

Collaboration

Collaboration is a purposeful, strategic relationship in which all parties choose to cooperate in order to achieve shared or overlapping design objectives.

In complex projects, collaboration is an indispensable engagement process that project teams use to facilitate optimal design outcomes, especially when there are a number of competing interests or complicating factors that could hinder the project delivery.

The participation of collaborators ensures the design process is informed by considerations from the broadest possible base, including clients, stakeholders, end users, technical and design specialists and other essential parties.

Why is collaboration important for design projects?

Collaboration has benefits as a standard working practice. Good collaboration:

- allows good ideas to develop from the process of working together on a problem
- brings all considerations, challenges and opportunities to the table, from a range of disciplines with different perspectives
- helps to facilitate better outcomes which meet all needs
- enables large and complex projects to be resolved efficiently – faster, with lower costs, and the highest possible quality – compared with traditional silo-based design processes.

When do we start?

Ideally collaboration should start at the beginning of a project, to allow all parties to be a part of the process from the outset. Successful collaboration will bring continuity to the project team, and ensure the team's input is integrated throughout the life of the project.

If the process has a specific end point, such as the Gateway process or development approval, the team may agree on and prescribe further actions to ensure successful delivery of the project.

Who will be involved?

Most complex projects involve a broad range of specialist professional consultants. Your project team might include

developers, state and local government, design professionals, technical experts, representatives from different aspects of the client's operations as well as community members, community organisations and others.

The project must be at the centre of any collaboration – and all parties must come together with an open mind to ensure the best for the project.

How will we collaborate?

- Set up an appropriate governance structure with clear leadership, which nominates the parties that will be involved in the process.
- Select good team members and bring all relevant government agencies, including local councils, on board to develop a collaborative approach from the outset.
- Each member participates on the basis of their particular field of expertise, operational knowledge, commercial interests and so on. Team members need to have an open attitude to other disciplines and their input into the process.
- Encourage 'role swapping' and establish focus teams with a mixture of backgrounds, interests, and disciplines.
- Agree on an appropriate scope for the collaborative process, and which issues can be addressed individually, i.e. without collaborating.
- Communicate effectively, listening and understanding other needs, presenting ideas and giving clear feedback.

GANSW ADVISORY NOTE

Making Government a Better Client

- Develop a clear vision for the project or precinct (see GANSW advisory note: Strategic visioning). The vision should describe the aspirations along with specific objectives to support its delivery.
- Map the process – identify a program and tasks, loosely structured into investigative, speculative, optioning, and testing phases.
- Coordinate with the project's consultation strategy to connect and engage with other external stakeholders

Principles for working with others**1 Shift from hierarchical to networked thinking**

Relationships within organisations are shifting where new platforms for collaboration and partnerships between citizens, corporations, and public institutions are developing. These relationships cut across organisational types, geographic borders and connections, and are more permeable.

2 Work in a way that is interdisciplinary, not just multidisciplinary

Break down divisions between disciplines. Projects should be run on interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary lines where skills intermesh, joint solutions emerge and perspectives change through working across boundaries to create new, shared insights. In the interdisciplinary world the aim and intent – making a great place or street, for example – is central and continually the focus.

3 Be strategically principled, tactically flexible

The organisations most effective in being agents rather than victims of change are those which operate with strong, publicly acknowledged principles.

4 Focus on optimising, not maximizing

The complex and non-linear nature of the challenges faced by organisations today require complex and adaptive solutions that balance competing and conflicting interests in a project.

5 Let vision shape rules rather than rules shaping vision

Resolving complex urban conditions requires rethinking of guidelines and rules. The vision and its underlying principles should guide the purpose and application of a regulatory framework.

6 Reframe

Reframing is changing the nature of something or a situation by looking at it from a different standpoint, and by doing so unleashing new potential and a fresh view.

How can GANSW help?

GANSW can help by providing advice on effective ways to collaborate with other agencies on projects.

Further information

For more information see Better Placed: An integrated design policy

for the built environment of NSW (GANSW 2017) available on the GANSW website: ga.nsw.gov.au.

Government Architect NSW

GANSW provides design leadership in architecture, urban design and landscape architecture. In this role, GANSW works across government, the private sector and the community to establish policy and practice guides for achieving good design. GANSW provides strategic advice across design, planning and development to support good policy, programs, projects and places.

Contact GANSW

GANSW makes every effort to keep its advice up to date. From time to time we will release new versions of these advisory notes. For further advice, or if you think there is information missing, please contact GANSW.

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