



Strategic Plan

2024 - 2026

(Updated Feb 2025)



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1 BACKGROUND

Trust Democracy was formally incorporated on 30 October 2019 and elected officers at its inaugural meeting on 4 May 2020, which was held by Zoom video conference during the Covid-19 lockdown. It was formed as the next ‘incarnation’ of the New Zealand Social and Civic Policy Institute, which promoted the use of deliberation and sustained dialogue in communities. Sadly, the Institute was dissolved in 2016 as its founding director, David Robinson, was dying. Before dying, however, David realised that it had been a mistake and asked Dave Henderson, his long-time friend and collaborator, to reinstate it. This is the genesis of Trust Democracy.

Trust Democracy is governed by a committee. Committee members are elected by members for terms of two years.

2 DEVELOPING THE PLAN

In 2023 the Committee decided to produce a Strategic Plan. The approach adopted was to produce a draft plan with the assistance of a professional facilitator and then invite the input of the wider membership using the deliberative discussion tool Consider.it.

The Committee met on 24 February 2024 in Wellington to undertake this work.

A draft was circulated to the membership, inviting their contributions.

Following the Consider.it consultation with the wider membership, the Committee met again on 26 June 2024 to review the feedback. Changes were made in response to the feedback and the plan was confirmed on 7 July 2024.

3 TRENDS AND SIGNALS OF CHANGE

A signal of change is a short-term indication of a change in direction. It might be interest in a particular topic or a shift in preferences, and in a commercial environment it could include a new product or service that enters the market, or a sudden change in sales. These signals can be used to inform decisions about the future.

The Trust Democracy Committee considered key signals that are impacting on the democracy environment in New Zealand.

Signal	Implications
Case law on Climate Change	The evolving body of case law on climate change in New Zealand Aotearoa suggests that there is a shift towards greater consideration and influence of tikanga Maori. However this government’s response to this signal has been inflammatory and may not be the lever for taking climate change seriously, that it perhaps was under previous administrations.
Generative AI	The rise of AI generated content (written, video, audio and imagery) may lead to a loss of trust in political bodies and their messaging. The level of participation in democratic practice is also adversely affected. The Committee felt that this is an important signal and that it is important enough to consider partnering with related organisations to support the development of an ethical framework in this space.
AI in Political Processes	There is a growing use of AI in democratic processes to assist with facilitation and interpretation of input from the public (e.g. submissions and online debates and discussions). There are risks around this practice that include possible capture by interest groups, the amplification of division and baked in bias. Additionally, using AI to support a flawed traditional consultation process may serve to amplify the flaws inherent in those processes.
Growing Interest in Evolving Democratic Process and Increasing Pressure for Reform of Submission Processes	The work of organisations such as Trust Democracy, Koi Tu, the Porirua deliberative community governance project and the Gisborne research into deliberative practice, is raising awareness of the opportunity to go beyond our traditional democratic practices. However there are challenges, particularly with lack of resources and funding to enable organisations on the ground to experiment in this space. Trust Democracy could have a role in encouraging politicians to support this work. The Committee noted in 2025 the high levels of engagement in submission processes, considering this to be an indication of interest in being included in political processes. However, it was also noted that there are risks that submissions processes will be overwhelmed by large numbers of submissions and becoming more performative

	<p>with submission periods being moved to later in decision processes.</p> <p>The Committee also noted (in 2025) that there appears to be a growing disenchantment with the select committee process and that this may open an opportunity to create a conversation about what a better process might be.</p> <p>It was noted that officials had been instructed to start work on the Treaty Principles referendum to be done with the 4 year term referendum (see J Kelsey’s submission and Hobson’s Pledge) and that this would perhaps reinforce disenchantment with the select committee process.</p> <p>The Committee noted the approach to citizen inclusion in Taiwan, that is via the vTaiwan process, as an example of a way of accommodating increasing interest in inclusion.</p>
Political Power Imbalance	<p>Our legacy political landscape is shifting with funding skewed towards appeasing the existing power structures. There is both a need and an opportunity to influence the conversation on lobbying and political donations.</p>
Local Government Planning Cycle	<p>The planning cycle for local government is not aligned well with the nature of the decisions and communications needed now. Short-termism has been reinforced for decades. We are now seeing the impacts of this short-termism with asset failures and an inability to fund the work needed; along with a failure of strong locally-led community planning.</p> <p>The Committee noted (in 2025) a possible swing towards local government interest in more inclusive practice as we move towards the upcoming local government election with deliberative practice being seen as a way a shoring up local voice in the face of central government directives. It was noted that there are currently over 80 deliberative processes running in Victoria in local government and the infrastructure space, including water pricing.</p>
Geopolitical shift to a more populist angle	<p>The shifts in political norms are driving people to question the basic fundamentals of our political systems and lose trust in conventional politics.</p> <p>The Committee noted (in 2025) growing instability in the geo-political environment with a swing towards populism.</p>
Cost of Living Crisis	<p>The cost of living crisis is making some feel disenfranchised because they don’t see political and economic structures being able to meet their needs. Should they be invited to participate in any deliberative process, they may not feel they have the capacity or resources to participate.</p> <p>The Committee noted (in 2025) that growing levels of unemployment is creating an environment of social unrest.</p>
Loss of Trust in Science and Institutions	<p>Along with the loss of trust in conventional electoral political systems, there is also a loss of trust in science, the media and evidence based policy. Ideology is gaining</p>

	momentum as the basis for policy and political decision making.
Climate Crisis	The climate crisis has built a culture of fear for some, especially when combined with the loss of trust in evidence based policy. When faced with existential risks, some in our communities can turn away and towards a more hard line, less consultative leadership. To date, the current political and economic structures appear to be unable, and in some cases unwilling, to address the challenges.
Growth in Social Media	The challenges posed by the growth of social media as a source of information and opinion sharing, is well documented. The ‘battle for clicks’ algorithms create a move towards more extreme views that generate outrage, polarization and a breakdown in social cohesion. Conversely, social media presented the opportunity to build social cohesion across boundaries.
Polarisation and the Influence of Indigenous Thinking	We are seeing increased political polarisation around the inclusion of Māori in decision making. The current government is reducing Māori involvement. Some others are advocating for the inclusion of indigenous thinking with its focus on the natural world and collaborative approaches. For Trust Democracy, engaging with Māori and Pacific peoples is crucial.
New Concern: AI Use in Policy Generation	The Committee noted the growing use of AI in policy generation and the potential for error, inconsistency/incompatibility to creep in. There is also a growing use of AI and synthetic processes to simulate target audience response in order to extract data to inform policy development.
New Concern: AI in Political Processes - Fake News	The Committee notes the growing influence of fake news generated by AI and that this can destabilise political processes.
New Concern: The Emphasis on Mandate	There appears to be a growing emphasis on political “mandate” which at times can suggest an over-reach that is being used to undermine a richer democratic process when making policy. This risks driving parliament further into disrepute.
New Concern: Space for Civil Society Shrinking	The space for civil society appears to be shrinking with central governments around the world becoming more populist (e.g. the security legislation being developed in NZ that restricts rights to protest and partial strike and work to rule legislation). It was noted that we are likely to see more and stronger public order legislation appear globally.
New Concern: Increasing Polarisation	Around the world members of the public appear to be more motivated to speak up, but in a more polarised way. This may lead to more and/or stronger legislation to prevent this. In New Zealand Aotearoa, the Treaty Bill is described as being divisive rather than generating a more

	<p>meaningful conversation about the place of justice, equity and equality in a democratic space.</p> <p>An additional impact of this could be a lower level of participation in information gathering activities (eg surveys) leading to inaccurate government data.</p>
<p>New Concern: Campaign Strategy Changes</p>	<p>The Committee noted that campaigns were shifting to a more populist model (e.g. the Australian Voice campaign) and that there was a need for parties to build capability in this space (simple messaging whilst avoiding dishonesty). The Committee noted that there is a space for campaigns that encourage learning and hearing as well to counter misinformation (see Jess Berentson-Shaw's work).</p>

In summary, Trust Democracy is operating in a space where there is a significant need for ways to grapple with the destabilising of our previously settled understanding of liberal, representative democracy. How we deal with fractured political environments will be a key challenge.

4 PURPOSE:

To identify our purpose, we considered what would be improved by Trust Democracy being here:

- a) A group of people committed to democracy
- b) Advocates for democratic innovation
- c) Safeguarding and strengthening democracy
- d) Providing input into decisions that affect society with regards to democracy
- e) Equality and equity
- f) Improved social cohesion
- g) People having more power
- h) A happier, healthier society
- i) A commitment to the principle of power coming from the people
- j) Informed wisdom of the crowd
- k) Empowering people to build a better society
- l) Framing the issues
- m) Helping democracy works as it should
- n) Research into democracy
- o) Building networks and relationships

From this the Committee agreed on a draft purpose statement:

Fostering democratic innovation for a fair, just and inclusive society.

5 VALUES

This is underpinned by seven key values:

- 1) Open and transparent
- 2) Truth and knowledge
- 3) Dialogue and collaboration
- 4) Creative and constructive
- 5) Embracing diversity of people
- 6) Sustainable environmental systems
- 7) Many issues cannot be addressed through the lens of the nation state

6 TRUST DEMOCRACY STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

Key Result Area	Action	Internal Indicator	External Indicator
Advance knowledge and experience of democratic practices	Supporting existing initiatives driven by others ACHIEVED AND ONGOING	Continue to support at least 2 initiatives throughout the 24/25 year. Feedback from key stakeholders on quality of mentoring or involvement has led to increased understanding.	Whether the organisations we support feel positive about the experiences and the outcomes.
	Provide opportunities for more people to experience deliberative processes (e.g. citizens' assemblies).	Deliver up to 2 public deliberation simulations in the 24/25 year. PARTIALLY ACHIEVED Feedback from participants is positive. Ensure the media are aware of the opportunities. NOT ACHIEVED	Media coverage
	New Action: Build a coalition of civil society actors to initiate a collaborative approach. Suggest approach Helmut Modlik. Explore whether iwi are doing anything in the space of community based treaty education and look to support that.		
Strengthen deliberative democracy in local government	Work with Taituarā and selected councils to identify the best approach to developing Community Outcomes and Strategic Priorities for the 27/37 LTP	Develop relationship with Taituarā NOT ACHIEVED Identify 2-3 Councils who are willing to explore this approach for the 27/37 LTP ACHIEVED	Regular working relationship established. Councils agree to participate. Add story to the website when possible.

	Promotion of past local government efforts	Distribute information via media release, videos and case studies with videos NOT ACHIEVED	Media coverage Increasing enquiries from LG
Identify, research and frame issues or public discussion	See above for events		
	Identify key issues and distribute media releases	2 op eds this year NOT ACHIEVED	2 op-eds published this year that cite TD
		Media releases to key media list PARTIALLY ACHIEVED	2 news articles published this year citing TD
		Build media list NOT ACHIEVED	
	Website refresh	Website is updated regularly PARTIALLY ACHIEVED	Website traffic increases
	Webinars	Host at least 2 webinars this year. PARTIALLY ACHIEVED	Attendance and media coverage.
Social media presence	Establish Blue Sky profile with at least 1 post per month. ACHIEVED		
	Establish LinkedIn profile with at least 1 post every 2 months PARTIALLY ACHIEVED		
		Use social media presence to promote our activities (including individual member activities) NEW	
Build networks and where appropriate formalise relationships with people and organisations interested in democracy.	Develop a stakeholder engagement plan that includes other agencies eg Hui Ē, Eco, Forest and Bird, etc	Stakeholder engagement plan developed NOT ACHIEVED	Get invited to speak at conferences
	Formalise relationships with key agencies e.g. Involve, Amnesty, Forest & Bird, trade unions etc	Identify what sub-committees Taituarā has and seek connection NOT ACHIEVED	
		Identify what sub-committees LGNZ has and seek connection	

		NOT ACHIEVED	
		Formalise key relationships	Ensure one person we recommend each year is accepted.
		Ensure website reflects our connections	
	Deliberative Democracy Film Night	Run at least 1 per year NOT ACHIEVED	
	Establish an annual Deliberative Democracy Essay Prize	Run annually PARTIALLY ACHIEVED	Media coverage and entries
Strengthen relationships with iwi hapu	Build on existing relationships eg Te Runanga o Toa Rangatira	Build monthly catch-ups with ReShape PARTIALLY ACHIEVED	
		Build 2-weekly catch-ups with Porirua deliberative community governance project ACHIEVED	
Support work on high-integrity policy making	High integrity policy making is about equity of voices, and input into framing, option design, trade offs, outcome choices, monitoring, all of which are key aspects of participatory democracy.	Make submissions to each of these organisations. Respond to work done by others. Encouraging commitments to deliberative methods in political party manifestos ahead of the 2026 election. ACHIEVED	
Advocacy on policy issues	Submissions on key issues identified by the Committee as they arise ACHIEVED	Ministry of Justice	
		Health Coalition Aotearoa	
		Future for LG Review. Seek a voice at the conference. PARTIALLY ACHIEVED	

		<p>Te Tiriti Submission – get whole membership involved to support the work that would be involved e.g. Presentation and issue book, leading the discussion, supporting iwi/hapu on the Māori wards issue. Support discussion on how to have a national conversation about fundamentally challenging conversation.</p> <p>REMOVE</p>	
		NZ Stats	
		Electoral Review – submit on the 4 year term and make contact with different political parties to highlight issues.	
Getting commitments to democratic innovations in political party manifestos ahead of 2026 election.	Write to parties inviting them to consider democratic innovations.	Continue reaching out to political parties to ask for commitment to democratic innovation.	
	Seek meetings inviting party representatives to discuss.		

This will be reviewed annually.

7 RISK SCHEDULE

Risk Description	Recommended Mitigations
Te Tiriti commentary could harm our reputation if not well considered	Ensure careful research before making statements and build appropriate partnerships.
Committee member burnout	Manage workload and expectations. Source funding to pay for some of the work. Invite the wider membership into specific tasks.
Member driven (and TD supported) projects could present a risk if not well aligned with our values and purpose.	Ensure appropriate peer reviews and establish an internal review process.
An authoritarian style government could create legislation that conflicts with our purpose and values, creating a large workload to defend against.	Careful consideration of what issues TD will get involved with. Protecting our reputation as not being party political to ensure we continue to be invited to comment.
TD inadvertently publishing fake data or information, creating risk to reputation.	Careful consideration of what we comment on.
Committee membership turnover.	Build awareness in the membership of the opportunities to be part of the committee. Build the membership base. Manage expectations of what committee members are expected to do. Focus on recruiting younger members.
TD fails to attract sufficient membership to achieve its goals and be sustainable.	Work to consider whether we tie our functioning and legitimacy to being a membership-based organisation. Review constitution to consider alternative structures for TD to achieve its goals.
Nihilism	We show people that engagement in our work leads to positive change.

This risk schedule will be reviewed at least annually.

8 ISSUES SCHEDULE

Issue Description	Management Strategies
Our funding stream is low	Build better relationships with funders and seek a wider range of funding sources.
Political environment and the speed of change is creating increasing workload on non-core activities	Reflect on what issues to focus on at each Committee meeting.
Incorporated Society registration needs renewing.	Reach out to wider membership to see if there are any willing and skilled members who could help.
Diffused sources of information is making it challenging to keep up with what's happening in the democracy space both locally and globally.	Committee to reflect on key issues from journals and Participedia at each meeting. Run an annual process on "State of Democracy in NZ/Aotearoa". We need to source funding for this exercise.

This issues schedule will be reviewed at least quarterly.

9 CONVERSATIONS TO COME:

- 1) What is Trust Democracy's role in the Te Tiriti referendum question?
- 2) Should TD support member-driven projects that align with our strategic focus/projects?