Case Study 2

FAME Economics of Trees

Co-design at the core of collaboration

Parties Involved

Centre for Health in All Policies Research Translation (CHiAPRT), University of Adelaide, Flinders University, City of Salisbury, and City of Unley.

Funded by: University of Adelaide's Institute for Sustainability, Energy, and Resources FAME Sustainability Grant and University of Adelaide's Environmental Institute.

Overview

Recognising that trees are often misvalued as liabilities rather than community assets, the project **From Cost to Value: Novel Decision-Making Tools for Harnessing Sustainable Economic Benefits of Trees and Greenspaces in Urban Planning** set out to quantify the long-term health, environmental and economic benefits of urban street trees, and to translate this evidence into a practical decision-support tool.

This project utilised co-design and co-production methods, involving partnerships with the City of Salisbury and the City of Unley, chosen for their differing and diverse contexts. Over the course of this 1.5-year project, council representatives engaged regularly through workshops, providing critical insights that shaped both the project direction and the tools developed.

This project culminated in the development of a decision-making tool to be provided to the councils to inform future greenspace decision making, and there are plans to further extend the project across Australia.

Research-Translation Successes

- Early collaboration ensured that the project was aligned with each council's unique context and priorities.
- Ongoing workshops enabled councils to meaningfully shape the project, fostering genuine ownership and connection to the tool.
- A willingness to co-design, listen and adapt helped build trust, reassuring councils that resources would be developed around their needs.
- Working within existing council systems made engagement easier and reduced friction.

Research-Translation Challenges

- Collaborative momentum was lost when researchers paused engagement during a grant application process, requiring relationships and trust to be rebuilt.
- Early engagement with councils was limited while the work remained conceptual; councils showed greater interest once a tangible, useful product was demonstrated.

Transferable Insights

Key Methods

- Develop a strong relationship with at least one core facilitator from stakeholder organisations that is familiar with their local context and can act as a boundary spanner*.
- Working from a blank page can be challenging and confronting – provide stakeholders with drafts or examples (even if they're rough) as a platform to build upon.
- When trying to foster stakeholder engagement, work with the mentality that you are trying to *help them* with *their* problems. Research agendas should be secondary.
- Accept working within the limits of the systems you're trying to enact change in as this enables stronger engagement and ensures relevance.
- Believe in the value of what you're doing, even if there is reluctance.

Reflections

- Stakeholder engagement is critical; without buy-in, there is no research to produce. Reflexivity and adaptability are often required to achieve this engagement.
- Trust takes time to build – persistence and consistent communication are key.
- Adaptability is essential for meeting stakeholder needs and involving them early helps avoid rework later.
- Processes should be established to maintain contact with stakeholders during busy periods so that momentum and relationships are not lost.
- Stakeholder engagement increased once the value of the project was visible – provide examples and mock-ups throughout.
- Authenticity matters - meetings and interactions should be relational, not transactional.
- Avoid becoming attached to a specific path or outcome; being dynamic and adaptable enables better collaboration and results.

For more info about the FAME Economics of Trees Grant

- Calculating the True Value of Urban Greenspace | Project Executive Summary
- From Cost to Value: Novel Decision-Making Tools for Harnessing Sustainable Economic Benefits of Trees and Greenspaces in Urban Planning | FAME Sustainability Grant Report
- Green Infrastructure, Stronger Economies: A Collaborative Approach to Valuing Urban Greening | FAME Project Policy Brief

*For more information about boundary spanners, please see the *Boundary Spanning Statement of Value*.

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