Review of the Code for Aotearoa Open Data Fellowships

December 2016

Overview

"What if we had license to do things differently, and what if we could reimagine the way that those issues and challenges were given to us."

Alvaro Maz, Code for Aotearoa

Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) and Open Data NZ funded the launch of Code for Aotearoa and two three-month fellowships at LINZ and Wellington City Council in 2016. This was to test how bringing private sector experts into government agencies could help open up government data and meet more of the needs of users.

The overall goal of the fellowships was to act as a vehicle for driving cultural and structural change inside government - encouraging innovation, understanding and mitigating risk, and increasing the capacity for transparency and engagement.

Code for Aotearoa is part of the international civil society-led Code for All network of organisations who believe that digital technology opens new channels for citizens to more meaningfully engage with central and local government and have a positive impact on their communities. The Code for All network currently operates across 10 countries including the US, Germany, Mexico and Pakistan.

"The Fellowships demonstrated the global model of Code for All in New Zealand to bring fresh thinking and new ideas."

Rochelle Stewart-Allen, Land Information NZ

Code for Aotearoa & Open Data NZ teams: (LtoR) Peter Jacobson, Gabrielle Young, Cam Findlay, Rochelle Stewart-Allen, Alvaro Maz, Vaishnavi Ilyer, Marcus Crane, Paul Stone

How the fellowships operated

"What I liked about the civic labs project was that the Fellows followed a textbook lightweight iterative design process to solve a real problem."

Dan Randow, Collaboration Wrangler

The Fellows were split into two teams - one team of two at Wellington City Council and one team at Land Information New Zealand (LINZ). As the teams chose to job-share within their organisations, each individual worked 20 hours per week during the 12 week fellowships.

The Fellows initially spent a week together with Alvaro Maz from Code for Aotearoa working out their approach over the 3-month fellowship period.

Within the first week of arriving at their organisations, Fellows held meetings with relevant staff and external stakeholders to determine how best to make an impact during their short time with each organisation. The aim was to gain a good overview of each organisation, where the barriers to releasing open data might be, and how the Fellows might contribute to clearing those roadblocks.
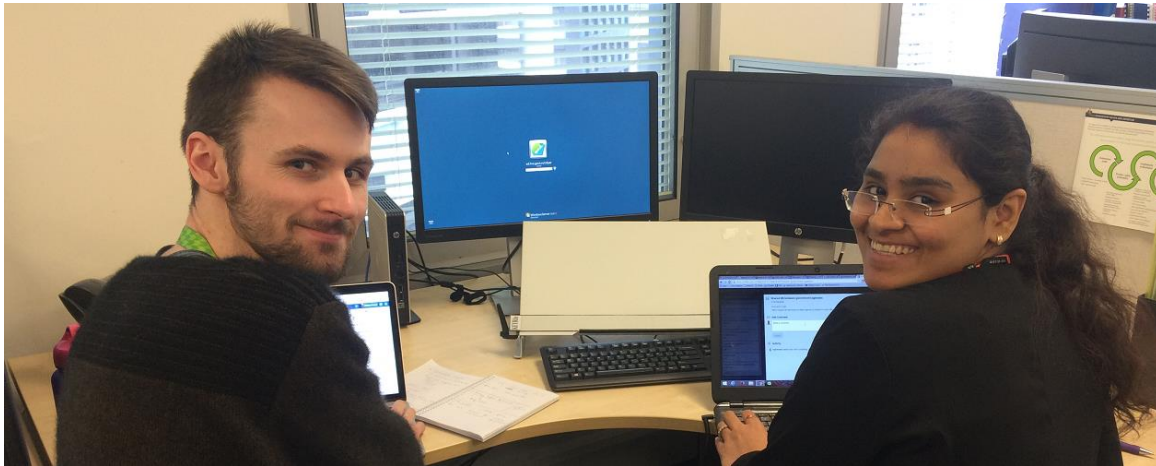
Given the short timeframes, it was not expected the Fellows could achieve significant change during the 3-month fellowships. The goal instead was to test whether the Code for All Fellowship model could be adapted to the New Zealand environment and run successfully here.

After initial gathering of information, the Fellowship teams designed individual projects to roll-out within their organisations:

The Civic Lab held at Wellington Public Library

The Wellington City Council Fellows established Civic Labs to ask Wellingtonians what makes a successful city and then how the Council can help make Wellington more successful. The Fellows ran 5 Civic Labs at Wellington Public Library which enabled them to connect and collect responses from a wide variety of people, including those from marginalised communities. They have released the feedback as open data. [More information about the Civil Labs, how they ran and their outcomes, is available online.](link)

The LINZ Fellows' first day

The LINZ Fellows spent their 3-months designing and putting together an Open Data Toolkit. The toolkit focuses on providing core information to individuals and organisations wanting to open up data, particularly those based in government. The Toolkit was submitted for review to the Open Government Ninjas, a group of open government technical experts committed to helping government roll out the open data agenda. The Open Data Toolkit is available to view online.

Review of the Open Data Fellowships

Feedback was collated from the Fellows, Code for Aotearoa, LINZ and Wellington City Council to provide an overview of the successes and challenges of the Fellowship Programme, and suggestions for future fellowships.

Successes

> *"What we got was a culture of openness, transparency, and agility that we could actually use and which we've used to operationalise the City Council during this latest [earthquake] recovery."*
>
> *Sean Audain, Wellington City Council*

The Fellowships model adapted well to the New Zealand. It showed that Fellows bring fresh thinking and new, more agile, ways of working into government. This was evidenced by the adaptability shown by Wellington City Council staff following the November 2016 earthquake, and their direct comments attributing the change to what they'd observed from the Fellows. The LINZ Fellows also exhibited open and transparent practices through use of open Google Docs where both LINZ staff and future fellows can freely access this content.

Code for Aotearoa received 62 applications for fellowships which demonstrated the interest and support for the pilot initiative. The appointed fellows were selected by Code for Aotearoa which provided a level of independence outside usual government ownership.

Support was received from Land Information Minister, Hon Louise Upston, Richard Foy (DIA) and Joshua Vial (Enspiral Dev Academy) which helped encourage a robust number of applications.

Senior staff in both LINZ and Wellington City Council were committed to trialling out the Open Data Fellowships and providing their executive support to the pilot. This included LINZ providing start-up funding. This support enabled Code for Aotearoa to be launched in New Zealand, and the Fellowships pilot to be rolled-out.

The pilot did lay a base for future fellowships and provided a flavour of what the Fellowships could achieve should sufficient funding and commitment be given by an organisation (a minimum of 12 month fellowships is recommended).

A positive working relationship between Code for Aotearoa, LINZ and Wellington City (WCC) Council did much to pave the way for success of the Fellowships. Commitment from all parties provided on-the-ground support to help the Fellows navigate through their challenges.

The Fellowships demonstrated to LINZ and WCC staff new innovative ways of working, which were considered a refreshing change by some staff. The Fellowships also provided opportunity for central and local government to work more closely together. WCC commented they felt more in touch with their community following the Civic Labs.

There has been considerable public support for what the Fellows achieved with a great deal of enthusiasm. This is despite the limited timeframe and limited resourcing and support.

The two public events (the launch and close-of-fellowships celebration) were both well-supported and well attended. This helped to raise the profile of the Fellowships and publically demonstrated the Government's commitment to innovation and change.

> *"The Fellows were open to learning as they went, changing tack and re-prioritising on the go to achieve their outcomes."*
>
> *Cam Findlay, Land Information NZ*

Challenges

The 3-month timeframe was always going to bring challenges. Fellows estimated they spent at least the first month doing needs analysis through meeting with both internal and external stakeholders, then a further month designing their initiatives. This left only a month to test and roll-out their projects.

Buy-in from across the organisations was not consistent and this, at times, limited where the Fellows were able to focus their energy to make the greatest impact. The complexity and culture of each organisation was also difficult to understand with such short timeframes. Add to that none of the Fellows had previous government experience.

The Fellows were recent development graduates - unlike the Australian Fellowships where the average age range is 26-43 years - and having additional skills would have helped the Fellows navigate both professional and personal roadblocks along the way. A core factor in the level of candidates applying was undoubtedly the stipend offered for the 3-month period and a higher stipend would increase the appeal to more applicants with more professional experience. As this was a pilot programme, funding levels were restricted.

Given the short timeframes Fellows had within their organisations, there was limited opportunity for them to make any real long-term change. Priorities had to be set for initiatives the Fellows could accomplish within the 3-month timeframe.

As with any start-up phase, obvious initial challenges arose - unclear support lines, inconsistent messaging, and irregular communication channels. These issues can be addressed through more consistent guidance, planning, and expectations set at the outset of any future fellowships.

> *"Fellows were stretched and challenged with regards to the organisational wrangling and while difficult, these are useful lessons for later."*
>
> *Cam Findlay, Land Information NZ*

Recommendations for future fellowships

Having clear buy-in from the organisations where the Fellows are based is essential, including at executive level (top 3 tiers). This will provide sufficient mandate for the Fellows to make a difference to the organisation.

Increasing the timeframes to 12 months (in line with the Code for Australia Fellowships), with a minimum of 2 people in each organisation will provide the opportunity for Fellows and organisations to achieve long-term change. Having a minimum of 2 fellows in an organisation at one time will ensure sufficient co-support, collaboration, and cooperation is available for each Fellow. This is particularly important as Fellows are working to break down barriers which require a change management skillset.

Provision for committed funding is essential for the fellowships to operate in New Zealand in an ongoing capacity. This funding can either come from a dedicated funding pool from either central or local government, or could operate under a shared contribution model between central/local government and business (as demonstrated by the Australian model).

Improving the stipend range to attract more mid-career applicants (5+ years of experience) will provide Fellows with the necessary skills to navigate through roadblocks.

Local government provides a level of adaptability and innovation which is conducive to gaining the most rewards from fellowships (this also reflects the findings of the Australian model). Local government allows greater interaction at the community level which can bring increased buy-in for any new initiatives launched.

> *"Our vision for Code for Aotearoa and the Open Data Fellowships is that we [LINZ/Open Data NZ] have demonstrated this pilot to show how something that happened internationally could be adapted here and the success that it can bring."*
>
> *Rochelle Stewart-Allen, Land Information NZ*

Appendix 1: Media highlights

Press releases

- [Techies to bring fresh perspective on unlocking government data](#) (Minister Upston press release)
- [Council launch new Code for Aotearoa fellowship](#) (Wellington City Council press release)

Blog posts

- [Why Code for Aotearoa?](#) (15 Sept)
- [The World Called LINZ](#) (19 Sept)
- [Hydrography, or Hey Pal, Stop Launching Missiles From Our Ocean](#) (22 Sept)
- [Ambition](#) (9 Oct)
- [Change](#) (10 Oct)
- [Civic Lab Prototyping](#) (25 Oct)

Tweet highlights

govtech @govtechnz Nov 30
Great things happen inside and outside #government when people push boundaries, connect and work together. Great talk today @codeforaotearoa

Ed Strafford @EdNZ Nov 30
Learning about how government can deliver value quicker, wider & better from @alvaromaz & folks from @codeforaotearoa

Hariata Hema @hariata Nov 30
@codeforaotearoa Thanks for an exciting session. Mindboggling possibilities. #code #community #democracy #participation #inclusion #opengovt

:=iiii=:!! @hippiehacker Sep 19
ii wants @codeforaotearoa folk to come and be fed, hosted, and housed at our iimaginarium /cc @TgaCouncil @BOPRC

Penny Webb-Smart @pennywebbsmart Sep 8
Clever partnership to use land data to solve civic problems in wellington, well done @codeforaotearoa @alvaromaz http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/AK1609/S00247/council-launch-new-code-for-aotearoa-fellowship.htm …

aimee whitcroft @teh_aimee Sep 8
Packed room at the @codeforaotearoa launch at @WgtnCC. Many smiles, much excitement, very proud!