

The Community Strategic Planning/Visioning Process

Produced by Futures Thinking Aotearoa (2008)

Introduction

This document has been produced by Futures Thinking Aotearoa (the NZ Futures Trust) to help communities identify important issues when preparing their plans for the future. Government legislation now requires local governments to prepare long-term strategies to assist them identify issues that should be taken into account when annual plans and budgets are being prepared. It is imperative this process be an amalgam of views put forward by the various communities that make up each local government area, after taking into account available money for carrying out the plans.

Other organisations, and even individuals, might find the process useful when building plans for the future. While it is not possible to forecast our futures, it is possible, now, to identify the major changes going on in the world that will likely impact on the way we will live. By taking these into account, there is a better chance of not being blind-sided by the changes that might otherwise cause significant disruption to our lives.

The Process

Necessary elements for a good process include:

- Having a purpose.
- Someone taking responsibility to ensure all steps in the process are completed
- Having an adequate resource base, people, time and dollars.
- Asking pertinent questions.
- Having a credible information base.
- Testing by reviewing against a background of current identified trends and drivers of change.
- Revisiting regularly.
- Works for those people who are involved.
- Being robust enough to be used by various types of communities.
- Being action oriented
- Has published results, in language able to be understood by a thirteen-year-old and kept up-to-date, ideally using a website.
- Is regarded as a 'journey' from now to the future.
- Participants taking a pride in the work they are doing.

This exercise should ideally include the major segments making up the community. e.g. age groups, ethnicity, special interest groups, geographic diversity (e.g. urban, rural), and social diversity (rich people, middle income, lower income etc).

Size of group – minimum of 12, maximum 250.

Minimum Time involved - 25 hours spread over 6 months with energy and enthusiasm

Techniques – the best processes have used:

- Face to face communication
- Facilitation by an experienced and neutral person
- An open-ended questioning approach and have not been overly time constrained but have had output targets set.
- A structured form e.g. using a checklist of topics (see below)
- Surveying and polling in a community to validate findings with larger group

A group of 'guardians of the process' over-viewing the project should ideally be established at the earliest stage to make sure that the key process steps are kept to.

The Process' Four Segments

This process is based on well proven community visioning processes performed worldwide over last 25-30 years, many of them now revisiting Visions done over 20 years ago!

There are four separate parts to the process which are best used sequentially

1. ***What do we want in our lives?***
List needs, aspirations, alternatives, trade-offs, on an agreed timeframe basis e.g 20-50 years from now.
2. ***Where are we now?*** (recognising that much has happened to get us where we are)
Performs a stock-take on key matters/issues and then develops the key uncertainties/drivers of change which will be in action over the agreed timeframe.
3. ***What is the difference between now and the future, and how could we get there ?***

Determines the choices and directions facing us in getting from where we are now, to where we want to be at some specific time in the future.

Makes a list of the differences between now and where we want to be in the future in time-framed manner e.g. what can be done in the next 5 years, in next 10, in next 20 etc and sets goals to get there.

4. *Who will do it and when?*

Determines, at least for the initial 5-10 year period, which groups making up the community will start taking any agreed action, often working collaboratively with others to achieve the agreed goals.

Step 1 What do we want/need in our lives? ("wants" must be realistic)

This step is one of brainstorming, with the group(s), what people would like to see happening at the end of the period agreed to e.g. 20 years. It keeps going until there is some cohesion about what people would like to concentrate on, assigning something tangible to each one.

Example checklist of topics

- Housing
- Natural (sustainable) environment
- Defence of the realm
- Law and order – personal safety
- Population/demographics
- Connectivity/access, (global and local)
- Education and training
- Social structures – hospitals, schools, shops, food,
- Adequate basic services infrastructure water, waste disposal/elimination systems,
- Employment – business economics, production,
- Health and well-being
- Recreation
- Government services
- Governance structures
- Belonging
- Sense of place
- Community spirit
- Tolerance
- Diversity

Step 2 Where are we now (in the community under study)?

This step need only cover detailed information that makes the community being studied different from the national scene. Below is a list, using the Wellington community, as an example. The list of topics can be added to, reduced or expanded as appropriate.

Political

- Capital city
- Government workers including MPs
- Embassies
- National offices (declining in number)
- Consultants/lobbyists
- Relatively (to rest of New Zealand) high average salaries

Economic

- National resources
- Research organisations
- Universities
- Major port with exports
- Airport
- Limited manufacturing
- Limited agriculture
- Horticulture/wine
- Transit centre/land transport transits
- High proportion of property and business services
- Creative industry sector
- Education (polytechnics)
- Retail
- Finance & Insurance
- NZ stock exchange

Social

- Cultural centre; Festival etc
- Ethnic diversity
- Socio-economic breakdown by area,
- Special demographics
- Education
- Strong NGO/NFP presence
- Collection of villages
- Significant rural and urban character
- Fastest growing area in New Zealand (Kapiti Coast)

Environmental

- Weather not climate
- Very diverse terrain impacting on transport infrastructure security and cost.
- Farming/forestry/fishing.
- Parks and reserves – restoration
- Exposure to natural hazards – e.g. earthquakes
- Harbour environment
- Cook Strait
- Long and varied coastline
- 5 distinct parts; Wellington/Hutt/Porirua/Wairarapa/Kapiti.

Technological

- Wellington City broadband infrastructure is largely in place
- Poor broadband coverage in rest of region.
- Public transport in need of substantial upgrading
- Research Institutes and commercial spin-offs
- Business Incubators
- Film industry
- Role of SME's in this area
- No power generation in the region
- Most infrastructure is old technology
- Waste systems need reviewing and being brought up-to-date
- Universities and research institutes provide well trained technology labour force
- Housing technology is outdated; insulation energy efficiency etc
- Vehicle fleet is 'oldish'
- Airport can be classed only as a 'regional' one because of physical constraints.
- Developing technology usage is low
- Main supplies come from out of the region e.g. energy

Other

- Sustainability of Region
- Employment of young and old people problematic
- Wide skill base available but significant shortages
- Family incomes situation

Form for this information

- Ideally needs a dedicated website with a good search engine so anyone can find relevant information

- Needs to be owned by someone in an authoritative position and kept up to date

Step 2 B: Dealing with Uncertainties and Drivers of Change

This step consists of identifying the uncertainties over the expected time period under study, and the external drivers of change over which the community being studied has no control. This information is important in establishing viable alternative futures. Suggested list is:

- Continuous stream of new knowledge leading to new technologies and ideas
- Water – surpluses and shortages (includes oceans)
- Social inequalities
- Globalisation versus localisation
- Changing international financial power centres
- Natural hazards including biological hazards e.g. earthquakes, pandemics etc.
- Climate change
- Belief systems and multi-ethnicity
- Population dynamics
- Energy; form, security & sustainability

Form

- This should be expressed as simple examples in the form of wildcards e.g.
- “ We get new knowledge about how to control diseases from birth by 2015”

Step 3. Differences between wants/needs and now

This is often the longest and most complex step and requires good facilitation. A good way to portray this information is in timelines for a group of wants/needs e.g. transportation, showing at various times what new technology could be adapted, what communities it could serve and what the effects would be if wildcards and the change drivers from Step 2B came into play.

Form

- Tables and plans

Step 4. Action Plan

This step takes the differences from Step 3 and determines who could work together in putting some of them into place. It asks the personal question “What can **you** do?” to all the participant groups.

This step

- Depends on the enthusiasm for the process of the ‘communities’
- Picks up their local interests
- Encourages sharing with other ‘communities’
- Encourages dialogue with Councils, especially as part of the LTCCP process.
- Plans to formally revisit in three years to tie in with LTCCP process.

Form

- Action lists and plans published on central place and linked to Council/Govt websites
- A dedicated website would be an ideal co-ordinating location for multiple Community Strategic Plans

References.

The following resources were used in the preparation of this document.

"A Guide To Community Visioning-Hands On Information For Local Communities"

by Steven Ames,
Publisher Oregon Visions Project, 2001.

Robin Gunston, Experienced futures thinking consultant and group facilitator,
Wellington

The wisdom, experience, and enthusiasm of the FTA members who contributed at the meetings held to develop this approach.