



Community planning guidelines

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Summary: Steps for creating your community plan

Step one: Assessment - community readiness

Check in with your 'why' and understand the commitment required

Step two: Create a structure

Establish your planning group and identify the management structure

Step three: Gather information and data

Gather key information and data about your community

Step four: Engage with the community

First phase of engagement - inform your community about who you are and your purpose

Step five: Analyse community feedback

Collate and analyse the feedback received by your community and stakeholders

Step six: Draft your plan

Start the design of your draft plan from all information received

Step seven: Engage again

Second phase of engagement - share your draft plan with your community

Step eight: Finalise and activate your plan

Start working on the actions in your plan and regularly check progress

A guide to developing your community plan

Introduction

The Whakatāne District is largely made up of many rural communities, all of which have their own unique identity, history and special characteristics. From inland Te Urewera to the vast stretch of sea from Ōhiwa to Ōtamarakau, to the springs of Braemar and everything in between, communities have aspirations they want to achieve. To help them do this, the Council's Community Partnerships team provides support and advice to communities that want to develop their own community plan.

A community plan is an effective tool that captures and prioritises the aspirations of the community and provides a blueprint for how to get to the desired destination. There are no specifics or limitations about what can go into a community plan, but the intention is that it covers a broad range of community goals and issues. The plans are essentially the voice of the community, a collective vision, developed by the community for the community through input and feedback.

Each plan relies on a group of committed people who give their time voluntarily to drive the development of the plan, and then support the delivery of the identified actions. Your plan can be as simple or as complex as you want it to be. The aim is not to try and fix everything, but to provide a road map to mobilise your community to begin to act.

Once a community plan is developed, it is used to develop direct relationships with stakeholders providing services in the area to achieve the outcomes. A community plan can also be used to support appropriate funding applications.

This guide takes you through a simple, but flexible, step-by-step process for developing and implementing your community plan.

Step one: Assessment – community readiness

The decision to develop a community plan is a commitment requiring time and dedication by all who agree to take on this journey. It is essentially making a pledge to your community that, collectively, you are prepared to lead them in achieving their aspirations.

Some of the key reasons for developing a community plan can include exploring ways to address issues, identifying community goals and aspirations and/or creating opportunities for collective action.

To drive successful community plans and outcomes, it is important that the community is at the core of all decisions. There can be huge satisfaction in being part of change, creating community connections, developing new relationships and achieving the aspirations of your community.

Once you have had *all* the necessary conversations within your community and you have confirmed a commitment and consensus to develop a community plan, you are now ready to move to Step Two of the process to drive your community's goals and aspirations.

Step two: Create a structure

Establishing a strong foundation and structure is important. That is, identifying the right people and decision-making structure you will use as you progress your community plan.

Foundation: People capability and capacity

The most valuable resource is your people. When identifying the right people, you will need to consider their capabilities, who they represent, what they will do and what other resources and skills they can provide.

It is important to ensure that you have connections with all sectors within your community. An effective way to achieve this is to build a lead/project team that includes wide community representation.

For example:

- Whānau/iwi/hapū
- Community groups/service providers
- Youth
- Local businesses
- Schools/kōhanga reo/early childhood education providers
- Elected members
- People with connections and knowledge i.e. disability, environmental, cultural etc

The important thing is to find people who are passionate about their community and want to drive change. Having representation from locally based groups and organisations can also provide increased access to in-kind and funding contributions and provide future buy-in from their members.

You may also want to consider how you can accommodate new people into the group as word gets around that you are developing a plan.

Structure and governance

The next part of the process is to consider what type of management structure will best serve your purpose for the delivery of your plan. You may consider using an established (umbrella) charitable trust, register as your own charitable trust or incorporated society, or simply remain a community group/collective. Either way, there are pros and cons to each structure and it would be beneficial to discuss the different options to ensure you are creating a strong, fit-for-purpose structure for your group.

Let's explore some of these structures.

Umbrella organisation

Setting up under an existing organisation can be a less onerous option for your community group. It removes the responsibility of any formal organisational compliance requirements. However, you will need an already-established Trust to agree to your community group becoming a subsidiary of their organisation. Developing a Memorandum of Understanding between the two groups is advised. The umbrella organisation will be the applicant whenever your group seeks external funding where the applicant must be an incorporated entity, and will have overall responsibility as to how the funds are spent and accounted for. The umbrella organisation will need to also check that creating a community plan is a permitted activity under their Deed / Constitution.

Registered entity

The most common community entity is a charitable trust or incorporated society. If you choose to create a new entity, you will need to follow the steps outlined on the Charities Services and NZ Companies Office websites. This can be a lengthy and involved process. The establishment of a formal entity to oversee the implementation of the plan could be an action of the community plan. Therefore, you may need to consider a combination of having an umbrella organisation to kick start you until you can become your own entity.

Community group

Remaining an informal community group is absolutely fine. It means you have no formal compliance responsibilities, and you are free to operate as fluidly as you see fit. Some funders will approve community groups as applicants, providing they meet the criteria of the fund being applied for.

Careful consideration needs to be given to how funds are accounted for, and good records of any decision-making are kept, allowing transparency with your community.

Collective agreements

Collective agreements can be formed with other community groups that are already registered entities. Working together to help identify key leads for project/s and streamline funding avenues can fast-track the process of achieving community goals.

Good practice

As a newly formed group, you should follow good governance guidelines. This includes providing evidence of progress and financial accountability.

During your community plan development phase, use the time to meet regularly. Set agendas, take minutes and present financials (however small at the time) to show funders your governance group is meeting its responsibilities and is up to the task of managing the project.

Step three: Gather information and data

Now that you've established your group and structure, it's time to gather all your community's key information and data. This is a vital step in the process of developing your community plan, as it builds a full picture of who you are as a community and provides knowledge that will help support the decisions you make collectively. It's also a great opportunity to acknowledge the past and provide an overview of what is already happening. The following are some key pieces of information about your community that would be helpful to gather:

- Demographics and stats e.g. ethnicity/age/population etc.
- The history of your community/town e.g. whānau/hapū/ iwi
- Community groups and clubs
- Local businesses and industries
- Local resources and infrastructure
- Local boundaries/special areas
- Schools/kōhanga reo/early childhood education providers
- Service providers i.e. health providers, government agencies etc.

Other key questions that can help guide this process are (note this is not an exhaustive list):

- What is this community known for?
- Are there other existing community or related plans?
- What previous community engagement has been undertaken?
- What's awesome about this community?
- What community aspirations / challenges have already been recorded?
- SWOT – what are our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats?

When you have completed the research phase, it should be formatted into a report, highlighting all key information and the current state and landscape of your community. The report should include key information from (or links to) any confirmed community engagement opportunities previously undertaken. The report should outline what community input was received and any gaps or opportunities identified.

The completed report can be used for the next step, which is the first phase of engagement with your community.

Step four: Engage with the community (phase one)

In the first phase of engagement, it will be good to introduce who your group is and its purpose. This is also an opportunity to share with your community the findings of your research and call for further input from your community.

Take your time planning this initial consultation and engagement process. It's an extremely important stage of developing your community plan because it's the first opportunity to begin capturing your community's voice. This first stage of engagement may take weeks or months to complete. You want to be able to reach into all corners of your community, different personalities, ages, ethnicities, genders, social preferences, working, non-working as well as solo mums and dads etc. So, you will need to think about where and when the best time is to engage.

The following are some different ways you can undertake engagement with your community:

Collaborate with Mana Whenua

It is important that Mana whenua (whānau, hapū and iwi), as part of Te Tiriti o Waitangi – the Treaty of Waitangi partnership, are invited to the table at the start of the engagement process. Seek representation and input from them into the foundations of the community plan i.e. vision, values and key priority areas that have been voiced by their whanau/hapū and iwi. They are also likely to contribute to the historical story of your place and identify places of cultural significance.

Social media

Online surveys are a popular and useful option for consultation and engagement. Make sure the information you provide is not too wordy, keep it simple and encourage people to use the comments function, with the option to remain anonymous. There are some particularly good online tools which you can use to create your own survey and to create a short video on your group's purpose and what you are wanting to achieve.

Events

Events are a great way to capture a wide-ranging audience. It is also a nice way to make your group known to the community. Communities may hold events such as Christmas in the Park, Easter activities, concerts and market days, which you can take part in. Alternatively, hold an event specific to gathering feedback and offer things such as a free BBQ, entertainment and kids play area to entice participation.

Community meetings/gatherings

You may take a more formal approach to consultation and engagement by scheduling community feedback meetings at the local hall or school. This is a fantastic opportunity to target specific groups aligned to schools such as parents, teachers and rangatahi.

Mail drops

As 'old school' as this may seem, mail drops continue to be an effective way of gathering feedback, particularly from the elderly community. A form with general details, a questionnaire and a place to comment should suffice.

Articles in local publications and newsletters are also a good way to reach people who are not connected online.

Tips:

- For all opportunities, provide a contact person and phone number / email address for comments, questions, and responses.
- Make feedback interactive and fun. Encourage 'no answer is wrong' responses.
- Use maps of the community and different areas where people can pinpoint certain areas they want improved or changed.
- In all engagement you undertake, it's still essential to capture people's input and feedback
- Create an 'interested people' mailing list for future pānui/notices.
- You may want to identify a facilitator and administrator who can guide the conversation and capture notes.
- Write questions on flip sheets and use post-it notes for participants to write down their thoughts.
- Ensure there are refreshments and kai.
- Invite the community to contribute photos, maps and other resources that can be used in the plan.

Step five: Analyse community feedback

After each round of engagement, your planning team/group should analyse the feedback as soon as possible to ensure its essence is captured. Here are a few tips on what you can do to analyse feedback.

When collating your community input and data, you will start to see commonalities - grouping these into themes will give you key priority areas. Usually these will link back to what are often called the four pillars of wellbeing:

- Social Wellbeing (People) - Tangata Ora
- Cultural Wellbeing - Ahurea Ora
- Environmental Wellbeing - Whenua Ora
- Economic Wellbeing - Pakihi Ora

Once you have completed the exercise of grouping into themes, and depending on how much input you receive, it's recommended to do another round of engagement with your community to confirm priority goals under each of the four wellbeing's.

Tips

- To help flesh out the conversation, set aside a planning session or a series of community discussions based on each wellbeing.
- An online survey is an efficient way to determine community priorities.

When you have confirmed and identified priority goals for each wellbeing, and you are happy that you have all required information, then you're ready to start drafting your plan document.

Step six: Draft your plan

Throughout this process you have collected, analysed and confirmed enough information to produce a draft plan. What is required now is to transfer that information into a well laid-out, methodical and logical plan that can be easily understood by your community. Here are a few suggested headings to help you decide what content you would like to add into your plan.

Introduction

The first pages of your document are especially important, as they introduce who you are and the reason and purpose of your plan. There are many ways you can choose to begin your document. For example, you may include a mihi or a message from your chairperson or planning team, or if offered - a whakataukī from mana whenua. Whatever you decide, the introduction will set the tone of your plan from the beginning.

Setting your vision and mission

A vision and mission statements are a declaration of your plan's purpose and aspirations. These statements may already exist in your community. If not, you'll need to create new ones.

Once you have agreed on your overall vision and how you are going to work together, your group can start to weave in the specifics of what you are trying to achieve.

Community information and data

This section can be displayed as key information that you have gathered from your background research report. It is an opportunity to highlight your community's journey, history and who you are today, for example:

- Cultural history
- Local history
- Demographics
- Maps of your town and graphic images
- Community assets
- Infrastructure (services and facilities)

Four wellbeing section - Objectives and activities

Use this section to frame up what you are going to do, how you are going to do it, who will be involved and when you plan to do it. Under each section of the four wellbeing's, you should have:

- Priority goals/objectives
- Actions / leads and partners
- Stakeholders
- Timeframe

This will help your group identify what can realistically be achieved through your plan and when actions will be delivered. It can also assist your group to develop a work programme.

Remember this is a living document, nothing is cast in stone. Just because it's in writing doesn't mean it can't be amended to meet the changing environment. The environment will change over time, so give yourselves and your plan permission to be agile.

Tip

- Keep your writing simple to follow for everyone in your community. There are no set rules on how you produce your plan; it can be very visual, like a storyboard or video -whatever works for your community.

Step seven: Engage again (phase two)

Sharing the draft plan with your community recognises people's contributions, no matter how big or small. Valuing people helps them remain engaged with the process and potentially give more of their time to the cause.

You are now ready to take your draft plan to the community to seek validation that you have accurately captured the voice of all stakeholders. Make sure to include community providers, businesses, elected members, community boards and any other key groups and individuals in this engagement.

Engagement plan

An engagement plan ensures a consistent approach to communication and clarity of engagement across your community. Engagement is not 'one-size-fits-all', so knowing your audience and delivering the right messages in the right way is key to a successful outcome.

Developing an engagement plan will assist you to achieve the overall outcomes and goals of your plan. Some of the key benefits are:

- Informs your community and stakeholders about your community plan and provides a road map of ongoing engagement of how you intend keep them updated.
- Increases the opportunity for your plan to be widely accepted and supported
- Link with key stakeholders and agencies to identify any activities or projects that can potentially align with your plan e.g. council plans and projects.
- Opportunity to gather further feedback from your community and stakeholders regarding their opinions, support and create solutions for achieving your priorities and objectives

Some suggestions on ways you can start your community and stakeholder engagement are:

- You may want to develop resources that help the community understand the journey, how it began, what process was undertaken to inform the plan and how you arrived at the draft product.
- A one or two-page consultation summary that captures the essence of the plan is particularly useful if you are considering mail-drops or disseminating information via social media platforms.
- Media coverage is another effective tool to build awareness of your project and can be done through using key relationships and connections to local media.
- Create opportunities where you can present the plan to your community and stakeholders i.e. community events, meetings, online presentations, drop ins, existing community newsletters and linking with community network forums.

Step eight: Finalise and activate your plan

You will almost definitely need to make changes to your plan due to this consultation and engagement process. However, these should be relatively minor if your initial engagement was thorough, and your analysis of feedback was precise. It's now time to socialise and activate your plan.

This is when the real mahi gets done. While the plan belongs to the community, your group is the driver of the plan, ensuring that the plan is a living document and not something that sits on a shelf collecting dust.

Print off some hard copies to leave around the community; now you have a plan, it's good to continually socialise it with the community, local businesses, government agencies. You can offer to be a guest speaker at community events or hui, or mention the plan in your conversations with newcomers to your area.

Annual plan and budget

Pull together the first year of activities identified and agreed to from your community plan. This will be your group's actions for the next 12 months and essentially be your key performance indicators.

Identifying the resources needed to achieve each of your activities will give you a better understanding of what is required to achieve your goals. Through your community plan journey and through other means, you will have identified or met with stakeholders that have similar aspirations. These can be potential opportunities and avenues for you explore further by:

- Identifying funds or other funding opportunities that could be used to achieve actions in the plan. For example, philanthropic funds, Council funding rounds etc.
- Identifying stakeholders with similar aspirations who may wish to work in partnership with you to achieve community plan outcomes.

Tips

- Timing is everything, make sure you know when various grants open and close for applications.
- There are websites that can be accessed through your local library that will provide you with an array of philanthropic funders and have an easy search engine.
- Your local council and/or community board may offer grants funding opportunities and other ways to achieve outcomes in the plan.
- Your regional council may offer community grants focused on environmental projects.

Evaluation and review

Developing a schedule to measure and evaluate your community plan progress is an important component of achieving overall success and delivery of your community plan outcomes. Some of the reasons to have a schedule are:

- Keeps projects on track and informs of progress, including reporting on outcomes.
- Accountability of project leads and stakeholders to ensure there is achievement of project objectives.
- To ensure that efficient use of limited resources is effective to achieve outcomes.
- Identifies areas for improvement, understanding what is working and what is not.
- Sets out a plan for measuring key milestones, which can be shared to community and stakeholders for transparency and feedback.

It's important that you confirm a plan to review the community plan. For example, a full review in three years' time with annual reporting on progress to your community.

Tip

- Set clear expectations including evaluation parameters and timeframes, who will undertake the process and how you intend to report and inform your community and key stakeholders.

Acknowledgements:

Whakatāne District Council congratulates communities that have already undertaken community planning processes and encourages others to think about giving it a go. We hope this resource will help you on your journey.

For further information please contact the Community Partnerships Team on email:
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