



Eastern and Central Community Trust: Sharing Power with Young People through TiraRangatahi

Eastern and Central Community Trust kaupapa

Eastern and Central Community Trust (ECCT) is one of twelve community trusts in Aotearoa New Zealand, providing grant funding and support to community organisations operating in the Gisborne Tairāwhiti, Hawke's Bay, Tararua, Manawatū, Horowhenua, and Wairarapa districts. Through its grants, ECCT invests approximately \$6 million per annum in its communities.

TiraRangatahi is an independent rangatahi rōpū that is working in partnership with ECCT. The rōpū has facilitated the creation of a Rangatahi Action Plan that outlines a vision for change informed by rangatahi aspirations across the ECCT rohe. ECCT has committed \$4 million over four years to enable funding initiatives designed, curated, and developed by TiraRangatahi.

Whakapapa – the journey of developing TiraRangatahi

ECCT published its strategy in 2018, identifying children and young people as a focus area to be supported by its

strategic modes of grantmaking. The prioritisation of children and young people was based on a combination of community consultation and indicator data that showed evidence of regional disparity experienced by younger populations. Trustees were interested in working differently to develop the ECCT's youth focus area, and created an environment where staff had space outside of the trust's responsive grantmaking to try something new and learn.

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ECCT embarked on a deep and considered process of youth engagement to determine how it might use its strategic funding and other resources to help realise the aspirations of local rangatahi. An initial project budget of \$250,000 was provided to explore what an adult-initiated but

rangatahi-led process for activating the trust's youth focus area could look like. This included \$50,000 of initial pilot grant funding.

ECCT embarked on a 12-month period of youth engagement, including hui, informal conversations, wānanga, and other activities. A rangatahi leadership rōpū was formed, comprising predominantly rangatahi Māori aged 16-25 years. The rōpū co-facilitated engagement activities alongside ECCT staff and took on greater leadership of the project as their confidence and facilitation skills developed.

A major output of this engagement was the Rangatahi Action Plan and subsequent commitment by ECCT to resource youth-identified priorities through initiatives led by, with, and for rangatahi.

How The Philanthropic Landscape key practices present in the work of Eastern and Central Community Trust

Project Manager Emma Haxton reflects on the importance of ECCT being open with its process and listening to rangatahi right from the beginning. "We needed to go to rangatahi straight away to design how to do this, to understand how rangatahi wanted to be involved. The key thing we heard back was around allowing rangatahi to own the project."

Piripi Ropitini began his connection with this work as a participant. He became

“...the first opportunity for rangatahi Māori to voice their opinions about the community without being judged

a rōpū representative and has now been employed as ECCT's Rangatahi Engagement Specialist. He recalls being called to an ECCT rangatahi hui and feeling that it was "the first opportunity for rangatahi Māori to voice their opinions about the community without being judged [...] The major thing was feeling looked after. The manaakitanga was unmatched...we were taken care of and so could participate fully."

ECCT noticed that the level of trust and partnership with young people deepened over time. The trust worked in ways that enabled rangatahi to consciously explore themes of power, colonisation, and equity as they developed the action plan. The result is a plan that centres these issues across core strategies, including for example:

- **Challenging the system:** Challenging inequalities in systems that marginalise rangatahi. Contributing to decolonisation. Growing rangatahi voice and leadership.
- **Sharing the power:** Supporting more power-sharing between rangatahi and adults in organisations and communities.

There is also an overarching intent to address regional equity issues. For Piripi, it was important that TiraRangatahi

“focused on the level of fairness and where a lot of pūtea and mahi should actually go. Rangatahi in rural areas are often disadvantaged and left out, so this pūtea can level that out”.

Piripi reflects that the eventual commitment of \$4 million to the Action Plan by ECCT is seen as a show of trust that affirms the power-sharing model. “It was like winning the Lotto. Across the whole process we were in awe of how ECCT trusted us, put faith and pūtea and mana in us to design realistic and actionable change for young people that is youth-led.”

For ECCT trustees, there was some initial concern about the initially slow pace of project development but engaging directly with the young people involved provided reassurance. “Trustees were

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used to our normal funding processes, but this was going slower at the start as rangatahi worked out their values,” an ECCT advisor observed. “But when trustees met the rangatahi and saw the values, there was a lot more comfort and relaxation. They could also see how what was chosen to be funded aligned to those values. That made sense to them, and

that led to trust being developed.” This grounding in shared values meant that the project could move more quickly later.

The partnership that has now developed between ECCT and TiraRangatahi is also demonstrably contributing to the indigenisation of ECCT’s funding practice, enabling rangatahi Māori space to meaningfully incorporate te ao Māori. Piripi explains that young people “are the ones making decisions, [using processes that] we designed from scratch with the holistic inclusion of te ao Māori and wairuatanga. Whatever kaupapa we come across, we see what our puku is saying. We ask, ‘does it feel like we should invest in it?’; or if it doesn’t feel good then we explore why and figure out what we need to do to address that [...] We also really whakatinana our values. It’s unconscious; it’s Māoritanga.”

As new trustees come on board, staff are proactive in reaffirming the kaupapa of this work to maintain an ongoing level of comfort from the board to cede decision-making power to the rangatahi involved. Whakawhanaungatanga continues to play a key role. Emma explains that “one of the things is that this is all based on relationships, influence, and trust. The relationships are organic, shifting, and moving. You have movement in the rōpū members, the ECCT board. People also change [...] so, making sure that there is a grounding in relationships is important.”

As TiraRangatahi moves into implementation of the Action Plan, the importance of relational practice has

continued to come to the fore. In his employed role with ECCT, Piripi has been more exposed to the wider funding system and is aware how importantly different the process is for TiraRangatahi. “For us, it is getting a name and number, getting people to tell us about their kaupapa, working with them if we need to learn a bit more...We want good stuff to happen, and if we believe in the kaupapa we will support it.”

Key elements of this practice have rippled across ECCT’s other funding processes. Seeing values in action and having relational points of access into the trust has seen more kaupapa Māori organisations engaging with ECCT who might otherwise not have seen a fit or felt that ECCT was accessible to approach.

As those involved with TiraRangatahi look to the future, they reflect on the importance

that adaptability and learning will have on achieving the vision for impact. “Flexibility for the rōpū is important ongoingly as they are learning and growing in the process, and the process adapts in relation to that,” Emma notes. “They gain knowledge from being involved, from others in the sector, and from being out in their communities. That shifts the process. That adaptive nature of it means that they are more in tune with what is going on with their communities and where funding can make more change. In terms of what TiraRangatahi want to do in the community it is about systems change at so many levels; having a voice, more power in the communities [...] Flexibility can support this to happen.”

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