

Local Employment Co-ordination

— *What can a Regional Commissioner do ?*

by Jan Francis and vivian Hutchinson

*Me whakawhirinaki ki te whakawhiwhi mahi
Working together for employment*

“ Regional Commissioners have been set up to bring about a fundamental change in the way that the department interacts with the community. The innovation, energy and commitment which exists in communities must be harnessed by the Regional Commissioners so that job seekers are assisted into sustainable employment, community work or training in much bigger numbers than currently and to much greater effect. Regional Commissioners will need support to achieve this goal ... “

— *Work and Income NZ (Integration Transition Team)*

LEADERSHIP FOR EFFECTIVE ACTION

EMPLOYMENT IS STILL a critical issue in our communities that needs action and results. A Regional Commissioner for Work and Income can achieve a great deal to bring focus and effectiveness to this major public challenge.

The leadership required here is one that is also able to reach out beyond the boundaries of any one government department. It is a leadership that can inspire and encourage a variety of local groups and individuals to play their part in the overall solution to local unemployment.

Employment is an issue within which no-one is “in charge”. It is an issue where each area of action — government, business, community and individual — sees the problem differently and offers different parts of the solution. This diversity of perspectives can be seen as an obstacle for co-ordinated action ... or it can be seen as a creative asset that has the potential to generate many innovative solutions.

The establishment of *Regional* Commissioners has come from a desire to capture this sense of local innovation. The regional focus comes from the acceptance that nationally-driven solutions to unemployment will not be sufficient on their own. The employment issue exists within a “shared-power” environment in which diverse groups and individuals need to get on with their part of the wider challenge.

This is a deeper understanding of the title *Commissioner* where it confers the authority for “co-missioning” — a leadership that brings together the goals and strategies of a variety of people and organisations, in order to foster an overall mission.

The leadership skills at work here are not those of command and control. They are the professional skills that understand the process of fostering co-ordination, collaboration and co-operation in order to achieve a common good.

mission

To enable every New Zealander to have the opportunity to be in paid work by making local action on employment issues more informed, creative and effective through the co-ordination, collaboration and co-operation of local organisations.

key results

- real job creation
- effective local action on employment issues
- improvements in services to unemployed people and beneficiaries
- enhancement of the work practices, information flows and communications between participating agencies
- improved stakeholder involvement in planning, resourcing and monitoring
- creation of joint-ventures, with tangible results
- effective recognition of the needs of Maori and Pacific Island people
- effective advice to the WINZ management and to government
- research and debate on the future of work and income

critical factors

- the overall state of the NZ and global economy
- the ability to influence real job creation
- political stability, and the political constraints on outcomes
- the ability of government organisations to be flexible in the way they use resources locally
- access to and distribution of useful information
- local leadership that demonstrates commitment and credibility
- skills and talents within local action groups and the skills of their co-ordinators
- maintaining participant motivation and commitment
- the need to reflect local needs and initiatives within the regional context
- community ownership of results

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key assumptions

- we need more effective action on local employment issues
- we need practical approaches to local job creation and local economic development
- we need to avoid the wastage of finite resources available to address these issues
- we need a co-ordinated local approach to working on these issues
- we need leadership which creates a high-trust and collaborative working environment amongst the main agencies and organisations

“ A network of Local Employment Commissioners should be established. The Local Commissioners would be responsible for taking the lead in ensuring that effective co-ordination takes place, and that local employment opportunities are identified and promoted ...

“ The Employment Commissioners would be co-ordinators par excellence. They would be a focal point for local employment action, an advocate, a mentor and, if necessary, a thorn in the side of unhelpful bureaucrats. Their knowledge and contact with a wide range of official and unofficial networks and organisations would see them bring together diverse organisations and agencies. They will help to package local employment and business development plans ...”

—*Prime Ministerial Task Force on Employment (1994)*

THE NETWORK of Local Employment Co-ordination groups were set up by the National government in 1996 in response to the recommendations from the Prime Ministerial Taskforce on Employment. The initial goals were to:

- make sure all Government agencies are co-operating and working together, to ensure co-ordination of services to their communities, and
- resolve unemployment problems in a pro-active way through a co-operative approach between the public, private and community sectors.

Local Employment Co-ordination (LEC) groups have become an important resource in developing “local solutions to local employment problems”. The Regional Commissioner can play an important role in further developing this mission.

The results that can be achieved with local employment co-ordination include:

- stimulation of real job creation.
- being a catalyst and motivator for effective local action on employment issues.
- improved stakeholder involvement in planning, resourcing and monitoring processes.
- enhancement of the work practices, information flows and communications between the main contributors to employment action in your region.
- creation of joint ventures between the main agencies and organisations in your regions, with tangible results.
- demonstrable improvements in services to unemployed people and beneficiaries in your region.
- more effective recognition of the needs of Maori and Pacific Island people and other minority communities.
- more effective advice to the WINZ management and to government as to the state of employment in your region.
- research and debate on the future of work and income in your region.

PARTNERSHIPS, ALLIANCES, NETWORKS, clusters, co-operation and collaboration are all common objectives in strategic and business plans of the 1990's. Throughout New Zealand, these initiatives have included examples from the private sector (Joint Action Groups, "hard business" networks and regional clusters); the public sector (the Strengthening Families project, Safer Community Councils, The Foresight Project of the Ministry of Research, Science and Technology); and the community sector (Councils of Social Services, Runanga committees, informal networks, local authority facilitated liaison committees).

This range of initiatives illustrates the growing understanding that co-ordination of activities and developing working partnerships have the potential to improve economic prospects, strengthen social cohesion and increase sustainability.

The LEC groups have been one more example of these growing partnerships. They have assumed that flexibility and responsiveness is best achieved by involving local communities in decision making and allowing autonomy at the local level. They have also set out to prove that this flexibility and responsiveness will deliver better outcomes for employment policy.

At the time of writing, there are forty-two groups around New Zealand (38 geographic-based, two Maori, and two Pacific Island) with 750 participating members from the public, private and community sectors. These groups are serviced by contracted, part-time co-ordinators.

All LEC groups have been expected to develop and maintain local employment and labour market profiles, agree on goals to improve employment opportunities, provide better information about employment assistance to members of their communities and plan for collaborative action to improve the employment outlook at the local level.

The groups have worked on a number of successful initiatives which have included :

- joint ventures to address unemployment and training issues and leverage local funds and resources to achieve better outcomes for their communities.
- facilitation of community economic development programmes.
- initiatives to assist economic development and employment on marae.
- public forums and debates on employment issues.
- front-line staff training programmes across agencies.
- development of co-operative protocols between agencies dealing with the same clients.
- development of seamless service strategies and the production of agency directories.

— *see also "Local Employment Co-ordination — Spotlight on Good Practice" by Vicki Wilde (1999)*

As soon as the LEC groups were established, it became very clear that co-operative ways of working needed to be developed before any real progress could be made. Generally speaking this involves developing trust and building relationships across the cultural boundaries that define central government, local government, private sector and community sector agencies. Working on joint initiatives, sharing agency information

and hosting local events have all aided this process. But the skill development and support for these activities needs to be on-going.

IN 1998, AN EXTERNAL evaluation of the LEC groups was undertaken by the WEB Research Team. In their final report, they pointed out that LEC participants were seeing the tangible benefits of the co-ordination, including :

- Being able to keep in touch with developments in the government sector which because of the amount of change occurring, was otherwise very difficult to do.
- Being able to break down and challenge the assumptions and 'myths' that often prevailed around the different organisations involved.
- People's awareness was being raised and, in some cases, attitudinal changes were occurring through exposure to other viewpoints and realities.
- There were considerable professional development opportunities for individuals both in the information and networking areas.
- New relationships were being forged that were helping individuals in their own jobs as well as spinning off into other activities.
- LEC involvement was educational and helped raise the level of debate about important local issues.
- In a number of cases, LECs had helped relationships develop between key government agencies. This was one of the main benefits also mentioned by senior managers.

— *Web Research, LEC Evaluation Report (1998)*

The Local Employment Co-ordination initiative is still relatively new. The integration of LEC into the new WINZ department provides an opportunity to develop further strategies for effectiveness on the employment issue. The Regional Commissioners have plenty of opportunities for action and results.



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KEY RESOURCE PAPERS

- This paper is also available in the internet at www.jobsletter.org.nz/art/lec99.htm
- Prime Ministerial Task Force on Employment (1994) *Employment: Addressing New Zealand's biggest challenge, He Puanga Mahi Rau : Proposals for Action*, Prime Ministerial Task Force on Employment.
- Department of Internal Affairs (1991) *An Evaluation of the Alternative Employment Programme*, Research Unit Department of Internal Affairs.
- Leslie MacGibbon (1997) *Local Employment Co-ordination Document Analysis*, Unpublished.
- Web Research (1998) *Evaluation of Local Employment Co-ordination Groups*, Unpublished.
- Jan Francis (1997) *Local Employment Co-ordination In New Zealand*, paper presented to the Regional And Urban Development Conference, Wellington, 8-12 December 1997.
- Jan Francis (1998) *Breaking Down Patch Protection*, paper presented to the ANZRSIAI Conference, Barossa Valley, South Australia, 21-23 September 1998.
- Vicki Wilde (1999) *Local Employment Co-ordination — Spotlight on Good Practice*, available from Work and Income NZ
- vivian Hutchinson (1999) *Co-operation, Collaboration and Co-ordination — the challenges of working together on unemployment and poverty*, available on the internet at www.jobsletter.org.nz/vivian/cc99.htm

“ Solutions to complex problems are best addressed through multi-sectoral dialogue and collaborative approaches. All sectors, including governments, business, labour, education, foundations, and social agencies must take responsibility for tackling economic, social and environmental issues...”

— Sherri Torjman, *Caledon Institute of Social Policy, Ottawa*
“Partnerships between Community, Business, Local and Central Government”.

“ In the past, society has looked to single institutions to solve community problems. Today, such complex public issues as homelessness, urban crime, and global warming spill beyond the capacity and jurisdiction of any single organisation — and must be tackled by many agencies that share the power and resources to get things done...”

— John Bryson and Barbara Crosby
“Leadership for the Common Good”

Local Employment Co-ordination

— *Opportunities for Action*

1. STIMULATING REAL JOB CREATION

What you can achieve :

- Real job creation that results in fewer long-term unemployed people.
- Policy decisions informed by, and responsive to, the local labour market.
- The best match in each local community between the recruitment needs of the employers, the skills of the job-seekers and the range of training opportunities available.
- The creation of locally-driven economic development initiatives.

What you can do :

Identify the skill needs of the key growth sectors in your region.

- Create a profile of economic growth sectors, their recruitment potential, skills required now, and the impact of future technology etc.
- Invite feedback on the profile from the key growth sectors in the region.

Create better linkages between WINZ, community job seeker organisations, private training providers, other funding providers and employers to establish appropriate training courses.

- Encourage sector-specific training joint ventures targeted at potential job growth areas.
- Create a plan for addressing the barriers that exist to local people taking up job opportunities..
- Create a plan for addressing the barriers that exist for employers to employ staff in the key growth areas.

Sponsor and promote Local Economic Development programmes.

- Sponsor education workshops in your region on local economic development. Take leadership in public planning days, which will result in pragmatic local action plans.
- Sponsor events that will encourage entrepreneurial thinking and the development of new enterprises locally.
- Assess the economic development potential of alternative land use in your region.
- Identify the opportunities for infrastructure improvement in your region using the skills of local unemployed people.

2. CATALYSING EFFECTIVE LOCAL ACTION ON EMPLOYMENT

What you can achieve :

- The establishment and maintenance of Local Employment Co-ordination (LEC) groups which will be considered to be your local ‘powerhouse’ of effective action on employment issues.
- Improved stakeholder involvement in your planning, resourcing and monitoring processes.
- Key local people, and organisations becoming better informed and wiser about employment issues.
- The creation of a high trust and supportive environment in which groups can brainstorm ideas and discuss options from different points of view.
- The enhancement of work practices, information flows and communications between participating groups.
- A decrease in “holding back”, “patch protection”, or “power games” within the participating groups.
- The creation of joint-ventures between local organisations, which capitalise on opportunities for service improvements, client access and job creation possibilities.
- A reduction in the wastage of public resources available for employment action.
- A monitoring and accountability process for local employment action.

What you can do :

Establish or maintain Local Employment Co-ordination (LEC) groups in your region.

- Evaluate the variety of groups that do exist now and build upon the experience and ‘best practice’ they have developed in recent years.
- Create and maintain a strategic plan for collaborative action.

Attract the most effective local participation in the LEC process.

- Define a preferred list of key players.
- Obtain commitment from the senior management of key participating organisations.
- Ensure that a commitment to the LEC process is expressed in organisation’s business plans.

Create and maintain a local employment profile for your region.

- Develop an employment profile through a public consultation and research process.
- Make the profile available to the general public through your internet website.

Develop a strategy to promote awareness of the local services that are available now.

- Create and maintain up-to-date agency profiles, and joint-agency information packs.
- Encourage exchange visits between participating groups.
- Develop “roadshows” which can take this information to the people in your region, or create a database of co-ordinated services that can be accessed through your internet website.

Develop a strategy to distribute information on employment-related issues.

- Distribute labour market information to LEC group members.
- Facilitate sector group and business forums.

Reduce the wastage of local resources for employment action.

- Take an independent audit of the government resources coming into your region to support employment action.
- Share information frankly on what worked and what didn't.
- Develop and promote “best practice” strategies.
- Take leadership in inter-agency business planning.

Broker joint-ventures between the LEC group members.

- Draw on the “best practice” examples of joint-ventures that have happened in similar groups around New Zealand.

“Walk the talk” in being a role model of co-ordination, collaboration and co-operation.

- Create a high-trust environment within your LEC groups that is catalytic and motivating.
- Provide or support professional training in the skills of facilitation and co-operative action.
- Recruit co-ordinators with the appropriate skills for the job.
- Create a buddy-system between LEC co-ordinators which can provide support, coaching and mentoring in developing these skills.

3. IMPROVING SERVICES TO UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE AND BENEFICIARIES

What you can achieve :

- Greater sensitivity to the needs of individual clients
- Unemployed people and beneficiaries being able to take advantage of a co-ordinated menu of assistance.

What you can do :

Develop holistic approaches to the needs of your clients.

- Develop a strategy for “seamless service” between organisations, including a plan for reducing gaps, discrepancies and overlaps in service deliveries.
- Facilitate the joint-agency training of front-line staff.
- Develop co-operative protocols between agencies who are dealing with the same clients.

Facilitate the voice of unemployed people, beneficiaries and the general public in giving feedback to local groups and agencies.

- Support the establishment of resource and support centres for unemployed people and beneficiaries.
- Create customer focus-groups to give feedback on inter-agency services, procedures and effectiveness.

Improve access for clients to a co-ordinated menu of assistance in employment, training and income services.

- Establish mobile service delivery in regions where distance to central offices is a barrier for access.
- Establish a co-ordinated strategy of information delivery and assistance over the internet.
- Establish specific service delivery strategies for minority groups, such as people with disabilities.

4. RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF MAORI AND PACIFIC ISLAND PEOPLE

What you can achieve :

- Maori and Pacific Island communities having adequate and appropriate access to the resources of government agencies and local employment groups.
- More effective recognition of the needs of minority communities, and the economic and job opportunities to be gained from embracing diversity.

What you can do :

Create better linkages between Maori and Pacific Island economic opportunities and the main economic development organisations and resources in your region.

- Take leadership to establish a *partnership* framework for collaborate action for jobs in these communities — together identifying opportunities and addressing barriers to job growth.
- Enable and encourage Maori and Pacific Island authorities to design their own employment, training and income strategies that can be supported or resourced by LEC members.

Create specific Local Employment Co-ordination groups which will focus on the needs of disadvantaged communities.

- Support the establishment of Maori and Pacific Island LECs.
- Develop demographic profiles of your local region.
- Support diversity training amongst your staff and the membership of LEC groups.

5. ADVISING WINZ MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNMENT

What you can achieve :

- Timely and accurate communication of local trends, concerns, issues and initiatives to the WINZ Chief Executive and relevant Ministers.
- Early advice of policy-sensitive information, and effective briefings of local stakeholders regarding government polices.
- Feedback to government on the local effects of their policies.

What you can do :

Develop a research and monitoring strategy on employment issues.

- Create and maintain key measurement indicators relating to employment and income issues at the local level.

Enable communities to work together for policy changes to address unmet local needs.

- Create a two-way flow of information relating to government employment policies.
- Encourage LEC members to contribute to good quality feedback to government —giving well-researched examples of the impacts of policies, and suggesting alternatives.

6. RESEARCHING AND DEBATING THE FUTURE OF WORK AND INCOME

What you can achieve :

- Communities having a greater ability to address the re-definitions of “work” and “income” taking place in society today.

What you can do :

Promote research and debate about the future of work and income.

- Commission research on the future of work and income in your region.
- Disseminate key information and research as it becomes available.
- Sponsor and participate in public forums and debates on the future of work and income.
- Endorse and promote positive role models of new approaches to work and income in your region.

“Only by building strong, self-sustaining local communities will people in every country be able to withstand the forces of technological displacement and market globalisation that are threatening the livelihoods and survival of much of the human family...”

— *Jeremy Rifkin, author of “The End of Work”*

“ It is not difficult to tally preferences in this era of instantaneous electronic polling and of sophisticated marketing techniques for discovering what people want and how much they want it. It is a considerable challenge, however, to engage the public in rethinking how certain problems are defined, alternative solutions envisioned and responsibilities for action allocated...”

— *Robert Reich, former US Labour Secretary, Clinton Administration*