

# Co-design and Co-production

## Innovation in service design and delivery

*More than a Haircut: The Barbershop Project engages Afro-Caribbean fathers in facilitated conversations in barbershops in Toronto's Eglinton Oakwood neighbourhood. Trained fathers facilitate monthly dialogues on various topics to promote positive father involvement in child development. Barber 'hosts' acquire skills and knowledge to act as an informal resource for Afro-Caribbean fathers between sessions. The project was initiated to counter-act the many negative stories about black fathers portrayed in mass media. It was designed and is delivered by Macaulay Child Development Centre in collaboration with barbers and community leaders.*

Staff at Macaulay describe this project as community collaboration, but it illustrates many of the characteristics and benefits of 'co-design' and 'co-production'. These approaches involve working *WITH* citizens in a community to design and deliver/produce services they need.

### Co-design and co-production approaches can generate:

- ✓ **innovative solutions:** piggy-backing onto natural gathering places (vs. services delivered in organizational spaces)... using community barbershops as an innovative approach to reach fathers
- ✓ **better access:** the engagement of community assets... such as barbers and their barbershops... can expand the availability of services in a community
- ✓ **better results:** services informed by service users and those with lived experience... such as black community leaders... are often more responsive to end-users' realities and consequently address their needs more effectively
- ✓ **more resilient communities:** characterized by greater capacity, engagement, inclusion, and connection... among fathers in the community.

The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI), an organization that has pioneered innovative co-design and co-production initiatives, notes that the 'co' refers to collaboration and community; while 'design' refers to the use of design principles (*see sidebar*). The 'production' in co-production refers to the engagement of community assets – i.e. community members' time, talent and resources – in the delivery of programs, services or supports.

Non-profit organizations attempting to address today's complex social problems are constantly being asked to do more with less. In such an environment, innovation and creativity are not options, but imperatives. At the same time, there appears to be a growing appetite for participation among community

### Think like a Designer\*

- **See everything as an experiment:** make projects iterative, open-ended and reflexive; "fail early to succeed sooner" – Tim Brown, CEO, IDEO
- **Challenge the status quo:** reframe the questions you ask to ensure you're solving the right problem; keep asking 'why...?'; imagine a different future by asking 'what if...?' and 'how might we...?'
- **Be concrete:** build physical or virtual prototypes when developing a solution – e.g. map service journeys to identify the multiple interactions between service users and service providers in a system
- **Value the citizen:** view people's relationships not as a constraint, but as a valuable resource; design is concerned with people, practices and their context

\*Note: Adapted from *Leading Public Sector Innovation*.

members young and old. Many of the non-profit organizations we work with are trying to find ways to respond to stakeholders who are interested in becoming more actively involved in the organization's work.

**We see co-design and co-production as approaches organizations can use to respond to community members' desire for greater engagement; craft innovative solutions; leverage underutilized resources; and build social capital.**

## PRINCIPLES IN CO-DESIGN AND CO-PRODUCTION PROCESSES

Christian Bason, Director of Innovation at Denmark's MindLab<sup>1</sup>, another thought leader on co-design, suggests the benefits of creating solutions *with* people, rather than *for* them include the divergent and new thinking that comes from engaging citizens in the design and innovation process. Bason outlines three principles for organizations wanting to take a co-design or co-production approach.

**Shift your focus to strengths:** rather than trying to deliver services to address the immediate needs of individuals experiencing a problem (e.g. seniors with dementia or people experiencing food insecurity), shift your focus to the individual's assets and strengths and consider how they could be engaged in problem-solving. Or focus on those members of the individual's network who may be willing and well-positioned to help, but who may need some encouragement, guidance or training to do so. In creating its Southwark Circle Project, a membership organization that helps community members "take care of household tasks, forge social connections and find new directions in life", Participle consultants asked, "*How can a locality mobilize public, private, voluntary and community resources to help all older people define and create quality of life and well-being for themselves?*"

**Engage community assets:** identify available resources in the community that could be used in the design or production of services and supports. Do an inventory and consider how you might make use of underutilized or abandoned spaces in the community such as schools, parks and public buildings. Consider how members of an individual's social network – their family, friends, or neighbours – might contribute. How could you engage their social, intellectual or financial capital to co-design or deliver services? TACSI's Family BY Family program is an Australian network of families helping other families make the changes they want to make so they can thrive. Many community members are looking for opportunities to give back and connect in their community – this may be particularly true of recently retired and highly skilled baby boomers; new grads eager to apply their knowledge and acquire experience; and people with some form of disability who are not always invited to participate.

**Facilitate and create spaces/platforms:** rather than doing everything internally, consider how your organization might create spaces for community members to work together, learn from and support one another. These spaces may be physical (e.g. festivals, meetings, conferences) or virtual (e.g. online forums, webinars). Probus clubs, which were initiated and sponsored by Rotary to help retired and semi-retired people connect and remain active in their communities,

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1. MindLab is a cross-ministerial innovation unit within the Danish government that involves citizens and businesses in developing new solutions for the public sector. Their Director, Christian Bason, spoke at MaRS in 2011 and subsequently met with the Ontario government to discuss the potential of co-creation in public services. His presentation is available online (see resources at end).

are a good example of such a platform which facilitates self-organization. Rotary members approach retired community members and assist them in establishing a Probus club in their community. Once established, Rotary’s involvement is reduced as Probus club members assume leadership of the club. Club members volunteer to host different groups based on their interest and skills - some might teach woodcarving, lead hikes or organize trips to the theatre. Monthly club meetings provide an opportunity for members to connect; some clubs arrange for guest speakers to present on community or global issues of interest to members.

**TRANSITIONING TO CO-DESIGN AND CO-PRODUCTION**

Lucie Stephens, Head of Co-production in the Social Policy team at the new economics foundation (nef) in the UK, presented the grid below at a recent Toronto session to illustrate how services can be designed and delivered in different ways: through a professional, together (i.e. co-production), or citizen-driven model. One advantage of the co-production approach is the opportunities it offers for knowledge exchange between professionals and service users. Many service approaches are situated in the grey areas around these three models.

DELIVERED BY	DESIGNED BY		
	Professional	Together	Citizens
Professional <i>(designed and delivered by paid staff in the public or non-profit sector)</i>	City gardens Hospitals and ‘institutions’ Daycare services		
Together <i>(designed and delivered by organizations and citizens working together)</i>		Community gardens <i>(cultivated by organizations and citizens)</i> Mental Health Healing Networks <i>(organized peer support)</i> Co-op daycares <i>(parents work shifts)</i>	
Citizens <i>(designed and delivered by citizens)</i>			Guerrilla gardening People living with and supported by their family in the community Informal daycare network

Over the years various public services have shifted from a public service, professionally designed and delivered model to a co-production model that engages community energy and assets in the design and delivery of services. For example, when institutions housing people with disabilities were closed by the government, some of the individuals transitioned into semi-independent living arrangements in the community. Community Living St.Marys and Area’s

“Share a Home” program is an example of how one community responded to this challenge: today several individuals with disabilities live with other community members as part of an extended family. In Toronto, some city parks have made space for community gardens or are being shaped by active community groups. Friends of Dufferin Grove Park is a community group that animates the park by hosting popular events (e.g. Friday night suppers, a theatre and cooking festival, and arts programs) that attract people from all over the city. The group’s participation in the park has evolved over time through negotiation with the City’s Parks and Recreation department.

**If you think the work you’re doing requires fresh thinking and could benefit from greater community involvement, that’s a great place to start** – whether you have a persistent problem that needs solving or an existing service you want to redesign.

**Addressing a persistent problem:**

*The Family BY Family project was initiated by The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI) as a way to help families thrive and reduce the number of families going into crisis. TACSI worked with families to co-design*

*the project which helps families set goals, move forward and thrive. This is a good example of co-production, since families who have been through tough times are trained by professional coaches as the primary deliverers of the service. In addition to reducing demand for government services, this project recognizes and engages community assets, reduces social isolation, and builds social capital.*

**Getting Started\***

- **Catalyze and convene:** bring others who have an interest in the issue together
- **Share leadership:** work with community members as equal partners... their lived experience and personal expertise will complement staff skills
- **Foster reciprocity:** build mechanisms for exchange into the process so that everyone gives and takes
- **Acquire or develop skills:** in community-based research and design thinking.

\*Note: Adapted from “Co-production. A manifesto for growing the core economy”

Prior to initiating the Family BY Family (FbyF) network, TACSI recognized that the services and supports the government offered to families in crisis, such as moving their children into care, were costly and delivered less than optimal results. Their quest for a better solution began with community-based research with families. The research, which involved meetings with families in their homes; hosting a family festival; spending time with families in the community; and the exchange of stories between families, enabled TACSI to identify practices used by families that *were* thriving. The co-design effort began with the development and testing of a concept, “Family Exchange”, aimed at helping families develop these thriving behaviours. Based on feedback from families the design was revised, tested again and further refined into what became FbyF. At this stage a preliminary vision, mission, theory of change, beliefs and the more clearly defined FbyF process were shared with practitioners and funders. TACSI then developed a prototype to pilot the concept with a small number of families. This iterative, “try and refine” approach typifies the co-design process.

**Evolving what you have:**

If your organization has a service or program that isn’t having as much impact as you hoped, start by spending time with the people who use your services to better understand their lived reality (e.g. interview people in their environments). This will help you more clearly define the problem and identify individual strengths and community assets. After doing so, engage

interested service users in workshops to explore how to adapt the program to better meet their needs – e.g. test hypotheses, ask for ideas, and identify lead users. As you uncover innovative ideas about how to improve the program, expand engagement – e.g. use a survey to solicit feedback and suggestions from more users. Once your solution is further developed create pilot projects (prototypes) to engage select service users in testing and refining the solution.

## CO-DESIGN AND CO-PRODUCTION PAST AND PRESENT

These approaches have emerged in response to a number of forces: the global economic recession forcing the government in the United Kingdom to make significant cuts to social services funding; “nothing about us without us” movements in the mental health and developmental sector communities reinforcing the desire service users have to participate in decision-making; and informed, motivated citizens becoming more vocal in calling for better solutions. Although Ontario’s austerity agenda has not led to the dramatic funding cuts seen in the UK, organizations are expected to do more with less – which means doing differently.

Like many developed countries, Canadians have come to expect a lot from public services – most of us rely on government for our health care, education and many other social needs. Over the years a robust non-profit and charitable sector has emerged to address gaps left by government, or in some cases to deliver services on behalf of government. Many of these non-profit organizations *began* as a group of concerned citizens trying to resolve a social issue for a specific group of people... often people they were close to. These groups tended to be intimately familiar with the problem and its effect on people, and drew on any available resources to experiment to find what works. Their experiments often led to the development of successful solutions; solutions were often scaled up and groups became more professional in their approach. In some cases this led to the formation of a non-profit organization, the hiring of staff and the pursuit and acquisition of funding.

Governments at all levels are in deficit positions today and non-profit organizations are increasingly competing for fewer funds. Organizations are forced to seek efficiencies, alternative sources of resources and funding. For many organizations, community assets may represent untapped or underutilized resources – in the form of social, intellectual and financial capital. Collaborating more closely with community members – from different generations with different perspectives and experiences – can spur new thinking and innovation.

## AUTHORS

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online: [www.vision-management.ca](http://www.vision-management.ca)



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## LEARN MORE

### Program Examples

More than a Haircut: The Barbershop Project – The Macaulay Child Development Centre, Toronto [http://www.macaulaycentre.org/barbershop\\_project.html](http://www.macaulaycentre.org/barbershop_project.html)

Share a Home – Community Living St.Marys and Area, St.Marys, Ontario  
<http://www.communitylivingstmarys.com/shareahome.html>

Friends of Dufferin Grove Park – Toronto <http://dufferinpark.ca/home/wiki/wiki.php>

Probus clubs – international <http://www.probus.org/>

Family BY Family – TASCII, Australia <http://familybyfamily.org.au/>

The Circle Movement – Participle, UK <http://www.participle.net/projects/view/5/101/> and Southward Circle project: <http://www.southwarkcircle.org.uk/>

Washington Youth Court – Washington, USA <http://youthcourtofdc.org/>

### Recommended Reading & Viewing

*Building communities from the inside out. A path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets.* John P. Kretzman and John L. McKnight. ACTA Publications, 1993.

“Co-production. A manifesto for growing the core economy”, Lucie Stephens, Josh Ryan-Collins and David Boyle, new economics foundation, 2008. Available from nef website (see below).

“Design thinking for social innovation”, by Tim Brown & Jocelyn Wyatt. Stanford Social Innovation Review, Winter 2010.

“Design Thinking”, by Tim Brown. Harvard Business Review, June 2008.

*Leading public sector innovation. Co-creating for a better society.* Christian Bason. The Policy Press, 2010. Author's 2011 presentation at MaRS on the co-design of public services (*video*): <http://www.sigeneration.ca/christian-bason-on-mindlab-and-professional-empathy/>

“Public services inside out. Putting co-production into practice”, David Boyle, Julia Slay and Lucie Stephens. Nef, The LAB and Nesta. 2010.

The cheap all-terrain wheelchair - Stakeholder-driven design. Amos Winter's Ted talk (*video*): [http://www.ted.com/talks/amos\\_winter\\_the\\_cheap\\_all\\_terrain\\_wheelchair.html?quote=1965](http://www.ted.com/talks/amos_winter_the_cheap_all_terrain_wheelchair.html?quote=1965)

### Organizations fostering Co-Design and Co-Production

MindLab, Denmark: <http://www.mind-lab.dk/en>

new economics foundation (nef), UK <http://www.neweconomics.org/>

The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI), Australia <http://www.tacsi.org.au/>