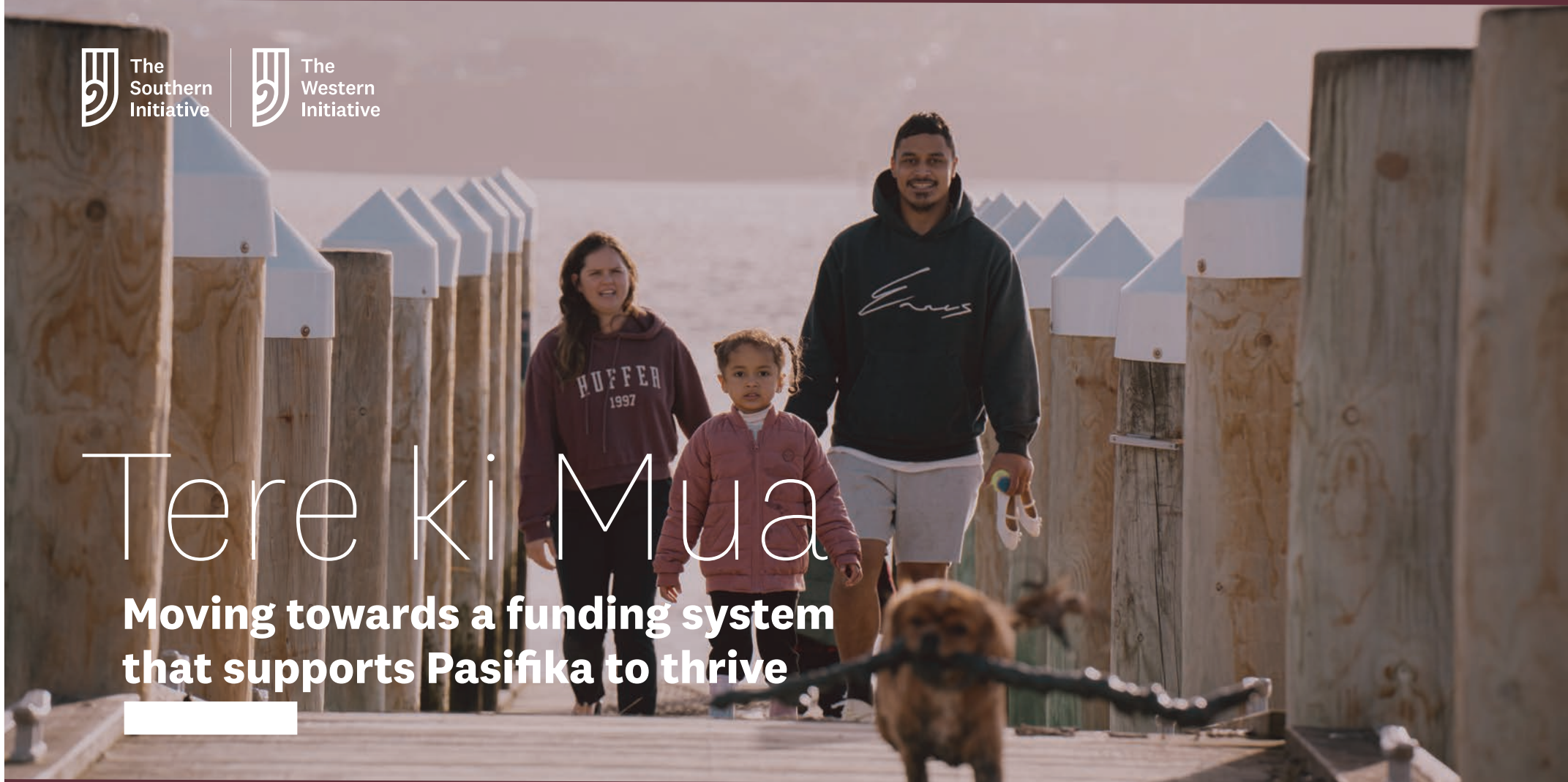




# Tere ki Mua

**Moving towards a funding system  
that supports Pasifika to thrive**



## The Southern Initiative and the Western Initiative

The Southern Initiative and Western Initiative are Auckland Council's socio-economic innovation capacity in south and west Auckland. Our mission is to support south and west Auckland to become prosperous, resilient places where tamariki and whānau thrive. We are not in the business of BAU—our job is to demonstrate that a just, inclusive, circular and regenerative economy, where prosperity is equitably shared, is not just desirable but also possible. We do this through ground-up innovations, learning what it takes to achieve real and enduring socioeconomic transformation and using our practice-based evidence to influence systems change and shape new markets.

You can find out more about us and our work at [www.tsi.nz](http://www.tsi.nz).

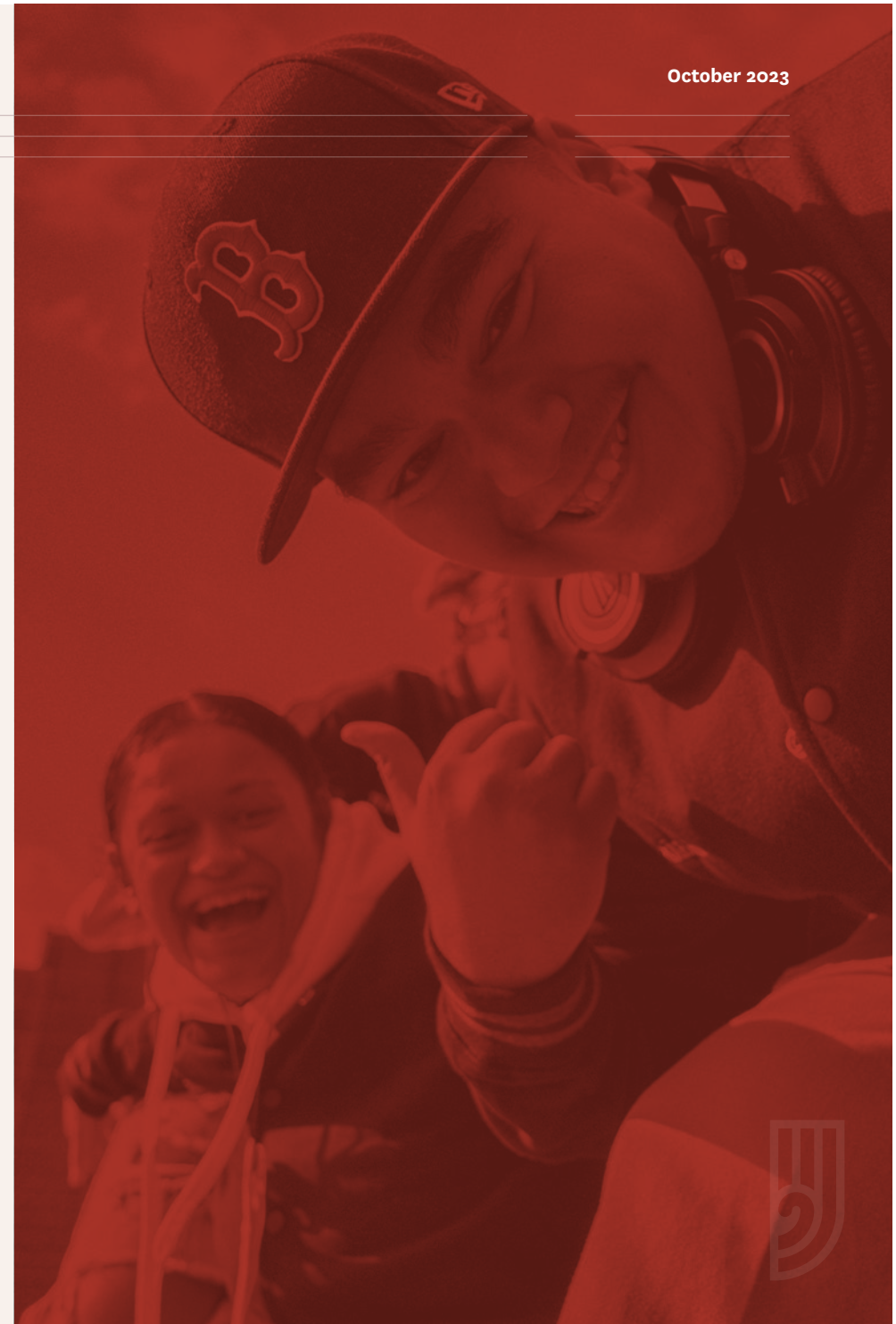
The Tere Ki Mua Project Team: Dr Analosa Ulugia-Veukiso from Manino Consultants, Mary-Jane Kivalu from Fusi Fonua Partners, Fole (Daleki) Finau, Anna-Jane Edwards and Ema Hao'uli from The Southern and Western Initiative (TSI & TWI).

## The Peter McKenzie Project

This project was funded by the Peter McKenzie Project (PMP). As a key programme of the J R McKenzie Trust, the Peter McKenzie Project funds a small group of Kaikōkiri – organisations leading change – who work together to shift the systems which lock children and families into poverty.

The project has a long-term focus and is taking an experimental approach to systems change. Its participatory funding model allows its Kaikōkiri, Committee and team to work together to make decisions about strategy, resourcing, and grant making. PMP believes this way of working can help build an Aotearoa where all children and whānau are free from poverty, and living lives full of opportunity.

You can find out more about PMP at <https://www.petermckenzieproject.org.nz/>.



# Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> . . . . .	<b>4</b>	<b>How do Pasifika system change leaders experience the funding system?</b> . . .	<b>22</b>
<b>Introduction</b> . . . . .	<b>6</b>	Funding opportunities that aren't informed by Pasifika communities, and our ways of knowing and being, do not work	22
Methodology	10	Lack of transparency about how decisions are made and how resources flow facilitates inequity and erodes trust	23
<b>Being Pasifika in Aotearoa NZ</b> . . . . .	<b>11</b>	Funder staff biases get in the way of genuine engagement with Pasifika kaikōkiri	24
Pasifika identity is a contested identity	12	<b>Systems leadership in action: Case studies</b> . . . . .	<b>27</b>
'Pasifika' is an Aotearoa NZ-specific identity, shaped by its history	13	Sina: Leading from within	27
Pasifika identity is about shared values	14	Keahi: Leading from the outside	29
Pasifika relate to Māori through whakapapa, and as tangata Tiriti	16	<b>Call to Action</b> . . . . .	<b>31</b>
Pasifika identity is strengthening with each generation	17	<b>Conclusion</b> . . . . .	<b>36</b>
<b>What is systems change, for Pasifika systems change leaders?</b> . . . . .	<b>19</b>	<b>Acknowledgements</b> . . . . .	<b>37</b>
Talking about systems change is a privilege	19	<b>References</b> . . . . .	<b>38</b>
Systems change is about equity	19		
There are different perspectives about which systems to focus on	20		
Systems change leadership requires a long-term view – and humility	21		

# Executive Summary

Pacific peoples are a fast-growing, young population. By 2043, around one in five children in Aotearoa New Zealand will be Pasifika. The relatively young age profile of the Pasifika population in Aotearoa NZ means Pasifika kids represent a growing proportion of our future workforce.

A prosperous Pacific population is essential for a prosperous Aotearoa NZ. But our labour and housing markets, and health and education systems, do not provide the conditions for Pasifika to thrive. Pacific peoples are one of several populations in Aotearoa NZ that disproportionately experiences persistent disadvantage. Only 10 percent of Pacific peoples report having all four of the following good outcomes of wellbeing: excellent or very good health, more than enough or enough money to meet everyday needs, not felt lonely in the last four weeks, and no major problems (cold, damp, mould) with their home.

To transform the markets and systems that entrench the inequity that Pasifika experience in Aotearoa NZ, Pasifika voices and experiences must be front and centre. Organisations that work towards the common purpose of funding for-purpose organisations for social good – including philanthropy, and central and local government – can make an important contribution, individually and as a sector, to supporting Pasifika to lead systems change. But the funding system itself needs to change to do this well.

To support funders to better support Pasifika-led systems change, our Pasifika project team has gathered the stories and reflections of five Pasifika systems change leaders in talanoa (discussions), to provide deep insights about how Pasifika peoples understand, experience and contribute to systems change in Aotearoa NZ, with a particular focus on how funders and Pasifika kaikōkiri (grantees) interact within the funding system

**Some funders do not have a strong grasp of what it is to be Pasifika in Aotearoa NZ in 2023.** Our Pasifika systems change leaders spoke about aspects of Pasifika identity that they considered funding organisations needed to understand to be able to support Pasifika-led systems change. Key themes included the contested nature of the ‘Pacific umbrella’ identity, the impact of the history of Pasifika in Aotearoa NZ on that sense of identity, and the values shared across Pacific cultures – and in particular, the va (relational space). Our Pasifika systems change leaders also spoke about the whakapapa (genealogy) and Tiriti-based nature of the Māori-Pasifika relationship – and the growing sense of belonging of Pasifika with every generation in Aotearoa NZ.

**Systems change is about equity.** There was strong consensus among our Pacific systems change leaders that systems change is about ensuring that Pacific peoples have the same opportunities to thrive as other New Zealanders. Systems change, for them, is a lengthy process, requiring collaboration and humility. We also heard that systems change discourse may not have currency at the community level for many Pasifika. We also heard different perspectives on which systems should be changed.

**The funding system is not working for Pasifika peoples.** Three key issues with the funding system came out of our talanoa: the ineffectiveness of funding opportunities that aren't shaped by Pasifika communities and our ways of knowing and being, lack of transparency about decision-making processes and resource flows, and biases held by funding staff. We also saw these themes reflected in the international literature on funding for systems change. Our Pasifika systems change leaders also told us about what they are doing to effect change within the funding system, in leadership roles and as ngā kaikōkiri (grantees).

In sharing their stories, our Pasifika systems change leaders offer the philanthropic sector a taonga, a koloa, a measina – a treasure. With Tere Ki Mua, we offer this taonga to facilitate the opening of space for genuine learning and informed talanoa within and across the Aotearoa NZ funding system. We encourage funders that work with Pasifika, or want to, to boldly step forward with intention to meet Pasifika kaikōkiri communities in that space.

Different funders will be at different stages in their journey towards becoming systems-aware supporters of Pasifika-led change, and each organisation will have a different role to play, based on their strengths and role in the system. We are calling Aotearoa NZ funding organisations to action to:

- **Work with and learn from others in the funding system in Aotearoa NZ and globally who are doing internal and external work to support systems change and navigate complexity,** and
- **Focus on establishing and maintaining trust in their relationships with Pasifika kaikōkiri and communities.** In particular, funders should aim to:
  - Create culturally-safe spaces for connection to facilitate genuine engagement,
  - Adopt partnership models and asset-based thinking to achieve systems change outcomes
  - Be transparent to facilitate equity and build trust.

We look forward to the talanoa ahead.

# Introduction

Tere Ki Mua is a think-piece that has been developed by Pasifika people for non-Pasifika people and organisations in the Aotearoa NZ funding sector – including philanthropy, and central and local government funders – who are seeking to understand how they can better support Pasifika-led change. It was commissioned by the Peter McKenzie Project (PMP) and led by the Southern Initiative (TSI) and the Western Initiative (TWI).

The name of our project means ‘to move forward with intention’ in Cook Islands Māori. This proverb was chosen to reflect the important opportunity we have to focus on what works in shifting the dial for Pasifika and the pivotal role funders can play in supporting Pasifika to thrive.

Pacific peoples in Aotearoa NZ are a fast-growing population. From 2006 to 2018, the Pasifika population increased by 43 percent, more than double the growth of the general population (Statistics NZ, 2019). Pasifika are also the youngest population group, with 34 percent of its population under 15 and a median age of 23 (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2020). By 2043, around one in five children in Aotearoa NZ will be Pasifika (Statistics NZ, 2019). The relatively young age profile of the Pasifika population in Aotearoa NZ means Pasifika kids represent a growing proportion of our future workforce.

A prosperous Pacific population is essential for a prosperous Aotearoa NZ. But Pacific peoples are one of several populations in Aotearoa NZ that disproportionately experiences persistent disadvantage. The Productivity Commission defines persistent disadvantage across three domains: being left out, doing without and being income poor. Nearly half (45.7 percent) of Pasifika households with at least one working-age adult experienced persistent disadvantage in 2013 and 2018 – more than double the rate of persistent disadvantage across peak working age households in Aotearoa NZ as a whole (18.2 percent) (Productivity Commission, 2023). Only 10 percent of Pacific peoples report having all four of the following good outcomes of wellbeing: excellent or very good health, more than enough or enough money to meet everyday needs, not felt lonely in the last four weeks and no major problems (cold, damp, mould) with their home (Statistics NZ, 2022).

At TSI and TWI, we are learning what it takes for Pasifika families and communities to lead out on what matters most to them. This involves the recognition that our existing labour and housing markets, and health and education systems, do not provide the conditions for Pasifika to thrive. And that, to transform those systems, we must privilege Pasifika voices and experiences.

## What we mean when we talk about systems thinking and systems change

A system is a set of things that are interconnected in such a way that they produce their own pattern of collective behaviour over time. Systems thinking is a way of making sense of the world that focuses on the relationships between things and how they influence each other within a system. This contrasts with reductionist thinking, which seeks to understand complex systems in terms of their component parts. While systems thinking, as a field, emerged in Western knowledge in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, it aligns with Māori and Pasifika ways of being and knowing, and Indigenous knowledges generally. Konai Helu Thaman (2003) explains:

*Indigenous wisdom is nothing new; before the modern age, every civilization [sic] viewed the earth as alive, as an organism with a set of living relationships working together... Indigenous wisdom is about the connectedness and interrelatedness of all things and all people.*

Systems change approaches treat the complex issues in our world – like inequality, climate change, homelessness and addiction – as expressions of system behaviour. People create and reinforce the systems – like our economic system, or our health system – that create these wicked problems, through their ways of thinking, relationships, power dynamics, resource flows, policies and practices (Kania, Kramer & Senge, 2018). This means that people can also change systems, so that they behave differently, and produce different outcomes. Systems change is about identifying and shifting the conditions that hold systemic issues in place.



As the systems change movement has grown globally, we've noticed that much of the systems change literature comes from powerful voices, rather than the communities most affected by systemic issues. This missing feedback loop is a barrier to systems change in itself.

Our intention with Tere Ki Mua is to make a contribution to filling this gap, by bringing attention to the perspectives of Pasifika systems change leaders in the context of the funding system in Aotearoa NZ. This think piece sits alongside the incredible work of the newly established [Pacific Funders Network](#) (PFN). The aim is to complement PFN's work, by providing deep insights about how Pasifika peoples understand, experience and contribute to systems change in Aotearoa NZ, with a particular focus on how funders and Pasifika kaikōkiri (grantees) interact within the funding system.

## What we mean when we talk about the funding system...

We use the term 'funding system' to describe the organisations – including philanthropy, and central and local government – that work towards the common purpose of funding for-purpose organisations for social good. It also describes the conditions that operate within and across those organisations and the individuals who work within this system, and affect how this system behaves, including:

- How people think and feel: their worldviews, values, mindsets, biases, assumptions and, in particular, how they perceive the purpose of the funding system,
- How power operates and how people use power, in particular in the funder/kaikōkiri relationship,
- How people relate to others who are within or interact with the system – for example, the relationships between funders,
- How resources – including knowledge, people and money – flow, and
- Their practices and policies.

## ...and ngā kaikōkiri

In line with PMP practice, we use the term 'ngā kaikōkiri' to describe those who seek and receive funding within the funding system, often referred to as grantees. In te reo Māori, 'ngā kaikōkiri' means the people who champion, promote, advocate and lead their communities.



**SINA****MANU****KEAHI****ELENOA****SIONE**

To do this, our project team had the great privilege of interviewing five Pasifika systems change leaders. Sina, Manu, Keahi, Elenoa and Sione (not their real names) told us about their values, worldviews, their work, how they make change happen, and how they work with and within the funding system to do that. They told us that the funding system is not working for Pasifika peoples. We heard that some funders do not have a strong grasp of what it is to be Pasifika in Aotearoa NZ in 2023. We heard about funding opportunities intended to help Pasifika peoples that were not informed by Pasifika peoples or our ways of knowing and being, and were not effective. We heard about opacity in the funding system, with different rules applying to different kaikōkiri. We heard from Pasifika systems change leaders about their experiences of interpersonal bias when engaging with funders, creating additional mental and emotional labour.

As Pasifika practitioners and researchers, our project team were all too familiar with the kinds of stories shared by our Pasifika systems change leaders – from our own experiences, and from what we have heard many times over in the communities we serve. But we, as Pasifika, don't usually share these stories with funders, for fear of being misunderstood, being perceived as ungrateful, and not being funded.

In sharing their stories, our Pasifika systems change leaders offer the funding sector a taonga, a koloa, a measina – a treasure. It is not the responsibility of Pasifika – or any marginalised peoples – to educate those with power about themselves, or how the actions of those with power affect communities

and how they can do better. We believe, however, that there is a collective responsibility to actively open space for genuine learning and informed talanoa (discussion), where healing, strengthening and growth can occur.

With Tere ki Mua, we seek to facilitate an opening of that space within the Aotearoa NZ funding system. We encourage funders that work with Pasifika, or want to, to boldly step forward with intention to meet Pasifika kaikōkiri and communities in that space.

If there is one takeaway from our interviews and the research that we would like funders to keep front-of-mind as they read this think piece, it's this: the most valuable thing that funders can do to more effectively support Pasifika-led systems change is to turn their gaze inwards.

*There's a role for philanthropic funders, for government entities or, fundamentally, for the Western power structure in handing power back to our Pacific peoples. It would take sitting down to some conversations and figuring out, 'what is our role in these systems?' Rather than, 'how do we run their systems' which sometimes it feels like they are trying to do. (KEAHI)*

*The more engaged philanthropy becomes in its ambition to change systems, the more it requires foundations to work on themselves in relation to their mindsets, mental models and the redistribution of power. (THE AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION)*

## Methodology

This project drew on a Pasifika methodological approach. This involves conducting research with practices that are culturally rooted in the perspectives, knowledge systems, and experiences of Pasifika communities. It involves actively working alongside Pasifika communities, incorporates indigenous knowledge, and aims to address their unique challenges and aspirations for self-determination, cultural preservation, and advancement. This includes integrating diverse ideas from the field of Pasifika Studies and related disciplines, and a wide range of perspectives and insights, to guide the conduct of research and practices within Pasifika contexts.

Committed to drawing on community knowledge and expertise, the Tere Ki Mua Project Team included Pasifika researchers who have experience working alongside Pasifika communities.

### Talanoa with Pasifika systems change leaders

Five Pasifika systems change leaders were invited to share their experiences and insights through the process of talanoa.

With our experience in working with diverse Pasifika communities across Aotearoa NZ, the Tere Ki Mua Project Team identified Pasifika systems change leaders who could provide a valuable perspective for this think piece. These participants were selected for the range of perspectives they could provide,

in terms of: gender, age, birthplace (Pacific Islands and Aotearoa NZ), and leadership across various sectors (e.g. in local community, in public and private for-purpose and for-profit organisations, on government governance groups), and fields (e.g. professional clinical supervision, business, research and advocacy). The five Pasifika systems change leaders involved in Tere Ki Mua also reflect a range of ethnic heritages. Some were of sole Pasifika descent (e.g. Tongan or Samoan), others were of mixed heritage (for example, Samoan and Pākehā; Fijian, Māori, Samoan and Tuvaluan). While the majority of the group resided in Auckland, several also had experiences of living and working in other parts of urban Aotearoa NZ, and across the Pacific.

We note that the term, ‘Pasifika systems change leader’ is one we have chosen to describe our interviewees – not one they have chosen for themselves. The act of an individual self-identifying and promoting themselves as a ‘Pasifika leader’ is not common in Pacific cultures, which value humility and service. It is the community surrounding the leader who have elevated and identified this person to this role. We acknowledge the great responsibility and expectations these leaders shoulder from their communities.

We share the insights of our Pasifika systems change leaders below, with edits for clarity and brevity only.

# Being Pasifika in Aotearoa NZ

Our Pasifika systems change leaders' discussions about identity raised **five key themes**.

- Pasifika identity is a contested identity
- 'Pasifika' is an Aotearoa NZ-specific identity, shaped by its history
- Pasifika identity is about shared values
- Pasifika relate to Māori through whakapapa, and as tangata Tiriti
- Pasifika identity is strengthening with every generation.

## What we mean when use the terms 'Pasifika' and 'Pacific'

There is no agreed terminology to describe people who live in Aotearoa NZ and are of Melanesian, Micronesian or Polynesian descent. The range of terms used include but are not limited to: Pasifika, Pasefika, Pacifica, Pasifiki, Pacific peoples, Tangata (o le) Moana, Tagata Pasifika, Moana peoples, Pacific Islanders, Pacificans, Pasifkans, and PIs.

Our interviewees used 'Pacific', 'Pacific peoples' and 'Pasifika' interchangeably and, in this think piece, we do, too. We recognise, however, that these terms are contested.

'Pasifika' – a Samoan and Tokelauan transliteration of the word 'Pacific' – is thought to have been coined by the Ministry of Education in the 1990s (Fa'avae, 2022). 'Pasifika' has generally been preferred over 'Pacific' given its emergence from a 'localised Aotearoa context' (see Mila-Schaaf, 2010). However, there has been a shift in the late 2010s. Some consider that 'Pasifika', as a Polynesian term, is not inclusive of Micronesians and Melanesians. Central government agencies, including the Ministry of Education, now generally use the terms 'Pacific' and 'Pacific peoples'.

In academia, researchers may use multiple terms – for example, 'Pasifika/Pacific' may be used in an education context, in recognition of both current government usage, and 20 years of 'Pasifika education' discourse (Wendt Samu, 2020). There has also been a movement in favour of the term 'Moana peoples', signalling another shift away from colonial identifiers (see Fehoko et al, 2021). However, as one recent draft government strategy noted, this term may also apply only to Polynesians and may not be used by some Melanesian or Micronesian peoples (Creative New Zealand, 2023).

## Pasifika identity is a contested identity

“ When we talk about the Pacific, we’re talking about the ocean and all that is connected to it. Our systems are inherently transnational – back to the islands, but also to Australia, out to the entire west coast of America, going up around Canada and then into Alaska. **(KEAHI)** ”

There are 17 distinct ethnic groups, from the regions of Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia, in Aotearoa NZ’s Pacific classification category. These are: Cook Islands Māori, Fijian, Hawaiian, i-Kiribati, Indigenous Australian, Nauruan, Niuean, Ni-Vanuatu, Papua New Guinean, Pitcairn Islander, Rotuman, Samoan, Solomon Islander, Tahitian, Tokelauan, Tongan, and Tuvaluan. The largest Pacific populations are: Samoan (47.9%), Tongan (21.6%), Cook Islands Māori (21.1%), Niuean (8.1%) and Fijian (5.2%) (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2020).

Some academics consider the ‘Pacific umbrella’ to be a symbol of collective unity (Wendt-Samu, 2015). Others have questioned grouping Pacific ethnicities, as this hides their unique histories, cultures and knowledges (Finau, Tavite and Finau, 2014). This is a particular risk for Micronesians and Melanesians, as minorities within a minority. Manu, who is Polynesian, and Elenoa, who is Melanesian, raised the need to ensure conceptions of Pasifika were inclusive. Some Pākehā and Polynesians hold narrow ideas about what it is to be Pasifika that need to shift.

“ From the Pākehā perspective, there is love for the islands. But our Melanesian cousins do not get the same love that Polynesia has. **(MANU)** ”

“ I feel like our own people can be the worst for that. My children included! They have this cultural superiority – Samoans, Tongans, Fijians to some extent – because they’re the majority within a minority. **(ELENOA)** ”

## ‘Pasifika’ is an Aotearoa NZ-specific identity, shaped by its history

“ How do we define Pasifika? We have to be inclusive in our definition, but who we are and what we are is defined by our differences in the sense that we’re a collective. And that collective is evolving. Because who we are today in 2022 is different to what it was in the ‘80s and ‘90s. It’ll be different again in twenty years. **(MANU)** ”

Pacific peoples have a long history of migration to Aotearoa NZ, spanning back to the 1800s. Large waves of migration, however, did not begin until the 1950s. Encouraged by the New Zealand Government, Pacific peoples sought employment opportunities in the midst of Aotearoa NZ’s manufacturing and primary sector labour shortages. Things changed in the 1970s, though, when New Zealand’s economy declined. Political and public attitudes to Pasifika flipped. In the mid-1970s, Pacific families were targeted early in the morning or late at night by police and immigration officials seeking to deport illegal overstayers, in what became known as the Dawn Raids.

In the 1980s, economic deregulation and liberalisation by the Fourth Labour Government had a significant impact on the wellbeing of Pasifika communities. Economic restructuring saw the end of import tariff policies that had protected Aotearoa NZ’s manufacturing industry, resulting in the collapse of the sector, and huge job losses for Māori and Pasifika. The Pasifika employment rate – which had been the highest of any of the measured ethnic groups in 1987, at 62 percent – fell by almost a third to 43 percent by 1991 (Fletcher, 2009; Statistics NZ, 2002).

Pasifika communities were also affected by the social welfare reforms of the Fourth National Government in the early 1990s. State housing policy restructuring increased housing-related poverty and overcrowding for Pasifika families, and labour market deregulation through the Employment Contracts Act 1991 depowered unions, making Pasifika workers particularly vulnerable (Cheer, Kearns and Murphy, 2002; Salesa, 2017). Cuts to benefits and tightening of benefit eligibility criteria also contributed to material hardship experienced by Pasifika beneficiary families (Ministry of Health, 2008).

Despite these massive structural challenges, Pasifika have shown great resilience. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the Aotearoa NZ-born children of Pacific migration began to develop unique forms of expression and identification (think Scribe, Nesian Mystik, bro’ Town), in what has been called an ‘efflorescence’ of things Pacific in the social and cultural life of Aotearoa NZ (Teaiwa and Mallon, 2005). Pacific-led innovations in healthcare and education have not only had positive effects within Pasifika communities, but been successful in other communities, too (Salesa, 2017). Today, Pacific peoples rate their family wellbeing higher on average (8.1 out of 10) than the total population (7.7) (Statistics New Zealand, 2022).

For our Pasifika systems change leaders, this complicated history has contributed to shaping a distinct Aotearoa NZ Pasifika identity for the over 382,000 Pacific peoples who call Aotearoa NZ home – two-thirds of whom were born here (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2020).

“ We’ve got a people that is evolving in the context of historic hurts. **(MANU)** ”

“ Pasifika culture is an Aotearoa diasporic identity that has been formed over the past 40 or 50 years. It has a culture, it has linguistic differences, it has ways of operating, it is pan-Moana... It has a completely different attitude and thought patterns to our cousins who are back in the homeland. **(KEAHI)** ”

An important aspect of that history are New Zealand’s colonial and constitutional relationships in the Pacific. Tokelau, Cook Islands and Niue are part of the realm of New Zealand; their citizens are New Zealand citizens.

## Pasifika identity is about shared values

All of our Pasifika systems change leaders emphasised the Pacific collective as being characterised not only by geographical links, but also connection through values.

There’s no pan-Pacific identity, but there are values that cross all of our boundaries. That’s the reason why, when you go to a conference in Aotearoa, there’s the brown corner. **(KEAHI)** ”

Acknowledging, respecting and navigating socio-relational spaces, known as *va*, *vā* or *wā*, was identified as a central guiding value.

That’s how you operate in the Pacific space, you know? The *va* is unspoken and you know it intuitively... We talk about respect, but it is about the *va*, it is about different levels of respect. **(SINA)** ”

Relationships are critical to who we are and what we’re about. We invest in them and then reciprocation appears in ways that we don’t fully understand, and grow from there. **(MANU)** ”

**Va/vā/wā describes Pasifika conceptions of relational space. Prolific Samoan writer, Albert Wendt's (1999), explanation is well-known:**

*Va is the space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates, but space that relates, that hold separate entities, and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meaning to things. The meanings change as the relationships and the contexts change.... A well-known Samoan expression is “ia teu le va”—cherish, nurse, care for the va, the relationships. This is crucial in communal cultures that value group unity more than individualism, that perceive the individual person, or creature, or thing in terms of group, in terms of va, relationships.*

**Tēvita Ka'ili (2005) has explained the concept of vā in the Tongan context:**

*... Tongans generally view reciprocal exchange, whether within Tonga or transnationally, as a socio-spatial practice, or tauhi vā – taking care of sociospatial relations with kin and kin-like members.... Tauhi vā has been acknowledged by many Tongan elders as one of the fundamental cultural values of Tongan society... The Moanan idea of space, vā, emphasizes [sic] space in between. This is fundamentally different from the popular western notion of space as an expanse or an open area.*

Keahi explained how va underlies their advocacy organisation's approach to their work.

*Sometimes we are leading out on a project, sometimes we're advising into someone else's project, sometimes we're co-designers or co-developing a project. Sometimes we're just having a meeting and nothing comes out of it for six, seven, eight, 12 months and then all of a sudden someone says, 'oh, we need this to happen – hey, we know youse can do that, can we have a conversation?' It's a very Pacific model that's very much va-centric and 'let whatever grow from the va', rather than 'here's the thing we're gonna put in the va, and try and mould it to work'.*

## Pasifika relate to Māori through whakapapa, and as tangata Tiriti

Several of our Pasifika systems change leaders mentioned that, for Pasifika, nurturing the va with their Māori whanaunga (relations) was important.

The relationship between Māori and Pasifika in New Zealand is complex. Ethnically, Māori are Polynesian, but as tangata whenua in Aotearoa NZ, they are recognised as distinct from Pacific peoples who have migrated to Aotearoa NZ (Te Punga Somerville, 2012). Te Tiriti o Waitangi recognises the rights of Māori to tino rangatiratanga, equity and the protection of their taonga.

Sina discussed how she understood the role of Pasifika peoples in relation to tangata whenua.

“ Māori are tangata whenua, and we’re really tauiwi, we were the people of the Treaty. It’s not that we are second-class citizens, but that you know who to give the fa’aaloalo [respect] to, you know? Knowing your place, and how you speak into that space.

Colonisation and its ongoing impacts – including institutional racism – continue to affect the wellbeing of Māori and Pacific peoples. In facing these systemic challenges, many Māori and Pasifika have recognised that there is strength in working together.

This can be difficult to understand from a western perspective, which sees the different ethnicities of the Pacific as discrete and separated by sea – rather than related and connected by the sea, as Māori and Pasifika see it (Thomsen, Shafiee and Russell, 2023). Manu explained that, in his experience, Pākehā funders found it difficult to hold the connectedness of Māori and Pacific peoples alongside their differences. Some funders questioned why Māori and Pasifika organisations would pool their resources.

Funders go, “well, why are you sharing with them?” Because if they’re looking at you as the Islanders who are migrants to New Zealand, that’s very different from them looking at you as family members, who are related to Māori up the whakapapa tree... From an execution perspective, the proximity of our cultures actually means you know that the way something operates for Māori is likely transferable and could work for our people.

Manu also noted the growing population that identifies as both Māori and Pasifika, which increased by 47 percent between 2013 and 2018.

If you ask the question, “what is Pasifika in twenty years?” it is likely to continue to be intertwined with the Māori story.



## Pasifika identity is strengthening with each generation

Our Pasifika systems change leaders, some of whom had been raised in the Islands, recognised the way Pasifika identity is evolving – particularly in terms of the expectations of young, Aotearoa NZ-born Pasifika. Sione, who was raised in the Islands, discussed the challenge of bringing up children in New Zealand.

“It’s a tough world that they live in and it’s a new world for me because I’m not walking in their shoes. There are certain environments and factors that created me, and to impart that onto my children when they’re in a completely different environment... Part of me just has to resign myself to the fact that they’re just different. We perhaps might not have all the same core values because you’re in a different world. But we need to find a middle ground where you’ve got a bit of the old, and you capture the best of the new. I wrestle with that a lot as a father.

Manu noted the sense of belonging his children felt in Aotearoa NZ that he, having also been brought up in the Islands, did not have:

“Having New Zealand-born children, they have a right to feel entitled to be equal-footed in society. I will never have that entitlement because I didn’t. I wasn’t born here and I’ve always known I’ve been a little bit like an outsider. I can understand why it will be different for my children because rightfully they do have that entitlement.

Sina also discussed the generational shift she had observed:

“My children’s generation or even younger are a lot more intolerant of bad behaviour. Intolerant of when they’re told what to think and how to be, you know, “be the good brown people...”

## Questions for reflection

- What did you learn? What do these themes reveal for you about your conception of Pasifika identity?
- How well do you understand the history of Pasifika in New Zealand? How does this history inform the way you and your organisation engage with Pacific peoples?
- How do you and your organisation acknowledge and recognise the different ethnic groups that make up the Pasifika community in Aotearoa NZ, and how is that reflected in your funding strategies?
- What role could you play as a funder to facilitate strengthened relationships and connections between Māori and Pasifika organisations and individuals?
- Are you investing enough in the quality of your relationships, with Pasifika and others?
- How might you incorporate what you have learned into your funding policies and practices?



## What is systems change, for Pasifika systems change leaders?

We heard **four key themes** from our systems change leaders about systems change.

### Talking about systems change is a privilege

Several leaders questioned the premise of ‘systems change’ from a Pasifika perspective. Elenoa argued that systems change, while important, was not top-of-mind for Pasifika at the community level.

“ *In the everyday and in the now, none of that really matters to anyone here. It matters to policy makers and people making the decisions, but it doesn’t matter here. I just don’t think that there’s a collective system change mindset, because everyone, like locked down here in the community is trying to live, and everyone up here is like, theorising about living.* ”

Sione also recognised this.

“ *As long as you’re under pressure to pay bills – or you’re just under pressure – it’s very difficult to think of anything else other than, ‘how do I just put food on the table?’* ”

### Systems change is about equity

Our Pasifika systems change leaders had a shared conception of systems change, rooted in equity.

*Systems change for me will look like everyone having equal opportunity in all the systems. (ESTHER)* ”

*When we say ‘system issue’, that to me is a structural difference that’s difficult to reconcile. (SIONE)* ”

## There are different perspectives about which systems to focus on

Sione talked about exploring changing Pasifika systems to facilitate wealth creation.

“If wealth is one of the measures that we’re trying to lift, to me it’s about: how do you protect our young people, or isolate them, to allow them the space to quickly accumulate that capital in the same way that the Pālagi person’s doing? Without damaging our cultural responsibilities? And if it is our cultural responsibilities that’s really holding us back, perhaps it’s time for us to face into that, to say, ‘is that still the best thing for us to do, or do we have to look at that?’

On the other hand, other Pasifika systems change leaders, like Manu, focused on changes to Aotearoa NZ systems.

*In order for New Zealand to prosper as a society, it needs to account for all components of society. And when you have systemic underperformance, however you choose to measure it – health, education, work, GDP – that creates issues.*

*If you move forward twenty years, you have a society that is more deeply brown. The reality is that our future is blended. If we go, “well, what is the systems change needed?” it’s evolving the system to acknowledge what we’re heading to and accepting that.*

Keahi also encouraged the funding sector to focus on Aotearoa NZ systems.

*Start to think about your role as being outside of Pacific systems, but advocating within Aotearoa systems – without trying to fix or define.*

## Systems change leadership requires a long-term view – and humility

Our Pasifika leaders recognised that changing systems is a long game that requires collaboration.

“ *That’s a big, long, difficult process that involves everybody. No one person can fix that. (KEAHI)*

Manu observed the need for leaders to take a long-term view in how they think about systems change – and their role in it.

“ *If you’re trying to redesign systems or shift systems, accept that it’s going to be noisy and we’ve just got to keep going. For many of us, it’s not getting to the destination, it’s knowing that we’ve taken it as far as we can. And then we pass it to the next.*

Sina acknowledged the ambition of young Pasifika systems change leaders, and the need to eventually pass over the reins.

“ *There’s been a whole change: these are young people who are looking for a future where they can be more prominent in what the decisions are that are being made. It’s accepting the fact that we elders don’t know what’s best. You need to sit back, and that’s one of the lessons I’ve learned. I know that my use-by date is probably coming up.*

## Questions for reflection

- What did you learn? What do these themes reveal for you about your conception of systems change?
- What are the differences between your idea of systems change and the perspectives of our Pasifika systems change leaders? Why might these differences exist?
- Systems change discourse may not be relevant for the communities you are funding. What are the implications of this for the way that you might engage with Pasifika communities on systemic issues?
- What is your time horizon for supporting Pasifika-led systems change? Does this align with Pasifika perspectives on systems change?
- How might you incorporate what you have learned into funding practice? For example, how might your organisation take an integrated approach to supporting Pasifika communities to take leadership both in meeting their immediate needs and effecting systems change?

## How do Pasifika system change leaders experience the funding system?

The current funding system is not working for Pasifika. **Three themes emerged** from our talanoa with Pasifika systems change leaders.

### Funding opportunities that aren't informed by Pasifika communities, and our ways of knowing and being, do not work

Our Pasifika systems change leaders spoke about funding opportunities for Pasifika organisations that had been developed by government and philanthropic organisations without the involvement of the communities they were intended to benefit. As Keahi explained, this often results in projects that do not achieve the outcomes they seek.

“ You're just throwing thousands of dollars at a pointless project. Yet another pointless project where the funder doesn't understand why it didn't work. You built your house on sand, so of course it fell apart. You didn't talk to anybody Pasifika. You didn't consider the implications. You didn't consider what 'Pasifika' means now, not in 1993, where it was, 'stick a frangipani on it, and it's good'.

The traditional western philanthropic funding approach – in which funders decide what and who to fund for a short time, and provide funding to recipients who must then meet their conditions – is based on the idea that funders know best about how to help communities in need. But this framing ignores the systemic issues that have contributed to the problems that marginalised communities face. Focusing on what communities lack – which is known as deficit-based thinking – also ignores their inherent strengths and capacity.

Keahi's experience of the way that government and funders apply deficit-based thinking when considering the issue of Pasifika mental health exemplifies this.

*In my mind, there are two distinct categories of deficit: deficit in terms of the work and the capacity of people to do the work, but also deficit in terms of the communal experiences of our communities. So when people say, 'there's not enough mental health organisations who can do Pacific stuff' – that's the deficit of capacity. And there's the deficit of community, which is like 'Pacific people have high rates of mental health issues and don't access those services that do exist because they don't trust them'.*”

“ This kind of thinking ignores the fact that there are a few services starting to change away from the western medical model and think about an integrated medical model, where the medical side is in the background but the Pacific values are held at the forefront. There is something that can be built on, and there are practitioners outside of those organisations or projects who already think like that. How do we adequately provide that kind of support at multiple levels?

Keahi also questioned the use of ‘Pacific experts’ by government and philanthropic organisations to inform their work, as a substitute for community engagement.

“ I’m not an expert. I know what I’ve done and I know who I’ve worked with, and, ‘Pacific’ is such a broad thing. What do you mean ‘a Pacific expert’? I’ve never worked with people from Nauru, I’ve never worked with i-Kiribati communities... So to say that you’re a Pacific expert, you should really be saying, I’m a Pacific connector with this particular project, and I can call you out on a few top level things, but actually, you need to go and do some consultation with communities themselves.

### **Lack of transparency about how decisions are made and how resources flow facilitates inequity and erodes trust**

Our Pacific systems change leaders told us about their frustration with the ‘opacity’ of funding processes: the lack of transparency between sector or organisational insiders, and outsiders (Reid, 2018).

Sina spoke about her experience of transparency working in Samoa, as compared to working in Aotearoa NZ. She observed that while Samoan culture may not have a concept of transparency that aligns with the Pākehā value of transparency, the social context in Samoa reinforces transparency and accountability in a way that she did not experience in New Zealand.

People say, “in Samoa, there’s no transparency, accountability”. I say well, actually in New Zealand, it’s just a bit bigger and we can hide things better. But in Samoa, because it’s so small, you can’t hide things. At least you know what the rules of engagement are. Whereas here, the rules of engagement are very unclear because Pasifika peoples don’t necessarily sit in a place where we can see all of that or have that power.

Hidden decision-making practices privilege people who have the knowledge, relationships and resources to navigate them, excluding people who do not. They also erode trust in the sector as a whole. Elenoa explained how she was able to get around burdensome formal processes to access funding – and how she helps other Pasifika peoples in her sector to do this, too.

“ I don’t believe in formal ways of doing things anymore. When we got our first lot of funding, it was evident that decision-makers could change things to make it easier for you. From that, I was like, to everyone that needed money, “call this person”. All of these processes sucked, and now I know that people will gladly move the goalposts. It’s just been real eye-opening. Because how can we get a significant amount of funding by just one meeting, sending some details that we put together ourselves, and them taking care of it? When, on a website, it tells us that you need to do this, and it takes six months. We got it in three months.

### Funder staff biases get in the way of genuine engagement with Pasifika kaikōkiri

Decision-makers in the philanthropic sector are predominantly Pākehā; a 2019 Philanthropy New Zealand survey found 73.3 percent of Board members for the respondent philanthropic organisations identified as Pākehā/NZ European (Philanthropy New Zealand, 2019). The survey also found that Māori and Pasifika are underrepresented in leadership roles at these organisations. The public service has a similar ethnic makeup: over 80 percent of senior leaders (tiers 1-3) are Pākehā, while only 5.1 percent are Pasifika (Te Kawa Mataaho, 2022).

We heard about the work that Pacific systems change leaders do to make themselves and their work palatable to predominantly Pākehā decision-makers. Several Pasifika systems change leaders discussed needing to fit into Pākehā expectations at an interpersonal level, in order to be respected, heard and get what they needed.

Sometimes Pacific leaders come into these spaces with funders and they have to ‘take their jandals off’ in order to have these conversations. **(KEAHI)**

Talk about breaking down spaces. Sometimes you break down the self in order to fit the space. **(MANU)**



Several Pasifika systems change leaders spoke about having to be comfortable with conflict in their respective leadership positions, and how their cultural grounding helps them navigate this. We also heard about how their assertiveness would be read as ‘aggressive’.

“As the one that’s trying to drive change, you’re always going to rub people up the wrong way. And you can’t be deterred about it. You know you need to be that person. A lot of people are embedded into the existing system and you’re going to be stepping all over them. It’s a difficult one. **(SIONE)**

“People always need someone like me to make it uncomfortable. And then probably a nicer version of me to make the va nice again before we all move forward. I’m fine with messy va, but everyone else needs nice va to work together. I’m at a place where people come to me to help in those spaces, because they know that’s how I work. That I don’t mind being that voice, being unapologetically uncomfortable voice for people and calling things out in a really professional way. **(ELENOA)**

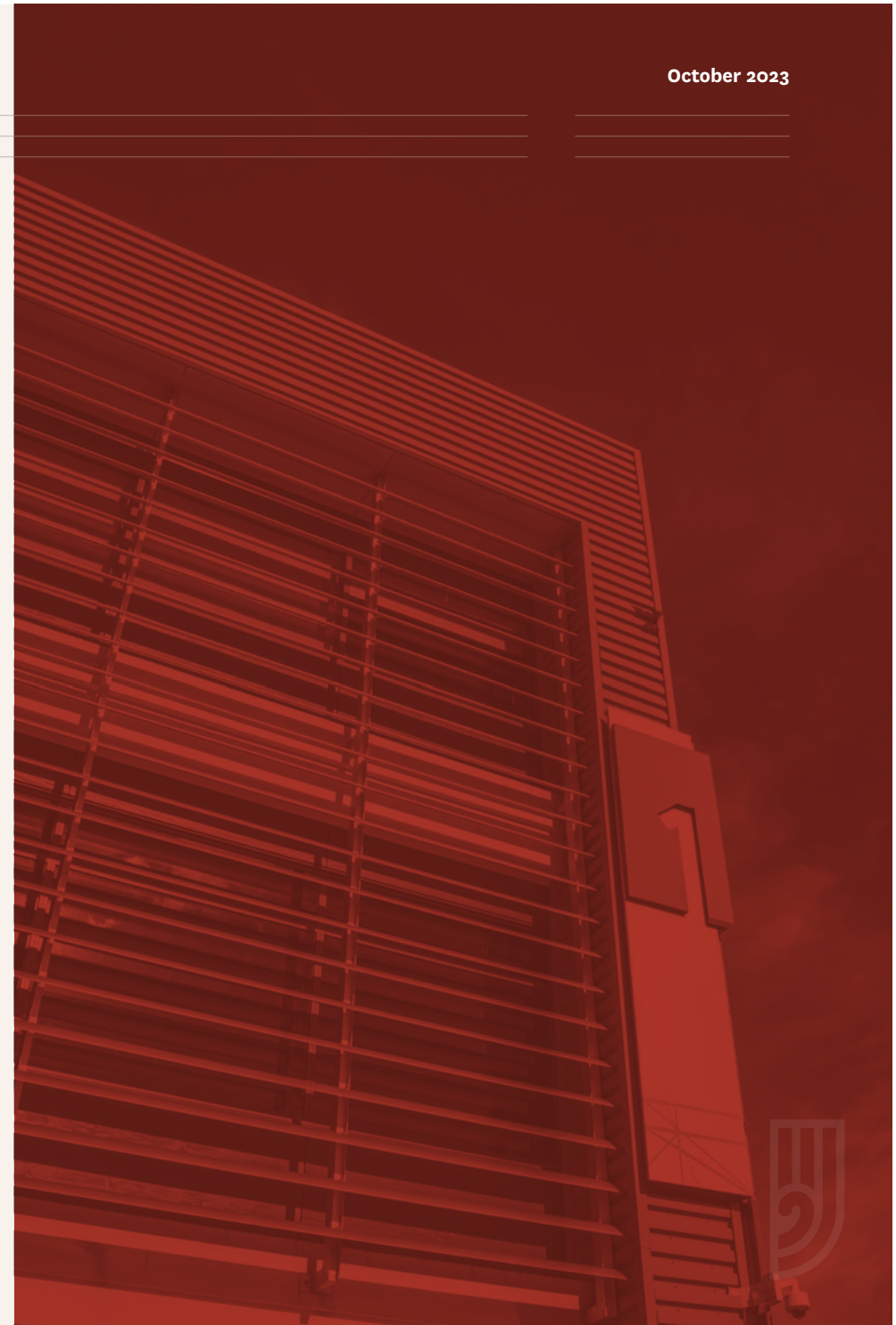
*I try really hard not to move into an adversarial position in those conversations. I try to come at it from a very Pacific way of approaching things, leaning into the va, and then figuring ways to untangle any entanglements that are in there, which might be preconceived notions, biases, contractual requirements, blah, blah, blah. But there’s no lean in from the other side, because they don’t know how to do that. So I find myself more and more having to shift into being that angry brown person. **(KEAHI)***

These experiences align with recent US research by Echoing Green and Bridgespan on racial disparities in funding. They found that interpersonal bias of funding staff – manifesting as mistrust that inhibits relationship-building and emotionally burdens leaders of colour – was one of the four major barriers to funding experienced by leaders of colour (Dorsey et al, 2020).

Elenoa and Keahi also spoke about the translational work they did to appeal to some decision-makers' ideas of 'valuable' knowledge – emphasising western concepts rather than Indigenous knowledges, and academic research, rather than lived experience.

“ How do I want to practice as a practitioner? How do I articulate that in 'white people language' without fundamentally ignoring or denigrating our own scientific knowledge basis for this work? **(KEAHI)** ”

“ When you're talking to policy writers or people in government or people that make the big decisions, they don't take me seriously, as stupid and colonial as that is. They don't take you seriously unless you can talk their language. So it's been really helpful being able to translate what I need into all the academic bullshit I can't stand. I'm only doing it to make things better for everyone, but it's been really help using that in a way that can benefit from us. **(ELENOA)** ”



# Systems leadership in action: **Case studies**

Our Pasifika systems leaders are actively working to change the funding system. **Here are two examples.**

## **SINA: Leading from within**

Sina serves on multiple boards of organisations that are focused on social justice issues. Her story demonstrates the impact that one Pasifika board member can have in a philanthropic organisation seeking to better support Pacific-led systems change.

Lack of ethnic diversity around the board table can mean decision-making is dominated by a Pākehā lens. This can be challenging for Pasifika leaders who are the minority in these contexts, and may see things differently to their Pākehā colleagues.

Sina discussed her experience of being on a predominantly Pākehā board:

“When you are sitting in that place, you’re not just working to advocate for the things you believe in. You’re also being quite vulnerable. It is a space where very experienced people operate and, even if you are experienced yourself, there are still some nuances that are quite different to your values.”

In explaining the values differences she experiences when working with her Pākehā colleagues, Sina gave an example of a discussion involving a child. She explained how her perception of that child – in their relational context – differed from those of her Pākehā colleagues, who saw the child primarily as an individual.

*We might talk about a student and, you know, I see who sits behind that child. And not just behind, but alongside and who sits in front – you see all of that. Whereas some of my colleagues who might sit at that table only see the child and see the problems, but don’t see that that particular child or person is just wanting to do the best for their family.*

Sina spoke about the work she had done as a board member of a funder, alongside another Pasifika board member, to make changes to practices and policies to allow that funder to better engage with Pasifika communities.

“ There were very few Pacific organisations who were getting past the pre-application part. We knew that was on us as board members, so we would ask all the right questions at the board level. That became a really important part for us to change. So the next time the strategy came up for renewal, we really pushed that. And pushing for a Pasifika person to be at the ops level was really important. She’s only been here a year, but we’ve had some big changes. And we’ve funded some Pacific groups for a quarter of a million dollars over the next three years, which is great.

Having Pasifika staff at funders who can work with Pasifika kaikōkiri can help to ensure that cultural differences do not become a barrier to their success, because staff understand their context. For example, Sina spoke about the tendency for Pasifika kaikōkiri to ask for less than what they need and overcommit themselves, in line with our collectivist values. While Pākehā may take all funding requests at face value, this may not always be appropriate for Pasifika kaikōkiri.

A pālagi... they don’t know, they just think what you’ve described that you need is all it is. But for those of who know, who are Samoan, or Tongan, or Niuean, for example – we know that when they are asking for this, behind them sits all these other things that they’re doing for free. Like, “who are you going to get to do that while you’re doing this?” But nobody’s going to ask them those questions unless they know what the landscape looks like for them.

Sina’s experience exemplifies the importance of having Pasifika at the decision-making table.

Values can’t exist from the ground up. They can be enacted on the ground, but they have to be articulated and lived by the people who lead the organisation.

## KEAHI: Leading from the outside

Keahi works for an advocacy organisation that works to improve social inclusion and wellbeing. Their story demonstrates how collaboration across the funding system can have multiplier effects.

Keahi's organisation has a strategic goal to influence the philanthropic sector.

“ We have a critical strategy and our theory of change that is focused around decision-makers – and philanthropics, specifically. We're trying to have an impact on the way that they work to open up doors for our communities to be able to access funding and be at decision-making tables.

Keahi shared about how their organisation had worked with its three funders to change their process requirements to better align with their needs:

“ Because it's core funding, we don't want to have to do the same report with slight variations three times over three times, twice a year. So instead, we have a roundtable and they have a responsibility to have ongoing conversations about how they're funding our communities between themselves... It sounds ridiculous that its revolutionary in the philanthropic funding space. Because to get three funders to talk to each other, and agree to join a joint reporting process, that should be good practice, actually.

This had had flow-on effects that were beneficial for funders and nga kaikōkiri, to remove burdens on other kaikōkiri.

“ Unintentionally, or accidentally, it's a peer support network for the decision-maker, for the philanthropics themselves. Because they can talk to other philanthropics without the power and control issues of having to talk to the people you're actually funding. Most philanthropics love collaborative projects, but now this is collaborative on their end. So that conversation is happening before the funder goes to the people they're funding and saying, “hey, Project Lead, who actually has a full-time job, part-time job and is a parent? Can you also now just try and navigate four different funders to see how we can collaboratively fund you?”

## Questions for reflection

- What did you learn? What do these themes reveal for you about how Pasifika peoples experience the funding system in Aotearoa NZ?
- Reflecting on the way you and your organisation engage with Pacific peoples, do the stories and themes shared resonate? Why/why not?
- What is your assessment of the quality of your and your organisation's engagement with Pasifika leaders and communities? What are you doing well? Where are there opportunities for improvement?
- How might you work with others in the funding system to further explore these themes and their implications for the funding system as a whole?



## Call to Action

Different funders will be at different stages in their journey towards becoming systems-aware supporters of Pasifika-led change, and each organisation will have a different role to play, based on their strengths and role in the system. We outline below some approaches, tools and resources for philanthropic funders to consider on this journey, informed by the stories of our Pasifika systems change leaders.

### **Funders should work with and learn from others in the funding system in Aotearoa NZ and globally who are doing internal and external work to support systems change and navigate complexity**

Navigating a path to role clarity in systems change can be challenging and overwhelming. Keahi recognised this, when asked what their advice would be for those in the funding system:

*It's kind of hard because it's contradictory advice. On one level, shut up and listen to what communities are saying. Instead of rushing to fix and create frameworks and problem solve, focus. Shift out of solution-mode and move into person-centred or community-centred practice. And at the same time, figure out what is the work that you need to do. Where are your own gaps as a practitioner? Think about your own system.*

*Those pieces of work are very different. It's about listening to what is happening with the people in front of you – and that might change with every conversation you have, but all of it is valid – and at the same time, figuring out what's your role in this.*

Funders are not alone in grappling with system tensions, and there is much to be learned from the experiences of others. There are philanthropic organisations in Aotearoa NZ that are working to support transformational change, and understand their role in the systems change kaupapa as convenors and learning partners for others in the sector.

### **Pasifika Funders Network**

Philanthropic organisations may wish to partner with the Pasifika Funders Network (PFN). PFN was originally formed to support the COVID-19 response effort and assist Pasifika communities to access funding pathways. Beyond the COVID-19 response work, the network offered a safe talanoa space to unpack key challenges facing Pasifika staff, trustees and community organisations in the funding and community sector, and to collectively identify opportunities to address those challenges, overcome barriers, and collaborate on ideas and solutions. PFN has an accumulated wealth of Aotearoa NZ philanthropic knowledge which spans well over 40 years and are deeply connected to their Pasifika community through kinship and history. PFN is ethnically diverse, with a depth of Pacific heritage, ancestors' knowledge of practice, language and value systems that continue to benefit Pasifika people today. PFN is currently developing a Jandal Assessment Tool, which will be used to facilitate an audit of the philanthropic and community funding sector. PFN is a credible partner and conduit for philanthropic organisations and Pasifika communities.

### **Ki te Hoe Capability Building Framework**

Philanthropy New Zealand, Tōpūtanga Tuku Aroha o Aotearoa, commissioned Tūmanako Consultants to develop this framework to build the capacity and capability of funders to engage and support Māori aspirations in a mana-enhancing way. Ki te Hoe, which means “to the paddle!”, provides guidance to funders on three stages of their journey towards supporting Māori aspirations: learning history and building understanding of personal bias and te ao Māori, building relationships with mana whenua and tangata whenua in preparation for the work to be done, and sharing power and finding new and different ways of doing philanthropy and grantmaking. There are many considerations in this guidance that have relevance to Pacific-led systems change. We recommend that funders consider how they can apply this three stage process to help them better support Pasifika-led systems change.

### **The Philanthropic Landscape: A review of trends and contemporary practices**

JR McKenzie Trust commissioned this report by the Centre for Social Impact, which found that there are five key themes in contemporary philanthropy: equity, power sharing, systems change, decolonising practice, and adaptability and learning.



There are also lessons to be learned from overseas. While our context here in Aotearoa NZ is unique (and we must always keep that in mind), our systems – and their behaviour – share commonalities with Canada, Australia and the US as a result of our shared colonial histories.

Here are some examples from the literature that align with the reflections our Pasifika systems change leaders have shared:

### **The Yin and Yang of Equity-Centred Philanthropy**

In this article, Easterling, McDuffee and Gessell engage with the competing objectives that philanthropic organisations face when committing to equity that Keahi acknowledged: following the lead of community-based groups on one hand, and using their power and influence to advance equity on the other. The authors draw on the experiences of six US-based foundations to provide guidance on how to navigate these tensions, recommending that funders develop strong partnerships with grantees, and organise their equity strategies into parallel lanes.

### **Looking in the Mirror: Equity in Practice for Philanthropy**

Young, Love, Csuti and King share about the efforts of three US-based foundations to examine their internal policies, programmes and practices with an equity lens. These detailed examples may provide ideas and possible pathways for Aotearoa NZ funders to learn from and follow as they assess their own organisational fitness for driving equity. Common themes that arose included the importance of leadership buy-in, and recognition that this work is a personal and professional journey, with continuous learning and risk-taking.

### **Philanthropy, systems and change**

The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI) report is aimed at supporting systems-curious funders, and is packed full of examples and lessons about how philanthropic organisations around the world think about and contribute to systems change. Many align with the reflections shared by our Pasifika systems change leaders. For example, one funder cautions against overemphasising systems change if kaikōkiri do not have a framework for understanding it, as this can act as another requirement that kaikōkiri must contort to fit. They encourage mutual systems learning processes for funders and kaikōkiri – like co-creating a systems map. This report also has an excellent reading list.

### **Philanthropy, systems and change: Conversation tools**

TACSI has also developed conversation tools that funders can use to critically explore their understanding of and role in systems – including how their relationships, giving, organisational culture and practices, and other actions contribute to change in systems. While they have been developed for an Australian context, they can be adapted to fit. These tools can also be used by seasoned systems changers, to facilitate a systems change audit.

## **Embracing complexity: Towards a shared understanding of funding systems change**

This report is a collaboration by funders, intermediaries and systems change leaders that aims to answer the question: how do we get better at funding and supporting systems change? The report offers five principles, and recommendations, for funders to adopt to better support systems change work. These principles echo what we heard from our Pasifika systems change leaders – in particular, work in true partnership, prepare for long-term engagement, and collaborate with other stakeholders.

### **Funders should focus on establishing and maintaining trust in their relationships with Pasifika kaikōkiri and communities**

“ Everything is about relationships. The starting point is: how do we work together so that we can move from where you are now? It’s about having those real conversations, and about trust. (SINA) ”

In their reflections of what is not working in the funding system, our Pasifika systems change leaders have provided a roadmap to building strong, enduring relationships with Pasifika kaikōkiri and communities, that support their leadership of systems change:

### **Create culturally-safe spaces for connection to facilitate genuine engagement**

The concept of ‘cultural safety’ was developed by Dr Irihapeti Ramsden and Māori nurses in the 1990s and was originally used in our health sector. In contrast to cultural competency, cultural safety rejects the idea that health practitioners should focus on learning the cultural customs of other ethnic groups to provide better care. Instead, it requires that they examine themselves and the potential impact of their own cultural biases, attitudes, assumptions, stereotypes and prejudices on the quality of healthcare they provide. (Dr Elana Curtis explains further in her article, [I love my culture, but it’s not the answer to Māori health inequities](#)).

Cultural safety provides a useful frame for understanding power imbalances in funding relationships. Our Pasifika systems change leaders shared several examples of how funders’ implicit biases and assumptions worked as barriers to effectiveness. Funders – and in particular, Pākehā funders – should consider how they can improve their capacity for culturally safe engagement, both within their organisations and with those they work with.

### Adopt partnership models and asset-based thinking to achieve systems change outcomes

Uneven power dynamics between funders and kaikōkiri and marginalised communities play a big role in perpetuating funding system inequities, and limiting your capacity to support systems change. Systems change funders can adopt partnership models to invert these dynamics within their relationships. Keahi and Sina's case studies provide great examples of this, and many more are cited in the resources shared above.

Disempowering mental models, like deficit-based thinking as mentioned by Keahi, also need to shift. GrantAdvisor.org's blogpost, [How to \(and why we should\) Adopt an Asset-based Framework in Grantmaking and Grantwriting](#), provides a helpful overview of how reframing issues with asset-based language helps us to better understand systemic issues and solutions, and facilitate community-led change.

### Be transparent to facilitate equity and build trust

Philanthropy NZ's [Guidelines for good](#) and [Transparency self-assessment tool](#) are a useful starting point for thinking about transparency for philanthropics. Your demographic data, policies and practices will show how you commit to diversity, equity and inclusion within your organisation. Transparency also includes being upfront about the learning journey your organisation is on, including owning mistakes you have made, and sharing what you are doing to improve. This honesty strengthens the va, and opens space for kaikōkiri to share honestly, too.

Organisations on their journey towards being Tiriti-committed funders will no doubt recognise the relevance of that work to the way they might think about building better relationships with Pasifika communities. An example of how these complementary paths overlap can be seen in Kate Frykberg's excellent blogpost, [Philanthropy, Transparency and Indigenous Relationships](#). She explains how imbuing partnership, openness, and transparency in her philanthropic trust's engagement with kaikōkiri Māori opened up opportunities for it to fund initiatives it would have been unlikely to be trusted by Māori to fund otherwise.

## Conclusion

Pacific peoples are one of the fastest growing, most youthful populations in Aotearoa NZ. This means that thriving, prosperous Pasifika families are essential for the future prosperity of Aotearoa NZ. But the Pasifika population continues to experience persistent inequity as a result of Aotearoa NZ's health, education and economic systems.

Pasifika must lead out in driving the systems change that is needed to enable our communities to thrive, and the funding sector has an important role to play in facilitating and supporting Pasifika. But to do this effectively, changes to the funding system itself are needed. In this think piece, we have woven the rich, honest insights of five Pasifika systems change leaders with lessons from the literature to provide a pathway for reflection for funders, individually and collectively, about how they can better support Pasifika to lead change.

We hope this think piece sparks talanoa across the funding system about the changes needed– to its purpose, people's mindsets, power dynamics, relationships, resource flows, policies and practices.



# Acknowledgements

We, the Tere Ki Mua Project Team, would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Pasifika systems change leaders who participated in this project for generously sharing their insights and experiences. We are overwhelmed with the spirit and the wisdom you, as pioneers in your respective fields, have entrusted to us in sharing your stories for the betterment of Pasifika communities.

We would also like to thank the Peter McKenzie Project (PMP) and the JR McKenzie Trust for your continued commitment to enhancing the wellbeing of Pasifika communities and funding this project. Without your support, this work would not have been possible. Our hope is that this offering may support those working alongside Pasifika communities and their families to realise their aspirations.

Meitaki ma'ata, Fa'afetai tele lava, Malo 'aupito, Fakaauae lahi lele, Fakafetai lasi, Vinaka vaka levu.



## References

**Cheer, T., Kearns, R., and Murphy, L. (2002).**

Housing policy, poverty, and culture: `discounting` decisions among Pacific peoples in Auckland, New Zealand. *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 20(1): 497-516

**Creative New Zealand. (2023).**

Pacific Arts Strategy 2023-2028. Retrieved from [https://creativenz.govt.nz/-/media/Project/Creative-NZ/CreativeNZ/PublicationsFiles/20230309-CONSULTATION\\_Pacific-Arts-Strategy-2023---2028\\_2.pdf](https://creativenz.govt.nz/-/media/Project/Creative-NZ/CreativeNZ/PublicationsFiles/20230309-CONSULTATION_Pacific-Arts-Strategy-2023---2028_2.pdf).

**Dorsey, C., Bradach, J., & Kim, P. (2020).**

Racial Equity and Philanthropy: Disparities in Funding for Leaders of Color Leave Impact on the Table. Echoing Green and Bridgespan Group. Retrieved from <https://wiphilanthropy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Racial-Equity-and-Philanthropy.pdf>

**Fa'avae, D.T.M. (2022).**

Wayfinding waves and winds of change: The currency of the post- covid gaze into Pasifika/Pacific education's trajectory. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 27(3), 7-20. <https://doi.org/10.15663/wje.v27i3.1020>

**Fehoko, E., Hafoka, 'I., & Tecun, A. (2021).**

Holding Tightly onto Land and People During a Pandemic: Kava Pedagogies and Tertiary Learning Relationships in Vahaope. *Journal of Global Indigeneity*, 5(1), 1-15. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48717690>

**Finau, S., Tavite, S., & Finau, D.F. (2014).**

Collective Label of People from the Pacific Ocean Proper. In *New Zealand Qualifications Authority, Enhancing Mātauranga Māori and Global Indigenous Knowledge* (pp. 166-181). Wellington, New Zealand: New Zealand Qualifications Authority. Retrieved from <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/Maori/Te-Rautaki-Maori/Publications/Enhancing-Mtauranga-Mori-and-Global-Indigenous-Knowledge.pdf>

**Fletcher, M. 2009.**

Social policies in the recession. *Policy Quarterly* 5(1): 29-35. <https://ojs.victoria.ac.nz/pq/issue/view/510>

**Ka'ili, T.O. (2005).**

Tauhi vā: Nurturing Tongan Sociospatial Ties in Maui and Beyond. *The Contemporary Pacific* (17)1, 83-114

**Kania, J., Kramer, M., & Senge, P. (2018).**

The Water of Systems Change. Retrieved from [https://www.fsg.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/The-Water-of-Systems-Change\\_rc.pdf](https://www.fsg.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/The-Water-of-Systems-Change_rc.pdf)

**Mila-Schaaf, K. (2010).**

Polycultural capital and the Pasifika second generation: negotiating identities in diasporic spaces. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Massey University, Auckland, New Zealand. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10179/1713>

**Ministry of Health. (2008).**

Improving quality of care for Pacific Peoples: A paper for the Pacific Health and Disability Action Plan Review. Retrieved from <https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/improving-quality-of-care-for-pacific-peoples-may08.pdf>

**Ministry for Pacific Peoples. (2020).**

Pacific Aotearoa Status Report - A snapshot 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.mpp.govt.nz/assets/Reports/Pacific-Peoples-in-Aotearoa-Report.pdf>

**Philanthropy New Zealand. (2019).**

Philanthropy New Zealand Tangata Whenua and Diversity Research Report. Retrieved from [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/608a1a95d5087f40f9c2e366/t/614a2c112b938e2a2168af01/1632250900376/PNZ\\_Tangata-Whenua-and-Diversity-Report.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/608a1a95d5087f40f9c2e366/t/614a2c112b938e2a2168af01/1632250900376/PNZ_Tangata-Whenua-and-Diversity-Report.pdf)

**Productivity Commission. (2023).**

A fair chance for all: Breaking the cycle of persistent disadvantage. Retrieved from [www.productivity.govt.nz](http://www.productivity.govt.nz)

**Reid, R. J. (2018).**

Foundation Transparency: Opacity — It's Complicated. The Foundation Review, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.9707/1944-5660.1408>

**Salesa, D. (2017).**

Island Time: New Zealand's Pacific Future. Wellington, NZ: Bridget Williams Books

**Statistics New Zealand. (2002).**

Pacific Progress: A report on the economic status of Pacific Peoples in New Zealand. Retrieved from <https://www.stats.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Retirement-of-archive-website-project-files/Reports/Pacific-Progress-A-Report-on-the-Economic-Status-of-Pacific-Peoples-in-New-Zealand-1945-2001/pacific-progress-full-report.pdf>

**Statistics New Zealand. (2019).**

Ethnic group (detailed single and combination) by age and sex, for the census usually resident population count, 2013 and 2018 Censuses (RC, TA, SA2, DHB) [Data set]. Retrieved from <https://nzdotstat.stats.govt.nz/>

**Statistics New Zealand. (2022).**

Wellbeing statistics: 2021 [Data set]. Retrieved from <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/wellbeing-statistics-2021/>

**Teaiwa, T. & Mallon, S. (2005).**

Ambivalent Kinships? Pacific People in New Zealand. In Liu, J.H., McCreanor, T., McIntosh, T. & Teaiwa, T. (Eds.) New Zealand Identities: Departures and Destinations (pp. 207-229). Wellington, New Zealand: Victoria University Press

**Te Punga Somerville, A. (2012).**

Once Were Pacific: Maori Connections to Oceania. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press

**Te Kawa Mataaho. (2022).**

Workforce data – Diversity and inclusion. Retrieved from <https://www.publicservice.govt.nz/research-and-data/workforce-data-diversity-and-inclusion/>

**Thaman, K. H. (2003).**

Decolonizing Pacific Studies: Indigenous Perspectives, Knowledge, and Wisdom in Higher Education. *The Contemporary Pacific*, 15(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cp.2003.0032>

**Thomsen, S., Shafiee, H. & Russell, A. (2023).**

Pacific peoples' wellbeing: Background Paper to Te Tai Waiora: Wellbeing in Aotearoa New Zealand 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2023-04/ap23-01.pdf>

**Wendt, A. (1999).**

Afterword: Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body. In Hereniko, V. & Wilson, R. (Eds.) *Inside out: Literature, cultural politics, and identity in the new Pacific*. Maryland, US: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers

**Wendt Samu, T. (2015).**

The 'Pasifika Umbrella' and quality teaching: Understanding and responding to the diverse realities within. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 20(3). <https://doi.org/10.15663/wje.v20i3.229>

**Wendt Samu, T. (2020).**

Charting the origins, current status and new directions within Pacific/Pasifika education in Aotearoa New Zealand. *New Zealand Annual Review of Education*, 26: 197–207. <https://doi.org/10.266686/nzaroe.v26.7138>





The  
Southern  
Initiative



The  
Western  
Initiative