

Collaborating across a large region – a new approach

Organisations across Otago have expressed interest in collaborating more, but how do you make it happen? With a large diverse region, ORED (a collective of economic development agencies) looked for how collaboration could occur more deliberately and discovered 'Strategic Doing' – a process that helps people find common ground and work together. Strategic Doing builds confidence that change is possible by focussing on projects that use the resources of those at

the table. By getting traction on simpler projects, this creates impetus to collaborate more.

Several people across Otago have now completed one of the two Strategic Doing Practitioner training courses, facilitated through ORED, with a third course beginning this month. Four have since taken it to the next level, having completed the 12-week Workshop Leader Certification. We recently touched base with them to find out how they're using Strategic Doing in their work.

Inspiring Waitaki's economic development

Mel Jones, Waitaki District Council's business Attraction & Recovery Manager, used Strategic Doing to support a collaborative approach towards building an entrepreneur ecosystem in Waitaki.

Developing an entrepreneur ecosystem was identified in the Hāpaitia te Waitaki: Uplifting Waitaki Economic Development Strategy as an opportunity to improve productivity and growth.

To progress this, Mel and a core group of stakeholders workshopped possibilities using the Strategic Doing process, leading to the creation of 'Inspire Waitaki' - a "collective who want to position Waitaki as an incubator for sustainable solutions that improve our environment, grow our economy and benefit our communities."

Inspire Waitaki held its inaugural event at Oamaru's Business Hive on 13 June, where three South Island business owners shared their stories, and talked about creating a business ecosystem focused on sustainable, environmental innovation – with audience turnout exceeding expectations.

Mel says "gathering individuals from different sectors and communities around the table to share assets and come up with a collective outcome made sense for this particular initiative".

According to Mel, Strategic Doing offers an energising, structured, and timebound process for collaboration.

"This approach encourages quick wins which build momentum over time. With everyone doing a little, we made real headway quickly while building trust and deepening relationships. It's about shared effort, shared costs and shared benefits."

"The event's success has proved the value of its approach and I'm keen to help others move from talkfests to doing-fests that build stronger relationships along the way."



More than 70 people attended the first Inspire Waitaki event in June this year.

Mel sees benefits for other projects and economic development across Otago.

"We are all facing gnarly issues; skill and labour shortages, diversification in workforce development and skill build, land use optimisation including agri-innovation."

When asked how Strategic Doing fits with mana whenua views, Mel notes that while collaboration is at the heart of Te Ao Māori, the more structured, formulaic approach of Strategic Doing - with its tight timelines and its US-based language - can be challenging.

"Fortunately, the originators are keen that Strategic Doing is appropriately adapted for the culture in which it is being utilised. Having mana whenua at the table will be important to ensuring tikanga Māori is woven effectively into Strategic Doing."

"We're still figuring out where to from here. It's a new methodology, but it's proven itself as a powerful tool for engagement and action".

Using Strategic Doing to empower solutions for housing shortage

Peter Harris, Economic Development Manager for Queenstown Lakes District Council put Strategic Doing under the ultimate pressure test – Queenstown Lakes' workers' housing shortage.

With housing for workers being a pressing issue in the district, Peter brought a local group of stakeholders together using the Strategic Doing process to see what could be done to help in the short term to help.

"A key role of local economic development is to 'join the dots' between people and foster collaboration. Strategic Doing offers some structure for doing this."

Peter says while the group understood that meeting Queenstown's housing issues ultimately requires new residences to be built or for legislation to be altered, in the short-term "Strategic Doing helped us focus on what could be done now without waiting for Government or developers."

This led them to combining their knowledge and resources to create an information booklet for employers outlining how they can support their staff in securing accommodation - from offering references and taking a head lease, right through to buying a house to accommodate staff.

"We were able to pull together a diverse group and keep them focused on this one 'Big Easy'- a tangible course of action we could deliver now."

Peter said it was encouraging for people to be able to achieve something useful rather than being overwhelmed by the size of the issue.

Peter believes Strategic Doing has more far-reaching potential than the "small piece of the housing puzzle" the group worked on in this instance.

"There's potential for it to be used on local issues and to become a collaboration 'language' for economic and community development professionals across the region".

Considering mana whenua perspectives, Peter feels the collaborative, non-hierarchical nature of how decisions are made in Strategic Doing is well aligned. He notes, however, that it could be challenging because "the process jumps to solutions speedily, when the Māori approach has a strong emphasis on whakapapa and relationship building."

"Te Ao Māori needs to be respected and where possible woven into Strategic Doing. Strategic Doing will not be appropriate in all settings."

"Strategic Doing is only one tool. But I think it is a really useful tool."



"Using the Strategic Doing process, we quickly moved past the typical conversations about what the Government, council, university, corporates should be doing - and being frustrated by that - to being able to build trust through small wins to help give people confidence that positive change is doable."

Breaking new ground in strategy development with Strategic Doing

As a strategic planning, policy and communication specialist and Strategic Doing certified Workshop Leader, Andrea chose the Strategic Doing approach to begin testing out networks and ideas for developing a culture strategy.

She explains, "the concept of 'culture' is challenging and it's easy to go in endless circles finding perfect definitions and meet everyone's expectations around what a culture strategy should include. It can be a perfect storm for lots of talking and not much doing".

Andrea has been developing strategic plans for several years and was becoming frustrated with the traditional, hierarchical approach, which she says, "can get bogged down in creating overly wordy documents that often don't see much daylight."

"Strategic Doing focuses everyone on the assets already available in the community - notably networks, which are foundational in developing and maintaining a community's culture."

Andrea used a Strategic Doing workshop as a starting point for engaging a small stakeholder group.

"The process opened the group up to possibilities that could be mobilised into action immediately using existing networks and assets."

In addition to identifying a solid portfolio of ideas for the culture strategy, the workshop group identified and agreed on piloting a collaborative project between the Council's cultural facilities and Ōamaru's iconic Penguin Entertainers Club to celebrate NZ Music Month in May.

"This proved to be a really successful starting point in terms of meeting the group's strategic objectives and aligning with outcomes in Council's broader strategic framework. Everyone was able to contribute in their own

unique way to get the project over the line and it didn't feel like a burden over and above business as usual. It was actually energising for the people involved."

Andrea likes that Strategic Doing provides a framework and methodology for collaboration that is agile and flexible, and being able to link it to broader strategic frameworks.

On this note, she thinks there will need to be a considered and flexible approach to applying it in New Zealand to ensure it's a good fit for all of our unique contexts, especially where Te Ao Māori is integral."

"Strategic Doing doesn't have to be used exclusively or in isolation, and I see great potential for using it to help address some important challenges and opportunities facing our communities."



Waitaki District Archives Curator, Elly Dunckley, holds up posters donated by Oamaru's Penguin Entertainers Club, which were used to help promote a collaborative project celebrating NZ Music Month.

Addressing remote worker support in Central Otago with Strategic Doing

Cara Tipping Smith, coworking space owner in Oamaru, used the Strategic Doing approach alongside Central Otago District Council's Economic Development Manager, Nick Lanham, to consider options for a coworking space for Central Otago.

The conversation about developing a local coworking space had already started between Cara and Nick when they both undertook Strategic Doing practitioner training earlier this year.

They recognised that Strategic Doing could be a perfect fit for addressing this particular challenge.

"Coworking spaces are as much about people and culture as they are about desks and meeting rooms."

As a starting point, their first workshop resulted in the creation of an online network of remote workers in Central Otago.

Cara believes a critical element of Strategic Doing is that everyone around the table chooses what time, expertise or resources they can and want to contribute, without needing anyone else's permission.

"Working within the bounds of what you actually have, takes a lot of wishful thinking out of the equation immediately".

She considers that Strategic Doing provides a vital new pathway to achieve commercial and community outcomes.

"Community projects stand and fall on individuals, funding criteria and good will. Commercial projects, similarly. Strategic Doing challenges that dependency and gives a project more resilience."

"Bringing the already-interested people around the table made sense and I could see how Strategic Doing's asset-to-action approach could help bridge the 'no-benefactor factor'."

One thing Cara has noted is the value of administrative support across the different Strategic Doing projects.

"Where resourcing has been available for dedicated co-ordinators, there has been greater organisation and cohesion."

Speaking further on the New Zealand context she says, "I'm optimistic that Strategic Doing will be useful for mana whenua and a Te Ao Māori world view."

"While the methodology in the room is fast, it also allows groups to start very small and actively use the process to help build relationships over time."

"All that it really requires (apart from some methodological expertise) is a general willingness to agree on a small course of action, right now".

Cara said the Strategic Doing process also means they can pivot at any time to another one of their ideas and progress that possibility.

"Success with Strategic Doing is, by its nature, everyone's success - and starting slowly and building on small wins breathes a culture of sustainability into future projects."

