

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR CLIMATE ADAPTATION

What is climate adaptation & who pays for it?



Why should council engage the community?



How do we set achievable objectives?



What adaptation options are really on the table?



Are there any risks in this engagement?



How do we keep our community engaged & turning up?



Climate change is affecting many communities across Aotearoa and we must work together to plan for the future. This information is for council staff, particularly those new to working with communities, providing a starting point on what to consider when undertaking engagement.

Changing with our climate

START ADAPTATION PLANNING TODAY

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR CLIMATE ADAPTATION

DEEP SOUTH CHALLENGE RESEARCH DISCUSSED HERE:

- Janet Stephenson & Sophie Bond (Centre for Sustainability), “Policy guidance (including engagement framework) for local and central government”
- Priya Kurian, Debashish Munshi & Sandy Morrison (University of Waikato), “Centring culture in public engagement on climate adaptation”
- Jule Barth and Nicolle Vincent (Centre for Sustainability), “Local Authorities and Community Engagement on Climate Change Adaptation”
- Huhana Smith (Massey University), “Climate Change and Coastal Māori Communities”
- Catherine Iorns & Jesse Watts (Victoria University of Wellington), “Adaptation to Sea-Level Rise: Local Government Liability”

There’s no shortage of research about climate change or about methods of engagement. But practical guidance around how to engage communities for climate adaptation is less well-covered.

Engaging with a community on climate adaptation is as much an art as it is a science.

Science tells us that our planet is warming, that this has been caused by humans, that we’re locked into damage we can’t undo, and that we’re already feeling the impacts. If we don’t make significant reductions in our greenhouse gas emissions, the damage will get far worse.

The “art” of how to engage with communities on climate change, and climate adaptation, is more intuitive. As a practitioner in this area, you’ll be dealing with incomplete or uncertain data, as well as conflicting values.

To some degree, climate adaptation is the ability to use what we do know to make the best decisions about what we don’t know.

It is widely accepted that communities should have a role in adaptation decisions that will affect them, and many governing regulations include requirements on councils to provide opportunities for public participation. Furthermore, iwi, hapū and whānau, through Te Tiriti o Waitangi, have a right to input in these decisions, whether they are resident in your area, or not.

While there’s no adaptation rule book, some valuable insights from Deep South Challenge researchers, councils and communities with adaptation experiences are worth sharing. This infosheet is a free and frank distillation of the key questions and answers we, as well as experienced council staff, are often asked.

Our regulatory framework and responsibilities are currently evolving. Always consider the current legislation before undertaking engagement.

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WHAT IS CLIMATE ADAPTATION?

Climate change requires two responses: mitigation and adaptation.

Mitigation focuses on limiting the causes of climate change to reduce future damage (reducing greenhouse gas emissions, capturing carbon, etc.).

Adaptation refers to the crucial plans and actions that a community might take to protect itself against the current and future impacts of climate change.

Another common word used in adaptation conversations is resilience, which refers to our ability to recover equitably from the slow-moving disaster of climate change.

A robust community climate plan or strategy will likely include mitigation, adaptation, sustainability and infrastructure resilience. Note that some climate change has already been “locked in”, and the need for climate adaptation is now unavoidable.

The degree of climate adaptation required will vary depending on the climate hazard, the environment and land use. For example, unpopulated coastlines may need less climate adaptation, as the natural environment is free to evolve and change.

COMMON CLIMATE ADAPTATION SOLUTIONS:

- » Planning for adverse events (deciding to live with and recover from events)
- » Maintaining and restoring habitat (planting, wetlands)
- » Redesigning, building or adapting climate-ready housing and infrastructure (eg raised or water friendly flooring, raised electrical wires, stilts, removable structures, etc.)
- » Stopbanks
- » Seawalls (gabion baskets or concrete seawalls)
- » Beach nourishment (adding sand, shingle, gravel or other material to a beach)
- » Water capture and storage and using water efficiently
- » Relocating, moving buildings & infrastructure, selling & moving to areas with less hazards
- » Changing land use (for example, from residential housing to open, blue-green spaces)

Not all of these solutions are sustainable in the long-term, and not all of them result in equitable outcomes.

For example, when we use “hard” adaptation solutions to defend private property (think private sea walls), it literally transfers wave energy down the coast, often to a neighbour.

Outcomes like this, when the adaptation solution has become more harmful than helpful, are known as **maladaptation**.

“*Research has shown that the most successful adaptation solutions are those that work with nature.*”

ROB BELL, CONSULTANT

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Who pays for climate adaptation?

There are two parts to this question:

- » Who pays (and how much, over what time period) for the engagement process?
- » Who pays (and how much) for the adaptation solutions devised during engagement?

Community engagement aims to make the question of “who decides” more transparent and equitable. The “who pays” question also needs robust debate. Putting it aside for later is not recommended.

Even communities that have co-designed adaptation processes, and come up with relatively low-cost, low-impact solutions, struggle to implement these solutions if the funding question hasn’t been addressed up-front. In fact few, if any, adaptation solutions in Aotearoa have made it to implementation without major setbacks due to funding.

Asking “Who is prepared to pay?” and “How much, over what period of time?” might feel backwards, when you don’t yet know what you’re potentially agreeing to fund. But without some sense of funding, the exercise will likely be hypothetical, with the risk of alienating community members from further engagement.

Perhaps you might consider a cost-benefit or real options analysis before you begin. Putting options on the table from the get-go – such as targeted rates to co-fund adaptation solutions – is another positive start.

In time, centralised funding may reduce the pressure off some of these discussions. Even so, it’s likely that funding solutions will include a mix of general public and targeted charges. Creative thinking by local communities and councils will always be part of the answer.

What is your council’s commitment?

- » What is the council able to offer the community when it comes to climate adaptation engagement processes?
- » Are you (as council) making or implying any commitments around funding solutions? Are these commitments confirmed?
- » Do all relevant teams at council agree on the process and the objective?

*What is your council's commitment?
(continued)*

Do you have the funding available to run a full-on, months long, workshop-based, project with a budget for catering, venue hire, technical advisors and engineering models? An engagement process like this takes a small team to run and can easily cost tens of thousands – before any engineers are contracted or physical adaptation work has started. If you use external engineers and experienced consulting firms you can quickly be looking at hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Low-key events with less time commitment allow for more people to participate. It's well known that when people are more involved in a process (e.g. chairing a meeting, setting up the chairs and bringing some food) they feel more ownership of it, and in turn are more likely to champion the process and advocate the outcomes. One downside in this kind of engagement is that often only the usual suspects turn up and you may not attract a diverse mix of the wider community.

What adaptation options are really on the table?

Councils' core business includes providing and maintaining infrastructure assets, and they will continue to protect these assets from climate damage - at least in the short- to medium-term. (Natural or green assets such as rivers, walkways and parks are not as clear-cut.)

Councils may also have a "duty of care" towards their communities. But in lieu of clearer legislation or more case law, the legal consequences of this responsibility are not clear. To be blunt, it isn't councils' role to protect private property.

However, the Resource Management reforms currently underway are looking to address this very question. It remains to be seen how this will work, but the proposed Climate Adaptation Act aims to deal with managed retreat and financing and funding adaptation.

This background helps us understand how much resource a council might invest in any given community engagement process.

Scenario

A coastal walkway between the sea and a main road gets overtopped regularly. It's highly likely the walkway will be upgraded for years to come. Storms will hammer the walkway harder and more often, yet the walkway will continue to be "upgraded for the community". This is because the council-owned walkway is protecting the council-owned road from the sea. The council is looking after its assets.

The budget bid for this work in the council's Long-Term Plan probably won't be listed as "climate adaptation work" – even though it's exactly that. It will be something like "community walkway upgrade".

The community will be grateful, and any private property owners on the other side of this road will enjoy being protected from increasing storm surges and quick clean-ups after extreme events, at no direct cost to them.

In contrast, a natural asset or recreational area – such as a beachfront that is

What adaptation options are really on the table? (continued)

being eroded by increasing storm surges and weather events – is less likely to be upgraded by the council. From the council’s perspective, if there are no assets in harm’s way, there’s no need for adaptation solutions.

Any private property that’s impacted by this erosion is likely to be the owner’s responsibility. In this scenario, if the sea becomes a known, foreseen risk, it’s probable the homeowner’s insurance company will increase premiums or decline ongoing cover of the house. This scenario is known as “insurance retreat” (see our infosheet [House insurance and climate change](#)).

Until the government creates more robust climate adaptation policy for how local government and individuals can plan for and implement adaptation solutions, councils’ approach will understandably depend on their own assets at risk.

In short, if council infrastructure is vulnerable to the climate hazard, the council has a vested interest in long-term adaptation solutions and the community has a stronger chance that council will contribute to the cost of this solution.

Even if there’s no council-owned infrastructure at risk, an engagement process can build awareness of local climate issues, barriers and solutions, giving local people information to make informed decisions for themselves.

Okay, so where do I start?

SET AN OBJECTIVE YOU CAN DELIVER ON

- » Your objective might be to inform your community, and to learn more about concepts like whakapapa, kaitiakitanga and rangatiratanga, and the histories of the iwi and hapū in your region. This kind of objective is likely to create a strong association with whenua (place) and begin to build trust and respect. It won’t result in an adaptation “solution” per se, but setting realistic expectations with the community will be important.
- » Your objective might be to devise an adaptation strategy that means you can live with or avoid climate hazards. In this case, it will benefit everyone if the objective is specific. What hazard/s are you referring to? Who are you adapting for? How many years are you looking out to... 10, 50, 100, 1,000 years?

Test your objective with the community and with different departments across council. Can everyone sign up for it? Has your process been robust and transparent?

SCOPE IT UP

With so much uncertainty, it’s helpful to insert some structure. Ensuring your scope is well-defined from the outset is crucial. After people are signed up and committed, it’s very hard to change scope.

- » Define the physical area you’re engaging about.
- » Define the climate change hazards and the risks.

- » Share these widely and in different ways – for example, create a visual tool so people can literally see the boundaries and high-risk areas under discussion.

*Who is the community?
How do I get the right
people involved?*

Once you've got a handle on the Council's own assets and risk exposure, and you know what's on offer to the community in terms of the engagement process, budget, scope and the objective, it's time to get the community involved.

You need true community representation in a discussion as crucial as this. The local residents' association is unlikely to be a complete cross-section of any community.

It might take time to reach and convince some people that their view is valid and important, but it will be time well spent. Consider how your council could make it easier for people who aren't comfortable with conflict or with local government processes to feel more at ease.

Explicit consideration of iwi and hapū perspectives is critical and brings a clear sense of intergenerational stewardship and kaitiakitanga to the discussion. Iwi members are in high demand for their time and knowledge, but are often not properly compensated. Pay tangata whenua representatives for their expertise, as you would any other expert or technical advisor.

People who whakapapa to the area, who own or rent a home or land there, who use the area recreationally, who work or own a business there, or who have historical or cultural ties – they all form the wider community and deserve to have a voice.

Young people and less-advantaged people are often missing from community debates. Be creative and find ways to make it easier for diverse community members to attend or contribute.

*How do I define
and manage an
engagement process?*

The type of engagement process you run will depend on your budget and your objectives.

If you're creating a series of hui to form relationships and build understanding, it will likely be more fluid and less formal.

- » **South Dunedin** has been holding regular hui for a number years to allow the community to share stories, build trust and define common purpose.

If you're hoping to create a long-term adaptation strategy in an urban environment, you'll probably require a more structured process.

- » **The Hawkes Bay Coastal Hazard Strategy** has been a long-running process with impacted communities at the centre of decision making. It followed a very structured approach.

- » **The Mākara Beach project** combined formal workshops and informal community events over a tightly scheduled 6-month period.

How do I define and manage an engagement process?
(continued)

METHODOLOGY

Community engagement is a marathon not a sprint. There are several methodologies of community engagement that you can choose from to suit your goals. Before embarking on the community engagement journey, it pays to plan. Ask yourself what is going to work best for your community and understand how long and how much time/effort it may potentially take. Below are a few links to information that might help you with that process:

- » [Engaging with Communities for Climate Change Adaptation](#)
- » [The Policy Project Community Engagement Resources](#)
- » [Te Arawhiti's Engagement Framework and Engagement Guidelines for engaging with Māori communities](#)

Once you've decided on your process, set a timeline that the community representatives (and the council resources) can commit to.

- » A half-day workshop once every six months is probably doable but much more than that and many won't be able to sign up.
- » Meeting 'once every few months' won't get you very far in six months, but will work well over a longer period of a year or more.

For communities that are likely to be significantly impacted by climate change it is best to have a long running programme of engagement. This will build trust and a collective understanding of the challenges and opportunities.

To recap, so far you have explored:

- » The council commitment (council vs private assets)
- » Budget for this engagement
- » Budget for implementation
- » Objectives (in detail)
- » Your engagement process
- » Timeframes

Regardless of your process - informal hui or formal workshops - you'll need an agenda, perhaps some speakers, and some points to debate.

“Ultimately, the role of the project manager is to facilitate, moderate and empower the people of the community to share their views. You're there to give the community a bloody good listening to.”

JACQUI HASTIE, CONSULTANT

How do I keep the community involved and coming back?

The engagement process is continual and you'll need to stay connected with the community

Your community members need to feel that spending their private time discussing climate adaptation has value to them, and that their contribution is valued.

- » Can you give a koha to the attendees, or pay them for their time?
- » Can you organise free parking, and/or find a venue that limits travel time?
- » Can you serve really good food? Being generous with catering demonstrates that you value your community and their time.

Research is uncovering new (and much older) ways of engaging successfully with communities to make collective decisions. Here are some ideas:

- » Ensure there is plenty of opportunity to explore the values and cultural perspectives that each community member is bringing to the discussion. Common values can help centre engagement and provide an important measuring stick for decision making.
- » Use locally grounded art, photography, maps and interactive tools like virtual reality. These help people relate to the issue locally and to understand their own pasts and futures.
- » Get outside to understand and discuss how climate impacts are emerging. Local people are experts in their own environments.

Spend time understanding what your community's main concerns are. If relevant, schedule expert presentations that speak directly to these concerns. For example, the community might want to know more about the impact of climate change on:

- » property values, rates or insurance
- » community infrastructure like community halls, sports clubs and grounds
- » local rivers and taonga species
- » gardens and groundwater
- » public or private transport networks etc.

Resist the urge to lecture your community about global or even national climate change issues. It is important for the community to understand that they are able to influence the kinds of responses that councils may undertake. Undoubtedly, locally applied climate and social science will be required at some stage. Ensure that people want the science or at least understand why they need it.

“To ensure successful adaptation in the face of climate change, local authorities need to adopt new ways of engaging with affected communities..”

JANET STEPHENSON, CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABILITY

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR CLIMATE ADAPTATION

Community engagement on climate adaptation is about people, the whenua and the future. These are critical and emotive subjects. When combined with heavy science, discussion often becomes about risk.

In contrast, when engagement is held in stories as well as science, and when a community owns its own narrative, the discussion can more easily turn to the opportunities we can find in adaptation.

This infosheet has been developed in 2022, prior to the implementation of the Three Waters and Resource Management Act reforms.

Your council's roles and responsibilities may have changed since the publication of this infosheet.

“ People tend to be very good at ignoring low-probability events. This has been noticed internationally, even when there is significant risk facing a property. Although these events, such as flooding, are devastating, the low probability makes people think they're a long way off. ”

HUHANA SMITH, MASSEY UNIVERSITY

www.deepsouthchallenge.co.nz

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