundtable held on 24 May 2022; members of the roundtable endorsed the themes and goals of the strategy and discussed approaches to future governance. The CALD Strategy 2024-2028 was released in 2023.

“[The CALD Strategy] is one of the best pieces of work the agency has done” – Governance Member

However, the delivery of co-design projects and uptake of co-design outputs were affected by changing policies and politics beyond the control of project staff. One participant shared how they had spent a year

and half in the co-design process, only for the work to be shelved following the outcomes of the Review. Another shared:

“The fact that we got policies finalised and that they’re about really important things that the Agency had not had policies on before that they went, they sailed through our board with green lights, the Minister was happy to announce them all, and implementation plans were then established to progress actually to implement them. That’s as far as I got with it. I thought that was a great thing. I imagine that the outcomes have been somewhat slowed down by the government deciding to have a massive independent review and everybody downing tools on many things in the Agency. I would be surprised if the outcomes were anywhere near as good as I would have wanted them to be at the time. But I suspect there are probably many reasons beyond the Agency’s or anybody else’s control.” Community member

4.3. Transformative outcomes

What do we mean here?

Transformative outcomes speak to the broader goals of co-design to cause lasting or important change, including contribution to personal, collective and social change.

Embracing the expertise of disability organisations to reach new audiences

As part of the Supported Decision Making project, the NDIA worked in close partnership with Inclusion Australia to co-design approaches to speaking to different audiences of people with an intellectual disability. These were co-designed by a small project team including two staff members from Inclusion Australia, one of whom was a NDIS participant with an intellectual disability who co-facilitated sessions with an NDIA engagement team member. The group met weekly to co-design inclusive, accessible and safe approaches to working with different communities.

One such example was working with Merger of Minds, a group of people and families from Western Australia who use augmented and alternative communication methods. With support from Developmental Disability WA (DDWA) the project team took time to adapt questions for this group using pictures and simple sentences. These were shared with the group in advance so that members could prepare responses using their preferred communication devices and tools. Over two longer than usual workshops, the co-facilitators explored decision making experiences for the group which were invaluable in informing the new policy for a group of people more likely to require supported decision making. For the group, having a co-facilitator with lived experience of disability and of being an NDIS participant was invaluable in building a trusted space for safe discussions.

This partnership approach with Inclusion Australia not only allowed the NDIA to grow and learn from the expertise in the sector, it was an empowering and enjoyable experience for all with the Inclusion Australia co-facilitator noting “I could easily have done this [work] for another few months. At the end of the day everyone had their say!”

Participants have observed improvements in the way NDIA engages with participants and in the delivery of co-design

Partners and community members noted that the NDIA has been on a journey with co-design and has made many improvements over the course of the six projects.

“It is so much better now than in the last couple of years. So, it's more structured. They're getting rid of the jargon and giving you preparation time. Now, you'll get the agenda and reading material with adequate time. And in the session, it is more controlled. Everybody has a say, but you are not put on the spot. The feedback loop is much quicker. We will immediately get feedback about what we shared and hear what's happening next. Now we get summaries of each session, and an email says we spoke about this today, and this is the next step. And we can add to it, saying you've missed out on this, or I've got a question about it before it goes to the next step. We're much more included. It is not the black hole after a meeting like it used to be.” – Community member

“It is getting better. The co-designs I was involved with today differ from those I have been involved with. They are trying to get better.” – Community member

“I recall that the documents we were presented with to review had so much jargon, and I have a university degree. It was hard going, but this was early on in Participant First. They have come a long way and do less of that now.” – Community member

Some participants, including staff, felt proud to be part of the process

Participating in the co-design process was meaningful for some community members and staff.

“I still remember how proud I felt when my group started taking action on the various proposed changes.” – Community member

“I really enjoyed being part of making a change. It’s been one of the highlights of my career to be involved in creating a policy for people with disability, actually to feel included and make decisions, and to learn how to make decisions. That is a huge honour for me.” – NDIA staff member

Some participants reported improved capacity and increased connections

A few participants shared that their involvement in the co-design process had improved their capacity and increased connections. A particularly notable example is shared below:

Snapshot from a participant:

“When I went in, my capacity was as a NDIS participant. We have a section in our plans called capacity building. The idea around capacity building is that you learn how to engage with the services that can support you in living a more ordinary life.

My attendance in the co-design committee provided more capacity building than going down to the local psychologist and having a session with them for a session of support. When I was on the committee, **I was building a skill set**, experiencing anxiety, getting through it and **building resilience**. Creating a whole skill set that I realise can lead to a career. How incredible is that? ... my steering committee is more effective for me than my NDIS plan, and it costs them very little...

It has improved my capacity. It has got me involved in advocacy. I am far more involved in my community than ever, thinking about career pathways and leveraging these experiences. ...

There were two workshops, each engaging with organisations. We were invited to those and hear what the focus groups were saying. It was an incredibly important engagement for me to be there. My connection as a member of the steering committee was very powerful... because when these very professional staff saw me there and realised that I was a person participating in the scheme, it sent a very clear message about power, and **I felt empowered to be there.**

I absolutely appreciate the staff members' commitment to supporting me through the process...they were essential. I got to know a couple of people very well... They could even be potential referees for me; for someone who may not have been in the workforce, having a reference is intensely important.”

5. FINDINGS: APPROPRIATENESS

Headline findings

The evaluation indicated that there is general support for co-design at the NDIA. While there was not yet a formalised approach to co-design at the time of the six projects, co-design was appropriate for strengthening engagement with the community in some cases. There needed to be a stronger authorising environment with greater accountability for the NDIA to build trust through co-design.

5.1. In this section

This section responds to the following evaluation questions:

- To what extent is the approach to co-design in the NDIS appropriate for building trust, strengthening engagement, and improving the relationship between the NDIA and disability community?
- Is co-design an appropriate approach to guide the delivery of an effective and efficient scheme?
- What parts of co-design are most important?

We have also provided our recommendations in this section.

5.2. Comments on appropriateness

Is co-design an appropriate approach to guide the delivery of an effective and efficient scheme?

In this evaluation, interviewees primarily provided their experiences and views based on their participation in a particular co-design project, rather than considering the overall role of co-design for the NDIS scheme. Therefore, we do not have sufficient evidence to answer this broad and significant question.

However, it is clear that co-design forms an important part of the NDIA's engagement with the disability community, which was re-affirmed in the NDIA's recent statement on its approach to co-design (published in June 2024). Interviewed participants also showed support in principle for co-design at the NDIA, noting the potential benefits of co-design when done properly.

“The NDIA aims to contribute to social and economic participation and an ordinary life. Co-design can achieve that goal. Co-design can be mutually beneficial because if you participate, you will create skills and connect with peers, and your voice will be heard. This is why co-design should be a formalised process.” – Community member

“I think that co-design needs to be an ongoing piece of work. At the same time, we don't need to co-design everything. We can focus on the really important things that affect people's lives.” – Partner

To what extent is the approach to co-design in the NDIS appropriate for building trust, strengthening engagement and improving the relationship between the NDIA and disability community?

At the time of the six co-design projects, whilst an approach to co-design had been articulated in the NDIA Engagement Framework, there was not a systematic and consistent approach to using this at the NDIA (in line with the Agency's commitment to 'learn by doing'). Therefore, we are limited in our ability to judge the appropriateness of an approach which was not yet formally developed.

However, the evaluation does suggest that the NDIA's approach at the time was appropriate, to a degree, for strengthening engagement and improving relationships between the NDIA and the disability community. This is because participating community members were able to develop relationships directly with NDIA staff through the process and felt that staff members were genuine and committed.

"The NDIA team gave us a bit of themselves to get that trust right; they gave us themselves. They weren't nameless, faceless public servants. They were real people. Who people engaged with and formed genuine relationships with." – Community member

NDIA staff also reflected that they had wanted to build trust through co-design.

"We were all clear that the co-design work needed to be done in a way that rebuilt trust, and that was the biggest thing we needed to achieve out of co-design." – NDIA staff

"We wanted to build trust - a big goal from the start. It was about not just bringing something already finished for them to give us feedback on, but to be sitting in the room and honest and very open that we haven't started and very genuine in the fact that where we're writing it now as you speak and you're writing it. It was a lot of trust-building, but we were also the first co-design project within the Agency to kick off." – NDIA staff

However, this evaluation found that the Agency's ability to build trust through co-design was limited at the time of the six projects. This was because, as previously noted, there were no formal mechanisms to ensure that the NDIA was accountable for co-design outcomes. It was clear that the authorising environment was not sufficient for effective co-design leading to a lack of transparency and inconsistent outputs. Where participants felt it was a consultation process, or where the co-design outputs did not reflect the process, trust was damaged.

"The trust and confidence disappear when we haven't heard anything... I think faith and confidence have a long way to go again." – Community member

“Has anything practically changed on the ground? No. I think that is the problem. I think that co-design, done properly, is worthwhile. I have worked from different sides of the equation. When it is done poorly, it does more damage than good. After being part of the first one, I could not participate in further co-design activities. It was tokenism at its utter worst.” – Community member

“If the Agency can’t co-design. Don’t bullshit us. Just consult.” – Community Member

“You can only co-design and expect people to put in both the practical and emotional effort to engage with you if they see that you’re doing the same. It must be an exchange of equals, right? I can’t hammer home the idea that you need to earn trust enough. People want to talk to the government but don’t trust it.” – Community member

Our literature review suggested that co-design is difficult in practice because it involves challenging existing mindsets and ways of working. The literature suggests viewing participatory processes such as co-design as an incremental process, with a series of small wins towards fuller participation in joint decision making.

This fits with our understanding that the NDIA has been on a journey to evolve and improve its approach to co-design, in line with its commitment to ‘learn by doing’. Indeed, during the sensemaking process, NDIA staff members shared that efforts have already been made to improve processes after these initial six projects. Community members and partners also believe that the NDIA is improving.

This means that the NDIA’s approach to co-design is likely to become more appropriate as it becomes more considered and structured, and the conditions become more supportive.

“It wasn’t perfect, but it was one step in the right direction, and it’s been great now to see the evolution of the Agency” – Community member

“It is getting better. The co-designs I was involved with today differ from those I have been involved with. They are trying to get better.” – Community member

“They are making changes slowly. I think they are trying hard.” – Community member

5.3. Recommendations

What parts of co-design are most important?

This final section discusses our findings regarding the most important parts of co-design and our recommendations.

The NDIA developed and published a shared statement and commitment to co-design with the IAC, DRCOs, the Minister for the NDIS, the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission and the Department of Social Services in June 2024 on its co-design approach. There is strong alignment between our recommendations and the agreed principles in this statement, demonstrating that the Agency is already addressing some of the issues identified in this report.

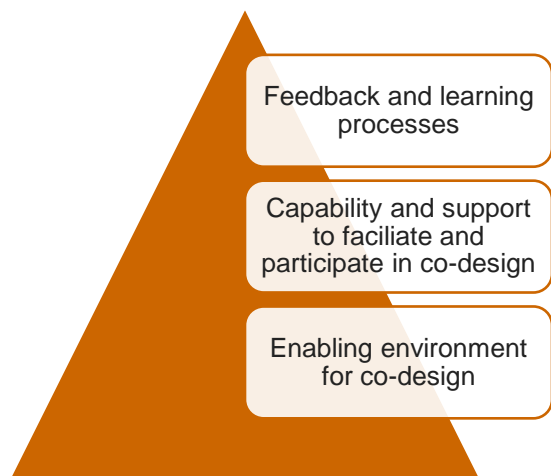


Figure 1 shows the most important parts of co-design that we identified through this evaluation – this is not a definitive list, but rather what was emphasised by interviewed participants.

Enabling environment

The evaluation suggests that an enabling environment is the most important part of co-design. An authorising environment to act on the decisions made through co-design is what enables the process to move from consultation to co-design, and honours participants' commitment, time and trust in the process.

This necessitates strong leadership support; a stable and aligned political context; clearly understanding and communicating the limits of what can and cannot be co-designed in a statutory body; and, carefully selecting opportunities that suit co-design. Participants were clear that it was important for the Agency to consider if and where they can commit properly to co-design. A small number of participants also noted that not everything should be co-designed which aligns with the original engagement framework (for example, more technical matters such as internal systems).

Figure 1. Most important parts of co-design identified through this evaluation

“At this stage, co-design only happens when policy is concerned. There also needs to be resource and time commitment and the assurance that the process is valued and embedded so that decisions cannot be made without co-design. Then it could become actual and genuine co-design.” – NDIA staff

“It takes time and [is] expensive to do it properly, and... a government has to be willing to cede control, which [it is] not very good at, right. So the challenge of co-design is understanding...what you're willing to cede control of, and if you're not willing to cede control of it, question whether or not co-design is the type of activity that is right to be undertaken.” – Community member

“Look for instances where you can co-design and focus on where we will commit to codesign. It comes down to setting expectations; what is being codesigned? Whatever that thing is. Who is involved in decision-making? Be clear about what you are co-designing.” – Partner

Recommendation 1. Strengthen accountability mechanisms for co-design processes.

Recommendation 2. Set a clear shared understanding of the scope, purpose and limits of co-design work.

Recommendation 3. Clarify the role of senior leadership and oversight mechanisms in co-design processes.

Recommendation 4. Prioritise projects for co-design that have a clear purpose, scope and limits, as well as sufficient time and support for co-design.

These recommendations align with the NDIA’s commitment to be **transparent**, particularly to explain what the activity will be, to be honest and open about any constraints and outcomes, and to be accountable for delivering improvements to the NDIS. It also supports the commitment to be **timely** (to make sure co-design is not rushed).

Capability and support to facilitate and participate in co-design

Beyond the authorising environment for co-design, the evaluation also found that a key requirement for co-design is committed, genuine and skilled staff to ensure inclusive engagement.

The staff at the NDIA were highly committed to the co-design process but lacked capacity building in both co-design and working with people with disabilities. Community members also required more capacity building and personalised support to fully participate in the co-design process.

“If you want co-design to inform policy development, participants need support to understand how policies are developed. Learning about the policy’s intent is how decisions are made about policy. You can start with that content and provide that skill base to the group because public policy is a skill set. Recognising that shared experiences only take a policy so far is important. However, you can close gaps in policy and create an equal playing field for the Agency to make change if the co-design can be facilitated so you are working together.” – Partner

Recommendation 5. Continue to build on and improve approaches to inclusive practice in engagement and co-design.

Recommendation 6. Embed capacity building and support for staff and community members in codesign.

These recommendations align with the NDIA’s commitment to be **ready to listen and learn**, particularly to keep building NDIA staff knowledge about co-design. It also supports the commitment to be **inclusive** and to support participants in the co-design process to have the capacity and capability to participate.

Feedback and learning processes

The other important component of co-design is feedback and learning processes. This evaluation found that the NDIA is committed to learning and evolving their approach to co-design. However, the feedback loop to participants could have been improved – it is important for participants to understand what the co-design effort has resulted in and how it is being taken forward to increase trust in process and the Agency. This aligns with the NDIA’s commitment to be **transparent**, particularly to provide regular updates on progress

Recommendation 7. Ensure clear feedback loops for participants involved in co-design and engagement.

A rubric to support co-design

A tangible way to support the above recommendations would be to collaboratively develop a rubric for co-design at the NDIA. A rubric is a tool that can help to assess something in a relatively quick and simple way. A rubric is built around a set of criteria (things that are important for co-design) and a set of ratings to help assess the criteria. This is usually displayed in a table format such as below:

Table 4. Example of rubric format

Criteria	Poor	Good	Excellent
1	Description of poor for criteria 1	Description of good for criteria 1	Description of excellent for criteria 1
2	Description of poor for criteria 2	Description of good for criteria 2	Description of excellent for criteria 2

The benefit of a rubric is that it will build a shared understanding about what is most important for good co-design. When developed collaboratively with key stakeholders, the criteria and standards are informed by a variety of perspectives and are more likely to be seen as legitimate by all stakeholders. The rubric can continue to evolve as the NDIA continues to refine its approach to co-design.

A rubric can facilitate transparency and learning when used to check how co-design is being implemented and experienced at the NDIA. This can be done relatively informally within co-design projects, or across co-design at the NDIA (for example, with the CAG). In either case, it provides a consistent way for staff and stakeholders to assess, reflect on, and improve co-design processes.

As part of this evaluation process, the evaluation team drafted an initial rubric based on the process and outcome standards (Appendix D). The draft rubric was presented to the CAG for feedback in mid-October 2024. The group broadly agreed with the proposed criteria but felt that they need clarifying and defining in greater detail. We recommend that the NDIA takes this forward to collaboratively define the criteria and standards.

Recommendation 8. Collaboratively develop a co-design approach and use tools, including the suggested rubric, to increase shared understanding, transparency and accountability.

6. CONCLUSION

This evaluation report looked retrospectively at six projects which purposefully undertook co-design as a methodology at the NDIA. The evaluation found that **NDIA staff were faced with a difficult task**: to implement co-design at pace, with limited skills and support, in an environment that could not fully support acting on the decisions that came out of co-design.

Despite this, **NDIA staff genuinely tried their best** to support community members to participate in the co-design process, and, in some cases, it produced high quality policies and was a positive experience for participants. However, **trust was damaged** when the NDIA provided inconsistent feedback, when participants did not feel the outputs represented what had been voiced in the process, and when staff were unable to action decisions made through co-design.

It is evident that **the Agency is on a journey to learn and improve** their approach to co-design and working with community members. This retrospective evaluation is just one of the avenues to do so, and the NDIA has already made changes to improve their approach since the original co-design projects. There is **potential for co-design** to build trust and strengthen relationships – particularly if it is **judiciously used** where there is a **clear purpose and scope; shared understanding and communication of limits; and capability building for staff and participants**.

However, it is important that the NDIA continues to **grapple with the big issues** of trying to properly do co-design in a statutory body. There was a pervasive view from stakeholders that the Agency was not accountable in the process. Accountability requires the Agency to remain **steadfastly committed to the people who take part** and to **genuinely be prepared to act on the outcomes** of co-design.

It was recognised by stakeholders that **this will take time** and is no easy feat. This was also supported by our literature review, which suggested that changing mindsets and ways of working to truly share power and implement genuine co-design is a challenging and gradual process. **Ultimately, what is most important, is that the Agency continues to incrementally create the conditions required for the community to engage in decision-making with the government as full and equal participants.**

Summary of recommendations

1. Strengthen accountability mechanisms for co-design processes.
2. Set a clear shared understanding of the scope, purpose and limits of co-design work.
3. Clarify the role of senior leadership and oversight mechanisms in co-design processes.
4. Prioritise projects for co-design that have a clear purpose, scope and limits, as well as sufficient time and support for co-design.
5. Continue to build on and improve approached to inclusive practice in engagement and co-design.
6. Embed capacity building and support for staff and community members in codesign.
7. Ensure clear feedback loops for participants involved in co-design and engagement.
8. Collaboratively develop a co-design approach and use tools, including the suggested rubric, to increase shared understanding, transparency and accountability.

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APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW TALLY

Project	Stakeholders								Total		
	NDIA and ex-NDIA staff		DRCOs and external stakeholders		Community members		Co-design governance		Interviews	Staff and stakeholders	Community members
	Number of interviews	Number of people	Number of interviews	Number of people	Number of interviews	Number of people	Number of interviews	Number of people			
CALD	1	1 ¹			2	10			3	1	10
First Nations	1	1 ²							1	1	0
Home and Living	7	6 ³	4	4	5	10			16	10	10
Information gathering	3	3			2	2			5	3	2
Participant Safeguarding	1	1 ⁴			6	13			7	1	13
Supported decision-making	2	3	1	1					3	3	1
All projects	2	2	1	2			5	5	8	4	5
Total	17	17	6	7	15	35	5	5	43	23	41

¹ Staff at NDIA were invited to interview but did not respond

² Staff at NDIA were invited to interview but did not progress to an evaluation interview

³ One person was interviewed twice.

⁴ Several members included in the 'all projects' row were involved in the Participant Safeguarding co-design project

APPENDIX C INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview question template

Introduction

Thank you for discussing your involvement in the project. This initial discussion aims to help us understand the context and approach of the project, as well as identify key stakeholders to be involved in the evaluation. We will have a more in-depth interview with you later in the process to gather your perspectives on the outcomes and overall process of the project. In today's discussion, we would like to focus more on the 'objective' facts about what happened and who was involved.

Introduction

- Tell us about yourself
- What was the nature of your involvement in the project?

Approaches

Partnership

- Did your project have any informal or formal partnerships?
 - What was the purpose of the partnership?
 - How was the partnership established?
 - How did the partnership improve processes and experiences for co-design participants?
 - Were there any challenges with the partnership?

Engagement

- Did you have a role in the engagement of various stakeholders?
 - Can you tell us about how different groups of participants were engaged in the project and co-design process and your involvement.
 - What worked well with these engagement processes?
 - What learnings could we share for future co-design?

Governance

- Were you involved with any governance functions of the co-design process?
- How did the Governance functions contribute to the effective functioning of the project?
- What lessons could we share about governance for future co-design?

Codesign processes

- Were you involved in the design or participation in co-design processes?
 - Can you tell us about the processes and why they were selected?
 - How did these processes contribute to positive experiences for participants and the effective development of outputs?
 - What learnings could we share about co-design processes for future co-design?

Conditions

- We have a list of conditions for co-design, which are ways of working. The back of the interview guide includes a list of conditions and their definitions.

I would like to hear about:

- Whether this condition was in place for the project you worked on (relevant).
- If you agree that this is a necessary condition.
- If any other conditions are necessary.
- How NDIA could ensure this condition is in place for future co-design work.

Working with people		
Relational	Building strong relationships with people.	We show interest in each person who is part of co-design.
Transparent	Communicating on time. Actively sharing information and not withholding information. Explaining what can and cannot be done.	We say what we mean, we don't lie, and we don't keep secrets.
Building trust	Do what you say you will do, focus on the person, and admit mistakes.	If we make mistakes, we will tell you and explain why it happened.
Responsive		
Accessible	Considering the needs of each person attending so each person has equitable opportunities to participate.	We make sure that we meet the needs of every person.
Cultural appropriateness	Considering the cultural backgrounds of people attending and working in ways that are respectful to cultures.	We learn about people's culture and work in ways that respect that culture.
Good practice		
Clear purpose	The role of co-design and how it contributes to an output is clearly defined and communicated.	We make sure there is a good reason for asking you to do this work.
Transformative	Processes are fostering a shared commitment to change.	We work with you to agree on what needs to be changed.
The outcome		
Enduring	We are committed to ensuring that the shared outputs of the co-design process are implemented.	We continue to take action so that the work we do together makes a difference.

Mindsets

- We have a list of mindsets for co-design. These are attitudes that will impact the delivery of a co-design process. For each mindset, I would like to hear about:
 - Whether these mindsets were in place for the team working on the co-design project.
 - If you agree that this is a necessary mindset for co-design.
 - Are there any other important mindsets?
 - How NDIA could ensure this mindset is in place for future co-design work.

Person-centred	I am interested in each person in the process.
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Power-aware	It is important to me that we are aware that each person will have different levels of control over the outcome.
Power sharing	It is important to me that each person in the co-design process can have an impact on the outcome.
Inclusive	It is important to me that we bring together people who represent the group we are co-designing for.
Dedication	I want the co-design work we do to lead to lasting change.

Barriers and enablers

- For people involved in project:
 - What were the key enablers for the project?
 - What were the key barriers for the project?

For the future

- What are the likely enablers of co-design work going forward?
- What are the likely barriers of co-design work going forward?

Outcomes

- What came out of the process?

Understanding

- Did you see an improvement in shared understanding among the people involved?

Improved relations

- People with lived experience report improved trust and confidence in the NDIA.
- People with lived experience are more likely to communicate with the NDIA.

Policy and process change

- Have you seen any policy or other outputs developed because of co-design?
- If yes, how did co-design contribute to the quality of the policy?

Skills

- Did you personally develop skills due to being part of this co-design process?
- Did you see others develop skills due to being part of this co-design process?

APPENDIX D: DRAFT RUBRIC

Background

What is a rubric?

A rubric is a tool that helps us to assess something – in this case, the quality of co-design at the NDIA. A rubric needs a set of criteria (things that are important for the quality of co-design) and a set of standards (ratings to help us assess the criteria).

A rubric should help to create a shared understanding about what matters for good co-design. It should facilitate conversation, reflection, and learning about co-design efforts at the Agency and generate action and improvements.

As part of the evaluation, we conducted a literature review of co-design best practices. The literature review informed the development of a set of processes and outcome standards. These standards identify the conditions that need to be in place for good co-design. We have used these standards as the basis of the criteria for the rubric. This means that the rubric focuses on ensuring that there is an enabling environment for co-design. The rubric can be applied across the Agency or within specific co-design projects.

The draft rubric was presented to the Co-Design Advisory Group (CAG) for feedback in mid-October 2024. The group broadly agreed with the proposed criteria but felt that they need clarifying and defining in greater detail. The NDIA will continue to take this forward with the CAG and other stakeholders.

We have provided a generic set of ratings that can be applied across the criteria. The NDIA could choose to develop individual and specific ratings for each criteria, which would help to develop a greater shared understanding of what good looks like.

Criteria and sub-criteria for co-design at the NDIA

Generic rating scale

Not yet present	Emerging	Embedded	Excelling
Initial work has been undertaken but there is no clear evidence that this aspect is in place. There are important areas that need to be addressed.	There is some evidence of development taking place in this area. There are still some important areas for improvement.	There is evidence that the implementation and performance in this area is generally strong and is meeting the shared expectations of stakeholders.	This area is embedded in the culture, systems and processes of the NDIA (where appropriate) and there is evidence that it is contributing to valued outcomes.

Process criteria

Power sharing

Criteria	What will this criteria look at?
Authorising environment	Clear information about the authorising environment for co-design.
Leadership	The role of senior leadership in overseeing co-design.
Accountability	How the Agency is accountable for the decisions and outputs generated in co-design.
Oversight	The role of governance in oversight of co-design projects.

Transparency

Criteria	What will this criteria look at?
Shared understanding	Clear definitions of the scope, purpose and limits of co-design.
Communication	Communication approach and strategy.

Relational

Criteria	What will this criteria look at?
Engagement	Approach to the engagement of community members for co-design work.
Collaboration	Approaches to building trust and relationships among stakeholders (inc. partners).
Delivery	Processes and tools for the facilitation and delivery of co-design.

Equitable

Criteria	What will this criteria look at?
Inclusive	Trauma-informed, safe and inclusive approaches are embedded.
Capacity building	Approach to building the capacity of stakeholder groups to participate in co-design.
Diversity	Working with diverse groups.

Outcomes criteria

Generative outcomes

Criteria	What will this criteria look at?
Reflection	Reflection and learning processes in co-design
Feedback	How feedback to community members and stakeholders takes place
Output	The outputs that will be generated

Transformative outcomes

Criteria	What will this criteria look at?
Outcomes	The expected outcomes of the co-design process.
Benefits	How community members will benefit from participation.
Human Rights	Contribution of co-design to UNCRPD.

Rubric for co-design at the NDIA

The rubric can be applied across the Agency or within specific co-design projects

			Not yet present	Emerging	Embedded	Excelling
Themes	Criteria	Description (NB. These have been provided as concepts to be refined into more detailed descriptions by the NDIA)	<i>There is no clear evidence that this aspect is in place. There are important areas that need to be addressed.</i>	<i>There is some evidence of development taking place in this area. There are still some important areas for improvement.</i>	<i>There is evidence that the implementation and performance in this area is generally strong and is meeting the shared expectations of stakeholders.</i>	<i>This area is embedded in the culture, systems and processes (where appropriate) and there is evidence that it is contributing to valued outcomes.</i>
Power-sharing	Authorising environment	Clear information about the authorising environment for co-design.				
	Leadership	The role of senior leadership in overseeing co-design.				
	Accountability	How the Agency is accountable for the decisions and outputs generated in co-design.				
	Oversight	The role of governance in oversight of co-design projects.				
Transparency	Shared understanding	Clear definitions of the scope, purpose and limits of co-design.				
	Communication	Communication approach and strategy.				
Relational	Engagement	Approach to the engagement of community members for co-design work.				
	Collaboration	Approaches to building trust and relationships among stakeholders (inc. partners).				
	Delivery	Processes and tools for the facilitation and delivery of co-design.				

Equitable	Inclusive	Trauma-informed, safe and inclusive approaches are embedded.				
	Capacity building	Approach to building the capacity of stakeholder groups to participate in co-design.				
	Diversity	Strategy for working with diverse groups.				
Generative	Reflection	Reflection and learning processes in co-design.				
	Feedback	How feedback to community members and stakeholders takes place.				
	Outputs	The outputs that will be generated.				
Transformative	Outcomes	The expected outcomes of the co-design process.				
	Benefits	How community members will benefit from participation.				
	Human Rights	Contribution of co-design to UNCRPD.				