

SYSTEM CHANGE IN THE HAURAKI GULF - GIFT INSIGHTS

June 2020

Foundation North's [Gulf Innovation Fund Together](#), or GIFT, is in its fourth year. GIFT is an innovation fund that aims to restore the [mauri](#)¹ or life force of Tikapa Moana/Te Moananui-ā-Toi (Hauraki Gulf). It funds flexibly through a [seed, scale and system model](#). Annual reports sharing the journey, outcomes and learning from GIFT, plus case studies of funded initiatives, are available [here](#)².

When Foundation North initiated this fund in late 2016, it knew little about the human systems surrounding the Hauraki Gulf, root causes behind its environmental degradation, or what it will take to reverse declining ecosystem health. Three years in, this report shares evidence from GIFT grantees, their projects, evaluation, reflection and learning processes, about what is blocking change and where seeds of hope and potential lie.

System change blocks in the Hauraki Gulf

GIFT grantees report running into system 'blocks' and entrenched ways of thinking and being that get in the way of improving the mauri of the Gulf³. These interrelated 'mental models' and system blocks are summarised below.

Mental models and values 	• Human separation and disconnection from nature, its needs and rhythms • Human dominion and mastery over nature - 'We are in charge' • A sense of entitlement – 'I can do and take what I want' • Siloed thinking • Economic interests outweighing ecological interests, and preparedness to trade-off ecosystem health for short term economic gain • Individual benefit over intergenerational access • Lack of care for nature and apathy; leading to uneven political will for change •
Human systems	• Inadequate legislation, regulation and policy to protect marine habitats and species • Lack of controls on land to protect water bodies • Rigid bureaucracy and uneven ability to respond to good ideas and innovation • Roles and responsibilities for land and water split within central government, and between central and local government • Fragmented leadership • Lack of connection, trust, relationships and goodwill • Poor engagement processes •

The above contributes to the serious environmental issues outlined in the three yearly [State of our Gulf](#)⁴ reports. Seeds for hope and enablers of change that GIFT is exploring are outlined below.

¹ See <https://www.giftofthegulf.org.nz/mauri-1> for descriptions and perspectives on mauri.

² See <https://www.giftofthegulf.org.nz/what-we-have-learned>.

³ See for example the [GIFT Year Two Report](#), p15 and 18 and [GIFT Year Three Report](#), p13.

⁴ See <https://gulfiournal.org.nz/state-of-the-gulf/>.

Te Ao Māori, Mātauranga Māori and Tangata Whenua Leadership

Te Ao Māori (Māori world view) is premised on Mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge systems), and operates on a very different set of values and mental models to those above. GIFT's vision to restore the mauri of Tikapa Moana/Te Moananui-ā-Toi has acted as a doorway into this world. We are learning that Te Ao Māori does not separate people and nature; they are one and the same. Harming ecosystems is harming ourselves: "Ko ahau te moana, ko te moana ko ahau - I am the ocean and the ocean is me."⁵

Mātauranga Māori rests on deep whakapapa relationships⁶. Kaitiakitanga or guardianship roles apply a longer term, intergenerational view, and support collective stewardship.

Through GIFT we are learning that placing Māori values and concepts at the centre, holding space for knowledge systems to coexist and complement each other, and trying to work with all of this knowledge authentically, helps to shift mental models and allows different things to happen.

We have learned that because Māori concepts are so different to Western mental models, that opening people up to these concepts is a journey and that people are at different places on this journey. It is a decolonising process and resistance is likely. It requires the right people to act as guides and a willingness to go on the journey. One such process was held via a mauri wananga in August 2019 at Orakei Marae, facilitated by [Te Kaa](#). The GIFT network was invited to explore mauri and Te Ao Māori in their mahi for Tikapa Moana/ Te Moananui-ā-Toi.

We are learning that Mātauranga Māori, or Māori knowledge, especially when combined with Western knowledge, offers us unique insights and opportunities to do things differently in the way we look after our whenua and moana (land and sea). Having a Science Advisor and a Mātauranga Māori/Science Advisor sitting at the GIFT Committee table has enriched thinking and decision making. A Cultural Advisor in the GIFT project team is enabling bicultural thinking and practice. This bicultural approach holds huge potential at governance and operational levels.

Which leads to another area of learning, about leadership. In the Hauraki Gulf, Iwi capacity to engage in other people's processes can be limited by over consultation, poor engagement processes, heavy existing demands from local and central government around resource management, differing stages of Treaty settlements, lack of people on the ground, capability, and intra and inter-iwi dynamics. In GIFT, we are quietly exploring what might support not just Iwi or Manawhenua to grow their leadership and kaitiaki capacity, but also what might support tangata whenua leadership for change in the Hauraki Gulf. We draw on [guidelines for ethical engagement with Māori](#) in this work, that can apply to all engagement processes.

In all contexts, Foundation North will need to recognise the specific customary roles of Mana Whenua under Te Titiri of Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi.

With the belief that indigenous values, knowledge and leadership are central to system change in the Hauraki Gulf (and regenerating environments generally), building genuine, long term relationships with iwi and tangata whenua is needed, as is letting go any needs Foundation North might have, in favour of simply listening and sitting with, seeking to understand where people are at, what might assist and where the possibilities lie. We are keen to co-design with iwi and tangata whenua how to practically restore mauri in the Hauraki Gulf, blending Mātauranga Māori and Western knowledge.

Holding a mirror to systems

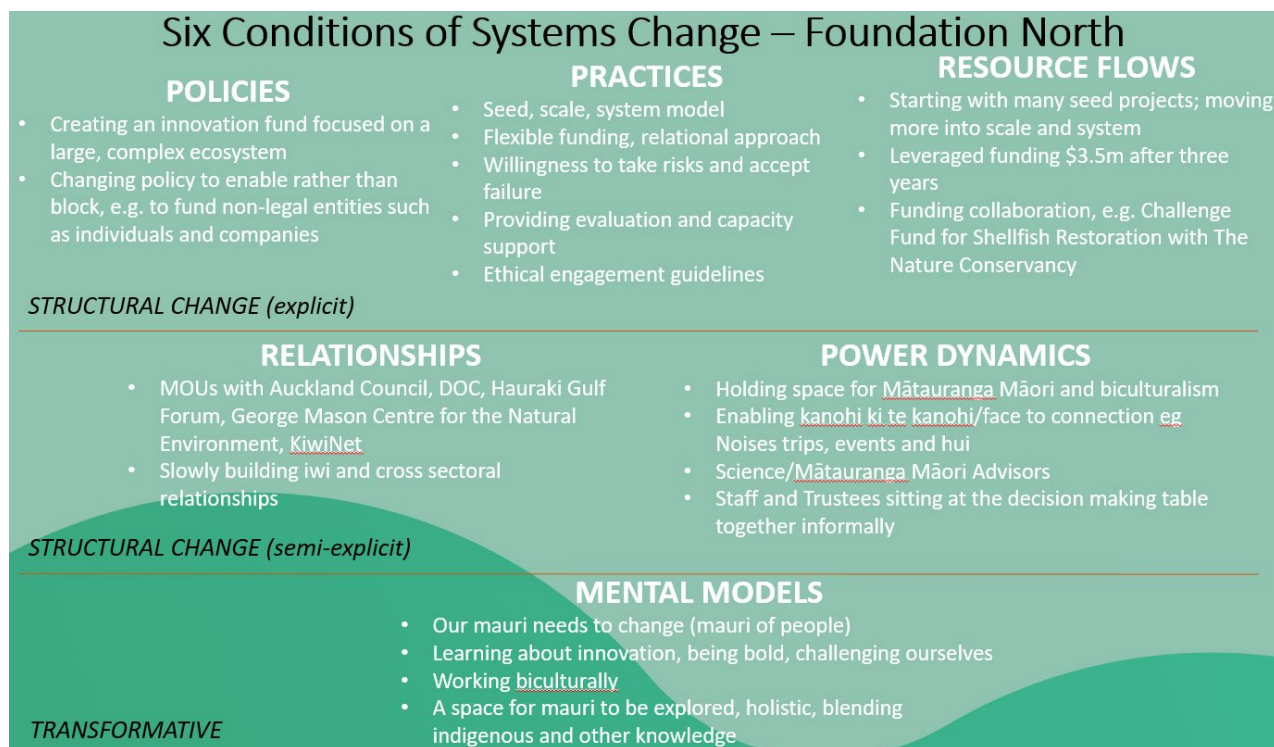
Through GIFT, we are learning that a key role for philanthropy is to hold a mirror to human systems and how they enable or block the outcomes that everyone typically wants.

We are also understanding Foundation North more as a system and its potential role in system change in the Hauraki Gulf. How do we enable new things to happen, good ideas, innovation and positive disruption? How do our own policies and processes enable or get in the way?

⁵ See the [GIFT Year Three Report](#), p2 and p12.

⁶ See for example <https://thespinoff.co.nz/atea/17-06-2020/i-am-the-river-whanganui-iwi-on-the-four-principles-that-guide-them/>.

We are continually learning about the human systems surrounding the Gulf and the big blocks and enablers of change. We are finding the [six conditions of systems change](#)⁷ to be a useful model in this regard. This model was used in the [GIFT Year Three](#) report (page 5) to show the aspects of system change influenced via GIFT supported projects to date. It is also used below to show how Foundation North as a system has changed as a result of its learning from GIFT:



Holding a space for something different

Through GIFT as an innovation fund, we have been intentional about seeking new ideas, testing good ideas, supporting good ideas to scale and exploring how to disrupt what can seem very entrenched ways of thinking and being in the Gulf. This role of holding space involves being bold, unafraid of failure and willing to give things a go, even if outcomes are unclear or unknown. This is very different to traditional philanthropic approaches, where funders tend to want clear outcomes nailed down in advance, within a limited timeframe.

We have learned how much effort it takes to activate innovation, and that we all have defaults that we fall back into unless challenged. Until 2020 we had an Innovation Advisor (Louise Marra), whose role was to challenge and support us to be bold; to hold a space for different things to happen.

Funding differently

We decided to break our own rules with GIFT – and we realised that many of our ‘rules’ and policies’ could in fact be changed – we could fund non-legal entities such as individuals and companies, we could have no closing dates, a short application form, minimal criteria, co-fund creatively, we could stretch timeframes, we could allow groups to change their project as circumstances changed, we could fund experiments, we could expect groups to fail and make it safe to fail⁸.

We learned that if we were seeking innovation from others that we needed to innovate ourselves, and that this means being okay with discomfort, not knowing and ambiguity. We decided to wrap capacity support around groups and provide independent evaluation support. We consistently get positive feedback from grantees for this different funding approach.

⁷ See this influential 2018 FSG article by John Kania, Mark Kramer and Peter Senge called The Water of Systems Change, for an outline of the six conditions https://www.fsg.org/publications/water_of_systems_change.

⁸ See the [GIFT Year One Report](#), p5.

Connecting energy and change makers

In a context of fragmentation, blocks, disconnection and competition for resources, we have had repeated calls from our grantees to be connected with each other and with other work going on in support of the Gulf. The Hauraki Gulf has many heroic individuals and small groups battling for change, yet repeatedly coming up against the same things: system blocks and inertia.

Witnessing this, the GIFT team is exploring how to connect people and bring different parts of the system together. So far, this looks like:

- Supporting initiatives designed to bring changemakers together (such as [Oceans Lab](#))
- Mapping GIFT projects within the wider Hauraki Gulf system of influence, to highlight linkages, potential collaboration, and where opportunities lie
- Hosting grantee learning and sharing hui every year
- Offering to play a convening role to government and others, as a neutral ground to bring diverse interests together
- Planning to host 'courageous conversations' around the Gulf, with people from parts of the system who are sometimes in conflict
- Wananga on mauri with the GIFT network, and mauri peer support groups
- A system change peer support group.

The initiatives above are actively working with the mauri or life force of the human system in the Gulf; the energies at play in the Gulf. This requires the ability to work skilfully with conflict and to work with human systems artfully and constructively. A goal is to build power, share power and yield power. Playing a facilitative, restorative role in these energies is an exciting role for philanthropy.

A long term view

For system level impact, a few years of dabbling and exploring isn't enough. It takes that long to start to understand what you are working with. Ten year plus intentional funding and support is needed, or as long as it takes to either make some major impact, or realise that something else is needed. In our roles as mirror holders, activators, convenors, facilitators and influencers in relation to complex systems, funders need to be prepared to play a long game.

Multiple level impacts

As well as a long term view, we have learned that change for the Hauraki Gulf will require cumulative change across multiple levels (including the six conditions of system change), and particularly awareness and culture (values and mental models). Shifts in one area (for example in policy, resource flows, relationships and power dynamics) can have significant ripple effects.

Capacity and agency building as an outcome

A key role for philanthropy in system change is to build capacity for change within a system. This may involve identifying skilled people and change makers, joining the dots among them, and building skills such as: facilitation; awareness of Māori tikanga and knowledge; advocacy; engaging with Māori and communities generally; and incentivising change. Growing the capacity, capability and agency of key players within a system is critical for system change.

National and global ventures and possibilities

GIFT is just beginning to engage with central government and potential overseas partners, with a Challenge Fund in development. Impact investment, creative co-funding and other possibilities for partnering internationally are new doors opening for GIFT.

The GIFT Year Four report in late 2020 will share further learning and directions for GIFT.