

# ***Partnerships Under the Spotlight***

## ***Workshop One***

### ***September 22nd 2003***

#### ***Welcome and karakia***

Introduction from Dr. David Craig

#### **Group Session One: Mandates and Representation**

Feedback

### **Break for Coffee and Dessert**

#### **Group Session Two:**

Power and Powerlessness in Partnerships - making community sector representation more “meaningful”

Feedback

Reflection on key themes from Workshop One - Dorothy Wilson

Wrap up

*Karakia to close*

# **Under the Spotlight” Partnerships in Waitakere**

## **Summary Notes from Workshop One “Strengthening Representation” Monday September 22<sup>nd</sup> 2003**

### **Workshop Overview**

As a core part of the Local Partnerships and Governance research programme’s activities in Waitakere City, a series of Shared Learning Groups are to be hosted around themes in partnership and collaboration that had emerged from earlier discussions in the project.

The first shared learning group focussed on strategies for improving representation in partnership and especially collaborative contexts: getting (and keeping) the right people around the table, strengthening the representatives, especially where they were representing the community in situations where they were not well resourced and supported to do so.

All of the information here came thanks to the voluntary and big hearted contributions of the 40 participants who attended the first shared learning group.

No big or quick fix emerged from these discussions; rather, they focussed on where gains might be made in improving on existing processes, processes which have been around for a long time in Waitakere. The material below was gathered by notetakers sitting in each of the 4 workshop breakout groups. The material has been grouped into themes and issues, with added commentary by researchers from the LPG project.

The themes and issues were

### **1. Strengthening representation systems**

- Mandating issues: Recognising and respecting emerging representation roles and rules
- Starting out (and going on) with diversity
- Accepting different agendas and interests
- Strengthening the infrastructure around partnerships and collaboration
- Strengthening nomination/ election processes
- Funding/ resourcing representation, valuing voluntary contributions
- Getting the right information out (and reducing the noise)
- Cultural safety and issues in participation and representation
- Consistency in representation
- Overcoming the language barrier
- Continual feedback: resourcing and demands
- Taking time for representation, consensus
- Making it fun

## **2. Strengthening and supporting the representatives**

- Qualities of representatives: balanced, passionate, visionary, seeing the shared vision?
- Getting beyond jargon, and talking community language
- Recognising and respecting limits
- Respecting cultural limits
- Peer support for representatives
- Pressure, burnout
- Civic awareness training?

At the conclusion of the document, we have included a summary of the final feedback sessions, including some final challenges presented by Dorothy Wilson.

**Please do add your commentary and feedback to this ongoing discussion:**

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### **Themes from the Workshops**

## **1. Strengthening representation systems**

### **Mandating issues: Recognising and respecting emerging representation roles and rules**

Issues of mandates and the right to represent are complex in situations like this: it isn't just one person one vote, or even one organisation one vote. But that doesn't mean representation in collaboration contexts is impossible, or always illegitimate. It's a matter of knowing what it can and can't do, and where its weaknesses need to be strengthened, or remembered.

In general, as one participant said, it is arguably the case that :

*'People representing the community need to be able to prove that they have the mandate to be there.'*

And that

*'Representatives represent their organisation and do not act as individuals.'*

True,

*'But we are all individuals. This is an important issue. We all bring our own expertise...'*

So, whose mandate, and how is this secured?

*'Representatives are critical, but the challenge is 'who sets the question upon which the mandate is established for the representative?' This is a problem...'*

Nonetheless,

*'There need to be clear rules of engagement, ... and good support around the table and back-up mandates. We need the same rules around the table...'*

*'There needs to be a structure within the group. Boundaries need to be acknowledged and the representative must be able to communicate.'*

And

*'There needs to be a charter. Representatives should be charged with coming back and reporting to the community, and they need a group to back them up'.*

Part of this will be an ongoing process of endorsing and respecting:

*'We need to endorse that person's presence, by the community and by the table'.*

But many representatives will still work in contexts where the ground rules and protocols of representation are not always clear. In some situations they are working a lot of things out as they go along.

For example, as one 'Pacific representative' noted, there are very interesting dynamics in Pacific contexts–

*'There is no such thing as Pacific identity; but there is still value in having ethnic communities coming together and addressing common ground, and in having a leader or true rep who can come through that, to become Pacific leader. You would need to win support and sympathy from each ethnic community.'*

So, representation and collaboration issues are complex, and getting more so. Paying attention to improving mandating in pragmatic ways arguably looks like a positive investment in local democracy...

*'A pragmatic view is needed. There needs to be the inclusion of some history, some current views on the current location. Then we could all bring our capacity, wearing several or multiple hats. For example, I'm an Iwi representative, a council representative and a parent.'*

*'There's a need for central and local government to be collaborating: key ministries with key drivers. They need to share each others work programmes and hear what each other is saying. – like in the Ranui Action Project model we have. The fragmentation of the community is getting wider but everybody has the same objective'.*

### **Starting out (and going on) with diversity**

*'In the early stages: you need to focus on an issue. Distill a series of issues into one. Bring together a layer of people who can get that focus. Attack the issue from the basis of information and credibility. Build a case from a base of the widest possible information, the widest possible variety of voices. This is for both the community and council agencies, and the government. Engagement at the highest level (government) enables engagement from the community – it gives what you are doing credibility. Everyone has a bit of the problem and a bit of the answer'.*

*'We need the right mix of people. There is a need to gel groups together – but this is hard to control. And don't leave the community behind. The challenge is to maintain a balance between local and central government'.*

### **Accepting different agendas and interests**

*'You need to concentrate on accepting that everyone has their own agenda – and then ask, 'how does that fit with our agenda'. Find things to agree on'.*

*'If there is more than one party there is going to be more than one agenda, and more than one need. We need to acknowledge and accept that'.*

*'At meetings with people from different parts, the process needs to recognise where people are from and their particular restrictions. Process is important e.g. not letting one person dominate and letting others have their say'.*

### **More generally: strengthening the infrastructure around partnerships and collaboration**

*'There needs to be an infrastructure around key partnerships. This is needed in order to have mastery and develop key pointers to minimise the risks of fragmenting of the infrastructure. The question is, how do we make the best of where we are currently. It's necessary to piece together gender issues, and those for young adults. There are a number of capacities that need some thought. But then, are we biting off too much in one bite?'*

### **Strengthening nomination/ election processes**

*'COGS, for example, has a community election process. Community groups nominate representatives then the represented sector gets a number of seats (such as the seats reserved for Maori or women). However, this year this process has been changed so that representatives are now nominated on the basis of their contribution to the community rather than their sector. This is a big change and is for the better. It avoids people driving their own sector's agenda'.*

*'People must be open and say what strengths they have. This could be worked into the nomination process where people are chosen on the basis of their strengths. Job applications could add to this process and it could be down to less people to choose. Thus, you would have more control, but this is less community friendly'.*

*'This is a process that government increasingly uses'.*

### **Funding/ resourcing representation, valuing voluntary contributions**

*'You need specific resourcing to engage in partnership'.*

Even where there is enormous goodwill and voluntary effort, it's still true that to some extent you get the representation you resource. At the moment, demands for

participation in a range of collaborative issues and programmes is probably at an all time high.

In some organisations (government agencies, councils), the resources will have to come from a reallocation of resources within the agency to reflect the new importance of representation, and new demands on representatives.

In other contexts, new roles (with new funding) will have to be established. Where are the sources from which community organisations can access funds to support their representatives?

*'How do you manage your day to day activities and do all these other things? It requires local authority and central government support so that local people can participate. At a practical level you need two things, (1) access to information and (2) someone to do the day to day jobs. This is release stuff.'*

*'... Often in community houses, for example, representatives can not come to community initiatives as they need replacement people to continue their work.'*

*'Time is also important, perhaps this is more central than training. Most representatives have the skill but lack time. They must be given the opportunity to focus. Representatives are always just coping and never have enough time.'*

*'There needs to be a deliberate process of looking at where different people come from. Physical resources are limited. For example, computers, photocopying, and also support systems are often a matter of chance.'*

*'There needs to be resources from government to support people morally. There's a power imbalance. Understanding each other's world is difficult. People in government departments need to be living in the community world in order to know how to support them.'*

*'Often community groups are given just enough money and have to sort out there work in their own time. In comparison government workers have adequate funding for their jobs. It needs to be worked out how to give enough money to community groups to do their jobs.'*

*'They don't get enough money for ads in order to do necessary PR. There is stress and fears of going from their culture to government culture.'*

*'There are gender issues for women there too.'*

*'I've been involved in a lot of community work. There's a lot of people dependent on voluntary work. But still, "Monkeys get the peanuts." At the end of the day there's got to be something put on the table for the people at the bottom, to support the voluntary workers.'*

*'Local government needs an "attitude of "How can we support you?" in stead of the nit-picking attitude.'*

*'The Kaumatua are left on the back block until they're needed. That's the way the bottom people are looked after. They can suffer as voluntary workers'.*

*'Times are changing. Younger people will survive in different ways. We've been in the attitude of being voluntary because we've been doing it a long time. So we're so unused to being paid we can't give an answer to the question of how much we should be paid'*

*'Lots of people are altruistic and care and jump in because we are passionately committed to a cause, so we feel we get something out of contributing'.*

*' Lots of meetings take place at the council rather than council workers doing the travelling and paying for the travel'.*

### **Getting the right information out (and reducing the noise)**

There's SO MUCH information circulating out there, from so many sources: this is clearly a part of the MESS. Some of it is clearly vital, and should inform everyone about crucial upcoming issues, new government strategies, community opportunities: but which? How do you know which information is vital and crucial? It almost needs someone with a mature and strategic eye to act as a clearing house for this information.

*'Representatives need the freshest government research'.*

*'We need to give people the best information possible'.*

*'There need to be executive summaries. Language needs to be easy to understand'.*

*'You need to be able to find out where what you are doing fits in the food chain of the government's agenda'.*

*'This information needs to be more than the agenda. For example newsletters or other means of full disclosure. You need to feel part of a team. This may need funding, but by whom?'*

*'People must know the agenda prior to the meeting. Most decisions to be made at the meeting need to be circulated before hand to enable commitment. There needs to be organisational support before hand.'*

*'When it comes to faxes, emails, phones, busy people can be overloaded. Its necessary to use concise, focused and easily fed back communication. If there's waffle it's too much to read in the time available. There's different skills for communication in reports and talk. It's important to know how to present and how to give feedback.'*

*'There needs to be support to learn these skills?'*

*'Yes!'*

### **Cultural safety and issues in participation and representation**

*'Ethnic mixes can be very fruitful, that is, if it gels'.*

*'It comes back to upskilling too for community groups so they won't feel so vulnerable: so that they will feel comfortable and confident'.*

*'Out west we were initially a very closed group. However other people came with ideas so we opened up.'*

*'How do you find these people? Shoulder tapping who's who? How do you get information to people not involved?'*

- *By community election processes and public meetings.*
- *This immediately removes people who don't feel confident with the process. How many people, would want to do this in your area?*
- *It is very difficult to find another person like me who would do this.*
- *This may be the same for Maori and Chinese communities, people are not necessarily going to feel comfortable.*
- *This reinforces the importance of the cultural process through which this takes place. How do we get processes that reflect diverse ethnicities? Currently, it is mainly Pakeha who feel comfortable. You need processes that reflect cultural styles. The process needs to be relevant.*
- *Or do you set up token representatives?*
- *If you know there is a key shoulder tapping person you have a leader on board and gain a collective of people. You need to get the leaders and they are the ones that show up to meetings.*

**A goal: consistency in representation**

*'The right people are the ones who are going to be at the next meeting'*

*'There is another problem of constantly changing representatives and members of organisations'.*

**Another goal: overcoming the language barrier**

*'There's a need to simplify words and their application to make it easier for community people. It seems like there's a deliberate language barrier put up. It's necessary to "keep it simple".'*

**Another goal: continual feedback: resourcing and demands**

*'Representatives bring stuff back for all the group to decide what needs to take place. It should be a democratic process. It needs to be determined by the group, this is no different from a community board'.*

**Another goal: Taking time for representation, consensus**

*'Yes, more time is required. The time allocated is often unrealistic and just enough to shut you up. For example it takes time to know when you have the right person'.*

**Another goal: Making it fun**

Participation in collaborative tables is still (mostly) voluntary. While the aim is to build free and frank communication and accountability, people may well not come if they are confronted with weighty expectations and demands

*'Don't beat anyone over the head! Work through issues with people. Build long-term relationships – then they will come back to work with you'.*

In Waitakere, Tony Mayow has talked about a laughter index, (ie a measure of how much time in a meeting is spent laughing and taking the mickey) as an indicator of how well the thing is going

*You need to give people good reason to be there. Find something to attract them – food, fun, information.*

## **2. Strengthening And Supporting Community Representatives**

A lot will fall back on the representatives themselves. People talked about strengthening representation through more knowledge and assistance in what they do and how they do it.

### **Qualities of representatives: balanced, passionate, visionary, seeing the shared vision?**

Obviously, given the rising expectations, not everyone is going to find representation is their thing. Many people talked about core personal attributes of representatives: words like leadership, inspiring, vision... and their ability to rise beyond their own interests and articulate a shared vision in a common language

*'You work for shared goals while representing own organisation, and then priorities for next year across the table become shared goals'.*

*'It comes out of capacity to easily identify common grounds, and what benefits everyone. This is also an issue around leadership: It's critical that people who come through as reps are those that have qualities – articulate, with shared values/vision and enhancing particular group, and see how that works in to the respective groups he/she is representing'*

*'It's important to be able to speak a common language as good rep'*

*'Someone who has good networking skills, is good at connecting with people and is close to the ground'.*

*'They need to relay information – not 'this is my opinion' stuff – they need to listen to people, they need to represent the whole. I'm a bit wary of people with passion'.*

*'Personal agendas are not helpful'*

*'They need to be able to step outside their personal issues, and understand the wider business, not just fulfilling their own agenda, but objectively looking at the business. Although sometimes this is disguised through professional language but it still shows itself'.*

*'Representatives need to be able to see the bigger picture. They need to listen to other's points of view. They need to be action-focused, and do what they say they're going to do'.*

*'They need skills, ability, knowledge, rapport with community, profile in community, good personal network, experienced, passion for purpose, they don't claim to represent everyone, they are open-minded, walk the walk not just talk the talk, they have good supports in place, know the parameters of their ability, are a good listener, there's honesty...'*

### **They can get beyond jargon, and talk community language**

*'Communities need to have their own representatives, who will know how to target and reach their own people. They need to know how to speak with the right language and use the right jargon.'*

*'We have to acknowledge that some people don't have equal input because of jargon used.'*

*'Another problem is that there is a difficulty in communication between the voluntary sector and people who work in the area: Volunteers often can't be reached during the day, people who work in the area can't be reached at night.'*

### **Recognising and respecting limits**

*'Knowing your personal boundaries, seeing where your personal interests start and finish, knowing how much you can and can't do.'*

*'A good representative must recognise that some decisions are not in your area of expertise. For example Maori issues.'*

*'Boundaries need to be acknowledged.'*

*'A good representative knows who they don't represent and doesn't claim to represent them.'*

*'The representative doesn't need to know everything, they should have networks for finding information and support. S/he just needs to care and want to do it. They need to have a passion for the purpose.'*

### **Respecting cultural limits**

*'They need to be a good listener. It needs to be acknowledged that different people (and ethnicities) have different ways of communicating. Representatives need to be aware of this and they need to be careful that they don't ignore people's needs. We need to hear and reach people who don't have the same ability to communicate their needs.'*

### **Peer support for representatives**

*'Having more than one representative from each organisation may also help. A coupling up of people, that may have different agendas. You also need to acknowledge experience and fresh perspectives.'*

*There is the issue that you don't want to be the lone person, you say we need more of that support....*

*The standard thing at Council is that there is an 'alternate' who goes when I can't go...*

*... the nominated board members all have 'alternates' on our committee, but not the elected members*

*'We need to look after the people who are being consulted. We need to provide resources for peer supervision. They need to be paid to come together and talk to each other.'*

### **Pressure, burnout**

But:

*'This puts a huge pressure on a few co-ordinators'.*

*'There's the issue of the burn-out cycle. Acceptance and support is needed. Voluntary worker burn-out is big'.*

### **Solutions: Civic awareness training?**

*'There's a need for civic awareness training – A need to understand problems that they may come up against and how the process works'*

## **Summary Report backs from Each Group**

### **Nomination/election/appointment processes for community sector representatives:**

- You need a fair representation. It should be all inclusive in deciding who is the best representative.
- It's a 2 way process and there should be open communications
- Integrity is needed because of how it's seen by the wider community.

### **Strengthening the “community voice” at the table:**

- It is necessary to endorse the community group and acknowledge them: ie “shut up and listen”
- It is necessary to understand the rules of engagement.
- There needs to be equitable resourcing: voluntary groups can be against businesses like drug companies and against the council.
- It is necessary to make sure there are mentors who are not present at the table, to help community groups to express themselves.
- There needs to be civic awareness training for community representatives, to ensure they know what the processes are.

### **Resource requirements of community sector representatives:**

There were some strong responses. The voluntary sector is at risk. Many volunteers are drained, for example Kaumatua feel like they're called on when they're needed and then left on the shelf. They need to feel they are being looked after.

There's a need for some practical financial resources: meeting fees, travel allowances, pizzas and some more direct commercial innovations.

We had a debate about our roles: whose participation is encompassed in they're job descriptions? There was an interesting debate on altruism and what people get out of doing community work. This can be defined by looking at the power imbalance: some people can gain from networking while those from the community without power have little to gain from being there.

**Shared performance review:**

- It's necessary to acknowledge that people come together for a high level goal.
- There are different partners involved and there needs to be acknowledgement that every time we participate it should be evaluated to see if we're moving to a higher level goal.
- Does "partnership" imply equity? "Partnering" is perhaps a better word and needs to be explored.

**Closing Comments: Dorothy Wilson**

Dorothy noted that while the workshop was very inspiring there have been some sobering thoughts. She recalled having heard very similar things for the last few years.

She noted, however, that Waitakere is once again at the leading edge and taking the next step, asking 'how can we do this?' Reality is that much of this is better solved at a local level rather than waiting for things to be fixed nationally.

Respect and valuing she acknowledged as very important, but emphasised that there is more to it than that, in particular practical issues.

'We need to follow on from these discussions, to show how boundaries can be overcome. This is also beginning to happen nationally, for example in the Review of the Centre. It is an enormous exercise. Local government must look at these things when it works with the community'.

There was also a considerable responsibility on the research project: This knowledge needs to be shared. This is not just about writing things down but also involves talking to people around the country. Safe sharing and talking is at the heart of sustainable development. Collaboration is central. This is beginning to work at the local level. Action must come out of these discussions.