

The Philanthropic Landscape Volume II:

Shifting Culture and Power through Mana-Enhancing Partnerships

Our Centre for Social Impact (CSI) insights papers provide a brief overview of the research and analysis reports we undertake with our clients and partners.

This paper, **Shifting Culture and Power through Mana-Enhancing Partnerships** draws on a report developed by CSI in partnership with the J R McKenzie Trust. It is a companion piece to *The Philanthropic Landscape Volume I – [Trends and Practices in Contemporary Philanthropy](#)* published in 2019, which identified five key trends in philanthropy. Volume II explores how these trends are being brought to life in practice by funders across Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia, centering on the characteristics of impactful, mana-enhancing funding partnerships. The full report is available to [here](#), alongside videos of funders speaking to their practice.

Insights into mana-enhancing partnerships

– a summary of key themes identified in

The Philanthropic Landscape Volume II

Within the context of impactful giving, mana-enhancing relationships are those where funder and ngā kaikōkiri (communities, funded groups, grantees) enact a culture of reciprocity – working together in service of a kaupapa or shared purpose, in ways that ensure all parties have agency and voice, feel understood, trusted and respected, and valued for what they bring into the relationship. The partnership uplifts everyone.

Through discussions with funders and ngā kaikōkiri, The Philanthropic Landscape Volume II identifies nine important characteristics of partnerships for purpose.

1. Humility, values and courage to change

Getting to mana-enhancing partnerships requires a willingness to embark on an internal change journey. Letting go of ego, and having the humility to acknowledge that communities hold solutions, are important. Funders must hold up the mirror to examine where power sits, and commit to seeing and undoing funding practices and decision-making structures that are not mana-enhancing. Values act as a compass for this process, and trustees need to be on the journey alongside staff.

2. Trust and connection – doing the work of relationship-building

Funders must commit deep effort to whakawhanaungatanga and connecting with ngā kaikōkiri, listening before offering, understanding community realities and aspirations and building trust as a basis for partnership. This moves funding relationships from a space of transaction to one of care and reciprocity. Funders grow legitimacy and mandate to work alongside community, and better understand the capacities and resources needed for the partnership to be both mana-enhancing and impactful.

“It’s about manaakitanga in its fullness, it’s about giving mana in different ways – listening, appreciating, and empathy.”

Lili Tuioi, Peter McKenzie Project

3. Focus on the kaupapa/purpose

Mana-enhancing partnerships aren’t predicated on funding, but rather a clear sense of shared purpose and values. Where funders and ngā kaikōkiri find such alignment, the relationship is equalised and all parties are recognised as part of the same system trying to work on solutions to complex issues. In practice, this can look like funders investing in purpose (untagged funding) over projects, and undertaking a range of non-financial resources /activities alongside and in collaboration with ngā kaikōkiri.

4. Intergenerational horizons

Complex issues have taken generations to unfold, and will take generations to shift. Committing to an intergenerational view on systems change is vital. In this context, long-term partnerships equalise power by recognising inter-dependence, whereby funders and communities are both necessary parts of the movement for change. Ngā kaikōkiri need a sense of surety and an explicit clarity of commitment about the longevity of their relationship with the funder – both relationally and financially.

5. Healthy accountability

In mana-enhancing partnerships there is a healthy accountability from all parties to one another. There is a shift away from the traditional accountability hierarchies of the funder-grantee relationships, towards transparent commitments and accountabilities to the kaupapa from both sides. Some funders develop a relationship plan with ngā kaikōkiri to make accountability explicit and guide how partners will show up in the relationship. In Aotearoa, healthy accountability also considers and makes clear the funder's relationship with Māori and to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

6. Self-determination and agency

Mana-enhancing partnerships are enabling of community self-determination. Ngā kaikōkiri should have agency to determine their kaupapa and their approach. There should be acknowledgment that communities own their impact and story, with funders focusing on whether and how their practice has been enabling. Resourcing ngā kaikōkiri to have time and space to develop their strategies and solutions, to gain traction and embed their approach is important. Untagged funding also enables flexibility and agency for ngā kaikōkiri to make decisions and shift their approach if the needs of communities evolve.

Threaded through community self-determination is the opportunity for funders to support capability development – equipping communities to lead change, investing in community governance structures, and supporting equitable participation and pathways into decision-making spaces for communities who may otherwise experience barriers.

7. Reciprocity, leadership and service

Reciprocity is a central principle that runs through all identified characteristics of mana-enhancing partnerships. For power to be truly shared between partners, the relationship must be mutually beneficial, affording respect to the mana and contribution of both ngā kaikōkiri and funders. Shared learning approaches sit at the heart of reciprocal relationships – where all parties are learning about what works and their respective roles. The tension for funders when working towards reciprocal partnerships is balancing leadership with service; considering when to wield its institutional voice and power for influence, and when to stand behind ngā kaikōkiri partners – or even get out of the way completely.

8. From allyship, to coalition

Systems change work requires advocacy and shared risk-taking. Funders can be good allies and advocates by using their institutional voice and non-financial resources to advance an issue; as well as by working with communities to decolonise systems of philanthropy. Some funders are consciously moving language from allyship to coalition, to more keenly recognise philanthropy's advocacy role in partnership with, rather than on behalf of, community.

9. Learning and unlearning

Partnerships for purpose are underpinned by an ongoing process of learning about what works and what doesn't. Alongside this is a process of unlearning practices that aren't serving communities – particularly colonised processes and the hierarchical power dynamics of transactional models of philanthropy. Learning-led practice is particularly important for funders looking to influence systems change. This involves letting go of notions of 'funding accountability', instead focusing more deeply on learning about where there is traction with priority issues, how partnerships are progressing, and the conditions that can support systems change.

A key facet of effective learning practice is funders challenging themselves on what counts as evidence of impact – with a particular emphasis on prioritising whānau and community narratives. Being responsible with communities' stories and sovereignty of data is a key concern in the context of mana-enhancing partnership.

“Making cultural shifts in philanthropy is less about the skills or structures that you need to build, but what you need to let go of. I have really seen our board and Foundation let go, so that our strategy, funding and influence can be made more impactful for the community. If we could get more foundations into that space, we'd see a remarkable shift.”

Carolyn Curtis, Fay Fuller Foundation

Summary

