

Report from Learning Circle

May 11th 2022, Mildura



Acknowledgement of Country

This report reflects the outputs from Hands Up Mallee's Learning circle, in which different organisational, governmental and community groups in Mildura came together at the Grand Hotel Mildura, on the traditional lands of the Latji Latji. We also acknowledge their nearest neighbours, the Barkindji people. We wish to pay our respects to the Elders past and present, as well as those who helped us host sessions. We also wish to acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, the traditional custodians where this report was compiled by the Centre for Public Impact in Melbourne, Victoria.

This report has been independently prepared by the Centre for Public Impact for HUM. For further information or clarifications, contact <https://www.handsupmallee.com/contact-hum>

Context and setting

On 11th May 2022, Hands Up Mallee (HUM) convened a Learning Circle to discuss the findings of the Progress Mapping Report compiled by the Centre for Public Impact (CPI). The findings of this would form the basis of the 2022/23 Action and Support Plan which focuses on the tangible actions to support the enablers of collective impact practice.

The progress mapping report was the result of six sessions with the stakeholders of HUM: government leaders from the federal, state and local government, local agencies and partners and community members. The report was shared with all Learning Circle participants ahead of the meeting. This ensured that discussions and the subsequent plan that would be based on the findings from the Learning Circle, was grounded in insights from stakeholders.

Methodology

The Learning Circle was structured around three challenges identified by the HUM backbone team from the Progress Mapping report. Each challenge contained three sub questions that participants were asked to consider according to the following structure:

- What can partner organisations and Government do to support or enable this work?
- What can communities do to support or enable this work?
- What does HUM need to know?
- What does HUM need to do?
- How does HUM need to be?

This structure was to enable participants to envision their role as part of the collective impact, in line with the enablers from the progress mapping tool that emphasise the role of community and partners in advancing the collective impact agenda, in addition to inviting suggestions for what they thought HUM should prioritise in their support and action plan for 2022/2023.

Over the three hour session, participants were initially allocated one of the three tables to address their first challenge, and then rotated through one more table to discuss a challenge they felt interested in contributing to. Groups were mixed to represent government partner agencies and community members across two tables, with the majority of government stakeholders represented on the third table. After the session we additionally received written notes from a participant who could not make it. These notes have been incorporated into the tables for a complete representation of the perceptions and priorities of stakeholders. The discussions concluded with a yarning circle where participants were encouraged to share key insights with the whole group.

What did we learn?

The findings from each discussion are presented on the following pages, with three tables detailing the conversation across the three sub-questions for each challenge. The tables contain notes taken as close to verbatim as possible, supplemented by notes taken by table scribes during the session.

Challenges included:

Challenge One: Connecting Community Aspirations

- Q1 How might HUM respond to community aspirations and needs?
- Q2 How might HUM build stronger networks and trust with community?
- Q3 How might HUM include community in governance for greater accountability?

Challenge Two: Relationships with Government

- Q1 How might HUM leverage their position as a pilot site to influence decision makers, local, state and federal governments?
- Q2 How might HUM support government to adapt funding in a way that supports collaboration?
- Q3 How might HUM continue their leadership and share knowledge more broadly?

Challenge Three: Partnerships and Growth

- Q1 How might HUM formalise ways of working and collaborating with partners and what would that look like?
- Q2 How might HUM engage those without formal decision making power to step into the role as collaborator?
- Q3 How might HUM connect and grow the movement towards collective impact?

The yarning circle provided a rich opportunity for participants to hear from each other and share insights and what they were excited about. The theme of these insights appeared to centre around how HUM expresses their self-confidence as an organisation. These included shifting the mindset from considering that senior bureaucrats were doing HUM a favour by participating in our work, to considering what an honour it was for them to be invited in to listen and contribute. We heard from several participants that HUM should lean into their role as experts more, and use the mandate their experience and the relationships and insights gathered through this, has earned. This referred both to relationships with government and in their role working with and alongside community. One participant in particular was clear about the need for HUM to escalate within government levels, if support was not demonstrated at lower levels. In the words of a community Elder “You’ve already got it - you’ve just got to do it”.

Challenge One: Connecting Community Aspirations

Q1 How might HUM respond to community aspirations and needs?

What can partner organisations and government do to support/ enable this work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● If there was more diversity in government (at all levels) then they would learn to talk and how to listen to people● If government consulted more they would waste less money● Create a system that lets HUM do their thing. Trust more and create enabling conditions.● RESPECT YOUR COMMUNITY● This means not doing consultation and then co-opting decisions to change the outcome. No real power sharing.● Less output focused funding● Align their efforts to the shared vision/agenda/aspirations of the work of HUM	
What can communities do to support/ enable this work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Communities can understand their role as part of the patchwork● Communities could be more curious about others● Develop more of a sense of collective responsibility beyond responsibility to those of the same race● Be open and available to each other - authentic, interested, welcoming	
What does HUM need to know? <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Recognise the power of relationship more● Understand that people are hurt and angry● Not everyone wants to participate in HUM	What does HUM need to do? <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Say G'day● Go slow and pause and reflect● Provide continuing space for people to be angry and hurt and to heal within relationship● Listen deeply	How does HUM need to be? <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Curious● Genuine - check ego and rescue mindset● Adaptive in their language - “agenda” is a tricky word - makes people think of hidden agenda

Challenge One: Connecting Community Aspirations

Q2 How might HUM build stronger networks and trust with community?

What can partner organisations and Government do to support/ enable this work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Get into the community and meet people● Not hiding behind clipboards but being real with people in community● Partners can enable their staff to work in this way - making network building a legitimate way to work● Connecting the right people in community so you can work with the community strengths - working with people who have wisdom and who are connected.● Asking themselves “where is the lived experience in our decision making?”	
What can communities do to support/ enable this work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Talk to each other about how the community is together in this work, despite difference● Sharing learning across different communities within Mildura● Work with HUM to build strategies based on what they know in order to be effective (avoid spinning their wheels)	
What does HUM need to know? <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Who are those who hold wisdom in the community - these connectors hold deep knowledge● The micro communities within the larger communities	What does HUM need to do? <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Create a safe sounding board to listening to people before the learning starts - a place where people feel listened to and valued● Connect and listen to community like they did with the pop ups during COVID● Take the challenge or the issue to the community to see how to get it done	How does HUM need to be? <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Listening● Trusting - enough to work through other’s expertise and prepared to let go of ownership

Challenge One: Connecting Community Aspirations

Q3 How might HUM include community in governance for greater accountability?

What can partner organisations and Government do to support/ enable this work?	Not directly discussed	
What can communities do to support/ enable this work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share their own governance structures and decision-making ways from community, to create a forum/system where people feel comfortable coming in and engaging in the work of governance • Get involved to ensure diverse representation 	
What does HUM need to know? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who the right people from the community are to be involved in this process. The community will tell you. • Ensure control is given to the community "You don't know what we know". 	What does HUM need to do? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a community connectedness plan to ensure continuity • Shape a process that communities understand and can engage in - not just invite to sit on a board. • Ensure that communities are represented • Create a strong but flexible (supple?) support structure that enables community members to lean in and out according to their priorities 	How does HUM need to be? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honest, trusting - good intentions • HUM should be representative of the community they work in

Challenge two: Relationships with Government

Q1 How might HUM leverage their position as a pilot site in order to influence decision makers and local, state and federal governments?

What can partner organisations and Government do to support/ enable this work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend funding to 15 year funding contracts with an “opt out if not working” clause • Government could make it a priority to educate within government about place-based approaches • Government need to be honest, trustworthy, be committed to building relationships and follow-up with funding that supports this way of working 	
What can communities do to support/ enable this work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community members are crucial to success in this work – how might they be more closely involved with Ministers and senior government bureaucrats? • Communities might also support the work to build the evidence based that might be used to strengthen arguments in favour of a collective impact approach 	
What does HUM need to know? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government never stands back and looks at the system they have created – no one ever stops to look at the duplication, or the wastage. No one ever asks if the systems and programs are meeting the needs of the community. • Government decision making is often opaque/impenetrable • There is still a great deal of work to do advocating within government for this way working 	What does HUM need to do? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share stories of change with government • Look for and advocate for long term funding for this way of working by sharing short term changes – ask for 15 years of funding, share the successes along the way. • Ask for 15 years of funding with an “opt out” for government if expected changes/KPIs not being met. • Ask the government what they need to see to justify ongoing funding for this work – do government know? 	How does HUM need to be? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic in playing the game. • Accountable to local community • Governed by local community

Q2 How might HUM support government to adapt funding in a way that supports collaboration?

What can partner organisations and Government do to support/ enable this work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisations don't know that sometimes 10% of funding can be flexible, government needs to make this clear in grants. • Be clearer about <i>where</i> there is flexibility in funding • Think about how this work might link with government priorities – like the Victorian government's roadmap to reform. How can champions within government point this out to others in government? • Include a clause in grant tender documents about engaging with the SPSP collective impact initiative when they are grants which cover the Mildura LGA. • Provide some discretionary funding for agencies to enable them to participate in collective impact activities – but they also need to report on this • “Program Plonk” (when the Federal or State Government decides it will “plonk” a new program in the Mildura LGA without consulting with community about whether the approach is correct or the program will address an issue) – how could agencies push back against program plonk using HUM as a mechanism. • How could governments avoid program plonk through using HUM as a mechanism for consultation and understanding needs and aspirations in community? 	
What can communities do to support/ enable this work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about place-based governance for very particular regions (sub-communities) such as Red Cliffs and Merbein. • How do we think about boards and their roles in the place-based system and what we are trying to change? 	
What does HUM need to know? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This work very much depends on who you have in the 3 different levels of government. • Maragunka have included the Maragunka principles in all Federal and State government contracts – could HUM consider the same? 	What does HUM need to do? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move government to understand that community knows best about the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of what is going to shift outcomes • Do we need to test/trial putting something up to government (a requested funding change either as a result of “program plonk” or existing funding we might want to modify the use of) – would require a solid 	How does HUM need to be? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear about process and clear about why and specific – so it is hard for government to say no.

	<p>methodology from HUM of engaging community voice, data and evidence. Start with something small (eg. Discussed changing how supported playgroup funding is utilised in Red Cliffs). Test and then move on to something bigger.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather together the evidence, data, community voice and clearly articulate how these things together work to move towards the goal/outcome and present to government. 	
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Q3 How might HUM continue their leadership and share knowledge more broadly?

What can partner organisations and Government do to support/ enable this work?	Not directly discussed	
What can communities do to support/ enable this work?	Not directly discussed	
What does HUM need to know?	What does HUM need to do?	How does HUM need to be?
Not directly discussed	Not directly discussed	Not directly discussed

Challenge three: Partnerships and Growth

Q1 How might HUM formalise ways of working and collaborating with partners and what would that look like?

What can partner organisations and Government do to support/ enable this work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make clearer where there is flexibility in funding • Making it easier to use funding differently [to what it was originally for] • Growth clause <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ This is where we start ◦ This is where we are ◦ How we keep ourselves accountable • Agreements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Partnership agreements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ How much organisations can realistically commit to - guard against overcommitment, ■ Why us and why now? ■ What can we contribute? ■ There should be an opt out of collaboration option ◦ Ways of working -who, why, how, expectations, outcome accountability ◦ Collaboration agreements with Continuity, Clarity, Less rework, Responsibility 		
What can communities do to support/ enable this work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be supportive and value this work • Suggest good partners for HUM 		
What does HUM need to know? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to know, understand and apply a deep knowledge of relationships with Community. • Who is funded to do what and how? • When to push and when to walk away 	What does HUM need to do? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners who work together should get more decision making power to benefit the organisation [incentive to collaborate] • Expect organisations to produce community continuity plans • Secure commitment and engagement from federal level partners past the signing stage. 	How does HUM need to be? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be flexible as things change • Transparent when they engage partners 	

Challenge three: Partnerships and Growth

Q2 How might HUM engage those without formal decision making power to step into the role as collaborator?

What can partner organisations and Government do to support/ enable this work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine what job requirements are and reframe “the work”. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Shift and nudge others to adopt ◦ Find stickiness ◦ Nudge structures policies etc, • Be a friend to people trying to do the work • Value the work in community and the community expertise • Understand that they need to work beyond the scope of their function and connect with community • Let HUM in through <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Shadowing ◦ Sharing stories ◦ Space for organisations to come together ◦ Conversations between stories 		
What can communities do to support/ enable this work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be there 		
What does HUM need to know? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People are often sharing what they need and need to be listened to • Be aware of the game and how people want to play and play it • Coffees, reports, involvement in small ways 	What does HUM need to do? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication, listening & take advice • Recognise the wisdom of community • Storytelling about who is being reached, what is happening, statistics and impact 	How does HUM need to be? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A bridge that crosses the space between organisations and the community • Careful - and real about what you can do 	

Challenge three: Partnerships and Growth

Q3 How might HUM connect and grow the movement towards collective impact?

What can partner organisations and Government do to support/ enable this work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners can play a connection role - sharing and connecting to broaden the scope of the work being done • Government can provide more support for local initiatives - not flying in and out • Connection is collaboration and should be a condition of funding • Program scope needs to include time for relationships and place - being in community • Investment in relationship or engagement work is valuable and should be reflected in allocations of government time and money • Funding requirements should shift from a competitive mindset to collaboration 	
What can communities do to support/ enable this work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considered the gendered labour of community - we need more male accountability • Be at the table and come as you are - show up and be loud • Share and make data • Information is power and the wherewithal to do something 	
What does HUM need to know? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build the capacity of services to listen and respond • Go where the energy is and if there's no energy how can we create it? 	What does HUM need to do? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HUM can work with government to help shift from a competitor mindset • Do pilots and projects that demonstrate • Create space for community • Welcoming • Outside • Flexible times for those with caring duties • Open engagement 	How does HUM need to be? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in slow and relational ways • The agitator and advocate to inform the community • The listener to community • Unified - all have to work together to push for new funding requirements

Cross cutting themes from the challenges - Going deeper

During the transcription process it became clear that there were cross cutting themes and recommendations across the challenges which we have drawn out and present below for ease.

Themes

Work with community

- Encouraging diversity and diverse participation in civic process with a better governing towards collective impact
- Communities need to grasp their role and the importance of the community collective
- Structures are needed to communicate and strategise with community members to create continuity and community line of sight and institutional memory
- Healing structures are needed to listen to community before community members can feel safe and able to engage in a two way conversation with HUM and other agencies.
- There are opportunities to draw on communities already established ways of working and knowledge to problem solve and encourage engagement. This redesigns the system to promote diversity of engagement rather than inviting those outside of the structures to participate in them.

Work with government

- Work to ensure that collaboration and networking is a valid part of agency work and is named and funded and

validated in invitations to tender and partnership agreements

- Working to ensure funding has flexibility built in to recognise the need to adapt and pivot in delivery in response to learning and changes in context
- What might be needed for a level of governments to discover and then demonstrate their value and respect for community expertise, insights and intelligence over what they need to thrive?

Work with other agencies

- Partnership agreements should be clear and explicit about reciprocity and signs of mutual respect between agencies and HUM

Other

- If HUM is a bridge between partners and communities, what does that mean for actions that HUM might want to take, work HUM might want to strengthen and connections HUM might want to lean on.
- HUM needs to work in slow and relational ways,
 - Slow also in order to be careful and in order to listen well.

Overall reflections on the process

The mix of people on each table provided rich conversation in some cases, where participants felt able to engage each other and build on each other's thoughts and ideas. In other cases, where the power dynamic appeared too unbalanced, community members stopped talking when those in leadership positions joined the table. We were unable to manage this in the moment but it's worth considering for future events of this type.

By putting all government partners on one table they were able to converse freely amongst each other, speaking the same language and understanding the same concerns, which was very valuable. However, the flipside of this was that they did not hear from community members or other agencies who were not at the table. Also, by populating the table that covered relationships with government with government partners, community members and other agencies did not have an opportunity to discuss these challenges. Many government partners left part way through the session, which meant that they did not have the opportunity to discuss the issues with community members and local partners.

We note that the BB team at HUM holds a lot of responsibility and demonstrates passion and commitment for their work. They work very hard and the team, led by Jane, has achieved a huge amount in a relatively short space of time. We wondered at the potential for even more dispersed leadership, as it seems the BB team are working at capacity and there is appetite for those in the community to take more on. We intentionally designed the canvases used in the session to explore this further, and highlight the role of partners and community. This could offer a slight re-framing of the roles. What does it look like for HUM to further strengthen the capacity of government agency partners and communities to become enablers of the collective impact approach?

Acknowledgements

We wish to express our gratitude to the community around HUM for the inspiring example of their enthusiasm, passion and commitment to work together for collective impact and to the HUM BB team for extending such a warm welcome to us in our role as external consultants.