

WHAT IS CO-DESIGN?

Co-designing is sharing power and designing with communities across New York City

Co-designing is a mindset, skillset, and process.

- **Mindset:** Understanding systems is a relational process that gives value to many perspectives. Seek multicultural, not monocultural, views.
- **Skillset:** Create safe spaces to listen deeply and affirm people’s lived experience and expertise.
- **Process:** Get used to being in the gray. Co-designing doesn’t follow a map, it is a journey in and out of ambiguity. Co-designing isn’t just about talking to each other. It’s about learning through doing and working together to design solutions.

“Ways of being and thinking, no tools necessary!”
- KA McKercher (2020)

Co-deciding: Why is decision making power so important?

Shared decision making power is the central function of co-design. It’s unrealistic to share every single decision throughout a project but there are key decisions that need to be made with or by those with lived experience to authentically be considered co-design. Recognizing **these five forms of power** can help City Agency staff share decision making power:

- Privilege:** What privileges might you have and how could this affect relationship building?
- Access Power:** Who is included/excluded and why?
- Goal Power:** How have the goals and outcomes been determined, and who has helped determine these?
- Role Power:** Who is making key decisions? Who is interpreting/prioritizing findings?
- Rule Power:** Who decides how a group will work together?

- Goodwill, Bijil-Brouwer, Bendor (2021)

“There is no co-designing without co-deciding.” - KA McKercher (2020)

Levels of collaboration in design

1. Designing at people:

Top down decisions are made on behalf of the communities best interest.

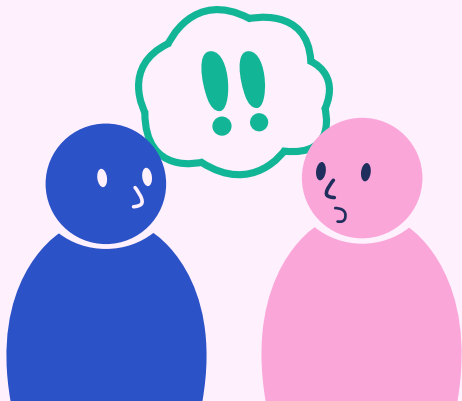


2. Designing for people:

Top down decisions are made by City Agency staff based on what they assume are on behalf of a communities best interest. Some input from the community may be involved but decisions making power is not shared.

3. Designing with people:

City Agency staff share power and make decisions in partnership (consensus decision making) with community.



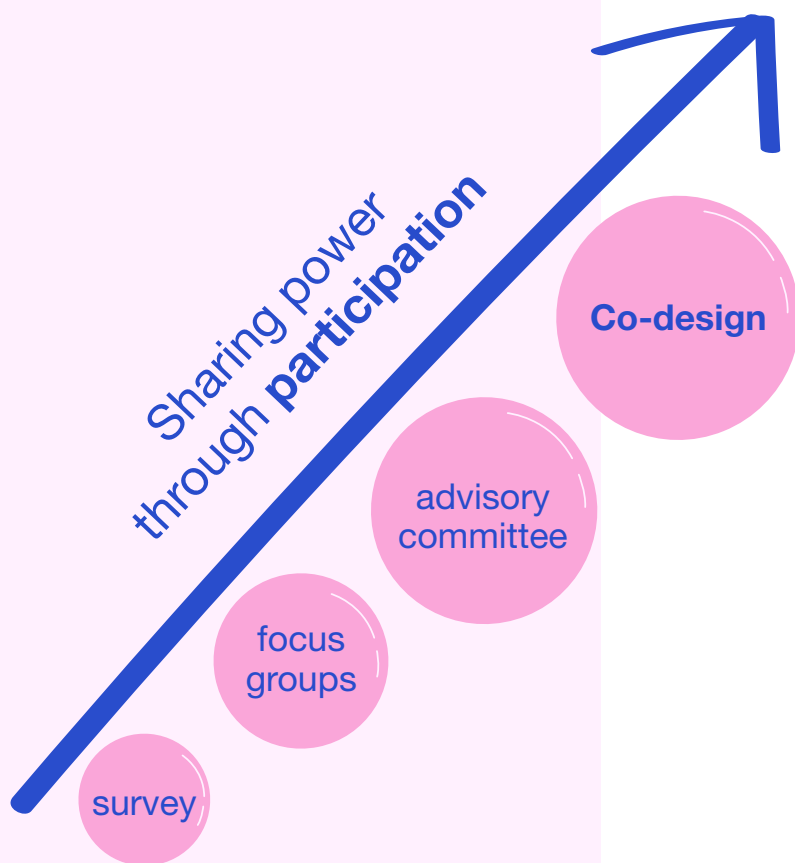
4. Design by the people:

Grassroots design decisions are made by the community, and City Agencies support in fostering advocacy and implementation of these decisions.

What sets co-design apart from other participatory activities?

Co-design goes deeper than many participatory design strategies and shifts participation of partners with lived experience from being “consultants” to key decision makers and shapers of the work.

- **Lived experience:** “The experience(s) of people on whom a social justice issue, or combination of issues, has had a direct impact. - Belijeet Sandhu (2017)
- **Lived expertise:** “The knowledge, insights, understanding and wisdom gained through experience” - Belijeet Sandhu (2017)



Why Co-design for public services?

- Leads to higher probabilities of uptake, success, and long-term sustainability
- Allows for more meaningful and effective measures of success generated by community
- Strengthens relationships between communities and NYC agencies and offices
- Cost-saving by investing in plans that communities desire
- Improved customer experience and satisfaction

- Steen, M., Manschot, M., & De Koning, N. (2011)

“We move decision-making and knowledge-holding from an individual or elite group of individuals to a diverse team of co-designers (a small circle). This includes people with lived experience, who know things that professionals don’t.” - Bovaird & Loeffler (2013)