



# Policy Advisory System

An interlocking set of actors and organisations that provide recommendations for action to decision-makers

## The concept

A policy advisory system is the interlocking set of actors and organisations that produce, channel and deploy recommendations for action to decision-makers. The system extends well beyond the formal apparatus of the state. It encompasses policy-making institutions in both state and non-state forms; expert advisors who sit between government and the academy; think tanks that translate research into recommendation; opinion writers, the commentariat, media and lobbying interests, public relations and engagement professionals; and academia itself, with its peer-reviewed research and its longer cycles of evidence. The map matters because no significant policy decision rests on a single source of advice, and because the relative weight of each part of the system shifts with the issue, the moment, and the receptivity of the decision-maker.

## In practice

We worked from the Mayor's Office on the recovery and rebuild in Christchurch, treating the work explicitly as a policy advisory system rather than as a single line of advice. In Aotearoa, no piece of infrastructure of any consequence relies on the Crown alone; a working advisory system has to draw in the city, iwi, the regulators, the technical experts, the affected communities, and the commentariat that shapes how each is heard. Mapping the system, and tending it deliberately, was the precondition for advice that could actually be acted upon.

## Questions we ask in client strategy conversations

- Which actors and organisations make up the advisory system around this decision, and which are presently unheard?
- Where does the centre of gravity sit in this system, and is that where it should sit?
- Which parts of the system are producing recommendations, and which are producing only commentary?
- How are state and non-state contributions reconciled before a decision is taken?

## Questions to ask yourselves

- Have we mistaken the advice we receive most often for the advice we most need?
- Where in the system are voices systematically underweighted, and what does that cost us?
- Do we treat our own role as the final point of decision, or as one node in a working system?
- When a decision is made, do we explain it back to the system as well as we explain it to the public?

## Red flags we look for

- An advisory system that has narrowed to a single trusted source.
- A reliance on the commentariat to do work that should be done by expert advisors or peer-reviewed research.
- The systematic exclusion of non-state policy-making institutions from contested questions.