Co-Design Toolkit for Regenerative Tourism

Developed from co-design methods piloted by the Brecks Regenerative Tourism team, University of Greenwich (2026).

A toolkit of techniques for tourism businesses, destination managers and community partnerships adopting co-design.

Co-design, in plain terms, means designing something with the people it's for, rather than for them. Instead of an expert handing down a finished plan, everyone with a stake in the outcome - owners, employees, residents, visitors, shapes ideas together, testing and reshaping them as they go. It's a way of thinking, learning and working together, through real conversation and hands-on practice.

In regenerative tourism, co-design is crucial. A place can only regenerate through the people who know it, live it and work in it. This toolkit turns that thinking into a set of choices and techniques any tourism organisation can adapt to its own scale and context.

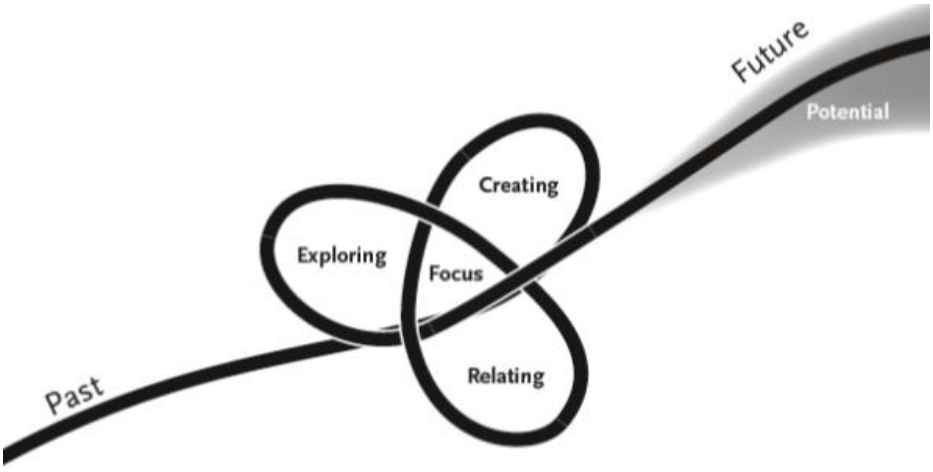


Figure 1: Illustration of Co-design thinking (Ylirisku & Buur, 2007).

Step 1. Choose Your Starting Point

Co-design looks different at different scales. Match the process to the size of your organisation or team running it.

Organisation type	What this looks like	Typical scale & duration
Single business / SME	One or two internal sessions with staff, and, where useful, a handful of regular guests or close partners. Light governance, fast iteration.	4 - 8 people; 2-3 hours total, in one sitting
Destination / place partnership (DMO, National Character Area, etc.)	A structured multi-stakeholder process: baseline listening, two or more workshops, and a synthesis/validation stage returned to participants.	10-20 people; weeks to months, 2+ half-day workshops
Community-led / grassroots initiative	Lighter formal structure, higher emphasis on trust-building and relationship over reporting; often volunteer-facilitated.	Variable group size; paced around community rhythms, not a fixed calendar

Step 2. Choose Your Co-Design Strategy

Co-design strategies should be purpose-led. Naming which one you're running, even informally, at business level, helps set the right expectations for participants.

Strategy purpose	Best used when…	Who's in the room	Core moves
Creative, solution-oriented	An operational or tactical problem needs a workable solution reasonably quickly.	A diverse, often one-off group, not all of whom represent the wider system.	Ideate → prototype → test, with activities largely designer-led.
Knowledge-based, solution-oriented	Participants already know each other and the local issues well.	Established stakeholder representatives with real tacit knowledge of the system.	Draw on existing shared knowledge → co-develop solutions that fit current capabilities and resources.
Priority-setting, problem-oriented	The problem itself is complex, contested or not yet well understood, typical of ambitions to renew or reimagine a whole system.	A diverse stakeholder group exchanging knowledge over multiple sessions.	Clarify and prioritise the problem space first, then move to a shorter, more focused solution phase.

Step 3. Choose Your Participation Depth

Before designing activities, be honest about how much power participants will actually have over the outcome. IAP2 Spectrum is a standard reference point, promising less and delivering it beats promising "Empower" and quietly delivering "Consult."

IAP2 level	Promise to participants
Inform	We will keep you updated.
Consult	We will listen and acknowledge your input.
Involve	We will work with you to ensure your concerns are reflected.
Collaborate	We will incorporate your advice into decisions, to the maximum extent possible.
Empower	We will implement what you decide.

Regenerative tourism co-design generally needs at least Collaborate, and, wherever Indigenous or long-term custodial communities are involved, should be aiming toward Empower.

Step 4. Run the Process - a Generic Four-Phase Arc

Whichever strategy and scale you chose above, the underlying rhythm is the same. It maps loosely onto the Design Council's Double Diamond (Discover – Define – Develop – Deliver) if that framing is more familiar to your team.

Phase	What happens
1 Understand	Build a shared picture of current reality before convening anyone, baseline listening through surveys, interviews or informal conversations or reflections.
2 Ground	Surface place/organisational identity, values, non-negotiables and tensions together, through personal reflection followed by shared sense-making. Contradictions, tensions and paradoxes are common and should be valued.
3 Prototype	Turn insight into direction: name the mindset shifts needed, design and test concrete ideas or experiences in mixed groups.
4 Commit & Review	Convert agreement into trackable commitments; synthesise into a draft output and return it to participants to validate and iterate before publishing.

Step 5. Method Menu - Pick One or Two Techniques Per Phase

Co-design activities generally fall into three families: Telling, Making and Enacting. Don't try to run all of them in one session, pick what suits the phase, the group and the time you have. Be flexible to adapt depending on the group dynamic.

Telling: reflection & narrative (best for Understand / Ground)

Technique	What it does	Adapt it
Reflective writing prompt	A short personal-reflection exercise (e.g. a letter to your future self or organisation) anchors honest individual starting positions before group work begins.	Any prompt meaningful to your group works, keep it private and personal, revisit it at the close.
Guided storytelling circle	Participants share a place-based memory or experience; the group listens without judgement for common threads rather than debating them.	Works well as a warm-up for groups that don't yet know each other.

Technique	What it does	Adapt it
Non-negotiables exercise	Individuals name what must never be traded away; small groups then find what they hold in common.	Keep the "what must never be lost" framing, it travels well across contexts.

Making: tangible & generative (best for Ground / Prototype)

Technique	What it does	Adapt it
Object / artefact elicitation	Participants bring a meaningful object, image or story representing a local asset, tension or opportunity, then discuss it through a few simple lenses (e.g. what's the gift here? what's at risk? what could this open up?).	Swap the lenses and prompts to fit your own landscape, culture and priorities.
Card-based "ingredient" design game or other similar gamifications	Combine decks representing local assets, emerging trends, agreed principles and visitor motivations to prototype new experiences, products or practices.	Populate the decks with your own local content; the mechanic is reusable anywhere.
Visual / collage scenario-building	Groups build a tangible collage or visual scenario of a possible regenerative future, using images, drawing or physical materials.	A strong option when words alone feel too abstract.

Enacting: embodied & roleplay (best for Prototype)

Technique	What it does	Adapt it
Role/function mapping	Names the functional roles that must collaborate for regeneration to happen (e.g. custodian, host, storyteller/guide, producer, network-holder); groups are then deliberately mixed across roles.	Rename roles to match your own sector mix, keep the rule that every small group spans more than one.
Persona pressure-testing	Check a prototype against a small set of visitor or stakeholder personas: who is it genuinely for? who is it missing? what's the smallest change that would include them?	Build 4-6 personas relevant to your own destination or customer base. Alternatively, engage with existing customer base.
Scenario stress-test / curveball	Introduce a plausible disruption (a funding cut, a bad season, a conservation or climate crisis) and ask the group how their prototype holds up.	Useful as a closing check before a prototype is taken seriously outside the room.

Step 6. Close with Commitment, Scaled to Your Context

Scale	Closing technique
Single business / small team	A simple written commitment/pledge: what, by when, who, posted somewhere the team will actually see it again.
Multi-stakeholder group	A three-part pledge: one personal action, one collective non-negotiable, and one relational commitment (naming another person or organisation to follow up with directly).
Whole destination/partnership	A living, collectively edited charter, revisited and re-signed at each subsequent stakeholder gathering so it stays a working document rather than a one-off output.

Facilitation Essentials

- Group size scales with ambition: 4-8 for a single-business session; 10-20 for a multi-stakeholder workshop. Consider a well-balanced gender, age and other identity markers.
- One lead facilitator holds the room; a scribe per small group captures participants' own language.
- Alternate individual reflection → small-group dialogue → whole-group harvest every time, skipping the individual step lets the loudest voices dominate.
- Seek consent for recording or photography and be explicit about how contributions will be used and attributed.
- Mix participants deliberately every session, by role, organisation type, age, tenure or worldview, rather than letting people self-select into comfortable groups.
- Close every session with something concrete participants take away personally, not only a group summary.

How to Adapt This Toolkit in Four Steps

1. **Choose your scale and strategy.** Pick your organisation type (Step 1) and co-design strategy (Step 2), or blend them informally if you're a small team.
2. **Set your participation depth honestly.** Decide, before you start, how much real influence participants will have (Step 3).
3. **Pick one technique per family, per phase.** One Telling, one Making, one Enacting technique is plenty for most sessions (Step 5).
4. **Design the commitment device to match your scale.** And build in a return/validation loop so participants see their input reflected back (Step 6).

Further Resources

Regenerative tourism theory

Bellato & Pollock (2025) “Regenerative tourism: a state-of-the-art review,” Tourism Geographies, https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2023.2294366

Mang & Reed (2012) “Designing from Place: A Regenerative Framework and Methodology,” Building Research & Information, https://doi.org/10.1080/09613218.2012.621341

Dredge (2022) Regenerative tourism: transforming mindsets, systems and practices, Journal of Tourism Futures, https://www.emerald.com/jtf/article/8/3/269/248702

Destination-level co-design

Smit, Melissen, Font & Dickinger (2024) “Destination Design: Identifying Three Key Co-Design Strategies,” Current Issues in Tourism, https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2024.2332495

OECD (2024, 2025) Tourism Trends and Policies; Building Strong and Resilient Tourism Destinations, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/building-strong-and-resilient-tourism-destinations_a57c343d-en.html

General co-design methodology

Sanders & Stappers (2012) Convivial Toolbox: Generative Research for the Front End of Design, https://www.amazon.co.uk/Convivial-Toolbox-Generative-Research-Design/dp/9063692846

Design Council, The Double Diamond / Framework for Innovation, URL: https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/resources/the-double-diamond/

LUMA Institute, Innovating for People: Human-Centred Design Methods, URL: https://www.amazon.co.uk/Innovating-People-Handbook-Human-Centered-Methods-ebook/dp/B07XPCHWBT

Nielsen, T. K. & Liburd, J. (2019). TOURISM CO-DESIGN. A Collaborative Design Catalogue with Design Methods, Tools and Techniques. Kolding: University of Southern Denmark. Center for Tourism, Innovation and Culture. ISBN 978-87-85268-66-2 CC

Participation frameworks

IAP2 (2018), Spectrum of Public participation, https://go.engagementinstitute.org.au/iap2spectrum