

MEETING AND GOVERNANCE SOLUTIONS



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DECISION MAKING BY ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES
THE USE OF COMMUNITY INTELLIGENCE

OCTOBER 2013

Decision Making By Local Government Elected Representatives – The Use of Community Intelligence

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Date October 2013

Overview

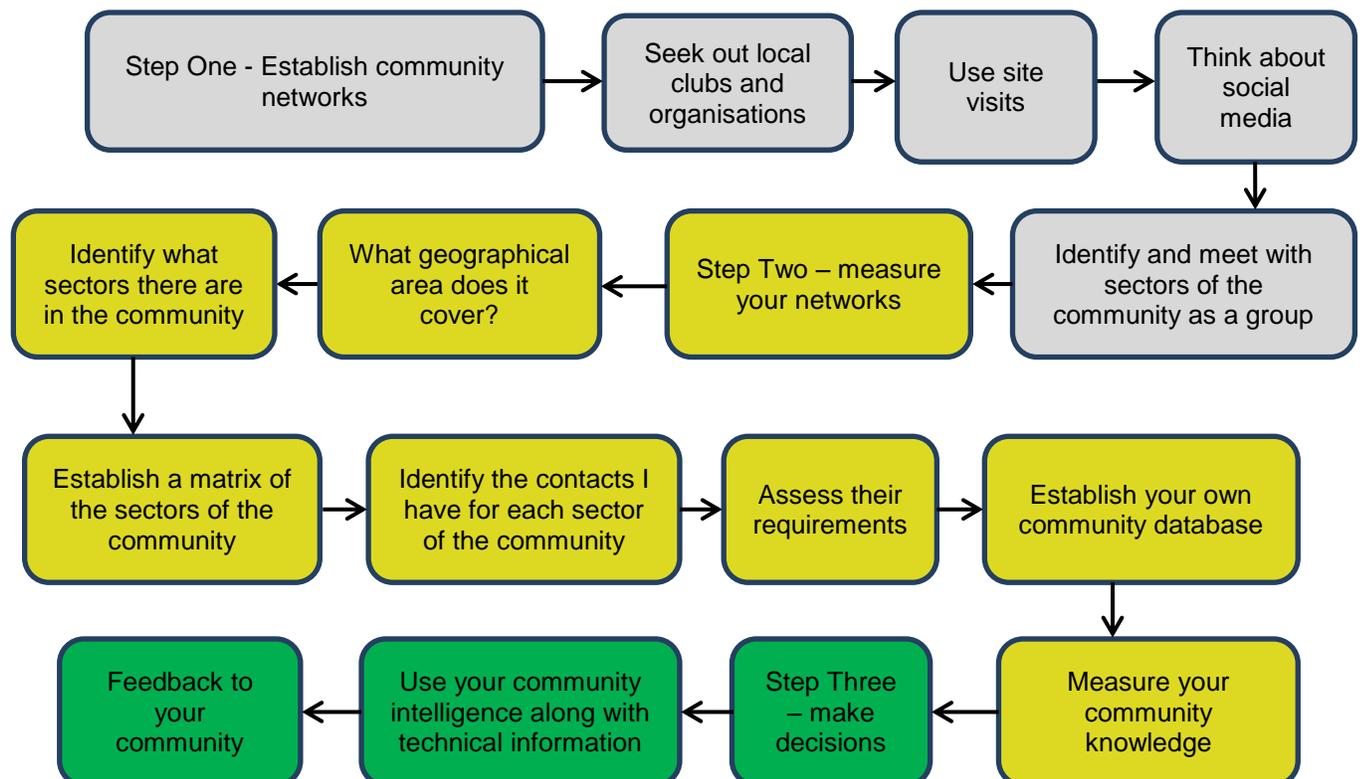
Elected representatives use a range of tools and information to make decisions including, but not limited to, their own subject knowledge and personal life experience, knowledge and opinions from other members and of course, expert officer reports.

Another tool that elected members use to support their decision making process is community intelligence.

What is community intelligence? It is the ability of an elected member to understand their community(s) interests, needs, expectations, issues in contention and wishes and apply that knowledge to decision making processes.

This paper explores the background to community intelligence, and the systems and processes for elected representatives to apply it successfully.

Summary – Developing and Using Community Intelligence



Introduction

The role of Mayor / Regional Council Chair, Councillors (Local Board Members in Auckland) and community board members requires significant engagement with their respective communities at a macro and micro level. Engagement will be through formal processes (e.g. council and community board meetings) or informally (e.g. one on one meetings, street meetings, phone calls, emails).

The changes to the Local Government Act 2002 that came into force in December 2012 offer an opportunity to the local government sector to think about a number of elements around decision making. This is particularly timely with the October 2013 elections producing a new bunch of locally elected representatives across the country that will inevitably be thrown into the deep end of decision making virtually from day one. They need to get up to speed quickly with the process to make decisions. The use of and understanding of the importance of community intelligence is critical to the success of all elected representatives.

The election of new and returned elected representatives provides a golden opportunity to implement community intelligence strategies as part of decision making. For example, making sure they are meeting a wide variety of the community and listening to their views on issues that affect that particular community. It is important to remember a community is not necessarily a ward or community area defined on a map.

There are likely to be many sub communities in each ward or community area.

So what is community intelligence?

It is the linkages that an elected member has to the community to gain information (including views and preferences, issue identification, perhaps even indignation) that the elected member can use either in formal decision making processes or for less formal mechanisms such as community meetings. Community intelligence provides data to an elected member to enable them to support and assist the community.

Like it or not local government elected representatives are politicians (even though a number of elected representatives really don't like this tag!) as they operate in a political environment. This does not necessarily mean formal political parties are in place (e.g. left wing, right wing, rural v town, groupings to reduce rates etc).

The use of community intelligence can significantly assist elected representatives to make decisions (often highly controversial for a small sector of the community or across the whole of the electorate) in a political environment that is founded on democratic principles.

Elected representatives need to be 'well armed' to effectively participate in debates with an objective of convincing the majority of the other elected representatives to agree with their way of thinking on the issue in contention.

One of the defining characteristics of any candidate in an election and then as an elected representative, is to gain the confidence of the community to represent that community fairly and reasonably. Communities will respect their elected representatives and the decision making process provided the following elements are present:

- Elected representatives are knowledgeable about the community they represent
- Elected representatives understand all the differing views of the affected community
- Elected representatives will listen to all sides of an argument and are open to persuasion
- The process is transparent - the public can see the process unfolding
- Elected representatives are accessible to the community as part of the information gathering process so that the community can present views to their elected representatives informally as well as through any formal engagement process

- Decisions clearly articulate why the decision was made and acknowledge the areas in contention

To be able to represent a community, an elected representative needs to understand the 'make up' of that community, the issues it faces, and the range of views / preferences within the community.

To make quality decisions, elected representatives need to use their knowledge and experience of the community along with technical information provided through officer reports.

There are four identifiable roles in participating or observing local government decision making as set out in the table below:

	Elected representatives	Staff	Public	Media
Informal				
Formal				
Implementation				

A decision making matrix outlining the elements for each role is attached.

Appendix One - Decision Making Tree

How does community intelligence fit the decision making requirements of the Local Government Act 2013?

Part VI of the Local Government Act contains the decision making provisions that all regional councils and territorial authorities must follow. Equally important is an understanding of the purpose of local government set out in section 10 of the Act.

Decision makers need to be confident that their decisions will be able to stand up to public scrutiny particularly if the decision is subject to any review by the courts or the Office of the Controller and Auditor General.

We have included a summary of the relevant sections of the Local Government Act 2002 in relation to decision making for elected representatives as attached. This table provides an overview of the sections of the Act that need to be considered as part of the process to arrive at a decision.

Appendix Two – Local Government Act 2002 Decision Making Provisions

There are Always Two Sides to Every Story!

You are highly likely to get complaints from the public about something the council has / has not done or is about to do. It will often come with a complaint about a staff member.

Occasionally these complaints may be well founded but it is important to make sure you find out all the information on the matter before committing to a specific position.

Community “noise” might be generated by a small sector of the community (e.g. ten people band together on a particular issue. Whilst it might be tempting at times to simply agree and assume the problem is

solved there will be other views you should hear before reaching any conclusion, e.g. you will want to hear from staff who know about the issue, you will want to listen to other members of the community who may live in the same proximity, and may have different views than the original ten people.

Enabling a wider section of the community and officers to share their views is pivotal to your decision making responsibilities.

Being “well armed” with all the information before committing to a particular position may save a lot of embarrassment. It will also demonstrate your ability to listen to both sides and be a clear thinker.

Consultation, Research and Community Engagement

Engaging with communities happens in three distinct areas:

Consultation – asking questions from the community. Consultation can be perceived by the community as a compliance exercise to meet the requirements of legislation. Characterised by being open to a defined sector of the community (which can be all the community) using a formal submission process with hearings before the council or a committee.

Research – analysing data such as:

- Undertaking qualitative research e.g. focus groups, interviews, review existing data;
- What statistics, measures, survey results as examples have we got?;
- Reviews of existing research – current thinking;
- Assess what have other organisations done for similar issues?

Engagement – formal and informal processes to connect to the community. These can be a combination of consultation and research and the use of community intelligence as described in this paper.

The International Association Public Participation (IAPP) has developed a public participation spectrum.

The spectrum identifies the different levels of increasing public impact in decision making from the lowest level to the highest level as follows:

1. Inform
2. Consult
3. Involve
4. Collaborate
5. Empower

Identifying for every issue which level of public impact will be used will provide early and helpful guidance on the type of community engagements to be used in conjunction with your community intelligence.

Appendix Three – IAPP Public Participation Spectrum

Techniques for Networking

Elected representatives might rely on the community to be proactive and contact them and in that way they will hear “what is going on at the grass roots”. But they are likely to be confronted with issues when they are on the back foot in this situation. The horse may already have bolted!

Elected representatives that actively reach out to the community are generally on the front foot when issues are identified because they are perceived to be people that are action orientated, want to make a difference, and are visible.

Networking is not always pleasant! Elected representatives may be approached in the supermarket, after church, at a local club or the like and “cop an earful” from members of the community who are frustrated with something council has or has not done (whether actual or perceived). But that is part of the job.

Having strategies to actively seek out the community, and be visible include:

1. Seek out local clubs and organisations – meet their leaders and get invited to a meeting to give a brief presentation on your background, current issues before the council that they may be interested in and to hear from them any topics / issues that have that you may be able to assist in working with the council.
2. Use site visits to meet residents and ratepayers regarding matters in the community – meeting on site is a great way to establish rapport and be “seen” in the community. You may want to arrange council officers to attend such meetings if subject matter knowledge is needed e.g. a traffic engineer on a road layout issue. Other site related activities could include walking the streets to see first-hand how the community looks, take part in a Police tour of the district to look at “hot spots (e.g. areas where alcohol related incidents occur), and get to know your local media / reporters.
3. Think about social media – Facebook and Twitter are examples where connections with community groups and individual members of the community are being used more and more by elected representatives.
4. Councils and community boards can form excellent networks with community sectors. For example we know of a community board that meets each month informally with a different sector of the community. The meeting provides an opportunity for each member to be introduced, an explanation of the plans, projects and issues the council / community board was working through in relation to the specific sector of the community, and an opportunity to hear from the sector representatives what aspirations, suggestions or areas of concern they had. Sectors could include:
 - Sport
 - Education
 - Religion
 - Commercial / economic
 - Volunteers
 - Emergency services
 - Cultural
 - Community groups e.g. Residents and Ratepayers, Grey Power
 - Youth
 - Etc

Measure your community networks

We have addressed the law in relation to decision making and community intelligence; the next step to consider is the effectiveness of your community networks.

The following key elements form the cornerstones to implementing community intelligence which identify the make-up of your community:

1 What geographical area does it cover?

2 Identify what sectors there are in the community?

Generic type sectors found in communities might include:

- Religion
- Sport
- Business
- Volunteers
- Federated Farmers
- Iwi
- Older People
- Youth
- Transport operators
- Utility companies
- Emergency services
- Education
- Ethic groups
- Entertainment / restaurant sector
- Clubs and associations
- Etc

3 Consider establishing a matrix such as the following:

Religion – list of churches and other religious organisations	Sport – list of sports clubs	Business – Local Business Association	Volunteers – Red Cross, Citizens Advice Bureau	Federated Farmers
Iwi – local Iwi or Hapu	Older people – Grey Power	Youth – local school youth leaders, youth groups, youth council, Girl Guides and Scouts	Transport operators – bus, train, taxi, ferry operators	Utilities – local power, telecommunication , fuel providers / operators
Emergency services – police, fire, ambulance	Education – chair of board of trustees and principal	Ethnic groups – local leaders	Entertainment – local owners and operators of dining, entertainment venues	Clubs and associations – e.g. gardening, fishing, horse riding

4 What contacts do I have in each quadrant?

5 Assess their requirements using the example in the following table:

Sector e.g. Business	Views / preferences	Needs / wants from council	Opportunities council can offer	Next steps
Issue e.g. Market day proposal				
Issue e.g. graffiti control				
Issue e.g. location of bus stops				

6 Establish a database of your community contacts, including organisations and individual citizens.

Include their:

Name

Organisation (if relevant)

Address

Email

Mobile phone

Phone

Dates you had contact with them and relevant notes

Microsoft Outlook has a very easy to use 'Tasks' feature to track any follow up you may want to do by setting a target date with an action.

This data, in whatever form you collect it, is great to track your community contacts, manage the issues you have engaged with and (a bonus!) provides a great data list to use when campaigning for re-election!

Consider establishing a regular email notice to your data base of council / community related topics that they may find useful. You could consider links to topics council is currently consulting on as an example.

7 Community knowledge measurement matrix

Measure how well you know your community. Mark in each box where you sit in relation to your knowledge of the community make up for each box:

	Extremely low	Low	High	Extremely high
Geography e.g. streets, rural areas, parks, business areas				
I know all the groups that make up the community				

	Extremely low	Low	High	Extremely high
I know the community group leaders				
I have access to a wide range of individual members of the community				
Key issues facing the community (can I state what they are?)				

Now that you know what the gaps are in your community knowledge, develop strategies to fill those gaps through an action plan as follows:

	Action plan to become more knowledgeable about my community and develop networks to the community
Geography e.g. streets, rural areas, parks, business areas	
I know all the groups that make up the community	
I know the community group leaders	
I have access to a wide range of individual members of the community	
I know what the key issues facing the community are (can I state what they are?)	
I am clear what the differing views are within the community	
I have a clear process to communicate with staff on the issue and get their input	

Officer Reports in Relation to Community Intelligence

Officer reports may include data in relation to consultation, research and community engagement. They are more factual in nature and assess the results of known community feedback. They generally do not make evaluative assessments of informal, anecdotal community knowledge.

The relationship between officers and elected representatives is clearly an important element for a functioning council. Part of an effective relationship is the ability of elected representatives to feed into

officers early the community intelligence that elected representatives have gathered in their role as community representatives.

It is up to the elected representatives to ensure that officers are aware of the community intelligence they are gathering. For example, if a council is considering the installation of a new playground in a local park, and an elected representative is aware, through their informal contacts, that the residents in the area are concerned about location, design, car movements or whatever, that information needs to be fed into the staff as soon as possible. Staff can then assess how to address that information in the report. It may trigger some further assessment of the issues and options which can be presented to the community before a formal report to a meeting is considered.

Following this protocol can reduce the risk that of the community being concerned that decisions are being made without consideration of the view or preferences of the local community.

So how much weight do you give to community intelligence where it may be in conflict with a proposal in an officer's report?

You will need to assess how much data you have gathered from the community and whether that represents a broad sector of the community that are impacted by the issue compared to the assessment of the options in the officer's report.

Questions you might ask are:

1. Has the officer got a good handle on what various sectors of the community are telling me?
2. Has the officer addressed what are the views and preferences of the community?
3. How the officer assessed issues that are in contention between sectors of the community and what weighting has that been given to one or other "side" in leading to a preferred option?

Appendix One - Decision Making Matrix

	Elected Members	Staff	Public	Media
Informal	<p>Community intelligence</p> <p>Site visit</p> <p>Avoid conflict of interest</p> <p>Informal discussions with other elected members</p>	<p>Informal advice to elected members</p> <p>Site visit</p> <p>Informal public discussions</p>	<p>One to one with staff / elected members</p> <p>Site visit</p> <p>Community meeting / petition</p>	"Watching brief"
Formal	<p>Workshop</p> <p>Site visit</p> <p>Check if conflict of interest</p> <p>Read report</p> <p>Informal discussions with other elected members</p> <p>Committee / Council meeting</p> <p>Questions / debate</p> <p>Motion / amendments / substantive motion / reasons</p>	<p>Workshop</p> <p>Site visit</p> <p>Consultation</p> <p>Write report</p> <p>Committee / Council meeting</p> <p>Presentation at meeting</p> <p>Record minutes</p>	<p>Site visit</p> <p>Respond to consultation</p> <p>Read report</p> <p>Informal engagement with elected members / staff</p> <p>Committee / Council meeting</p> <p>Public forum / deputation / petition at meeting / observe meeting</p>	<p>Read report</p> <p>Committee / Council meeting</p> <p>Attend meeting to view proceedings</p> <p>Report on outcome of meeting</p>
Implementation	Monitor effectiveness of decision	Implement decision		

Appendix Two – Local Government Act 2002 Decision Making Provisions

Section	Text	Comment
10 (1)(b)	Does it meet the current and future needs of communities for good quality in relation to the following that are most cost effective for households and businesses:	What are the current and future needs of the community in relation to this issue (for good-quality local infrastructure, local public services, and performance of regulatory functions in a way that is most cost-effective for households and businesses)?
	(a) Local infrastructure	Not defined in the Act
	(b) Local public service	Not defined in the Act
	(c) Performance of a regulatory function	For example development contributions
10(2)(a)(b)(c)	Good quality means infrastructure, services, and performance that are:	
	(a) Efficient; and	Need to demonstrate how
	(b) Effective; and	Need to demonstrate how
	(b) Appropriate to present and anticipated future circumstances	Need to demonstrate how
14(c)(i)	When making a decision, must take into account the diversity of the community, and the community's interests	Understand what the community make up is
14(c)(ii)	When making a decision, must take into account the interests of future as well as current communities	How do I know what those interests are?
14(c)(iii)	When making a decision, must take into account the likely impact of any decision on the current and future interests of the community	How do I know what those interests are?
78(1)	Must give consideration to the views and preferences of persons likely to be affected by, or have an interest in the matter	Am I clear on what those views and preferences are?
11A and 197	Is it a core service? In performing its role, a local authority must have particular regard to the contribution that the following core services make to its communities: (a) network infrastructure: (b) public transport services: (c) solid waste collection and disposal: (d) the avoidance or mitigation of natural hazards: (e) libraries, museums, reserves, recreational facilities, and other	S197 - network infrastructure means the provision of roads and other transport, water, wastewater, and stormwater collection and management Section 197 - community infrastructure means— (a) land, or development assets on land, owned or controlled by the territorial authority to provide public

Section	Text	Comment
	community infrastructure.	amenities; and (b) includes land that the territorial authority will acquire for that purpose
77(1)	A local authority must, in the course of the decision-making process	
77(1)(a)	Identify all reasonably practicable options	I am clear what the reasonably practicable options are
77(1)(b)	Assess those option by:	
77(1)(b)(i)	Benefits and costs present and future interests of the district	Are all the benefits and costs being assessed?
77(1)(b)(ii)	Extent to which community outcomes promoted or achieved	I am clear on what those outcomes are and how the issue promotes or achieves those outcomes
77(1)(b)(iii)	Impact on Council's capacity to meet present and future needs in relation to any statutory responsibility	What are the statutory responsibilities if any?
77(1)(b)(iv)	Any other relevant matters	What might they be?
77(1)(c)	If any options involve a significant decision in relation to land or water, must take into account relationship of Maori and their culture and traditions with their ancestral land, water, sites, waahi tapu, valued flora and fauna, and other taonga	Is this a significant decision relating Maori?
80(1)	If the decision of the Council is significantly different from a policy or plan, must identify the inconsistency, the reasons for the inconsistency, any intention to amend the policy or plan to accommodate the decision	Is this consistent with policy – if not why and is this a precedent? Do we need to amend an existing policy?
83	Special Consultative Procedure	If required by Act
90	Significance policy	To be followed to assess whether an issue, proposal, decision or other matter is significant

Appendix Three - IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

International Association for Public Participation

IAP2 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM

INCREASING LEVEL OF PUBLIC IMPACT				
INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Public Participation Goal:	Public Participation Goal:	Public Participation Goal:	Public Participation Goal:	Public Participation Goal:
To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the Public:	Promise to the Public:	Promise to the Public:	Promise to the Public:	Promise to the Public:
We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Example Tools:	Example Tools:	Example Tools:	Example Tools:	Example Tools:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fact sheets • web sites • open houses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • public comment • focus groups • surveys • public meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • workshops • deliberate polling. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • citizen advisory committees • consensus-building • participatory decision-making. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • citizen juries • ballots • delegated decisions.

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