



SmartGrowth Partner Forums

REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT 'HEALTH CHECK'

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Definitions

Throughout this document, we reference the entities and groups associated with SmartGrowth. To avoid confusion, they are defined as follows.

SmartGrowth Partnership/Partners	The organisations who are governing partners to the SmartGrowth initiative with funding and decision-making powers: Western Bay of Plenty District Council, Tauranga City Council, Bay of Plenty Regional Council and Tāngata Whenua
Councils	The two local authorities and regional council collectively
Agencies	Central government organisations who are partners to SmartGrowth; including NZ Transport Agency (NZTA) Bay of Plenty District Health Board and Ministry of Education
Forums / partner Forums	The current SmartGrowth partner Forums, of which there are seven (they are listed on page 8)
Members	Individuals who are members of the SmartGrowth partner Forums
Member organisations	The organisations (community, business, social service, etc) represented by the members of the partner Forums
Advisory Groups	The proposed name for the groups we recommend should replace the current partner Forums

SECTION 1: Executive Summary

SmartGrowth is a unique approach to regional collaboration for the enhancement of long-term, integrated development and planning. Around New Zealand and in Bay of Plenty itself, SmartGrowth is highly regarded for its success in unifying a wide range of players – from local and central government, business, Tāngata Whenua, service providers, advocacy groups and communities – around a vision for the future of Western Bay of Plenty.

This effort and commitment has been sustained since 2004 and the positive impact on the evolution of the region's spatial planning in the intervening years is evident. Consequently, expectations on SmartGrowth and its partners to continue the momentum are high.

As the pace of regional growth has quickened and the pressures on regional resources and decision-making have intensified, the expectations on SmartGrowth to ensure a robust and collaborative partnership approach to regional planning and sustainable development have grown too.

As the region grows, its continued prosperity and well-being rely on SmartGrowth's partners staying committed to working together to realise the vision of Western Bay of Plenty being a great place to live, learn, work and play.

As with all initiatives of this kind, from time to time it is appropriate to refresh the organisation's approach and focus so that it stays responsive to and keeps pace with external developments and community expectations.

Remaining fit-for-purpose also relies on the organisation's structures and functions being regularly reviewed to ensure they support the ongoing success of SmartGrowth.

Partner Forums have, to one degree or another, been an integral part of SmartGrowth since its inception and there are now no fewer than 160 dedicated individuals giving their time, expertise and commitment to the SmartGrowth vision by participating in partner Forums.

This research project was an opportunity to conduct an independent 'health check' on Partner Forums by seeking the views of those closest to them to understand what's going well, and what could be improved to ensure they are best set up to support the ongoing success of SmartGrowth.

The research was not commissioned because of any concern the partner Forums were failing, nor has it found that to be the case. Quite the opposite.

There is no doubt that the Forums are widely regarded as a crucial element of the success of SmartGrowth over time, and for contributing significantly to better long-term regional planning and decision-making in Western Bay of Plenty.

Throughout the course of this project, we met Forum members, chairs, governance members, local and central government officials and SmartGrowth support staff – all of whom are passionate about the Western Bay of Plenty, its future and the need for SmartGrowth to continue providing a forum for long-term visioning, collaboration and partnership.

Likewise, everyone interviewed and those who participated in the online survey, consistently expressed support for the principle concept of the partner Forums and their value to the SmartGrowth strategy and objectives.

While some people interviewed struggled to precisely define the value the Forums contribute, when asked what would happen if the Forums were to no longer exist, there was unanimous concern that the quality of long-term planning and development in Western Bay of Plenty would be significantly compromised.

“The purpose of the partner Forums is an acknowledgement that the collective wisdom about place-shaping and what this sub-region is going to look like in 30 to 50 years’ time, doesn’t just reside with councils. There are a number of other incredible thinkers and disciplines and agencies that need to be involved in that discussion.”

“Everything we do is about people – there’s no point having pipes under the ground and roads if it’s not focussed on the people who live here and are going to live here in the future.”

This review was an opportunity to take stock and consider whether it is possible to extract even more value from the partner Forums. It appears there is, and those opportunities centre around a number of quite simple, yet fundamental changes, summarised as follows.

- Better align the mandate of the Forums to the current SmartGrowth Strategy.
- Consolidate the partner Forums into a simpler structure, to align them better with the four well-beings and the SmartGrowth Strategy, strengthen their sub-regional focus, improve their capability, enable them to have more influence, and improve outcomes.
- Reposition Forum membership to ensure the right capability, skills, and representation and improve collaboration between Forums and the SmartGrowth partners, including Tāngata Whenua.
- Set clear accountabilities for Forum members and Chairs to ensure the right results and the right behaviours.
- Improve members’ capability (advocacy, awareness and understanding of local government processes and the machinery of government, community engagement) to support continuous improvement and to ensure Forums are competent and capable to contribute to the SmartGrowth Strategy.
- Improve institutional capability around effective community engagement and consultation (within councils, agencies and community organisations).

With these relatively simple enhancements, SmartGrowth can ensure a more valuable contribution from those with strong grassroots knowledge and community connections; and specialist expertise to the long-term regional planning and policy processes. As well, the SmartGrowth success story will be more widely appreciated, understood and leveraged for the long-term wellbeing of the sub-region.

In this report, we discuss the opportunities for improvement with regard to the current performance of the partner Forums and why the changes we recommend will improve their performance and contribution to the SmartGrowth Strategy. We do not detail how the changes would be implemented. That is for the SmartGrowth leadership to determine in consultation with the formal SmartGrowth Partners and Central Government Agencies.

SECTION 2: Summary of Research Findings and Recommendations

Insights	Recommendations
CLARITY OF ROLE AND PURPOSE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ⓓ The purpose of the Forums is not necessarily well understood. Ⓓ A lack of understanding of local government and public policy processes is an impediment to Forum performance and leads to a misunderstanding as to the Forums' capacity to influence. Ⓓ There isn't universal agreement that better community engagement leads to better decision-making. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Refine the purpose for Forums so that there is less ambiguity and less room for interpretation. 2. Change the name from partner Forums to Advisory Groups so that the relationship between the Forums and SmartGrowth is less ambiguous and the purpose of the groups is reinforced (advisory, not approval). 3. Redefine the mandate of Advisory Groups and resource accordingly so they're not inclined to get involved in the 'doing' (e.g. plugging research gaps). 4. Improve the quality of the induction for new Advisory Group members including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. The purpose and functions of SmartGrowth b. The purpose and functions of the Advisory Groups c. Operating principles d. How central & local government work e. The role of Advisory Groups in relation to the role of central and local government. 5. Boost the induction and upskilling for councils and agencies (elected and non-elected officials), including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. The purpose & functions of SmartGrowth b. The purpose & functions of the Advisory Groups c. Making best use of the Advisory Groups (in the context of long-term planning and statutory processes). 6. Councils and agencies need to adopt a more constructive approach to engagement with Advisory Groups to extract maximum value from the relationship. 7. SmartGrowth needs to identify which other community networks and organisations it needs to grow its link with, and why (e.g. Social Link, rural groups, migrant associations).
MEMBERSHIP, REPRESENTATION AND SKILLS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ⓓ There are too many Forums overall, requiring considerable resource to support and causing Forums to be siloed from each other and disconnected from the SmartGrowth strategy. The Forums are not closely aligned with the four well-beings. Ⓓ Membership is determined by virtue of a random mix of expertise, availability or community profile and this influences the quality of contribution and level of participation from members. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advisory Groups (currently called partner Forums) should be reduced in size, with a core membership of expertise; supplemented by specialist expertise when required, or by way of Technical Advisory Groups made up of appropriate specialists. 2. A stakeholder map should be developed for each Advisory Group, so that when specialist expertise is required, a list of appropriate people is readily available from which to call on. 3. Core membership of Advisory Groups should comprise those referenced in Fig 1.

Insights	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ⓓ Forum members need to have the right competencies and capabilities to ensure they can fully and appropriately fulfil their functions. Ⓓ There are opportunities to improve forum member accountability and willingness to participate and contribute more actively. Ⓓ Forums are not representative of Western Bay of Plenty's demographics or psychographics (mindsets). Ⓓ The quality and motivation of the forum Chair is enormously influential over the reputation of the forum, the level of participation and quality of outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4. The number of Forums should be reduced to two, reporting to the Governance Group and supplemented by Technical Advisory Groups. The Combined Tāngata Whenua Forum should remain stand-alone. This will improve alignment with the SmartGrowth Strategy, facilitate a sub-regional, long-term planning focus improve influence and engagement. 5. See Fig 2 for the proposed Advisory Group structure. 6. Advisory Group Chairs (x 2) should be contracted to deliver specific performance outcomes, and engaged based on their qualification and experience in governance and their ability to meet the functions of the Chair, set out in a position description. 7. Advisory Group Chairs (x 2) should be members of the SmartGrowth Governance Group, but without voting rights. 8. Advisory Group members should be contracted based on their qualification and experience and their capacity to meet the requirements of participation, set out in a position description. 9. SmartGrowth should be required to develop and execute capability development plans for Advisory Group members and Chairs, enabling continuous improvement and to ensure competence and performance relevant to SmartGrowth.

INFLUENCE AND VALUE

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ⓓ There is widespread agreement that the body of knowledge, expertise and insights available to SmartGrowth and its partners through the Forums, is crucial to inform and improve long-term planning and decision-making for Western Bay of Plenty. Ⓓ Some Forums are seen to have more influence than others. Ⓓ The Combined Tāngata Whenua Forum is not experiencing sufficient relevance in the subject-matter to connect issues back to hapu or constructively contribute to advancing SmartGrowth's objectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve the quality of engagements between Advisory Groups and the SmartGrowth partnership (Councillors and officials) to improve opportunities for Advisory Groups to share their expert perspectives and build the body of knowledge within Councils and Agencies. 2. Change the structure of the Forums so people feel more enabled to influence and to improve Tāngata Whenua representation and contribution (see Fig 1). 3. Build institutional capability around effective community engagement & consultation (within councils/agencies and community organisations). 4. Rethink the role and purpose of the Combined Tāngata Whenua Forum to improve the mutual benefit to iwi, hapu SmartGrowth and the SmartGrowth partners.
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QUALITY OF INTERACTIONS WITH SMARTGROWTH GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ⓓ Some believe governance doesn't respect or value communities and see SmartGrowth as bridging that gap. Ⓓ The quality and frequency of engagement between the Forums and governance are not optimal and there are mixed views as to the purpose of such engagements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Realign the purpose, functions and structure of the Forums (as recommended earlier) to align more closely with the SmartGrowth strategy and objectives (as discussed earlier). 2. Appoint the Advisory Group Chairs to the SmartGrowth Governance Group (as discussed earlier).
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SECTION 3: Background to SmartGrowth and the Partner Forums

SmartGrowth's purpose

SmartGrowth is a collaboration between Tauranga City Council, Western Bay of Plenty District Council, Bay of Plenty Regional Council, Tāngata Whenua, partner community and business organisations, and key government agencies which has been running successfully since 2004.

SmartGrowth's role is to provide a long-term unified vision, strategic direction and voice for the Western Bay of Plenty to help develop the sub-region as a place of choice to live, work, learn, visit and invest. SmartGrowth aims to enable good, efficient decision-making, grounded in strong partnerships, community engagement and communications.

The SmartGrowth Strategy is the spatial plan for the Western Bay of Plenty focused on six key outcomes:

1. Visionary leadership and collaboration
2. Sustaining and improving the environment
3. Building community
4. Growing a sustainable economy
5. Recognising cultural identity and change
6. Integrated planning.

Doing this well requires effectively facilitating growth, infrastructure and social development in a way that meets the needs of the diverse communities that make up the sub-region, while taking account of SmartGrowth's social, environmental, economic and cultural responsibilities.

Partner Forums purpose

To assist SmartGrowth are seven partner Forums that exist to provide input and feedback on the strategy. In addition to the forums, there is a Social Infrastructure Providers Group which operates in a more informal capacity, representing councils as social infrastructure providers. The partner Forums are:

- Population Ageing Technical Advisory Group (PATAG)
- Combined Tāngata Whenua Forum
- Housing Affordability Forum
- Property Developers Forum
- Social Sector Forum
- Environment and Sustainability Forum
- Strategic Partners Forum

These partner Forums meet bi-monthly, drawing on their sector and community experience and diverse membership to provide a view that reflects the interests of each Forum across the western Bay of Plenty. They also use their strong grassroots knowledge and community connections to alert SmartGrowth to emerging matters that may impact on policy and direction.

The Strategic Partners Forum has an overarching monitoring role to make sure the SmartGrowth Strategy and actions have input from the partner Forums, but considerable scope is given to each Forum to operate in a way that best meets the needs of the membership and issues and opportunities they are exploring.

All Forums provide input into the development of the SmartGrowth Strategy, give feedback on implementation actions, and act in a community 'audit' role assessing the success of SmartGrowth in delivering on its vision.

The Forums also play a role in enabling public and private sector participation in the design of the physical and social infrastructure that the Western Bay of Plenty needs. This is reflected in membership which spans subject matter experts, iwi, private sector industry, front line delivery agencies, local and central government officials, elected politicians, and community representatives.

We note there are also some exceptions to the scope of the Forums roles.

The Housing Affordability Forum has played a more hands-on role in leading implementation actions of the strategy through a pilot project, while the Population Aging Technical Advisory Group (PATAG) provides expert advice to the Bay of Plenty District Health Board and SmartGrowth on policy, planning and service development to help prioritise long-term investment in health services to match the aging population of the sub-region. An example of this is the PATAG paper *"Older People and the Rental Market in the Western Bay of Plenty Sub-Region: Summary and Possible Ways Forward"*.

The Combined Tāngata Whenua Forum represents the special status and interests of the sub-region's Tāngata Whenua and provides the links between treaty settlement outcomes and strategy implementation.

SECTION 4: The Review

The review purpose

The SmartGrowth structure is regarded as an exemplar of the benefits integrated regional planning and strategic thinking deliver in maintaining a strong and unified voice in an increasingly crowded space - and the partner Forums are a valuable input to this. The SmartGrowth catchphrase *'Harnessing our strengths to build our future'* recognises the sum is greater than its requisite parts and SmartGrowth's longevity is a compelling barometer of success in acting on this statement.

The success of SmartGrowth relies in large part on the quality of advice and guidance it receives from its advisory groups and partner Forums. Successes to date include establishing and driving a long term integrated plan for future sub-regional development, strong joint advocacy for infrastructure development, and brokering key partnerships with the likes of tertiary providers and the DHB to drive transformational change.

The future vision requires integrated planning for smart housing and urban design, smart infrastructure and smart transport, planning for the population of the future, continued strong advocacy for the sub-region, and a focus on future thinking to lead community conversations on the planning that needs to be done now to create the kind of region people want to be part of in the future.

As the strategic needs of the Western Bay of Plenty region develop and change alongside its growing population - so too must the role of the Forums. SmartGrowth and its partners face an increasingly dynamic political and social environment in which they need to advocate on behalf of the Western Bay of Plenty so now more than ever, the role of the Forums must add value on behalf of the issues and opportunities they represent.

Collaboration has been a core component of the success in implementing the SmartGrowth strategic plan. Ensuring ongoing success in addressing the key issues the Forums outline requires a shared sense of purpose, ongoing commitment, and a sense of excitement at the potential for ideas and influence the Forums could have.

Reputation Matters Ltd was commissioned by SmartGrowth to conduct independent research with the partner Forum membership, governance and support roles to gather a range of views on the current state, and future needs of the Forums.

There are high expectations of SmartGrowth and its partners to deliver for the Western Bay of Plenty region, so robust and honest feedback from those involved is required, and that is why independent consultants from outside the region were engaged.

The goal of the research has been to understand the issues and opportunities with the Forums as seen by those most closely involved with them, and to provide an independent commentary and recommendations to improve the future operation and value of the partner Forums to SmartGrowth and the organisations represented.

The research process

To know where the Forums need to go in the future, it is important understand where they are currently positioned, particularly in the areas of:

- Role clarity and delivery on terms of reference
- Forum participation and operation
- Relationships with relevant community, industry and other groups
- Relationships with SmartGrowth partnership staff and governance

To gain this insight the researchers:

- **Established an interview list that ensured representation from all aspects of SmartGrowth** – this list included representation from all Forums including: Forum chairs and membership, elected councillors from the Tauranga City Council, Western Bay of Plenty District Council, Regional Council, SmartGrowth partnership staff, combined Tāngata Whenua, Bay of Plenty District Health Board, NZ Transport Agency, Ministry of Education, and SmartGrowth support staff/consultants. The researchers consulted with the SmartGrowth office to ensure broad representation in the sample set.
- **Established a series of questions** for all interviews which was replicated for an online survey (see Appendix 1).
- **Conducted 25 face-to-face interviews** with a selection of Forum members, governance and support staff, conducted in Tauranga over 4 days in May 2017.
- **Received 50 responses to the online survey** sent to the broader SmartGrowth membership (Forum members, key partner staff, and members of the managers and governance groups).

SECTION 5: Performance Review and Recommendations for Change

In this section, we discuss the key insights from the research interviews and online survey and recommend opportunities to change the way the Forums operate, to improve their performance and contribution to the SmartGrowth objectives.

5a: Clarity of role and purpose



1. The purpose of the Forums is not necessarily well understood
 2. A lack of understanding of local government and public policy processes is an impediment to Forum performance and leads to a misunderstanding as to the Forums' ability to influence
 3. There isn't universal agreement that better community engagement leads to better decision-making
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1. The purpose of the Forums is not necessarily well understood

“Forums have to accept they are a cog to inform across and up – we play a role to inform each other, to be a reference group and resource. We can't feel aggrieved if our view isn't used.”

“In many cases, the purpose of Forums isn't clear, you have many of the same people on several Forums, and they are talking about things that are happening now when they should be focusing on the 11 to 50 year horizon.”

There is general agreement as to what the partner Forums are intended to achieve, but how and why is not so well understood.

Put simply, Partner Forums are intended to deliver an advisory function, with responsibility to advise both to SmartGrowth and back to their communities of interest.

Given the purpose of SmartGrowth, Forums should be able to provide subject-matter expertise and a 'grass roots' perspective that contributes to the body of knowledge underpinning long-term, regional planning and decision-making by the SmartGrowth partnership.

Partner Forums are a great vehicle for agencies and councils to grow their understanding of community perspectives, but the benefits are not universally acknowledged or understood.

Likewise, partner Forums are a great channel through which agencies and councils can socialise their priorities, grow community understanding and support and improve the flow of information back into communities.

Councils and agencies already highly engaged with communities should not see engaging with the Forums as duplication – their specific role and function means they have a longer-term, whole-of-region perspective, which is their point-of-difference.

Some Forums believe it is their role to undertake activities that are the responsibility of SmartGrowth or the SmartGrowth partnership. For example, if a gap in the body of knowledge around a particular community characteristic is identified, some Forums believe they should be able to commission the research to plug the gap; rather than understanding their role is to recommend the research to the SmartGrowth partnership.

2. A lack of understanding of local government and public policy processes is an impediment to forum performance and leads to a misunderstanding as to the Forums' capacity to influence

"It's quite frustrating to not really understand our role and how we can see change and have influence. What is the point if we can't provide cross-sector influence and input?"

"There's some naivety in the Forums of what can be achieved – what's possible and what's not and this turns people off."

"There seems to be an opportunity to do some capability building on both sides of the fence. The Forums are a conduit to the community to feed information back out so they have the ability to become much more informed about the kind of constraints and trade-offs councils are having to make in their decisions and planning. There's almost a political and process naivety amongst the forum members about how they fit in and how stuff happens to make place."

Some Forums don't believe they're taken seriously by either the bureaucracy or elected officials; and on the other hand, some councillors and officials are frustrated by what they see as the Forums having an over-inflated sense of their 'authority' in local government decision-making.

It would appear both are valid perspectives.

Some Forum members believe that Forums have an approval function – that is, they're intended to approve or reject regional policy and planning decisions.

This is not the case, but is symptomatic of a misunderstanding as to the broader purpose of SmartGrowth alongside the functions of Local Government.

SmartGrowth is charged with providing a unified vision, strategic direction and voice for regional planning and development in Western Bay of Plenty over the long-term (50 years).

SmartGrowth is not a growth management strategy and nor is it a delivery agency with any statutory responsibilities.

Local Authorities, the Regional Council and central Government agencies (Transport, Education, and Health) have the responsibility for delivering the infrastructure and services to support and enable regional growth.

They do this within the parameters of statutory regulation (e.g. resource management, local government legislation). Those same regulations set out the requirements for consultation with the communities and businesses who will be impacted.

SmartGrowth's responsibilities and activities exist in parallel to these statutory processes, enabling councils and central government agencies a forum through which long-term visioning and planning can be co-ordinated across Western Bay of Plenty.

This means councils and central government agencies can deliver on their short- and medium- term territorial responsibilities, in the context of a shared longer-term vision for the sub-region.

This relationship between SmartGrowth and Councils is not well understood by many of the Forum members interviewed and underpins considerable misunderstanding as to the role of the Forums.

Even the name 'Partner Forums' appears to have contributed to a perception that the Forums are partners to SmartGrowth in the same way as the Councils. Yet this is not the case.

This lack of role clarity has contributed to considerable resentment developing within and between some Forums and SmartGrowth partnership. This tension is particularly acute between some Forums and the Tauranga City Council.

3. *There isn't universal agreement that better community engagement leads to better decision-making*

"Councils who say 'we hear nothing new' are getting it wrong. Reinforcement is also important, especially of the sub-regional view. They need to take it as a vote of confidence that their engagement is working well."

"The assumption of some is that the Forums meddle, 'they don't understand we do it anyway, it will cost us more, it will take us longer' and that causes me incredible frustration."

"SmartGrowth brings a level of expertise we don't have locally and outcomes we can promote [to Wellington] which makes our business case process easier."

"We spend millions on schools, councils spend millions on infrastructure – so avoiding duplication is vital. SmartGrowth gives us an opportunity to get in a room with people and understand what their focus is – the hui is good."

"Council officers are head down, bum up, they think they are doing consultation and this is duplication, therefore Forums are seen as problematic rather than adding value."

Several people from central government agencies who have joined SmartGrowth more recently expressed considerable support for the Forums as vehicles through which they can now engage with expert communities of interest more effectively. As a result, they believe the quality of their planning and decision-making has improved.

Likewise, Western Bay of Plenty District Council representatives interviewed report the Council has embraced the benefits of regular community engagement and can evidence those benefits in the quality of its decision-making and policy implementation. The SmartGrowth Forums are an important element of their engagements.

In contrast, some Forum members and officials expressed concern that some in Councils view community engagement and consultation, of which the Forums are part, as a distraction from day-to-day process.

Some Forum members expressed concern that Tauranga City Council takes a more singular approach to community engagement relying on its own existing channels and forums. This has led to the perception it considers external views from the SmartGrowth Forums as more of a hindrance than a help.

There was general acknowledgement that the increasing demands placed on Tauranga City Council to address the growth-related needs of today places more pressure on already stretched resources. This is leading to a tendency to look inward rather than out in the interests of saving time and effort, particularly if council staff feel more comfortable going to some Forums than others based on the reception they receive.

→ RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Refine the purpose of Forums so that there is less ambiguity and less room for interpretation.
 2. Change the name from Partner Forums to Advisory Groups so that the relationship between the Forums and SmartGrowth is less ambiguous and the purpose of the groups is reinforced (advisory, not approval).
 3. Redefine the mandate of Advisory Groups and resource accordingly so they're not inclined to get involved in the 'doing' (e.g. plugging research gaps).
 4. Improve the quality of the induction for new Advisory Group members including:
 - a. The purpose & functions of SmartGrowth
 - b. The purpose & functions of the Advisory Groups
 - c. Operating principles
 - d. How central & local government work.
 5. The role of Advisory Groups in relation to the role of central and local government.
 6. Boost the induction and upskilling for councils and agencies (elected and non-elected officials), including:
 - a. The purpose & functions of SmartGrowth
 - b. The purpose & functions of the Advisory Groups
 - c. Making best use of the Advisory Groups (in the context of long-term planning and statutory processes).
 7. Councils and agencies need to adopt a more constructive approach to engagement with Advisory Groups to extract maximum value from the relationship.
 8. SmartGrowth needs to identify which other community networks and organisations it needs to grow its link with, and why (e.g. Social Link, rural groups, migrant associations).
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5b. Membership, representation and skills



1. There are too many Forums overall, requiring considerable resource to support. This is causing Forums to be siloed from each other and disconnected from the SmartGrowth strategy. The Forums are not closely aligned with the four well-beings.
 2. Membership is determined by virtue of a random mix of expertise, availability or community profile and this influences the quality of contribution and level of participation from members.
 3. Forum members need to have a set of competencies and capabilities to ensure they can fully and appropriately fulfil their functions.
 4. There are opportunities to improve forum member accountability and willingness to participate and contribute more actively.
 5. Forums are not representative of Western Bay of Plenty's demographics or psychographics (mindsets).
 6. The quality and motivation of the Forum Chair is enormously influential over the reputation of the forum, the level of participation and quality of outcomes.
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1. There are too many Forums overall, requiring considerable resource to support and causing Forums to be siloed from each other and disconnected from the SmartGrowth strategy. The Forums are not closely aligned with the four well-beings.

“The Forums will perform based on the resources provided – many of us have day jobs.”

“When you are in a Forum, it's a bit siloed and whilst there are common members there isn't a formal mechanism for bringing this information back.”

“I would like to see more cross-pollination of information shared across Forums – to get a better understanding of the challenges.”

There are seven Forums, each having been operating for a different period of time and each having been established in response to emerging regional issues.

For example, the Property Developers Forum has been operating for more than a decade, whereas the Environment and Sustainability Forum and Social Sector Forum have been established more recently.

Forums meet every two months, meaning SmartGrowth is required to support 48 meetings a year (support comprising agenda preparation, meeting venue co-ordination, circulation of pre-reading, minutes, support for follow up actions, and a long list of other organisational and communications tasks).

Given the role of Forums in the context of SmartGrowth's purpose and functions, it is not clear why all Forums need to meet as often as bi-monthly. Some Forum members expressed concern that there isn't necessarily enough relevant subject-matter to justify such frequent meetings. We agree, especially given it is not within the Forums' mandate to advance their own work programmes.

Many Forum members spoken to expressed concern at the lack of collaboration and alignment between Forums. There is little understanding of the focus of each and few opportunities for Forums to share insights and perspectives, or subject-matter of mutual interest. For example, the Environment and Sustainability Forum and the Property Developers Forum share common issues such as resource management and sustainable land use, yet never meet.

Some Forums benefit from having members who participate in several Forums, however this is not a reliable way to ensure cross-pollination of ideas and issues.

SmartGrowth has recently moved to address this by establishing a quarterly Chairs' meeting, but considerable responsibility sits with SmartGrowth staff to be able to identify common areas of focus between Forums. In the absence of Forums meeting together, the opportunities for the sharing of ideas and information are very limited.

We found a reasonable lack of understanding of SmartGrowth's purpose and strategy across the forum members we interviewed. Relatively few referenced the four well-beings and very few reflected that SmartGrowth has a sub-regional, long-term focus.

Forums need to be better anchored in SmartGrowth's purpose and strategy in order that they contribute more purposefully to the outcomes SmartGrowth exists to achieve.

This requires a tightening of focus and a realignment of Forum structures.

2. Forum membership is determined by virtue of a random mix of subject-matter expertise, availability or community profile and this influences the quality of contribution and level of participation from members

“Mandated members are elected, but are they qualified? Are they actually in a position to bring a hapu perspective?”

“The Forums are driven by people who are keen and available – some are more capable and experienced than others.”

“The Forums are passionate, sometimes with flags to wave but so what? That pisses officials off because they are full of people who appear to be annoying, especially to TCC who are facing enormous growth pressure.”

“Forum representatives are mandated by own organisations to be part of the Forums and that's fundamental for credibility, but if they're not focussing on their key issues engagement will be low.”

There are currently around 160 members across the eight Forums and there is considerable variability in why and how members are appointed.

Some have been appointed because they're willing and able to attend Forum meetings. Others are appointed because of their considerable subject-matter expertise. In turn, others are appointed because of their community profile and history of having worked in a particular community of interest over a long period of time.

A number of those interviewed shared their concerns that some Forum members use their participation as a platform for promoting their own particular agendas and that such activism alienates not only fellow Forum members, but also Council and agency officials.

There is concern that a few personalities prone to single-issue 'grandstanding' are having an entirely counterproductive effect on the performance of their Forum and its reputation with stakeholders, the community and SmartGrowth itself.

There needs to be a more robust process for the appointment of Forum members and a thorough induction and clear guidelines to ensure members understand the purpose of Forums and the difference between advocacy and activism.

3. Forum members need to have a set of competencies and capabilities to ensure they can fully and appropriately fulfil their functions

"Forums need a mix of interest and competencies, strategic thinking and a good understanding of council processes."

"Forums need a mix of cultural backgrounds and skills - leadership, managerial, people skills, academic, and pragmatic project management."

There are core skills forum members need so they are able to fulfil their functions effectively. They include:

- Advocacy experience in the context of policy making and local government process
- Understanding of the machinery of government and public policy decision-making
- An understanding of and experience in effective community engagement
- Subject-matter expertise relevant to the SmartGrowth purpose and strategy

It isn't necessarily the case that a subject-matter expert will have the requisite advocacy and community engagement experience; or vice versa.

But in the interests of getting the right representation, SmartGrowth needs to ensure the right combination of skills and capabilities across each Forum's membership and to appoint a high-quality Chair who can ensure all voices are heard and the Forum operates to its terms of reference.

4. There are opportunities to improve Forum member accountability and willingness to participate and contribute more actively

"There has to be sufficient mutual value to member organisations to turn up and be involved."

"The Forums need to be better resourced – under the current model they're not resourced properly to run."

Some Forum members participate more actively and consistently than others and there are many reasons for the variability in participation. For example, one member we spoke to does not attend Forum meetings because they consider the meetings a waste of time. They are happy to read the supporting documentation, but do not believe there is enough value in the meetings to justify attending.

Other members participate in a number of Forums and dedicate considerable time to SmartGrowth.

While Forum Chairs are paid a modest honorarium, Forum members are not remunerated for their involvement. Notwithstanding, there is considerable investment in operating the Forums and so active participation is fundamental to the return on that investment.

There are a number of practical steps that could be considered to improve participation, both in frequency and quality:

- Reduce the frequency of meetings.
- Reduce the size of each Forum – appoint a core of members and supplement with specific expertise when the subject-matter requires (either by way of individuals or through Technical Advisory Groups).
- Attach specific accountabilities to the requirements of Forum membership, including minimum annual attendance at meetings, a minimum number of external engagements representing the forum, and so forth.
- Consider making membership a paid position (where the member organisation is not remunerating the member).

5. Forums are not representative of Western Bay of Plenty's demographics or psychographics (mindsets)

“Representation on Forums is not reflective of society and the issues we are facing – youth, ethnic minorities, inequality.”

“A lot of voices are not represented on Forums. How do you really and truly hear from communities that are most affected? We need to avoid a myopic view.”

“Representation tends to be more middle class – what about the Salvation Army and Women's Refuge for example?”

Forum members are drawn from across the region and contribute a range of expertise and perspectives relevant to the forum/s to which they belong. Considerable effort is made to ensure that forum members legitimately represent a community of interest and a new process was recently introduced to ensure that members are formally endorsed by the relevant community organisation or interest group they represent.

However, Forums are not representative of Western Bay of Plenty's demographics or psychographics (mindsets). For example, young people (youth), millennials, parents, rural communities, the economically disadvantaged and socially isolated, ethnic minorities, migrants, and the working poor are just some population subsets not specifically represented on any of the Forums.

6. The quality and motivation of the forum Chair is enormously influential over the reputation of the Forum, the level of participation and quality of outcomes

“The Chair needs to be good at covering issues, listening, keeping their network informed. Forums should be solidly behind you. You need a good overview of working environment, open mind, cut through emotions to see all views.”

“Their role is to look out for opportunities to provide that input. I’d like to see their role be more engaged with some of the other Forums and to bring that information back to the forum members.”

“Chairs have big influence, being a good chair means managing the meeting, letting people have their say without talking too much, and the ability to sum up. It’s not about their personal position.”

Feedback suggests not every Forum currently enjoys the level of capability in their Chair to support the Forum to be successful, and the credibility of some Forums is compromised as a result (both with its membership and with SmartGrowth partnership and external stakeholders).

On the other hand, there was considerable consistency of view that several Chairs are exemplary in their abilities and that their Forums are highly regarded as a consequence.

There is universal agreement that having a competent and capable Chair is crucial to the effectiveness of Forums. The quality of the Chair is critical to the level of member engagement, the reputation of the Forum with SmartGrowth partners and other stakeholders, and the quality of outputs and outcomes.

A proficient Chair is one who:

- aligns the Forum’s activities closely to the SmartGrowth strategy and objectives
- advances the Forum’s purpose and functions and not their own ‘hobby horse’ or political interests
- manages the meeting agenda and process well so that the time is used to best effect and the outputs are aligned with the SmartGrowth purpose and objectives
- facilitates Forum discussions in an inclusive and collaborative way so that all participants can fully contribute and all perspectives are aired
- can represent the forum’s position and provide advice to the SmartGrowth management and governance groups on its behalf
- ensures Forum members represent SmartGrowth appropriately and effectively externally, especially with the communities of interest they represent
- ensures Forum members achieve their accountabilities and fulfil their responsibilities.

→ RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The number of Forums should be reduced to two Advisory Groups, reporting to the Governance Group with a broader focus to improve alignment with the SmartGrowth Strategy, facilitate a sub-regional, long-term planning focus and improve influence and engagement. These could be:
 - a. Land Use and Environment – representing all elements of the built environment from development and housing to transport infrastructure
 - b. People, Population and Culture – representing social and health needs, demographics and cultural wellbeing of region

The Combined Tāngata Whenua Forum should remain stand-alone, but with stronger links to the Advisory Groups. This could be facilitated by Tāngata Whenua representation on both Advisory Groups and regular interaction between the Chairs of the Combined Tāngata Whenua Forum and Advisory Groups.

2. Both Advisory Groups and the Combined Tāngata Whenua Forum would have the four well-beings (cultural, environmental, social, economic) as guiding principles.
3. Advisory Groups should have a core membership of expertise; supplemented by specialist expertise when required.
4. Advisory Groups would work independently but with strong links to each other and the Combined Tāngata Whenua Forum based in the principle that each informs and influences the other.
5. A stakeholder map should be developed for each Advisory Group identifying the key organisations and individuals that hold specific knowledge, or on the ground experience, or community perspective in the area of interest. This means that when more specialist expertise is required, a list of appropriate people is readily available from which to call on.
6. Core membership of Advisory Groups should comprise those referenced in Fig 1.
7. See Fig 2 for the proposed Advisory Group structure.
8. Advisory Group Chairs (x 2) should be contracted to deliver specific performance outcomes, and engaged based on their qualification and experience in governance and their ability to perform the functions of a competent Chair, set out in a position description.
9. Advisory Group Chairs (x 2) should be members of the SmartGrowth Governance Group.
10. Advisory Group members should be contracted based on their qualification and experience and their capacity to meet the requirements of participation, set out in a position description.

11. SmartGrowth should be required to develop and execute capability development plans for Advisory Group members and Chairs, enabling continuous improvement and to ensure competence and performance relevant to SmartGrowth.
12. The two Advisory Groups should be supported by Technical Advisory Groups with specific subject-matter expertise to advise on issues requiring more in-depth knowledge and specialised advice. For example - they may be used to commission research or act as a working group. These may be formed, operated and dissolved as required, depending on the needs of each Advisory Group.

A cautionary note:

Suggesting an alternative to the status quo is a dangerous place to live as a consultant, as people will be naturally inclined to explore the detail around 'what' it is and 'how' it would function.

This proposed structural changes to the current Forums is a 'straw man' only and is intended to stimulate further discussion between the SmartGrowth Partners that focusses on the benefits of change (the 'why') - to: keep the focus of SmartGrowth on the long-term, reduce information silos, encourage more cross pollination of ideas and enable the potential for a range of ideas to influence up, down and across the SmartGrowth partnership.

Figure 1: SmartGrowth Advisory Group Representation

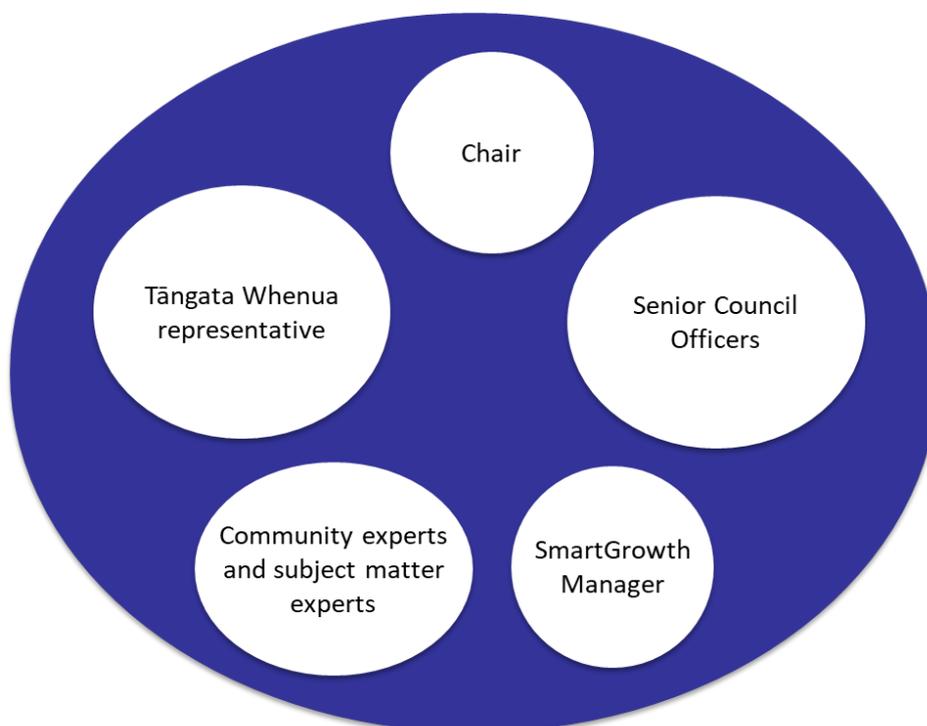
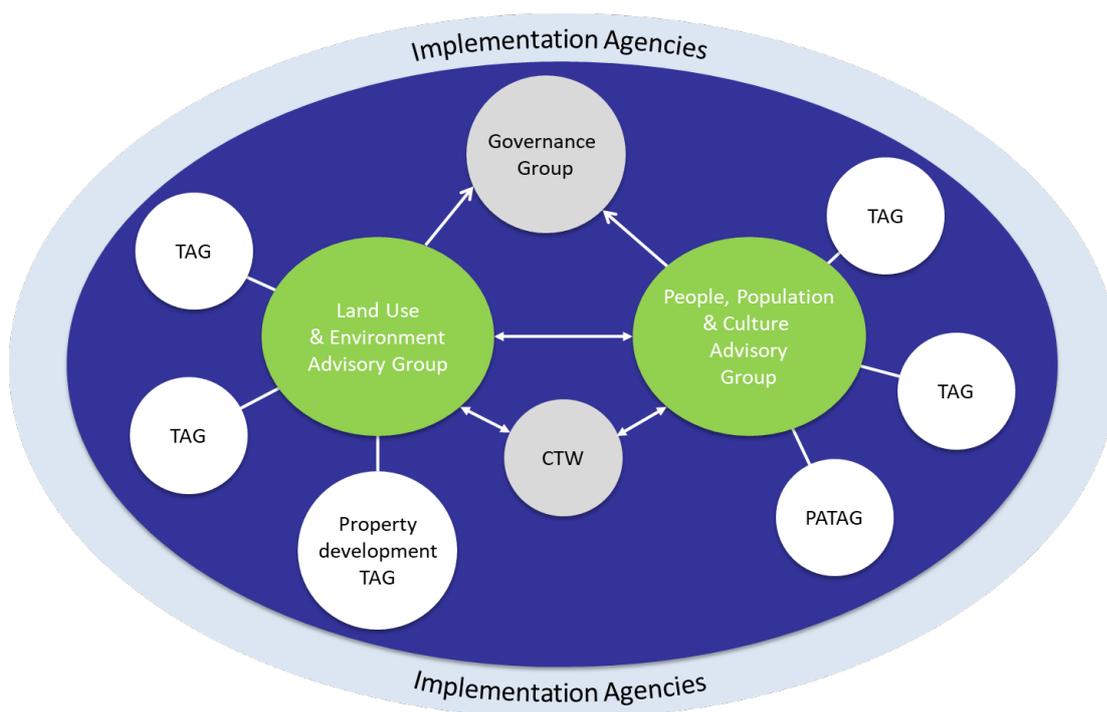


Figure 2: SmartGrowth Advisory Group Proposed Structure



5c. Influence and value



1. There is widespread agreement that the body of knowledge, expertise and insights available to SmartGrowth and its partners through the Forums is crucial to inform and improve long-term planning and decision-making for Western Bay of Plenty.
2. Some Forums are seen to have more influence than others.
3. The Combined Tāngata Whenua Forum is not experiencing sufficient relevance in the subject-matter to connect issues back to hapu or constructively contribute to advancing SmartGrowth's objectives

1. **There is widespread agreement that the body of knowledge, expertise and insights available to SmartGrowth and its partners through the Forums is crucial to inform and improve planning decision-making for Western Bay of Plenty.**

“SmartGrowth’s strength is its community. Politicians and committee structures come and go, but SmartGrowth remains – it keeps the pollies honest, and stops them reinventing things every three years.”

There is no doubt that the Forums are widely regarded as a crucial element of the success of SmartGrowth over time, and for contributing significantly to better long-term regional planning and decision-making.

As discussed earlier in this report, while some Forum members struggled to articulate the value of the Forums in relation to their individual influence, there was unanimous concern that the quality of long-term planning and development in Western Bay of Plenty would be significantly compromised without them.

There is strong support for the SmartGrowth vision to be delivered for the long-term well-being of the region and its communities.

SmartGrowth itself is highly regarded as being instrumental in unifying key players across the sub-region, connecting them to each other and the community and galvanising them around a shared vision.

Without doubt, the Forums have been an important part of that success.

2. Some Forums are seen to have more influence than others

“There’s huge engagement across the Forums, but this fails if people aren’t being listened to.”

There is a perception that some Forums are more influential in the regional planning and development process than others. For example, the Property Developers’ Forum versus the Social Sector Forum.

The level of influence seems to be determined by:

- the Forum’s understanding of its purpose and the parameters of its mandate
- the Forum’s understanding of the SmartGrowth strategy and objectives
- the Forum’s understanding of local government and public policy processes; and their role in the context of those processes
- the frequency and quality of engagements with elected officials and officials
- whether the engagement between Forums and councils and agencies is collaborative or combative;
- the willingness of officials and councillors to consult and engage with Forums authentically (without conscious or unconscious bias)

3. The Combined Tāngata Whenua Forum is not experiencing sufficient relevance in the subject-matter to connect issues back to hapu or constructively contribute to advancing SmartGrowth’s objectives

“I’m not sure we have the right formula for the [CTW] Forum – I don’t see commitment or skills to engage in the bigger picture.”

“The people on the forum are not right to represent – they are available rather than skilled”

“The ‘so what’ for our people isn’t clear – there’s a disconnect between what’s being said to them and what the future action is so there’s not a compelling reason to turn up – we need to link better to the issues that are relevant to them.”

As one member of the Combined Tāngata Whenua Forum said, SmartGrowth is valuable vehicle and provides a long-term vision for Western Bay of Plenty that they can work with and relate to.

There was a strong consensus on the importance of the Combined Tāngata Whenua Forum, but relatively little understanding from those outside it of how it is operating or the challenges it faces in the current structure, creating a sense of isolation from the broader SmartGrowth structure.

For SmartGrowth to make best use of the insights and perspective of Tāngata Whenua, members of the Forum feel there needs to be more connection made between the immediate challenges and priorities for iwi and hapu and the immediate priorities and activities of SmartGrowth.

This has begun with work to ensure better communication from the Forum back to hapu and marae, but without better alignment to SmartGrowth, partner organisations and the other Forums, the Combined Tāngata Whenua Forum will continue to struggle to represent issues back to their hapu in a way that resonates or seems relevant.

→ RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Improve the quality of engagements between Forums and SmartGrowth Partners (Councillors and officials) to improve opportunities to share their expert perspectives and build the body of knowledge within Councils and Agencies.
 2. Change the structure of the Forums so people feel more enabled to influence and to improve Tāngata Whenua representation and contribution (see Fig 1).
 3. Build institutional capability around effective community engagement & consultation (within councils/agencies and community organisations).
 4. Rethink the role and purpose of the Combined Tāngata Whenua Forum to improve the mutual benefit to iwi, hapu, SmartGrowth and the SmartGrowth partners.
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5d. Quality of interactions with SmartGrowth governance and management



1. The quality and frequency of engagement between the Forums and governance are not optimal and there are mixed views as to the purpose of such engagements

1. The quality and frequency of engagement between the Forums and SmartGrowth governance are not optimal and there are mixed views as to the purpose of such engagements.

“Forums have become largely ineffective except Property Developers because they feel they have to be combative to be heard, and we – the bureaucracy and politicians – have created that.”

“Leadership doesn’t understand the partner Forums – the story is lost; council staff often roll their eyes about SmartGrowth. We can’t have that. We need to rebirth the partnership.”

“Partners could be clearer about their expectations - what they want, like, don’t like, so there’s more direction.”

“There’s not a great relationship with leadership group – because there’s limited opportunities to give feedback and attend.”

Whether Forum members or council officials, there is a sense that the level of regard for the Forums within councils is not as strong as it should be, and there has been a deterioration in the quality of the relationships over time.

We suggest this is again a consequence of there being a lack of common understanding of the purpose of the Forums – from both quarters – meaning the engagements between Councils and Forums fall short of expectations.

Realigning the purpose of the Forums and aligning their structure more closely with the SmartGrowth Strategy and objectives could help resolve this, as would a deeper understanding amongst all parties as to the purpose of the relationship between SmartGrowth partners and the Forums.

Appointing the Advisory Group Chairs to the SmartGrowth Governance Group will also benefit the relationship between the SmartGrowth partnership and the Advisory Groups.

→ RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Realign the purpose, functions and structure of the Forums (Advisory Groups) to align more closely with the SmartGrowth strategy and objectives (as discussed earlier).
2. Appoint the Advisory Group Chairs to the SmartGrowth Governance Group (as discussed earlier).

APPENDIX 1: SmartGrowth Research Interview Questions

	Forum Partners	Leadership Group	Management/Support Staff
PARTICIPATION & OPERATION			
Clarity of role and purpose	<p>Describe in your own words the role of the SmartGrowth partner Forums, and why you think they exist.</p>	<p>Describe in your own words the role of the SmartGrowth partner Forums & why you think they exist.</p>	<p>Describe in your own words the role of the SmartGrowth partner Forums & why you think they exist.</p>
	<p>To what extent do you think the Forum you're involved in delivers on its purpose? In other words, do you think the Forum is fit-for-purpose? Why do you say that?</p>	<p>To what extent do you think the Forums deliver on their purpose? In other words, do you think the Forums are fit-for-purpose? Why do you say that?</p>	<p>To what extent do you think the Forums deliver on their purpose? In other words, do you think the Forums are fit-for-purpose? Why do you say that?</p>
	<p>Do you think there's consistency and alignment across the Forums in terms of their performance & contribution to SmartGrowth's vision?</p>	<p>Do you think there's consistency and alignment across the Forums in terms of their performance & contribution to SmartGrowth's vision?</p>	<p>Do you think there's consistency and alignment across the Forums in terms of their performance & contribution to SmartGrowth's vision?</p>
Membership, representation & skills	<p>What combination of skills and representation do you think the Forums need? Why?</p>	<p>What combination of skills and representation do you think the Forums need? Why?</p>	<p>What combination of skills and representation do you think the Forums need? Why?</p>
	<p>Do you think there need to be changes to the current representation and skills? What would those changes be and why?</p>	<p>Do you think there need to be changes to the current representation and skills? What would those changes be and why?</p>	<p>Do you think there need to be changes to the current representation and skills? What would those changes be and why?</p>
Influence & energy	<p>Do you think there are challenges to members participating actively in Forums and attending meetings, or is it easy?</p>	<p>Do you think there are challenges to members participating actively in Forums and attending meetings, or is it easy?</p>	<p>Do you think there are challenges to members participating actively in Forums and attending meetings, or is it easy?</p>
	<p>Do think there are better or easier ways forum members could participate?</p>	<p>Do think there are better or easier ways forum members could participate?</p>	<p>Do think there are better or easier ways forum members could participate?</p>
	<p>Do you feel the Forum has the influence you expect it to have? Why do you say that?</p>	<p>Do you feel the Forums have the influence you expect them to have? Why do you say that?</p>	<p>Do you feel the Forums have the influence you expect them to have? Why do you say that?</p>

	Forum Partners	Leadership Group	Management/Support Staff
RELATIONSHIPS & INTERACTIONS			
Quality of interaction with SmartGrowth governance & management	<p>☐ Tell us about the quality of the interactions your forum has with the SmartGrowth Leaders Group.</p>	<p>☐ Tell us about the quality of the interactions the SmartGrowth Leaders Group has with the Forums.</p>	<p>☐ Tell us about your perceptions or understanding of the quality of the interactions between the SmartGrowth Leaders Group and the Forums.</p>
	<p>☐ Do you think there are opportunities to improve the quality or frequency of the engagement, and what would they be? Why do you think that would help?</p>	<p>☐ Do you think there are opportunities to improve the quality or frequency of the engagement, and what would they be? How do you think that would help?</p>	<p>☐ Do you think there are opportunities to improve the quality or frequency of the engagement, and what would they be? How do you think that would help?</p>
	<p>☐ Tell us about the quality of the interactions you have with the SmartGrowth support team.</p>	<p>☐ Tell us about your perceptions or understanding of the quality of the interactions Forums have with the SmartGrowth support team.</p>	<p>☐ Tell us about your perceptions or understanding of the quality of the interactions Forums have with the SmartGrowth support team.</p>
	<p>☐ Do you think there are opportunities to improve the quality of the engagement and what would they be?</p>	<p>☐ Do you think there are opportunities to improve the quality of the engagement and what would they be?</p> <p>☐ Tell us about the quality of support you receive from the Support Team. Are you satisfied the team responds appropriately to the direction from the Leadership Group and are you satisfied with their overall performance?</p>	<p>☐ Do you think there are opportunities to improve the quality of the engagement and what would they be?</p> <p>☐ Tell us about the quality of the direction you receive from the Leadership Group. Are you satisfied the direction you receive is adequate and sufficient for you to be successful in your role?</p>
Effectiveness as a vehicle for community engagement	<p>☐ How does your Forum enable the community to participate and have a voice? Do you think this is sufficient to give you confidence you understand the community's perspective? Why, why not?</p>	<p>☐ How do the Forums enable the community to participate and have a voice? Do you think this is sufficient to give you confidence that Forums are reflecting the community's perspective? Why, why not?</p>	<p>☐ How do the Forums enable the community to participate and have a voice? Do you think this is sufficient to give you confidence that Forums are reflecting the community's perspective? Why, why not?</p>
	<p>☐ Do you think SmartGrowth should consult with others in the community not represented in the Forum? Who and why?</p>	<p>☐ Do you think SmartGrowth should consult with others in the community not represented in the Forums? Who and why?</p>	<p>☐ Do you think SmartGrowth should consult with others in the community not represented in the Forums? Who and why?</p>

	Forum Partners	Leadership Group	Management/Support Staff
Extent & effectiveness of relevant relationships with stakeholders and the community	<p>Ⓓ How would you characterise the relationship of your Forum with key stakeholders and the community? Why do you say that?</p>	<p>Ⓓ How would you characterise the relationships that Forums have with key stakeholders and the community? Why do you say that?</p>	<p>Ⓓ How would you characterise the relationships that Forums have with key stakeholders and the community? Why do you say that?</p>
Value to SmartGrowth decision-making & information sharing	<p>Ⓓ What value do you think Forums provide to individual member organisations?</p> <p>Ⓓ One of the roles of the Forums is to facilitate and encourage information and data sharing. Do you think your Forum is achieving that? Why, why not?</p> <p>Ⓓ Do you think the Forum is delivering value? What does value mean, to you?</p> <p>Ⓓ Do you think there's consistency and alignment across the Forums in terms of the value they're delivering? Why, why not?</p>	<p>Ⓓ What value do you think Forums provide to individual member organisations?</p> <p>Ⓓ One of the roles of the Forums is to facilitate and encourage information and data sharing. Do you think they're achieving that? Why, why not?</p> <p>Ⓓ Do you think the Forums are delivering value? What does value mean, to you?</p> <p>Ⓓ Do you think there's consistency and alignment across the Forums in terms of the value they're delivering? Why, why not?</p>	<p>Ⓓ What value do you think Forums provide to individual member organisations?</p> <p>Ⓓ One of the roles of the Forums is to facilitate and encourage information and data sharing. Do you think they're achieving that? Why, why not?</p> <p>Ⓓ Do you think the Forums are delivering value? What does value mean, to you?</p> <p>Ⓓ Do you think there's consistency and alignment across the Forums in terms of the value they're delivering? Why, why not?</p>