

COMPACT CASE STUDY

JANUARY 2026

Local Government Collaboration Model



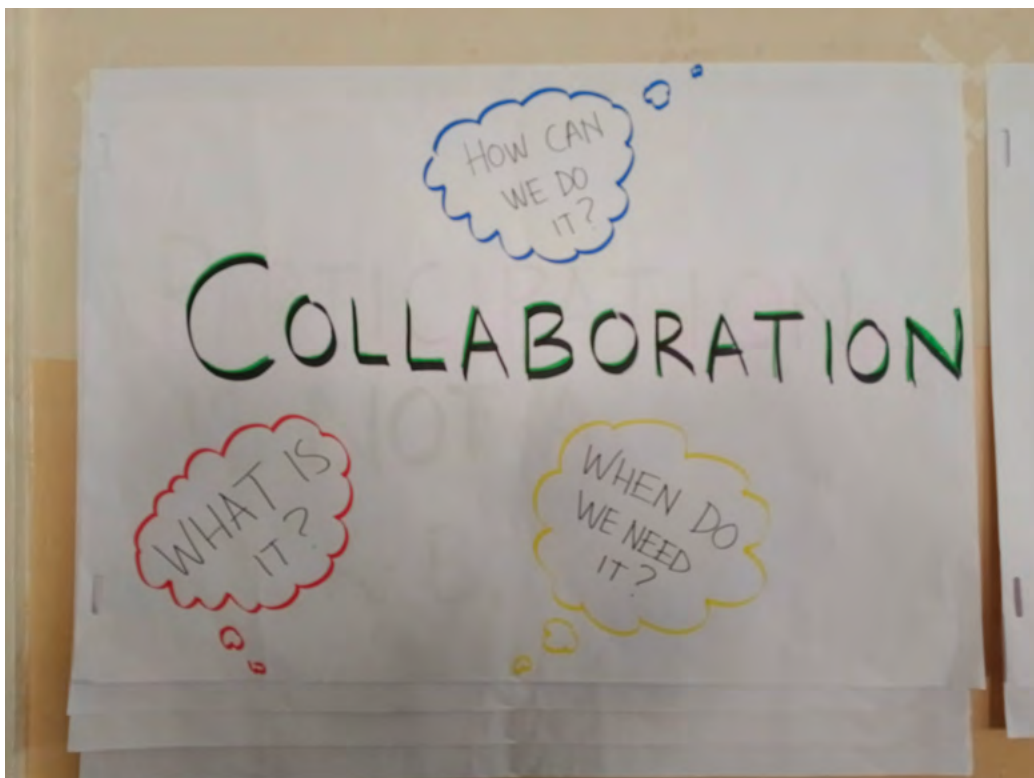
CONTENTS

1. Introduction and Background.....	2
2. COMPACT Local Government Collaboration Model and Implementation Process	3
3. Development and Piloting of the Model	7
4. Challenges and Opportunities	20
5. Key Lessons Learned and Critical Success Factors	21
6. Conclusion	24

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Collaboration in local government is vital to ensuring inclusive, sustainable development and service delivery. This case study sets out the development and piloting of the COMPACT Local Government Collaboration Model and Implementation Process, providing lessons that emerged.¹ The Local Government Collaboration Model is a development-oriented tool designed to foster structured, inclusive, and consensus-based engagement between the three key local government stakeholder groups: the **municipal administration**, **councillors**, and **the local community** (including civil society organisations, businesses, and citizens). It is one of the tools forming part of the [COMPACT Toolbox](#).

At its core, collaboration refers to *the combining of diverse skills, knowledge, and resources to generate innovative solutions to shared problems that no single actor could achieve alone*. The model therefore places emphasis on the “how” of collaboration, offering municipalities a structured way to strengthen problem-solving through inclusive and constructive dialogue. This case study shows how the collaboration tool can practically improve experiences and working methods by bringing together political, administrative and community elements of local government to address real challenges faced by municipalities, providing insights for strengthening governance and municipal capacity. Through an iterative process, which involved piloting the model with two municipalities as well as a train-the-trainer workshop, lessons have been learned which have led to the refinement of the model and the development of a [facilitation guide](#) for implementing the model in municipalities.

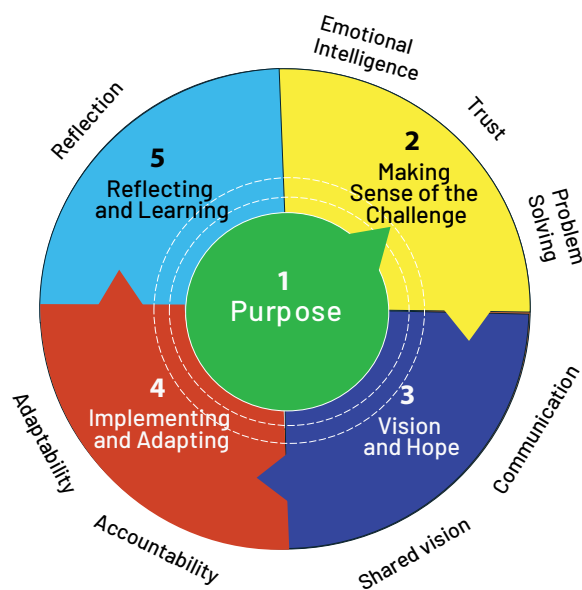
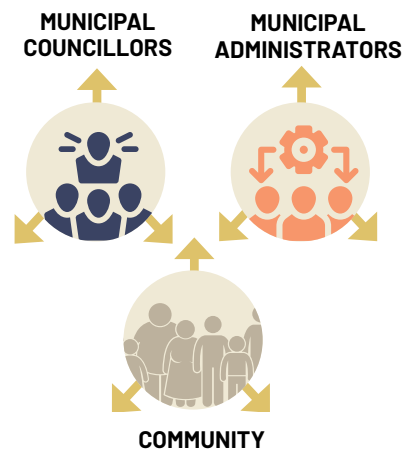


1 COMPACT is a partnership between the Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI), the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) and Integrity Action (IA). The programme is implemented with 12 partner municipalities in 6 provinces across South Africa and is designed to achieve a more responsive and accountable local government in South Africa by deepening democracy, enhancing the participation of local communities in the integrated development planning (IDP) processes and improving planning and oversight of service delivery in municipalities through enhanced community participation. See <https://pari.org.za/compact>

2. COMPACT LOCAL GOVERNMENT COLLABORATION MODEL AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

The COMPACT Local Government Collaboration Model and Implementation Process have been developed to foster meaningful collaboration amongst and within the three key municipal stakeholders:

- the **local community** (which includes various subgroups like civil society, businesses, and citizens);
- the **municipal administration**; and
- **municipal councillors**.

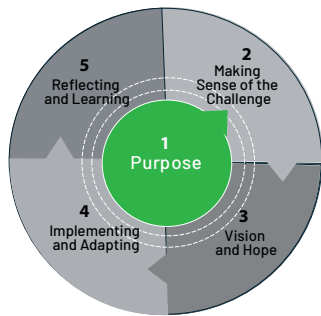


The model **focuses on the “how” (i.e. methods and processes) of collaboration**. The tool offers an alternative to traditional problem-solving by fostering constructive engagement. The diagram below presents the **five steps of collaboration** in terms of the model:

- 1. Purpose:** The core of the model is understanding the importance of achieving a common goal and identifying the purpose of the collaborative effort.
- 2. Making Sense of the Challenge:** Developing a shared understanding of the challenge, developing a systemic view, and unpacking and prioritising its key elements so we can better understand and navigate its complexity.
- 3. Vision and Hope:** Exploring creative responses to the challenge (enhancing awareness of self, others and systemic dynamics), synthesising insights into a compelling proposition, and establishing a shared agenda for collective action.
- 4. Implementing and Adapting:** Co-creating adaptive leadership principles through real-life scenarios, clarified roles and responsibilities, and finding ways to understand and work with resistance.
- 5. Reflection and Learning:** Synthesising key insights, reflecting across individual, organisational, and systemic levels, confirming ongoing resources, and updating the shared agenda for continued action.

The model also refers to a **set of skills and competencies** that can be built into the collaboration process. Collectively, while the competencies are relevant to all steps, they are presented within the area of the model that they are deemed to have most relevance.

The **five steps of the Local Government Collaboration Model** are set out in more detail below.

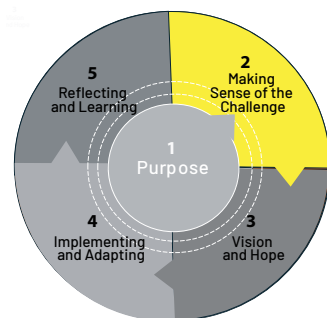


1. PURPOSE

At the centre of the model is *Purpose*. **Why** is collaboration needed? Collaboration, perhaps unlike other forms of public participation, is not an end in itself. It only happens when there is a clear reason for stakeholders to come together to jointly address a common challenge which none of them can address on their own. The model represents ripples outwards from *Purpose* into the four other elements of the model. This illustrates that the *Purpose* should always anchor what follows.

Getting clear on the *Purpose* requires preparatory engagements with two intentions:

- To identify, prioritise and explore the **particular issue** to be addressed; and
- To identify **who should be involved** through a **stakeholder mapping exercise**.



2. MAKING SENSE OF THE CHALLENGE

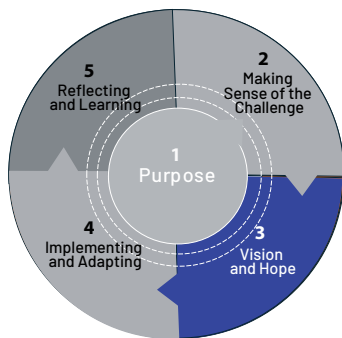
With the *Purpose* and stakeholders clarified the next step is to convene them in order to *Make Sense of the Challenge*. **What** is the main problem? This is undertaken in three ways:

- An **immersion** which provides an experience of the challenge;
- Making sense of the challenge through viewing it from **different perspectives or lenses**; and
- Unpacking the **elements of the challenge** – and deciding how they can best be addressed.

Competencies:

1. **Emotional Intelligence:** Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand and manage one's own emotions, as well as recognise and influence the emotions of others.² It includes being able understand and empathise with the perspectives of others.
2. **Trust:** Trust is built through transparency, reliability, integrity and consistent communication.
3. **Problem-Solving:** Creativity, critical thinking and a systemic approach to a problem.

2 See <https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/emotional-intelligence-in-leadership>



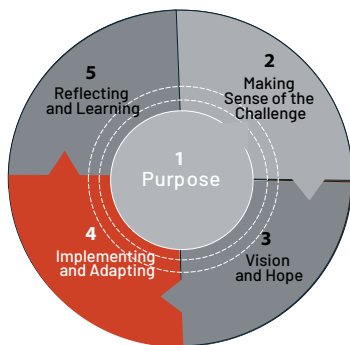
3. VISION AND HOPE

With the challenge unpacked and better understood, the next step is to generate a *Vision* around what the situation will look like once the challenge is addressed and offer *Hope* to the stakeholders that it can be achieved. Here there are two areas:

- **Understanding the “self”** in relation to the challenge; and
- Generating a compelling and inspiring **vision statement**.

Competencies:

1. **Shared Vision:** A shared vision and associated common goals in order to align team members.
2. **Communication:** The ability to actively listen, to give and receive feedback and clearly articulate ideas.

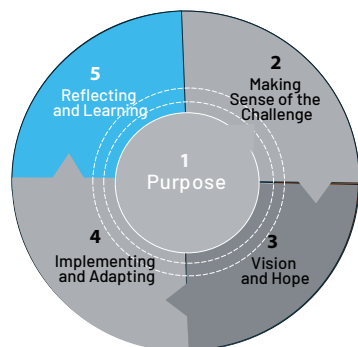


4. IMPLEMENTING AND ADAPTING

Implementation and Adapting involves actions that will be taken by the various stakeholders – the plan – and **how** they will need to adapt to inevitable challenges along the way.

Competencies:

1. **Adaptability:** Flexibility and openness to adjust plans and practices to evolving circumstances through being able to take in new realities, ideas and approaches.
2. **Accountability:** Taking ownership of responsibilities, delivering on commitments, and holding oneself and others accountable for results.



5. REFLECTING AND LEARNING

The fifth element of the model pays attention to *Reflecting and Learning*. This is space created for participants to reflect on what they have been learning about themselves and the team they have been working with in relation to collaborating on the challenge so that this growth can be leveraged for the next step of the journey. We also clarify how the team will work together going forward and what support is required and offered.

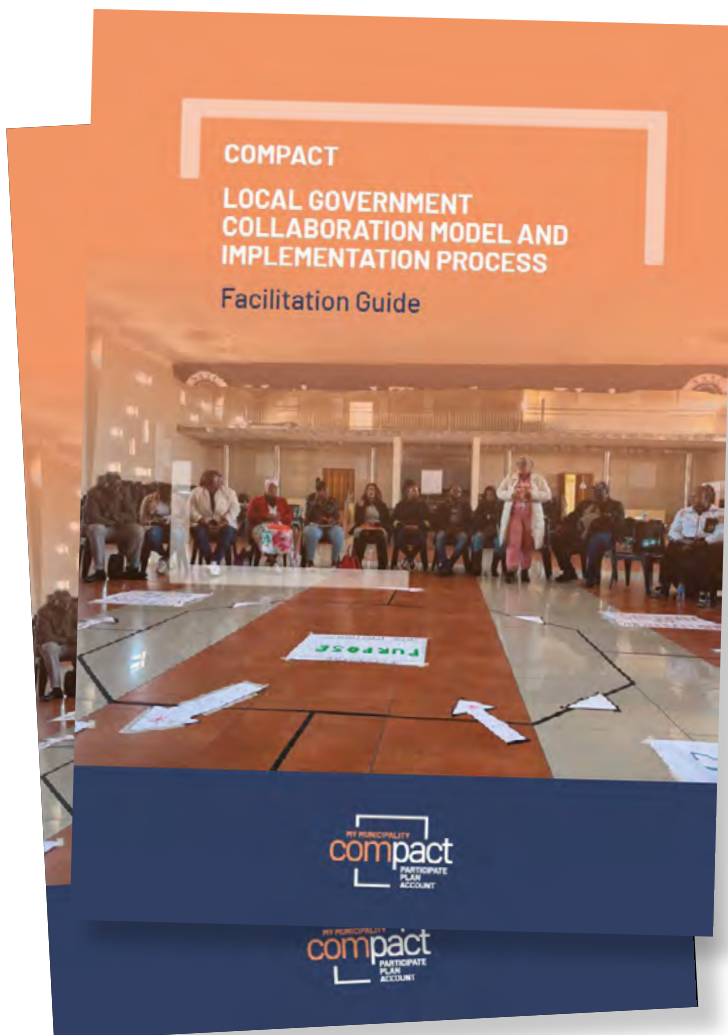
Competency:

1. **Reflection:** Reflecting on lessons learnt in the process and how these can be applied in future work.

At the heart of the **implementation of the COMPACT Collaboration Model** is the facilitation of a two-day Collaboration Workshop between local government stakeholders. The implementation process takes place over three main phases:³

1. **Preparation Phase:** The preparation phase is critical and worth investing the requisite time and energy. This phase involves three key steps: clarifying the purpose of the collaboration workshop; mapping the stakeholders; and organising logistics for the workshop (e.g. invitations, venue, materials, catering etc.).
2. **Collaboration Workshop:** The two-day collaboration workshop is implemented through five modules, corresponding to the five steps of the collaboration model.
3. **Follow-up Phase:** Ongoing work is required beyond the workshop, and it is important that follow up sessions be scheduled to assist with keeping the initiative on track.

COMPACT has developed a comprehensive [facilitation guide](#) setting out some techniques used in facilitating collaboration, presented according to the preparation phase and the five modules that constitute the model.



1 Contents

SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Overview	1
1.2 Background	1
1.3 Development of the Collaboration Model and Implementation Process	2
1.4 What is Collaboration?	3
1.5 Structure of this Document	4
SECTION 2 COMPACT LOCAL GOVERNMENT COLLABORATION MODEL	5
2.1 Purpose	5
2.2 Making Sense of the Challenge	6
2.3 Vision and Hope	6
2.4 Implementing and Adopting	7
2.5 Reflecting and Learning	7
SECTION 3 IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS	8
3.1 Preparation Phase	8
3.2 Collaboration Workshop	8
3.3 Follow Up Phase	12
SECTION 4 FACILITATION TECHNIQUES FOR COLLABORATION	18
4.1 Stakeholder Mapping	13
4.2 Module 1: Overview, Orientation and Group Formation	16
4.3 Module 2: Making Sense of the Challenge	20
4.4 Module 3: Vision and Hope	28
4.5 Module 4: Implementing and Adopting	31
4.6 Module 5: Reflection and Learning	35
SECTION 5 ENLARGERS FOR COLLABORATION	38
5.1 Balloon Tower	38
5.2 Grounding Bodyscan	38
5.3 Cup Stack	41
5.4 Helium Hula Hoop	42
5.5 Group Juggle	43
5.6 Dr Zach Bush 4 Minute Work Out	44
End Notes	45
ANNEXURES	46

³ Section 3 of the *Local Government Collaboration Model and Implementation Process: Facilitation Guide* sets out the implementation process in full, while Section 4 provides facilitation techniques for collaboration: <https://pari.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/COMPACT-LG-Collaboration-Model-Facilitation-Guide-FINAL.pdf>

3. DEVELOPMENT AND PILOTING OF THE MODEL

The COMPACT Local Government Collaboration Model and Implementation Process were developed and piloted as part of iterative process between 2024 and 2025. The first step was to **review SALGA’s Stakeholder Engagement Tool (SET)** with the aim to understand how the document addressed collaboration and to identify ways to take the work forward. A **first draft of the collaboration model and implementation process** was then developed, drawing on good practice in the field.

The next step was to **pilot the model in two local municipalities**: Blue Crane Route in the Eastern Cape and Newcastle in KZN. The aim was for the content and discussions to be tailored to each municipality’s priorities and institutional realities. Finally, a **train-the-trainer workshop** was held with municipal stakeholders and civil society organisations (CSOs) in a joint setting to further **refine the model and implementation process**. The focus was on finalising the facilitation guide, while also equipping municipal representatives with tools to apply and share the model in their own contexts.

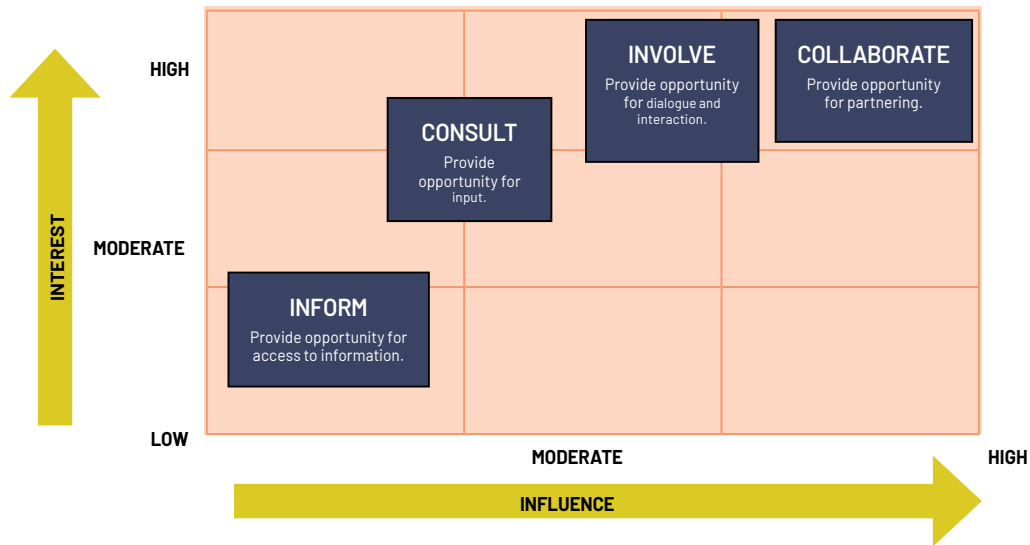
3.1. SALGA’S STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT TOOL (SET)

The Local Government Collaboration Model draws on SALGA’s Stakeholder Engagement Tool (SET). The aim of the SET is to “provide a mechanism to assist municipalities to fulfil the minimum requirements for public participation”, and the document orientates stakeholder engagement within the Constitution which requires municipalities to involve communities and community organisations in the matters of local government.⁴ It highlights the process of identifying stakeholders, categorising them in terms of the type of engagement and whether they are regarded as internal or external stakeholders. **Stakeholders are defined as “the people with an interest in the way that government governs, project outcomes, the achievement of constitutional and legislative objectives, policy development etc. They also have valuable knowledge, expertise and opinions to shape the design, implementation and monitoring of project activities, and support their long-term sustainability. They can make a difference, affect or be affected by the achievement or non-achievement of a municipality’s objectives.”**

The document offers a table to identify mechanisms to be used in the community engagement spectrum. This draws from a good practice framework used internationally called “The Ladder of Participation” by Arnstein (1969), which is referenced in the Public Participation Framework for the South African Legislative Sector (2013). A table is offered with the characteristics of the level of engagement and their associated requirements.

⁴ The SET was developed as part of the “Enhancing Municipalities’ Capacity for Development (EMCD)” programme, funded by the European Union and implemented by SALGA between 2018 and 2021. The EMCD project sought to strengthen the capacity of municipalities to become more effective, efficient, responsive, and sustainable in fulfilling their developmental mandate. Among its sub-objectives was the promotion of participatory planning as a means of driving long-term socio-economic development. Other instruments developed included the Municipal Accountability Assessment Tool (MAAT), the Municipal Accountability and Consequence Framework, and a low-tech ICT-based accountability solution.

For the purposes of this document, the table has been translated into a diagram:



The SET describes what a stakeholder engagement plan should comprise and identifies a five-step stakeholder engagement process: 1) Engagement Strategy; 2) Stakeholder Mapping; 3) Preparation; 4) Engagement; and 5) Action Plan. A table to identify mechanisms to be used in the community engagement spectrum is provided.

**Community engagement spectrum:
Increasing the impact on decision-making and governance**

INFORM Provide honest and objective information about services, programmes, projects.	CONSULT Discuss quality and range of services and invite feedback on decisions taken about new projects or services.	INVOLVE Work with the community to ensure their aspirations and concerns are addressed at every stage of planning and decision-making.	COLLABORATE Enable community participation in every aspect of planning and decision-making for new programmes or services to ensure that the community produces outcomes.	EMPOWER Give the community sole decision-making powers over certain new projects or services. Professionals only consult and support.
The municipality will keep you informed.	The municipality will inform you, listen to your input and let you know if your ideas and concerns have influenced decisions.	The municipality will ensure your input and feedback is reflected and let you know if and how you influenced decisions. You will be a partner in implementing solutions.	The municipality will co-create and co-produce solutions. You will be a true partner in making and implementing decisions. Your advice and recommendations will be incorporated as much as possible.	The municipality will support your decisions and work, to implement solutions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact sheets • Newsletters • Website • Newspapers • Radio 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys • Focus groups • Public meetings • Forums • Radio talk shows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder forums • Public meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council membership • Ward committees • Advisory boards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support governance, leadership and partnership

The *Collaborate* column is highlighted as this is the focus of the SET review. However, it is important to note that in this model, *Empower* is provided as a fifth level of engagement which is at a “higher” level than collaborate. Methods identified for the community engagement spectrum include the following: public meetings, workshops and focus groups, forums, web-based engagement (websites, email, social media apps; consensus building workshops, street/event stalls, community surveys, community radio, and community newspapers.⁵

⁵ The SET document explores the challenges and factors causing public participation to fail. One of the main challenges identified is around access. Within this, five key barriers are defined: physical access; lack of effective information; insufficient public education; language barriers; and skills for public participation. Administrative challenges are also identified: lack of clarity on who is responsible or evaluating their effectiveness; poor inter-departmental collaboration and coordination and lack of clear roles; short notice for inviting people to public meetings; the need for a standardised process for submitting and processing petitions; and language and medium of communication. Roles and responsibilities for implementation of stakeholder engagement process are not defined, apart from proposing that each municipality should undertake their own internal assessment under the Office of the Speaker and from there assign roles and responsibilities.

COMPACT worked with a service provider Distillery to build on the foundations of the SET. Lessons were integrated from COMPACT’s action research, which was conducted with political office-bearers, councillors, municipal officials, ward committee members, community leaders, and civil society organisations (CSOs) between 2022 and 2024 across the 12 partner municipalities. The research highlighted the need for practical approaches to improve cooperation and collaboration between local government stakeholders, who were often working in silos and not talking to each other. The need for a structured collaboration model that could move beyond fragmented engagement practices was identified. To facilitate its design, Distillery with COMPACT developed a model that is both evidence-based and practical for municipal use: focusing on “the how” of collaboration in a municipal environment.

3.2. PILOTING THE COLLABORATION MODEL WITH MUNICIPALITIES

The first iteration of the Local Government Collaboration Model and Implementation Process was piloted in two municipalities in 2025: **Blue Crane Route Local Municipality (BCR LM)** and **Newcastle Local Municipality (Newcastle LM)**. The pilots took the form of two-day workshops – the first held on 22–23 April 2025 at Pearston Community Hall in Pearston, and the second from 29–30 May 2025 at Alan Thompson Hall in Madadeni. These sessions were designed to test and refine the collaboration model and implementation process as a tool that brings together political, administrative, and community stakeholders to tackle pressing local challenges. The collaboration facilitation guide was then refined based on the experience of the pilots as well as a train-the-trainer workshop held in August 2025.

At the heart of the implementation of the Local Government Collaboration Model is the facilitation of a two-day Collaboration Workshop between local government stakeholders. The implementation process takes place over three main phases: preparation phase; collaboration workshop; and follow-up phase. The start of the piloting process in each municipality began with **identifying the purpose of the collaborative engagement:**

- In Blue Crane Route LM, the residents of the town of Pearston confronted persistent water issues and the municipality chose this as the focus of the workshop. The focus was driven by the urgency of **Pearston’s water crisis** which requires immediate collaborative responses from stakeholders involved in water service delivery and infrastructure.
- In Newcastle LM the focus was on **local economic development (LED) and the regulation of spaza shops**. The choice of LED as the focus was shaped by local and national political and socio-economic factors. The area faces a high unemployment rate compounded by the closure of ArcelorMittal, one of the region’s largest employers. Against this backdrop, municipal leadership prioritised spaza shop regulation as a local intervention that could strengthen economic resilience and create a healthier environment for informal businesses to operate. This decision also aligned with national priorities, including the recent declaration of unemployment as a national disaster and the roll-out of the 10-Point Local Government Action Plan, which emphasises economic recovery at the local level.

The **stakeholder engagement and workshop attendance** in both municipalities reflected a deliberate alignment to the distinct priorities. In Blue Crane Route LM, participants were primarily drawn from sectors linked to water services and infrastructure, ensuring that discussions addressed the area’s pressing water service delivery challenges. In Newcastle LM, planning workshops with the municipality emphasised stakeholders connected to LED and environmental health, particularly in relation to tuckshop operations. This stakeholder differentiation ensured that the composition of participants was context appropriate and positioned to generate practical, locally relevant solutions and interventions in each municipality. The key stakeholders involved in piloting the collaboration tool at Blue Crane Route LM and Newcastle LM are listed in the table below:

Key stakeholders involved

Newcastle Local Municipality	Blue Crane Route Local Municipality
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newcastle LM staff (LED, IDP, IGR, Environmental Health units) • Ward committee members • Municipal Manager's Office • Speaker's Office • Mayor's Office • COGTA: CDW • SALGA staff (KZN & National Office) • PARI • Distillery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BCR LM municipal officials and councillors • Speaker • Mayor • Community social workers • SMMEs • SAPS • Students and unemployed youth • SALGA staff (Eastern Cape and National Office) • PARI • Distillery

The two pilot collaboration workshops applied the Local Government Collaboration Model and entailed the facilitators from Distillery organising the workshop participants into plenary as well as into smaller groups. The collaboration workshops are designed to be very interactive and were aligned to the different steps of the collaboration model. Over the two days, workshop participants were collectively involved in the following activities:

- **Identifying and categorising key challenges and developing a problem statement** to consolidate the main issues impeding service delivery.
- **Reflecting on the challenge individually and collectively** to develop inspiration for the way forward.
- **Mapping the system** and providing a **forward-looking perspective** by **creating vision statements** for the future.
- **Exploring implementation aspects**, establishing a unified agenda and **identifying immediate next steps** to address the challenge.
- **Formulating principles** to guide collaborative efforts.
- **Identifying priority areas** to streamline efforts in addressing the challenge and **identifying additional stakeholders** who could help expedite solutions.
- **Reflecting on lessons learnt** from collaborative experience to inform a way forward.

The structured approach provided by the workshops made it possible to explore how the model was understood, adapted, and applied in different governance settings. The participating municipalities' contrasting areas of focus provided the basis for a comparative case analysis, where the differences illuminated context-specific dynamics and generated lessons that fed back into the iterative refinement of the model. This created opportunities to compare outcomes and capture lessons that could guide its wider use in strengthening collaboration within local government.

Blue Crane Route Local Municipality Pilot Workshop

Blue Crane Route LM selected the long-standing water crisis experienced in Pearston as the focus of the collaboration workshop. An important component of the collaboration workshops is immersion, to unpack and understand the challenges faced. On Day 1 a site visit was planned for two locations related to water challenges faced in the Pearston community, to give participants firsthand experience of the issues being discussed. The participants visited both a non-operational, unequipped borehole and an equipped borehole that was no longer functional. At the unequipped borehole, the Mayor and community members discussed the long-standing borehole issue, which has persisted for eight years.

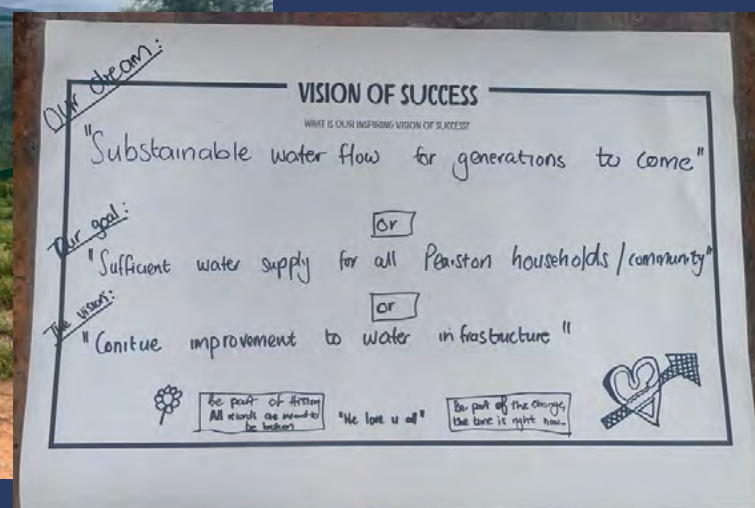
A community member highlighted that the municipality's lack of personnel to maintain the distant borehole has directly led to the nearby community in Pearston residing on the hillside being without water access. Municipal officials explained regulatory constraints, noting that current water laws require purification of water before distribution, unlike in the past when borehole water could be used directly. The high costs of piping water to the purification plant and then all the way back to the community were also mentioned as a reason why the municipality had been unable to equip the borehole.

The group also visited a fenced off equipped borehole, with the large water treatment plant in view a few hundred meters up the road. The participants discussed the critical infrastructure issues within the municipality, particularly regarding non-operational facilities and water systems. A councillor raised concerns that the equipped borehole has been non-operational for over a year due to a burnt-out motor. The discussion revealed that there was an awareness of the issue and an attempt to get assistance to fix it, but the contractors approached were not on the approved municipal suppliers database so could not be paid to fix the problem. The water treatment facility completed in 2022 had not been operational for two years. When enquiring about the reasons, the Mayor indicated that the regulations require that the person operating such a facility has a minimum set of qualifications. The initial person employed to do the job left after a few months and they have been unable to find a replacement.



The workshop facilitators invited participants to reflect on the experience, what they saw, heard and felt. The facilitation team brought awareness to the reflective discussion space provided for when participants got back into their respective vehicles. In the debrief session, participants highlighted the invaluable clarity gained from seeing the problem firsthand, a perspective often absent in boardroom discussions. Key points raised included the urgent need for intentional action to resolve the 8-year-old water challenge; a preference for local consultants over those from Gauteng in upcoming tenders; and the necessity of employing someone genuinely committed to solving the water challenge. To explore the multifaceted water challenges in the municipality, participants were divided into two mixed stakeholder groups and invited to work at tables set up at the back of the room. Their task was to identify these challenges and subsequently categorise them under the following headings: environmental, financial, political, societal, and technical (see section 4.3.2 of the facilitation guide). After categorising the issues, the two groups defined a problem statement. The facilitation team noted how the different groups' perspectives, though coming from different angles, complemented each other and helped build a more complete understanding of the infrastructure challenges.

Following the reconvening of participants in plenary, there was a shift from defining the problems towards envisioning future solutions. Unfortunately, many municipal officials left this point, while most community representatives remained. During this stage, the facilitator introduced the concept of "above the line" thinking, supported by a video resource, to encourage a constructive and solution-oriented mindset. This approach emphasised curiosity, creativity, and collaboration as opposed to the defensive and closed attitudes associated with "below the line" thinking. While participants recognised the value of this perspective, some noted the difficulty of maintaining such a mindset in the face of practical challenges and shifting dynamics of the water crisis. This highlighted the tension between aspirational leadership principles and the realities of the municipal working environment. To provide a forward-looking perspective, the two groups concluded the day by creating vision statements for the future they envision for the Pearston community and Blue Crane Route Local Municipality (see section 4.4.2 of the facilitation guide).



On Day 2 of the workshop an initial discussion between the participants decided that the focus would be on practical solutions and the cultivation of hope, with a shared understanding that individual initiative and collaboration are the starting points for change, even within systemic constraints. A hands-on marshmallow tower exercise was conducted where participants were split into two groups, each tasked with building the tallest possible structure using spaghetti, tape, one meter of string, and a marshmallow (see section 4.5.2 of the facilitation guide). The competitive nature of the exercise generated significant energy within the room. In the subsequent debriefing, participants reflected on the enjoyment, the opportunity for connection, and the valuable lesson in collaborative problem-solving when faced with uncertainty.

This engaging activity served as an effective transition into Day 2, which focused on collaborative forward planning, implementation frameworks and adaptation. The participants were tasked with formulating a set of principles to guide their collaborative efforts in addressing the identified problem statement. The next task was to identify priority areas to streamline efforts in addressing the challenge. After prioritising tasks, the groups identified additional stakeholders who could assist with addressing the challenge but were not present. The group then compiled a list of immediate next steps.



Newcastle Local Municipality Pilot Collaboration Workshop

In preparation for the collaboration pilot workshop, the COMPACT team engaged with Newcastle LM around defining a clear problem statement, identifying key stakeholders whose participation was essential, assessing site feasibility for an immersion exercise, and finalising logistical arrangements (such as the number of attendees, venue selection etc). While an initial date had been set for the workshop, it became evident that substantial preparatory work was necessary to ensure its success. Introductory meetings were held within the COMPACT team, incorporating officials from KZN SALGA to determine the most strategic approach for municipal engagement. An important planning meeting brought together representatives from SALGA's national and provincial offices, Distillery, and various municipal departments, including Public Participation, the Speaker's Office, the Mayor's Office, the LED Business Regulation section, IDP Office, Community Safety and Enforcement, and Communications. The primary objective of this session was to solidify all preparatory steps and ensure consensus on the process leading up to the workshop.

It was decided that the purpose for the collaboration workshop would be to address the regulation of spaza shops (in particular, access for new entrants and enhancing after care measures) and the municipality's role in supporting LED. Due to safety concerns an immersion site visit was unfortunately not feasible. On Day 1 of the workshop the facilitation team divided the participants into mixed table groups and introduced four fictional characters and their stories which represented some of the realities at play within Newcastle LM's economic and spaza shop ecosystem. Groups were invited to reflect, share and document how they typically engage with the character's stories, how they frame the challenge, and what the typical responses are. The groups then presented to the plenary and as the next step the groups were tasked with generating consensus on the one main challenge based on the character stories they were each working on.

Each group had a slightly unique sense of the challenge, however in the groups there were clear demonstrations of being able to work together by agreeing to a single challenge to focus on. The purpose of this exercise was to offer experience in consensus building (*"siyavumelana"*). The facilitation team observed how language was proving divisive, with an example being the use of 'illegal immigrants', which renders someone illegal when it is not their being that is illegal, but that they do not possess the legal documents. Participants were then invited to be mindful of language and were supported to explore more connective and respectful language even in contested terrain. The final part of this step saw participants working in their table groups to "flip" their problem statements to "opportunity statements" (see section 4.3 of the facilitation guide). This is a technique that reframes the challenge from a focus on the constraint into exploring possibility.

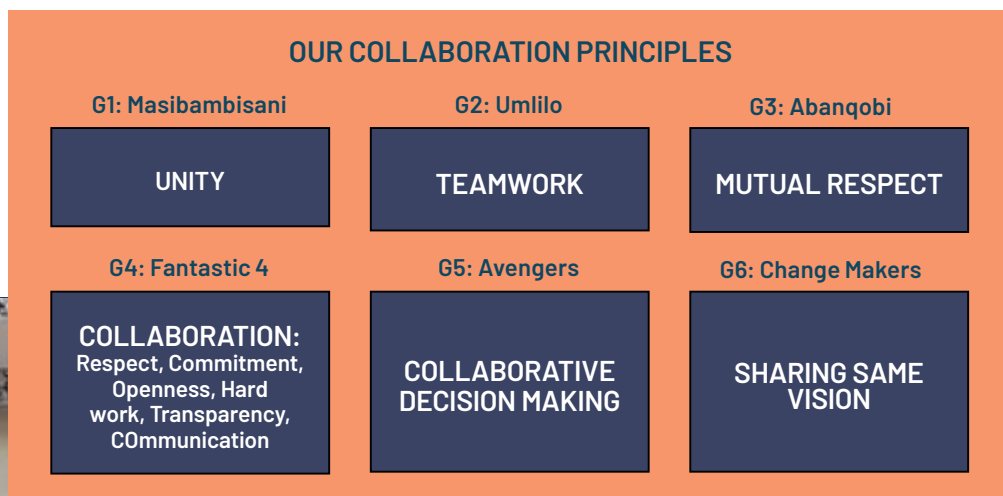


Day 2 started with the facilitator sharing a story of hope and resilience, with the purpose of connecting participants with their own strength and agency. The group was then taken through a visioning exercise which invited them to imagine that they were in May 2030 and that what they were envisioning had been realised. Participants were then invited to work in their groups to build on their opportunity statements by transforming them into inspiring vision statements (see section 4.4.2 of the facilitation guide). These statements illustrate a positive stance and a clear shift in the outlook relative to the challenge faced. After groups had established a clear vision for where they were headed and what was possible, they were invited to identify three clear actions that represented the immediate next steps as well as who should be involved in their implementation (see section 4.5.1 of the facilitation guide).

While groups had determined “what” needed to be done, there was a need to clarify the “how”. Working across boundaries means that there are many inherent differences and barriers to working effectively as a team, whether in different departments in the municipality, between politicians and administrators, or between the local community and the municipality. Groups were invited to play the “Marshmallow Tower Challenge, which allowed participants to have a first-hand experience of collaboration (see section 4.5.3 of the facilitation guide).

Teams were asked to reflect on the experience and there were rich insights shared about what enabled the team to work well together and what limited their success. Groups were asked to discuss the principles they believed enabled them to work well and then capture and share one key principle. These are outlined below.

When the teams completed the marshmallow tower game, they were all invited to the circle so that the session could be consolidated and wrapped up. Participants were invited to discuss amongst each other key lessons learned from the two days and what they would be taking home.





2.3. TRAIN-THE-TRAINER COLLABORATION WORKSHOP

In August 2025, the COMPACT team came together for a three-day workshop aimed at learning and applying the collaboration workshop methodology. The workshop was facilitated by Distillery, with SALGA, PARI, representatives of several municipalities, and CSOs forming part of the workshop. The workshop aimed to ensure that the tool was understandable enough to teach to other people and to identify any gaps that would make it difficult to use across other municipal contexts. The train-the-trainer workshop comprised five modules (corresponding to the five steps of the collaboration model), and by the conclusion of the programme the participants were expected to have the ability to share the content in their respective contexts. On each day, participants were encouraged to write down tips and tricks for different themes, and lessons were drawn from each module and item. These are all included in the [collaboration facilitation guide](#) that has been developed.

The five modules undertaken were:

- Module 1: Team Building, Agreements and Establishment of Learning Groups
- Module 2: Making Sense of the Challenge
- Module 3: Vision and Hope
- Module 4: Implementing and Adapting
- Module 5: Reflecting and Learning



Module 1: Team Building, Agreements and Establishment of Learning Groups

The first module had the participants introduce themselves and be familiar with the expected outcomes, encouraging them to share input on how to reach those expectations with their desired experiences. This was done through the Human Bingo and Affinity Statements exercises (see sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 of

the facilitation guide). These activities had participants move outside of the room and interact with each other, sharing information about themselves. The activities were not only for fun but also encouraged participants to identify their attitudes on collaboration prior to the workshop, establish how many other participants have the same values, and be able to evaluate after each module if they have changed.

Participants discussed what should be put in place for a meaningful experience (time management, active listening etc.) and it was highlighted that these had to be chosen by participants themselves and not imposed by the facilitator, so that the responsibility of maintaining them is shared between facilitators and participants. Participants were divided into groups to discuss how they would apply the orientation model in their own contexts, with the participants realising the model's innovation and how it increased interest in the workshop. The participants agreed that the orientation model could be effectively applied in various contexts, provided that activities are adapted to the local context and there are strategies to engage reluctant or disengaged participants.

The stakeholder mapping tool was then introduced as a method to characterise stakeholders and help visualise both the size of each stakeholder group and the intensity of engagement required at each level (see section 4.1 of the facilitation guide). The tool was designed to be a purpose-driven way to decide on participants, rather than just creating a list of potential participants.

The key concerns on implementing collaborative approaches in municipalities included: deciding who should champion collaborative initiatives, whether those who were part of problems can also be part of solutions, and how to navigate complex political dynamics.

Module 2: Making Sense of the Challenge

Module 2 focused on the three techniques needed to make sense of the core challenges:

- **Immersion:** a technique where participants directly experience a challenge to gain a deeper understanding. This is done by participants visiting sites to have a first-person perspective of the issue at hand (section 4.3.1 of the facilitation guide).
- **Lenses:** a concept which uses different perspectives to view problems. This method increases empathy amongst affected groups and helps prioritise issues (section 4.3.2 of the facilitation guide).
- **Cynefin Framework:** a framework that helps identify the type of problem that people are facing, therefore applying an appropriate solution to the problem (section 4.3.3 of the facilitation guide). The framework categorises problems as simple, complicated, complex, and chaotic. Through identifying where each problem falls, one can also identify the level of expertise required to approach it.

At the end of Module 2 participants were asked to write down tips and tricks for making sense of challenges on sticky notes under the following four key themes: understanding and exploring the problem; process and approach; clarity and purpose; and tools and techniques (see section 4.3.5 of the facilitation guide).



Module 3: Vision and Hope

The third module explored the leadership mindset, collaboration, and the psychology of approaching challenges positively. It was explained by the facilitation team that when in leadership positions, it is important to understand one's mental state and not dwell on problems but rather identify possible solutions. Methods to achieve this were introduced through the following:

- *The Line*: A video used to help people think about their psychological space (section 4.4.1 of the facilitation guide). The video explained the concept of being "above the line" (open, curious, committed to learning) versus "below the line" (closed, defensive, committed to being right).
- *Fired Up and Ready to Go!*: A second video featuring Barack Obama's experience in Greenwood, South Carolina where he met Edith S. Childs, the woman who started the now-famous chant "Fired up, ready to go!". The video illustrated how one person's enthusiasm could inspire others and create a movement (section 4.4.2 of the facilitation guide).

Both videos explained the importance of positivity through adversity, and the importance of one person being committed to making a positive impact and influencing other people. The output of this module is the development of a vision statement. Participants also came up with some tips from practice (see section 4.4.4 of the facilitation guide).

Module 4: Implementing and Adapting

By Module 4 of the workshop, the participants had a thorough understanding of the tools and had questions on how to implement them in an environment with many challenges (section 4.5 of the facilitation guide). Participants raised that while it is achievable to do so in spaces where there are defined accountability measures, it is difficult in spaces where decisions are dependent on multiple parties finding a similar goal and where people have different ideas of success. Some advice shared on the implementation phase of collaboration included:

- A strategic approach with three important actions to start with, in place of creating comprehensive plans. It is **always better to start the project small and build momentum**, rather than to have a plan that could demoralise participants should it not succeed from the onset.
- When collaboration happens outside of institutional frameworks and accountability mechanisms, **trust becomes the binding factor**.
- Understanding **the importance of adaptation in collaborative spaces** - unexpected challenges are inevitable in collaborative spaces, and adaptation proves more commitment to the solution than committing to a failing plan.

Workshop participants shared tips from practice on several topics, including: resilience and perseverance; flexibility and adaptability; relationship building and trust; strategic thinking and planning; self-awareness and mindset; collaboration and inclusivity; and learning and development (see section 4.5.4 of the facilitation guide).

Module 5: Reflecting and Learning

Reflecting on the completed modules, the facilitators went back to **summarising the key principles of collaboration: staying focused on purpose, engaging in collective sense-making, using different lenses to understand challenges, maintaining vision and hope, implementing strategically rather than comprehensively, and embracing 'wild cards' as opportunities.** The importance of always keeping the *purpose* of the collaborative effort at the forefront was emphasised. Participants were encouraged to always keep in mind that understanding “why” collaboration needs to take place is the fuel that drives the collective project.

At the end of the final session, participants reflected on what they learned and the support that they needed to start collaborating in their own spaces. They also highlighted the value of the facilitation methods demonstrated throughout the workshop, particularly the importance of creating spaces for meaningful conversation rather than following rigid agendas or protocols.



4. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The piloting of the Local Government Collaboration Model faced some challenges, however these provide additional insights and opportunities for further developing the implementation process. Some challenges included:

- **Municipal buy-in:** Due to the model being new and not yet institutionalised, time and effort was needed to solicit buy-in at both pilot sites. This remains imperative for institutional ownership, continuity, and seamless replication.
- **Logistical constraints and attendance variability:** Both pilot workshops experienced delayed starts due to reliance on public transport (Newcastle LM) and uneven stakeholder presence, particularly higher drop-off from municipal officials on Day 2 in BCR LM.
- **Political resistance and institutional culture:** In BCR LM, political dynamics impeded engagement, with some councillors expressing scepticism about real change emerging from the workshop.
- **Safety and immersion limitations:** Newcastle LM's logistical and safety concerns precluded a full site visit, requiring adaptation to character-based case studies instead of on-the-ground immersion.
- **Overemphasis on internal agendas:** At BCR LM, one group discussion focused narrowly on political culture rather than addressing the practical water infrastructure challenges, leading to unproductive sessions until rebalanced.
- **Inconsistent engagement levels:** Both pilot sites saw fluctuations in stakeholder energy and late arrivals, which occasionally disrupted flow and consensus-building exercises.

Limited municipal commitment, unclear roles and responsibilities, and over-reliance on municipalities for logistical arrangements highlighted the need for preparatory/planning meetings, structured follow-up, and oversight of the collaboration process. To address these issues, the implementation of the collaboration model should establish clear responsibilities, ensure timely stakeholder engagement, and maintain flexibility to respond to variable municipal participation.



5. KEY LESSONS LEARNED AND CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

The piloting experience of the COMPACT Local Government Collaboration Model provides valuable lessons which were key for refinement and are also crucial for its replication in the South African local government context. The piloting process demonstrated that effective collaboration in municipalities requires immersive understanding of challenges, constructive problem framing, inclusive stakeholder engagement, adaptive implementation, and sustained follow-up.

The structured discussions from identifying and prioritising challenges to developing vision statements, implementation plans, and guiding principles illustrate how the Collaboration Model operationalises its core tenets. By linking activities to purpose, systemic understanding, vision, and adaptive action, the model provides a scalable and context-sensitive approach to strengthening inclusive municipal governance and service delivery.

The key lessons learned are set out in more detail below.

5.1. PREPARATORY WORK AND STAKEHOLDER MAPPING ARE CRITICAL

Investing time and energy in planning and preparatory work, including stakeholder mapping, is critical to clarify the purpose of the collaboration workshop and to identify relevant stakeholders. This was done with Newcastle LM and resulted in a clear purpose being agreed and relevant stakeholders identified so that they could be timeously invited. A key lesson is that stakeholder diversity enhances problem-solving and legitimacy. Both pilots included a wide range of participants who surfaced innovative proposals that municipal officials had not previously considered. The workshops also facilitated the identification of additional stakeholders and priority areas to streamline efforts. This exercise had participants listing stakeholders that are key for the successful implementation of the model in alignment with the areas that needed to be prioritised. This demonstrates the importance of stakeholder mapping and the identification of the relevant stakeholders pre-implementation, highlighting linkages with the “Implementing and Adapting” phase of the model which emphasises the co-creation of adaptive leadership principles, clarified roles, and mechanisms to navigate resistance. This reflects the developmental mandate of municipalities, which requires engaging communities to strengthen both service delivery and local economic participation.

5.2. TYPE OF VENUE MAKES A DIFFERENCE

The venue for a collaboration workshop is very important. Where possible, venues should be chosen that are big and have both wall space and floor space. The venue chosen by Newcastle LM was a big hall with lots of floor space to allow for group tables to be set up, a plenary circle to be created, and space for participants to gather in relation to the affinity statements as well as large wall space to stick the work of the table groups on. Given challenges with projecting, at both venues the facilitation team created the collaboration model on the floor using masking tape and flipchart paper. This worked very well as it allowed the facilitators to communicate the model by standing in each step and moving to the next steps as they progressed through the programme. In the check-in and check-out parts of the days, learnings relating to the model could be summarised and reinforced in this manner.

5.3. CONTEXTUALISED INVOLVEMENT SURFACES REALITIES AND GROUNDS THE PROCESS

The piloting of the model revealed the importance of context, stakeholder dynamics, facilitation, and adaptive practices to enable effective collaboration in municipalities. One of the clearest lessons was that contextualised involvement is critical for understanding and addressing complex challenges. In Blue Crane Route LM, site visits to boreholes and communities experiencing the water crisis made the problem tangible, emotionally engaging participants and motivating immediate action. In Newcastle LM, narrative-based immersion through case studies and simulations substituted effectively for site visits, allowing stakeholders to explore the dynamics of LED and informal trade safely. These approaches reflect the model's emphasis on the development of a shared understanding of complex issues, prioritisation of key elements, and systemic analysis to guide collective action.

5.4. PROBLEM FRAMING SHAPES THE QUALITY OF COLLABORATION

The pilot workshops illustrated the importance of constructive problem framing in shaping the quality of collaboration. When participants reframed challenges constructively, more cohesive and creative solutions emerged. In Newcastle LM, informal trade was reconceptualised from "unregulated chaos" to a potential economic driver, while in BCR LM facilitators actively guided discussions away from unproductive political debates toward solution-oriented dialogue. This reflects the "Vision and Hope" phase of the model, where participants synthesise insights into a shared agenda, explore creative responses, and establish a forward-looking vision.

5.5. FLEXIBLE FACILITATION METHODS ARE KEY TO ACTIVE AND FRUITFUL ENGAGEMENT



The pilot workshops highlighted the flexibility and scalability of the Collaboration Model. The BCR LM pilot required political sensitivity, while the Newcastle LM workshop demanded logistical adaptability. Interactive tools such as floor tape models and exercises like the marshmallow tower challenge supported experiential understanding and engagement across groups. The iterative process of identifying challenges, developing problem statements, reflecting individually and collectively, mapping systems, and formulating vision statements demonstrated that structured engagement coupled with fit-for purpose facilitation tools leads to actionable solutions and shared accountability.

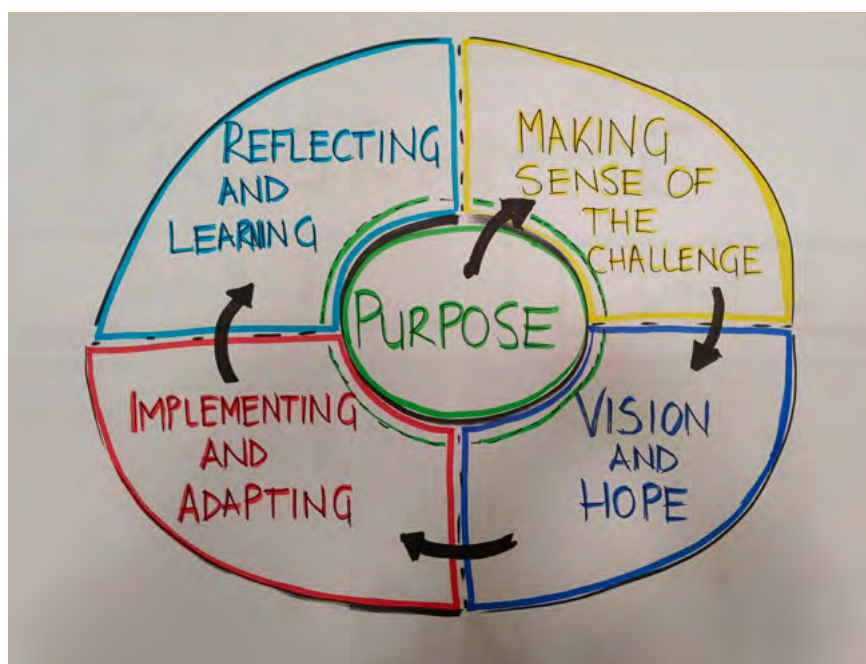
5.6. TRUST, TIME AND FOLLOW-UP ARE NON-NEGOTIABLE

The pilot workshops emphasised that trust, time, and follow-up are essential for sustainability of any collaboration initiative. Without clear feedback loops, municipal endorsement, and scheduled progress reviews, collaboration risks being episodic rather than embedded in institutional culture. Effective strategies include empowering municipalities to select focus areas, involving provincial teams for proximity and support, and maintaining consistent communication amongst all partners.

Critical Success Factors for Implementation

The piloting of the COMPACT Local Government Collaboration Model has shown that there are several critical success factors for implementation:

- **Strong Local Buy-In:** Visible commitment from mayors, speakers, and municipal managers to champion collaboration.
- **Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement:** Ensuring balanced representation from political, administrative, and community groups.
- **Flexible Facilitation Resources:** Capacity to adapt immersion methods (site visits etc.) based on local context.
- **Time-Bound Workshops:** Realistic agendas allowing depth without stakeholder fatigue.
- **Clear Follow-Up Protocols:** Pre-arranged feedback meetings, progress tracking tools, and digital communication channels.



6. CONCLUSION

The COMPACT Local Government Collaboration Model offers a scalable tool for South African municipalities to tackle complex challenges through collaborative leadership, community activation, and shared accountability. The facilitation guide that has been developed provides guidance on how municipalities can do this in practice.

The pilot workshops in Blue Crane Route LM and Newcastle LM brought to life the practical application and contributed to the refinement of the model as an effective mechanism for inclusive problem-solving within a municipal context, specifically in the case of service delivery issues. Despite different purposes and focus areas, the model provides a common framework that can help alleviate mistrust, align stakeholders, and generate tangible, community-driven actions. Insights from these pilots show that through careful facilitation, inclusive participation, and strategic follow-up, municipalities can move beyond crisis management toward collective, deliberative and initiative-taking governance.

The implementation phase of the model requires institutionalisation by turning pilot lessons into permanent practices within municipalities, adapted to the local context.





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