



Snapshots from our Year in Review

2025/26

Introduction

The wish to leave the world a better place has inspired generations of philanthropists and community leaders. The path from intention to impact, however, is not a straight one. Success is often elusive.

As Foundation North's social business, the Centre for Social Impact works with funders and community organisations to increase their chance of achievement of social impact. We work alongside a diverse range of organisations that want to make a difference for their communities, from the Foundation and other community trusts to other philanthropic funders and corporate foundations, to not-for-profit organisations of all sizes.

We draw on a national network of associates to bring to each assignment the knowledge and experience wanted by a funder or their community partner. We support research and analysis, evaluation and learning, community engagement and participatory design, strategic advice and planning, collaboration and collective impact, capability development, governance development and communicating for influence.

Our knowledge and experience have grown over the twelve years since our founding, informed both by our experience with innovative local funders and changemakers, and the continuing development of philanthropic practice internationally. What we learn we share through our knowledge hub, Te Pūaha o te Ako. This is funded by Foundation North to give funders, community organisations and changemakers free access to information, resources, insights and learning to support their social impact journeys.

The snapshots in this report are just five examples of the Centre's work over the last year that provide an insight into the range of our mahi. Our thanks to the organisations featured: Foundation North; JR McKenzie Trust; Clare Foundation; Philanthropy New Zealand; Ōtūrei Marae and the global Future Search Network.

The Centre is fortunate to have the support of Foundation North as our 'parent' and major client. Special thanks to my own team and our colleagues from Foundation North, and to our experienced and talented network of associates who make it all happen.

Ēhara tāku toa i te toa takatahi, engari he toa takitini.



Karinia Lee
Head of Centre

Social enterprise

Project Jumpstart

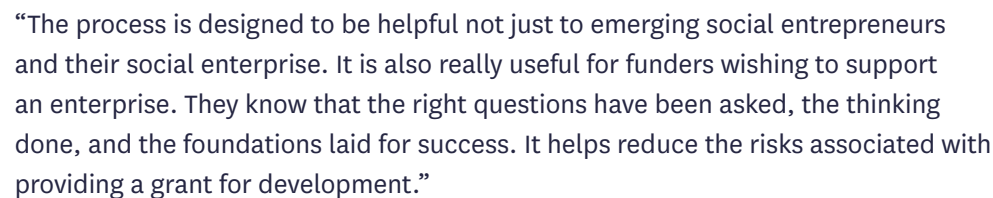
Social entrepreneurs operate at the intersection of business innovation and social impact. Unlike traditional commercial entrepreneurs driven primarily by profit, or non-profit leaders limited by grant reliance, social entrepreneurs use market-driven mechanisms to solve systemic societal or environmental challenges.

It is estimated there may be up to 3500 social enterprises in New Zealand but there is limited support available for social entrepreneurs to make a compelling case to potential funders to fund the initial start-up of the enterprise, then develop, launch and sustain their enterprise.

CSI associate Dave Booth knows how important early-stage support can be to new enterprises, whether they be social or commercial. Dave has drawn on his own success as an entrepreneur and business owner to inform his work as a Business Angel, in his consultancy and management to not-for profit organisations through the Scope Project, and his involvement with commercial start-up ventures through the Ice House Accelerator Programme.

As a CSI associate, Dave brought his experience to shape Jumpstart, an eight-week programme for social entrepreneurs who either have an early-stage concept or want to test if there is a market for their idea. Jumpstart works through an initial process of discovery, to help strengthen the skills of the social entrepreneur and the organisation. Then the project moves to validate the idea or strengthen what work has been done. This allows the social entrepreneur and the organisation to be able to pitch to a range of potential funders and be ready when funding is confirmed.





Founder Jade Willow Buck says Project Jumpstart was really an essential stepping stone for Cahoots. “It provided structure so that we could build out our ideas and kaupapa into something actionable. We built a plan, verified our assumptions, and came out with something workable we could take as a template to our partners.



June 2000

What does financial sustainability mean for non-profits?

- Securing enough income to deliver activity that meets community needs, is the highest quality possible and achieves goals for impact.
- Keeping costs, particularly overheads, as low as possible through lean operating models and the use of volunteers.
- Paying staff a living wage.
- Investing in evaluation for continuous improvement.
- Having sufficient multi-year financial security to enable planning, retain key staff and invest in organisational development, whilst also retaining sufficient cash reserves to keep delivering during difficult times.



Kat Dawnsler – CSQ associate

Is this possible at all, and especially at the moment?

Doing this well is a tricky and tricky balancing act. Charities have to compromise on their scale, reach or ability to innovate, depending on what resourcing they can secure. With ongoing pressure to meet community need, the cost is often staff retention, wellbeing and burnout. Many organisations have not bounced back from the financial shock caused by the COVID pandemic and weather events, and are further struggling in the face of rising operational costs, community need and complexity in an ongoing cost of living crisis¹.

The end of COVID funding streams, such as the Cultural Sector Recovery Funds and Jobs for Nature, has created sharp funding cliffs for some and halted impactful initiatives.¹ The current Government is focused on reducing public spending,² and cuts to funding are threatening the viability of key services like food banks and budgeting services. Organisations that retain government funding over long periods of time often don't achieve full cost recovery (typically 80% funding), leaving a hole that must be somehow filled. The current government has been clear in its signals to philanthropy to 'contribute more alongside government'.³ This pushes charities to fill the gap from donations and philanthropy;⁴ however, many philanthropic decision-makers are reticent about being a gap-filler for

All of these issues are factors in rising levels of competition for funding that can be seen across diverse sectors and funders. For example, regional community trust Foundation North has experienced a 23% increase in applications and an 11% increase in quantum requested between 2022/23 and 2023/24.¹⁵ In the second round of its new Civic Impact Fund, announced in December 2023, Creative New Zealand was able to approve only 11% of eligible

applications and award only 9% of the total funding requested*. Auckland Council's Sport and Recreational Facilities

Social enterprise is a tool many charities consider when looking to boost financial sustainability. This was considered in our insights paper published in the year, [Busting the myth of financial sustainability for charities](#).

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Leadership

Pou Tuarā Leadership Programme

Leadership, particularly in communities that are facing complex challenges, requires ongoing, adaptive support.

The Pou Tuarā leadership circles were developed by CSI with support from Foundation North, Trust Waikato and Clare Foundation. The circles were commissioned in response to feedback from leaders that traditional short-term training programmes often fail to provide the sustained connection and resources they need. Pou Tuarā provides support over 18 months through three in-person wānanga and nine opportunities for one-on-one online sessions with facilitators.

A Kaupapa Māori Leadership Circle provides a dedicated space for Māori leaders. Facilitator Kate Cherrington says while there are many good leadership programmes available, the advantage of Pou Tuarā offering a Kaupapa Māori circle is participants' shared understanding of leadership in the context of whakapapa and tikanga. "That means we can quickly get to the heart of the issues the leaders are facing." The most recent wānanga saw the team develop a framework for self-evaluation. "Because of a shared understanding of tikanga, we were able to move quickly into deep conversations about how to improve their practice of leadership."

Leaders participating in the culturally diverse Tauīwi Leadership Circle have discovered many common needs and have enjoyed being able to learn from others how they are managing the challenges of community leadership. "It has been fantastic to see peer support in action with the leaders offering support to each other through shared learning," facilitator Chloe Harwood says.



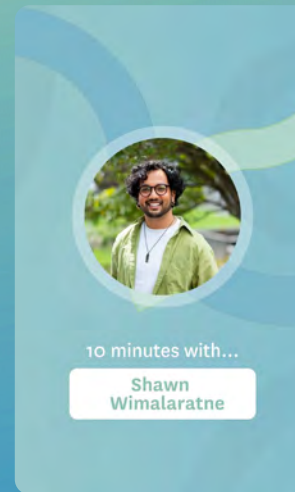


“The mixture of formal content and peer-to-peer learning is complemented by the individual online coaching sessions where needs specific to each participant can be addressed.”

“What is also evident from the circles is the importance of supporting leaders, in a sector where overwork and burnout is endemic, to help leaders understand processes like nervous system regulation to resource themselves and their teams for what is often complex and stressful mahi.”



TE PŪAHA O TE AKO



New resources added in the year to the Leadership Hub on our knowledge bank, Te Pūaha o te Ako, included video interviews with eight community leaders about their leadership. In this video, Shawn Wimalaratne, Co-Chair of Rainbow Youth talks about their leadership as a changemaker focused on equity, storytelling, and systems transformation.

[Watch the video here](#)

Governance

New trustee development

Effective governance is essential for any organisation. CSI's experience in supporting community and not-for-profit sector governance saw Ōtūrei Marae request support for incoming trustees, committee members and emerging leaders.

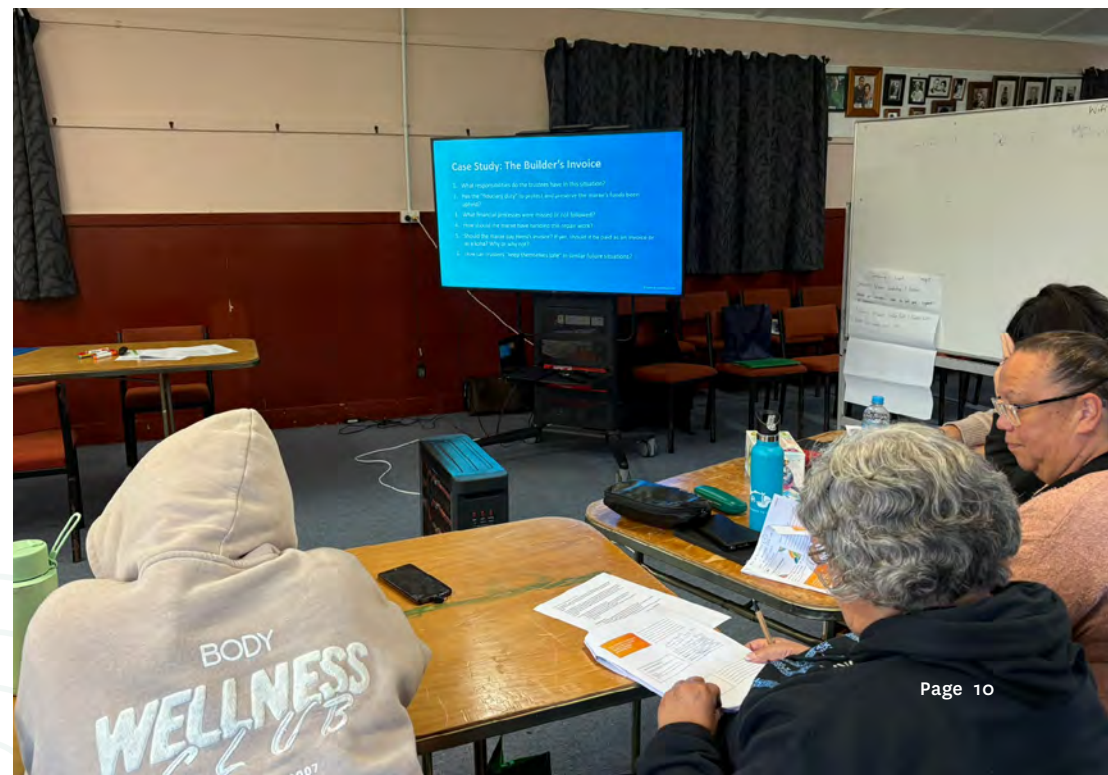
CSI associate Te Aorangi Murphy-Fell facilitated a two-day wānanga at the marae to introduce new trustees the essential elements of good governance. The wānanga provided an introduction to legal compliance, financial oversight, good faith, transparency and accountability.

“For trustees of marae, these have to be managed in the context of marae tikanga and kawa,” Te Aorangi says. “Kaumatua and kuia, for example, while not being board members, may well want to have a presence and a voice at board meetings. When everyone is clear on what governance responsibilities are, it becomes easier to balance and manage the relationships.”

The wānanga has seen a meaningful shift in how the members aim to govern, according to trustee Rosie Nathan.

“Together, the collective has committed to a unified way of working that strengthens leadership and enhances governance effectiveness. This shift reflects a deliberate move towards more strategic, tikanga-grounded, and collaborative decision-making.”

“The support from CSI and Te Aorangi was provided in a way that aligned with our needs and resources, allowing for a balance between CSI guidance and our autonomy.”



Informing the practice of philanthropy

The climate action influence

Philanthropic practice continues to evolve. CSI has been actively involved in mapping and explaining the changing philanthropic landscape through our work alongside leading philanthropic organisations such as the JR McKenzie Trust.

In recent years, we have seen climate action emerge, both internationally and locally, as a focus for philanthropic practice and funding.

The Funders Commitment on Climate Action Aotearoa (FCCA), for which CSI provides administrative support, has played a major role in informing climate action thinking for local philanthropic trusts. Esther Whitehead, Climate and Biodiversity Lead for FCCA, was one of the panellists at the 2026 Philanthropy New Zealand conference session on what it means to centre care in philanthropy exploring ‘caring about’, ‘caring for’, ‘care giving’, ‘care receiving’ and ‘caring with’.

“The FCCA framework, including the Tika Transition which embraces tikanga Māori and the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, was used to help us explore the topic,” Esther says.

“I was interested to see that for many of the 75 participants, the way they are thinking about climate action is influencing their wider thinking about whose voices are heard, whose voices are missing, and who gets to shape decisions about resources and impact. The conversation highlighted that these questions extend beyond human communities, that nature’s voice should also be heard. That led to a broader question about what it means to care for what we don’t immediately notice, value or understand.”

FCCA will continue the conversation at the Combined Community Trusts conference in November, connecting care, tika and the FCCA’s new tool to support community resilience in its role in responding to adverse weather events.

Esther’s fellow panellists were Arohanui West (Te Arawa whānui, Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Tūwharetoa) - Climate Action Aotearoa; Dennis Turton - Trust Waikato CEO; Kaeden Watts (Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Tūhoe) - climate advocate, and; Karinia Lee (Te Ākitai Waiohū, Te Rarawa) - CSI Head of Centre.



Kaitiaki Group for the Funders Commitment on Climate Action

TE PŪAHA O TE AKO

New resources to inform the practice of philanthropy added in the year included our:



Better funding guide

Information on how funders can make the work of applying for funding easier or harder for their community partners. The guide includes a one-page self-assessment tool to help funders identify opportunities to strengthen their funding practice.



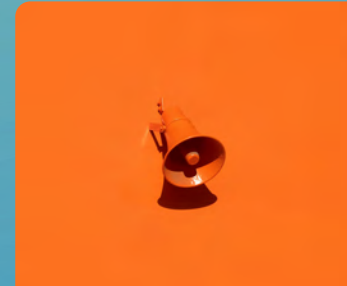
Participatory grantmaking guide

This provides information to funders on how to draw on the insights and expertise of their communities to make more informed funding decisions. An example of this type of funding is the [Asian Artists' Fund](#), a co-investment partnership between Foundation North, Creative New Zealand, and Auckland Council developed in collaboration with key stakeholders from the Asian artist community.



Understanding impact resource

A guide to help philanthropic organisations understand whether their grants and other kinds of support to enable 'good' in the widest sense are having a positive impact. This resource was developed drawing on our engagement with Foundation North as it refined its approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL).



Advocacy resource

An introduction for funders to advocacy as a tool to help raise awareness of an issue, win hearts and minds, change the way organisations work, and influence Government policy and how it can be used to support systems change.



Climate action tools hub

Curated resources to make climate action easier and more achievable for small not-for-profits. It includes operational tools; and information on cultural grounding; communication and engagement; finance, legal, investment; and governance.

Systems transformation support

Future Search

Future Search is a globally recognised action planning process that brings all the parts of a complex problem into the room to find common ground and agree action.

CSI associate Miranda Cassidy-O'Connell champions Future Search in Aotearoa New Zealand including honoring Te Tiriti o Waitangi in Future Search practice. "I've seen over multiple Future Searches how powerful the methodology is," Miranda says. Future Searches she has co-facilitated have considered issues as diverse as sustainable fisheries, community response to ocean challenges, to restoring the mauri of Te Oneroa-a-Tōhe, Ninety Mile Beach.

"I was keen to work with CSI to make this more widely available here and received agreement from the global Future Search Network to run the first training programme for facilitators in Aotearoa."

The three-day training programme offered by CSI in August 2025 attracted 39 participants who have joined Miranda to form the FS Aotearoa cohort. In the year since training, the cohort have practiced their Future Search skills in their diverse sectors, learned off each other and from global Future Search Network. In March this year, some of the cohort met on Waiheke Island in the first of planned annual wānanga. Highlights and reflections from the wānanga are available [here](#).

Having a dedicated cohort of trained Future Search facilitators in Aotearoa is a powerful field for community to tap into when making systems change.

CSI wish to thank the Clare Foundation for supporting the FS Aotearoa cohort and Sandra Janoff and the global Future Search Network.



TE PŪAHA O TE AKO



Systems transformation support

Healing systems and whole system collaboration - This hui brought around 80 people to Te Mahurehure Marae to explore why and how to bring connection, healing and coherence into systems change work. We drew on internationally renowned systems change leader John Kania, founder of the Collective Change Lab (CCL), and colleague Laura de la Balceron to open the hui and provide some foundation stones for the day's kōrero to open the event alongside our associate (and CCL senior Associate) Louise Marra. This was followed by a Haumanu practice masterclass which took 40 participants deeper into the 'how' of bringing healing into their system change mahi.

[View the resource here](#)



Mā te mahi tahi ka ea ngā mahi

Through working together, the tasks are accomplished.

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