

What have we learned about high-engagement funding?



What have we learned about high-engagement funding?

Foundation North's Māori & Pacific Education Initiative

Contents

I	Background	4
	The Māori and Pacific Education Initiative (MPEI)	4
	High-engagement investment-what is it?	5
II	What did we learn?	7
III	It's all about trusted relationships	8
	Engaging	8
	Listening	9
	Understanding	9
	Commitment	10
IV	Our communities can create the change they want to see	11
	Don't decide for us, let us decide and just support us	11
V	It's about walking alongside each other and thinking together	13
	Stewardship	13
	Dispositions	13
	Capacity development	14
	Leadership	14
	Advocacy	14
	Transitioning beyond high engagement	15
	It's not for everybody	15
VI	Expect change and be prepared to be courageous	16
	Tolerance for uncertainty and vulnerability	16
	The power of stories and celebration	16
VII	Ensure reflective and evaluative thinking and practice is built in from the start	17
VIII	Conclusion	19
	References	20
	Appendix A: MPEI project summaries	22

Acknowledgements

The evaluation team was from the Kinnect Group and included Kate McKegg, Nan Wehipeihana, Judy Oakden, Julian King, Alex McKegg, Kiri Paipa, Debbie Goodwin and Pale Sauni.

To cite this report: Kinnect Group & Foundation North (2016). *What have we learned about evaluating high-engagement funding? Foundation North's Māori and Pacific Education Initiative*. Auckland: Foundation North.

Disclaimer: The information in this report is presented in good faith using the information available to the evaluators at the time of preparation. It is provided on the basis that the authors of the report are not liable to any person or organisation for any damage or loss which may occur in relation to taking or not taking action in respect of any information or advice within this report.

Tables

Table 1	Māori and Pacific Education Initiative project summaries	22
---------	--	----

I Background

The Māori and Pacific Education Initiative (MPEI)

In the face of overwhelming evidence of long-term, systemic educational failure for Māori and Pacific young people, Foundation North (known then as the ASB Community Trust) set out in 2006 “to explore a new, transformational approach to philanthropy”. The hope was that the new approach could go some way towards “overcoming educational underachievement in Māori and Pasifika communities” in Auckland and Northland. The cold, hard reality was that if left to continue, the wellbeing and prosperity of some Māori and Pacific communities was at serious risk; worse still, New Zealand’s economic progress, social cohesion and national identity could be argued to be on the line.¹

“Let’s do something big and bold.”

*Pat Snedden,
Deputy Chair, 2006²*

The Trustees of Foundation North set aside substantial funds, and committed to a long-term, innovative investment approach, that they knew would be risky and challenging for them, but necessary, if community-led solutions to seemingly intractable problems were to be found. The Māori and Pacific Education Initiative (MPEI) vision—*Mā tātou anō tātou e kōrero, We speak for ourselves*—captures the essence of the initiative, that communities know what is good for them, and must be able to speak for themselves and make their own decisions.³

Kevin Prime, Trust Chair when the MPEI was conceived, expressed the purpose of the MPEI:

The core objective of MPEI was always to advance Māori and Pacific Island engagement in citizenship through educational achievement. Our educational experts and community leaders informed us that approaches that nurture a strong cultural identity through tikanga components will support Māori and Pacific Island children to develop self-confidence and self-esteem, and to achieve their educational potential ... so they may stand tall and take up their place in the heart of our society, succeeding as Māori and as Pacific people respectively and as good New Zealand citizens.⁴

Nine projects were chosen⁵ and funded for five years, each one inspired from within a Māori or Pacific⁶ community, with community backing, and focused on lifting the educational achievement of Māori and/or Pacific young people.

¹ MPEI contributors & Hancock (2013) *Nga Maumaharatanga: Māori and Pacific Education Initiative—Our journey of forging philanthropic innovation together*, p. 15. (see References section for full source details—footnotes give short titles only)

² MPEI contributors & Hancock (2013)

³ Kevin Prime, Chair of ASB Community Trust, 2003-09, in Hancock (2009)

⁴ MPEI contributors & Hancock (2012) *He Akoranga He Aratohu: Māori and Pacific Education Initiative lessons to guide innovative philanthropic and social practice*, p. 41

⁵ See Appendix A for details of the MPEI projects

⁶ Originally, MPEI was named the Māori and Pasifika Education Initiative. Following discussion among committee members, the term “Pasifika” was replaced by the word “Pacific”. While the term Pasifika is used in some contexts, the word Pacific was considered a more universal expression. Pacific is an English term and Pacific peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand rely on English as their common language, while also speaking their own languages within their own communities. (MPEI contributors & Hancock, 2012, p.4)

The aspirations of these communities were clear:

“We want what others have: university enrolments; high paying jobs; people who are successful in their life careers whatever their field and confident about themselves and their culture. How come the state education system works for most people in the population but not for our peoples?”⁷

The projects selected offered a diverse range of solutions to the problem of educational underachievement—from early childhood to tertiary level—and their success demonstrates the acumen and ability Māori and Pacific communities have to generate compelling answers to the challenges they face.⁸

This report summarises some of the learning about high-engagement funding in a set of principles, distilled from feedback gathered over the course of the Māori and Pacific Education Initiative from Trustees, staff and providers. See other reports in this series for what was learned about the key components of Māori and Pacific education success, challenges of project evaluation, and assessment of the overall value for investment of this initiative. (See www.foundationnorth.org.nz/how-we-work/maori-pacific-education-initiative/.)

High-engagement investment—what is it?

For many years, philanthropic organisations have handed out grants to organisations, initiatives and projects without necessarily paying close attention to the strategic impact this granting was having in communities. More recently, there has been a shift in approach, as philanthropic funders have become more interested in the impact and value of their social investing. There has been a growing desire among many philanthropic funders to break out of old ways of doing things to support innovative approaches to complex and intractable problems that have evaded our ways of knowing how to solve them.⁹

There is a range of terminology that applies to this shift in approach, including venture philanthropy, catalytic philanthropy and high-engagement philanthropy.

In broad terms, it is characterised by a few key attributes:

- ✘ a principled focus on supporting and realising community aspirations
- ✘ provision of funding PLUS support for grantees to build organisational capacity
- ✘ commitment to long term, partnering style relationships between funders and grantees
- ✘ desire to achieve lasting and meaningful results
- ✘ use of evaluation for learning
- ✘ aspiration to influence systemic change.

⁷ Hancock (2009), p. 4

⁸ MPEI contributors & Hancock (2012)

⁹ Kramer (2002) Will ‘venture philanthropy’ leave a lasting mark on charitable giving?

Typically, there are bold visions and aspirations anchoring a high-engagement initiative.

Writer, researcher and community development specialist Frances Hancock describes Foundation North’s intention (known then as ASB Community Trust) with the MPEI:

*A drive to forge social change by doing things differently led the Trust to think outside traditional models in favour of testing new approaches aligned with entrepreneurial philanthropy.*¹⁰

Keeping the vision of a high-engagement initiative alive and fresh over the long term is a significant challenge, and requires agile and adept management by those involved.

The high-engagement approach is not linear; it unfolds in an environment where traditional forms of decision-making are not suitable for addressing the challenges being faced. It can be expected that issues will emerge that were not necessarily knowable from the outset, so cannot be planned for and predicted.

The core value of this approach is its responsiveness to emergence. Leadership plays an important role in supporting and facilitating the process¹¹ and building and sustaining the conditions and capacity needed for the approach to succeed.¹² Human relationships and social interactions are at the centre of this approach and are key to success; it’s all about people and the dilemmas they face, the conversations they need to have to understand what’s going on, and the need to find genuine solutions to issues and problems.

It’s important to note that high engagement isn’t for everyone. It requires a considerable commitment of time and resource on both sides¹³ and it is a completely different relationship to the one that many non-profit organisations are used to having with funders.

¹⁰ MPEI contributors & Hancock (2012), p.13

¹¹ Olson & Eoyang (2001) *Facilitating organizational change: Lessons from Complexity Science*

¹² Twyford, Waters, Harde, & Dengate (2012) *The Power of Co—The Smart Leaders’ Guide to Collaborative Governance*

¹³ Cairns & Chambers (2008) *ATM or Development Agency? Challenges of moving beyond grant-making for charitable foundations*

II What did we learn?

Deciding to take on a high-engagement process was a bold step for Foundation North. It had never undertaken anything like the MPEI before. Throughout the implementation of the MPEI, the Foundation has provided space for reflective learning about it, and has captured much of this learning in a series of narrative accounts written by Frances Hancock.

As part of the evaluation of MPEI, Foundation North and the external evaluators, the Kinnect Group, set out to uncover a set of principles that might be adapted and applied to other high-engagement initiatives, by Foundation North and other philanthropic funders.

Five principles were distilled from the learning and reflection gathered throughout the MPEI implementation that it is hoped others will find can be usefully adapted in a range of other contexts.

In a nutshell, these principles are:

- ✘ *It’s all about trusted relationships*
This principle we believe should be at the heart of engaged philanthropy. It is the foundation for everything that follows and it flows into all the other principles. Without it, the aspirations of funders and communities are less likely to be effectively realised.
- ✘ *Our communities can create the change they want to see*
A belief in the knowledge, experience, practical wisdom and expertise of communities to solve their problems is an essential operating principle of engaged philanthropy—that is hard to put into practice.
- ✘ *It’s about walking alongside each other and thinking together*
This principle is all about the type of journey that those involved in engaged philanthropy go on. It is a journey that will be filled with excitement, puzzles, surprise, unexpected challenges, joy, tension and celebration. And each step of the journey requires many heads and hearts to share the job of sorting out what to do next in order to broaden the impact that is possible when we work together.
- ✘ *Expect change and be prepared to be courageous*
Everyone learned that change is a constant in engaged philanthropy, and yet there are many pressures and incentives on funders and communities to standardise—to be like others, maintain a course of action, follow old patterns of behaviour and practice. This principle expresses the requirement for those engaging in this type of philanthropy to be constantly courageous and to get comfortable with ambiguity as they navigate the unknown in the pursuit of passionately held aspirations.
- ✘ *Ensure reflective and evaluative thinking and practice is built in from the start*
Having a culture of reflection, learning and evaluative thinking embedded in the process, not an add-on, is a fundamental principle of successful engaged philanthropy. And rather than a rigid, over-specified approach to evaluation, what is needed is a process that is responsive and dynamic, and specifically designed for the context in a way that supports people to integrate evaluative information into their thinking and decision-making.

The five principles will now be discussed in more detail.

III It's all about trusted relationships

The evaluators highlighted that this principle should be at the heart of engaged philanthropy. Their learning was that it was the foundation for everything that followed and it flowed into all the other principles. Without it, the aspirations of funders and communities are less likely to be effectively realised. The evaluation team drew the framing of this principle from the works of Maister, Green and Galford,¹⁴ and Stephen Covey.¹⁵

Engaging

From the very beginning of the MPEI process, Foundation North (known then as ASB Community Trust) set out to gain a mandate from Māori and Pacific communities to proceed. Through a well-resourced process of consultation, the Foundation's approach was to take advice from the community through the development of both Māori and Pacific reference groups. These reference groups brokered relationships with the community, advised the Foundation on process, protocol and approach, and gave feedback from and to the community.

One of the key learnings from this consultation process was that with authentic early engagement, funders and communities can demonstrate to each other that an ongoing relationship is worthwhile. Without this initial belief in each other, it is unlikely that the MPEI would have succeeded.

*The early suspicions of reference group members gave way to trust as [the funder's] representatives stressed a genuine approach and a willingness to earn buy-in at every step along the way. All agreed that without community buy-in, the initiative would fail to gain traction.*¹⁶

Having the right people in the right place at the right time was an important dimension of the relationship development process. Having Māori and Pacific Trustees fully engaged in the process, as well as Māori and Pacific staff to help steward the MPEI over time, demonstrated a commitment to culturally competent engagement that was important to the Māori and Pacific communities involved. Being prepared early on to use Māori and Pacific engagement processes such as hui and fono also “showed a willingness to act in a culturally appropriate manner”.¹⁷

Once the MPEI projects had been selected and funded, planned, deliberate, culturally appropriate engagement processes were an important feature of the early stages of the implementation process. From the outset, hui and fono were held regularly, bringing providers together to meet and connect with each other and to learn from each other.

The MPEI manager, as well as other capacity support partners, visited projects often, sometimes together, at other times separately. These face-to-face meetings ensured that early engagement efforts were sustained.

Not that it was plain sailing. With turnover of Trustees, or when new projects were funded, the challenge of refreshing the MPEI purpose and vision and engaging with new people was significant; and it would be fair to say that subsequent cohorts of projects were probably not ever quite as engaged

¹⁴ Maister, Green & Galford (2004) *The Trusted Advisor*

¹⁵ Covey (2008) *The Speed of Trust*

¹⁶ MPEI contributors & Hancock (2012), p. 21

¹⁷ MPEI contributors & Hancock (2012), p. 22

as those in the first wave of the initiative. However, it was important to put energy into bringing everyone along, even those Trustees who were sceptical, to ensure both the success of the initiative, and the take-up of learning from it for future investment decision-making and practice.

It didn't sit well with me, I thought the whole thing was idiocy, but now I see that it [MPEI] is making young people better, and also building the administration capacity of organisations...

Trustee

The task of matching capacity support expertise to projects was also tricky, requiring a careful and astute balancing of technical, cultural and personal attributes. And not every relationship worked out, with the reasons being quite specific to each context. The need for a nuanced and individualised approach to the right “fit” of capacity support is noted in some of the early literature on engaged philanthropy.¹⁸

Listening

From the providers' perspective, the quality of their relationship with Foundation North was enhanced by the consistent engagement they had with Moi Becroft (MPEI Manager) and Annie Johnson (the MPEI project support). Moi and Annie were faces they recognised, people with a cultural connection as well as being consistent and compassionate listeners. Providers talked about being able to just be themselves with Moi and Annie—they could say things they wouldn't tell other people. Moi and Annie were the critical “cultural fit” between the projects and the Foundation over the course of the initiative. The importance of feeling understood was exemplified when Annie's role was changed and then Moi became unwell. During this time, some providers talked about feeling as if they would not be able to carry on (in relationship with the Foundation) without Moi.

Ensuring there was a culturally competent, stable, compassionate, well-resourced backbone in the Foundation had a hugely positive effect on the relationship that developed with Māori and Pacific providers. Having the capability to listen well, pay attention to, and affirm providers' identities as Māori and Pacific was critical to the development and maintenance of relationships within MPEI high-engagement partnerships.

Understanding

This is just what we do, it's not a programme, it's a way of living. This is what it looks like being Māori.

MPEI provider

A trusted relationship develops over time, and strengthens when people feel they understand each other, and feel able to engage in deeper and more critical ways. In a high-engagement initiative, having the ability to be able to question, puzzle and frame issues, problems and opportunities together, in useful and beneficial ways, is important—but doesn't happen immediately and can't be taken for granted.

¹⁸ Cairns & Chambers (2008)

IV Our communities can create the change they want to see

The MPEI reference group was able to take the time to nurture relationships without pressure, ensuring future high trust engagement “whakawhanaungatanga tētahi ki tētahi”. The relationships built between Māori and Pacific communities and the Foundation was a marriage of community knowledge and expertise and the Foundation’s ability to resource the solutions.

Just as hui and fono were a feature of the early phases of MPEI engagement, so too were they a feature throughout the journey. They supported the development of deeper, sustainable relationships between Trustees, providers, Foundation staff and management, and other capacity support partners, by enabling people to interact collectively, building and reconnecting, sharing information and clarifying issues of importance.

Commitment

One very clear piece of feedback from MPEI providers was the value they perceived the Foundation had in the relationships with each of them. This was exemplified in the long-term commitment of the Foundation’s MPEI Manager, Moi Becroft.

A key part of the MPEI partnership was about both sides staying the course, and being prepared to invest time, energy, resource and emotion into the relationship with each other. For many Māori and Pacific communities, they’ve seen funders come and go, but the credibility of the relationship with the Foundation was clinched because providers perceived that it was prepared to be in there for the long haul.

From within the Foundation, however, although there were committed individuals, staying the course wasn’t a given. Having trusted relationships around the Foundation’s Board of Trustees’ table was an important feature during the early stages of the MPEI. There was a strong sense of trust that deepened among Board members as they began the MPEI journey together. However, with Trustee turnover, it wasn’t always easy to maintain this momentum or level of commitment—there were doubts and insecurities about the MPEI from several of the new Board members and it could very easily have fallen apart. Recognising this fragility, the leadership of the Foundation and the MPEI invested considerable energy into inducting and deepening new Board members’ understanding of the initiative and each other as a vital part of ensuring the longevity of the MPEI.

The learning that has been successfully shared with Trustees and staff throughout the MPEI journey has the current Board poised, with a real sense that they may have the necessary trust in each other to take on another “game-changing” initiative.

*We’ve had such outstanding success and achievement...
how do we take these learnings and go forward?*

Trustee

A belief in the knowledge, experience, practical wisdom and expertise of communities to solve their problems is an essential operating principle of engaged philanthropy—that is hard to put into practice.

The Māori and Pacific MPEI providers told the evaluators that they commonly experienced a poor understanding from funders about the reality of what it takes to effect change in highly vulnerable communities. Funding is often inadequate to properly address the issues that exist for whānau and communities. And the relationships they have with funders are often one-sided, weighted towards the funder’s need for fiscal accountability and numerical data that, in the main, does little to describe the actual wellbeing within a community.

Foundation North took a collaborative and inclusive approach, which from the MPEI providers’ perspectives demonstrated a belief that Māori and Pacific communities have the knowledge, solutions and expertise to solve their own problems. The Foundation and the selected MPEI projects then walked alongside each other to create and develop solutions, and providers were able to exercise their own authority to develop models that fit their realities.

*[The Foundation] enabled us to be innovative,
bringing our visions to being.*

MPEI provider

Don’t decide for us, let us decide and just support us

“Don’t decide for us, let us decide and just support us” —these were the words of an MPEI provider.

There is a long history in New Zealand of Māori and Pacific communities not being at the table when decisions (such as policy, funding and programming) are made that affect them.

Providers told the evaluation team that what was fundamentally different about the MPEI high-engagement approach was that they felt that, for the first time, they were able to lead and decide what should be done, and they were then simply supported to do this.

[Foundation North] gave us wings.

MPEI provider

This opportunity wasn’t given without an expectation from the funder that they would be able to walk alongside providers, in a relationship of high trust; where the ups and downs of the journey would be transparently shared between providers and the Foundation. Providers were expected to work together with the Foundation to problem-solve and evolve the needed strategies to address programme opportunities and challenges.

The people at Foundation North realised that in order to bring the MPEI vision to fruition, they needed the providers, as much the providers needed them. The providers were pivotal to the design and implementation of the vision, but they needed support.

Ⓥ It's about walking alongside each other and thinking together

Support was provided in a number of forms, including:

- ✘ **Funding**
Long-term funding (five years and more for some) was provided to the MPEI projects. For many, the Foundation funding was the largest component of funding they received over the five years.
- ✘ **Capacity building**
Tailored budget and financial advice, governance training and advice, organisational development support, and evaluation capacity development (see capacity building section).
- ✘ **Learning opportunities**
Free attendance at events with a range of local and international speakers as well as professional learning opportunities.
- ✘ **Advocacy**
An aspect of support that was also provided was advocacy for the projects at different times. Some didn't need this, but others did. As projects began looking for alternative longer term funding solutions, for some, advocacy by the Foundation and by Trustees was really important.

The MPEI was a large, complex, collective initiative; the coming together of a large cast of people, organisations, communities, hopes and aspirations. The Foundation recognised early on that the most innovative solutions would come from the communities themselves and, with support, might develop the potential to grow and scale-up further.

This principle is all about the type of journey that those involved in engaged philanthropy go on. It is a journey that will be filled with excitement, puzzles, surprise, unexpected challenges, joy, tension and celebration. And each step of the journey requires many heads and hearts to share the job of sorting out what to do next in order to broaden the impact that is possible when we work together.

Stewardship

One of the lessons learned about the high-engagement journey was the importance of stable, consistent, trusted stewardship of a high-engagement initiative and the people in it. MPEI providers were clear that without competent, capable, committed stewardship, undertaken by manager Moi Becroft, the high-engagement process would not have been successful. The evaluators reported it would be fair to say that providers felt that her stewardship had a profound influence on the development of each of the MPEI projects. Moi was a constant presence throughout the MPEI journey and she was described as compassionate, caring and fair, as well as deeply committed to the aspirations and wellbeing of the community organisations funded by MPEI. The importance of having someone in this role who has this range of attributes is borne out in the literature on collective impact and servant leadership.¹⁹

Dispositions

A high-engagement journey is all about shifting gear; it's about change—multidimensional change—in leadership, structures, systems, relationships, people and communities. For the funders and providers involved, it is likely to be a tumultuous, exciting, exhilarating, terrifying, satisfying and deeply transformative experience.

The evaluation team learned that there are at least two dispositions—willingness and commitment—that people and organisations need to head into the high-engagement journey and stay the course—and these apply to both funders and providers.

Funders and providers have to be willing and committed.²⁰ If those leading the change process are unwilling or not fully committed then their efforts are more likely to founder and be less successful.²¹

The evaluators said they learned that with a willingness to engage and a commitment to the journey on both sides, it was possible to co-create the conditions for success.

Other dispositions necessary for a high-engagement journey that have been identified in the capacity-building literature, and with which the evaluators concur, include:

- ✘ *open-mindedness*—an active desire to listen, and to consider different perspectives and alternative possibilities
- ✘ *responsibility*—being willing to carefully consider the many possible consequences of actions
- ✘ *courage*—being motivated to critically examine one's assumptions and beliefs, as well as actions and results, with the intention of learning something new, adapting and responding with agility and flexibility.

¹⁹ van Dierendonck (2011) Servant leadership: A review and synthesis

²⁰ Connelly (2007) Deeper capacity building for greater impact: Designing a long-term initiative to strengthen a set of nonprofit organisations

²¹ Connelly & Lukas (2010) *Strengthening nonprofit performance: A funder's guide to capacity building*

Capacity development

In a high-engagement investment journey, everyone is learning. And it's not a one-size-fits-all experience; every journey and situation is unique.

One of the key principles is that capacity development needs to be fit for context, that is, tailored to meet the needs of the people leading and running the programmes and organisations.²²

There is no recipe for this, but it ultimately boils down to a matching exercise, whereby the right people come together, in an open and trusting relationship of respectful learning. It is really important for funders to “listen carefully” to providers about what their needs are, and who might be appropriate for them to work with. It's not easy for some providers to ask for help, nor to say that someone isn't right for them. There will always be a power dynamic between a funder and a provider, so it's important for the funder to watch carefully for signs that the support being offered is the “right” support.

The evaluators learned that it takes time for organisations to develop the capacity needed to realise their visions, particularly if they are starting from scratch. At the outset of the MPEI, five years of funding and capacity support seemed like a long time. It was assumed that the level and type of support provided to the MPEI projects would steadily decline over time. But as the initiative progressed, it became clear that these initial assumptions about how long it might take for the MPEI dreams to come to fruition were flawed. The MPEI providers all developed in different ways, at a different pace in different areas, but all still needed ongoing capacity support, of some kind or other.

The evaluators also learned that it's important for both funders and providers to travel together and learn together along the capacity development journey. It was important to be continually reassessing what might be needed at different stages of development and together working out what might be the most appropriate support. It cannot be viewed as a “set-and-forget” relationship.

Leadership

Another key learning is that the learning and capacity development journey has to be a distributed one, across governance, leadership and staff—for both funders and providers. It is not enough for the relationship to be focused at only one level or with only one person from each side of the relationship. The MPEI projects that gained the most significant traction were those that understood that they needed their governance, leadership and staff to fully engage in the process. They never showed up alone; there was always more than one level of their organisation present at meetings and learning and sharing opportunities. And conversely, those that relied too heavily on a single person struggled to maintain momentum. Similarly, the combination of Trustee support, commitment from the CEO, and solid and committed stewardship from key Foundation staff throughout the process (albeit with a few ups and downs along the way on both sides), created a resilient learning system, capable of adapting and responding to changes that were needed (to funding, to agreements and so on) along the way.

Advocacy

As the high-engagement journey unfolded, the evaluators noted that a relationship of reciprocal and mutual advocacy became apparent between

the Foundation and some of the MPEI providers. In the early stages, some Trustees stood alongside providers and projects, utilising their strategic, professional and relational capital to advocate for them in different circumstances, providing them with access to additional networks of support and funding.

And then further along the MPEI journey, the evaluators noted some providers becoming advocates and ambassadors for the funder (known then as ASB Community Trust) in their communities, helping others to better understand who the Trust was, and what it could, and couldn't, do for them.

This reciprocal advocacy was unexpected, but demonstrated the outcome of high-trust relationships, and the principle of walking alongside each other and thinking together.

Transitioning beyond high engagement

When the MPEI started, it was assumed that the funding relationship between providers and the Foundation would finish after five years. In reality, as the MPEI initiative unfolded, it became apparent that the next stage of development for the MPEI projects was not going to be a one-size-fits-all transition. Some projects seemed confident and capable enough to scale their models up to other sites and contexts, and were attracting interest and funding from government, and from other philanthropic and private sources. However, some were not interested in scaling up; their models had been tested, found to work, and maintaining the quality and depth of their work was more important to them.

The learning and success of the MPEI had contributed to major strategic changes at Foundation North that included new forms of funding. This meant a number of the MPEI projects were able to continue some kind of funding relationship beyond the five years. This turned out to be necessary for some, partly because, as discussed earlier, providers just needed more time to realise the potential value and impact of their efforts thus far.

From the Foundation's perspective, the relationships developed with most of the providers had become important—far beyond what might have been imagined at the outset—and so finding ways to sustain a mutually beneficial relationship (with or without ongoing sources of funding) has become important.

It's not for everybody

A high-engagement journey is not for everyone. Having the dispositions, capacity and capability to engage in this way can be very demanding—for funders and providers.

Organisations need to have deep levels of shared commitment and willingness to open themselves up to a new type of relationship, as well as sufficient time and other resources available to devote to a demanding high-engagement process and journey.

It would be fair to say that there were different levels of commitment and willingness among the MPEI projects to be part of the high-engagement process. It would also be fair to say that the Foundation's capacity and capability to support the high-engagement process with every MPEI provider in appropriate ways wasn't always ideal.

A key learning is that high-engagement investment is all about building and sustaining a high-trust relationship—and both sides have to be willing and committed to it.

²² Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (2015) *Strengthening nonprofit capacity*

VI Expect change and be prepared to be courageous

All involved in MPEI learned that change is a constant in high-engagement philanthropy, and yet there are many pressures and incentives on funders and communities to standardise—to be like others, maintain a course of action, to follow old patterns of behaviour and practice. This principle expresses the requirement for those engaging in this type of philanthropy to be constantly courageous and to get comfortable with ambiguity as they navigate the unknown in the pursuit of passionately held aspirations.

Tolerance for uncertainty and vulnerability

Working in such an innovative way requires a tolerance for uncertainty, and an openness to vulnerability. For example, the Foundation and the MPEI providers acknowledged from the outset that sometimes things would go wrong. Having an open and transparent approach to sharing information, based on the trusted relationships they had built, meant that errors could be weathered and dealt with quickly. Both groups brought a willingness and attitude to the process that meant they were able to work together, to find solutions to issues and problems, as well as to respond to opportunities.

One way both groups managed uncertainty was by embedding reflective practice into the process. This meant adopting a “show up and see what happens” attitude, where progress was constantly reviewed and changes occurred “mid-step” at times. It took courage for both parties to stay the course when outcomes and changes took much longer than planned—for instance, the consultation phase with communities and the reference groups took two years. Maintaining the end goal and vision in mind allowed everyone to manage the flux and change of chaos.

Embarking on the MPEI journey was a leap of faith for everyone, where every step felt new. Coping with uncertainty was more tolerable because of the investment upfront in the development of high-trust relationships, creating the conditions for high levels of willingness and commitment by everyone.

The power of stories and celebration

In any long-term initiative, people come and go. One of the major challenges for the MPEI was a constant turnover of Trustees. With new people on the Board came uncertainty about the level of funder support for the initiative. One of the most effective ways in which the Foundation managed this uncertainty was by using stories and celebration. Stories are well known for their power to ignite and engage people in often difficult and turbulent initiatives.²³

The Foundation also supported the development of digital and infographic stories so that different audiences and stakeholders could engage in and celebrate the success that was unfolding. The Foundation sponsored several events, bringing together business and government leaders as well as all those who had been involved in the MPEI, academics, community leaders and other community members, project leadership, staff and young people, capacity support partners, Trustees, Foundation management and staff. These events focused on and highlighted key milestones and successes and were designed to encourage conversation, connections and confidence in the MPEI.

²³ Denning (2004) *Squirrel Inc. A fable of leadership through storytelling*

VII Ensure reflective & evaluative thinking & practice is built in from the start

Having a culture of reflection, learning and evaluative thinking embedded in a high-engagement process, not just an add-on, is a fundamental principle of successful engaged philanthropy.²⁴

However, rather than a more traditional approach to evaluation, when the context is characterised by complexity, innovation and rapid change, evaluation needs to be responsive and dynamic, supporting people to reflect, learn and make decisions throughout the process of development.

The Foundation and MPEI providers needed evaluative feedback while they were grappling with real-life questions and issues; they needed to be able to participate in the processes of making sense of feedback and decision-making about the implications of what they were learning.

For these reasons, the Foundation funded a developmental evaluation. The approach offers a way of engaging in evaluation quite different to more traditional approaches.²⁵ This project showed that developmental evaluation (DE) is an approach to evaluation that is well suited to a high-engagement funding context. DE was able to be dynamic, responsive to context, transparent and use-oriented. It was able to be integrated (mostly) into the business-as-usual of MPEI projects, it was participative and was also able to sit alongside projects as they developed, supporting emergence and innovation.

An important learning was that having the capacity and capability to engage in evaluative thinking and practice is not a given, for any organisation. And yet it is vital to the success of innovative initiatives. The Foundation’s commitment to evaluation was clear from the outset, and this laid a platform of learning that underpinned and characterised the whole initiative. The evaluators found that those projects that built evaluative capacity into their programme design from the outset, and prioritised regular and continuous engagement with what they were finding, were more likely to make faster and greater strides.

Across the MPEI providers, there was a really diverse range of provider “mindsets” or buy-in to more formal evaluative thinking and practice. Some were immediately on board, recognised the importance of evaluation, prioritised their efforts to engage in it and were highly motivated to build their own capacity.

Others already had some evaluation capacity and didn’t really need much support. Still others, whilst they recognised the importance of evaluation, struggled to prioritise it, and would have preferred if the task could be done by someone other than themselves.

Evaluation capacity can be thought of as a system of action or learning that is linked to the ability of organisations to enquire and engage in evaluative activity and practices.²⁶ This system of evaluation capacity is made up of knowledge, skills, attitudes, structures, leadership, motivations, expectations and consequences; and this capacity will to a great extent depend on the motivation and ability of people in organisations to take ownership, commit and engage in the effort.²⁷

The evaluation team reported that they learned that the motivation for evaluative thinking and practice could be nudged, by the use of collective processes of sharing and reflection, such as hui and workshops.

²⁴ Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO) (2012) *Four essentials for evaluation*; see also GEO and the Council on Foundations (2009) *Evaluation in philanthropy—Perspectives from the field*

²⁵ Patton (2011) *Developmental evaluation*

²⁶ Preskill & Boyle (2008) *A multidisciplinary model of evaluation capacity building*; Cousins & Lee (2004) *Integrating evaluative inquiry into the organizational culture: A review and synthesis of the knowledge base*

²⁷ Baser & Morgan (2008) *Capacity, change and performance: Study report*

VIII Conclusion

Evaluation hui and meetings were held a few times, with as many of the MPEI projects attending as possible. These were considered very useful by providers and Trustees alike.

The benefits of these hui and meetings included:

- ✘ sharing experiences of project development; what worked and what didn't go so well
- ✘ discussing barriers and ways to overcome these
- ✘ learning about available resources and/or opportunities to benefit the projects
- ✘ increased understanding of the evaluation process and benefits for providers.

*We all really enjoyed connecting with the other projects.
We were constantly inspired by their energy.*

MPEI provider

The MPEI journey showed that reflective and evaluative thinking and practice can make a significant difference to the impact trajectory of programmes and organisations. In order to achieve this, leaders and staff—of funding organisations and recipients of high-engagement funding—need to embed evaluation into more than the design of initiatives; evaluation needs to be integrated into business as usual.

The MPEI was a bold step for Foundation North. One Trustee recently described the MPEI as “an extraordinarily successful and sophisticated thing that is worth capturing”.

In this report, we have tried to synthesise some key principles of the MPEI high-engagement journey that can be applied to future efforts by the Foundation and other philanthropic funders.

The MPEI journey has laid a platform of learning that has informed major strategic shifts in the way in which Foundation North funds many of its community partners.

The Centre for Social Impact (www.centreforsocialimpact.org.nz) was formed in the latter phases of the MPEI, and many of the principles and practices of this new centre are founded on the learning gained from the MPEI. In particular, the high-engagement approach of the MPEI demonstrated the potential of Māori- and Pacific-led responses to providing answers to long-standing challenges.

The Foundation still has an appetite for courageous and innovative philanthropic practice, wanting to be part of helping to create a better future for Māori and Pacific people in Aotearoa. But Foundation Trustees and staff realise that to make the kind of difference they envision, they will have to continue to be brave. No “recipe” has emerged from the Māori and Pacific Education Initiative; rather, everyone involved has learned that any journey that sets out to create visionary change will be uncertain.

It seems appropriate that the words that seem to capture how best to set out on a high-engagement journey are those of the MPEI Manager, Moi Becroft:

It's not perfect. It can't be all things to all people but it works when we approach it with hearts and minds that are open.

References

- Baser, H., & Morgan, P. (2008).** *Capacity, change and performance: Study report. (ECDPM Discussion Paper 59B)*. Maastricht: European Centre for Development Policy Management.
- Cairns, B., & Chambers, R. (2008).** *ATM or Development Agency? Challenges of moving beyond grant-making for charitable foundations*. A paper prepared for presentation to the ARNOVA Annual Meeting, Philadelphia. Institute for Voluntary Action Research.
- Connelly, P.M. (2007).** *Deeper capacity building for greater impact: Designing a long-term initiative to strengthen a set of nonprofit organisations*. New York: TCC Group.
- Connelly, P.M., & Lukas, C. (2010).** *Strengthening nonprofit performance: A funder's guide to capacity building*. New York: TCC Group.
- Cousins, J.B., & Lee, L. (2004).** Integrating evaluative inquiry into the organizational culture: A review and synthesis of the knowledge base. *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation, 19*(2), 99-141.
- Covey, S. (2008).** *The Speed of Trust*. New York: Free Press.
- Denning, S. (2004).** *Squirrel Inc. A fable of leadership through storytelling*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO) (2012).** *Four essentials for evaluation*. Washington, DC: www.geofunders.org.
- Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (2015).** *Strengthening Nonprofit Capacity*. Washington, DC: www.geofunders.org.
- Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO) and the Council on Foundations (2009).** *Evaluation in philanthropy—Perspectives from the field*. Washington, DC: www.geofunders.org.
- Hancock, F. (2009).** *Māori and Pacific Education Initiative Thinkpiece*. Auckland: ASB Community Trust.
- Kramer, M. (2002).** Will 'venture philanthropy' leave a lasting mark on charitable giving? *Chronicle of Philanthropy, 14*(14), May 2.
- Maister, D., Green, C., & Galford, R. (2004).** *The Trusted Advisor*. New York: Free Press.
- MPEI contributors & Hancock, F. (2012).** *He Akoranga He Aratohu: Māori and Pacific Education Initiative lessons to guide innovative philanthropic and social practice*. Auckland: ASB Community Trust [now Foundation North].
- MPEI contributors & Hancock, F. (2013).** *Nga Maumaharatanga: Māori and Pacific Education Initiative—Our journey of forging philanthropic innovation together*. Auckland: ASB Community Trust [now Foundation North].
- Olson, E. E. & Eoyang, G. H. (2001).** *Facilitating organizational change: Lessons from complexity science*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer.
- Patton, M.Q. (2011).** *Developmental evaluation*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Preskill, H., & Boyle, S. (2008).** A multidisciplinary model of evaluation capacity building. *American Journal of Evaluation, 29*(4), 443-459.
- Twyford, V., Waters, S., Harde, M., & Dengate, J. (2012).** *The Power of 'Co' - The Smart Leaders' Guide to Collaborative Governance*. Australia: Twyfords Consulting.
- van Dierendonck, D. (2011).** Servant leadership: A review and synthesis. *Journal of Management, 37*(4), 1228-1261.



Appendix A:

MPEI project summaries

In **Table 1** are brief summaries of the MPEI projects, in alphabetical order for ease of reference. Please refer to the Foundation North website (www.foundationnorth.org.nz/how-we-work/maori-pacific-education-initiative/) and project provider websites for information beyond these short introductions.

Table 1: Māori and Pacific Education Initiative project summaries

Project name	Brief outline
<i>C-Me Mentoring Trust: Trades At School</i> <i>Oceania Career Academy</i> www.oca.nz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ Māori and Pacific Year 11-13 students are assessed and selected for engineering trades career ✘ supported by mentors to work on NCEA at secondary school and Level 2 Mechanical Engineering (a study pathway to 10 apprenticeship options) at Manukau Institute of Technology ✘ personal development programme and pastoral care support from mentor to connect with family, tutors, school and industry ✘ aims to offer high quality, culturally responsive career education and guidance; and through partnerships with employers, students gain work experience and support to find employment that uses their skills ✘ has a vision of arresting poverty and youth underachievement, enabling youth to serve their communities and be future leaders.
<i>High Tech Youth Network (HTYN)</i> www.hightechyouth.org	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ targets under-served young people, aged 8 to 25, to link cultural knowledge and values with technology, and encourage positive identity and belief in their potential ✘ network of community-based High Tech Youth Studios with digital capital (broadband, community wi-fi, cloud technology); connected across NZ and the Pacific to foster a digital and social learning community ✘ personal development plans to track, mentor and credential young people through to graduation ✘ supports value of technology within the home and family, lifelong learning, and higher learning pathways.
<i>Ideal Success Trust: Ngā Huarahi Tika</i> www.foundationnorth.org.nz/stories/catalysts-for-change/ideal-success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ Ngā Huarahi Tika (“the right pathway”) is a needs-based, strengths-based programme for Māori 10-year-olds (Year 6-7) identified by local schools as facing challenges ✘ staff work with the child and whānau to develop learning plans and goals; literacy/numeracy support; health/wellbeing plans; cultural connectedness; finances; and strengthened relationships ✘ each whānau establishes own goals with youth mentors/whānau support workers who also provide advice, advocacy and referral to other services; whānau wellbeing is seen as critical to ensuring a child’s educational success.
<i>The Leadership Academy of A Company: He Puna Marama Trust</i> www.mokonzo.co.nz/a-company.php	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ Whangarei-based He Puna Marama Trust draws on core values of the 28th Māori battalion to build resilience and self-confidence in Māori boys ✘ each intake of cadets is named after a respected member of “A Company” men from the north ✘ uses military-style training and Mātuaranga Māori (Māori understanding, knowledge and skills) around three pou (platforms): Be Māori - by graduation, cadets will demonstrate excellence and confidence in all areas “o te ao Māori”; Be Rangitira – have the core virtues and character to model excellence in their chosen field and lead a new generation of Māori; and Be Educated – achieve excellence in education and in their chosen pathway.

Project name	Brief outline
<i>Manaiakalani Education Programme</i> www.manaiakalani.org	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ Manaiakalani (“the hook from Heaven”) aims to “hook” children into learning for life as fully engaged digital citizens ✘ based in a cluster of 12 schools (covering Year 1 to 13) in the low-income, predominantly Māori and Pacific communities of Tāmaki ✘ uses netbooks, wireless and cloud technology to give young learners access to the worldwide web, engaging them as they “learn, create and share”; parents can pay off the devices over 3 years ✘ a focus on family/whānau engagement offers training modules for parents to confidently engage with their children’s digital learning ✘ there is also professional development for teachers and ongoing university research into programme outcomes.
<i>MITE: Māori into Tertiary Education</i> <i>Refer to tertiary institution websites for information on Māori programmes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ builds on an Auckland-wide collaboration of high schools, tertiary institutions and employers to provide pathways from high school to tertiary study to jobs, apprenticeships, and internships for Māori ✘ the MITE Pipeline Project targets the steps from tertiary study to employment, in order to bridge the “education to employment” divide; gain greater employment success for Māori; promote the benefits for corporate business to recruit and retain Māori employees; and support Māori business and enterprise to grow and employ Māori students.
<i>Mutukaroa: Sylvia Park School</i> www.mutukaroa.org.nz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ Mutukaroa School and Community Learning Partnership began at Sylvia Park Primary School, based on research showing children achieve better when schools and families work together ✘ from a 5-year-old’s intake into primary school, progress and needs are tracked, and the Mutukaroa Coordinator works with teachers and family/whānau on child’s learning journey ✘ a School Coordinator also works with parents/whānau to support learning at home, including literacy and numeracy resources (available in Pacific languages and te reo Māori), and to set learning targets with regular follow-up and interpreters available for parent meetings ✘ aims include empowering children and parents to understand student learning; to enhance student learning at home; and for schools to be more responsive to learning inquiries from parents.
<i>Rise UP Trust</i> www.riseuptrust.org.nz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ charitable trust educators and volunteers support South Auckland parents to engage with their children’s learning at school and at home, through programmes for parents, families, and children aged 6 to 12 ✘ 4Es approach – Engage with whānau; Establish relationships; Equip them with keys for learning; Empowered whānau ✘ focus on culture and identity to build confidence for Māori, Pacific and other families and children ✘ tools to help families understand one another and their children’s learning style, language and personality ✘ develop 21st century lifelong learners; set whānau up for success in learning and relationships; “Truth in Love” – knowing who we are, applying universal human values and Biblical principles; connecting hearts and minds through families and communities learning together.
<i>Unitec Graduate Diploma in Not-for-Profit Management</i> www.unitec.ac.nz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ the Unitec Graduate Diploma in Not-for-Profit Management has run for 15 years, aiming to strengthen the management, leadership and organisational capacity and capability of the not-for-profit sector with a Level 7 course that is interactive, practice-based, and taught by tutors who work in the field ✘ MPEI funding provided scholarships for Pacific students working in the early childhood sector (in management or governance) to complete the diploma in 5 years ✘ the funding also covered individualised pastoral care with tailored academic advice, tutorial support and supervision to support student retention and educational achievement ✘ funding supported networking with Pacific communities to encourage community support for those entering academic training.



**FOUNDATION
NORTH**
*Te Kaitiaki Pūtea o
Tāmaki o Tai Tokerau*