

FUTURE BULLER

ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE

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Future Buller Community Engagement Interim Report – Phase One

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May 2024*

Project Overview

Future Buller is a joint long-term project between Buller District Council and the University of Canterbury, working in collaboration with the local community to find ways to respond to the changing climate and related events, for now, and into the future.

Future Buller's primary objective is to develop a robust climate adaptation plan for the Buller district.

Community Engagement

The Importance of Engagement

Effective and ongoing community engagement is vital for climate adaptation. Community engagement can empower the decision-making process and provide an avenue to work collectively for a shared vision of the future. This is not a one-off process but a series of ongoing conversations with communities across the next decades.

The key principles that underpin our approach to engagement design can be summarised as:

Open and Accountable:

- Engage openly and transparently – be honest about what we know, what we are doing, and what our constraints are.
- Deliver on commitments made.
- Ensure duty of care to participants and the engagement team.
- Provide accessible, applicable (relevant to the community), and actionable information and outputs.
- Ensure one common language across all engagement.

Inclusive:

- Engage early and keep engaging.
- Be responsive and flexible – engagement is not a one size fits all programme.
- Provide a sense of agency/self-efficacy.

Collaborative:

- Engage with a genuine desire to listen and incorporate community concerns and ideas.
- Build strong local partnerships with Mana Whenua, Māori, relevant agencies, and community groups.

What does successful engagement look like for Future Buller?

1. **Inclusive Engagement:** Ensuring that a wide range of community members with diverse perspectives actively participate in the project.
2. **Acceptance of Adaptation:** Achieving community acceptance, even if reluctant, of adaptation strategies and trigger points for future actions.
3. **Community Behaviour Change:** Evidencing proactive steps taken by the community to adapt to challenges and changes.
4. **Positive Community Sentiment:** Maintaining an optimistic and positive outlook within the community.
5. **Integration into Decisions:** Integrating community engagement into decision-making processes.

Phases

Our community engagement approach is based around four phases aligning with the broader project goals. This report focuses on the preliminary findings derived from Phase One.

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Phase 1</i>	<i>Phase 2</i>	<i>Phase 3</i>	<i>Phase 4</i>
Title	What do you value?	What is at risk?	What are our options?	Make it happen
Description	Raise awareness of the project & identify what is valued. Setting the scene & understanding communities. Questions focused on what is important, rather than what might be lost.	Understand climate risk & share information from the detailed risk analysis. Provide opportunities for questions & feedback.	Explore adaptation options & pathways. Provide a platform for community ideas on adaptation options.	Confirm 'Preferred Options'. Feedback on draft adaptation plans, pathways, or decision points.
Aim	Listen and building relationships.	Education & providing space for dialogue.	Collaborating with community & stakeholders to define options & outcomes.	Listen & gather feedback. Ensure a draft plan is submitted to council.

Phase One Activities

In November and December 2023, Future Buller hosted eight community drop-in sessions across the Buller District to start raising awareness of the project and begin a dialogue with the Buller community. Alongside these sessions, an online platform ([Future Buller: Adapting to climate change \(bullerdc.govt.nz\)](https://futurebuller.org.nz)) was launched to enable those unable to attend a face-to-face session to share their voice and engage with the project.

Approximately 90 participants attended the drop-in sessions:

Karamea	17
Ngakawau	18
Mōhikinui	5
Carter's Beach # 1	6
Carter's Beach #2	20+
Charleston	8
Punakaiki	15
Reefton	1

These drop-in sessions were informal with posters and opportunities to talk to the project team about the Buller District and community values. As the intent was to listen to, and build relationships, there was no formal presentation about the project, rather a brief overview was provided with scope to explain during the conversations. The online platform continues this approach with community members able to add notes through the Buller District Council website detailing what they value and like about the district.

Two of the face-to-face engagements were shared with the West Coast Regional Council as part of their roadshow about amendments to the natural hazard layers in the the Te Tai o Poutini Plan (TTPP). Given the shared messaging and cross-over in engaging and communicating with various communities, it was agreed that Future Buller would work with WCRC and share part of their space.

All face-to-face sessions were held in community facilities and to minimise expenditure, the project team attended multiple sessions on each day, and on consecutive days. This reduced the flexibility around the 'when' each workshop was held and 'for how long'. We are aware this led to some non-optimal timing for communities and will seek to better address this withing our budgetary constraints in phase two.

Phase One Findings – What do we value?

Post-it notes collected at face-to-face engagements and contributions to the online platform were analysed to reveal the following key values:

The importance of the natural environment

"I like the clean rivers, bush and beaches" (Charleston resident)

“Sounds of bird life and little traffic” (Karamaea resident)

Across many contributors, the importance of the connection and ease of access to the natural environment was noted. From clean rivers, natural bush, and the sounds of the sea through to the inverse of little traffic, few people and bird rather than car noise. Also noted was the dynamic nature of the environment with on-going adaptation needed.

The importance of community

“A living community with local shops and a pub” (Ngakawau resident)

“Small community that supports each other” (Charleston resident)

Many contributors noted the sense of belonging including historical ties to place, along with community connectivity and social ties. Also, within this theme it was noted that non-conformity was OK. Reduced crime was mentioned, along with distance from larger communities being a good thing.

The importance of affordability

“Affordable property and people moving here from big cities” (Ngakawau resident)

“Price of property is a big driver” (Karamaea resident)

Affordability went hand in hand with amenity of space and natural environment. Also noted under environmental was the need to maintain a local economy, and links to tourism between local amenity and the natural environment. Also noted was the need to enable community members to make good investment choices across adaptation pathways.

Concerns around this project’s aims and cost

“The decision of BDC to spend \$538,000 developing a ‘climate policy’ is yet another grotesque waste of ratepayer funds” (Westport resident)

“Money should only be spent on identified problems” (Westport resident)

A minority of community members expressed very strong concerns about the wisdom and expense of this project. Concerns included whether climate change exists, historical occurrences of expensive reports commissioned but no action taken, the focus on future rather than current problems, issues around equity and conflicts of interest in how decisions are made in the region, and concerns about agendas to take people’s land.

Summary

Phase One of community engagement was intended to generate awareness of the Future Buller project and begin the discussions about what the community values, and as a means to inform future dialogue. These four themes represent the community feedback to date. These are the things that we must ensure are retained and considered to enable successful climate change adaptation.

Community Engagement Reflections

Some aspects of the first round of engagement proved challenging with opportunities for our team to learn and adapt.

Key Issues & Challenges

- Strategic integration and prioritisation of communications and community engagement across multiple projects (with interdependencies) that enables:
 - Best use of resources, and
 - Best outcome for communities.
- Building trust across our communities following a turbulent post-disaster period.
- Best use of available budget to avoid sub-optimal outcomes e.g., events with little participation.
- Developing best practice as we work through the process i.e., there are currently no “off the shelf templates” for the delivery of climate risk assessments and adaptation plans in Aotearoa, nor for engaging with diverse communities.
- Working effectively under the challenge presented by Buller’s significant climate risk profile, in the absence of central government policy for these already highly exposed and impacted communities.
- Working effectively to communicate the considerable and increasing risk to our built environments and social structures, as well as the complex indirect and cascading risk profile.
- Keeping our most vulnerable communities safe while we face the reality of no ‘good’ options (for some).

Lessons Learned

The first round of community engagement had some limitations and unpredicted responses that led to a refocus from hosting community members towards managing safety for the female project team in the different community spaces. The following points reflect on the lessons learned from Phase One – What do we value? They also highlight the key takeaways for subsequent iterations of community engagement as we progress through the risk and adaptation phases.

1. If possible, avoid earlier than planned engagement:

Future Buller was pulled into early engagement due to TTPP engagement on coastal hazards. As there was the desire to align the interdependencies of approaches and messaging, Future Buller began the community engagement with a different plan than originally intended. To address this, Future Buller will:

- Ensure engagement is scheduled months in advance so we can build awareness of what is happening and what potential conflicts may arise.
- Ensure alignment between project schedules well in advance by maintaining effective communication and informing the different projects.

However, consideration for the moving parts to coordinate means the need to remain flexible may inevitably require adaptation in our engagement planning.

2. Community does not care which organisation we are from (BDC or WCRC or other):

Future Buller is associated with other projects as there is a similar message or theme of climate change, exposure, and resilience. To manage this cross-over, Future Buller will:

- Ensure there is a joined-up approach (both Councils), and if possible, with other agencies and departments – no ‘passing the buck’.
- Align messaging, the communications strategy, and schedule as it is all one project (Buller district future resilience).

3. We need to keep working on community awareness and participation:

Lower community participation impacts the diversity of views and reduces process robustness and legitimacy. We need to do better to:

- Ensure multiple opportunities and mechanisms are provided for engagement and offered over a period of time, including the various awareness-building activities and promotion of online engagement.
- Ensure support mechanisms (e.g., transport or online support at the library) are provided so all community members are given the opportunity to engage, whether that is at a workshop or through other methods.
- Target already established community networks and groups and community events and use these to propagate communications.
- Engage directly with youth forums and schools to ensure a diverse range of voices are heard.
- Consider fewer workshops but at more convenient times for community e.g., group Karama / Northern Buller workshop and hold in, say, Ngakawau, from 3pm – 7pm.
- Use community connectors to connect people and help build awareness of the project, and the process. Part of this includes establishing a relationship with the various community connectors so there is a willingness to participate and support the process in some instances.
- Budget availability will impact on the number (but more importantly timing) of in-person workshops that can be held. This may affect attendance as people may be less willing or able to travel longer distances to attend workshops.

4. There is misinformation, climate change denial, and mistrust regarding incompetence or hidden agendas of the Future Buller project:

To address this, Future Buller will:

- Start communicating and keep communicating (even if we have nothing new to share) through proactive engagement with The Westport News, other print media and social media, to fill the gap with facts and counter misinformation with science.

- Develop and manage a wide range of community relationships which can alleviate some of the pressure and spread of negative perceptions.
- Budget availability will impact on communications resourcing but there is the option to maintain a presence through Council's website and the Future Buller engagement platform.
- Maintain our key principles of openness and transparency, noting where there is uncertainty in the science.

5. Confrontations at events are off putting for attendees and project team members:

- Individual community members intent on derailing the process and female project team members reported feeling unsafe.
- Consider security to manage escalations for safety of the project team and other community members attending the workshops.
- Develop mixed community engagement approaches to have a wider reach throughout the community.

Next Steps

Activities already underway to address our lessons learned include:

- Planning for greater awareness and reach for Phase Two engagement via engagement with community connectors, greater advance planning, and the use of a variety of communication channels.
- Continuing to work with aligned projects to ensure integration.

Summary

Community engagement is an iterative process that needs to be flexible and adaptive in the style and approaches used. There is no clear guide to effective inclusive engagement and there is always scope to reflect and evaluate on the next steps. Future Buller needs to establish rapport to build trust and develop lasting relationships, which will help to bring awareness to the project but also help to inform the adaptation planning and decision-making. We continue our efforts to gather data on 'What is valued', to ensure that adaptation plans keep the things that matter most to Buller communities.