



FOUNDATION

Toi Foundation: A commitment to rangatiratanga and growing reciprocal and enduring partnerships with iwi

The Toi Foundation kaupapa

Toi Foundation (formerly TSB Community Trust) is one of twelve community trusts in Aotearoa New Zealand. It provides grant funding, impact investment, and other non-financial support to community organisations operating in the Taranaki region, investing just over \$22 million as grant funding in the 2022 financial year.

Toi Foundation’s purpose is “to support our communities to build a thriving, inclusive, and equitable Taranaki”. It is focused on “reducing economic and social disparities, funding where there is evidence of greatest need”. The foundation has identified four key outcome areas: improved environment; increased access to opportunities; enhanced child and youth wellbeing; and rangatiratanga empowering Māori aspirations. For each of these outcome areas, Toi Foundation has developed a strategy to share with communities its priorities for impact.

Toi Foundation’s funding activity is delivered through four channels. Alongside grassroots community funding, it has developed a strategic fund that centred on relational partnerships with communities, an innovation fund for seeding or scaling new ideas, and impact investing for both social/environmental impact and financial return.

Whakapapa – the journey of Toi Foundation

Toi Foundation has significantly evolved its practice over the last five years. This journey began with a review of evidence that identified a strategic opportunity to focus on shifting child and youth wellbeing indicators. This led to a strategic planning process that has ultimately shifted the foundation’s approach from a “post-box” funder towards a strategic focus on equity, partnerships with tangata whenua, and more impactful models of investment into community outcomes.

This evolution has been organic and very clearly informed by relationships with the foundation's community partners, including iwi. In 2021, Toi Foundation refreshed its strategy and also changed its name and branding, seeking to more clearly reflect the foundation's values and aspirational vision for Taranaki. The vision is centred on the people of Taranaki, its land and prominent landmarks, history, culture, and the importance of partnership.

How The Philanthropic Landscape key practices present in the work of Toi Foundation

Equity is a key pou within the Toi Foundation strategy, and Chairperson Chris Ussher reflects that, during the most recent strategy refresh, trustees "looked carefully at our purpose and what we wanted to achieve, and we shifted to focus on a 'thriving and equitable Taranaki'. We needed to be clear about what we meant by equitable, which for us is looking at where there is the greatest need in our area".

The focus on equity is carried through into Toi Foundation's decision-making and monitoring, where key "equity indicators" have been identified. These allow the foundation to track whether its funding is aligned to areas of greatest need and to understand how these needs are shifting over time. Chris reflects that this "is where the rubber

hits the road in terms of how much you're committed to your strategy, when as trustees you're faced with decisions about a major community project that doesn't hit those equity indicators."

Increasingly, this focus on equity is leading Toi Foundation to take a long-term view about its role and contribution to impact. Chris acknowledges that, "through our funding approaches, we are hoping to have a more intergenerational impact".

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This intergenerational mindset has meant that Toi Foundation's practice has become more clearly about community inter-dependence, whereby Toi Foundation, community organisations, and iwi are working in relationship as a more deliberate ecosystem to affect systems change and achieve community aspirations. Getting to this point has seen Toi Foundation go on a significant journey to decolonise practice and build relationships with iwi and hapū. Chris shared that "one of our strategic outcomes is about empowering Māori achievement – we actually use the word *rangatiratanga* in our strategy [...] We've got a memorandum of understanding with six iwi. We've worked pretty hard to think about how we will work together".

Chief Executive, Maria Ramsay, describes the importance of these MOUs being about partnership, rather than transaction. “The key thing about these MOUs is that there is no funding linked to them, they are purely about how we work together and support each other. It really is a reciprocal relationship rather than a funder-applicant relationship [...] We wanted to form true, trusted relationships that are mana-enhancing for each other”.

Toi Foundation is now developing a theory of change in relation to its rangatiratanga strategy, co-designed with iwi, organisations, and individuals in Taranaki. The foundation was given permission to use a karakia as the basis of this theory of change and iwi partners are also using the rangatiratanga theory of change to inform their impact investment practice. “It has been co-designed and is not just for us, it is for everyone in Taranaki,” Maria reflects.

A think-piece board paper about participatory philanthropy was a key catalyst for Toi Foundation beginning to think even more deeply about power sharing. The foundation has since begun to explore ways of investing in impact through trusted partnerships with community. Poutama Initiative is a current pilot that is a key example of this approach. Based on Ford Foundation’s Build programme,

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In addition to the funding aspect of Poutama Initiative, Toi Foundation partnered with EY Tahi to offer organisational assessments and develop capacity and capability development roadmaps focused on strengthening each organisation in a range of areas. These include strategy, communications and marketing, and financial sustainability. Toi Foundation also facilitates the convening of these organisations as a cohort to share learning in ways that strengthen the community sector ecosystem.

Maria highlights that through the Poutama Initiative, Toi Foundation has developed trusted relationships with these partner organisations. “They are a willing to tell us what’s not working, and the relationship we have provides the safety for that”. Chris further underlines that

being able to provide certainty of funding over multiple years helps to ensure relationship longevity – which is fundamental to the ability of funders like Toi Foundation to authentically share power. “It’s about being able to say, ‘we want to work with you, we want it to be a genuine partnership’, and as part of that there needs to be a genuine long-term commitment on both sides”. From here, Toi Foundation is seeking legal advice around future possibilities for making much longer-term commitments to its strategic funding partners.

Another initiative that highlights Toi Foundation’s relational and collaborative approach to philanthropy is its ongoing partnership with the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. This partnership looks to strengthen child wellbeing in the region through a focus on young parents from pre-pregnancy through to the first 1,000 days of their child’s lives. This work has been highly developmental, beginning with a needs analysis and working closely with key regional organisations in this space, and evolving through co-design of solutions with communities of young parents.

Maria reflects on the importance of Toi Foundation’s ecosystem approach – including having providers in the room, having central government involved from the outset and “most importantly, going out and engaging with the community, co-designing and listening

to the voice of [young parents]”. As this work progresses, Toi Foundation will have flexibility to use its innovation funding to “trial some ideas and look at getting a proof of concept that potentially could be picked up by central government”.

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One of Maria’s biggest learnings is that committing to power sharing, partnerships, and decolonising practice requires people. “It is a more intensive approach to philanthropy that can’t be undertaken from behind a desk. You have to be going out, meeting people, and engaging. If you want to have enduring relationships, it starts well before you start talking about money. You need time for whakawhangaatanga, understanding where each of you is coming from, and maybe in twelve months something comes out of it. But you have to be patient and you need the people to do it”. Toi Foundation now has a whole team of people dedicated to social innovation engagement and partnerships. Maria believes that investing in these roles is essential to achieving better outcomes. “It’s not always best to be

lean and mean – we invest in our communities to develop their capacity and capability, and our board is prepared to invest in us to do the same”.

Across all of its work, Toi Foundation is committed to adaptability and learning – practices that Maria believes are both essential to, and enabled by, a relational approach. “We want to walk alongside organisations. We are learning a lot from them, and they learn from us. We don’t just expect a group to come back and tell us some outcomes in 12 months’ time. Now our practice is more about having conversations, realising that the outcomes the community want to achieve has led them in a different direction, and learning from that”.

Maria believes that continuing to listen to and engage with

communities means that Toi Foundation will remain much clearer on where it fits in the Taranaki ecosystem and how it can continue to best support regional impact. “We recognise the knowledge and wisdom that the community holds, so we are prepared to learn. We can help guide and provide backbone support, we can ask challenging questions, but we don’t have all the answers.”

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