

System Design Toolkit for Organising Around Shared Problems

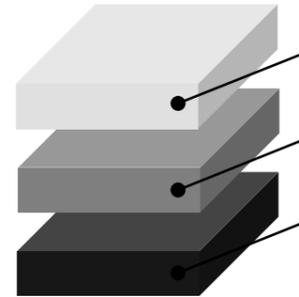


What's this toolkit for?

- In the past, where problems crossed agency boundaries, the two main ways to organise our work on them were voluntary cooperation between agencies, or a structural change to place the whole problem within a single agency.
- More recently, the State sector has used various approaches to collaboration that are stronger than purely voluntary cooperation but don't involve changes to agency structures.
- This toolkit organises and presents many of these solutions to give those grappling with cross-agency problems an easy way to find the types of solution that might be most appropriate.
- Where the best answer is to allocate the problem to a different agency, our existing Machinery of Government advice continues to apply.

The layers

The horizontal layers classify the approaches according to how many agencies are involved and in what way.



- 1. A FEW AGENCIES AT NATIONAL LEVEL**
"taking a systems approach within sectors"
- 2. MOST/ALL AGENCIES AT NATIONAL LEVEL**
"system leadership roles"
- 3. WORKING TOGETHER AT FRONTLINE OR COMMUNITY LEVEL**
"organising around customer and place"

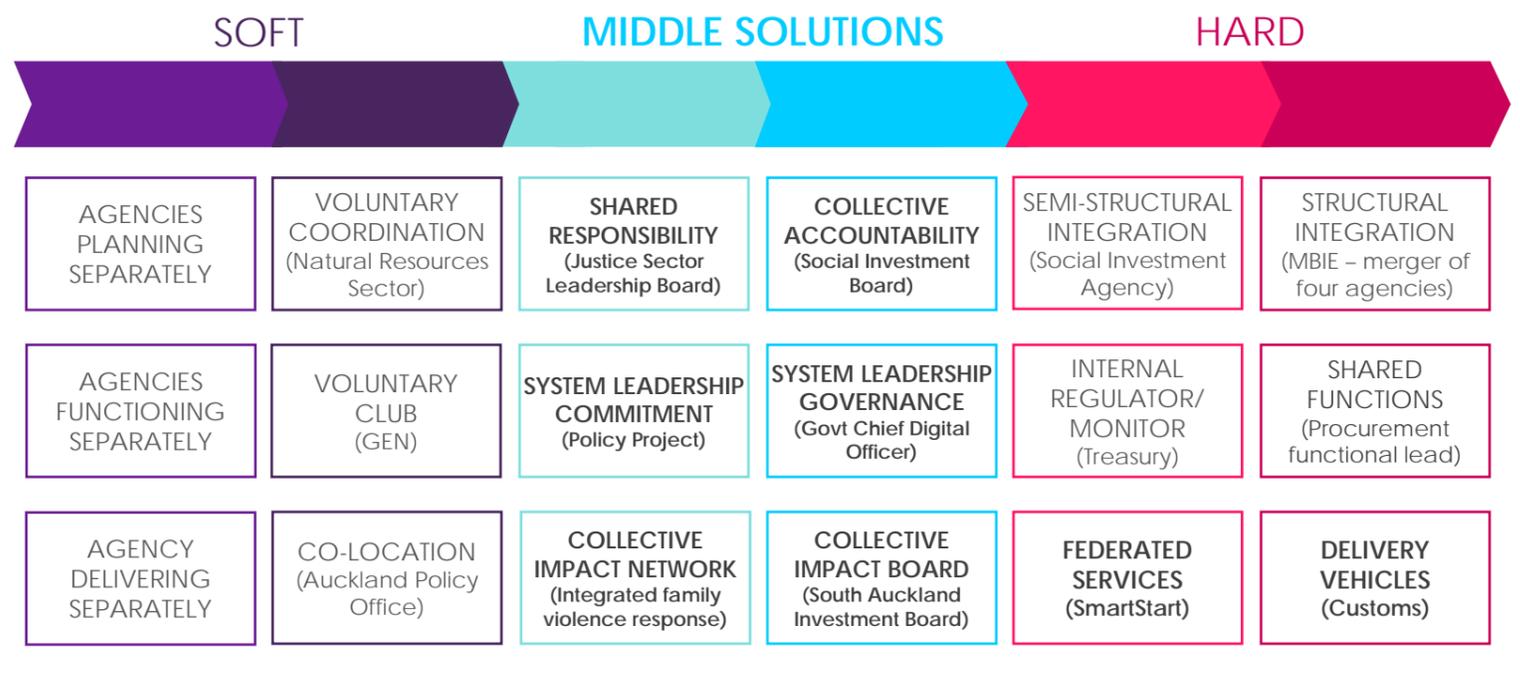
The spectrum

- The range of system design approaches should be understood as a spectrum of increasing intensity in cross-agency working from 'soft' (voluntary) to 'hard' (structural reorganisation).
- In the 'middle' are various approaches that involve greater commitment or mandated engagement without structural changes.
- The spectrum can be seen as a loop where once structural integration takes place, you are back to an agency operating separately.

Before using this toolkit you should define your problem and understand why and how it is a shared one.

THE TOOLKIT

- Putting the spectrum and the layers together gives us the following range of approaches – we've provided an example for each.
- The approaches in bold type are in the early stages of development. Some of the others are mature and well developed.
- More detail for each of the approaches is given on following pages.



The process

- The first step in using the toolkit is to establish what level your problem operates on.
- Based on your understanding of the problem and context, the descriptions of when different solutions are used should guide you along the spectrum.
- Within each solution arrangements for agreeing on Goals/Outcomes, Governance Models, Ministerial Relationships, Incentives and Funding illustrate how an effective model may be structured.

The solutions

The solutions described in the toolkit are 'ideal types' but they are not rules or prescriptions. They, and the process, are meant to be flexible and iterative:

- Different solutions may be appropriate at different stages in your initiative's life cycle.
- Some problems may operate at multiple levels and solving them may involve combining approaches.
- Similarly, solutions from the same level may be combined to create a more layered and proportional response.

Key Considerations

When deciding to pursue cross-agency working you need to be sure the benefits of doing so will outweigh the costs, and this should remain a key consideration when moving along the spectrum. Other key drivers of your progression from soft to medium to hard might include:

- The tension between collective and agency interests: the greater the tension the more likely formal arrangements and/or external governance will be required.
- The current state of working together: the level of communication, trust and previous working between parties is a key factor in the success of collaborations.
- The required durability of the cross-agency arrangement: 'soft' solutions tend to be less durable as they are more reliant on the interest of key individuals.
- How many parties need to be involved in key decision-making arrangements: the effectiveness of collective decision rights and funding arrangements tend to decrease as the number of decision-makers increases.

Still working on...

This guidance should be regarded as a living document – as solutions and arrangements are tried and tested we will update the toolkit to reflect what works best. As more advice is required around certain solutions we will expand the guidance.