

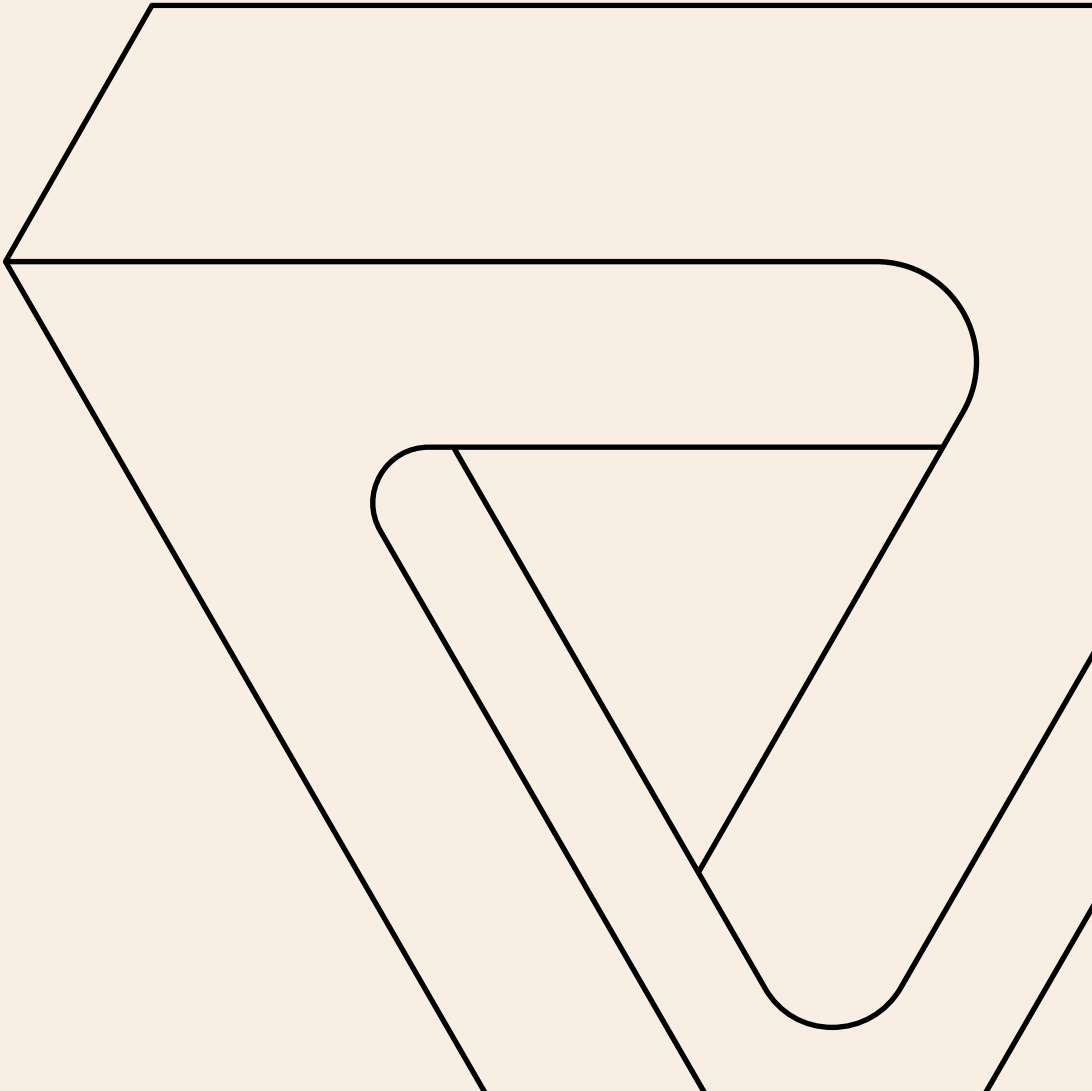
Community perceptions of Fire and Emergency New Zealand's Local Advisory Committee

Report | 01 May 2025



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1.

Introduction to the research

Background

Local Advisory Committees (LACs) provide independent advice to Fire and Emergency New Zealand about the fire and emergency needs of their communities, and the risks each community face. LACs engage with their communities to collect feedback, which they then use to inform their perspective on local issues and risks. This advice is communicated back to Fire and Emergency through the Committees. This advice from LACs helps Fire and Emergency to better support communities to reduce risk, prepare for and respond to emergencies, and recover quickly when they happen.

LACs are established by the Fire and Emergency Board under the Fire and Emergency New Zealand Act 2017. By June 2020, the first seven LACs were set up in Northland, Tairāwhiti, Hawke's Bay, Marlborough, West Coast, Chatham Islands, and Otago. LACs in other districts have since been established or are in the process of being set up.

This research focuses on the experience of community partners who have engaged with the first seven LACs established. It is intended this research will provide input into the set up and development of the newer LACs to ensure their effectiveness. Through the lessons learnt from the first seven LACs, the insights shared in this report can serve to inform other LACs about what drives successful community engagement.

The problem to solve.

A need to hear and understand community partner organisations' perceptions of LACs.

To date...

Fire and Emergency evaluation work has provided a solid understanding about Fire and Emergency's relationship with LACs.

Now...

There is a need for further work to encompass community perceptions on the impact of existing LACs in their local communities.

So that...

Fire and Emergency can assess the effectiveness of LACs for the community – where they are doing well and where they can improve.

Evaluation approach: 33 interviews across 29 people

(We interviewed four LAC Chairs twice).

Method overview



Target audience – LAC Chairs and community partner organisations.



Fieldwork dates – November 2024 to March 2025.

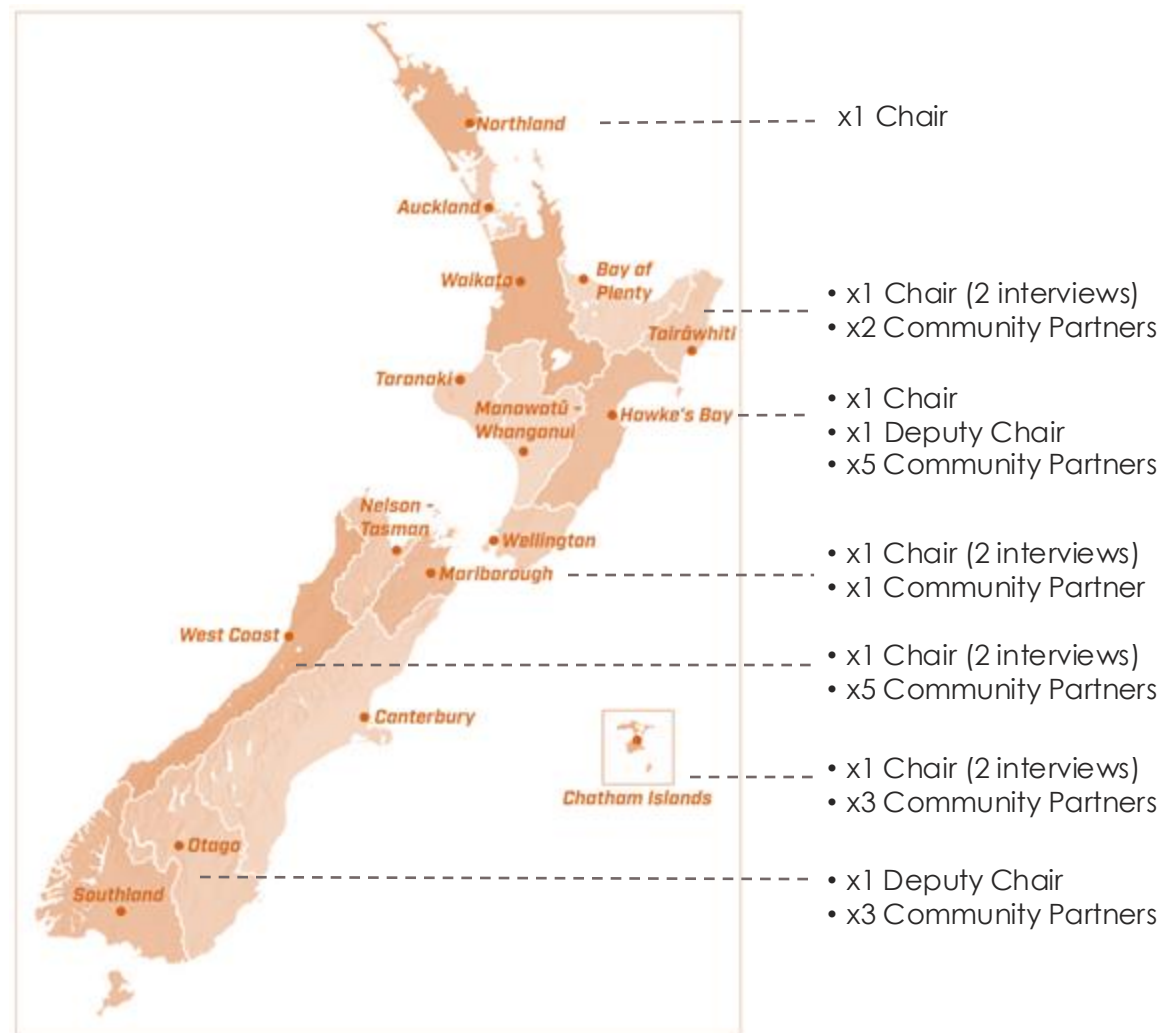


Method – 45 to 60 minute online qualitative interviews.



Sample size

- x19 community partner organisations
- x8 LAC Chairs/Deputy Chairs
- x2 Fire and Emergency National Office staff.



2.

Key insights

LACs' ability to effectively contribute to community outcomes hinges on how well they engage with their communities. Current community engagement is variable. Sometimes, there is strong engagement taking place. Other times, engagement isn't as effective as it could be.

WHEN ENGAGEMENT IS STRONG.

01. Some LAC members are **highly visible** in their communities, which initiates a clear understanding of the Committee's purpose. Through this understanding, the community can see the value the LACs provide.

02. The community considers the key value LACs bring is to **provide Fire and Emergency with independent intel and advice** about fire and emergency issues and risks directly impacting their community.

03. Effective LACs **engage** with their communities **in multiple ways**. The engagement might be planned and deliberate, or unintentional. Sometimes, LAC members can be highly involved in the engagement, and less so in other situations. All types of engagement complement each other and play a critical role to understand communities' fire and emergency needs and risks.

04. LACs have **strong working relationships with Fire and Emergency district teams**. Through these strong relationships, LACs determine which community relationships need to be established, and work to fill these gaps by making connections with existing networks or via new contacts.

WHEN ENGAGEMENT COULD BE EVEN BETTER.

01. Conversely, LACs' perceived value is undermined when **communities lack clear visibility of the LAC**, what it does, and how its role differs to other teams and organisations.

02. A strong reliance on individual LAC member relationships exists, which can result in **siloed engagement planning**. While there is typically agreement at a Committee level about LAC members' portfolio and/or location responsibility, this is often where shared engagement planning stops.

03. Engagement is less effective when **LAC members feel reluctant to engage beyond their existing networks**. This is sometimes related to a LAC member's capability or confidence levels, or because the LAC member believes they already understand their communities without needing to engage specifically about fire and emergency needs.

04. If communities **don't receive timely and tailored feedback** on the insights they provide, they can feel the engagement was pointless. LACs can be better at feeding back to their communities, and Fire and Emergency can support this by providing timely and tailored feedback from the board. The feedback would share intended actions as a result of the community's insights, and when these actions will occur. Where no action is intended, feedback should provide a rationale.

3.

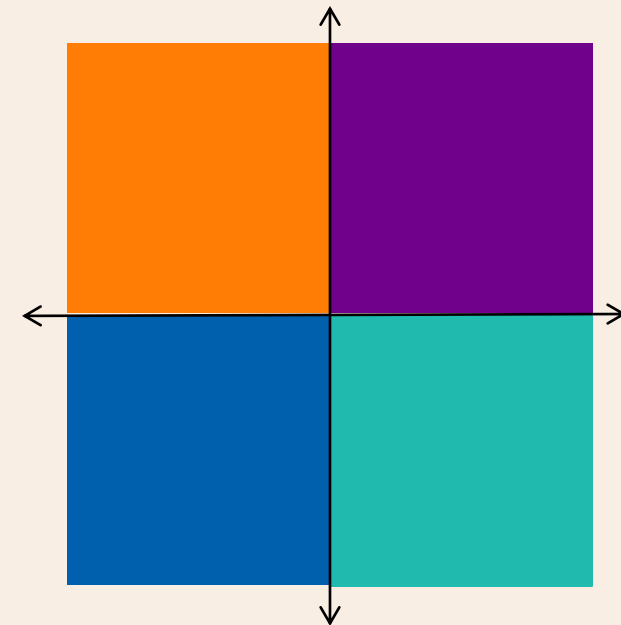
The experience of LAC community engagement

When engagement takes place, it varies by levels of involvement and intention.

We observed a range of different types of engagement between LACs and the community. One core way engagement differs is based on how involved LAC members are in the engagement. A second core difference is how intentionally focused the engagement is on the subject of fire and emergency services.

These differences form the basis for a LAC community engagement model that shows four key types of engagement. The model has potential to be a useful tool for planning, developing, and reviewing LACs' engagement activity.

The following pages build an explanation of the engagement model.



Some engagement is more involved than others.

The first way in which LAC community engagement differs is by how involved LAC members are with the interaction.

High involvement engagement:

At one end of the continuum is high involvement engagement. When high involvement engagement occurs, LAC members are highly engaged and active in their interaction with community. LAC members are very 'hands on' during the interaction and the engagement is visible and obvious.

Low involvement engagement:

At the opposite extreme of the continuum, low involvement engagement involves LAC members informally engaging from the background. When low involvement engagement occurs, it typically requires less time and input from LAC members.

HIGH INVOLVEMENT



LOW INVOLVEMENT

Engagement also varies in how intentional it is.

The second core way LAC community engagement differs is by how intentionally focused the engagement is about fire and emergency services.

Unintentional engagement:

Engagement at this end of the continuum is secondary or tangential to the topic of fire and emergency needs and services. Any discussion about fire and emergency risks and concerns is unplanned and impromptu. Often, these engagements rely on LAC members' existing relationships.

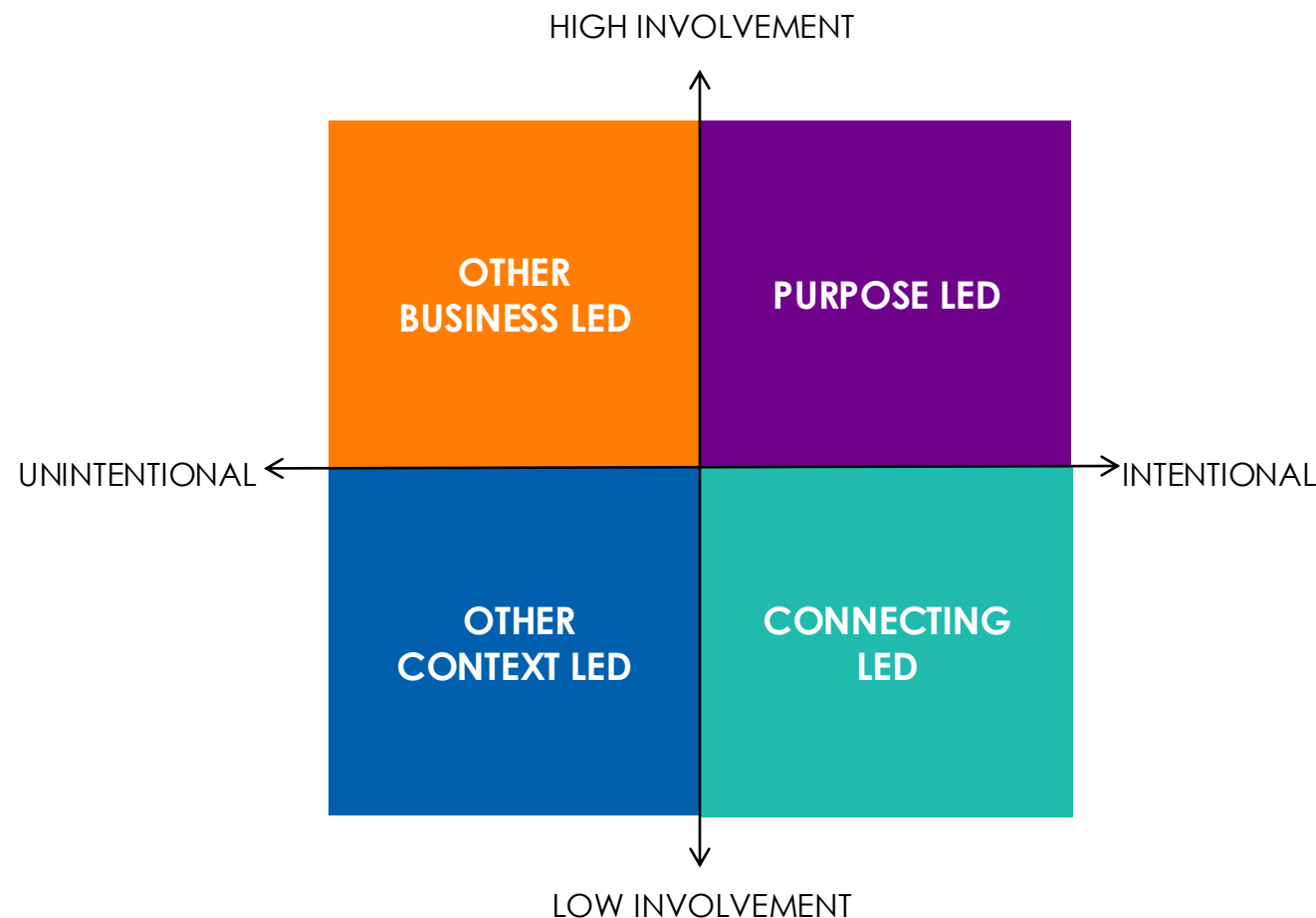
Intentional engagement:

Highly planned and pre-arranged engagement sits at the other end of the continuum. The primary focus or purpose of this engagement is deliberately about fire and emergency community needs and risks.



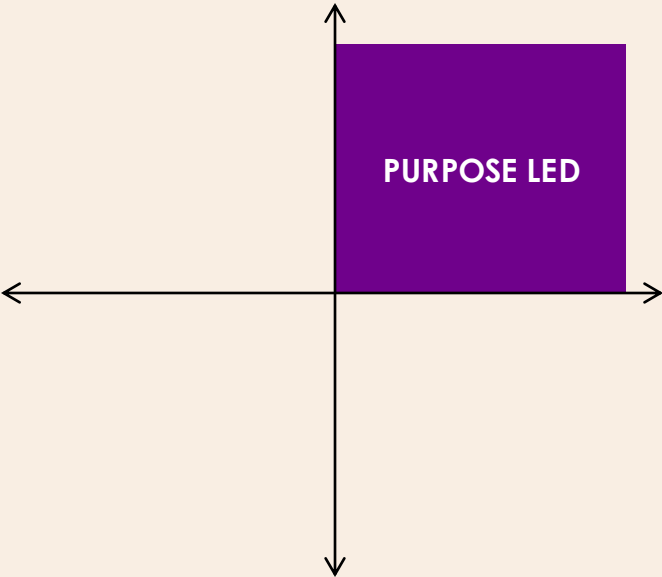
The interaction of the involvement and intent continuums defines four key types of engagement that exist between LACs and community partners.

Each of these four types of engagement are described in the following pages.



Purpose led engagement

High involvement, intentional



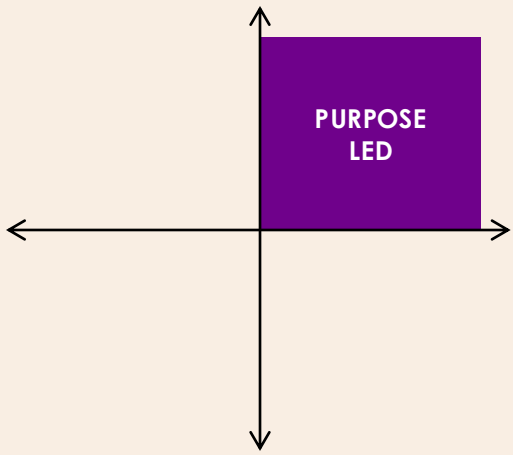
When purpose led engagement takes place, the LAC deliberately engages with a community group or organisation with the intent of achieving a specific purpose and/or outcome related to fire and emergency services.

It is a planned interaction, explicitly focusing on the community's specific fire and emergency needs and risks. Examples of purpose led engagement include LAC members speaking at events, to local groups, or even at more informal settings such as a potluck dinner. In some instances, Fire and Emergency district teams are invited to these engagements. Typically, the information gathered from these engagements is reported back to Fire and Emergency in the LAC's insights report.

Additionally, purpose led engagement enables community partners to discover the ways in which Fire and Emergency and/or the LAC can support communities via a range of services (e.g. home fire safety visits).

Purpose led engagement adds value by formally capturing the community's fire and emergency risks and needs, while also providing the opportunity for community to become more familiar with how Fire and Emergency/LAC can provide support and services. It is impactful, with a clear structure and purpose. While this type of engagement has many strengths, it is time consuming and effortful. This means it works well alongside other types of engagement.

Bringing to life purpose led engagements.



A connection to someone who is [an LAC member] has been really helpful, in that that particular person is very proactive in those relationships.

Community partner

Snapshot of purpose led engagement*.

A LAC member emailed their local Mayor, introducing themselves and the LAC. This was the first time the Mayor had heard of the LAC, but was interested to find out more because the email seemed promising in terms of benefit to the community. The Mayor agreed to meet with the LAC member.

At their first meeting, the LAC member shared with the Mayor in more detail how the LAC’s role is to seek out community needs and risks related to fire and emergency services. They then report any needs and risks they identify back to Fire and Emergency. The Mayor felt this was a great opportunity for Fire and Emergency to hear direct from their community about the sorts of issues they grapple with.

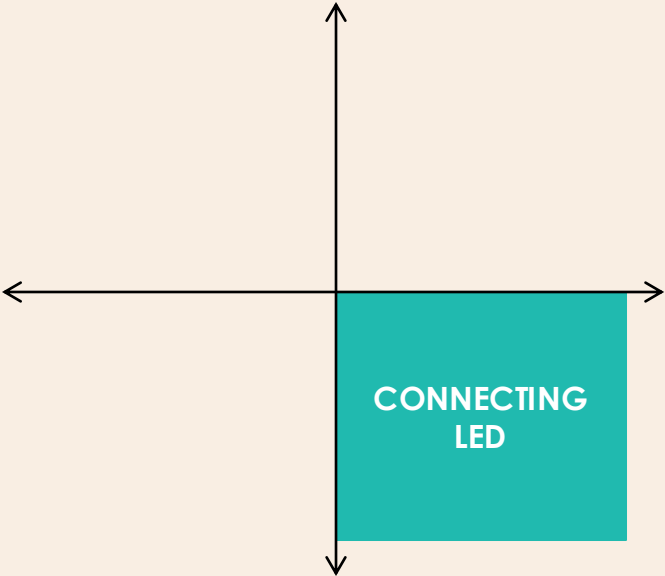
After their initial meeting, the Mayor invited the LAC member to speak at one of their local council meetings. From this meeting, the LAC member broadened their engagement and heard from different councillors about some of the fire and emergency needs and risks observed in their community.

The initial email from the LAC member flourished into an ongoing relationship with the local council.

* Created from a range of examples shared with us by Chairs and community partners.

Connecting led engagement

Low involvement, intentional



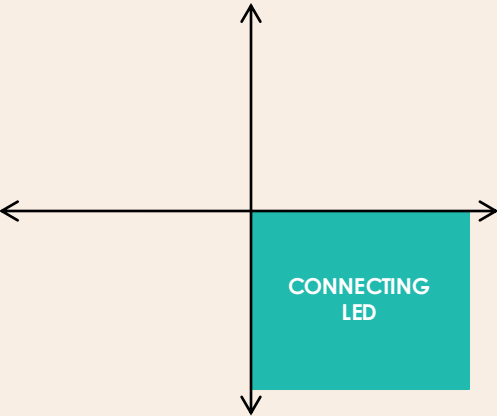
Connecting led engagement is initiated by the LAC member, but the relationship is then built and maintained by local Fire and Emergency district teams.

The LAC member acts as a connector or intermediary. LAC activities centre around leveraging their relationships to create community connections with Fire and Emergency district teams where those connections don't currently exist. Occasionally, when the Fire and Emergency district team identifies a gap in their community relationships and LAC members lack existing connections with that particularly community group, the members will strive to establish new relationships.

The interaction between the LAC member and community partner is relatively quick and seamless.

Connecting led engagement adds value by making introductions and connecting community partners to the Fire and Emergency district team, opening the door for Fire and Emergency to build and maintain new community relationships that may have otherwise been closed to it. This engagement provides a strong mechanism for the Fire and Emergency district team to broaden their community relationships. However, it can mean the community don't always recognise the value of the LAC, because it is the Fire and Emergency district team that then maintains the relationship. This type engagement effectively complements other forms of engagement by providing an additional way to create and establish community relationships.

Bringing to life connecting led engagements.



“ My understanding of the function of the Local Advisory Committees is to be that conduit between community and Fire and Emergency, and from my personal experience that's exactly the role that they've played.
Community partner

“ I introduced [Fire and Emergency District Manager] to the CE of the district council to form a relationship. I became the conduit of that engagement. And then, once that was established, I just pulled away.
Chair

Snapshot of connecting led engagement*.

A Fire and Emergency district team wanted to establish a relationship with members of its Pasifika community, but didn't have any direct connections. In a meeting with the LAC, the district team mentioned this gap in their community relationships.

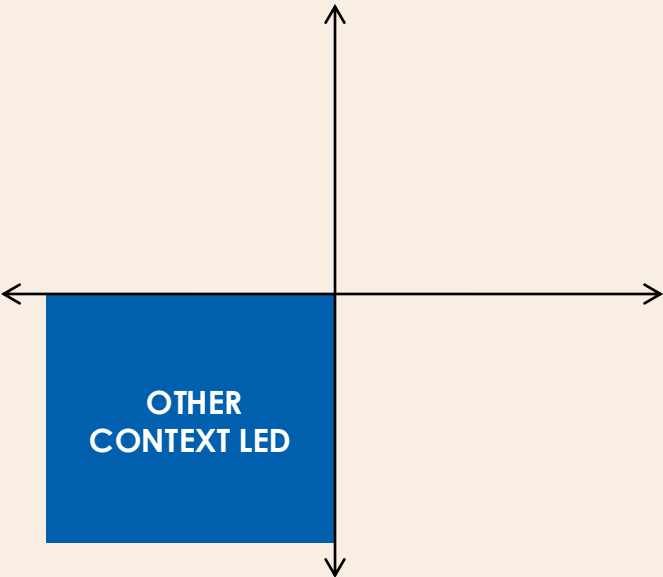
One of the LAC members knew a local Pasifika church pastor, and introduced the pastor to the Fire and Emergency district team.

This connection has lead to a stronger relationship between the Fire and Emergency district team and its Pasifika community, resulting in the district team conducting home fire safety visits amongst this community.

* Created from a range of examples shared with us by Chairs and community partners.

Other context led engagement

Low involvement, unintentional



Other context led engagement arises when LAC members engage with the community in other contexts unrelated to fire and emergency.

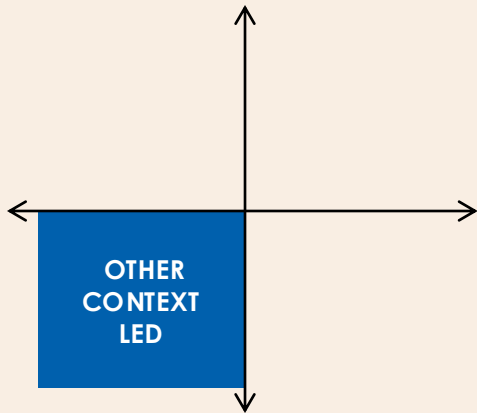
For example, these engagements could be based on LAC members’ day-to-day interactions with friends and family. Or, the engagement might take place when the LAC member attends an unrelated community event and strikes up a conversation with a local they know.

During these engagements, impromptu conversations about fire and emergency business emerge. The focus of the interaction is about something else, but the discussion turns to an area that is relevant to the LAC.

The LAC member takes this opportunity to explore the discussion further. It might be to share how Fire and Emergency supports the community and the services it can provide, or to hear about specific community fire and emergency risks and needs.

Other context led engagement adds value by informally tapping into LAC members’ existing connections and acquaintances, thereby broadening Fire and Emergency’s understanding of the risks, needs, and opportunities facing communities at the ground level. It is also an opportunity for the community to learn more about how Fire and Emergency can support it (beyond response). There is potential for other context led engagement to lead to alternate types of engagement, such as purpose led or connecting led engagement. While it enhances and supports other engagement types, this engagement is limited to existing LAC member networks.

Bringing to life other context led engagements.



The main reason I probably know anything about it is because one of my friends sits on an advisory committee.

Community partner

Snapshot of other context led engagement*.

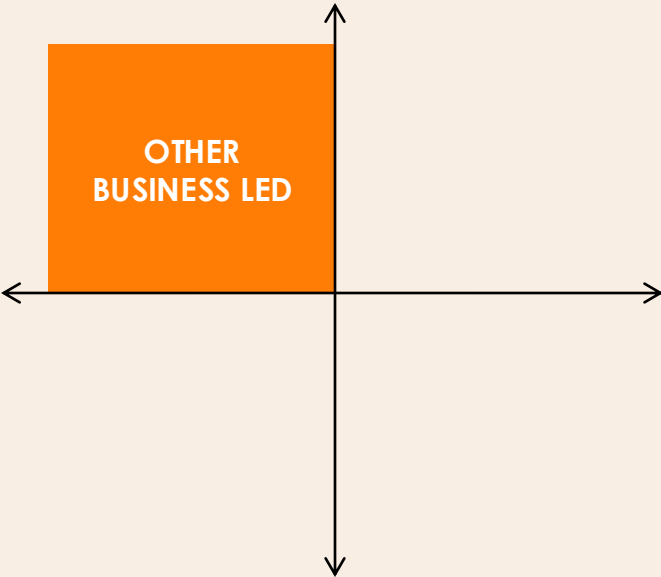
An LAC member was catching up with a friend who is teacher at a local primary school. They were sharing what they'd been up to since they last saw each other.

The LAC member had recently been to one of the regular LAC meetings, and mentioned this to their friend. Not having heard about LACs before, the teacher asked what it was all about. It sounded interesting and the teacher wondered if it could be worth her school connecting with the LAC to hear more. Maybe she'll follow up with her friend....

* Created from a range of examples shared with us by Chairs and community partners.

Other business led engagement

High involvement, unintentional



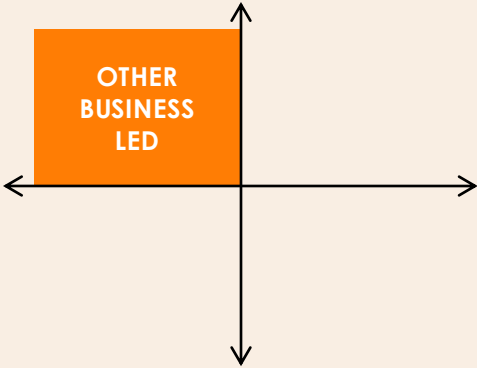
Other business led engagement evolves when LAC members engage under the guise of another community role.

Essentially, the topic of fire and emergency risks and needs arises while LAC members are wearing another community ‘hat’. This can be quite common because LAC members are often highly involved in their communities across a range of roles.

During these types of engagement, LAC business is tangential to the core discussions taking place and is not a pre-planned part of the interaction.

Other business led engagement adds value by LAC members using opportunities in other community roles they hold to discuss fire and emergency topics. This broadens the communities exposure to LACs and fire and emergency business, and is another way LACs can actively seek out risks facing their community. This type of engagement can mean it is not always obvious amongst the community that LAC members are effectively ‘switching hats’, thereby not noticing the value of the LACs.

Bringing to life other business led engagements.



“ I’ve been a district councillor since [date]. I have a couple of other governance positions, and I’m a volunteer firefighter.

Chair

“ It has not been until [Local Councillor] has been the [LAC] Chair that we have actually physically seen the LAC in our community.

Community Partner

Snapshot of other business led engagement*.

An LAC member is very active in their local community. They hold multiple roles that support the community in some shape or form. Some of the roles are volunteer positions, while others are paid.

This LAC member is also a local councillor. At a recent Council meeting, the councillors were discussing an issue that had been brewing in the community. It was an issue that related to a fire and emergency service need.

The LAC member saw that they could report this issue back to Fire and Emergency through the LAC insights report. The other councillors weren’t aware of the LAC, so once the LAC member explained what it was all about and how they could raise the issue with Fire and Emergency, it was agreed that this would be a good way to proceed.

This interaction led the LAC member to set up meetings with other local councils in the district to introduce the LAC and its purpose.

* Created from a range of examples shared with us by Chairs and community partners.

Chairs endorse the engagement model, saying it reflects the different types of engagements the LACs undertake.

We shared with Chairs a draft version of the engagement model, and there is a general sense that it effectively categorises the engagement types that take place.

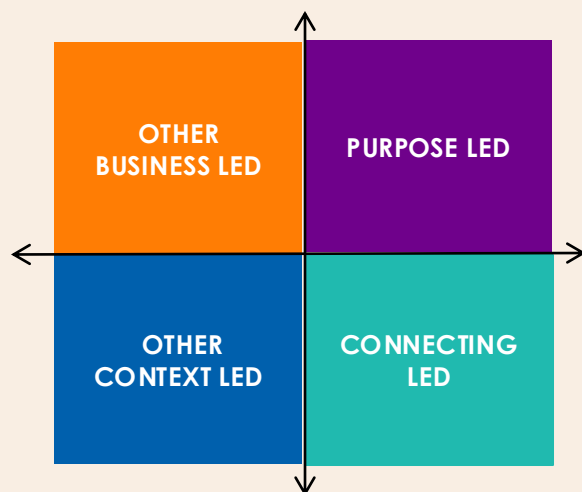


I think you've nailed it. I'd say from my personal perspective, I engage in all of those ways, and I would say that our LAC members would too.

I have to make an effort for those purposeful, intentional engagements. [The unintentional engagements] happen all the time. It's a good reminder that there there's no one-size-fits-all and there are different approaches.

Chair

Used purposefully, the model with its combination of engagement approaches, can strengthen engagement across the broad.



All types of engagement provide different ways for LACs to connect Fire and Emergency with community. When the different types of engagement are used in combination, there is broader reach into community groups.

All types of engagement work together towards achieving the common goal of reducing community harm.

Depending on the district, situation, or community partner, some engagement types may be more effective than others. LAC members can work with whichever approach is best suited for the occasion.

Unintentional engagement allows LAC members to take up opportunities as and when they arise.

One type of engagement can lead to another, particularly unintentional engagement leading to intentional engagement. The initial engagement may begin unintentionally about fire and emergency needs and risks, but later lead to more focused engagement.

“

There's equal value in all of those engagements, because the outcome that you're driving for is actually less incidents of harm. I think you need them all because potentially they have different players, different audiences. They're all different types of engagement, but they lead to the same benefit.

Chair

While different types of engagement exist, it is hard to know how much engagement actually takes place.

This is difficult to determine because:

1. Sometimes, engagement might not actually be happening

In some instances, engagement may not be happening regularly or extensively.

- A sentiment exists amongst a couple of Chairs that not all LAC members actively engage with their community. These LAC members believe they are well equipped to talk on behalf of their community because they already know their community.



I've got many people who sit on these committees, and they absolutely don't do engagement. **They are talking from a point of their own personal standpoint.** They will just say 'I know what's best for my community'. Well, I've never seen them provide stakeholder reports of engagement with their community."

Chair

2. Community partners don't know they've engaged with the LAC

When engagement is unintentional and/or informal, LACs blend into the background.

- This leads to limited visibility of LACs, their role, and who the members are. Consequently, community partners don't always recall or realise they've engaged with a LAC member (when they may in fact have engaged in some way).
- Indeed, some of the community partners we interviewed stated they had not engaged with the LAC, and others declined to take part in an interview for this reason. These community partners were from a broader list of community partners who Fire and Emergency identified as having interacted with a LAC.



Nobody has been to talk to us around LACs. [Our community organisation] would not know that existed.

Community partner

3. Community partners aren't always sure who they've engaged with

Sometimes, community partners see LAC members and Fire and Emergency district teams as one in the same.

- When this happens, community partners think they have engaged with the LAC, but it turns out their interaction was with a Fire and Emergency district team member.



I attend a forum here in [location]. It's generally chaired by [name of Fire and Emergency district manager]... I can just ring [name of Fire and Emergency district manager] up to ask any questions, or easily go in and talk to him about any concerns I have.

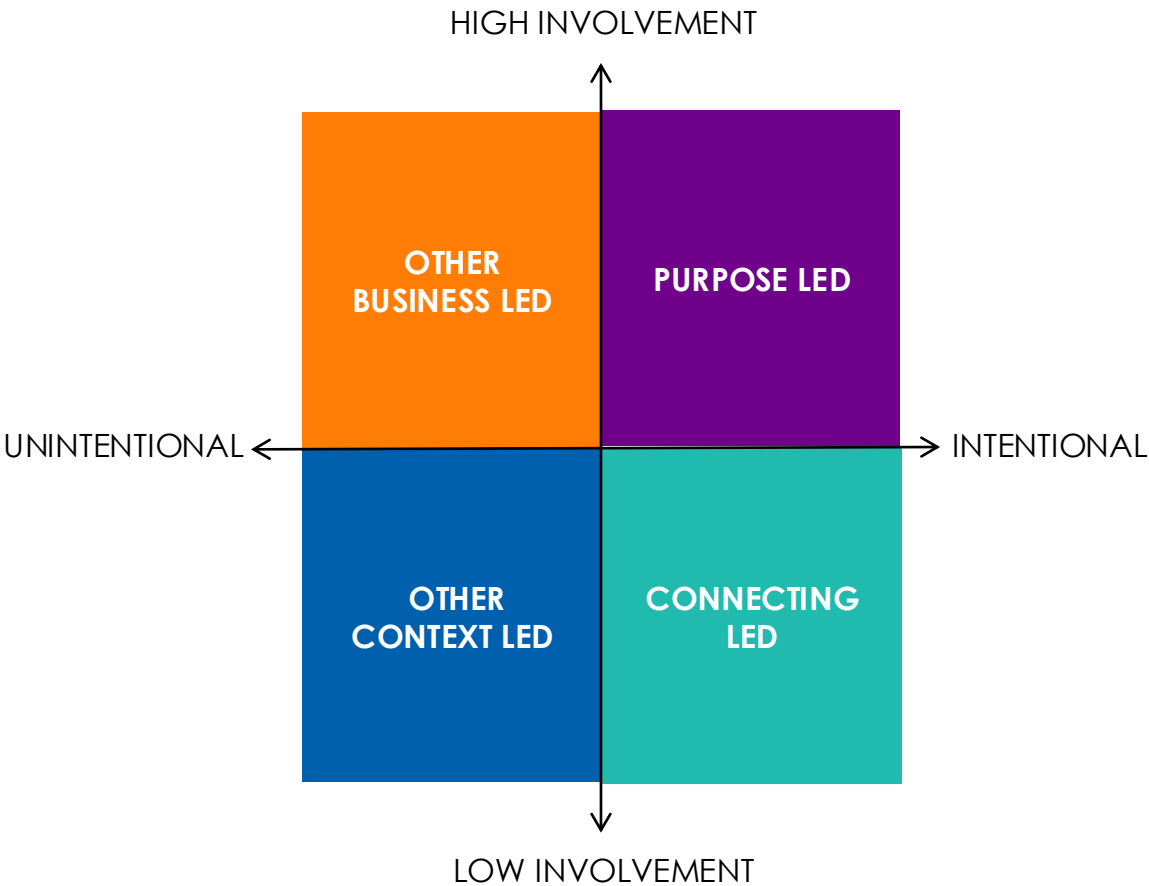
Community partner

Not all engagement is recorded or recognised as LAC engagement, making reporting of all engagement unlikely.

LACs may not necessarily record an engagement if it doesn't lead to insights they report back to Fire and Emergency. Additionally, if the engagement is other business led or other context led, they are unlikely to record the engagement. This is because these are unintentional engagements that happen when fire and emergency isn't the core purpose of the interaction.

Unintentional engagement also means community partners won't necessarily recognise it as LAC business. When this occurs, community partners may be unaware they've engaged with a LAC member.

It is likely the totality of engagement that occurs with the community, and therefore the benefits of all types of engagement, isn't being fully captured and recognised.



4.

Motivations and challenges to building and maintaining engagement

Community partners are motivated to engage with LACs because they believe it is critical for Fire and Emergency to hear the community voice.

There are three reasons why community partners believe this is critical for Fire and Emergency:

1 INDEPENDENT VOICE

Engaging with LACs enables the community voice to be heard via an independent channel.

- While community partners often recognise they have strong engagement with their Fire and Emergency district team, there is a sense that the LACs provide greater independence from the Fire and Emergency hierarchy.
- Community partners feel confident LACs will raise all issues and risks impartially with Fire and Emergency, without necessarily needing to consider operational implications.



We could have an officer here who takes a bit of feedback into the system that says [the district] really wants a bylaw that bans fires at [place]. And, it's really easy for that person's boss to say 'well, that's nice, but you work for me'... The LAC puts an authentic voice to that community. They champion that community voice.

Community partner

2 GRASSROOTS UNDERSTANDING

It provides for a strong understanding of the risks and issues happening on the ground in the local community.

- Local community understanding enables Fire and Emergency to make decisions about fire and emergency support that are best for each local area and community.



Certain things have to be local, and have to be 'boots on the ground'. If you don't have 'boots on the ground', then you are not making the right decisions for that place.

Community partner

3 NEW CONNECTIONS

LACs connect Fire and Emergency district teams with communities they might otherwise not connect with.

- LAC members are recruited (in part) on the basis of their diverse networks. These networks enable Fire and Emergency to hear from a broad range of community groups.
- Sometimes, LAC members open doors to communities who may otherwise be hesitant to engage with people in uniform (e.g. some migrant communities where uniform doesn't always equate with trustworthiness).



Those connections would not have been made without the LAC contribution. They were networked opportunities, and it wasn't anything highly formal. It was [name] sitting on the LAC, being able to say, 'oh, here's [name's] phone number.

Community partner

Chairs and community partners identify five key challenges for LAC engagement...

These are discussed in more detail on the following pages.

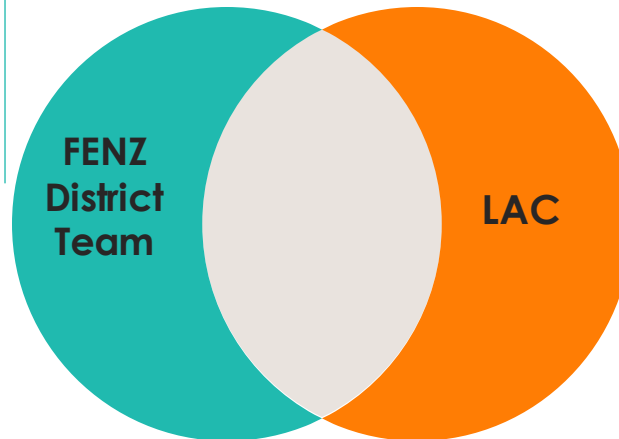
- 1 A perceived **duplication of effort** between LACs and other teams or organisations.
- 2 Community specific challenges, such as **geographic isolation** across some regions, and **engagement fatigue**.
- 3 LAC members and community have **other, more pressing priorities**. Maintaining momentum can wane.
- 4 **Turnover of LAC members**, taking their connections with them, making it difficult to maintain those relationships.
- 5 Some LAC members feel uncomfortable or unconfident to **establish new connections**.

1: Some community partners believe there is a duplication of effort, so are uncertain about the need to engage with LACs.

While some duplication may occur in smaller communities, we suspect in other communities the perceived duplication is linked to the community's limited awareness of the LAC's role and purpose.

Some community partners don't see a clear benefit to engaging with LACs because they feel they can engage with others on the same subject. They consider many of the issues covered by LACs are also (or should be) covered by Fire and Emergency district teams or other government agencies (such as civil defence).

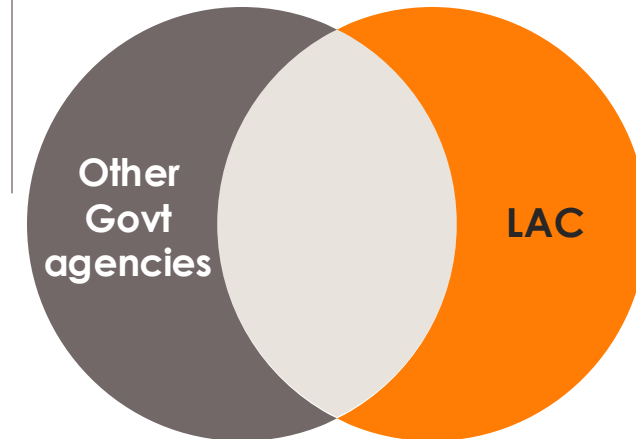
A belief that LAC's tasks do or should fall to the district team.



It's unnecessary, a double up for a little community. The Chair does a great job, even though it's unnecessary.

Community partner

A sense that LAC's role overlap with other government agencies' roles.



We've got local government. We've got emergency management. We've got all these little siloed things that are all talking about priorities. It should be a bit more joined up. That's my reservation.

Community partner

2: Some challenges are specific to the community. For example, reaching some priority groups can be more difficult if the district is spread geographically, or when certain community groups experience engagement fatigue.

A REGION'S GEOGRAPHIC SPREAD

The geography of some districts is large and generously spread out, which leads to some community groups being isolated. The size and distribution of a district can create significant challenges for ongoing engagement amongst more isolated communities.

Some LACs are better set up to cover a wide geographic spread with different members located in different parts of the district. However, some LACs emphasise a portfolio focused engagement approach, where one LAC member is responsible for a specific area or industry (e.g. forestry, agriculture) based on their areas of knowledge and existing networks. With a portfolio focus, there may be situations where a LAC member needs to travel more extensively.



[Our district is] long and skinny. It's technically a pain in the backside. To go from one end of the district to the other is probably closer to five hours [drive].

Chair

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FATIGUE

Some community partners are overburdened with engagement from a range of government agencies, and often about similar subjects.

Trying to engage with engagement fatigued community groups isn't easy as they consist of busy people. LAC members are also cognisant to maintain respectful boundaries and be patient.



This is what we see with Māori, with iwi. Everyone wants a piece of them. So, we don't manage to engage with one of our priority groups... we're trying, but we also respect their space.

Chair

3: It can be challenging to maintain engagement momentum due to other, more pressing priorities.

LAC members are typically busy in their communities with many demands on their time.

LAC members are well connected into their communities. Indeed, this is an important criteria to effectively carry out the tasks of an LAC member. Being well connected means LAC members are often busy and active in their communities, undertaking roles and tasks beyond those of the LAC. Their general busyness can lead to LAC members sometimes deprioritising LAC engagements, but with the intention of re-prioritising at later date.



Towards the end of last year, I did as much as I possibly could in the spare time that I had. I've got to pick that up again, now that it's March and with the heat of the rush over with January, February and so forth. I need to get back into it myself.

Chair

Communities are often focussed on more immediate issues.

Sometimes, communities face more pressing issues, e.g. economic hardship, crime. There is a focus on these concerns that trouble the community at this moment in time. While the risk of fire or other emergencies is important for the community, they aren't necessarily issues facing the community right now. Consequently, LAC members can find community aren't rushing to engage on these issues.



If we were to look at a register of priorities within communities, yeah, fire is important when it comes up, when it happens. Absolutely. Prevention – kind of not.

Chair

4. There is often a strong reliance on individual LAC member relationships.

The advantage of relying on the networks of individual LAC members is that it enables a broader reach into communities, tapping into networks that otherwise may not have been able to connect with.

However, there is a risk that when LAC members step down from their committee role, their connections go with them. The turnover of LAC members can make it challenging for the LAC to maintain relationships with community partners.



We all have different approaches, different perspectives, and different ways of doing that. Each member has their own communities. We have our own networks. We have our own styles. I think that's a good thing. I think that brings diversity and ensures that we that we do have a good reach, because all our skills and backgrounds are different but complementary.

Chair



Thinking about the individuals on the LAC, some of them are very involved in community. Even though you're talking about the LAC and the role of the LAC, they see you as an individual. Because in your community, you're seen as a community leader, and so therefore the identification is actually with you as an individual, which is not what you want. What you're wanting is the identification to be with the LAC.

Chair

5. Some LAC members don't feel confident establishing new connections.

While LAC members admirably harness their existing networks, there are some instances where making new connections beyond their existing relationships can feel uncomfortable.

Chairs recognise this as a potential issue, because there is a risk on missing out on establishing key community relationships. They would like to see greater support or training around creating new connections.



It's about building relationships, and I guess some people don't have the ability to build a new relationship with people they don't know. It happens to all of us. There's no way I'd go into an area that I knew nothing about and try and talk to the guys, they'd be just like 'who is this lady?'. But, in saying that, if you don't have the right connections in those communities, then you're going to end up with nothing, and that that means we're not performing.

Chair



What we want to do is build on our skills to actually engage with people externally, and step outside our comfort zone. We get that some [members] don't like it, they don't feel comfortable doing it, that's OK.

Chair

Additionally, closing the feedback loop can act as a motivation, or create challenges, to ongoing engagement.

When Fire and Emergency provides feedback on the insights it has received:

The **community** feels heard and valued...

and...

LAC members' credibility and reputation remains intact.

But, when there is a lack of feedback from Fire and Emergency and the loop isn't closed:

There is a risk the **community** loses interest in future engagement...

and...

LAC members can want to step down from their role.



Our biggest issue is the feedback loop. It's built on personal relationships. So, we use our connection, the credibility that we have there with very busy people.

Chair

Chairs and community partners share mixed views about the feedback received from Fire and Emergency, but there is agreement that it is improving.



When the feedback from Fire and Emergency doesn't consistently hit the mark:

- ✗ There is a perception that there has been no response from the board.
- ✗ If there is a response from the board, it is seen as generic and lacking relevance to their community.
- ✗ The feedback doesn't acknowledge specific issues raised by the community.
- ✗ The feedback doesn't specify outcomes or timelines for when actions will be taken.
- ✗ There is no rationale provided in the feedback for not pursuing an issue raised.



The sense that feedback from Fire and Emergency is improving stems from:

- ✓ Fire and Emergency provided a response.
- ✓ Fire and Emergency acknowledged the community insights it received.
- ✓ There is some district specific feedback provided (although, not widely recognised).

What is needed from Fire and Emergency feedback?

Community partners feel valued and heard when they receive meaningful feedback on the advice they provide to Fire and Emergency.

Likewise, LAC members feel more motivated to engage with their community when they can feedback to that community the value and outcomes of the engagement.

To successfully meet both community partner and LAC member needs, they would like to feedback to cover the points on the right hand side.



The feedback required from Fire and Emergency needs to:

- ✓ Be even more tailored and relevant to local communities.
- ✓ Be meaningful so that it doesn't feel like it has been copied and pasted, and that it is not simply a 'tick box exercise'.
- ✓ State timelines for any intended actions as a result of the feedback received from communities.
- ✓ Provide rationale if Fire and Emergency decides to not take action on the insights it has received from the community.
- ✓ Be concise and to the point.
- ✓ Be easy for LACs to share more broadly with their communities (e.g. sharable format, appropriate tone).

5.

Six principles for success

Principles for effective community engagement.

01

Strong LAC presence and visibility matters.

When LACs have a strong community presence and are highly visible, they are more likely to encounter successful community engagement. Active and visible LAC members drive communities' understanding of the LAC's role and purpose. In turn, this creates greater community awareness of the value LACs contribute.

Currently, some LAC activity is highly visible, and the community knows the engagement is about the community's fire and emergency risks and priorities with a LAC member.

Other times, the LAC interaction is less obvious. Value can still result from an interaction that is less clearly associated with an LAC, but the community may not connect the value to LAC activity, undermining the LAC's perceived effectiveness.

02

A range of engagement types are required.

Effective LACs use a variety of ways to engage with their communities. At times, engagement might be planned and deliberate; other times it could be unintentional. There may be engagement where the LAC member is highly involved, and different situations when they are less involved. All types of engagement play a critical role in understanding communities' fire and emergency needs and risks.

Using different approaches caters to the various needs and contexts of each district and community group. It also opens up the LACs potential reach into a broad range of communities, using opportunities to engage as and when they arise.

Some current LAC members gravitate towards specific types of engagement. However, at the Committee level, evidence suggests LACs are making the most of a range of engagement types to interact with their communities.

03

Shared engagement planning is key.

LACs are highly successful when they collectively plan their engagement as a committee and agree on shared outcomes. When committees take a cohesive approach to engagement planning, it is more strategic and less haphazard.

Shared engagement planning also paves the way to determine how to effectively maintain community relationships held by an individual LAC member who steps aside from their role on the committee.

To date, LACs' approaches to engagement planning varies across the seven committees. Usually, individual committee members agree on their portfolio responsibilities (determined by their expertise and/or networks), and sometimes geographic areas within a region are also allocated. However, once assigned, individual members are commonly left to their own devices.

Community relationships are mostly held with individual LAC members, rather than at a committee level. When a member steps aside, the relationship tends to go with them.

Principles for effective community engagement, continued.

04

Documenting community engagement is necessary.

Keeping a record of community engagement that has happened provides an understanding about what interaction is taking place and with whom. Knowing what engagement has occurred feeds into strategic planning for future engagements.

Effective documentation of community interactions requires guidance about what to document, and easy ways to do this.

Currently, not all LAC interactions are documented or reported – especially interactions that were unintentional (i.e. other context and other business led engagement). Additionally, LACs may not document or report an engagement if it doesn't result in an insight reported back to Fire and Emergency.

05

Partnering with district teams is key.

Having strong partnerships with the Fire and Emergency district teams establishes broader community engagement because LACs better understand where relationship gaps exist, and look to fill these gaps.

Existing LACs often have strong relationships with Fire and Emergency district managers in their regions. Through these relationships, LACs determine which community relationships need to be established, and then look to make those connections on behalf of the district teams.

06

Closing the feedback loop matters.

Closing the feedback loop is an important step in effective community engagement to ensure ongoing engagement occurs.

Community partners are more willing to keep engaging when they receive meaningful feedback on the advice they provide to Fire and Emergency. This is because they feel their input is valued when Fire and Emergency closes the feedback loop.

LAC members also feel more motivated to continue engaging with their community when they can demonstrate to that community that Fire and Emergency is listening. To do this, LAC members need tools and formats to easily share Fire and Emergency feedback with their communities.

Historically, feedback from Fire and Emergency has fallen short at times. In particular, there have been examples where feedback hasn't been timely, nor tailored to the region. However, there is recognition from LAC Chairs that this is improving and continues to be a work in progress.

6.

Appendix

Detailed methodology

1 Sample	2 Recruitment	3 Fieldwork	4 Sense-making hui
<p>LAC Chairs and community partner organisations</p> <p>Our target audience for this research was:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- LAC Chairs across all seven LAC regions.- Community partner organisations that engage with their local LAC.	<p>An iterative, opt-in approach for community partners.</p> <p>Our recruitment process involved the following steps.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Verian accessed community partners' contact details via contact sheets provided by Fire and Emergency. Some LAC Chairs also provided contacts.- With a staggered approach, Verian invited community partners to book in interviews using Microsoft Teams. There was low uptake from the lists, with a high non-response rate.- Fire and Emergency HQ also contacted LAC Chairs requesting further community contacts for Verian to contact.- Verian consistently reviewed the types of community partners making bookings, and targeted further emails to aim for diversity across the sample.	<p>A qualitative approach, supplemented with ratings questions.</p> <p>We conducted online interviews with LAC Chairs, community partners, and Fire and Emergency National Office staff.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Fieldwork was conducted between November 2024 and March 2025.- We interviewed eight LAC Chairs/Deputy Chairs via 60-minute, online conversations. These chats provided district contexts.- We also conducted 19 qualitative interviews with community member organisations in existing LAC areas.<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Online, focused, 45-minute interviews• Conversations included a couple of quantitative-style rating questions.- Two interviews with Fire and Emergency national office staff.	<p>Sharing key insights and framing report focus.</p> <p>We met with key stakeholders to share insights gathered, and seek input into the final report.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Two sense-making sessions with Fire and Emergency.- We suggested a broad report structure, with feedback gathered.- Stakeholders contributed their thoughts around what insights / themes stood out to them as particularly valuable.- This process enabled Verian to produce a final report that is responsive to Fire and Emergency needs.

Sample breakdown

Overview

Community partner contacts supplied#	139
Contacts excluded*	53
No response	67
Completed interviews: community	19
Completed interviews: Chairs and Deputy Chairs (Includes second interviews)	12
Fire and Emergency National Office staff	2

From contact lists, plus x8 new contacts supplied by Chairs
* Of which duplicates x7, no contact information/website contact form x28, opt outs x18.

Community interviews

Chatham Islands	3 interviews
Hawke's Bay	5 interviews
Marlborough	1 interviews
Northland	0 interviews
Otago	3 interviews
Tairāwhiti	2 interviews
West Coast	5 interviews

Chair/Deputy Chair interviews

Chatham Islands	2 interviews with Chair
Hawke's Bay	1 interview with Chair 1 interview with Deputy Chair
Marlborough	2 interviews with Chair
Northland	1 interview with Chair
Otago	1 interview with Deputy Chair
Tairāwhiti	2 interviews with Chair
West Coast	2 interviews with Chair

In our interviews, our conversations covered...

... with LAC Chairs:

- Types of community partner organisations the committee engages with, and how these are identified.
- What is involved in engaging with community partners.
- How committee members build and maintain relationships with community partner organisations.
- The challenges faced to engage with community partner organisations.

... with community partner organisations:

- Their understanding of the LAC purpose.
- How they became involved with their LAC, and what their engagement involved.
- Satisfaction with their engagement with LACs.
- In what ways they believe establishing a LAC is or is not an effective way for Fire and Emergency to understand their local community's issues, risks, and opportunities related to fire and emergency services.
- In what ways they believe establishing a LAC is or is not an effective way to influence the delivery of fire and emergency services that are aligned with community needs.
- In what ways they feel LAC engagement could be improved.

Thank you.

Introducing Verian

We are an independent research and evaluation agency dedicated to social research. Our heritage goes back more than two decades under our previous names Colmar Brunton and Kantar Public. We provide evidence and advisory services to government and the public realm, across Aotearoa New Zealand and around the world.

Verian is a corporate member of ESOMAR and all research staff are members of Research Association New Zealand (RANZ). We are honoured to be the Supreme Award winner at the 2024 RANZ Research Effectiveness Awards.

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Powering decisions
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