Partnering for Change: A shared-responsibility approach to environmental change

The idea: If farmers could see urban groups making equal change to improve the environment, they would be more motivated to make change themselves.

Aim / objective

Bring urban and rural businesses together to co-design outcomes and agree on actions that are individually applicable and collectively relevant.

The ultimate objective of this research is to equip the primary industry with a tested, shared-responsibility approach for creating environmental practice change on-farm.

Participants

Four rural and four urban businesses participated from Te Tai Tokerau / Northland, Dannevirke, Kāpiti, Te Whanganui-a-Tara / Wellington and Ōtautahi / Christchurch.
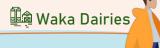
Childspace

Kamahi NORTH Ltd.

NZYF
NZ YOUNG FARMERS

Longview

Mills Albert
LIMITED

Te Karoa Farms

WOMBATNET

Waka Dairies

The journey

Businesses met to co-design the project's shared responsibility approach.

They decided they would like to learn from each other, and decided that the best approach was to visit each business in-person to increase connections and understandings of other businesses.

Over the course of six months, from Feb-Aug 2023, participants were brought together during four in-person hui and three online hui. The group visited Dannevirke, Te Tai Tokerau and Te Whānganui-a-Tara. They also stayed connected via group chat.

Changes made because of the project

Re-used excavated land	Purchased 3 hybrid vehicles	Created a sustainability plan

Asked sustainability questions in job interviews

Made changes regardless of others' help

Installed solar power

Planted more natives

Considered wider perspectives

Increased motivation to implement existing sustainability programme

Sought iwi input

Asked for fruit and veges not to be delivered in plastic

Increased rainwater collection tanks

Set firmer groundwork for green policies

Ran clothing swaps / donations

Became aware of small-scale polluting activities

Learnt about food sources

Considered day to day, individual actions instead of just farm systems

Approached community stakeholders to ensure business changes align with community needs

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Learnings

Designing clear outcomes to aspire to is important.

The shared responsibility approach and learning about and from other businesses, were a catalyst to accelerate the sustainability journey of businesses and change mindsets among work group participants. Outcomes achieved included:

- Increasing mutual understandings between businesses and bridging the rural-urban "divide"
- Securing a social license to operate
- Fostering practice change for increased environmental sustainability.

The types of businesses and their motivation dictates success

The diversity of participating businesses was a key factor in achieving outcomes. However, recruiting participants from diverse industries was challenging. Relying on existing connections and a snowball recruitment process was the most successful approach.

Rural businesses motivations centred around sharing their story and identifying practical solutions. Urban businesses sought inspiration, support and were interested in reducing their environmental impact but lacked direction and knowledge.

Co-design the project's approach is good for buy-in.

The co-design approach was successful in identifying a common vision and defining the scope. While co-design helped manage expectations, the diverse needs made compromises necessary. Everyone should be given the opportunity to leave the group if it cannot meet their expectations.

The co-design process also needed to exist alongside a single leader.

There is value in embedding the values of kotahitanga and kaitiakitanga in the project from the start.

Engagement and momentum can be maintained in different ways.

Meeting face-to-face was a priority and worked well. It was key to creating a sense of community, increasing awareness, knowledge and confidence about environmentally sustainable practices. Informal chats worked well to maintain interest and share updates.

Individual and collective progress against the shared vision, objectives and commitments should be measured, reflected on, and celebrated. This was essential to tracking the project and was useful for each participant to reflect on their journey.

Sharing the approach is essential, but requires time and skills.

Unless more work groups are implemented, or shared responsibility is embedded in other projects, the positive outcomes our pilot group experienced will stop with them.

We encouraged participants to share their experiences in their organisation and networks at regional hui. These hui generated interest in the approach and the potential creation of similar groups. However, participants need to have the capacity and capability to organise and facilitate engaging hui, which can be challenging.

Recommendations

Rely on existing organised rural groups and provide rural businesses with opportunities to lead and inspire.

Understand the impact and viability of the Partnering for Change approach would be to implement a catchment group run work group.

Meet face to face and visit each business.

Future Partnering for Change work groups need to prioritise business visits and face-to-face hui.

Manage expectations from the onset.

Expectations from each potential participant, and from the group as a whole, should be acknowledged and discussed to ensure that they can realistically be met.

Track progress and provide participants with feedback

Include monitoring and evaluation activities in the implementation of any future work groups to allow continuous improvement and make it possible to celebrate successes and share the impact of the work group externally.

Have a clear value proposition to maximise recruitment efforts.

Recruitment efforts can be supported by having a clear value proposition which should be informed by the findings from this project.

Embrace diversity while maintaining a common thread.

Consider "diversity with a common thread" when recruiting participants.

Provide leadership and structure.

Have a clear leader, either a group member or a third party, whose role will involve finding the appropriate balance between setting expectations and directions and giving free reins. The "right" balance will vary for each group.

Keep momentum without overwhelming participants.

Meeting often, particularly in the initial stages of the project, is necessary to create and maintain momentum; it will direct participants' focus and energy. A second phase of the project could then spread out hui to check-in on each other and track progress over time.