

Establishing a Local Food Policy Council

“With a collaborative response by both the community and local government, movement towards food security is possible” says Dana Thomson, Senior Health Improvement Advisor, Toi Te Ora.

The idea for establishing a food policy council in the Tauranga and the Western Bay of Plenty region came from a Toi Te Ora food security literature review in 2013. The review highlighted the need for intersectorial collaboration from all parts of the food system: production, processing, distribution, consumption, waste/recycling and sustainability in order to address the factors that impact our access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life. Evidence suggested that the best way to get things started was by forming a food policy council to drive and advocate for work addressing food insecurity.



A food policy council is an organised representative group of people working collaboratively to build a healthy local food system. To thrive, this project requires strong community partnerships including stakeholders from across the food system and representation from a wide range of sectors including local government, health and environmental sustainability.

Toi Te Ora has a history of working with local government and has a dedicated healthy policies team. One representative from this team is tasked with addressing food security through local government engagement and healthy public policy work.

Toi Te Ora initiated the relationship with key council staff champions. They have a local government engagement strategy whereby Toi Te Ora’s healthy policies team have ongoing relationships with a key staff member (typically a policy analyst) within councils across our region. In this instance Toi Te Ora developed a collaborative relationship with a council staff member with responsibility for environmental sustainability as it was broad enough to include the food system.

This relationship and work with one council was then leveraged to seek buy-in from a key contact at the neighbouring council. The working relationships with each these councils was formalised when a report was put forward to the relevant council committees, which confirmed the councils were able to commit staff time towards participating in the food policy council.

The Tauranga and Western Bay of Plenty region were selected because key indicators for the successful establishment of a food policy council were uncovered during a feasibility assessment across the broader region that Toi Te Ora serves.

Several key strategies were used to engage with different groups in the community:

- Developing a communications strategy – media, websites, resource development, public presentations.
- Targeted engagement and snowballing contacts (asking contacts to suggest other contacts) for key informant interviews, attendance/presentations/discussions held at various community food groups’ meetings.
- Facilitating three public kai hui brainstorming sessions, with results reported back to the community.
- Participating in council ‘Community Connections’ meetings in the local community.

This engagement was key in gaining a better understanding of the needs and objectives of different groups across the food system.



Local community gardens

Stakeholders and partners provided valuable support in different ways, and this project would never have gone as far as it has without input from: council staff, community food groups/collectives (e.g. ‘Good Neighbour’ food rescue, farmers’ markets, community garden groups, permaculture groups, organic farms groups), staff from the health sector, plus a range of others such as the Sustainable Business Network.

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Successes to date:

- A major milestone has been the councils formally agreeing for staff to be part of the food policy council.
- The kai hui brainstorming sessions attracted 50 people locally who wanted to part of the discussion. This has generated momentum in the community, with these people helping to spread the word of plans to form a food policy council.
- Recently the first Bay of Plenty kai hui was held and there was overwhelming support for the establishment of a local food policy council. The hui stimulated momentum, media attention and public awareness of the plan to address food issues through a food policy council.

Where to next:

As a result of the Bay of Plenty kai hui, the next step is to host a meeting for those who are committing to being part of the ongoing the group. This will effectively be the inaugural meeting of the food policy council. The purpose of the meeting will be to decide collectively the next course of action and the actions needed to get there.

Keys to success:

- Council representatives who are the champions for the food policy council (both at staff and councillor levels). Research indicates that having local government support for a food policy council is a key indicator for success.
- Positive media, particularly showing community is on board with the idea.
- Maintaining a focus on equity and engaging with Māori as a key stakeholder. This has been strengthened through engaging with local tangata whenua forums within council and also the DHB Māori health service.
- Getting some small quick wins on the board:
 - Tauranga City Council agreed to include promotion of edible planting through their Tree & Vegetation Management Policy.
 - When council were asked to play a role in the food policy council they remembered last time saying yes to the last request and how that had been a positive outcome with positive media.

Key learnings:

- Find a key champion whose role overlaps with what you're trying to achieve.
- Understand that council staff work in a political environment and that you need to work with them to ensure councillors see the benefit in any work they are doing with you.

- It's best to work in with your community and those who are willing to be involved – there is no one-size-fits-all model.
- Collectively there is a huge knowledge base in the community, and also great support for food system change.
- Not everyone has the same beliefs on what is the answer to our current food issues.
- When bringing people together it's important to focus on what they have in common – a shared desire to influence the food system.
- Once formed, the food policy council needs to have a very clearly defined decision making process.
- Things won't change fast – to date, this has been a slow process of engaging with the councils, community, and businesses to seek support for the idea of a food policy council.
- It helps to continually grow support by hosting numerous occasions for people to engage with the concept.
- Consider the sustainability of your efforts and a range of possible funding sources.
- We have shifted to talking about the concept as a strategic food alliance locally. Once formed, the group is likely to finalise its own creative name.
- Community engagement always takes time to develop the necessary relationships and reaching the right people.

“I keep meeting knowledgeable people who have been trying to address food system issues for years. They're always excited and appreciate that we're trying to help support a more coordinated approach”

Dana Thomson

Senior Health Improvement Advisor, Toi Te Ora.

For more information visit the Toi Te Ora [website](#).