Connecting to Strengthen Community Sector Governance:

A national conversation to explore opportunities for growing community sector governance capability
22 March 2019

Report

Background

Community governance capacity, capability and practices are long-standing issues of shared interest across communities, the community sector, local and central government and philanthropy.

A number of initiatives focused on this issue are beginning to emerge across New Zealand. Rātā Foundation and the Centre for Social Impact identified the opportunity to bring together a group of cross-sector stakeholders for a national conversation to explore:

- *What are the shared issues, interests and experiences?*
- *What initiatives and opportunities are emerging?*
- *What potential is there for collaboration or joint action to strengthen community sector governance?*
- *What action has the greatest potential for impact?*

This report provides a summary of discussions and proposed actions from a national workshop convened in Wellington on 22 March 2019 by Rātā Foundation and the Centre for Social Impact. This first national conversation aimed to provide a starting point from which ongoing discussion and action could develop. Participants at this workshop included:

ACE Aotearoa	**LEAD Centre for Not-for-Profit Leadership**	**Victory Community Centre**
Ara Taiohi	**Marlborough District Council**	**Volunteer Marlborough**
Auckland Council	**NZ Navigator Trust**	**Volunteer Nelson**
BayTrust	**Otago Community Trust**	**Volunteer New Zealand**
Bishop's Action Foundation	**ParryField Lawyers**	**Wellington Community Trust**
Centre for Social Impact	**Rātā Foundation**	**The Wheelhouse**
Department of Internal Affairs	**Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu**	**Youth representatives**
Foundation North	**Todd Foundation**	
Inspiring Communities	**TSB Community Trust**	

As a group these participants offer or have access to:

- Communities, volunteers and governance practitioners.

- Tools, templates, resources and training programmes.

- Research capability and capacity.

- Digital platforms/tools.

- Funding - as individual trusts or via co-investment

- Influence and reach nationally, with ability to convene ongoing national conversations.

Shared Interests

The workshop process identified shared interests and aspirations for strengthening community sector governance. These shared interests centred on:

- Strengthening 'business-as-usual' governance capability across the community sector.

- Exploring opportunities for systems change, to evolve and/or generate new models of governance that are more fit-for-purpose in 2019 and more responsive to diverse organisation types.

Creating a collaborative vision

Workshop participants identified a shared interest in building opportunities for collaboration focused on strengthening governance practice. The scope and purpose of such collaboration are further described in this report.

Generating opportunities for ongoing shared conversation were seen as an important step for building a 'coalition of the willing' that could begin to develop a collaborative vision for strengthening governance. Creating this shared vision is seen as a critical success factor for achieving positive impact on a national scale.

Strengthening 'business-as-usual' capability

Participants identified a shared interest in enabling and empowering community sector organisations to strengthen their governance capacity in ways that are relevant and meaningful to their respective contexts, needs and aspirations.

This looks like strengthening and accelerating good governance practice by making information, tools, resources and capacity support more relevant, accessible and responsive.

It could also involve building better mechanisms for sharing practice and learning within and between communities and supporting the development of future leaders (youth).

Systems change

This national conversation highlighted a shared interest in driving opportunities for disruption, innovation and systems change in relation to community sector governance practice and models.

In this context, systems change opportunities were understood as relating to the structural drivers that are not universally fit-for-purpose in enabling good governance, for example, euro-centric governance models, government legislation, and funding compliance models. Systems change approaches could potentially focus on:

- Governance within more contemporary community sector operating models – such as social enterprise and community-led development.

- Culturally diverse ways of working, including kaupapa Māori approaches to governance.

Current Ecosystem

Participants mapped the current governance ecosystem to identify major challenges and strengths in relation to current governance practices; as well as the programmes, resources and investments that aim to support and enhance these practices.

The mapping process also helped to identify emergent/ promising opportunities with significant potential to address the identified challenges and strengthen governance models and practices at a local, regional and national level.

What is working well?

>> Communities that are full of inspiring, passionate leaders and local governance champions driving local change

>> There are clear examples of good collaboration to strengthen local ecosystems and develop local 'communities of practice'

>> There are lots of technical resources, information and toolkits available – but these aren't always joined-up or curated with community input

>> There are numerous effective capacity support providers working locally and regionally to strengthen practice

>> There is a growing number of strategic initiatives seeking to grow diversity in the governance space

>> There are opportunities to learn from models of support within the school governance sector

What is challenging?

>> Capacity, capability and burnout issues are commonplace across the sector – and the sector is too often 'blamed' for these issues

>> Current governance structures, legislation and models of practice assume a 'one-size-fits-all' approach, but are not universally fit-for-purpose

>> There is a lack of diversity and inclusion within current governance roles, and models of practice

>> Typical funder requirements are not responsive to non-traditional models of governance

>> There is a lack of investment into community sector governance capacity building and practice development

>> There is no clear vision for change and a lack of cross-sector leadership and collaboration to drive it

>> There is a growing number of stakeholders interested in taking a leadership role to drive change

>> There are emerging new models of governance – including communities that are finding new ways to mobilise and self-govern

>> There is emerging research into new models of governance (e.g., Community Research) and diversity (e.g., Superdiversity Institute, Centre for Social Impact)

>> The Charities Act Review is an opportunity for the sector to have a voice and influence change

What is promising/ emerging?

>> There are examples of the philanthropic sector beginning to invest strategically in governance practice e.g., Rātā Foundation, Wellington Community Trust

>> There are examples of collaboration, including umbrella models to address funding challenges related to structure and governance

The ecosystem mapping shows that:

Current structures, systems and policies are reinforcing or 'sticking' the current challenges.

There is lots of positive activity happening across the country.

There is a lack of vision, collaboration, leadership and central investment; all of which needs to be addressed.

There is priority interest in strengthening existing models of practice and growing new ones.

Strengthening current models of practice	Systems change – generating new models of practice

Conditions for Success

Workshop participants were invited to generate ideas about success in relation to community sector governance, and the conditions required to support this success.

Strengthening current models of practice		Systems change - generating new models of practice
Strong governance pathways that support recruitment, talent development and succession planning		Mechanisms to share emerging national practice locally and regionally
Mechanisms to grow and support local and regional communities of practice that strengthen capacity and capability	*Local and Regional Conditions*	Opportunities to prototype innovative models – e.g. constellations, community stewardship, 'umbrellaing', 'super-trustees'
Resources and learning opportunities that are visible, accessible, relevant and can be locally curated		Active engagement of diverse communities to generate new thinking and practice
Active engagement of diverse communities		Supported opportunities to prototype and scale new practice
Clear understanding of what 'good governance' looks likes e.g., a national capability framework		A shared vision for change/future practice and collaborative leadership to drive it
Strategic investment in strengthening community sector governance, across all layers i.e. volunteers → large sector organisations		Disrupting the privileging of one model, and growing new flexible, contemporary and culturally responsive models of governance
A national practice backbone that provides a voice for the sector and curates and disseminates learning and resources	*National Conditions*	Adaptive resourcing – disruption of traditional funding models and associated compliance requirements
Developing and resourcing backbone/ umbrella models that addresses challenges for small organisations		Government engagement in national practice conversations, to facilitate potential legislative and policy change

Priority Opportunities

Workshop participants discussed ideas/opportunities with potential to respond to and enable the success conditions identified (above).

A number of priority opportunities emerged and are described in this section, along with the potential actions that this group could take forward individually and collectively.

Priority opportunities	Actions
>> Curate and strengthen resources available to support the community sector at the local and national levels, with opportunities for user-centred processes	>> Mapping of existing tools and resources to explore consolidation and curation opportunities
	>> Nelson and Marlborough communities of practice to engage with NZ Navigator/ CommunityNet to pursue opportunities for user-led design (*in progress* - *Rātā Foundation and CSI will be working with partners, local communities and other stakeholders to support developmental approaches to strengthening capacity tools and the communities of practice approach*)
>> Consolidate current groups engaged in national conversations about governance development to activate a national leadership group/community of practice with the resources and influence to take this work forward towards a shared vision	>> Update Auckland-based group on outputs from this workshop (*in progress*)
	>> Explore potential for follow-up national hui within next 3 months to explore priority workstreams (1- strengthening capacity, and 2- systems change) (*call for interest*)
	>> Identify opportunities to engage appropriate audiences in next step developments – with a focus on increased engagement from central government and Māori and Pacific communities
	>> Explore opportunities for an affiliated group of governance capacity development practitioners (*call for interest*)
>> Advocacy/engagement with government and other regulatory bodies to catalyse systems change	>> Participant organisations to include governance considerations in submissions to the Charities Act 2005 Review; and explore potential for a joint submission from this group (*included in CSI submission*)
>> Leveraging the current engagement from philanthropic sector participants to explore co-investment opportunities	>> Share workshop feedback with the Community Trusts group to test appetite for engagement (*in progress*)