

Engage with the community

Involving local people in the design and care of public spaces is necessary for their long-term success. Local communities provide useful information and the project can, in return, help to increase their skills and confidence. Local involvement also helps to engender a sense of connection, ownership and civic pride.

Generally, the area's Local Board or the park's governing body is responsible for deciding how and when to engage with the community and key stakeholders. Engagement and partnership with mana whenua early on in the project is critical. The appropriate time to engage will vary from project to project, depending on the community, and the scale of the project, but early engagement with key stakeholders is generally advised.

Forming a consultation or engagement plan at the outset will set out who, when and how to involve key stakeholders. IAP2 (International Association for Public Participation) provides a number of valuable resources to facilitate successful public consultation. The IAP2 Public Participation Toolbox offers techniques to inform and consult the public, and should be used to inform a consultation process. The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation outlines the level of public participation that could be proposed, ranging from consult, through to involve, collaborate and empower. It is important to establish the level of engagement proposed on the IAP2 spectrum, so that the community's expectations of its influence over any outcomes can be managed.

The consultation or engagement plan should be flexible enough to adapt to any issues that may arise. In developing a plan, consider the following questions:

- Why is the consultation being carried out?
- Who are the key stakeholders?
- Who should be involved and what interest will they have in the project?
- What previous consultation has been carried out that may provide a useful starting point?
- What existing groups are in the area that may have an interest?
- What kind of information or outcomes do you want to get out of the consultation?
- At what stage will it be important to involve different groups of people?
- What kind of techniques will achieve the desired outcomes?
- How will we provide feedback and keep the community updated on progress?
- How will we involve and engage a range of members of the community – different ages and ethnicities?

Some or all of the following people should be involved in any public consultation:

- Current and future users, including: local residents, young people and local school children
- Iwi
- Councillors and/or Local Board members
- Representatives from the relevant council departments
- Local residents' bodies including community restoration groups
- Local businesses, business associations and local investors
- The voluntary sector, for example children and young people's clubs and housing associations
- Disability Strategic Advisory Group
- Visitors to the area
- Infrastructure providers including: transport, water and wastewater, electricity and telecommunications
- Regional Sports Organisations (RSO) and local clubs
- Relevant public service providers such as the police and fire services

Those with a financial or legal interest in the project should be consulted, as well as current and future users. There is no substitute for engaging with stakeholder groups in the community, so take time to listen to any concerns they may have to ensure that what is created will serve the needs of everyone.