



Massey Matters: Action focused 'community building community'.

Initiative: Massey Matters

Theme: Creating and sustaining momentum

Getting started can involve a whole lot of administration and planning. Not so in Massey. Here community building was the priority from the get-go, and communities have been the ones doing it! This approach remains the focus of Massey Matters, even as the structures and individuals within the project have changed.

Action has always been a fundamental part of Massey Matters. The project began with a Community Forum in 2006 and then quickly went to develop projects such as the Tatou West Harbour Neighbourhood project, Te Raa Mokopuna, Massey Marvels, Westgate Pedestrian Bridge, Our Amazing Place Treasure Hunt, Massey Matters newsletter and Community Projects Fund *because* these were activities that people involved in the initial stages were passionate about and had strong support for.

Without huge initial visioning and strategic planning, these conscious early decisions not to dwell on governance and structure enabled the project to evolve in an organic and collaborative way. This evolution has been in response to community and organisational energy and opportunity rather than working to externally imposed without timelines and expectations. It has also created the flexibility to engage individuals as well as organisations and to more effectively accommodate reflection and differences of opinion which, in turn, contributes to the growth of the project and of Massey as a community. And it meant that Massey Matters was visible in the community from the start.

This is an example of what Jaime Lerner (2007) means when he says, "To innovate is to start!" Solutions for the future are pointless according to Lerner, because "by then the problems will probably be different". For him, action that generates change needs to start now and not need decades to show results: "the present belongs to us and it is our responsibility to open paths".

And this is exactly what Massey Matters has been doing. While action focused, Massey Matters doesn't actually do much of the doing. Massey Matters is not an entity as such, it is "a brand for doing things together". That is, Massey Matters works in the spaces in between – it is a vehicle for

discussion, connection, alliance and coordination for an evolving collective of interested parties who are, or want to be, active in the Massey area. The doing Massey Matters is involved directly in is about grassroots engagement - facilitation and linking, administration and organisation. These things happen through the newsletter, community forums and events and help to ensure both that Massey Matters has a mandate from the various communities in Massey and that energies are focused on priorities generated by the community.

Massey Matters also takes on enabling, brokering and co-ordinating roles as an umbrella for an array of smaller projects happening across Massey. Ownership, control and decision making and “doing the doing” remains with the individual projects and project teams, with the support of key Massey Matters staff in co-ordinating roles.

In recent times, once Massey Matters was established, a new phase has emerged and Massey Matters has evolved into a cycle of strategic planning. Elements of consolidation, strategic direction, governance considerations became more important to sustain Massey Matters as a vehicle. Just as communities evolve and change, so too did Massey Matters. In fact Massey Matters, and most community led development, works in a shifting landscape where change can feel like the only constant!

In this space, having a clarity of vision and regular reflection and review helps to ensure the project is still relevant and useful. This has meant a move to a more formalized structure. Massey Matters now has a governance committee and in June 2011 became an Incorporated Society. While Auckland Council is still the only funder at present and still provides the employment and financial framework, Massey Matters is working towards becoming fully independent administratively. There is a certain irony, given the initial aversion to formalized structure, that the emerging form of Massey Matters has also helped to ensure that the origins of the project aren't lost.

So, even after six years and changes in the way things are organised, the Massey Matters role remains being a bit like the oil in a machine: it fills the in between spaces to enable the overall machinery to work more smoothly and effectively for longer. Massey Matters was designed this way in order to be responsive in its enabling of others to take the actions they wanted to towards an ‘alternative future’, as Peter Block writes, for Massey. By providing mechanisms such as the Massey Matters Community Projects Fund (a contestable funding pool to foster and support activities undertaken by local organisations that contribute to the goals and priorities of community building in Massey), Massey Matters enables the local building of community by the local community.

Intent

To focus from the get-go on enabling and delivering action derived from what communities want and can be part of instead of spending precious time planning then using reflection and review process to establish effective systems to support the direction of energies and resources towards community-led priorities and possibilities.

Key Learnings

- Initial effort and resources into getting action happening on the ground meant the visibility and value-add of Massey matters became apparent immediately and locals wanted ot know more and to be involved.
- Over time, there has become a need for more structure. Staff changes along with shifts in community leaders and priorities mean the development of systems becomes crucial to sustaining momentum and directing energies towards where they might be most effective.
- Regular reflection and review help to ensure changes to what and how the project works consciously reference the original intent as well as how that may need to evolve.

Key outcomes

- Massey Matters has enabled many, many local projects, events and efforts, some of which are listed above.
- As well, Massey Matters plays a pivotal role in the Strong Local economies Call to Action – part of the Wellbeing Collaboration project which is a partnership of central and local government agencies and community organisations working together to improve the wellbeing of communities in West Auckland. Massey Matters co-convenes the Strong Local Economies Call to Action as a vehicle for enabling more training and employment services to be delivered in Massey as well as capacity building support for community organisations and local businesses. A number of ‘local projects have grown out of the call to action:
 - Massey Employment Gateways – again work with WEA to secure discretionary funding from the Henderson-Massey Local Board for a pilot project to establish three community employment gateways in Massey that will provide first steps employment and training support for local residents.
 - DIA Enterprising Communities Project – one of our key partners WEA is the fundholder for this project but the Enterprising Communities Coordinator works in the Massey Community to support skills development and community economic development
- Massey Matters provides the community representation in a tripartite project between the Ministry of Education and Board of Trustees at West harbour School, Auckland Council and Massey Matters staff in the development of the West Harbour Community Hub.
- Massey Matters has also spawned another brokering project Back2Back. Since 2009 the Back2Back project has been working across Ranui and Massey communities to champion and support neighbourhood-led action emerging from street and neighbourhood engagement. The project builds on the work of the Ranui Action Project, Sustainable Ranui, Tatou West Harbour, Massey Matters, Project Twin Streams, Neighbourhood Support, and others engaging with residents and neighbourhoods in Ranui and Massey.

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References

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