

Local and Regional Partnerships and Governance Forum Held on 23rd April 2004

Summary Forum Report Back

**Cohosted by the Strengthening Communities through
Local Partnerships Research Project and Sustainable
Auckland**

The forum was attended by around 55 people from a range of agencies. Following welcomes and a presentation on the wider context for collaboration, a number of workshop discussions were held. Copies of presentation overheads are available on www.lpg.org.nz along with a summary of workshop discussions.

General feedback on the Forum was very positive. Many spoke about the need to “take time out” to discuss, debate and think about the wider drivers and issues surrounding collaboration and partnership. In acknowledging that this kind of working is part of a new national/international trend, participants saw value in **regularly** and **collectively** reflecting on people’s knowledge and experiences of implementing interagency collaboration.

Next Steps:

A report back on the Forum will go to an upcoming meeting of the combined Sustainable Auckland Steering Group and Sustainable Cities Senior Officials Group, for further discussion.

The Research project continues until the end of 2004 and further papers/reports will be posted on www.lpg.org.nz . While there are no plans for a similar co-hosted follow up forum, the Research Project is likely to hold a more academic based seminar (venue/timing/location yet to be confirmed) later this year – April Forum attendees will be advised of this event.

However, agencies/organizations who would like to follow up on any points from the notes or for research team to members to discuss/present key findings of the research to their organization/networks etc are welcome to contact any of the Team below:

Wendy Larner, Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Auckland
ph 09-373 7599 w.larner@auckland.ac.nz (returning from the USA in late July)

David Craig – Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Auckland ph 09-373 7599 ext 88657 da.craig@auckland.ac.nz

Project Manager: Maria Butler, Local Partnerships and Governance Research Group at the University of Auckland, Ph 09-373 7599 ext 88665
md.butler@auckland.ac.nz

Kind Regards and thanks for your participation on April 23rd
the Local Partnerships and Governance Forum Working Group

Workshop: Working Regionally and Locally

Presentation

Key messages:

- A number of issues have been driving regional and local government to work together, including passenger transport, government agendas and Sustainable Auckland.
- The Regional Growth Forum has been a success story because it shows that people can get together, can get results on the ground, has looked at what a sustainable infrastructure might look like and it provides a vision.
- Big picture thinking is the key. While the central government sector has a clear philosophical statement and clear programme, the Auckland region lacks an agreed position or approach. A big challenge is to work out where local effort sits in regard to the macro-economic environment and to develop a vision at the local government level and a coherent response across the region, and hold onto it.
- The concept of region is used differently by different people, and in different contexts, so it is difficult to define what is regional and what is local. At present, this is largely determined by what has been done in the past.
- Sustainable Auckland has developed important relationships but we need to be strategic to build on the strengths we've got and ensure that delivery and outcomes reflect what is wanted by communities.

Discussion

The discussions were far ranging and somewhat disparate. However, key concerns focused around the process and outcomes.

1. Process

- There is a need to define what the different levels of government actually do as few subject matters can be viewed or dealt with on just one level. There is also an issue of how we partner with all levels of government at all times and at all stages of the process.
- Sustainable development has to happen at the ground level therefore we need to get local people involved. The communities outcomes process offers a major opportunity to look at options, build on what has been done, identify gaps, and get more engagement with communities. However, it is not always clear who the people are that need to be engaged and getting the community involved and feeling like they are involved is tricky. What is clear is that engagement can't just be left to the local people, government must be used as the vehicle and people need to feel comfortable with the levels of the process. It is also important to let people know what the parameters are when asking the question "what do you want".
- A question was raised about whether the process should be bottom up or top down because we will get different perspectives from each of these approaches and the approaches have different effects on the community. It was noted that big macro issues are unlikely to come out of the community consultations, so we need both approaches.

- An important goal of the process is to get more specific about the decisions and the conversations, and to ensure that getting the process right is not used as an excuse to delay things that we already know we need.
- Identifying sources of control around the process is difficult. Three examples were raised. First, we can't always say what should be controlled at the local, regional or central level as so many issues overlap and are interrelated. Second, that enabling people to do things at the community level can be problematic and risky because of underlying institutionalised systemic issues. Third, that government has little control over much of the activity in the private sector.
- The point was made that the decision-making processes we have aren't progressing at a fast enough rate to deal with the problems that are arising. The question was asked whether we are trying to analyse a problem with a model that isn't really relevant anymore and whether the whole partnership process is riddled with tradition and assumptions.

2. Outcomes

- It was generally agreed that many people and communities, particularly Maori communities, are tired of being consulted and disillusioned with the process because of a lack of outcomes. The feeling is that we keep reinventing processes rather than delivering results.
- It is important that we focus on the response, which requires a commitment across the board. This requires us to look at what works to achieve outcomes and provide feedback on what works (best practice models?). We also need to look at the levers that we have available and the real drivers of change.
- Resources to undertake the task were a key concern. It was felt that we might need to develop a practical response that focuses on a few key areas.

Workshop: Strategic Brokers and Resourcing Coordination

1. Other Words/Terms for "Strategic Broker"

- Broker skills sit across many positions rather than necessarily within fulltime jobs with broker type titles
- Job titles change according to the culture of each organisation
 - Purpose of the job needs to be clear but no need for job title standardisation
- Need to promote bi-cultural and multi-cultural approaches to broker terminology ie. how are these skillsets reflected/valued/named in other cultures??

2. About the Brokerage Function....

- Focus for broker discussion shouldn't be just on the individual but on the organisation ie. organisational as well as workforce development
- How does the organisation value the brokerage function?
- What values base underpins both the organisation and the brokerage function?
- Need to focus on strategic brokering (the function) rather than strategic brokers (the person, job title)
- Need to appreciate and respect that collaboration and brokering are organic processes and very much dependent upon needs, personalities and timing

-shouldn't try to put brokers into too tight a box or attempt to managerialise it or we could lose the flavour
- BUT there is a balance, certainly by writing and discussing the brokerage function you do start to recognise and appreciate these often intangible skillsets – which very much need validation and recognition in order to grow.

3. **Broker Skillsets – are they generic or different for people working in central government, local government and community organisations?**

- Rather than skillset differences between the levels above, skillsets differ between whether you're working at the strategic or operational level
- Some specific skillsets included:
 - Ability to move across silos (CG)
 - Ability to reframe problems and take horizontal ownership, and encourage others to do the same (CG, LG)
 - Advocacy skillsets more prominent in community brokers – have to often yell louder to be heard. Also the issue of brokers taking on more political roles when Boards may be weak, individual non-governmental CEOs also often expected to take on a more public profile
 - Middleman/piggy in the middle/intermediary – often a role that local govt brokers find themselves in, similar situation also now experienced by regional central govt staff also
- Some generic skillsets included:
 - Leadership as opposed to an individual leader – not just in terms of what you are able to do yourself but who else you can influence/inspire/take with you
 - Ability to tap into people at the right level
 - Ability and comfort in working in a world of ambiguity, mess, slowness and complexity = and staying optimistic
 - Political acumen and professionalism key – applies to CG, LG and community, in CG terms though it means being politically neutral in a very political environment
 - Strong networking – the broader networks the better, means you can make the connections and join the dots and take a multidisciplinary/sustainable approach
 - Being a good listener and know how to include people
 - Being aware of diversity and how to change tack quickly to promote diversity/inclusion
 - Being a translator and re-translator of information/policy/programmes etc up and down and down and up

4. **Resourcing Coordination – is it happening, is it enough, where are the gaps?**

- Function needs to be part of everyone's job description and the way that organisations do business
 - A need to change baseline behaviour, which in terms of resourcing means baseline funding as opposed to one off project funding
- Need to look at cultural change (and resources to support this) within organisations to support brokerage function, not just funding individuals ie. organisational development.
- If a collaborative project is seen as a priority by management ie. there's a big mess to fix, then resources will be made available
 - a pressing need to make tradeoffs between projects/initiatives rather than just adding to already work programmes and budgets. These are long term, complex problems that collaborative initiatives are trying to fix.

- if roles and organizations grow and expand in a certain directions it may get to the stage where the function has to be resourced
- need a larger supportive evidence base to enable collaboration/coordination to be better funded
 - reality is that the evidence in NZ isn't out there – especially in terms of outcomes
 - need to be smart about when to collaborate and when not to
- still a major gap in resourcing to allow community participation
 - need to seriously look at reallocation
 - accountabilities need to be looked at to protect use of public money
- massive change of collaboration/partnership needs to be better communicated
 - gap at the level of “what it means I should do differently”, need to go further than descriptive rhetoric into how things should practically be done differently within government etc
 - reality that this new collaborative way has not yet properly translated down through funders/contractors
 - still a lot of resistance to doing things differently
 - need to balance risks yet still be creative
 - need to be prepared to contract for relationships (time to attend meetings, build trust, work together) as well as specific services
 - major funding still locked into “core” services, not clear how much funding is needed for collaboration
 - theory of how to do it needs to be better understood by politicians so that resources, processes and programmes can be reworked
 - need to know what \$\$ are available for collaboration within each sector so that this can be put on the table to start discussions with other sectors/communities....need to be able to be up front about what you have to contribute to effectively engage others

Workshop: Multiparty governance, contracting and funding issues Summary of Discussion

Question One: Is it useful for a relational contract to be developed by the parties before they begin collaborative processes/projects?

- It helps to formalize a shared understanding of vision, principles and values, and to establish some of the ways in which funding might be shared based on that vision. It helps to develop common language and shared ideas the projects start. It also helps address liability issues.
- Sometimes, however, we may not have all the relevant details. Committing to paper too early can also inhibit free debate. So if we start with the relational contract then it is important that it is reviewed as things progress and as the collaboration evolves.
- It is also important to think carefully about what forms of documentation are appropriate to specific contexts. It all comes back to what you want out of the relational contract. While it is important to have some bureaucratic record of key agreements as they are reached,

MOUs may be most appropriate for government departments. They are about how things will work and service agreements. Community groups may need more user-friendly processes and terms to help build community understanding.

Question Two: If it is useful to establish a relational contract what should be included? (visions, governance processes, protocols for working, resources required, relationships with community/iwi, branding and naming etc)

- The content will be driven by the circumstances; for example, the size of the project, the purpose of the project, the nature of the parties, what they have in common and what they are working towards.
- Even though you might be agreed on outcomes it is still difficult because there are multiple interpretations of, for example, community participation. Common definitions are important.
- Documents should be seen as a vehicle for conversations about the way we work. They also require 'good faith'; for example, there is a risk of people not saying what they want to say.
- Relational contracts should be seen as 'umbrellas' under which there may be more specialized contracts between specific parties dealing with legal and resource issues.
- The risk of specifying and writing down relationships is that it may make it difficult to deal with the changing content of the relationships.

Question Three: What are the practical difficulties associated with relational contracts and multiparty funding?

- what have we learned to date?
- what are the next steps to improve things?

- Communication is a crucial issue. Individuals may build up good relationships with organizations, but other members of that individual's organization will also have an important impact on the relationship. Getting everyone on board early is very important.
- Relatedly, the policy/operations split is an issue. While the need for collaboration might be identified in policy, if the operations people are not also on board that will undercut collaborative processes.
- It is important that organizations identify who should be involved in collaborations; who has appropriate working styles and personal skills.
- Resourcing of the participation of Maori and community groups remains an issue. It is often community organizations that are being represented, not communities themselves. Maori and communities don't have out-clauses like central and local government.
- The quality of the conversation is important. Templates can get in the way; talking, clarifying, and building shared understanding is the point of the exercise.
- There are expectations about how you'll perform that may be hard to meet, and these can cause a project to fall down. What will happen when something goes wrong and relational contracts get put to the test legally? A relational contract appears to have no sanctions, rather it is a statement of intent based on trust and respect.
- There's a difference between partnership and 'partnering'. A relational contract provides a forum to move beyond the service for contract and to develop innovative ways of working.

- Partnering needs 'team rules' so we should develop processes for working together, but these are tools for moving on, we shouldn't get tied up in them.
- The codification of trust doesn't always make things better in practice. For example, sometimes relational contracts inhibit the expression of different points of view. It is important that if someone is genuinely challenging the status-quo that their views can be expressed. Enforced collaboration is an unequal relationship.
 - There is a risk that funding will get 'squandered' in the relational process.

Workshop: Getting to outcomes in a multiparty environment: principles, protocols, priorities - key themes

Getting to the point where you could even talk about outcomes: 'Front ending', 'sequencing', and alignments that could lead to outcomes.

Developing and sustaining the networks over time

Waitakere Wellbeing Collaboration process, sets out seven calls to action, each of which is framed in outcome terms. For example, "Families give their children a great start", "Violence against children and women is reduced", "New migrants settle successfully", "All students leave school with a plan". The process of getting to outcomes in this case meant literally years of the development of strong community groups and forums, these being brought together by council (and ultimately with an intersector government forum) under the auspices of community wellbeing. Various phases of the community wellbeing process have led to the current collaboration process, which sees groups voluntarily committing themselves to one of the calls to action, and then participating as they are willing and able in the various projects under each call. The years of process leading up to the collaboration phase were crucial. In fact it was of some benefit that the process had not begun with a large amount of money on the table: it had enabled good process and identification of goals from a more disinterested basis. That said, the time to decide whether to look for sustainable, devolved funding is approaching fast.

Recognising that people, their time, their commitment are central to sustaining things

Manukau City: Collaborative Action plan on Child Poverty - the process didn't regard resources as meaning just funding, but rather recognised people's time and commitment as a kind of funding. This placed people's own commitments at the centre of the project and process, and in itself raised the accountability stakes. People had consistently turned up around the table, over a long period. This provides a kind of 'continuous mandating'.

'Front ending' and Sequencing: necessary steps for progress

Perhaps then we should talk about a sequencing for collaboration, realising that we are not going to see results up front, but that you have to do a certain amount of front ending: taking certain steps in order to get to the point where you can begin to expect outcomes to be attainable. Don't go money hunting at the beginning: get your processes right. Don't rush to formalise agreements at the beginning. Without front ending, there is a risk of assuming all the parties want the same outcomes.

Forging agreements before presenting the issue to central government

Another angle on sequencing, and on having your agreements worked out locally before bringing them to Wellington. With reference to the Auckland Transport Strategy, there was discussion on the importance of the Auckland Mayors having come to a mutual political and practical agreement before presenting their position and options in Wellington, and how sustaining this agreement throughout discussions and negotiations there considerably strengthened their case and hand.

Starting with aligning people: the people who are interested, and seeing where core shared interests lie

In the case of the Christchurch Youth Action Plan, a group of agencies interested in working together sat down to see what they could plan together and found their shared area of interest coalesced around youth. Actions and budgets followed, building on the initial free identification of genuine areas of shared interest.

Recognising that outcomes are complex, and can't all be aligned (or measured) upfront

In fact, getting to outcomes can be so complex that it is impossible to anticipate what you need upfront: you won't be able to measure it before hand, or plan for all of it. Measuring the kinds of process things you need to do upfront to get to outcomes is simply not possible. Sometimes you can only see in retrospect you had (or didn't have) the right focus.

The culture of how to operate is initially more important than final outcomes desired. Also recognising that some outcomes are difficult to measure in tradition terms of outputs or in short time frames.

'Don't try to align everything in the first year!'

'Perhaps with the Sustainable Communities process, expecting outcomes in two years is too soon?'

Realising, though, that central government won't commit without expectation of outcomes

'its not that governments are risk averse, but they have to risk manage, and be accountable for budgets'

Perhaps try to develop outcomes that measure the activity required which will lead up to the outcomes. (such as networking that creates continuous mandating; or developing processes to capture institutional knowledge that will manage the fact that people move on).

'You need to be able to tell compelling stories'.

Allowing people to align non-judgementally, organically: 'Latching on' to others' processes

What's needed is a process that allows a community to come together non-judgementally. Mandating and sustained collaborative support for example from Maori can come if the alliances are allowed to develop generically: it's not just a matter of saying 'you're it'.

'It takes time to latch onto other's processes, and areas of commonality. But when you do it's powerful, you can work'

Developing relationships we can sustain...

From a Te Ruru Korero perspective: 'We're taking time to develop relationships we can sustain. Yet Urban Maori are a whole new challenge to us, when we're traditionally dealt with iwi and hapu'. There's unnecessary consultation at times, and people not wanting to go through the process again'

Keeping an action focus

'Keeping an action orientation has been a way of keeping it real'

Aligning processes

Recognition of sharing what we know, but also to get well beyond that, into processes of developing collaborative data. And this involving not just the collection of data together, but sitting down together to analyse it. Having creative conversations with a range of players about your data...

Seeing where the organizational affinities and potential alignments are

...a rising awareness of the potential of Public Health, DHBs, and TLAs working together both on service delivery components, and strategically.

Realizing what you can and can't take on, what you need to collaborate and align on

In the case of the Waitakere City deprivation index shifts, that's not something Waitakere can take on alone: it's a metropolitan thing.

Aligning to advocate

'A regional issue does not mean that it's a regional government issue but instead a regional advocacy issue'

It's a maturity thing to be able to recognise what to advocate on and what to seek to take control of yourself

Aligning language

Different groups using different terms lead to mutual mis-comprehension. For example, the use of the term public health made some people think of hospitals, but talking about community wellbeing seemed to bring everyone on board. In the Waitakere wellbeing process, the development and spread of collaborative language has been a feature: talk and shared understanding about 'mandates', getting people consistently 'around the table', recognition of the role of 'strategic brokers' was all an important step in working together.

Informal alignments: gossip and carpark chats

Several participants commented on the value of the informal chatter and interaction around collaboration processes, for example in breaks and in the carpark, when often real new shared understandings were reached, and practical agreements made and sealed.

Sharing the costs of alignment

General agreement that collaboration is now recognized as a part of everyday practice, but it needs to be considered as a cost of doing business: it's a cost that needs to be managed, because it will need to be paid from somewhere

Cross-pollination in aligning of planning processes

In the Waitakere Wellbeing Collaboration process, actual components of plans were disseminated among participating organizations, and were embedded (like seeds? Spores?, viruses?) in the plans in that way. It's a kind of alignment.

Picking your partnerships and collaborations

The need to strengthen core planning processes...

A strong and integral approach to the LTCCP should bring strength to all related planning processes, in the community and in government agencies.

... while acknowledging that different planning processes will provide different alignments: you can't fully predict things, or easily pick winners

Yet even core, well resourced and iterative processes like LTCCP will end up as mixed bags in terms of what actually gets agreed and committed to by whom. For some, these will be opportunities and a springboard for their ideas, for shared ideas. For others, some parts will just grow and others atrophy: it's got to be an organic process: mix and match, what we can in fact do with our own resources, maybe not fully mandated and supported up and down. However, exchange of benefits is critical for the success of partnerships, as is the need to be clear at the beginning about time frames.

The big picture: getting to tough outcomes

Taking on outcomes that consider the big picture, not just tick the box outcomes/ hairy outputs

It is increasingly important for little and local collaborations to make the links with bigger picture issues: cultural, economic, political, etc. Here, it's about moving beyond the mere rephrasing of outputs as outcomes, to enable local and other governments merely to 'tick the box' on their outcomes. It's important not just to settle for outcomes that are really just 'hairy outputs'. Some have taken an easy way out there.

It is critical to have 'big picture' focus and outcomes but balanced by pragmatism – accepting that it can't all be achieved at once and that there are short term and longer term outcomes. Even with this, there is need to accept that "perfection" is probably unattainable, even longer term. However, making a start on the longer term outcomes is critical. Without this, some are reluctant to start, apprehensive that they are being set up to fail. To compensate, the "low hanging fruit" (the easy outcomes) are ticked without focus on the gains required longer term.

Sustaining collaboration and alignment isn't easy

Working together is demanding: it requires ongoing motivation.

Q: 'Where does this motivation come from?'

A: Starting with common goals and aspirations was a beginning, but sustaining higher levels of collaboration remained difficult...

There needs to be on-going focus on the real issues – the need for compelling stories to support this.

Measuring or highlighting the likely outcomes from remaining with the status quo can be a very effective, on-going motivator.

Avoiding the hard issues

'It's too easy in the current context for the hard issues to get pushed aside by the ones people want and collaborate on, and can collaborate on more easily. How do you make sure people collaborate around the harder issues?'

*'Does the fact we go for consensus in agreeing on issues to approach mean we drop the things we can't agree on?' **Referred to as the "collusion delusion".***

"We need macro thinking, not just micro 'joined-up' thinking."

When to try to get funding etc to take on the tougher ones

'That's the big question in Waitakere at the moment. Do you chase the big funding, or do you try and take the bigger, harder problems. Waitakere has had some success around the process stuff but still a feeling that still fiddling round the edges and not tackling the hard things'.

Strengthening collaboration and accountability: The need to make collaboration compulsory

The problem is that in some really tough areas, like Child Youth and Family, there's a real need for collaborative action, but no one is forcing anyone to collaborate, so the collaboration doesn't happen..

'Should someone be telling people they have to collaborate in those circumstances?'

Perhaps the government should send stronger signals that people can and should collaborate