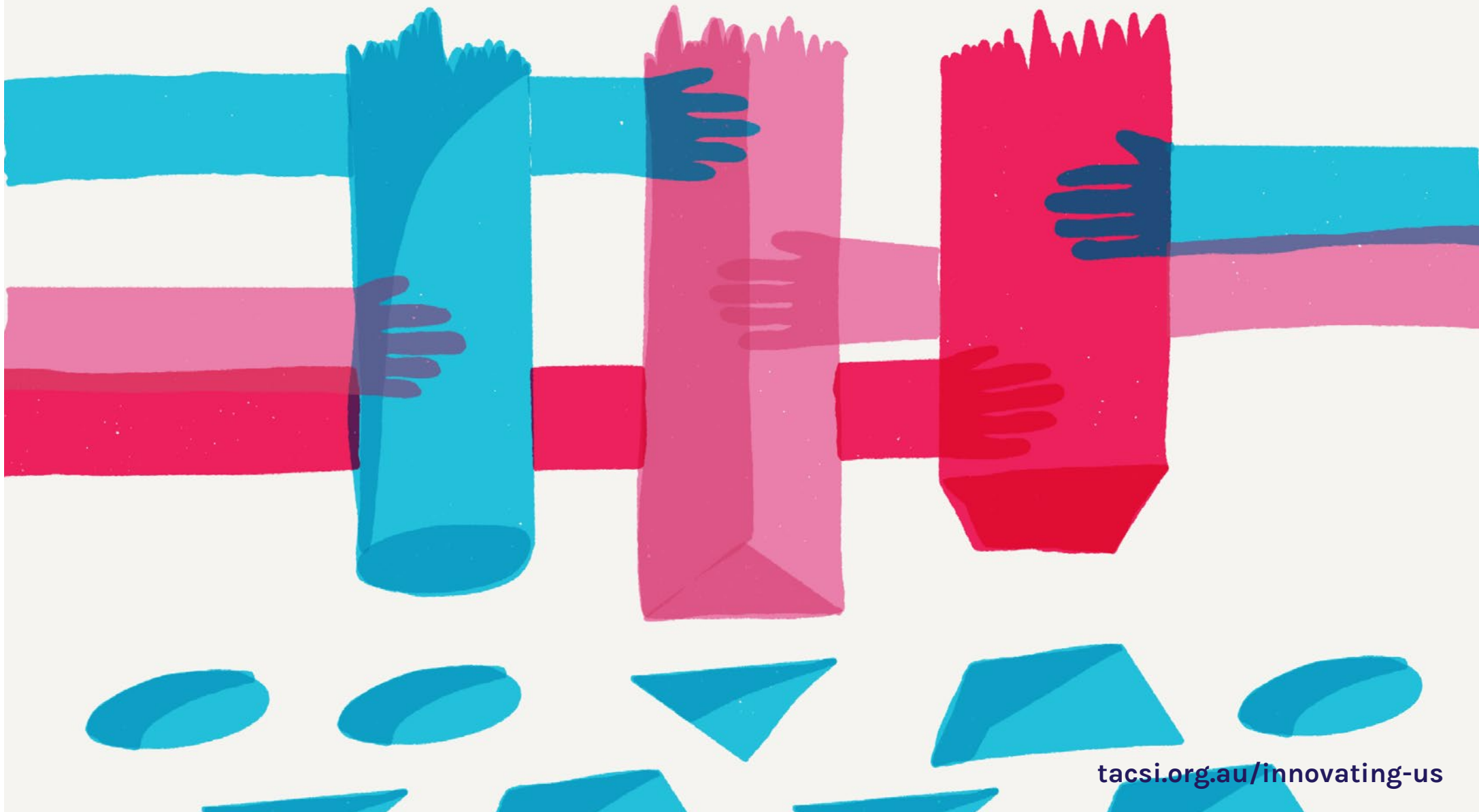


Innovating us

# Decentralising toolkit

THE  
AUSTRALIAN  
CENTRE FOR  
SOCIAL  
INNOVATION



[tacsi.org.au/innovating-us](http://tacsi.org.au/innovating-us)

# Words to Live By

Our Words to Live By (WTLB) arose from a challenge we discovered right back when we began decentralising TACSI.

At the start of this daunting journey, we realised that we didn't actually have a clear idea of who we collectively wanted to be in our work together. What shared mindsets and behaviours did we trust to make TACSI's purpose and vision a reality? What did we stand for?

We needed to define our values. But more than this, we needed to make them a natural, embedded part of the way we work. As a networked organisation, we wanted to live our values, not just refer to them occasionally.

For that to happen, we knew that a high level of buy-in from our people was vital. Our new values, whatever they might be, must be authentic. They needed to represent all of us if our people were going to embrace them.

Co-creation was the obvious answer – what better way to foster a sense of ownership than to involve the whole team in designing our values? So we got everyone together on one of our quarterly all-in days. Together, we worked out what sort of organisation we wanted TACSI to be, and what sort of working culture it would take for us to get there.

And so the Words to Live By took shape. Beyond traditional brand values, the WTLB are the way we define who we want to be at work, and also the 'compass' we use to stay true to purpose. They remind us that the ways we interact with and support each other are not incidental to our work; they are instrumental to our work.

A vital part of the success of the WTLB as a tool is that they focus on behaviours – the 'how' rather than the 'what'. They begin with a desirable outcome (e.g. inspiring growth in others) and then cultivate the behaviours that will bring it about (e.g. giving constructive, honest feedback). Importantly, this extends to our acknowledgment system, which is based entirely around these behaviours, rather than on work outputs.

At their best, the Words to Live By produce a culture in which our behaviours uphold our values and help us to create a more supportive, more fulfilling workplace – which is the TACSI we all want to become.



# Growth Signposts

A defining feature of a networked organisation is that it is always learning. At TACSI, our people are always actively engaged in their own development through our Growth Horizons program. Growth Signposts is a conversation guide that kicks of the Growth Horizons process.

The Growth Signposts are designed to help each of us identify our goals for personal and professional growth. Through conversation and reflection with our colleagues, they offer a template for productive (and often uncomfortable) inquiry into who we are at work and how we can improve. They bring the Words to Live By into action towards specific targets, giving us practical ways to nurture growth in one another and in ourselves.

A crucial component of the Growth Signposts is that they are personal as well as professional. Self-mastery is a non-negotiable part of working in a networked organisation; it simply won't hold together unless everyone is committed to the inward journey. This can be a big challenge for people who are accustomed to keeping their professional and personal lives completely separate – it can be confronting to be told you need to work on yourself as part of your job.

It's also important to note that learning for the sake of learning – for example, taking a seminar on how to successfully trade on the stock exchange – is not the aim. It's easy to blur the lines between what's important for your growth in the workplace and what simply interests you personally.

The development the Growth Signposts are focussed on is very specific. What the tools aim to identify is the 'sweet spot' where your role, your personal growth and your organisation's goals all intersect. This common ground is where your people will find the most effective growth opportunities, and often the most challenging ones.

The image shows a 'Growth Signposts' canvas template. It is a worksheet with a header 'Growth Signposts' and a 'Name' field. The canvas is divided into several sections:

- 1. How are you as a learner?** (Share your learning preferences, barriers, experiences and environments)
- 2. Where have you been?** (What are your important past experiences that make you who you are today? What have your experiences of learning and of life been like? What have been the ups and downs of this experience?)
- 3. Where are you now?** (Why TACSI? What are your interests? What's important to you? What are you good at - and what not so good at?)
- 5. Signposts** (ask others to flag some work focus areas and growth opportunities for you e.g. ask project people)
- 6. Surfacing broad goals** (thinking about things you could do to grow, learn and deliver in order to do your best)

There are also sections for 'PROFESSIONAL' and 'PERSONAL' goals, and a 'TACSI & I will benefit if I ...' section. The canvas includes various icons, arrows, and a sidebar with 'TOP 3' and 'BOTTOM 3' sections.

[DOWNLOAD THE GROWTH SIGNPOSTS CANVAS >](#)

# Profiles and Commitments

Our Profiles and Commitments are where we put our Growth Signposts into practice. They are the result of the careful refinement of a few different tools we researched and adapted, in particular the profile tools we learned about when Helen Sanderson from [Helen Sanderson Associates](#) visited Adelaide.

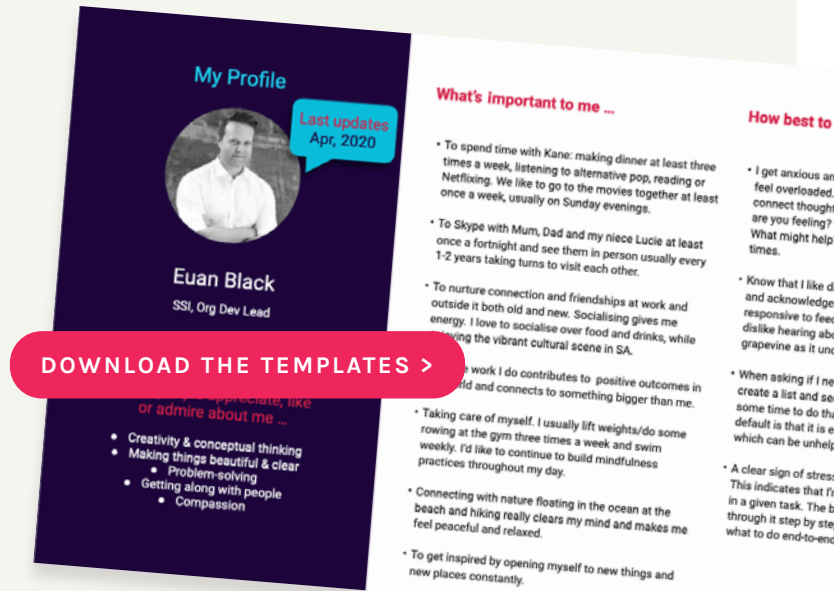
Profiles are the heart of personalisation at TACSI. As Helen Sanderson says: 'They provide us with an at-a-glance way of knowing what really matters to people.' Profiles help us build stronger relationships by telling us what really matters to our colleagues in their lives and in their own words.

Commitments offer a step-by-step framework for setting development goals (both personal and professional), with practical steps to be completed within seasonal rhythms. The guides which accompany them offer a little direction on how to set effective development goals, how people learn most effectively, and what information will be most useful. Taken together, the Profiles and Commitments form a little dossier about each person who works at your organisation. They are intended to be openly shared with colleagues at the start of each project, as a way to get to know one another.

But more than this, the Profiles and Commitments provide our colleagues with an understanding of our (often unconscious) behaviours and thought patterns, and how we are trying to grow. They offer a glimpse of our internal world and how it informs our responses to stress. The profiles show others how to tell when we are feeling overwhelmed or overworked, and how best to support us.

Importantly, for these tools to be really useful, people must share information at a depth which can be uncomfortable. The guides we've created are aimed partly at helping overcome this discomfort, and to avoid profiles full of jargon, generalisations or platitudes. As always, authenticity is key.

At their core, the ambition of the Profiles and Commitments is to create a more compassionate workplace. Understanding ourselves and our colleagues through a lens of vulnerability is a big step towards reducing stress and nurturing better health and wellbeing.





# Circles of Support Agreement and Reflective Activity

Creating the tools and processes for a networked organisation is only part of the job. They must be kept fresh and brought to life in a meaningful way as part of how we all work – in a business model designed for constant adaptation, there is no ‘set and forget’.

The Circle of Support Agreement and Reflective Activity ensure everyone is spending some time each week maintaining their growth commitments and reflecting on their work and wellbeing.

At TACSI, colleagues are matched up into ‘circles’ of three or four and given budgeted time to meet for one hour every week. The where, when and how of the meetings are decided between them, and they direct their own discussions within the meetings. Circles exist to fulfil two important functions: 1) to create accountability between peers; and 2) to support reflection and wellbeing.

When we talk about running an organisation without a hierarchy, one of the most common questions we get asked is about accountability. If everybody is sharing all the risk and responsibility equally, how is anyone accountable for anything? Who are they accountable to?

These tools are a big part of the answer. The Circles of Support are our organisational accountability mechanism. The critical difference is that instead of

being accountable to someone higher up the pyramid, we are all accountable to each other. This includes valuable time spent on reflection, growth and support – which a hierarchy does not offer – and it keeps us ever-evolving and ever-refining our roles at TACSI.

As with many aspects of our decentralisation journey, these tools are imperfect. Putting them into practice can take some trial and error - when the wheels start to turn, the friction points make themselves known. Finding the right rhythm and support for Circles continues to be a process of reflection and iteration. And like all of the material in this toolkit, doing it right is a challenge. Putting this amount of work into your company culture isn't easy.

But our people and our organisation derive immense benefit from these tools, and the positives build on themselves. Allow for some false starts and some flexibility, and the advantages far outweigh the challenges.

[DOWNLOAD THE AGREEMENT TEMPLATE >](#)

## Circles of Support Reflective Activity

**Fortnightly reflective questions**  
These questions are designed to surface what's going on for you as a group. You might go through all of them every session or divide them across sessions. Circles may or may not choose to reflect on particular documents or tools when answering some of these questions e.g. Growth Horizons.

1. What was my best moment and how can I have more moments like it?
  2. What was my most challenging moment and why? How will I respond next time?
  3. How has my mood with others been and how can I improve it?
  4. How did I support my colleagues and how will I continue to do so?
  5. What are the biggest obstacles to improving my practice and how will I overcome them?
  6. What am I doing for myself and why is this important?
- Please note: it's not necessarily the role for colleagues to offer advice or opinions.

**The purpose of this time is supporting each other with the following responsibilities:**  
• Creating a safe space for each other to be open, vulnerable/ courageous and true to yourselves in your time together

- Ensuring all our 'Profiles' are complete, up-to-date and visible to everyone (on Dropbox)
- Setting and maintaining boundaries/ hot buttons/ triggers visible to everyone (on Dropbox)
- Ensuring you are clear on the responsibilities of your **Role Narrative** and within **project work** and meeting commitments to your colleagues and clients
- Assisting each other to **identify and access support needs** from other colleagues or externally
- Assisting each other to identify and offer support skills to other colleagues
- Celebrating each other's personal milestones (e.g. Birthdays) and successes

[DOWNLOAD THE REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY >](#)

# Meet our Organisational Development team



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We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians and Owners of the lands in which we work and live on across Australia. We pay our respects to Elders of the past, present and emerging. We are committed to collaboration that furthers self-determination and creates a better future for all.