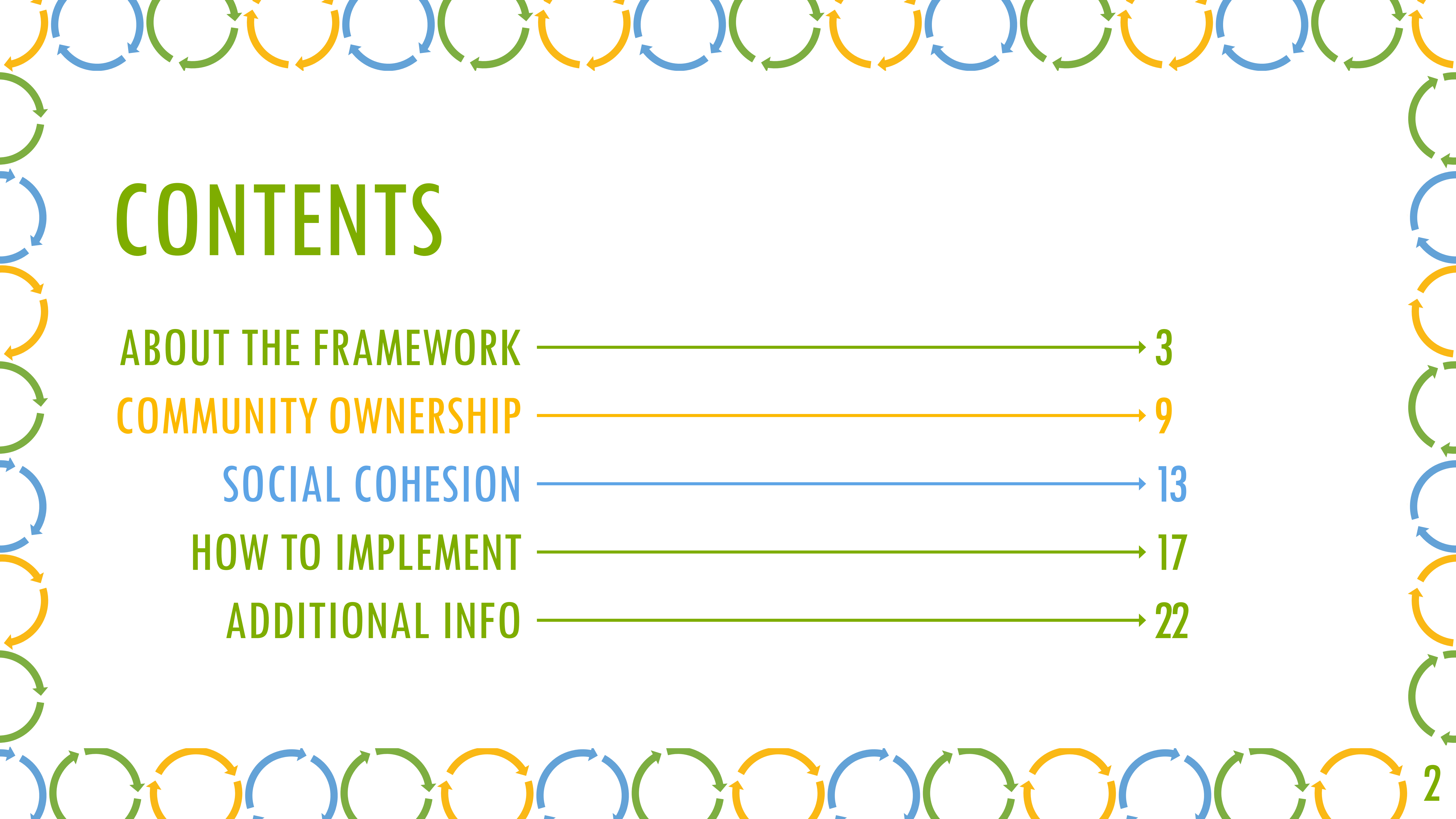




FRAMEWORK FOR FUNDERS

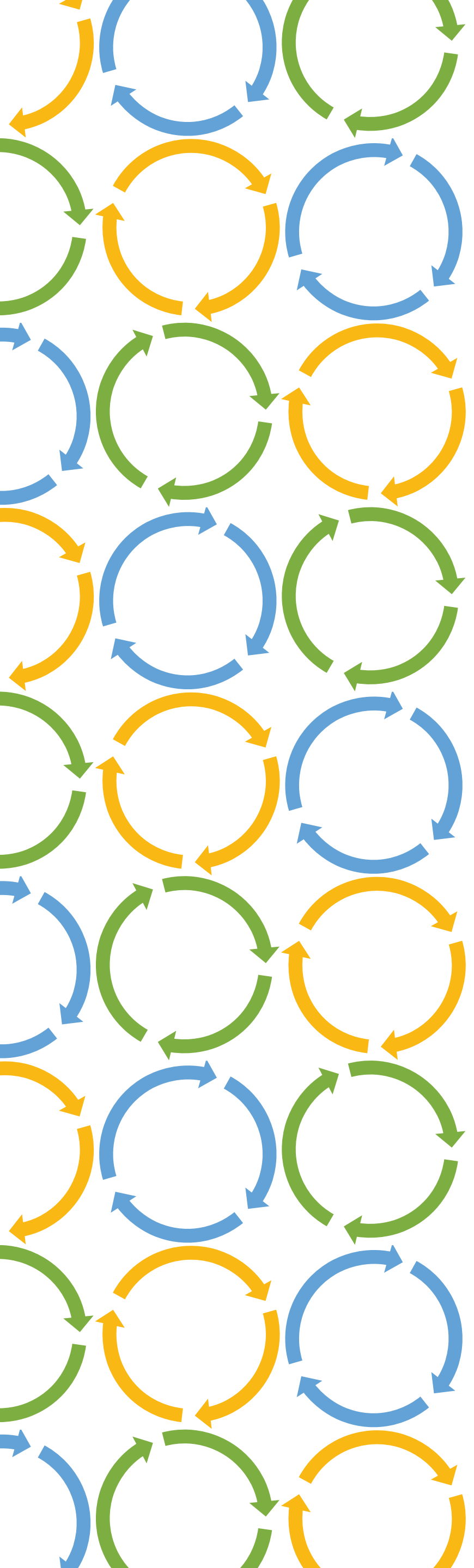
HOW TO IDENTIFY LOCAL PARTNERS THAT ARE CREATING REAL CHANGE

JUNE
2026



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ABOUT THE FRAMEWORK

Out of a pool of potential partners, how do funders know which local groups are best positioned to create truly long-term, transformational impact?

Unlike the many frameworks and recommendations that already exist to guide funders on how to fund in order to best support local¹ groups, this framework is intended to help funders select who to fund based on their intention and ability to strengthen **Social Cohesion, Community Ownership, and Trust.**

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PRIMARY AUDIENCE

Philanthropists and funders—including intermediaries, facilitators, and accompaniment organizations who redistribute funding to local actors—or anyone interested in linking short and mid-term outcomes to long-term change.

OBJECTIVE

This simple framework is meant to provide guidance to funders who are interested in supporting local partners to create positive, transformational change in their communities, linking² crisis response to long-term development and sustainable peacebuilding.

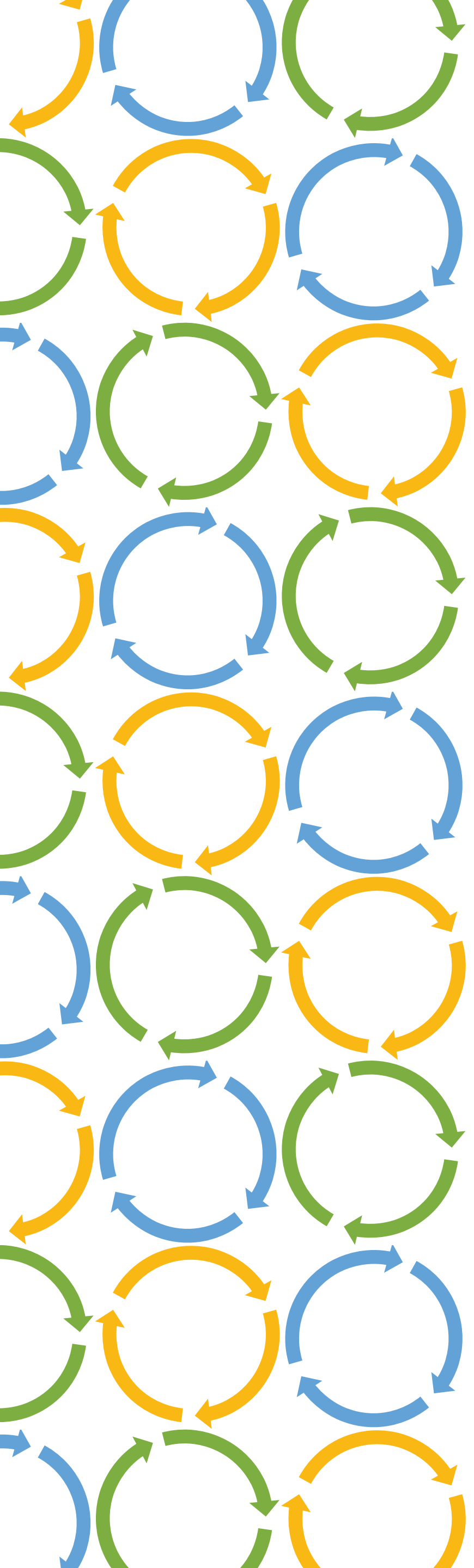
Rather than evaluating local groups solely on their ability to deliver short-term project outputs, this framework encourages funders to assess groups' contributions to the collective outcomes (Community Ownership, Social Cohesion, and Trust) that serve as critical pathways through which communities strengthen their ability to withstand shocks, recover from crises, reduce dependency on external assistance, and build the foundations for healthy communities and sustainable peace.³

THE FRAMEWORK

As illustrated in the image, two interconnected, fundamental dimensions are foregrounded in this framework: 1) Community Ownership and 2) Social Cohesion.

Between these two dimensions is Trust, the connective tissue of relationship building, which allows for a strong foundation between individuals, groups, and communities to foster Community Ownership and Social Cohesion.





THE FRAMEWORK

These three elements—Community Ownership, Social Cohesion, and Trust—form a positive feedback loop:

- 🔄 The more a community has ownership over the work, the more trust they build within themselves and with each other, and therefore the more social cohesion there is.
- 🔄 The more social cohesion there is, the more trust there is among community members, the more people are able to show up and contribute to initiatives, therefore strengthening community ownership.

THE FRAMEWORK

A community that is socially cohesive can resolve their own conflicts; a community with agency and ownership can respond quickly and effectively when disaster strikes.

As time goes on, and these elements are further reinforced through repetition, they form the foundation for a community that is peaceful, economically prosperous, and able to withstand shocks.



The background of the entire image is a solid yellow color. Overlaid on this background is a repeating pattern of white circular arrows. These arrows are arranged in a grid-like fashion, with some rows being more densely packed than others, creating a sense of movement and flow. The arrows themselves are simple, consisting of a circle with a small arrowhead pointing in a clockwise direction.

COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

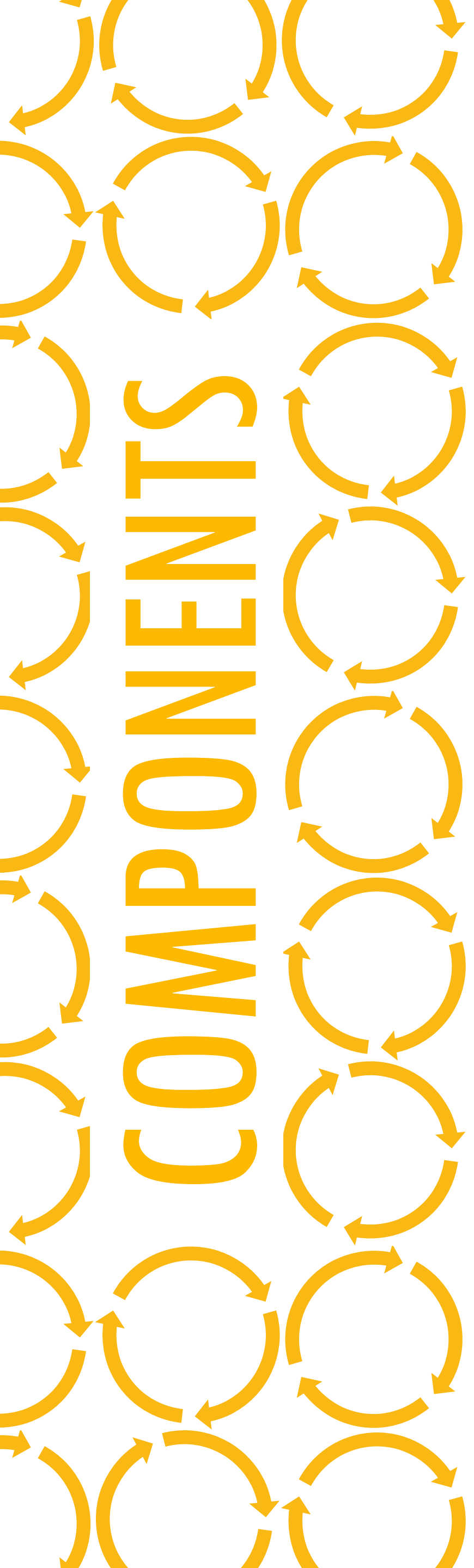
COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP



When communities have control at every step—decision making, project implementation, resource uses, and evaluation—projects are relevant, locally led, and sustainable.

The components of Community Ownership are:

1. Decision-Making Power
2. Shared Responsibility
3. Resource Mobilization



1 DECISION-MAKING POWER

Communities are central in decision making, a bottom up-approach is used to shift typical power structures, and community knowledge and decisions are valued and used within all processes.

2 SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Communities are creators of their own outcomes, shifting power from international and national actors to local actors; communities take responsibility for project implementation and processes.

3 RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

As many of the project's resources—material, financial, and human—as possible are sourced from communities or the local area.

THE RESULTS

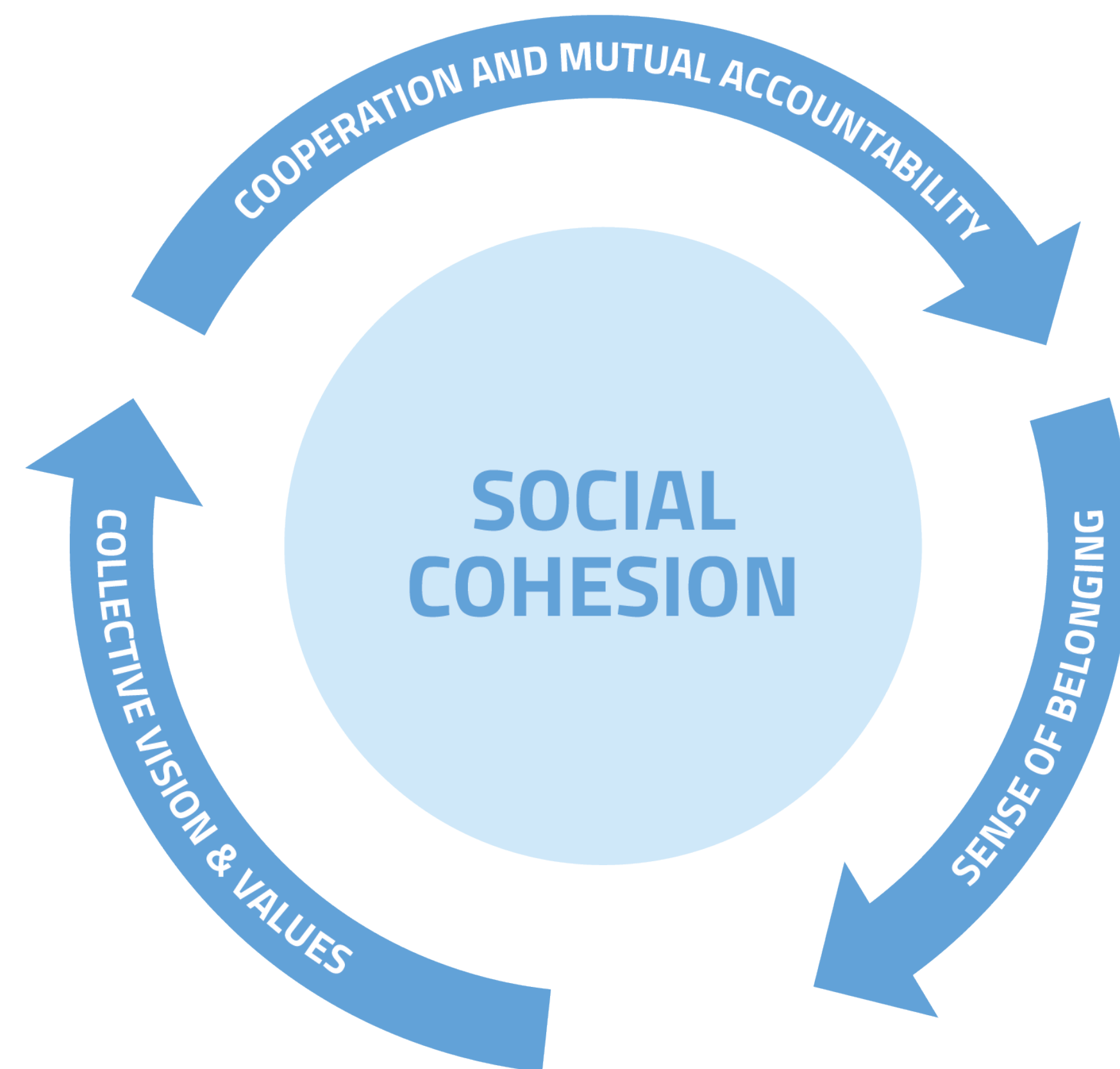
When communities have ownership over projects, they:

- Design and implement projects that fit their needs and vision for their community.
- Become invested in the success and impact of the project, increasing long-term thinking and leading to more sustainable results.
- Strengthen their ability to mobilize for and implement projects in the future.
- Increase their belief in the capacity and agency of themselves and of local leadership.
- **Build trust within and among the people and groups contributing to the project and the wellbeing of the community.**



SOCIAL COHESION

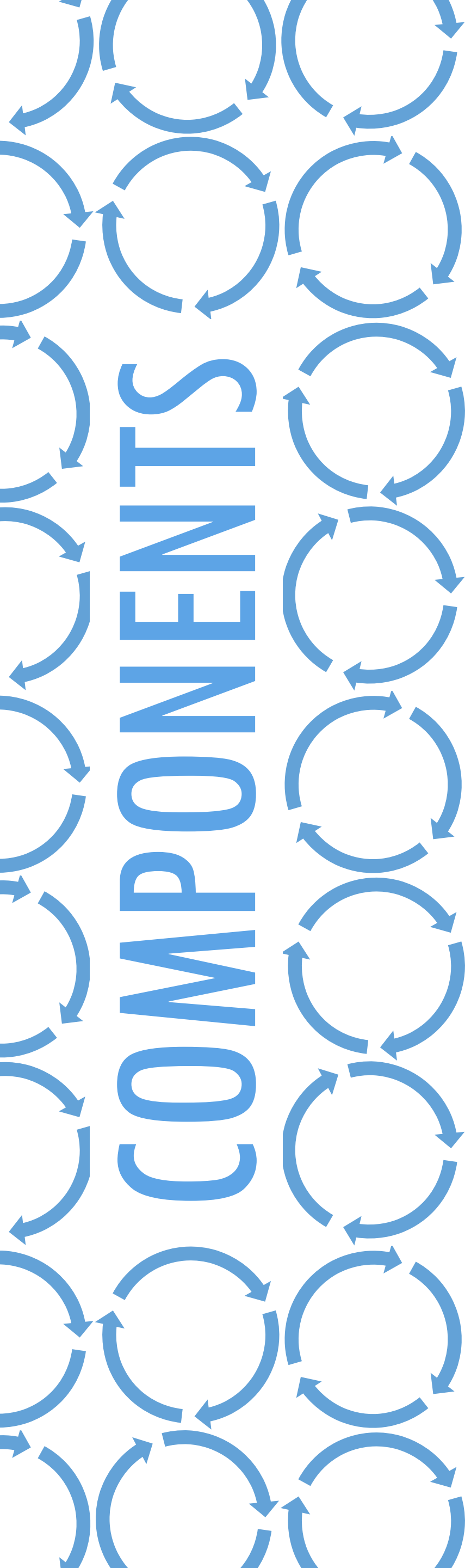
SOCIAL COHESION



When communities are socially cohesive, individuals feel connected to their community and their public institutions beyond just shared geography and are committed to strengthening the overall wellbeing of their community and the other people within it.

The components of social cohesion are:

1. Cooperation & Mutual Accountability
2. Sense of Belonging
3. Collective Vision & Values



1 COOPERATION & MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Local groups cooperate not only internally but with members of the community, local authorities, and other local groups, creating multi-directional accountability for project outcomes.

2 SENSE OF BELONGING

Local groups foster a sense of inclusion, equity, and safety for all members of their community, reaching out to underrepresented members and creating space for everyone to contribute and benefit.

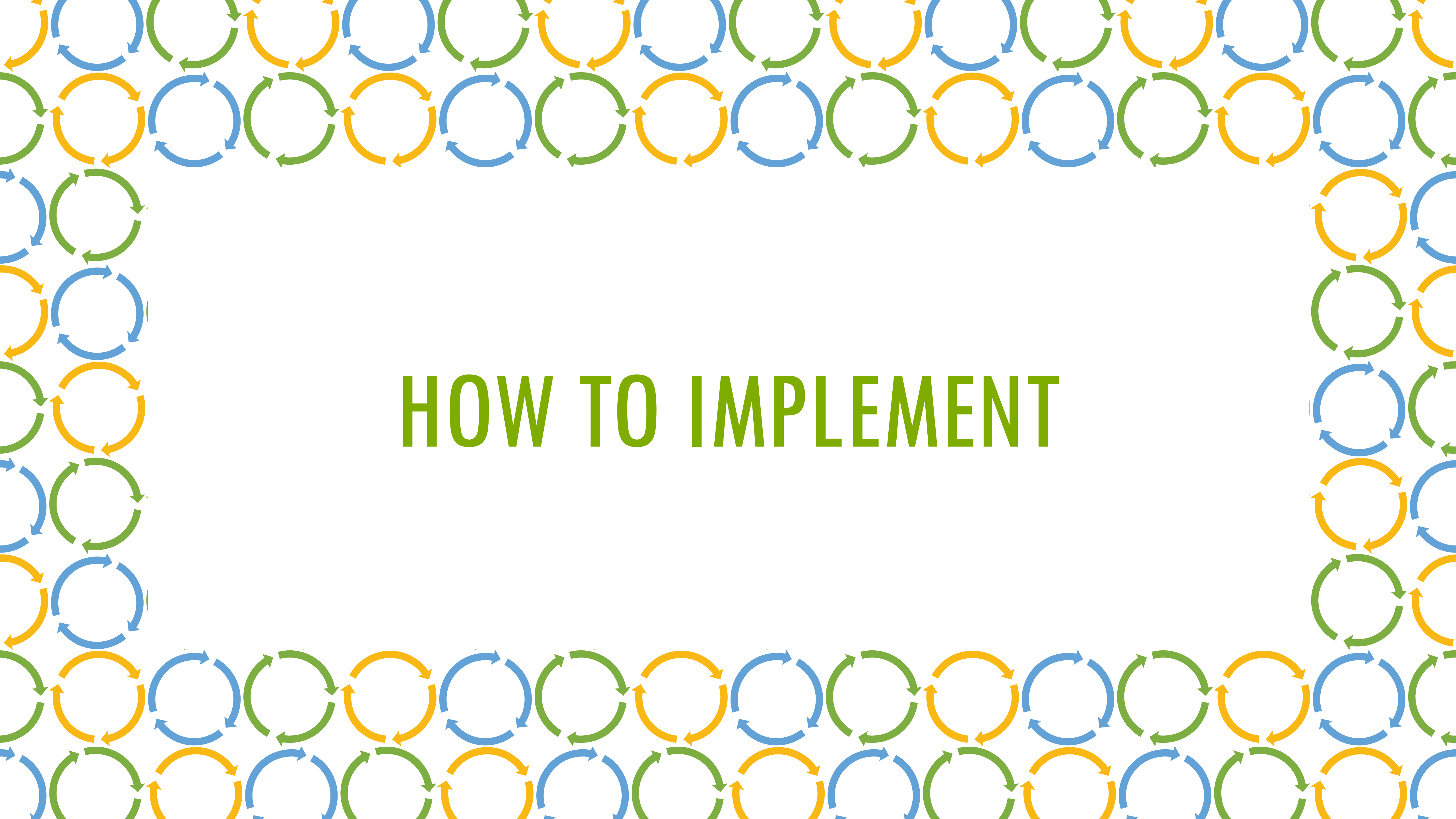
3 COLLECTIVE VISION & VALUES

Local groups build a shared vision for the community with community members themselves, along with culturally rooted and relevant values that the group exemplifies through their words and actions.

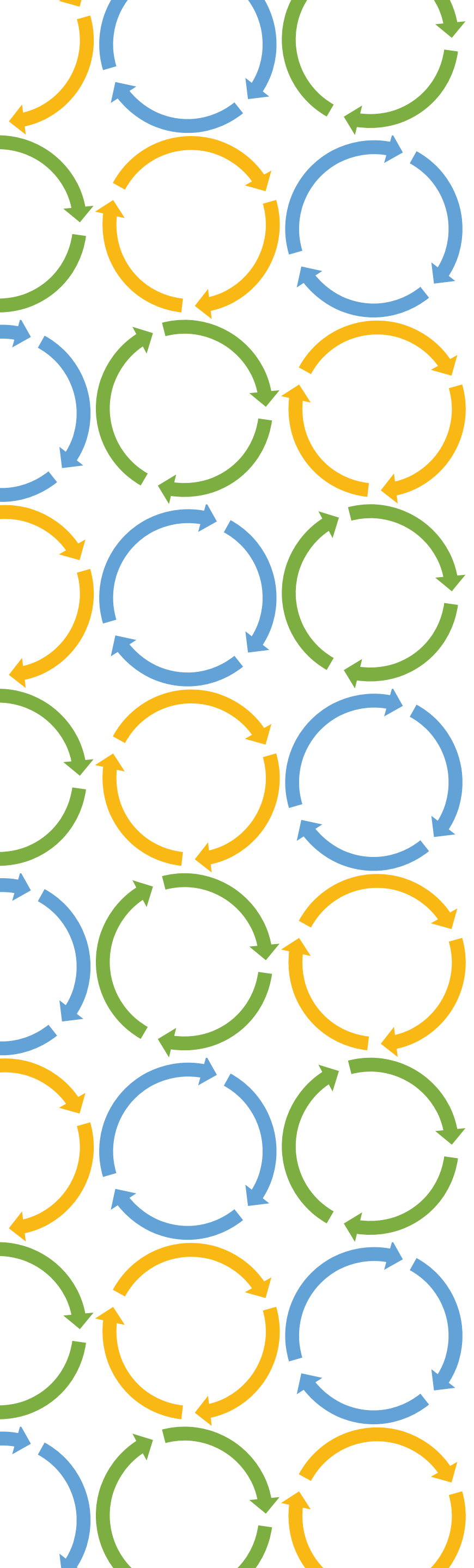
THE RESULTS

When social cohesion is strengthened through a project or program:

- There is less competition for resources.
- People feel included and bought-in to the wellbeing of their community.
- Projects are aligned with the community's shared vision for their own future.
- There is more cooperation and less conflict in the community in the long-term.
- **Trust—among individuals, between individuals and institutions, among community groups—is strengthened, allowing for further cooperation and collective action.**

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HOW TO IMPLEMENT



Below is a short list of questions for you as a funder to incorporate into your partner selection process. We've intentionally framed them as open-ended so as to not give away the “correct” answer in the question itself.

These work best as discussion questions, rather than as written questions on an application form. Incorporating them into a conversation will allow you to ask follow-ups and ascertain depth of understanding and integration of these concepts into your potential partners' work, ensuring that you get the best overall picture of their ability to create long-term change.⁴

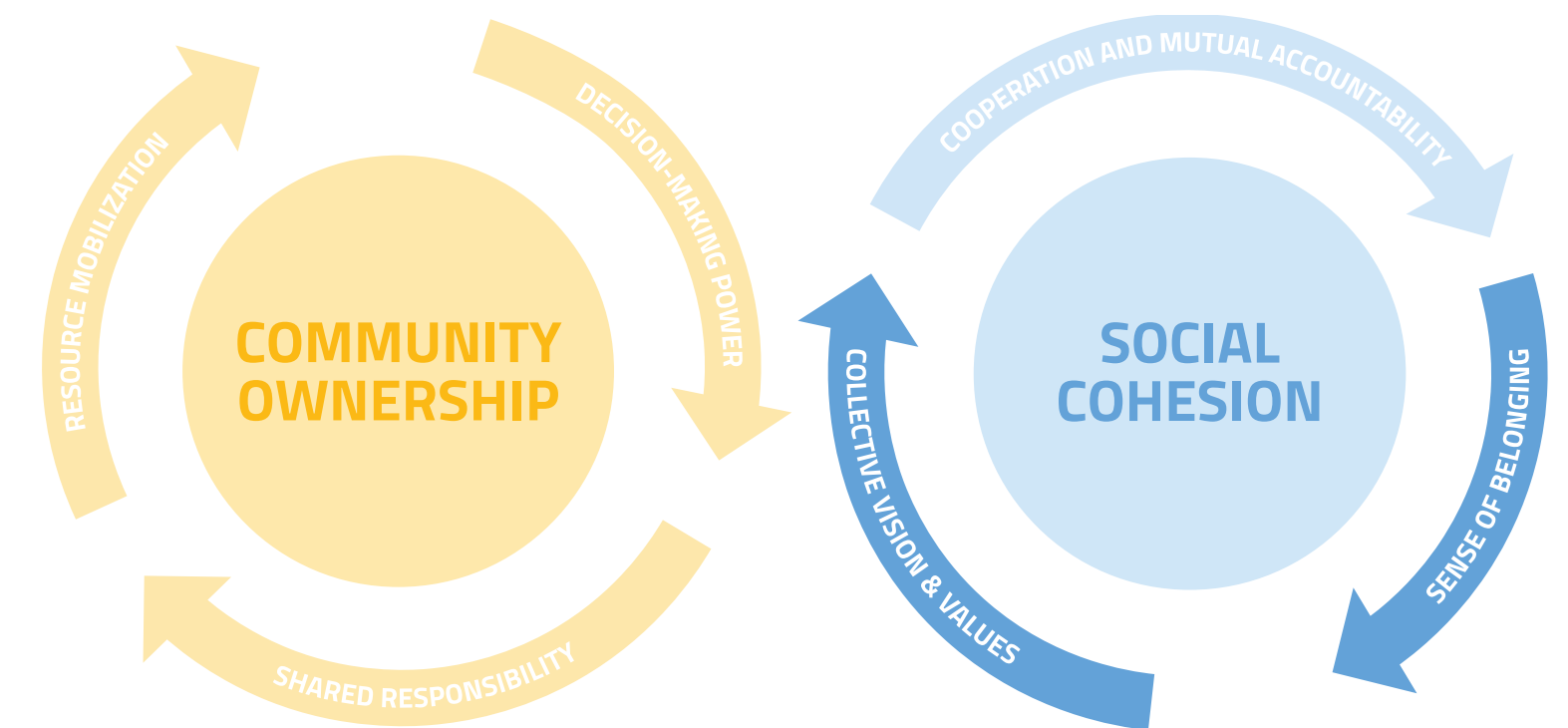
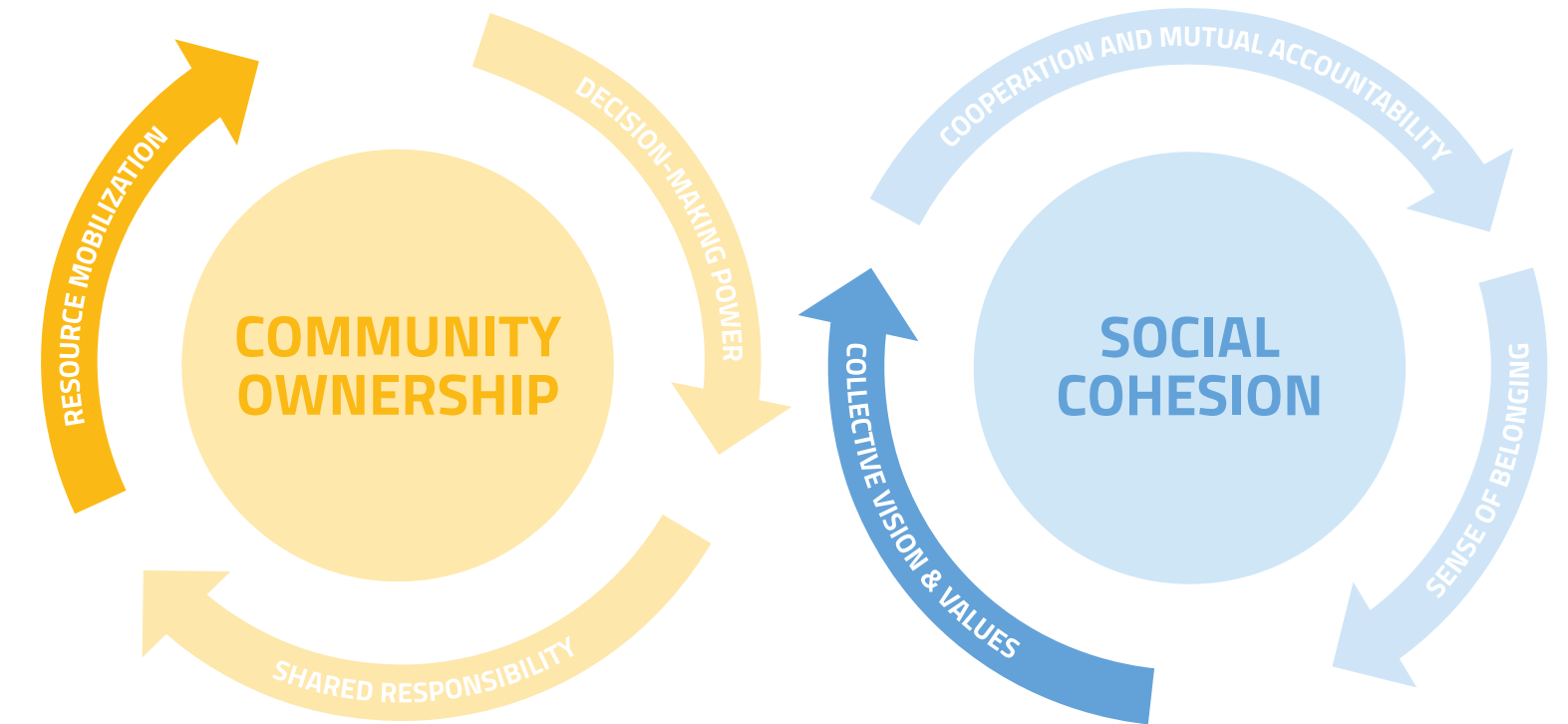
As a reminder: this is not meant to be a post-implementation Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) framework.⁵ Your local partners should be the ones defining what success means for them and their communities in M&E processes—these questions are intended solely to help funders ascertain which of their potential partners are working to build Social Cohesion, Community Ownership, and Trust, and are therefore best positioned to create long-term change.

QUESTION 1

What is the story of your group? How did it start and how has it changed?

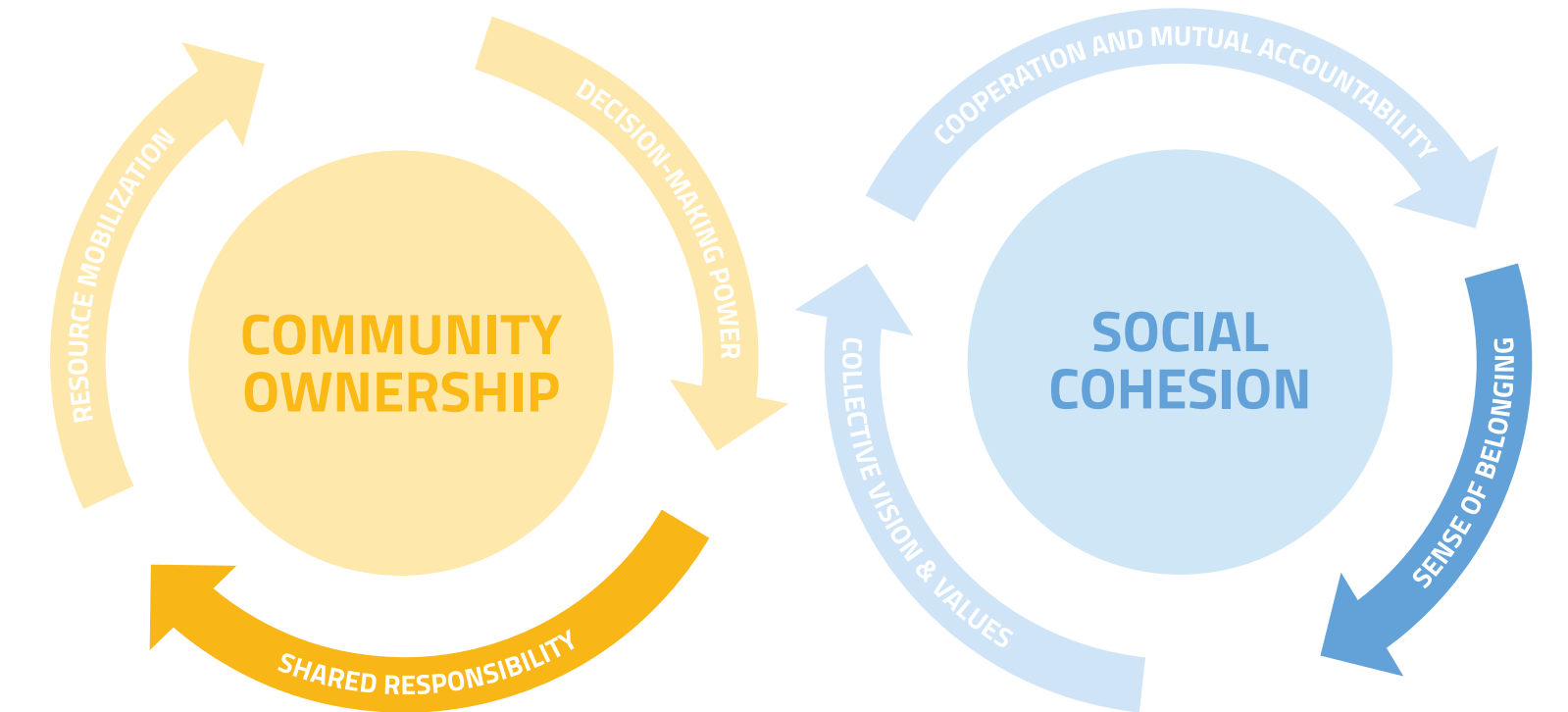
QUESTION 2

Does your group have shared principles and values? How were these developed and decided? How do you share those with the community? If you don't have expressly written values, what would you consider a non-negotiable for your group? What will you absolutely never do, or what do you always do?



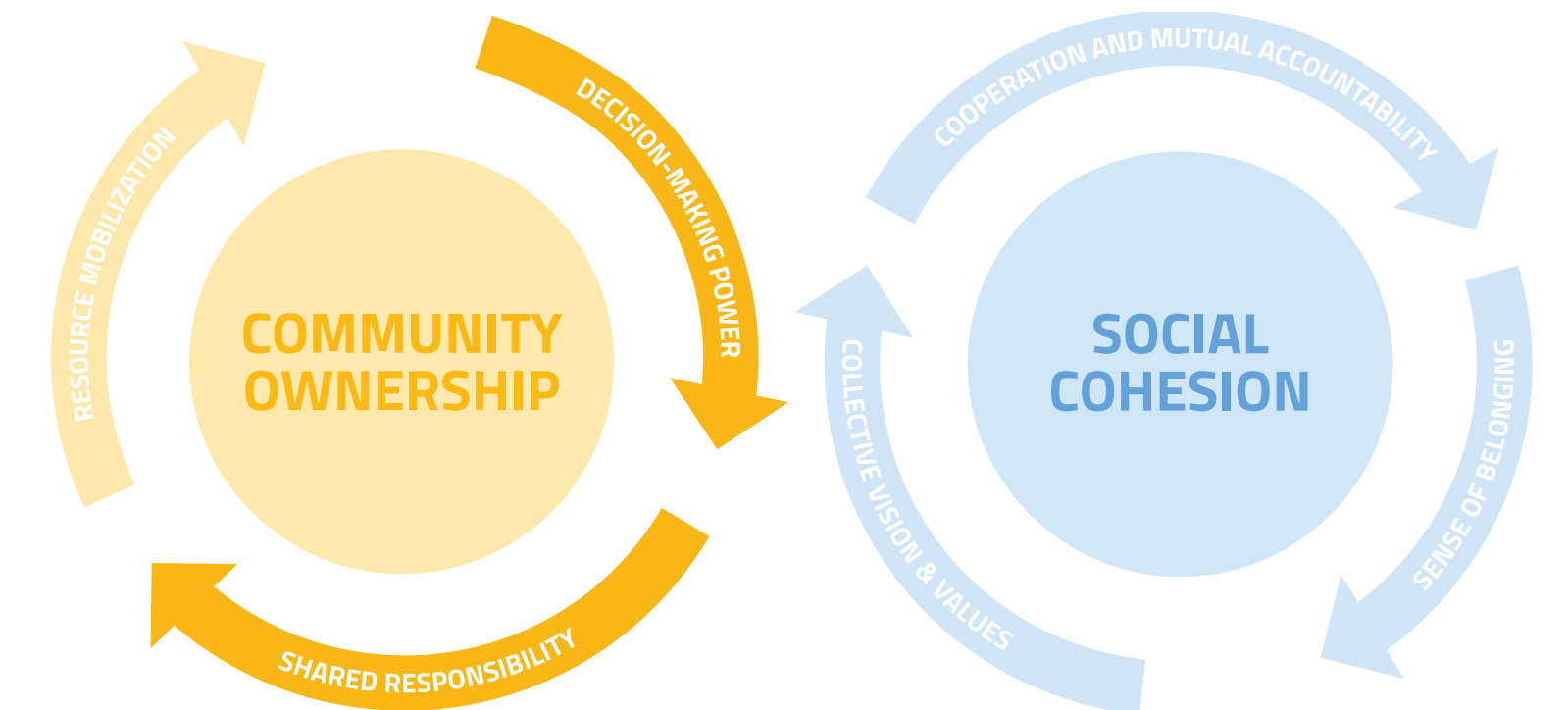
QUESTION 3

How do you foster relationships within your group and the larger community? Are there particular segments of the population that you gear specific outreach towards (or hope to in the future)?



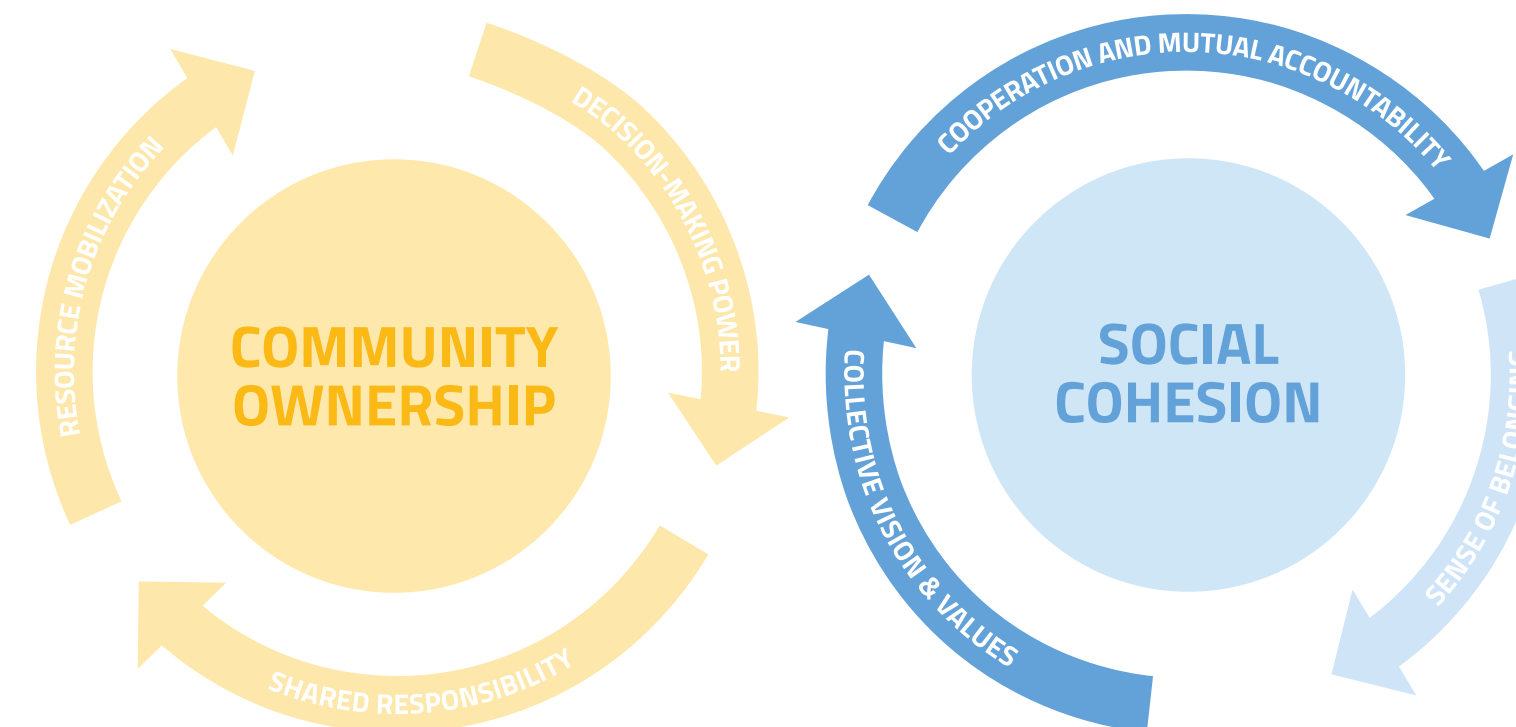
QUESTION 4

How does your group come up with projects/initiatives? Tell us about your proudest accomplishment and perhaps what you are less proud of, but was perhaps a learning moment?



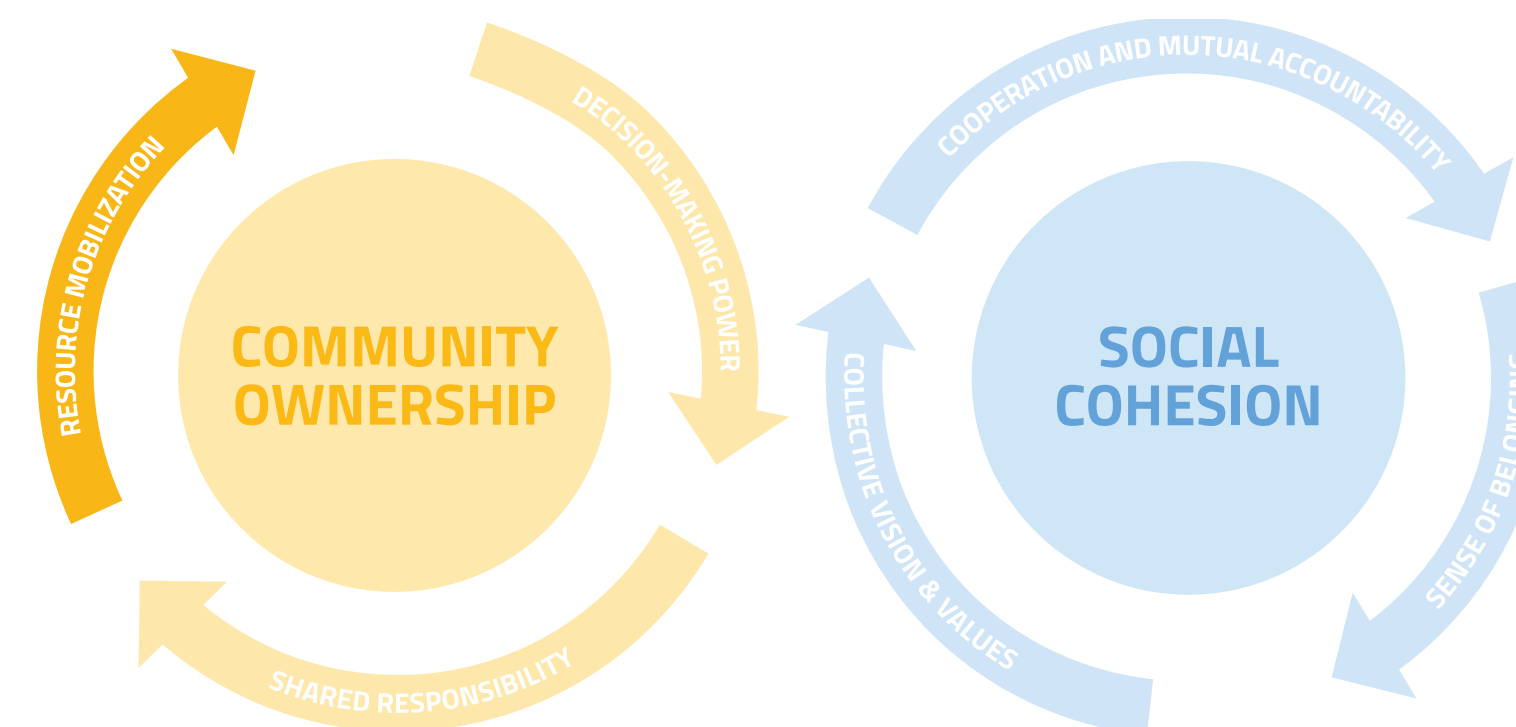
QUESTION 5

How do you foster transparency and effective communication?



QUESTION 6

How do you utilize local resources?



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

CONSIDERATIONS

1. In this framework, “local” or “community-based” groups or organizations refer to those most proximate to communities and the challenges they face.
2. This framework applies “Nexus” thinking, which acknowledges that humanitarian response, long-term development, and sustainable peace are not separate sectors, but interconnected.
3. In order to achieve these transformational impacts, any funding and accompaniment received by local groups must align with the wants and needs of the community, the values and principles of the local group, and the evidence-backed tenets of Trust-Based Philanthropy, CLD, SCLR, ABCD, and/or others. (See the appendices of our full research document for relevant frameworks and tools).

CONSIDERATIONS, CTD.

4. This is not intended to be a standard Monitoring & Evaluation format for local groups. M&E systems should be guided by what the local group and its community defines as success for themselves through Community-Led Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning ([COLMEAL](#)) processes, not based on requirements from donors.
5. This framework is not meant to stand on its own or replace other potential metrics that measure the success and/or efficacy of a particular initiative or organization.

AUTHORS



Roots of Development is a US-based nonprofit organization that was founded in 2007. We're working to shift the aid system in Haiti toward a locally led model by strengthening a national network of Haitian-led, community-powered organizations and driving international support for change through research and advocacy.

The research team for this project was led by Jessica Hsu, Head of Advocacy, Research, & Learning for Roots of Development. Jessica was supported by Managing Director Charlie Estes, American University graduate student Ashley Wakeling, and the Roots of Development Research & Advocacy Advisory Committee.