

# Project evaluation

*Where we belong:* creating inclusive and accessible communities across Glebe, Haymarket, Pyrmont and Ultimo



Centre for Social  
Justice & Inclusion

# Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, upon whose ancestral lands this project unfolded. We pay respect to Elders past and present, acknowledging them as traditional knowledge holders and recognising their continuing connection to land, waters, country, and community.

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# Executive summary

The *Where We Belong* project set out to explore how inclusive and accessible spaces contribute to a stronger sense of community in the suburbs of Glebe, Haymarket, Pyrmont, and Ultimo. Through a participatory and strengths-based approach, the project engaged community members and local partners in Appreciative Inquiry interviews, sensemaking, and co-design workshops to identify key priorities and develop potential community-led projects. This evaluation assesses the project's implementation and impact, highlighting successes, challenges, and opportunities for future action.

Overall, the evaluation findings are largely positive, indicating that the project successfully engaged a diverse range of community members and delivered its intended activities with only minor delays. Workshops were well-facilitated, inclusive, and highly valued by participants, fostering a strong sense of connection and empowerment. Over 80% of participants reported feeling more connected to their community, and many expressed increased confidence in their ability to contribute and advocate for change. Additionally, UTS was recognised as a trusted partner in community engagement, strengthening relationships with local organisations and individuals.

However, the evaluation also identified challenges, particularly in translating

community ideas into actionable co-designed projects. While workshops generated meaningful discussions and creative solutions, limited funding and structural barriers made it difficult for many initiatives to move beyond the ideation stage. The community newspaper *Glebe Connections* emerged as a notable success, but concerns remain regarding the sustainability of community-led initiatives without ongoing resourcing. Engagement gaps were also noted, particularly among younger people, First Nations communities, and LGBTQIA+ individuals, indicating a need for more targeted outreach in future projects.

The project contributed to important short-term outcomes, including increased community connection and confidence among participants and advocacy capacity among partners. While mid-term outcomes – such as the implementation of co-designed projects and the creation of more inclusive spaces – were less fully realised, the project provided a strong foundation for ongoing efforts. The research approach itself was seen as valuable, with community partners adopting Appreciative Inquiry methods in their own advocacy work.

Looking ahead, the findings of this evaluation provide a roadmap for strengthening future community-driven initiatives. To maximize long-term impact, securing dedicated funding for co-designed projects, ensuring clearer pathways for implementation, and fostering greater community ownership will be critical. Additionally, strengthening partnerships with key decision-makers and embedding these insights into broader policy and planning frameworks will help ensure sustainable

change. Ultimately, *Where We Belong* has demonstrated the power of community-led research and collaboration in shaping more inclusive and accessible urban spaces, setting the stage for continued progress in this area.

*An inclusive community isn't built overnight, but this project has shown that when people are given the opportunity to shape their own spaces, lasting change begins.*





# Introduction

The *Where We Belong* project was developed to explore how inclusive and accessible spaces contribute to a greater sense of community and belonging in the suburbs of Glebe, Haymarket, Pyrmont, and Ultimo. Recognising the importance of community voice and strengths-based approaches, the project aimed to engage local residents, practitioners, and community partners in meaningful discussions about what makes a space truly inclusive. By bringing together diverse voices, the project sought to uncover both opportunities and challenges in fostering welcoming public and private spaces.

This evaluation report examines the implementation and impact of the project, assessing whether it successfully achieved its intended outcomes and its contribution to broader social change. The evaluation focused on key areas such as community engagement, the effectiveness of participatory workshops, and the extent to which co-designed initiatives translated into tangible action. Through an analysis of participant experiences and partner and project team reflections, this report provides valuable insights into what worked well and where further efforts are needed.

By documenting the successes, challenges, and lessons learned, this evaluation report provides a foundation for refining and strengthening future community-driven initiatives. It highlights key enablers and barriers to implementation, offering practical recommendations to enhance community engagement, secure funding for co-designed projects, and foster long-term sustainability. The findings can inform policymakers, practitioners, and researchers working to create more inclusive and accessible spaces, ensuring that future efforts build on this project's achievements while addressing gaps in participation and implementation. Ultimately, this report serves as a guide for evolving and scaling this work, reinforcing the importance of ongoing collaboration between communities, institutions, and decision-makers.

# Background and context

In 2022, a suburb-level Story of Change was developed collaboratively with the local community in Glebe, Haymarket, Ultimo, and Pyrmont (Aitken et al. 2023). This process helped uncover priority areas for the community, specifically those that facilitated an increased sense of belonging.

One of the priority areas the community identified was enhancing inclusive and accessible public and private spaces.

## 1 The *Where We Belong* project

In 2023, a community-based participatory research project was conducted to understand how inclusive and accessible public and private spaces empower people to participate and contribute to community (Loomis et al. 2025). This body of work sought to generate new knowledge about the lived experience of communities in UTS's local precinct. Participatory and asset-based methodologies were employed to elevate community voice, uncover community strengths, and identify community needs and solutions. The insights gained from this work were used to develop a Story of Change about inclusive and accessible public and private spaces.

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*A Story of Change is a diagram or written description of the strategies, actions, conditions, and resources that facilitate change and achieve outcomes. It can help explain why you think particular activities or action will lead to particular outcomes (AIFS, 2021)*

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The research project was divided into three phases:

### 1. Discovery

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) workshops were attended by community members who work, live, study, or volunteer in the UTS precinct. In these workshops, community members were invited to share positive experiences of inclusive and accessible spaces in their local community. These stories are recorded by scribes.

### 2. Sensemaking

Following the first workshop, the project team conducted a thematic analysis of the AI interviews, identifying key themes that were then reviewed by the Community Partners Group for validation. Using these insights, the team drafted 'ideal state' statements, which were presented to community in sensemaking workshops. In these sessions, participants provided feedback on these statements and collaboratively developed a 'Story of Change' outlining pathways to achieving key outcomes.



### 3. Co-design

Two co-design workshops were held with community members to collaboratively develop project ideas based on the Story of Change. The project team would go on and support community members to undertake their projects by connecting them with existing funding opportunities, for example, the UTS Social Impact Grants or the UTS Shopfront Program.

Table 1 provides an overview of what the project entailed – including the necessary resources, key activities, outputs and intended outcomes.

For more information see the full research report: [Where We Belong: Creating inclusive and accessible communities across Glebe, Haymarket, Pyrmont and Ultimo](#)



**Table 1. Inclusive and Accessible Spaces – Program logic**

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Social Impact
<p>Program staff at UTS</p> <p>Community partners</p> <p>Community members</p> <p>Practitioners</p> <p>Existing evidence base (100 Voices Suburb-level Story of Change)</p> <p>For workshops:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Meeting spaces</li> <li>- IT equipment</li> <li>- Equipment for activities (e.g., markers, butcher paper)</li> <li>- Translation services</li> <li>- Nanny services</li> <li>- Vouchers for participants</li> <li>- Catering</li> </ul> <p>For ongoing meetings with partners group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Meeting spaces</li> <li>- IT equipment</li> <li>- Catering</li> </ul> <p>UTS program funding</p>	<p>Establish community partners group</p> <p>Ethics application</p> <p>Project plan</p> <p>Engage participants in the project via community partners</p> <p>Evidence review</p> <p>Appreciative inquiry workshops</p> <p>Sensemaking workshops</p> <p>Co-design workshops</p> <p>Data analysis</p> <p>Ongoing community partner meetings</p> <p>Project reporting and dissemination</p>	<p># Appreciative Inquiry workshops</p> <p># Sensemaking workshops</p> <p># Co-design workshops</p> <p># of attendees at each workshop</p> <p>Community partners group</p> <p># of meetings</p> <p># of attendees at each meeting</p> <p># of co-designed projects</p> <p>Final report</p> <p>Animated video</p>	<p><b>Short-term outcomes:</b></p> <p>Community members have an increased level of connection to community</p> <p>Community members have an increased level of confidence to contribute to community</p> <p>Community members have an increased level of 'say' about what happens in their community</p> <p>Community feel empowered to make a difference</p> <p>Community partners have an increased understanding of opportunities and needs relevant to inclusive and accessible spaces.</p> <p><b>Mid-term outcomes:</b></p> <p>Community experiences a strengthened partnership with UTS, feeling supported by UTS and trusting of UTS.</p> <p>Community members initiate and implement projects that address outcomes identified through the ToC.</p> <p>Codesigned projects result in more inclusive and accessible spaces for community members.</p> <p>Learning around the Appreciative Inquiry approach for community engagement to address community priorities.</p>	<p>Ultimo, Glebe, Pyrmont, and Haymarket have inclusive and accessible spaces where community members feel a sense of connection and belonging.</p> <p>Community partners have increased capacity to advocate on behalf of their communities.</p> <p>UTS is a trusted partner in community engagement and capacity-building work; sharing resources and knowledge, and uplifting and centering community voices.</p> <p>CSJI is at the forefront of community-engaged research, creating a bridge between the university and the community that leads to social change.</p>

# Evaluation framework

The purpose of this evaluation is to understand the extent to which the *Where We Belong* project outcomes were reached as well as to gain insights into the implementation of the project. These learnings are important in informing the ongoing place-based work of the project team in the UTS precinct.

A process and outcome evaluation were undertaken. Process evaluation is of heightened importance in place-based work due to the complexity and evolving nature of local contexts. It is important to understand what was done, when and how, and how projects pivoted to meet the changing needs of stakeholders. Equally, outcome evaluation is vital for measuring the tangible impacts on the community, ensuring the project meets its intended goals, and informs future improvements.

The process evaluation focused on how activities are carried out, examining fidelity to project plans and timelines, barriers and enablers to implementation and stakeholder engagement and participation. The process evaluation offers learnings that can improve the research and engagement processes to better align activities with intended goals. The outcome evaluation explored what outcomes were achieved for community members, community partners, and the project team. It assessed whether short- and medium-term outcomes were achieved and how the project contributed to broader social impact.

## 2 Criteria of merit

Criteria of merit were established through conversations with the project team about what dimensions of the research project would be most important to evaluate. As seen below in Figure 1, four key areas were identified.

Implementation	Satisfaction	Effectiveness	Social Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How well the core components of the project were delivered and if they were delivered as intended. This includes audience reach as well as barriers and enablers to implementation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extent to which community partners and members were satisfied with the project.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The extent to which the project met the anticipated outcomes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The extent to which the project contributed to creating inclusive and accessible spaces in the UTS precinct.</li> </ul>

**Figure 1. Criteria of merit**

**Implementation** was chosen because the project team wanted to better understand if/how they could improve their processes and practices. The project is in its second year, and no previous evaluation has explored this in a systematic way. There was an acknowledgement that the project would continue for a further year with another priority area. Evaluating implementation will help future efforts build on this year's strengths and lessons learned.

**Satisfaction** was selected because the project team wanted to gain insights into the extent to which community were satisfied with the project. Satisfaction reflects how well the project meets the needs, expectations, and goals of its stakeholders, which is often a key measure of success. Feedback on satisfaction highlights areas where the program is performing well and areas needing improvement, ensuring better alignment with stakeholder needs.

**Effectiveness** was chosen because demonstrating effectiveness ensures the project is delivering on its promises, showing accountability to the community and stakeholders. Effectiveness highlights whether the project is creating tangible, positive outcomes for the community, such as addressing needs, solving problems, or improving quality of life.

**Social impact** was selected because it helps determine how the project contributes to addressing the real priorities and challenges community face. It speaks to the capacity of the project to contribute to longer-term sustainable change.

### 3 Rubrics

Rubrics are valuable tools in an evaluation because they provide a structured, transparent, and consistent way to assess performance, processes, or outcomes. They help by defining criteria and performance levels, helping all stakeholders understand what is being evaluated and the standards for success, in other words, what does good look like?

In collaboration with the project team, rubrics were developed for each criterion (i.e., implementation, satisfaction, effectiveness, and social impact). Each rubric sets out five levels of performance - excellent, good, adequate, poor insufficient – and describes what performance looks like at each level. This approach was chosen to simplify the evaluation and make transparent the evaluative judgement of the project overall.

### 4 Key evaluation questions

In line with the criteria of merit, the evaluation will seek to answer the following key evaluation questions (KEQ):

<b>KEQ1: Implementation</b>	<p>Was the project implemented as intended?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The extent to which timelines were met.</li> <li>• Was the intended audience able to be reached?</li> <li>• What barriers and enablers impacted implementation?</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What if any, are the recommendations around implementation?</li> </ul>
<b>KEQ2: Satisfaction</b>	To what extent were participants and stakeholders satisfied with the project?
<b>KEQ3: Effectiveness</b>	Did we achieve the intended outcomes? If so, for whom? If not, why?
<b>KEQ4: Social Impact</b>	Did the project contribute to the desired social impact?

## 5 Evaluation methods

The evaluation employed a mixed-methods approach combining both quantitative and qualitative data to offer a thorough analysis of the project. Five key sets of data were collected and analysed throughout the project:

1. Project timelines and meeting minutes: key documents were reviewed to understand how the project was implemented
2. Demographic data: at the beginning of the Appreciative Inquiry workshop participants were asked to complete a survey about their demographic characteristics. It was not mandatory to complete the survey, and participants were not required to answer all of the questions.
3. Feedback forms: at the end of each workshop participants were asked to complete a feedback form asking for their reflections on the workshop. These forms include both open-ended questions and a series of Likert-scale questions.
4. Reflection sessions: two reflection sessions were held with the community partners group throughout the project. Notes were taken during these sessions to capture partners' insights.
5. End-of-project focus group: a focus group was conducted with the community partners group at the end of the project to gather feedback and assess overall outcomes.
6. 12-month follow-up: a focus group was conducted with key members of the project team, roughly 12 months after the last workshop. The focus group sought to uncover key lessons the team had learnt during this time and how the work had progressed. An interview was also conducted with a UTS staff member leading one of the co-design projects.

The demographic data and data from the feedback forms were organised in Excel and cleaned to identify missing or incomplete data. Descriptive statistics were conducted to summarise and organise the quantitative data. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the short answer questions in the feedback forms as well as the information gathered from the reflection sessions and focus groups.





# Key findings

Overall, the evaluation paints a positive picture, showing that the project successfully met many of its intended goals. The evaluation found that the project was largely implemented as intended, with only minor delays that did not significantly affect the overall timeline. While some planned components, such as practitioner interviews and the identification of success indicators, were not fully executed, the project maintained its core objectives and engaged a diverse cross-section of community members. The workshops were well received, with strong facilitation, flexibility, and inclusivity cited as key enablers of success. However, challenges such as resourcing constraints, limited community readiness for project leadership, and engagement gaps – particularly with younger people, First Nations communities, and LGBTQ+ individuals – highlighted areas for improvement. Additionally, while co-design sessions generated valuable ideas, most did not progress beyond initial discussions due to structural barriers, lack of funding, and uncertainty around project ownership.

Despite these challenges, the project made significant strides in fostering community connection, increasing participants' confidence to contribute, and strengthening trust in UTS as a partner in community-led initiatives. Over 80% of participants reported feeling more connected to their community, and many valued the opportunity to share their voices and engage in meaningful discussions. The Appreciative Inquiry approach was particularly effective in surfacing shared priorities, though the ability of the broader project to translate insights into action remains an area for growth. While the initiative laid the groundwork for long-term social impact, future efforts should focus on securing funding for co-designed projects, ensuring greater representation from underrepresented groups, and developing clearer pathways for sustaining community-led change beyond the project's initial phase.

## 1 KEQ1: Was the project implemented as intended?

To determine if the project was implemented as intended, the following areas were evaluated:

- a) Project timelines: was the project delivered on time?
- b) Reach: did the project engage the target audience?
- c) What were the barriers and enablers to implementation?

### 1.1 To what extent were the project timelines met?

A Gantt chart was employed on a weekly basis to systematically track progress and monitor project timelines. This was assessed by reviewing the minutes from weekly meetings and in discussion with the project team. While some tasks required more time to complete than initially anticipated, the overall schedule remained unaffected, with no significant delays encountered.

There was agreement that additional time to integrate the evidence review may have enhanced the process, as only preliminary findings were available to inform the co-design phase. Furthermore, the

planning for co-design activities occurred slightly too late to capitalise on UTS funding opportunities. Nevertheless, it remains uncertain whether earlier planning would have resulted in co-design projects being successfully funded.

Two components of the project that were in the original plan/timelines were not conducted as intended: identifying indicators of success and conducting interviews with practitioners. While the project team did develop a list of indicators these have not yet been shared with the community partners group or tested with key stakeholders. Further work is needed to refine the indicators and understand their utility. Further, a decision was made during the project to not proceed with planned interviews with practitioners. This was for a multitude of reasons including an acknowledgement that there was already engagement with community leaders/experts through the Community Partners group and this group was also invited to participate in the workshops. There was also a need to consider capacity as the research team was unexpectedly down a staff member for a significant period of the project.

Overall, we believe the project activities were delivered as planned and as such, have assessed this as 'good' in the implementation rubric – 'the project was completed as intended, with only minor delays that did not significantly impact the project' (see Table 6).

## **1.2 Was the intended audience reached?**

The intended audience was an inclusive sample of community members who work, live, study, or volunteer in the UTS precinct – Ultimo, Haymarket, Glebe, and Pyrmont.

The project team emphasised the importance of reaching a diverse cross-section of the population, with a particular focus on underrepresented groups. This included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, individuals with diverse gender, and sexual identities, people with innate variations of sex characteristics, as well as people across different age groups, individuals with disabilities, and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Additionally, efforts were made to incorporate participants representing various living arrangements, such as renters and those living in social housing.

There were many ways community members (those who work, live, volunteer, or study) were able to participate in the research. They could participate in:

1. Appreciative Inquiry Sessions: community members interviewed each other about inclusive and accessible spaces.
2. Sensemaking sessions: community members were invited to review the themes that have been extracted from the data from the Appreciative Inquiry workshops. A draft Story of Change was developed.
3. Co-design sessions: community members could come and work on developing a project that addressed outcomes from the Story of Change.

There was also a Community Partners group composed of community leaders who are highly active and engaged members of the community, as well as staff from local community organizations, including individuals in roles ranging from CEOs to program managers. This group met monthly and

played a crucial role in providing insights, guidance, and strategic input to ensure the initiative remained aligned with community needs and priorities.

To determine the extent to which the intended audience was reached, a review of the demographic data of participants who attended the Appreciative Inquiry workshop was completed. We then used census data to look at the demographic profile of the UTS Precinct, across the suburbs of Glebe, Haymarket, Pyrmont, and Ultimo to further contextualise this diversity. It is important to note that demographic data was only collected at the first workshop, as such, we cannot report on how inclusive the remaining workshops were. However, as the first workshop had the largest number of attendees and it was in this workshop that data was collected to develop the Story of Change, we believe this approach provides an adequate picture of the project.

In total, there were 84 participants at the Appreciative Inquiry workshops, 52 at the sensemaking workshops, and 25 at the co-design workshops. An additional 11 people participated through a workshop with a local parenting group and 3 people participated in a one-on-one Appreciative Inquiry interview. The project team was also invited by a Community Partner to have a stall at an event to connect people who recently experienced homelessness with local services. While the project team attended this event, no interviews or workshops were held here. Instead, the team had informal community conversations with 3 people, who shared information what public spaces in the local area they feel connected to.

In the demographic form, participants were asked which suburb they connected with. Participants could select multiple responses, for example, if they lived in Glebe and worked in Pyrmont. Table 2 provides a breakdown of responses to this question. While the majority of participants selected Ultimo, there was adequate representation from all for suburbs.

**Table 2. Breakdown of Appreciative Inquiry workshop participants by suburb**

Suburb	Appreciative Inquiry Workshop
Glebe	26
Haymarket	24
Pyrmont	24
Ultimo	43

Data source: Appreciative Inquiry Workshop: demographic form

Note: participants were able to select more than one suburb. For example, if they lived in Glebe, but worked in Pyrmont.

Participants were also asked if they lived, worked, studied, or volunteered in the community. Again, participants could select multiple responses. Most of the participants lived in the community (see Table 3), with many also studying or volunteering.

**Table 3. Breakdown of Appreciative Inquiry workshop participants by role in community**

Suburb	Appreciative Inquiry Workshop
Live	40
Work	13
Study	21
Volunteer	18

Data source: Appreciative Inquiry Workshop: demographic form

Note: participants were able to select more than one role.

The demographic form included a number of questions about key characteristics and identities of participants.

**Age:** The ages of people who attended ranged from 18–88, capturing a wide spread of people. However, with an average age of 51, the makeup of the group did tend to favour older community members (see Table 4). For example, there were 31 participants over the age of 60 and only 18 participants under the age of 30.

**Gender:** There were far more female participants than male, 69.5%, compared to only 26.8% (see Table 4). Only a small number of people identified as non-binary or gender-neutral (n=2). There were also two participants who said they were intersex. The workshop failed to include any participants who are transgender (or who felt comfortable sharing this).

**Sexual orientation:** Regarding sexual orientation, the vast majority of participants 83.5% stated they were heterosexual/straight, with 8.8% of participants identifying as gay/lesbian, bisexual, or as using a different term to describe their sexuality (see Table 4).

**First Nations:** Almost 5% of participants identified as Aboriginal (see Table 4).

**Language and birthplace:** The workshops were incredibly diverse when reviewing the country of birth and the main language spoken data. Almost 60% of participants were born outside of Australia, the majority of which were born in China, with another 18 countries of birth being represented, including the Philippines, Nicaragua, Turkiye, Jamaica, Ireland, Vietnam, Colombia, South Korea, India, the USA, Saudi Arabia, and Iran (see Table 4). Unsurprisingly, the main language spoken at home or in their community was English (77.4%), with Mandarin and Cantonese being the next most common (see Table 4). Another 11 languages were listed by participants though, including Spanish, Farsi, Hindi, and Arabic.

**Housing:** The housing status of participants was also diverse, with almost a third of participants either owning their own home, renting, or living in social/public housing (see Table 4). A further 17% of participants describe their housing situation in other terms, including living at home, with their parents, or in student accommodation.

**Disability:** The demographic data also revealed that most participants, 76.5%, did not have a disability (see Table 4). About 1 in 5 of the participants, 21%, reported living with disability.



Table 4. Demographic characteristics of Appreciative Inquiry workshop participants

Demographic characteristics	Appreciative Inquiry Workshop Participants % (n)	
<b>Age</b>	The average age of participants was 51 years old, with a wide spread from 18–88 years old.	
<b>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander</b>	Aboriginal	4.8% (4)
	Torres Strait Islander	0
	Both	0
	No	95.2% (80)
	Total	100% (84)
<b>Country of birth</b>	Australia	41.5% (34)
	China	17.1% (14)
	Other	41.4% (34)
	Total	100% (82)
<b>Main language spoken at home or in the community</b> Note: multiple languages could be listed	English	77.4% (65)
	Mandarin	13.1% (11)
	Cantonese	8.3% (7)
	Other	16.7% (14)
<b>Gender</b>	Woman or female	69.5% (57)
	Man or male	26.8% (22)
	Non-binary	1.2% (1)
	Gender neutral	1.2% (1)
	Preferred not to answer	1.2% (1)
	Total	100% (82)
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	Straight (heterosexual)	83.5% (66)
	Gay/lesbian	2.5% (2)
	Bisexual	2.5% (2)
	I use a different term	3.8% (3)
	Don't know	1.3% (1)
	Prefer not to answer	6.3% (5)
Total	100% (79)	
<b>Transgender or Trans</b>	Yes	0
	No	95.1% (77)
	Don't know	1.2% (1)
	Prefer not to say	3.7% (3)
	Total	100% (81)
<b>Intersex or variation of sex characteristics</b>	Yes	2.5% (2)
	No	93.8% (76)
	Don't know	0
	Prefer not to say	3.7% (3)
	Total	100% (81)

<b>Housing</b>	Homeowners	26.8% (22)
	Renters	30.5% (25)
	Social/public housing	31.7% (26)
	Other	11.0% (9)
	Total	100% (82)
<b>Disability</b>	Yes, I have a disability	21.0% (17)
	No, I do not have a disability	76.5% (62)
	Prefer not to say	2.5% (2)
	Total	100% (81)

Data source: Appreciative Inquiry Workshop: demographic form

To help paint a picture of how inclusive the research project was, we have compiled Census data on the four suburbs in the UTS precinct (see Table 5). Given the qualitative nature of the project, it was not explicitly aiming to be statistically representative of these suburbs. However, this data provides a useful comparison point and gives additional context about the communities the research project was working with.

There are a number of areas where the research project was able to reach key groups, including those born overseas and people who speak a language other than English, people living with disability and renters and people living in social/public housing.

There are, however, other areas where the research project may have fallen short. As discussed above there were many more women than men in the workshops and the workshops did have more older community members. Efforts could be made to include younger people (under the age of 30) and more men.

When looking at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation, compared to the local population, it would appear the workshop performed quite well, having 5% of participants identify as Aboriginal, compared to a maximum of 3.3% in the local community. However, this still only amounts to 4 Aboriginal people across the workshops. This limited representation may have restricted the depth and diversity of First Nations perspectives, potentially impacting the ability of the project to fully identify issues relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The workshop also did not fully achieve a diverse representation of sexualities, gender identities and experiences, or people with innate variations of sex characteristics, limiting the breadth of perspectives included in the discussions. While census data on sexual orientation and gender diversity is only just becoming available, early estimates suggest that approximately 3.6% of the Australian population over the age of 16 identify as LGB+<sup>1</sup> and an estimated 0.9% of Australians over 16 report being transgender or non-binary (ABS, 2022). Given the small number of trans and non-binary people across Australia, it is hardly surprising the research project was unable to reach more of

<sup>1</sup> LGB+ is the acronym used by the ABS. It is said to represent people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or use a different term to describe their sexual orientation.

these groups of people. However, efforts should be made in future projects to ensure those with diverse gender and sexual identities have an opportunity to share their experiences.

Given these key findings, the extent to which research participants represented the intended audience of the project was assessed as 'good' (see Table 6). While the research participants cover a significant portion of the community's demographic diversity, there are gaps that could be addressed.

**Table 5. Demographic characteristics of Ultimo, Pyrmont, Glebe, and Haymarket**

Demographic Characteristics	Ultimo	Pyrmont	Glebe	Haymarket
<b>Median Age</b>	30 years	37 years	38 years	30 years
<b>Sex</b>	Male: 50.8% Female: 48.2%	Male: 50.5% Female: 49.5%	Male: 47.8% Female: 52.2%	Male: 49.2% Female: 50.8%
<b>Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander</b>	1%	1.2%	3.3%	0.2%
<b>Country of Birth</b>	Australia: 26.7%  <i>Other top responses</i> China: 16.8% Thailand 7.1% India: 4.4% Indonesia: 4.0% Colombia: 2.5%	Australia: 40.7%  <i>Other top responses</i> China: 6.2% England: 4.2% India: 4.0% Thailand: 2.5% New Zealand: 2.2%	Australia: 57.0%  <i>Other top responses</i> England: 4.4% China: 4.0% New Zealand: 2.7% Vietnam: 2.2% USA: 1.4%	Australia: 13.0%  <i>Other top responses</i> China: 21.4% Thailand: 17.5% Indonesia: 11.2% Malaysia: 3.0% South Korea: 2.8%
<b>Language used at home</b>	English only: 34.5%  <i>Other top responses</i> Mandarin: 17.9% Thai: 6.9% Cantonese: 6.2% Spanish: 3.7% Indonesian: 2.7%	English only: 52.6%  <i>Other top responses</i> Mandarin: 6.9% Cantonese: 4.3% Spanish: 3.3% Thai: 2.6% Indonesian: 2.7%	English only: 68.2%  <i>Other top responses</i> Mandarin: 4.4% Vietnamese: 2.7% Spanish: 2.1% Cantonese: 1.7% Greek: 1.0%	English only: 68.2%  <i>Other top responses</i> Mandarin: 24.3% Thai: 16.3% Indonesian: 8.6% Cantonese: 5.7% Korean: 2.5%
<b>Housing</b>	Owned (outright or with mortgage): 24.6% Rented: 68.1%	Owned (outright or with mortgage): 35.7% Rented: 61.7%	Owned (outright or with mortgage): 35.1% Rented: 61.0%	Owned (outright or with mortgage): 19.8% Rented: 75.6%

Data source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census All persons Quickstats.

Ultimo: <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/SAL14024>

Pyrmont: <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/SAL13297>

Glebe: <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/SAL11645>

Haymarket: <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/SAL11884>



## 1.2 What barriers and enablers impacted implementation?

To understand if and how the research project could be better implemented, an analysis of the feedback forms from each workshop as well as discussion with the project partners and project team was conducted. A number of key enablers and barriers were identified and are discussed below.

### 1.2.1 Enablers

#### Effective workshop facilitation

Participants consistently highlighted the workshop's strong organisation, meticulous planning, and well-structured approach. They expressed appreciation for the carefully designed activities, the clarity of the workshop's objectives, and the adherence to the schedule, describing the workshop as "thoroughly organised" and that "everything was explained well".

Effective communication and interaction were also key themes. Participants valued the opportunity to speak freely, engage in open conversations, and collaborate with diverse individuals. They highlighted the importance of communication from various community members and the facilitator's role in guiding discussions, as one participant stated the "facilitator was clear and direct in what we had to do. Questions were structured well for the best answers." Participants appreciated the facilitator's ability to create a comfortable environment for sharing ideas and opinions.

#### Being flexible and agile

The project team believed their willingness to remain open and responsive to community needs was fundamental in fostering an inclusive and effective process. From the outset, they prioritised flexibility, recognising that a one-size-fits-all approach would not be suitable for the diverse groups they aimed to engage. One key aspect of this adaptability was adjusting their language to align with participants' preferences and ensuring that discussions resonated with their lived experiences. This meant being mindful of the terminology used, avoiding jargon, and ensuring that concepts were communicated in ways that felt accessible and relevant. By making these adjustments, they created an environment where participants felt heard and understood, leading to deeper and more meaningful engagement.

The ability to pivot in real time was another crucial factor in maintaining engagement. Rather than rigidly adhering to a predetermined structure, they remained flexible, adapting session formats and facilitation styles based on the needs of each group. For example, if a particular concept was not landing well with participants, they would reframe it or introduce alternative ways of exploring the idea. This responsiveness helped participants feel that their input was genuinely valued and that the process was designed to meet their needs rather than impose an external agenda.

#### Inclusivity and diversity

Feedback from participants emphasised inclusivity and diversity, with participants expressing appreciation for the opportunity to engage with people from different backgrounds. One participant stated, "This workshop is really inclusive; it invites people from different backgrounds to share their stories." Participants believed the workshops provided a platform for all community members, including those who may not typically engage.

The project team believed that the involvement of community partners in recruitment played a crucial role in strengthening engagement by ensuring that outreach efforts were both credible and far-reaching. Partners, who were often well-established and trusted figures within the community, acted as bridges between the project team and potential participants. By leveraging their existing networks, they were able to reach individuals who might not have otherwise engaged with the project, particularly those who may be hesitant to participate in initiatives led by external organisations or academic institutions. Beyond simply spreading the word, community partners provided a sense of reassurance and legitimacy to the project. Their endorsement signalled to community members that the workshops were valuable, relevant, and safe spaces for open discussion. This trust was instrumental in encouraging participation, especially among groups that are often underrepresented in similar initiatives.

### **Fostering connections**

Participants highlighted the sense of engagement, connection, and community fostered by the workshops and the project generally. They felt a sense of connection and community, enjoyed meeting new people, sharing stories, and feeling heard and valued within the community. As one participant expressed: “I love the thoughtful structure, with in-depth discussions and engaging hands-on activities. Our community is valued and respected. Most importantly, I feel heard, and my voice is genuinely acknowledged”.

When speaking to the project team, they echoed this sentiment and believed that a core part of their practice, taking the time to “meet people where they’re at”, “to just pick up the phone and to have a chat” demonstrated to community how much the team values their contributions and their relationships. This approach fostered trust and made participants feel valued. In turn, the project team believed that this sense of respect and recognition ultimately encouraged deeper engagement.

### **Reducing barriers to engagement**

Accessibility was praised, particularly regarding interpreters and translated documents to facilitate participation, especially for individuals with language barriers or other access requirements. One participant who utilised the interpreter and translation services said, “The interpreter is thoughtful and empathetic, with excellent time management skills and adept at guiding conversations effectively”.

The project team also believed that offering workshops at different times, during the day and at night, led to a more diverse cohort of people participating in the project. Further, in addition to the primary workshops, the project team also conducted targeted sessions and 1:1 interviews with people and groups who were unable to attend the workshops. This flexible approach ensured that anyone who was interested in the project was able to contribute.

Further, recognising and respecting participants’ contributions through financial compensation was believed to also encourage attendance and participation.

### **Building a sense of ownership**

Finally, the project team also believed that dedicating more time to the sense-making sessions was essential in ensuring that participants felt ownership over the project's framework and outcomes. In particular, refining the wording of the Story of Change (SoC) was a highly collaborative effort, allowing participants to carefully examine the language used and ensure it accurately reflected their perspectives and priorities. This process went beyond simple word choices it was about creating a shared vision that felt authentic and meaningful to those involved. By giving participants the space to 'nit-pick' and refine the language, we reinforced the project's inclusivity and responsiveness. As a result, the final SoC was not just a document but a reflection of collective insights and values, strengthening the project's overall impact and sustainability.

### **1.2.2 Barriers**

#### **Resourcing constraints**

Resourcing constraints posed significant challenges to the project's implementation. The project team highlighted the lack of dedicated funding to support the co-design projects and the limited time to explore alternative funding options or pathways. These challenges ultimately meant that many of the project ideas generated in the co-design sessions didn't progress any further than the workshops.

Initially, the project team planned to direct co-design projects to the UTS Social Impact Grants program as a potential option for funding. However, in the end, there were significant structural barriers that limited the accessibility and utility of the program for potential activations. Issues such as the requirement to partner with a UTS staff member, the complexity of the application process, and the inability to guarantee whether community would be successful in the grant application process all created potential roadblocks for community members who may have otherwise wanted to apply. Moreover, conflicts of interest made it unclear how much direct support the project team could provide to applicants, adding another layer of complexity.

Finally, the project team also discussed the challenge of managing multiple overlapping projects and the pressure they felt to pivot to new initiatives before this work had been fully disseminated and embedded in community. The need to shift focus meant that this project was left in a state of transition, without a clear plan or structure in place for how community would be supported to use the Story of Change or to act on the key findings from the research. As a result, the team recognised that there was a risk that this valuable work could lose momentum or fail to reach its full potential simply because the necessary time and attention could not be dedicated to ensuring the long-term success and integration of the project within the community.

#### **Community readiness**

In our focus group with the project team, they reflected on the community's readiness to take on and drive new projects. One issue they encountered in the project was the limited energy available for this within the participant groups. While there were dedicated individuals who were willing to be involved, there was a noticeable lack of new people stepping forward to take on work. Many community members, particularly those who were already stretched thin, simply did not have the capacity to engage at the level required to drive a co-design project. This challenge was exemplified by the

community newspaper initiative, which, while successfully launched, was primarily carried forward by UTS staff and students. This raised concerns about long-term sustainability – if UTS stepped away, would the project continue? UTS' heavy involvement in this project also saw the project team question if this piece of work was genuinely community-led. This highlighted the broader challenge of fostering true community ownership, underscoring the tension between building local capacity and providing institutional support.

### **Engagement gaps**

As discussed above, a major barrier was the difficulty in connecting with certain communities. The project team recognised that despite efforts to reach a broad and diverse audience, gaps remained - particularly in First Nations representation and engagement with the LGBTIQ+ community. The reliance on community partners for recruitment, while effective in many ways, had its limitations. Because outreach was largely dependent on the networks of these partners, the project was mostly able to engage individuals who were already connected to those networks. This raised the question of whether there needed to be greater diversity among community partners to ensure a more representative cross-section of the community was reached.

### **Engagement challenges**

In the feedback received from workshop participants, a number of barriers to effective engagement were shared. Some participants noted that some questions were hard to comprehend, describing them as “quite abstract” or “a little complex”. This created a challenge in ensuring that all participants could fully engage with the discussions and contribute meaningfully. Addressing this barrier may require simplifying question structures, refining wording, or allocating more time to clarify expectations and provide context during discussions.

Another challenge was ensuring that participants understood how their contributions would translate into tangible outcomes. As one participant said that they would like facilitators to “explain more where this input would go” and to understand how this work would inform other projects. Without a well-communicated plan for follow-up and implementation, participants may feel that their engagement lacks impact, potentially reducing motivation to participate in similar initiatives in the future. Ensuring transparency about the next steps and maintaining ongoing communication with participants could help mitigate this issue.

The structure and pacing of the workshop also presented barriers to effective engagement for some participants. Suggestions were made to incorporate more breaks for reflection, extend session lengths, or space out activities to allow for deeper conversations. Some participants felt that the sessions were “run at a fast pace”, making it difficult to complete exercises or reflect on discussions. In particular, the fast-paced nature of the workshop posed difficulties for non-English speakers and those relying on interpreters: “[the workshop was] running at a really quick pace. For people who use [the] help of interpreters, sometimes there is not sufficient time to finishes all exercises”. Addressing these issues by offering additional sessions for non-English speakers, more translated materials, and

ensuring that the workshop structure allows adequate time for interpretation could help make participation more inclusive and equitable.

Additionally, the composition of participant groups was noted as an area for improvement. Many attendees sat with familiar faces, which may have limited opportunities for broader knowledge exchange and intergenerational dialogue:

*“Everyone I knew sat together, and the impact of the exchange can be magnified by separating friends and getting in touch with people you don’t know”*

*“Maybe when you sign up, ask more questions about age group – get younger people interviewing more experienced people”.*

Some participants suggested a more intentional seating arrangement or structured activities to encourage engagement across different age groups and backgrounds to maximise the impact of discussions. There were also suggestions to organise workshops more frequently to ensure that everyone in the community has an opportunity to participate and provide input.

**Table 6. Project implementation rubric, including final evaluation assessments**

Level of performance	Project activities were delivered as planned	The extent to which research participants represented the intended audience of the project
<b>Excellent</b>	The project is completed well within the specified timeframe, meeting, or even surpassing deadlines.	Research participants closely mirror the diverse demographics of the community, including age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other relevant factors.
<b>Good</b>	The project is completed as intended, with only minor delays that do not significantly impact the project.	Research participants cover a significant portion of the community's demographic diversity, though there may be gaps or underrepresentation in specific subgroups.
<b>Adequate</b>	The project is completed as intended, but there might be noticeable delays that are manageable and do not cause major disruptions.	Research participants cover a satisfactory portion of the community's demographic but there are gaps or underrepresentation from many subgroups that the project team wanted to reach.
<b>Poor</b>	The project is not implemented as intended – there are significant delays that impact the overall timeline which cause dissatisfaction among stakeholders.	Research participants cover a poor representation across demographics, with significant gaps or underrepresentation in most groups.
<b>Insufficient</b>	The project experiences substantial delays, making it significantly late and causing significant negative consequences for stakeholders.	Research participants poorly reflect the diversity of the community, with very little to no representation from the groups the research team intended to reach.

## 2 KEQ2: To what extent were participants and stakeholders satisfied with the project?

To assess satisfaction with the project, we explored the views of the workshop participants and community partners. We analysed data from participant feedback surveys from the three workshops to understand the research participants' satisfaction with the project. We also analysed community partner debrief sessions and the end of project discussion with community partners to develop an understanding of their satisfaction.

### 2.1 Workshop participant satisfaction

Research participants expressed high satisfaction with the workshops they attended. Across all three workshops, the overwhelming majority of research participants, 96% or more, rated the workshop 'good' or 'very good' (see Figure 2). A very small minority of participants, no more than 4%, assessed the workshops as 'neutral' and no participants felt the workshops were 'bad' or 'very bad'. Open-ended responses in the feedback forms add further weight to this finding with many participants describing the workshops as "enjoyable", "lovely" and "engaging". Participants often thanked the project team for running the workshops, citing that it helped them "learn more about people in their community", that they were "touched listening to the stories that were being shared" and were "incredibly grateful" for the opportunity to participate in this "fantastic work". One participant spoke about the facilitation in a positive light: "facilitation was good – you had 'soft hands', there wasn't a choke hold on the process".

These positive findings speak to the strong engagement from community members in project. As such, participants' satisfaction with the project was assessed as 'Excellent' with 'The majority of community members (80% or more) express high satisfaction with the workshops.' (see Table 7).

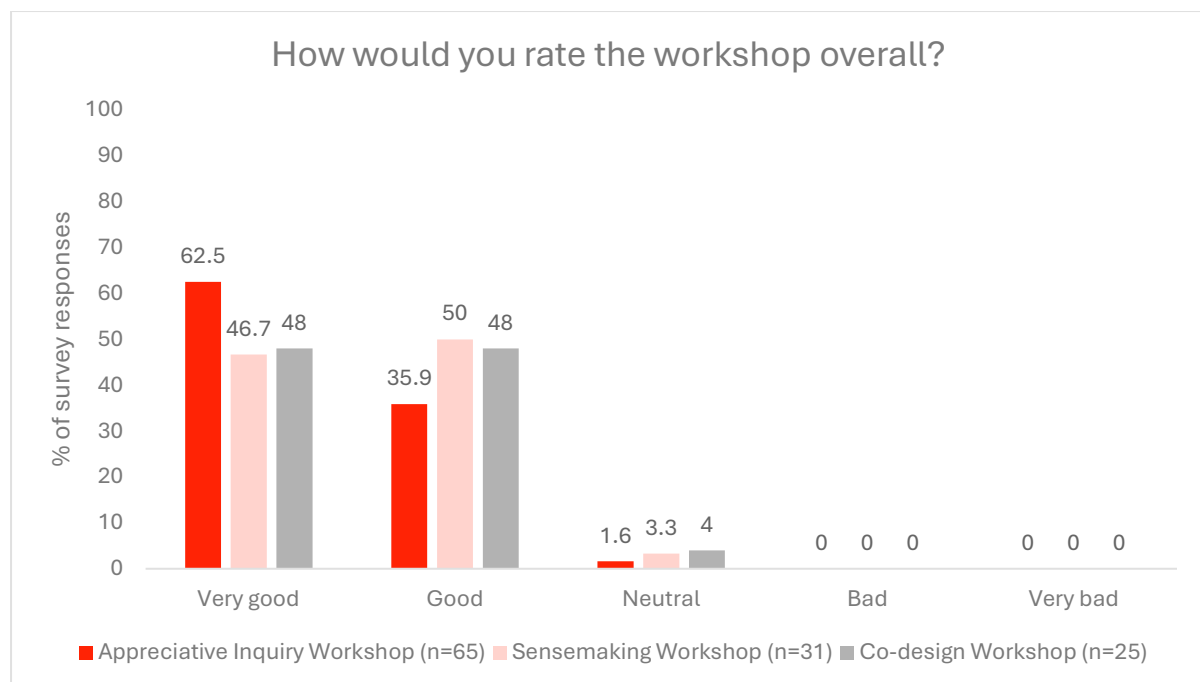


Figure 1. Workshop participants levels of satisfaction per workshop

## 2.2 Community partners satisfaction

Community partners had high praise for the project, specifically the Appreciative Inquiry process with some partners reporting they have taken this approach back to their own communities. There was also agreement that the project was facilitated to a high standard, with participants feeling included and welcome. The insights generated from the project, around what make public and private spaces inclusive and accessible, also prompted workshop participants and partners to consider this work in their own contexts.

Community partners expressed a desire to understand more about the findings from the Appreciative Inquiry interviews and to have access to this data in some way. Partners reported, at the time of the evaluation, that the Story of Change was too new to be used as an advocacy tool. It is expected that more time will be needed to understand its utility.

Further, it was also recommended that more ‘power holders’, i.e., stakeholders that can create change, be invited into the research process. Community partners recognised that there is a limit to what they can change at a structural systemic level, and as such, this may constrain the long-term impact of this work.

Community partners expressed the need for more resources to successfully implement the ideas developed during the co-design sessions. While the sessions themselves were productive in generating creative and actionable concepts, a key challenge was the absence of clear and immediate funding avenues to support the initiatives. This gap in financial support was understandably frustrating, as one partner expressed,

*“Looking around and having circular conversations, not getting to the pointy end of the solutions. Not talking about how we fund this. Let’s figure out what limitations of the project are, and put scaffold around it, and figure out how we can actually move it forward.”*

This quote reflects the difficulty of having valuable discussions without addressing the critical question of funding and practical support, which are necessary to transition ideas into tangible actions.

Despite these challenges, there was a sense of progress in terms of refining the ideas and creating clearer action steps compared to earlier projects. As one partner noted,

*“We got to the idea/action faster than previous sessions, things were channelled more effectively but what we didn’t have was who is going to do it and when is that happening... what is happening with those projects? Lots of followers but lack of leaders who want to take it on.”*

While the co-design process was seen to be more focused, there was a significant gap in leadership and accountability, which hindered the ability to move projects forward. Partners were able to identify what needed to be done, but they struggled with the question of who would take ownership and responsibility for implementation.

The overall sentiment from partners was that more clarity around resources and leadership was essential for the success of the initiatives. As another partner succinctly put it, “... when we start the

co-design project, we need to have an idea of who is doing the resourcing, so we know where it will go.” This underscores the importance of not only having a vision for the projects but also understanding how to fund and resource them. The lack of these elements left partners feeling uncertain about the long-term viability and impact of the projects they had worked on.

The insights provided from community partners are of particular value as they speak to the project as whole, rather than the individual workshops (as per the research participant feedback data). Community partners were included in the design and implementation of the project, and while many of them attended the workshops, they also participated in monthly meetings throughout the project to provide advice, feedback and input. Overall, community partners feedback on the project was largely positive. However, as discussed above, there was general agreement that some aspects of the project could be improved particularly in relation to codesign and funding. As such, community partners satisfaction with the project was assessed as ‘Good’ (see Table 7).

**Table 7. Satisfaction Rubric, including final evaluation assessments**

<b>Level of performance</b>	<b>To what extent were research participants satisfied with the project?</b>	<b>To what extent were community partners satisfied with the project?</b>
<b>Excellent</b>	The majority of community members (80% or more) express high satisfaction with the workshops.	Most community partners express high satisfaction with all components of the project, with some very minor recommendations.
<b>Good</b>	A significant portion (50-79%) of the community expressed satisfaction with the workshops.	Community members are satisfied with the project components but could identify 1-2 key aspects that could be improved.
<b>Adequate</b>	Community satisfaction is varied, with some (45-50%) expressing contentment and others indicating areas for improvement.	Community partners have an acceptable level of satisfaction but are able to highlight many key areas (3-4) that could be improved.
<b>Poor</b>	A notable portion (50%-70%) of the community members expresses dissatisfaction towards the workshops.	General dissatisfaction, with many areas requiring improvement and more negative feedback than positive.
<b>Insufficient</b>	Most community members (70% or more) express high levels of dissatisfaction towards the workshops.	The majority of community express high levels of dissatisfaction towards the research project, indicating mostly negative feedback on all aspects of the research project.



### 3 Did we achieve the intended outcomes? If so, for whom? If not, why?

As per the research projects program logic, a number of short- and mid-term outcomes were identified to assess the effectiveness of the project. These outcomes are below in Table 8.

The evaluation found that the *Where We Belong* project largely achieved its intended short-term outcomes. Participants overwhelmingly reported feeling more connected to their community, with the workshops fostering a sense of belonging and meaningful engagement. Many also expressed feeling heard and valued, with some indicating greater confidence in their ability to contribute to their community. The project also strengthened UTS's reputation as a trusted partner in community engagement, deepening relationships with community members and organizations.

However, progress toward mid-term outcomes – such as implementing co-designed projects and creating more inclusive and accessible spaces – was more limited. While the co-design workshops generated creative and relevant ideas, only the community newspaper moved into implementation, highlighting challenges related to funding, time, and clear pathways for turning ideas into action. The Appreciative Inquiry methodology and Story of Change were seen as valuable tools for engagement and reflection, and some partners have already used these approaches in their own work. While their use in advocacy and planning is still emerging, there are opportunities to further embed these tools in future initiatives to strengthen their impact. These findings highlight the need for continued investment in capacity-building, clearer mechanisms for implementation, and ongoing efforts to sustain community-driven impact beyond the initial research phase.

**Table 8. Short- and mid-term outcomes**

#### Short-term outcomes

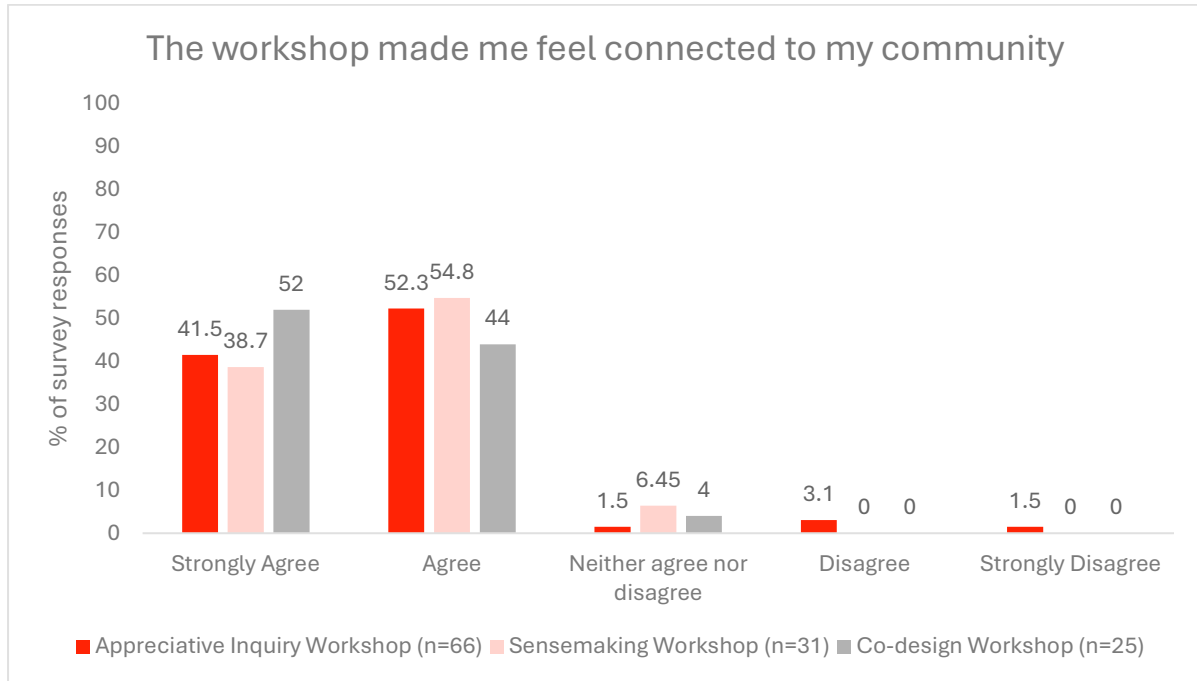
1. Community members have an increased level of connection to community
2. Community members have an increased level of confidence to contribute to community
3. Community members have an increased level of 'say' about what happens in their community
4. Community feel empowered to make a difference
5. Community partners have an increased understanding of opportunities and needs relevant to inclusive and accessible spaces.

#### Mid-term outcomes

1. Community experiences a strengthened partnership with UTS, feeling supported by UTS and trusting of UTS.
2. Community members initiate and implement projects that address outcomes identified through the ToC.
3. Co-designed projects result in more inclusive and accessible spaces for community members.
4. Learning around Appreciative Inquiry approach for community engagement to address community priorities

### 3.1 Short-term outcome 1: community connection

Overall, the findings from the feedback forms was overwhelmingly positive. Figure 3 illustrates the extent to which participants agreed that the workshop generated community connections. Across all workshops, the vast majority of participants strongly agreed or agreed that the workshops enabled them to feel connected to their community.



**Figure 3. Participants reported levels of connection to community, per workshop**

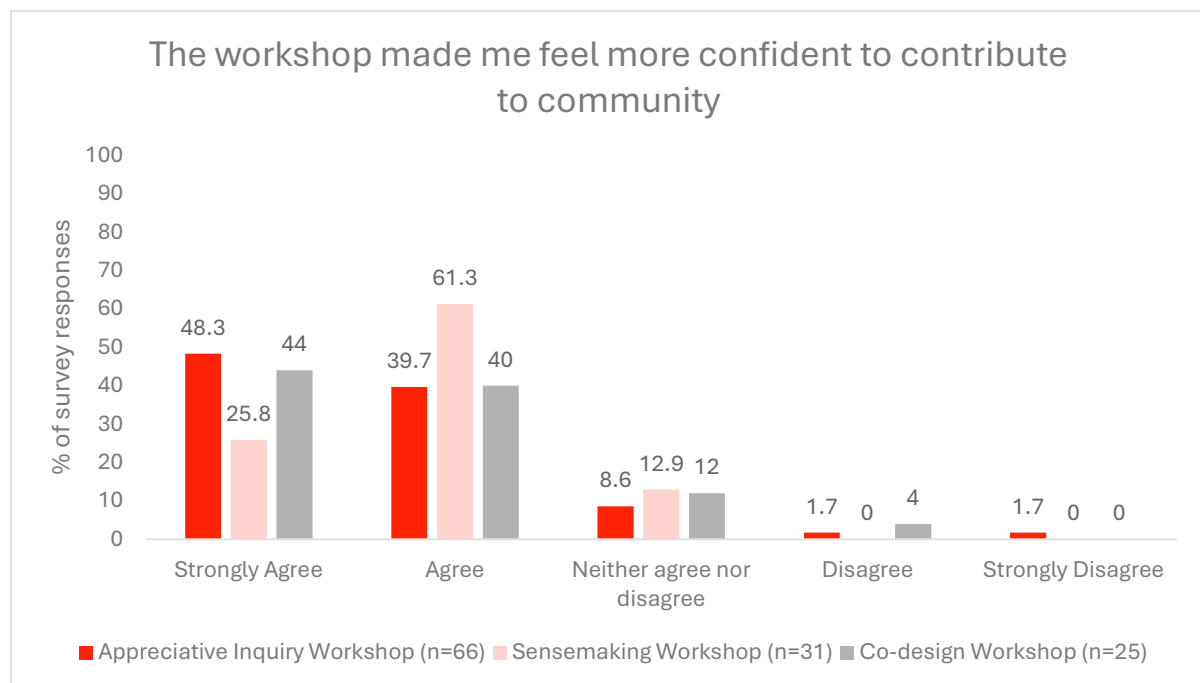
The feedback forms from the workshops highlighted a strong sense of community engagement and connection. Many participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to interact with others in their community, describing the workshops as a valuable space to build relationships. Comments such as “interaction with other locals,” “communication from a lot of different ranges of people in our community,” and “getting to connect with new people” reflect the inclusive and engaging experiences the workshop participants had. Participants also spoke to the workshop’s ability to foster a sense of belonging, with one stating it was “very engaging” and they “felt a sense of connection and community.”

Community partners echoed these sentiments, noting how practical elements like exchanging contact details, sharing lunch, and creating a welcoming atmosphere helped strengthen connections. One participant in the Appreciative Inquiry workshop specifically mentioned the focused approach of the session, noting that it provided “an opportunity for people who may not be locally engaged to share their aspirations for their community.” Another participant shared how hearing others’ stories left them inspired, saying, “Hearing stories from other people in my community and feeling inspired by the sense of generosity that we are all capable of.” These reflections suggest that the workshops not only facilitated connection but also sparked a shared sense of inspiration and collective potential within the community.

Based on the criteria in the corresponding rubric, this outcome was rated as 'excellent' - 'the vast majority (80% or more) of community members participating in the research project felt connected to community (see Table 9).

### 3.2 Short-term outcome 2: confidence to contribute

The majority of participants believed the workshops increased their confidence to contribute to community – with over 84% of participants across all three workshops strongly agreeing or agreeing that the workshops made them feel more confident to contribute (see Figure 4). There were, however, a number of participants who can neutral responses to this question and a small amount who said the workshop did not increase their confidence (3.4% in the AI workshop and 4% in the co-design workshop).



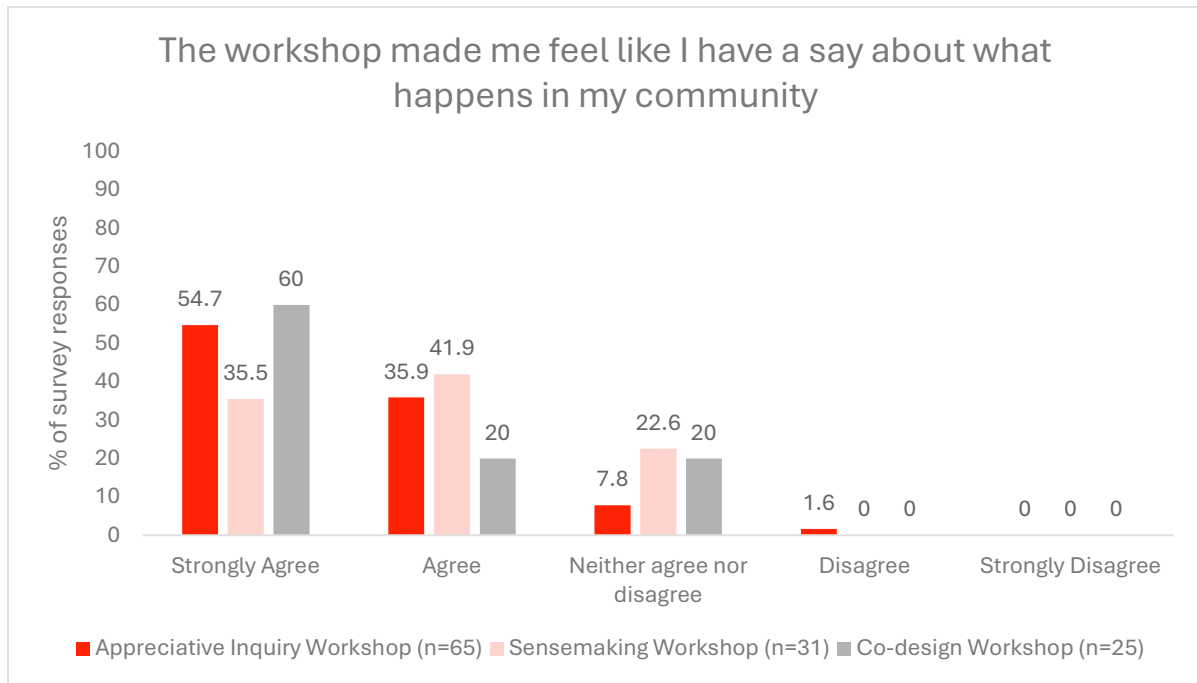
**Figure 4. Reported levels of confidence to contribute, per workshop**

Several quotes from participants in the feedback forms also highlight how the workshop boosted their confidence to contribute to their community. One participant expressed, "It was lovely to meet with so many lovely people from my 'hood' and a good reminder of how important it is to be involved with community and stay motivated." This reflects how the workshop rekindled a sense of belonging and encouraged ongoing community engagement. Another participant shared that one of their key insights from the day was, "the idea that I can actually participate in something that will help contribute to the community", indicating that the session enabled and inspired them to contribute. These reflections collectively show that the workshop not only helped participants feel more confident but may also have motivated them to take concrete steps towards engaging further with their community.

Based on the criteria in the corresponding rubric, this outcome was rated as 'excellent' – 'the vast majority (80% or more) of community members participating in the research project felt an increase level of confidence to contribute to community' (see Table 9).

### 3.3 Short-term outcome 2: getting to 'have a say'

Many of the workshop participants felt as though the workshop enabled them to have a say about what happens in their community. Over 77% of participants across all three workshops agreed or strongly agreed that the workshop made them feel like they can have a say (see Figure 5). For the sensemaking and co-design workshops, about 1 in 5 of the participants gave a neutral response. This finding may suggest that the workshops are not having the intended impact for a small subset of participants.



**Figure 5. Reported levels of feeling like workshop participants have 'say', per workshop**

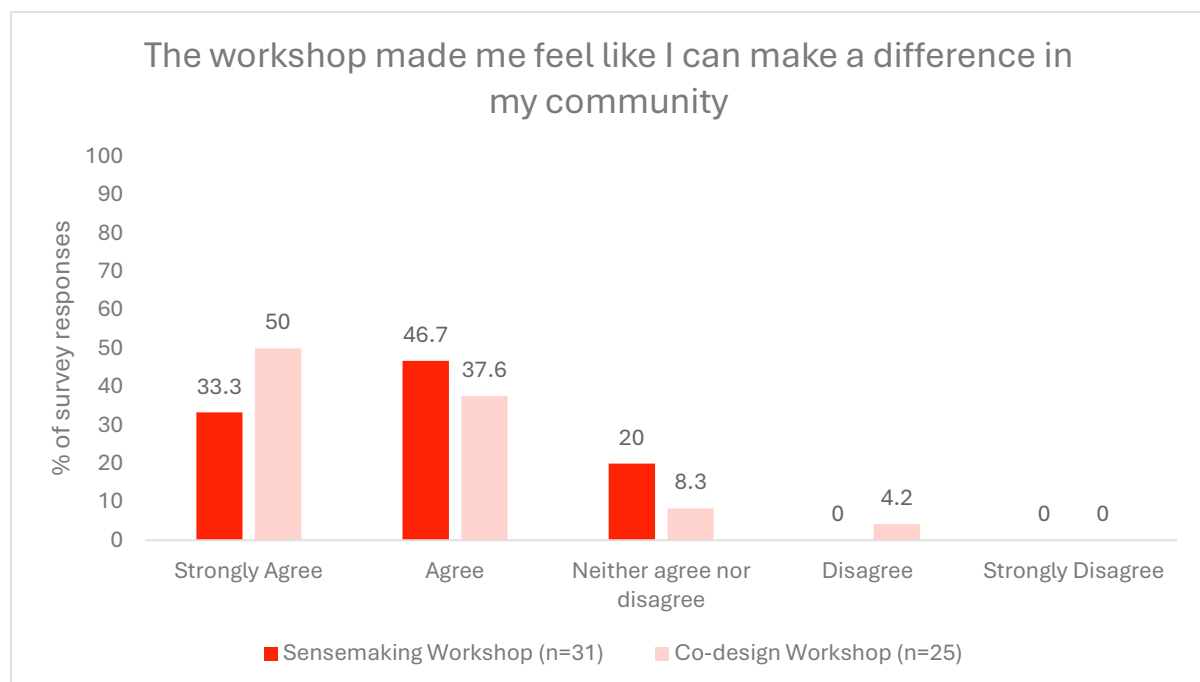
Participants expressed that the workshop gave them a valuable opportunity to have a say in what happens in their community. One participant shared, "I feel heard, and my voice is genuinely acknowledged," highlighting the sense of being recognized and valued. Others mentioned that it was "easy to talk" and that they felt a strong sense of "respect from all," creating an open and welcoming space for sharing ideas. Additionally, many appreciated the "ways of collaborating and sharing ideas," emphasizing how the workshop fostered a supportive environment where their input felt meaningful and impactful.

Several participants shared that the workshop gave them a sense of having a say in shaping their community's future. One participant highlighted the value of having their voice heard, saying, "Very meaningful activity – grateful for UTS to provide us an opportunity to express our opinion. I want to know more about the improvement in the community." Additionally, a participant noted the importance of being included in community conversations, stating that a key insight from the day was, "We all have different experiences and insight that needs to be listened to". These quotes reflect a strong sense of empowerment, with participants feeling that their contributions were valued and could influence future community actions.

Based on the criteria in the corresponding rubric, this outcome was rated as 'good' – 'most (60% - 79%) of community members participating in the research project felt they had an increase level of say about what happens in community (see Table 9).

### 3.4 Short-term outcome 4: making a difference in community

For the sensemaking and co-design workshops, participants were asked to reflect on if the workshop empowered them to make a difference in their community. Similar to above, the majority of participants, over 80%, stated that the workshop made them feel as though they could make a difference. However, for the sensemaking workshop, 20% for participants can a neutral response and for the co-design workshop, 4.2% felt that the workshop did not empower them. While these results are still overwhelming positive, this finding could indicate that the workshops are not having the desired effect for a small cohort of people.



**Figure 6. Reported levels of feeling empowered, per workshop**

Participants shared that the workshop gave them a sense of empowerment and the belief that they could make a difference in their community. One participant shared that a key learning from the workshop is that, "community is people-led, and hearing everyone's voices is what matters. A diverse group is a rich group." This highlights how the workshop fostered a sense of collective action. Another said, "Everyone has an opportunity to share their ideas. I am strongly inspired by the group," indicating that the opportunity to contribute inspired a sense of agency. Additionally, a participant shared that their key learning was, "the diversity of ideas created and the team effort", showing how working together allowed participants to feel that their contributions could lead to positive change. One person also shared, "I can share my thoughts freely," reinforcing the idea that the workshop created a space where individuals felt empowered to express themselves and contribute to community-driven solutions. Finally, a participant noted that what they liked most about the workshop

was, "meeting with other people in the same area, learning and giving feedback on issues, and working together with solutions," emphasising how the collaborative nature of the workshop helped participants feel they were actively involved in shaping their community's future.

Based on the criteria in the corresponding rubric, this outcome was rated as 'excellent' – the vast majority (80% or more) of community members participating in the research project agree they can make a difference in community (see Table 9).

### **3.5 Short-term outcome 5: Increased understanding of inclusive and accessible spaces**

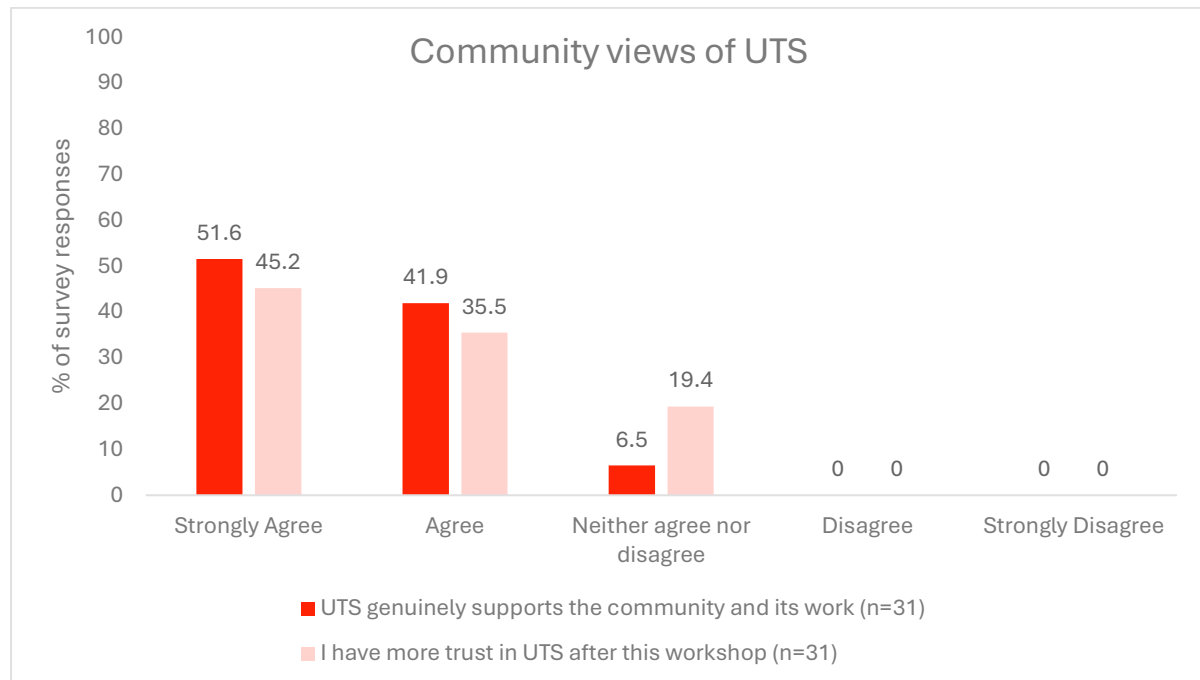
Community partners had mixed perspectives on if the research project increased their understanding in relation to inclusive and accessible spaces. Some community partners agreed that it has helped increase understanding and spoke about how they "have been able to hear and listen to different perspectives". Other community partners stated that there is a desire to learn more from the stories collected. One community partner stated that it would be helpful if the project team was able to "share a summary of everything we have learned or current issues" and that there was a need to share back information about the findings more effectively.

While this outcome was focused on the experiences of community partners, it is worth noting that the workshops also deepened community members understanding of the opportunities and challenges that exist around creating inclusive and accessible spaces. Several participants highlighted the need to address social isolation, especially for residents in public housing, noting the importance of providing spaces that foster connection and inclusion. When asked about their key learnings from the day, one participant shared, "Challenges facing residents in public housing to combat social isolation," while others emphasised the importance of better utilising community spaces, stating, "How to utilise our community space in a better way" and that there are "not enough community boards" and "underused community centres". The workshops also raised awareness of vulnerable groups, with one participant sharing their key learning that "not every community member has access to technology." Discussions on safety underscored its critical role in enabling community engagement, with one participant stating, "Community safety is the most important thing for residents and visitors to engage and use the spaces." The need for accessible, inclusive spaces was echoed by several, with one participant observing, "Accessibility and inclusiveness in public and private spaces are important to create a healthy, liveable community." Overall, the workshops fostered a broader understanding of how creating safe, accessible spaces is essential for building a strong, inclusive community where everyone feels valued.

### 3.6 Mid-term outcome 1: Strengthened partnership with UTS

In the sensemaking workshop, participants were asked to share their views of UTS. Two questions were used to ascertain levels of trust in the institution and a belief that UTS supports the work of the community. Just over 80% of participants stated that they 'have more trust in UTS after this workshop', with the remaining 19.4% giving a neutral answer (see Figure 7). Almost 94% of participants said they believe 'UTS genuinely supports the community and its work". Overall, the responses indicate a strong sense of trust and belief in UTS's commitment to supporting the community, highlighting the positive impact of the workshop on participants' perceptions of the institution.

Based on the criteria in the corresponding rubric, this outcome was rated as 'excellent' – 80% or more community members strongly agree or agree with the statements around support and trust (see Table 10).



**Figure 7. Research participants views of UTS (sensemaking workshop)**

In our focus group, the project team emphasised that a key outcome of the project was the strengthening of UTS's reputation within the community. The stories and anecdotes they shared, based on informal discussions with community, revealed how they worked hard to break down institutional barriers by prioritising relationships, trust, and reciprocity. The team highlighted that their approach – “conversations first, research second” – allowed for more organic and meaningful engagement, making the university feel more approachable and aligned with community needs. By using accessible language and methods that resonate with participants, they were able to foster a sense of shared ownership and collaboration, reinforcing UTS' role as a genuine *partner* in community-led work. The team shared with pride that UTS is increasingly seen as an integral part of the community, rather than a distant institution. This sense of embeddedness is so strong that when

UTS is absent from community spaces, like PUNS meetings, people take notice and feel that something is missing. This reflects the depth of trust and connection that has been built, reinforcing UTS's role as a valued and active community member rather than just an external academic institution. Further demonstrating this trust, many community partners have returned to collaborate on future projects, recognising UTS as a reliable and engaged partner. This retention speaks to the university's strong reputation for fostering meaningful, long-term relationships and its commitment to working alongside the community rather than imposing an external agenda.

### **3.7 Mid-term outcome 2: Co-designed projects are implemented and mid-term outcome 3: Co-designed projects create more inclusive and accessible spaces**

As part of the project, co-design sessions were conducted to support community to generate ideas for projects and initiatives that could be undertaken to activate the Story of Change. A bank of ideas was developed by community members to be taken forward for development.

One idea that has since come to fruition was a community newspaper: Glebe Connections. The community newspaper project emerged from an idea proposed by the Glebe Youth Service (GYS) and was developed further through the co-design workshops, in response to community members' wanting accessible ways to understand what's on in the local community. Initially, the concept was in its early stages, but with input from various community members, it quickly took shape as a platform to meet several community needs. The newspaper serves as both a practical resource – offering a consolidated two-page spread of accessible and low-cost community events – and a storytelling medium that highlights the voices and experiences of local residents.

The newspaper has seen significant success, with two issues published to date and a third on the way. Approximately 1,500 copies are printed for each issue and are distributed door-to-door, primarily in social housing, by UTS student volunteers. This hands-on approach to distribution helps ensure the newspaper reaches those who might benefit from it the most.

In conversation with the newspaper's creative director, it was shared that they believe the newspaper not only provides valuable information to community, but also strengthens community ties by broadening awareness of local happenings and fostering a greater sense of connection among residents. For example, many of the events shared in the paper, to the surprise of some involved in the project, were held at St. Helen's Community Centre, revealing a vibrant but under-recognised hub of activity.

Further, a core aspect of the newspaper is its commitment to community storytelling. It features personal accounts from local figures, often sharing their life trajectories and deep connections to the area. These stories offer an intimate look into the lives and contributions of those shaping the Glebe community, bringing attention to important social issues and highlighting local achievements. Beyond its value to readers, it is believed that the project also had a profound impact on those featured. For some, seeing their life stories in print was a cathartic and fulfilling experience, while others appreciated the exposure it provided for their work. At a broader level, the newspaper is thought to



have helped cultivate a deeper sense of community identity and awareness of Glebe's history and local leaders.

Despite the newspaper's success, it has raised important questions for the project team about its alignment with their broader goal of enabling community-led initiatives. While the newspaper was born from a community-generated idea and has been further developed in collaboration with GYS, much of the work – writing, editing, and production – has been driven by UTS staff and students. This partnership has undoubtedly strengthened local storytelling and provided valuable professional experience for UTS students, but it also highlights the challenge of ensuring true community ownership. If UTS were to step back, would the newspaper continue? This underscores a tension, discussed by the project team, between building local capacity, to transition more responsibility to community members, and providing institutional support, providing learning experiences for UTS students and delivering a partnered initiative. Moving forward, the team is exploring what genuine community-led projects look like and the role UTS can and should play in these projects, as an institution that the local community considers part of its own fabric.

A key goal of this research project was to foster multiple community-led initiatives through the co-design process, yet the community newspaper was the only idea that successfully materialised. This presents a challenge for the research team, as it raises questions about the barriers preventing other initiatives from taking off and the level of community readiness to drive projects independently. Additionally, resource constraints – both in terms of funding and the team's capacity – limited the level of support that could be provided to emerging ideas, making it difficult to nurture multiple initiatives simultaneously. While the newspaper demonstrates the potential impact of collaborative efforts, its success also highlights the reliance on institutional support from UTS staff and students. Moving forward, the team must consider how to better equip and empower community members to take ownership of projects, ensuring that future initiatives are not only community-driven in concept but also in execution to ensure long-term sustainability. This will require deeper reflection on capacity-building strategies, ongoing support structures, and the conditions necessary for community-led change to flourish.

Overall, these outcomes were difficult to assess due to the limited amount of data available. Based on the criteria in the corresponding rubric, we have rated the outcome 'community members initiate and implement projects that address outcomes identified through the Story of Change' as 'poor' (see Table 10). This is because as the community newspaper was the only project to be implemented, only a few community members were able to initiate and implement the project. Further, at this stage, it is largely unknown if the co-design project, the community newspaper, resulted in more inclusive and accessible spaces. The information shared above about the success of the newspaper are the views of the paper's creative director. As such, it is not known if community members themselves believe the newspaper has made a positive contribution to the community.

### 3.8 Mid-term outcome 4: Learning around Appreciative Inquiry

A key objective of the project was to support community partners in understanding how Appreciative Inquiry (AI) could foster engagement and help address shared priorities. To assess this, we analysed partners' reflections at the project's conclusion.

Overall, community partners gained valuable insights into how AI could be used as a tool for community engagement and identifying shared priorities. Some even applied these approaches in their own work or volunteer roles – for example, one partner incorporated AI-style questioning when working alongside tenants in a social housing estate, demonstrating its practical relevance beyond the project itself.

Project partners also discussed the limitations of AI; recognising the need for more concrete steps beyond conversation. While the group believed AI was effective in surfacing ideas and fostering dialogue, there was frustration around not reaching actionable solutions or discussing implementation details such as funding. As one partner pointed out "[we're just] looking around and having circular conversations, not getting to the pointy end of the solutions and not talking about how we fund this". This highlighted the challenge of balancing open-ended, strengths-based discussions with structured planning to ensure ideas translate into tangible outcomes.

The Story of Change was seen as a useful framework for organising ideas, and some partners felt the process moved discussions towards action more effectively than previous projects. One partner noted, "we got to the idea/action faster than previous sessions, things were channelled more effectively". However, there were still concerns about accountability – who would take ownership and how would projects move forward. The challenge of translating enthusiasm into leadership was a key barrier, as one partner observed, "There were lots of followers but a lack of leaders willing to take it on."

These reflections demonstrate that partners gained a deep understanding of both AI's strengths and its limitations. They recognised that while AI fosters creativity and connection, and can uncover shared priorities, it does not inherently provide a structured path to implementation. The realisation that "lots of followers but a lack of leaders" can slow progress suggests that AI, while valuable for surfacing ideas, needs to be paired with more action-oriented strategies to ensure follow-through. This reflects a nuanced understanding: AI is a useful tool for initiating change, but without clear mechanisms for responsibility and resource allocation, progress may stall.

Ultimately, these reflections indicate that partners not only learned how to use AI but also developed a critical perspective on its practical application. They recognised the importance of balancing creative engagement with structured decision-making and leadership development. Moving forward, this awareness could shape how they apply AI in their own work – adapting it to include stronger implementation strategies to ensure that the momentum generated during discussions leads to tangible community outcomes.

**Table 9. Short-term outcomes rubric, including final evaluation assessments**

<b>Level of performance</b>	<b>Community members have an increased level of connection to community</b>	<b>Community members have an increased level of confidence to contribute to community</b>	<b>Community members feel they have an increased level of say about what happens in their community.</b>	<b>Community members feel empowered to make a difference</b>	<b>Community partners have an increased understanding of strengths and needs in relation to inclusive and accessible spaces.</b>
<b>Excellent</b>	The vast majority (80% or more) of community members participating in the research project felt connected to community.	The vast majority (80% or more) of community members participating in the research project felt an increase level of confidence to contribute to community.	The vast majority (80% or more) of community members participating in the research project felt they had an increase level of say about what happens in community.	The vast majority (80% or more) of community members participating in the research project agree they can make a difference in community.	The vast majority (80% or more) of community partners reported an increased understanding of strengths and needs in relation to inclusive and accessible spaces.
<b>Good</b>	Most (60% – 79%) of community members participating in the research project felt connected to community.	Most (60% – 79%) of community members participating in the research project felt an increase level of confidence to contribute to community.	Most (60% – 79%) of community members participating in the research project felt they had an increase level of say about what happens in community.	Most (60% – 79%) of community members participating in the research project agree they can make a difference in community.	Most (60% – 79%) community partners reported an increased understanding of strengths and needs in relation to inclusive and accessible spaces.
<b>Adequate</b>	Perceptions of community connection vary among members, with some (50% – 60%) expressing connection while others may feel more neutral or might disagree.	Increased levels of confidence to contribute to community vary among members, with some (50% – 60%) expressing agreement while others may feel more neutral or might disagree.	Views on the extent to which community felt an increase level of say about what happens in community did vary. Some (50% – 60%) expressing agreement while others felt more neutral or disagreed.	There were mixed views (50% – 60%) of community members participating in the research project who agreed they can make a difference in community.	There were mixed views (50% – 60%) from community partners who reported an increased understanding of strengths and needs in relation to inclusive and accessible spaces.
<b>Poor</b>	Only some (49 – 35%) community members participating in the research project felt connected to community.	Only some (49% – 35%) community members participating in the research project felt an increase level of confidence to contribute to community.	Only some (49% – 35%) community members participating in the research project felt they had an increase level of say about what happens in community.	Only some (49% – 35%) community members participating in the research project felt they can make a difference in community.	Only some (49% – 35%) community partners reported an increased understanding of strengths and needs in relation to inclusive and accessible spaces.
<b>Insufficient</b>	Only a minority (34% or less) of community members felt connection with community.	Only a minority (34% or less) of community members felt an increase level of confidence to contribute to community.	Only a minority (34% or less) of community members felt they had an increase level of say about what happens in community.	Only a minority (34% or less) of community members felt they could make a difference in community.	A minority (34% or less) of community members felt they had an increased understanding of strengths and needs in relation to inclusive and accessible spaces.

Table 10. Mid-term outcomes rubric, including final evaluation assessments

Level of performance	Community experience a strengthened partnership with UTS, feeling supported by UTS and trusting of UTS	Community members initiate and implement projects that address outcomes identified through the Story of Change	Co-designed projects result in more inclusive and accessible spaces for community members	Learning around Appreciative Inquiry approach for community engagement to identify community priorities
<b>Excellent</b>	80% or more of community members strongly agree or agree with the statements around support and trust.	Most community members participating in the codesign projects were able to initiate and implement projects that address outcomes identified through the ToC.	The majority of community members, 80% or more, agree the co-design project made a meaningful contribution to increasing inclusive and accessible spaces.	Gaining an in-depth and detailed understanding of how AI is able to identify community priorities.
<b>Good</b>	60% – 79% or more of community members strongly agree or agree with the statements around support and trust.	Most community members participating in the codesign projects were able to initiate and implement projects that address outcomes identified through the ToC.	Overall, 60% – 79% of community members agree the project contributes to increasing inclusive and accessible spaces.	Gaining an overview and general understanding of how AI is able to identify community priorities.
<b>Adequate</b>	50% – 59% or more of community members strongly agree or agree with the statements around support and trust.	Some community members participating in the codesign projects were able to initiate and implement projects that address outcomes identified through the ToC.	50% – 59% members agree the project contributes to increasing inclusive and accessible spaces.	Learning around some aspects of AI but no clear insights on what worked or did not work and why.
<b>Poor</b>	Less than 50% of community members strongly agree or agree with the statements around support and trust.	Few community members participating in the codesign projects were able to initiate and implement projects that address outcomes identified through the ToC.	Less than 50% of community members agree the project contributes to increasing inclusive and accessible spaces.	No learnings on AI approach were gained to help inform the benefit of using this method to address community priorities.
<b>Insufficient</b>	No data is available to answer this criterion as the task was not able to be completed.	No data is available to answer this criterion as the task was not able to be completed.	No data is available to answer this criterion as the task was not able to be completed.	No data is available to answer this criterion as the task was not able to be completed.

## 4 KEYQ4: Did the project contribute to the desired social impact?

It was difficult to assess if the research project contributed the desired social impact given the 1-year time frame of the project and limited time to utilise and test research project outputs (i.e., the Story of Change and potential co-design projects). Though more work is needed to fully understand the projects contribution to social change, there is evidence to suggest it has empowered community partners to advocate more effectively, deepened trust in UTS as a genuine collaborator, and positioned the Centre for Social Justice & Inclusion as a leader in bridging research and real-world practice. While the early signs are promising, the real challenge lies in sustaining this momentum and ensuring these efforts lead to lasting, community-driven transformation.

### 4.1 Ultimo, Glebe, Pyrmont, and Haymarket have inclusive and accessible spaces where community report an increased sense of connection and belonging.

In this evaluation, we did not have the opportunity to assess how much inclusive and accessible spaces had increased connection and belonging in the precinct. The evaluation of co-design projects undertaken by community could provide insight into this long-term outcome. Further work needs to be undertaken in this space to understand the contribution of this project to this long-term outcome.

It must however, be noted that through participation in this project, community members and organisations were able to think more about this topic, what it might look like for them, their community and their existing organisations.

### 4.2 Community partners have increased capacity to advocate on behalf of their communities.

The project has contributed to building the capacity of community partners to advocate on behalf of their communities, as evidenced by community partners integrating the work into their advocacy efforts. In our focus group with the project team, it was shared that one partner used insights from the project to highlight community priorities within their organisation, while another leveraged the findings in discussions with a local social housing provider. These examples suggest that the project has provided valuable tools and frameworks that support partners in articulating and advocating for the needs of their communities.

However, while these early signs of impact are promising, further work is needed to understand the long-term and broader effects. It remains important to assess whether these advocacy efforts lead to tangible policy or service changes and how the project's influence continues to evolve over time. Future evaluation should explore how community partners sustain and expand their advocacy beyond the initial project period, ensuring that the knowledge and skills gained translate into lasting change.

### **4.3 UTS is a trusted partner in community engagement and capacity building work, sharing resources, knowledge and uplifting and centring community voices.**

As previously discussed, the project has significantly strengthened UTS's reputation as a trusted partner in community engagement and capacity building. Data from the sensemaking workshop shows that over 80% of participants reported increased trust in UTS, and nearly 94% agreed that the university genuinely supports the community and its work. These findings highlight the effectiveness of UTS's approach in building relationships and fostering confidence among community members.

The project team emphasised that this trust was cultivated by prioritising relationships over rigid research agendas – an approach summed up as “conversations first, research second.” By using accessible language, engaging in open dialogue, and breaking down institutional barriers, UTS has positioned itself as an active and embedded community partner rather than a distant academic institution. The university's presence in community spaces has become so valued that its absence is noticed, demonstrating the depth of connection that has been built.

However, sustaining and expanding this trust requires continued effort. While many community partners have returned for future collaborations, further work is needed to ensure these relationships remain equitable and community-driven. UTS must continue to refine its role, ensuring that it ‘uplifts’ rather than leads, and that community voices remain at the center of decision-making. Strengthening pathways for long-term, self-sustaining community-led initiatives will be key to deepening this impact.

### **4.4 The Centre for Social Justice & Inclusion is at forefront of community-engaged research, creating a bridge between the university and the community that leads to social change.**

We did not assess this outcome in the first year, as it was too early to determine whether social change had occurred. However, through discussions with the project team, we identified several key actions they have taken that could contribute to this outcome overtime.

One significant way the project has contributed to community-engaged research is by sharing its insights and tools with industry and government partners. The team has presented the SoC and project findings to the City of Sydney and to industry stakeholders, influencing how they approach social impact work. For example, the team's work has informed the social impact strategy of one key industry partner and contributed to the development of a community resilience strategy for another. Additionally, the project played a role in shaping a submission for the government inquiry on loneliness, demonstrating its relevance to broader policy discussions. These efforts highlight how the research is being used beyond the university, bridging academia and practice to drive change. However, the team acknowledges that breaking down barriers, particularly with government, will take time and continued engagement. Ongoing relationship-building and strategic dissemination of the work will be essential moving forward.

Additionally, the project has been shared within academic spaces, including at the Engagement Australia conference and a Carnegie network session, sparking conversations about institutional

barriers universities face in supporting community work. The upcoming project launch in March 2025 provides another opportunity to disseminate findings and demonstrate the value of community-engaged research.

However, further work is needed to ensure the long-term impact of this research. A key challenge is extending its reach beyond initial presentations and workshops – disseminating findings more widely and ensuring they translate into concrete advocacy and policy change. The team must also consider how to support ongoing community advocacy efforts, ensuring that the relationships built through this project continue to foster trust, collaboration, and meaningful social change.





# Limitations

This evaluation encountered several limitations that impact the depth and scope of its findings. The evaluation did not include any longer-term data collection to assess the impacts of the research project beyond the first year. Future check ins or follow ups will be necessary to understand how/if the Story of Change was used to enhance and advocate for more inclusive and accessible communities.

A key limitation of the evaluation was how, other than the newspaper, co-design ideas did not eventuate into projects. Key outcomes were related to this component of the project, and as such we were unable to explore how the project could contribute to enhancing inclusive and accessible spaces for community members. This greatly constrained our ability to explore the longer-term value of the project.

There was limited qualitative data collected from community members, who only provided written reflections after attending workshops through a feedback form. While the short-answer survey questions offered valuable insights about their experiences, interviews or focus groups with community members could have provided richer understanding of the participants' reflections and the project's longer-term value.

Further, another key limitation is that in this evaluation we have relied heavily on the stories and anecdotes shared by the project team and the creative director of the newspaper. While these perspectives were valuable, they provided a second-hand account of the project's impact rather than firsthand reflections from those featured in the newspaper, community members, or project partners. Capturing these voices through interviews or focus groups would have strengthened our understanding of the project's influence and provided a more comprehensive assessment of its outcomes.

# Recommendations

This evaluation has provided valuable insights about the strengths of this project, the impact on community members, and helpful lessons to take into the next year of work. Below are key recommendations that could strengthen future iterations of this work. They encompass improvements that could be made to processes and practices of the project team, as well as recommendations for how the project team can progress this body of work, working towards achieving the mid- and long-term outcomes they had identified.

## 1 Broaden engagement

Although the project successfully engaged a broad cross-section of the community, some groups were underrepresented, particularly First Nations people and members of the LGBTIQ+ community. Future projects should adopt more targeted recruitment strategies, diversify community partnerships, and explore additional engagement methods to ensure a wider range of voices are included in the research process.

## 2 Share back community stories

While we acknowledge that efforts have already been made to share community stories, including an upcoming launch event and presentations to the partners group, there is a need to deepen engagement by expanding these initiatives. Future projects should prioritise sharing back community stories in a variety of ways to foster deeper engagement, reflection, and collaboration. This could involve creating accessible and interactive formats, such as storyboards or visual summaries to capture and convey the key themes and lived experiences shared by participants. Additionally, the project could develop a digital repository where community stories are archived and made available for ongoing reference, ensuring that partners can revisit and utilise these narratives in their advocacy or planning efforts. Sharing stories in meaningful and tangible ways would not only validate participants' contributions but also empower partners to act on the findings, using these insights as a foundation for co-designed solutions and sustained community-driven impact.

## 3 Turn ideas into action

Future research projects should place a stronger emphasis on turning ideas into action by embedding clear pathways for implementation, sourcing adequate funding, and supporting leadership development among community members. This could involve making it clearer to participants from the outset of the project what their contributions could lead to and the role they can play in this work – managing people's expectations but also empowering people to step into a leadership role. This could also involve supporting community members through capacity-building initiatives that enhance skills in project management, advocacy, and grant writing to empower them to take ownership of projects.

Further, facilitating partnerships with organisations that can provide additional support or resources would further empower community members to lead initiatives effectively. This could also include providing community partners with an outline of the ideas generated in the co-design workshops, in the event that they may be interested in taking further action in these areas. By fostering a culture of accountability and leadership within the community, future projects can ensure that the ideas generated translate into tangible, lasting impacts.

## 4 Expand advocacy and policy influence

The project contributed to advocacy efforts, with community partners using its insights to influence organisations. Additionally, findings informed a submission for the government inquiry on loneliness. Future work should build on these efforts by proactively identifying opportunities to use the Story of Change and other research outputs to shape policy discussions, inform government strategies, and strengthen advocacy initiatives.

Future projects could also better facilitate engagement with ‘power holders’, such as government bodies, industry leaders, and other influential stakeholders, to drive systems change and amplify community impact. This could involve convening forums or roundtables where community members and power holders collaborate to discuss the research and its implications. Additionally, future projects could build advocacy capacity within the community, equipping participants with tools and strategies to effectively engage and influence decision makers. By bridging the gap between grassroots initiatives and institutional actors, projects can foster partnerships that lead to policy change, resource allocation, and structural reforms that support long-term, equitable outcomes for communities.









# Conclusion

The *Where We Belong* project has demonstrated the power of community-based participatory research. The participatory methodology of Appreciative Inquiry, incorporating community interviews, sensemaking sessions, and co-design activities, fostered a deeper connection among community members and empowered them to envision meaningful changes in their neighbourhoods. Participants reported high levels of satisfaction, emphasising the importance of feeling heard, valued, and included in conversations about their community's future.

Beyond its direct benefits to community members, the project has strengthened the relationship between UTS and the local community. Community members expressed increased trust in UTS as a partner committed to uplifting and centring their voices. This work further reinforces the role of UTS as a catalyst for social impact in the precinct, building on the foundation laid by the Centre for Social Justice & Inclusion.

Despite its successes, the project also highlighted several areas for improvement, particularly in turning co-designed ideas into action. The absence of clear pathways for implementation and limited funding opportunities constrained the ability to transform community-led concepts into tangible outcomes. The reliance on UTS staff and students to drive initiatives, such as the community newspaper, raises important questions about sustainability and community ownership. Additionally, the project underscored the need for stronger engagement with underrepresented groups, capacity building with community, and deep ongoing engagement with power holders such as government and industry to drive systemic change.

As the project moves forward, integrating these learnings will be critical to ensuring lasting impact. By aligning resources, empowering community leaders, and fostering strategic partnerships, future iterations of this work can build on its successes to create more inclusive, accessible, and vibrant communities. The insights and relationships cultivated through this project lay the groundwork for ongoing collaboration and advocacy, with the potential to inspire long-term, transformative change across the precinct and beyond.

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