

Lessons learned from one of New Zealand's most challenging civil engineering projects: rebuilding the earthquake damaged pipes, roads, bridges and retaining walls in the city of Christchurch 2011 - 2016.

## 'REAL' response to resource roles

**Story:** Resourcing and Capability

**Theme:** People and Culture

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A document which outlines SCIRT's best practice approach to recruitment and training.

This document has been provided as an example of a tool that might be useful for other organisations undertaking complex disaster recovery or infrastructure rebuild programmes.

For more information about this document, visit [www.scirtlearninglegacy.org.nz](http://www.scirtlearninglegacy.org.nz)



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## ‘REAL’ response to resource roles

More than 2000 people from over 100 organisations joined forces under the SCIRT umbrella at the post-earthquake peak of the Christchurch rebuild.



*Broken city: Work gets under way on damaged infrastructure.*

With a wrecked cityscape, broken pipes, twisted roads and bent bridges, the horizontal infrastructure rebuild took five and a half years – more than double the usual lifespan of a civil infrastructure project.

Hundreds of people came and went, bringing innovation and tenacity to an enormous task.

Under the SCIRT umbrella, many were chosen to complete a particular job, while others came for the experience before moving on to a higher-level role or being head-hunted because of their upskilling.

SCIRT was a “virtual organisation”, so no one was directly employed by the entity. Instead, frameworks and initiatives were established that enabled people to participate, contribute and grow in a structured way.

According to the Alliance Agreement, SCIRT would “purposefully lift the capability of the sector-wide workforce” and “lift the capability of all subcontractors; do something meaningful to reduce the level of unemployment in Christchurch”; and “target delivering a new wave of skilled resources into the market”.

### Mind that workforce gap

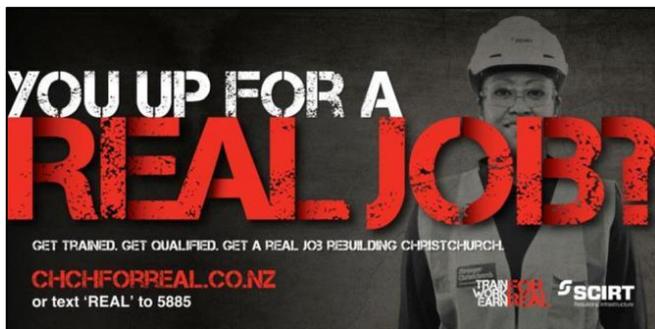
An alliance arrangement involving the construction industry and asset owners was the key to ensuring that 2000 team members could be found for the rebuild.

SCIRT brought together the resources of five large civil contractors, as well as asset owner employees, to meet the needs of the SCIRT Integrated Services Team (IST) and five Delivery Teams.

Subsequently, SCIRT also called for resources from more than 18 professional services organisations to provide the IST with design and asset assessment resources, focusing on Christchurch residents. The five Delivery Teams were resourced by a combination of their employees and subcontractors (provided by hundreds of small to medium businesses). Through organisational collaboration, resource gap risks were minimised.

Between January and April 2012, an analysis of resource and skillset requirements for the duration of the programme was undertaken by the SCIRT Delivery Management Team. The availability of those skills in the Christchurch market was also investigated. While the 180 design engineer positions could be filled via the professional services organisations, a shortage in the operational workforce was identified.

SCIRT needed 1300 workers (e.g. drain layers, excavator operators, general civil labourers etc) at its peak. Analysis showed only 700 were available locally (at best). After factoring in turnover (300 people) during the five-and-a-half-year programme, a 900-person gap was identified. Bridging that gap and recognising that several new entrants to the industry would need to be supported by on-the-job training would require an innovative approach.



*Real deal: SCIRT offers job opportunities.*

### Team member numbers must add up

- **“FOR REAL!” recruitment and training programme**

With the data indicating there would be a major shortfall, SCIRT identified several key risks to resourcing the programme. These included the potential escalation of labour rates through high demand and short supply, and decreased delivery performance because of low skills impacting on safety, productivity and quality.

To address these risks, SCIRT designed and initiated an innovative programme, “FOR REAL!”.

The “FOR REAL!” training and recruitment programme was developed to attract and train new entrants to the construction industry to service the contractor employers under the SCIRT umbrella. The programme was underpinned by a value proposition to attract participants: certainty of employment; no fees while learning, as well as a living allowance; ongoing supported training; and a national qualification. To design the training and qualification pathway, SCIRT collaborated with training providers and the Industry Training Organisation.

SCIRT also set up a Training Centre with experienced on-the-job trainers to support new entrants after six to eight weeks of “classroom” training.

To manage expressions of interest, the civil contracting organisations and training providers established a collaborative virtual “HR Hub” with recruiters from the alliance partners and training providers.

At the centre of the campaign, which was launched by Earthquake Recovery Minister Gerry Brownlee on

November 1, 2012, was the FOR REAL! Bus. It travelled around New Zealand’s South Island, providing as many people as possible with an opportunity to “get on board” and learn more about the SCIRT rebuild and the training programme.

Expressions of interest were taken on board the bus or via a website created for the campaign. Marketing was also channelled through social media, radio, bill posters and media channels. The cost of running the programme outweighed the cost of doing nothing, 16 to one.

The “FOR REAL!” campaign attracted about 2500 expressions of interest; 600 were linked to other rebuild opportunities through the government-established “Skills Hub” and 150 new entrants were selected, trained and joined the civil construction industry.

For more lessons about the “FOR REAL!” programme, see [Operational Workforce Gap](#).



*Get on board: The “FOR REAL!” recruitment bus.*

- **Establishment of the SCIRT Training Centre**

The SCIRT Training Centre was established in June 2012, bringing together experienced operational people from the civil construction alliance partners and providing those people with training in adult learning principles.

They were linked with trainees to provide on-the-job training and support towards gaining national qualifications. The training was available to all organisations involved in the SCIRT rebuild.

By the end of the programme, the Training Centre had hosted more than 7600 attendees at its short courses,



*Train to gain: SCIRT workplace tutors: Kingsley Hannah, left, David Tunbridge, Bill Hicks, Roy Parkin and Dennis Smyth.*

assessed more than 1000 unit standards, developed and delivered a successful crew leadership programme, and assisted 180 people towards completing a national qualification.

For more lessons, see [SCIRT Training Centre](#).

- **Tap into underused local markets – women**

The Ministry for Women conducted research with 500 under-employed and unemployed women in Christchurch, releasing the results in 2013. It found an untapped pool of labour.

Half of the women surveyed would explore construction roles in the Christchurch rebuild, but perceived the roles to be “just for men” and did not know how to

access training.

In August 2013, SCIRT established a working group of interested parties from the Delivery Teams and the IST, which tagged itself “SWIC” (SCIRT Women in Construction). It aimed to “raise the visibility and enable women across the SCIRT programme”.

The group met monthly, supporting several initiatives that contributed to making a difference in the industry. The efforts of SWIC went a long way to establishing a “new normal”.



*Fashion forward: Women's workwear for SCIRT.*

It became more commonplace to see women in civil construction roles.

In May 2015, SWIC won the empowerment category at the National Association of Women in Construction NZ Awards. However, it was most proud of the results in the field. The percentage of crew (or trades level) women at SCIRT rose from 2 per cent in 2013 to 12 per cent in 2015.

SWIC contributed to a major shift in Canterbury. Pre-quake, the region recorded the lowest percentage of women in construction roles (9 per cent). By 2015, it achieved the highest result in the country, almost double at 17.8 per cent.

For more details and lessons, see [Women in Construction](#).

- **Supporting international resources to join SCIRT**

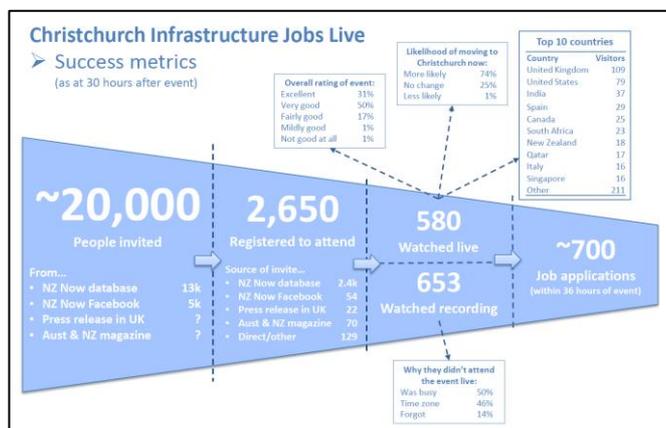
The SCIRT approach to resourcing was well-defined: locals first, then New Zealand-wide, followed by international recruitment.

SCIRT did not want to exacerbate the disaster recovery impact on Christchurch (housing shortages, fragile infrastructure etc) by bringing in a lot of new people to the city.

SCIRT also acknowledged the positive impacts for those local residents engaged in the rebuild of their city. Additionally, the region's economic recovery was supported by using residents and local businesses.

However, there were some specialist skills that SCIRT would need to find outside the region and, possibly, New Zealand. SCIRT launched several initiatives related to international recruitment. These included working with Immigration New Zealand to contribute to the Canterbury skills shortage list and ensuring that the SCIRT employers' skill gaps were represented; offering opportunities for SCIRT employers to collaborate and participate in an overseas recruitment drive in 2012; working with Immigration New Zealand to trial a recruitment drive webinar; and establishing “newcomer networks” for SCIRT people and their families. A link to the webinar is available here:

<https://www.newzealandnow.govt.nz/resources/construction-jobs-in-christchurch>



Metrics: Results from Immigration New Zealand's webinar.

### Collaborative approach to integrated team

The timely and effective resourcing of the SCIRT programme was “mission critical”.

SCIRT harnessed the collective forces of the alliance partners and established some groups to support resourcing, along with defining protocols and processes.

From the start, SCIRT governance realised the importance of not artificially inflating the labour market. It agreed on a “no poaching” approach to resources, acknowledging that pooling resources was better for the rebuild programme. This approach was recognised across the teams and contributed to a more “settled” market.

A Resource Coordination Group (RCG) was established to provide support from the non-owner participant (NOP) organisations for resourcing and filling critical roles. Group members held senior operational roles within the NOP organisations but sat outside SCIRT. As a result, they had the access and authority to assist SCIRT.

The intention of the group was sound. However, the delivery, and engagement from group members were not consistent. A clearer purpose, coupled with accountability measures reported to the SCIRT Board, could have improved the group's impact.

In January 2012, two forums were established to connect employees to their employer organisations. The operational Human Resources (HR) forum, which

met monthly, focused on tactical activities, while the Strategic Human Resources forum met quarterly (then, later, every two months). These forums meant people and culture initiatives could be better shaped through collaboration. They also provided the opportunity for employers to stay connected to employees.

IST members were seconded from the contributing organisations. It was soon evident that clear procedures and protocols for the employer organisation and SCIRT regarding recruitment and selection were important. A recruitment procedure was reshaped in February 2012, and the HR forums' input sought. For the first few years, this process proved very effective, with about 95 per cent of roles filled before the incumbent left SCIRT, allowing for a seamless handover and programme momentum.

In later years, the SCIRT programme had to compete with NOP resourcing for other projects. A more targeted approach to resourcing was needed. SCIRT recommended to the RCG that each NOP take its turn to resource IST vacancies, ensuring a quick turnaround.

Equally, it was important to have the right people supporting the managers in their selection decisions. The IST HR team understood the wider complexities of the SCIRT model and the importance of cultural fit. The team's involvement in selection decisions resulted in better outcomes as capabilities beyond technical skills were taken into consideration.

### State of transition

The HR processes were seen through a lens of “employee experience”, which enabled high performance. How people “transitioned” into and out of the SCIRT programme was positively shaped, aimed at best practice. This was most important in the context of traditionally high attrition rates in alliances. SCIRT had to transition many people very effectively to maintain the high-performance momentum and enable individual and industry learning.

When an IST member started, they would arrive to an allocated desk, computer login details and induction material, along with a first-week schedule. This started



*Thanks: A slide from the SCIRT induction presentation.*

with an “onboarding” process that linked key IST areas. An induction book was provided and their leader took new staff through an induction checklist. Within the first two to six weeks, the new team member attended an induction workshop hosted by all Management Team members.

All these activities helped the team member contribute as quickly as possible,

maintaining the high-performance momentum.

The transition of team members out of SCIRT was designed to support people through major change, reconnect people with home organisations, and encourage the transfer of SCIRT programme lessons into the wider industry.

Transition meetings – facilitated by SCIRT HR – were held with the departing team member, their SCIRT leader and their home organisation leader. Team members attended a 90-minute “unduction” workshop to celebrate their contribution and offer the opportunity to plan for change and enable their positive lessons beyond SCIRT. About 300 IST people underwent these transitions.

### Resource retention

In 2014, the SCIRT Board identified an issue over team member retention as the programme drew to a close. In all, 30 per cent of resources were on fixed-term employment contracts (more than 50 per cent of NOP secondments in IST). Retaining those people to ensure programme outcomes and maintain productivity was important.

However, it was also important to achieve positive outcomes for those individuals who had contributed to SCIRT’s success.

In October 2015, the HR and Peak Performance team initiated the “Finishing Strong – Individual Commitment” programme for IST personnel. Delivery Teams subsequently initiated similar programmes for their people.

Discussions with each person about their “Stay Commitment” began in November 2015 and continued bi-monthly until the person left the programme. Participation in four workshops about change and career development – collectively entitled “Strength to Strength” – was also offered. The HR forum collaborated and enabled the aim of 100 per cent of team members being linked to their next opportunity, proactively supporting people to their next step beyond SCIRT regardless of their employer; and continuing to invest in the development of team members.

While not every team member stayed, these initiatives proved very effective in retaining most of the necessary resources to complete the SCIRT programme. Team engagement remained high (in the mid-70s) as team members recognised that SCIRT and their home organisations were proactively supporting their transition.



## Lessons learnt

- Alliances provide a very effective way of mobilising resources quickly.
- Conduct resource analysis early in the programme but review it regularly with feedback (both data and anecdotal) from employers as the market can shift quickly.
- Take a different approach to attracting resources, highlighting the “once in a lifetime” opportunity.
- Identify risks to resourcing and capability early, and address those risks using collaboration (e.g. the establishment of SCIRT Training Centre and the “no poaching” philosophy).
- Build partnerships with government agencies to support resourcing initiatives (SCIRT could have done this earlier in the programme).
- Establish a Resource Coordination Group to support the programme but provide the group with a clear purpose and parameters while highlighting outcome accountability.
- Take into account, when selecting recruits, that cultural fit and the ability to work in complexity results in better outcomes (for the individual and the organisation).
- Those organisations that stay connected with seconded employees have better outcomes in terms of retention and maximising the benefits of their team members’ “learnings” to their organisation.
- Focusing on transition benefits employee retention and the wider industry also gains benefits.
- In general, SCIRT retained team members without having to apply the “golden handcuff” approach of retention bonuses.