



Art for Everyone
Approaches to Inclusive Practice





Cover - *The Feast, Way Out West, 2013* / Photography: Catherine Acin
Above - *Under My Skin, The Delta Project, 2014* / Photography: Pippa Samaya

Art for Everyone — Approaches to Inclusive Practice



This publication is an outcome of the Connecting the Dots Project, delivered by Arts Access Victoria with the support of Creative Victoria and the Department of Health and Human Services. The project aims to address barriers to cultural participation by people with disability and mental health issues and who are Deaf.

ARTS ACCESS VICTORIA IS GRATEFUL FOR THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS:

- Artful Dodgers Studio (Jesuit Social Services)
- Arts Access Victoria staff
- Arts Project Australia
- City of Moreland
- City of Port Phillip
- Cohealth
- Deaf Arts Network
- Footscray Community Arts Centre
- Wild@HeART
- Writers Victoria

In particular, we acknowledge Sarah Austin's contribution to this publication.



Introduction

This publication is designed to assist individuals, artists and organisations wishing to undertake inclusive art projects by providing them with ideas and resources to design projects that engage artists and people with disability, mental health issues and who are Deaf. For the purposes of this publication, we call this work *inclusive practice*.

Victoria has a strong track record of delivery of excellent projects within a community arts and cultural development framework. For this publication, we have drawn on models that have delivered outstanding results, for and with people with disability, mental health issues and who are Deaf. The practices that we highlight in this publication cross the domains of mental health, disability and the Deaf community, as the people who participate in these programs may identify with more than one group. Our aim is to draw strengths from each of these domains, and to build confidence and capacity within the community to develop and deliver cultural programs that are accessible and inclusive to all community members, but particularly people with disability, mental health issues and who are Deaf.

We are also responding to the changing landscape of disability and mental health, heralded by the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme. The National Disability Insurance Scheme presents a unique opportunity to increase participation by people with disability, mental health issues and who are Deaf in arts and culture, by allowing people choice and control over the government resources that are allocated for their support needs. This means that eligible people should be able to choose to spend some of their NDIS funds on their cultural participation, where that participation is seen as reasonable and necessary to support their quality of life goals and aspirations.

Inclusive art projects deliver a range of positive outcomes for both artists and audiences, from the wellbeing and health benefits of participating in culture-making, employment and economic participation, to the creation of new aesthetics, comment on contemporary arts practice and social critique.





Different projects will have different priorities, and this resource will assist the reader to define the goals for their project and the steps required to set up the project for success and sustainability.

Created as a reflective resource, we hope that this publication will provide organisations and artists with the confidence to develop and deliver inclusive arts projects. It is not intended as a 'one size fits all' approach, but rather a guide to developing and delivering meaningful opportunities in an arts, disability and mental health context.

Who is this publication for?

This publication is intended to assist those interested in establishing or maintaining community arts and cultural development programs for and with people with disability, mental health issues and who are Deaf. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Artists with disability, mental health issues and who are Deaf
- Local government cultural or community development workers
- Service providers
- Health providers
- Allied health providers
- Arts and cultural organisations
- Community organisations
- Artist facilitators
- Artist collaborators
- Support workers
- Carers and families

This publication will also support the work of those who are already engaged in arts, disability, mental health and the Deaf communities, by leading a dialogue about inclusive practice.

What is inclusive arts practice?

Inclusive arts practice is a flexible, creative process that ensures equal access to the arts for all marginalised groups, including people with disability, mental health issues and who are Deaf, as audiences, artists and participants. Providing an equitable framework for access and participation requires careful thought and planning and a clear understanding of what the barriers may be for the particular community you wish to engage. Working in an inclusive way means making sure that you have done your research and planned carefully, consulted with the community you will work with and considered the tools and resources available to you.

The inclusive arts landscape

Inclusive arts incorporates a range of different creative practices including theatre, dance, comedy, visual arts, writing, music and media arts. Much has changed in the inclusive arts landscape over the last decade, as artists with disability, mental health issues and who are Deaf challenge their place at the margins.

Inclusive practice provides the foundations for a fulfilling life, through its capacity to support self-expression, wellbeing, community connection and social cohesion. Participation in inclusive arts programs contribute to individuals' skill development, which in turn can lead to confidence building, increased self-esteem as well as economic participation, such as employment.

Inclusive practice strives for authenticity of voice and narrative. Its terrain is the lived experience of people with disability, mental health issues and who are Deaf and their perspectives on life. Art made by people with disability, mental health issues and who are Deaf can be distinctive, compelling and transformative.

Through the application of inclusive practices, arts programs can challenge preconceived ideas about who is an artist, raise the profile of disability, mental illness and the Deaf community, and address barriers to inclusion which place people with disability, mental health issues and who are Deaf outside current cultural trends and dialogues.

Inclusive practice explores how aesthetic strategies and community development practices position artists with disability, mental health issues and who are Deaf as cultural innovators. These approaches enable artists to express their lived experience; challenging, transforming and subverting notions of identity, rights and citizenship. We recognise that exclusion is not just a social or economic problem, but also a problem of visibility, identity, and language.

This work explores the potential of artists with disability, mental health issues and who are Deaf to contribute to culture by challenging and extending artistic practices. Therefore, rather than simply addressing longstanding barriers to access, through inclusive practice we also address aesthetic and attitudinal barriers faced by artists.

This includes the development of new creative projects in collaboration with a broad range of organisations and people.

Inclusive practice begins with the placement of artists with disability, mental health issues and who are Deaf, and their communities, at the centre of this work. Opportunities for engagement in arts and culture are made in response to their interest and aspirations.



What are some examples of inclusive arts projects?

Inclusive projects may take many forms, reflecting the broad range of goals and motivations of project initiators. They can:

- Be ongoing, weekly engagements or one-off initiatives that bring together a group for a particular purpose or event
- Involve one artist working independently, an ensemble of artists with and without disability, mental health issues and who are Deaf, or indeed, a group of 200 artists who come together in a public space for a performance
- Be delivered as part of a larger service offer of a community organisation or be completely independent
- Be supported through grants from government or philanthropy, offered at a fee or be purely voluntary in nature
- Be artist-led or the product of a collaboration, cooperative or network
- Deliver a public outcome that engages audiences, or focus on the skills development of participants

What defines them is a commitment to the participation of people with disability, mental health issues and who are Deaf and a desire to enrich the life of individuals through artistic endeavour.

Below are some examples:

A local community centre offers visual art sessions for people who experience mental illness that run within school terms. They are led by a local artist and are funded by the local council or Adult Community and Further Education. Participants pay a small fee per three hour session. Morning tea is included. There is an exhibition of artwork held yearly at the centre. The focus is on participation and skills development, as well as social interaction.

A local arts centre offers drop-in theatre workshops for marginalised young people. The program is funded through a philanthropic grant and is supported by the youth department of the local council. It is run by a team of experienced theatre and production artists, working in partnership with the local mental health service. There are opportunities for mentoring in production. The group create and perform a piece of theatre that they produced at the end of the project series. The focus is skills development and creating quality artistic outcomes.

Movement sessions for women are offered by a Women's Neighbourhood House. They are offered weekly and are delivered by women with dance and movement teacher training. The sessions are promoted through a Migrant Resource Centre, mental health, disability and Deaf services and local council. It is an opportunity for women to meet other women in their local community as well. This has a strong health and wellbeing focus, as well as creative expression.

A local group of artists whose aim is to be inclusive has negotiated the use of the local church hall and they meet every fortnight to have lunch and make art. Each member brings their own materials and it is a social event as well. They sometimes have guest artists and speakers to visit. The participants pay a small contribution to cover the cost of the use of the hall and coffee, tea and biscuits. Two members volunteer to organise the meetings. The focus is on artmaking and collaboration.

An inclusive choir meets once a week in the local school hall to learn new songs and work towards performances in the local community. They have a community grant from a local bank that is auspiced by an incorporated not-for-profit as well as support from the school for the use of the venue. It is run by an experienced choir leader and there are opportunities for others in the group to lead parts of the sessions. It is run as a co-op with members taking responsibility for aspects of the program. The focus is quality singing outcomes, skills development and social connection.

A local network of artists that is open to all, meet every two months to discuss opportunities and plan for local art events. The local council provide a meeting room and a staff member from the arts and culture department attends the meetings to link the group to council happenings and support. Members elect people to chair and minute the meetings. Opportunities to share information about their own practices and events are part of the meetings.

A local community festival delivered by the local council engages skilled artists to lead a ten week series of arts-based workshops at a Neighbourhood House with people who live in Supported Residential Services. The artwork produced through the workshops is exhibited as part of the festival. Some of the participants of the group give artists talks on the work, and some work alongside the lead artists to deliver artmaking workshops with the public as part of the Festival events. The focus is inclusion, community engagement and connection.



What is your project focus?

There are a many reasons why an individual, group or organisation may wish to create or get involved with an inclusive arts project. The purpose of your project may also change over time as the work develops and participants become more deeply engaged or develop more sophisticated artistic ideas and skills.

Below are six of the most common focus areas for an inclusive arts project. While your project may consider all of these important, it's a good idea to discuss and articulate which are the biggest priorities and communicate this to project partners, facilitators and participants so that everyone shares that understanding.

Artistic

Since this document is only concerned with inclusive arts and cultural projects, it is assumed that there will be some attention given to the quality of the art.

If your project prioritises excellence in artmaking as one of its primary objectives, then you will be considering:

- Creative exploration of ideas that matter to the individuals or the group and have relevance to a contemporary audience
- Skills development in the art-form leading to high quality execution of the creative ideas
- An artistic outcome or product that may be for public presentation such as an exhibition, performance or showing
- Managed risk-taking and authenticity of the 'voice' and ownership of the artist or artists
- Viewing and reviewing the development of the work with a critical eye/ear

Projects driven by artistic excellence will likely seek broader recognition through arts funding, partnership with recognised artists or arts companies and marketing.

Engagement and participation

Ensuring that the project design meets the needs and desires of the participants is essential. In prioritising engagement and participation your project will be striving for:

- Targeted and outreach-based communications that clearly state the opportunities of the project as well as an invitation to participate that is accessible to the community you hope to work with
- A project design that creates an equitable platform for everyone to attend, participate and contribute to the project development and direction
- Use of community cultural development practice with a strong understanding of the moral and ethical implications of working within a community
- Deeply invested and potentially long-term, sustainable relationships with participants (this does not imply a personal relationship, although social friendships between participants and collaborating facilitators are often a wonderful result of arts projects)
- An adaptive and flexible plan and methods that can accommodate the direction and drive of participants' own creative needs and ideas

A project that pursues excellence in engagement and participation may preference a high quality process over artistic outcomes (although they are definitely not mutually exclusive!). It may be preferred to remove the pressure of a public arts outcome in favour of other social and personal outcomes for the individual participants.

Engagement of participants begins with genuine and thoughtful consultation and understanding of the community with whom you wish to work.

Partnership

Many inclusive arts projects occur in partnership because one organisation or individual does not have all the skills and resources that the project requires.

Partnerships are purposeful relationships that are about a mutually beneficial exchange with a shared goal or aim.

It would make sense in an inclusive project for and with people with disability, mental health issues and who are Deaf to ensure that both arts expertise and disability, mental health and Deaf community expertise or support are present. A project seeking excellent partnership outcomes would prioritise:

- Clarity of shared purpose and the roles of the partners
- Shared decision-making or an agreement about who will make decisions
- Timely communication of any information that the other partner should know
- Clarity of the level of investment and commitment from the partners

Partnerships, like any other relationships, are built on trust. Trust can only be achieved when both of the partners are striving for equity, transparency and mutual benefit.

Leadership

Leadership excellence in the context of this document requires the leading voice of an artist or artists with disability, mental health issues and who are Deaf. Leadership within the context of your project could take a myriad of forms - leading creatively, in planning, in community outreach or in advocacy around language or inclusive processes.

Critically, leadership excellence in an inclusive arts project involves:

- The cultural agency and decision-making of people with lived experience of disability, mental health issues and who are Deaf
- Access to relevant information about the project by people with disability, mental health issues and who are Deaf
- Decision-making opportunities for participants – especially in relation to their own creative rationale and artistic choices
- Opportunities for development and pathways for participants within and beyond the scope of the project

Leadership-driven projects may make career or other development outcomes a key objective.

Health and wellbeing

Arts programs play a key role in opening a dialogue between the broader community and people with disability, mental health issues and who are Deaf; they are often the lynchpin in rebuilding the confidence and wellbeing of these individuals.

A desire to achieve excellent outcomes in health and wellbeing through cultural participation can be reflected in changes in lifestyles, improved social and community connections, improved health outcomes and reconnection with support systems. Projects that see health and wellbeing outcomes as an important objective will be:

- Providing excellent opportunities to access health support through the project through partners, networks or direct provision of health-building activities in the project design
- Creating ways to acknowledge and build on positive health outcomes through the project process
- Capitalise on initiatives where the participant sees an opportunity for themselves that improves their wellbeing through flexible project timelines or plans



Health and wellbeing may be a secondary goal of your project, but by identifying it as a priority, the project plan can include ways to make the most of the benefits of art to health.

Social justice and advocacy

Inclusive arts projects are often concerned with social issues, political ideas and agendas about equality and justice. Many excellent artistic projects have also included important social messages in the work. In seeking to create a project that has high quality engagement and outcomes for social justice or advocacy you will want to consider:

- Ensuring that the voice of the participants and their authentic opinions are paramount
- Avoiding the imposition of beliefs and political views held by the facilitating artists or organisation
- The safety, confidentiality and privacy of participants within the context of their families and communities
- Space for both bravery and managed risk

People with disability, mental health issues and who are Deaf can find it difficult for their voice to be heard as valid and authoritative (even of their own experiences). Ensure that the project participants are satisfied with and wholly endorse the messages, stories and statements in the work they are producing or collaborating on.

How to achieve inclusive practice

Before embarking on an inclusive arts project, there are questions you should consider that will help you define your project and ensure it is properly resourced and accessible. Each of these sections are intended to guide you through relevant considerations.

1. Participants and communities

Possibly the first question that should be asked when embarking on an inclusive arts project is, 'who is it for?'

Ideally, your project stems from the interests of community members. This exploration stage can take time, so be sure to allow the time to build the relationships with the individuals and communities you want to engage. It is critical that the group you want to work with has expressed a desire to collaborate and participate. Consultation and engagement with the specific community before establishing the parameters of the project are essential. If you have a project idea that you are bringing to a new community, you'll need to find ways to check that your ideas align with the needs, interests and aspirations of those community members.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

People

- Have you identified a particular group of people that your project would like to engage?
- Do you already have a relationship with this group or are you forging new relationships?
- If you are forging a new relationship, do you have facilitators/representatives from the community who can help you make introductions?
- How can you find out if your project aligns with community interests?

- How will you structure the project to enable empowering community engagement?
- How will you manage if people come in and out of the project in unanticipated ways?

Project Concept

- Is your project addressing a particular community issue or interest?
- Is there a creative project that you would like to explore with a specific community?
- Will the art project provide an original or insightful way of thinking about a particular group or bringing the voices of a particular community to a wider public?
- Are you able to be adaptable with your project ideas if the community suggests an alternative approach?
- If you are planning for a public outcome, who is the audience for your project?
- How might you attract new audiences to see the work?

2.Planning for Inclusive Practice

Setting up an inclusive arts project requires careful and thorough planning, including consideration of what support mechanisms you may need to enable full participation by the community you are working with. It is always a good idea to make sure your budget has a reasonable contingency for access costs.

Inclusive arts projects may require a range of support mechanisms that other arts projects do not, and projects need to be tailored to reflect the individual needs of participants.

Some of these needs may include:

- Support workers
- Support services such as counselling
- Disability support services
- A policy or statement around safety in participation
- Auslan or other language interpreters
- A familiar or quiet space

From the very first interaction that you have with project participants, you want to ensure that the engagement is welcoming, safe, accessible and culturally appropriate.

You should be prepared to adjust and modify the way you may have always done things to ensure you are being inclusive. One example of an adjustment that often needs to be made is time. Inclusive arts projects sometimes take longer than other arts projects, particularly if you are working with individuals with a range of access requirements. If you are not sure about something, you may wish to look up the resources listed at the end of this publication. Where possible, open engagement with participants to identify specific needs, and mechanisms for constant feedback within the process to ascertain how people are experiencing the engagement is important.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

Individual Support

- Have you spoken with participants and/or their carers to fully understand their support needs?
- How will you capture this information so that everyone is clear about what is needed?
- How can you adjust or modify your practices to ensure that all participants are included?
- Will you have a process for co-design, where participants can lead as well as participate?

Communication

- How will you develop with your participants a set of agreements around respect and safety when working together?
- How will you communicate with participants so that there is clarity about what is happening and when?
- Do you have a process for checking in regularly with participants that their needs are being met?
- How will you evaluate your project in a way that is accessible to all participants?
- How will you document the outcomes of the project and promote its outcomes?

Process

- Have you allowed sufficient time for the project?
- Have you given due consideration to the potential consequence of inviting and exploring personal and sensitive content?
- Do you have a plan for managing disclosure of abuse or other personal information which may make a participant vulnerable?
- Have you prepared the broader community to welcome the project and understand the context of the work?

3. Removing barriers to participation

It is important that before initiating any project you have carefully consulted with the community you wish to engage with about their needs and interests, and researched solutions to removing any barriers that would prevent their equitable participation. Some commonly reported barriers include: cost, communication, participant choice and control, access to physical spaces, attitudes and transport.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

Cost

- If participants are expected to contribute to the cost of a project, are their ways to ensure that it is not prohibitive?
- Can participation be subsidised for those who cannot pay?

Communication

- Do you know how to tap in to community networks to get your message out to potential participants? (Remember, not everyone uses a computer)
- Are you using accessible communication formats?
- Is the language you are using welcoming and culturally appropriate?

Participant Choice and Control

- Does your project allow for participants to be involved in designing it?
- Your ideas of what might work for a particular community may not always match up with the perspectives of those community members. Have you built in consultation so that your project adequately reflects the needs, interests and aspirations of community members?
- How will you gather feedback and input from participants throughout the project?

Attitude

- How might you begin to prepare your partners to welcome the project and its participants, in a way that provides for a safe and productive creative space?
- How might you respond to challenging attitudes from project partners or others in the community?
- What is the role of project participants in helping to shift community attitudes through the project?

Accessibility

- Is there good access to the venues you want to use? Think broadly about accessibility – getting in the front door does not constitute accessibility. Are the toilets accessible? Is there parking?
- Is there good access to public transport? Is there an accessible public transport stop nearby?

General

- Do you have a plan for identifying the potential barriers that may prevent people from engaging in your project?
- Do you have strategies in place to address barriers to participation?
- Do you have a budget for access?
- Where can you seek assistance if needed?

Remember that the people you want to engage with are the experts in their own needs – ask them.



4. Skills and workforce

There are many skilled community arts and cultural development practitioners who are experienced in working with people with mental health issues, disability and who are Deaf. This work requires competency and experience. Make sure project staff are equipped to support participants to engage fully in the project, understand duty of care and other legal requirements, and share your philosophy of inclusive practice. If you are working with a group of practitioners who are new to the sector, there is training available to assist you to build a culture of inclusive practice within your project.

Successful inclusive arts projects are dependent on excellent artist facilitators (with and without disability, mental health issues and who are Deaf) who have a good grounding in inclusive practice and experience working with the particular community you wish to engage.

Good facilitators understand collaboration, are flexible and accommodating in their approach and are aware of how to address any power imbalances to ensure a range of voices are heard.

If you are inexperienced in working in this area, but keen to develop the skills and expertise, consider finding an established program in which to work or volunteer.

Challenges can arise in any project, including in the delivery of inclusive arts projects. Perhaps expectations are not met, or there is miscommunication about elements of the project. Conflicts can arise between participants, or a participant and a facilitator. Perhaps participants can become unwell, and unable to see the project through. In these instances, a skilled practitioner will help you to navigate these circumstances.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

Skills and experience

- Are you working with a community or individuals that require specific support skills?

- What kind of artists might be required to create or facilitate this project?
- Do you have the skills and understanding to work with this particular community?
- Do you have the right people with an appropriate skill set to achieve your project goals?
- What obligations do you have as an employer/project manager? i.e. ensuring appropriate safety screening

Training

- Where can you find training and support for new practitioners?
- Have you considered opportunities for people with disability, mental health issues and who are Deaf to be employed in your project?
- If challenges emerge, do you know where to go for advice and support?

5. Resources

Inclusive arts projects can be resource intensive, depending on the scope of the project and the access requirements of participants. It's important to budget with access in mind. Financial support could come from a range of sources, including philanthropic, local, state and federal government and the private sector. It's also important to consider in kind support, such as donations of materials, a venue or transport. Many projects begin with very little money and a lot of goodwill, and build from there. Don't overlook your local community contacts who can be a great source of knowledge and support. Partnerships are also likely to be critical to your project's success. Working in partnership will ensure that your project is informed by different areas of expertise across the arts, disability, mental health and Deaf community.

*Your project is also subject to laws and regulations.
It's important to have the right agreements in place
that protect you and participants.*

If you're new to project management, you might consider an auspicing arrangement with an experienced organisation. Auspicing is when an incorporated association takes legal responsibility for your project finances and obligations to funders, usually for a fee.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

Financial

- Have you got adequate financial resources for this project?
- Have you developed a project budget that identifies both income and expenditure?
- Have you factored in both cash and in-kind contributions?
- Have you budgeted adequately for all access requirements, including your intended audience?
- Do you have a process for managing the project finances?

Partnerships

- What kind of partnerships will be required to support the project, which may include arts organisations or community organisations?
- How will you document the various elements of your partnership? i.e. values, goals and expectations, contributions and deliverables.

Legal requirements

- What kind of legal requirements does your project have? i.e. insurance, contracts, copyright agreements, mandatory reporting?
- Do you know where to find information about these requirements and support? (see section on Resources)
- Is an auspicing arrangement better suited to your project?

Moving from projects to sustained programs is an aspiration that many artists and communities hold for their work in the arts and disability, mental health and Deaf communities. This resource is intended to explore approaches to inclusive practice in projects, but many of the foundations for ongoing programs stem from the practice that is described here. Some of the considerations that will most impact on your ability to transition from project to program include:

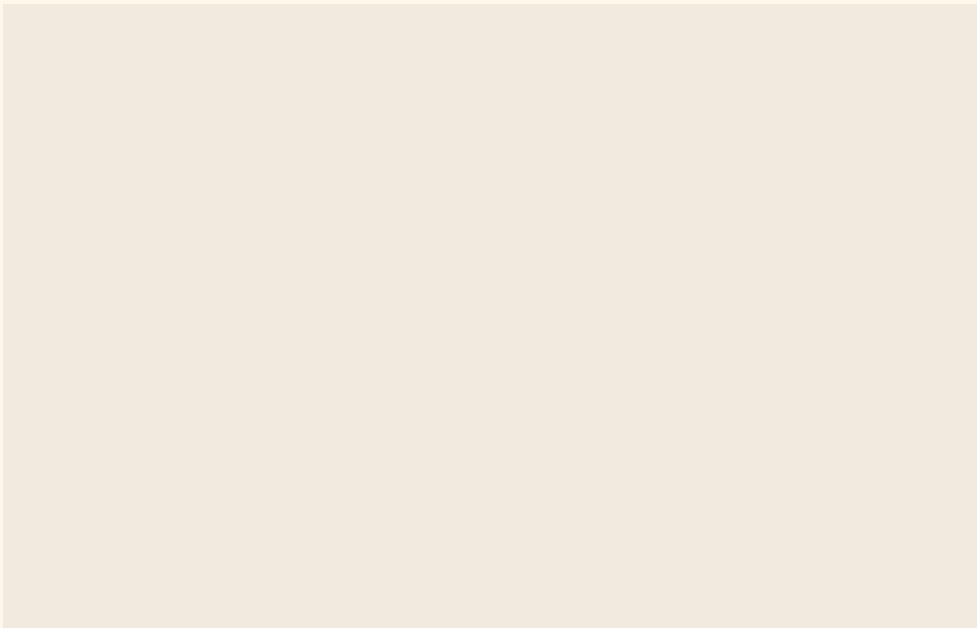
- Identifiable community need/interest
- Clearly articulated partnerships
- Ongoing funding
- An understanding of regulatory and compliance requirements

If you are at a point where you are seeking to make this transition, please contact Arts Access Victoria for further advice and support.

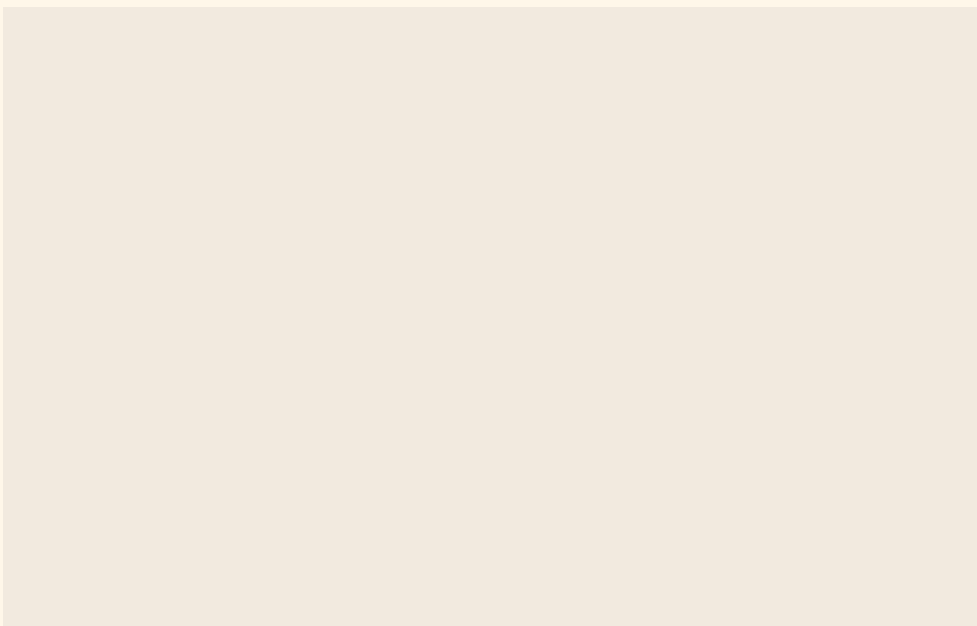
Inclusive Practice Project Planning Template

To begin:

- 1. The individuals/community we are planning to work with include...**

A large, empty rectangular box with a light gray background, intended for users to write down the names of individuals or communities they plan to work with.

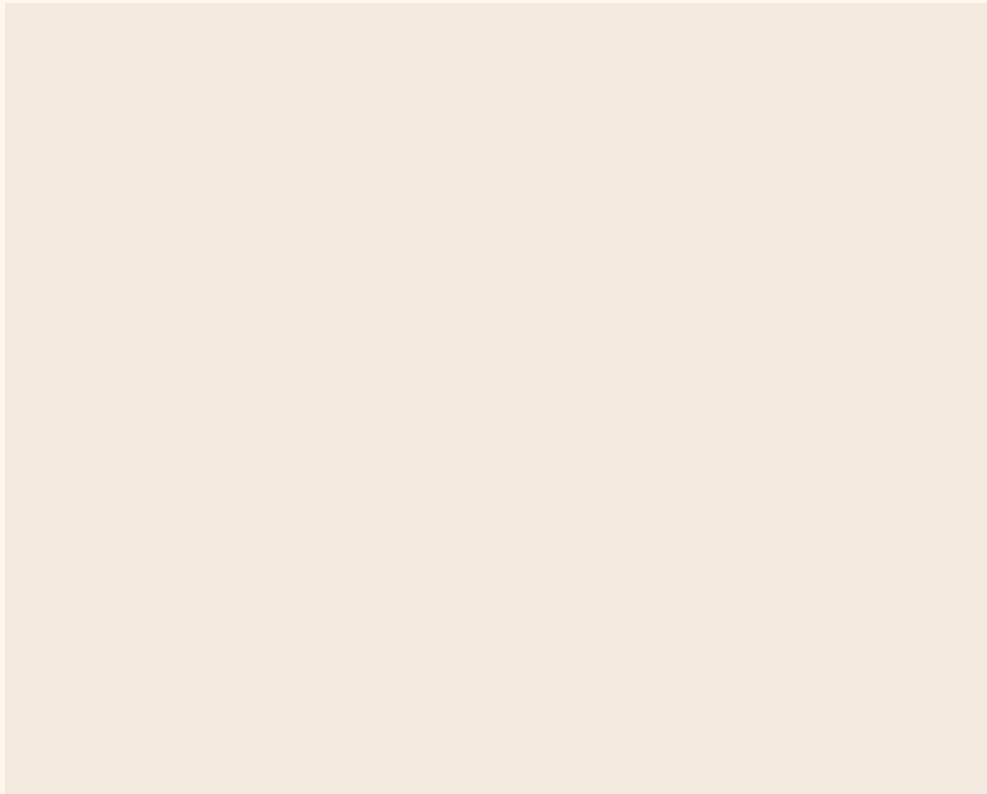
- 2. The steps we are taking to consult with these individuals/community are...**

A large, empty rectangular box with a light gray background, intended for users to describe the steps they will take to consult with the identified individuals or community.

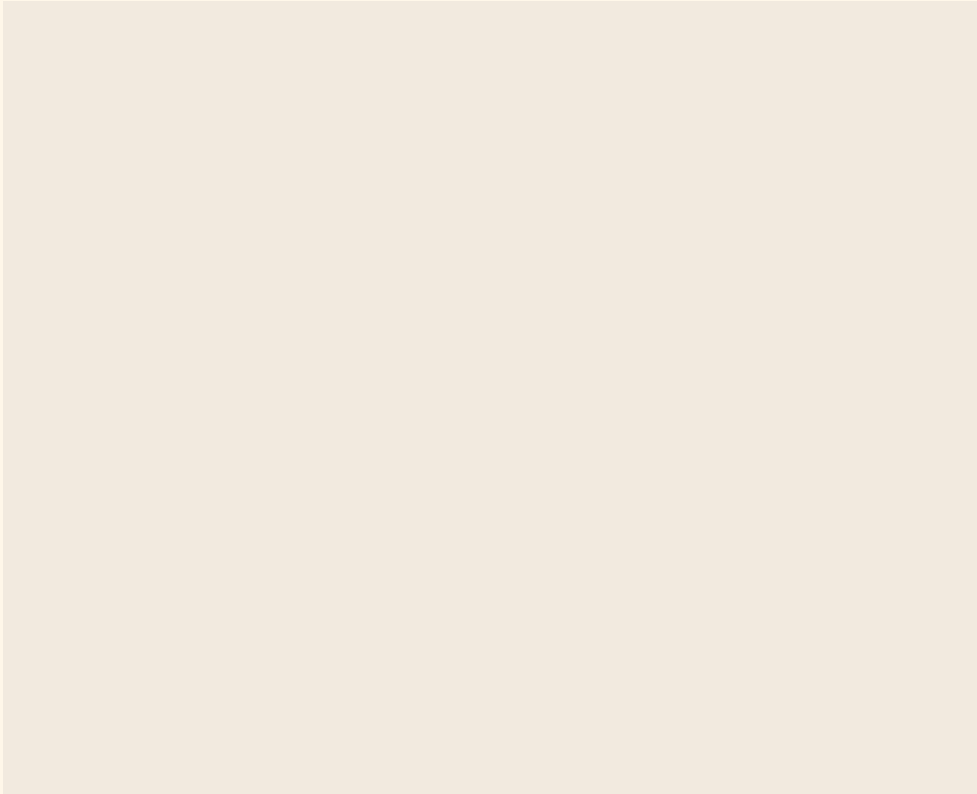
3. Together, our creative ideas include...



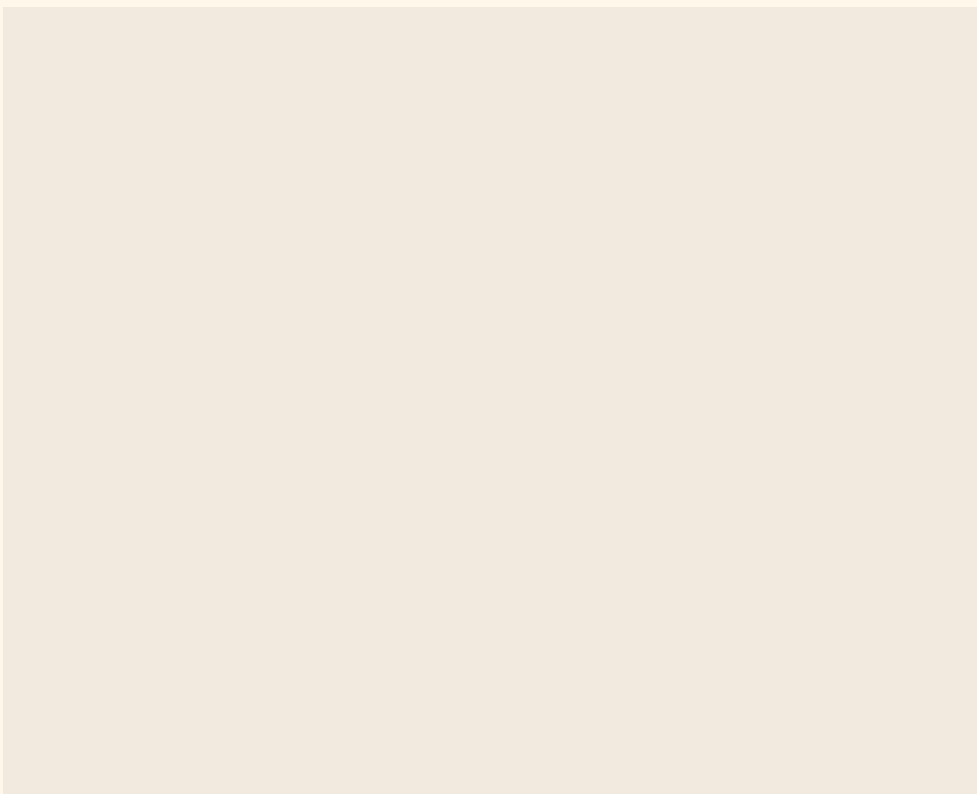
4. The areas we want to focus on are...



5. The partners we'll need to make this project happen include...

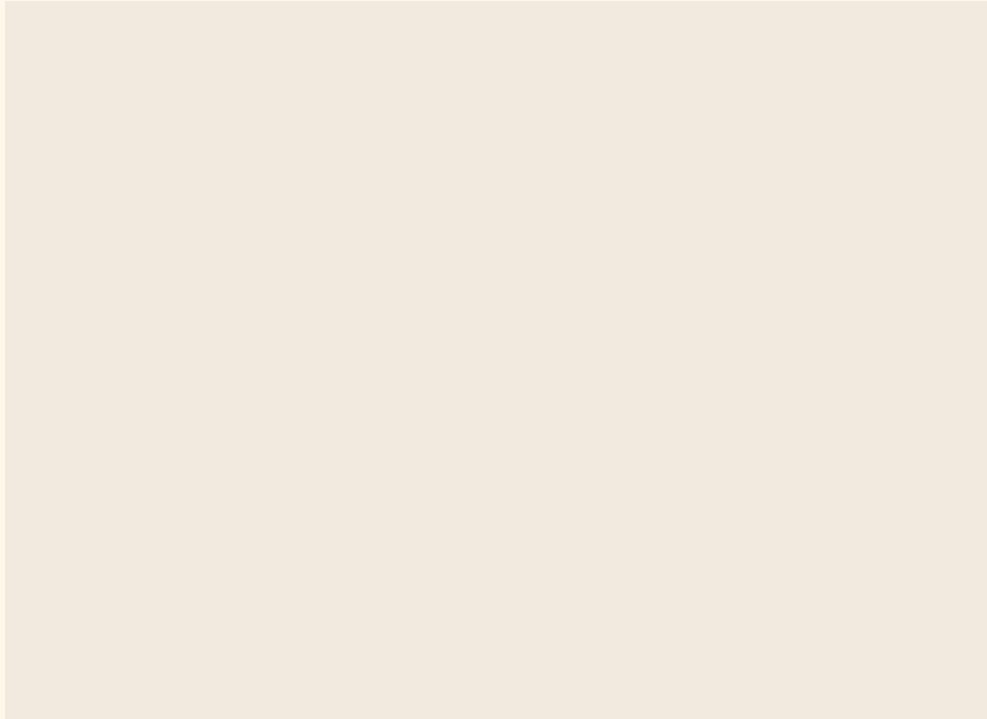


6. The skills we need to manage this project are...

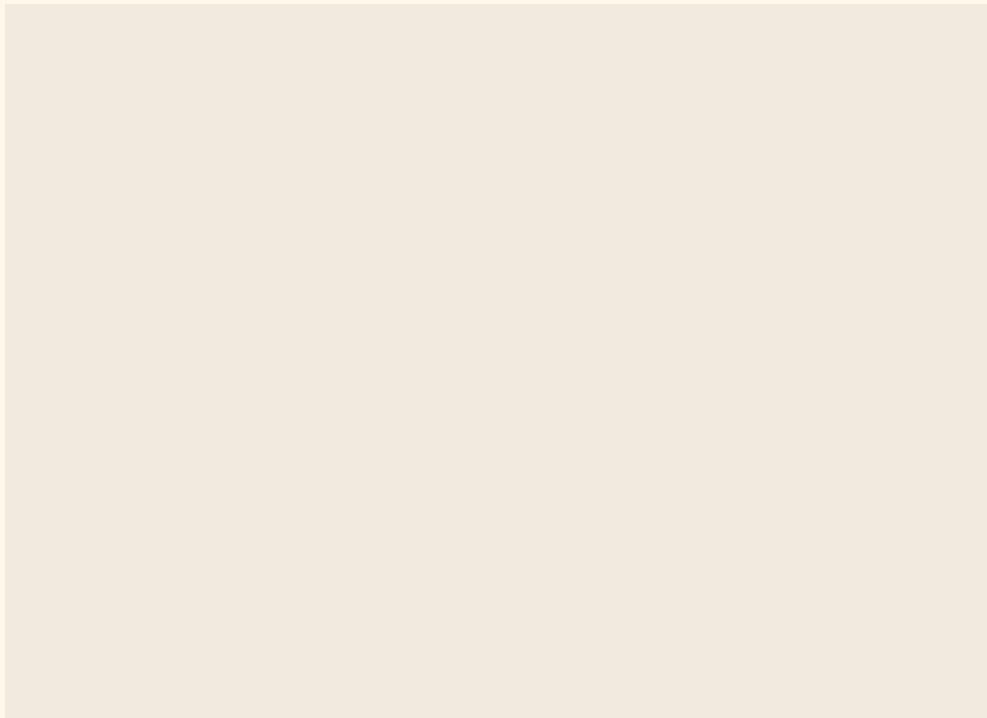


As you gain momentum:

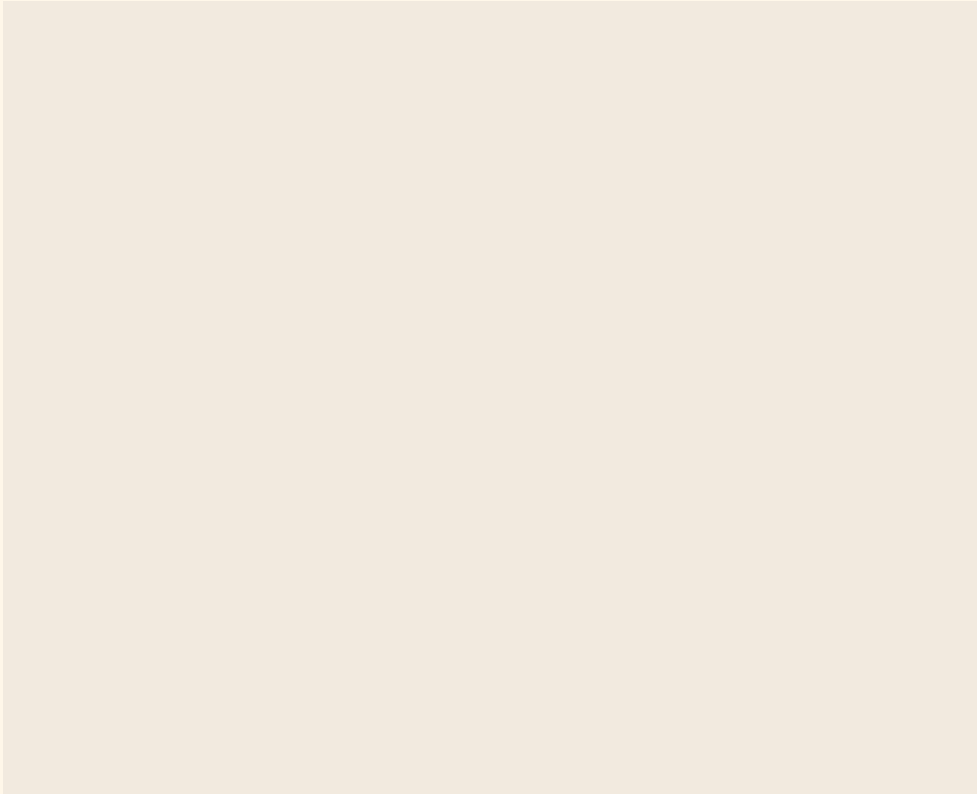
7. The way we'll plan for an inclusive process is through...



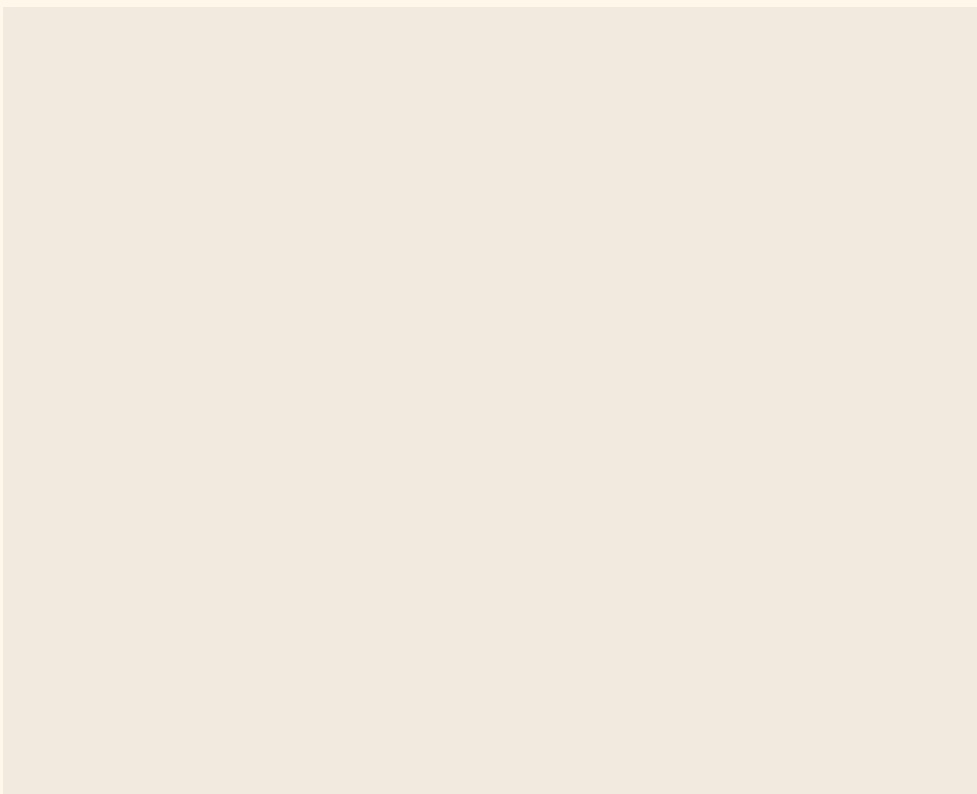
8. The roles/skills we are going to need to bring in to help us are...



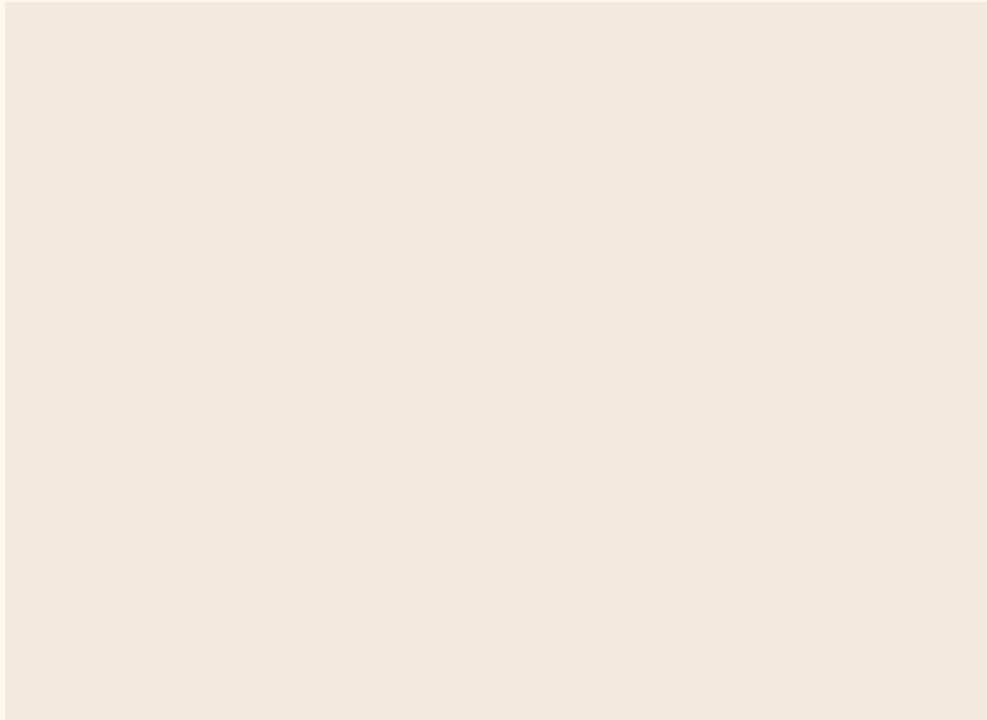
9. The financial and in-kind resources we'll need to undertake the project are...



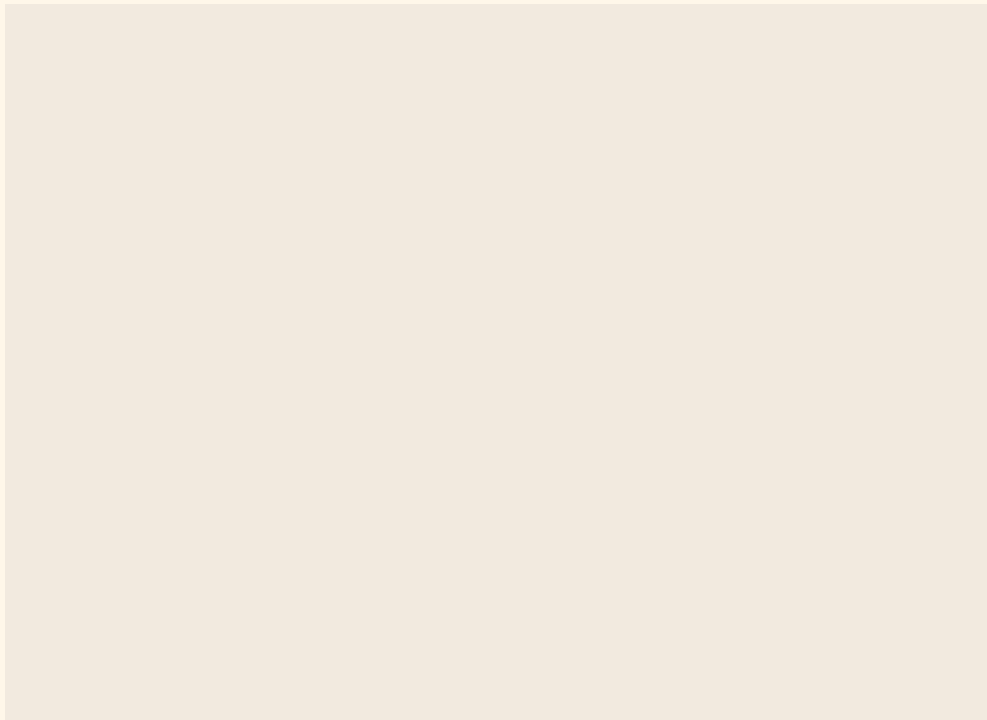
10. The venue/s for the project include...



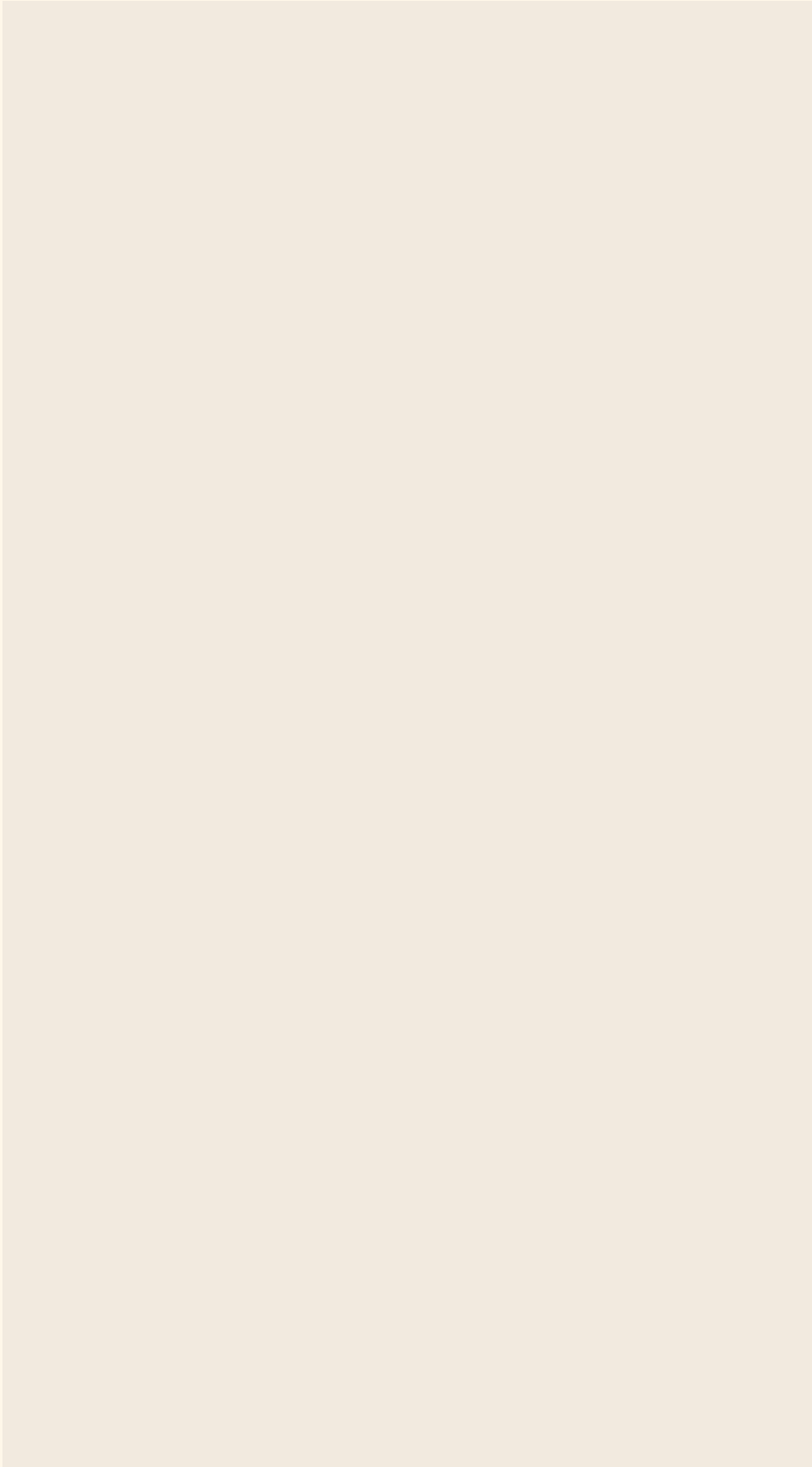
11. The process we've all agreed to communicate with each other is...



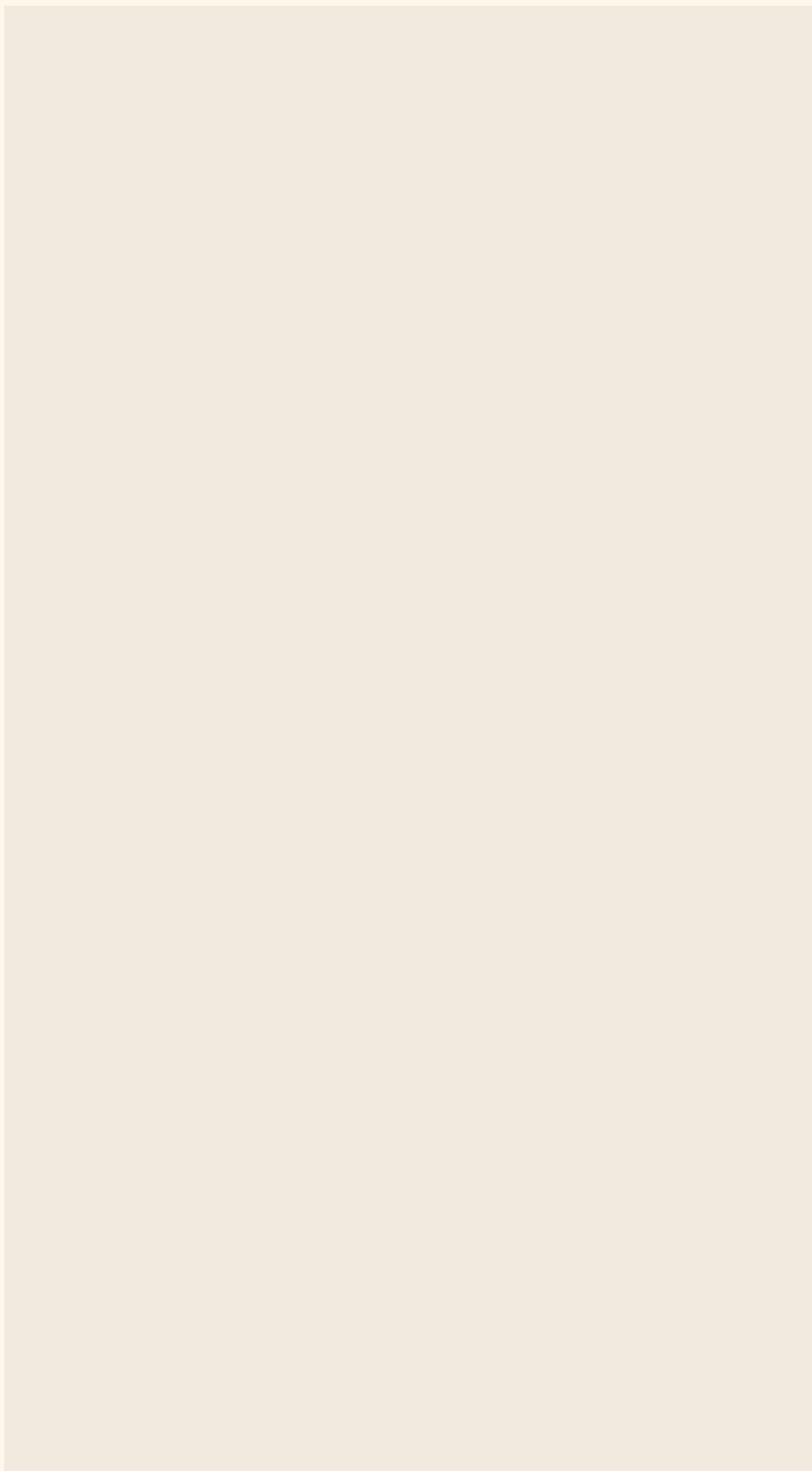
12. We'll get the important information and advice we need from...



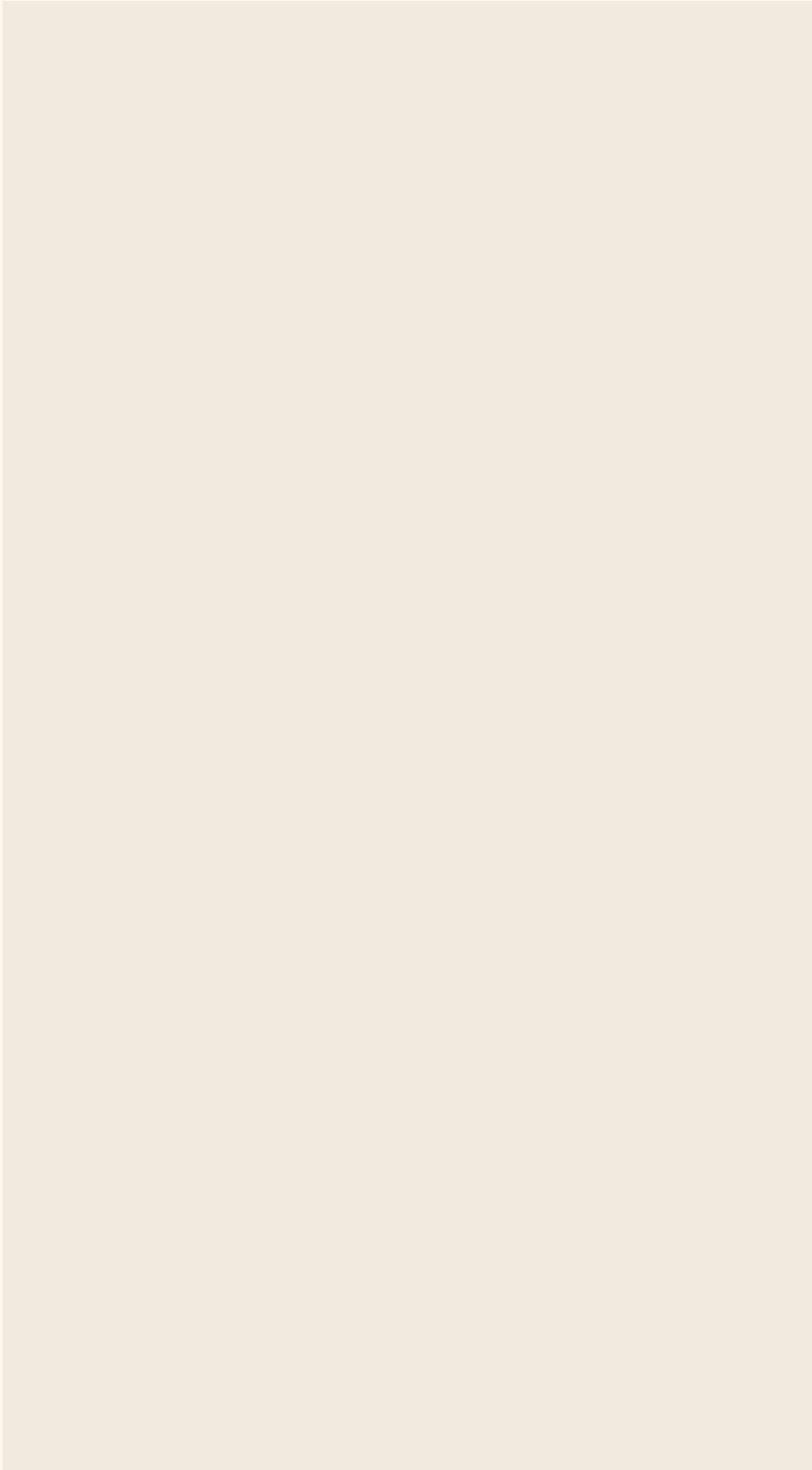
Notes



Notes



Notes



You can get more help or advice here:

There are many resources on the Arts Access Victoria website dealing with:

- Inclusive practice
- Accessibility
- Training and consultation
- Legal information
- Research
- Audience development

Go to www.artsaccess.com.au/resources for more information



ARTS ACCESS VICTORIA

Arts Access Victoria

WEBSITE: www.artsaccess.com.au

PHONE: 03 9699 8299

EMAIL: info@artsaccess.com.au



Arts Access Victoria

WEBSITE: www.artsaccess.com.au

PHONE: 03 9699 8299

EMAIL: info@artsaccess.com.au