



Response to feedback on the DRAFT Governance Handbook

9 December 2021

Summary

Resilient Blue Mountains (RBM) is a community led network, for collaborative, community action on creating a resilient and sustainable future. During November 2021 the RBM Anchor Group (a coordinating working group) held a consultation process with members to hear feedback on the Draft Governance Handbook.

As face to face events were not possible due to the current Public Health Orders, the consultation was held online using a survey tool and zoom discussion events.

After receiving feedback, the Anchor Group has adopted a number of suggestions made by members and the new Governance Handbook can be accessed here [LINK]. The Handbook will be reviewed annually by the Anchor Group and members can make suggestions at any time.

The Governance Handbook

The Draft Governance Handbook is an outline of how we will work together to achieve that vision. As we grow, it will continue to develop, and suggestions to add to or adapt parts of this document will always be considered.

The Handbook contains our vision, values, principles, code of ethics and governance frameworks - essentially how we will work together. It was initially drafted by the members of the Governance group - a subgroup of the Anchor Group. It was endorsed for wider consultation by the Anchor Group in July 2021. You can access the Handbook here: [UPDATE LINK](#)

Consultation on the Draft Governance Handbook

The Governance Subgroup set out to develop a draft document, then build on it through feedback and discussion with RBM members. Covid and lockdowns have made being together for discussions or workshops nearly impossible, so we resorted to online methods of consultation with members on the Draft Governance Handbook. This process included:

- A short survey that allowed members to give feedback on the Handbook, including making suggestions (Appendix A). The survey was open for 4 weeks from 9/11/21 to 7/12/21.
- Two zoom discussion sessions were held to allow for discussion and questions on the Handbook
 - For working group members - 7pm Wednesday 17th November
 - For all - 7pm Wednesday 1st December.

Findings

Overall we had excellent feedback on the Draft Governance Handbook, along with a range of suggestions to improve it.

A summary of the findings is included here.

- All respondents were connected with Resilient Blue Mountains
- All but one person was from the Blue Mountains
- All but one person thought the draft was “an excellent starting place”, the other indicated “I like it but it needs more work”. No one selected “I don’t like it / it needs significant reworking”.
- All participants agreed that the Draft provides a framework for safety and collaboration, or is close.

Specific survey feedback related to the following areas:

- Putting a stronger emphasis on First Nations knowledge systems
- Making the vision, mission and strategies more specific
- Noting that the document will be under regular review
- Clarification of what a Project is
- The wording of some of the values was raised - with suggestions of putting two in positive rather than negative terms (the *Stubborn optimism* and *Avoid blame* values).

Additional feedback from the zoom discussions included:

- A desire to more easily find out how to be involved
- A keenness to get back to face to face meetups and events
- The hope that the Governance Handbook isn’t required very often
- The view that it is a very comprehensive governance document.

Response to feedback

The anchor group has adopted several of the changes suggested. Here is a summary of the changes made to the Governance Handbook:

Put a stronger emphasis on First Nations knowledge systems

In both cases we adopted the suggestions in full.

- The following statement was added at the start of the values section:
 - “In implementing these values, we acknowledge First Nations Knowledge systems, particularly the Gundungurra and Darug people in Caring for Country over thousands of years, as a foundation for a resilient and regenerative future.”
- Draft principle 3 was replaced with this as Principle number 1:

- “We seek to acknowledge and learn from First Nations knowledge systems and support First Nations elders and leaders in Caring for Country in all its many levels of meaning.” (from Barbara Lepani).

Making the vision, mission and strategies more specific

We acknowledge that the Governance Document is not specific in goals and strategies. The document is intended to lay out HOW we work together, not WHAT we do or are aiming to achieve. It is the role of Working Groups and Projects to develop specific goals, and collectively for all members of Resilient Blue Mountains to participate in processes that develop overarching goals. Throughout this year it has been difficult to hold the kinds of events that would facilitate that kind of strategic visioning and we hope to be able to do this in 2022.

We do agree that the document could be improved by adding a few case studies (of working groups and projects) up front to help illustrate what it looks like when it’s working. We will develop and add these based on some of the projects that have succeeded this year in spite of the pandemic.

Regular review

We agree and the Governance Handbook will be both

- Reviewed annually by the Anchor Group - as we grow and gather experience in working together it will be good to check that the Handbook still meets our needs or if it needs any additions or changes.
- Members can suggest additions or changes throughout the year. High priority changes will be considered on a case by case basis, and others will be considered in the annual review.

Modifying the working of some values to frame in the positive

We agreed that some of the values could be worded slightly better.

- Change “Stubborn optimism” to “Determined optimism”. This value stems from this inspiring quote from Christiana Figueres “With radical collaboration and stubborn optimism everything that is important is possible.” and reflects that we don’t want to spend our precious volunteering time focusing on what we can’t do. We acknowledge that the word stubborn can be misconstrued without the context of the quote and have switched to ‘determined’ as an equally useful word.
- Change value “Avoid blame” to “Collective responsibility”. The draft value definition still noted that “we avoid blame” - addressing the concern that some activism directs blame at other people, communities or institutions, sometimes within organisations and sometimes externally. Instead the value of Collective responsibility encourages a positive “focus on what has been achieved and what can be improved”. Also added to the value is “We avoid blaming individuals and communities.”

The majority of member suggestions were adopted.

Appendix

Survey Questions (excluding demographics)

1. Are you currently connected to Resilient Blue Mountains?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Not sure
 - d. Other
2. IF you are involved with us, please choose all that apply:
 - a. I'm on the mailing list
 - b. I have attended one or more events
 - c. I'm a member of a working group
 - d. I currently fill a role within Resilient Blue Mountains
 - e. Other
3. If you are a member of another organisation in the Blue Mountains that is or could become part of our network, please list them here:
4. Have you reviewed the Draft Governance Handbook?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Partially
5. What is your overall opinion of the Draft Governance Document?
 - a. It's an excellent starting place
 - b. I like parts of it but it needs more work/more sections
 - c. I don't like it / it needs significant re-working
 - d. Other
6. Do you think the Draft Governance Handbook provides a framework for collaboration with safety and direction?
 - a. (Scale of 1 to 5 from "YES, it's ready to be put into practice" to "NO, not at all")
7. What would you like to see changed or included in the document? You can make general comments or reference particular sections.
 - a. (Long answer text)
8. What kinds of things would YOU like to do or achieve with Resilient Blue Mountains?
 - a. (Long answer text)
9. What kinds of things do you think Resilient Blue Mountains should be doing?
 - a. (Long answer text)
10. What do you see as priorities for Resilient Blue Mountains for 2022?
 - a. (Long answer text)
11. Would you like to get more involved with Resilient Blue Mountains?

- a. A specific role or join a small team that is fulfilling a role
- b. Join a working group or project
- c. Start a working group or project
- d. Help with the planning for the Festival of Resilience
- e. Already involved
- f. Other