

# Co- Production Guidebook



Connecting  
Nature

Bringing Cities to Life,  
Bringing Life into Cities

# Acknowledgments

*Co-producing nature-based solutions in cities: collaborating with and mobilising diverse urban actors*

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# Contents

Co-production is a novel governance method for developing nature-based solutions where there are a lot of actors (individuals, groups or organisations) involved. Co-production is about collaboration, empowerment and producing shared results, such as policies and visions.

This guidebook introduces what co-production is. It covers:

- The outputs and benefits of co-production
- Principles to define and evaluate co-production processes
- How to design co-production processes step by step

**Section 1** Introduction

- What are Nature-Based Solutions?
- What is the Connecting Nature Framework?

**Section 2** What is Co-Production'?

**Section 3** How to design and implement co-production

**Section 4** Additional Resources



# 1 Introduction

## What are Nature-Based Solutions?

The European Commission defines nature-based solutions as solutions to societal change that are:

*“inspired and supported by nature, which are cost-effective, simultaneously provide environmental, social and economic benefits and help build resilience. Such solutions bring more and more diverse, nature and natural features and processes into cities, landscapes and seascapes, through locally adapted, resource-efficient and systemic interventions.”*

Nature-Based Solutions benefit biodiversity and support the delivery of a range of ecosystem services.



## What is the Connecting Nature Framework?

Designing and implementing Nature-Based Solutions on a scale that delivers economic, environmental and social co-benefits, while also building resilience and benefiting biodiversity is complex with many different issues to consider.

Many questions arise and need answers.

What is the best solution for the area?

Who will manage it?

How will it be financed?

Who needs to be involved in the planning, delivery and stewardship?

Will it support innovation and generate jobs?

How to measure the economic, environmental and social impact?

How can we manage change?

Even identifying where to start can often be a challenge!

In response to this uncertainty, Connecting Nature has developed a process tool to help cities and other organisations navigate the path towards implementation of Nature-Based Solutions on a large scale: the **Connecting Nature Framework**. The Framework identifies **three distinct phases of development** for a nature-based solution: planning, delivery and stewardship.

Throughout each phase there are **seven separate elements** that cities and other entities need to consider when shaping their individual nature-based solution: **technical solutions, governance, impact assessment, finance, entrepreneurship, co-production** and **reflexive monitoring**.

Cities may choose to start with any element of the Framework process and consider the others in the order that suits their context. What emerges from the Framework process is a comprehensive 360° overview of each stage of development of the nature-based solution.

## Guidebooks

To assist you in developing your nature-based solution, Connecting Nature has produced a series of guidebooks. The overall Connecting Nature Framework Guidebook is a good starting point. There is also a guidebook for each element of the framework process describing the implementation steps and providing case studies to show how it works in practice. A step-by-step how-to manual on the Connecting Nature Framework process is also available.

All the Connecting Nature guidebooks and the manual may be downloaded from [www.connectingnature.eu](http://www.connectingnature.eu).

## Connecting Nature Framework



# 2 | What is Co-Production?

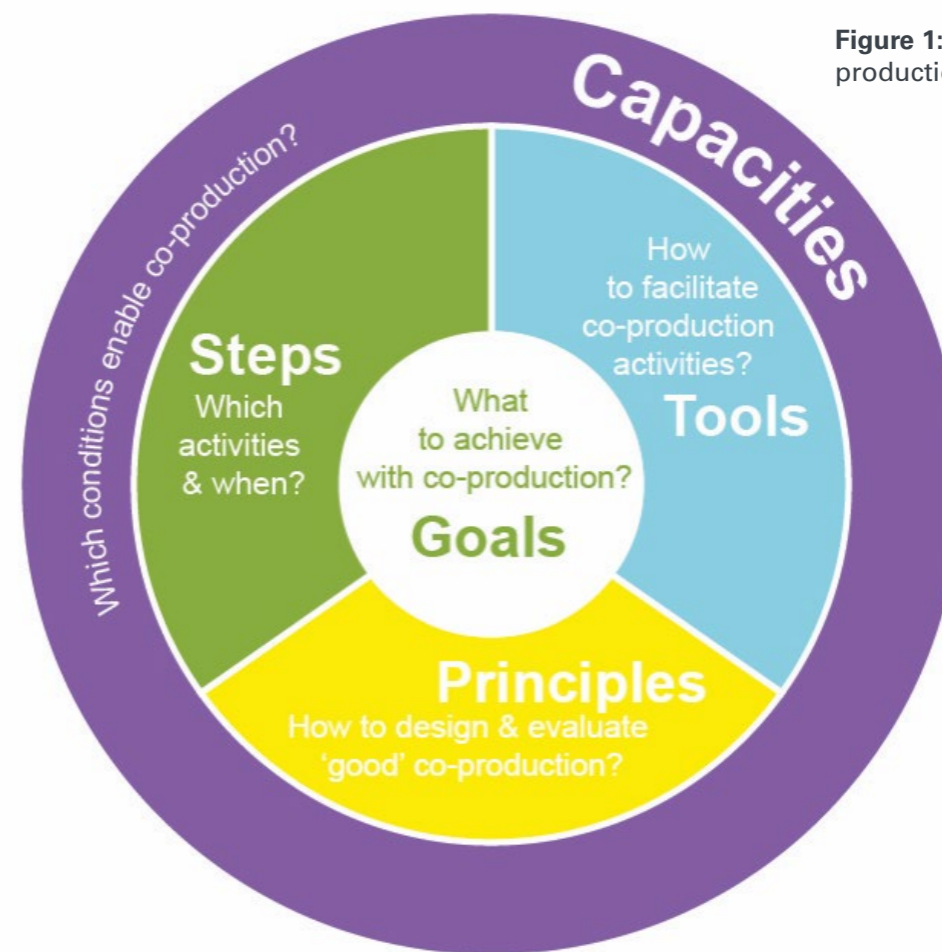
## Co-production in a nutshell

Co-production is a governance method which can be used by cities and other stakeholders when developing nature-based solutions in cities and for the good of cities. Not only does co-production foster collaboration and partnership but it stimulates learning among diverse actors – these actors could be civil servants, citizens, urban planners, entrepreneurs, architects, scientists or engineers, to name but a few. In a co-production model, they contribute to the design, implementation and management of nature-based solutions together.

## Co-production democratises urban governance

Actors are not just consulted or informed, they are involved from the very beginning in the process. They have a role in the making of plans, infrastructure and policy. The goal of co-production is to generate results that may be shared with all the actors. Examples of such results would be new ways to frame a problem, or new policies and visions. By bringing diverse actors together, co-production also results in new relationships. It can therefore mobilise and empower participants to create better and greener cities and communities.

**Picture:** The day of the official opening of an open garden in Poznań that was co-produced with residents, teachers, children and parents (March 21, 2018)



**Figure 1:** What makes co-production processes

## Why co-produce nature-based solutions?

Nature-based solutions address complex urban problems which have no quick fix. Because of this complexity, a diverse set of actors is needed to collaboratively design a nature-based solution that will respond to various needs. However, more often than not, policy and planning leave little room for collaborative processes.

## Co-production creates better and greener cities and communities in the following ways:

- It produces tangible outputs: new visions, new ways of framing problems, and innovative solutions, including, for example, new business models

- It allows for new relationships, partnerships and collaborations among actors who were previously not in contact with each other
- It mobilises and empowers a diverse set of actors for joint solutions and action
- It engages the 'unusual suspects' in enhancing the ownership of and quality of solutions
- It allows for the collection of knowledge in the absence of data
- It bursts open departmental siloes within city governments and other local government agencies to facilitate the pooling of resources

## What elements make up a co-production process?

It is important to keep the different elements that make a co-production process in mind throughout: goals, principles, steps, tools and capacities.

## How to design a 'good' co-production

In order to ensure that processes intended to do co-production actually deliver co-production, every co-production process needs to adhere to certain design principles. For example, co-productions should involve everyone who is affected by the outcomes (irrespective of people's interests or resources) and they should not only benefit policymakers and urban planners, but also the local community – this is an example of the Inclusivity principle. All the principles are laid out below.

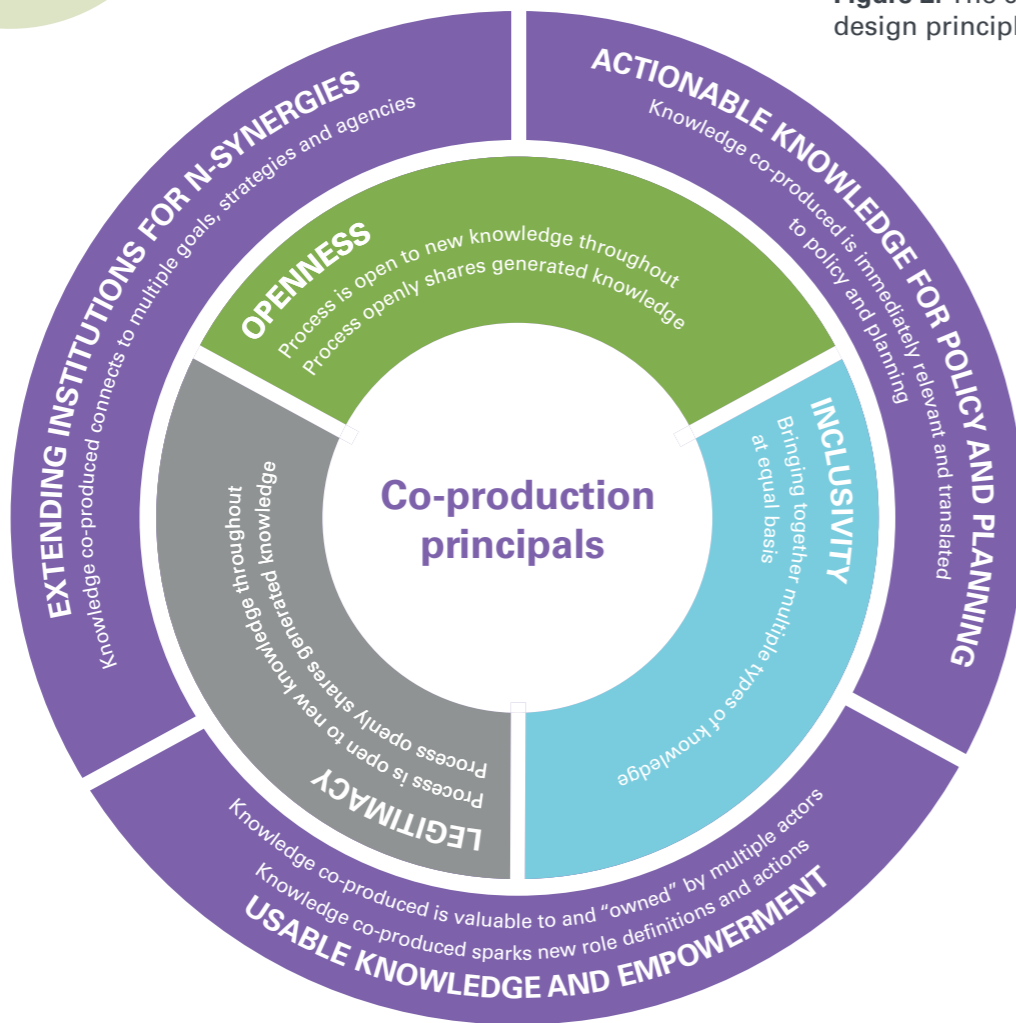


Figure 2: The co-production design principles



## 3 | How to design and implement co-production

### Co-production design principles

Six design principles have been identified, three relating to the process and three to the outputs. All six principles must be evident in the design and implementation of the nature-based solution for it to be considered a co-production.

These principles facilitate the design, evaluation and adaptation of 'good' co-production processes. They ensure that groups designing co-productions pay attention to specific local contexts, questions and needs.

### Three process design principles ensure procedural quality:

1. Inclusivity for bringing together diverse actors and multiple types of knowledge at equal level
2. Openness to adopt, integrate and share knowledge throughout
3. Legitimacy to ensure that the process includes legitimate and credible knowledge and is trusted by participants and wider urban actors

### Three output design principles show what kind of results should be generated as a result of the co-production:

1. Actionable knowledge for policy and planning ensures that the co-produced knowledge is immediately relevant and translated into policy and planning
2. Usable knowledge and empowerment ensures that the co-produced knowledge outputs are valuable to and taken up by many actors
3. Extending institutions for N-Synergies ensures that the co-produced knowledge connects to multiple goals, strategies and agendas within the city. This helps to create synergies across sectors.

*Co-production processes can be designed and implemented in five steps. The steps are iterative, which means that they are continuously reflected upon, redefined and adapted if and when needed.*

For example, the goals of the co-production process are defined in step 1 (see below) but they may change or be adapted throughout the process.

### Step 1: Define the goals of the co-production process

It is important to define goals for the co-production process. Goals may include the development of new visions and strategies, concrete solutions, networks or partnerships and the empowerment of citizens. The goals influence who should be involved (which actors) and how the collaboration can be achieved (the tools used) in such a way as to empower the actors and produce shared results.

**Step 2:  
Use the design principles to  
flesh out the co-production  
goals and structure**

The design principles guide our approach to the co-production process by highlighting key considerations. For example, who should be involved, what type of knowledge is needed and what kind of results are sought. The principles also help us to reflect on the process and results.

In this step we would work through each design principle in the framework to define how we it will be addressed. For example, looking at inclusivity, we would define who will be involved and who will not, and why, what types of knowledge and results we want to generate, and so on.

We would also describe how we will meet the design principles during the co-production process. For example, how do we ensure that co-production processes are inclusive, legitimate and open? How can we facilitate empowerment of the actors? How can we involve them in the design, delivery and stewarding of the nature-based solution?



*Learning from practice: co-production goals in Genk*

In Genk, Mien Quartier works on the design and implementation of the co-production process of the Stiemer Valley. Here's what she has to say about her experience of co-production:

“We, the city government, believe that all residents have individual talents for creating a better city. We aim to give everyone the space they need to develop their own initiatives and we design our co-production processes in a participatory way. In the co-production process of the Stiemer Valley, we engage citizens through various activities. One example is the ‘Stiemersafari’ bike tour, to discover the valley in a fun way. Our Friends of the Stiemer take part in brainstorm and organise events throughout the whole co-production process.”

“We have learned that the process is at least as important as the end result. It helps to create a common vision and approach with the involved stakeholders. You need to ensure that the process and outcome are valuable for everyone involved. Then you can motivate people to take action. We thus focus on identifying and connecting with the right actors, developing lasting relationships and planning our engagement formats.”



**Figure 3:** Co-production steps and activities

**Step 3:  
Plan the co-production  
steps and activities**

The steps in a co-production process are puzzle pieces which connect together activities that need to happen to achieve the goals of the co-production process. They can vary in order and are iterative. It is important to identify the concrete co-production steps with a timeline of when these are going to happen. This is not meant to be a blueprint – it is likely that the process will need to change and adapt therefore it is important to allow for enough flexibility and time to do so. It is also important to identify and – as early as possible – reach out to the actors who need to be involved in each co-production step.

In the figure, we highlight different possible steps to take in a co-production process. Each of these steps helps to achieve different – intermediate – process goals.

*Learning from practice: co-production principles in Pozna – Legitimacy*

The city of Pozna co-produced an ‘open garden’ in a local preschool, a small part of which citizens have access to. The garden increases the amount of accessible green space in the city and gives the school the opportunity to make its playground a nature-oriented one. Police officers contributed with knowledge about safety rules for opening up the preschool garden to the public. Their involvement in the process was important for the legitimacy design principle.



**Step 4:  
Select the co-production tools**

Specific co-production tools facilitate each step of the process towards desired goals. The choice of tools depends on the goals of the co-production process, on the specific co-production step and on the type of actors involved.

After selecting the co-production tools, it is important to identify the materials, skills and other requirements needed to implement the tool. Think for example of the space/room, atmosphere and time needed.

Some examples of co-production tools used in partner cities are given below.

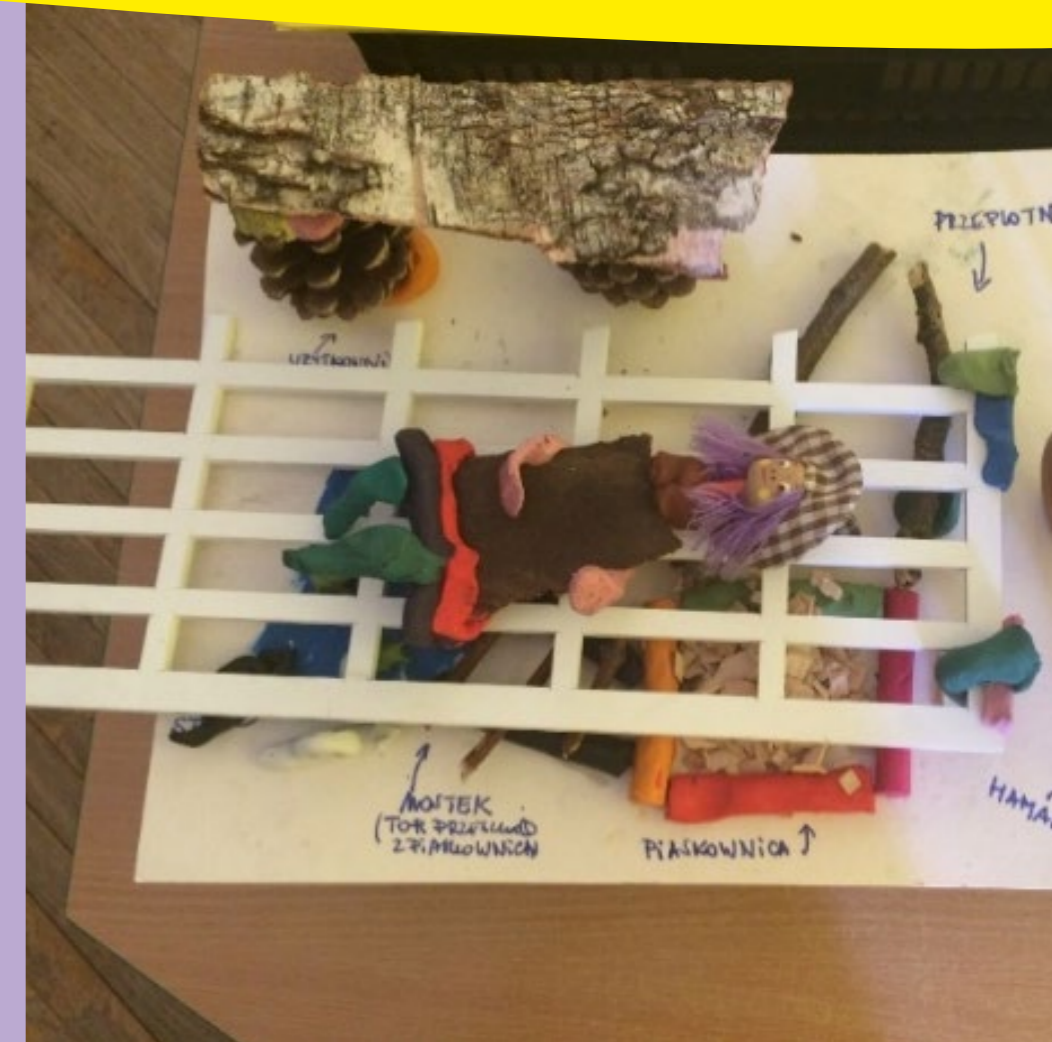


*Learning from practice: Poznan used envisioning workshops as a tool to engage with current and future users.*

In Poznań, children, teachers, parents and residents participated in envisioning workshops as part of the process of co-producing the pre-school open garden. In these workshops, the participants exchanged ideas about what an open garden could look like and how to play and have fun there. Participants, especially children, visualised their ideas in pictures and drawings. This method helped to identify the needs of its future users, namely children and their parents. The workshops really inspired the designer and architect who then used the presented ideas to create a conceptual design for the garden.

**Pictures:** Children's inspiration – their dreams about how the open garden would look (June, 2017).

**Source:** City of Poznań



Name/Organisation: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address/Email: \_\_\_\_\_

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Do you think this is the right approach? If not, tell us why and what you think should be done instead.

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**FREEPOST PLUS RSHB-XKGJ-SLCX**  
Development Plan Team (GOSS)  
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*Learning from practice: Glasgow used postcards as a co-production tool seeking feedback on its Open Space Strategy from citizens.*

In Glasgow, postcards were used to get people to engage with the proposed open space strategy. The postcards encouraged citizens to consider the key aims of the draft strategy and to give feedback. The postcards were disseminated across Glasgow and included a picture on the front, a return address and stamps.

**Pictures:** Postcards used to engage people with open space in Glasgow

Improving the quality of all open spaces across the city



Place Setting for improved economic and social vitality

### Step 5: Reflect on the co-production process and results

Co-production processes are never set in stone. They are open processes and evolve over time as learning progresses. They 'go with the flow' of the participants' ideas and needs. This requires continuous reflexivity. Reflexivity helps to identify lessons learned

and to adapt the process in light of changing objectives. Therefore, those involved in co-production should ask a lot of questions of the process along the way such as Which goals does the process aim to achieve? Is the process on the way to achieving these, or do we need adaptations? Reflexive monitoring can help to achieve reflexivity (for more on reflexivity, see the Connecting Nature Reflexive Monitoring guidebook).



*Learning from practice: In Genk, the city harnessed the activity of a city youth service programme, Junior Teams, as a tool to generate ideas about how to develop the Stiemervalley.*

The Junior Team is an annual programme run by the city's youth service in which pupils from the sixth grade work for a few months on the question of how to make the city more child friendly. In 2018, the city involved the Junior Team in the development of the Stiemervalley, a route that runs through several neighbourhoods alongside a waterway connecting a number of important wetland areas.

The Junior Team explored the Stiemervalley by way of different activities, and co-developed ideas on how to make the Stiemervalley attractive. They made ten proposals for the Stiemervalley, from which the following three were selected for implementation by other kids and the city of Genk: 1. Putting up bird houses, 2. Building a treehouse and 3. Establishing a trail for children in the water.

**Pictures:** (Top) The Junior team presents their 10 proposals to the city, the press and the public.

(Bottom) The Junior Team and the youth service put up the bird houses.





### **Invest in capacities for co-production**

Co-production doesn't just happen; it requires the development of new skills, organisational resources and relationships for exchange and collaboration. Three main capacities to start with are:

#### **Creating space for co-production.**

Co-production means departing from pre-defined results and conventional planning processes. Setting up, designing and implementing co-production requires a lot of time, openness, trust, political support and skills. Using professional facilitators and mediators helps to build trust and shared understanding.

#### **Generating uptake of co-produced knowledge.**

There are two aspects to this; at a community level, the co-production process and its results need to be supported by the stakeholders – outreach and awareness activities such as PR campaigns or public events are important to achieve this. At a local government level, the co-production process should be built into existing strategic agendas and plans in order to foster connections and synergies so that the knowledge gained is available for future innovations.

#### **Delivering 'good' co-production.**

There are many aspects to realising good co-production. Firstly, co-production is all about inclusivity;

it is important to include the usual suspects but also to go beyond them and to give voice to critical perspectives; regular community meetings which are open to all create good conditions for co-production to succeed. Secondly, it is critical to take time to analyse inputs and discussions and to incorporate them in the outputs. Related to this, it is important to communicate to participants how outputs evolve and change due to the nature of co-production – if care is not taken to communicate the reasons for changing outputs, participants may feel they have wasted their time, and may become frustrated and disengage from the process. It is important to track who does (and does not!) benefit from the results.

## 4 | Additional Resources

#### **For more information on Connecting Nature, visit:**

- [www.connectingnature.eu](http://www.connectingnature.eu)
- YouTube channel Connecting Nature: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCI24BLyUnvxq7aehGu-XMKw/videos>

#### **For more information on co-production approaches and tools, visit:**

- The European Union Horizon 2020 project SIC (Social Innovation Community): <https://www.siceurope.eu/>, and for the tools: <https://www.silearning.eu/tools/>
- The European Union Interreg project MUSIC (Mitigation in Urban Areas: Solutions for Innovative Cities): <https://drift.eur.nl/projects/music/>, the tools are in the guidance manual, see Roorda et al. 2014: [https://drift.eur.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/DRIFT-Transition\\_management\\_in\\_the\\_urban\\_context-guidance\\_manual.pdf](https://drift.eur.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/DRIFT-Transition_management_in_the_urban_context-guidance_manual.pdf)
- Bound and Mulgan (2019), tools are in the compendium: <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/compendium-innovation-methods/>
- The collective action toolkit for social impact: <https://www.frogdesign.com/work/frog-collective-action-toolkit>

