

Maroochy 2025 and the Learning Inspired Village Network: A partnered project to engage leadership development through action learning practices between Maroochy Shire and Queensland Education, Australia

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Abstract

This article provides an introduction to the Maroochy 2025 Community Visioning project, highlighting the benefits of using such a framework for the development of community visions, strategies and actions to create a preferred future. One of the many unique aspects of Maroochy 2025 project has been the development of leadership strategies and actions in conjunction with its community. The 'learning inspired village networks' (LIVN) is a strategy to recognise and increase the accreditation of Maroochy's community leaders and their competencies. Through a joint partnership with Queensland Education and Maroochy 2025 the LIVN is facilitating the development and transformation of alternatives approaches to leadership development.

Maroochy Shire is situated 100 kilometres north of Brisbane within the South East Queensland region. With South East Queensland rated as one of the fastest growing regions in Australia, growth management is a vital issue for Maroochy Shire. The Australian Bureau of Statistics forecasts South East Queensland increasing in population from 2.46 million to 3.4 million by 2021. Of this, the Sunshine Coast is expected to experience one of the largest increases, estimated to double from 245,000 to 435,000.¹ Maroochy Shire is expected to absorb more than half of this population growth. This would equate to an increase of 237,000 Maroochy residents within 16 years (2021) compared with current population figures estimated at 130,000 in 2004.

Keywords

Action, learning, visioning, village, leadership

A strategy called Maroochy 2025

The impact of population growth is one of several issues affecting Maroochy Shire's future. Other issues include the changing nature and viability of traditional industries, the need for alternative learning approaches, increasing community requests for more direct involvement in decision-making, concerns surrounding sustainable development and the development of leadership capacities. These various factors made it clear that the acceptance of a 'business as usual scenario' was not seen as desirable. These issues have all contributed as drivers in developing a strategy for managing Maroochy Shire's future, thus a strategy ensued and was titled *Maroochy 2025 Community Visioning Project*.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002, *Basic Community Profile: LGAs*, (Cat. no. 2001.0), Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

As a means to determine the validity of the proposed *Maroochy 2025* strategy, Maroochy Shire Council undertook preliminary research through a review of existing strategic documentation pertaining to Maroochy's future. Results were presented and discussed at a *Maroochy 2025* priming workshop. The summit included key public, private, and community stakeholders who had previously been active in planning for the region's future. It was within this early consultation period that it was made clear that the *Maroochy 2025* strategy would be much better equipped to address future issues, if a deeper understanding of the nature of the shire's community was acquired. This deeper understanding included emergent issues and how communities define their futures. Stakeholders had already perceived from early evidence that the community desired to sustain its unique environment, character, culture and social dynamics.

The key question being asked at the workshop became "Do we the citizens of Maroochy Shire want to be passive receivers or active co-creators of the future?" The answer was that 92 per cent² surveyed agreed for the need for a shared vision for to pull Maroochy Shire into the future. Additionally the community desired to provide stewardship, support and information and wanted to partner in the development of Maroochy's visions.³ Ultimately it was hoped that the outcomes from the project could assist and influence local planning and policy-making decisions.

Maroochy 2025 Community Visioning and Action Planning

The scope of *Maroochy 2025* was to reach a targeted audience of up to three per cent (4,200) of the population in order to be representative and statistically significant. Therefore community engagement was the cornerstone of *Maroochy 2025*. The *Maroochy 2025* process sought not just to engage community opinion, but to *involve* the community in activities through which they would best articulate their preferred visions for the future of their region. *Maroochy 2025* processes were specifically designed to collect and utilise as many varied contributions as possible. To maximise public participation, many different methods of collecting and informing public opinion were applied.⁴ These methods included:

- a pre-consultation workshop
- the *Maroochy 2025* Background Paper
- a website
- stakeholder consultation and questionnaires
- community workshops
- school summits
- Youth Council ('Youth Voice') visioning sessions
- Maroochy Shire Council staff workshops
- community summits and summit pre-polling
- creation of a Community Task Force

² Maroochy 2025 Community Visioning Workshop, 17 April 2003.

³ Survey conducted as part of the Maroochy 2025 Visioning Workshop, 17 April 2003.

⁴ Gould S 2005, *Maroochy 2025 Book: Philosophy & Methodologies: Future Studies Applied and Public Participation Methods*, Maroochy Shire Council, Nambour, Australia, pp. 10 -35.

- action planning groups
- an Action Planning 'Integration Night'
- document and literature reviews
- community surveys
- Maroochy 2025 Community Newsletters
- articles in Maroochy Council newsletters, local newspapers and other media.

This ensured an unprecedented level of involvement from residents, making *Maroochy 2025* a thoroughly representative community plan. In the end, it embodied:

- input from more than 3,840 people who directly participated in the visioning and action planning stages
- more than 40,208 public responses (written, emailed, phoned, etc.)
- more than 32,514 hours of community representatives' time
- more than 3,368 community vision ideas/goals (from which the community vision statement was created)
- more than 60 community strategies and 200 community actions — crafted from the above ideas/goals, during some 1,728 hours of prioritising, organising and summarising by community members.

Participants included representatives from a range of special interest bodies and stakeholders, including:

- state and local government
- local academics and professionals
- business representatives
- community groups
- schools and youth groups
- local ethnic groups
- Indigenous communities
- persons with disabilities
- the public.

This broad mix of representatives was especially active in the development of the action planning stage of *Maroochy 2025*. In essence, *Maroochy 2025* is about creating long-term, future-orientated policy options and consultation frameworks for emergent communities and government planners. *Maroochy 2025* aimed to be a means of empowering the many while creating energy and space to consider the alternatives for Maroochy Shire. *Maroochy 2025* has given the Maroochy community a way of recognising significant actions or milestones along the way to its preferred scenario for Maroochy 's future.

One of the many pivotal events of *Maroochy 2025* was the ability to bring over 400 residents together and reach consensus on a preferred scenario for their future. Over 74 per cent voted for a Connected and Learning Villages model for the future. This was a landmark event in *anticipatory democracy*, which highlighted the inherent potential and existing capacity and leadership and foresight that exists within the Maroochy Shire community.

Anticipatory democracy (AD) means having groups of people engage in meaningful dialogue about not one, but many alternatives to the future. Jim Dator, one of the founders of Future Studies, believed that “All human beings are futurists, but some people may be more futuristic than others.”⁵ In other words, to become a reality, our future must first be imagined. Unfortunately, there will be a myriad of competing and often conflicting imagined futures — some more constructive than others. Anticipatory democracy allows us to compare and contrast these diverse visions as a group. It allows us to negate or affirm their plausibility, to arrive at a consensus, and even find alternative images neither party had even dreamt of. As an activity, anticipatory democracy consists of ‘futurising’ democratic, participatory and community-based consultation and a community can actively lead the debate for alternative futures. However, AD groups can often be little more than planning meetings. To avoid this, Maroochy Shire used Future Studies processes to help the community task force concentrate on exploring both anticipatory and alternative visions, methodologies for finding the answers to Maroochy’s future and new ways to undertake community leadership activities within the context of existing democracies.

As a result Maroochy 2025 identified six key focus areas and developed visions, strategies and actions to achieve the Maroochy 2025 preferred scenario. One of these key focus areas was called ‘Our responsible leadership, participative decision-making and foresight’. Under the Leadership focus area, Maroochy 2025 identified five key vision ideas. Under each vision idea, various strategies and actions have been developed in context of the Maroochy 2025 visions to evolve the leadership capacities. One of these key strategies is to further recognise and develop existing community leadership competencies through developing future leadership accreditation opportunities.

Maroochy Shire’s Learning Inspired Village Leadership Network

By identifying potential leaders and developing a framework for mentoring, professional development, and networking across the shire, Maroochy 2025 aims to ensure that leadership is to creating a preferred future for Maroochy Shire. To achieve this, Maroochy 2025 is implementing educational initiative called Learning Inspired Village Leadership Network (LIVLN).

This initiative is a partnership between Maroochy 2025, Queensland Education and learning institutions and is facilitating new programs that recognise and accredit Maroochy’s existing and emergent leadership competencies. Through a credentialing process the LIVLN provides Maroochy 2025 with a database of future leaders in their local areas for the purpose of offering their leadership to the community as appropriate.

Professional Practice Accreditation Log

LIVLN programs will be linked to the International Bureau of Education (IBE), Suncoast Cyber schools and the Institute of Learning Management Australia through a ‘professional practice accreditation log’ (Appendix 1). The accreditation log will record the progress of community leaders through the various stages of accreditation and this will enable Maroochy leaders to choose from a range of pathways to achieve

⁵ Dator J 1978, *The future of anticipatory democracy*, Sage, Honolulu, pp. 315 ff.

outcomes that have meaning for each participating individual. One of these pathways will include articulation of site-based work to post-graduate qualifications. To encourage synergies with existing leadership systems, the accreditation process will be involving local leaders to become part of the accreditation process.

Conclusion

The *Maroochy 2025* LIVLN Project has happened as a result of a growing and emerging localisation of leadership within Australian communities. The need to own the decisions that determine a community's future and to share the responsibility for creating such a future highlights the arrival of sophisticated, intellectually savvy and cohesive communities who are no longer prepared to be recipients of a faceless, professionalised bureaucratic society. The effectiveness of 'community taskforces' model, as seen in *Maroochy 2025*, indicates a growth in residential community leadership and associations who are eager and willing to engage in sub-local communities or projects such as learning leadership competencies.

References

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Notes

- Survey conducted as part of the Maroochy 2025 Visioning Workshop, 17 April 2003.
- Advising consultant for Maroochy 2025 was Mr Steve Ames, *Principle: Steven Ames Planning: Building Strategic Vision for the Future* Portland, Oregon, USA.
- Accreditation Log supplied by Suncoast Cyber schools operating through Burnside State High School, Queensland Education.

Appendix 1. Professional Practice LIVLN Accreditation Log

<p>LOCAL SITE ACCREDITATION</p> <p>The nominated professional practice is acknowledged as good practice in the local site of the organisation. Local centre manager considers the nominated practice worthy of recognition, further development or expansion.</p> <p>Accredited by: Site Manager _____ Village LIVLN rep _____ Maroochy _____ LIVLN Councillor _____</p>	<p>VILLAGE ACCREDITATION</p> <p>The nominated concept is acknowledged as good practice within the village and has been presented at a forum involving 3 or more businesses/community organisations. Professional review panel considers the nominated practice worthy of recognition, further development or expansion.</p> <p>Accredited by: _____ LIVLN Site Manager _____ Village LIVLN Review Panel Chair _____</p>
<p>SHIRE ACCREDITATION</p> <p>The nominated concept is acknowledged as good practice within the shire and has been presented at a forum involving shire businesses/community organisations. Shire industry peers agree the nominated practice is worthy of recognition, further development or expansion.</p> <p>Accredited by: _____ Site Manager _____ Shire Professional LIVLN Review Panel Chair _____ Maroochy Shire Mayor</p>	<p>STATE ACCREDITATION</p> <p>The nominated practice is acknowledged as good practice at a State level. State body representing this profession/business/ industry considers the nominated practice worthy of recognition, further development or expansion.</p> <p>Accredited by: _____ State Professional LIVLN Review Panel Chair _____ State LIVLN representative</p>
<p>NATIONAL ACCREDITATION</p> <p>The nominated concept is acknowledged as a Best Practice model across Australia. The presentation is of the standard required for national and international clients and conferences.</p> <p>Accredited by: _____ National Professional LIVLN Review Panel Chair _____ National LIVLN representative</p>	

Developed by Suncoast Cyber schools and the Institute of Learning Management Australia