



# Co-**Creation** AND **co-DESIGN**

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# Introduction

Co-creation is about working together to bring diverse voices and experiences into the creative process. At We Don't Settle, this practice is at the heart of our work. By breaking down traditional hierarchies and emphasising shared ownership, co-creation enables participants to collaborate meaningfully, create impactful projects, and contribute to lasting change in their communities.

This resource introduces the principles and practices of co-creation, offering practical tips and insights for anyone interested in collaborative projects within the arts, cultural, and heritage sectors. It is designed to empower individuals and organisations to explore co-creation's potential and apply it in ways that align with their unique goals and values.

## What is Co-Creation?

Co-creation brings together people from different backgrounds to work collaboratively on shared goals. It involves participants—often referred to as collaborators or stakeholders—in decision-making and the development of creative outputs, from programmes to exhibitions and more.

Key aspects of co-creation include:

### **COLLABORATION**

Working together to achieve a shared goal.

### **SHARED OWNERSHIP**

Ensuring all contributors have a stake in the process and outcomes.

### **EQUITY AND INCLUSION**

Valuing diverse perspectives and removing barriers to participation.

### **FLEXIBILITY**

Adapting approaches based on feedback and evolving needs.

By placing people at the centre of the process, co-creation ensures that projects are inclusive, innovative, and impactful.

# Principles of Co-Creation

To successfully implement co-creation, it is essential to adopt the following principles:

## **EQUITY, TRUST, AND TRANSPARENCY:**

Foster open communication and ensure fair access to resources and opportunities.

## **HOLDING SPACE:**

Create a safe and welcoming environment where participants feel heard and respected.

## **ACTIVE LISTENING:**

Focus on understanding diverse perspectives to build consensus.

## **COLLABORATION:**

Promote shared decision-making and collective ownership of the process and outcomes.

## **ADAPTABILITY:**

Be open to feedback and willing to adjust plans as needed.

## **SUSTAINABILITY:**

Aim for long-term impact and ensure the project's benefits extend beyond its completion.

## **RESPECT:**

Value different ways of working and learning, ensuring that all participants can contribute meaningfully.

## How to Get Started

### **Define Goals and Values**

Clarify the purpose of your project and the values guiding your approach. Co-creation should align with the interests and needs of all participants.

### **Engage Collaborators**

Identify and invite participants who bring diverse perspectives and experiences. Provide clear information about roles and expectations to ensure everyone understands how they can contribute.

### **Create a Welcoming Environment**

Pay attention to practical details, such as:

**Location:** Choose accessible and comfortable spaces.

**Duration:** Plan sessions that respect participants' time and energy.

**Facilitation:** Use inclusive practices to encourage participation.

<b>Develop a Shared Plan:</b>	Work collaboratively to define the project's goals, methods, and timelines. Use participatory decision-making to ensure everyone has a voice in shaping the process.
<b>Foster Skill Development:</b>	Provide opportunities for participants to build their confidence and expertise. This could include training, peer coaching, or mentorship.
<b>Reflect and Adapt:</b>	Regularly review progress and gather feedback from participants. Be prepared to make changes to improve the process and outcomes.

## Practical Tips for Co-Creation

### Building Trust and Collaboration

Encourage open dialogue by starting sessions with icebreakers or visioning questions.

Use clear and inclusive language to ensure all participants feel comfortable engaging.

Develop a method for shared decision-making to avoid power imbalances.

### Managing Conflict

Conflicts or differing perspectives can arise during co-creation. Address these challenges by:

Validating participants' feelings and viewpoints.

Encouraging active listening and empathy.

Using participatory approaches to resolve disagreements.

### Balancing Structure and Flexibility

Establish clear goals and parameters while remaining open to new ideas.

Respect different working styles and create space for reflection.

Incorporate regular check-ins to assess progress and make adjustments.

# We Don't Settle Case Studies

## Heritage Intercepted Conference

Delivered in partnership with Black Studies Department of Birmingham City University, this youth-led conference brought together young people, academics, and heritage professionals to discuss decolonisation in the arts and cultural sectors. Participants co-designed panels and workshops, exchanging knowledge and insights in a supportive environment. The event demonstrated how co-creation can amplify marginalised voices and foster meaningful collaboration.

## Black is Beautiful. Blackness Without Apology exhibition

At Aston Hall, young curators reinterpreted historical narratives through a modern lens, creating an exhibition that explored the impact of enslavement on Black women's experiences. This display transforms Aston Hall's Boudoir into a young Black girl's contemporary dressing room. The young co-creators were integral to producing the exhibition, and delivery of the project's public-facing elements, such as the launch event.

# FAQs and Common Challenges

## How is co-creation different from consultation?

Co-creation involves active collaboration and shared decision-making, whereas consultation typically limits participants to providing feedback on pre-defined ideas.

## What if resources are limited?

Consider starting with smaller-scale projects or focusing on consultation as a first step. In-kind support, such as donated space or volunteer time, can also help offset costs.

## How do we ensure long-term impact?

Build sustainability into your project by considering its legacy. Document lessons learned, celebrate successes, and explore opportunities to continue collaboration beyond the project's initial scope.



# In Short

Co-creation is a powerful tool for fostering collaboration, creativity, and social impact. By embracing shared ownership and inclusive practices, individuals and organisations can create meaningful projects that resonate with diverse audiences and contribute to positive change. Whether you are new to co-creation or looking to refine your approach, this resource provides a foundation for exploring its potential and applying it to your work.

To learn more about WDS's programmes and how we embed co-creation in our practices, visit [www.wedontsettle.com](http://www.wedontsettle.com) or reach out directly at [info@wedontsettle.com](mailto:info@wedontsettle.com) to explore collaborative opportunities. Together, we can make a lasting impact in shaping an inclusive and equitable heritage, arts and cultural sector.



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