

Time to shine, time to take stock, time to shape our future.

A survey of Aotearoa New Zealand's
community sector on the impacts of
COVID-19

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Foreword

COVID-19 has profoundly impacted people and nature. So has the nature of our response.

It's clear there are people in our whānau whānui and communities who would do anything for us. And they did. They harnessed their collective generosity and ngākau nui, big heartedness to help their communities stay connected, get well, stay well and answer the call to unite and be kind.

This report honours the aroha, kindness, reciprocity, innovation, imagination and collective spirit that surfaced during lockdown—the elements needed to bring balance and harmony, to steady us in a time of disruption and concern.

Many, many people came together over the past few months to be of service to others. Effective leadership, compassion and fast action by government was matched by people and communities across Aotearoa.

It's likely that anyone reading this report has a continued part to play in protecting, growing and revitalising our communities, and in bringing renewed harmony and balance into being.

This report continues a conversation happening across our sector and with government and philanthropy about what now needs to be done to honour and grow our effort and effect.

We bring a united voice to this conversation from the Centre for Social Impact, Hui E! Community Aotearoa, Philanthropy New Zealand, and Volunteering New Zealand. We acknowledge the recently released Inspiring Communities *Shaping the Future* report, and the Bay of Plenty *SocialLink* survey.

We note that there are common threads emerging in experiences being reported across the sector, in the desire to harness the power and potential of what was activated during the COVID-19 lockdown, and in the will and enthusiasm to reshape the future together.

We have work to do! Our response to COVID-19 gives us a new reference point for what can be achieved when we come together for a common good.

What is your next step in giving our communities, and the organisations who care for them continued life and energy? The hā, or breath of one element becomes the life force of another. In this way we are all related and reliant on each other.

Acknowledgements

Our heartfelt thanks to the many people in the tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector in Aotearoa New Zealand who participated in this survey, at a time of many personal and organisational challenges

This research was funded by Foundation North through Te Pūaha o te Ako—a multi-disciplinary social impact knowledge and practice hub based in the Centre for Social Impact. The survey's design and analysis was led by the Centre for Social Impact, working in partnership with Hui E! Community Aotearoa, Philanthropy New Zealand, and Volunteering New Zealand

Executive Summary

Introduction

This report details the findings of a national COVID-19 impact survey carried out across the tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector in May-June 2020. This was as we were moving between Levels 2 and 1 of the COVID-19 lockdown. The findings are based on 1,424 responses from a broad cross-section of the sector.

The research is a partnership between the Centre for Social Impact, Hui E! Community Aotearoa, Philanthropy New Zealand, and Volunteering New Zealand.

The findings shine a light on the experiences of the sector in cherishing and caring for communities throughout COVID-19 and beyond. They take stock of the impact that effort has had on the sector. They start the conversation about what now needs to be done to honour and grow our effort and effect.

They can help lead confident, collective, well informed discussions around recovery and re-imagining the future state of a tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector that is well, flourishing and thriving.

Shining a light

INSIGHTS: While a sizable number of participating organisations took a hit during lockdown, they mobilised, moved with agility, and in some cases did, and are still doing more with less.

Effective leadership and fast action by government was matched by people and communities across Aotearoa.

High trust models of funding, flexibility and mutual respect between local and central government, philanthropy and the sector created the conditions for some stunning outcomes for communities.

Survey participants highlighted some clear strengths and service adaptability within and across organisations. In particular:

- unlocking a previously unknown capacity for flexibility and innovation
- being responsive, nimble, adaptive and resourceful
- an appreciation of technology as a powerful tool (with caveats), offering new ways to connect and communicate and deliver some services, and the extent to which it was embraced by clients, stakeholders and members alike
- the extent to which COVID-19 revealed the strengths and capabilities of teams and organisations
- the immense value of working together and the huge appetite for collaborating within the not-for-profit sector, which was seen by many as being key to its ongoing sustainability.

“We have never worked so hard with so little. Challenging but hopefully with good outcomes.”

“Our community is absolutely amazing. So many organisations really stepped up to the mark and did everything humanly possible to support their local community or constituency.”

Taking stock

INSIGHTS: Post-lockdown, the sector is in a fragile, finely balanced position. There remains a significant gap in the available and funded resourcing for tangata whenua, community and voluntary organisations to deliver services.

Many participants lost revenue through cancelled fundraising initiatives, gaming trusts, government or philanthropic repurposing, and reduced corporate and public donations. Some saw further fundraising opportunities being considerably reduced with an expected recession coming as a consequence of the pandemic.

Survey participants reported reforecasting, restructuring, seeking alternative income streams and changing their business models.

Funding impacts

We asked survey participants to indicate how COVID-19 impacted their revenue for the year ahead compared to the previous 12 months. A substantial majority (74%) experienced or were expecting reduced funding, 14% forecast no change and only 5% experienced or expected an increase in funding. When asked to specify the loss in monetary terms, those who were able to do so (622 responses) indicated losses in the range of less than \$1,000 to \$9 million, with a median decrease of \$35,000. The small number of participants (38) who could specify funding increases were in the range of \$5,000 to \$5 million, with a median increase of \$65,000.

“We have been declined by four grants in a week that we have previously been given.”

Responses indicated that most participating organisations had funds or operational funding in reserve to enable some continuity (noting that at the time, almost one-third of participating organisations were accessing the government’s wage subsidy). But for many, without ongoing funding, their positions were clearly precarious. One-fifth (20%) had sufficient funds to maintain staff and activity for two to three months. A further 15% had sufficient funds to enable staff and activity for four to five months. Almost one-half (46%) had sufficient funds to maintain staff and activity for six months or more.

Service delivery impacts

When asked to indicate the impacts of COVID-19 on the level of services, a majority of participants (59%) indicated they had cut back on service delivery. One-fifth (20%) indicated services were maintained at the same level, and 17% indicated some increases in service delivery.

Reasons for reducing service delivery included social distancing restrictions; restrictions on events or large gatherings; closing or halting operations during lockdown; and reduced income. Increased community need was a key driver for increasing service delivery. This included a sharp increase in the demand for services, response to material hardship, and impacts on emotional wellbeing.

Challenges and opportunities

Participants noted the most common challenges of COVID-19 were meeting the needs of the people we support (66%); ensuring sufficient revenue to maintain viability (58%); ensuring staff and volunteers were well supported (51%); developing new service offerings (41%); changing our service provision to meet public health criteria (40%); and meeting the levels of work required (39%).

“Remain calm, roll with the punches, don't be afraid to test something new out quickly (and be prepared to learn from the outcome), keep at it/be resilient and determined, be agile...”

The most common opportunities surfaced by COVID-19 were a stronger sense of community or common values (47%); new ways of connecting with those using services (46%); working closer with other organisations for the common good (40%); greater appreciation for and recognition of work being delivered (38%); options around where and how organisations work (34%); and ability to move quickly (30%).

Key priorities and concerns

Dealing with financial uncertainty, managing the impacts of this uncertainty on service delivery, and organisational viability were the most prominent priorities or concerns, raised by 43% of participants. These responses followed three broad themes: concern regarding diminished or precarious financial resources; challenges to service delivery or viability including the challenge of now doing even more with less; and steps planned or taken to maintain funding continuity or manage impacts of financial uncertainty.

“With the increase in clients but not in revenue, our current staff levels are inadequate but we can't afford to take on new employees.”

“Most funders want to fund sexy new programmes. Right now, we need grass roots, basic funding with no special ties to programming. We just want to survive, revive, and thrive.”

Other priorities participants identified were meeting the needs of communities (23%); resuming business as usual and operating in the 'new normal' (16%); and recruiting, retaining and supporting the wellbeing of staff and volunteers (11%).

Taking action

Steps taken in response to COVID-19

We asked organisations to indicate if they had made changes to how they delivered services. Almost all indicated changes. Some 16% made 'minor' changes, 39% made 'some' changes and 31% made 'major' changes. Only 11% said they made no changes.

Many participating organisations were rapidly innovating and adapting delivery in response to COVID-19. Notable areas included delivering more remote online or phone services (54%), seeking new funding sources (35%), and reducing some services (31%). Reducing service costs, changing organisational rules or purpose to enable new activities, and developing in-person service offerings were each selected by 10-11% of participants.

“With extensively exploring remote service offerings, and the creation of new online options for families, our team would definitely like to explore this as an extension of our current programmes.”

Lockdown also resulted in some changes in staffing and volunteer input, including reducing volunteer support (14%); reducing staff wages and salaries (12%); reducing staff numbers (9%); increasing volunteer support (12%); and increasing staff (5%).

Accessing support

Survey participants accessed a wide range of supports in response to COVID-19. Principal among these was the government's Wage Subsidy Scheme, accessed by 35% of participants. A further 18% accessed other government COVID-related funding, and 17% accessed new funding sources. Some 15% received donated goods and services and 11% engaged voluntary support. A large proportion (35%) indicated not applicable.

Shaping the future

INSIGHTS: Survey participants largely remain upbeat and positive, excited about the possibilities for change that COVID-19 has opened up. They have enormous optimism. They developed a new confidence and proficiency through having their own team strengths and capabilities realised. The strong sense of togetherness, digital connectivity and revitalised sense of value and purpose resulted in a renewed sense of vibrancy.

Collective effort across the sector, government and philanthropy is now needed to revive funding sources, replenish reserves, reshape the volunteer base, build technological and social infrastructure and skills, and rethink how services are delivered, supported and funded.

Short-term outlooks and supports needed

Despite the challenges of COVID-19, survey participants were generally optimistic about the continuity of their organisations. We asked participants to rate on a six-point scale how pessimistic or optimistic they were regarding whether their organisation would still be operating in six months time. Two-thirds (65%) were very confident, rating six. A further 17% rated five. Only 4% rated very pessimistic (rating one) and a further 3% gave a rating of two.

When asked to indicate the five most needed areas of support, the most highly rated areas of support were fundraising (57%); marketing and communications (45%); digital technology (40%); innovation and strategic advice (36%); grant writing (27%); and more volunteers (26%). These responses indicated there remained significant gaps in the available (and funded) resourcing for community organisations to deliver core services.

Strengthening the sector

The most commonly needed changes selected by participants to strengthen the community and voluntary sector into the future were collaboration between organisations (65%) and funding to cover salaries and operational costs (62%). Other areas of strengthening included sector-wide leadership to provide voice and influence (40%), access to information and data in one place (35%), strengthening governance knowledge and skills in the sector (34%), and strengthening financial management knowledge and skills (32%).

“A silver lining of COVID-19 has been the immense increase in networking and collaboration and we need to continue this momentum.”

Lessons from COVID-19

A range of learning emerged from the experience of COVID-19. Many highlighted the importance of responsiveness and flexibility (12%) and being open to new ways of working. Participants also mentioned significant advances in information technology capability and the value generated by these changes (11%). Many reflected on the extent to which COVID-19 revealed the strengths of teams and organisations (10%). COVID-19 also appeared to be a powerful catalyst for relationship-building and cross-sector collaboration (6%). Others highlighted the importance of preparedness as a key learning (5%).

Gearing up for the future...working with industry to get practices and policies that work in the future (we've proven it can be done differently) rather than going back to what worked before—it's a whole new world!"

Sustaining sector voices

Following public release of this report, we intend to release the survey results as an open dataset. This will enable other organisations in the tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector, government and philanthropy to re-use the data. This will provide another level of value to the contribution from the community organisations who generously took the time to complete the survey.

Survey approach and participants

Data collection

We distributed the survey via email and social media networks from late May to mid-June 2020, as Aotearoa moved between Levels 2 and 1 of the pandemic alert levels.

We distributed the survey to people on the email databases of the partner organisations (Centre for Social Impact, Hui E! Community Aotearoa, Philanthropy New Zealand, and Volunteering New Zealand). We used a snowball sampling approach in which we encouraged recipients to distribute the survey to others in the sector. We sent regular reminders through social media and email (Figure 1), and engaged media networks to increase awareness and uptake of the survey.

The survey was intended for people who were either senior in their organisations, or who had some level of authority to be able to complete the survey on behalf of their organisation. For this reason, we included an initial screening question asking participants if they were able to respond on behalf of their organisation.

The survey included a mix of open-ended and closed-response questions.

In total, 1,746 people accessed the survey and answered the screening question, of which 1,424 were eligible to participate.

We quantified as percentages the themes arising in responses to stand-alone qualitative questions, to a minimum of 1.50%. We did not calculate percentages for 'other' responses to quantitative questions, or for qualitative questions where the number of responses was significantly lower than other questions (below 300 responses).

The sampling approach means that the results may not be representative of the community sector across Aotearoa; nor can a response rate be accurately calculated. The results do however highlight some key themes that can inform the future. The breadth of responses we received indicated a broad cross-section of the community and voluntary sector participated in the survey.

Figure 1: Examples of communications messaging for survey

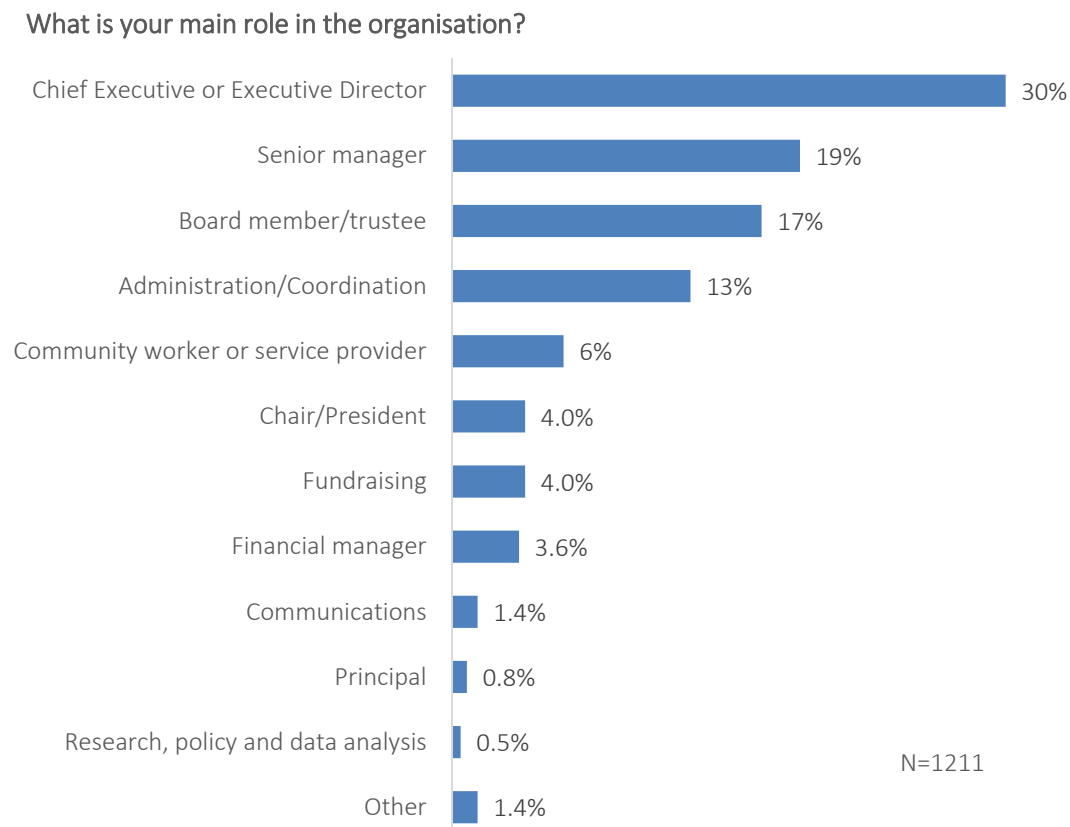


Survey participant profiles

Organisational roles

More than 60% of survey participants were in senior roles in their organisations, whether as chief executives or executive directors (30%), senior managers (19%), or board members/trustees (17%), and administration/coordination roles (13%). There was a spread of other organisational roles, as detailed in Figure 2. 'Other' responses included facilitators, volunteers and ministers (1.4%).

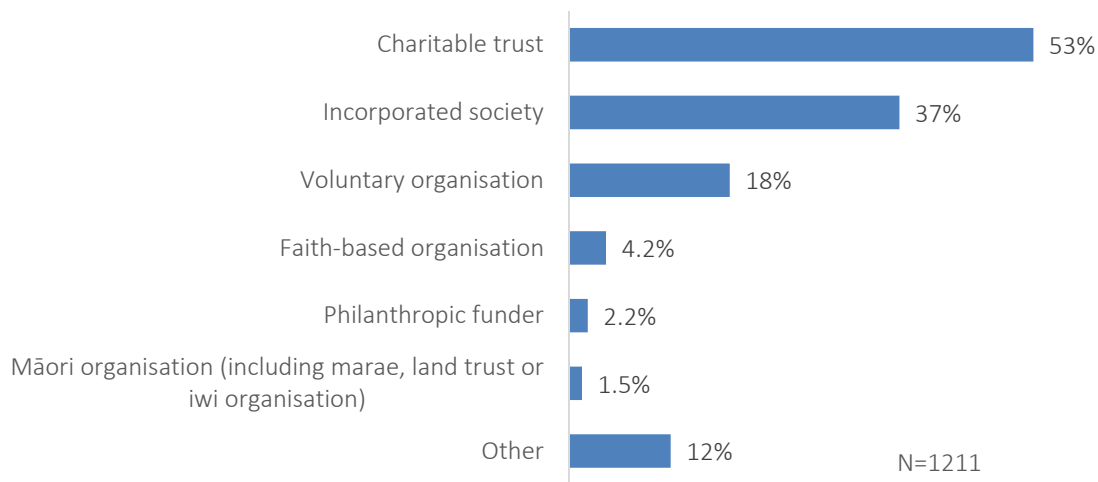
Figure 2: Survey participants' organisational roles



When asked about the type of organisation participants were representing, more than half were charitable trusts (53%), and a third were incorporated societies (37%). A further 18% were voluntary organisations, and 4% were faith-based organisations. (Figure 3). 'Other' types of organisations included schools, sports organisations, businesses, social enterprises and creative organisations (12%).

Types of organisations

Figure 3: Types of organisations represented by participants

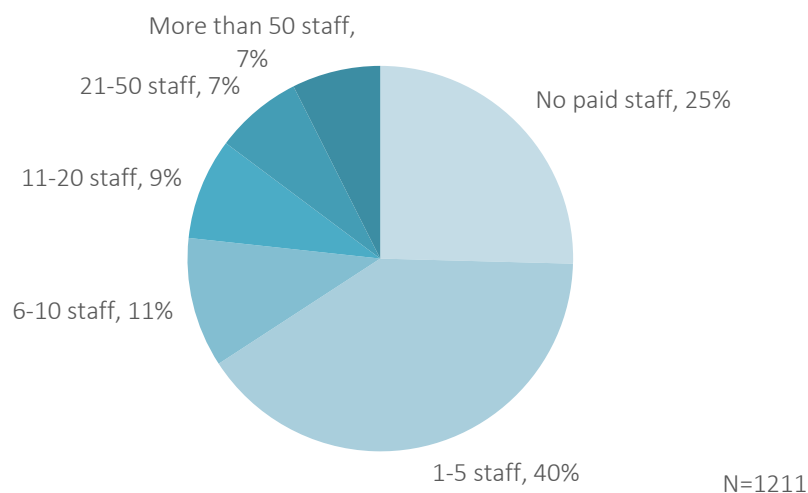


Note: Multiple responses could be selected

Staffing, volunteer and revenue levels

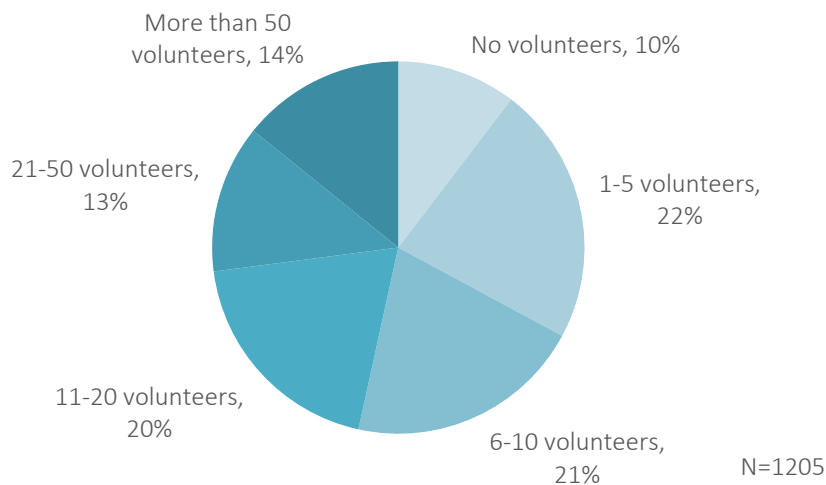
Participating organisations had a wide range of staffing levels: one-quarter (25%) had no paid staff and a further 40% had one to five staff. Similar proportions were recorded for six to ten staff, 11 to 20 staff, and higher levels (between 7% to 11% each, Figure 4).

Figure 4: Paid staff and contractors in participating organisations



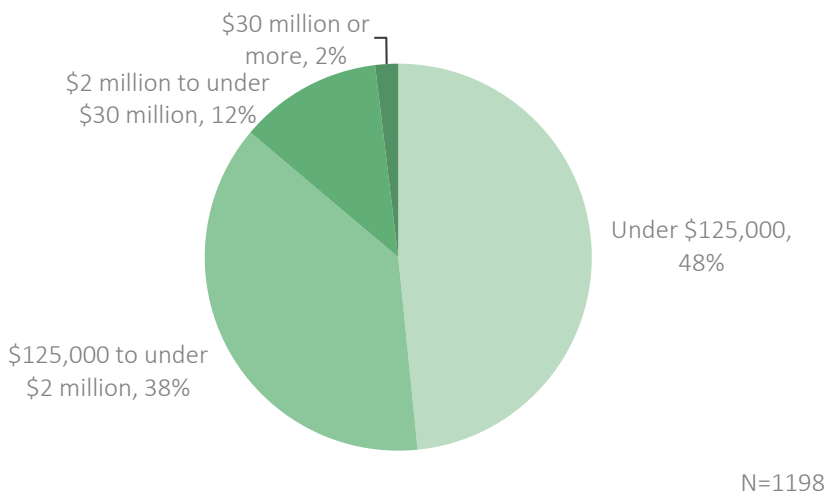
Almost all organisations had some level of voluntary activity. On a monthly basis, 10% had no volunteers, while one to five volunteers, six to ten volunteers and 11 to 20 volunteers were each reported by 20% to 22% of participants. More than a quarter had more than 20 volunteers each month (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Volunteers engaged by participating organisations (per month)



Using Charities Services’ tiered system of Tier 1 to Tier 4 levels, we asked participants to indicate their annual revenue. Almost half (48%) had revenues of less than \$125,000 per annum, and a further 38% had revenue between \$125,000 and \$2 million per annum. The remaining 14% had more than \$2 million annual revenue (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Participating organisations’ annual income

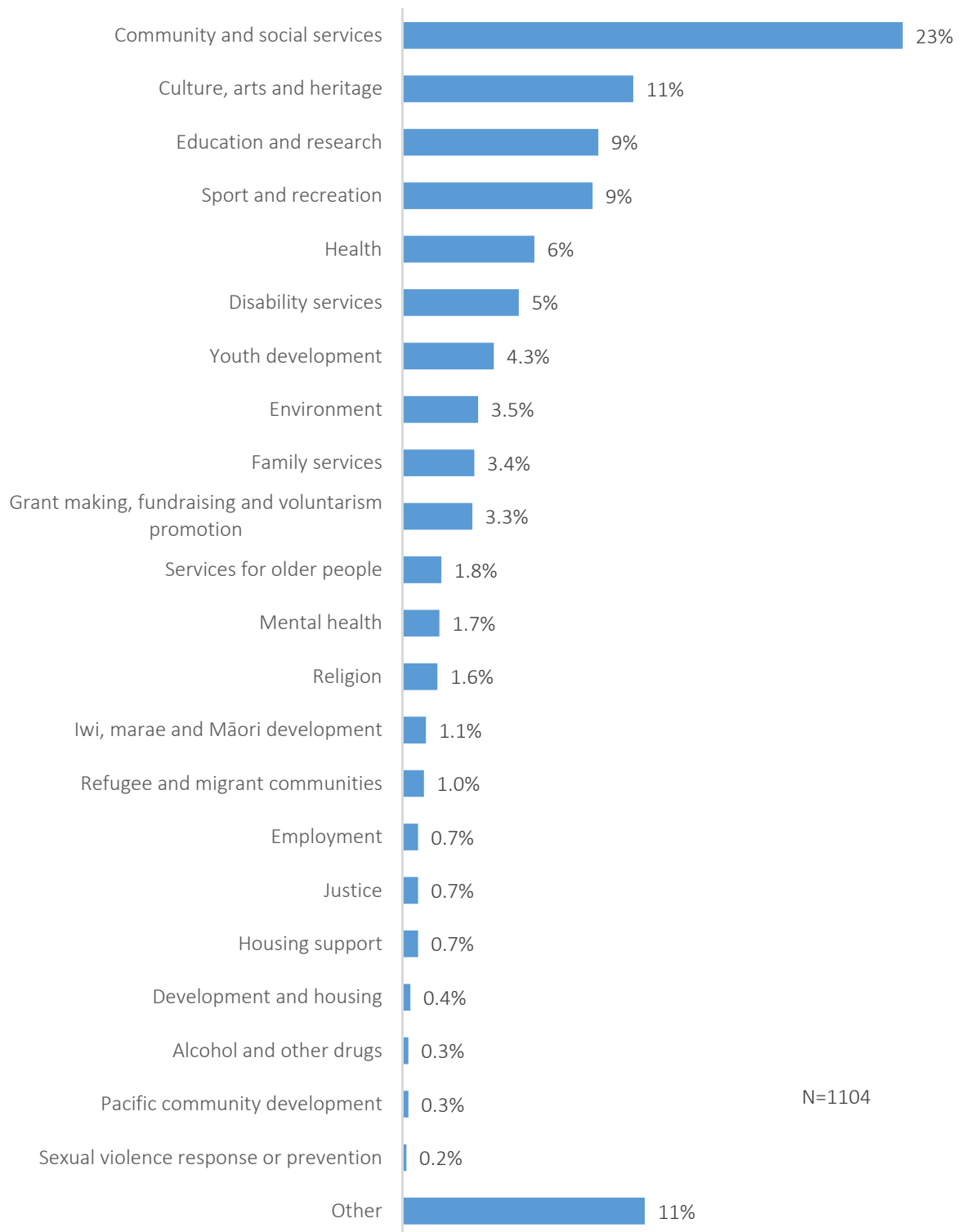


Activities and services

We asked survey participants to choose from a drop-down list a category that most closely aligned with their activities or services. The most common responses received were community and social services (23%), culture, arts and heritage (11%), education and research (9%), sport and recreation (9%), health (6%) and disability services (5%) (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Participating organisations' activities or services

Of the following, which best describes your organisation's activities or services?



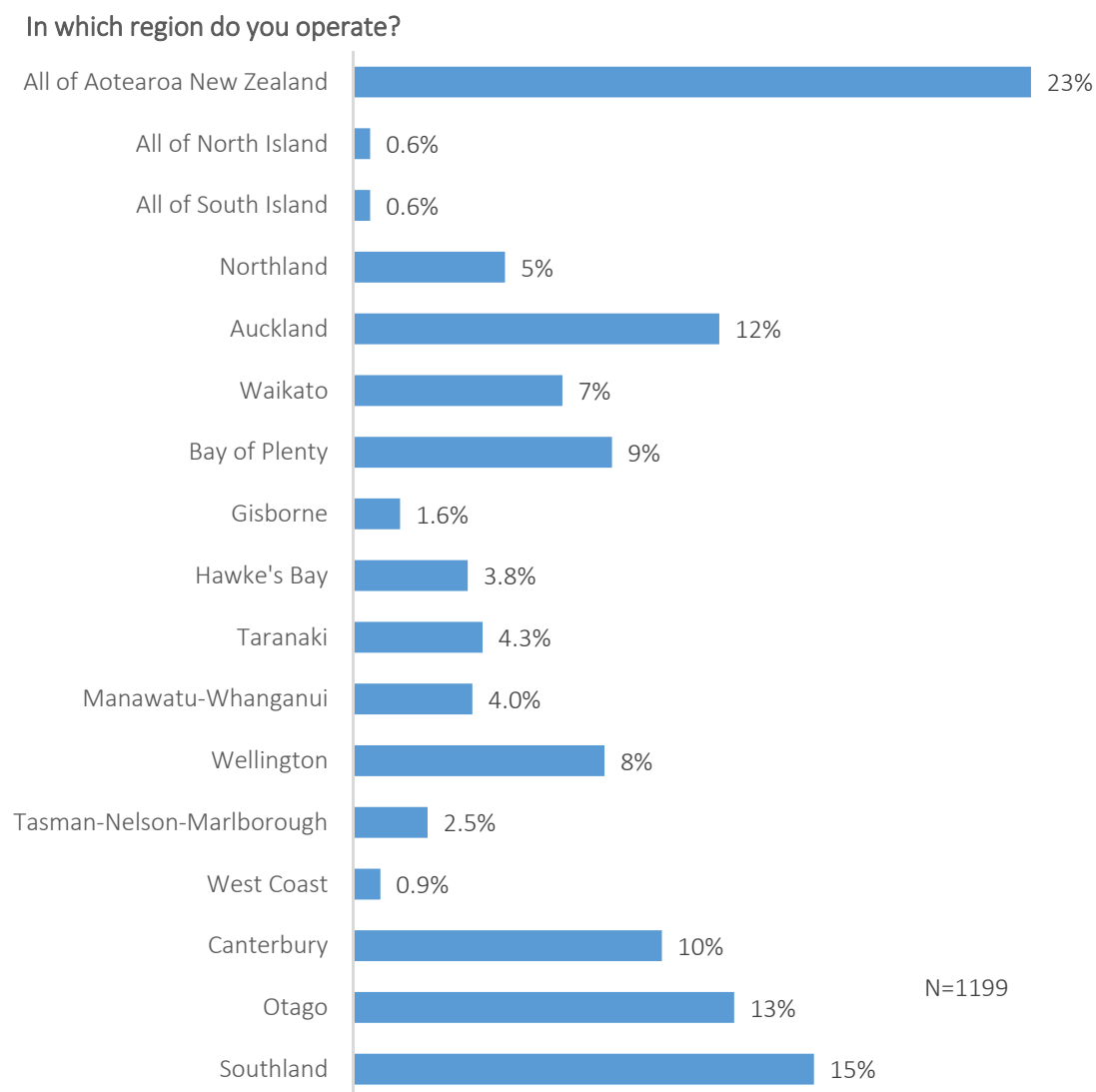
Regional spread

The substantial majority of organisations worked only in Aotearoa New Zealand (91%). A further 8% worked in New Zealand and elsewhere, and only 0.8% worked solely outside New Zealand.

Of those that worked in Aotearoa New Zealand (either solely or overseas as well), the activities of one-quarter (23%) covered all of the country, and there was a significant spread across individual regions, including Southland (15%), Otago (13%), Auckland (12%), Canterbury (10%), Bay of Plenty (9%), Wellington (8%) and Waikato (7%) (Figure 8).

It is likely that many nationally-focused organisations are based in Auckland and Wellington, which would partly explain the relatively low percentages for these regions. We note also that there was significant interest and outreach in the Otago-Southland regions to this survey. Multiple responses could be selected for this question.

Figure 8: Regions where participating organisations operate

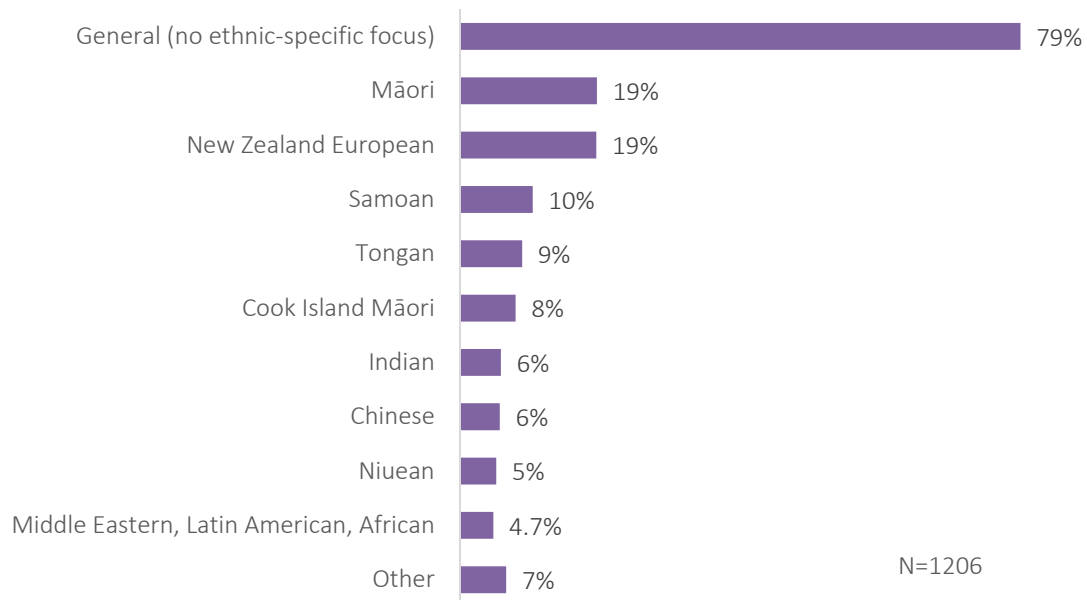


Note: Multiple regions could be selected

Ethnic focus

Although a substantial proportion of participants indicated their organisation didn't have an ethnicity focus (79%), there remained a wide range of organisations that had a diverse ethnicity focus, including Māori (19%), New Zealand European (19%), Samoan (10%), Tongan (9%), and Cook Island Māori (8%) (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Ethnic focus of participating organisations' activities



Note: Multiple responses could be selected

Shining a light

Acknowledging effort and effect

“We have never worked so hard with so little” sums up the experience of some organisations who were able to continue to provide services throughout lockdown.

Survey participants talked about moving rapidly—some noted ahead of government—to help with material hardship, food assistance, shopping and deliveries, emergency accommodation, care packages, budgeting assistance, job hunting, utility payments, and to reduce and address loneliness and isolation.

Umbrella organisations and peak bodies mentioned increasing their support for their members. They provided advice around health and safety, staffing, budgeting, and staff and volunteer wellbeing. They supported online set-up and business continuity.

Organisations talked about adapting and diversifying to changing needs, developing new programmes, doing what was needed even if it wasn't their core work, or shifting to online support.

Organisations that were unable to provide their usual services noted creative ways to keep relevant and keep connected remotely with their members. They talked about their value in setting up communities to be physically, emotionally and spiritually resilient to get through a challenge such as the pandemic.

Survey participants noted a revitalised sense of the value of community organisations' contributions, purpose, and of the important role they play in the lives of their clients, members and stakeholders.

Some participants extended praise and thanks to government and related agencies for their response to COVID-19 on a national scale.

Surfacing strengths

Survey participants highlighted some clear strengths and service adaptability within and across organisations. In particular:

- unlocking a previously unknown capacity for flexibility and innovation
- being responsive, nimble, adaptive and resourceful
- an appreciation of technology as a powerful tool (with caveats) offering new ways to connect and communicate and deliver some services and the extent to which it was embraced by clients, members and stakeholders
- the extent to which COVID-19 revealed the strengths and capabilities of their teams and organisations
- the immense value in working together and the huge appetite for collaborating across the not-for-profit sector, which was seen by many as being key to its sustainability.

Taking stock

Funding impacts of COVID-19

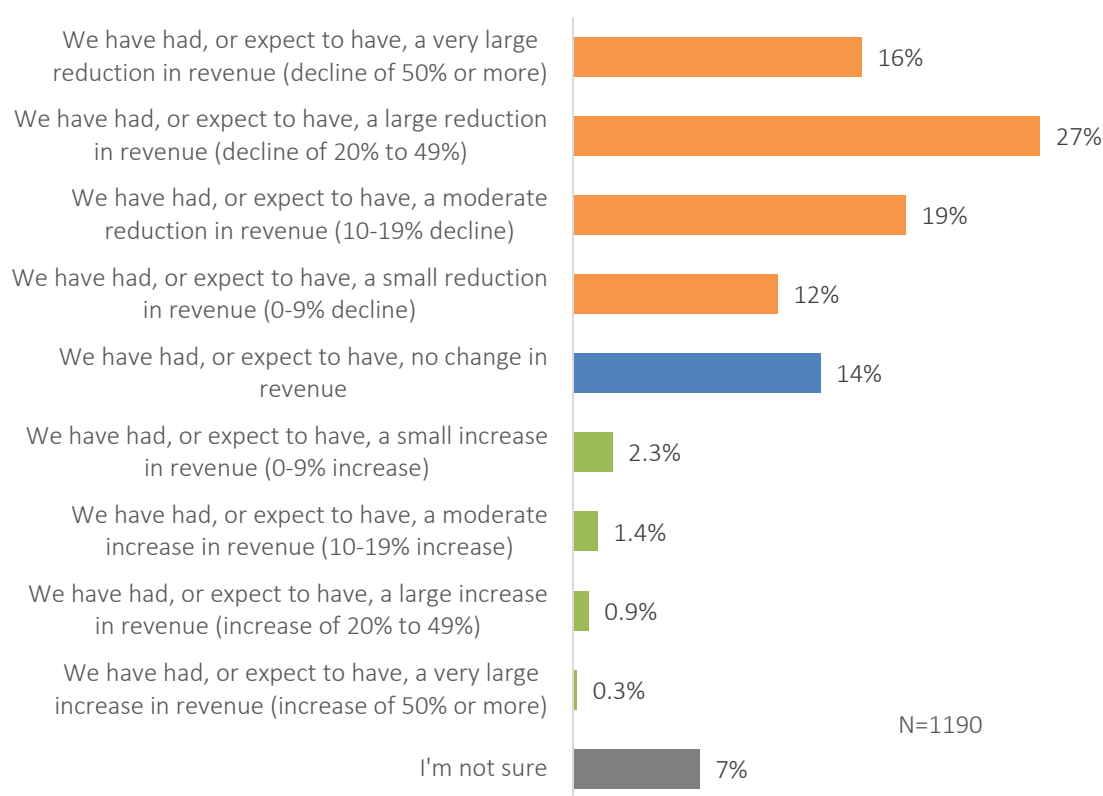
Scale of funding impacts

We asked survey participants to indicate how COVID-19 would impact their revenue for the year ahead, compared to the previous 12 months. A substantial majority (74%) experienced or were expecting a reduction in funding, 14% forecast no change and only 4.9% experienced or expected an increase in funding (Figure 10).

Of those expecting a loss of revenue, 12% indicated a small loss (0-9%), 19% indicated a moderate reduction (10-19%), 27% indicated a large reduction (20-49%), and 16% indicated a very large reduction (50% or more).

Figure 10: Funding/revenue impacts of COVID-19

Please tell us how COVID-19 has affected your funding or revenue for the 12 months ahead, compared to the previous 12 months



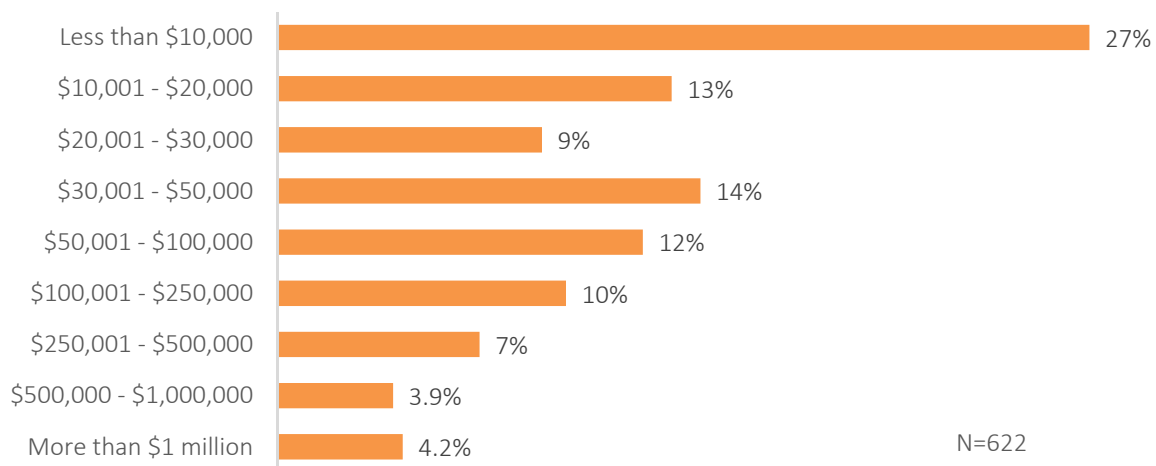
Quantifying funding impacts

In this section we explore the levels of funding decreases and increases reported by survey participants. To improve comparability of responses, we have excluded philanthropic funders from this analysis, so that as much as possible the responses are limited to those receiving funding in different forms. This removed 11 responses from the analysis.

When we asked participants to specify the loss in monetary terms, those who were able to do so (622 responses) indicated losses in the range of less than \$1,000 to \$9 million. The median decrease was \$35,000, and the average (mean) decrease was \$220,000. This suggested that small numbers of participants reporting large cuts in funding were shifting the average to a level much higher than the bulk of the sample. This is apparent in Figure 11 below, where one-quarter of participants (27%) reported reductions of less than \$10,000, and 63% reported reductions of less than \$50,000. Nevertheless, as subsequent sections reveal, these losses have consequences for organisations and the people they serve.

Figure 11: Reported reductions in funding as a result of COVID-19

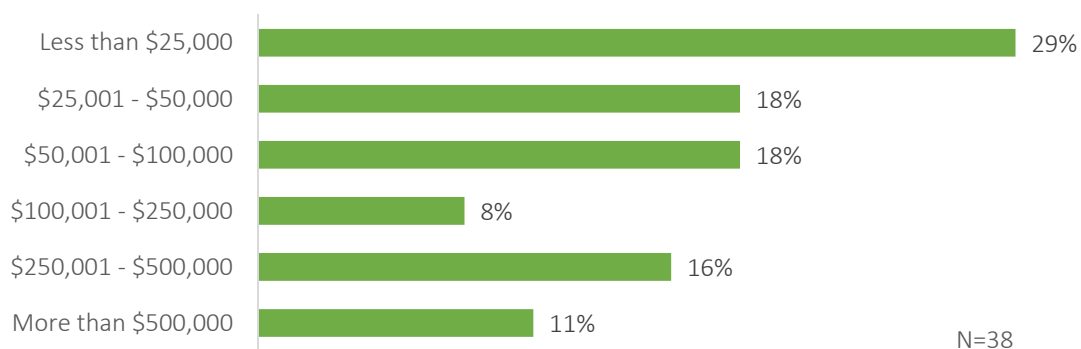
Reported reductions in funding as a result of COVID-19



Similarly, when we asked participants to specify the funding increase in monetary terms, those who were able to do so indicated increases in the range of \$5,000 to \$5 million. This was a substantially smaller group of 38 participants. The median increase was \$65,000 and the average (mean) increase was \$489,000. As with decreases, this indicated larger increases in funding for a few organisations were shifting the average to a higher level than the main group of participants. This is shown in Figure 12 below, where almost one-half of participants to this question (47%) reported increases of less than \$50,000, and only 11% reported increases of more than \$500,000.

Figure 12: Reported increases in funding as a result of COVID-19

Reported increases in funding as a result of COVID-19

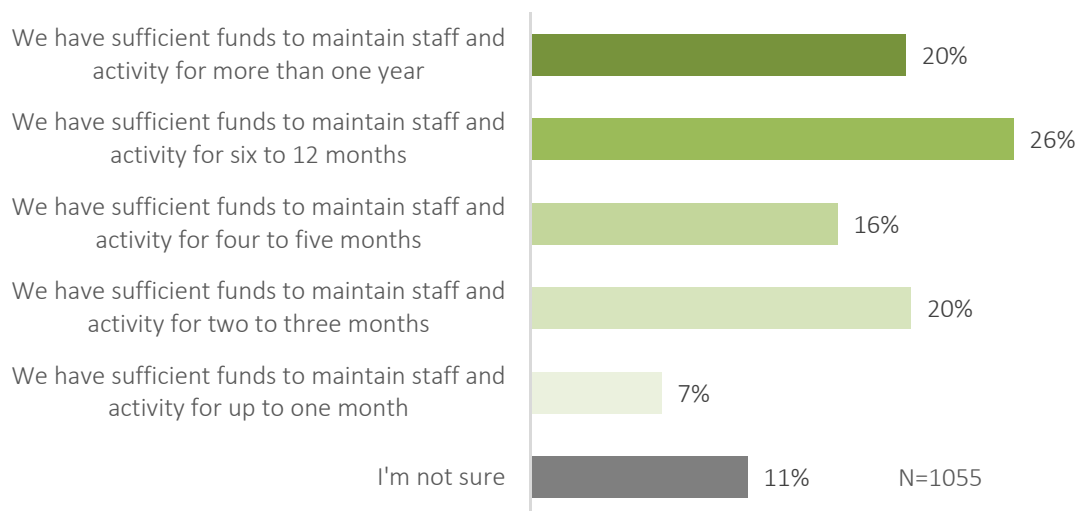


Funding reserves

Responses indicated that most participating organisations had funds in reserve to enable some continuity in the face of COVID-19. One-fifth (20%) had sufficient funds to maintain staff and activity for two to three months, and a further 15% had sufficient funds to enable staff and activity for four to five months. Almost one-half (46%) had sufficient funds to maintain staff and activity for six months or more (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Participating organisations' funding reserves

Please indicate from the list below how much funding your organisation has in reserve to maintain staff and activity



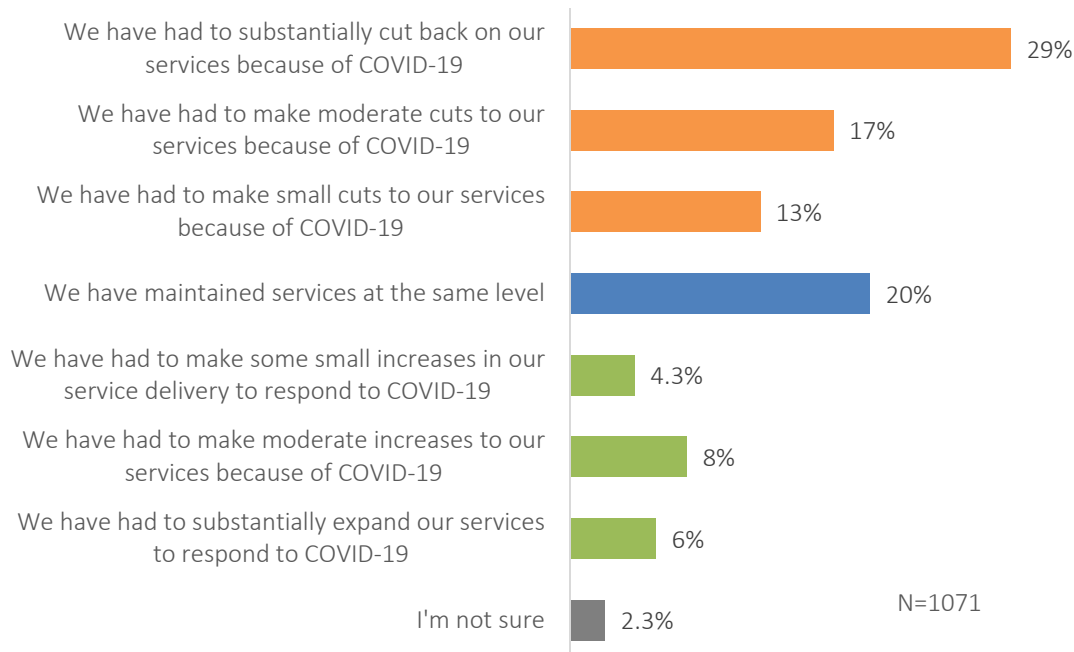
Service delivery impacts

Level of service delivery

When we asked participants to indicate the impacts of COVID-19 on the level of services, a majority of participants (59%) indicated they had cut back on service delivery, with 13% indicating small cuts, 17% indicating moderate cuts and 29% indicating substantial cuts (Figure 14). One-fifth (20%) indicated services were maintained at the same level, and 17% indicated some increases in service delivery (4% noting small increases, 8% noting moderate increases and 6% substantially expanding services).

Figure 14: Service delivery impacts of COVID-19

How is COVID-19 affecting your current level of service delivery?



Service level reductions

Social distancing restrictions

As noted above, 59% of participants reported cutting back service delivery. The most prominent reason for this was being unable to engage face-to-face with service users (indicated by 17% of all participants to this question). Many elaborated that much of the work undertaken by their organisation relied on close personal interaction, either individually or in groups. Consequently ‘social distancing’ or ‘no face-to-face contact’ resulted in key aspects of service delivery being halted for some or all of the lockdown levels. This included consultations, assessments, health checks, home visits, training and other supports.

“Our work relies on face-to-face contact with people and as such we have not been able to operate our programmes during lockdown. We do work in prisons and schools and even at Alert Level 2 we are unable to enter these facilities.”

“While we expect significant increases in demand post-COVID we cannot deliver our service while social distancing restrictions are in place.”

For many providers work could not resume until New Zealand reached lockdown Level 1. This was particularly for those working with vulnerable clients such as the elderly or chronically ill. Participants also faced significant restrictions for services provided in people’s homes or other confined spaces, and those requiring the gathering of larger groups. A few participants who identified themselves as working with particularly vulnerable populations would not resume services for some time after Level 1 was in place.

While a few participants spoke of interference to internal processes such as staff meetings, the majority described significant disruption to their core business, with unviable modes of service delivery and a large portion of their client base inaccessible.

“No gathering at all, no visiting, no personal counselling, cannot offer any assistance to the elderly.”

Beyond lockdown Levels 4 and 3, social distancing measures continued to impact capacity, productivity and workflow. Examples included lower numbers able to attend educational programmes, trainings, clubs or performances. A few participants noted the financial implications of significantly reduced capacity. Some participants shared how they were using digital technology to mitigate some impacts of social distancing on their work.

“Social distancing requirements—we can only sell 20/40 seats.”

“We have to operate with smaller numbers in order to social distance effectively...Much of our work is using safe touch to support learning and increase social connection. We are unable to do this.”

Restrictions on events or large gatherings

Cancelling or postponing events during lockdown, and the later restrictions on the nature and size of gatherings was reported by 11% of participants.

The impact on services based around events had been significant. Some participants noted the difficulty in shifting their offerings to an online format. A wide range of organisations reported that it was either impossible (Levels 4-3) or challenging (Levels 2-1) to hold in-person public events, and they reduced programmes significantly. Examples of events unable to take place included public meetings or consultations, competitions, exhibitions, performances, retreats, public faith-based events, camps, conferences, seminars and environmental restoration.

“We run free quarterly workshops that attract 70-100 people and we have canned two of these.”

Many participants reported having to modify timeframes, in some cases rescheduling for up to a year ahead. A few were unsure whether cancelled events would be reinstated in the near future, if at all, due to uncertainty regarding funding. For other organisations, a lack of certainty regarding when larger gatherings would be able to take place made planning for any event in 2020 hugely challenging.

“We run a conference as one of our primary service delivery offers. The COVID uncertainty meant it was impossible to plan for the conference (even though it is in November) so we have cancelled it.”

Groups working in the performing arts space accounted for a significant proportion of the participants impacted by event cancellations or restrictions. Participants representing these organisations were greatly impacted by being unable to rehearse or perform. Many productions were cancelled, while others were

postponed for up to a year, with significant financial impacts. Restrictions on theatre seating numbers continued to be a challenge for some of those who were able to host productions at the time of responding.

Closure or halt to operations during lockdown

For 11% of participants, their operations had to close or stop providing services due to lockdown measures. The majority of these participants shared that their service, venue, business, office, marae, community centre, museum, club, polytechnic, school or other community facilities were 'shut down', 'closed', 'locked down' or that they were unable to access their sites or premises. Many of these participants, particularly marae, community centres and drop-in services described being on-site as essential for delivering their service.

“Marae-based meant our whānau could not come here, and that our marae-based services could not operate.”

“We provide a day activity centre for frail elderly people. We have had to close since the beginning of Level 4 and are still closed.”

Some participants specified the length of time or lockdown levels at which their services ceased. The majority were unable to operate under Level 4 and 3, with severely limited operations at Level 2. The reasons given for services remaining closed at the lower lockdown levels were varied. They included protecting vulnerable volunteers, health and safety requirements, and because compliance was too complex.

Some participants noted that their organisations would be completely closed for an extended period, up to four months. A few participants shared that the delays in getting 'back to normal' left their organisations with reduced income to cover operating costs.

“We closed for seven weeks and now are working at one third capacity.”

Reduced income

Diminished financial resource was listed by 11% of participants as the key reason for reducing services. Most attributed their reduced income to the 'loss', 'withdrawal' or 'freezing' of existing funding in the form of grants and contracts. Many participants raised the loss of grants and funding, resources repurposed for the COVID-19 response, and uncertainty regarding contracts with central and local government. A few participants said their organisations had lost all funding sources and others anticipated real hardship retaining what they had.

Organisations that relied on donations from the public or philanthropy were also significantly impacted. Some participants said that COVID-19 had left them unable to plan or hold fundraising events within their communities. A few had decided not to fundraise for the foreseeable future because they did not want to add to the stress their communities were already facing.

The pandemic had also reduced interaction with potential philanthropic donors, and a small number of participants noted non-cash donations reduced. Similarly, they had experienced or anticipated a decrease in corporate donations and sponsorship. One participant, expecting a significant decrease in corporate donations for their charity, highlighted the precarity of all revenue sources:

“...We have been advised to expect a 70% reduction in income as business struggles to get back on its feet. Likewise, the gaming trusts who are our usual funding sources for operational costs are suspended, and there’s uncertainty around what will be available moving forward.”

Organisations that received client fees or earned revenue by other means also experienced reduced income, in most cases due to being unable to operate during lockdown. Examples included declines in revenue from café sales, social enterprises, advertising and student fees.

A few organisations had lost rental income from tenants unable to operate and pay. Others who relied on income from venue hire were impacted by cancellations and reduced bookings. Organisations working in the event or performance space lost revenue from ticket sales, sponsorship or payments for corporate events. Budget cuts by event partners such as corporate sponsors and local government were a further cause of lost revenue.

“Because we could not earn revenue during lockdown, we spent all our reserves on rent and power and have nothing left in the coffers to build programming. We are basically starting all over again.”

Many of these participants spoke of how funding cuts had resulted in reduced staffing, explaining how restructuring or downsizing staff numbers was, in turn, impacting the scope, quality and impact of services they provided.

“Less \$ means we had to let go staff, therefore don't have the staff to do the same level of work.”

“Because of our funding cuts we are down to 80% payment for staff. Therefore we are only working four day weeks. The demand is there (higher than ever) but our funding and serviceability isn't.”

Other responses

The vulnerability of clients, and to a lesser extent members, was a further reason for reducing or halting services due to COVID-19. For this group (3% of participants), service provision was seen as exposing clients to undue risk. While many of these participants did not provide specifics, some referred to the people they serve, such as older people, high risk, or clients with underlying health issues. A few of these participants noted that pivoting to online delivery would not work for the communities they serve.

Challenges related to using, recruiting and retaining volunteers was a further reason for reducing services (3% of participants). Many indicated that their services were reduced because the majority of their volunteers were older adults in the 70 years and over age group. Others experienced reduced volunteer numbers due to resignations, reluctance to return in the current climate, or because volunteers were unable to work from home.

“Only 15 [out of] 40 frontline volunteers have returned under Level 2.”

For a small number of participants (2%), their ability to deliver services was impacted by partners, stakeholders or supporters reducing their operations. Examples included the impact of school closures, restrictions on visiting rest homes and prisons, and the extended closure of some charities. Some organisations that relied on spaces located in or donated by other organisations, such as libraries or polytechnics, had their activities restricted by ongoing closures. Others relied on donations from businesses that were closed.

Other areas of discussion related to how the different needs of clients had impacted their organisation’s ability to deliver services online. Examples included material hardship, age, learning disabilities or language barriers. A further theme was the impact of border closures on service delivery.

No changes to service levels

One-fifth (20%) of participants indicated they made no changes to service levels. The most frequently cited reason for this was because participants changed their delivery method. They maintained delivery by bringing their services online and connecting with their clients remotely via phone, text or video conferencing in place of face-to-face meetings. A few participants highlighted inequity in client access to online services. One provider addressed the issue by distributing data packages and Chromebooks to ensure clients could continue to engage with their programme.

A further group of participants spoke in general terms about maintaining pre-COVID levels of delivery without providing specifics. Some shared that demand for support had increased and cutting back services ‘when it is needed most’ was not an option.

For some organisations, access to available funds from cash reserves was a further reason they were able to maintain service delivery.

Some providers noted their service had not suffered significant disruption because they had completed delivery or closed for the season by the time COVID-19 became a significant threat. Most of these organisations operated predominantly over the summer period.

Further themes were that funding had not yet been affected, the participant’s organisation had been deemed an essential service, and that smarter and harder work from staff ensured a product or service was still delivered, despite disruptions.

Service level increases

Service level increases were reported by 17% of participants. Of those in this group, most did so in order to meet growing need in the communities they served. Most of these participants delivered frontline services, and many specified increased material hardship as the reason for the surge in demand. Others (in substantially smaller proportions) were providing increased support to organisations or practitioners dealing with increased demand. A further group contributed in a formal capacity to the COVID-19 response of Civil Defence/Emergency Management or other government entities. Other reasons provided for an increase in service were the resource intensive nature of digital delivery, adapting and changing operations, and COVID-19-related health and safety compliance.

Increased community need

Some 11% of all participants indicated the need to increase service delivery to cater for a sharp rise in demand for services from families and individuals. These participants described a surge in the level of need within the communities they served. Many spoke in general terms about expanding, adapting or extending services in

order to keep up with increased demand. Some had taken on additional staff. Many of these participants indicated that COVID-19 had led to numerous new clients engaging with their service. A few specified an increase in demand, from 30% to six fold.

“We went from helping 20 families to 80.”

“To respond to the community need. We don't receive additional funding for additional services but we feel strongly about helping our community in their time of need.”

“Due to many migrants affected by the pandemic we have to substantially expand our working hours to cater to the demands, request of information and guiding them to the right resources.”

Some providers found the needs of their existing service users increased or became more complex, and they had to adapt and expand accordingly. Some of these participants shared that COVID-19 led those they served to be more engaged with their services. Others described being in more frequent contact with their clients in order to better monitor and maintain their health and wellbeing.

“Responding to emotional and physical needs of people with disabilities and their families which are greater through this pandemic. People with disabilities were some of the first into lockdown and will be the last to emerge.”

Common among this group was a response to material hardship. Reasons for increased services included ‘poverty’, ‘hardship support’ and ‘increased demand for welfare services’. Many participants specified the nature of their work or the welfare issue addressed. An increase in demand for food assistance received numerous mentions, with participants sharing that their clients were experiencing ‘increased food instability’ and that ‘the demand for food parcels has increased exponentially’. Greater need for emergency accommodation, care packages, budgeting assistance and job hunting support also received multiple mentions.

“A large increase of people in emergency housing and now in the process of securing permanent housing for them.”

“We provide care packages for infants living with material hardship. COVID-19 has seen demand for these packages increase significantly.”

“We have had to respond to 1100 households to distribute food parcels and utility payments. We brought in volunteers to do the work.”

A small number of participants attributed the increase in demand for their services to the impact of COVID-19 on some people’s emotional wellbeing. Increased loneliness and isolation were identified as issues for both younger people and older adults. A few participants noted heightened demand as families struggled with change, home schooling and other transitions.

A further group identified their working with people of a higher risk profile as a reason for increased demand. They took on the additional work of ensuring their clients received the services they needed, such as shopping/food and healthcare.

Remote working and service delivery

A small proportion (2%) of participants indicated increases to services due to the resource intensive nature of remote working or service delivery. Many had moved their service delivery online in response to COVID-19, and some were delivering through a range of channels. These participants reported finding digital client contact to be more time consuming than conventional in-person delivery as they were often in more regular, personal contact with their service users.

A few noted difficulties making contact with clients. Others noted an increased workload associated with the capacity and connectivity required for volunteers and staff to work remotely, and with supporting clients to connect online.

“Our weekly group has moved to an online platform as we cannot meet in person...we have aimed to keep in touch regularly with these individuals by phone, email or text, and provided some resources for use at home—all more time consuming than our usual in-person group delivery.”

Notably, some participants reported their intention to continue online delivery when face-to-face services resumed, depending on client preferences. They anticipated continued demand for online options, resulting in a permanent increase in the level of service.

Other responses

While the majority reported increasing frontline services, a small group (2% of participants) had to increase their services to support other organisations or practitioners in their work. These participants provided a range of services. Some represented networks or member organisations who increased support to their members who had increased demand for their services. Some provided support or capacity building in the areas of health and safety, business continuity planning, networking initiatives, communications and research.

Some reported increasing their services to support services moving into online delivery, e-commerce or digital marketing. This group also included organisations who were able to assist with funding for frontline COVID-19 response.

Other organisations reported having to make increases to their services because they were involved in providing formal COVID-19-related services on top of their customary service delivery (2%). Close to half of these participants reported being involved with the Civil Defence/Emergency Management response. This included assisting as part of the welfare committees or response teams, or operating as an essential service at their request.

“We were an essential service for MSD and also Civil Defence assisting people outside of our normal criteria.”

Some reported receiving additional contracts or other funding towards the COVID-19 response on top of their existing work (2%). Other examples included undertaking a sector support and liaison role and being involved in the government COVID-19 disability communications response.

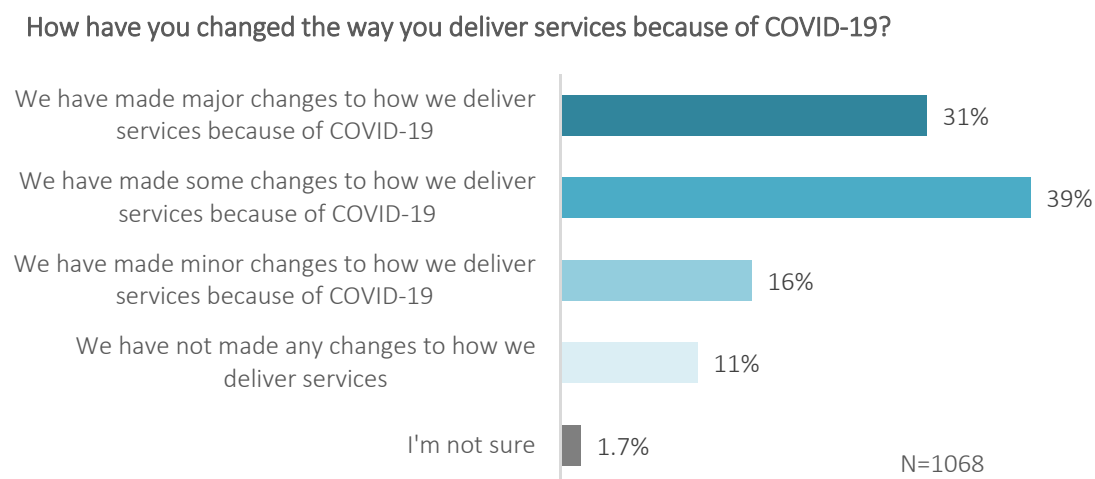
A further reason for increased services was adapting or diversifying operations in order to cater to the changing needs of communities. Participants described changing content or delivery, or developing programmes that filled an evident need. Examples included providing more wellbeing or COVID-19-related information, and advice and resources connecting clients with other relevant services.

COVID-19-related health and safety compliance also contributed to increases to service. Some were challenged by supporting clients individually who would ordinarily have engaged in group settings. This resulted in substantial increases in staff hours, administration, and information technology resources. Others reported modifying facilities, and cost and time increases due to increasing infection control procedures and supplies, or appointing a COVID-19 coordinator to manage risks.

Changes to how services were delivered

When we asked organisations to indicate if they had made changes to how they delivered services, almost all indicated changes. Some 16% made 'minor' changes, 39% made 'some' changes and 31% made 'major' changes (Figure 15). Only 11% made no changes. We discuss the types of steps taken in the 'Taking action' section.

Figure 15: Service delivery changes as a result of COVID-19



Challenges and opportunities

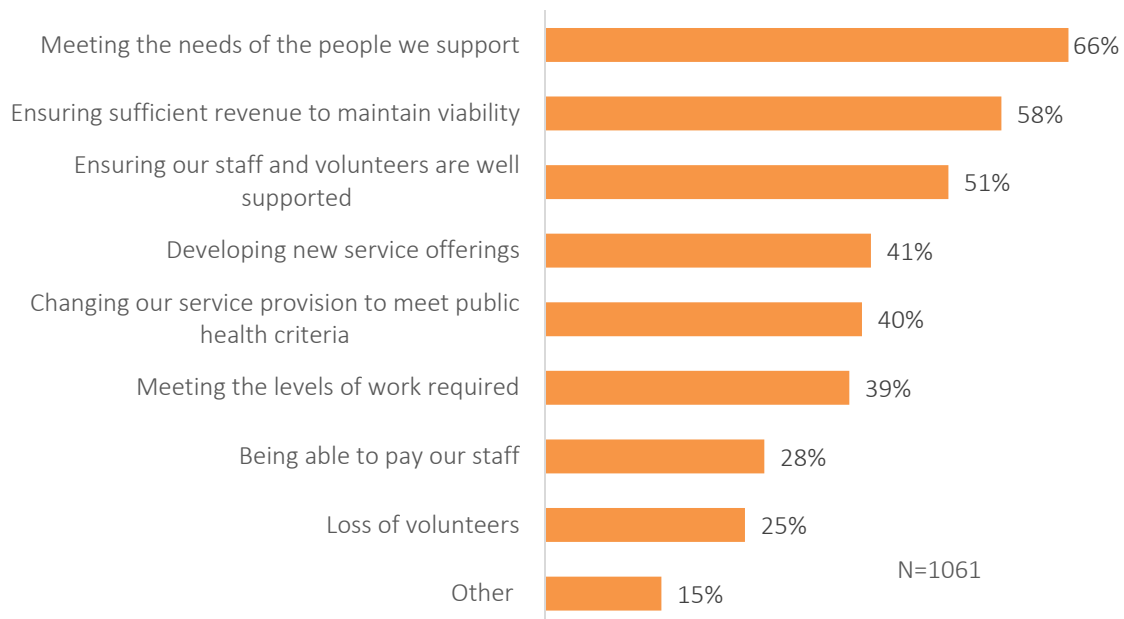
Key challenges presented by COVID-19

We asked survey participants to choose, from a drop-down list, up to five key challenges that they faced as a result of COVID-19. The most commonly noted challenges, as detailed in Figure 16, were:

- Meeting the needs of the people we support (66%)
- Ensuring sufficient revenue to maintain viability (58%)
- Ensuring staff and volunteers are well supported (51%)
- Developing new service offerings (41%)
- Changing our service provision to meet public health criteria (40%)
- Meeting the levels of work required (39%).

Figure 16: Key challenges faced by participating organisations

What would be the five main challenges that you currently face as a result of COVID-19?



Other challenges

Reduced income

Participants specified the other challenges faced by their organisations. The strongest theme was current and projected reduction in income. While many spoke in general terms of losing income or funding opportunities, others reported losing grants, sponsorship or contracts due to COVID-19. Several had grants postponed. A few were anticipating their contracts being cancelled or not renewed. A further theme was the challenge of obtaining funding from new sources as previous revenue streams became unavailable.

“Obtaining new funding from areas we have not applied to before.”

“A reduction in numbers of schools involved. This is our sole income stream.”

Some organisations were impacted by receiving less by way of donations from members, service users or the public. This was because fundraising opportunities were reduced due to lockdown, and there were closures and a decline in face-to-face contact with members. A few people anticipated that fundraising or obtaining sponsorship during a recession would be challenging. Others noted fewer individuals or organisations willing to pay for services because of reduced income. One participant highlighted that pivoting to online service delivery presented significant challenges in charging for services:

“Online capacity support is unable to generate revenue like face-to-face work is—if it's online people expect it for free.”

A further theme in relation to reduced income was difficulty meeting operational costs. Participants noted that their biggest challenges were paying rent, insurances, utilities, rates or maintenance costs for buildings and equipment. A few people noted that meeting operational costs is a challenge at **all times**, as funding frequently supports project delivery only.

Dealing with uncertainty

The challenge of operating in a climate of uncertainty was a further key theme in these responses. Participants shared that their most significant challenge was dealing with continual change and maintaining momentum when there was little certainty of what the next 12-24 months might look like. The ability of these organisations to plan for the future was affected by reduced income, limited ability to predict or control customer demand, or uncertainty around when large gatherings might be able to resume. A few participants shared that their organisations' plans to grow their services were now on hold given the current climate.

“Meeting the previous granting areas with reduced income and uncertainty about the income for the next 12-24 months makes planning very difficult.”

Supporting the wellbeing of members/clientele

A further theme in responses was the challenge of supporting the mental and physical wellbeing of their clients after COVID-19. Some participants shared that lockdown was detrimental to the mental health of those they support, in some cases due to financial hardship. Many of these participants were experiencing or expecting an increase in need for practical and emotional support from those who depend on their services. For some participants, this surge in demand was coupled with reduced resources with which to operate.

“Meeting the needs of people and families who have never experienced poverty, extreme stress and tough life-changing decisions.”

Other responses

Challenges recruiting staff and volunteers was a further theme in the data. Some participants stated that recruiting staff was a challenge. Others needed to take on new staff to meet increased demand, or struggled to find team members with the right skills. Recruiting new volunteers was an issue for some organisations, with COVID-19 intensifying staff turnover.

Inadequate technology, computer skills and expertise, in particular platforms such as social media, were key challenges for some organisations. A few wished to improve their use of information technology to offer more services online. Others were concerned about the limited access to technology of the people they serve, particularly those in disadvantaged communities.

Being flexible and adaptive were highlighted as challenges for some participants who described the difficulty of 'being agile and nimble to adapt fast enough' and remain viable. Participants were challenged by needing to pivot due to changes such as border closures or reduced client contact, adapting programmes and finding new ways of connecting with members.

Re-establishing confidence within the community to attend services or events was a challenge for some organisations. Where clients were reluctant to leave their 'bubbles' to re-engage with face-to-face services, this meant reduced session numbers, and difficulties planning ahead.

A further group cited rebuilding better after COVID-19 as a significant yet exciting challenge. These people saw the pandemic as an opportunity to reimagine the future and ‘do things better going forward’ as a sector.

“Gearing up for the future...working with industry to get practices and policies that work in the future (we’ve proven it can be done differently) rather than going back to what worked before—it’s a whole new world!”

Further themes included maintaining and developing relationships/partnerships, preserving or growing membership levels or patronage, and a lack of recognition from government of the sector’s unique challenges or concerns.

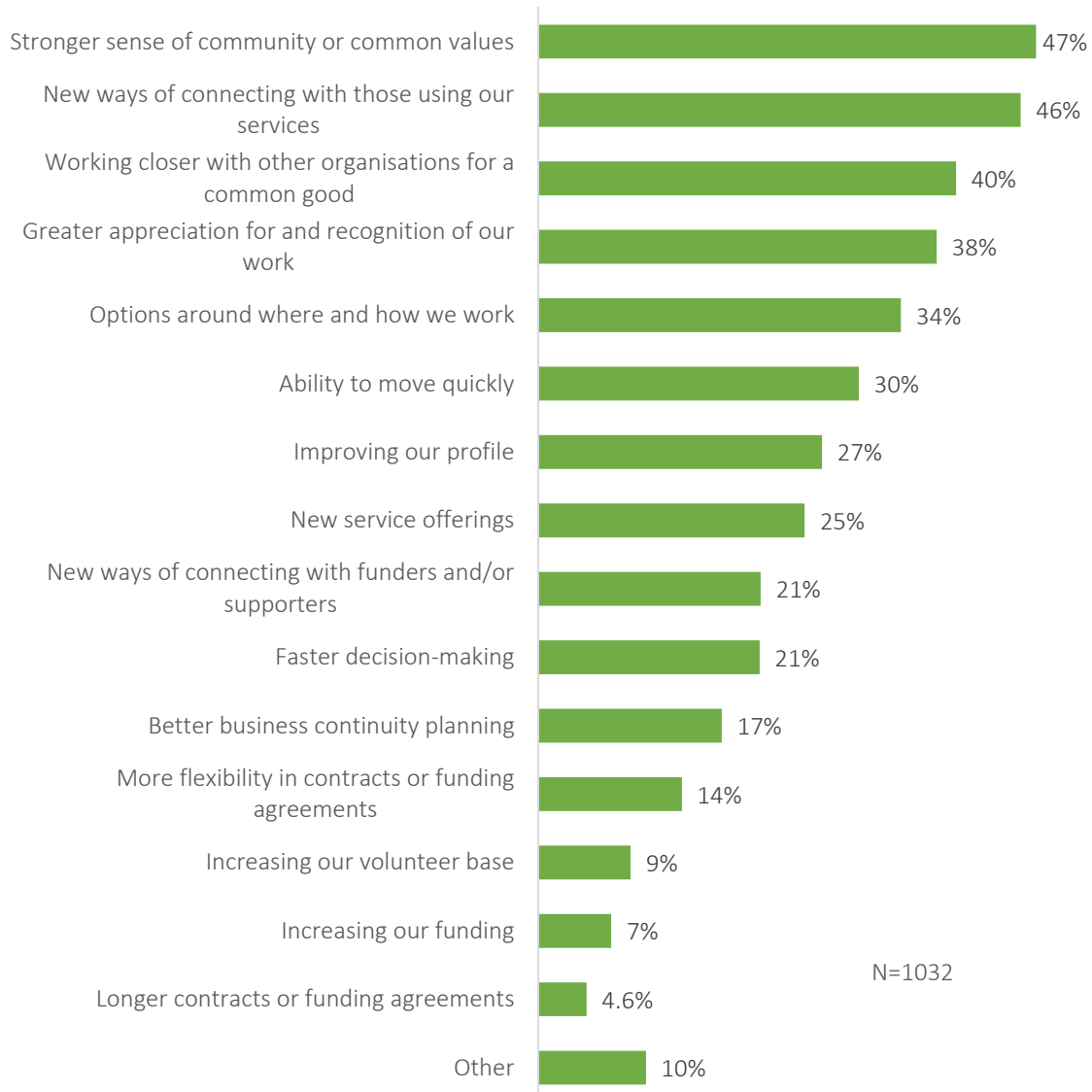
Opportunities presented by COVID-19

Despite the manifest challenges of COVID-19, the pandemic also created opportunities for many organisations. As with challenges, we asked survey participants to list the top five opportunities from a drop-down list. The most commonly noted opportunities, as detailed in Figure 17, were:

- Stronger sense of community or common values (47%)
- New ways of connecting with those using our services (46%)
- Working closer with other organisations for the common good (40%)
- Greater appreciation for and recognition of our work (38%)
- Options around where and how we work (34%)
- Ability to move quickly (30%).

Figure 17: Key opportunities presented by COVID-19 for participating organisations

What would be the five main opportunities that have come your way as a result of COVID 19?



Other opportunities

Some 10% of responses indicated 'other' in response to this question. Of these, 40 responses indicated that the question was either not applicable, or that there had been no opportunities as a result of COVID-19.

Greater use of technology

COVID-19 provided motivation to engage with new technologies. This featured prominently for participants that had experienced other new opportunities. Staff, and at times clients, had developed new confidence and proficiency in using technology. Some reported that a 'better culture around embracing digital technology' now existed within their organisation. Participants were now able to provide 'digital experiences' and had access to 'different ways of engaging with staff and clientele'. Online meeting tools, such as Zoom were mentioned as most useful.

“Shifting the mental blocks within our staff about using technology for our work. COVID has transformed attitudes to working on/with technology.”

An opportunity to reflect, review and revise

A further key theme was that COVID-19 had provided both space and motivation to reassess the functioning of both operational and service delivery. Participants described having the opportunity to review and revise their strategic planning and gain ‘greater clarity on what’s important’ both for themselves and government agencies and funders. COVID-19 had provided these organisations with a chance to ‘reboot’ or change approach. Some saw value in ‘being forced to make hard decisions’ to ensure efficacy and/or cost-effectiveness. One person noted that they valued the opportunity to use the ‘talents and expertise of staff in new ways’.

“It made us reassess the entire structure behind the programme we offer and helped make a decision to step away from that as we are never likely to get funded through mainstream funding applications.”

“Opportunities to identify needs/opportunities and re-configure how we work with partner agencies to serve client groups AND give clients/communities a greater voice in service design.”

Other responses

Disruption to business-as-usual driven by the impacts of COVID-19 was also seen to present important opportunities for positive change in the sector and wider society. These participants saw the potential for this disruption to re-prioritise societal values, build a more meaningful future and enable ‘new systems change and possibility thinking’ to achieve the greatest possible impact.

How relationships, and in turn collaboration, had been fostered and strengthened by the pandemic featured in several participant responses. These people described how connecting and collaborating had been enhanced within their teams with sponsors and funders, other organisations and the community more broadly.

A few participants noted the positive impact COVID-19 had on their organisation’s funding or fundraising. Being granted funding ‘without piles of red tape—being trusted to just get on and do’ was described as very refreshing by one participant. Others had received additional funding, or had their fundraising plans fast-tracked.

Further themes were that COVID-19 had raised the reach or profile of their organisation, and the opportunity for volunteers to have a break.

Key priorities and concerns

We asked survey participants to describe in their own words their current key priorities or concerns. We detail the responses in the sections that follow. Key themes are presented in Figure 18 below.

Figure 18: Key priorities and concerns



Financial uncertainty

The most prominent themes were dealing with financial uncertainty and managing the impacts of this uncertainty on service delivery and organisational viability. These concerns were raised by 43% of participants. These responses followed three broad themes: concern regarding reduced or insecure financial resources, including the loss of particular income streams; challenges to service delivery or viability, including the challenge of now doing even more with less; and steps planned or taken to maintain funding continuity or manage impacts of financial uncertainty.

Funding access

Access to funding was the key concern of many participants at this time. Some spoke in general terms about a lack of funding availability, uncertainty about whether current funding would be renewed, a loss of income, or having ongoing or anticipated financial support withdrawn, repurposed or put on hold. Others were focused on 'maintaining viability', 'surviving' this period of financial uncertainty or determining 'how to keep going'.

“Key concern is ability to obtain funding due to some traditional sources going on hold.”

“We have been declined by four grants in a week that we have previously been given.”

A significant number detailed the loss of particular income streams on which they had previously relied. This included grants, donations, membership fees, corporate sponsorship or contracts. This echoed the challenges noted earlier by those that were required to cut back services due to reduced income. Many named specific grantmakers or contracting bodies that had, or were anticipated, to reduce support.

Reliance on gaming trust income received numerous mentions from organisations struggling to fill gaps created by closures and the subsequent pause in funding. Further challenges were council shortfalls, creating concern around future service agreements, and a lack of available funding from government. This included uncertainty about the level of funding due to delayed budget allocation and redirecting funds to meet the COVID-19 response. Others explained that trusts they would normally apply to were closed at the time of responding.

“We rely heavily on gaming machine trusts...With gambling venues closed for several weeks/months, no funds will be forthcoming from this source for some time to come.”

“Postponed procurement by government department (major project funder)—loss of income.”

Others reported financial uncertainty, or needing to access donor funds and other income streams because of reduced revenue due to COVID-19 regulations. This included closures and cancelled events. Further concerns included losing supporters/members and donations due to reduced fundraising opportunities. It was anticipated that greater unemployment and decreased disposable income in the community would impact fundraising drives.

Some participants foresaw low business confidence putting pressure on their corporate partnerships and undermining their ability to gap fund through sponsorships and donations. Others worried that an economic downturn would reduce demand for their service offerings, which might be perceived as ‘nice to have’ by patrons, or deemed a low priority by sponsors or funding bodies, who were directing their focus to frontline emergency services. This was a particular concern for arts and culture entities.

Organisations relying on funds from membership, subscriptions or other fees anticipated significant shortfalls. There was concern about the cumulative effect of reduced membership and renewal to the extent that this might weaken future grant applications.

Longer-term funding outlook

Many participants expressed concern that an already precarious situation would soon worsen as the true impact of COVID-19 is felt on both organisations and funders. Some of these organisations felt confident they would survive to the end of the year but predicted 2021 to be very challenging in terms of funding. Others had already used their reserves and struggled to see how they could remain operating with a reliance on traditional fundraising models.

Many anticipated long-term uncertainty and scarcity, with significant challenges obtaining money from charitable trusts who may be overwhelmed with requests from more organisations competing for a shrinking pool of resources. Several participants mentioned inequity in funding distribution, which was seen to prioritise large, high-profile organisations. This was of particular concern to those working with populations already experiencing disadvantage. They worried this would be compounded should services be lost.

One representative of a funding body shared the challenge of ‘having to decline or defer BAU applications in anticipation of the second wave of enhanced community need’, with knowledge of the impacts this had on organisations whose funding options are increasingly limited.

“We were already running on fumes and many, many volunteer hours and now our funders are struggling.”

“Funding, funding, funding. Particularly in 12-24 months time...Concern is that this is on top of reductions in funding that were already happening. We feel there is going to be a funding crisis that tips a large number of organisations into closure. We are fortunate to have a six-month reserve, but this won't save us in the longer term.”

“... Our largest funders have already advised us they will be reducing the amount of funding that we will receive due to increased demand on their available resources.”

Service delivery impacts

Key priorities and concerns of many participants were responding to particular challenges impacting service delivery or ongoing stability. Many were experiencing a shortfall in revenue to cover salaries, to fill existing vacancies, or to recruit additional staff in response to an increased demand for services created by COVID-19 (discussed in more detail in previous sections).

A key priority for many was securing enough income to retain their staff through to the 2022 financial year. Others worried that their lack of income, leading to likely job reductions, would leave them unable to ever get back to pre-COVID levels of participation. They also highlighted the challenge of planning for staffing and other resourcing with future uncertainty.

Operational costs

Securing the financial resources to meet operational costs such as rent, utilities, insurance, administration, purchasing equipment or meeting new resourcing needs associated with a move to digital delivery were also key concerns. Some participants were unsure as to whether the current climate of uncertainty would impact their future access to operational funding. Others were struggling with an immediate deficit in funds to cover these expenses. Some organisations had long-term building or repair and maintenance projects planned, some of which were already underway, but now lacked secure financial support to see them through.

Some responses noted the inequity of many grants, funds and contracts not covering or contributing to core operational costs. A few people noted that this was also the case with targeted COVID-19 funds. A small group of participants noted that, while they held revenue targeted at delivering particular services, they required other income sources to cover the fixed costs that made service delivery possible. A drop in this funding had left them exposed.

Some highlighted that, while the pressure for some had been heightened by COVID-19, the tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector ‘always struggle[d] to meet our basic costs’ and were forced to plan and deliver services without consistent, confirmed funding.

“...The struggle we face now is the uncertainty of community funding to top up our service contracts that are built on a "contribution to service" model. We need community grants to keep the service running.”

“Most funders want to fund sexy new programmes. Right now, we need grass roots, basic funding with no special ties to programming. We just want to survive, revive, and thrive.”

“The prospect of a 70% reduction of income from business means we are unable to meet the level of demand and provide these essential supports...”

The comments of these and other participants highlighted the immense pressure they found themselves under. This is as they worked to maintain the complex and challenging balancing act of maintaining a level of service to the community that met the needs and expectations of stakeholders/members on reduced revenue.

Many struggled to find 'the optimum balance' between delivering services and managing the financial impact to ensure they remained sustainable in the long term. Some had or were in the process of reducing services.

A prominent theme in the participant's accounts was that community organisations were now doing even more with less. Organisations supporting vulnerable or marginalised populations experienced a significant rise in the need for support. This had left services struggling to meet both the increased needs of existing service users and those of new clients experiencing hardship due to COVID-19.

"With the increase in clients but not in revenue, our current staff levels are inadequate but we can't afford to take on new employees."

"Funding worries...The work is going to grow so any reduction will be really hard and likely result in needing to reduce service delivery at a time when we will need to remain at the same levels or likely higher to meet the demands of our community."

Maintaining viability

Some participants shared their strategies for remaining viable, mitigating the impacts of severely reduced revenue and maintaining a permanent staff base and service continuity. Many had prioritised creating alternate sources of income, particularly to replace event and trust revenue. Others reported re-forecasting their budget and operation, restructuring to reduce operating costs or making changes to their business model, such as moving to project-based funding.

Some were working to engage funders and donors to maintain support, or offer small incentives. Others were deferring these conversations. They expressed concern that approaching sponsors now, particularly corporate donors, would jeopardise their relationships. In anticipation of a significant economic downturn a few participants, representing sports or other clubs, were adjusting pricing to ensure services remained affordable and accessible to members.

The significant amount of time and resource spent looking for new funding sources as those previously in place became unavailable was a further theme in responses. Participants described having to apply extra staff hours to find other funding avenues. Drafting applications and accountability reports took them away from core operational and service delivery. They highlighted the inefficiency of the current funding models and how a short-term view hindered organisations' ability to plan and develop services.

"Many [funders] are focused on short term, ie one to two year support which doesn't help us to grow for the future. Just meets current needs. Welcome the opportunity for improved dialogue with funders."

"...Trying to work through how we will deliver our core business with the reduced and changed environment. We are having to think differently and completely change our strategic plan, and trying to figure out how to do that and remain focused on our core purpose."

Meeting the needs of communities

Continuing to provide impactful services that meet the needs of clients remained the key priority or concern for almost one quarter (23%) of participants.

Maintaining existing service delivery

Many emphasised that providing relevant, quality services had always been their goal. This remained unchanged despite the reduced/changed environment, because their work was 'not something that can be put aside for later'.

Many specified how they were striving to enhance lives and improve outcomes in their communities and provide support during this time of instability. Examples included providing learning and employment opportunities; addressing social isolation; providing opportunities for creative expression; meeting spiritual needs; establishing cultural tikanga for iwi and hapu; supporting families and individuals through grief; providing housing; providing food to those who most needed it; meeting the physical and mental health needs of clients; creating opportunities for people to spend quality time together; and supporting and empowering Māori.

“Continue to deliver intensive services for our traditional clients who were already 'at the bottom of the heap'. Ensure that they do not experience another generation of disadvantage and compound[ed] inequity in NZ.”

“Delivery of quality welfare services with sufficient time to engage with clients, assess deeper needs, advocate for them, make referrals and provide follow up if required.”

Increased demand for services

The other prominent theme within these responses was that community organisations were dealing with significantly increased demand for their services as people faced greater vulnerability and complexity of issues due to COVID-19.

Many were concerned about keeping up with the demand on their service as clients faced multiple, intersecting challenges. These included material hardship, higher levels of stress and anxiety (often enhancing the need for support), relationship stress, and increased loneliness and isolation. Some expressed real concern for the mental health of their service users. Older adults, young people and migrants were groups identified as having particularly high needs for support at this time.

“Our concern is we couldn't meet demand pre-lockdown and we are in a worse position now due to the increase in anxiety and other mental health and addiction issues.”

“COVID-19 has been a big learning curve and we have been flying by the seat of our pants. Our main priority is to meet the needs of our clients and community to ensure that their welfare needs are met...”

“Providing services to young people post COVID-19 that meet their heightened need for support in the areas of wellbeing, resilience, and self-confidence. Looking at ways to create opportunities that are responsive and affordable.”

Increased demand was both due to existing clients requiring greater care, and new clients accessing services due to jobs losses and financial challenges, stress and anxiety, and other issues that impacted resilience. Balancing COVID-related demand and other extras with business-as-usual work was a further challenge for community organisations whose resources were split between the support of traditional service users and ensuring capacity to provide services to the high volume of new clients.

A further area of tension was the increased burden some groups carried in safely resuming business-as-usual face-to-face services, while continuing to provide remote support for those unable to meet in person or wishing to continue receiving online engagement.

Resource reductions

For many participants, this burden of increased demand was compounded by reduced resourcing. This resulted in an unstable balancing act for often already overextended services. Some participants expressed immense frustration that the increased needs from 'the new normal' were to be met on a decreased budget. They also expressed sadness at their inability to meet the current need 'which far exceeds our ability to be effective'. A small number of organisations shared impacts of dealing with increased demands. These included reduced time available for mid-term planning, and staff being overwhelmed. Yet despite these many challenges, a few participants remained resolutely optimistic.

“We are very worried about how we will find funding to continue our current work, let alone increase it to meet increasing demand.”

“...Turning away clients in need due to this is SO hard.”

“We have never worked so hard with so little. Challenging but hopefully with good outcomes.”

Uncertainty of need

The key concern for some participants was the uncertainty and anticipation of greater need to come, as the real impact of COVID-19 became apparent and intensified existing inequities. Some were expecting increasing demand for support once wage subsidies ended which they worried would lead to overworked staff, waitlists and an unhappy community.

“Have no idea how busy we will get—stressful just waiting...”

“Ensuring that the Social Services are fully prepared for the influx of more clients and actually being able to help and not flog them off or pass them from pillar to post making them even more frustrated as a lot of our newer clients have not had to deal with these organisations before.”

Ensuring those in need could ask for the services they required was a further concern for participants. Some worried that people who had previously never asked for assistance may not realise what help was available. These organisations were prioritising advertising what they could offer. Other solutions included supporting the confidence of those hesitant to re-engage with services, ensuring prices were affordable, and developing offerings that engage with those still isolating due to vulnerabilities of COVID-19—older adults, young people or the lonely or socially isolated.

Resuming business-as-usual and operating within ‘the new normal’

A desire to return to full operation was a further prominent theme when participants shared their key priorities and concerns. This was raised by 16% of participants. Approximately half of these participants were focused on resuming business-as-usual services, programmes or activities and returning to pre-COVID functioning. Some were keen to resume activities as quickly as possible, and a few noted the need for services to resume to gather much-needed revenue.

Many participants were looking forward to reconnecting with the public, engaging with supporters/members or interacting with clients in-person. Some noted that those they worked with had struggled without the services they provided. A few felt that COVID-19-related restrictions were preventing their clients from accessing important support, or that the isolation or vulnerability caused by COVID-19 made their offerings even more critical. Others were anxious to hold events or other activities that had been cancelled or delayed due to lockdown or other restrictions.

“Our primary concern is to get back to operating again as we were, with perhaps some new opportunities that we can cater for. The delay is frustrating, costly and risks us losing volunteers.”

“Emerging from the lockdown and returning to a near normal programme as quick as we can.”

However, others were concerned with how best to resume services while addressing the challenges and obligations of operating within ‘the new normal’ of COVID-19. These participants were concerned with how to operate effectively and safely within any restrictions that may be placed on them. They questioned how soon could/should they safely return to in-person engagement. Some were exploring new ways to connect with their community or fundraise in other ways while still meeting health requirements.

“Our priority is keeping our service users safe...while still trying to provide stimulating and meaningful programmes and activities.”

A few questioned how group gatherings might be managed under social distancing rules, or whether health and safety requirements or restrictions regarding gatherings were likely to change. One noted they needed stability for several weeks at a time to operate, and certainty several months ahead in order to plan events.

A few raised the challenge of meeting client expectations and health needs and their obligations under health and safety requirements, or of welcoming visitors or new clients or members into such a strange environment. Others were concerned whether those who used their services would be willing to engage ‘in a COVID world’. These participants were focused on gaining the confidence of clients to re-engage and feel secure receiving services onsite.

Balancing health and safety restrictions with cost-effectiveness was a concern for some. They were keen to return to work, yet wondered if it might be more financially viable to remain closed for an extended period. Motivating members, service users and volunteers to remain engaged was a further priority, with some noting clients needed reassurance to engage again with services.

Wellbeing, retention and recruitment of staff and volunteers

The safety and support of team members, along with challenges associated with recruiting and retaining staff and volunteers were key priorities and concerns for approximately 11% of participants. There was a fairly even split between a focus on volunteers or paid staff. Recruiting and retaining volunteers was a key priority for many of these participants who were concerned about whether they had the volunteer numbers required to deliver their service. Some wished to increase numbers but anticipated this being challenging in the current climate.

Others noted that volunteer availability appeared to have decreased due to COVID-19. Some noted the impact of cancellations and temporary closures of services on keeping volunteers. One issue was volunteers replacing their regular routines since lockdown. Others suggested attrition was due to the impact of increased job and financial insecurity, and associated burnout and stress, or over-commitment of volunteers.

Challenges associated with an ageing volunteer base were also noted, with many of these participants seeing a drop off in older volunteers due to their vulnerability to COVID-19. Some were concerned with keeping their elderly volunteers safe and healthy. One noted the need to find younger volunteers to fill in for those more vulnerable. Another noted how the majority of their volunteer base being older left them vulnerable to the impacts of further COVID-19 outbreaks, as they would be unable to deliver their services.

Supporting volunteers and older members in particular to feel confident to return to the workplace was a priority for some participants. A further priority was greater recognition of and support for volunteers.

Examples of effort undertaken in this area were maintaining a sense of equality in protecting paid staff versus volunteers during COVID-19, building a stronger volunteer support group for the organisation, redefining the volunteer role, and ensuring managers appreciated the value of volunteer resources.

“Most of our volunteers are retired people and helping them feel safe back at our organisation has been difficult and I sympathise with them.”

For organisations with paid staff, a key priority was staff welfare and wellbeing after what had been a very stressful period for many. Participants were concerned about staff that had worked under increased pressure in a rapidly changing context, often remotely and in some cases with little sign of workload reducing. They were concerned about the mental health of team members with high anxiety levels, or potential burnout due to the increased need for services.

“Exhaustion of staff and no ability to take leave as our work increases and will do over the coming months.”

“...Ensuring we keep ourselves well throughout this period of trying to get back to BAU as quickly as possible.”

Recruiting and retaining staff were also highlighted as key priorities or concerns. Sustaining a skilled workforce was described as a huge challenge by some participants, who were concerned about turnover and maintaining staff in roles to deliver on obligations.

Providers in the social work space highlighted an inability to compete with government agencies in recruiting staff. They found themselves unable to offer competitive salaries for quality staff, affecting the quality of delivery. Lower numbers of people studying towards social work at a tertiary level was seen as a further cause.

“Retention of staff—already undervalued in their wage and to take on top of that increased pressure to meet demand could push them over the edge and leave the service. Their experience and expertise cannot be replaced immediately.”

Capitalising on the opportunities presented by COVID-19

‘Building back better’ and taking the opportunity for reimagining a better future were key priorities for a small group of participants (4%) who wished to build on new learning and skills and make changes to the sector’s ‘status quo’. Some reflected on the positive experiences and opportunities driven by COVID-19, and a desire to capitalise, both on these and the ‘new environment’ and sense of momentum. Examples included how the ‘shakeup’ renewed focus on mission, fostered collaboration, strengthened capacity, enhanced acceptance of digital working and delivery and provided an opportunity for reorganisation internally as well as in relation to government.

A desire to work differently and more collaboratively was strongly evident in these responses. Some reflected that adapting to the constraints of lockdown Levels 4 and 3 had renewed an appreciation of how people spent their time, and what mattered most to them. It had also provided opportunities to explore how services might support whānau in ways that better met their needs.

“Maintaining momentum, taking the ‘best’ of lockdown to see how we can be leaner and smarter.”

“In a way the biggest challenge for me is holding onto the changes we made. Staff and service users want everything back to ‘normal’ which is not always ideal.”

Concern the sector is underestimated and overlooked

A small group of participants (3%) shared a range of concerns under the broad theme of a desire to see a change in relationship with the government. For some providers, COVID-19 illustrated the extent to which the sector was heavily relied on to deliver services to vulnerable groups by a government that continued to operate in a ‘siloed’, ‘top-down’ way. These participants were concerned by the lack of awareness by government departments of how the tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector’s demographic was being affected by COVID-19. They were concerned that plans for the recovery phase continued to rely on the work of the sector, yet it was felt that their engagement with providers in developing these plans had been minimal.

“Extremely disappointed with community groups/volunteer groups/NGOs being overlooked throughout entire COVID planning pre and post.”

Many of these providers wished to see more genuine engagement from government with the tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector and communities, and a commitment to people-centred and community-led approaches. Others felt there was a lack of flexibility and time to engage with central and local government on project proposals and management planning issues, and that funding processes needed to be more transparent and equitable. Overall, there was a hope that COVID-19 would present an opportunity to end ‘the old business-as-usual’ approach and replace it with a more collaborative, sufficiently resourced relationship.

“Ongoing funding provision, mandate and support for communities and agencies to be strategically part of local-level responses in recovery phase. Big agencies will dominate because of their power/resource base.”

“How has COVID-19 impacted on Māori whānau...and do we contribute to the collective creative collaborations that need to happen for Māori community sector working with government, which need to be led by Māori? Stop with the top-down stuff that has never worked!! And ensure that Māori are 'included' at all the levels of decision-making and resourced in the way that works best for us.”

Digital delivery and information communications technology (ICT) capacity development

Priorities or concerns related broadly to working digitally were a further theme, raised by 2% of participants. Some wished to invest further in ICT equipment or capacity building. Some were driven to make services more accessible, simplify systems, provide better analytics for decision-making or greater flexibility for staff or volunteers.

Some highlighted the costs associated with a shift to digital working. For a few, this was a barrier to making the investments noted above. Others were concerned about meeting the ongoing, unbudgeted costs of maintaining an online presence or supporting staff to work from home.

The digital divide and inequity in access to technology were further concerns. Some participants struggled to maintain contact with vulnerable people who did not have information technology skills, internet connections or devices due to socio-economic or age factors—issues that were exemplified by the lockdown experience.

Other themes

Further themes present in multiple participant responses included prioritising readiness for any further outbreaks or lockdowns due to COVID-19, the challenge of managing multiple uncertainties, and a desire to foster collaboration and partnership working, noting there is no set of instructions for this. Others highlighted the need to adapt delivery in the new context, be flexible enough to survive in the fast-changing environment, and maintaining momentum after such disruption to delivery.

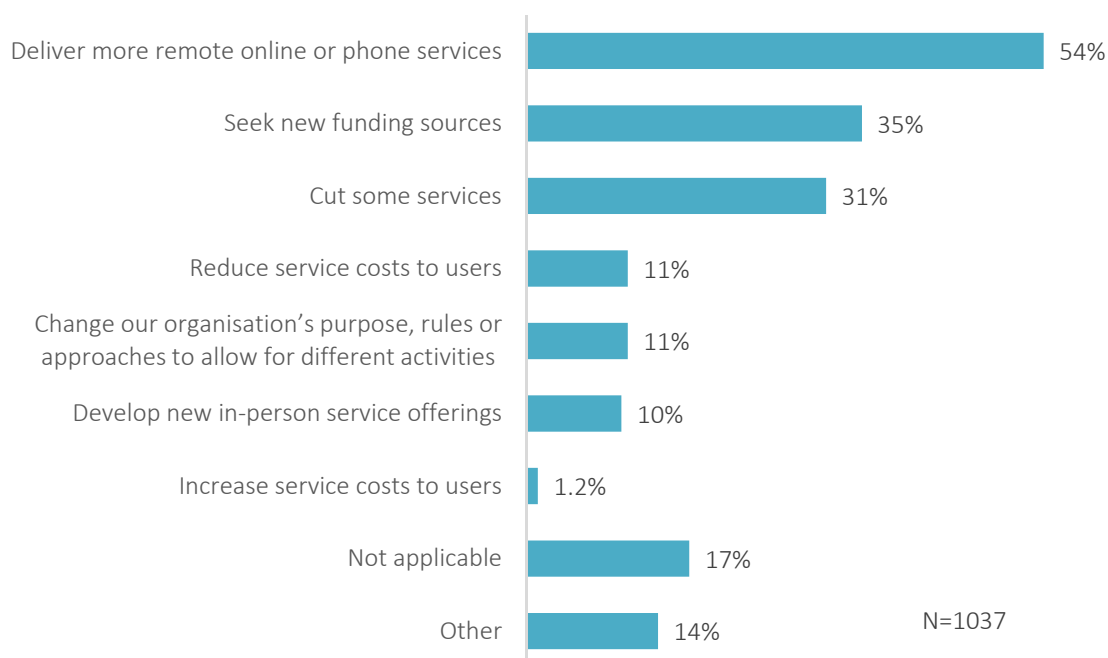
Taking action

Adapting service delivery

Steps taken in response to COVID-19

Many participating organisations were rapidly innovating and adapting delivery in response to COVID-19. As seen in Figure 19 below, notable adaptations were in delivering more remote online or phone services (54%), seeking new funding sources (35%), and reducing some services (31%). Reducing service costs, changing organisational rules or purpose to enable new activities, and developing in-person service offerings were each selected by 10-11% of participants.

Figure 19: Steps taken by participating organisations in response to COVID-19 (service delivery)



A range of prominent themes arose in participants' 'other' responses. Many responses echoed themes discussed in earlier sections. These were the ongoing need to reduce staff or provide services; the need to delay services and events, particularly during the stricter levels of the lockdown; and cancelling or closing services.

“Out of town activities are cancelled and we will organise local activities when the alert level permits us. We already cancelled the organised activities since March.”

“We have ceased or developed some services along different lines but have not 'cut' any permanently as of yet.”

“Have been forced to put some service offerings on hold due to lockdown restrictions. Additional cost and administration in being able to provide service capacity under restrictions.”

In contrast, some participants indicated an ongoing increase and expansion of their services, with some outsourcing or teaming up with other services to meet demand.

Some participants noted changing methods of communication with service users as well as within teams.

“Develop online social media campaigns to try to connect with the communities we work in during COVID-19.”

“Offered webinars completely free of charge at this time. Gone completely online.”

Others mentioned decreasing the cost of existing services to make them more accessible, or amending or diversifying the services that were offered during lockdown.

“Diversification of services—adding new services to meet clients’ needs.”

“Working with other organisations to deliver food to people directly. Parcels for those without a permanent address available from our store.”

“Reduce service cost to partners where required. We do not charge clients for services.”

Several participants outlined plans taken in response to Ministry of Health guidelines for contact tracing and ensuring social distancing. These measures were expected to be in place in for some time beyond the acute phase of COVID-19.

“Ceased operations for the time being, but have put in place some cleaning and physical distancing protocols to enable a faster start-up once that's permitted by the government department we work alongside.”

A further method used to ensure service delivery was applying for additional and alternate sources of funding.

“We have put in more funding proposals but they don't seem to have progressed to an outcome.”

“We are desperately seeking more funding to help more as the needs are growing due to high unemployment and people feeling depressed and stressed now no employment.”

It was notable that many organisations, both those who had already changed aspects of their service, and those who had not, were undergoing a planning and restructuring process at the time of completing the survey, in order to adapt and survive in the post-lockdown environment.

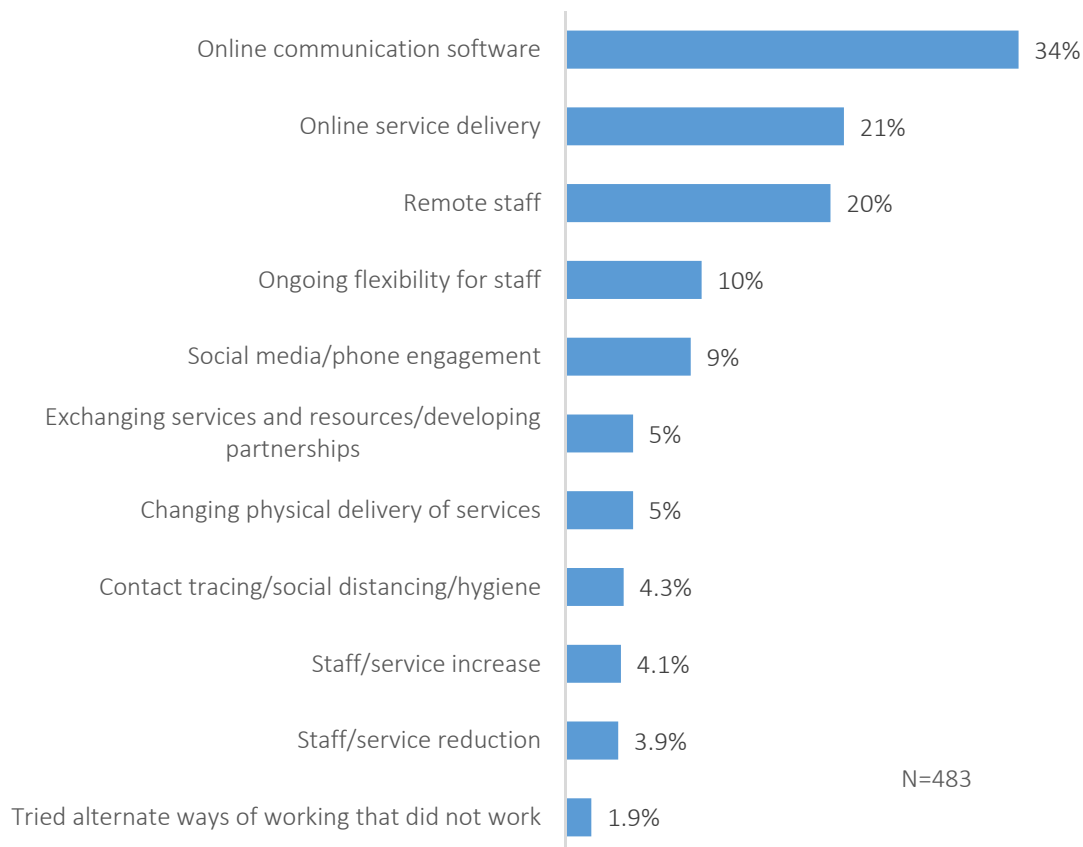
“This is very much a work in progress. In many areas we are (i) listening to communities on their needs, priorities and strengths, and (ii) working with partner agencies to see how we can work together differently to improve efficiency and effectiveness.”

“Essentially the pandemic made us rethink the entire model of how we fund what we believe is pretty essential work in the community.”

New ways of working

We asked survey participants to describe if there had been any other new ways of working that they had adopted during the lockdown to continue operating. Their responses are consistent with others indicated above. We have summarised these in Figure 20 below.

Figure 20: New ways of working for participating organisations



The most prominent new method of working mentioned by participants was using online meeting software. Zoom in particular was mentioned as a means for facilitating remote working, facilitating a sense of connection within a team, and offering modified services to members of the community. This was raised by 34% of participants.

“We've used Zoom a lot for staff meetings, board meetings, and meetings between chairs of our 10 regional branches. We also ran our AGM via Zoom and the added benefit was that people from all over the country could attend, not just those in the city where it is normally held.”

“We now use Zoom to engage with members throughout the whole Federation... Coaching, referee, and player development has become hybrid with a blended approach taken to development.”

In addition to video conferencing, 9% of participants mentioned utilising other technology-enabled solutions. Popular platforms for reaching out and contacting people in the community were social media, and phones for texting and calling.

“Increased posting and monitoring of group closed Facebook page.”

“Finally we've had the chance to work on our social media strategy and sort out our channel marketing properly, and we are building a stronger social media presence.”

“Keeping contact with our members by regularly phoning them.”

“We will keep up our greater online presence, mainly our online engagement and activities with young people including online youth work, greater use of Instagram, Houseparty and Tik Tok for engagement and activities.”

Another related theme that participants outlined was a move to ensure that staff were supported to work remotely, raised by 20% of participants. Notably, many participants said that COVID-19 was an opportunity for them to see that they could increase staff productivity and wellbeing by allowing flexibility in working arrangements. Many were intending to allow ongoing remote working options for staff.

“High trust, self-management model has worked brilliantly as a team.”

“With extensively exploring remote service offerings, and the creation of new online options for families, our team would definitely like to explore this as an extension of our current programmes.”

“Working from home for office-based staff has been an interesting exercise and realisation that this does not necessarily impact on productivity, indeed it can increase productivity.”

Participants noted that online platforms were an effective method of communicating with staff and the community, and provided means for delivering online services that helped to maintain the operation of the organisation (21%).

“Worship services on our webpage with recorded speakers. More home visits to housebound. Care circle phone calls. Zoom meetings.”

“Utilise our marae more in support of our uri, provide Zoom accounts to marae to better engage not only with their hau kainga, but others that tatai back to each marae, government agencies and iwi. Iwi broadcast weekly via Zoom, marae broadcast weekly.”

For services that involved more in-person interaction, the focus was on changing aspects of how these services were delivered to maintain safety (5%).

“Once we are able to get access to residents in rest homes we will look at doing some singing outside, normally we sing and work with residents inside.”

“Two volunteers handled all client requirements in a contactless way.”

“We operate a drive-through system for those in vehicles that allows them to stay in their vehicles while we provide their food in their vehicles. This maintains social distancing and reduces any possible conflict.”

Another theme that emerged (4%) was the need to increase staff and service delivery during lockdowns, and the need to reach out and partner up with other organisations in order to be most effective (5%, detailed further in lessons of COVID-19).

“We have been teaching online, we have strategised to expand our outreach program through a charitable trust.”

“Continuing to have a mix of working from home and onsite; increased online communications; increased volunteer engagement to support increased workload.”

“Engaging with community leaders to share the response to the increased needs of our community.”

However, some participants found that alternate ways of working did not work, and they returned, or intended to return to previous methods (2%).

“Working in isolation—but long-term, due to what we do, this is not useful or practical.”

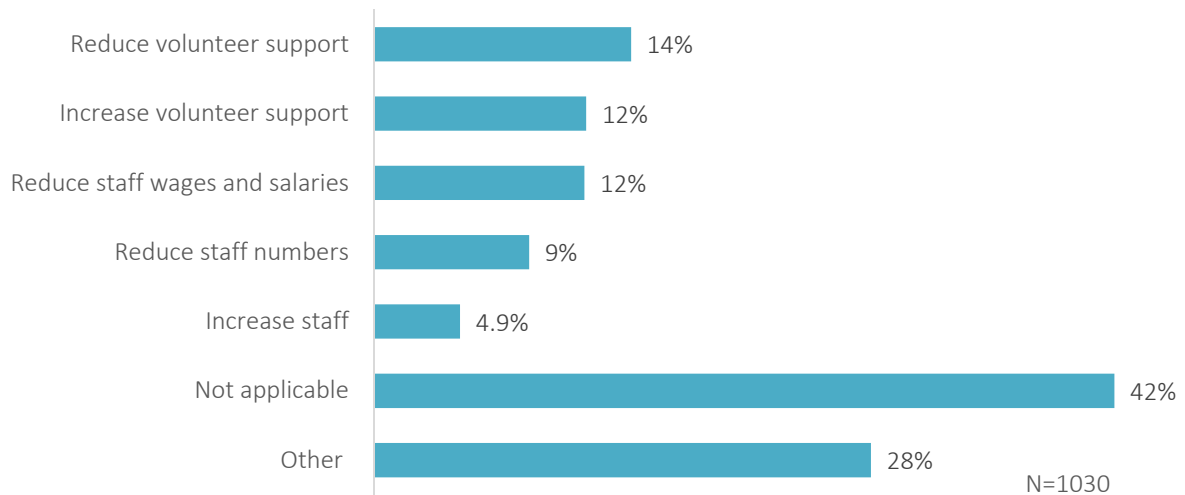
“We have considered running some aspects of our operations ‘working from home’ instead of working out of government department premises, but currently without additional technology (sponsored mobile phones or sponsored 0800 number and associated call plan), that’s simply not practical for us.”

Staff and volunteer changes

We asked survey participants to select from a range of options regarding possible changes to staff and volunteers. Notably, 42% indicated none of the responses were applicable and 28% selected other responses. A small percentage of organisations selected a range of options from the drop-down list. In particular reducing volunteer support (14%), increasing volunteer support (12%), reducing staff wages and salaries (12%) and reducing staff numbers (9%) (Figure 21).

Figure 21: Steps taken by participating organisations in response to COVID-19 (staff and volunteers)

Please indicate the steps your organisation has taken in response to COVID-19 for your staff and volunteers



Other steps taken

Among the 28% of participants to this question who indicated other steps, key themes were remote work; maintaining staff and salaries; reviewing or restructuring staffing; and increasing support or pastoral care.

Remote work

A move to remote working, both during lockdown and going forward, featured prominently when participants shared the other steps they had taken for their staff and volunteers. Organisations supported remote working by providing equipment, upskilling staff in using technology, covering office expenses and providing allowances, and enhanced communication with staff through Zoom, phone calls and emails. Increased flexibility regarding when and how staff work to accommodate family and other needs also featured.

“Flexibility in the way we work, good IT resources so we can stay connected, good communication around what is happening.”

Maintaining staff and salaries

Many participants described reducing staffing as a ‘last resort’. A range of changes were made to maintain staff pay and hours at pre-COVID levels. A large number took advantage of the government wage subsidy, which was credited with retaining many staff in their roles. Other adjustments included changes in roles/duties, redistributing funds, using cash reserves to pay staff, and moving forward scheduled work such as maintenance to ensure there was work available.

“We shifted around jobs and projects to include team members who were unable to work on the project they had been hired for.”

Review or restructure staffing

Participants reported a wide range of changes to staffing levels, remuneration and recruitment. These included both increases and decreases to staff hours, reducing wages to match the government wage subsidy, halting salary increases, suspensions, and staff being requested to take leave to help reduce the organisation's holiday pay liability.

“Temporary reduction in working hours due to inability to meet contracted hours.”

“We removed fixed-term contracts very early on and managed to keep all our permanently employed staff (so far) by us reducing salaries to 60% and three day weeks.”

Staff recruitment and retention was also affected. A few participants expected to reduce staff numbers over time. Some reduced their use of contractors. Others took on temporary staff to cover those who were vulnerable. Another strategy was a freeze on recruiting. A small number of participants needed to employ additional staff where particular skills were required.

“We have employed a new digital strategist as we feel this is now important for our organisation and that online is going to be a prominent aspect of our future.”

Meeting increased staffing needs due to heightened demand for services was a further challenge. This was met by increasing time-off-in-lieu options for staff, or swapping volunteers for paid roles. A few participants would have liked to increase staff numbers/hours to meet the greater demand for services, but lacked funds.

Others had to curtail service provision by reducing intake numbers or cutting back on activities to manage increased staff workload. Changes to volunteer numbers received far fewer mentions. A few organisations had reduced volunteer numbers due to unease about returning to face-to-face work. Consequences included reduced hours of service and a higher workload for paid staff.

Increased support and pastoral care

A further theme in responses was that organisations had put more time and resources into the wellbeing of their staff, and to a lesser extent, volunteers. Participants responsible for staff had put in place a range of initiatives to support them personally and professionally during this time. Supports included increased supervision, regular formal and informal phone/Zoom calls with line managers, team video chats and emails, and flexible work arrangements. Managers also worked to connect staff with external services such as EAP or financial advice to reduce stress or hardship.

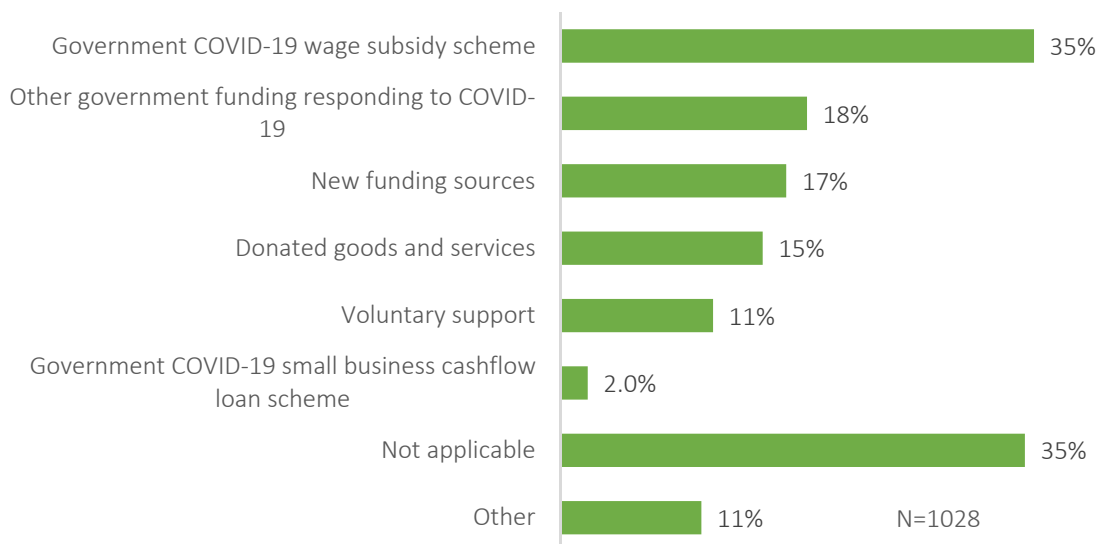
“We increased our team meetings and tried to make them as much about wellness and socialising as it was about making sure the work was getting done.”

Other responses included collaborating and sharing resource with other groups and services, and improving health and safety measures, such as hygiene, infection control, paid flu vaccinations and providing PPE.

Accessing support

Survey participants accessed a wide range of supports in response to COVID-19. Principal among these was the government's Wage Subsidy Scheme, accessed by 35% of participants. A further 18% accessed other government COVID-related funding, and 17% accessed new funding sources. Some 15% received donated goods and services and 11% engaged voluntary support (Figure 22). A large proportion (35%) indicated not applicable.

Figure 22: Support accessed by participating organisations



Some 11% of participants indicated 'other', of which one-quarter indicated they did not access any support.

Fundraising from the public was a notable theme. This included donations via community or emergency appeals, Give-a-Little campaigns, cash donations from patrons, or general fundraising. A further group were in the process of exploring potential funding sources to support their organisation at this time. One participant felt they lacked knowledge of where to apply for funding that might be available. Others were awaiting responses to funding applications.

A few participants commented that they did not qualify for the government Wage Subsidy Scheme, with one noting that they were therefore funding staffing from their reserves. Others shared that they were planning to apply, or that their funders had not wanted them to do so.

Further themes included having received or been denied rent relief, receiving Creative New Zealand funding, and support in kind from individuals and organisations by way of training or other expertise.

Shaping the future

Strengthening organisations

Short-term outlooks

Despite the challenges of COVID-19, participants were generally optimistic about the stability of their organisations. When asked to rate on a six-point scale how pessimistic or optimistic they were about whether their organisation would still be operating in six months time, two-thirds (65%) were very confident (rating six),

and a further 17% rated five. Only 4% rated very pessimistic (rating one) and a further 3% gave a rating of two (Figure 23).

Figure 23: Participant outlooks for participating organisations

How pessimistic or optimistic are you that your organisation will be still operating in six months time?



Support needed

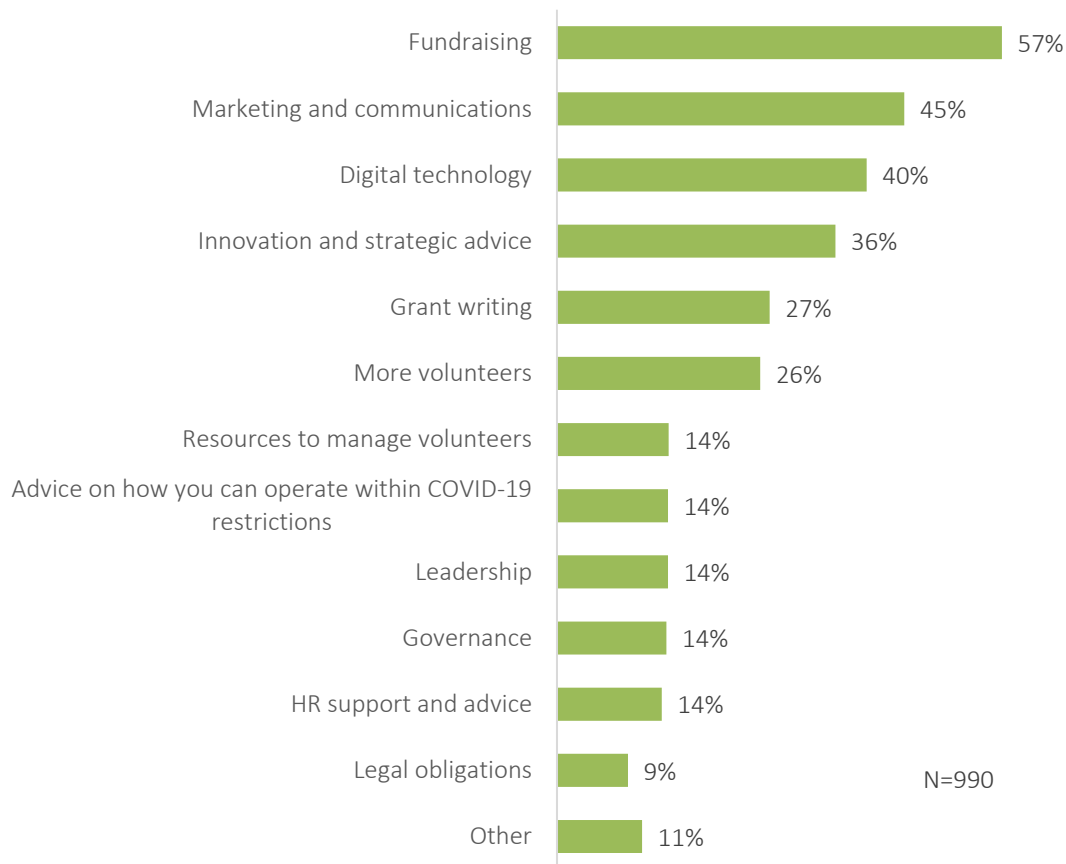
We note however that stability discussed above does not rule out the challenges faced, or the support needed to meet the needs of each organisation’s purpose. When we asked survey participants to indicate the five most needed areas of support from a drop-down list, the most highly rated areas of support were:

- Fundraising (57%)
- Marketing and communications (45%)
- Digital technology (40%)
- Innovation and strategic advice (36%)
- Grant writing (27%)
- More volunteers (26%).

These responses indicate there remained significant gaps in the available (and funded) resourcing for community organisations to deliver core services after lockdown. We detail the full range of responses in Figure 24 below.

Figure 24: Key areas of support needed for participating organisations

From the list below, what would be your five most needed areas of support at the moment as a result of COVID-19?



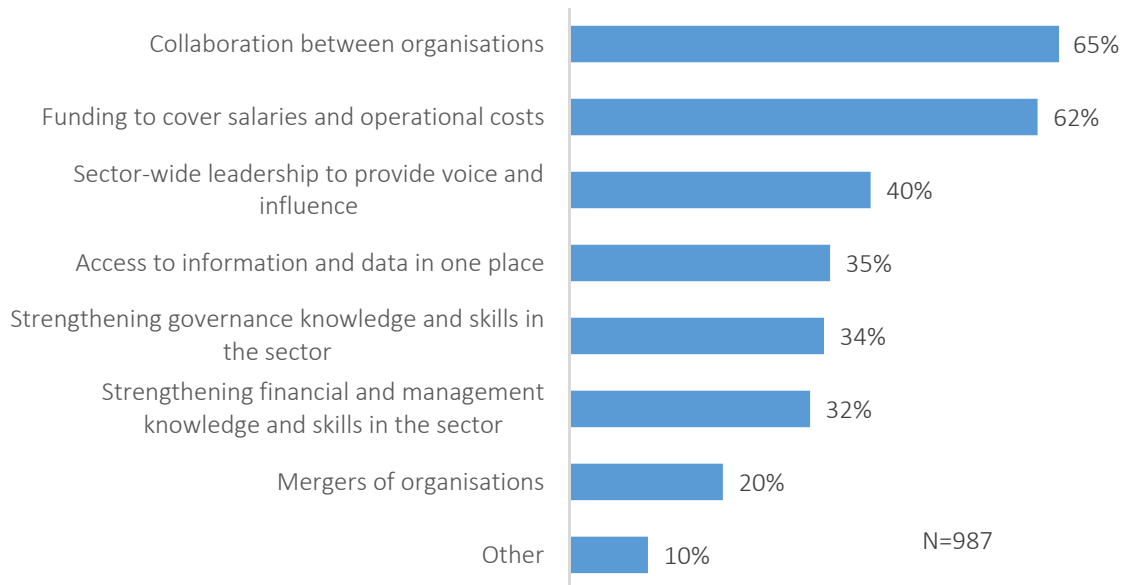
Strengthening the sector

Changes to the community and voluntary sector

We asked survey participants to identify changes that are needed to strengthen the tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector into the future. The most commonly selected responses were collaboration between organisations (65%) and funding to cover salaries and operational costs (62%). Other areas included sector-wide leadership to provide a voice and influence (40%), access to information and data in one place (35%), strengthening governance knowledge and skills in the sector (34%), and strengthening financial management knowledge and skills (32%) (Figure 25).

Figure 25: Suggested changes to strengthen community sector

What sorts of changes do you think are needed to strengthen the community and voluntary sector in the future?



Other sector changes

Some 10% of responses indicated other changes. Important themes included funding; government recognition and engagement; collaboration and consolidation; skill and capacity development; and genuine engagement with Māori.

Funding

Changes to the way sector funding is allocated and distributed was a prominent theme. Many stressed that widespread funding inequity must be addressed. There was concern that a small group of the largest organisations received an unequal share of resources. These participants wished to see greater support for smaller, lower-profile organisations, or those who did not have government contracts.

“Ways at looking after less high-profile charities that don’t have funding for media advertising and don’t have huge funds, but do amazing work.”

Another group of participants felt that funders must broaden their view of the needs and wants of local communities. There was concern that funding was often earmarked for activities or services that did not necessarily align with community needs or aspirations. Providers felt forced to design projects that met funding criteria at the expense of more relevant, innovative initiatives.

“Organisations are marginalised, ignored, and even obstructed by funding organisations and local government unless they involve one of a very small handful of mainstream activities and objectives...needs to be a wider acceptance and less judgemental assumptions as to the type of needs communities have.”

Long-term, strategic funding replacing one-off project investment, was seen as another important change for the sector. Participants noted that the current short-term model was resource intensive, and funding was almost always less than applied for, severely impacting effectiveness and long-term planning. The merging of funders was also suggested as this would reduce the significant operational costs of having to apply to multiple sources.

“Complete disruption of the funding structure for community and charity organisations. Current system is broken—it does not and cannot work. Short-term funding requires that we have to dedicate far too much time and effort to ‘chasing the next dollar’ instead of getting on with making an impact in our communities. Funders don’t get value for their investment and charities operate with less efficiency than would be the case if strategic funding partners were the norm.”

A further group of participants believed that funders must recognise that operational costs were an essential part of delivering services. Funding must therefore cover the full cost of providing a service. A few sought increased funding for community sector leadership so they could offer better support to the sector and/or government. One participant wished to see increased funding for volunteering infrastructure.

Government recognition and engagement

A desire to see a change in the relationship of government with the tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector also featured. For this group, the key to the future strength of the sector was genuine engagement and greater recognition by central and local government of the significant, important work they did for the resources they received. They also saw enhancing official understanding of the sector as important.

Genuine engagement was described as government ‘being willing to listen, hear, and work with’ the sector, providing sufficient financial support, and allowing the sector ‘a leadership voice in how services are provided’. There was a desire to see greater trust for the sector to make their own decisions. This included government commitment to including experts from sector organisations throughout decision-making processes. A further ask was convergence of government agency contracting and monitoring approaches ‘so there is a more whole of government approach’ to the sector.

“Government recognition that this is a vital sector which needs to be appropriately funded—not from the proceeds of gaming or lotto, and that workers employed in this sector need to be appropriately valued for the work they do and the knowledge and skills they bring to the work.”

“...We are not just ‘providers of government services’.”

A few participants wished to see a cohesive, unified vision and voice for the sector with the authority to ‘really influence’. One participant sought a stronger collective voice:

“...There are many voices that speak to power but the lack of a cohesive and unified voice means the sector is easy to dismiss—we don’t see the government with ‘social sector ready’ projects in the way we see the ‘shovel ready’ projects.”

Collaboration and consolidation

Changes to the way collaboration, consolidation and partnership were perceived, presented or brokered were also prominent themes from participants. Some felt there is a significant opportunity to consolidate organisations to address duplicated services and increase effectiveness and efficiencies in service provision to benefit more people.

Suggested changes that might address these issues were incentives and encouragement to develop innovative services or work within existing organisations, and information sharing of funded services so gaps and duplication may be identified.

Responses indicate that there is a lack of clarity around what collaborating looks like, and who might be best placed to broker these relationships. Participants emphasised a need for guidance on how to collaborate, as well as spaces and systems for collaborating and connecting, enabling organisations to effectively support each other and thrive together.

A few people felt that accessible public knowledge about community services and opportunities for collaborating would be helpful. Another suggested that opportunities for sharing resources when they were not being used by other organisations would strengthen the sector. A further point was that NGOs must take up the challenge of role-modelling effective collaboration and innovation to the wider sector:

“NGOs often ask government etc to make all the changes but aren't always willing to work differently at community level. Position papers and government won't effect change—exemplars of US working together will.”

A further comment was the need for more effective framing of how organisations joining together might function. This person noted that mergers don't necessarily mean losing the front-end brand, delivery and culture, and should focus on shared service delivery and reducing costs and inefficiencies.

Several mentioned issues with what was perceived as a push to collaborate. One person noted that a competitive funding model doesn't encourage collaboration. Others felt their organisations would not benefit from joining with other groups. Another participant felt there needed to be more focus on increasing operational efficiencies across organisations rather than organisations joining together.

Skill and capacity development

Resourcing and developing capacity in ICT, and in evaluating and reporting were further changes participants felt were needed to strengthen the tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector in the future.

With regards to technology, there was desire for access to training and skills, sponsored technology (including smartphones and hosted GPS tracking solutions for staff safety) and grants focused on developing internet capability. With regard to evaluating and reporting, participants sought access to measurement evaluation frameworks and reporting tools/models, both to enhance their reporting and to collect data that genuinely informs policy change.

Genuine engagement with Māori

Participants also felt the sector would be strengthened by working harder to genuinely engage with Māori. This group wished to see Māori better represented across the sector. They wished to see more consulting and collaborating with Māori, and support for organisations to strengthen their knowledge and practice in this area so that they could effectively build relationships and work in partnership with iwi/Māori. One participant wished to see indigenous practices accepted as models of mainstream delivery. Another addressed the unfair allocation of funding for services to the Māori community as they have higher needs and less access to services.

“[The] community sector has an overall inherent inequality in representation of Māori, about Māori, for Māori, and by Māori.”

Further themes that received a few mentions were that the sector would be strengthened by greater recognition of the importance of community participation, a need for lower compliance requirements or costs, and expert leadership with a vision for change.

Lessons of COVID-19

We asked survey participants to describe their most important learning from this time. We received almost 800 responses. Participants mentioned a wide range of themes. We have summarised these in Figure 26 below.

Figure 26: Most important learning from COVID-19



Importance of responsiveness and flexibility

For many participants (12%), COVID-19 had highlighted the value of being responsive, agile and adaptive. The importance of being open to new ways of working, both in terms of service design and delivery were prominent in responses, as was having the capacity to quickly implement any changes required. Flexibility was seen as key to resilience, particularly in this uncertain environment. Participants shared that organisations must be willing to adapt their services and ‘pivot or become redundant’.

For many organisations, the rapidly changing environment unlocked a previously unknown capacity for flexibility and innovation. Participants frequently talked about learning how quickly an organisation could adapt and deliver new initiatives as they responded to evolving need. However, rather than considering responsiveness simply as a reaction to the challenging circumstances of a pandemic, many participants wished to retain and foster these newfound strengths to progress their organisation.

“That we are an adaptable and nimble organisation that is able to respond quickly to change.”

“Smart organisations survive!”

The qualities that foster responsive working featured in some responses. These included the value of being positive and ‘up for it’ and willing ‘to make the most of things’. Some participants from smaller organisations felt that their size left them better placed to pivot and respond quickly and effectively to the changing environment, while it was thought that some larger more established organisations struggled. A further theme was the need to balance being bold and working quickly and creatively with a commitment to established best practice.

“Remain calm, roll with the punches, don't be afraid to test something new out quickly (and be prepared to learn from the outcome), keep at it/be resilient and determined, be agile...”

The value of digital connectivity

Significant advances in ICT capability and the value generated by these changes were mentioned by 11% of participants. Many organisations had technological advancement forced upon them and were required to adapt quickly to working in a digital environment. This resulted in a great ‘leap forward’ in terms of skills and confidence.

An appreciation of technology as a powerful tool offering new ways to connect and communicate was prominent in responses. So was excitement at the potential for alternative ways of working and of delivering services. Among participants that specified the aspects of their work impacted by this new way of working, there was a fairly even division between a focus on internal work processes and delivering services.

“Mastering online meeting technology and appropriate etiquette.”

“We can operate online and the sector values this.”

In terms of service delivery, participants learnt that delivering services online could be impactful and effective. A few participants noted cost- savings incurred by using online delivery. Taking up technology enabled a widening of service delivery options as organisations and their communities adapted to new ways of connecting.

Many participants were surprised by the effectiveness of remote delivery and the extent to which it was embraced by clients, stakeholders and members alike. Online consultations and telehealth were rapidly

adopted. Some participants noted that their clients seemed perfectly happy with Zoom or telephone contact in lieu of face-to-face meetings.

“Online service delivery and keeping connected is collaborative and cost-effective, and people have enjoyed it. This will become an increasing proportion of our service delivery.”

“That whilst most of business should be face-to-face, we can still provide good quality support remotely via phone and online.”

Another prominent theme in these responses was learning that digital delivery had increased access to services. Participants reported that using Zoom and other platforms provided another means to meet the needs of clients. This enabled people to remain engaged in care during lockdown levels. It also broadened their geographical reach.

Digital delivery extended the reach of these organisations to people in all parts of Aotearoa, rather than limiting service provision to the few regions in which they provided face-to-face services. A few people noted that working online had removed barriers by streamlining other aspects of their work with clients, such as some administrative processes that had previously required client access to items such as using printers and scanners.

Enhanced access also featured heavily in responses from participants working in the education space. It appeared that most of these participants had delivered online learning for the first time and had gained much from the growth in ICT skills and the opportunity to try out new ideas and delivery methods.

“Online learning is actually easy and you can reach more people through it.”

However, access was restricted by varying degrees of digital literacy and access to devices. One educator noted that delivering online learning took a lot more time. Another highlighted that, while lessons could be delivered digitally with relative ease, other important aspects of their work such as pastoral care were very difficult in an online forum.

“That we can deliver our learning programmes online but the lack of personal contact with our whānau being part of their child's learning has been the biggest challenge.”

Despite the positive experience of many organisations adapting their offering for online delivery, there was a small group (2% of participants) who found there was no substitute for face-to-face contact. Some reflected that COVID-19 taught them that in-person meetings were an essential part of their service, in a few cases because deep engagement required in-person interaction and 'online chats can only go so far'.

Vulnerable youth and older people were two groups that participants identified as being in particular need of in-person support. For some, online consultations might have been a useful workaround, but would not be incorporated as part of their future service delivery.

“...Those we support rely heavily on in-person, group or face-to-face contact, we struggled to find a way around this.”

In terms of internal work processes, learning of the versatility, ease and effectiveness of using video conferencing software, such as Zoom to connect team members and facilitate contact with stakeholders featured prominently. Many people noted the efficiency of moving communications online. Some mentioned savings in time and travel costs by replacing face-to-face meetings with online meetings. Some noted that online meetings streamlined other work processes, such as board meetings. They also reduced the potential for misunderstandings and drawn out timeframes from lengthy email discussions involving many people.

“With added efficiency of virtual communications—have had more opportunity to get ‘off the tools’ and work on bigger picture.”

“The development of capability within our organisation for complete remote working. This has hastened the switch to (almost) paperless board meetings, which was previously taking forever to achieve.”

Online meetings were primarily used to facilitate remote working. Participants learnt that it was not necessary to share an office to work collaboratively and effectively. Participants were surprised how easy it was to work from home and maintain a positive team culture. They saw huge benefit in the increased flexibility that remote working brings.

“...That we can build meaningful connection, culture and teams in cyber space.”

“That we have all worked extremely well from home and in fact have found it quite efficient not having to travel in the Auckland traffic every day. We will now continue to work from home.”

While the vast majority spoke about what they found to be the ‘huge benefits’ of working online, a few issues were identified. Organisations must be sufficiently resourced to work remotely. Some learnt they needed better digital capability, or that COVID-19 had highlighted the importance of continual upskilling in the use of technology and up-to-date equipment. A few participants learnt the value of a physical office for productive working, maintaining focus and vision, and deep collaboration.

Highlighted organisational strengths and capabilities

Some 10% of participants highlighted the extent to which COVID-19 had revealed the strengths of both their teams and organisations as a whole. Participants described learning that their team was ‘fit for purpose’, strong, capable and effective. Discovering new strengths and capabilities revealed ‘the true value’ of teams and highlighted their commitment and strong sense of mission within the organisation.

“I am so proud of our team, staff and board for their commitment to our core values. We were tested and we were true.”

Being adaptive and responsive continued as a prominent theme. Many shared how they learnt of their team’s capacity to move quickly and efficiently to respond to challenges in a dynamic environment. Teams were revealed to be flexible, agile and versatile as they demonstrated their ability to adapt delivery and internal processes, such as decision making, when required.

“We can adapt quickly when needed. We can’t go back to the old bureaucratic ways of operating now that we know how efficient we can be.”

“Our team is more agile and innovative than they ever thought they could be—has grown their confidence in themselves.”

The resilience of teams and organisations also featured strongly in these responses. Participants learnt that their organisations were robust and able to overcome adversity. The pandemic taught many of these participants that their organisations had the capacity to cope in an emergency and could ‘survive and manage whatever the crisis’. This learning fostered new confidence by showing that ‘impossible is nothing’ and that in uncertain times these providers were able to survive and also move forward. For some, a positive attitude was a key component of resilience, enabling teams to remain vibrant and effective, and also to make the most of challenging circumstances.

“That we can do this! What seemed scary way back at the start has been addressed and we have found ways to carry on.”

Positive team culture was also highlighted by the way teams responded to the challenge of COVID-19. Participants noted the collaboration, generosity, caring and kindness of staff, with team members reaching out and supporting one another and ‘banding together’ when required. This resulted in a strong sense of togetherness. For some participants, there were enduring positive gains, with teams ‘strengthened by working through this together’.

Relationship building and collaboration

COVID-19 was a powerful catalyst for building relationships and collaborating across the sector. It highlighted the immense value in working together. Overall, responses highlighted the huge appetite for collaborating within the not-for-profit sector, which was seen by many as being key to its sustainability.

For many, the COVID-19 response demonstrated the power of collaborating and showed how quickly people could come together to achieve a shared objective. Participants felt their ability to collaborate and strengthen organisational relationships was enhanced by the pandemic. They achieved this through increased networking with like-minded organisations, enabling the sharing of experiences, knowledge, skills and resources.

The value of more formalised professional networks was another important learning. The important role played by umbrella groups was also highlighted. A few participants shared that they had relied heavily on umbrella groups during the response.

“Cooperate with other organisations. A silver lining of COVID-19 has been the immense increase in networking and collaboration and we need to continue this momentum.”

“We had invaluable local online meetings during lockdown that occurred organically (not through formal organisation) that had key stakeholders and volunteer managers present. This was excellent for sharing resources and knowledge quickly and efficiently, as well as providing a space for managers to talk that I believe improved wellbeing for all of us during lockdown.”

“Having a collective of knowledgeable and experienced CEOs to bounce ideas from during this time was invaluable.”

“Communication and collaboration is very important to get the best outcomes from a people and fiscal perspective, as it is to develop resilience in our community, so in the event of adversity people are better equipped.”

While many focused on collaborating across the sector, the importance of fostering productive relationships with other organisations and stakeholders also featured. Examples included cultivating strong ties with local authorities and ‘a collective approach,’ with more opportunities for the NGO sector and government to work together. One participant described this as having ‘stunning outcomes’ during the pandemic. The importance of strengthening hapū and iwi relationships was also highlighted.

Some noted the importance of building and maintaining relationships with communities before a crisis hits. There was also a desire by some to draw on the community knowledge of other organisations, particularly those with a good appreciation of community needs.

“I have networked with more people during COVID-19 lockdown than I was able to prior to lockdown. Our agency has grown in terms of our ability to communicate both within the agency, across government departments, with local organisations as well as with other providers in our same sector.”

“The relationships we have worked on previously have been invaluable now.”

Looking to the future, some participants talked about what would be useful to further enhance collaborating across the sector, echoing many of the desired future changes to strengthen the sector. Some felt that organisations needed to prioritise relationship building, with COVID-19 showing how crucial it was to have these in place. The need for greater awareness across the sector of what other organisations were doing featured once again, as did how a competitive funding model stifles collaborative working.

Importance of being prepared for the unexpected

The need to be prepared for any possibilities was a further theme, raised by 5% of participants. This group had learned of the importance of conservative financial management and comprehensive planning that included worst-case scenarios. A few people reflected that their organisations were well prepared thanks to investments in technology, business continuity and pandemic planning; time well spent which enabled them to continue to support their clients uninterrupted. However, the bulk of this group noted their organisation’s need to do better in this area.

The majority of participants that spoke of the need to plan ahead and prepare had learnt of the importance of retaining cash reserves and/or a contingency fund to meet unknown challenges. Many reflected that their organisation's reserves had been insufficient to deal with the impact of COVID-19. A few people highlighted the need for clear policy around how reserves were built and used.

Other considerations raised were the need to know and put aside the cost of winding down while still in a positive financial position, that a reserve fund must be financially self-sustainable, and the need for a clear rationale to justify the need for retaining this cash to members.

“Back-up finances and emergency plans for ALL and ANY conceivable issue need to be given thought to.”

“That we needed to have funds put aside for a rainy day. We had ploughed all income into subsidies for clients. Without the wage subsidy we would have gone under by now.”

The importance of effective business continuity planning was a further theme in responses, with most reflecting that their plans had been insufficient or needed updating. One person pointed out the need for policy and procedures to be kept as living documents.

Other aspects of readiness highlighted were the need to keep good stocks of personal protective equipment and ensuring that all staff had the right form of technology that suited their ability. A further group of participants shared that COVID-19 had taught them valuable skills, resilience and approaches for dealing with difficult and uncertain situations. These people felt they were now more resourceful and skilled when it came to planning, prioritising resources, and increasing efficiency by reducing operational loads.

“Our business continuity plan was not sufficiently well defined for a pandemic event like this, however it gave us a good base from which to start our crisis management. It needs to be reviewed and revised.”

Within this theme, a small group of participants felt that COVID-19 had revealed that many charities in Aotearoa New Zealand lacked preparedness for, or resilience to, unexpected events. These participants saw an honest, hard look at organisational viability as important and that the 'inevitable' consolidation needed to happen sooner rather than later to streamline the sector, and make more efficient use of what would be a smaller pool of financial resources in the near to mid-term future.

Good communication is vital

For a further group of participants (5%), COVID-19 had reinforced the importance of clear and timely communication. The majority of these people spoke in general terms about 'the need for open communication' during these uncertain times, both within their organisation and with external stakeholders.

Effective internal communication processes with team members, volunteers and governors were seen as important for maintaining wellbeing and managing change. Some participants identified a need for decisive and timely communication from leadership to staff.

A few noted how their organisation's skills in this area had been strengthened during COVID-19, while one or two gaps were also identified. A reliance on group gatherings for information sharing was one example provided by a volunteer organisation.

“Our daily communication with service users, staff and governance has been key.”

“...Communication is king. We became much better communicators with our staff and volunteers and have seen the benefits of this.”

Regular communication with service users was seen as vital. Several participants highlighted the importance of 'clear, brief messages for whānau'. A few had found certain methods particularly effective for managing information flows with clients and members. Regular newsletters (both email and paper) were mentioned as a useful tool for sharing information about service availability, health messages and other information, as well as the value of making personal contact via phone calls.

The importance of having up-to-date contact details available when needed was also noted. Paramount too was open communication with other external stakeholders such as supporters, partners, funders, and the wider community. Some participants reflected on their organisation's successes in this area.

Some participants felt that regular contact with key partners and funders had enabled them to understand and share the impacts of COVID-19. On the flip side, one person noted that receiving too much information, and duplicated information from different sources was frustrating and time-consuming.

The value of our contribution

COVID-19 reinforced the value and importance of the work of their organisation, raised by 4% of responses. One prominent theme was that the pandemic highlighted that their work addressed community needs that would be otherwise unmet. For some, this was fostered by the swift and effective response of their organisations, or the sector more broadly, to the enhanced or changing needs of their communities: COVID-19 was evidence that they could deliver in a time of crisis. These participants reflected on how successfully they had managed, despite significant constraints, and a few felt that the sector had mobilised to meet community needs faster than government responses. Some believed the pandemic had revealed the extent to which communities and society, in general, rely heavily on the 'vital' work of the tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector.

“Our organisation is small but a much needed service. We do fill in the gaps in our community.”

“What we do matters to the community and it has given us determination to keep going, despite the anxiety and uncertainty.”

For other participants, COVID-19 illustrated the extent to which their work enhanced the wellbeing of their communities. Examples included representatives of clubs sharing how lockdown highlighted their important role in facilitating socialising and togetherness. Arts organisations reflected on the important role of creative expression and celebration of culture, particularly in times of great upheaval. A further group of participants reported learning how appreciated they were both by supporters and the communities they serve.

Overall COVID-19 had fostered for participants a revitalised sense of the value of their contribution, of purpose, and the important role they play in the lives of their clients. Conversely, a few people had learnt that their work was viewed as a luxury, or a 'nice to have', or they were misunderstood, undervalued or ignored.

The strength, resilience and effectiveness of the sector

A further theme (3% of participants) was that the tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector's response to COVID-19 had illustrated its strength, resilience, and ability to quickly and effectively meet the needs of the communities it served. The sector was described as 'strong', 'resourceful', 'rock solid', 'resilient' and 'agile'. Some reflected on the lengths sector organisations went to in order to provide services to their communities under difficult circumstances, or how sector organisations had rallied and 'pulled together' for whatever was required. The extent to which the sector had been heavily relied on during the pandemic was also noted.

"Resilience of grass roots community groups, their ability to read what is required and adapt accordingly."

"Grassroots can achieve a large amount based on the generosity of volunteers."

Other responses

A range of themes were raised by approximately 2% of participants: that crisis brings opportunity; the sector's reliance on unsustainable revenue streams; the importance of clear vision and purpose; and the resilience of our communities. We discuss these below.

A few participants used this question as an opportunity to reflect on the potential for the disruption to be an agent for positive change. These participants shared a strong sense of optimism for the future, despite the serious impacts of the pandemic, because 'there are always opportunities out of adversity'.

Some reflected on the new opportunities to enhance service delivery or fundraise differently. For others, the opportunity presented was for 'a reset' and deeper, structural change. COVID-19 had shown how easily traditional structures can be dismantled to make way for more agile, flexible approaches and the ability of crisis to bring people together to work for a common goal. But regardless of the scope of the opportunity presented, the pandemic was seen as a valuable chance to 'build back better'.

"...Looking forward to taking the best of what we have learnt and the best of what we traditionally have done and making a better future for clients and staff."

"Sometimes there needs to be a burning platform within the sector to effect needed change. COVID-19 is presenting one of those."

COVID-19 revealed the precarity of the revenue streams on which much of the sector relied. A few people described the position of their organisations and the sector more broadly as 'fragile', 'vulnerable' and 'unsustainable'. Some specified certain funding sources as particularly uncertain or risky, such as council funding and gaming trust grants. One person noted the need to spread this significant risk among a greater variety of funding options to avoid a similar situation arising in future.

A few participants highlighted the challenge of operating in an increasingly uncertain environment in which organisations are competing for fewer and fewer dollars from funders and donors—a situation that one participant described as living in 'a house of cards'.

“The precarious nature of community and social services relying on gaming grants to fund wages and to run their services. It's not sustainable and it's not equitable.”

Some raised the need for clarity of purpose and action, particularly during times of uncertainty. Keeping the focus on vision and mission central were crucial, even if it meant reducing some aspects of service delivery. COVID-19 taught some the importance of focusing on core services, not letting distractions get in the way, and what can be accomplished when you have a strong purpose and values that your team believes in.

“A reminder that it is important to be clear about your beliefs, philosophies and why you do what you do—this then makes it easier to make decisions not only about what needs to be done but also how it should be done. Once that is established—keep it as simple and clear as possible. Message it over and over again.”

For a small group of participants, discovering the resilience of the people, families and communities they serve was the most important lesson. These people described how their communities remained positive, coped with the isolation of lockdown and were open to learning new skills and technologies. Some participants were struck by the sense of community in the areas in which they worked, and the way members cared for and supported one another.

Final reflections

Survey participants were given the opportunity to offer any final reflections. Broadly, participants appeared to use this question to raise issues and ideas with a wider scope, most commonly in regards to the wider community sector and New Zealand society.

A prominent theme arising in responses was praise. The opportunity was taken to praise and offer thanks to individual organisations and funders either on a national or local scale.

“Our community is absolutely amazing. So many organisations really stepped up to the mark and did everything humanly possible to support their local community or constituency. It was our privilege to help to support them with C19-specific funding.”

“I think the country would have found it difficult to have coped so well without our voluntary organisations.”

Notably, several participants extended praise and thanks to the government and related agencies for their response to COVID-19 on a national scale.

“The government response to COVID-19 infections management and to the financial impact have been phenomenal.”

“We are very grateful for the wage subsidy, and business loan. Also for the regular COVID bulletins from various government departments. We feel very supported so far in the face of the challenges.”

Other prominent themes amongst participants were relief and resilience in light of the relaxation of strict lockdown measures.

“Young people are very resilient and creative. We need to listen to them.”

“Keep being positive and explore new ways to keep our organisation strong.”

“Although it’s been challenging, as an organisation this has been a great time of growth in relationship for us as a team, both staff and governance. We have all pulled together to keep the ship afloat which is one of the essences of a not-for-profit organisation—everyone willing to pitch in for a greater cause.”

Furthermore, for several participants the changing environment brought out by COVID-19 led to a sense of opportunity for change or development in the future. Within many responses there was a sense of determination and a focus on looking ahead and continuing to offer services.

“There are opportunities in the volunteering space—are we ready to engage!”

“Let’s hope this pandemic is not wasted, and we all in this sector use it to create positive change!”

In contrast, there were also calls for help, and details of ongoing challenges and loss that were causing uncertainty and grief for participants.

“Help—arts is CRUCIAL for wellbeing, social cohesion etc and yet is not the PRIORITY for community funding for council etc—it needs to be!”

“It’s been hard for Māori in rural areas—there’s no public transport and many whānau are going without.”

“I’m so tired, and struggling to continue some days with the energy to continue with this work as I feel like it’s just me hitting my head against a wall so much of the day...The change in support/belief from the private sector to non-profit is mind blowing and frustrating.”

Wider social themes were also apparent within responses. There was a strong call for changes to the sector, and for changes to funding in particular.

“Uncertainty over funding makes sustainability and continuity much more difficult. It is difficult for future planning, development and strategic thinking when we are just making do to survive each year if we can.”

“Funding opportunities are minimal, so you end up fighting for the small amounts with other trusts and that limits collaborative opportunities and makes it harder to reach wider conservation goals.”

“What would happen to NZ if all charities downed tools for a month?”

Several participants urged a focus on stronger partnerships and emphasised the importance of planning for the future and being aware of the possibility of further challenges.

“The sector can be a leader in rebuilding NZ Inc. We must have a united innovative voice that shows people are to the foremost & the 'economy' is there to support our wellbeing.”

“The level of innovation and excitement for change has stimulated what could be a crowded domain. We need to create the forums and relationships that can enable [us] to [do] good stuff to be recognised and the new priorities to be addressed. We do not want to find ourselves returning to old troubles.”

There was a prominent call for wider social change and utilising COVID-19 knowledge and energy to address wider social issues such as climate change, racism, mental health awareness, and inequity in New Zealand.

“There was feedback from the disabled community that their input wasn't widely sought or considered highly enough throughout this pandemic. How do we help amplify the voices of those who could be most affected in times like this?”

“To the higher beings—you must learn to trust communities. We know our own!”

“There is huge momentum for change so we can address inequality, environment, and climate change in our recovery, while also investing in community-led solutions.”

Lastly, this question was used to offer feedback and suggestions about the survey and dissemination of the results.

“So many surveys—now some action please!”

“Mihi aroha ki te ngakau tautoko o tenei Kaupapa.”

“Data is so important to help evidence based decision making and this survey will definitely help.”

Sustaining sector voices

Releasing the survey as open data

We will be releasing the data from this survey as an open dataset to enable other organisations to conduct their own analysis. This can then be used for service delivery and policy design across community organisations, government and philanthropy.

We asked survey participants if they agreed to their data being shared (noting that no identifiable data would be released). This received a very positive response, with 96% of responses received agreeing to the aggregated data being shared.

We intend to anonymise the responses and load the open dataset on to the Community Research platform for open access.

Re-engaging survey participants

We indicated that this survey may be repeated in the future to explore if any changes had occurred in organisations and the needs of the community and voluntary sectors. Responses indicated a highly engaged audience in this research, with 78% of responses being willing to be surveyed again, and 32% willing to be interviewed should this be required. A further 47% would like to receive a summary of results of the survey.

Conclusions

Shining a light

COVID-19 has profoundly impacted people and nature. So has the nature of our response.

It's not surprising that love, kindness, respect and compassion surfaced during the COVID-19 lockdown period.

The tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector had long secured our wellbeing and our ability to cope with big and small challenges. They set us up mentally, physically and spiritually to remain connected. They set us up for creative expression and immersion in culture. They set us up to remain fit and active. They set up nature to fill the silence left by lockdown.

The results of this survey show that, while a sizable number of organisations took a hit during lockdown, they mobilised, moved with agility, and in some cases did, and are still doing more with less.

Effective leadership and fast action by government was matched by people and communities across Aotearoa.

The sector earned trust and mandate through its ability to read what was required and move rapidly. Examples seen in this survey included helping with material hardship, food assistance, shopping and deliveries, emergency accommodation, care packages, budgeting assistance, job hunting, utility payments, loneliness and isolation.

Umbrella organisations and peak bodies were mentioned for increasing support for their members and networks. This included advice on health and safety, staffing, budgets, wellbeing, and supporting online set-up and business continuity.

Organisations adapted and diversified to changing needs, developed new programmes, did what was needed even if it wasn't their core work, or shifted to online support.

High trust models of funding, flexibility and mutual respect between local and central government, philanthropy and the sector created the conditions for some stunning outcomes for communities.

It's clear there are people in our whānau whānui and communities who would do anything for us. And they did. "We have never worked so hard with so little," said one. Some were delivering food parcels well before government support came through. One organisation went from helping 20 families to helping 80. Individuals provided care while needing to access the foodbank themselves. Others used their own devices and their own data to make services available. Some delivered services in good faith before government funds came through. We know many put themselves at risk to be shoppers and deliverers.

Taking stock

Not surprisingly, this took a toll.

We knew that before COVID-19, there was a shortfall of \$630 million in government funding to social service providers delivering services on behalf of the government¹. We also knew that there was a \$200 million shortfall to meet the demand for services². We knew that there were more organisations competing for decreasing pools of funding. We knew there were staffing and salary pressures.

¹ 'Social Service System: The Funding Gap and How to Bridge It', August 2019 - <https://bit.ly/2WYsFKc>

² 'Social Service System: The Funding Gap and How to Bridge It', August 2019 - <https://bit.ly/2WYsFKc>

Post-lockdown, the sector is in a fragile, finely balanced position. There remains a significant gap in the available and funded resourcing for tangata whenua, community and voluntary organisations to deliver services.

Most survey participants (74%) reported that they took some form of financial hit during lockdown. Almost half had sufficient funds to maintain staff and activity for six months or more, the rest did not without revenue coming in.

Inequities were highlighted. The pendulum swung, as the profile of some types of organisations fell and the profile of others rose. Some participating organisations received additional income (17%), while others increased their services with the same or reduced income. Many (59%) reduced services to protect clients and an elderly volunteer base, or because facilities such as schools, marae, community centres were shut.

Many participants lost revenue through cancelled fundraising initiatives, the Gaming Trust, government or philanthropic repurposing, and reduced corporate and public donations. Some saw further fundraising opportunities being considerably reduced with an expected recession coming as a consequence of the pandemic. A few did not wish to fundraise for the foreseeable future because they didn't wish to add stress to their communities.

Survey participants talked about reforecasting, restructuring, seeking alternative income streams and changing their business models.

Shaping the future

Surprisingly, our participants from the tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector largely remain upbeat and positive, excited about the possibilities for change that COVID-19 has opened up. They have enormous optimism. They developed a new confidence and proficiency through having their own team strengths and capabilities realised. The strong sense of togetherness, digital connectivity and revitalised sense of value and purpose resulted in a renewed sense of vibrancy.

Some in the sector surprised themselves with their ability to move rapidly, adapt and be nimble. They are poised to further embrace the digital space, share knowledge, work together more, and reshape the way they deliver services and support to their communities.

Collective effort across the sector, government and philanthropy is now needed to revive funding sources, replenish reserves, reshape the volunteer base, build technological and social infrastructure and skills, and rethink how services are delivered, supported and funded.

Moving forward

COVID-19 has ignited the imagination and opened up our potential. There were “stunning outcomes” from opportunities for working better together.

Survey participants have sent a clear message that there is a “huge appetite” to harness the power and potential that was activated during lockdown. They want to protect and grow:

- high trust
- a broadened view of local needs
- locally-led decision-making
- moving quickly
- being bold

- digital connectivity (in an appropriately blended way) and new ways to connect and communicate
- alternative ways of delivering services and support
- team strengths and capabilities
- resilience and robustness of teams
- confidence, vibrancy, effectiveness
- working together
- formalised professional networks
- umbrella groups, who were relied upon heavily
- cash reserves
- revitalised sense of value and purpose.

We know the impact of COVID-19 is far from over. The true impact on our communities is yet to come. We have an obligation to honour and grow the aroha, kindness, reciprocity, innovation, imagination and collective spirit that will bring balance and harmony, that will steady us in a time of disruption and concern.

What is the next step in giving our communities, and the organisations who care for them continued life and energy? The hā, or breath of one element becomes the life force of another. In this way we are all related and reliant on each other.