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Empowerment through community-led responses to racism

A practical guide for local governments

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge and recognise the traditional custodians and ancestors of this country, and the continuation of their cultural, spiritual and ceremonial practices. We pay our respect to Elders, past and present, and to the deep knowledge embedded within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and their ownership of Country.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

On 17 May 2021, Victoria University (VU), Wyndham City Council (WCC) and Wyndham Community and Education Centre (Wyndham CEC) jointly launched a new local support network.

This network was the first of its kind in Australia, set up in close collaboration with communities to offer alternative community-based reporting pathways and support services for people who have experienced racism. This launch marked the formal end of an 18-month pilot project conducted by VU in partnership with WCC, made possible by support from the Scanlon Foundation.

This report has two main aims.

First, it documents the Wyndham pilot project, detailing the work accomplished and the issues explored there.

Second, it seeks to offer a practical guide on how similar anti-racism support networks and services can be developed and implemented, in close collaboration with local communities and other stakeholders, in municipalities across Victoria and beyond – led by municipal councils or other key local organisations.

Racism is a term used throughout this report to mean both racial and religious prejudice and discrimination. *Racism* can manifest in prejudiced attitudes, discriminatory behaviour and institutional and systemic forms.

This report's use of *racism* is centred on the experiences of communities.

What communities?

We use the term *communities* to refer specifically to local networks of people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, multicultural and multifaith backgrounds.

This usage seeks to include all people and communities that are or may be directly affected by racism.

We acknowledge that this terminology may be contested and encourage respectful, critical conversation about these and alternative labels, centred on the experiences and views of those communities.

The Wyndham Pilot

While the new local network, hosted by Wyndham CEC, is called Wyndham Anti-Racism Support Network, its main purpose is not primarily to reduce racism, at least not directly and in the short-term. First and foremost, it seeks to empower local communities affected by racism and to help counter some of the harmful effects that experiences of racism can have both on the individual and the community. As such, the pilot project constitutes a small piece of a comprehensive anti-racism strategy. It is, however, an important piece as it aims to respond to the needs of those who experience racism.

In recent years, calls to report racism have grown louder and more frequent. There is an increased recognition among many policymakers, human rights commissions and parts of the police, as well as academics and community organisations, that underreporting of racism is a serious issue that needs to be addressed.

The Wyndham project team fully agrees with such an assessment and applies a place-based approach to better understand locally-specific reporting barriers, support needs and reasons for reporting. Key questions to consider are: What does a person gain by reporting? What are the practical, mental or emotional costs associated with reporting? And ultimately, what factors might encourage or discourage someone from reporting racism and seeking support?

The rationale of the Wyndham pilot was that existing reporting pathways and support services may be regarded by many in the community as insufficient or in some ways inadequate. Thus, this project focussed on working with local communities to improve support structures in the local context by making them more responsive to their specific needs. The only way this could be achieved was with a strong place-based approach and genuine dedication to centring the voices of local communities. As the Wyndham pilot showed – also captured in comments from some of the people involved that we quote in this report – this community-centring approach can have a transformative effect, building local trust in the value of collective efforts against racism.

Empowerment

The Wyndham pilot was fundamentally shaped by a commitment to strengthening community and individual empowerment. This commitment guided the way the project was conducted from the beginning to the end. Here, empowerment is not a theoretical concept but a real-life practice that requires constant reflection and listening to communities – whose members are ultimately the judges of whether the project delivered on its promise. Extensive community engagement and the change-oriented nature of the project were essential in pursuing this empowerment goal.

The pilot's most significant outcome is also a contribution to empowerment, since it has involved working closely with local community groups to develop a roadmap towards a community-led support network in Wyndham. Having adequate and accessible support and reporting services in place may help to break the silencing effects of racism, encouraging more people to speak out and seek the support they desire. If community organisations can enhance their capacity to provide culturally sensitive assistance to those in their community who experience racism, this can also have empowering effects.

‘
The power has been put into our hands – and we feel like we as a community group are more in charge now...
Through this project we have been empowered to play an active role as a community group. We no longer simply hope that others do something about racism.’

South Sudanese community leader, actively involved in the Wyndham pilot

Given the pilot was initiated by VU and WCC rather than by community members themselves, it is important to acknowledge that the project team had more control over how it was implemented in the early phases. As the work progressed, control and ownership shifted away from the project team towards the community, without pushing the responsibility of delivering the pilot onto communities. Local communities took full ownership at the moment of the pilot's completion, when the Wyndham Anti-Racism Support Network commenced its work.

From external initiation to community ownership and agency

Evidence driven

The second key principle of the project is its empirical, evidence-driven approach. This focuses on employing robust research tools (including surveys and focus groups) to collect qualitative and quantitative data. This is crucial for systematically analysing the capacity of local organisations to support people who experience racism within the municipality. It also contributes to a rich, evidence-based understanding of the perspectives, experiences and recommendations of local communities.

From building an evidence base to improving local support and reporting services

Purpose of this report

Reflecting on the Wyndham pilot, the next step for VU has been to explore ways to scale up the work and help people working in other municipalities to embark on similar projects, improving support services and reporting pathways for people who have experienced racism.

This report aims to encourage and assist local councils and other actors in this endeavour by equipping them with an understanding of the Wyndham pilot.

To that end, the project team has developed a practical step-by-step guide (section A of this report). Of course, each municipality is different, and it is crucial to take the locally-specific context into account when implementing a project like this. This guide is not designed as a technical manual to replicate the Wyndham pilot. New challenges are likely to arise in each municipality whose Council or other key local organisation adopts the approach we discuss here. Those challenges are a large part of why community-focussed work matters, but they also require nuanced responses in line with the key principles of empowerment, discussed in section B.

Local councils (or other local stakeholders) interested in developing similar local community-led support services in their municipalities are warmly invited to contact Welcoming Cities and Victoria University to request more information and discuss different support options.

SECTION A
Step-by-Step Guide

This section documents the 18-month Wyndham pilot, conducted between 2019 and 2021. It uses the project learnings to develop a practical step-by-step guide aimed at assisting other local councils in carrying out similar local initiatives.

It is important to emphasise that these steps should be understood and underpinned by the key principles outlined in section B.

We propose to implement such a project along six, partially overlapping stages.

STEP 1

Understanding the demographic specifics of the municipality and its diverse communities

STEP 2

Organisational engagement: understanding the organisational landscape and connecting with local stakeholders

STEP 3

Community engagement: from community information session to sustained collaboration

STEP 4

Understanding the specific experiences, expectations and needs of local communities

STEP 5

Analyse data and draft report

STEP 6

Collaborative actions towards sustainable community-led support structures

1

STEP 1

Understanding the demographic specifics of the municipality and its communities

Purpose and objectives

Developing any responsive program or services for communities in a certain municipality or any given local area requires a clear understanding of the demographic features of the local community context. That understanding informs the strong place-based approach of this project.

A key step to obtain local evidence is to use existing statistical data sources to examine the demographic profile of the municipality.[1] The evidence serves as an important reference at various stages of the project delivery. It helps build answers to five main questions:

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1   While the place-based focus of the project is important, it can also be carried out in local areas that do not align with local government boundaries.

STEP **I**

1. What are the municipality's main ethnic, cultural and religious communities and what is the size of the local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community (or communities)?

2. What are the main non-English speaking groups? What is the level of English proficiency?

3. Which of these communities are already well-established and which are currently emerging? Are there significant numbers of recent arrivals and where are they from?

4. In what areas of the municipality do these communities reside? Are they spread across the municipality or do they live predominantly in certain suburbs or neighbourhoods?

5. Which of these communities have recently grown or declined, and are there signs that suggest changes in the future?

Implementation

When developing a data-driven overview of the local demography, the first step is to examine the latest Census data, provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The Census offers comprehensive population statistics in Australia, which can be broken down by municipality, suburbs and even small spatial units, such as the Statistical Area Level 1[2] (SA 1; see image 1). The ABS allows registered users to run their own statistical analysis based on available census data, free of charge.

Local councils often have census-based demographic information about their communities, which are either publicly available or can be shared for local research. In addition, there are publicly accessible resources such as the consultancy company .Id that provide useful statistical data.
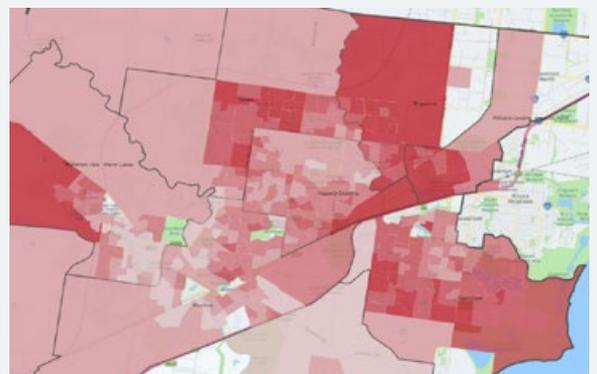
What we did in the Wyndham Pilot

In collaboration with Wyndham City Council, we used the most recent Census data (ABS 2016) to map the local community profile. Key statistical data were provided by the council and reviewed by the project team, and additional analysis was performed on a number of demographic indicators in the municipality—in some instances, also on suburb and SA 1 levels. The indicators included the following:

- Birthplace: proportion of residents born overseas and country of birth, on suburb level and SA1 level

- Ancestry (self-identified cultural associations and backgrounds)

- English proficiency and language spoken at home, on suburb level and SA1 level

- Religious affiliation, on suburb level and SA1 level

- Migration patterns: new and recent arrivals and their country of birth (arrival in previous five years; on suburb level and SA1 level)

- Population size and projected growth

In gathering knowledge about the community profile, we identified established and emerging communities and in which areas of Wyndham they reside. This analysis suggested, for example, that due to demographic changes in some parts of the municipality the community service infrastructure may not have caught up with the rapid growth, potentially affecting the level of service accessibility.

atlas.id.com.au/wyndham (example: overseas born)

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2   On SA1 level spatial units encompass usually between 200 and 800 people, according to the ABS.

STEP **1**

How to implement in your municipality

To understand the demographic specifics of communities in a municipality, we suggest the following steps:

Review existing demographic data on community profiles.

Complement demographic profiles with additional analysis of publicly available Census data.

Review other relevant data sources.

Document key demographic data on community profiles in the municipality by suburb and, where relevant, by smaller spatial units.

Potential challenges and issues for consideration

Outdated data

Given the reliance on the ABS Census data, it is important to keep in mind that the latest Census may not always accurately reflect the current situation in the community (as the Census is conducted only every five years). For example, according to Census data, the local population in Wyndham that identified as Hindu increased from 6,900 in 2011 to almost 19,000 in 2016. The most recent Census was conducted in August 2021, most data are expected to be made available in June 2022.

Data quality

If statistical sources other than ABS Census data are being included in the demographic analysis (e.g. local surveys), it is important to assess the quality of these sources. How and when was the data collected and are they representative of the local population? Alternative data sources can offer helpful additional insights but not all surveys are designed to yield reliable and representative data.
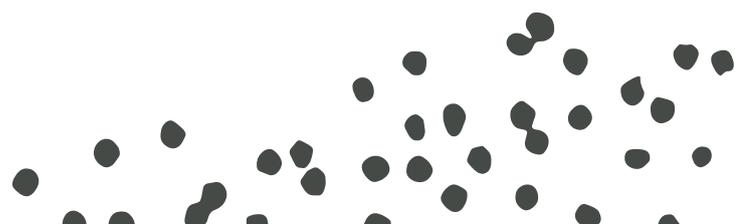
2

STEP 2
Organisational engagement: understanding the organisational landscape and connecting with local stakeholders

Purpose and objectives

A key premise of the project is that existing service providers and community organisations in the local area have expertise and established relationships of trust with local communities. These organisational capabilities and resources need to be acknowledged, valued and fostered; they are essential in improving support services for those who have experienced racism.

This requires the project team to collaborate closely with a variety of local organisations to ensure and foster their commitment to the project's aim of improving community support. We refer to these processes as **organisational engagement**.

Organisational engagement pursues several interconnected objectives:

1. **Understanding the organisational landscape in the municipality**
What are the main community organisations and service providers (e.g. health, employment, settlement, youth work) that engage regularly with people from local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, multicultural and multifaith communities?

2. **Connecting and engaging with a broad range of local stakeholders**
Introducing the project and inviting them to share their insights and expertise.

3. **Building relationships with and encouraging stakeholders to become involved in the project**
This can range from informal support of the project (e.g. sharing information with their members or clients) to active involvement in a future network of local organisations that provide support for those who experience racism.

4. **Understanding the way local stakeholders support people who experience racism**
How do the organisations respond?

Organisational engagement is as an open, flexible two-way process of communication and mutual learning between local organisations and the project team. It spans the entire duration of the project and should be expanded and strengthened throughout the delivery of the project.

STEP 2

Implementation

Engaging and collaborating with a diverse range of local service providers and community organisations is an integral element of the project. It evolves and expands throughout the duration of the project and is expected to continue after the formal end of the project.

An effective starting point for this organisational engagement is to identify and liaise with already **existing community networks** in the local area, such as Aboriginal community hubs and interfaith or multicultural networks. It is important to ensure broad representation of local community organisations and service providers that support local communities. These may include faith groups, cultural groups, community health services, employment services, settlement services, youth groups, neighbourhood houses or hubs, community legal centres, local police and the council.

A good way to start the engagement is by holding a **kick-off event** that brings together as many local organisations as possible. It provides an opportunity to connect local stakeholders, introduce the project, demonstrate its relevance and encourage them to play an active part in the project and its outcomes. It also aims to value the expertise and capabilities of local organisations, and begins the process of jointly moving towards improved services for those who experience racism.

The kick-off event may not reach all relevant organisations, especially those that are not already well connected in the local context. Continuous efforts of **engaging with (grassroots) community groups** and other stakeholders are necessary to increase the scope and diversity of organisations involved in the project.

Another element of organisational engagement is the **organisational survey**. The survey offers local organisations and service providers the opportunity to provide specific recommendations and to self-assess their capacity to support clients or community members who experience racism. It also invites them to express interest in becoming involved in the project and possibly in a future support network. The organisational survey developed by VU can be adapted to the local context, translated into multiple languages and completed both online and offline.

STEP **2**

What we did in the Wyndham Pilot

In collaboration with our project partners at the City of Wyndham, we began creating a database of relevant local organisations assumed to have regular contact with people from Wyndham's communities. It continuously evolved and expanded.

We drew on a variety of sources, but what was particularly important was the council's knowledge of the local context and their established relationships with various community groups. We also benefitted from existing organisational networks in the local community, such as the Wyndham Humanitarian Network (WHN) and the Wyndham Interfaith Network (WIN).

We contacted and liaised with as many of these organisations as possible, often starting with an email and followed up by in-person meetings and phone conversations. As the Covid-19 pandemic escalated, making in-person meetings impossible, we shifted to meetings online.

One particularly important activity during the early stages of the organisational engagement was the project team's invitation to present and discuss the project at two in-person meetings of the WHN, coordinated by Wyndham CEC. It helped us connect with and build trust with a large number of highly committed and active local organisations that work closely with Wyndham's communities.

What assisted our organisational engagement efforts was the well-established relationships between various organisations in Wyndham. This allowed us to effectively expand our engagement with local stakeholders. In addition, we sought to identify and fill gaps in existing networks in Wyndham, making additional connections with other, typically more informal or newly emerging community organisations or groups that were previously not (or only marginally) linked to the established networks. This helped strengthen local community connections and relationships in Wyndham, which proved beneficial beyond the context of our specific project.

VU developed an online questionnaire aimed at local organisations. This survey served a double purpose, both as an evidence-gathering tool and as a way to engage with stakeholders. With regards to the former, the survey was our main instrument to gather evidence on the experiences of local organisations with, and their responses to, reports of racism from their clients or community members. The survey was also promoted as an opportunity for local organisations to share their expertise and suggestions around support services and to express their interest in becoming involved in the project. Ultimately, the survey assisted us in identifying organisations that demonstrated commitment to join the local community-led support network – and many of them became its founding members.

> 'Even though we [at Wyndham CEC] set up those initial meetings through the Wyndham Humanitarian Network, the project team then made their own connections and went much broader than that. Sometimes researchers will just jump on one group and stop there, and get all of their material from that, but I think this project went much broader. So we might have done the introductory stuff but they did the rest.'
>
> Representative of Wyndham CEC

STEP **2**

How to implement in your municipality

Every local government area is different, and the organisational engagement needs to be tailored to these specifics in order to achieve its goals:

- Understanding the local organisational resources and capabilities,

- Building and strengthening networks under the banner of anti-racism and community support, and

- Encouraging a broad range of service providers and community organisations to become actively involved in the project.

Key steps towards these goals are:

Identifying and engaging with key stakeholders and pre-existing organisational networks.

Holding a kick-off meeting as an effective way to start this process.

Expanding existing networks.

Extending engagement with a range of organisations, including those that have previously been less involved in local networks.

Gathering evidence, using the online survey tool.

Gaining a better understanding of local organisations' experiences with and responses to reports of racism.

Ongoing open engagement.

Listening to local organisations and building their sense of ownership for the development of improved support service structures.

Potential challenges and issues for consideration

Identifying local stakeholders

While we were fortunate to find well-established networks of relevant organisations in Wyndham, it is important not to take such pre-existing relationships of trust and collaboration for granted. They may be less developed or under political strain in other municipalities. This can make it more difficult and take more time to identify and connect with a variety of local organisations.

While well-established networks facilitate organisational engagement, it can also indirectly discourage the project team from identifying or bringing in groups that have not (yet) been connected to these networks. It is unrealistic to expect, for example, that local councils – even those with extensive community relationships – can reach all community groups, especially more informal or newly emerging ones.

It is important to engage with as many of these previously less connected groups as possible to avoid perpetuating structures of exclusion and to foster cross-community connectivity. This is a key element of empowerment. It requires extensive outreach work, the preparedness to also pursue alternative engagement pathways, especially those that are more culturally sensitive and responsive to local communities.

Reliance on support and buy-in from local organisations

The success of the project relies on the commitment and support from organisations that have regular interaction with people from local communities and enjoy a level of trust, at least among some segments of these communities.
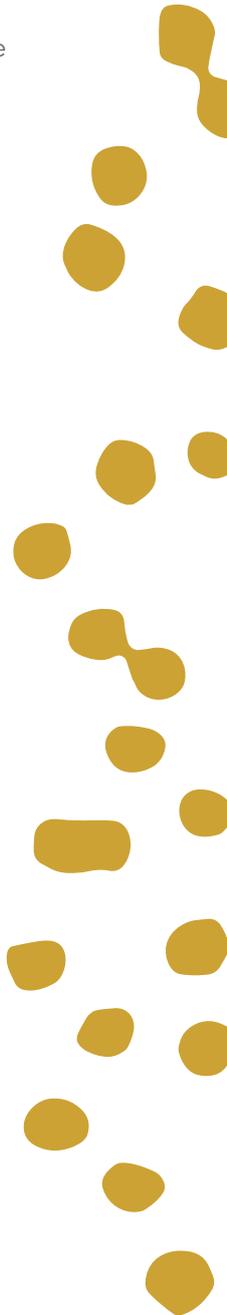
STEP **2**

Several factors can discourage these organisations from engaging with and contributing to the project. We see three potential reasons for such hesitancy and propose ways to mitigate these:

- **Lack of interest in improving support for those who experience racism.** Some organisations may be reluctant to engage in the project due to, for example, a general sense of discomfort with anti-racism or because they are unaware that racism continues to be a significant problem.

  - It is important to emphasise that racism exists everywhere. Partaking in the project does not mean the local area is a particular hotspot.

  - Instead, the project may reflect well on the organisations involved, showing a willingness to take collective action against racism.

- **Lack of resources.** Many community organisations, especially grassroots groups, may have limited resources. Commitment to any additional tasks may be difficult.

  - The problem of limited resources and capacities needs to be acknowledged and respected. The project needs to offer flexible opportunities for engagement.

  - Becoming involved in the project and taking part in a short training workshop may help organisations to make their responses to reported incidents of racism (something many already do informally) more efficient.

- **Lack of trust in the project team or the project's approach.** Some organisations and community groups may view the project with scepticism as an external research project with no meaningful outcomes for communities. Related to this, some community groups may feel consultation fatigue.

- The project relies on research tools to gain an evidence-based understanding of the local context and community expectations. However, the surveys and focus groups should not be regarded as tools to 'extract' expertise from communities but rather as an opportunity for community members to have input into how local support services should be improved.

- The collected data help, together with the community engagement, develop services that are in line with community needs and expectations.

- It will also be made publicly available in a report, which can be used for community advocacy.

STEP 3
Community engagement: from community information session to sustained collaboration

Purpose and objectives

While step 2 is about sustained engagement with local organisations, this step focuses on **meaningful engagement** with members from local communities. This begins the process of building connections of trust with local communities. It also provides the project team with opportunities to introduce and explain the vision, principles and intended outcomes of the project. The insights, experiences and suggestions provided by communities will then inform the pathway towards community-led local support structures (step 6).

The ultimate purpose of this stage is to listen and elevate community voices to shape the development of a local roadmap towards improved support services for those who experience racism (a **change-oriented approach**). It is essential for communities to develop confidence in the project and become actively involved in shaping its outcomes. Community agency, control and ownership should increase in communities as the project progresses.

Implementation

This project relies on the active and ongoing involvement of local communities. To nurture this involvement, the project needs to promote opportunities to connect in three different ways:

- *With individuals:* the project team should encourage opportunities for individuals to contact them and connect for one-on-one conversations.

- *With community groups:* the project team should offer opportunities to connect with community groups in ways that suit them.

- *Bringing communities together:* the project team should coordinate opportunities where individuals can develop and strengthen their connections with other local communities.

Community engagement is an ongoing process throughout the project, delivered in a way that is centred on advancing community agency and reducing the silencing and disempowering effects of racism. This includes creating culturally safe spaces and offering different pathways of engagement that are responsive to specific cultural needs and expectations.

STEP 3

What we did in the Wyndham Pilot

To launch this community engagement stage, we held an open-invitation **community information and engagement session** for people from various communities in Wyndham. The session served a number of functions:

- introducing the project team and the project to communities;
- fostering connections and building trust with communities;
- providing an opportunity for communities to share their experiences and connect with each other; and
- sharing information about the different ways community members could become involved in the project.

The invitation was open to all residents from Wyndham's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, multicultural and multifaith communities. Together with our project partner and assisted by local organisations (step 2), we invited people who were actively involved in their local communities, including representatives as well as community leaders and advocates. We made an effort to also reach grassroots communities and those who had previously been less connected with council or other local stakeholders. Drawing on our insights into the demographic specifics in Wyndham (step 1), we sought to achieve a broad representation of communities and from different neighbourhoods.

In the session we shared information about the project and discussed different ways that people could become involved (e.g. as focus group facilitators, see step 4). The most important aspect of the community session, however, was to provide a safe space for those who attended to share their experiences with racism, barriers to reporting and accessing support services – and for the project team to listen to and learn from these experiences.

The session was a catalyst for our community engagement and for the development of new networks across communities and local organisations. The connections and conversations between participants and the project team led to the establishment of relationships of trust, which evolved throughout the project and became an essential part of community engagement. They led to ongoing collaboration and exchange of ideas, with countless informal (virtual) meetings and phone conversations about the project and beyond. We referred to these committed and involved community members as *friends of the project.* They have been particularly central in shaping the direction and outcomes of the project.

'We connected, since the first information session, with so many other communities in Wyndham who also experience racism... Thanks to the project many within our community have realised that they aren't the only ones who face racism, and that has made them more inclined to speak out against it.'

Tyson, Māori community leader, actively involved in the Wyndham pilot

STEP ⬤ 3 ⬤

How to implement in your municipality

Community engagement will shape the co-delivery of the project and the project outcomes. All community engagement activities should aim to strengthen empowerment, agency and control. They should also aim to facilitate connections between individuals, within and among communities, and with local organisations.

Acknowledging that community engagement activities will extend and expand throughout the project, it is suggested that **key activities** in this step should include:

Develop an extended list of local community leaders, representatives and community advocates, and residents from grassroots communities, including those whose voices may have been underrepresented.

Coordinate a community session to bring together diverse groups, creating opportunity for mutual introduction and learning.

Develop and promote ongoing opportunities for open engagement with individuals, communities and between communities.

Potential challenges and issues for consideration

Attendance at the community session not reflective of demographic diversity

We acknowledge how difficult it is to ensure that all local communities are included in engagement processes. But it is important that the project demonstrates ongoing commitment to be as inclusive as possible and makes efforts to continuously expand the diversity of communities involved.

Some communities may not be as responsive as others, for a wide range of reasons, and some may be reluctant to engage with the project. These are challenges for the project team but they must not easily or too quickly be (mis-)interpreted as a lack of interest within these community segments. Instead, the onus is on the project team to consider alternative ways to connect and engage – VU and Welcoming Cities may be able to offer supportive counsel here – without forcing the project onto communities who make a choice not to become involved. The decision when and where to stop pursuing engagement from certain communities requires sensitivity and is, ideally, guided by those within the respective community.

Limited trust and engagement from local communities

The project requires trust and active involvement from local communities. The project team should focus on fostering an inclusive environment, where everyone feels comfortable asking questions about the project's goals and purpose. The project team should emphasise that the project is not focussed on research outcomes, but rather change-oriented outcomes to improve the support for local communities who experience racism.

STEP ● ● ● **3** ● ● ●

Inauthentic or unsustainable engagement

Effective community engagement will require time commitment throughout the project. If the project team are not able to give this time to foster and nurture connections, they may lose the interest and involvement of communities. It is important that the project team allow enough time for engagement activities, noting that some – or many – may fall outside of traditional working hours. It is also vital to consider the time resources of those the project seeks to engage with. VU, in collaboration with Welcoming Cities, offers different support options to assist with all aspects of the project.

STEP 4
Understanding the specific experiences, expectations and needs of local communities

Purpose and objectives

The community engagement outlined in step 3 is closely intertwined with step 4. Here, the project focuses on working closely with local communities in order to build an evidence-based understanding about their experiences of racism, their perceptions of and experiences with existing reporting pathways and support services, and recommendations for improvement in the local context.

We suggest three main avenues for people to have their voices heard. The implementation of all three avenues needs to be responsive to the specific needs of local communities:

- Completing a community survey
- Partaking in community-led focus groups
- Sharing input through informal open (proactive) engagement processes.

Implementation

The ultimate goal of the project is the establishment of a local network of community-led support services, tailored to the specific needs and expectations of local communities. This can only be achieved by deeply listening to the expertise, input and recommendations of local communities.

This step requires significant commitment from communities and the project team. As the project develops, the dynamic between local communities and the project team should shift, where communities ultimately shape the project outcomes. This requires relationships of trust, genuine collaboration and transparent discussions to ensure communities have maximum say but do not feel they have to carry the responsibilities for the project's outcomes.

‘I think if you'd only given us one way to capture the information, it really wouldn't have worked.’

Tyson, Māori community leader, actively involved in the Wyndham pilot

STEP **4**

What we did in the Wyndham Pilot

We pursued all three avenues in parallel: the community survey, community-led focus groups and continuous open engagement processes[1].

Community survey

The project team developed a survey through which individuals from local communities could anonymously share their insights and recommendations on how to improve local reporting and support services for those who have experienced racism. The draft questionnaire was reviewed by Wyndham City Council and Wyndham CEC and underwent a pre-test by community members with significant knowledge of Wyndham's communities.

The survey was promoted within Wyndham's communities in various ways with support from many individuals and organisations, including those we had established relationships with during step 2 and 3. It was made available online but could also be taken offline. It provided the most formal channel for local communities to share their insights in the project. Encouraging people to complete the survey required extensive community engagement, a series of opportunities to explain and discuss its purpose. That in turn afforded opportunities to communities for shaping future support services in Wyndham.

Focus groups

In collaboration with Wyndham City Council, Wyndham CEC and local communities, we organised 10 focus groups with different segments of the local communities. The selection of these focus groups was an iterative process which considered factors including:

- Reflecting the demographic community profile of Wyndham (step 1).
- Ensuring that those community groups are included that have raised particular concerns about being targeted and affected; taking into account that some community segments may be less likely to speak about racism but that this may not mean that racism is less prevalent.

- Including the voices of young people and women.
- Pragmatic considerations, such as finding peer facilitators for community-specific focus groups.

The focus groups were facilitated by peers from the respective local community groups. The process of identifying potential facilitators started with the community session (step 3), where the project team invited participants to consider facilitating a focus group. After that we worked closely with various community members to ensure an adequate mix of focus groups in line with the factors listed above.

The project team conducted facilitator training sessions to build capacity and confidence among the facilitators to lead the focus groups. The training focussed on the practicalities of preparing and running their focus group. In addition, each facilitator was connected with a person in the project team to offer support throughout the process.

The focus groups had to be held online (due to Covid-19 restrictions); each included between 5 and 8 participants, recruited by the respective peer facilitator, and most ran for approximately 1.5-2 hours. The focus group recordings were selectively transcribed and analysed.

Each community facilitator was offered a debriefing with the project team to share their experience as a facilitator and was invited to compile a short report, reflecting on key insights and observations from the group. The facilitators were paid for their time and received a certificate. Each focus group participant was also acknowledged for their time and given a voucher.

Open engagement process

Parallel to the survey and the focus groups, the project team sought to provide ongoing and informal opportunities for open engagement with local communities. Following on from the community session (step 3) and expanding the circle of *friends of the project*, the project team consistently encouraged people from various communities to share, in any way they preferred, ideas, experiences and recommendations about how the local reporting and support options could be improved.

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1   The research component of the project received Ethics approval from Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee.

STEP 4

How to implement in your municipality

Delivering this step requires both formal and informal engagement with local communities. Offering different opportunities intends to encourage people to engage with the project and the project team in ways that resonate with them and their community. For example, the Wyndham pilot relied heavily on digital technology for its survey and focus group inputs, due to the Covid-19 restrictions, but that was reliant on levels of digital literacy that might differ across communities

Another issue much considered in this project has been whether language support (interpreting and/or translating) would improve community participation. The Wyndham pilot did not ultimately make use of this support, but similar work in other communities might need to.

Community survey

- The community survey provides an opportunity to anonymously share experiences and suggestions. It is the most structured and formal way to gather community input and to effectively collect empirical evidence from a relatively large segment of the local communities.

- Although designed to be completed online and in English, the survey can be adapted to suit local communities. Digital literacy, English proficiency and most commonly spoken languages should be considered when implementing the survey. There is opportunity for the survey to be translated and for it to be completed in pen-and-paper format.

- The survey gathers emprical insights about factors that may encourage, discourage or impede people from reporting and accessing support.

- Although not statistically representative, it generates quantitative empirical evidence.

Community-led focus groups

- The peer faciliated focus groups provide an opportunity for communities to come together in a culturally safe space to share experiences of racism, and explore issues around reporting barriers, and ways to improve support services.

- Focus groups should reflect as much as possible the local demographic community profile.

- They are led by peer facilitators from the respective community. The facilitators are offered training to build their capacity and confidence to deliver 'their' focus groups and offered ongoing support by the project team, available at their discretion and direction.

- Some focus groups may need to be conducted in a community lanuage.

- The project team should refrain from trying to control the delivery of the focus groups and place trust in the capacity of the facilitators to run their focus group.

- Peer faciliators need to be acknowledged for their important contribution to the project (e.g. appropriate remuneration).

Open engagment

- As focus groups and the online survey may not be the preferred ways to engage for all communities, alternative opportunities to share input need to be established and promoted.

- The project team needs to proactively seek community input and be flexible and responsive to the requests of local communities.

STEP 4

# Potential challenges and issues for consideration

Focus group

A potential challenge may be finding community facilitators who are prepared to organise and lead focus groups. One way to address this is to demonstrate the significance of the project and its potential for real-life improvements for local communities. Community engagement and transparent communication about the roles and responsibilities are essential. The personal connections built at the community session and throughout the project (step 2 and step 3) should offer opportunities to identify facilitators.

Another challenge may be that facilitators struggle finding participants for their focus groups; some may be deterred from being involved due to capacity limitations, while others may feel that racism is not a common issue in their community or be reluctant to speak about it. Here, the facilitators' community connections and relationships with potential participants are very important for encouraging people to participate. What can further help in this process is highlighting that the focus groups are a safe place to share one's views and experiences.

Individual community survey

The project team may encounter low levels of engagement with the individual survey. There can be a range of reasons, and the project team needs to endeavour to explore potential factors. For example, do communities feel over-consulted? If so, the project team should reflect on and potentially alter the way the survey is promoted, emphasising that it is a way for people to have a say in the development of improved reporting and support options.

Another factor may be that segments of linguistically diverse communities encounter language barriers. If so, the project team should evaluate and, where feasible, provide a translated version of the survey or assist individuals in completing the survey, for example through the support from a translator or bilingual workers. The survey can also be made available in pen-and-paper format.
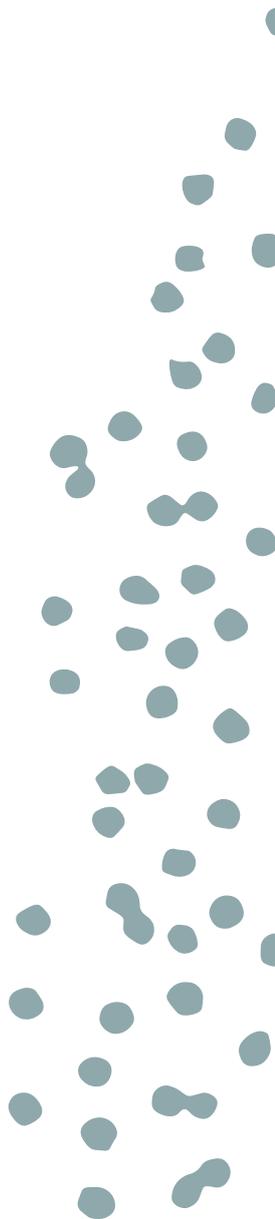
STEP 5
Analyse data and draft report

Purpose and objectives

In this step, all evidence and input gathered throughout the project is systematically analysed. That work draws on the learnings from the organisational engagement (step 2) as well as the findings from the community survey, focus groups and community engagement (steps 3 and 4). The aim is to offer nuanced, evidence-based and locally-specific answers to the key question of the project: *how can local support structures be improved to meet the specific needs and expectations of local communities?*

The findings should be presented in a public report. Developing a report serves a number of purposes:

- Highlighting the experiences, perspectives and recommendations of local communities affected by racism, to elevate their voices and stories.

- Publicising locally-specific evidence to support communities and other stakeholders to raise awareness of racism and to assist in planning and developing targeted projects within the municipality.

- Valuing the expert input from local communities and their commitment to speaking out about racism and to jointly seeking ways to strengthen community-led responses to racism.

' The report is awesome. It's not only an accountability or transparency thing, it's a pride thing from a community organisation perspective. Our time was worth putting money into this report and having it shown, you can't take that away from us now. It's right there, on paper, we did this, we created this change.'

Anonymous Wyndham resident, actively involved in the Wyndham pilot

STEP 5

What we did in the Wyndham Pilot

The project team analysed the qualitative and quantitative data collected in the two surveys. This was complemented by an in-depth examination of the community focus group transcripts as well as the insights gained through other avenues of community engagement. The analysis shed light on both the organisational structures and capacities in Wyndham as well as community views on reporting and support options, deficiencies in existing services, and recommendations about how to better support local communities who may experience racism in the future.

The project team drafted a report, which particularly highlighted community perspectives. As the project team conducted this step in parallel to Step 6, the report also included a Wyndham Roadmap, detailing how learnings could be put into practice. Wyndham City Council contributed to the report, and Wyndham CEC and other key community members reviewed the draft and provided feedback.
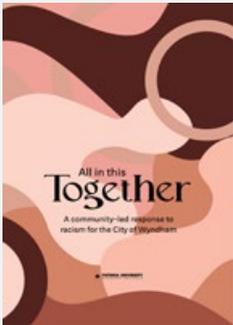
The final report, titled [All in this Together – A community-led response to racism](#), was formally launched in May 2021 at an in-person event with representatives from local communities, Wyndham City Council, Wyndham CEC and representatives from state and local government and media. Community members who had been involved as focus group facilitators and other *friends of the project* played an important role in launching the report and advocating for the implementation of the Wyndham Roadmap.

Implementation

The data from the surveys and focus groups, combined with the insights from the organisational and community engagement, needs to be systematically analysed. This analysis needs to focus on how the evidence can be translated into real-life changes to the support services and reporting pathways for those who experience racism. This covers a range of areas:

- Which local organisations and service providers are trusted by particular segments of the local communities?

- Which factors discourage communities from reporting or seeking support? How can these factors be addressed in organisational and community settings?

- Which local organisations and services need to improve their visibility, accessibility and cultural responsiveness? How can communities be involved in this process?

- What are the specific opportunities for capacity building and awareness raising?

- How can existing procedures be improved to make reporting racism a more empowering experience?

While drafting the report is a responsibility of the project team, key community members should be invited to review the draft and provide critical feedback. It is also important to make this report publicly available and promote its dissemination in order to raise awareness of racism and amplify the voices of local communities.

STEP 6
Collaborative actions towards sustainable community-led support structures

Purpose and objectives

The project's ultimate purpose is to improve support services and reporting pathways for those in the local community who have experienced racism. This final step of the project needs to move as closely as possible to implementing this goal. At the very least, the project needs to distil all the learnings and findings of the project into a clear and implementable **roadmap** that outlines how local support services should look in practice and what final steps need to be taken to implement this roadmap. Ideally, the project team can go beyond this by taking concrete steps to **establish the local support services**, together with local community groups and other stakeholders.

Both the development of a roadmap and the establishment of improved local service structures need to be a collaborative process where communities play a key role in shaping the outcomes. The roadmap, and ultimately the new services, should be shaped by two factors:

- **Organisational structures and capacities.**
  The capacity of local organisations to provide accessible and culturally responsive support to people who experience racism

- **Community input.**
  The identified needs and expectations of local communities towards improved local support service and reporting pathways

As the project is fundamentally driven by the principle of **community empowerment**, it is vital that the contributions and commitment from communities lead to tangible improvements. This is what we refer to as the **change-oriented nature** of the project. Failing to deliver can reinforce community sentiments that there may be good intentions to tackle racism but no firm commitment to take actions that effectively improve the situation in their everyday lives.

The principle of maximising community empowerment guides the development of the roadmap and future support services. These processes need to be undertaken in ways that strengthen community agency and build capacity within local organisations to offer improved support services.

STEP 6

Implementation

At this final step the project team works closely with communities to develop a roadmap towards locally grounded, responsive support services, drawing on the insights and learnings gained throughout the project. Some key questions for consideration are:

- What gaps exist in the local reporting and support infrastructure? What can be improved to meet the diverse needs of local communities?

- What specific factors discourage communities from reporting racism? Are there opportunities for procedural changes or should new reporting pathways be established?

- What can be done to improve the confidence and capabilities of local community organisations to assist people who experience racism?

- What opportunities exist to make reporting and support options more accessible and culturally appropriate for local communities?

The development of a roadmap continues the collaboration between the project team, communities, and local organisations. The collaborative process is guided by the input from the community, reflecting its aim to establish ownership of future support services by those local organisations who have been actively involved in the project. This is crucial also for the sustainability of the services. The project team's role in this transition, and where and when its involvement ends, should be discussed openly to ensure the expectations of all stakeholders are met.

What we did in the Wyndham Pilot

The analysis we conducted to compile the project report (step 5) also shaped the drafting of a roadmap that aligns with community expectations (step 3 and 4), whilst taking into account the capacities of Wyndham's organisational landscape (step 2). This was an iterative process, where the project team developed a preliminary proposal, which was then revised following discussions with local organisations and individual community members who had been actively involved in the project.

We jointly arrived at a three-tier support network model. The proposed network should:

- **comprise a number of 'first contact' organisations** from grassroots community groups to local service providers, which (a) enjoy trust in segments of Wyndham's communities, (b) are interested in enhancing their capacity to respond to clients or community members who have experienced racism

- **be hosted by a community organisation** which has the capacity to act as a coordinating centre and be trusted in the community

- **be connected with existing specialised service providers** such as local police, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC), community legal centres and mental health service providers

In order to put such a model into practice we identified and liaised with local organisations who could become involved as **first contact organisations**. Drawing on the insights from our organisational engagement, we had many conversations with community groups and local service providers to discuss how their involvement could look. This led to 12 local organisations committing to becoming a first contact organisation within a future support network in Wyndham.

These first contact organisations are not expected to offer expert advice but to provide a supportive and safe space for individuals to turn to and talk about their experiences with racism, offer emotional support and help affected individuals explore their options and potential referrals to more specialised supports.

STEP ○○○○○○ **6**

In addition, the first contact organisations should systematically record each incident of racism reported to them, using a short recording template.

These conversations with local community organisations were also an opportunity for the project team to identify which organisation could act as a **'coordinating centre'** of a future local support network of first contact organisations. This role requires additional resources and professional structures. Considering the insights from our organisational and community engagement, the project team identified Wyndham CEC as the main candidate for this role. Wyndham CEC, who had been actively involved in, and supportive of, the project from the outset, was prepared to act as the coordinating centre. This role involves a number of responsibilities, including:

- Supporting the local network of first contact organisations and coordinating its gradual expansion
- Promoting the new support services and reporting pathways within Wyndham
- Centrally collecting the individual reports of racism (as recorded by the first contact organisations)
- Working with local communities to use this locally-specific evidence for awareness raising campaigns and to inform targeted prevention and intervention measures

Parallel to supporting the establishment of this local network, the project team developed a **directory of specialised support services** for people who experience racism. This directory is not limited to local services in Wyndham but offers an overview of existing services, including crime-related services, legal support and mental health support, with a focus (where possible) on culturally sensitive or community specific services. This directory was developed to assist first contact organisations with relevant referral options.

At this stage, the development of the roadmap was completed. In order to assist Wyndham CEC with the transition and, ultimately, with the implementation of the new local anti-racism support network, the project

team worked closely with Wyndham CEC to deliver the following activities:

- Co-delivering several capacity building sessions for all first contact organisations. These sessions were aimed at preparing organisations for their new role. Most of the sessions were delivered with input from Victoria Police and VEOHRC.
- Developing a preliminary recording template, which could be used by all first contact organisations to consistently register reported incidents of racism.
- Preparing material to be used to publicly promote the new services among the local community.

The network was formally launched, together with the project report (step 5), by the City of Wyndham, VU and Wyndham CEC in May 2021 at public event – with speeches from the local mayor, the local MP as well as a number of people from Wyndham's communities.

Source: SBS/Abby Dinham

STEP · · · · · · 6

How to implement in your municipality

The roadmap towards improved local support services and reporting pathways needs to be tailored to the specific situation in the local area. There is no one-size-fits-all, so the three-tier system that was established in Wyndham may or may not be suitable in other municipalities. However, developing such a roadmap should always be a collaborative process, take into account the locally-specific organisational capacities and be guided by community input as expressed in the community survey, the focus groups and the open engagement.

Collaboration and ongoing community engagement

Organisational capacities

Which local service providers and community organisations are interested in building their capacity to respond more adequately to clients or members who have experienced racism?

+

Community expectations and needs

How should improved support services and reporting pathways look? Which organisations are trusted within (segments of) the communities?

Ideally, the project does not end with the development of this roadmap but continues with its **implementation**, setting up a local network of support services. This will require additional activities, including:

- identifying local organisations willing to enhance their support services or build their capacity to respond adequately (in line with community expectations) to those who seek support after having experienced racism; this also includes recording such incidents;

- formalising the commitment of these organisations and building their capacity through, for example, trainings, provision of resources and connecting them with specialised services;

- developing and implementing a strategy to promote and raise awareness about the newly established services and reporting pathways; and

- considering any administrative or resourcing issues that may need to be addressed to successfully and sustainably implement the roadmap.

STEP 6

Potential challenges and issues for consideration

Capacity and resourcing limitations

Effectively implementing a roadmap depends on the capacity and resources of those involved. In assessing and planning the roadmap, it is suggested the project team works closely with local organisations to discuss if and how adequate support services can be implemented without exceeding their capacities. This discussion needs to include a transparent assessment of additional resources or operational assistance that may be required to provide such support services.

- One important argument is that many local organisations already respond to clients' and community members' reports of racism. Many of them try to assist but there may be opportunities to strengthen these processes. Through their involvement in the local support service network they can enhance their capacity to respond more efficiently, for example by providing more effective referrals.

- Concerns around resourcing need to be acknowledged. If the local support network includes a coordinating centre, as it did in Wyndham, this role may require additional resources, particularly in the early stages when the network is being prepared for operation. Other organisations in the support network may face resourcing gaps after the network has been established, especially as community access to the new support services increases. The more these issues can be anticipated and planned for, the easier they are to manage.

- Additional external funding or operational assistance may help establish and expand such support networks or to keep them operational. Local and state government can demonstrate their commitment to anti-racism, empowerment and community cohesion by providing financial or operational support. The project report can be a tool to demonstrate, based on its empirical evidence, the importance of such local services and to argue for sustainably resourcing them.

No real-life implementation

Given that this project is designed to lead to applied improvements, the greatest challenge is to ensure that the roadmap will be implemented. Not delivering on this promise of the project is likely to disappoint all those who have actively engaged with the project.

- This risk of such inaction is higher where the project team ends the project with the development of the roadmap, and lower where the project team continues its involvement throughout the implementation of the roadmap. Ideally, the project team offers ongoing supports to a point where first contact organisations and the coordinating centre can operate confidently.

- A clear and transparent transition of control and assigning of tasks and roles to the new support service providers is essential in this process.

- The project team may also assist in exploring additional funding sources or other forms of operational assistance.
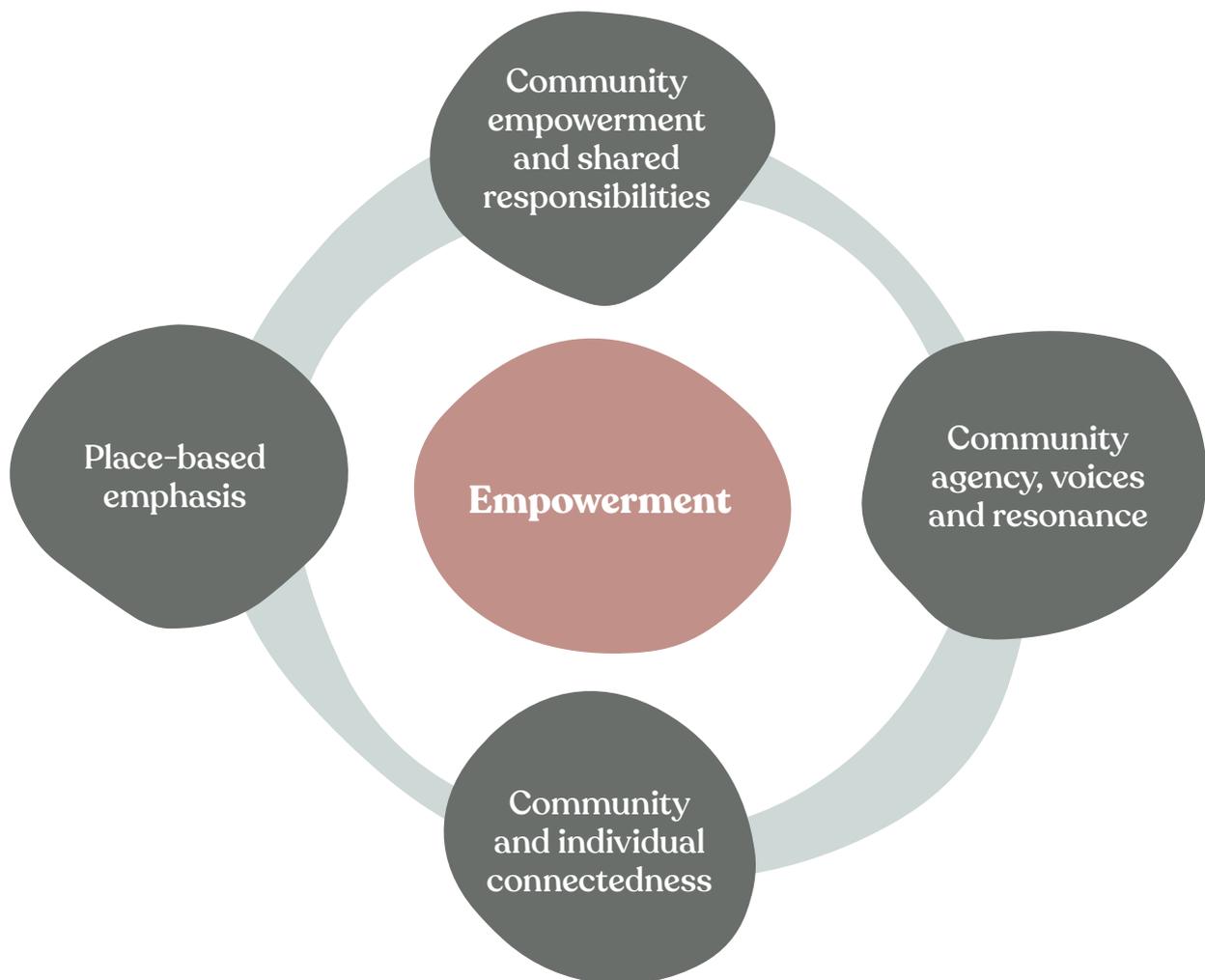
Project Principles: Dimensions of Empowerment

The previous section of this report offers a practical step-by-step guide on how to create a better understanding of the gaps in existing services for those who experience racism and to jointly work towards establishing improved support services and reporting pathways in local contexts.

The process of implementing such a project can only succeed in empowering its local communities when it is fundamentally guided by four key principles:

Community empowerment and shared responsibilities

Place-based emphasis

Empowerment

Community agency, voices and resonance

Community and individual connectedness

These principles are all interconnected, and they are aimed, directly or indirectly, at contributing to and facilitating processes of individual and community **empowerment** in the local context. We use the term empowerment in its original sense to refer to 'the ability of individuals and groups to act in order to ensure their own well-being or their right to participate in decision-making that concerns them'. [1] This goes beyond a narrow understanding of individualistic 'liberal empowerment' which is uncritical of structural barriers and inequalities and focuses solely on individuals' access to 'assets, information, choices and opportunities so that they are able to improve their own situations.'[2]

Considerations of empowerment shape the way the project is being conducted – every step taken needs to be accompanied by a critical assessment (including constant community feedback) of the processes and how they may enhance a community sense of agency and empowerment.

But empowerment is also closely linked to the intended outcome of the project: the establishment of community-led support services for those who have experienced racism, where communities feel they have the capacity to respond to the needs of their members, or – to use the words of a South Sudanese community leader in Wyndham – where *'the power has been put into our hands – and we feel like we as a community group are more in charge now… and no longer simply hope that others do something about racism.'*

Community empowerment and shared responsibilities

The emphasis on individual and community empowerment and agency should in no way suggest that those who experience racism are also responsible for 'fixing' it. A central challenge the project faces revolves around two interconnected questions.

How can we enhance community agency without creating an imbalance where communities are expected to bear the responsibility of responding to, or even tackling, racism?

How do we advance initiatives aimed at improving support services and reporting pathways for people who experience racism, without imposing on, and taking agency away from, affected communities?

The first step in addressing these challenges is to acknowledge them and to discuss them openly with communities involved in the project. These conversations provide an important opportunity to listen to the views of communities and jointly negotiate ways to address the challenges of balancing community empowerment and the active role of the project team.

It is also important to recognise that this balance will – and needs to – **shift towards a greater level of community control and ownership** over the course of the project. As the project in Wyndham was not initiated by communities themselves but by VU in partnership with the local council, the project team had initially more control over the project and more power to decide how it should be conducted.

1   Calvès, A-E. 2009. Empowerment: The History of a Key Concept in Contemporary Development Discourse, *Revue Tiers Monde,* 200(4): 735-749.
2   Sardenberg, C. 2008. Liberal vs. liberating empowerment: A Latin American feminist perspective on conceptualizing women's empowerment. *IDS Bulletin,* 39(6): 18–27.

However, this control needs to flow continuously towards the communities involved in the project – to a point at the end of the project when the project team ends its involvement and local community groups, together with other stakeholders, can jointly take control of the operation and future evolution of the support services.

The balance between community empowerment and responsibilities also shapes another fundamental part of the project: the general **question of reporting racism**. Many stakeholders, from police and human rights commissions to academics and politicians, have increasingly and with good intentions called on people to report their experiences of racism. While it is true that the person who experiences racism needs to make a decision as to whether to report the incident or not, there is a risk that these calls for more reporting put pressure on them to do so. Is reporting racism now becoming an additional civic duty for communities affected by racism? And to what extent do calls for more reporting disregard individual agency and their potentially deliberate choice not to report?

The pressure to report can be especially problematic when existing support services are regarded as insufficient and the personal costs (e.g. time, effort, emotional costs) of reporting are seen to be higher than the expected benefits and outcomes. Under such circumstances, calls for more reporting can reinforce power imbalances and be both disempowering and ineffective. This may be the case in particular:

- when the motives behind external stakeholders' calls for more reporting (e.g. better data on racism) and the scope of support provided (e.g. limited by the organisation's mandate) are insufficiently aligned with the reasons of those affected by racism for report racism (e.g. receiving adequate support); and

- when the reporting experience becomes disempowering or even re-traumatising due to shortcomings in the reporting procedures and processes (e.g. lack of culturally sensitive responses; feelings of not being taken seriously; a sense of not being informed about the outcomes of the report).

In the project we firmly prioritised the importance of developing improved community-led support structures that are responsive to the needs of those who have experienced racism. Moreover, existing reporting and support service providers have the opportunity to learn about community expectations and adjust their services accordingly. If services become more responsive, readily available and widely promoted, more people will come forward, seek support and report – and the reporting experience is more likely to be empowering.

Strengthening community agency, voices and resonance

Seeking to maximise community agency was a core principle and goal of the project. It needs to be put into practice in many different ways through a fundamental commitment to listening to and being guided by community voices.

This starts by centring the **subjective experiences of racism** at every stage of the project, instead of imposing any legislative, academic or operational definitions. It needs to be made clear that the project team is not the one to define racism or even to question whether a certain incident, experienced as racism by an individual, meets any external definitional thresholds to classify as racism. **The communities and individuals who experience racism are the experts.**

Strengthening community agency was particularly important for the Wyndham pilot, given it was not initially proposed in collaboration with communities. A similar dynamic might apply in other municipalities that use our approach. Acknowledging the shortcomings associated with a lack of co-design at the outset as well as the positionality of the project team, the project needs to create a broad range of culturally appropriate opportunities for local communities to shape both its delivery and outcomes. This is reflected in the project's approach

to community engagement based on **deep listening** rather than mere consultation. This is implemented based on a combination of three platforms that communities can use to have a say in how future support services and reporting pathways should look like: the community survey, the community-led focus groups and continuous processes of open engagement (see step 3).

These three pathways should not be used as data collection techniques to 'extract' community expertise but rather offered as opportunities for communities to **contribute to the shaping of future support services** and reporting structures. Their voices should have practical resonance, shaping the project outcomes. The design and development of community-led local support networks becomes then a joint community effort, based on the outcomes of the organisational (step 2) and community engagement (step 3 and step 4). This can strengthen community agency through active involvement in the process.

The project ultimately seeks to help establish a local network of community-led support services and reporting pathways for those who have experienced racism. Community agency and control needs to be at the heart of this network, its foundation, evolution and operation.

Community and individual connectedness

The project report was titled 'All in this together' to reflect the notion that tackling racism in general and, more specifically, improving local support services and reporting pathways requires concerted whole-of-community efforts. This underscores the importance of meaningful collaboration between various institutional stakeholders (such as university, local council, police, and human rights commissions) and communities, but it also highlights the importance of strengthening connections within and across diverse community groups.

This is something that does not simply happen. It needs to be actively encouraged and facilitated throughout the project and beyond (especially when the support network begins to operate), for example, by providing:

- **safe spaces** for communities to share their experiences with each other and across ethnic, cultural or religious boundaries; as well as

- **opportunities for communities to connect** and engage with representatives of (external) institutional stakeholders.

‘
Connecting with different communities, you hear the same thing [about racism]. Not only is my community experiencing this. It does build your confidence; it does help you. These connections make you feel confident and give you the energy to speak about it.’

Shemsiya, actively involved in the Wyndham pilot

While the positive effects in strengthening existing and building new networks and lines of communication are obvious, the empowering effects of intra- and intercommunity connectedness among different communities seem often underestimated.

The project has taught us that bringing many different communities together has enormous potential to change the local and broader conversation around racism, build new cross-community alliances and encourage a sense of joint commitment and purpose. The statement of a representative of the local Māori community captures this very well:
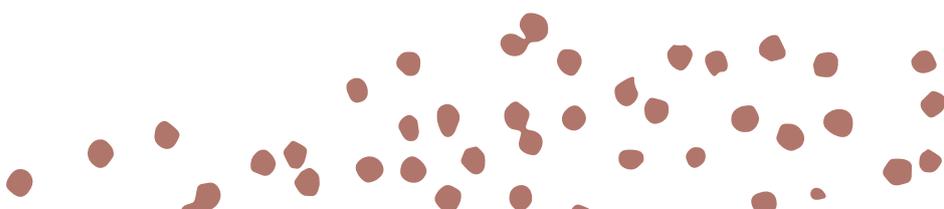
'We connected, since the first project information session, with so many other communities in Wyndham who also experience racism. And that created an immediate awareness that we actually have this issue too, and it almost forced us to do something about it. We didn't want to put up with it any longer. Thanks to the project many within our community have realised that they aren't the only ones who face racism, and that has made them more inclined to speak out against it.'

Māori community leader, actively involved in the Wyndham pilot

Sharing experiences of racism across different communities has helped many of the people involved in the project to overcome the silencing effect of everyday racism, microaggressions and systemic racism. It has motivated community groups to engage more in conversations about racism within their communities, and it has helped many to see racism as a phenomenon that affects many different communities. All these effects can contribute to reducing individuals and communities' sense of helplessness in facing racism alone. As one participant of African background stated:

'...we can achieve the impossible. It may be slow but we will eventually achieve our goal. So if we work together, we will be able to find solutions to the issue of racism.'

Wyndham resident of African background, actively involved in the Wyndham pilot

Place-based emphasis

The project needs to pursue a strong place-based approach to be able to take into account the specific local context and community expectations. This was confirmed during the Wyndham pilot, when almost

all the participants emphasised that support services need to be provided locally and close to where people live to ensure accessibility.

A high level of trust in local organisations is another crucial factor. This underscores the importance of building upon the existing organisational landscape in the local area, expanding the capacity of trusted local service providers and community groups to become part of a local network of support services.

A place-based emphasis is crucial for the development of support services tailored to the specific expectations of local communities and reflective of the locally-specific demographic situation. It is also particularly effective in building strong cross-community alliances and lines of communication and trust between communities and local service providers such as local council, public health providers or local police. This is also important for the establishment and operation of the local support network, which will then also help better understand the scope and nature of racism in a specific local area and develop more tailored measures to respond to it locally.

Through its intensely local focus, the project can contribute to empowering communities and to overcoming a sense of being overwhelmed by the complex and multifaceted problem of racism, as the following statement from a young Muslim resident suggests:

'In the past I thought nothing can really be done about racism because it's a bigger problem. I had never really looked at racism through a local lens before, but now, after this project, I think actually there is a good chance to make a real impact on racism on the local level. There are better levers on the local level. And everyone can have an impact.'

Wyndham resident of Muslim background, actively involved in the Wyndham pilot