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)

**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.

"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." - Boyd & Leffler (2018)

**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)

- 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)

**Why Co-design for public services?**