

DISINFORMATION IN THE CITY

PLAYBOOK CO-DESIGN
PROCESS OVERVIEW

G | M | F
IDEAS LEADERSHIP HOPE



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Melbourne Centre
for Cities

DISINFORMATION IS IMPACTING CITIES. IN EXTRAORDINARY TIMES OF RAPID INFORMATION SHARING, DISTRUST AND DISRUPTION, CITIES ARE ON THE FRONT LINE OF DISINFORMATION IMPACT. LOCAL AUTHORITIES ARE THE MOST ACCESSIBLE LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT TO THE PEOPLE AND THEY ARE TASKED WITH LEADING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EVER MORE COMPLEX SOCIETAL AND GLOBAL CHALLENGES. IN THIS UNPRECEDENTED SPACE, CITIES HAVE REQUESTED A PLAYBOOK TO GUIDE EVIDENCE-BASED RESPONSE TO DISINFORMATION IN THE UNIQUE CITY CONTEXT.

Background

Disinformation and misinformation are nothing new in cities globally, with a long history of both sharing inaccurate information – misinformation, and concerted fabrications that are deliberately misleading – disinformation¹. From anti-Semitic campaigns to 9/11 conspiracies, there have been examples of disinformation throughout modern history. However, during the past decade disinformation has exploded in both prevalence and impact.

In the city realm, those responsible for urban governance – both elected representatives and city officials – are increasingly faced with the consequences of concerted disinformation campaigns. These erode city capacity to address collective challenges including climate change, public health, and social cohesion. The 15 Minute Cities campaign, which advocates a planning framework to allow residents to access all that they need within a 15-minute walk or cycle has led to protests on multiple continents, and death threats to Council staff in the UK². The UN's non-binding resolution on sustainable development, Agenda 21, has been reframed as 'linchpin in a plot to subjugate humanity' by lobbying groups that have successfully seen anti-Agenda 21 legislation introduced across the US³. A city declaration of climate emergency in the Australian city of Onkaparinga saw protests erupt in the council chamber, with staff and councillors evacuated for their safety⁴. Anecdotally, disinformation campaigns related to climate change are influencing the functioning of city governance in cities across Australia and globally. Yet disinformation is not limited to climate action, with prominent campaigns of dissemination in relation to COVID-19 vaccines⁵, migration⁶ and religious diversity⁷. This is a far reaching issue facing cities across the globe.

Playbook Approach

Understanding how disinformation spreads, and how to respond effectively, is increasingly critical for city governments tasked with leading and implementing effective collective decisions. Such information is constantly evolving, and responses are being developed and refined at various levels. Fact checking labs have sprung up from Melbourne⁸ to Madrid⁹. Disinformation registers and FAQ pages abound on the websites of electoral commissions¹⁰ and cyber-security agencies¹². Current knowledge, however, is focused primarily on the national and international realms and not readily accessible and translatable for the specifics of city governance. This playbook will collate city experiences of disinformation, existing scholarship and global responses, working with academics, city representatives and other relevant organisations to translate this to the specific contextual framework within which cities operate.

¹ <https://www.apa.org/topics/journalism-facts/misinformation-disinformation>

² <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-02-27/the-15-minute-city-conspiracy/102015446>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2015/jun/24/agenda-21-conspiracy-theory-sustainability>

⁴ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-01-18/police-called-to-city-of-onkaparinga-council-meeting/101866018>

⁵ Pertwee, E., Simas, C. & Larson, H.J. (2022). An epidemic of uncertainty: rumors, conspiracy theories and vaccine hesitancy. *Nat Med* 28, 456–459. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41591-022-01728-z>

⁶ <https://www.smh.com.au/world/newspaper-report-of-mass-sexual-assault-by-refugees-in-frankfurt-was-baseless-police-say-20170216-gudybw.html>

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/sep/19/mayor-blames-leicester-hindu-muslim-unrest-on-social-media-disinformation>

⁸ <https://www.rmit.edu.au/about/schools-colleges/media-and-communication/industry/factlab>

⁹ <https://www.newtral.es/automated-fact-checking/>

¹⁰ <https://www.aec.gov.au/media/disinformation-register.htm>

¹¹ <https://elections.nsw.gov.au/integrity/disinformation-register>

¹² <https://www.cisa.gov/rumor-vs-reality>

Structure

The playbook will be developed through a series of three co-design workshops during early 2024. These will bring academics and city officials together to develop context-specific responses to disinformation. The group will comprise roughly 30 participants, who will co-design the playbook by requesting, receiving, and analysing information to develop collective playbook priorities. The same 30 people will participate in all three workshops, for continuity and sequential content development. Written content will be provided in accessible formats for busy professionals prior to each workshop, and the two-hour workshops will then be used to rapidly analyse, critique, and progress the playbook development.

Participants will be provided with the following for review and completion.

- Terms of Reference
- Confidentiality Agreement
- Pre-Survey

Before each of the workshops, participants will be provided with collated information for their review and consideration. This will be drawn upon in the session, with an assumption that participants will have some familiarity with the contents prior to the workshop. The language of delivery will be English.

The group will be surveyed prior to the workshops and the collated, de-identified responses provided as pre-reading material prior to each workshop. This will allow confidential input, whilst also maximising useable time within workshops.

Participant Selection

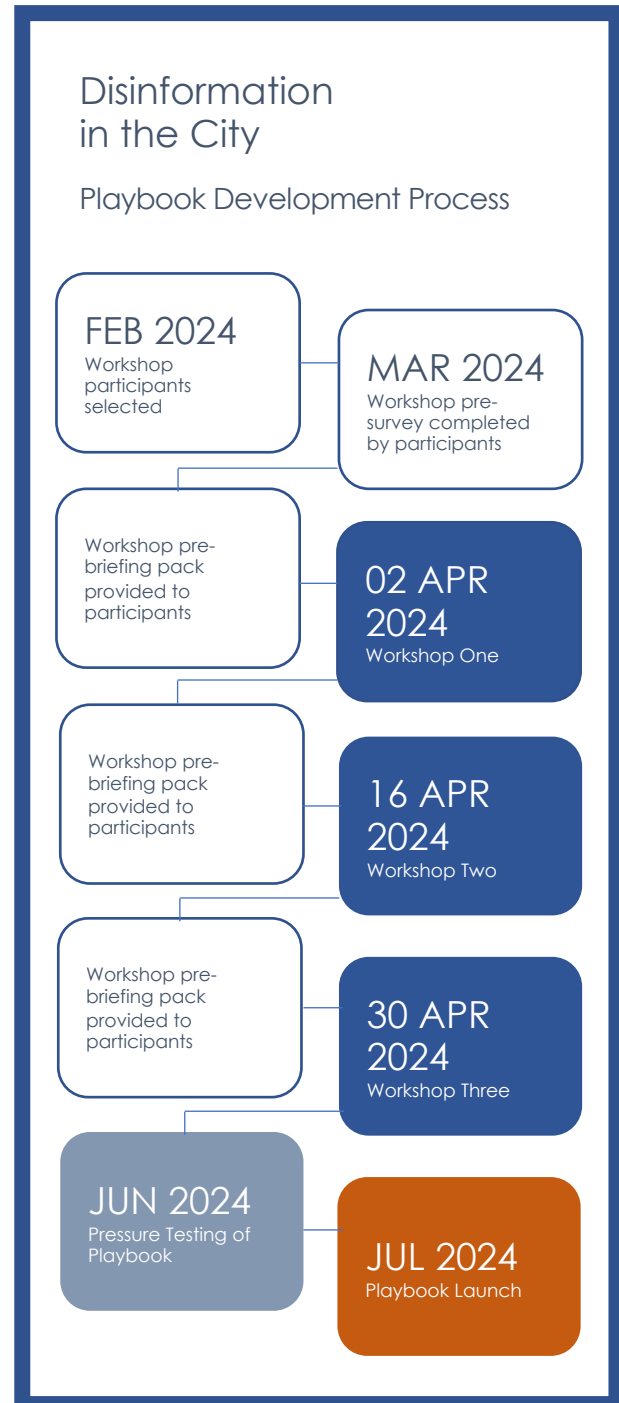
Participants will be selected through an Expression of Interest process. These will be accepted via an online form, and the project team will compile the final panel of city or network representatives, civil society, academics, and other stakeholders as relevant, based on the following criteria:

1. Expertise and relevance of experience
2. Diversity of representation: geographic, demographic, and disciplinary

Participation in the co-design process will be confidential, and all participants will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement as part of the group's terms of reference. Participants will be able to elect to be identified, or to self-identify, but will not be able to identify each other unless explicitly requested.

To **express interest in participating**, please visit:

<https://sites.research.unimelb.edu.au/cities/news-and-events/news/eoi-disinformation-in-the-city-playbook>



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IDEAS LEADERSHIP HOPE

Workshop One: Tuesday 02 April 2024 (2 hours)

Location: Hybrid online/Naarm (Melbourne), Australia

This workshop will focus on establishing the process and scope of discussions and setting the context for playbook development. It will include baseline content and discussions about what disinformation is, how and why it is created, spread and used, and how disinformation is experienced in cities specifically. Workshop participants will also collectively determine the thematic areas for exploration in Workshop Two.

Pre-reading provided will include:

- An accessibly written review of current literature, including scholarly, industry reports (grey literature) and media articles on the topic of disinformation (general) and in cities.
- Collated survey responses.

Workshop Two: Tuesday 16 April 2024 (2 hours)

Location: Hybrid online/Naarm (Melbourne), Australia

This workshop will focus on the thematic impacts of disinformation in cities including, for example:

- Governance and policymaking
- Health and wellbeing
- Gender equity and diversity
- Climate action and sustainability
- Organisation, people and culture
- Communications

Participants will then determine response areas for exploration in Workshop Three.

Pre-reading provided will include:

- An accessibly written review of current literature, including scholarly, industry reports (grey literature) and media articles on the topic of disinformation specific to the elected themes.
- Collated survey responses.

Workshop Three: Tuesday 30 April (2 hours)

Location: Hybrid online/ Naarm (Melbourne), Australia

This workshop will focus on city responses, drawing on global expertise and advice from different levels of government. This includes policy settings, thematic responses, and multi-level action, including creating enabling operating environments. Participants will then prioritise and refine themes and content for playbook.

Pre-reading provided will include:

- An accessibly written review of current literature, including scholarly, industry reports (grey literature) and media articles on the topic of disinformation responses.
- Collated case studies: City responses to disinformation (and related)
- Collated survey responses

Playbook Pressure-Testing: June 2024

*City leaders and other key stakeholders
(not included in workshops)*

Following the completion of the three workshops, the draft playbook will be provided to key industry leaders, sector experts and scholars for 'pressure testing'. They will be asked to assess the viability of implementation and identify any additional barriers or key opportunities left unexplored.

Disinformation in the City Playbook Release: July 2024

The Disinformation in the City Playbook will be formally launched in July 2024, and disseminated through industry network partnerships, peak bodies, and directly through social media and mass media avenues.

Following the completion of the process, participants will be invited to participate in an evaluation survey to reflect on and evaluate this playbook development process.

DISINFORMATION IN THE CITY COLLABORATION

The development of this playbook is a partnership between the Melbourne Centre for Cities and German Marshall Fund of the United States. It is part of a broader research collaboration on Disinformation in the City which includes an interdisciplinary, cross-institutional team.

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The Melbourne Centre for Cities is designed to foster responsible and cosmopolitan city leadership, and the information it needs, in an interconnected and increasingly urbanised planet. It works across the Faculties of Science, Arts, Architecture, Building and Planning, and Law, at the University of Melbourne. We acknowledge we work, study and travel from the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nations, and do so on many other lands of Traditional Owners domestically in what is now known as Australia as well as overseas, and would like to pay our respect to their elders past, present and emerging in our form commitment toward reconciliation and opening up spaces for indigenous voices in cities.