

Future Search Aotearoa New Zealand case study: Murihiku Southland

Challenge and place

Following the July 2020 closure announcement of the New Zealand Aluminium Smelter (NZAS) – otherwise known as Tiwai – the Government committed to supporting the Southland region through a “Just Transitions” programme. The aim of this was to help Southland ‘build its economic, environmental, and social resilience through and beyond the planned closure of the New Zealand Aluminium Smelter in December 2024’.

Seven workstreams were established to meet this aim. Invercargill City Council signed a contract with the Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment (MBIE) to deliver on the workstream focusing on building resilience in Murihiku communities (also known as the Capacity Building workstream, and latterly called the Strong Communities Murihiku workstream). A region-wide working party was established to steer this work, and a facilitator was contracted to lead the engagement that would deliver contractual obligations, which were to:

- Develop an overarching vision and model for community capability building in Southland
- Review of existing reports and engagements to identify opportunities and projects for community development in Southland
- Develop two or three fundable project proposals for consideration.

Purpose

Throughout the process it was acknowledged that the time frame for engagement, due to Government requirements, was tight. Strong Communities Murihiku held several ‘conversation cafes’ and online conversations so that as many Southlanders as possible could contribute to future-focused thinking on building strong communities in the region.

The Future Search conference was a region-wide opportunity to build on the information collected from these engagement activities and to form the beginning of a wider community-led process for developing support for community organisations across the Murihiku region.



Image: Future Search conference Invercargill May 24 – 26 2022
Photo credit: Sandra James

Host

A working group of community representatives, including mana whenua, was established to guide and plan this work.

The aim of the group was to support community engagement for the Strong Communities Murihiku workstream.

Funding source

As part of the Just Transitions process MBIE provided funding for the workstream engagement, including contracting a facilitator.. Invercargill City Council provided oversight and administrative support.

Voices of the system

Fifty people from diverse backgrounds from throughout the Murihiku region were invited to the Strong Communities Murihiku Conference.

- 10 iwi
- 10 citizens with lived experience (across age groups/geographic/gender/ethnicity)
- 10 business people/owners
- 10 community leaders
- 10 government/local government representatives

Thirty-eight participants attended the 2 ½ day wānanga. Facilitated by Sandra James, the conference successfully brought people together to explore the past, talk about the present and dream about the future they collectively wanted to see.



Photo: Understanding external trends that are impacting on building Strong Communities in Murihiku. Photo credit: Sandra James

“The Future Search conference was an ideal way to bring together a range of people with diverse experiences and views and to mix that altogether. Through this process we were able to clearly see what the gaps were for supporting our community sector to be more resilient.”

The conversations that happened over the two and half days were powerful. This included the conversations that happened over lunch and breaks. The process generated genuine connection amongst those who attended.”

Becs Amundsen, community leader, Invercargill City

Special features

- Financial support for travel and accommodation enabled people to attend from across the region Limited time for the process, fast tracked engagement in a genuine way
- The Groundswell/anti-vax movements were active in providing public responses as part of earlier engagement
- This was the first time the wider region had come together to develop common ground for the future Catering was provided by a local social enterprise that supports people with disabilities.

Key outcomes

Information gathered through the Strong Communities Murihiku Conference and other engagement processes formed the basis for a region-wide collective impact approach.

Two further hui were held to seek feedback, confirm the approach and continue the building and strengthening of collaborative relationships.

Post Future Search activities

Following the conference a number of activities occurred:

- A follow-up hui was held to update participants on the Government process
- A second hui was held to maintain and grow connections. This was hosted by Active Southland, the region's sportstrust
- The Connected Murihiku project was developed. This project is focused on the key messages from the hui; the need for better connections across the sector and increased visibility and capability building.

- Funding was received from MBIE to support the development of this project through a Project Lead role and website
- A Connected Murihiku Project Lead was engaged, and a website developed
- Regular e-newsletter is being distributed to a growing database
- Development of training and support for community organisations commenced with a focus on working with volunteers, funding, and governance and board upskilling.

View the website [here](#).



Diagram: strong Communities Murihiku vision and strategic framework. Diagram developed by: Invercargill City Council.