



Creating a successful ambassador programme: a practical guide

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More information about the workshop and the work that ShopCare does on this subject can be found on our violent and aggressive behaviour webpage:

<https://shopcare.org.nz/workstreams/violent-and-aggressive-behaviour/>

Introduction

Creating safer, stronger communities

ShopCare is committed to improving health, safety and wellbeing outcomes for workers across New Zealand's retail sector and its supply chain.

This step-by-step guide is designed to help town centre managers and those operating retail precincts establish an ambassador programme – an initiative that enhances safety, supports local businesses, and fosters strong community connections.

In this guide, we cover the key steps to creating and running a successful ambassador programme:

1. Understanding the role of ambassadors
2. Building a strong foundation
3. Recruiting and training ambassadors
4. Creating a supportive environment
5. Sustaining the programme
6. Appendix – templates, Manurewa Business Association ambassador programme case study, additional training resources

1. Understanding the role of ambassadors

Ambassadors serve as the eyes and ears of a town centre or retail precinct, engaging with visitors and businesses to create a safe, welcoming atmosphere. Their role goes beyond simple presence; they proactively support the wellbeing of the community by addressing concerns before they escalate.

Their key responsibilities include:

- **Community engagement** – Ambassadors act as friendly, knowledgeable representatives, welcoming visitors, answering questions, and promoting local businesses and events.
- **Safety and wellbeing** – By being visible and approachable, ambassadors help prevent antisocial behaviour, provide reassurance, and escalate safety concerns when necessary.
- **Business support** – Ambassadors strengthen relationships with local businesses by offering updates, gathering feedback, and sharing promotions to encourage visitor engagement.
- **Incident monitoring and reporting** – They observe and report any issues, from maintenance concerns to security incidents, ensuring quick resolution and ongoing improvements.



It is important to note that whilst there are other key organisations such as Māori Wardens and community patrols, ambassadors are predominantly a function of a business association, town centre, or retail precinct management entity with specific goals and objectives. Working closely with these organisations is essential to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort and to strengthen a more cohesive approach to town centre/retail precinct development and safety.

2. Building a strong foundation

Ambassador Programme Roadmap

01

Define objectives

Define the scope and core objectives and outcomes the ambassador programme needs to achieve and establish an evaluation framework to assess programme impact, report on outcomes and guide development.

Engagement

Engage with key stakeholders to test and clarify support and scope for the programme and its outcomes.

02

Structure, roles and functions

Define a team size, structure and functions with position descriptions and key candidate attributes for each role.

03

Resourcing

Determine the ambassador's operational base, transportation and equipment needs including uniforms and other day to day requirements.

04

05

Training

Prepare a training schedule to equip ambassadors with the key skills required to achieve the programme's purpose.

Recruit ambassadors and launch programme

Assessing community needs

Before launching an ambassador programme, a fundamental step is to understand the unique characteristics, challenges, and aspirations of the local businesses and its community. This ensures that the programme is tailored to local needs and has long-term relevance.

Key steps in assessing community needs:

- **Engage with key stakeholders** – Connect with businesses, residents, community organisations, local government, and law enforcement to gather insights and concerns.
- **Conduct surveys and forums** – Gather direct input through online and in-person surveys, focus groups, and public meetings.
- **Analyse demographic and economic data** – Consider factors such as age distribution, income levels, cultural background and visitor trends to help inform the types of ambassadors needed and their training focus.
- **Identify existing issues** – Determine challenges such as safety concerns, lack of visitor engagement, accessibility barriers, or declining foot traffic.
- **Review local economic conditions and trends** – Understanding the broader goals of economic development will help establish priorities in the programme.

Prioritising the identified needs and considering factors such as urgency, feasibility and potential for community engagement. Regular assessments ensure the programme remains relevant, effective, and well-supported.

See support resources to guide your engagement processes in the Appendix.

Setting clear goals and objectives

Setting clear goals and objectives is critical for the success of any ambassador programme within a town centre/retail precinct, ensuring that the ambassador programme has a defined purpose and measurable success criteria. Objectives should be aligned with community priorities and structured to deliver tangible benefits.

Establishing these elements is essential as they create a framework for the programme's activities and ensure that all team members are aligned. This alignment enhances accountability whilst fostering a sense of purpose among ambassadors.

Key steps:

- **Define the programme's primary goal** – Is the goal to focus on improving safety, increasing foot traffic, enhancing visitor experience, or supporting local businesses?
- **Set SMART objectives** – Each objective should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.
- **Review and adjust goals and objectives** – Regularly review objectives to respond to changing community dynamics and emerging challenges.

Example:

- **Goal:** increase the number of visitors by 20% in the next 12 months.
- **Objective:** to host monthly community events that attract at least 500 attendees each time.

Collecting and analysing data

Effective data collection and analysis are key to developing an ambassador programme that is responsive, evidence-based, and relevant to the dynamics of the space.

There are several key steps:

1. Identify **what types of data are most relevant** to your objectives. This may include foot traffic counts, demographic information of visitors, feedback from local businesses and incident reports regarding safety or security concerns.
2. **Understanding the dynamics** of the town centre is crucial to ensuring that ambassadors are deployed effectively and addressing the right priorities. Collecting data provides valuable insights into how people use the space, what challenges exist, and where improvements can be made.
3. Establish a **systematic approach** to data collection. Utilising both quantitative and qualitative methods can provide a comprehensive view of the town centre's environment.
4. **Analyse the data** to uncover trends and insights that can guide programme development.
5. **Communicate the findings** to all stakeholders to foster a collaborative environment where everyone can contribute to the programme's success.

Utilising software tools for data management can streamline the analysis, helping managers visualise trends through graphs and charts. Installing foot traffic counters can yield numerical data that reflects visitor patterns. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) can also be employed to map out foot traffic patterns and identify hotspots within the town centre. By leveraging technology, managers can transform raw data into actionable insights, allowing for more informed decision-making and strategic planning.

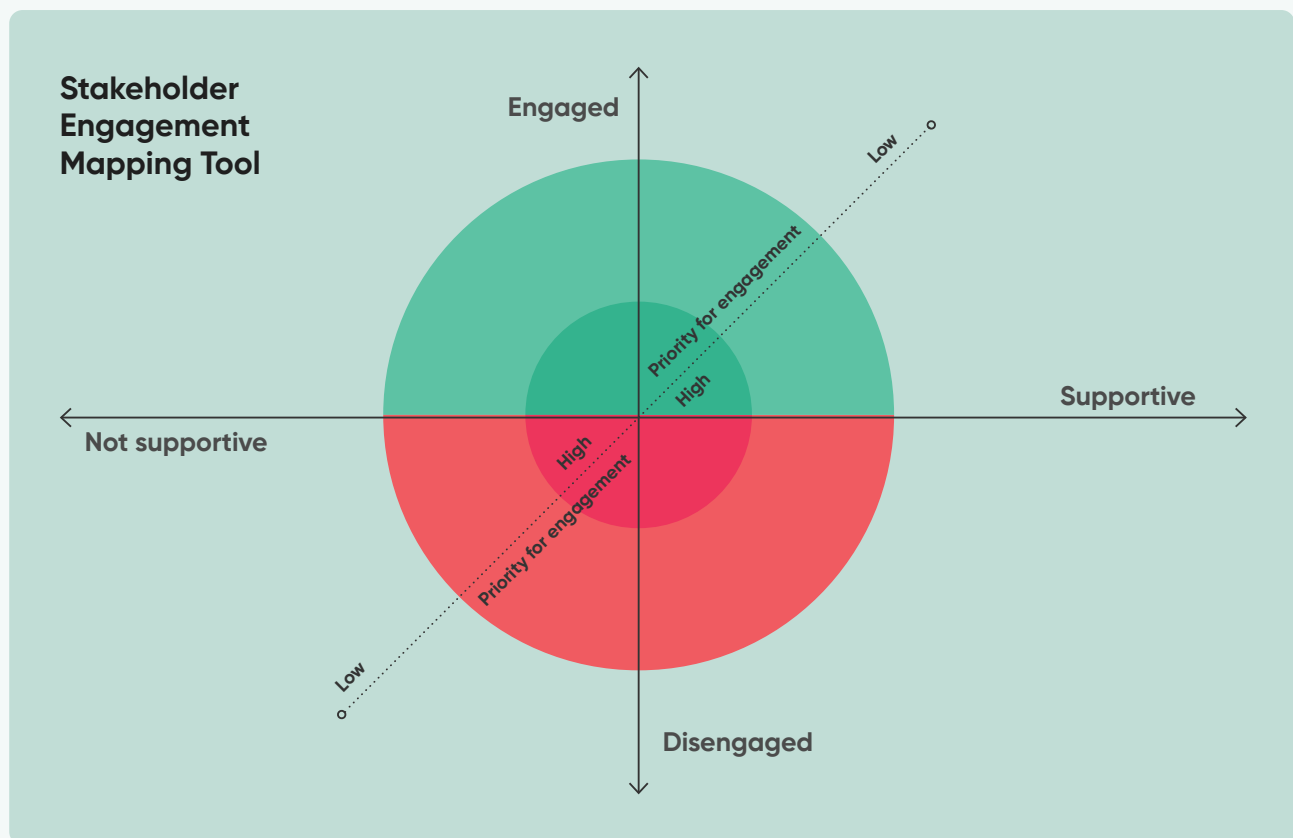
Identifying stakeholders and partnerships

A successful ambassador programme depends on identifying key stakeholders and partnerships. Stakeholders are individuals or groups that have an interest or investment in the town centre's success, while partnerships can enhance the programme's reach and effectiveness.

The first step in identifying stakeholders is to map out the various entities involved in the town centre ecosystem.

This includes local businesses, Iwi and Mana Whenua, community organisations, police, government agencies and residents. Each group plays a distinct role and has unique perspectives that can contribute to the ambassador programme's objectives.

The following Stakeholder Engagement Mapping Tool can be used to help identify your stakeholders and how supportive they may be of establishing an ambassador programme.



Building effective partnerships

Partnerships can significantly impact the success of an ambassador programme. Collaborating with local businesses and other key stakeholders can lead to opportunities that not only provide financial support but also increase visibility and support for the programme.

- **Develop clear roles and expectations** – Ensure all stakeholders understand their contributions and benefits.
- **Create a stakeholder advisory group** – Establish a regular forum for collaboration, idea-sharing, and decision-making.
- **Leverage co-funding opportunities** – Seek grants, sponsorships, or joint initiatives to strengthen financial sustainability.
- **Communicate programme value** – Regularly share updates on ambassador achievements and impact to maintain stakeholder engagement.

Engaging stakeholders early and consistently ensures that the ambassador programme has broad community support and remains aligned with local priorities.

3. Recruiting and training ambassadors

Defining ideal candidate profiles

Town centres require ambassadors who not only represent the community but also embody its values and mission. An ideal candidate profile has the following:

- **Strong communication and interpersonal skills** – The ability to listen, empathise, and provide clear information to a diverse demographic is key to ensuring positive interactions.
- **Local knowledge** – They must be well-versed in the area's history, attractions, and services to provide accurate and helpful information.
- **Problem-solving abilities and resilience** – Whether de-escalating a tense interaction, providing assistance in an emergency, or managing an unexpected challenge, ambassadors must remain calm under pressure and take appropriate action.
- **A passion for community engagement** – A collaborative approach will ensure that any issues that arise are dealt with swiftly, protecting the experience of visitors and the integrity of the town centre.



A sample position description is included in the Appendix.

Recruitment strategies and techniques

A well-structured recruitment process ensures that the best candidates are selected for the ambassador role, rather than those simply looking for any available job.

- Engage **local networks**, including business associations, community groups, and cultural organisations, to identify potential candidates who are invested in the success of the area.
- Create a **dedicated social media and web page** for the ambassador programme to showcase the programme's goals, benefits and success stories. Engaging content such as videos, testimonials and behind-the-scenes glimpses can attract individuals who resonate with the programme's mission. For example, Manurewa Works is a web and social media campaign run by the Manurewa Business Association to connect Manurewa residents with local employment opportunities.
- **Advertise roles** through social media, job boards, and Work and Income offices to broaden the reach.
- Establish a **referral incentive programme** to encourage local businesses and community leaders to recommend suitable candidates

The selection process should include an interview and assessment phase, focusing on communication skills, ability to handle real-life scenarios, and alignment with the programme's goals. Role-playing exercises and scenario-based questions can provide insight into a candidate's ability to think on their feet and manage difficult interactions effectively.

Ensuring that the application and interview process is welcoming, positive and inclusive can attract a diverse range of candidates. Emphasising the programme's commitment to diversity and inclusion will resonate with many individuals seeking to be part of a community-focused initiative.

Developing a comprehensive training programme

Ambassadors need practical, real-world training to feel confident and capable in their role. A blend of theory and hands-on learning ensures they're prepared for the varied situations they'll face in the town centre or retail precinct.

Start by identifying the key competencies they'll need, typically including communication, conflict resolution, local knowledge, and customer service.

In addition to these core skills, effective training programmes should include:

- **Community engagement and relationship-building** – Emphasise the value of local connections. Workshops with stakeholders help ambassadors understand community needs and act as effective liaisons.
- **Ongoing development** – Regular workshops, online learning, refresher sessions and feedback keep ambassadors sharp and up to date with local events, policies, and expectations.
- **Role-playing scenarios** – Practising real-life situations helps ambassadors build confidence in de-escalation, wayfinding, and public engagement.
- **Mentorship opportunities** – Pairing new ambassadors with experienced ones promotes shared learning and a strong team culture.
- **Regular evaluation** – Use tools like surveys or performance reviews to track progress, improve training delivery, and highlight areas for growth.

Recommended training topics:

- Situational awareness
- Customer service
- Emergency management
- Event management
- Conflict de-escalation
- Destination marketing
- Crowd control
- Local economic development

A comprehensive training programme is not just a one-time endeavour but an ongoing commitment to excellence and service in the heart of the retail environment.

4. Creating a supportive environment

Establishing a clear organisational structure

Establishing a clear chain of command ensures that ambassadors know who to report to in different situations. A team leader should oversee day-to-day operations, provide ongoing training, and serve as a key support figure for ambassadors. Regular check-ins, debriefs, and structured performance evaluations help maintain high standards and identify any areas for improvement.

A dedicated support system for ambassadors also plays a crucial role in their success, ensuring that they feel valued, respected, and equipped to handle the challenges of the role.

Providing tools and resources

Ambassadors need the right resources to be effective in their role. Essential resources include:



- A **distinct uniform** should make them easily recognisable to the public while remaining professional and approachable. Uniforms should be designed to differentiate ambassadors from security staff, helping to establish their role as community connectors rather than enforcers.
- **Communication devices**, such as mobile phones, ensure that ambassadors can report incidents quickly and stay connected with their team.
- Having **online access** is useful so ambassadors can see real-time information about events, promotions and safety alerts. Group messaging apps allow the team to stay connected. Access to maps means they can provide helpful visual guidance to visitors.
- Finally, **protective gear** should be provided where necessary, particularly for ambassadors working outdoors in varied weather conditions.

Fostering teamwork and collaboration

A cohesive team is more effective, engaged, and confident in their role. Regular team meetings allow ambassadors to share experiences, troubleshoot issues, and support each other.

Clear communication channels, such as group messaging apps and check-ins, help ensure everyone stays informed and connected. Feedback tools like short surveys or suggestion boxes give ambassadors a voice in how the programme evolves.

Team-building activities, whether casual or structured, build trust and strengthen relationships. Peer support and mentoring help new ambassadors settle in quickly and feel supported from the start.

Ongoing training in communication, teamwork, and conflict resolution keeps the team sharp and aligned. Celebrating achievements through recognition or small rewards helps maintain morale and reinforces the value of their work.

5. Sustaining your ambassador programme

Funding strategies

For a town centre or retail precinct ambassador programme to remain effective long term, it must have a sustainable funding model.

Depending on the host organisation's financial circumstances, additional funding may be required to support the programme's operations and development. Town centre and retail precinct managers should explore multiple funding sources to ensure financial stability.

Potential funding avenues include:

- Community grants and philanthropic support from organisations that prioritise community wellbeing.
- Local government budgets may be able to support the programme through budgets allocated to economic development and public safety initiatives.
- Wage subsidies for employment initiatives, such as Work and Income's Flexi-wage programme¹, which supports job placement and skill development.

Resourcing the programme

Ambassadors need access to functional and relevant tools, facilities and equipment. The following list outlines some of the key resources to be considered for an ambassador programme. These items are indicative only, and a more comprehensive list of resources should be created during the establishment phase of programme development.

Transportation

- **Bikes and scooters:** For short-distance travel within the town centre.
- **Cars:** For longer distances or transporting equipment.
- **Access to public transport:** Ensure ambassadors have passes or tickets for buses, trains, etc.

¹<https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/employers/subsidies-training-and-other-help/flexi-wage.html>

ICT Equipment and software

- **Smartphones or radios:** For communication, navigation and reporting.
- **Tablets:** For communication, navigation and reporting.
- **Laptops or desktops:** For office-based tasks.
- **Software:** office and CRM systems, scheduling software, communication apps (e.g., Slack, Teams).

Uniforms and protective gear

- **Uniforms:** Branded clothing for easy identification – differentiating from security guards and the police.
- **Protective gear:** Helmets (for bike/scooter use), high-visibility vests, stab-proof vests, body cameras
- **Weather-appropriate clothing:** Hats, footwear, water-proof jackets and uniform items appropriate to each season.

Office facilities

- **Office space:** A central location for meetings, planning, and administrative tasks.
- **Meeting rooms:** For team briefings and training sessions.
- **Break areas:** For rest, recuperation and refreshments.
- **Changing facilities:** A private space including lockers to change before and after shifts.

Stationery and supplies

- **Basic stationery:** Pens, notebooks, clipboards.
- **Promotional materials:** Flyers, brochures, maps for distribution to the public.
- **First aid kits and supplies:** Available in the office and vehicles.

Measuring impact

Establishing metrics that are relevant to the programme, stakeholders and wider community is essential; showing how the programme is achieving these goals and targets is invaluable to the programme's sustainability and development. Data can also be used to prove the need to change direction, if required. For Ambassador programmes reliant upon external funding, data-backed accountability reports and funding applications are a must.

Key metrics could include:

Negative	Positive
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Graffiti reported• Littering• Illegal dumping/Fly-tipping• Anti-social behaviour• Vandalism• Trespasses issued	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Graffiti removed• People helped• Public events supported• Promotions and campaigns supported• Public enquiries received• Feedback from local business, community, etc

Adapting to changing needs

A strong ambassador programme must be flexible. As community needs, business priorities, economic dynamics and visitor expectations shift, the programme should be able to evolve in response.

Stay relevant through representation

Recruiting ambassadors who reflect the community's diversity is one of the most effective strategies for ensuring authentic and impactful relevance. Shared cultural understanding and local knowledge enhance credibility and connection.

Adjusting to economic conditions

Economic changes affect what town centres/retail precincts need from their ambassadors:

- In a **slow economy**, focus may shift to supporting local businesses and enhancing the customer experience to drive foot traffic.
- In **growth periods**, ambassadors might assist with promoting new developments, events or attractions, and welcoming new businesses.

Programme goals should be reviewed regularly to reflect the current climate.

Listening and responding to feedback

Ongoing community input keeps the programme responsive. Tracking key data points, such as the number of safety concerns addressed, business interactions, and public enquiries, allows town centre managers to assess the programme's impact.

Regular reviews and stakeholder feedback sessions help identify areas for improvement and ensure the programme evolves in response to community needs.

6. Appendix

Sample town centre ambassador position description

Please note this sample position description is illustrative only, and that advice from a suitably qualified human resources professional should be sought for a formal ambassador recruitment and employment process.

Position description

Job title: Ambassador

Location: [Specify]

Reports to: [Specify supervisor/manager]

Employment type: Select one Full time/part time/casual

Job summary:

The ambassador plays a crucial role in maintaining the safety, cleanliness and overall well-being of the town centre/retail precinct. As the eyes and ears of the community, ambassadors actively engage with local retailers and businesses, visitors and residents to ensure a welcoming and secure environment.

Key responsibilities:

1. Observe and report:

- Patrol the retail area and district, actively engaging with local retailers, visitors, and the community.
- Report any issues or jobs to the appropriate authorities to ensure the smooth operation of the area.

2. Graffiti management:

- Monitor and report graffiti incidents.
- Assist in the clean-up of graffiti to maintain the aesthetic appeal of the area.

3. Crime and antisocial behaviour:

- Act as a first line of defence against criminal and antisocial behaviour by focusing on community engagement and relationship-building.
- De-escalate potentially volatile situations when safe to do so or refer more serious situations to security or police as appropriate.

4. Event support:

- Participate in local events to support the safety and well-being of participants.
- Assist in the successful delivery of events by providing on-ground support.

5. Liaison with local stakeholders:

- Actively build and maintain positive relationships with local retailers, businesses, residents and visitors.
- Serve as a point of contact for concerns, feedback and suggestions from the community and businesses.

Personal attributes:

- Strong communication and interpersonal skills, especially in cross-cultural communications and engagement.
- Ability to remain calm and composed in potentially stressful situations.
- Observant and detail oriented.
- Friendly, empathetic and approachable.
- Proactive and able to take initiative.
- Committed to community safety and well-being.
- Highly effective team player

Training requirements:

- Comprehensive training in conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques.
- Communications and reporting procedures.
- First aid and emergency response training.
- Orientation on community engagement, destination marketing and customer service best practices.
- Regular refresher courses to stay updated on new policies and procedures.

Working conditions:

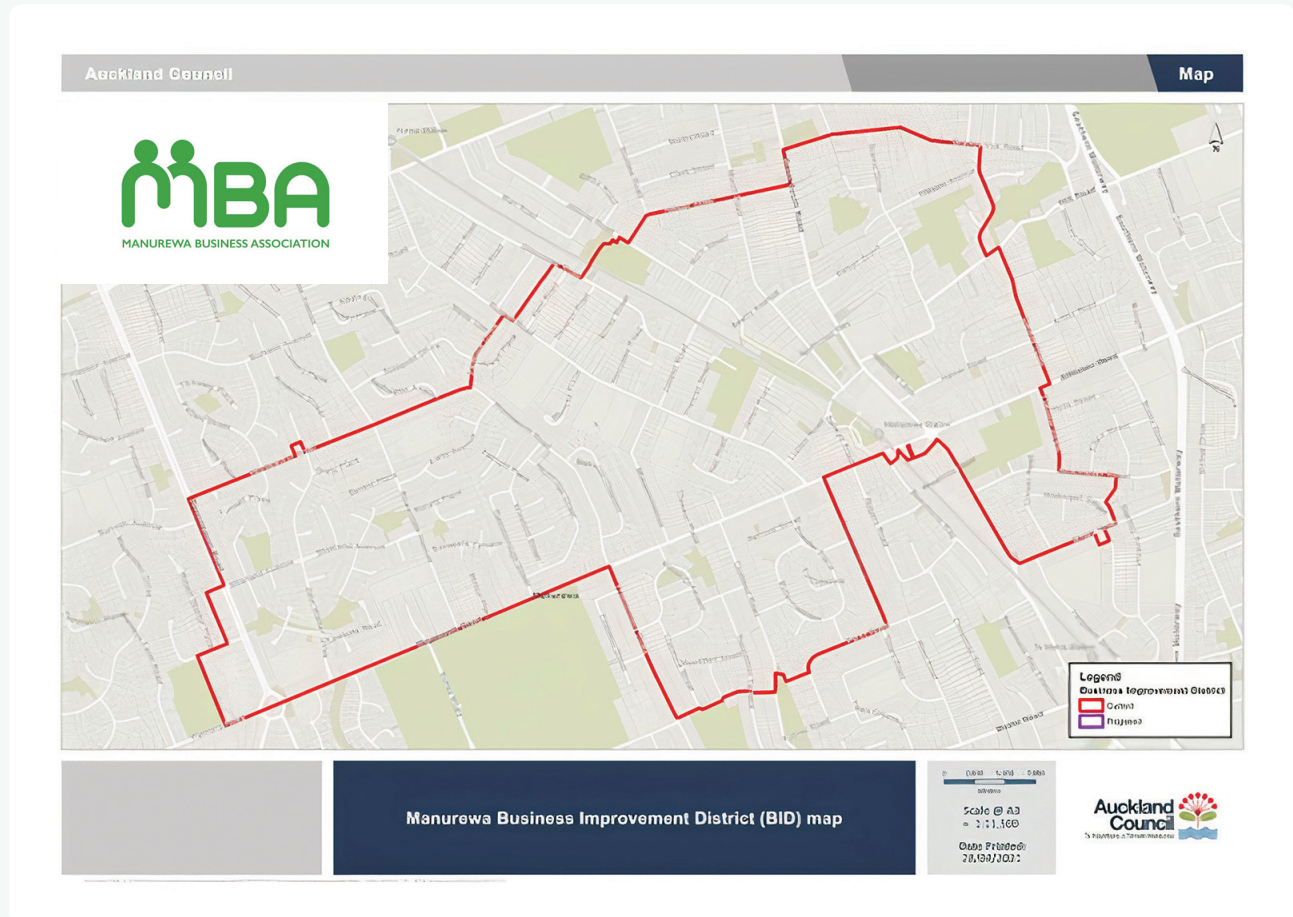
- Must be willing to work outdoors in all weather conditions.
- Must be adaptable and willing to work in highly varied environments.
- Flexible working hours, including weekends and public holidays.

Sample ambassador patrol report form - template

To use this form, decide on the zones to be patrolled and replace the example focus points with the focus points for your town centre or precinct. It may also be useful to introduce a category for each incident type to help with reporting. If resourcing allows, this form could be digitised and used by ambassadors on a mobile phone or tablet.

Ambassador daily patrol report			
Ambassador:			
Date:			
Patrol zones	Time	Incident	Action taken
Zone 1			
Station Road Roundabout			
Mike's Vege Shop			
Mall West Entrance			
Baker's Lane			
Zone 2			
East St Methodist Church and Op Shop			
Frankie's Bar and Grill			
ASB, High St			
Zone 3			
Town Hall and Library			
Summer Park and Playground			
Day St intersection			
West Middle School crossing patrol support			

Case study: Manurewa Business Association



The Manurewa and Clendon town centre ambassador programme

1. Introduction

The Manurewa and Clendon town centre ambassador programme is a leading example of how well-trained ambassadors can create safer, more vibrant town centres.

Ambassadors act as on the ground "eyes and ears" for the Manurewa Business Association (MBA), fostering a positive environment for local businesses, residents and visitors.



Launched in 2013, the programme initially aimed to help long-term, local job seekers gain valuable skills and experience in town centre management, retail and security. The programme was focused on addressing a need for increased safety, improved town centre presentation and stronger engagement with the local community.

2. Programme journey

The programme was developed in collaboration with Work and Income, utilising their "Flexi wage" wage subsidy model to employ and upskill local people registered as Job Seekers with Work and Income. The original programme was structured as a 6-month employment cycle for ambassadors which presented both advantages and disadvantages. The advantages included a greater number of people accessing and graduating from the programme, as well as introducing a range of new and fresh perspectives to the programme and town centre management. The main disadvantage was the limited time for ambassadors to successfully master the wide range of skills required for the role, to take those skills with them into their next job.

To embed and grow the programme Manurewa Business Association (MBA) worked closely with a broad range of key stakeholders including:

- Work and Income
- Local businesses
- Community groups
- Schools
- Manurewa residents and community.

MBA highlight a key element in the programme's development was establishing the ambassador team leader as a permanent role. The team leader provides ongoing training and guidance to new recruits which helps to ensure continuity and a higher level of support for incoming ambassadors.

3. Key results and achievements

The Manurewa ambassador programme has demonstrated tangible success in several areas:

- **Reduced crime:** The presence of ambassadors has contributed to a reduction in the volume of crime, graffiti, and illegal dumping.
- **Improved town centre presentation:** Ambassadors have played an active role in maintaining a clean and welcoming environment.
- **Increased business confidence:** A safer and more vibrant town centre has led to increased foot traffic and improved business confidence.
- **Stronger community engagement:** The ambassadors foster positive relationships between businesses, residents, and community groups.

Specific examples of success include:

- **Placemaking events:** "Coffee with a Cop," "Safer Plates," and "Town Centre Cleanups" have strengthened community connections and promoted safety awareness.
- **Proactive patrols:** Regular patrols by ambassadors deter crime and provide a visible presence that reassures residents and businesses.
- **Support for community groups:** Ambassadors assist local schools, kindergartens, and other organisations with events, patrols, and crossings.
- **Conflict resolution:** Ambassadors are trained to de-escalate situations and resolve conflicts.
- **Assisting vulnerable individuals:** Ambassadors provide support to those in need, such as the elderly or people experiencing homelessness.

4. Lessons learned



Key insights:

- The importance of a permanent team leader for training and mentorship, and
- The value of community engagement and building relationships with diverse stakeholders.

What worked well:

- The team leader role,
- the focus on community engagement, and
- the wide range of activities undertaken by the ambassadors.

What could be improved:

- Explore ways to retain experienced ambassadors for longer periods, potentially through alternative funding models or career pathways.

5. Conclusion

Manurewa Business Association's ambassador programme demonstrates the value of:

- A clearly defined role for ambassadors with a focus on community engagement, retailer training and conflict resolution.
- A comprehensive training regime and ongoing support for ambassadors individually and as a team.
- A dedicated, and suitably skilled team leader to lead and support the team.
- Collaboration with multiple stakeholders on planning and delivering the ambassador programme, joint training, communications, events and campaigns.
- Adaptability to meet the specific needs of different locations and business types.



ShopCare training resources

ShopCare offers a variety of free training courses, webinars, research papers and guidance documents on our website.

The following ShopCare online training courses are of relevance to a town centre ambassador training programme: shopcare.org.nz/training

Violent and aggressive behaviour (VAB)

- Situational awareness
- Managing an angry customer
- Staying safe
- Supporting your team (manager's course)
- Wellbeing in the aftermath
- Wellbeing in the long-term

Fostering cultural competency in the workplace

- Timatatanga (The Beginning): Setting the foundation
- Te Kakano (The Seed):
 - Te Kakano 1: Cultural awareness
 - Te Kakano 2: Cultural capability
 - Te Kakano 3: Cultural responsiveness
- Te Whanake (To Rise): Strengthening leadership

Ngā mihi

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