

CASE STUDY

Community Connectors 2021: A Multicultural NSW COVID-19 Delta Wave Response Project



Highlights at a glance (max 500 words)

The Multicultural NSW Community Connectors Program was instigated during the COVID-19 Delta Wave in New South Wales, which began in June 2021. Multicultural NSW had designed community responses to both **inform** and **consult**, and Community Connectors aimed to **involve** and **collaborate** with stakeholders.

The project addressed key questions:

- What can co-design between community stakeholders and Government look like, in times of increased pressure and need?
- How can we 'join the dots' and ensure community stakeholders are aware of and can access Government supports?
- How can we support community stakeholders to support each other?

Community Connectors was designed to support communities within the 12 Local Government Areas (LGAs) that were most impacted by COVID-19 case numbers and public health restrictions during the Delta Wave. These were principally within Western and South-Western Sydney. Community Connector groups were built, comprising of organisations and community leaders based in the 12 LGAs. Group participants were drawn from successful applications to Multicultural NSW's 'Empowering and Supporting Local Communities' grant program, which recognised the need for local solutions to local needs, and aimed to fund projects driven by local expertise.

Community Connectors groups meetings occurred fortnightly, facilitated by Multicultural NSW community engagement team members.

A Project Flow' framework was developed to enable feedback and ideas discussed in meetings to be fed around the Community Connectors network, around the wider Multicultural NSW team and to key decision makers contributing to the NSW Government Delta response.

The project led to outcomes across 'three tiers':

1. Intra/Inter-Group actions: Community Connector participants sharing ideas and resources with each other, for example - information on clothing drives, sharing surplus resources and offering advice and program ideas. This was facilitated during meetings, and participants were empowered to collaborate outside of meetings.

2. Multicultural NSW-led actions: in response to the key issues raised across the community connectors groups, the following was organised:

- Food and Essential Items Projects Support Forum (11/11/2021). The panel involved representatives from FoodBank, OzHarvest, Good360, Resilience NSW and Department of Communities and Justice. Held due to the high number of participants running community delivery projects during lockdowns.
- NSW Health Q&A (25.11.2021). The panel included representatives from NSW Health and NSW Multicultural Health Communications Service. Held as response to direct requests from participants.
- Invitations to 'Safeguarding Social Cohesion' workshops were distributed to all participants. These workshops were co-developed by Multicultural NSW and the Department of Communities & Justice, and included training in effective communications and tackling misinformation.
- Resource sharing from Services Australia and Service NSW to enable community organisations to help clients access their digital/paper Covid-19 vaccination certificates.
- Guest speakers, including representatives from the Office of the Advocate for Children & Young People, TAFE NSW & relevant Local Councils, were invited to contribute to individual meetings to respond to specific issues.
- Detailed information was shared on Multicultural NSW responsive funding programs.

3. Government actions: Synthesising key themes through the Multicultural NSW Policy Team to share with the agency's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and the NSW Government's Covid-19 Delta Wave community response pillar (via the Delta Project Management Team – PMO)

Key search words: Government - State, Multicultural NSW, Government Community Collaboration, Collaborative Engagement, Community Vision,

1.0 Objectives

700 word limit – currently 700

BACKGROUND:

Multicultural NSW is a New South Wales Government agency, focused on promoting community harmony and social cohesion in one of the most culturally diverse states in the world. Multicultural NSW's Community Engagement team creates responsive engagement projects; working with grassroots organisation, religious leaders and peak bodies to support NSW's diverse communities.

The Community Connectors Project was developed in response to the 'COVID-19 Delta Wave' in New South Wales, which saw an increase in positive cases and an increased push to raise vaccination rates. Early in the Delta Wave, some Local Government Areas (LGAs) in and around Western and South-West Sydney were placed under more stringent public health orders due to rapidly rising case numbers in these areas. These became known as the '12 LGAs of Concern'.

Community leaders and organisations in the '12 LGAs of Concern' identified the need for more localised solutions to support people. These LGAs have highly culturally diverse populations, with community organisations that have demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting the people they represent. The Community Connectors Project spoke to this need, responding to the following:

- Calls from communities as identified through Multicultural NSW's community engagement initiatives and community sentiment analysis
- Priorities under Pillar Five of the COVID-19 Delta Wave Micro Strategy to 'Empower Communities'
- Multicultural NSW's strategic priority – 'Community Resilience' under the (communities coming together in times of need), as outlined in the 'Stronger Together Strategic Plan'

KEY PROJECT OBJECTIVES:

- To develop a co-design process between community and government, to better inform communications and government responses related to COVID-19 and public health orders
- To ensure that there can be local solutions for local issues, recognising the expertise of community groups and organisations in developing responses and policy to improve vaccination rates and to better support people during COVID-19
- To connect community groups and organisations in the same LGAs and support them to offer mutual support

PROJECT SCOPE:

Eight Community Connector groups were slated - Bayside/Georges River, Blacktown, Burwood/Strathfield, Campbelltown/Penrith, Canterbury-Bankstown, Cumberland, Fairfield and Liverpool/Parramatta. Each group would have around 10 participants.

Group participants would be selected from successful recipients of the Multicultural NSW 'Empowering and Supporting Local Communities' grant (Round 1) - this funding program enabled community members and organisations to propose a project in direct response to locally-identified need.

Stakeholder sentiment prior to the instigation of Community Connectors ranged from frustration and anger to hopefulness. Some community organisations and members felt that their local areas were being treated unfairly, and that their efforts to curb the spread of COVID-19 were being overlooked. People felt punished and blamed.

Others felt hopeful that their connections with Multicultural NSW could make a difference, having participated in large-scale community forums being run by the agency.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT:

An R&D phase produced the following:

- Research into Australian and global community engagement projects set-up in response to COVID-19, for example, the UK Community Champions Program
- Research into non-COVID-19 community connector programs in Australia, for example the NDIS National Community Connector Program
- Practice research, comparing the project to Deliberative Engagement and mapping it along the IAP2 scale
- Assessing the ‘Empowering and Supporting Local Communities’ grant applications, ensuring strong awareness of the key themes present in applications

Informed by research outcomes, the project planning stage included:

- Demographic Mapping for the targeted LGAs - to inform the group-building process, ensuring each group could be representative. For example, 2016 ABS Census Data showed that 18-24s were the largest population age-group in Fairfield, and therefore it was necessary to ensure that the Fairfield Community Connectors Group included organisations with programs run by/for/with young people.
- Preparation of a project artefacts, including:
 - An equity-centred program logic which mapped project inputs, activities and intended outcomes
 - A ‘project flow’ diagram, showing how information would flow between groups and Multicultural NSW’s Senior Leadership Team for community feedback and ideas to be heard and potentially actioned. This included how the project could link to the NSW Government’s Covid-19 Delta Wave community response pillar.
- A pilot initiative supporting South Sudanese community leaders with food delivery projects was instigated and evaluated to test information flow processes. Feedback from participants directly informed the development of Community Connectors. Participants went on to join the Blacktown Community Connectors group.

Responsive: Community Connectors was developed in direct response to articulated community need, addressing the necessity for greater collaboration between government and community.

Local Needs, Local Solutions:

Community Connectors recognised that the experts of local need and the communities living and working in the local areas. The project sought to create solutions to issues related to the COVID-19 Delta Wave in the ‘12 LGAs of Concern’ by collaborating with local community organisations.

Collaboration: Previous engagement around COVID-19 had included forums to disseminate information and community consultations.

Community Connectors aimed to create collaborative solutions, building policy and government responses as a direct result of ideas discussed in Community Connector meetings.

2.0 Methodology

Maximum 1000 words for this section (currently 949)

PROJECT PROCESS

Building on research and development, Community Connectors project planning incorporated the following:

Group Building

There were 85 successful applicants in Round 1 of the ‘Empowering and Supporting Local Communities’ funding, many of which were based within the ‘12 LGAs of Concern’. To build the Community Connectors groups, we used:

- Eligibility Criteria were developed by the Multicultural NSW Policy Team
- Demographic Mapping helped ensure representative groups could be built
- Grant recipients’ projects and reach were analysed to ensure each Community Connector group incorporated organisations running diverse projects for different community demographics

Team Training

- Each Community Connector group had a Facilitator and Scribe from the Multicultural NSW Team. Team Training was developed to ensure everyone understood the project, how it would run and its intended outcomes. The training also covered an exploration of co-design facilitation, and the team created a set of ‘shared facilitation principles’ to inform group session tone.
- Facilitators and scribes were provided with a Team Training Booklet containing all relevant project documents and training outcomes.

Group Meetings: Facilitation & Co-Design

Community Connector groups met on a fortnightly basis, allowing for interim meetings between the Multicultural NSW Team to action responses and feed key information to decision makers.

Group meetings were facilitated according to co-design principles – designed to not feel like community consultations or information dissemination sessions.

Techniques such as developing *‘How Might We...?’* questions were used. This is a collaborative process reframing issues as questions. This helps to:

- Recognise that there are multiple approaches to answering a question: often we can become fixed on our solutions/projects as being the main way to solve a problem, but by focusing on a question we can have a more open discussion about the spectrum of what can work.
- Recognise that there is a wide ecology from grassroots initiatives to Government all working on addressing the same questions – we can be ‘stronger together’.
- Enable creative thinking, coming up with new ideas and big picture thinking
- Connect ideas and organisations together to explore responses to common questions

Data Collection and Sharing

Data and notes from meetings were gathered through pre-prepared templates and consolidated for sharing as per the Project Flow.

Weekly email communications were sent to Community Connector participants sharing key meeting discussion themes and the actions generated due to everything shared during meetings.

Project Flow (*image below*) and Outcomes

Community Connectors was set up as a co-design project, ensuring that NSW Government communications and local policy could be informed by feedback from the groups, as well as creating the opportunity for group-members to network and overcome local issues together.

Throughout Community Connectors, actions developed in response to identified needs, across three tiers:

1. Intra/Inter-Group actions: Community Connector participants sharing ideas and resources with each other, for example - information on clothing drives, sharing surplus resources and offering advice and program ideas. This was facilitated during meetings, and participants were empowered to collaborate outside of meetings.

2. Multicultural NSW-led actions: in response to the key issues raised across the community connectors groups, the following was organised:

- Food and Essential Items Projects Support Forum (11/11/2021). The panel involved representatives from FoodBank, OzHarvest, Good360, Resilience NSW and Department of Communities and Justice. Held due to the high number of participants running community delivery projects during lockdowns.*
- NSW Health Q&A (25.11.2021). The panel included representatives from NSW Health and NSW Multicultural Health Communications Service. Held as response to direct requests from participants.*
- Invitations to 'Safeguarding Social Cohesion' workshops were distributed to all participants. These workshops were co-developed by Multicultural NSW and the Department of Communities & Justice, and included training in effective communications and tackling misinformation.
- Resource sharing from Services Australia and Service NSW to enable community organisations to help clients access their digital/paper Covid-19 vaccination certificates.
- Guest speakers, including representatives from the Office of the Advocate for Children & Young People, TAFE NSW & relevant Local Councils, were invited to contribute to individual meetings to respond to specific issues.
- Detailed information was shared on Multicultural NSW responsive funding programs.

*The large forums were open to all Multicultural NSW community engagement stakeholders.

3. Government actions: Synthesising key themes through the Multicultural NSW Policy Team to share with the agency's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and the NSW Government's Covid-19 Delta Wave community response pillar (via the Delta Project Management Team – PMO)

Project Evaluation and Exit Strategy

The need for a good evaluation and exit strategy was mapped in the initial project planning. It was important to ensure the program could be 'exited' well, with participants feeling a sense of completion.

The following steps supported evaluation:

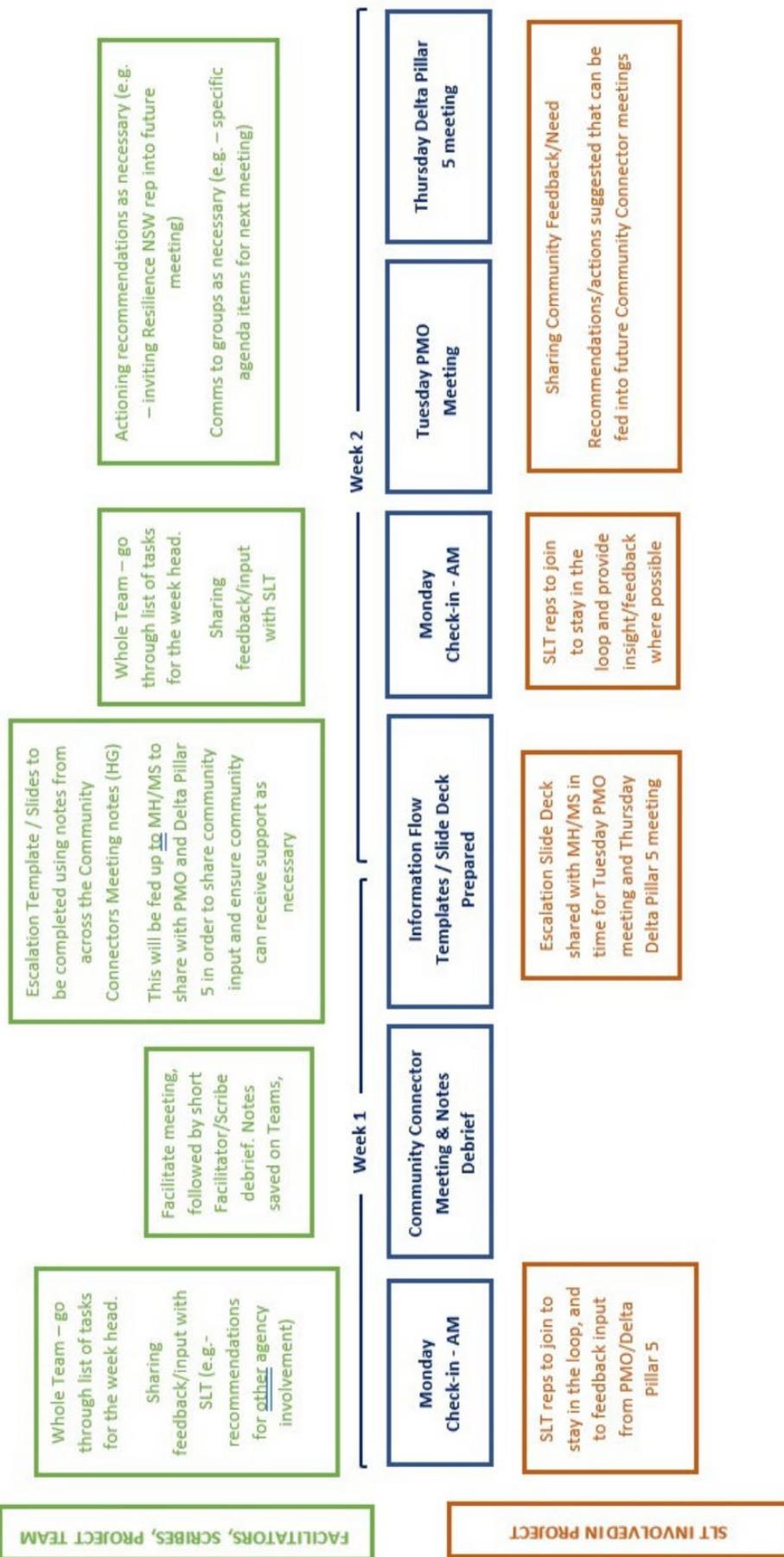
- Recording ad-hoc feedback during each meeting
- Regular meetings for the project team to reflect on progress and debrief
- 1:1 phone conversations during the final weeks of the project with a cross section of participants
- Team reflection surveys for Multicultural NSW staff
- Participant reflection surveys, with time dedicated to filling these out the final session.
- Participants were given a summary report of key outcomes, their group's contact details, and ongoing supports available.
- Participants are also supported to continue to network with each other and can reach out to the Multicultural NSW Community Engagement team in future as needed.

TIMEFRAME AND RESOURCING

Community Connectors had a limited timeframe, bound by ensuring quick responses to issues faced by communities due to COVID-19 and lockdowns.

The project was resources 'in-house' at Multicultural NSW, led by the Community Engagement team. Support was provided by additional government agencies and large NGOs in direct response to discussions arising from Community Connector meetings.





Alignment with IAP2 Core Values for the practice of public participation

IAP2 Core Values	Example of how this was considered in the design of your project methodology
<p>1. Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process</p>	<p>This was core to Community Connectors.</p> <p>The project was centred around the concept of ‘local needs, local solutions’. Participants were drawn from ‘Empowering and Supporting Local Communities’ grant recipients – a grant round designed specifically to fund projects created at a grassroots level in direct response to community need.</p> <p>Participants were based within the ‘12 LGAs of Concern’ – local government areas in Western and South-West Sydney that were considered most impact by COVID-19 case numbers and public health restrictions. Community Connectors recognised local expertise, enabling participants to be a voice for their local communities and residents.</p> <p>Community Connectors was designed to enable community organisations and leaders to collaborate with government to inform policy and responses to issues related to COVID-19.</p>
<p>2. Public participation includes the promise that the public’s contribution will influence the decision</p>	<p>Community Connectors was set-up to allow community feedback to directly inform government-led supports. The ‘Project Flow’ outlined how discussions and ideas raised in Community Connectors meetings would be shared across Multicultural NSW to lead to the creation of support forums and resource sharing.</p>
<p>3. Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers</p>	<p>During Community Connector meetings, participants and facilitators discussed a venn diagram showing the overlap between how government and community can work together. Decisions arising from Community Connectors were time-specific, due to the nature of the issues relating to COVID-19, but the process of enabling co-design facilitation between a government agency and community organisations had sustainable impact.</p>
<p>4. Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision</p>	<p>Community Connectors sought out participation from community organisation and leaders in areas disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and public health</p>

	orders. This ensured that opinions and ideas from these areas were amplified.
5. Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate	<p>Principal engagement in Community Connectors was through fortnightly virtual meetings, however participants were given opportunities to feedback in alternative ways through email, phone calls and community forums.</p> <p>The fortnightly meeting agendas and dates/times were set-up in consultation with participants.</p>
6. Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way	<p>Participants received information regularly through meeting debrief communications, outlining the combined data and key themes from across all meetings.</p> <p>Resources around COVID-19 were continually updated through the Delta Wave, and these were shared as part of the meeting debrief communications.</p> <p>Participants received further information through community forums, which featured guest speakers to ensure relevant and up-to-date information could be shared.</p>
7. Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision	Community Connector meeting debriefs continually shared how participant input affected decision making, highlighting the supports generated by and with Multicultural NSW in direct response to ideas discussed.

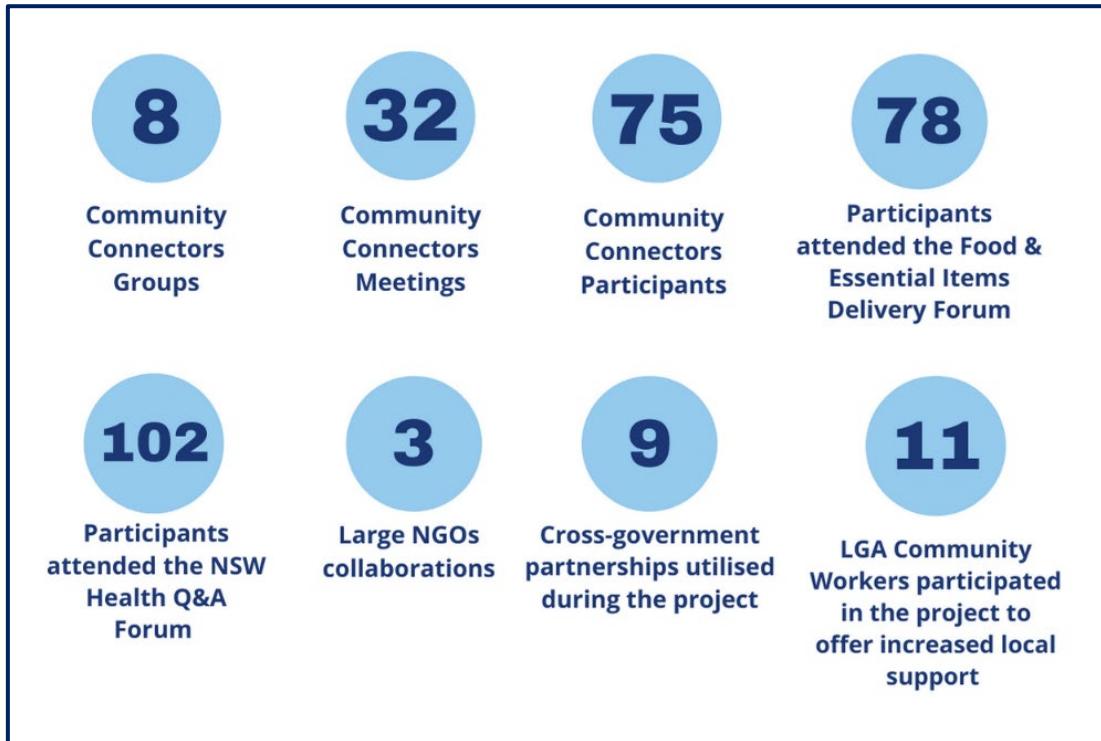
"Very well done, a great initiative. I have been working in this sector for the last 32 years, I always hoped that there would be this kind of close linkage between community service providers and Multicultural NSW."

– Community Connectors Participant, 2021

"A collaborative approach between government and organisations is essential to building robust and resilient communities in times of emergency and crisis. Community Connectors is the beginning to fostering innovative and sustainable partnerships not only with government but between organisations."

– Community Connectors Participant, 2021

COMMUNITY CONNECTORS IN NUMBERS:



COMMUNITY CONNECTORS IN THE WORDS OF PROJECT STAKEHOLDERS (MOST COMMON WORDS FROM EVALUATION SURVEYS)



IMAGES FROM COMMUNITY CONNECTORS MEETING SLIDES

How Might We...? Questions

'How might we...?' questions reframe issues as question. This helps us to:

- Recognise that there are multiple approaches to answering a question: often we can become fixed on our solutions/projects as being the main way to solve a problem, but by focusing on the question we can have a more open discussion about the spectrum of what can work.
- Recognise that there is a wide ecology from grassroots initiatives to Government all working on addressing the same questions – we can be 'stronger together'.
- Enable creative thinking, coming up with new ideas and big picture thinking
- Connect ideas and organisations together to explore responses to common questions



Where to next: How might we....?

We're going to come up with our own set of questions. Here are some examples...

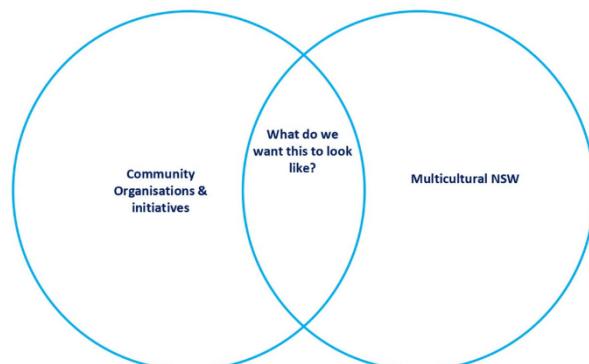
How might we... support seniors to re-join face to face programs?

How might we... support young people who have missed education?

How might we... continue to offer support to people in isolation?



How might we define the 'overlap'?



EQUITY-CENTRED PROGRAM LOGIC

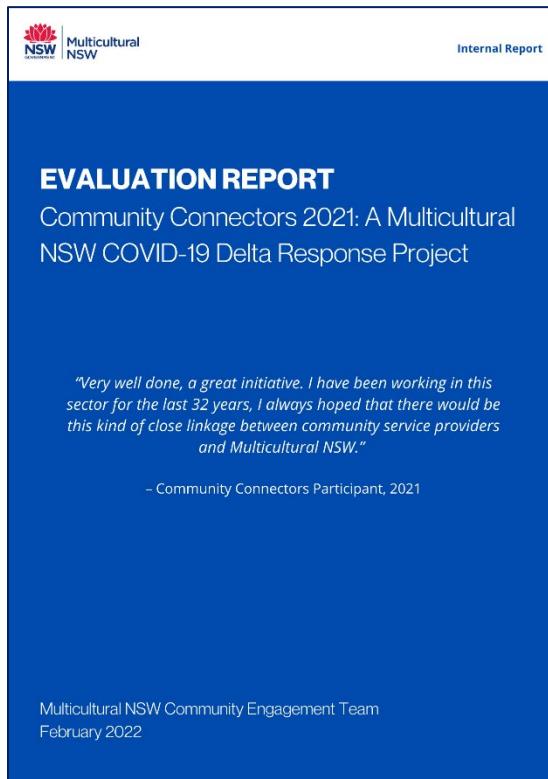
EQUITY-CENTRED PROGRAM LOGIC: COMMUNITY CONNECTORS (CC) PROJECT

Equity Context: Community Connectors will support the 12 Greater Sydney LGAs most impacted by Covid-19 cases. Due to the focus on these 12 LGAs throughout the current Covid-19 wave there is a perception of a divide between what are viewed as the more affluent and less affluent Sydney suburbs. The 12 LGAs of concern have been subject to more stringent public health orders than other LGAs, and this has added to the perception of divide and arguably to increased need in the areas.

Inputs (what we'll invest):	Activities (what we'll do):	Outcomes (short term):	Impact (long term/sustained):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MNSW Staff: Community Engagement & Policy Team members lead and facilitating project. Additional support from other MNSW Teams (e.g. Language Support, Comms) as necessary - MNSW Senior Leadership Team: SLT to support and advise, and feed up necessary information to PMO, Pillar 5 and other relevant agencies - PMO/Pillar 5 Meetings: Input and feedback direct to Covid Response networks - Logistical Support: Access to MNSW Teams/Zoom and other administration to support project - MNSW Connections and ESLC Grant Recipient Network: Community Leaders, Organisations and Grant recipients in order to build effective and representative groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Up to 9 Community Connector groups to be formed, focused on the '12 LGAs of Concern' - Fortnightly meetings with CC groups to support local solutions to issues created or impacted by Covid-19 - Internal Team Meetings for the MNSW staff involved to discuss arising issues and to play ahead accordingly - Circular information-sharing process to feed community solution ideas and sentiment to PMO and Delta Pillar 5, and to get recommendations & responses from both networks back to CC groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provision of targeted, tailored support and co-designed solutions delivered by and with local communities - Policy informed by discussions and ideas from CC group meetings to ensure stronger social outcomes - Increased coordination of community led COVID-19 initiatives and reduced duplication of effort - An adaptive, responsive method of engagement and information flow between Government and community - Better understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on communities and a better awareness of effective community solutions - A model which can be replicated across Multicultural NSW, supporting future community collaborations and grassroots initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ongoing collaboration and increased connectivity between community and Government, leading to solutions-focused thinking and future co-design projects - Stronger processes to ensure co-design with community stakeholders that can continue or be re-enacted as necessary to ensure government can be led by grassroots need - Foundations laid to support community recovery, and community-preparedness for future issues - Social policy developed that supports community resilience and recovery from the impacts of Covid-19

Assumptions: 1. Community will want to work with Government as part of this process. 2. Community members selected to participate will have time and capacity. 3. MNSW will be able to provide the resources/connections to support co-designed solutions discussed in meetings. 4. That grassroots, community-driven solutions will lead to positive outcomes to deal with issues due to Covid-19 and increase vaccination rates – constant evaluation will be needed to chart the project's process, potential and impact. Awareness of these assumptions will help us plan our facilitation style and meeting outline for each Community Connector group meeting.

PROJECT EVALUATION COVER



3.0 Manage Engagement

Maximum 500 words for this section

LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

The aforementioned ‘Three Tiers of Engagement’ were activated throughout Community Connectors.

Community Connectors sought to move community engagement from Inform to Collaborate. Throughout COVID-19, Multicultural NSW and other Government agencies had been keeping stakeholders informed through large forums and by direct sharing of resources with in-need groups. Consultation began through a series of weekly 1:1 community sentiment engagements, mapping how community leaders and members were feeling in relation to key issues related to COVID-19. This feedback was shared with decision makers.

Community Connectors aimed to create a forum for involving and collaborating with community stakeholders. Specifically designed to engage through co-design processes, Community Connectors invited participants to discuss and influence alongside Multicultural NSW staff. In addition, Community Connectors participants were supported to collaborate with each other to share programs and resources which addressed local need.



CHALLENGES

Ensuring equity: Community Connectors participants were drawn from successful ‘Empowering and Supporting Local Communities’ grant recipients. With multiple possible participants, it was necessary to develop a clear rationale for participant selection. The tight time-frame, driven by the need to quickly respond to the impact of the COVID-19 Delta Wave, meant groups needed to be built quickly.

A set of ‘eligibility criteria’ was created for potential participants, which was used alongside demographic mapping and organisational focus mapping to build representative groups for each Local Government Area.

Future iterations of the program may involve a longer information sharing and self-selection process for potential participants.

Effective data analysis and sharing: Community Connectors operated as a mechanism within multiple larger processes within the NSW Government Delta Response Strategy. Meeting discussions and key themes were synthesised fortnightly and fed up to decision makers through wider policy suggestions and sentiment reporting. This meant it could be challenging to map the direct impact of ideas discussed during Community Connectors, but it was clear that these synergised with key points arising from other forums and consultations, therefore amplifying need.

Data analysis was effectively shared within the Community Connectors group network, leading to organisations being able to collaborate with and support each other. The analysis also enabled Multicultural NSW to create a number of responsive supports driven by needs discussed in Community Connectors meetings.

‘JOINING THE DOTS’

Throughout Community Connectors, it was clear that needs could be met through 'joining the dots' – ensuring that community stakeholders were fully aware of government supports being developed and how they could access them.

A clear example of this was around Food Delivery Projects. Many grassroots organisations were running delivery projects, often sourcing or buying the food themselves from supermarkets, and spending long hours packing and delivering boxes. Concurrently, organisations like OzHarvest and FoodBank had been contracted by the NSW Government to distribute food. The grassroots organisations were not aware that they could access the larger NGOs to obtain crates of food for delivery. The Food & Essential Items Delivery Forum was set-up to respond to this issue, directly link the organisations and ensure the grassroots organisations could access support and resources.

4.0 Outcomes, impact and insights

700 word limit, currently 709

PROJECT OUTCOMES

The Community Connectors evaluation process is outlined in Section 2. The Project Evaluation Report outlined how the project's intended and additional critical outcomes were met. These included:

1. Provision of targeted, tailored support and co-designed solutions delivered by and with local communities:

Targeted and tailored supports were developed throughout the program, from facilitating intra/inter-group supports to holding large, open forums on key themes such as Food Delivery Projects.

2. Policy informed by discussions and ideas from Community Connectors group meetings to ensure stronger social outcomes:

The Project Flow process ensured meeting outcomes could be actioned across the 'three tiers'. However, whilst key themes from each Community Connectors meeting were fed up via the Multicultural NSW Policy team, the potential impact is outcome was sometimes limited due to external pressures and the breadth of COVID-19 response work being undertaken by Multicultural NSW.

3. Increased coordination of community led COVID-19 initiatives and reduced duplication of effort:

Resources and supports were enacted across the 'three tiers', connecting organisations working on similar projects and ensuring community organisations could be more effectively connected with government initiatives through large-scale forums.

4. An adaptive, responsive method of engagement and information flow between Government and community:

Community Connectors was a new engagement mechanism introduced by Multicultural NSW to respond to need. Throughout the Community Connectors, the Multicultural NSW team adapted to ensure strong outcomes for community members through the forums and supports. Furthermore, mid-way through the process, the Multicultural NSW team decided to merge groups, combining nearby LGAs so that ideas and issues could be discussed more widely. This was an effective way of 'rejuvenating' the process for participants.

5. Better understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on communities and a better awareness of effective community solutions:

Meeting outlines were prepared each week outlining facilitated engagement activities to facilitate effective discussions and enable participants to share. Thorough meeting documentation and data analysis helped the team to understand the pending issues for community organisations and to respond.

6. Increased networking, community-building and mutual support amongst Community Connectors participants:

During the Community Connectors project, it became clear obvious the participants were able to support and share

resources with each other, in addition to discussing supports that could be offered by Government. Mutual support became a key outcome of the project. 100% of participants survey respondents listed ‘networking’ as a positive outcome of Community Connectors. 60% of participants shared that they were able to make formal or informal referrals due to the new networks they created due to Community Connectors.

7. Increased positivity and trust in Government during difficult time: Many community organisations faced increased challenges during COVID-19 and the group meetings were an opportunity to debrief with colleagues across the sector and provided a source of positivity during a challenging time.

PARTICIPANT SATISFACTION

Participant surveys attested to a high level of satisfaction, and an acknowledgement that the project was a unique approach to engagement and a move towards stronger collaboration between government and community:

"I feel like it has eased the tension between government and community by a lot. As they are heard and allowed to share their feedback, they would more likely listen to what government has to say, its a win-win situation."

"Feels like we are working in a partnership with Multicultural NSW, looking forward to working on future projects."

"The Community Connector group has been impactful - local organisations with local solutions."

REFLECTION

Community Connectors advanced co-design practice within a government setting, directly working with community participants to influence policy and actions.

Prior to Community Connectors, COVID-19 engagement focused on consultation and information sharing. Moving to a process which saw community participants engaged in co-design activities to directly inform policy and responsive actions was innovative.

There is a limit to how far community/government co-design can go, as key government priorities are set from the top-down and budgets are predetermined, however the genuine collaboration achieved through Community Connectors can shape future engagement strategies leading to normalising co-designed priority setting and policy in future.

During the project evaluation, participants expressed a desire for Community Connectors to continue, and to co-develop projects more closely with Government in future. Community Connectors could pave the way to move from ‘Involve’ and ‘Collaborate’ to ‘Empower’, recognising community and grassroots expertise.

Acknowledgements and to find out more

We would like to thank Multicultural NSW for agreeing to share this case study and insights to advance engagement practice. This case study was authored/co-authored by Hannah Grant.

At the time of publishing, Hannah Grant was employed by Multicultural NSW in the position of Community Engagement Officer. Hannah has experience in the public and non-profit sectors and expertise in engagement, facilitation and community co-design.

For more information about this project see:

- www.multicultural.nsw.gov.au

To connect with the authors:

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