

The Place Project Change Rubric

From asking permission to exercising power built on Theory of Change 3 - July 2026

Domain	1. Suspicion and waiting <i>Oliver Twist</i> , asking permission	2. Transactional engagement	3. Deep engagement Trust, 'the dots in the middle'	4. Co-design & shared power	5. Leading and designing <i>Rosie the Riveter</i> , exercising power
Self-understanding and agency	Waits for permission and direction, <i>tell us what to do</i> . Experiences self as recipient; dependency behaviours; discomfort in uncertainty read as failure.	Participates when paid, required, or curious (FOMO). Agency framed by role; retreats to the comfortable when stretched.	Can name own motivation and what they bring to place work. Sits in the grey without demanding a framework or a fix.	Acts without waiting to be asked; tests ideas; owns and delivers commitments (15% Solutions). Reflects on own assumptions and blind spots.	No longer experiences self as someone who needs to ask. Aspiration exceeds the funding envelope, <i>\$1M is not a scary number</i> . Brings others into agency.
Voice and story	Others speak for community. Story absent from evidence; deficit narratives imported and repeated uncritically.	Story used as promotion, the <i>corporate film</i> reference point. Numbers dominate reporting; storytelling excluded from measurement.	Real stories told, warts and all. Story and heart data valued alongside numbers; deeper meanings dug for and found.	Communities own and govern their stories, consent, IP and data sovereignty at the centre. Narratives co-produced and shared across places.	Story leads advocacy and measurement. Community members hold the talking stick, no one speaks for them. Data sovereignty governance mechanisms in place. Local stories displace imported narratives.
Relationships and connection	Isolation. Communities and organisations don't know each other's work; egos and logos; grudges held.	Networking by institutional role; contact confined to events; competitive positioning underneath the courtesy.	Names, not roles. Trust built across communities; relationships hold through rough water; people stay in relationship, no grudges.	Unusual bedfellows form at the edges; cross-community initiatives; a core group self-organises and recruits wider.	A movement, not a network of providers: shared backbone components, new members welcomed and attached, connection maintained as deliberate infrastructure.
Engagement with the system	Blames or avoids the system; gives power to it. <i>Living in systems not built for us</i> .	Quiet workarounds without dialogue; whinging without proposition; hard conversations shied away from.	Names conditions precisely; constructive truth-telling; less blame, redistributed fairly. Barriers and workarounds surfaced and shared.	Works at the level of conditions alongside system actors, car-park deal-making that sticks; constructive dialogue replaces conflict.	Shapes the system: informal governance addressed, big-P policy realigning as the work becomes understood; rules broken constructively and openly.
Power and decision-making	Top-down governance; beneficiaries absent from decision tables; engagement performative.	Consultation without influence; feedback loops never closed; <i>What community? Community who?</i>	Genuine listening; power named and examined (over / with / to); beneficiaries sometimes at the table.	Beneficiaries routinely at the deal-making table; community co-facilitation of shared processes; decisions genuinely shared.	Community leads and designs from the ground up; institutions practise servant leadership; subsidiarity is the default, not the exception.
Funding relationship	Dependency, <i>happy to take the crumbs</i> . Funder distant or feared; conditions invisible because unquestioned.	Programs shaped to fit guidelines; pilot-to-pilot survival; funding conditions unnoticed or accepted as weather.	Funding conditions noticed and named, <i>we notice them</i> . Honest conversations with funders begin; sanitised reporting resisted.	Funders participate, not observe; contracting loosens; relational and signal-based reporting accepted alongside milestones.	Funding is diverse and community-shaped; the <i>invisible</i> relational work is funded on purpose; guidance flows from community to funder.
Structures, rules and resources	Rigid structures that never really worked; compliance burden suppresses participation and volunteering.	Rules followed to the letter; resources locked inside programs and organisations; every organisation funds its own backbone.	Barriers actively removed, per diems, hosting, access, time, and read as signals of where power sits.	Routines and accountability visibly evolving; resources repurposed across boundaries; sensemaking embedded in governance.	New institutional layers emerging to hold the work; structures serve community pace; holding space for the long game is resourced, not stolen.

Using the rubric

This rubric operationalises the theory of change the project discovered: *when communities move from asking permission to exercising power, the systems built around managing them have to change too*. The five stages follow the progression from: suspicion→transactional engagement→deep engagement→co-design→leading and designing, anchored at either end by the project's Oliver Twist and Rosie the Riveter framing. It is a companion to the self-understanding and agency rubric trialled with the Burnie Works Board in April 2026, widening the lens from the interior shift to the seven domains where the reflection data shows change actually happened.

Principles

- Plot movement, not scores. Question *where were we twelve months ago, where are we now, and what moved us?*
- Expect uneven profiles as this work is really lumpy and that is ok. A community can be at stage 4 on voice and story and stage 2 on funding relationship at the same time. The unevenness is the diagnostic: it shows where conditions need attention.
- The middle stages cannot be engineered. Stages 2 to 4 are the *dots in the middle*, i.e. trust doing its slow work. Use it to map readiness.
- Assess together, in both directions. The most honest use is self-assessment by communities alongside assessment of the system actors around them, funders, government and auspices can and should be plotted on the same domains, because the theory of change says they must move too.
- Pair every placement with a signal (what is the subtle shift you are seeing?). A placement without an observed signal is an aspiration, not an assessment.

Signals bank, observed in this project

Signals that marked stage transitions in The Place Project, (as drawn from the reflection data, gathering records and learnings notes). Use these as calibration examples when placing a community or system actor on the rubric.

- Toward deep engagement (3): return attendance across gatherings (the 'core 25'); community hosting that improves and doesn't fade; truth-telling entering the room without rupture; real stories replacing promotional ones; conditions and workarounds named out loud.
- Toward co-design (4): community co-facilitation changing the depth of conversation; unusual bedfellows forming without facilitation; beneficiaries at deal-making tables as routine; in-kind contribution rising; contracting and administrative practice visibly loosening; funders showing up as participants.
- Toward leading and designing (5): new voices taking leadership; aspiration exceeding the funding envelope; communities initiating their own next steps (Meet the Neighbours, the online community, Parts B/C/D asked for by name); reduction in lateral violence; a community that *wouldn't have thought there was a reason to talk to others, now I can't imagine otherwise.*
- System-side signals at any stage: the shift from roles to names; observer-to-participant movement (DSS); friction-to-curiosity movement (TCF); contract equalisation and emergence mapping (PRF); auspicing language shifting; funding used differently; rules broken to hold space for the long game.