

SUPPORTING YOU TO PARTICIPATE IN CODESIGN

This document was created to help you better understand and participate in codesign. It was developed by practitioners and researchers experienced in codesign, with insights gained from older Australians.

What is Codesign?

Codesign is a new mode of public participation in government policy making that aims to genuinely create some “thing” with participants, in order to help address their actual needs or problems. Codesign may be applied to the development of policies, programs, services, products - anything that can benefit from input and insights from people who will use the actual “thing” or final product.

Goodwill and open minds, from everyone involved, are essential for meaningful and effective codesign (or collaboration in general). Without this, the process will likely fail to generate solutions that genuinely meet participant needs and interests.

Like all forms of consultation and engagement, codesign should be:

1. **Authentic** and accountable to improving outcomes through collaboration
2. **Inclusive** and supportive, seeking input from the relevant people or perspectives
3. **Transparent** so you understand your influence and how your contributions are used

The reason to use codesign is to help ensure that the “thing” being created is useful for those it is intended for and that they are invested in its success. A key part of the codesigner’s job is to decide what aspects of the “thing” will be the focus of codesign, and when. Even within a codesign project, not everything will be up for change - some elements will be simply beyond scope of the project e.g.: minister’s authorisation, budget allocation, etc. In addition, not all parts of the problem will require codesign.

A key feature of codesign is providing the opportunity for all parties, who have an interest in the “thing”, to interact directly, with the support of people with lived experience, subject matter experts, designers and trained facilitators. It connects those with insight and interests with those who are developing and making decisions, helping them all to build a shared and robust understanding of not just the solutions, but the underlying problem as well.



Who Is Involved

Ultimately, who is involved, when and why should be carefully thought through by those leading the codesign process - it is not always an "all in from the start" approach. The contribution of perspectives and interests will typically be sequenced to support the subject matter's various topics, or to build a progressive picture of the problem and solution. Codesign projects are typically quite complex, and sequencing engagement (especially managing participation numbers) can be key to not overwhelming the process. Communicating this to participants and where you are in the project can aid their understanding of the reason they are attending and their ability to contribute what is most important.

What Happens

The particular codesign techniques used in a project or workshop can vary greatly, depending on the design challenge, the stage the project is in, or the needs and interests of those participating. Common activities include problem definition, generating ideas or solutions, prioritising, assessing risks or opportunities or spotting gaps in knowledge or ideas. While these activities are most commonly delivered as part of interactive workshops (whiteboards, sticky notes, pens and paper) it is also common to gain these insights through other means like video conferencing, small group / one-on-one interviews, or prototype testing (testing a draft version of the thing being created). In addition, supporting research activities might also be used (surveys, discussion papers, focus groups) especially to help build foundational knowledge in the early stages of a codesign project.

Should I Participate?

Codesign projects are always complex and involve many elements. Due to the need for goodwill as mentioned above, participants need to carefully consider their involvement, so they can feel comfortable, bring the right mindset and understand what they are being asked to contribute. Key to deciding if and how to participate, is developing an understanding of the bigger picture and how you are contributing to the development of the final 'thing'. Doing this requires further research and sometimes conversation. The following provides the key topics to explore and some example questions you might ask.

1. Outcomes & Contributions

- ▶ Understand: Why you are being asked to participate and how this influences the final result.
- ▶ Ask: "What outcome are you delivering and to who? How will you benefit from my participation and how might I? What is on and off the table? Am I participating as an individual (for my own experience or insights), or as a representative of a group or perspective?"

2. People & Process

- ▶ Understand: What the overall process is and who is involved.
- ▶ Ask: "What is the bigger picture government or policy process, and how does the current step fit in? Who has been / will be involved in the current and later steps? Are there opportunities to be reimbursed and/or remunerated for my time and contribution?"

3. Your Interests & Support

- ▶ Understand: How your interests will be served and protected. How you will be supported to attend and contribute.
- ▶ Ask: "How might I benefit from participation, or those I represent? Will I get access to other participant contributions and the final result? Will my contributions be published publicly and/or de-identified, who will they be shared with? Is participation online or in-person and is there wheel-chair access / other support available (including for technology)? What kind of activities will I be involved in?"

Tips To Remember

Start the conversation by asking your highest priority questions, then follow up with more detail after you get the conversation started.

Stay focused on maintaining goodwill while trying to understand the overall codesign focus and process.

Be sure to consciously and actively decide to participate (or not) - it's your choice! Codesign can be intensive, so you should feel valued and valuable to the final result.