Quick tips on making the most of community conversation feedback

People want to know that even though your community conversations might be informal, something is going happen as a result. It's important to have a simple, practical system in place to record what you have heard from your community conversations. Here are some tips and tricks.

- If an idea comes out of a conversation that can be actioned straight away – just do it! - especially if it is something you already have ability to do yourselves, e.g. organising a street barbecue, removing some red tape holding up a community initiative. Small wins build trust and confidence to engage more!

- If you get spontaneous feedback – positive or negative – about the work of your CLD initiative – treasure it, engage with it, do something with it - don't hide it or close it down by being defensive! Feedback might be shared at your next team meeting to consider wider action needed, used towards your evaluation work (link to indicators document), and/or simply addressed one on one with the person offering the feedback.

- If feedback is not happening spontaneously, then get clever about intentionally inviting feedback through the questions you drop into conversations, e.g. so what do you think was making that work so well? What part did you play in that change happening? What, if any, contribution do you think our community initiative has made? How do you

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think we could have an even better impact?". While surveys do have their uses, conversations can be more effective in getting in-depth, useful feedback as you engage with people naturally.

- For each activity or meeting you hold, you can repeat some simple quick questions that you ask at the end – either as group round or for people to write on post-it notes or on a large paper on the wall – to gather more systematic feedback. For example: What worked well today? What didn't go so well? What improvement suggestions for next time?
- If you want statistics you can add a rating scale to questions e.g. about overall satisfaction or how useful or relevant events were. Or you might ask people for just one word that sums up how today was, and build a wordle or something similar to show the range and strength of key messages.

If your conversations are building towards something bigger – like getting a clearer shared local vision, or gathering ongoing evaluation data – then you need a few more systems in place.

- You need a simple system to record notes. For example, you could set up a Word or Excel document or a shared online Google document or just a single file one person uses.
- Put in some headings in your document as soon as themes start to emerge so that similar comments get grouped together. Add new headings as new themes emerge.
- Or if you have chosen some indicators for tracking success, use these indicators as your headings for collating evidence and have an extra space for unexpected feedback/outcomes that doesn't easily fit anywhere else!
- Set up other columns of your word table or spreadsheet for people's contact details if they have shared these. Organise this in a way that is not just adding names to your community contacts database, but is also linked to what people said was important to them, especially if they have said how they want to be involved and are happy to be identified this way.
- You might find someone with research skills or needing a project for their study who is happy to help you collate the data, but do keep it simple and retain ownership of your own data.

Your job isn't finished when you have collated all your raw data. You still have to make sense of what it all means – and your interpretations of that data may not all be the same. That's OK, even useful!

- Build from your "raw data" to summarise recurring themes and patterns, key messages about what you have learned so far. This is good to do in a group, even if one person has done some initial work, as we can often each notice different things, which helps build a richer picture.

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- Consider the So what? Now what? questions as a group. What uses are we going to make of the data? For our own planning, improving how we do things, reporting back to funders, partners, our community, for a media story?

And then you have a communication task:

- Plan how you will communicate this feedback back to the community in a variety of ways. In a newsletter? A display at the local supermarket? At a community gathering? A follow-up visit?
- How creative can you get about your communication? E.g. draw a big graphic/mindmap on a wall chart, video each of your group talking to one key theme each, do a really short powerpoint presentation, or make a game or play or who knows what fun you can have! Keep communications clear, short, simple and engaging!
- You might be planning to feed what you have learned about community strengths and aspirations into a community party or hui to shape vision and next steps. Check out our tools for running such a gathering here.
- Acknowledge whose voices you have heard so far, and whose voices are missing – as part of your ongoing engagement strategy work

And a cautionary note: Remember you are not primarily doing research ON, TO or FOR the community but engaging WITH the community to help activate action and learning around local aspirations! At every opportunity when people come up with ideas, explore what part they could play in making their own idea happen. Link people up with similar interests. Create opportunities for local voices to be part of the action and learning together to shape the future. Try not to become the person or group that everyone looks to, to fix, do, know or organize things. Rather, facilitate connections and contributions to enable people to take action on their own ideas and learn from the doing.

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Local wisdom²

Inspiring Communities catalyses locally-led change, to achieve sustainable, effective outcomes.

We are the reference point for community-led development in New Zealand, building on international and local practice-based evidence to grow and share expertise.

Inspiring Communities operates across many sectors at multiple levels.

RESOURCES

Harakeke/Flax - from the root to the flower the harakeke shares its properties.

ADVICE

Korimako/Bell Bird - fluent, graceful speaker.

EVENTS

Whakaatu/Presenting - the peak of the mountain as a stage to present from

Talk to us about your CLD training, workshop needs, coaching, support and opportunities in your community or region. We understand diversity! We can tailor packages to your specific requirements.

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