
Collaborative Governance

for Community-Led Change

Report prepared by
Regenerative Communities
for Hands Up Mallee
June 2024

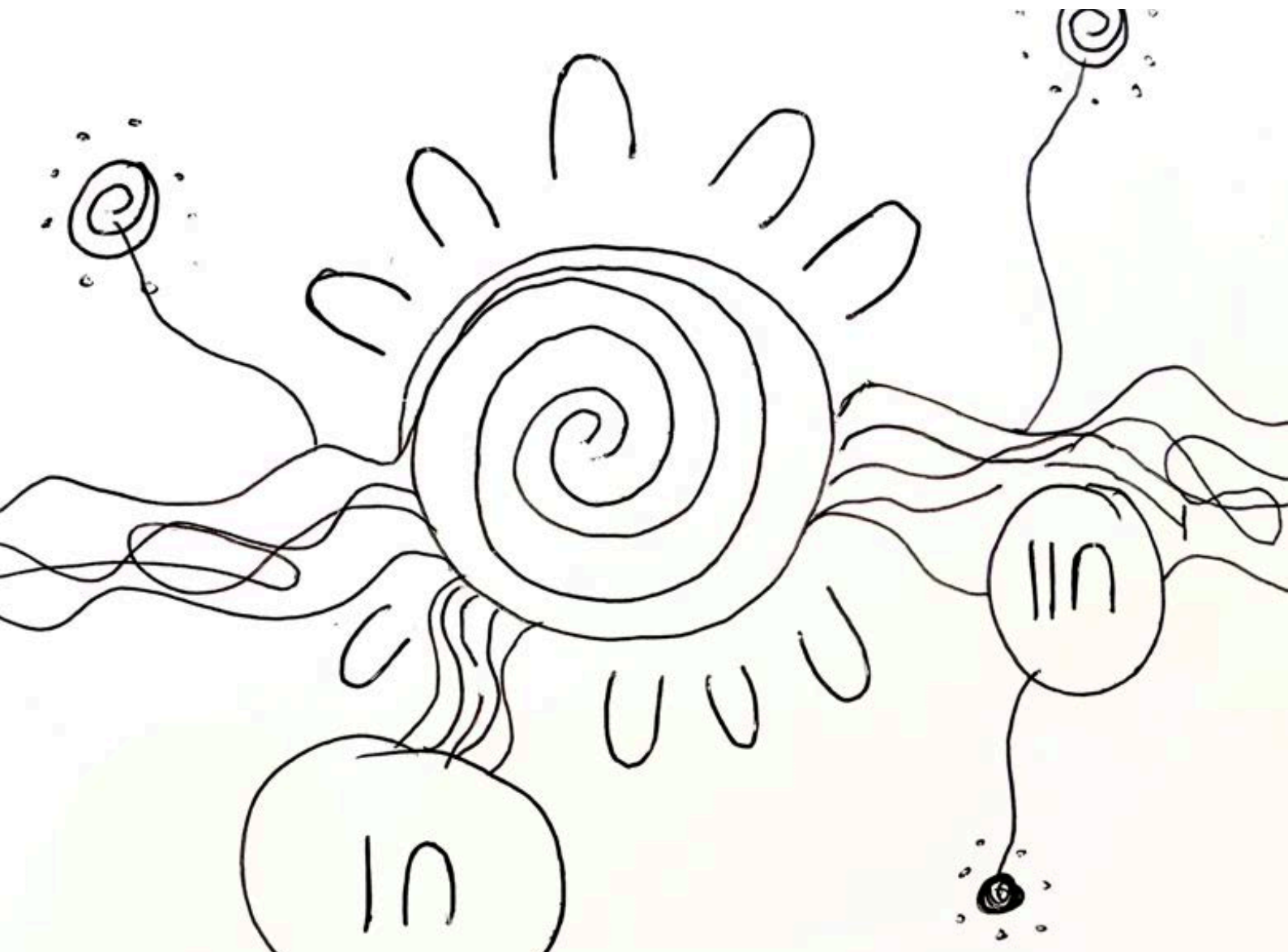


ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the First People of the Millewa Mallee as the Traditional Owners of the land where we work, live and play. We also acknowledge the Barkindji people. We acknowledge all Countries on which we live, and the Peoples that have cared for them for tens of thousands of years.

We pay our respects to past and present Traditional Owners and Elders of these lands and to young leaders today.

We value Aboriginal leadership, governance and kin structures and wish to respectfully learn from them.



TIMELINE

CONTENTS

JUN 22	Co-design group	Background	Pg 1
NOV 22	External Facilitator	Regenerative Communities	Pg 2
DEC 22	Recruitment 1	Recruiting to Reflect Community	Pg 3
FEB 23	Workshop 1	Will, Being and Function	Pg 5
MAR 23	Monthly meetings	Creating an Environment for Collaboration	Pg 7
JUL 23	Journey Map	Finding our Feet	Pg 9
AUG 23	Recruitment 2	Unpacking Diversity & Inclusion	Pg 10
OCT 23	Cultural Day	Walking in our Footsteps	Pg 12
FEB 24	Workshop 2	How our thinking is changing	Pg 14
		Refining the Foundational Work	Pg 15
MAY 24	Evaluation	Reflective Practice	Pg 19
		Most Significant Change	Pg 21

BACKGROUND

**JUN
22**

Co-design group

Hands Up Mallee (HUM) is a collective impact initiative based in the Northern Mallee region of Victoria. HUM was created to bring local leaders and the community together to address social issues and improve health and well-being outcomes for children, young people and their families.

HUM is a unique collective impact initiative, and requires a unique approach to governance, vision holding and strategic decision making that aligns to the community-led values of the initiative.

Over the years HUM found that traditional governance models couldn't deliver the kinds of support and guidance that HUM needed to maximise their impact.

They believed that an alternative model of governance, co-designed in partnership with community, would be a high leverage transformational part of the change HUM are seeking in their collective impact initiative.

From January to June 2022 a number of community members and Hands Up Mallee network members worked on co-designing a new approach to governance, facilitated by The Australian Center for Social Innovation (TACSI).

The outcomes of that work was documented in a report which detailed the proposed model for collaborative governance, and guidance on how to test and improve the model over time.

People involved in the co-design were Patsy Doolan, Nikita Hart, Kate Roberts, Cheree Jukes, Martin Hawson, Simone Heald, Jane McCracken, Catherine Thompson and Fiona Merlin.

REGENERATIVE COMMUNITIES

NOV
22

External Facilitator

In November 2022 Rhae Kendrigan, Director of local social enterprise Regenerative Communities, was approached to become the external facilitator for the formation of a new Collaborative Governance Group (CGG) for HUM.

HUM were looking for a person with local knowledge, deep care for our community and a unique approach to facilitating emerging processes.

Regenerative Communities is an independent community development service which offers a regenerative approach to research, planning and project management.

Three members of the co-design group- Patsy Doolan, Kate Roberts and Nikita Hart continued on to work alongside Rhae to bring the project to life, using the TACSI report as a guide and starting point for our approach.

EXTERNAL FACILITATOR RHAЕ KENDRIGAN

Rhae is passionate about building strong rural and regional communities through embracing diversity, developing kinship with our natural resources and creating localised economies. Rhae has worked for grassroots community activists, not for profit organisations and local government on a wide variety of projects including community development, event management, creative production, project management and strategic planning.



RECRUITING TO REFLECT COMMUNITY

NOV
22

Yarning Circle

Rhae, Patsy, Kate and Nikita met to discuss how we wanted to approach recruitment for the CGG. We aimed to design a process which was accessible to a range of people, felt welcoming, and moved away from a formal approaches such as lengthy written applications, skills audits and one-on-one interviews.

We wanted to create a group that was reflective of the people HUM served. Rather than seeking executives and highly experienced board members, we were interested to find out who was out there in the community who may be interested in the role. People who had the right motivations, and the capacity to learn and grow alongside us.

An information pack was developed outlining what had happened so far, why we wanted a collaborative approach, and what the group would do. Expressions of Interest were invited via email, over the phone or at the HUM office. We asked people to tell us their community experience, what they can give to the group and what they would like to get from being in the group.

We advertised via the local newspaper, social media, radio, but mostly through our networks in the local community. Applicants were invited to attend a group 'Yarning Circle' in to find out more about the project and for us to meet them.



The Yarning Circle was an informal environment, with a series of facilitated discussions that aimed to show us how applicants engaged in a group setting and what motivated them to apply. Topics included identifying our shared values, lived experiences and community concerns. We had an artist interpreter drawing our conversation for engaging, visual communication.

The new CGG members were selected using an intuitive process of discussing the strengths of each applicant. We then looked at how they interacted with the group, their diverse perspectives and lived experiences, to choose a balanced final CGG.

Each applicant received a personal phone call with positive feedback and notification of their result. During these calls we received a lot of comments about how comfortable people felt in the Yarning Circle and how enjoyable the session was.

Nine EOI's were received and we recruited four new members, as well as a representative from HUM's auspicing partners- Mildura Rural City Council and Sunraysia Community Health Services. We ensured that each person recruited understood that they join the group as an individual, community representative. Any one with formal roles or positions of authority in local organisations was to bring their experience to the table, but not be representing who they work for.

New recruits: Simone Heald, Finley Hopely-Willcock, Rowena Keenan, Sara McClelland, Stedman Watts, Liam Wood.



WILL, BEING AND FUNCTION

FEB
23

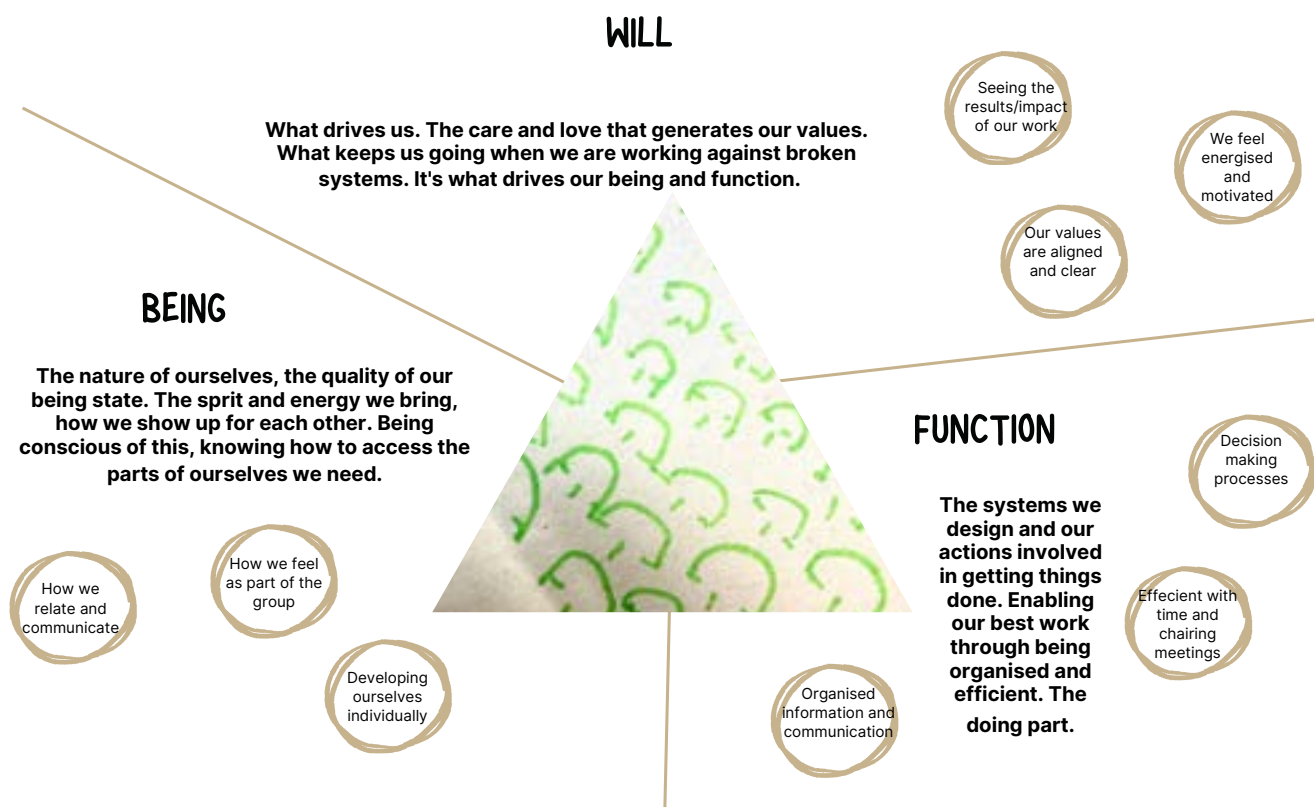
Workshop 1

We started off 2023 with a full day workshop in which all CGG members participated, along with the EO of HUM. The workshop was held at a local property with extensive native gardens. Rhae designed a day which included:

- Grounding/reflective activities such as walking, meditation, collective reading and movement.
- Using a regenerative framework of Will-Being-Function to build a foundation for the governance model
- A shared meal of local, nutritious food supplied by social enterprise Out of the Box Sunraysia

The shared aim was to get to know each other beyond the surface level. We delved into new ways of connecting to build empathy. Coming into the workshop there were a lot of unknowns - we felt intrigued, vulnerable and even uncomfortable. But as the day unfolded we really immersed in the environment and activities. It was surprising how quickly we were able to connect with each other and feel present and grounded. We left feeling optimistic, intentional and excited for the work to come.





Will-Being-Function framework developed by Regenesi Institute with HUM CGG indicators.

The premise behind the framework is that will, being and function need to be equally considered as we develop ourselves and the systems we engage with. When all three work in balance, we are more whole in how we approach what we want to do. If any one of them drops out, the others can decline. When they are out of balance, our perspective is distorted and we risk becoming ineffectual. The results of our workshop included:

Being: *Creating a set of 'Being' statements:*

We practiced listening to each other and the environment, then described what it felt like to truly listen, to be heard, and what we need to access within ourselves to create this state. From here we created a set of statements around how we want to 'be' together in this group.

Will: *Tapping into our Will to create values and principles:*

Reflecting on a collective reading *Message from the Nguura Palya* by Ambelin Kwaymullina, and using the work of the co- design group, refining our Values and Principles.

Function: *Setting our flow through meeting agendas and timelines:*

We discussed how we wanted to meet together and what is important about the timing, the environment, and how we make decisions together.

CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT FOR COLLABORATION

MAR
23

Monthly Meetings

We discovered the environment we meet in and how we set up the space is really important to foster the kind of work we are doing. The environment influences the way we relate to each other- therefore we aim to use meeting venues where we can create a comfortable space. Being away from an office setting, having no tables between us, a variety of seating options, adjustable lighting and good food all make for a more accessible and welcoming space. There are no expectations around how we dress and sitting/laying on the floor or standing/moving when needed is accepted.

We set monthly meeting dates for the year ahead. The agenda and meeting papers are sent out a week prior with written or audio introductions. Meetings run for two hours with a short break if needed, to allow for ample time to discuss agenda items. Our format is to arrive fifteen minutes early to make a cuppa, chat and settle in. Meetings start and finish on time. We share the responsibility of acknowledging Country by taking turns each month. There is designated time at the end of each meeting to ensure we evaluate.

The first fifteen minutes at the start of the meeting is dedicated to a grounding activity led by Rhae such as a meditation, breath work or nature connection activity. The grounding activities have become an integral part of our monthly meetings, demonstrating our commitment to approaching governance in a new way.



FACILITATOR REFLECTION

The way this group has come together and operates is collaborative and responsive in its nature, so that means we are part of something new and we all have a role in co-creating it. We are designing as we go, so we need to be comfortable with not having the answers at times. I am not a governance expert, my role is to support the design and hold space for processes to emerge. I am trained in practises that are emerging and unique, and offer regenerative frameworks to support our thinking.

I like that no matter where you come from, we're all heard. I feel quite honoured to be part of the group and I think it's because what the group stands for. I love that I can say I'm a part of a group that are moving forward by listening to what the community need. We are actually and listening and saying okay, this is what they need to make change in the best interest of them.

-Sara McClelland

It's just a different dynamic. The way it operates is different to what I'm used to, which is refreshing. It is a different way of learning or looking at things. What do I get from the group, to be honest, is that there's a sense of calm, it's kind of a bit of a refuge. it's been nice to be a part of the journey and learn a different way, which often doesn't happen in this day and age.

-Liam Wood

As a person, and an engaged community member, I felt very welcomed and safe in participating.

This is a bit of a different governance group. This whole process is seeing more of the humanity in each of the participants. I've been able to sit there in the moment and listen to each individual person that's offered their thoughts or experiences, and there's a lot more empathy.

-Sted Watts



**JUL
23**

In July 2023, six members of the HUM CGG were interviewed one on one by Rhae. We mapped their experience across the journey of the project, starting from recruitment to the present. A written report and visual story outlined the findings.

A key learning from the Journey Map was that the group felt we were 'still in the formation stage.' There was still so much to learn about HUM and at times it was difficult to feel our purpose/role was clear. Developing an alternative governance approach from traditional styles comes with unknowns and challenges that take time to work through. HUM itself is a unique initiative with different needs to other organisations.

We also reflected on how our thinking has been developing over time, if our ways of thinking are supported and our questions explored. We discussed the future, and what we hope will have changed as a result of the group working together to support HUM. We wanted to capture the potential of the group, to help us stay connected to our will.

We acknowledged there is something unique about these people, coming together at this particular time, in this particular place. We all give something special and receive in return, which generates a field of capacity building for all members.



UNPACKING DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

AUG
23

Recruitment 2

During 2023, four governance group members resigned leaving us with six members, therefore a second round of recruitment was initiated to bring group numbers up. Building off the success of the first round, the second round of recruitment used the Yarning Circle model, this time led by three existing CGG members with Rhae's support.

We made improvements to the Expression of Interest document to be more visually engaging and the language simplified. We also unpacked how we communicated what we were looking for in potential members and why.

In the first recruitment round we listed the 'types' of diverse people we wanted to attract to the group in the EOI document. Concerns were raised by some group members around how that might feel to read as a person applying. How do we demonstrate that we genuinely want these people for the right reasons? So instead we discussed what needs people may have to participate, and what resources do we have to be able to provide for these needs?

Rather than recruiting to reach a set number we aimed for finding a balanced group. Eight EOIs were received and we welcomed five new members

New recruits: Benedict Baraka, Linda Henderson, Jarrod Lehman, Beltana Thomas, and Anna Vandermerwe.



FACILITATOR REFLECTION

At this stage our conversations around diversity and inclusion began to deepen as we questioned the way we were asking for diverse community members to apply. We withdrew the EOI document to make further improvements - although holding up the recruitment process it felt like important questions needed to be asked. We didn't want to just say we wanted diversity- we wanted to actively demonstrate why we value diversity and how we can support people's access needs. This was a key learning point for the group and myself, as I was learning to advocate for my own access and inclusion needs at the time.

How do we get the voices of people who maybe are carrying more, are more impacted by difficulties in the community or removed from the mainstream? Maybe they're going to be the harder people to support to stay with us. What would make it easier for people, what would support them?

-Rowena Keenan

It builds people in their skills, so they can move forward in their own kind of work and realm, they can feel a lot more comfortable in their skin, to do other things for community. It's a good chance to mould people to be those community leaders.

-Patsy Doolan

I'm really fascinated by people, and my lived experience with pain and my ability or disabilities. I'm constantly watching how humans react with their lives, because it's constantly re-evaluating how I live and how I conduct myself. I will never know what it's like to be most people. You can see half a dozen people they all have experienced the same sort of trauma. And you can have six different ways that they've dealt with it or grown through it.

-Sted Watts



WALKING IN OUR FOOTSTEPS

OCT
23

Cultural Day

HUM have a Voice Yarning Group which is made up of Aboriginal leaders from across our region. In October 2023 HUM's Aboriginal Social Impact Lead supported the Yarning Group to plan and guide a Cultural Learning experience on Country, for members of the HUM Backbone Team and CGG. The purpose of the Cultural Learning event was to deepen cultural understanding as well as strengthen connections across the HUM initiative.

We reflected on the European settlement of Australia through the eyes and stories of Traditional Owners; Uncle Warren Clarke, Uncle Peter Peterson, Auntie Jemmes Handy, Beltana Thomas and Auntie Ada Peterson who facilitated the Cultural Learning on Country.

The weekend started at the Canoe Tree Junction in Wentworth, where the Murray and Darling Rivers meet, for a Welcome to Country and smoking ceremony by Barkindji Elders Uncle Warren and Uncle Peter. We went for a nature walk to learn about scar trees, shell middens, native berries, coolamons and boundary trees.



We then travelled to Mungo National Park for a tour with Uncle Warren Clarke. Lake Mungo is home to the earliest modern human remains found in Australia, and possibly the world. We delved into the deep spiritual connections the Barkindji, Muthi Muthi, and Ngiyampaa (Nyampar) people have to the Willandra Lakes region.

The Yarning Group will continue to play a lead role in guiding cultural learning for the initiative in future. We are planning for our groups to meet together, engage in future activities and share our progress.



Hearing directly from the Elders about their own lives and experiences, and continuing practice of/living culture informed me particularly about living culturally today, and the practices that are still important in everyday life, not just historically, or as reintroduced practice to reclaim or relearn culture. I came away from our time On Country with such a sense of the enormous load carried by these Elders in caring and guiding their community, educating us (broader population) and constantly telling their stories of hardship and loss so that we finally (hopefully) get the message. What a huge and ongoing task!

-Rowena Keenan

HOW OUR THINKING IS CHANGING

FEB
24

Workshop 2

A second full day workshop kicked off 2024 with all members of the HUM CGG and the HUM EO, facilitated by Rhae. The workshop was held at the Cabarita Inc Community Hall overlooking Lake Hawthorn.

We reflected on the details in the landscape, particularly focusing on salt bushes and their role in the environment. Local foodie Deb from Floodplains and Food catered using 99.9% local ingredients.

As per the 2023 workshop, the day was structured around the Will-Being-Function framework. Much of the day was spent reviewing the foundational work that was developed during the first workshop and throughout the year:

- Being statements
- Values and Principles
- Cultural Commitments
- Evaluation
- Purpose statement



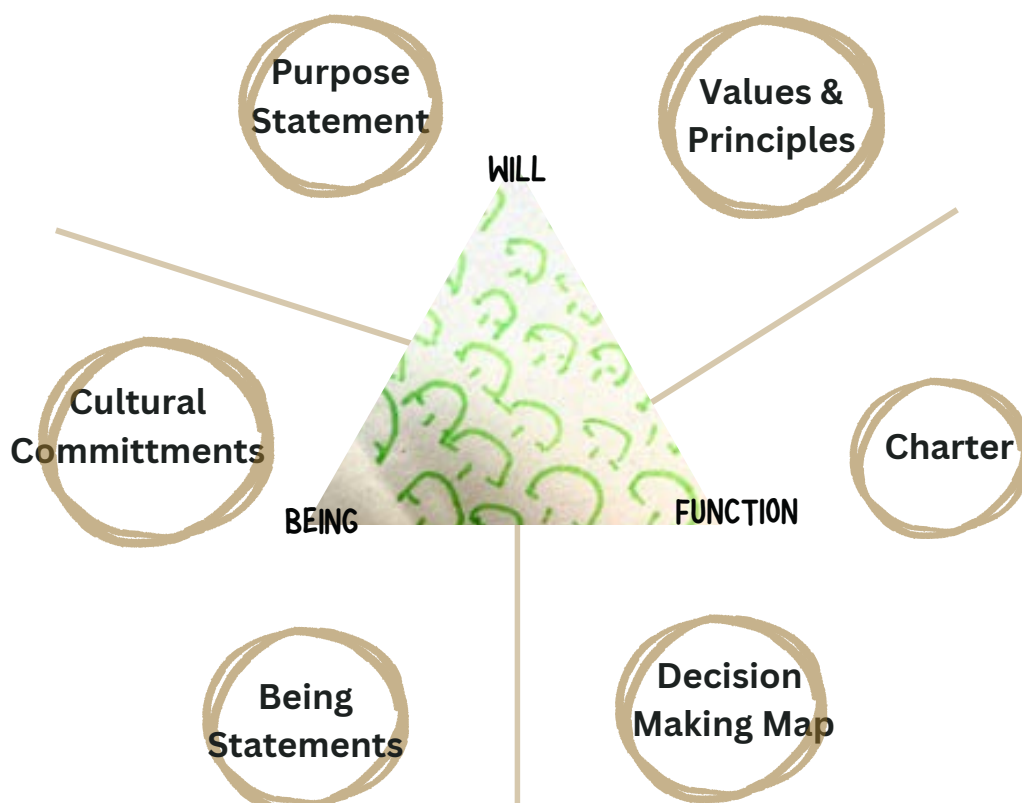
FACILITATOR REFLECTION

What became very evident during the workshop was just how much the thinking of the group had elevated over the course of the first 12 months together. Reflecting on things like values and principles and cultural commitments, they were critically analysing their own work from the previous year and making vast improvements in the language, deeply questioning the meaning behind each statement. I felt very confident at this stage that we had created an environment for inclusive and critical conversations.



REFINING THE FOUNDATIONAL WORK

Resulting from the workshop, six pieces of foundational work were refined. Referred to as emerging frameworks, they are alive documents - meaning they can be changed at any time to better reflect where the group are at. They are tools to use for reflection, refinement and growth.



WILL

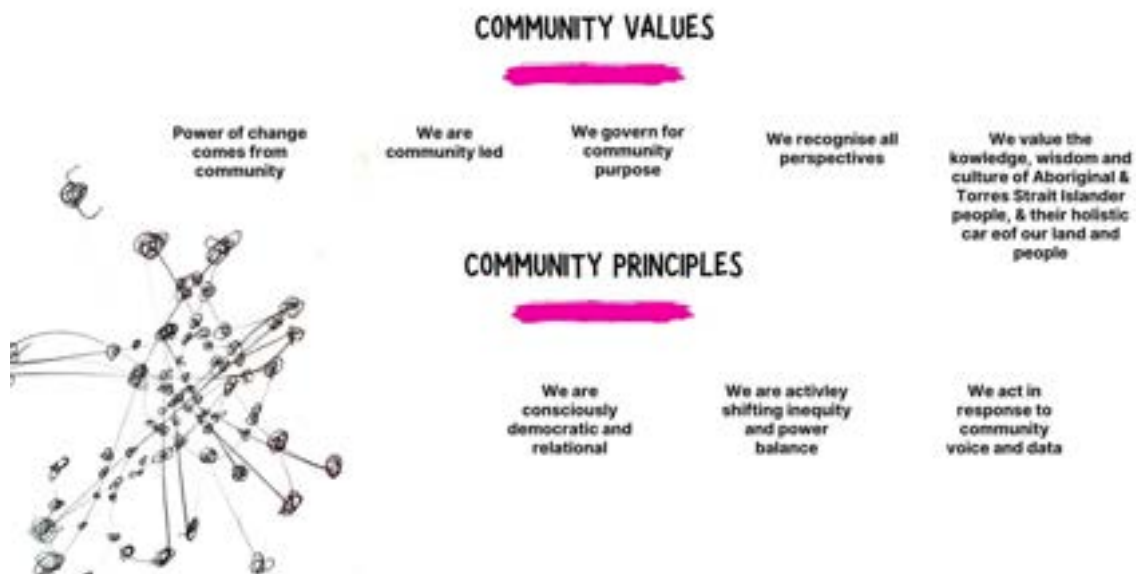
Purpose Statement

Using a nested model we looked at how the CGG is nested within HUM, who are nested within the community. We thought about what we are doing and the way we are doing it, in order to influence the change we want to see in the community.



Values and Principles

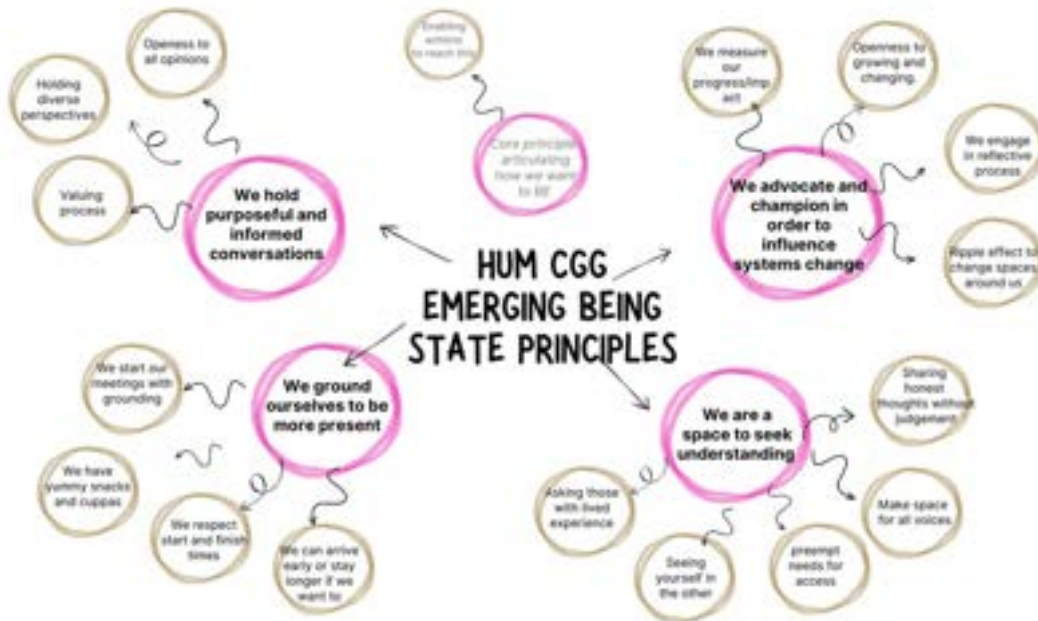
Starting with the work the co-design group did in early 2022, over time we have made adjustments to the values and principles, analysing where else they show up in the foundational work. Simplifying language to be more compelling, our current set is:



BEING

Being Statements

Our being statements tune into what we need to be true in order to create the quality of being within the group that we aim for. They are evolving statements that give us direction in how to approach our relationship to ourselves, each other and the work.



Developed from Dan Palmers Holistic Decision Making process

Cultural Commitments

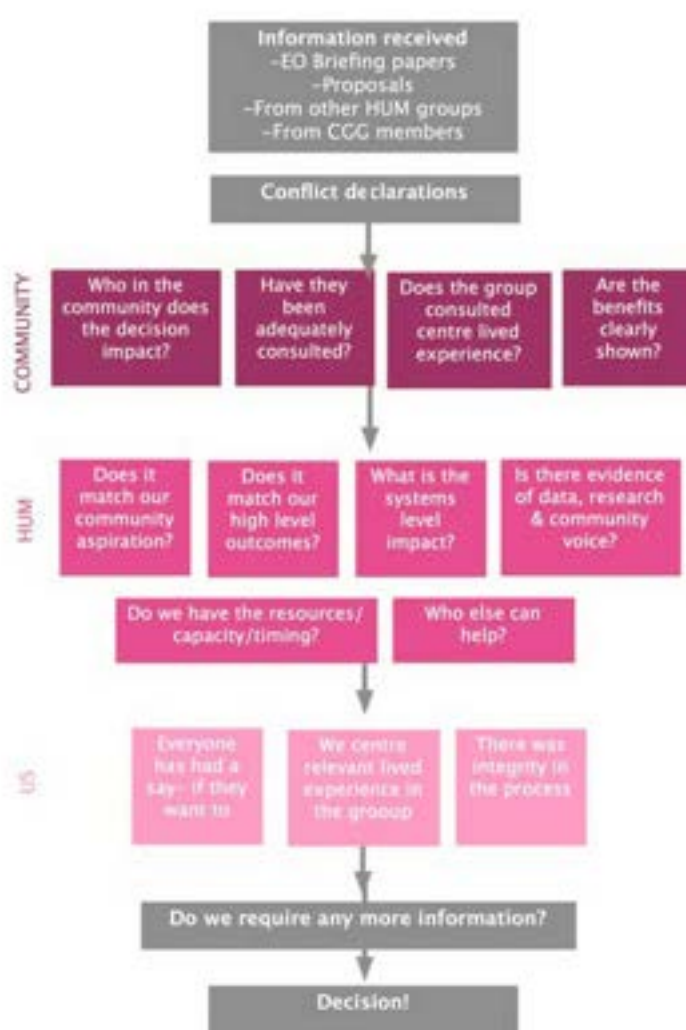
The original cultural commitments were developed by the co-design group in early 2022. Upon reviewing these at the 2024 workshop, considerable changes were made to simplify the wordy statements into clear and direct statements that united Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the work.



FUNCTION

Decision Making Map

Beginning in the 2023 workshop, when we drew a 'road map' of a decision making process, we again considered how the decisions we make as a group ripple out into the organisation and the community we serve. We created a series of questions to filter through that create accountability in our decision making across the three levels of CGG, HUM & community. This ensures we are thinking from all perspectives.



Charter

The charter has been progressively added to over the last 12 months as topics have arisen during meetings. It covers our culture, roles, procedures, policies and strategy.

For a copy of the charter [please visit the HUM website](#)

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

MAY
24

Evaluation

Evaluation was developed and trialled throughout the project to enable:

- Those involved to reflect and learn
- Group accountability
- The group to share and advocate for the value of our work

We wanted to evaluate the governance model and its effectiveness, our individual and group development, and the impact we were having on HUM's work. We saw a need for evaluation across different time frames such as monthly pulse checks, and bi/annual reviews through interviews, journey mapping and surveys.

Methods of monthly pulse checks included:

- Rating at the completion of each meeting the quality of our will, being and function, on a scale of 'not great' to 'awesome!'
- Rating at the completion of each meeting how much we thought our being statements felt 'true'
- Writing down a question we were holding at end of each meeting- as a way to track how we were thinking, and to keep the questioning of the work alive.

At the 2024 workshop we discussed these monthly measurement processes, that although reflecting positive feedback, they weren't giving us the clear data needed to show where areas of improvement needed to be. We were ready to move into something deeper and more reflective of our now refined purpose.



A decision was made to engage more with The Voice Yarning Group and HUM Backbone team, to look at their already well established evaluation methods and how to better align measuring our outcomes alongside HUM's overarching aims. We enlisted Fiona Merlin- HUM's Unlocking Sunraysia's Potential Project Officer- to attend our monthly meetings. Fiona shared with us Theory of Change and Measurement, Evaluation and Learning frameworks that HUM use.

From here, we were able to develop a theory of change for the CGG, and a series of evaluation questions that are deeply connected to our foundational work, as well as the overall purpose of the CGG and how we contribute to the change that HUM is making in the community.

Governance Key Evaluation Questions and Sub-Questions

Developed by Fiona Merlin

1. What was the role and contribution of the Governance Team in achieving outcomes for community and beyond? What impacts are we seeing for children, young people and families?
2. How has HUM Governance contributed to systemic changes?
(shifts in mindset, power relations, relationships, policies/ structures, practices, and resource flows)
3. To what extent and how well are we implementing our activities?
 - (i) How well are we upholding our Governance principles? (consciously democratic and relational, actively shifting inequity and power balance, responding to community voice and data)
 - (ii) How well are we using ethical and culturally appropriate ways of deepening engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people?
 - (iii) How well are we working together as a team?
 - (iv) How well are we creating and nurturing a safe space for learning and decision-making?
4. Are community aspirations and priorities driving our governance decision-making, activities and use of resources? (see principles)

MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE

We landed on the Most Significant Change evaluation tool to take stock of where we are currently at the eighteen month point of the project, and the cessation of Rhae's external facilitator role.

CGG members were asked to look back over the period that we have been building the foundations for Governance, and identify the most significant learnings they have observed.

Overall we found the conditions we have created within the CGG have allowed for notable development in the way that our people communicate and think. These changes ripple out into the broader community as our CGG members interact with their families, workplaces and communities.

The refinement of the language we use over the last eighteen months reflects how much confidence has been developed in our collaborative approach to governance for HUM. We have deeply questioned what governance looks like and feels like, reviewing each step along the way to ensure that we have integrity in our will, being and function.



FACILITATOR REFLECTION

Over the last 18 months I have been required to find my own voice and style as a facilitator. Thinking about creating a 'safer space' for a diverse range of people has also meant thinking about what that means for me. It has been incredibly rewarding to be in deep questioning with the CGG in not just what we do, but how we create the conditions for thinking and being together. When it comes to governing by community for community, it means truly making space for emergence and responsiveness. We don't always say the right thing, or make the best decision, but the important thing is that we are all open and willing to listen and make changes within ourselves to better serve our community.

The CGG is made up of all different people from all different walks of life. We are not all from the same part of community. I don't work or live in the same parts of community as others in the group. CGG is about giving people equal rights to have a say. Then it is a group decision, not a single person's decision. That's what the CGG is all about – collective decision making, not just one voice.

-Patsy Doolan

I feel that as a group we have gained more clarity and strived for simpler language and more concise statements that allowed us all to conceptualise how the framework would look and feel in our actual actions. I don't think there has been a meeting go by that I have not challenged myself with regard to the language I am using to describe things- moving away from the traditional governance model to a more community informed lens.

-Linda Henderson

Indy Johar from Dark Matter Labs talks about 'the boring revolution'. He says we get distracted with 'shiny objects', new services and products, new technology etc. but that the change we are looking for in the world is actually coming from the 'boring bits' – policies, procedures, organisational hierarchies, funding mechanisms. I'd add governance to that list. It is so often seen as 'boring', and therefore we just do it the way it has always been done. We don't put any thought into the way we govern, the practices, how we relate to each other. This last 18 months has been about discovering what happens when we do put thought into it, when we do pay attention to the aspects we so often just accept as the way things are. The deep why, and then how are so important. We've experimented with what it means to develop the model and practice overtime. Maybe in looking at the boring you discover it isn't boring after all, it is the ultimate key to change.

-Jane McCracken, HUM Executive Officer

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all serving members of the CGG 2022-23:

Benedict Baraka
Patsy Doolan
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Rowena Keenan
Jarrod Lehman
Sara McClelland
Kate Roberts
Beltana Thomas
Anna Vandermerwe
Stedman Watts
Liam Wood

Hands Up Mallee:

Jane McCracken- EO/Backbone Lead
Lisa Godfrey- Executive Assistant
Fiona Merlin- Unlocking Sunraysia's Potential Project Officer
The Voice Yarning Group

For more information on Hands Up Mallee
www.handsupmallee.com

For more information on Regenerative Communities
www.regenerativecommunities.com.au

VOICE THE SONGS
LISTENED A R D
TO BY COUNCILS
& GOVERNMENTS
COMMUNITY
COLLECTIVE
VOICES
FEEL
IMPORTANT
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FOR
YOUNG ONES
PARENTS
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ACTION
LEADERS
SEE THERE'S SOMETHING HERE
FOR THEM

