

# Social Design AcademyAustralia

Building design capability for  
social impact and systems change

*2026 Program Brochure*



# About the Social Design Academy (Australia)

The Social Design Academy (SoDA) is an 8-month, project-based program, which supports organisations, leaders, and practitioners, to deliver real world innovation projects, grow their design capability for social impact and build conditions for systems change.

Facilitated by our team of experienced social innovation practitioners, the Social Design Academy runs as an online program with fortnightly workshops, regular coaching sessions, and peer-to-peer meetups, alongside a cohort of like-minded professionals and organisations.

*\*If you don't have a team and would like support to form one, please [contact us](#).*



## Identify a project

Identify a real world priority project within the organisation



## Bring a team

We recommend 2-3 team members to provide peer support and increase uptake of new ways of working\*



## Learn along the way

Over 8 months, complete the project with targeted learning and coaching



## Create impact

Implement innovation, and secure long term shifts in mindsets and skills.

# Why join?

The Social Design Academy welcomes professionals from a wide range of sectors, including not-for-profits, government, and social enterprise. Participants choose SoDA for its practical teaching from experienced practitioners, connection with a diverse cohort, and the chance to directly apply skills through real-life projects.



Get bespoke design support and coaching to deliver a priority project for your organisation



Build innovation and design capabilities to apply to complex social issues and systems change



Be connected to a community of like-minded professionals and organisations

"This course has really helped add to my toolkit. It's not just been a theoretical course, you get to embed it into your practice."

*Helena Shojaei, Principal Project Officer,  
Department of Communities WA*

"It has been a great team building process, we now all talk a similar language and have a new set of shared experiences to draw on when we are considering innovation and service design."

*Andrea Dwyer, Director Innovation,  
Anglicare Victoria*

# Intended outcomes

The Social Design Academy is intended to build design and innovation capability to help shift complex social challenges and create better outcomes for people and communities.

## **For individuals**

Building design capabilities to be applied in social innovation projects.

## **For organisations**

Building innovation capacity, solving real-world problems, and developing leaders who think differently.

## **For systems**

Building capacity to shift complex social challenges and make the kind of impact Australia needs.

# Program content

The Social Design Academy program focuses on developing your team's ability to apply design methodologies to social issues, build conditions for systems change, and lead change through complexity. Topics include:

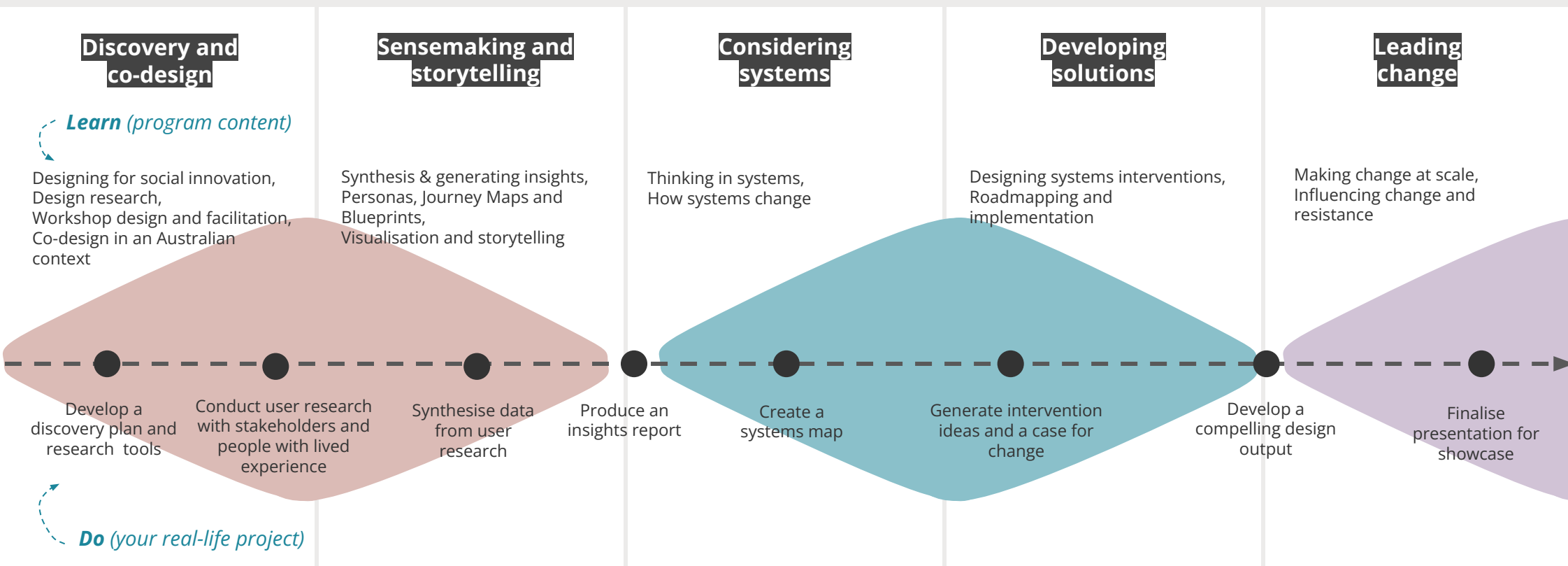
Introduction to co-design	Personas, journey maps and service blueprints	Generating ideas
Designing with First Nations people	Visualisation and storytelling	Prototyping social interventions
Design research	Thinking in systems: building systems maps	Roadmapping and implementation
Workshop design and facilitation	How systems change: identifying leverage points	Creating the conditions to make change stick, at scale
Synthesis and generating insights	Designing systems interventions	Championing design for social innovation and systems change

*Program content may change depending on the feedback and learning needs of each unique cohort of participants*

# The SoDA journey

The program structure uses a parallel learning and project journey, coaching you through a real world project identified as a priority of your organisation while you build your design knowledge.

Each phase is designed to help your team learn key design skills, from discovery through to implementation, and to apply these directly into practice.



Although we have some suggested milestones to guide your project work, our facilitators will work with you and your team to establish which deliverables will be most useful for your project. You will receive regular feedback on your project work through coaching sessions.

\*Program structure may change depending on the feedback and learning needs of each unique cohort of participants

# A month in the life

The monthly learning cycle of a Design Academy participant

## WORKSHOP

*Professionally facilitated online (2.5 hours)*

Deep dives into design and innovation tools, skills, and approaches, led by experienced facilitators from the ThirdStory team and expert guests.

## MEETUP

*Professionally facilitated (~1.5 hours)*

An opportunity to connect with the cohort, further explore specific concepts or tools, and reflect on your learnings with peers.

## COACHING\*

*Online with ThirdStory facilitator*

Get bespoke advice and feedback as you develop your social innovation project. Teams each have 7 coaching sessions allocated across the program, and can choose how to schedule this time with their coach.

## WORKSHOP

*Professionally facilitated online (2.5 hours)*

Deep dives into design and innovation tools, skills and approaches as above, led by experienced facilitators from the ThirdStory team and expert guests.

*\*Some weeks could look slightly different depending on how teams decide to schedule their coaching hours*



# What you're working towards

## Learning outcomes

The Design Academy program will focus on developing your knowledge and expertise in designing for social innovation and systems change, as well as building wider design skills and creative confidence. We'll work towards a range of learning outcomes including:

-  **Greater confidence and competence in applying a range of design methods and techniques to complex social challenges**
-  **Gaining a systems view on social challenges, and developing confidence in building conditions for system change**
-  **Confidence to lead and implement projects for social innovation and systems change**

## At the end of the program, you'll take home...

### **The program content and resources**

You will have access to all program resources, including slide decks and recordings from workshops and meetups. These will be available for download throughout the program via a Miro board.

### **Deliverables from your real-world project**

Across the program, we'll be supporting you to lead a real-world project and to create a series of deliverables that demonstrate your design skills and generate genuine social impact. You'll receive coaching and feedback as you develop discovery tools, an insights report, a systems map, and an output tailored specifically to your project, as well as a final presentation of your work.

### **A SoDA Certificate**

Along with the outputs and impact of your real-world project, you'll leave the program with a personal certificate to officially confirm your completion of the Design Academy.



# The team behind SoDA

The Social Design Academy is delivered by ThirdStory staff with complementary expertise in capability building, co-design, facilitation, community engagement, research, and systems change. Our team is experienced in leading design work in the social, education and health systems, and will be sharing practical learnings with participants throughout the program.



**Jethro Sercombe**  
**Director Innovation Practice**

Jethro is an experienced not-for-profit leader, and is passionate about the potential innovative social services and adaptive systems to respond to complex issues. Prior to joining the ThirdStory team, Jethro dedicated his work to youth homelessness, spending 17 years in Western Australia's NFP sector, culminating in the flagship project Foyer Oxford. He was named one of Business News' 40 under 40 (2013) and awarded a Westpac Social Change Fellowship (2019).



**Emma Whettingsteel**  
**Senior Project Lead**

Emma works in the middle spaces between research, built environment practice and social innovation. At ThirdStory, Emma leads projects that span highly relational local engagement to large-scale design and evaluation. With a PhD in Interior Architecture, Emma shares research and visual storytelling skills with participants.



**Claire Dodd**  
**Senior Project Lead**

Claire is a connector who thrives when working with people bringing diverse perspectives. Before joining ThirdStory, Claire's experience included roles delivering services directly to the community, as well as at a systems level, facilitating cross-sector collaboration through the WA Alliance to End Homelessness and as co-director of the Social Impact Festival. Passionate about nurturing the next generation of change makers, Claire is also a sessional academic at the University of WA.



**Keren Caple**  
**Chief Executive**

Keren is a systems change leader with a deep commitment to making social systems more human. With extensive experience in leading complex change initiatives, including driving education reform in Bermuda, Keren is a guest speaker at SoDA to help participants explore what it takes to make change at scale and lead through resistance.

# How to join

## **Expressions of Interest**

Fill in the [EOI form](#) and don't hesitate to [contact us](#) if you have any questions on the process. We encourage you to identify people within your organisation (or partners) who might be interested in joining as a team and working on a project together. We are happy to help you in this process.

## **Submit an application**

When applications open, complete and submit your application form (it's not too onerous, we promise!). We'll reach out to all teams who've submitted an EOI. Our team are available to support you with your application and answer any questions you might have.

## **Confirm your team's place**

Once you've submitted your application, we'll be in touch to make sure SoDA is the right fit for you. Following this chat, we'll confirm the outcome of your application, and if successful, you'll be invited to pay a deposit to secure your team's place in our 2026 cohort.

## **Team onboarding sessions**

We'll be in touch to line up a conversation with your team where we'll ask a bit more about what you're hoping to learn and the shape your project might take, and you can ask us any questions you might have about the program.

## **Program kick-off** *Early 2026*

After your onboarding session you'll receive a welcome pack and we'll introduce you to the rest of the cohort, before we kick off the program!

# The investment

## What's included

- 50+ hours of professionally facilitated workshops and learning sessions
- 7 personalised design coaching sessions (per team)
- Curated program materials and readings, including practical toolkits
- Experience applying design skills and tools to real-world projects
- Opportunities to connect and learn with like-minded peers
- Access to experts in design, innovation and systems change
- A dedicated space to commit time and energy to building design capabilities in your organisation

## Pricing details per participant

Standard rate for non-profit, government, social enterprise and ACCO participants\*

**\$9,990 ex. GST**

**Early bird offer  
10% off**

*If you sign up by the end of  
the financial year  
30 June 2025*

**\*Please note discounts are available for additional participants per team. [Contact us](#) for more details.**

In previous years, ThirdStory has secured funding to offer half priced places to a limited number of participants. There may be potential for subsidies for those who identify as First Nations, Lived Experience practitioners, or are from a small organisation. Please indicate this in your application.

If you are a funder interested in subsidising SoDA places, you can register your interest [here](#).

A close-up photograph of a person's hands writing on a white document with a green pen. The person is wearing a ring on their left hand. The background is blurred, showing a red object and a patterned surface.

## Express Your Interest Now

Complete our **Expression of Interest Form** to learn more and gain support in your application or participation.

For any questions, contact the Design Academy team at [designacademy@thirdstory.org](mailto:designacademy@thirdstory.org)

[Expressions of Interest](#)

[Visit our website](#)

# About ThirdStory

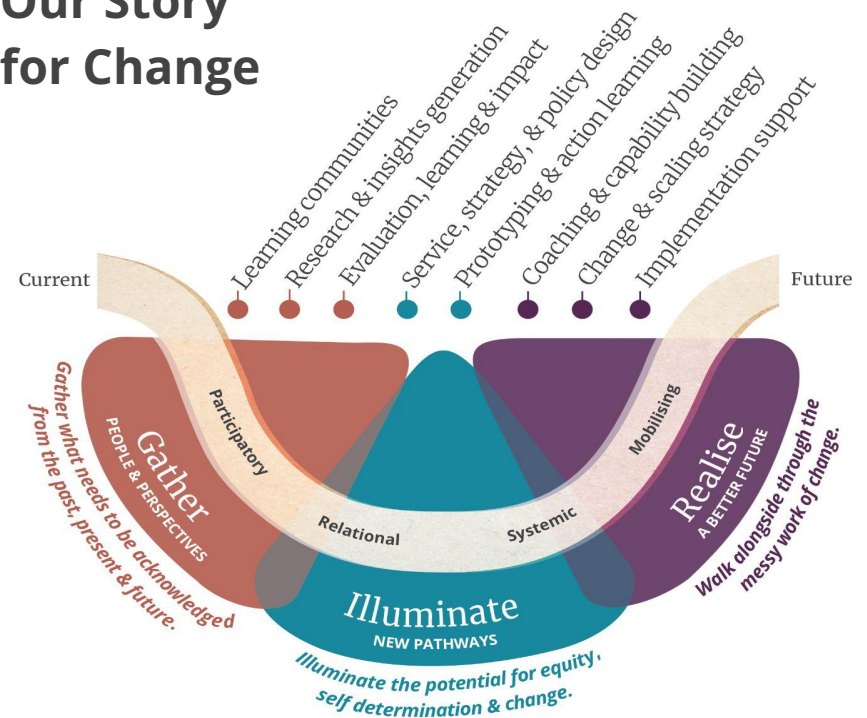
[ThirdStory](#) (formerly Innovation Unit Australia New Zealand) is a trusted partner for innovation and change. With operations in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and Bermuda and the Caribbean, our approach is informed by two decades of partnerships and projects in local and international contexts.

At ThirdStory, we collaborate with communities, government and others to develop, grow and scale new possibilities. Our multidisciplinary team of social innovators focus not on problems and symptoms but on the **ambitions, needs and potential** that communities hold.

Our partners and clients engage us to convene diverse stakeholders; design services, strategy and policy; prototype new ideas; help them with learning, research and evaluation; and support capability building, change and scale.

The Design Academy initially started to run in the UK in 2021 (under Innovation Unit). We adapted the program to our Australian context in 2022 and have been running the program successfully over the last three years, supporting 45 participants across 15 organisations.

## Our Story for Change





# FAQs

## How much time do I need to dedicate to this program?

You will need to dedicate at least half a day per week to this program. This includes time spent in sessions, as well as time spent working on projects. The weeks on which you have workshops will be more time demanding due to workshops lasting 2.5 hours. We expect the time demands of your project work to vary throughout the program, with more and less intensive periods.

## What do the project and deliverables consist of?

SoDA is designed to be undertaken by teams completing a real-world design project, so you can apply the design skills and tools you are learning about in your project and receive feedback regularly throughout the program to grow your practice.

Throughout the program, you'll undertake a real-world design project in a small group, with expert coaching and peer feedback.

Examples of deliverables you may create as part of your project include:

- A research plan, interview guide or workshop plan
- An insights report detailing the discovery methods you used, and the most important things you learnt in that process
- A journey map or service blueprint
- A systems map sharing the understanding you've built of the complex relationships and dynamics perpetuating your chosen problem
- A compelling design output, tailored to your project, that builds on your learnings to make a tangible intervention in the relevant system

At the end of the program, you will present your project work to your peers within the cohort as well as a broader group of peers and colleagues at our SoDA Showcase events.

## Is the SoDA Certificate officially recognised or accredited by professional or academic organisations?

Not for 2026 unfortunately.

# Contact us

For any questions on the Social Design Academy, please contact our team at:

**[designacademy@thirdstory.org](mailto:designacademy@thirdstory.org)**

**[www.thirdstory.org](http://www.thirdstory.org)**

## We are currently supported by



*In 2024 and 2025, this program was made possible by Meshpoints, an initiative supported by Lotterywest and Spacecubed, which exists to build a stronger culture of entrepreneurship and innovation in WA.*