

Engaging and empowering rangatahi

As written by a rangatahi, Arohanui West

Overview

Community trusts are crucial in supporting social, cultural, and economic initiatives across Aotearoa. To remain relevant and impactful, they must actively engage rangatahi (young people) and empower them to participate in decision-making, leadership, and community-centred and driven kaupapa.

Value youth voice

When young people are empowered to contribute in meaningful ways to our shared mahi, everyone wins.

Rangatahi bring fresh perspectives, creativity, and a passion for change. They are digitally connected, value authenticity, and seek meaningful contributions to their communities. Just as it benefits young people to develop leadership skills and gain work experience, it benefits your workplace to hear the unique voices of rangatahi and allow that to shape the trajectory of your organisation towards a thriving future for all of us.

Make it accessible

We can make it easier for rangatahi to engage by;

1. Providing leadership training, workshops, and internship opportunities.
2. Supporting rangatahi-led projects with funding and guidance.
3. Recognising and celebrating youth contributions.
4. Hosting community hui and workshops in youth-friendly spaces.
5. Maintaining cultural safety ie incorporating te reo Māori.
6. Honouring their time adequately (pizza isn't payment).

Youth representation in governance

Having young people on your board and in leadership positions provides a fresh perspective and diversity of thought.

You could begin by offering mentorship programmes connecting youth with experienced trustees. If you have the means, establish a youth advisory group or implement youth quotas on your board to ensure diverse perspectives are present at the decision-making table.

Not just one

Being a young professional in industries predominantly led by experienced, mature individuals can be lonely.

Don't treat it like a tick-box exercise, if you are hiring or engaging with rangatahi its best to work with three or more – that way there's a higher rate of staff retention, and an opportunity for young people to make friends, connect, bounce ideas off others and feel a sense of belonging.

How do we get rangatahi involved?

1. Promote volunteer and work experience opportunities within trusts.
2. Involve rangatahi in designing and leading projects that directly impact them.
3. Partner with schools, universities, and youth groups.
4. Host events in youth-friendly spaces.
5. Provide paid opportunities for youth involvement.
6. Advertise on social media ie TikTok, Facebook and Instagram.

One size doesn't fit all

It is imperative that we do not place young people into a box. One of the greatest contributing factors from rangatahi is that they are young and therefore offer a fresh perspective. They are privvy to a new emerging world full of idioms, technologies, styles and ways of doing things that may differ to the traditional medthod that you are accustomed to. Embrace that change, don't expect young people to complete a task exactly the way you would.

Avoid placing rangatahi into restrictive roles with predefined expectations. Instead create opportunities for them to explore diverse interests and ideas. Foster an environment where they can innovate, take risks, and learn from their experiences. After all, if we always do what we've always done, we will always get what we're always got.

Conclusion

To build a resilient and inclusive future, community trusts must actively engage and empower rangatahi. By using a trust-based model and fostering representation, communication, skill-building and collaboration community trusts can harness the passion and energy of young people to drive meaningful change across Aotearoa.