

CHAPTER 10: GOVERNANCE

'Your input will be taken on board': Wendy's reflections

Often during a community engagement event, like a meeting or a workshop, a senior person (planner, developer, their consultant, a bureaucrat...) will thank participants and tell them (always in the passive voice), 'Your input will be taken on board.'

But where does this information go? What is this ghost ship that sails away into the mist carrying a cargo of comments from community engagement processes? I have never seen this ship on the ocean or entering a port. Nobody I know has, either. To my knowledge, it has never docked and unloaded its treasures of community comments or the plans that evolved from community 'input'.

I see this ship in my mind's eye, lying on its side somewhere, rusted beyond recognition. That 'somewhere' is a very long way from the place where my neighbours and I contributed our ideas. Long ago, all our heartfelt and passionate contributions slid off the deck into the ocean and were washed out to sea. Some perished on the rocky beach. Tiny shreds still cling to the rotting timbers. Vestiges of our passionate words echo weakly inside the rusted hull...



Figure 10.1: Your input will be taken on board

So, if you don't mind, if you can't tell me where the ship is headed, who is steering it and how its precious cargo is to be handled, I don't want my ideas 'taken on board', thanks very much.

Introduction

'Your input will be taken "on board".'

How many times have you heard this phrase during community engagement processes? For us it always rings warning bells. It makes us question, 'How will that be taken on board?', 'How will differences of opinion be resolved?', 'Who will make the final decisions?' and 'Who will be responsible for implementation?'

After forty years of hearing this mantra, Wendy, in exasperation began carrying around a photo of a rusted beached cargo ship lying abandoned on a forsaken beach at a ship salvage yard. Her call to action: 'That is where community contributions will end up unless we challenge the "that will be taken "on board" approach.'

Governance — the final ingredient in our **EATING** approach — is often overlooked in community engagement processes. Musings about housekeeping and imagining better futures will remain simply that unless we roll up our sleeves and address the nitty-gritty details of how to transform ideas and energy into sustainable action. *For that we need* governance. If we think about the hard

work that goes on (often behind the scenes) to enable a great meal to be shared at the kitchen table – leafing through recipe books, deciding on the menu, taking allergies, cultural requirements and food preferences into account, selecting and buying ingredients or preferably picking them from the garden, finding the appropriate beverage, setting the table, preparing the meal, enjoying it, discussing it, clearing up afterwards. We could go on. And so it is with community engagement with sustainability. To transform ideas into action, we must address the *how*. This is essentially what governance is about in the context of community engagement with sustainability.

Governance at the Redland Youth Plaza

One of Steph's projects is a good illustration of the importance of building in governance approaches at the very beginning. And this was a project that involved young people, who are not always renowned for housekeeping or doing the laundry! Construction of the Redland Youth Plaza began in 2007, while Steph was working with cultural planning agency Plan C in Brisbane. The Youth Plaza, located fifteen kilometres east of Brisbane, features a world-class skate and BMX bike facility and live performance infrastructure, co-located with a basketball court and playing fields. The site was designed to become a highly supported and supportive youth space attracting young people from throughout South East Queensland.¹ The Council's project manager was committed to ensuring that the facility was relevant to the needs that local young people had expressed for years. Collaborative work with them focused on involvement in engagement activities to shape its planning and design and to determine management and activation principles and approaches.

Early on, governance issues were raised. While the Plaza was being constructed, a Plaza Advisory Crew (PAC) was established. PAC was a community group responsible for activating the facility, involving the broader community and working with the local council to resolve management issues before they could become problems. Steph worked with a diverse group of local skaters, BMX riders, artists, musicians, event producers, business owners, sponsors and council officers to develop the PAC's structure and protocols. He also proposed governance protocols. The long process was tolerated by the young people only because they had a direct commitment to the success of the facility. They knew from experience that management problems can plague skate parks. The PAC, facilitated by Plan C, met weekly for three months to resolve meeting protocols, decision-making processes and conflict-resolution procedures. They also collaboratively designed the launch event and learned event-production skills. When Wendy heard about this governance process she nearly wept, as her local Nimbin Skate Park, completed but unopened, has sat unused for several years because management and acoustic issues were not resolved early on. In a small rural community with little recreation opportunities for young people, this is regarded locally as a massive failure of governance. It did not have to be this way.²

Back in Redland Shire, despite wide acknowledgement of the importance of establishing group operating processes from the beginning, many PAC members felt the 'governance' work was tedious. Members were keen to discuss the launch and the fun they would have when the facility was completed. Governance was an intangible 'something', especially to the younger members. When Steph reported that all regular PAC meetings would incorporate a 'governance session', a teenaged member of the PAC asked, 'what is governance, anyway?' It's a good question.

What is governance, anyway?

Governance includes 'all "collective action" promoted for public purposes'³ and describes how the 'whole system of interrelated actors performs these actions'.⁴ In the context of community engagement with sustainability, governance includes practical matters like those the Redland Youth Plaza PAC addressed: capacity building and strengthening, conflict-resolution procedures, decision-making processes, evaluation and monitoring mechanisms, meeting protocols, process design and so forth. Later in this chapter we provide some recipes for good governance which offer practical suggestions.

Throughout *Kitchen Table Sustainability* we've emphasised that sustainability problems are not simple or even complicated. They are complex. They are 'wicked' problems that demand innovative approaches. Governance is a critical part of any solution. Table 10.1 below presents a typology of societal problems and corresponding strategies. Most sustainability problems exist at the *complex* end of the spectrum. The typology suggests that these types of problems require a governance approach, diffuse decision making and ongoing learning. We need to remember that when designing community engagement with sustainability.

Problem/Solution	<i>Simple</i> to <i>Complex</i>			
Type of Approach	Technical	Market	Stakeholder	Governance
Decision making	Expert elite	Cost-benefit analysis	Consensus Building	Diffuse
Policy Process	Regulations	Negotiation	Pacification	Learning

Table 10.1: Typology of societal problems and strategies

Source: after Hisschemöller 1993; Dirven et al. 2002⁵

Considerations of value and power are central to resolving governance issues.⁶ We argue that it is very difficult to resolve governance questions unless the community engagement goal and ‘promise to the public’ are both clear. This brings us back to chapter 3, where we presented the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation. If the goal is ‘empowerment’, very different governance mechanisms are required than if the goal is simply to ‘inform’. Substantial research into participatory governance has expanded our understanding of the benefits of participatory, rather than representative governance. Nevertheless, our sad experience is that most engagement practices in the countries we know still resist these innovative approaches, as Wendy’s story below illustrates.

One terrible day I had to present a draft report to my clients, senior planning bureaucrats in Sydney. They asked for a short presentation so I came with only a few notes.

‘Nothing fancy,’ they said on the phone. ‘Just tell us the highlights.’

We’d been working on the report for nearly four months and had conducted a massive review of Australian and international research. Our client wanted to know what ‘leading practice’ looked like and we were keen to find out, too. The topic was one aspect of community engagement. We felt privileged to be giving advice to such senior people. We hoped our research and our experience would make a difference. They had a huge project on their hands and seemed desperate for our advice.

Steph, the activist, had his reservations as he saw me off at Brisbane airport. Yollana was more sanguine: ‘Tell them all about it and don’t forget to tell them how important it is. Good reports *always* see the light of day, Wendy.’ she offered.

I smiled, knowing that she was probably wrong but not wanting to disappoint her. Yollana was always reminding me to watch those negative ‘seed thoughts’.

But later that day when I was ushered into the small meeting room and looked at the ashen-faced men who greeted me, I knew that things were not going to turn out the way Yollana had dreamed.

The project manager got straight to the point while his other three colleagues looked at their hands.

‘Give us your summary, please, Wendy,’ he requested, somewhat formally.

I reviewed the principles we had drawn from our research and experience and the guidance we felt would help his department with their project.

There was a long silence when I finished. Then one of the other men spoke. His voice was small for his size. He kept looking down.

‘Look, Wendy,’ he said, shuffling his papers. He picked up my report and held it gingerly, as though it might burn his fingers. ‘We know you put a lot of work into this study and it’s a really good job. Truly it is. Your recommendations are right on the money. We can see how much thought you’ve put into it.’

He put down the report.

‘And you have to know that we will never be able to implement a single one of your recommendations. I could bet my life on it. Not a single one.’

I stared at him, breathless, heat rising in my body. 'Not a single one.'

'Yes,' the project manager spoke up where the other man had left off. He fixed his eyes on a point on the wall behind me. 'I'm afraid that's right. *Totally* right. Please don't blame us for this. Our Minister would never allow us to do *any* of the things you've recommended. We have no budget to do anything properly – in consultation terms – on this project. And I am afraid there's more bad news: your report will never see the light of day. We can't let it get loose in the system, so you must promise not to release it, either. Is that understood?'

I nodded.

'I'm really sorry. Honestly, I am,' he continued. 'Please don't have a bad opinion of us, Wendy. We just can't do anything else.'

We settled the reporting arrangements. I confirmed that my invoice would be in the post.

I rang my office from the coffee shop downstairs.

'Oh dear,' Yollana said. 'I'm so sorry. At least they told you the truth. *That* part was good.'

'Please let me speak to Steph,' I said.

'I'm sorry too,' he mumbled into the phone. 'It's a great report. I wish I had been wrong.'

Unfortunately, these sorts of outcomes often accompany community engagement processes. Now, as we face the most serious problems we have ever faced as an Earth community, we need to do better. We need to think ahead to the governance implications of not acting.

Good governance practices are based both on local sustainability needs and active engagement by the local community to meet those needs. The expression, 'If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem', coined by *Chicago News* columnist Sydney J. Harris in the late 1940s, reflects our belief that maximum involvement in community engagement processes and consequent actions are required to achieve sustainability. We are interested in exploring governance that enable collective responsibility for the outcomes of community engagement. From practice there is ample evidence that the results of community-led collaboration are vastly superior to processes kept behind closed doors. *Participatory governance* is a valuable approach that has generated much research and experimentation in practice.

Exploring how people can engage actively with sustainability and how to enable it are the primary purposes of this book. Community governance is the ultimate embodiment of participatory democracy. Without authentic local access to decision-making, our communities are at risk and will grow and develop in ways that do not accurately reflect the diversity of existing local knowledge, needs and interests. Participatory governance diversifies the range of interests and perspectives from the narrow focus currently expressed through government and industry's management of governance practices. Ensuring that those seated at the table represent a diversity of voices and perspectives and using good governance approaches increases participation by those who might otherwise be marginalized or ignored. We recommend a very different paradigm from the one in which we are currently embedded. In that model, as we explain in chapter 8, Inclusion, those outside of the mainstream are often forced to battle to have their perspectives listened to by decision makers, who often appear preoccupied with what they believe to be the concerns of the dominant group.

Locating our views about participatory governance

When we were preparing this chapter, we had many conversations about participatory governance. What do we mean by it, how do we locate our views and why does it matter to community engagement with sustainability? Karl, the only one of us formally trained in sociology, downed tools in his makeshift kitchen, left his kitchen table, moved to his desk and undertook to provide an explanation, a summary of which follows.

In this book, we use a working definition of participatory governance, based on research and practice. Participatory governance is one of the foundation planks of participatory democracy and civil society's engagement in reshaping not only the institutions of governance, but also the reformation of democracy. This approach aims to empower the voices of civil society in decision making by

maximizing accountability and transparency. As Kohler-Koch, a presenter of a European Union Commission research paper, explained, 'Both political discourse and normative theories of democracy attribute civil society a key role in reinvigorating democracy'.⁷

Kohler-Koch's paper, as well as others,⁸ explores the tensions between the system of governance, the bureaucracy and external political disaffection. Governments in Western democracies face increasing pressures regarding this potential issue of legitimacy and mandate. Not surprisingly, increasing the perception of participation and inclusion is high on the agenda in many countries, as evidenced by newly elected Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's Australia 2020 workshop to explore ideas for Australia's future and communicate them to the Federal Government.

This approach, it is hoped, will somewhat insulate governments and institutions from blame for policy failures in what is an increasingly complex economic, environmental, as well governance environment. While acknowledging a degree of cynicism for such perceptions, we also see this as an opportunity for added momentum to a practice we have advocated throughout our work. It reflects a principle of our practice: to provide opportunities for even the smallest and softest voices to be heard.

Our approach in our community engagement work and in writing this book is grounded in the theoretical writings of Jürgen Habermas (communicative action theory) and Paulo Freire's educative work with poor people in South America. We believe that both theories are applicable to the problems confronting modern-day communities. We have found that institutions and the people who operate in them are as protective of their official territories as they are self-protective. Not surprisingly, many resist change and are far from transparent in their decision-making. Often they tend to obfuscate, causing serious problems for communities trying to engage with them. Nevertheless, those institutions need to retain their functions while we work to rebuild them. We need competent people to operate them. We need to find a way to repair the ship while keeping it afloat. But these gatekeepers must change if communities are to have real influence in addressing the planetary crisis. We, our neighbours and professionals everywhere, must find ways to help them change while the 'ship of society' remains afloat.

This is where the educative processes and strategies at the heart of Freire's work join the insights of the Frankfurt School.⁹ Our experience reveals that only through facilitating the empowerment of individuals to represent themselves and their communities in the company of their neighbours, by strengthening their own capacities, asking informed questions and aiming for institutional accountability in their dealings with functionaries in those institutions, is there hope for the future. We believe that sinking the ship is not an option.

Five good governance principles for community engagement with sustainability

Many characteristics of good governance are advocated by existing research and practice. These include approaches that are empowering, transparent, responsive, consensus-oriented, participatory, accountable, equitable, inclusive, effective, efficient, coordinated, flexible, strategic, information-rich, persistent and so on. In previous books in the *Community Participation in Practice* suite of books (1994-2003), Wendy and colleagues teased out many of these approaches in illustrative case studies from their practice. This is well tilled ground. Alarming, however, many proponents and practitioners ignore the advice and warnings that are readily available.

We have identified five principles that we consider essential for designing governance approaches for community engagement with sustainability. We outline them briefly below before sharing two cautionary tales: a tale of a community engagement processes that fell by the wayside and a tale that demonstrates these principles in action.

Principle 1: Accountability

Accountability is vital to developing new paradigms of governance. It provides an ongoing openness and responsibility regarding how governance occurs, ensuring that relationships based on trust and collaboration can emerge. Governance structures must be accountable to the community and to supporting local, regional and global sustainability on all levels. Creating accountability in governance requires a transparent, multi-step approach that focuses on diverse engagement, action to flow from this engagement, evaluation to follow action and review of the overall process to emerge from this evaluation. If at any stage the doors are closed and the process stops being accountable, governance opportunities are lost and the community ceases to have the influence that it needs to be effective.

Principle 2: Transparency

Transparent governance practice requires full community access to decision-making processes, legal and statutory information (and that bugbear 'commercial-in-confidence' material). Transparency

requires that this engagement be grounded in realistic power dynamics so that those involved are clear about levels of influence in decision-making and policy forming. Governance practices also need to be consistent with the effective rule of law that produces and protects fair legal frameworks and guarantees community access to good governance practice, enforced impartially through an independent judiciary and an incorruptible police force.

Principle 3: *Strategic adaptability*

Strategic governance must begin with the collaborative development of shared future visions involving government, community and industry participants. Adaptive, strategic approaches can then be produced based on these visions, while focusing on action outcomes to achieve sustainability for community management. Strategic and sustainable governance requires shared decision-making and management practices. Governance *structures* must reflect the diversity of interests of all stakeholders, encourage collaboration and integrate diverse views. This means we need succession strategies, intergenerational collaboration processes and knowledge-management systems to ensure that some people or groups do not dominate governance processes.

Principle 4: *Participation*

In developing new participatory governance structures, inclusiveness must become our overriding mantra. This requires involvement of those often neglected or ignored in the decision-making process, including young, older, marginalized people, young people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. It depends upon authentic access to information about how decision-making occurs, including use of adaptable, consensus-based processes that ensure a diversity of stakeholder representation in resulting policy and actions. These processes also need to acknowledge that different agencies have different timeframes, processes and understandings. We must design governance practice to accommodate these localized needs.

Engagement in governance also needs to be empowering on both personal and community levels. This means that processes should strengthen social capital and social networks and create opportunities for relationships, particularly between and among stakeholders whose needs may seem to conflict. As we have discussed, current approaches to governance tend to prioritize *economic* outcomes and marginalize those who seek to broaden the discussion to encompass social, cultural and environmental issues. How the discussion is framed, as demonstrated in chapter 6, Action and chapter 8, Inclusion, can limit participation. Developing new approaches to governance, based on sustainable, participatory practices, requires providing more authentic access to the processes of governance and decision-making. We must employ appropriate structures and focus on fairness and equitable representation. This means access to the highest level of policy development and decision-making, not simply tinkering at the edges of implementation and evaluation. Once again, the distinction is the difference between influencing what a development should look like and deciding whether it should happen at all.

Accountability groups, reference groups, citizen action groups and other forms of governance groups are valuable in different contexts. Membership issues are very important, as 'stacking' is always a concern and representativeness needs to be vigilantly monitored. Any group with governance responsibilities — for carrying a plan or policy into fruition — must reflect the diversity of the local community, as well as affiliated stakeholders. We are convinced that facilitation is the key to successful participation: groups need to be facilitated equitably so that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate, to have their perspectives heard and to contribute both the decisions and the way they are made. Importantly, those involved in governance groups also need to be clear about how much influence they are going to have over the final decisions.

Principle 5: *Persistence and patience*

In the transition to a participatory model, we must acknowledge that some people will be jaded, cynical and unsure about how they can participate in governance practice. Further, redefining governance relationships to include community, government and industry participation will take time and resourcing if we want to facilitate new dialogic structures. Given these considerations, the transition to a new approach based on shared values needs persistence and patience from all concerned: government agencies, community leaders and organizers and participants. These qualities always seem to be in short supply.

Reflections on governance in practice

All five of us have experienced good and terrible examples of governance approaches to community engagement with sustainability. Wendy, however, has over forty years of experience observing what works and what doesn't. She's witnessed the consequences of ignoring good governance principles, when the laundry is left undone. In this section, we reflect on two community engagement processes.

They are two very different tales of how governance was taken into account and the subsequent consequences.

Good Governance Principles ignored: The tale of BlueWater Cove

It's sad to report that a project that had so much going for it ended up as a failure. And we believe it's largely because nobody was willing to do the *laundry*. When Steph, Wendy and Yollana think back on the sad tale of BlueWater Cove, we're reminded of a provocative book by Jack Kornfield, *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry: How the Heart Grows Wise on the Spiritual Path*.¹⁰ Kornfield, a wise spiritual teacher, explains that even the most enlightened beings have to take time out to 'do the laundry'. Life is not one continual ecstatic spiritual experience, even for a guru. We believe that the same applies to community engagement with sustainability and especially to the 'governance' component, which is so often ignored. We have to make time for the time-consuming, boring and repetitive work of community engagement. And that's often the governance components, which is one reason we have featured 'governance' in this book.

In the case of BlueWater Cove, a waterfront site near a large northern Australian city, we designed and implemented a sophisticated program of community engagement and capacity-building process with the full support of the developer, DevelopersRUs. That was necessary because the project was a 'rescue mission' for a project that had previously fallen apart under suspicious circumstances, leaving some local people financially burned and others who had bought neighbouring properties very disappointed. They had been promised a marina, various resort and recreation facilities and all manner of delightful beachside amenities on their doorsteps. None had eventuated. And, sadly, several years after our involvement in the enthusiastic relaunch, described by one local as 'clowns and elephants dancing down the street,' it appeared that nothing was happening. Again.

Initially, we were so proud of our sophisticated engagement processes that we intended to make the BlueWater Cove story the cornerstone of this book, using its full identity. However, when we returned to BlueWater Cove to see how things were proceeding, we discovered that the project had stalled and that local people felt dispirited and betrayed by inaction. The delays were not the developer's fault. Quite the contrary. But nobody was telling the community what was going on. More than that, the community members didn't know what to do. They had no formal processes, protocols, or further ways to be empowered. The developer was holding only occasional meetings and the locals were slipping into passivity and despair. They had never taken charge – as a community – of the governance components of the engagement process after the 'clowns and elephants' departed. They had not built their capacity and they felt completely disempowered by the inexplicable delays.

As we explored matters further, it became clear that the developer and their consultants (and community members) had found participatory design exercises, bus trips, site visits and long lunches with residents more fun than developing and refining consensus-based decision-making processes and protocols for the community group that was to guide the project. Thus, the whole governance process had fallen apart. Further, the charismatic and courageous project manager had resigned, leaving instead an inexperienced, nervous and risk-adverse deputy, terrified of even speaking with the community when he had 'nothing to report'. In a fertile ground of silence that continued for months and years, suspicion again took root. The community came to believe that they had been let down again (when, actually, there were some hopeful signs behind the scenes). Inside the developer's office, however, it was 'business as usual' and the openness and community capacity-building approaches that characterized our earlier work and that of the courageous project manager were nowhere to be seen. In fact, she was now vilified. She had said that the culture change and internal governance changes had been the most difficult of all to achieve in the relaunch of this complex project. Now, no longer part of 'the family', she had to admit to the failure of her attempts at cultural change within the organization.

Some very simple – but possibly boring – processes – could have contributed to an ongoing relationship between the developer and the community and much higher levels of trust. An empowered community might have been able to help the developer put pressure on others who were delaying progress. We discuss these processes in this chapter. We also show how, in a very different community some years earlier, careful attention to boring matters of governance resulted in strong and enduring community strengthening and empowerment processes. Those processes helped to transform a depressed and disenchanting community into one that was full of energy and ready to embrace change. That community was the low-income community of Eagleby, described in the next story. In Eagleby, with the help of a committed and thoughtful project manager, community members did the laundry. Lots of it.

Good governance principles in action: the tale of the Eagleby Residents Action Group (ERAG)

Wendy was leafing through some old photos when she came upon the one showing members of the Eagleby community were making the award of the first *Order of Eagleby* to Mike Allen in 2000. As the second recipient of that honour the following year, she holds these matters very dear to her heart. What is a nondescript low-income community on the edge of Brisbane doing giving an award to a consultant? And what for? And what did it matter? And what does this mean for governance in a community engagement context?

A lot, truly. But first, a bit of background:

When Wendy began working in Eagleby in 1999, it was regarded as one of the most disadvantaged communities in Queensland. Bureaucrats ticked off a long list of things that were supposedly wrong there. The usual: high levels of welfare dependence, little community infrastructure, too much drug use and pregnancy among teens. Two State Government Departments, Queensland Housing and Queensland Health, had massive projects operating and Wendy was managing the community engagement processes for both of them. Like it or not, Eagleby was being 'renewed'.

Sad feelings about governance

The residents were very sceptical about the process. Sadly, some of their scepticism was well founded. Their comments below (in the public record) are typical of community members who have experienced poorly organised community engagement processes with inadequate attention to governance:

'When CRP [Community Renewal Program] first commenced the community was stumbling, but when we asked for information about how other CR [community renewal] areas had done their community reference group we were not provided with anything. There was very little guidance offered by the Department of Housing about how we should go about it.'

'The ERAG [Eagleby Residents Action Group] was functioning prior to CRP as the Eagleby Action Team which evolved into the ERAG. Our name was RAGE (Renewal Action Group for Eagleby) but senior staff of the Department of Housing came to one of our meetings and advised that this was an "unfortunate" name for the group and that we would have to change it to ERAG.'

'...it [the demand for the name change] immediately set the Department up in conflict with us. It caused a lot of negative feeling towards Housing and a loss of trust. We felt that once staff of CRP decided the group should go down this path, that was it and we were just forced to go down that path.'

'Another example was the terms of reference for the ERAG were given to us (without discussion/consultation) and we were expected to simply accept them. We felt no credibility was accorded the group as a representative body, or that Eagleby residents would have skills – "it was a Big Brother statement".... they were doing things to us rather than working with us.'¹¹

The farmer from Toowoomba

These experiences simply added to residents' earlier experiences of being ignored by successive local and state governments for several decades. Naturally, they were suspicious of new programs and especially suspicious of consultants. But Mike Allen, first recipient of the coveted *Order of Eagleby* award, was something else. He was a farmer in his day job – in Toowoomba, a rural community some 150 kilometres away. He came to work in jeans and spoke with people in plain English. He knew how to listen and he never put people down. Furthermore, he understood bureaucracies. What a blessing!

In a wide-ranging series of workshops over about six weeks, Mike helped the Eagleby residents and members of the newly formed Eagleby Residents Action Group (ERAG) tackle the issues of how the Eagleby community would relate to the bureaucrats, funding programs, administrative requirements and the management of several millions of dollars for social and physical infrastructure that was eventually poured into the community. As one resident commented, 'We were on a steep learning curve and made it up as we went along.' The first meeting of the community organisation (a requirement of the funding) was poignant. Nobody felt confident enough to take minutes or had much experience with meeting procedures. It was embarrassing and frightening. The woman who tried to take the meeting notes ran

sobbing from the room. It felt like it was going to be a long haul.

Mike's tireless and patient tutoring helped the Eagleby residents develop their confidence, to remember what they already knew from other organisations and processes, to build solidarity and get a sense of their mission and their identity as a group. All agreed that they had to be protected from unwelcome intrusion until they were ready: until the group had properly 'formed'. One memorable day when ERAG was meeting, early in its formation, the Minister's minder arrived at the door, demanding to attend the meeting. Wendy and the local community development worker stood with their backs to the door, protesting that ERAG was not ready to meet with anyone and when they were, his boss (who was also the local member) would be the first to know. This local member was not the housing or health minister... but had another Cabinet portfolio. He was a powerful man, an old-style Queensland politician.

With Mike's gentle tutoring, ERAG flourished: no subject was too embarrassing; no shy question seen as too foolish to ask. It took about six weeks of group-development workshops, learning meeting procedures, unpacking the intricacies of *Robert's Rules of Order*, developing decision-making models, electing and training officers, learning how to take meeting notes, chair meetings, propose motions, read and prepare budgets...

At the same time that Mike Allen was working with ERAG on governance issues, Wendy's husband Karl Langheinrich, a qualified social worker, was helping the new community organization grapple with meeting procedures and protocols so that they would be effective in working with the various government departments that had programs operating there. Karl was adamant that this form of 'laundry' needed attention, partly because of problems he and Wendy had recently experienced in projects in Sydney, where community groups refused to tackle the boring tasks of governance and decision-making. Karl prepared a paper called, 'Suggestions for Procedural Rules for Use with a Consensus Interaction Method Decision-Making Framework'. He began by explaining the weaknesses of formal meeting procedures, the role of a facilitator as opposed to a Chair, the role of the recorder, common rules for managing meetings, process guides and examples of how to work through various roles. His work supported Mike Allen's coaching and mentoring.

When all of this was absorbed – with lots of practice runs and role playing – ERAG was ready.

Then they invited the bureaucrats to lunch.

In some ways, Eagleby has been a poster child for community renewal in Queensland and Australia. Other projects have been successful, too, but if you look at Eagleby's website (www.eagleby.org.au), you can see what we mean. All those weeks doing the laundry and learning how to do boring and repetitive (but necessary) administrative tasks helped the community strengthen their capacity to deal with all the issues they faced in subsequent years. They've taken initiatives in many realms, including community safety, park regeneration, development of a wetlands recreation area and community employment programs. ERAG was recently disbanded, as the formal renewal funding has finished and life is more or less 'normal' there now. But ERAG 'graduates' work for pay now – in community renewal programs throughout Queensland – helping other communities. We believe that this is as it should be...

Early forays into partnership and collaboration

There is more to the Eagleby governance story than the personal qualities of Mike Allen, however. In 2000, the Eagleby Residents Action Group negotiated a milestone agreement with Queensland Health that represented the type of governance structures we have been discussing in this chapter. The words, 'whole-of-government approach' are easy to roll off the tongue but fraught in practice, as different government agencies have different agendas, different management cultures and different attitudes and approaches to community engagement. In Eagleby, the South Coast Public Health Unit consciously pioneered a leading practice approach to community engagement and made great commitment to it. After many months of negotiation with the local community, an exemplary protocol or Memorandum of Understanding (a Partnership Agreement) was signed with ERAG. This approach guided the Eagleby *Stories in a Park* project that Wendy, Karl and their colleague community artist and activist Graeme Dunstan worked on for many months.

This commitment won the confidence of Eagleby residents. But there was much to be learned on all sides. Much of consultants' time was spent consolidating and affirming ERAG as a working committee and a confident community voice, and, as described above, tutoring committee members in meeting skills, acronyms and the ways of bureaucrats. The success of this governance work was evident in the prevailing good feeling within ERAG meetings and the goodwill towards, and support for, the *Stories*

project. It was also evident in the number of government representatives who were drawn to attend ERAG's weekly meetings. For a bureaucrat obliged to consult a community, finding a stable, intelligent and receptive community committee to work with is a very important matter.

The partnership agreement was a formal document signed by Queensland Health and the President of ERAG in December 2000. It commits each party to work collaboratively with the other. The effectiveness of this document is testament to the work of another remarkable professional who was willing to 'do the laundry', Project Manager, Rebecca Cotton. This is Rebecca's recollection of the process of negotiating the governance agreement:

Rebecca's story

I'll always remember how it felt.

We decided to have a session that would help us to build trust with these folk we were only just getting to know before we commenced with the 'supportive environments for physical activity' work as government representatives. I sensed that many of them had been damaged by their experiences of dealing with government authorities — and I had heard that some of them had quite tragic stories (Jane having her kids removed — how heart-breaking).

To be honest, I felt a bit embarrassed coming in from a state government body. I felt like an intruder who was preceded by a history of intruders who left damage in their wake. I wanted to prove somehow that I wasn't like the others. Wanted to prove that the South Coast Public Health Unit (Kate and I) weren't like the others—that we were fair dinkum. I know that Kate felt the same way. So we planned a session that would begin by allowing the (later to be called) ERAG folk a chance to 'tell us their horror stories' (and that is exactly how I said it) about dealing with government people and representatives.

After each horror story, we paused in the group for a moment to think about how that must have felt for the person telling the story. Together we looked for the lesson that the government could learn from the story. We then made a reciprocal agreement about the story. That became the Partnership Agreement. Basically we said, 'OK, we promise to XYZ. And what can you promise us in return?'

And we did this for each story told:

- 1 Horror story told.
- 2 Reflect as a group on how it must have felt.
- 3 What can we learn from that story?
- 4 What do we promise you as a result of hearing this story?
- 5 And what do you promise us in return?

Each of these reciprocal promises became a reciprocal agreement. And all the agreements together made our partnership agreement. Each session was very moving and intense - very intimate. And we were always held to the agreement. ERAG and the Eagleby people quickly reminded us if we weren't living up to what we promised. I heard a few years after (after I had left) that ERAG continued to be happy to deal with Queensland Health 'because we have a partnership agreement with them'. I was so pleased that the Partnership Agreement had a lasting effect.

The Queensland Health Partnership Agreement

What makes the process described above so potent is that the Partnership Agreement was written in the form of guidelines between Queensland Health and ERAG members. It's a precise, signed and dated statement about what each group promises to the other with respect to the SEPA-Q (Supportive Environments for Physical Activity) project.

PARTNERSHIP GUIDELINES, 2000

1. Input and Guidance

- Queensland Health staff will ensure that ERAG is given the opportunity to provide input and guidance for all stages of project development and implementation.
- ERAG members will actively follow the progress of the SEPA-Q project in Eagleby and provide input and guidance to the Queensland Health staff.

2. Best Practice

- Queensland Health staff will strive to base all work on proven best practice at every stage of the process.
- ERAG will hold the Queensland Health project staff accountable for using proven best practice in all their work.

3. Keeping Up To Date

- Queensland Health staff will provide an update at an ERAG meeting on all SEPA-Q activities at least once per month. This update will include a written progress brief and a spoken update by one of the Queensland Health staff.
- ERAG will ensure that a Queensland Health staff member is given an opportunity to provide a progress update at least once per month at an ERAG meeting.

4. Raising and Listening to Issues

- Queensland Health staff will listen actively to all comments and concerns raised by ERAG members. We welcome discussion and negotiation on any issue pertaining to SEPA-Q.
- ERAG will raise all concerns about the SEPA-Q project with the Queensland Health staff according to the ERAG policy guidelines for communications.

5. Respect

- Queensland Health staff will treat all members of ERAG and the Eagleby community with the utmost respect, recognising that every person has a valuable contribution to make to the project.
- ERAG will treat the Queensland Health staff with respect and value them as equals in this process.

6. Preferred Processes

- Queensland Health staff will honour the preferred processes of ERAG, adapting work to align with these processes.
- ERAG will clearly explain their preferred processes to the Queensland Health staff so that the SEPA-Q project may come into alignment with these processes at every stage.

7. Asking and Answering Questions

- Queensland Health staff will answer questions honestly, with courtesy and respect and with appropriate language. If we cannot answer your questions straight away due to a lack of knowledge, we will research the issue and return an answer to you as soon as possible.
- ERAG members will ask and answer questions with honesty and integrity.

8. Courtesy

- Queensland Health staff will always be mindful that they are guests in the Eagleby community and will behave with courtesy and respect at all times.
- As hosts, ERAG will behave with courtesy and respect at all times.

9. Preparation and Punctuality

- Queensland Health staff will arrive at all ERAG meetings and other SEPA-Q related events on time and well prepared.
- ERAG members will arrive at meetings with Queensland Health staff on time and prepared.

10a. Decision-Making

- Queensland Health staff will respect and honour the decisions made by ERAG.
- ERAG will clearly explain all decisions made concerning the SEPA-Q project and ensure that Queensland Health staff understand the reasoning behind the decisions.

10b. Decision-Making

- Queensland Health staff will engage ERAG in all decision-making processes concerning the project.
- ERAG members will honour decisions made in consultation and co-operation with Queensland Health staff.

11. Positive Representation

- Queensland Health staff will always present Eagleby in a positive manner in all discussions, meetings and media-related activities.
- ERAG will strive to positively promote the SEPA-Q activities to the wider Eagleby community, and to prevent and resolve any rumours that may develop.

12. Acknowledgement and Opportunity

- Queensland Health staff will acknowledge and reward the effort made by ERAG members and the community in the SEPA-Q process.
- ERAG will endeavour to link local people with specific skills and talents with appropriate SEPA-Q initiatives.

13. Overcoming 'Red Tape' Frustration

- Queensland Health staff will assist ERAG members by identifying and clearly explaining any bureaucratic processes and procedures which may delay SEPA-Q activities. Queensland Health staff will also strive to overcome any bureaucratic restrictions that do not support best practice community participation in the SEPA-Q project.
- ERAG members will express any dissatisfaction with delays in progress and will ask for clarification from Queensland Health staff in this event. ERAG members will also identify any blocks to the progress of the SEPA-Q project as soon as they become evident.

This Agreement is still spoken about as a benchmark in engagement processes. It took many weeks of painful and sometimes boring 'laundry' work to come up with such a straightforward and helpful document. But, as Rebecca Cotton explained above, it worked. In our experience, careful attention to the mundane tasks in the 'laundry' of community governance is never wasted.

Rebecca Cotton's story and the Partnership Guidelines are testament to what is possible in community engagement. The willingness of government to engage with mistakes of the past is far too rare. In refusing to be open to negative feedback, government agencies often lose a valuable opportunity to build trust and improve relationships and community engagement processes. We hope that this story will inspire more people in 'positions of power' to admit and to learn from the mistakes of their organization, so that the real (the 'everyday' laundry) work of community engagement can begin and flourish.

Coming to public judgment

One of the important stages in participatory governance is called 'coming to public judgment'. This means moving from public *opinion* to public *judgment*. Coming to judgment requires three steps: (1) consciousness raising, (2) working through and (3) resolution. It also involves local people accepting that they no longer have to bow to expert views and what has been called 'a culture of technical control'. As Costanza explains, 'Coming to judgment is the process of confronting and resolving these inconsistencies by breaking down the barriers between the mutually exclusive compartments into which knowledge and information have been put'.¹²

Costanza argues that, 'This can be done most effectively by formulating the choices as complete visions of the alternative states of the world, and incorporating all the divergent elements'.¹³ We strongly support this view, as we have found that community groups must work divergent thinking and move into more convergent thinking modes. This is the difficult work: the 'groan zone'.¹⁴ Demanding work, for communities and for facilitators, it can be enormously assisted by strong governance structures that give community members confidence that their contributions will not be trumped by 'expert' views and that their contributions will reach decision-makers and make a difference.

Recipes for good governance

As the tales above illustrate when governance arrangements fail, people jump ship. Sometimes the ship goes down, with some people still on board. On the other hand, when good governance arrangements are addressed up front and centre, conditions for a possibly transformative journey are optimised. The ERAG story is a wonderful demonstration of this. We want to keep the ship afloat.

Below we provide four recipes for good governance that will ensure better community engagement with sustainability.

Recipe 1: *Resourcing*

Recipe 2: *Processes and procedures*

Recipe 3: *Capacity strengthening*

Recipe 4: *Learning opportunities*

Recipe 1: *Resourcing*

We advocate a participatory approach to governance which requires addressing how we can resource the community involved in any engagement process to enable full participation. Resourcing includes access to funding, meeting spaces in which to meet and organize and access to information and knowledge. Community Assistance Schemes (CAS) and similar programs provide specific resource and infrastructure funding to community organisations working for broad community outcomes. Providing funding and access to shared community spaces, noticeboards, equipment and other resources strengthen opportunities for action to occur and trusting relationships between proponents and the wider community. Shared community spaces help the local community to participate more effectively, as they can be used for meeting, gathering, information dispersal, storage and other activities associated with community organizing.

A *coproduction* model allows for participant assistance in financial terms, adequate budgets for resourcing of community groups, to pay their expenses so that they can participate fully and easily (the argument being that the bureaucrats and consultants are paid but the community members are volunteers).

Access to information and knowledge is another aspect. Information made available to a community organisation or group needs to be in a form that they can digest, taking issues of cultural and linguistic diversity into account. Reports and plans need to be in understandable formats and plain words. Community groups need sufficient notice and time to review reports and respond to plans and proposals so that the group can convene a meeting, gather advice, seek professional assistance, if required, workshop a plan or proposal and prepare a thoughtful response. Regular and convenient meeting times of appropriate length are also important.

Recipe 2: *Processes and procedures*

Many practical processes and procedures are necessary to keep wind in the sails of community engagement processes to support transformative change: decision-making processes, conflict-resolution procedures, accountability mechanisms and meeting protocols, to name but a few. As with any decision-making structure, there are always opportunities for groups of like-minded people to dominate, control and manipulate community governance processes and structures. However, when we incorporate good governance principles, we can help participants self-manage and regulate inappropriate behaviour. Appropriate conflict-resolution processes can maintain balance and reduce domination, offering participants confidence that there are systems for maintaining balance, equity and equal access.

When designing governance processes and procedures, six questions require our attention:

1 High-Level Decision-Makers: How can we enable access to high-level decision-makers so that the passions and concerns of the local community can be heard directly and not filtered through bureaucratic language?

2 The Same Faces: How can we provide assurance that the same people will be able to be contacted (so that the time spent in relationship-building with bureaucrats is not wasted), and that that person *has* authority to make decisions when meeting with a representative of a community group?

3 Children and Young People: How can children and young people be incorporated into the decision-making processes as full participants to ensure they are included and that their views are not exclusively communicated by adult gatekeepers?

4 Status in Open Forums: How can we establish open forums where community members have status to speak and be heard and can also hear the planners and proponents with respect to the plan or proposal?

5 Coaching and Mentoring: What coaching and mentoring opportunities can we provide available for community members to participate in submissions, panels and formal review processes?

6 Accountability: How can we design community engagement processes with directly accountable links between community members and the proponent and government representatives?

As the ERAG story above demonstrates, there is no simple formula. However, with a commitment to

participatory processes and sufficient time, participants can agree on locally appropriate processes and procedures. Like the ERAG Partnership Guidelines.

Recipe 3: Capacity strengthening

Participatory governance practice demands a focus on strengthening community and individual capacity to participate effectively. This requires resources (as discussed above), as well as community education approaches that create localized and broader exchange of high-quality information, learning tools and experience to broaden people's understanding of governance practice, community needs and sustainability imperatives. We discussed this requirement at length in chapter 5, Education. We need to develop capacity-strengthening opportunities in tandem with building community connectivity through intergenerational approaches such as mentoring programs and through skill-sharing and support exchanges among individuals, groups, professionals and academics.

Capacity strengthening can include assistance to any of the following matters:

Knowledge and practice of small-group consensus decision-making processes;
Training in how to manage a community advisory group: how it is formed, statutory and formal reporting requirements (especially if the group manages any money), how to work up an agenda, a report to a meeting, how to run meetings, take minutes, report on meetings, manage conflict and resolve it effectively within meetings, determine the representativeness of any group and seeking to widen membership to be more representative;

Education about reading balance sheets, understanding plans and drawings, reading plans in three dimensions, understanding technical matters like Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED); and

Coaching and mentoring for community members to participate in panels and formal review processes that can be frightening contexts.

Often found at the core of resistance to participatory governance is an unwillingness to share or devolve power. Our educator colleague, Noel Wilson, reminds us that power structures exist within all organizations. And the lessons are the same: change the basic power structure or in the endgame, you change nothing. To change the power structure, we have to deepen our *Promise to the Public*, as discussed in Chapter 3. And communities with a stake in the matter must have authentic opportunities to strengthen their capacities.

Cathy visited the Castle Vale Housing Action Trust (CVHAT) in Birmingham in 2002 as part of a study tour focusing on learning from innovative urban renewal projects in Great Britain.¹⁵ The CVHAT was a community-based housing association, established with significant funding in 1993 to improve housing and general living conditions in Castle Vale, following thirty years of physical, social and economic decline. It was to have a ten-year life span. From the outset, a priority was to strengthen community capacity so that when the CVHAT wound down there would be sufficient local capacity to carry on the work. The CVHAT dissolved in 2005, having achieved tangible health, education and living standard improvements across the community through multi-agency approaches. Most importantly, over ten years, people worked together to strengthen the community's capacities and successor organizations were established to enable the local community to manage its own affairs into the future. These included a credit union and junior credit union, a community development trust (focused on employment and training linked to local job creation), the Castle Vale Community Care Partnership and the Castle Vale Community Environmental Trust.

Local people now see the potential to transform the cycle of poverty entrenched for generations at Castle Vale. The capacity to maintain and extend the hard work lies within the local community. What was so special about this project was the active community strengthening designed into the process *from the outset*. It was no afterthought. This is a critical component of governance that must be on the agenda of any community engagement with sustainability process from the very beginning.

Recipe 4: Learning opportunities

There are no formulaic solutions to sustainability problems. We are all in this together and need to create deep learning cultures so we can learn from one another, from our mistakes and our successes, not at the end of the process but during it. Governance arrangements must provide the time and space for learning opportunities. We have spoken a great deal about learning in this book. In chapter 5, Education, we introduced concepts of 'transformational learning' and a 'learning society'. 'Transformational learning' is a deep kind of learning that has the capacity to transform our values and approaches into the future. A learning society recognizes that for us to develop, evolve and live

sustainability, we must be willing to evaluate our decisions, learn from our mistakes and gain knowledge from our successes. Governance for community engagement needs to be designed to support this type of learning.

In chapter 6, Action, we recommend the formative evaluation approach as one way to build learning opportunities into community engagement processes. Here are some other practical suggestions:

- Opportunities (formally sanctioned and definitely used) to give feedback to proponent, planners and bureaucrats about how community people feel they are being treated by them. Carefully managed, this can foster good working relationships. However, this requires 'safe' contexts where there will not be punishment later on for speaking openly;
- Senior people regularly attending local workshops, meetings and other engagement processes so that they know exactly what is going on;
- Opportunities for community people to share successes and feel good – together with the planners and bureaucrats – about how they are working together and celebrating common successes; and
- An action learning approach to conducting projects, where participants collectively review a project's outcomes and what they have learned from being involved.¹⁶

Conclusions

Kitchen Table Conversation Starters

Kitchen Table Conversation Starters are questions you can ask your friends, your family, your neighbours, your local politicians and anyone else who you find at – or can bring to – your kitchen table. Conversations about sustainability must be deep and broad to be effective. Each of these questions will likely raise many more questions. Yet the important thing is to begin. To be part of the conversation:

- How do you feel about current systems of governance where you live?
- In a practical sense, how could greater access to decision-making change the way your local community operates and looks?
- How effective have you found the governance components of community engagement processes?
- What changes would be required in your life for you to be able to participate in community governance? How would you prefer to participate?
- What skills would you like to strengthen to participate in governance processes?

For more opportunities to continue the conversation about community education for sustainability, please visit www.kitchentablesustainability.com.

A final thought

Our values directly inform the conversations and interactions we have at our kitchen tables. They inform our worldview – the lens through which we assess sustainability and how we relate it both to our communities and to our individual vision, hope and sense of possibility. Without governance, we cannot achieve successful sustainability strategies and programs. However, if people in communities perceive governance structures as inaccessible, remote and unrelated to their personal perspectives and aspirations, how can they be expected to engage? We need a better fit between people in communities and governance structures. When governance structures and processes accurately reflect our values, sustainability actions will flourish – grounded in local culture. Then, and only then, will we see our dreams translated into practical outcomes.

Encouraging active engagement in governance for sustainability is strongly linked to kitchen tables. Good governance practice, based on authentic community involvement, relies on those involved understanding and engaging with the complex requirements for creating sustainable communities. We can make progress only if we can speak openly about sustainability issues at our kitchen tables. And at all the other tables we set up for this purpose. We need opportunities for deep conversations about sustainability at many, many tables.

Notes

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7. Kohler-Koch, B. (2008) 'Does participatory governance hold its promises?', conference presentation, CONNEX Final Conference: Efficient and Democratic Governance in a Multi-Level Europe, Mannheim, 6-8 March, p3
8. See, for example:
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 Fung, A. and Wright, E. O. (eds) (2003) *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations In Empowered Participatory Governance*, The Real Utopia Project: Volume 4, Verso, London
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12. See:
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 Yankelovich, D. (1991) *Coming to Public Judgment: Making Democracy Work in a Complex World*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse
13. Costanza, R. (2001), p460
14. Kaner, S. with Lenny, L., Toldi, C., Fisk, S. and Berger, D. (1996) *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making*, New Society Publishers, Gabriola Island, BC
15. Castle Vale Housing Action Trust (2005) 'Castle Vale Housing Action Trust', www.cvhat.org.uk, accessed 30 May 2008
16. For more information on Action Learning, see Dick, B. (1997) 'Action Learning and Action Research', published online, www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/actlearn.html, accessed 27 May 2008