Tiriti as a Pathway to Social Cohesion
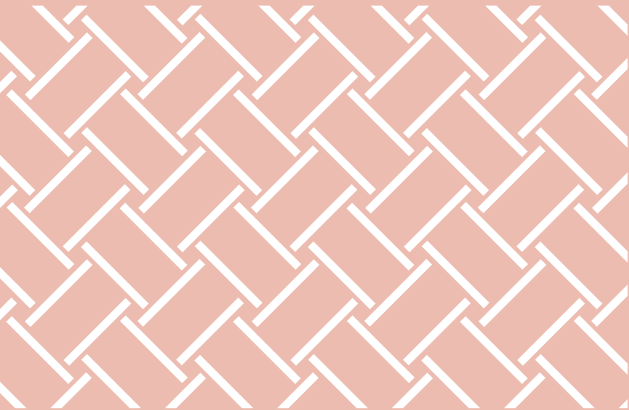
WOVEN TOGETHER

Authors

Lani Evans

Te Raukura O'Connell Rapira

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Woven Together is a report commissioned by a collective of funders who aspire to create a socially cohesive Aotearoa, where equity and inclusivity are prioritised, and every person feels safe, welcome, and valued. The work brings together insights from literature, media and interviews/hui with 80 subject matter experts to look at the state of social cohesion in Aotearoa, and how philanthropy can fund to strengthen it.

What is Social Cohesion?

Social cohesion refers to our ability to live well together. It encompasses ideas of trust and belonging, opportunities for civic action and participation and policies that ensure social and economic inclusion. Strong social cohesion leads to better civic engagement, reduced violence, and improved health and economic outcomes, while weak cohesion creates the conditions for systemic corruption and discord.

Globally, social cohesion is in decline. Key threats include escalating inequality, the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation, polarising political rhetoric, changing media landscapes, and online harassment. These factors erode trust in institutions, hinder public discourse, and exacerbate social divisions. Effective strategies to improve social cohesion include public education, active citizenship, positive intergroup interactions, and fostering inclusive social norms. To be truly effective, these efforts must be coupled with structural changes that address historic injustices and promote equitable opportunities for all members of society.

Aotearoa's Unique Context

The historic and ongoing impacts of colonisation present the greatest barrier to social cohesion in Aotearoa. Te Tiriti o Waitangi provides us with a pathway to cohesion, but it must be honoured in order to realise that promise. This has not been the case. The Crown has a 184-year legacy of bad faith actions and continual failures to uphold Te Tiriti, resulting in ongoing oppression and marginalisation of Māori. While Treaty settlements have been presented as progress, they have failed to fully address historical injustices and uphold the spirit of Te Tiriti. International bodies, including the United Nations, have repeatedly urged New Zealand governments to address human rights violations against Māori.

In recent years New Zealand has experienced a significant cultural and demographic shift away from monocultural dominance and toward more pluralistic worldviews. This change is reflected in growing public support for Te Tiriti, te reo Māori, and Māori cultural practices. However, systemic inequities persist, and structural changes, including constitutional reform, are required to correct them.

Constitutional Reform

Constitutional reform is crucial for reimagining a collective, cohesive future. Māori have long been ready and willing to have this conversation - Matike Mai providing a prominent example. Conversation on constitutional reform must be rooted in public education, consultation and active pushback against mis/disinformation. The current proposal for constitutional change, The Treaty Principles Bill, raises concerns due to its limited scope, absence of comprehensive public engagement, and potential misalignment with established Treaty interpretations. The bill, which will progress through its first parliamentary reading in 2024, is likely to embolden racist narratives and false narratives through the select committee process. If the Bill proceeds to referendum, it poses risks to social cohesion: this has been pointed out by the Waitangi Tribunal and demonstrated in other jurisdictions: both Brexit and the Australian Voice referendums increased polarisation, overt racism, and the spread of misinformation.

Recommendations

Funders play a vital role in helping to build strong social cohesion in Aotearoa. These recommendations do not aim to achieve the broader goal of social cohesion, but rather focus on what must happen now to prevent further erosion of trust and to protect our blueprint for social cohesion, Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Underpinning these recommendations is the need to prioritise Māori-led and kaupapa Māori organisations, to include people with lived experience in decision-making and to use other levers, beyond finance, to strengthen this work.

01. FUND TE TIRITI EDUCATION

Te Tiriti provides a blueprint for social cohesion in Aotearoa. For social cohesion to be realised, we must understand Te Tiriti, colonial history and the ongoing impacts of colonisation, what these mean and how they relate to our lives and our nation.

- Fund widespread access to Te Tiriti training
- Resource diverse, creative Te Tiriti communications
- Train the Trainers.

02. SUPPORT EVIDENCE-BASED MESSAGES AND NARRATIVES

Fund the development and dissemination of narratives and messages that deepen public thinking and shape public opinion on how we can honour and uplift Te Tiriti.

- Build the evidence base: fund data-gathering, research and analysis to better understand audiences, perspectives, narratives that can inform strategies
- Fund development and testing of helpful messages and narratives
- Support the dissemination of messages through diverse platforms.

03. CAMPAIGNING & ORGANISING

Philanthropy can invest in social movements by funding advocacy and activism that uplifts and upholds Te Tiriti o Waitangi. In particular we recommend funding Māori-led movements, Tiriti-led collectives, grassroots and youth led campaigns.

- Support campaign work towards shared political or social outcomes
- Fund advocacy, lobbying and strategic pressure put on decision-makers to influence political decisions and outcomes
- Enable community members to take action on the issues that impact them or that they care about.

04. ENABLE COLLECTIVE ACTION

Provide resources to strengthen the power and capacity of grassroots movements working on social cohesion issues, support the ongoing well-being of people working in this space.

- Fund wānanga that provide opportunities for collaboration, solidarity and strategising, including tangata whenua specific wānanga
- Provide healing justice grants to support the wellbeing, resilience and sustainability of social justice organisations and staff/volunteers
- Fund a systems map and commons library to more easily share/access resources
- Support the careful proliferation of new governance and leadership models that embody partnership and shared decision-making.

05. CHANGING PHILANTHROPIC PRACTICE

If a thriving, Te Tiriti based Aotearoa is the goal, then philanthropy must look inwards and explore how do our practices and priorities uphold unjust systems and structures.

- Apply a social cohesion and anti-racism lens to all funding
- Move towards more equitable funding practices, such as community-led priority-setting; participatory decision-making; high trust funding agreements and screening to ensure investment portfolios align with strategic priorities
- Amplify impact by leveraging all available assets, including voice, influence, investments, property, networks, relationships, time and skills.

At this moment there is a clear need to prioritise action, but a broader range of interventions should be considered useful and necessary in the future.

THESE INCLUDE

- Citizens assemblies to inform policy development and help us navigate complex problems across difference
- Media literacy programmes to reduce our vulnerability to misinformation and disinformation
- Strategic litigation funds to support lawsuits aimed at achieving social change
- Policy levers that reduce digital threats to democracy, including the regulation of social media platforms and policy to reduce international electoral interference
- Anti-racism, cultural appreciation and community development programmes, as well as other levers set out in Te Korowai Whetū.

INTRODUCTION

Many New Zealanders want to live in a socially cohesive Aotearoa, where equity and inclusivity are prioritised, and every person feels safe, welcome, and valued. A future where Māori rights and self-determination are upheld, te reo Māori and Mātauranga Māori are revitalised and celebrated; where wealth is distributed more evenly, and our democracy fosters openness, collaboration, and active citizenship.

This vision is possible, and Te Tiriti o Waitangi provides us with a pathway. It is foundational to how social cohesion can be understood and achieved in Aotearoa.[1] As stated in Te Korowai Whetū, Te Tiriti… *"sets the terms of a partnership between the Crown and tangata whenua, where tauiwi are welcome and belong in Aotearoa New Zealand as Tangata Tiriti, and Māori are guaranteed equal rights as citizens as well as tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) as Tangata Whenua."*

This paper was commissioned by a collective of funders who believe in this vision. They recognise the growing social division in Aotearoa, and see the increase in anti-Māori misinformation, disinformation and racism. In this paper we aim to respond to these challenges by providing philanthropy (and others) with an understanding of the challenges to social cohesion, the relationship between social cohesion and Te Tiriti o Waitangi and potential implications of the Treaty Principles Bill,[2] learnings from international referendums, and concrete ways in which funders (and others) can take action to grow and strengthen social cohesion at this moment.

We hope this paper will provide a basis for funders to reflect, learn and take effective action. We acknowledge that this is an evolving space, our work has considerable limitations and is focused on one slice of social cohesion. We encourage readers to use this paper as a springboard to further learning.

SOCIAL COHESION

The concept of "social cohesion" has its origins in the writings of classical sociological thinker Emile Durkheim[3] in the 19th century. Despite its long history, the term has multiple, contested definitions.[4] He Oranga Hou[5] defines social cohesion as the presence of high levels of trust, a sense of belonging, a willingness to participate and help others, and policies that ensure social and economic inclusion.

Put simply, social cohesion is our ability to live well, together. It asks us to grapple with our own identity, and our collective identity. It is not, and should not be thought of as assimilation or homogeneity – though these can be beneficial to social cohesion.[6]

When social cohesion is strong, there are more likely to be high levels of trust, belonging, inclusion, solidarity and active citizenship, alongside a belief that all voices can be heard. When social cohesion is weak, there is higher potential for systemic corruption, violence, racism and disharmony.

The benefits of a cohesive society are many: protecting and strengthening democracy; increasing volunteering and civic engagement; reducing the threat of terrorism and hate crimes, and better health and economic outcomes. Higher perceptions of cohesion contribute to increased life expectancy, improved mental health and wellbeing [7, 8] and greater community resilience to economic shocks.[9]

In Aotearoa New Zealand, post European arrival, social cohesion is thought to have reached its peak in the mid 20th century. Participation in religion and associational society was high, the war had forged a strong sense of national identity, the middle class was expanding and there was relative economic equality. But this projection of cohesion was fragile and exclusionary. It rested on systemic discrimination, underlying inequity and a failure to meet obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. It was, quite simply, social domination masquerading as social cohesion. When we think about, and talk about social cohesion, it's important to place it within this context.

Key Threats to Social Cohesion

Research suggests that social cohesion is in decline, particularly in settler colonial countries like the US, Australia and New Zealand.[10] Causes vary depending on the context, but include the ongoing impacts of colonisation, a rise in populist nationalist rhetoric, the decline of associational society, increasing social and age segregation, and time and resource poverty exacerbated by the on-demand economy.[11]

This decline is reflected by public opinion. New Zealanders feel increasing pessimism and growing distrust in government institutions and leaders.[12] The majority of respondents in a 2024 survey agreed that society is in decline and feel the country is broken. These results align with global trends.[13]

The World Economic Forum describes the decline in social cohesion as one of greatest risks to global stability in the next decade[14] exacerbated by inequality, the rise of mis- and disinformation, media consolidation and online harassment.

≠ ESCALATING LEVELS OF INEQUALITY

Between 1982 and 2018 New Zealand had the largest overall increase in wealth and income inequality in the OECD. As well as being fundamentally unjust, widespread and rising inequality hinders social mobility,[15] diminishes trust[16, 17] and has a negative impact on inclusive identity and cooperation for the common good.[18, 19] Professor Jonathan Boston suggested that the widening wealth gap empowers the rich to wield excessive political influence,[20] further reducing trust in others and in institutions. 74% of New Zealanders[21] now believe wealth inequality is pushing the country apart.[22]

Factors contributing to rising inequality include tax cuts for top earners, benefit reductions

in the 80s–90s[23] and the inaccessible, poorly regulated housing and rental markets, all underpinned and exacerbated by the ongoing impacts of colonisation. Colonisation led to the establishment of systems that privilege non-Māori[24] across social, cultural, educational and economic domains. Theft of Māori land enabled the growth of race-based inequality, as Māori lost access to land-based forms of support, industry and wealth accumulation. Additionally, land loss has contributed to the erosion of Māori well-being and cultural efficacy with ties to whenua critical for connection to whakapapa, wairua and hauora.[25]

> **"The fact that colonisation necessarily involved the brutal taking of Indigenous peoples' lands and lives has also been reframed and justified in stories that range from pseudo-scientific and legal rationalisations to blatantly racist presumptions... Indigenous peoples have spoken back against such stories but they remain the dominant narrative."**

Moana Jackson (Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāti Porou, Rongomaiwahine)

☹ MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION

Like inequality, mis- and disinformation[26] decrease trust in democracy and authority. The erosion of shared facts and narratives impairs public discourse, decision-making and faith in institutions - all critical elements of a cohesive society.[27, 28] The spread of false narratives has been accelerated by online tools, which are poorly regulated, constantly changing, and can rapidly perpetuate mis/disinformation through targeting & ideological segregation. Once ideas have propagated, it is expensive and time consuming to revoke them.

Mis- and disinformation are not new - the blatant use of fake news is woven throughout colonial history,[29] used to dehumanise Indigenous peoples, enable the theft of lands, and rationalise violence.[30, 31] New Zealand's history includes pervasive propaganda about European "civilisation" improving Māori lives as a pretext for confiscating lands and resources.[32, 33] Many Western institutions (religion, media, science, education) have participated in spreading this disinformation.[34, 35, 36, 37]

As Moana Jackson (Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāti Porou, Rongomaiwahine) writes,

"The fact that colonisation necessarily involved the brutal taking of Indigenous peoples' lands and lives has also been reframed and justified in stories that range from pseudo-scientific and legal rationalisations to blatantly racist presumptions... Indigenous peoples have spoken back against such stories but they remain the dominant narrative."[38]

Māori are not unique in this regard, in large part due to the Doctrine of Discovery, a set of 'papal bulls' issued by the Catholic Church in the 15th century. The Doctrine provided religious authority to invade and subjugate non-Christian lands, peoples and sovereign nations, impose Christianity on the populations, and claim their resources. It gave rise to the false notion of European superiority and resulted in edicts encouraging colonial forces to 'invade, capture, vanquish and subdue' Indigenous peoples and 'to take away all their possessions and property'.[39] Under this guidance, everywhere European colonising powers have been, anti-Indigenous racism has been spread.[40, 41] Despite the Vatican's repudiation[42] in March 2023, the Doctrine's principles remain embedded in some legal systems and continue to affect Indigenous rights and land claims.[43]

Despite this, New Zealanders have high levels of trust in media institutions: more than 80% of people hold high trust in traditional local news outlets and only 48% of people trust news provided by social media.

📰 CHANGING MEDIA LANDSCAPES

Traditional media can play a positive or a negative role in the development and maintenance of social cohesion.[44] On the positive side, a *"diverse and vibrant media landscape"*[45] provides platforms for the construction of shared identities, the amplification of marginalised voices and helps to combat the spread of fake news and disinformation. Conversely, the media can spread false narratives, reinforce polarisation, and influence public perceptions through unequal participation and representation. Pluralistic media environments act as a democratic safeguard.

In Aotearoa public media is in decline, with the erosion of the fourth estate described as *"existential"*.[46] Shayne Currie wrote in 2023 that

"Just about every media business in New Zealand is undergoing transformation and reducing costs…".[47] This shift is driven by digital disruption, changing consumer behaviour and a decline in advertising revenue. With diminishing resources, journalists are forced to seek 'easy wins' and as a result well-funded organisations with the capacity to engage with journalists and issue press releases are able to influence public discourse, creating an imbalance in publicised views.

Despite this, New Zealanders have high levels of trust in media institutions: more than 80% of people hold high trust in traditional local news outlets and only 48% of people trust news provided by social media.[48, 49]

🧑‍🤝‍🧑 FREEDOM-RESTRICTING HARASSMENT

Social media, unlike traditional media, is a two-way conversation. This dynamic enables unparalleled information exchange, and a platform for online harassment. In the UK, 76% of people report having restricted expressing their personal views, out of fear of receiving harassment either to themselves or their loved ones. The Khan Review[50] defines this as freedom-restricting

harassment, *"…when people experience or witness threatening, intimidatory or abusive harassment online and/or offline which is intended to make people or institutions censor or self-censor out of fear."*

In Aotearoa New Zealand, online hate is widespread,[51] disproportionately impacting people at the intersection of gender and

ethnicity.[52] Research[53, 54] found 32% of Māori and 33% of women have experienced online abuse and harassment. 76% of those who experienced online abuse subsequently changed their social media use and stopped posting on certain issues. This degradation of discourse reduces our capacity to constructively discuss, deliberate and problem-solve together. It makes us self-silence and engage in preference falsification.[55] Widespread preference falsification can result in collective illusions that drive polarisation, erode trust, and hold back social progress.[56]

It's worth noting that online harassment and hate speech are often tangled up in neo-liberal concepts of "free speech". The rhetoric of "free speech" has often been used to justify behaviour that has harmed marginalised and oppressed communities, especially Māori.[57] Free speech should not make others feel less free,[58] it should not enable nor incite discrimination, hostility or disregard harm caused by speech.[59] Without these guardrails, 'free speech' will perpetuate oppression, maintain hegemony and undermine social cohesion.

Improving Social Cohesion

All evidence to date concludes that a multi-pronged approach[60] is required to improve social cohesion. A systematic review[61] of 52 studies found the most effective strategies were awareness raising and countering stereotypes through education, facilitating positive intergroup contact, and building inclusive social norms and identities.

Philanthropically funded social cohesion initiatives often focus on interpersonal and community domains, but broader structural levers are also key. Political language, policy and public narratives can inhibit or enable social cohesion.

In Aotearoa, interest in concepts of social cohesion spiked in the wake of the Christchurch terrorist attack. Government efforts post massacre included leading the Christchurch call[62] and the development of Te Korowai Whetū.[63] This framework identified and funded projects to strengthen cohesion, including fostering common values, tackling discrimination, increasing participation and reducing inequalities. The framework does an excellent job of promoting social cohesion and inclusion in contemporary New Zealand society, but, while it acknowledges the importance of cultural differences and identities, it does not explicitly address colonial legacies and historical injustices faced by Māori.

THE LOCAL CONTEXT

As addressed earlier in this paper, what is often defined and measured as social cohesion is, in fact, social dominance. When systems and institutions are based on the knowledge and values of one dominant culture while ignoring or excluding others, discrimination and privilege become built in. This is structural racism.

In New Zealand, this most often looks like systems that privilege European culture and ways of working. Structural racism determines how our systems and institutions are resourced, designed, and managed, meaning it might be invisible to us unless we look carefully. Only changes to the way our systems are built and run will address the harm that structural racism causes. Moving away from social dominance and towards social cohesion in Aotearoa will require changes to the underlying systems, beliefs and paradigms that perpetuate the status quo.

What we have witnessed over the past 50 years with the migration of increasingly diverse communities to Aotearoa and the steady growth in the revitalisation of Mātauranga and te reo Māori, is a demographic and cultural shift away from Pākehā dominance.[64, 65]

This shift has been embraced by people and communities across Aotearoa,[66] with the majority or those living in New Zealand now viewing Te Tiriti as a powerful symbol that "*promotes mutual understanding and reconciliation*".[67] We have shifted away from Eurocentric worldviews and toward more pluralistic perspectives[68] . We see this in many aspects of life, including the large uptake of te reo Māori classes and support for a Matariki public holiday.[69, 70, 71] As a nation we are on a positive trajectory – a trajectory that will be difficult to change[72] – but to meet the goals of a socially cohesive society, more work must be done. Social cohesion cannot be achieved until Te Tiriti is honoured.

Trust and Treaty Promises

Social cohesion requires connected, tended to relationships[73] and trust in institutions and leaders,[74] but the Crown has a 184-year legacy of violence and bad-faith behaviours toward Māori, alongside continual failures to uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi.[75, 76, 77]

Over 500 rangatira signed the Māori version of the Te Tiriti which guaranteed Māori absolute chieftainship (or sovereignty) over their lands, people, homes, villages and taonga. In 2014, the Waitangi Tribunal confirmed that Māori did not cede sovereignty and that He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni - the Declaration of Independence of the United Tribes of New Zealand[78] was an unambiguous assertion of Māori sovereignty and independence.[79]

As Haimona Gray (Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa) writes, *"To achieve anything together, we must feel like we are truly together. There needs to be trust. Trust isn't inherent, it is something that is hard to earn, easy to lose, and requires maintenance. New Zealand government agencies have, since their inception, maintained trust amongst Māori like a negligent landlord maintaining a dodgy rental property with water pouring from the walls and black mould coating the throats of its unlucky inhabitants — intentionally poorly, while draining out every dollar they can."[80]*

Over the past four decades, multiple United Nations Special Rapporteurs on Indigenous rights have issued reports on the urgent need for New Zealand to bring an end to human rights violations against Māori.[81] Successive New Zealand governments have mostly chosen to ignore this advice. Where they have responded, they point to Treaty settlements' as evidence that they are upholding their Treaty obligations, but as Moana Jackson famously said, *"Treaties are meant to be honoured, not settled"*.[82]

Successive governments have,"flood[ed] local media with reports of the success of their settlements, to the point that many assume that Māori accept and are happy with them. Yet Māori report being subjected to ongoing injustice and trauma in the process as the divide-and-rule approach taken by the government tears their communities apart. Their negotiators report being bullied into accepting government-determined settlements."[83, 84, 85]

Between 2015 and 2018, Professor Margaret Mutu (Ngāti Kahu, Te Rarawa, Ngāti Whātua) interviewed 118 Treaty claimants and negotiators and found that Māori claimants want their claims, *"to be settled in accordance*

Following the release of the report, the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination urged the government to engage with Māori and discuss the recommendations, but to date, there has not been an official Crown response to Matike Mai.

with Te Tiriti o Waitangi – that is, fully and fairly, and to restore what was taken, including Māori power and authority."[86]

Since its establishment in 1975, Māori have taken more than 2,500 claims to the Waitangi Tribunal[87] and the Tribunal has issued more than 120 reports upholding claims against the Crown. Yet, according to Professor Mutu's research, *"The Waitangi Tribunal repeatedly urges the Crown to restore its honour in settling claims. Yet none of the claimants and negotiators considered that the government had acted honourably."*

💬 A NATIONAL CONVERSATION ON TE TIRITI O WAITANGI

A national conversation on Te Tiriti o Waitangi and its place in Aotearoa's governance and constitution is essential if we are to repair, restore and reimagine a collective and cohesive future. Māori have long been ready and willing to have this conversation, with Matike Mai providing a prominent example.[88]

In 2010, an independent working group was established by the National Iwi Chairs Forum. Its terms of reference were *"to develop and implement a model for an inclusive Constitution for Aotearoa based on tikanga and kawa, He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Niu Tireni of 1835, Te Tiriti o Waitangi of 1840, and other Indigenous human rights instruments which enjoy a wide degree of international recognition"*.[89]

As a result, between 2012 and 2015, Dr Moana Jackson engaged with more than 10,000 Māori across more than 250 hui, to inform the Matike Mai report. Launched on Waitangi Day 2016, the report makes seven recommendations and provides six indicative governance models that better reflect the promise of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The report provides 2040 as the deadline for *"constitutional transformation"*, 200 years after the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and a momentous occasion for its promise to be fulfilled.

Following the release of the report, the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination[90] urged the government to engage with Māori and discuss the recommendations, but to date, there has not been an official Crown response to Matike Mai. Subsequent reports and recommendations, including He Puapua,[91] have failed to gain traction, been subject to misinformation[92] or been shut down by the government.[93, 94,95]

> **"In its simplest sense decolonisation is the reclaiming of the right of Indigenous peoples to once again govern themselves in their own lands..."**
>
> Moana Jackson

✊ DECOLONISATION AS A PATHWAY TO SOCIAL COHESION

To ameliorate these historic and ongoing failures to honour Te Tiriti, efforts to achieve social cohesion in Aotearoa must include a commitment to decolonisation.

This means actively working to reverse legacies of racism and unequal power. It requires a focus on repairing the harms of colonisation and restoring what has been taken away. As Unangax̂ scholar Eve Tuck states, *"Decolonisation is not a metaphor"*.[96] It is the shifting back of power, land and resources to Māori and the process of deconstructing colonial systems, narratives and institutions.

"In its simplest sense decolonisation is the reclaiming of the right of Indigenous peoples to once again govern themselves in their own lands..." – Moana Jackson

Everyone has a role to play in decolonisation. It requires work at the institutional (policies, procedures, practices), personal/interpersonal (how we are with ourselves and each other) and cultural (beliefs, values, norms) levels. Through the work of decolonisation, individuals and institutions can help create the conditions for Māori ways of being, doing and knowing to flourish and for Māori to lead change for the benefit of all.[97, 98, 99, 100]

💰 DECOLONISING PHILANTHROPY

Indigenous knowledge can provide a roadmap for how we care for the planet and people. It also provides a roadmap for philanthropy. Philanthropy has operated within and perpetuated colonial structures throughout its history.[101, 102] To be relevant and effective into the future, and to contribute to social cohesion, philanthropy must decolonise itself.

The sector is well positioned to do so. Foundations and philanthropists are generally well resourced, have low public accountability and can be protected from backlash by wealth and anonymity. Despite this, philanthropy has been slow off the starting blocks, perhaps because decolonisation requires funders to reckon with their past. As Kate Frykberg[103] says, *"good philanthropy involves looking wealth squarely in the eyes, understanding and acknowledging the ways in which colonisation, privilege and environmental exploitation have contributed to wealth generation, and making reparation for those harms"*.

If the goals of philanthropic institutions include social justice, then those institutions must move beyond rhetoric to actively fund and advocate for human rights and support the expressed desires of underrepresented groups.

Much has been written about the actions[104] of decolonising philanthropy[105, 106] but it is also worth considering how we conceptualise what philanthropy is and can be.
"Many communities and cultures engage with philanthropy and sharing resources quite apart from the notion of philanthropic foundations… How can we use different entry points — like gifting or mutual aid — to conceptualise philanthropy and help the sector evolve?"[107]

New interpretations could open the philanthropic world up to new audiences and new thinking, but it cannot stop there. If the goals of philanthropic institutions include social justice, then those institutions must move beyond rhetoric to actively fund and advocate for human rights and support the expressed desires of underrepresented groups.[108, 109, 110] In Aotearoa, we have the opportunity to test our appetite for this type of action now, as we navigate the challenges presented by the Treaty Principles Bill.

THE TREATY PRINCIPLES BILL

The Treaty Principles Bill is legislation proposed by the ACT Party. The bill aims to replace principles that have been developed over decades by the courts, through legislation and the Waitangi Tribunal, through rulings and interpretations of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. ACT's Bill proposes a redefinition of Treaty principles as:

- **Kawanatanga katoa** - The NZ Government has the right to govern all New Zealanders.
- **Tino rangatiratanga** - The NZ Government will honour all New Zealanders chieftainship of their land and all their property.
- **Equality before the law** - All New Zealanders are equal under the law with the same rights and duties.

The Bill is one in a series of policy changes and legislative moves that have faced strong public opposition.[111] The Treaty Principles Bill has faced critique from Māori leaders, academics,[112] translators,[113] legal experts, government advisors[114] and citizens who view it as an attempt to rewrite or diminish Te Tiriti o Waitangi. To better understand the nuances of the bill, we strongly recommend reading *Primer on Treaty Principles* by Dr Carwyn Jones, included in the essential readings at the end of this paper.

As per the coalition agreements,[115, 116] The Treaty Principles Bill will be presented in Parliament and supported through to the Select Committee stage.

If the Treaty Principles Bill is put to a referendum as per ACT's stated intentions, it poses a risk to social cohesion, based on what we have seen in other jurisdictions, and on previous Waitangi Tribunal findings.

Once the Select Committee process is complete the bill may:

• Be stalled at second reading
• Continue past second reading with support of the National Party
• Be the subject of a campaign for a citizens initiated referendum, or;
• Become a talking point again at the next election.

If the Treaty Principles Bill is put to a referendum as per ACT's stated intentions, it poses a risk to social cohesion, based on what we have seen in other jurisdictions, and on previous Waitangi Tribunal findings.[117]

The ACT Party states[118] that the Treaty Principles Bill will generate a national discussion on our constitution and the place of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. This discussion is sorely needed, but academics believe that a referendum is not an appropriate vehicle. Referendums, by their very nature, are reductive and when they concern the rights of a minority population, they quickly become harmful.[119,120] As Dr Carwyn Jones says, the proposed referendum will "… reduce a range of complex legal, social, political, and constitutional issues to a yes or no proposition, likely to produce much more 'heat than light'"[121] likely to result in a further decline in social cohesion.

We can see this unravelling of social cohesion in other parts of the world where debates on important issues have played out in public.

LEARNINGS FROM INTERNATIONAL REFERENDUMS

In recent years Britain, Ireland and Australia have all faced high-stakes referendums. Referendum campaigns involved polarising rhetoric, emotionally-charged messaging, and clashing narratives[122] on justice and equity issues. Social media played a significant role, in many cases spreading misinformation and amplifying divisive content.[123]

As New Zealand prepares for a possible constitutional referendum, what can we learn from these experiences? How can we ensure positive outcomes when a blunt tool[124] is applied to complex and emotive issues?

01. Brexit

In 2013, David Cameron's Bloomberg speech[125] called for reform of the European Union, and promised an in/out referendum on the UK's membership if the Conservative party won the next election. They did, taking a 12 seat majority in 2015. A referendum was called and in June 2016 the 'Leavers' won by a narrow margin with 51.89% of the vote. Brexit inarguably divided and polarised UK society.[126]

The anti-immigration rhetoric used by political leaders in the lead up to Brexit legitimised and emboldened the expression of racist views, creating a "*climate of fear and anxiety*" among migrants,[127, 128] resulting in a 15–25% rise in race and religious hate crimes.[129] Omar Khan said in 2019 that[130] "*Brexit did not cause racism, [but] it has led to higher levels of racism being expressed*" with social media "*normalising hate and increasing division.*" So while racism existed before, Brexit surfaced it, normalised it and gave it social licence.

Racism has not been the only negative outcome - Brexit also generated high levels of polarisation and left Britain a divided country.[131] '*Leavers*' and '*Remainers*' have become entrenched in new, highly resilient political and social identities that show little sign of dissipating.[132] The majority of Britons are exhausted by this political division[133] and there is much for us to learn from their experiences.

POLITICAL LANGUAGE MATTERS

The UN[134] found the Brexit campaign trail was marked by "*divisive, anti-immigrant and xenophobic rhetoric*", with politicians and campaigners using language that "*created and entrenched prejudices*" stoking anti-immigrant sentiments.[135] When politicians engage in divisive, inflammatory language and 'culture war' debates they increase conflict, contribute to disinformation and undermine social cohesion.[136]

CAMPAIGN MESSAGING MATTERS

The '*Leave*' campaign[137] utilised concise visuals and slogans,[138] employed populist narratives, and produced content designed to provoke emotional reactions, driving online sharing. The '*Remain*' campaign lacked a single key message, shared dense reports and policy documents that were difficult to digest, and failed to provide an aspirational vision for the future.

Philanthropy must show up. While there were some notable and public donations[139] much of the philanthropic sector remained quiet in the lead up to the referendum.

"*We didn't engage at all pre-Brexit referendum, although now we wish we did. I was with other (UK) Community Foundations the morning the result came through, we all felt naïve to have assumed that the outcome surely wouldn't land as 'leave'.*"

There are varying views on why philanthropy failed to engage - uncertainty around the details of a "deal", generalised complacency, real and perceived constraints around activism, and a culture of conflict avoidance. Now philanthropy (and others) must sort through the consequences - rebuilding social cohesion, deconstructing polarisation, and unwinding the social, economic and cultural impacts of race based and religious violence.

02. The Voice Referendum, Australia

In 2023 voters in Australia[140] **also participated in a government-initiated referendum. The Voice to Parliament emerged from the Uluru Statement from the Heart,[141] a document drafted by 250 Indigenous leaders through 13 regional dialogues. Amongst other things, the statement called for the establishment of a constitutionally enshrined Indigenous Voice to advise Parliament on matters affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.**

In March 2023, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced the referendum, acknowledging *"the shared history and ongoing connection between Indigenous Australians and the land."*[142] The referendum asked whether voters wanted *"to alter the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice."*[143] Parliament would determine the specific composition, functions, and powers of The Voice through legislation if it succeeded at referendum.

The Voice had high levels of support in initial polling, sitting at 75–80%, but this rapidly declined amid intense public debate and campaigning. After final adjustments, the '*Yes*' campaign received just 39.9% of votes. As Australia, and Aboriginal people in particular, process the fallout of the referendum, learnings are beginning to emerge.

People who knew more about Australia's colonial history were more likely to vote '*Yes*'. A representative survey of 2,500 non-Indigenous people found a clear pattern: '*Yes*' voters had a more informed understanding of Australia's colonial history and *"...tended to agree that colonisation has an ongoing impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and that reparations are needed to address these impacts."*[144] '*No*' voters were more likely to believe *"...*

that land rights/native title are unfair and... if Indigenous Australians tried harder they could be just as well off as the non-Indigenous population".[145] As one of the Aboriginal people we interviewed said,

"We needed programs to educate the masses well before a referendum."

The Voice failed to address underlying issues. For many Aboriginal people the development of the Uluru Statement was culturally flawed and did not align with the longstanding demands of many Aboriginal nations, leaders and movements for sovereignty, land rights and self-determination.[146, 147, 148] One Aboriginal interview participant said,

"The people pushing for the Voice were academics and politicians, disconnected from the day-to-day lives of people living in community. So many Aboriginal people are living in poverty, on our own ancestral land. So much wealth is being extracted from our loss and hurt. There are so many things that could benefit - social services, land return - the Voice is the lowest priority in terms of what could impact Aboriginal people day-to-day."

02. The Voice Referendum

Australia

This failure to address underlying issues meant the referendum drove division among Aboriginal communities. Every Aboriginal person we spoke to spoke of the division in their families and communities as a result of the referendum.

"The biggest thing I want Māori to know is that you have to make space early on to prevent fractures from happening - upskill in conflict resolution. Our movements and our families have been torn apart and I don't know how we're going to rebuild from this."

The '*No*' vote leveraged what already existed: racism and disinformation. The '*No*' campaign built on false, harmful pre-existing narratives[149] supported by biassed and racist reporting.[150, 151] It benefited from the circulation of mis/disinformation, including claims that non-Indigenous people would be kicked off their land, or banned from sport venues if the Voice was successful. The impartiality of fact-checking organisations was attacked[152] and the Australian Electoral Commission had to actively counter false claims about issues like vote counting, ballot validity, and their impartiality in running the referendum process.[153]

📢 CAMPAIGN MESSAGING MATTERS

As we saw in Brexit, the '*No*' campaign had simple, repetitive, easy to remember messages like *"If you don't know, vote no"*. Often delivered by Indigenous spokespeople, these messages required no effort from their audience. '*Yes*' campaign messaging was less cohesive and, while focused on values, failed to resonate in the context of the Voice, despite a significantly higher advertising spend.

When asked what advice they have for Aotearoa, Aboriginal activists told us that,

"Funders should be putting their money behind Māori to have their own discussions internally so that iwi and hapū can be unified when the referendum comes. Look for the people, nations and organisations already leading discussions on the ground and fund and support them… Support self-determining conversations, gatherings and activities."

03. The Irish Abortion Referendum

In 2018 Ireland overwhelmingly supported a referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment, which had prohibited abortion in almost all cases.
The referendum outcome allowed the government to legislate for safe abortion access up to 12 weeks of pregnancy and later in cases where the pregnancy created risk to the mother's life or fatal foetal abnormality.[154]

This was not the first Irish referendum on abortion care. A 1983 referendum introduced the constitutional abortion ban, and a 1992 referendum failed to further restrict abortion access and instead allowed travel and information on abortion services outside Ireland.[155]

Key events galvanised the pro-choice movement in the years preceding the 2018 referendum: X Case;[156, 157] the death of Savita Halappanavar[158]; and the 2016 discovery of the Tuam Babies[159] – more than 800 babies secretly buried in a disused septic tank by Catholic nuns. This horrifying discovery reduced trust in the church and inoculated people against the religious positioning of the debate.

"If the church really cared about babies, and not just about controlling women's bodies, they would have made radically different choices – the mother and baby homes would never have existed."

As a result of growing public momentum, the Irish parliament established a Citizens' Assembly in 2016 to deliberate on several issues, including the ban on abortion. Over five weekends, the Citizens Assembly heard from experts, advocacy groups, and individuals. After engaging in informed deliberations on the complex ethical, legal and medical aspects of the issue, 64% of the Assembly recommended a law change. These recommendations were submitted to parliament, allowing politicians to gauge public sentiment before committing to a referendum. The final vote in favour of reform was 66.4%.

Unlike Australia and the UK, there is no evidence of increased violence or hate speech, political unrest, or a reduction in social cohesion following the referendum. What makes the Irish referendum so different?

The Irish referendum was called in response to growing public sentiment, rather than as a political tool. Brexit, by comparison, was called as a response to internal party politics,[160] not due to overwhelming public demand.

The Citizens Assembly increased knowledge and tempered disinformation. Live streamed hearings sparked public and private debate. This lent legitimacy to the process, informed the public and countered misinformation ahead of the referendum campaigning.

03. The Abortion Referendum

Ireland

📢 **CAMPAIGN MESSAGING MATTERS**

The successful campaign leveraged personal stories,[161] distributed local organising tactics, intergenerational solidarity and values based messaging.[162]

The development of a sophisticated digital interference strategy. In the lead up to the referendum, Ireland faced a number of digital threats, including international financing for online advertising and campaigns spreading mis/disinformation, and micro-targeted online ads. The Transparent Referendum Initiative[163] was launched as a response and

"in the absence of any regulation on digital political campaigning, set out to bring dark social media ads out in the open, to ensure that they are open and subject to scrutiny in the same way that traditional campaign materials are."[164]

Aotearoa can learn from Ireland, particularly their work to prevent foreign influence and interference in elections. The Interdepartmental Group on Security of Ireland's Electoral Process and Disinformation,[165] was established in 2017 and has since proposed[166] a number of interventions to protect democracy, including regulation of online political ads[167] and reform of political donation rules. Aotearoa could follow suit, protecting and strengthening our democratic processes, now and into the future.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Recommendations

There are many levers philanthropy can pull on the journey towards honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi and growing social cohesion in Aotearoa New Zealand. These recommendations are a synthesis of interviews and analysis of literature and writings, combined with the views of the authors themselves. They do not aim to achieve the broader goal of social cohesion, but rather focus on what must happen now to prevent further erosion of trust and to protect our blueprint for social cohesion, Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Underpinning these recommendations is the need to prioritise Māori-led and kaupapa Māori organisations, to include people with lived experience in decision-making and to use other levers, beyond finance, to strengthen this work. By investing in these critical areas, we can pave the way for a more inclusive, equitable, and cohesive Aotearoa.

01. Te Tiriti Education

**Te Tiriti provides a blueprint for social cohesion in Aotearoa.
For social cohesion to be realised, we must understand Te Tiriti, colonial history and the ongoing impacts of colonisation, what these mean and how they relate to our lives.**

FUND ACCESS TO TE TIRITI TRAINING

Fund access to Te Tiriti training and allow communities/organisations to choose the right educators for them. Prioritise trainers using evidence based pedagogies and strengths based, trauma informed facilitation. Prioritise training that includes both information and pathways to action.

RESOURCE DIVERSE, CREATIVE TE TIRITI COMMUNICATIONS

Resource poets, artists, comedians, writers and content creators to make and share varied and accessible information about Te Tiriti in multiple languages and across multiple media. Support the development of reliable, accurate, accessible information from trusted sources. Ensure that joy, and an aspirational vision for the future are part of these narratives.

TRAIN THE TRAINERS

Fund Te Tiriti training for educators and communicators across a broad range of communities to increase availability and access to high quality Te Tiriti training from diverse presenters, across all of Aotearoa (and beyond).

02. Narrative & Messaging

Narratives play a fundamental role in shaping our understanding of the world. They influence people's perceptions, beliefs and values which shape their economic, social, cultural, relational and political decisions. In every example that was shared with us from international counterparts and in almost every focus group and interview, people spoke about the need for positive, powerful, accessible and coherent stories, messaging campaigns and sustained work to shift narratives around Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

SUPPORT EVIDENCE-BASED MESSAGES AND NARRATIVES

Fund the development and dissemination of narratives and messages that deepen public thinking and shape public opinion on how we can honour and uplift Te Tiriti.

THE THREE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF WELL-CONSIDERED NARRATIVE CAMPAIGNS INCLUDE

1. Listening, data-gathering, research and analysis to better understand audiences, perspectives, narratives and platforms to inform communication strategies
2. The development and testing of helpful messages and narratives
3. The dissemination of those messages to audiences whose minds are open to shifting from a range of diverse messengers and platforms.

There is a large and growing body of evidence on effective narrative and communication strategies. This evidence should inform decisions around who to fund.[168]

03. Campaigning & Organising

Throughout Aotearoa's history, social movements have been at the forefront of justice and equality. Women's suffrage, nuclear free New Zealand, the growth of kōhanga reo, marriage equality: all of this has been enabled by social movements taking powerful, organised and coordinated action to bring about change.

Social movements have the collective capacity to mobilise, organise, motivate and inspire both critical mass and critical connections to shift systems.[169] Philanthropy can invest in social movements by funding advocacy and activism that uplifts and upholds Te Tiriti o Waitangi. In particular we recommend funding Māori-led movements, Tiriti-led collectives, youth-led campaigns and those working at the grassroots.

FUNDING ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM INCLUDES:[170]

- Campaigning supporting collectives to work in coordinated ways towards shared political or social outcomes grounded in an analysis of power, strategy and a credible theory of change
- Advocacy lobbying/strategic pressure to influence political decisions & outcomes
- Organising building and unleashing the capacity of community members to take leaderful action on the issues that impact them or that they care about.

04. Enabling Collective Action

To be effective partners in pursuing racial and economic justice, funders must provide resources that will strengthen the institutional power and capacity of grassroots movements working on these issues over the long-term, and support the ongoing well-being of the people working in this space.

FUND WĀNANGA

Resource gatherings that provide opportunities for collaboration, solidarity and strategising. Wānanga can bring people together, hold space and create safe environments for people to learn together.[171] Fund tangata whenua specific wānanga to reflect and process the emotional toll this work has on Māori.

HEALING JUSTICE GRANTS

Healing justice grants provide supplemental funding to support the wellbeing, resilience and sustainability of social justice organisations and their staff/volunteers. These grants, along with wānanga and better funding practices (eg. adequately resourced work, untagged funds, fully funded projects) are crucial for combating burnout and ensuring movement leaders have the capacity to sustain their mahi long-term. Many international funders support these grants, including Astraea Foundation,[172] Ford Foundation, Open Societies and the General Service Foundation.[173,174]

SUPPORT & CELEBRATE NEW GOVERNANCE & LEADERSHIP MODELS

Support the careful proliferation of new governance and leadership models that embody partnership and shared decision-making. Fund work that highlights and celebrates successful examples across different organisations (philanthropy, community, business) and provides tangible support for additional organisations to explore and implement these models.

FUND THE MAINTENANCE OF A SYSTEMS MAP AND COMMONS LIBRARY

Resource the ongoing development and maintenance of the systems map and a commons library of essential resources and documents - especially primary-source evidence.

05. Changing Philanthropic Practice

If a thriving, Te Tiriti based Aotearoa, free from racism and disinformation is the goal, then philanthropy must look inwards for change. How do our governance practices, processes and priorities uphold unjust systems and structures? How can we work to better understand our role and surface our own complicity and take effective action?

APPLY A SOCIAL COHESION AND ANTI-RACISM LENS TO ALL FUNDING

Put in place policy and practice that actively combats racial discrimination, increases funds for Māori aspirations, examines institutional biases, enables inclusive participation, builds organisational cultural capacity and understanding of what a Te Tiriti based future means, and prioritises community self-determination through philanthropic investment decisions and practices.

MOVE TOWARDS MORE EQUITABLE FUNDING PRACTICES

Funders can support social cohesion by using equitable funding practices such as: untagged funding; community-led priority-setting; participatory decision-making; flexible, high trust funding agreements with reciprocal accountability; and using both positive screening and exclusions to ensure investments rigorously align with funding priorities.

MOVE BEYOND MONEY

Philanthropy has long behaved as though it is 'apart' from the work that it supports, using financial resources to create change, while holding other resources close. There is an opportunity to amplify impact by leveraging all available assets. Funders can use their voice, influence, investments, property, networks, relationships, time and skills.

Once the immediate threats to social cohesion have been tackled, we urge funders to turn their minds to the longer term levers for systemic change.

THESE INCLUDE

- Citizens assemblies to inform policy development and help us navigate complex problems across difference[175]
- Media literacy programmes to reduce our vulnerability to mis- and disinformation[176]
- Strategic litigation funds to support lawsuits aimed at achieving social change[177, 178, 179]
- Policy levers that reduce digital threats to democracy, including the regulation of social media platforms and policy to reduce international electoral interference[180]
- Research to better understand, track and measure changes to social cohesion
- Anti-racism, cultural appreciation, community development, research etc.

At this moment there is a clear need to prioritise action, but a broader range of interventions should be considered useful and necessary in the future. A commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and to social cohesion is a long-term vision.

RESOURCES

01. Systems Mapping

As part of this work, the authors were asked to generate a systems map, illustrating the breadth of work being done across Aotearoa to uphold and honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi in various sectors and spaces. That was also a request made early and often by those working in this space. As a result, the authors have offered to compile this information into a living spreadsheet and make it available to everyone who has participated in this research project as a form of reciprocity to honour the knowledge, connections and expertise that were shared so generously with us. This systems map will continue to evolve, to reflect the growth of this space and be a resource for funders, practitioners, academics and activists. The work-in-progress map can be accessed here:

Systems Map: Kaupapa that Honour and Activate Te Tiriti o Waitangi

02. Further Learning

- Primer on the Treaty Principles Bill Carwyn Jones
- The Matike Mai Report published in 2016, presents a vision for constitutional transformation in Aotearoa New Zealand, one based on Te Tiriti o Waitangi and designed to better reflect and uphold the rights and sovereignty of Māori
- Funder's Guide to Building Social Cohesion is a paper by the Democracy Funders Network that looks at how we advance social cohesion and concludes with a set of open questions for philanthropy
- James Cook and the Doctrine of Discovery – 5 Things to Know This piece by Tina Ngata explains the Doctrine of Discovery and how it impacts Aotearoa New Zealand.

AUTHORS" NOTES

Our work brings together insights from literature and media and the views of 80 subject matter experts. We acknowledge, and are deeply grateful for the generosity of the contributors. The majority of quotes in this report are not attributed. This is to ensure the safety of those who spoke to us and to safeguard their relationships with government, funders, political parties and in some cases, their own organisations. Where quotes have been attributed, these quotes have either been taken from previously published materials, or the speakers consented to their inclusion. This does not imply that they agree with the overall premise and recommendations of the paper.

AUTHORS
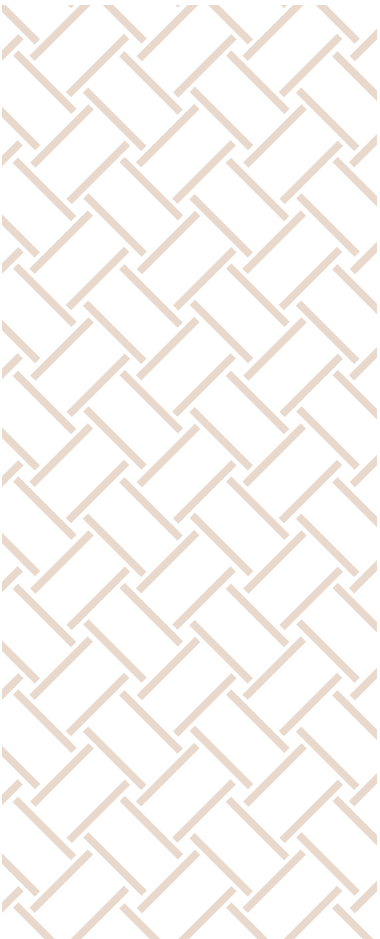
Lani Evans

Lani Evans (she/her/ia) is a for-purpose founder, leader and director focused on generosity, community and equity. She has spent the last ten years leading philanthropic organisations and is currently exploring shared and steward ownership models. She holds multiple governances roles across philanthropy and community development, and is a co-founder of Share Collective, a non-profit that distributes dividends from a charitable share portfolio. She is a 2024 Equitable Futures Fellow, a past recipient of the Winston Churchill Fellowship, an honorary member of Philanthropy New Zealand and was awarded a New Year's Honour for services to social enterprise. Lani lives in an intergenerational, multi-whānau household and is proud māmā to Bryn and Ara.

AUTHORS
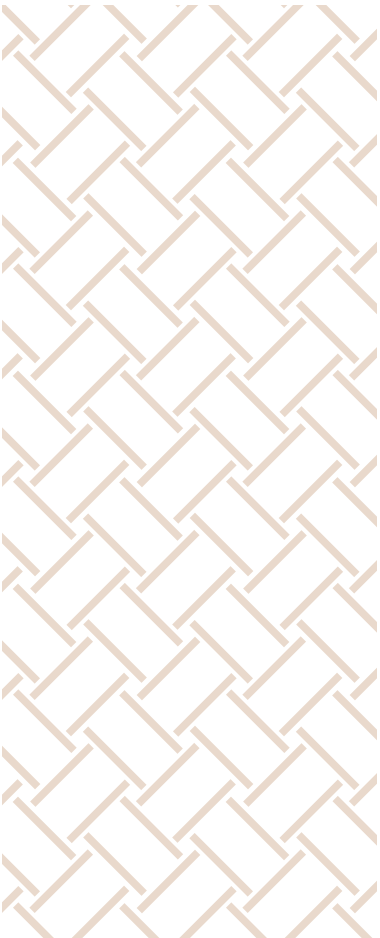
Te Raukura O'Connell Rapira

Te Raukura O'Connell Rapira (they/them/ia) is Māori and Pākehā from Ngāpuhi, Te Rarawa, Te Ātiawa, Ngāruahine, Ngāti Whakaue and Country Kerry in Ireland. They are an experienced campaigner, community organiser, strategist, facilitator, trainer, writer, researcher, people and project manager. Prior to freelancing, Te Raukura was the Executive Director of Movement Building at the Foundation for Young Australians and, before that, the Director of ActionStation Aotearoa. Te Raukura is also a co-founder of the Youth Movement Fund Aotearoa, Te Kuaka and Tauiwi Tautoko. Te Raukura is also a lead claimant in the WAI3365 Urgent Inquiry into Māori Wards.

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