

### WHANGANUI Events Plan

June 2021









## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Events form an integral part of Whanganui's growing reputation and provide an immediate benefit to the local economy.

This has been recognised locally, through an events fund supporting the delivery of events within Whanganui, and nationally through emerging event funds designed to stimulate movement around the country.

Events are consistently cited as an opportunity to allow visitors to experience Whanganui when they may not have had reason to otherwise. Many examples have shown that this not only provides the immediate benefit of the visitor spend but that those who return or even become residents, provide a large return on investment.

In contrast, the current emergence of COVID-19 puts the events environment at risk. Events take much time, planning and investment and external threats to this create a higher risk/reward than experienced in the past.

This plan provides a pathway for events for the 2020's, providing a guide on Whanganui & Partners (W&P) management of this function and funding. It also incorporates the input of a large number of those involved in the events sector.



## GUIDING STRATEGIES AND INFLUENCES

Whanganui District Council's Economic Development Strategy 2019 identified the following:

- 'Tourism and events' was identified as one of five 'game-changing' priorities
- Whanganui had a strong events portfolio
- Limited tourism infrastructure (accommodation)
- We want to attract events and conferences

The document prioritised the following, relating to events:

- 2.17 develop Whanganui's competitiveness as a centre for business events and conferences
- 2.18 grow Whanganui's attractiveness and identity through key drawcard events
- 3.9 secure a four/five star hotel in Whanganui

Whanganui & Partners Event Strategy 2015 detailed the following objectives:

- To provide an economic return on event investment funding
- To generate, on a national and international level, positive publicity for Whanganui
- To improve event management capability across funded events
- To investigate and develop new events likely to provide an economic return on event investment funding

In 2020, a Destination Management Plan was also in development and it was determined the Events Plan should be responsive to the inputs and output of this work. It is with this purpose that the Events Plan followed the development of the Destination Management Plan.

The Destination Management Plan recommended:

- Build events capability in the district
  - Utilise professional conference/event organisers for key events and sectors
  - Develop training programme for events volunteers and maintain register of skilled volunteers
- Establish a more active facilities promotion programme with events, arts and sports bodies
  - Undertake targeted marketing of events facilities with potential users
  - Undertake famil and/or hosting programme for PCO's and event organisers
  - Develop collateral with industry to promote conference and incentives opportunities within the district
- Incentivise and leverage events that deliver on overall brand positioning and aspiration
  - Develop transparent funding policy for events
  - Fund leverage opportunities for the destination
  - Support leverage and funding options with industry partners





## **EVENTS SITUATION ANALYSIS**

The following points are designed to capture the current events environment alongside recent work and known challenges/opportunities.

#### Infrastructure

The Whanganui District Council manages three venues that are available for events on behalf of the community. These are:

- Cooks Gardens: stadium, function centre and velodrome. The stadium and associated facilities host rugby and athletics and other sporting events
- Royal Whanganui Opera House an historic building that can host 830 patrons for live theatre events
- Whanganui War Memorial Centre largest of the venues in Whanganui with a capacity of 1300 for conferencing, 1600 for concerts and 600 for banquets
- In addition, Sarjeant Gallery Te Whare o Rehua Whanganui will become a more prominent venue when redevelopment of the gallery is complete



Other venues/locations in Whanganui utilised for notable events include:

- Whanganui Racecourse
- Hatrick Raceway
- Whanganui CBD e.g Bayleys Whanganui Vintage Weekend
- Whanganui River e.g Billy Webb Challenge, Opera on the Awa
- Oceanview Speedway e.g Stock Car Championships
- Jubilee Stadium e.g home and lifestyle show, national boxing championships

An often cited issue with maximising the economic impact of events is a lack of accommodation within Whanganui. W&P's current model places strong emphasis on delivering significant numbers into events but with c. 1800 beds in the region, capacity can be reached resulting in economic benefits leaking into neighbouring regions or not being realised.

Considerations:

- Alter funding decisions to further encourage off-peak, longer events
- Options for dealing with surge capacity e.g mass-camping options
- Hotel attraction business case an important strand of realising value of events

#### Impacts and Measures

Events have been reviewed using MBIE numbers on the value of overnight guests. Some events lack a full understanding of their participant numbers, usually a free 'come one, come all' type event which appeals greatly to the local community. Ticketed events allow a deeper understanding of where people travelled from and to what extent advertising may have influenced them.

Socio-cultural aspects and benefits to brand are less frequently measured or not at all. Consumer spending becomes a robust metric that is often used in the review of events.

Event capability and the organisation's sustainability should be considered as stronger components when it comes to decision-making.

Considerations:

- Review event evaluation document
- Lobby MBIE for a unified way of measuring event impacts
- Consider revised measures and objectives based on feedback



#### **Organisations/Stakeholders**

Whanganui events tend to be community driven and/or are run by a local events organiser. W&P takes a stance of guiding, enabling and connecting these organisations with opportunities. W&P does not try to influence or run these events with the view that those closest to it know it best.

Pressures on some events are that the respective organisation cannot fund an event organiser year-round. Masters Games and Cemetery Circuit do have year-round organisers with others awaiting confirmation of funding to enable them to hire an organiser. This limits the potential for some events e.g. Whanganui Vintage Weekend and Artists Open Studios.

#### **Process improvements**

A presentation was made to the W&P board in Oct 2019. This included the following observations:

PERCEPTION	PROCESS	LIMITATIONS
<ul> <li>SEEN MORE AS A DONOR THAN A SPONSOR</li> <li>A LACK OF COMPETITION FOR FUNDING (E.G 'LINE FUNDING' MAY SEE SOME EVENTS BECOME RELIANT UPON IT)</li> <li>A LACK OF CLARITY ON HOW TO GET INVOLVED</li> <li>EVENTS STILL SEEN AS GENERALLY POSITIVE THING FOR ECONOMY</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>AGREEMENTS AND PLANS MADE LATE, USUALLY THROUGH LATE APPLICATIONS FROM ORGANISERS</li> <li>SOME EVENTS GAINING FUNDING FROM MORE THAN ONE W&amp;P 'POT'(E.G. CREATIVE COMMUNITIES FUND AND EVENTS FUND) - HOW CAN THIS BE ADDRESSED</li> <li>A LACK OF CONSISTENT STRUCTURE OVER HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM EVENT ORGANISERS</li> <li>REPORTING &amp; EVALUATION STAGES VARIABLE (VARYING ENGAGEMENT FROM ORGANISERS)</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>W&amp;P 'DANCING AROUND THE EDGES' WHEN IT COMES TO PROVIDING INPUT ON MARKETING PLANS</li> <li>EVENTS BEING RUN OFF THE SIDE OF THE DESK BY ORGANISERS IN SOME CASES - A GOOD INVESTMENT?</li> <li>A FOCUS ON THE NUMBER OF EVENTS RATHER THAN THE OVERALL ECONOMIC BENEFIT TO WHANGANUI</li> </ul>

The following key changes were made as a result:

- We want to fund for success removal of funding after event (e.g. following event report) to ensure all funds are put into promoting the event
- Reward strong development of marketing plans explicitly written into agreements that we expect to see a marketing plan, to sign it off and this be tagged to a portion of funding allocated



The following recommendations have been delivered in part but need further attention:

FOCUS AREA	PROGRESS IN 19/20
<ul> <li>PROVIDE GREATER OPPORTUNITY FOR UNDERSTANDING THE EVENTS PROCESS, INCLUDING HOW APPLICATIONS ARE ASSESSED</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>A DEDICATED WEBPAGE FOR EVENTS WAS SET UP, LAYING OUT ALL STAGES INVOLVED</li> <li>APPLICANTS WERE PROVIDED WITH GUIDANCE AS TO WHY THEY WERE ASSESSED AS SUCH</li> </ul>
• WORK TO ATTRACT NEW EVENTS	<ul> <li>PRIORITISATION WAS GIVEN IN DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS WITH NEW EVENTS, RESULTING IN FUNDING FOR EVENTS SUCH AS HOOPNATION JUNIOR SHOWCASE, WELCOME TO NOWHERE FESTIVAL AND TASTE WHANGANUI</li> </ul>
• BRING FUNDING DISCUSSION FAR FURTHER FORWARD	• A NEW FUNDING WINDOW BEGAN BEING PUBLICISED FOR 2020/21. HOWEVER, UNCERTAINTY CREATED BY COVID-19 SAW A CHANGE TO A MORE FLEXIBLE APPROACH TO EVENT FUNDING. THIS WINDOW WAS REINTRODUCED FOR 21/22
• IMPLEMENT 'VALUE-ADD' OPPORTUNITIES TO UPSKILL PERSONNEL	<ul> <li>INITIAL PLANS WERE IN PLACE TO ASSIST EVENT ORGANISERS IN THEIR MARKETING. IN 2021/22, THERE WILL BE THE INTRODUCTION OF AN EVENT NETWORK TO FACILITATE ORGANISERS SHARING KNOWLEDGE AND ASSETS</li> </ul>
<ul> <li>FACILITATE A MOVE FOR STRONGER OUT OF REGION MARKETING, SHIFTING BALANCE FROM THE LOCAL AREA</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>THE ASSESSMENT OF MARKETING PLANS MEANT THAT W&amp;P COULD ENSURE IT FELT SATISFIED WITH THE AMOUNT OF OUT-OF-TOWN ADVERTISING AS PART OF FUNDING PROVIDED</li> </ul>

#### Funding background

Whanganui & Partners provides funding of around \$267k per annum to events. This compares to, for example, Venture Taranaki which provides around \$800k to Taranaki events.

#### National funding emerges

MBIE recognised events as a means to stimulate the economy in the wake of COVID-19 induced lockdowns. The Domestic Events Fund (DEF) and Regional Events Fund (REF) introduced significant funds and changed the model from being locally-funded to being of varying complexity. The DEF positioned W&P as an advisor to MBIE on events that may receive funding whereas the REF encouraged regional collaboration to determine appropriate event funds to support economic growth.



#### Regional Events Fund

Whanganui was allocated \$200k from MBIE's Regional Events Fund. This is to be used up until 2024 to supplement local government funding.

Whanganui & Partners propose putting out a contestable funding application and measure these against set criteria. Given the relatively low budget allocation we will look to invest more significantly in one or two key events to maximise impact, potentially focused within the initial years of this 4-year period.

This is likely to be used to support larger, existing events with the purpose of enabling them to continue in their growth. Alternatively, it may be able to be used to create one large new significant event for Whanganui.

The size of Whanganui events compared to others outside of the region should be considered, particularly in respect of their income and expenditure.

Other funding sources should be considered and a supporting function provided to enable organisations to utilise funding from a variety of sources. Other funding sources for Whanganui events include:

- 4 Regions Trust
- Whanganui Community Foundation
- Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment
- Event-generated revenue tickets, merchandise etc

#### Consideration:

- Set allocations or targets when it comes to the types of events funded and the length of their funding from W&P
- Make clear how funding decisions work when it comes to Council's own events i.e Masters Games

#### Resourcing

The Strategic Lead for Brand and Events is tasked with guiding the marketing of all key events, including strategic funding support for events that help position Whanganui in their overall work in marketing Whanganui.

It should be considered that any expansion to what W&P delivers within events may need additional resource, to assist the Strategic Lead with a person dedicated to events. It is anticipated that this would allow an expansion in the work done to attract events (particularly business), develop an event network and work alongside venues to enhance their attraction.





STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	
<ul> <li>W&amp;P HAS THE ABILITY TO MAKE CLEAR DECISIONS THAT ALIGN WITH WHERE THE BRAND SHOULD BE POSITIONED, PREVIOUS EVENT PERFORMANCE AND ECONOMIC</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>A 'TWO-TRACK' SYSTEM WHERE SOME ITEMS ARE 'LINE-FUNDED', WHEREAS OTHER EVENTS HAVE TO COMPETE FOR FUNDING THROUGH ANNUAL APPLICATIONS</li> </ul>	
<ul> <li>VALUE</li> <li>W&amp;P CAN MARRY THE MARKETING APPROACH WITH THAT OF EVENTS, UTILISING KNOWLEDGE OF THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE</li> <li>W&amp;P'S REGIONAL TOURISM ORGANISATION FUNDING CONNECTS LOCAL AND NATIONAL EVENT FUNDING STREAMS</li> <li>THE INTRODUCTION OF A CLEARER PROCESS THROUGH A REVISED FUNDING AGREEMENT, TAGGING FUNDING TO CLEAR MILESTONES IN THE DELIVERY OF THE EVENT</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>SOME EVENT FUNDING DECISIONS ARE MADE OUTSIDE OF W&amp;P, RESULTING IN A LACK OF CONSISTENCY IN APPROACH</li> <li>MANY WELL-KNOWN EVENTS ARE RELIANT ON OUR FUNDING, LEAVING LESS ROOM FOR NEW EVENTS TO COME IN</li> <li>EVENT CAPABILITY IS MIXED, MEANING W&amp;P HAS TO BE VERY FLEXIBLE IN THE SERVICE IT PROVIDES</li> <li>ONGOING BALANCE BETWEEN W&amp;P WANTING THE EVENT TO SUCCEED BUT BEING ABLE TO MAKE COMMERCIAL DECISIONS AROUND WHAT IT INVESTS IN</li> <li>THE STRATEGIC LEAD FOR 'EVENTS' IS PRIMARILY IN THEIR POSITION TO MARKET WHANGANUI, WITH EVENTS CONSIDERED 20% OF THEIR ROLE.</li> </ul>	
OPPORTUNITIES • ONE METHOD FOR THE FUNDING OF ALL EVENTS, WHICH GO THROUGH THE SAME PROCESS	THE MORE EVENTS COMMITTED TO THE LESS SUPPORT EACH EVENT CAN RECEIVE.	
<ul> <li>MAKE AGREEMENTS WITH EVENT ORGANISER OVER MULTIPLE EVENTS, GIVING THEM GREATER CERTAINTY IN PLANNING AHEAD</li> <li>PROVIDING ADMINISTRATIVE/JUNIOR LEVEL RESOURCE/SUPPORT WOULD ALLOW SOME OF THE WEAKNESSES TO BE ADDRESSED, PRIMARILY MORE 'ON THE GROUND' WORK IN WORKING WITH EVENT ORGANISERS AND ATTRACTING BUSINESS AND EVENTS TO WHANGANUI</li> <li>JOIN EVENT ORGANISERS UP AS A NETWORK TO SHARE LEARNING, ASSETS AND ENABLE W&amp;P TO STREAMLINE ITS COMMUNICATION INTO EVENTS PROFESSIONALS RATHER THAN THE EVENT-BY- EVENT APPROACH CURRENTLY TAKEN</li> </ul>	<ul> <li><b>THREATS</b></li> <li>OVER-RELIANCE ON COUNCIL FUNDING THREATENS SUSTAINABILITY OF EVENTS</li> <li>A FOCUS ON NUMBER OF EVENTS, RATHER THAN QUALITY/ECONOMIC OUTCOMES, MAY LIMIT SUCCESS</li> </ul>	



#### Increasing the prominence of our events

All events should consider where they lie on MBIE's events scale (below), with Whanganui & Partners working with events in progressing them up the ladder where it is possible and desired. This will likely flow into future funding decisions and ultimately having a clear major event for Whanganui.

Key considerations in terms of funding include:

- The impact our funding can make in an event moving up levels (local, regional, major, mega)
- To what extent the event aligns with our overall brand
- Whether there are clear gaps in our portfolio that would help take the brand in the right direction
- The extent to which an event is reliant on our funding to survive (and if this is genuine, having sought other streams of revenue elsewhere)

In future we may consider:

- The environmental impact of an event
- The benefit to the community and partners

"Long-term funding commitments would be a good thing"

"Let's consider the whole events ecosystem. A business friendly group for events?'

"Can we collaborate more to maximise the effect of events and venues?"

"It isn't a case of having to be sport versus art we can do both'

"The river is such a that's not reflected in events'

the priority" "It's not all about bums on seats, the experience is

"Economic return has to be

"A lot of our bills are seating, toilets etc, can we all connect for less wastage?"

"We receive line-funding, but we agree we need a better process to understand if that funding is appropriate"



markets of interest





## STRATEGY

Whanganui's events contribute towards the transformation of our brand and deliver a clear economic benefit.

Our desired philosophy:

- Assess all event opportunities equally
- Access central government funding to bolster local investment
- Ensure a process-driven approach allows for strong development of events
- Find the balance between competitiveness and collaboration, locally and regionally

Recommendations form around four key areas. These will form an action plan over the next 12 months:

- Funding for success
- Re-assess infrastructure needs
- An enabling process
- Enhance capability



# TACTICS

Funding for Success

What we fund is designed to provide the strongest economic result.

OBSERVATION	RECOMMENDATION
THERE ARE TWO PROCESSES TO GAIN FUNDING - LINE-FUNDING V. A CONTESTABLE FUND	ONE CONTESTABLE PROCESS FOR ALL EVENTS TO INCREASE TRANSPARENCY AND CLARITY OVER THE PROCESS
	LONGER-TERM FUNDING COMMITMENTS INCLUDED WITHIN THIS
EXISTING EVENTS CONSISTENTLY LOOK FOR FURTHER FUNDING FROM US	REGIONAL EVENTS FUND MONEY DIRECTED TOWARDS GROWING ESTABLISHED EVENTS
SEASONALITY AN ISSUE	GUIDELINES DEVELOPED ON FUNDING NON-SUMMER SEASON EVENTS (IN LINE WITH INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS)
CLARIFY OUTCOMES	MUST BE ABOUT ECONOMIC OUTCOMES, CONSIDER TIGHTENING THE DEMOGRAPHIC WE WANT EVENTS TO REACH I.E. GROW OUR WORKING POPULATION CONSIDER CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AS A METRIC ON THE EXPERIENCE

#### Re-Assess Infrastructure Needs

Ensure the potential of events is not limited by a lack of event infrastructure

OBSERVATION	RECOMMENDATION
A PERCEIVED LACK OF A MULTI- EVENTS CENTRE V. OVERALL 'BONES' OF INFRASTRUCTURE. SOME UPGRADES NEEDED	'NUTS AND BOLTS' NEED BRINGING UP TO MARKET REQUIREMENTS - POWER, LIGHTING ETC EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE AUDIT TO PRIORITISE OPPORTUNITIES E.G. SPRINGVALE/JUBILEE, WEMBLEY PARK, COOKS GARDENS

#### An Enabling Process

The end-to-end process adds value and provides understanding

OBSERVATION	RECOMMENDATION
A DATED PROCESS, LOTS OF PAPERWORK	DIGITISE THE PROCESS, ONLY GATHERING ESSENTIAL DATA WE ACTUALLY USE
A LACK OF UMBRELLA VIEW	W&P REPORT TO COUNCIL ON ANNUAL BASIS ON THE IMPACT OF EVENTS



#### Enhance Capability

Spread knowledge and upskill our events sector

OBSERVATION	RECOMMENDATION
THERE IS A CLEAR ISSUE WITH EVENT MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISER CAPABILITY VERSUS A QUESTION OVER WHAT W&P CONTROL RE EVENT MANAGEMENT, IF ANYTHING	DEDICATED RESOURCE DESIGNED TO WORK MORE ACTIVELY ON THE GROUND IN SUPPORTING ALL EVENT INITIATIVES
	ESTABLISH AN EVENT NETWORK - DESIGNED TO ENCOURAGE SHARING OF ASSETS AND KNOWLEDGE, CONNECTION INTO COUNCIL
	DEVELOP TOOLKIT AND MORE 'UPFRONT' SUPPORT TO ENSURE APPLICATIONS ARE AS STRONG AS THEY CAN BE

## **NEXT STEPS & TIMELINE**

The following milestones are anticipated on receipt of this report:

- Final feedback from Whanganui & Partners Chief Executive
- Acceptance from the Whanganui & Partners Board and Whanganui District Council
- Whanganui & Partners Statement of Intent 21/22 indicates the implementation of this plan to take no longer than 12 months, starting July 1, 2021 and finishing June 30, 2022







e Taonga Toi O Aotearoa

# ALL YOU NEED (AND THEN SOME)