Re-imagining Governance.

There are many practical resources about good governance for community organisations and initiatives. Community Net is one great website to look at for a start. This resource offers some of our favourite emerging ideas about governance in relation to community-led development (CLD) contexts. These add to and sometimes challenge conventional wisdom on governance. Take what's useful to you and leave the rest!

What Community-led Governance could look like.

Governance will depend on what kind of project or organisation you are, your size, and your core reason for existing. There is a saying "form follows function", that is, your structures/ways of organising should reflect your purpose and activities. Take time to think about what kind of governance model you might need. No one size fits all! The key questions are:

- How and how well is your current governance structure enabling community input into decision making, encouraging collaborative action and decision making? What would you like to change and why?

- What values and culture do you want to embrace in how your CLD governance will work? How might **CLD principles** be embedded in what you do and how?

Embedding CLD Principles in governance practice.

- **Grow from shared local visions:** The most important work of governance is to be wise kaitiaki or guardians, enabling the wider community (not just those elected or appointed) to shape dreams and plan activities to enable shared local visions.

- **Build from strengths:** Governance can empower action focused, project-based teams to work with their strengths, assets and passions and get on with their work in a nimble, adaptive way – though sometimes things might not always go as planned.

- **Work with diverse people and sectors:** Governance can take the lead in building movements for collective impact in communities. They can intentionally focus on enabling broad participation and seeking new alliances: making decisions with rather than for people, proactively looking for new collaboration opportunities.

- **Grow collaborative local leadership:** *Governance needs to be about relationships and connections more than hierarchical decision making. Lightweight, flexible, flat governance structures promote high trust and shared decision-making, with diverse leadership. Leadership 'tables' in communities need to be linked, not sitting in silos.*

- **Learn by doing:** Being courageous and taking risks is all part of CLD. Along with the wider community, a governance team intentionally learns from the doing at every step. They hold themselves accountable as guardians/kaitiaki of shared values and vision but know there's a collective responsibility for action and outcomes. They are accountable to the community and other stakeholders and are up for experimenting to see what works, actively adapting to ensure things keep moving forward.

Things we learned that work.

When a CLD group or project is just getting started:

- The most important thing is to let your vision, values and culture shape your structure, not the other way around! Aim to apply CLD principles to all that you do. That includes embedding these principles in way you do things and the governance structure you create or evolve over time.

- Get started by doing some things together that people have energy for. Focusing on governance structures too early on can be a bit dull and can dampen community energy for taking action. Make sure you read the mood of those you're working with – you don't need to be a formal group or entity to make things happen!

- You might look for an organisation to support you that has shared or similar values. They might be able to awhi your group as things get going, help fund or hold funds for your project, employ team members, provide venues or resources, make connections to funders etc. You might not always need their support, but in the early days it can really help having friends there supporting. Also make sure you have a clear agreement with them about roles, responsibilities and relationships and how you'll review things, recognising that things may evolve and change with time.

- Think about who needs to be involved in the core guiding or decision making group and what processes you'll use to make decisions. Given CLD is a relational, trust- based way of working, what decisions can be made by action teams, rather than the governance group? How will you encourage wider community.

Meetings don't always have to be closed group or traditional. You could use some of the following ideas for enabling greater community participation in your governance activities.

- Host **open community gatherings** (get togethers, afternoon teas, pizza nights, picnics in the park) every 3 or 4 months to bring people together and share what's happening in the community and with your project. Look for opportunities to actively involve others in the set-up of these so that they bring their networks too. You don't have to make it look like a meeting. Have some fun, acknowledge and celebrate people doing great things, welcome others to join in ask **some powerful questions** to get people thinking, create space for people to raise issues or explore their ideas .

- Host community awards nights, where people can share and celebrate stories about projects they've been working on, what they've learnt and their ideas for 'what next'. Or community story evenings where mana whenua and others can share the history of this place and special people, events that have shaped it.

- Invite in others from your community or stakeholder networks to be part of an annual reflection and sense-making session to look at what's happened in the last year and why, and how this should shape next steps. Again, make it light and fun! Why have a meeting when you could have a party?

- Reinvent AGMs as purposeful but more fun, interesting community conversations and celebrations. Reach out to get some new voices, host a community quiz or include ideas-gathering opportunities as part of your AGM events, e.g. what ideas do teenagers in your community have and how could you support them? What can we learn from mana whenua about the history of this place and support their future plans?

- Include planning and engagement activities as part of all your community events and activities during the year. For example, at your local Easter Egg Hunt you might set up a wishing tree so children and adults can share what they value in their place or what changes they'd like to see. Or you could informally interview people with your smart-phone, asking them the same questions, or take photos of people holding a chalk board with their ideas or response to a question.

Going deeper – four key leadership functions.

From our work in communities, we can see there are at least four core elements for any governance/kaitiaki group or organisation using a CLD approach: oversight, foresight, insight, and a strong team culture.

These ideas are adapted with a community-led development lens from Chait, Ryan and Taylor's work on Governance as Leadership (2005) and from others like Trower (The Practitioner's Guide to Governance as Leadership: Building High Performing Nonprofit Boards, 2013) who have built on their insights.

Oversight: good stewardship of things currently happening, and any associated decisions about policies, communications, systems, finances, employment practices, organisational culture, legal obligations, risks, problems and performance. This is traditionally the main focus of governance. It should be part of what governance focuses on, but not the only part, especially in a CLD context.

Foresight: being good strategic thinkers, – looking ahead to where we want to head and how to get there effectively, including what relationships will be required. Considering our vision, values, mission and key strategic priorities and then learning, adapting and innovating as risks and opportunities are identified. Many groups do this through some kind of regular cycle of strategic discussion and planning. In CLD we need a loose plan but not a grand or fixed strategic plan, because things emerge and evolve in many unexpected and diverse ways. It's essential to ensure capacity, resource and mandates are in place to proactively adapt as needed.

Insight: making spaces for generative thinking where we tap into the knowledge of the people around the governance table (and beyond it) and data to take a fresh look at opportunities and challenges for making the biggest impact. Given change is the only constant, there's a need to be aware of the changing environment and what this means for our vision and next steps. Building in sense making time to both look for past patterns and new ways of approaching things are key roles for CLD governance groups.

A strong team culture: this is our opportunity to be the change we want to see in our communities. We can model values-based ways of working together that grow trust, capability and confidence for diverse ideas and people/groups to connect, succeed, learn, fail, adapt and celebrate what CLD is making possible.

Here's one way of showing how these different ways of thinking and doing can weave together across these four governance functions.

All are important, and reality is much more fluid than these boxes suggest. However, see if naming these different approaches helps expand your sense of how to do good CLD governance:

	Stewardship	Strategy	Generative thinking	Team culture
Board contribution	Oversight	Foresight	Insight	Modelling new positive ways of working together
Key question	What's wrong?	What's the plan?	What's the question?	Are we being the change we want to see in our community?
Board focus	Define problems Review performance	Solve problems Shape strategy	Frame problems Engage in sense-making	Sound process Grow community leadership voice and capability
Board process	More formal meeting procedure	Logical and evidence – based discussion	More informal and creative dialogue	Facilitating collaborative, inclusive participation and sound decisions
Problems are to be	Spotted	Solved	Framed	More deeply understood
Decision making	Resolution	Reaching consensus	Framing the question	Enabling diverse voices/perspectives
Board sees its role as	Oversight and authority	Strategic and visionary	Reflective learners Fresh perspectives	Supporting diverse teams of community-led action
Performance measures	Facts, figures, finances, reports	Strategic indicators, environment analysis	Signs of learning, discerning & adapting	Growing leadership capability and confidence to work with complexity

**Adapted from Chait, Ryan and Taylor, (2005): Governance as Leadership and Trower (2013)
The Practitioner's Guide to Governance as Leadership: Building High Performing Nonprofit Boards
with CLD principles overlaid.**

Stewardship responsibilities are really important, but that doesn't mean we should only focus on 'business as usual' governance work. Strategic thinking invites us to look at our organisation or initiative's mission and values and our vision for the difference we want to make in our community and in the world. Strategic and generative thinking work expand possibilities by **asking better questions**, and in the process, new relationships can be formed and potential for greater **collective impact** can be enabled. **PATH** (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope) is another great resource for this kind of approach which is being used with great success with individuals, whānau and organisations in Aotearoa.

How can we think and work creatively around governance?

A number of CLD initiatives and partner organisations are working creatively to achieve good governance in terms of the four key functions above, with new ways of organising, including adaptations of what Tonya Surman referred to as **constellation governance**.

This model brings people together to:

- share their understanding of a compelling need/opportunity

- grow a shared vision

- map the different assets potentially available and

- develop a loose plan of action with devolved decision making.

Those involved shape a clear "Why" or shared sense of purpose, and agreements around "How" a stewardship steering group and self-organising action teams will work. In this model, a separate secretariat or backbone supports both the stewardship group and the action teams but how these roles happen, if at all, will depend on the scale of the initiative. The constellation model shows how we can create new, unique ways of fulfilling governance functions which support collaborative leadership, mobilise resources and share power, without necessarily having to set up new legal structure!

*SOURCE: https://zeitgeist-info.com/article/2011/04/governance-structures-decentralised-or-constellation-model/
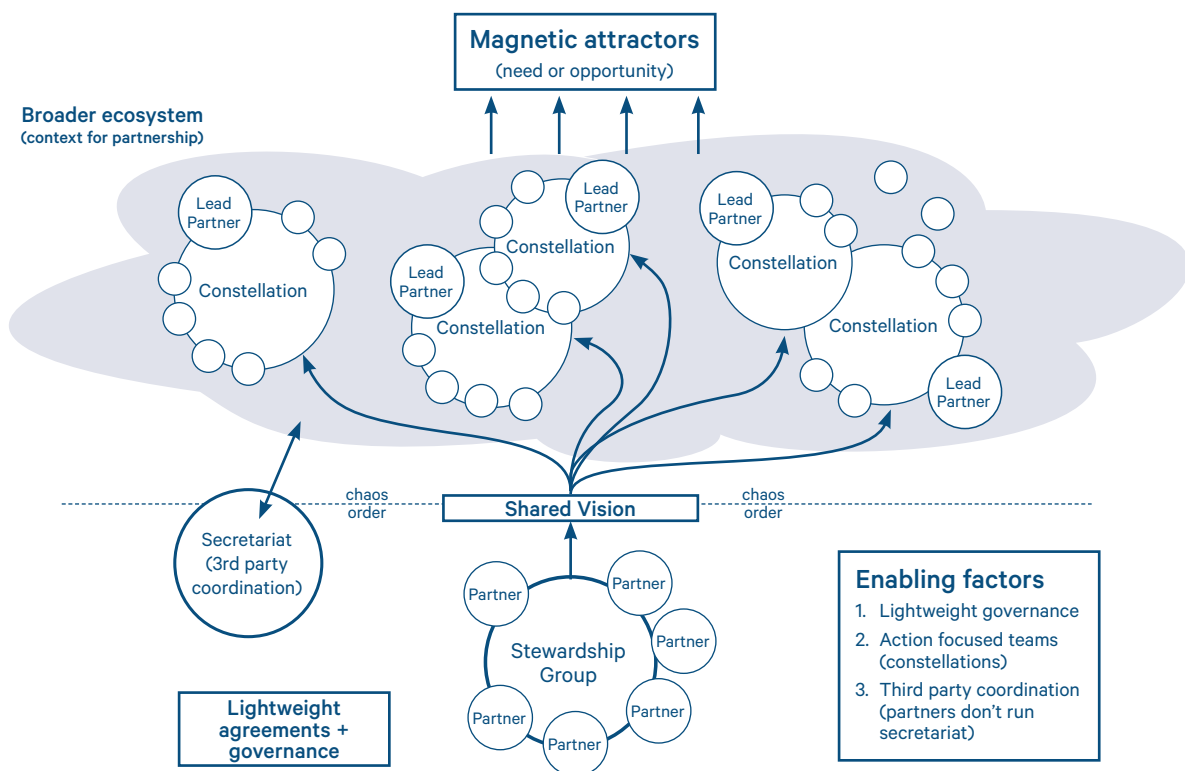
Building a positive governance culture.

Any new (or existing) governance group benefits from taking time out from their usual business to look at how they are working as a team, how effective governance and community action team relationships are working. It's helpful to pause and ask: What's working well, what's not and what could we do differently to embody CLD practices and aspirations in how we work?

Here are some practical strategies to consider in your review:

- Start where the energy is! Structure agendas to give the most time and the best energy to the key issues that matter most

- Don't fall into the habit of approving recommendations and not doing much else. This can work well for routine matters, but not big decisions

- Make space for informal discussion, sharing what's on top for people, and learning, framing key issues and relationship building opportunities as a team

- Encourage questions, not just statements about what people think about the issues being considered to encourage real dialogue. What's another way of looking at this issue? What would we like to see as the news headlines about our work in 5 years' time? How would this decision sound if we were interviewed on the local radio about it? What if our strategy is wrong? How would we know? Are we getting locked into 'either/or' thinking – what would 'and/and' thinking make possible?

- Try sometimes working in small groups to encourage multiple voices to speak up and to generate questions and alternatives

- Ask governance team members to think about different stakeholders: How would they react to this decision? What would they do in your shoes? Who isn't in the room that needs to be for good decisions to be made? Can we push the pause button till we have heard from or involved people with lived experience of the issue we're considering or bring other key expertise/perspectives we need around the decision table?

The following resources give some great examples of thinking differently about governance.

With our mantra of 'think like an organisation, act like a movement, Inspiring Communities has also a living example of how we, as an organisation, have adapted traditional models to align with our values and to allow us to apply CLD principles in how we do our mahi.

IC governance and operational model   **DOWNLOAD**

Community Engagement Governance   **DOWNLOAD**

Constellation-Governance-Model   **DOWNLOAD**

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