

superu



Effective community-level change:  
What makes community-level  
initiatives effective and how can central  
government best support them?

DECEMBER 2015



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# Executive summary

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**This report presents the findings of a literature review commissioned by the Ministry of Social Development and Superu. The purpose of the project was to inform the Ministry about what works in community-level initiatives, and how central government can best support effective community-level initiatives.**

For the purposes of this project, community-level initiatives are defined as those that: 1) do not provide services to individual clients; 2) have a significant community-engagement component; and 3) are aimed at addressing community-level issues and outcomes such as social connectedness, tino rangatiranga/self-determination, incidence of family violence, and crime rates.

The focus was on community initiatives relevant to the Ministry of Social Development's outcome areas as outlined in its Statement of Intent 2014–2018.

A literature scan<sup>1</sup> was conducted to provide information on definitions of community development, the New Zealand context for the project and, available literature on evaluation and outcome measurement for community-level projects.

The research questions for this report were:

- What are some examples of successful community-level initiatives?
- What are the success factors for effective community-level initiatives – eg key principles, practices, people, community-related factors (with a particular focus on central government-community relationships and processes)?
- What are the pitfalls, or factors associated with ineffectiveness or failure of community-level initiatives (with a particular focus on central government-community relationships and processes)?
- What are the processes and mechanisms through which positive change is brought about in communities and what examples are there of the means by which communities have successfully transformed themselves?
- How best can central government support community-level initiatives?

We identified material through Google and academic database searching and through our topic advisor, Jen Margaret. We focused on New Zealand literature, but also drew on international evidence and examples where relevant.

While the definition of community initiatives encompasses Māori initiatives it does not explore the unique position of Māori as tangata whenua or the relationship between hapū/iwi and central government under Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

The findings of this literature review are based primarily on case studies and qualitative research. There are methodological and practical challenges associated with evaluating the effectiveness of community-level initiatives, and outcome evaluations that enable attribution of causality are relatively rare.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.superu.govt.nz/effective\\_community\\_level\\_change](http://www.superu.govt.nz/effective_community_level_change)

## What works in community-level initiatives?

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Community-level initiatives have been widely implemented in New Zealand and overseas, and the insights of community-change practitioners about what works and how it works have been well-documented. There is wide agreement on the following key principles and success factors:

### Key principles

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- Community self-determination: the ability to have a voice, to participate and to exercise control over one's destiny
- A focus on the strengths and assets of communities and the importance of their knowledge base
- A holistic and ecological approach, recognising the interconnectedness and complexity of factors and outcomes at various levels: individual, family, community, society
- A focus on process and relationships as well as tangible outcomes.

### Success factors

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The following factors have been identified by evaluators and key informants as characteristics or processes associated with successful community-level initiatives:

- A shared vision, owned by the community
- Community readiness
- Intentionality and a focus on outcomes
- Long-term and adaptable funding arrangements
- A focus on community capacity-building
- Skilled leadership and facilitation
- Processes for addressing power imbalances
- A focus on relationships
- Appropriate scale
- Continuous learning and adaptation.

Additional success factors identified for initiatives in Māori and Pacific communities include:

- Initiatives that are grounded in relevant cultural concepts
- Funders using cross-cultural engagement skills
- Māori and Pacific participation and leadership
- Processes for reflecting on the impacts of colonisation.



## Barriers to success

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The achievement of desired community outcomes is hindered by a number of factors, including:

- Adverse funding and accountability arrangements
- A central-government culture that is not well-aligned to working with communities
- An unsupportive policy and regulatory environment.

And project-level factors such as:

- Lack of shared vision
- Poor engagement with Māori and Pacific communities
- Lack of focus on addressing 'upstream' factors
- Skill gaps and limited capacity
- Loss of momentum
- Rushing the process due to unrealistic timeframes
- Loss of funding.

## Examples of effective community-level change

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Selected New Zealand and international examples illustrate the above principles and success factors in action, and demonstrate what can be achieved, and how it has been achieved in specific cases.

These examples also illustrate the different ways in which central government agencies contribute to the success of community-level initiatives through various roles: funder, co-ordinator, collaborator and supporter. It is important to note that public-sector employees at regional and local levels (eg school principals, police, DHB staff) are often key enablers of community-level initiatives.

## How can central government best support community-level initiatives?

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Multiple reports and reviews over the past 15 years from New Zealand and overseas have provided advice to central government about the best ways to support community-level initiatives. Consistent themes in the literature are that, in order to enable effective community-level change, government needs to do the following things:

### Remove bureaucratic barriers

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- Government regulations, compliance demands and funding arrangements can actively work against the ability of communities to develop and transform themselves.
- Removing bureaucratic barriers to effective community-level change is a key way in which central government can support such change.

## Collaborate

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- There are inherent tensions and challenges in collaboration between central government and communities to effect community-level change.
- To date, successful collaboration between communities and central government (and between government agencies) is most evident at the local level, where public-sector staff are often key enablers of successful community-level initiatives.
- As a funder/project sponsor, central government can support collaboration at the project level by: 1) mandating collaboration; 2) recognising the time and resources required and funding appropriately; and 3) encouraging government agencies at the local and regional level to support the initiative and work together.

## Enhance capacity at both community and government levels

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- Central government can support effective community-level interventions by enhancing capacity at both government and community levels.
- Central government agencies need to establish the internal systems, roles and processes required to facilitate local, collaborative cross-sector work.
- Capacity-building at the community level can be enhanced by provision of training, mentoring, and technical support – either directly by government agencies, through skill-sharing within the community, or through a third party.

## Invest strategically

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- A key role for central government is to create an environment that supports longer-term, comprehensive collaborative approaches, based on best practice in community-level change-making.
- There is a need to co-ordinate efforts across central and local government agencies to build strong, resilient communities.
- Central government can better support community-level change by investing in organisations and community infrastructure as well as front-end interventions.
- Investment should be evidence-informed, and mechanisms for disseminating learning and putting it into practice are needed.

## Create a supportive policy context

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- A key role of central government is to create an environment in which community-level innovation and entrepreneurialism can thrive.
- Broader social and economic policies can impact on the capacity of communities to develop and sustain local action.
- The impact of community-level initiatives is enhanced when their objectives are supported by the wider policy environment.
- Social procurement may be an innovative way for central government to support communities and deliver additional social value.



# Contents

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<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>1</b>
What works in community-level initiatives?	2
Key principles	2
Success factors	2
Barriers to success	3
Examples of effective community-level change	3
How can central government best support community-level initiatives?	3
Remove bureaucratic barriers	3
Collaborate	4
Enhance capacity at both community and government levels	4
Invest strategically	4
Create a supportive policy context	4
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
Research questions	8
How 'community-level initiatives' are defined	8
How is 'effectiveness' defined?	12
Method	13
Limitations	13
Structure of the report	14
<b>01 What works in community-level initiatives?</b>	<b>15</b>
Principles	16
Success factors	17
A shared vision, owned by the community	17
Community readiness	18
Intentionality and a focus on outcomes	18
Long-term and adaptable funding arrangements	19
Focus on community capacity-building	20

Skilled leadership and facilitation	20
Processes for addressing power imbalances	21
Focus on relationships	21
Appropriate scale	22
Continuous learning and adaptation	23
Findings specific to Māori and Pacific community initiatives	23
Barriers to success	25
Project-level factors	25
System-level factors	26

## 02 Examples of effective community-level change 29

---

Evidence for the effectiveness of community-level initiatives	31
New Zealand examples	32
Victory Village	32
Tiakina ō Tātou Tamariki	34
The Māori and Pacific Education Initiative (MPEI)	35
The Campaign for Action on Family Violence	36
Healthy Village Action Zones	38
Amokura Family Violence Prevention Consortium	39
Ngāti and Healthy	40
International examples	41
Communities that Care	41
Healthy Together Victoria	42
Vibrant Communities	43
Strive Partnership	44

## 03 How can central government best support community-level initiatives? 45

---

Remove bureaucratic barriers	47
Compliance and regulatory barriers	47
Funding and accountability arrangements	47
Collaborate	49
Enhance capacity at both community and government levels	51
Invest strategically	53
Create a supportive policy context	54

## References 56

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# Introduction



This report presents the findings of a literature review jointly commissioned by the Ministry of Social Development and Superu. The purpose of the project was to inform the Ministry about what works in community-level initiatives, and how central government can best support effective community-level initiatives. Its aim is to draw together existing evidence to inform any potential future work in this area.

## Research questions

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The research questions the project addressed were:

- What are some examples of successful community-level initiatives?
- What are the success factors for effective community-level initiatives – eg key principles, practices, people, community-related factors (with a particular focus on central government-community relationships and processes)?
- What are the pitfalls, or factors associated with ineffectiveness or failure of community-level initiatives (with a particular focus on central government-community relationships and processes)?
- What are the processes and mechanisms through which positive change is brought about in communities and what examples are there of the means by which communities have successfully transformed themselves?
- How best can central government support community-level initiatives?

## How ‘community-level initiatives’ are defined

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For the purposes of this project, community-level initiatives<sup>2</sup> are defined as those that:

- do not provide services to individual clients
- have a significant community-engagement component, and
- are aimed at addressing community-level issues and outcomes such as:
  - > incidence of family violence
  - > crime rates
  - > annual pupil turnover
  - > unemployment
  - > access to services
  - > social connectedness
  - > community pride
  - > tino rangatiratanga/self-determination
  - > community resilience
  - > strengthening community infrastructure (eg leadership, networks and partnerships).

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<sup>2</sup> A review of the definitions of community-level initiatives is provided in the literature scan that was used to scope the research. See [www.superu.govt.nz/effective\\_community\\_level\\_change](http://www.superu.govt.nz/effective_community_level_change)



This definition includes a wide range of initiatives, including both community-initiated and government-initiated work, and ranging from neighbourhood to national scale. It includes initiatives aimed primarily at empowerment and building community capacity, and also those that aim to address specific concerns such as family violence or local crime rates. Geographic communities, ethnic communities and other communities of interest are included in the definition.

‘Community’ is implicitly conceptualised in different ways in community-level initiatives, for example as a setting, a target, an agent, or a resource (McLeroy, Norton, Kegler, Burdine, & Sumaya, 2003). Some initiatives aim for wide grassroots engagement of residents and community members directly, while in other initiatives community and voluntary-sector organisations are the primary agents of change.

A wide range of terms are used to describe community-level initiatives aimed at bringing about positive community-level change. In hapū/iwi/Māori contexts the terms used to describe intentional processes of working towards self-determined goals and aspirations include ‘tino rangatiratanga’, ‘mana motuhake’, ‘kaupapa Māori’, ‘whānau development’, ‘hapū development’ and ‘iwi development’ (Eketone, 2006; France, 1999; Moewaka Barnes, 2000). Some of the terms commonly used in Te Ao Pākehā are defined in the text box overleaf. These terms are underpinned by various models of community practice and theories of change. However, in practice, they are applied loosely (Loomis, 2012) and the definitions are often overlapping and contested. As “concern with definition can distract from more important issues” (Jennings, 2014, p 8), and because such terms mean different things to different people and can easily be misinterpreted, we have minimised their use in this report and opted for the broad umbrella term ‘community-level initiatives’.



## Types of community-level initiative – Selected examples of terms used in New Zealand

Action Research and Participatory Action Research are methods for collective problem-solving, action and reflection in community settings, and have been used by government (eg DIA's Local Action Research Projects – LARPs) and academic researchers, in particular Māori researchers (eg Eruera, 2010), as a tool for catalysing and understanding community-level change. Within these models, action and research are integrated and there is an emphasis on community empowerment and recognition of community expertise.

Community action is aimed at co-ordinating actors at the local level around a specific goal such as improving water quality, preventing family violence, or reducing alcohol-related harm. Community Action aims to change behaviour through local structures and systems as well as by changing social norms, and is often closely linked with local-level implementation of specific public policies (Casswell, 2001). The community action component of the 'It's Not OK' family-violence campaign is an example (see p 36).

A defining feature of community development is that the community leads in identifying the issue or issues they want to address, the outcomes they want to achieve, and the process for getting there. Projects may be initiated by the community or by local or central government, and may be funded through community, philanthropic or government funding. The community is seen as an agent of change, and there is an emphasis on empowerment and capacity-building, as well as tangible outcomes. Ethnic, geographic and other communities are included in the definition (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011).

Community economic development (CED) addresses community-defined priorities and promotes self-reliance and community control of resources (Jennings, 2014). CED includes co-operatives, non-government social-housing initiatives, exchange schemes, social enterprise, and initiatives to encourage small local businesses. CED may be self-funding, or supported by government or other funders. An example of government-supported CED was the CEDAR project supported by the Department of Labour (Sankar & Wong, 2003).

Community-led development is a variant of community development that is place-based, cross-sectoral, and outcome-driven, and emphasises grassroots engagement and authentic community leadership (Loomis, 2012). "The essence of CLD is working together in place to create and achieve locally-owned visions and goals" (Inspiring Communities, 2013a, p 14). An example is 'Victory Village' in Nelson (see p 32)

Community renewal has an emphasis on improving the built and social environment to foster strong communities and counter social exclusion. Projects are generally government-initiated and -funded, but there is an emphasis on local engagement and participation. An example is Housing New Zealand's Community Renewal Project (2000–2008) in Aranui, Clendon, Eastern Porirua, Fordlands, Northcote and Talbot Park (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011).

Community planning and devolved funding are methods that government has used to increase local autonomy and community input into decisions that affect them – eg MSD's Whānau Development Project (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011) and its current Community Response Model (MSD website, 2015).

A social enterprise is a values-driven organisation that trades to fulfil its social or environmental mission, and that uses any profit or surplus for community benefit rather than private profit. The definition includes organisations that are partially supported by external funding (Jennings, 2014).



Although there are a number of ways that community initiatives could be grouped, for the purposes of this project we have found it useful to divide them according to two dimensions:

- purpose (either broad development aims, or aimed at a specific outcome), and
- whether they were community-initiated or government-initiated.

The latter dimension is important to the current project because the question of how best central government can support initiatives depends significantly on where the project originated. The following table provides a few examples to illustrate these dimensions. It is important to note that this is a schematic representation, and in reality programmes may not fit neatly into these boxes, and they may shift across the boundaries over time.

	Broad aims, building community capability, tino rangatiratanga	Aimed at a specific outcome
Community-initiated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kōhanga reo movement</li> <li>• Victory Village</li> <li>• Men's Sheds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Violence Free Network Wairarapa</li> <li>• Kaupapa Tupeka Kore (Tobacco Free)</li> <li>• Amokura Family Violence Prevention Consortium (Te Tai Tokerau)</li> </ul>
Government-initiated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Whānau Development Project (MSD)</li> <li>• Intersectoral Community Action for Health (MoH)</li> <li>• Health Promoting Schools (MoH)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• E Tu Whānau (Family violence)</li> <li>• SKIP (Positive parenting)</li> <li>• Healthy Auckland Together (Obesity)</li> </ul>

In terms of topics or outcome areas, the current project was focused on community initiatives that might contribute to the Ministry of Social Development's outcomes, which are outlined in its Statement of Intent 2014–2018 (p 10):

- More people into sustainable work and out of welfare dependency
- More people are able to participate in and contribute positively to their communities and society
- Fewer children and people are vulnerable
- More communities are strong and thriving
- Fewer children and young people commit crime
- Fewer people commit fraud and the system operates with fairness and integrity.

Community-level initiatives in other fields (eg environmental initiatives) were excluded from the scope, as were local government initiatives.

## How is 'effectiveness' defined?

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In order to identify 'what works' we need a clear sense of what success looks like. In other words, what are the outcomes that community-level initiatives are aiming to achieve?

In the community-development literature there is a strong focus on 'community capacity outcomes' (France, 1999), also called 'intangible outcomes' (Department of Internal Affairs, 2013). Such outcomes include:

- a greater sense of self-determination and empowerment at the local level; increased co-operation between local organisations
- increased social connectedness between neighbours
- the emergence of community leaders
- the development of local organisations and/or networks
- an increased ability to solve local issues together
- the development of a greater sense of community and community pride.

In this report they are referred to as 'process outcomes'. These outcomes are sometimes difficult to measure, but are fundamental to what success looks like at the community level, because improvements in community capacity and processes are valuable outcomes in themselves (Casswell, 2001).

Community-level initiatives are often aiming to achieve 'tangible outcomes' as well, such as renovating a marae, raising pupil attendance and achievement at school, improving access to services, improving health behaviour, or reducing local crime.

There are several examples in the New Zealand literature of evaluation frameworks or indicators that have been developed for assessing the quality and success of community-level interventions – eg the Community Project Indicators Framework (Duignan et al., 2003) and the Community-led Development Outcomes Framework (Department of Internal Affairs, 2012, p 19). Kaupapa Māori evaluation frames effectiveness within a Māori worldview, acknowledging that Māori communities may have different interests and priorities from government departments or non-Māori researchers:

Rather than trying to describe programmes in terms that are accepted and largely legitimated in non-Māori research, we try to frame evaluations within a Māori world-view. For example, showing how a nutrition programme may have led to strengthening marae and iwi structures and why this is a successful impact has been part of another Whāriki evaluation (Moewaka Barnes, 2000).

All of these evaluation frameworks emphasise that 'community capacity outcomes' and 'process' – how things are achieved – are critical to overall success. The recent Inspiring Communities review of eight community-led development (CLD) case studies found: "The CLD initiatives clearly identify that the changes and outcomes they are most proud of are a combination of 'what' they achieved, as well as 'how' they have worked towards the achievement and 'who' they have worked together with" (Inspiring Communities, 2013b).



## Method

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We identified material through Google and academic database searching and through our topic advisor, Jen Margaret. Because of the exploratory nature of the work, and the breadth of potentially relevant literature, our approach was necessarily selective rather than systematic or comprehensive.

This current report draws primarily on existing review-level reports that focused on community development, community action, and/or models for central government partnership with communities. These documents generally included a number of case studies and key informant insights into the factors associated with successful community-level change, and discussion about barriers and pitfalls. We also drew on case studies and evaluation reports for individual projects and initiatives, and academic and theoretical literature (eg about the changing role of government vis a vis communities).

## Limitations

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New Zealand evidence on what works to effect community-level change is largely based on case studies and qualitative research and the insights of evaluators and practitioners. Findings about how to achieve effective community engagement and enhance community capacity are relatively clear and consistent; however, robust quantitative evidence on the outcomes of community-level initiatives is sparse. There are methodological and practical challenges associated with evaluating the effectiveness of community-level initiatives, and the evidence base is limited in this regard.

There is great diversity among community-level initiatives, and there is a risk that important differences are overlooked in the process of distilling overarching findings. The question of how best government can support community-level initiatives depends significantly on the kind of initiative – its aims and its locus of control for example. It was beyond the scope of the current project to discuss in detail ‘what works’ for a wide range of specific communities<sup>3</sup>, types of initiative, or outcome areas.

The majority of community-level initiatives (particularly those initiated by communities or by local government) are not formally evaluated or documented. The current literature review necessarily focuses on documented findings in the public domain. However, these findings may not necessarily be reflective of community-level initiatives as a whole.

Local government plays a major role in strengthening local communities and supporting community-level initiatives. Exploring this role was outside the scope of the current review, but it should be noted that there may be lessons from local government that are salient to central government, and ways that local and central government might work more closely to better support community-level initiatives.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, New Zealand’s increasing ethnic diversity is not yet well-reflected in literature looking at what works in specific ethnic communities (beyond Māori, Pākehā and Pacific communities).

The scope of the current review also excluded community-level initiatives outside the ambit of the Ministry of Social Development's outcome areas. It is important to note that a strong and growing area for community-led initiatives and community-government partnership is environmental protection (eg fresh-water management, biodiversity restoration, and climate change action). Environmental initiatives at the community-level have commonly engaged tangata whenua in ways that many of the socially orientated initiatives have not (M Courtney, personal communication, 23 Oct 2015), and may have wider impacts on social and economic outcomes. For example, pest-control initiatives may be associated with job creation, training and cultural revival (C Cheyne, personal communication, 23 Oct 2015). Such community-level initiatives in the environmental sector may therefore provide interesting and relevant learning for the social sector, but were outside scope for the current review.

Another area outside scope was hapū/iwi development. Again, this is an important area that could richly inform understandings of effective community-level change.

While the findings of this report incorporate learnings from literature on Māori initiatives, the report has been authored by Pākehā and does not explore the unique position of Māori as tangata whenua or the relationship between tangata whenua and government under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Therefore, the findings of this report need to be coupled with this analysis and with action to address both the ongoing impacts of colonisation and commitments inherent in the Treaty relationship.

## Structure of the report

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The findings are presented in three sections:

- Section 1 distils from the literature the key principles that underlie successful community-level initiatives, along with success factors and factors that hinder success.
- Section 2 provides illustrative examples of the principles and success factors in action, using examples of effective community-level initiatives from New Zealand and overseas.
- Section 3 addresses the questions of how central government can best support effective community-level action.

# 01

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What works in community-level initiatives?





### Key points:

- Community-level initiatives need a shared vision where the community is involved in identifying outcomes, targeting those in their community that need support and participating in the design and implementation of initiatives.
- Communities need to be ready, which means that the community wants to change and leaders are trusted and supported.
- The need for funders to be accountable means that sometimes communities can be burdened with costly processes for applying for funding and a high level of reporting when they do get funding.
- On-going focus on building the capacity of both the funder and the community was important for success. For example, local leaders can benefit from training, coaching and mentoring. The Māori and Pacific Education Initiative is an example of how a funder can adapt its culture and processes to better support Māori and Pacific communities (see p 35).
- Central government culture can undermine the principles and processes underlying successful community-level initiatives. For example, funding and procurement processes can impede community progress towards achieving their outcomes.

This section outlines key principles and success factors for community-level initiatives, based on published reviews of what works at the project level.

Community-level initiatives have been widely implemented in New Zealand and overseas, and the insights of community change practitioners about what works and how it works have been captured in numerous case studies and evaluations, and distilled in reviews. Although there are differences according to the type of initiative and its aims, there is strong agreement on a number of principles, success factors and risks or barriers that apply to community-level initiatives of many types.

Although some generalities can be extracted, research to date also points to the uniqueness of communities – for example in terms of social and ethnic diversity, geography, resources, and the issues faced. Therefore the principles and success factors outlined below should not be seen as a blueprint to be followed rigidly, but rather as a repertoire or menu. “The challenge is to wisely and strategically adapt the appropriate mix to the specific purposes and context of the particular community and time” (Gardner, Lalani, & Plamadeala, 2010).

## Principles

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Key principles that underlie a range of successful community-level initiatives include:

- Community<sup>4</sup> self-determination: “The ability to have a voice, to participate and to exercise control over one’s destiny” (Munford & Walsh-Tapiata, 2006, p 435; Tankersley, 2004)
- A focus on the strengths and assets of communities and the importance of their knowledge-base (Casswell, 2000; Cram, 2011; Inspiring Communities, 2013b)



- A holistic and ecological approach, recognising the interconnectedness and complexity of factors and outcomes at various levels: individual, family, community, and society (Dobbs & Eruera, 2014; Gravitas Research and Strategy, 2005; Ministry for Women, 2015)
- A focus on process and relationships as well as tangible outcomes (Inspiring Communities, 2013a; Māori and Pacific Education Initiative & Hancock, 2012).

## Success factors

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The following factors have been identified in the literature as characteristics or processes associated with successful community-level initiatives.

### A shared vision, owned by the community

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Development of a shared vision, which encompasses desired outcomes and operating principles, and is owned by the community, is widely seen as a critical success factor (Casswell, 2000; Greenaway & Witten, 2006; Inspiring Communities, 2013b). “Without an agreed overarching vision then actions and outcomes tend to be more fragmented and isolated, without a sense of achieving any change beyond the immediate activity” (Inspiring Communities, 2013b, p 5).

Although the initial motivation for a community initiative may be shared concern about a significant local issue (eg youth suicide or local crime), an effective shared vision is one that is positive, is strengths-based, and reflects community values, aspirations, and tikanga.

Broad community participation in the design and implementation of initiatives is essential, so that the principle of self-determination is put into action and the wisdom of community members is harnessed (Casswell, 2000; Inspiring Communities, 2013a; Munford & Walsh-Tapiata, 2006). Although this may be time-consuming, evidence from case studies suggests that it pays dividends in terms of overall effectiveness.

Particularly for government-initiated projects, local ownership and grassroots support is aided by the involvement of all key stakeholders at an early stage in the project, and by the identification and recruitment of local ‘movers and shakers’ as champions for the initiative (Greenaway & Witten, 2006a). Positioning community members as influential, and as central players in developing solutions, is also key to successful engagement and community mobilisation.

Development of a shared vision is aided by funding agreements that provide sufficient time and resources for a community-driven activation and visioning stage (Inspiring Communities, 2013a).

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4 As noted in the introduction, the term ‘community’ is used in this report to cover geographic communities, communities of interest or affiliation, and ethnic communities, including hapū and iwi.

“The community building process is not something governments can do to communities, groups and iwi. Effective local development and solutions to local problems are best achieved through community-driven processes and collaboration in determining investment priorities.”

– A Framework for Developing Sustainable Communities (Department of Internal Affairs, 2002)

## Community readiness

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Reviews have identified a base level of social capital and capability (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011) and community readiness as prerequisites for successful community-led initiatives (Inspiring Communities, 2013b). A recent report on collaborative place-based initiatives details five stages of the community ‘lifecycle’:

1. Waiting: the community is fragmented and ‘stuck’, waiting for something to save them.
2. Impasse: desire for change is strong but trusted leadership is lacking and in-fighting predominates.
3. Catalytic: people find a shared vision and ways of working together, and small wins trigger hope.
4. Growth: a sense of shared purpose and confidence grows; increased action, growing networks; leadership builds at all levels.
5. Sustain and renew: when people run out of energy and networks splinter, new leaders emerge, new centres of action are grown (Harwood, 2013, cited in Inspiring Communities & Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement, 2014).

While communities at the Waiting or Impasse stages can still be engaged in community-level initiatives, it is important to note that “time and more intensive capacity building would need to be built in up front so that the community can be an effective project partner” (Harwood, 2013, cited in Inspiring Communities & Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement, 2014).

## Intentionality and a focus on outcomes

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Successful community initiatives are intentional, outcome-focused, and aimed at creating enduring change. Recognition of process outcomes is important (eg improvements in community processes, networks, sense of empowerment, and social cohesion).

A recent Canadian review of lessons learned about comprehensive community initiatives states: “The most important principle and component may very well be intentionality. Initiatives cannot simply hope that activities will have positive wider outcomes... they need to explicitly analyse the inter-connected links between the social and community changes envisioned” (Gardner, 2011, p 29).



Such explicit analysis is reflected in the Community-led Development Outcomes Framework developed for the Department of Internal Affairs' community-led development pilot (Department of Internal Affairs, 2012, p 19), and investment in formative research for initiatives such as SKIP (Gravitas Research and Strategy, 2005).

In the health-promotion and community-action literature, there is a strong emphasis on the importance of effective project planning that is underpinned by appropriate theory and evidence (Greenaway & Witten, 2006a; Signal, Egan, & Cook, 2009). The community-led development literature also talks about the need for planning, but with greater emphasis on the need for adaptation of pathways and approaches in response to the learning that emerges from participatory processes (Margaret, 2011; McKinlay Douglas Ltd, 2014).

“Māori and Pacific Island peoples believe that when the process is good, you bring the future into the present. And when you do that, you know that things will go well.”

– He Akoranga He Aratohu: Māori & Pacific Education Initiative (Māori and Pacific Education Initiative & Hancock, 2012)

## Long-term and adaptable funding arrangements

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A key message from the literature is that assured long-term funding is a necessary factor for success. Long-term means at least three to five years, and longer (10 to 14 years) for large or complex collaborative initiatives (Inspiring Communities & Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement, 2014; Ministry of Health, 2008).

“Long-term funding is assured so initiatives can be properly developed, infrastructures are built and projects have time to ‘work’ (this usually takes several years because of the time it takes to establish partnerships and work collaboratively).”

– Intersectoral Community Action for Health (ICAH) Evaluation (Ministry of Health, 2008)

Within funding arrangements, it is important that agreements are flexible (rather than prescriptive) to allow for local tailoring and innovations to be made as projects develop (Inspiring Communities & Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement, 2014). It is also important for funders to recognise process outcomes as well as tangible outcomes, as noted above, and for monitoring and evaluation to capture unexpected outcomes, which may be important (Casswell, 2001).

## Focus on community capacity-building

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As noted above, to be effective, community-level initiatives require a certain level of community readiness and capability (Inspiring Communities, 2013b). A key finding from case-study reviews is that different communities will require differing levels and types of support. The Department of Internal Affairs community development trial found that an ongoing focus on building the capacity of both the funder and the community was important for success (Department of Internal Affairs, 2013).

Access to skills and resources from outside the community, when needed, is also associated with success in a number of reviews. For example, having access to mentors (Greenaway & Witten, 2006), consultants (Māori and Pacific Education Initiative & Hancock, 2012) and/or ongoing support from the funder organisation eg DIA's regional community advisors (Department of Internal Affairs, 2015) was valued by communities, and helped build capacity and address skill-gaps.

“Some applicants needed a capacity-building bridge to establish the infrastructure required to implement their vision. The Trust responded proactively by providing experienced consultants to work with the applicants.”

– He Akoranga He Aratohu: Māori & Pacific Education Initiative (Māori and Pacific Education Initiative & Hancock, 2012, p 13)

Identifying and nurturing current and potential community leaders was seen as particularly important, since effective facilitation of community-level initiatives is a highly skilled task. This is discussed further below.

## Skilled leadership and facilitation

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Capable and well-supported local leaders are critical to the success of community-level initiatives. According to a recent report on community-led development, the best leaders “are skilled at intentionally redistributing power in how they engage, encourage and lead. They are also skilled in knowing when to step up, step back, walk alongside or walk away, which enables those that follow to join in and lead themselves” (Inspiring Communities, 2013a, p 73).

Reviews show that projects benefit from the support of people with community-development expertise in various roles: for example, on the funder side, as project facilitators, or in governance roles (Greenaway & Witten, 2006).

In a review of eight case studies, Inspiring Communities also notes that the roles of both leaders and joiners contribute to overall effectiveness: “It is those who join with leaders who create momentum by demonstrating what working together can create” (Inspiring Communities, 2013b, p 6).



## Processes for addressing power imbalances

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The issue of power is seldom discussed in government documents, but is a central theme in non-government and academic literature on creating effective community-level change. The importance of power relations is explained in a paper on community-development practice in New Zealand's bicultural context:

For community workers in Aotearoa New Zealand, the nature of the work has been focused on reasserting indigenous rights and self-determination and interrogation of the power relations that have functioned to maintain tangata whenua in marginalised positions where they have been unable to lead out change. An examination of power relations in this country requires an exploration of the oppositional relationships between the colonized and the colonizer, but it also requires an examination of the spaces that have enabled these relationships to be transformed (Munford & Walsh-Tapiata, 2006).

The examination of power relations is important to enable communities and marginalised groups to envision what self-determination might look like, and strategies for getting there. It is also important for the day-to-day functioning of collaborations in which some individuals and groups hold more power than others. Developing understandings of the dynamics and nuances of power and addressing power imbalances in favour of groups and organisations with less institutional power is seen as a critical part of community-led development processes (Inspiring Communities, 2013a).

“Projects were enhanced when the power dynamics influencing the relationships between stakeholders were acknowledged and addressed throughout the course of the project.”

– ‘Meta-analysing community action projects in Aotearoa New Zealand’ (Greenaway & Witten, 2006, p 152; emphasis in the original)

## Focus on relationships

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Relationships of trust and respect are the foundations of for effective community-level change, and networking within and beyond the community is integral to community capacity-building (Greenaway & Witten, 2006). Greenaway and Witten emphasise the complexity of relationships: for example, there is a matrix of both vertical relationships within projects (of funder, fund holder, evaluator and community project team) and the horizontal relationships across projects (between funders, fund holders, evaluators, and community project members).

The importance of collaborative working across sectors (both within central government, and externally) is a key theme in the literature, because solutions to complex social problems rarely lie with one sector alone. Only by working together can positive community-level change be effected (Ministry of Health, 2008; Inspiring Communities & Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement, 2014).

“The literature indicates that a hybrid, cross-sectoral approach is beginning to make a difference – and that the ‘magic’ often happens at the intersections.”

– Community Economic Development: Understanding the New Zealand Context (Jennings, 2014, p 222)

A direct and ongoing relationship between the funder and the community, characterised by mutual trust and respect, has also been identified as a success factor. Central government agencies can aid such a relationship by:

- Taking time to get to know and understand the community, and acknowledge community culture and values (France, 1999)
- Engaging in reciprocal and respectful communication (Casswell, 2000)
- Ensuring staff representing the funder in meetings with the community have the authority to make decisions on behalf of the funder (Ministry of Health, 2008)
- Investing in activities to increase the funder’s cultural competence (Māori and Pacific Education Initiative & Hancock, 2012)
- Sharing responsibility for the success of the initiative (Māori and Pacific Education Initiative & Hancock, 2012)
- Providing support while also recognising the autonomy of the community (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011).

In government-initiated projects, working through existing community organisations and established processes is associated with success (Ministry of Health, 2008) and can be seen as an expression of respect for the community (Casswell, 2000).

## Appropriate scale

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Two recent reports presenting key learning from community-led development (CLD) case studies both concluded that smaller scale is associated with quicker progress and greater impact in projects aiming for grassroots participation. According to the Inspiring Communities report on CLD practice in eight ‘core learning cluster’ communities, “CLD makes the most tangible difference at the smaller town, suburb or neighbourhood level” (Inspiring Communities, 2013b, p 6). The Department of Internal Affairs evaluation of the DIA-funded CLD pilot in five communities found that after two years, two of these (Mt Roskill and Waitangirua/Cannons Creek) had made limited progress, and this was largely attributed to the size and diversity of those geographical areas (Department of Internal Affairs, 2013).

However, community-action initiatives that are focused on co-ordinating key agencies around a particular issue (rather than engaging broad citizen involvement in visioning and planning) have been shown to be successful at a larger scale. For example, the Amokura Family Violence Prevention Consortium (see p 39) and the Violence Free Network Wairarapa are both regional initiatives with evidence of effectiveness.



## Continuous learning and adaptation

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A key theme in the literature is that communities (and social problems) are complex and ever-changing, and there is no 'formula' for success. Rather, successful change is brought about by an ongoing process of innovation, learning and adaptation (Inspiring Communities & Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement, 2014; Jennings, 2014).

An international review noted that the best community initiatives build evaluation, learning and reflection into their working culture, and continuously adapt and improve their strategy and activities (Gardner et al., 2010). This is borne out by New Zealand studies that have identified reflexive practices and 'learning by doing' as key success factors. For example, "Reflexive practices, where used, contributed significantly to the development of community action projects and to building knowledge in the communities and organisations involved" (Greenaway & Witten, 2006, p 154).

"Critical foundations for successful working together in place include respectful and trusting relationships, a documented common focus, a sense of cohesion, proactive engagement strategies and effective processes for talking, working and learning together."

– Learning by Doing: Community-led Change in Aotearoa NZ  
(Inspiring Communities, 2013a)

## Findings specific to Māori and Pacific community initiatives

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As well as the principles and success factors above, additional success factors identified for initiatives in Māori and Pacific communities include:

### Initiatives that are grounded in relevant cultural concepts

Grounding of community-level initiatives in relevant Māori or Pacific cultural concepts and processes is associated with community buy-in and success (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011; Gravitas Research and Strategy, 2005). An example is the Amokura Family Violence Prevention Consortium (see p 39), which was grounded in a kaupapa Māori wellbeing framework, as explained in the following quote:

The use of cultural imperatives, for example, whakapapa, tikanga, wairua, tapu, mauri and mana, has the potential to inform wellbeing in intimate partner and whānau relationships, transform behaviours and provide alternatives to violence. Using these imperatives can guide transformative practices and inform strategies for whānau violence prevention (Dobbs & Eruera, 2014).

There are also well-documented examples from the education sector that demonstrate the transformative effect of whole-school programmes grounded in Māori concepts and values. For example Te Kōtahitanga successfully lifted Māori achievement in participating schools by changing teaching practices and the culture of the school community to better reflect Māori principles such as whānaungatanga and kōtahitanga, thus enabling Māori to achieve as Māori (Bishop, Berryman, Powell, & Teddy, 2007). The Māori and Pacific Education Initiative (see p 35) provides further examples.

Healthy Village Action Zones (see p 38) provides an example of a community-level initiative grounded in Pacific concepts of community wellbeing. A key theme from the literature on what works for Pacific communities is that initiatives must recognise and reflect the cultural differences between the different Pacific communities in New Zealand. Each Island nation has its own distinct history, culture and language and therefore a 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate, and may limit success.

### Funders using cross-cultural engagement skills

When initiatives are externally funded, it is important that funders use engagement processes, project frameworks and evaluation frameworks that are aligned with Māori and Pacific cultural concepts and processes (Moewaka Barnes, 2009). This often requires the funder to develop competency to engage with different approaches. "Outcomes sought by Māori may be regarded as 'intangible' by funders and others – this requires flexible thinking about measuring and reporting on outcomes" (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011).

The Māori and Pacific Education Initiative (see p 35), funded and initiated by ASB Community Trust (now renamed Foundation North), illustrates how a funder can adapt its culture and processes to better support Māori and Pacific community-level initiatives. The starting point was a willingness to learn, to do things differently, and to work in genuine partnership with Māori and Pacific communities from a place of mutual respect. "MPEI has contributed to a major shift in the culture of the Trust and shows that Māori and Pacific communities expect trustees and staff to demonstrate cultural competence when engaging with them" (Māori and Pacific Education Initiative & Hancock, 2012).

### Māori and Pacific participation and leadership

For government-initiated projects, input from Māori and Pacific communities from the earliest stages of the project, and visible Māori/Pacific leadership, is associated with community buy-in and successful project implementation. A key lesson from the Māori and Pacific Education Initiative was that "Māori and Pacific communities can and will generate compelling answers to the challenges they face when given the opportunity" (Māori and Pacific Education Initiative & Hancock, 2012, p 13).

This is illustrated in Healthy Village Action Zones (see p 38), developed in partnership between Auckland DHB, Pacific communities and other stakeholders. When local Pacific communities had the opportunity to prioritise their own health concerns and to design and lead the programme, significant community-level change occurred in health literacy and health behaviour. The evaluation found that engaging with, and gaining the support of Pacific church leaders was critical to the success of the initiative.

A related point is that projects that operate via existing Māori and Pacific community structures (rather than imposing new ones) tend to have greater success (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011; Ministry of Health, 2008).

### Processes for reflecting on the impact of colonisation

As previously noted, addressing power imbalances is fundamental to community-development practice, and in Māori contexts this includes critical reflection about the impacts of colonisation and current power dynamics. A theme in the literature is that culturally relevant processes such as storytelling enable such critical reflection and enhance projects' ability to meet their objectives – for example, by helping a community to articulate a common vision that links the past with the present and the future (Greenaway & Witten, 2006; Munford & Walsh-Tapiata, 2006).



## Barriers to success

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The achievement of desired community outcomes is hindered by a number of factors, and key themes in the literature are discussed below. Project-level factors are discussed first, followed by a discussion of more systemic issues. There is remarkable consistency in the literature over the past 15 years, suggesting that longstanding issues are yet to be resolved.

### Project-level factors

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Barriers at the project level identified in the literature include:

#### Lack of shared vision

- Lack of clarity about the purpose or vision of the project, as illustrated in the following quote from a meta-analysis of community action projects: “When the objectives of the project and processes for working together had not been clarified across all stakeholders and clearly communicated, projects struggled with confused understandings and misinterpreted actions” (Greenaway & Witten, 2006).
- Difficulty achieving a shared community vision, particularly in large and/or diverse communities (Department of Internal Affairs, 2013)
- Mismatch between government and community priorities; lack of local buy-in for government-initiated projects (Sankar & Wong, 2003).

A key message from the literature is that the initial relationship-building and visioning stage takes time, and that rushing this process may undermine the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of the project (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011; Māori and Pacific Education Initiative & Hancock, 2012).

#### Poor engagement with Māori and Pacific communities

- Local-level implementation of government policy that is not well-aligned with Māori and Pacific engagement and development principles (Hinkle, 2010).

#### Lack of focus on addressing ‘upstream’ factors

- Insufficient emphasis on systemic and policy-level change (Hinkle, 2010).

#### Skill gaps and limited capacity

- Lack of specific skills within the community – for example, in evaluation, strategic planning or business acumen (Jennings, 2014; Sankar & Wong, 2003)
- Difficulty recruiting and retaining skilled staff due to lack of money to pay well (Sankar & Wong, 2003) and/or lack of skill in human resource management (Department of Internal Affairs, 2013)
- Difficulty meeting the needs of the project due to limited capacity or insufficient funding (Inspiring Communities, 2013b).

#### Loss of momentum

- Sustaining energy and momentum, particularly in projects reliant on volunteer participation, is a key challenge (Casswell, 2001; Department of Internal Affairs, 2013; Sankar & Wong, 2003).

### Short-term approach / de-funding

As previously noted, a key theme in the literature is that community-level projects, particularly complex inter-sectoral projects, require long-term investment if they are to achieve their full potential. However, the New Zealand literature contains numerous examples of programmes being de-funded at the end of an initial three to four year 'trial' or 'pilot' period, or due to a change in government priorities, despite demonstrating evidence of effectiveness. Examples include HEHA (Healthy Eating Health Action) community-level projects that were cut in 2008 just as they were beginning to achieve traction (Hinkle, 2010) and the iwi-led Amokura Family Violence Prevention Consortium that was evaluated positively (Dobbs & Eruera, 2014) and won an international human-rights award before ceasing operations in 2011 due to government re-focusing of funding towards front-line services (Woodley & Palmer, 2014).

## System-level factors

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### Adverse funding and accountability arrangements

Community-level initiatives may be self-supporting, or funded through central government, local government, or philanthropic grants. The barriers most frequently mentioned in the literature are those relating to funding and accountability arrangements – for example:

- Insecure and/or short-term funding (France, 1999; Greenaway & Witten, 2006; Sankar & Wong, 2003)
- Overly prescriptive and/or inflexible funder requirements that do not allow communities to innovate or respond to changing local needs and opportunities (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011; Duignan et al., 2003; France, 1999; Inspiring Communities, 2013b; New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2015; Te Puni Kōkiri, 2013)
- Onerous requirements for applications, tendering and/or reporting, which are out of step with the (low) level of funding offered (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011; Ministry of Health, 2008; Sankar & Wong, 2003)
- Piecemeal funding from multiple agencies, each with their own separate reporting templates and requirements (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011; Sankar & Wong, 2003; Te Puni Kōkiri, 2013)
- Underfunding of initiatives, which undermines organisational sustainability (Hinkle, 2010; New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2015)
- Unrealistic timeframes imposed by funders (France, 1999; Signal et al., 2009).

As a result of these challenges, community partners argue that a disproportionate amount of community time and energy is spent on securing funding, and dealing with the associated administrative and reporting requirements, rather than delivering initiatives and furthering community-development objectives. The focus on short-term financial survival also impacts on longer-term strategic planning, which ultimately detracts from sustainability and achievement. Furthermore, financial insecurity and stretched budgets make it difficult to attract and retain quality staff (Sankar & Wong, 2003).



The barriers outlined above also indicate a fundamental mismatch between government processes – in which frameworks are imposed on communities and top-down control is exercised – and the way communities, and community-level initiatives, achieve effective change. A recurring theme in the literature is that government processes often undermine community self-determination and interfere with best practice at the community level. For example, broad community ownership is difficult to achieve “when funders require a strategic plan ahead of any developmental resourcing and/or when contractual outputs must be specified ahead of time, often with limited flexibility for change” (Inspiring Communities, 2013b, p 6). Similarly, a strong message from Māori organisations is that funding models and timeframes need to be compatible with tikanga Māori (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011). For example, working from a tikanga base takes time, and this needs to be reflected in project timeframes; there should be recognition of Māori knowledge and cultural practices as valid; and Māori must define their own aspirations and outcomes (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011).

### Culture of central government that is not well-aligned to working with communities

Recent reviews indicate that the way government operates, in general, can create barriers to effective partnership with communities (Building Better Government Engagement Reference Group, 2009; New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2015). It is important to acknowledge the pockets of innovation in central government agencies, and to note that there are individuals and teams within government departments that are highly skilled in working with communities. However, the overarching culture of government departments is generally described in the literature as:

- hierarchical, with a focus on top-down approaches
- focused on problems and deficits of ‘deprived’ communities, with little acknowledgement of their strengths and expertise
- narrow and issue-focused; fragmented
- risk-averse
- focused on ‘arms length’ contract management rather than relationship-building with community contract holders and grant recipients.

This government culture contrasts starkly with the principles and processes underlying successful community-level initiatives, and in government-funded projects may impede community progress towards achieving desired community outcomes.

Communities have, for a long time, expressed a desire to work in partnership with government agencies (France, 1999), but in practice genuine partnership approaches involving co-design and collaborative decision-making are rare<sup>5</sup>. Commentators note that government has not always followed through on promises, and as a result, lack of trust between government and community has sometimes been a barrier to success for community initiatives (France, 1999; Ministry of Health, 2008).

One of the key learnings identified by the Department of Internal Affairs through its community-led development (CLD) pilot was “the need for continuous CLD education and training at both the Department and community-levels” (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011). When further staff training was implemented during Year 2 of the pilot, this led to positive results: “Developing their knowledge base and confidence in CLD principles and processes has enabled Department staff to better deliver, inform and support the communities involved” (Department of Internal Affairs, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Examples of successful partnerships are provided in Section 2 of this report.

### Unsupportive policy and regulatory environment

As Casswell points out, “Community initiatives depend on a supportive policy environment to make a difference in people’s lives. Local-level action in isolation is unlikely to ameliorate the effects of a policy environment hostile to its goals” (Casswell, 2001). For example, community action on alcohol-related harm will have limited impact if central government does not also use the policy levers available at the national level to reduce harm caused by alcohol.

Central government policy and regulatory frameworks can actively work against government’s own aspirations towards building strong, resilient communities. For example, some community-level initiatives, particularly social enterprises based on business models, are thwarted by regulations and compliance costs imposed by government. These include Charities Services requirements, finance-related legislation for credit unions and cooperatives, and IRD restrictions (Jennings, 2014). The closure of AWHI Credit Union (see below) provides an example that demonstrates how government action in other policy spheres (in this case the passing of the Non-bank Deposit Takers Act 2013) can undermine community-level initiatives that are contributing to the overarching aim of the Ministry of Social Development: “To help New Zealanders to help themselves to be safe, strong and independent”.

#### Successful Māori Social Enterprise closes due to rising compliance costs

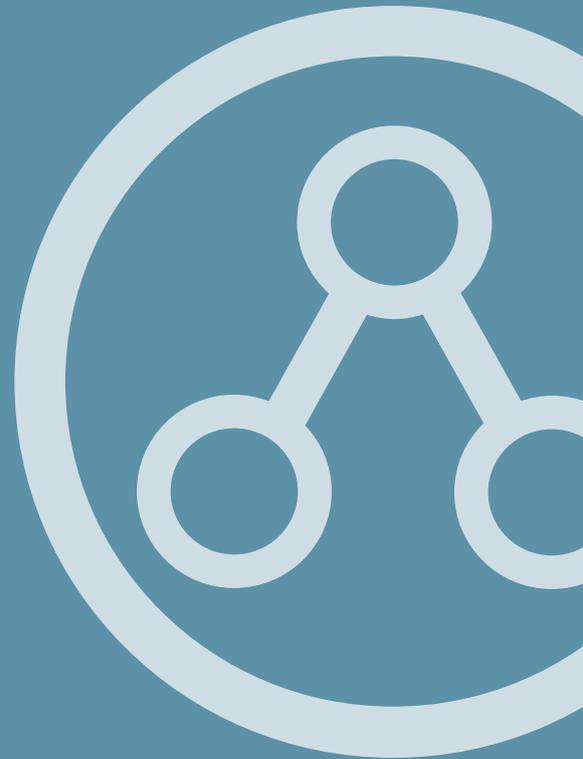
Established in 1991 by 21 founders in Torere (Ngaitai iwi), Bay of Plenty, who pooled their savings, the AWHI Credit Union was one of New Zealand’s longest-serving membership-based financial cooperatives, with branches in Rotorua, Ōpōtiki and Gisborne. It closed in September 2014, and according to media reports, AWHI was “killed by compliance costs” after the introduction of the Non-bank Deposit Takers Act. A spokesperson said “Five years ago our compliance costs were \$20,000 and last year they were \$70,000; this year they will be closer to \$100,000” (Ōpōtiki News, 2 September 2014).

The AWHI Credit Union offered micro-financing at superior rates to its 1,600 members (predominantly Māori), and empowered local people to set up small businesses, build family homes and educate their children. It also supported various community-development initiatives and joint ventures that benefited members and the wider community – eg establishing the Ōpōtiki Community Garden, assisting marae with purchases and upgrades, and sponsorship of local youth, sports, art and cultural initiatives. In 2006 AWHI won the NZ Credit Union People Helping People award, and Tariana Turia, in her role at the time as Minister for Communities, said “The AWHI Credit Union is a wonderful example of supporting communities to support themselves.” AWHI was completely self-funding, with income sourced from interest on loans, membership fees, and returns on investments (Jennings, 2014).

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## Examples of effective community-level change



### Key points:

- There is a substantial body of evidence about community-level initiatives, however this knowledge has not previously been synthesised into useful insights.
- The majority of community level initiatives are not formally evaluated and when they are evaluated most rely on qualitative case studies. Evidence from case studies is useful in understanding how initiatives were implemented and what changes they created, including community development.
- Evidence from case studies alone however is not sufficient to say that changes in a community lead to a change in their outcomes.
- Robust quantitative evidence on whether community-level initiatives are effective in achieving their outcomes is lacking making it difficult to assess how government can be effective in supporting communities.

There are many New Zealand communities where transformational change has occurred, both in terms of community empowerment and engagement in issues that affect them, and in terms of measurable outcomes such as reduced crime and increased educational success. This section provides examples of community-level initiatives that are contributing to such community-level change.

We have included both New Zealand and overseas examples that demonstrate what can be achieved, and how it has been achieved in these specific cases. These examples illustrate the key principles and success factors discussed in Section 1, such as:

- Intentionality and a focus on outcomes
- Grounding in relevant principles, eg self-determination
- Skilled leadership and facilitation
- A focus on relationships
- Identifying and building on strengths within the community
- Positioning community members as influential, and as central players in developing solutions
- Community mobilisation – active community involvement in the design and running of activities
- A long-term approach matched by long-term funding
- A holistic approach.

The examples also illustrate the various ways in which central government agencies contribute to the success of community-level initiatives through a range of roles: funder, co-ordinator, collaborator and supporter. Public-sector employees at regional and local levels (eg school principals, police, DHB staff) are often key leaders and enablers of community-level initiatives, as well as being local residents and community members. Thus the distinction between central government and community can become rather blurred when we examine specific examples at the local level.



## Evidence for the effectiveness of community-level initiatives

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Before presenting the examples, we provide a brief discussion about evidence for effectiveness, and the methodological and practical challenges associated with evaluating 'effectiveness'. This is an evolving science and an active area of research and development both in New Zealand and internationally.

Randomised controlled trials (RCTs) are often considered the 'gold standard' for testing the effectiveness of interventions, since they can provide robust evidence of a causal relationship between the intervention and the outcomes observed. However, there is much debate in the literature about best practice for evaluating community-level initiatives. Experimental designs have been widely critiqued on the basis that complex and long-term community initiatives are not easily amenable to such research. For example:

- Many of the desired outcomes of community-level initiatives are difficult to quantify, particularly capacity-building and social capital outcomes (Boutilier, Rajkumar, Poland, Tobin, & Badgley, 2001; France, 1999).
- Traditional impact/outcome evaluations (particularly RCTs) tend to be narrowly focused on a small number of tangible outcomes, and are unlikely to capture impacts on community processes and capacity, or unexpected outcomes that are valued by communities (Boutilier et al., 2001; Casswell, 2001; Kelly, 2010).
- Between-group 'contamination' is difficult to avoid in community-based RCTs, since knowledge, skills and ideas from 'intervention' communities are often transferred to 'control' communities via the media or through professional and personal networks during the course of the study (Casswell, 2001).
- Attributing causality is difficult in a complex community setting, even when control communities are used for comparison, because the community-based initiative is seldom the only influential factor that differentiates 'intervention' from 'control' communities over the period of the initiative (Cram, 2013; France, 1999; Kelly, 2010).

Because of these methodological problems with RCTs, some evaluators have concluded that, in many cases, "alternative methodologies are better science" (Casswell, 2001).

Many evaluations of community-level activity have therefore utilised a case-study methodology. Ideally they collect both quantitative and qualitative data, gain data from multiple sources to provide a multi-faceted picture of what has gone on, and analyse data within a theoretical framework that allows inference of causal effects (Casswell, 2001).

Thus the evidence base for the effectiveness of community development, both internationally and in New Zealand, is largely based on case-study evidence, rather than experimental or quasi-experimental studies (although some such studies have been conducted, particularly in the USA). The New Zealand literature includes a number of reviews that focus on distilling principles and success factors from these case studies, providing rich practice-based evidence about what works and how it works, based on the observations of evaluators and front-line practitioners. However, objective measurement of outcomes is rare within the New Zealand literature, and this is a significant limitation of the current evidence base. Robust impact and outcome evaluation is not only methodologically challenging but also resource-intensive, and this may explain why the impacts of many community-level initiatives are not evaluated at all, or are evaluated using designs that do not allow for causal inferences to be made.

There has been recent discussion in the New Zealand literature about how and why community organisations should enhance their evaluation practices (Nowland-Foreman, 2013; Tunnicliffe, 2013). For example, in 2013 Community Waitakere commissioned a review of best practice in community-development evaluation (Tunnicliffe, 2013), Victoria University/Volunteering New Zealand published a literature review on impact measurement in the voluntary sector (Blue, 2013), and this year Inspiring Communities published a discussion paper on measuring community-led change (Inspiring Communities, 2015). Another recent development is the Community Research-initiated 'What Works' project, which is currently developing a website to help to assess the impact and outcomes from the work of tangata whenua, community and voluntary-sector organisations.

Recent international literature also focuses on the question of how to measure success – for example a series of reports from Tamarack in Canada (Weaver, Born, & Whaley, 2010; Whaley & Weaver, 2010). Evaluation of complex community-level initiatives is an evolving science, and recent international innovations have come from 'collective impact' initiatives. Compared to traditional collaborative place-based initiatives, 'collective impact' initiatives have a much stronger focus on shared measurement. Data intentionally drives alignment of key stakeholder plans and actions focused around tight goal areas. Recent US initiatives are providing new evidence of effectiveness, but are expensive and not appropriate for all contexts (Inspiring Communities & Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement, 2014).

## New Zealand examples

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### Victory Village

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Over the past 15 years, the ethnically diverse suburb of Victory (Nelson) has successfully transformed itself using a school-based, family-centred approach aimed at improving student achievement and providing integrated services and support to children, families and the wider community. Victory Village is a partnership between Victory Primary School and Victory Community Health, and provides a good example of how community-led development at the local level can break down silos between education, health and social sectors, with very positive results.



### Evidence of effectiveness

The Families Commission carried out a large qualitative research project to examine outcomes and success factors at Victory Village (Stuart, 2010). Participants identified a range of positive outcomes for students, families, the community, school and providers. Specific outcomes included:

- Stabilisation of the school roll – from a 60% turnover in 1999 to just 9% in 2008
- Significant improvements in student achievement – eg the percentage of Pacific pupils achieving at or above national average in numeracy improved from 50% in 2000 to 93% in 2009
- Reported increases in student motivation, engagement and self-efficacy, and improvements in student-teacher relationships
- Families reported better access to services, enhanced health and wellbeing, and more involvement in their children’s learning
- Community outcomes included stronger connections between families and closer links between school and families, which increased the effectiveness of teachers
- Health and social-service providers reported that Victory Village helped them to access clients and to improve service quality because of the collaboration and holistic approach (Stuart, 2010).

### How was effective community-level change achieved?

The early catalysts for the initiative in the mid-late 1990s were 1) poor student achievement, and 2) frustration about the perceived lack of social services for high-needs families in the area (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011). Victory Primary School began developing its vision and practices in a family-centred direction in the late 1990s, using Health Promoting Schools as an umbrella framework. The appointment of a Social Worker in Schools (SWIS) in 2000 provided a bridge between education and social sectors (Stuart, 2010), and in 2005 an MSD Community Initiatives Fund grant enabled a community-consultation project aimed at developing a more effective system of social services for residents.

Based on this foundation, a decision was taken to combine the development of a new school hall and an integrated community health centre (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011). The school-based Victory Village community hub acts as a multi-purpose community, health and recreation centre as well as school hall. The hub offers health services, recreational and social programmes and events, available for all in the community.

Families received support that addressed needs, but was adaptable and evolving as families circumstances, needs and capacities changed. Reciprocity was strongly evident – as people were helped, so they became helpers. There was a community-centredness to the work and a clear understanding about how child, family and community outcomes were interconnected. Relationships were a strong element of the underlying principles (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011 p 46).

The evaluation attributed success to several factors:

- Enhancing family and community wellbeing was a conscious aspiration.
- Activities were underpinned by strong underlying principles around development, relationships, leadership and professionalism.
- The approach was family-centred (rather than service-centred), and strengths-based (rather than positioning parents as needy or lacking capacity).

- Reciprocity was strongly evident – as people were helped, so they became helpers.
- The development of Victory Village was community-led, and professional collaboration was directed organically and responsively towards community aspirations and needs.
- Creation of ‘social infrastructure’ (a system of social services, networks and facilities to support families within communities) enabled strengths-based, holistic family development to be put into action.
- The multiple contributors to family health and wellbeing were recognised, with a multi-level, integrated approach across the school, providers and community – underpinned by good relationships throughout the system.
- The integration was considered just as important as the success of individual activities within the system – and the coming together of diverse providers and professionals has enhanced their individual and collective capacity to improve outcomes (Stuart, 2010).

## Tiakina ō Tātou Tamariki

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Tiakina ō Tātou Tamariki is a community-led development project run by Te Ora Hou Aotearoa, based in Kaiti (Gisborne) and Gonville (Whanganui), aimed at increasing social connectedness between neighbours, and creating communities that care. Remarkable and rapid changes were achieved in these two neighbourhoods, which previously had high rates of child maltreatment, youth offending, and family and street violence.

### Evidence of effectiveness

Neighbourhood surveys and government statistics show positive shifts between 2010 and 2013 in social-capital indicators, including:

- A 31% reduction in local crime in Kaiti over a three-year period (compared with a 4% drop in the wider Eastern Policing District)
- A large rise in the proportion of residents who report they enjoy living in Kaiti – from 67% to 100%
- Residents who knew the names of more than 10 children in their street in Kaiti increased from 12% to 38%.
- Both neighbourhoods had reductions in tenant transfer requests (Community-led Development Learning Collective, 2014).

Kaiti residents also reported: increases in community pride, connectedness and socialising among neighbours; reduction in social isolation; and reduced reliance on external professionals paid to support vulnerable families (Community-led Development Learning Collective, 2014).

### How was effective community-level change achieved?

The project employs a local co-ordinator to facilitate community engagement and mobilisation activities, which aim to encourage greater social cohesion, co-operation, concern, action and care between neighbours (Community-led Development Learning Collective, 2014). A number of partners are involved in the work, including local and central government agencies (eg local councils, DHBs, Police, Justice and Housing), iwi authorities and private funders. The project’s principles are adapted from ‘Strong Communities’ in South Carolina, including an asset-based approach, a focus on transforming community norms and structures, and activities facilitating manaakitanga and reciprocity (Campaign for Action on Family Violence, 2011).



The Kaiti project's neighbourhood revitalisation projects included public art projects, coffee groups, street re-naming, and the development of a fruit forest. In Gonville, regular neighbourhood gatherings attracted an average of 300 local participants, and a 'Kōrero Corner' led to the establishment of various neighbourhood-led projects (eg community gardens and driver-licensing courses). The community also advocated successfully for a new local playground and was consulted by council over the design and crime reduction measures.

### Success factors

Reported success factors include:

- A neighbourhood focus (ie place-based)
- Intentionally building connections and mobilising the community to take part in designing and implementing local plans to address key issues
- A focus on using and increasing local residents' skills and capacity
- Accessing locally specific data from statutory agencies (eg Census Area Unit and meshblock/street level), which helped create ownership of local issues related to welfare, health, education, crime, etc (Community-led Development Learning Collective, 2014).

## The Māori and Pacific Education Initiative (MPEI)

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The Māori and Pacific Education Initiative consists of nine projects led by Māori and Pacific educational and community groups aimed at significantly increasing educational success in Māori and Pacific communities. Funded by ASB Community Trust (now called Foundation North), its substantial investment – \$20 million over the first five years – recognised that addressing entrenched problems would require a strategic and sustained approach (Māori and Pacific Education Initiative & Hancock, 2012).

MPEI is an example of 'high engagement funding' based on mutual respect between the funder and the community, and an assumption that "communities know what is good for them, and must be able to speak for themselves and make their own decisions" (Kinnect Group, 2015). MPEI uses a community-development approach to engage with communities and to 'learn by doing'.

### Evidence of effectiveness

Evaluations of individual MPEI projects show that they are making a difference, and achieving impressive returns on investment. For example:

- Before the Mutukaroa programme was introduced at Sylvia Park School, less than 60% of Year 3 students were achieving 'at' or 'above' the Year 3 Star reading assessment standard, but by 2012 over 95% were achieving 'at' or 'above' (Williams, Ala'alatoa, & Trinick, 2015)
- Ninety-three percent of those who completed the Trades at School programme achieve NCEA Level 2, despite being a group statistically more at risk of not achieving. Ninety percent of Trades at School graduates are in employment or are continuing with their study at Level 3 and above (Kotoisuva, 2015).

An evaluation of the programme as a whole is currently underway. Documented lessons learned from the initiative to date include the following success factors.



### Success factors

- Unity of diverse peoples and organisations around a common cause and purpose
- Engagement with those communities most affected by the problem of educational underachievement to generate and devise solutions
- Investment by the funder in cultural competency and engagement, eg:
  - > Use of a reference group and selection committee that enabled Māori and Pacific leadership to shape the initiative
  - > Ongoing advice and engagement with internal and external Māori and Pacific advisors
  - > Community-based hui and fono promoting engagement with Māori and Pacific communities, as distinct from 'tick-the-box' consultation
- Taking time to get the foundations right
- Commitment to an open, transparent and supportive partnership approach between funder and recipients
- Investment in capacity development by providing consultants to work with applicants, recognising that "Some applicants needed a capacity-building bridge to establish the infrastructure required to implement their vision" (Māori and Pacific Education Initiative & Hancock, 2012, p 13)
- Recognition that a long-term, strategic approach also requires significant investment in establishment and ongoing administration of the initiative
- Investment in evaluation
- Recognition that a diversity of solutions are required, rather than a single solution – a combination of efforts can help to tackle the problem of educational underachievement as a whole (Māori and Pacific Education Initiative & Hancock, 2012).

### The Campaign for Action on Family Violence

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The Campaign for Action on Family Violence ('It's Not OK', 'Are You OK?') is a comprehensive campaign that seeks to change New Zealanders' awareness, understanding and behaviour to reduce family violence (Campaign for Action on Family Violence, 2011; Ministry of Social Development, 2007). Community action is one component of the campaign; others include mass-media advertising, communications and resources. The work was launched by the Taskforce for Action on Violence within Families in 2007. E Tu Whānau! and Pasefika Proud are ethnic-specific movements that grew out of this campaign

Through a Community Action Fund, 147 community-change projects were funded between 2007 and 2010 to support local efforts to prevent family violence (Campaign for Action on Family Violence, 2011). Other efforts to expand the reach of family-violence prevention include:

- A 'Many Voices' strategy – working with new partners outside the family-violence sector such as local government, businesses, sports teams, churches and youth organisations
- Partnerships with national non-government organisations, Police and local family-violence collaborative networks.



### Evidence of effectiveness

Evaluation suggests the campaign as a whole is impacting on public awareness, attitudes and behavioural intentions (Point Research Ltd, 2010). Research suggests the campaign has reached Māori and Pacific populations – for example, high recall and reports of taking action because of the campaign (Campaign for Action on Family Violence, 2011; Point Research Ltd, 2010). The campaign is also credited with contributing significantly to the increased reporting of family violence (Woodley & Palmer, 2014).

### Success factors

Although the community-action component has not been specifically evaluated, the campaign has examined community-action case studies to identify success factors, including:

- Strong collaboration and community connection
- Prevention skills – in family-violence prevention and community action and mobilisation
- Audience-focused activity – eg reaching people in their usual settings
- Active leadership – engaging and involving community leaders (eg mayor, coaches, local celebrities, kaumātua, kuia and church leaders)
- Reflection and evaluation – used to inform project development
- Campaign leverage – using national campaign branding and resources to generate more buy-in locally.

Case studies and success stories from projects funded by the Community Action Fund are available (Campaign for Action on Family Violence, 2011; Ministry of Social Development, 2007). A selected example follows.

Taiohi Morehu is a community-based project in the Hutt Valley that seeks to develop leadership of young Māori and Pasifika and engage them in the 'It's not OK' campaign as catalysts to positively influence behaviour in their whānau and communities. The project has made a positive impact in communities, built community connections, and supported "huge personal growth" for the rangatahi involved (Campaign for Action on Family Violence, 2011). The project has received several awards for contributing to reducing family violence and youth development. Success factors included being student-led and using Māori performing arts to promote non-violence as the norm. Wide involvement from whānau, schools, community networks, local NGOs, marae and government agencies helped to embed the project in the community and encouraged adults to learn alongside youth.

## Healthy Village Action Zones

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The Auckland and Waitematā DHBs have recently joined together to co-lead a joint action plan to improve Pacific health in their districts: Our Health in Our Hands – Pacific Health Action Plan 2013–2016 (Auckland DHB & Waitemata DHB, 2014). The plan highlights that everyday family choices make the biggest difference to health, and primary responsibility for health lies with the home, community and neighbourhood. Healthy Village Action Zones (HVAZ) is one of the initiatives in the plan and was co-designed with a number of partners including primary-care providers and Pacific churches and communities. It proposes a community-development approach where Pacific families and communities are acknowledged as best placed to design and deliver solutions.

Healthy Village Action Zones is a collaborative partnership programme that was originally established about 10 years ago between Auckland DHB, Pacific communities and other stakeholders in Auckland. HVAZ is delivered via around 50 church communities in central Auckland and uses a community-development approach to improve Pacific health outcomes. The HVAZ framework is informed by best practice and learning from previous community- and church-based health initiatives, Pacific concepts of community wellbeing, and an understanding of challenges and opportunities for Pacific peoples.

Services provided by HVAZ include nurse-led clinics held in church communities and six-week self-management education courses that have been adapted to Pacific cultures. In addition, the programme builds the capacity of churches to deliver physical activity and healthy eating programmes, using 'train the trainer' and mentoring approaches.

### Evidence of effectiveness

A four-year evaluation by the University of Auckland found:

- Partnerships between the DHB, primary health organisations (PHOs) and Pacific churches and their communities were established and strengthened, with health committee structures underway to drive change from within the communities
- Increased numbers of heart and diabetes checks after attending screening events
- Improved self-management of long-term health conditions
- Improvements in health outcomes such as weight loss
- Increases in health literacy
- Culturally appropriate changes to the delivery of the self-management education (SME) model has engaged and maintained the interest of participants, and helped to improve outcomes – eg all 20 Tongan participants attending a community-based SME session returned at three months for an update and had lost weight (Clinton & Percival, 2012).

### Success factors

The evaluation identified a number of success factors, including:

- The relationships built with church and community leadership, with full support of the church leaders seen as the most fundamental prerequisite for success
- Healthy Village Action Zone members working together as a team
- A shift in DHB thinking from 'delivering a programme' to a 'deprived area', to listening to the wisdom and expertise of the local community (Clinton & Percival, 2012).



The following is an example of a particular initiative undertaken as part of Healthy Village Action Zones.

For Us, By Us: Ora'anga Kopapa Matutu – a Cook Island Māori community-led development initiative in Tāmaki, Auckland. Initiated in 2006, the project was a collaboration between local residents, Pacific churches, physical fitness services, the Auckland DHB, and PHOs. It emerged from the Healthy Village Action Zones strategy, discussed above. Funding and resources for Ora'anga Kopapa Matutu were provided by two local Pacific NGO health providers.

Three Pacific churches in Glen Innes worked together to develop the health-promotion initiative, informed by community discussions where local people came up with their key health concerns and designed and led the programme. Aerobics classes were linked with healthy eating, weight loss, fitness and training for life-skills and employment. Doctors, nurses and allied health professionals partnered with the community to provide a holistic health-education programme and medical checks for the whole family. A competition was used to encourage motivation to lose weight, attend fitness classes and participate as a family.

Reported outcomes include weight loss, training in aerobics instruction, increased community pride, and increased ownership of health issues. Success factors included: community ownership and local leadership; shared vision and listening to each other; adapting to developments; a strengths-based approach; and whole-family involvement across generations (Office of the Community and Voluntary Sector, 2008).

## Amokura Family Violence Prevention Consortium

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Amokura Family Violence Prevention Consortium was a community violence-prevention initiative developed by seven Te Tai Tokerau iwi in 2004. It aimed to provide a whole-of-population, multi-level and kaupapa Māori approach to prevention and early intervention in whānau violence, and to co-ordinate community engagement. A consortium of iwi was previously underway, but funding from the Department of Child, Youth and Family enabled the group to work together to deliver Amokura (Grennell & Cram, 2008). The initiative was based on the Mauri Ora conceptual framework (Dobbs & Eruera, 2014; Kruger et al., 2004). The framework is an ecological and cultural approach to whānau violence prevention, acknowledging that whānau violence has complex causes, both historical and contemporary (Dobbs & Eruera, 2014).

The initiative consisted of four project areas: community awareness and promotion; provider development and training; research; and advocacy (Grennell & Cram, 2008). A wide range of activities were implemented, including:

- A social marketing campaign
- Kaupapa Māori wānanga and workforce training for practitioners and volunteers
- Advocacy for non-violence at multiple levels, ranging from local through to national
- Three kaupapa Māori, strengths-based research projects, and local and national dissemination of research and policy information
- Adoption of a policy of zero tolerance to violence by the iwi authorities (Dobbs & Eruera, 2014).

Principles underpinning the Amokura initiative included:

- A focus on strengthening whānau wellbeing
- Understanding 'whānau' as opposed to 'family'
- Advocating for zero tolerance of violence
- Dispelling the myth that whānau violence is normal or culturally valid (Dobbs & Eruera, 2014).

#### Evidence of effectiveness

Evaluation of the initiative's first three years found the project had met its objectives and often exceeded expectations (Grennell & Cram, 2008). Participants reported positive outcomes and feedback in post-workshop evaluations. The evaluation reported 'ripple-out' effects from the project's initiatives to the whole of the Northland community (Grennell & Cram, 2008). More than 80 Māori practitioners throughout Te Tai Tokerau graduated with the national qualification developed through Amokura wānanga (Dobbs & Eruera, 2014). In 2009 Amokura received an international human-rights award from the Leitner Centre of Fordham Law School, New York (Dobbs & Eruera, 2014).

Despite its promise, however, Amokura ceased to operate in 2011 due to government funding being re-appropriated towards front-line family violence services (Woodley & Palmer, 2014).

## Ngāti and Healthy

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The Ngāti and Healthy project was a community-wide population health intervention in Te Tairāwhiti that began in 2004. The intervention had three components: community-wide health promotion initiatives conveying healthy lifestyle messages; community education and monitoring for identified high-risk individuals and their extended families; and a structural strategy aimed at adapting local environments to support lifestyle changes. The intervention and its evaluation were designed using a participatory community-development model (Tipene-Leach et al., 2013).

The project was a partnership between Ngāti Porou Hauora and the Edgar National Centre for Diabetes and Obesity Research (now EDOR). It aimed to reduce the incidence of insulin resistance in the short term, and type 2 diabetes in the long term.

#### Evidence of effectiveness

Evaluation after two years found that participation in the Ngāti and Healthy intervention reduced insulin resistance prevalence in those with the highest level of participation and most marked lifestyle changes (Tipene-Leach et al., 2013). The intervention raised awareness of diabetes and prevention. There was also evidence of community mobilisation – community members began to take an active part in the design, set-up and running of community initiatives (eg walking groups and water-only schools), which is a critical feature of sustainable community interventions.



## International examples

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### Communities that Care

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Communities that Care (CTC) is a community-change process for preventing health and behaviour problems in young people (Jonkman et al., 2009; Kuklinski, Briney, Hawkins, & Catalano, 2012). Using a positive youth-development approach, CTC guides local community coalitions through a tested five-phase process – including tools to identify and prioritise risk and protective factors, and to set measurable goals. The five phases are: 1) Get Started, 2) Get Organised, 3) Develop a Community Profile, 4) Create a Community Action Plan, and 5) Implement and Evaluate. Initially developed by the University of Washington and funded by the US federal government, CTC has been implemented widely in the United States and internationally, including the UK and Australia.

#### Evidence of effectiveness

Evaluations have demonstrated improved outcomes in intervention compared with control communities (Jonkman et al., 2008; Kuklinski et al., 2012). An initial five-year randomised controlled efficacy trial of 12 CTC intervention communities and 12 control communities (2003–2008) demonstrated effectiveness. Students followed from Grade 5 to Grade 8 (10–13 years) in CTC communities reported significantly lower rates of smoking initiation, tobacco use, alcohol use and delinquency compared to their counterparts in control communities (Hawkins et al., 2009, cited in Kuklinski et al., 2012). For example, Grade 8 students in CTC communities were:

- 25% less likely than control community youths to have initiated delinquent behaviour
- 32% less likely to have initiated the use of alcohol, and
- 33% less likely to have initiated cigarette use.<sup>6</sup>

#### Evidence of cost-effectiveness

A cost-benefit analysis found CTC was a cost-beneficial preventive intervention and a good investment of public funds, even under “very conservative” assumptions (Kuklinski et al., 2012). For every dollar invested in CTC, \$5.30 is returned in the form of lower criminal-justice-system, crime-victimisation and health-care costs, and increased earnings and tax revenues. Under less conservative but still viable cost assumptions, the benefit-cost ratio due to prevention of smoking and delinquency increased to \$10.23 per \$1.00 invested.

#### Success factors

Evaluations have identified duration as an important factor. The timeframe for achieving posited changes in CTC is two to five years for community-level effects on risk and protective factors and four to 10 years for measurable effects on youth-behaviour problems at the community level (Kuklinski et al., 2012).

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<sup>6</sup> See: [www.communitiesthatcare.net/research-results/](http://www.communitiesthatcare.net/research-results/)

## Healthy Together Victoria

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Healthy Together Victoria is a comprehensive community-wide health-promotion initiative in Victoria, Australia. The initiative uses a 'whole-of-system' approach to prevent chronic disease and obesity, working collaboratively to build healthy places through policies and partnerships (Healthy Together Victoria, 2015). A systems approach means considering how the systems that influence health work and where best to intervene for optimal health and social outcomes – in a sustainable, cost-effective way. The initiative is jointly funded by the Victorian government and the federal Australian government.

Examples of the initiative's interventions are an achievement programme to support early childhood services, schools and workplaces to create healthier environments; healthy eating advisory services; public education and community engagement strategies; and a policy to guide the development of children and young people. The Healthy Together Victoria operates state-wide for all Victorians, but also resources local government to lead a concentrated community-level effort in 12 Healthy Together Communities.

Guiding principles include: collaboration for collective impact; learning and adaptation; small-scale experimentation; leadership; equity; and implementation at scale. Implementation at scale means that strategies are delivered at a scale likely to impact large numbers of people in the everyday settings where they spend most time – education, workplaces and communities (Tobin & Proimos, 2014). The initiative aims to ensure 'line of sight' to provide a transparent view on how investment is translated into measured impacts in communities, ensuring best value from every dollar spent on prevention. The national investment in Healthy Together Victoria is almost a billion Australian dollars over nine years (Swinburn, 2014).

### Evidence of effectiveness

Evaluation is underway, which aims to measure the impact of Victoria's prevention effort using whole-of-community outcomes (Healthy Together Victoria, 2014). The evaluation includes a randomised comparison trial of 12 Healthy Together Communities (compared with communities without the programme), which will enable robust findings.

### Success factors

New Zealand public-health expert Professor Boyd Swinburn sees Healthy Together Victoria as the international leader in large-scale community-based obesity prevention, for the following reasons:

- Its vision is large-scale and long-term, with a view to converting it into a true 'prevention system' over time.
- Its 'systems approach' is all about reorienting existing organisations and systems rather than delivering programs and activities. Training people in predominantly 'see and think' systems (rather than program delivery) allows a step up in the scalability, synergies and sustainability of changes.
- It has very visible and strong leadership from the Health Minister, David Davis, and a highly dynamic and driven bureaucracy, led by Dr Shelley Bowen. These individuals are named specifically because individual champions really matter in getting things done.
- It is a serious investment in prevention, with over 100 new positions sited within 12 high-need communities as the 'systems-activators'.



- It is both evidence-informed and evidence creating. Healthy Together Victoria is investing in evaluation and it has been set up so that the 12 high-investment communities can be evaluated against matched communities that do not have the on-the-ground positions. The random allocation within pairs to Healthy Together Victoria investment means a robust cluster comparison is possible (Swinburn, 2014).

## Vibrant Communities

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Vibrant Communities (VC) is a comprehensive community initiative in Canada, comprising a network of urban collaborations that use multi-sectoral local action to reduce poverty. Initiated in 2002, it is a partnership between Tamarack Institute, Caledon Institute of Social Policy (both non-profit organisations), and a private foundation (JW McConnell Foundation). A federal government skills-development agency was also involved in initiating and partially funding the work. Vibrant Communities provides community collaboratives with matching grants, policy and research support, learning opportunities and coaching in return for the communities' commitment to document and share what they learn (Inspiring Communities & Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement, 2014).

### Evidence of effectiveness

Vibrant Communities has been comprehensively evaluated (Gamble, 2010, 2012). The evaluation reported impacts in three areas: moving poverty up the public agenda; building collaboration and coordinated planning; and reducing the impact of poverty. Results include:

- Over its 10-year duration, VC positively impacted on 203,000 low-income households and drove over 50 substantial policy changes.
- Over 250 poverty-reduction initiatives were completed or underway locally, with over 400,000 poverty-reducing benefits to approximately 200,000 low-income households
- Over \$22 million has been invested in local communities. A \$10 million investment in VC by the JM McConnell Foundation leveraged a further \$23 million investment in local poverty-reduction efforts. McConnell's CEO considers VC to have been "value for money" (Inspiring Communities & Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement, 2014).

### Success factors

Vibrant Communities has benefited from long-term investments and a focus on evaluation and learning (Inspiring Communities & Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement, 2014). The first-phase evaluation (2002–2010) identified the following success factors:

- A strong, credible convening organisation with high aspirations and influence
- Clear purpose and approach
- Leadership of the initiative includes all participating sectors
- High degree of resident mobilisation is present in the work
- High use of research to inform the work
- Government support in the form of funding/investment; enabling through technical assistance and local coordination; and creation of a supportive policy environment.

## Strive Partnership

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Strive Partnership is a large, multi-agency, collective-impact partnership that aims to improve academic achievement from “cradle to career” in Cincinnati, USA. Since 2006, more than 300 cross-sector representatives (both public and private) have joined the partnership, including school district superintendents, early-childhood educators, non-profit practitioners, business leaders, community and corporate funders, city officials, and university presidents.

The partners agreed on a common set of goals, outcomes, and success indicators, such as: kindergarten readiness; fourth-grade reading and maths scores; high school graduation rates; and college completion. By aligning their work, setting goals together, and investing in a common vision, the partners aim to fundamentally change their approach to the current education system. The partnership's work seeks to support every child along every step from cradle to career. This work is carried out by: catalysing and supporting collaborative action; building a culture of continuous improvement by using data effectively to improve outcomes; and aligning leadership capacity and funding to what works (Strive Partnership, n.d.).

### Evidence of effectiveness

The Strive Partnership has achieved impressive results in a short period. Significant investment has attracted involvement from a wide range of key stakeholders, and data is actively used to drive decision-making and positive, community-level change (Inspiring Communities & Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement, 2014). Results achieved by the partnership include:

- In five years, the project's educational-attainment indicators have improved from 68% of indicators trending in the right direction in 2010/11 to almost 90% in 2012/13
- Increases in college-retention rates (first to second year) at four-year tertiary institutions since the baseline year (2010/11)
- Kindergarten readiness was 55% for Cincinnati for the 2012/13 school year, representing an 11-point gain from baseline.

An external evaluation found that Strive had added value to community-level efforts, particularly in its roles as a convener, capacity builder, 'network weaver' and promoter of data-driven decision-making (Strive Partnership, 2013). It also identified several challenges, including a lack of clarity about the partnership's structure, roles and responsibilities, and a need to improve internal communications mechanisms.

# 03

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How can central government best support community-level initiatives?



### Key points:

- The report describes the difficulties of developing a genuine partnership between a funder and a community and the challenges of devolving decision-making.
- Funders need to walk a fine line between a 'hands off' approach (intended to empower communities) and providing assistance to build capacity to deliver and be accountable, which if not done collaboratively can end up disempowering the community.
- The Department of Internal Affairs has tried to address some of these issues with their community led development project. However, improvement is still needed across central government.
- There is confusion about the purpose of government funding to communities. Government agencies need to be clear about whether they are purchasing services that they wish to fully specify, or are contributing to community-level initiatives.
- There is a tension between the political pressure for 'quick wins' and the need for longer timeframes for community-level initiatives.

Multiple reports and reviews over the past 15 years from New Zealand and overseas have provided advice to central government about the best ways to support community-level initiatives. Consistent themes in the literature are that, in order to enable effective community-level change, central government needs to:

- remove bureaucratic barriers
- collaborate
- enhance capacity at both community and government levels
- invest strategically, and
- create a supportive policy context.

"The message to government is 'First, get out of the way – then develop policies and frameworks that enable.'"

– Community Economic Development: Understanding the New Zealand Context (Jennings, 2014, p 15)



## Remove bureaucratic barriers

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A key message from the literature is that the culture and systems of central government agencies do not generally align well with the principles and practices of effective community-level work. Regulatory systems that are designed with large financial institutions in mind do not necessarily work well for small, community-based social enterprises, for example, and government's funding systems and accountability demands can actively work against community-level empowerment and innovation. The most consistent theme in the New Zealand literature on how government can support effective community-level change is that government needs to remove the bureaucratic barriers that are hindering community-led economic and social development.

## Compliance and regulatory barriers

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Community-level initiatives aimed at economic development and/or using business models present an exciting opportunity for government, since they represent a model of sustainable community-led change that is not reliant on ongoing public funding. However, as the example of the AWHI Credit Union (p 29) demonstrates, the viability of such initiatives may be compromised by compliance costs and regulatory barriers imposed by central government. Bureaucratic barriers identified in a recent report on community economic development and social enterprise include: Charities Services requirements; finance-related legislation for credit unions and co-operatives; and IRD restrictions (Jennings, 2014). The report makes a number of specific recommendations to government to alleviate these barriers, including:

- Expand the lending criteria of credit unions, building societies, and ethical financial institutions to permit lending to social enterprises
- Review Financial Markets Conduct Act 2013 to minimise compliance demands for the establishment of small community-led co-operatives and community shares initiatives
- Review Charities Services legislation and eliminate barriers to social enterprises. The research identified particular issues in the social housing area, and changes are recommended to enable shared home-ownership programmes for people who cannot afford a home to be viewed as 'charitable activity'.
- Review the Financial Markets Authority and Reserve Bank legislation to create a low-income credit union designation that enables different tiers of compliance requirements for different sized organisations (Jennings, 2014, p 20-21).

## Funding and accountability arrangements

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For initiatives that rely on government or philanthropic funding via grants or contracts, the difficulties associated with existing funding and accountability arrangements are a recurring theme in the literature. As discussed in Section 1, community providers have consistently raised concerns about grants or contracts that: are insecure or short-term; are overly prescriptive and/or inflexible; require applicants to set project outcomes at the proposal stage, before funding has been released, to enable community engagement and visioning activities; provide insufficient funding to carry out work based on the principles and practices of effective community-level initiatives; or include onerous application and accountability requirements.



While some government agencies have made efforts to address some of these issues (DIA's community-led development project provides a well-documented example), recent literature suggests improvement is needed across a range of government agencies.

A fundamental issue may be the dominant 'contract for service' or 'contracting out' model of government funding, which is arguably unsuitable for funding community-led initiatives. A 1999 review noted that "there has been a tendency to confuse devolution of service delivery by government departments with community development" (France, 1999). France explains that community development is different from service delivery in that its purpose is empowerment and participation of communities, and developing a community vision for change. Community development includes local capacity-building as an explicit aim and implies accountability to community members rather than to the government. Commentators note that delivering on government contracts may actually detract from iwi/community capacity to define and achieve their own goals, rather than enable community-led change (Sankar, 2003).

It appears that confusion about the purpose of government funding to communities still prevails, with the More Effective Services: Draft Report noting: "Ambiguity often exists around whether government agencies are purchasing services that they wish to fully specify, or contributing to programmes originated by non-government providers" (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2015). The report sets out a range of commissioning models of which 'contracting out' is only one. An alternative is shared-goals models that "appeal to intrinsic motivation of players and also pursue common ownership of problems and goals, and so encourage constructive and integrated problem solving and creative solutions" (p 7). Consideration of such alternative models should be part of the development of a strategic investment approach to supporting effective community-level change.

According to the literature, key immediate steps that government can take are to ensure:

- Application and accountability requirements are as simple as possible, and in step with the amount of funding provided
- Agreements are flexible, and allow project objectives and timelines to change as the project develops
- Funding (and time) is sufficient to allow the principles and practices of effective community-level work to be put into action.

In summary:

- Government regulations, compliance demands and funding arrangements can actively work against the ability of communities to transform themselves
- Removing bureaucratic barriers to effective community-level change is a key way in which central government can support such change.



## Collaborate

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It is widely agreed that central government has a key role to play in effecting community-level change, alongside the tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector, local government, and business (Building Better Government Engagement Reference Group, 2009; France, 1999; Torjman, Leviten-Reid, & Cabaj, 2004). No sector on its own has the ability to solve complex social problems, and therefore collaboration is essential.

Collaboration is built on a shared interest in outcomes, and there may be significant overlap between what government is trying to achieve and what communities want for themselves.

Government outcomes and community outcomes are not necessarily the same, but communities/iwi/hapū can make an important contribution to social and economic development outcomes. Communities have various resources that they invest in their own development (such as volunteer hours, capital, skills and local knowledge) to achieve the goals communities want to achieve. Community resources, including those of the business and philanthropic sectors, can be utilised together with resources of central and local government and the private sector to better achieve these shared goals (Department of Internal Affairs, 2002).

For a long time, communities have said that they want to work in genuine partnership with government (France, 1999). However, there are inherent challenges and tensions in collaboration between government and communities. For example, a key principle for effective community-level change is community self-determination, but where the government provides funding for community-level initiatives, communities may feel this independence is compromised. Community and government may have different priorities, and community providers have sometimes described a tension between accountability to the community, versus accountability to the funder (Ministry of Health, 2008; Moewaka Barnes, 2009). A similar tension can arise when government agencies provide direct support (eg coaching) for community-level initiatives: “Funders of community development initiatives appeared to walk a fine line between a ‘hands off’ approach intended to empower communities and the provision of direct assistance to community groups to help them to build their capacity to meet project requirements” (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011). The power imbalance between the central government and community sector agencies heightens this tension, and has been described as a key challenge in the relationship between government and community (Torjman et al., 2004).

From the central government perspective, there are considerable risks and uncertainties in embarking on shared work or devolving power to communities, and this may be antithetical to government settings that are often highly risk-averse (Gardner, 2011; Inspiring Communities & Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement, 2014; Jennings, 2014). There is also a tension between the political pressure for ‘quick wins’ and the need for long-term timeframes for community-level initiatives. For example a New Zealand meta-analysis of community action projects found: “Almost all participants in the meta-analysis saw community action as a developmental process; however some funding officials noted that this perspective is often at odds with their focus on outcomes linked to a three-yearly political cycle” (Greenaway & Witten, 2006). There may also be political risks in government getting involved in work that may challenge current government policies – for example, community-level initiatives aimed at reducing poverty or inequality that might highlight deficiencies in current policies (Casswell, 2001).

Despite these risks and tensions, there is clear evidence that collaboration between government and community agencies aids community-level initiatives (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011). Collaboration between public-sector agencies (eg MSD, Te Puni Kōkiri, Police, DHBs, local authorities and schools) also aids community-level initiatives, as discussed by authors of a meta-analysis of community action projects:

This analysis strongly supports arguments that the development of community capacity requires changing the dynamics of relationships between and across governmental and non-governmental organisations. Where government agencies had strong and effective relationships and worked together on particular issues, major enhancement for the community action projects was evident (Greenaway & Witten, 2006).

The Department of Internal Affairs review of government-funded community-development programmes noted that collaboration is most effective when it occurs at the local level (and this is also evidenced in the examples of successful collaboration presented in Section 2). According to the DIA review, key lessons learned about successful collaboration at the local/regional level were:

- Effective collaboration occurs when key stakeholders have a shared interest in outcomes and accountabilities
- Collaboration is likely to be strengthened by a government mandate to collaborate
- Relationship development and collaboration takes time and resources, and needs to be prioritised and funded
- Sponsoring/funding agencies can assist collaboration by advocating on behalf of project leaders, and encouraging government agencies at the regional/local level to support the initiative (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011).

However, a number of reports highlight room for improvement in central government agencies' commitment to, and skills for, collaborating with community organisations. For example, in its report to the Office of the Community and Voluntary Sector, the Building Better Government Engagement Reference Group concluded: "Central government agencies are not yet sufficiently committed to, and skilled at, collaborating with citizens and community organisations in order to jointly tackle social problems" (Building Better Government Engagement Reference Group, 2009, p 1).

The need for capacity-building at the central government level is discussed further below (see "Enhance capacity at both community and government levels").

In summary:

- There are inherent tensions and challenges in collaboration between central government and communities to effect community-level change.
- To date successful collaboration between communities and central government (and between government agencies) is most evident at the local level, where public-sector staff are often key enablers of successful community-level initiatives.
- As a funder/project sponsor, government can support collaboration at the project level by: 1) mandating collaboration, 2) recognising the time/resources required and funding appropriately, and 3) encouraging government agencies at the local/regional level to support the initiative and work together.



## Enhance capacity at both community and government levels

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A further theme identified in the literature is that central government can support effective community-level initiatives by enabling capacity for such work at both government and community-levels. This implies adapting systems and improving the skills of central government staff, and providing technical assistance, funding, and other support to enhance capacity at the community-level.

At the central government level, there is considerable adaptation required to establish the systems, roles and processes required to facilitate local, collaborative, cross-sector work (Inspiring Communities & Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement, 2014). Key knowledge and skills needed by government staff, according to the literature, include:

- Expertise in community development – eg understanding of underlying principles and how to put these into action (Department of Internal Affairs, 2012; Greenaway & Witten, 2006)
- The ability to facilitate community-development processes and translate between government and community sectors (Jennings, 2014)
- Knowledge and understanding of the community, including culture and values (France, 1999)
- Cultural competence in working with Māori, Pacific and other ethnic communities (Māori and Pacific Education Initiative & Hancock, 2012).

As previously noted, ongoing training for government staff involved in DIA's community-led development trial, was shown to have positive impacts for the staff themselves and the communities they were working with (Department of Internal Affairs, 2015).

Government can support capacity-building at the local community-level by providing technical support such as coaching/mentoring, evaluation and learning support (Inspiring Communities & Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement, 2014). Skill and knowledge gaps identified at the community-level include:

- Strategic planning (Sankar et al, 2003, Jennings, 2014)
- Business acumen (Jennings, 2014)
- Human resources (Department of Internal Affairs, 2013)
- Management (France, 1999)
- Evaluation (France, 1999; Inspiring Communities & Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement, 2014).

There is some discussion in the literature as to how such support should be provided: directly by government agencies, via third-party consultants, or via skill-sharing within the community. Various models have been used successfully – for example, in the DIA community-led development project, ‘community advisors’ employed in regional DIA offices provided support to communities. A key finding of the Year 3 evaluation was that communities appreciated and valued the services provided by the community advisors, and the relationship was seen as key (Department of Internal Affairs, 2015). Third-party support is suggested in the literature where government agencies/funders lack the specific technical skills required (eg business acumen) (Jennings, 2014; Māori and Pacific Education Initiative & Hancock, 2012), or as a way of ensuring community ownership and control. The latter approach was taken in the MSD’s Whānau Development Project, but the evaluation findings indicated that communities would have preferred a direct relationship with the Ministry (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011). This suggests that where third-party technical support is provided, it should be provided in addition to rather than instead of an ongoing and direct relationship with the funder. An example of this dual model is provided in the Māori and Pacific Education Initiative (see p 35), which employs a high-engagement funding model, along with technical assistance provided by consultants.

The literature suggests that another important way that government can provide support is by facilitating access to local-level government data (France, 1999; Torjman et al., 2004). Local data can aid community understanding and ownership of local issues, and catalyse community action, as demonstrated in the Tiakina ō Tātou Tamariki example (see p 34).

International literature on ‘collective impact’<sup>7</sup> suggests that ‘backbone support’ is an essential condition for achieving collective impact. This means “An independent funded staff dedicated to the initiative [that] provides ongoing support by guiding the initiative’s vision and strategy, supporting aligned activities, establishing shared measurement practices, building public will, advancing policy and mobilizing resources’ (Kania, Hanleybrown, & Juster, undated). In government-initiated projects (eg the Campaign for Action on Family Violence), provision of this ‘backbone support’ is a key role for central government.

In summary:

- Central government can support effective community-level interventions by enhancing capacity at both government and community-levels.
- Central government agencies need to establish the internal systems, roles and processes required to facilitate local, collaborative, cross-sector work.
- Capacity-building at the community-level can be enhanced by provision of training, mentoring, and technical support – either directly by government agencies, through skill-sharing within the community, or through a third party.

7 ‘Collective impact’ is defined as a collaborative, disciplined, cross-sector approach to solving social and environmental problems on a large scale (Kania et al., undated).



## Invest strategically

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Current government-initiated community-level projects and policy strategies largely encourage short-term, fragmented, and relatively rigid approaches that undermine the effectiveness of community-level initiatives (Torjman et al., 2004). “Communities and hapū/iwi continue to complain of consultation burn-out, duplication of initiatives, inadequate or inappropriate resourcing, and lack of coordination across the ‘sector silos’ of government” (Department of Internal Affairs, 2002, p 20). There is a need to create an environment that supports longer-term, comprehensive and collaborative approaches, based on best practice in community-level change. Addressing complex social problems requires “a set of linked interventions undertaken by all orders of government working in collaboration with communities” (Torjman et al., 2004). Where the aim is to address complex social issues such as poverty or family violence, community-level initiatives should be seen as one strand in a comprehensive cross-government approach that includes policy and systemic change.

Effective community-level change relies heavily on a vibrant and active tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector. However, recent literature reflects ongoing concerns that this sector is being undermined by government underfunding and contracting arrangements that stifle innovation (Neilson, Sedgwick, & Grey, 2015; New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2015).

A large portion of government’s community-building efforts have been targeted at the direct service delivery or ‘front end’ of the value chain: provision of information and funding and overseeing service contracts. In effect, these forms of support, while ensuring some immediate service delivery, are often short-sighted and deplete rather than build the capabilities of communities and iwi/hapū to carry out their own development (Department of Internal Affairs, 2002).

This conclusion is supported by the Emerging Learnings from CEDAR report, which notes that “there is a perceived lack of coordination among government agencies working with community groups, particularly in the area of funding and resourcing.” Both community groups and government agencies said this limited the impact of community development at the macro level (Sankar & Wong, 2003).

For instance [both case study organisations] source their funding from a variety of central and local government agencies. Since the funding is focused exclusively on [each agency’s] own aims and outcomes, the organisations are forced to treat each funding proposal separately and in isolation. Consequently, the unacknowledged overlap and the pressure on already limited resources often ends up eroding rather than building organisational capacity (Sankar & Wong, 2003).

This points to a need for a more co-ordinated approach to investment across central government. There is a need to invest in organisations and community infrastructure as well as front-end interventions (Inspiring Communities & Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement, 2014).

Integral to a strategic-investment approach is a commitment to learning and continuous improvement. The recent *More Effective Social Services: Draft Report* suggests that this has not been a strength to date: “Government agencies have been largely unsuccessful in recognising and spreading the lessons from existing services and new initiatives” (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2015, p 5). After two decades of trials, pilots and reviews, many lessons about what works and what does not work at the community-level have been documented. There is also considerable existing knowledge about how government can best support successful community-level initiatives. What appears to be lacking are mechanisms for disseminating that learning and putting it into practice. As well as disseminating and embedding current knowledge, there is also a role for central government in investing in robust impact and outcome evaluation that is built in to interventions, and supporting forums for cross-fertilisation and knowledge-sharing between sectors and communities.

In summary:

- A key role for central government is to create an environment that supports longer-term, comprehensive and collaborative approaches, based on best practice in community-level change.
- There is a need to co-ordinate efforts across central and local government agencies to build strong, resilient communities.
- Government can better support community-level change by investing in organisations and community infrastructure as well as front-end interventions.
- Investment should be evidence-informed, and mechanisms for disseminating learning and putting it into practice are needed.

## Create a supportive policy context

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Across government, policies and regulations need to be aligned so that they support, rather than undermine, the goal of helping communities to help themselves. This can be through direct policies on community-level investment and funding, procurement policies, and also broader social and economic policies that affect the capacity of communities to engage in community action (Torjman et al., 2004). To achieve such alignment, greater co-ordination is needed within and across central government departments, based on a high-level commitment to community-level work.

Successive New Zealand governments have recognised the key role communities can play in achieving social policy goals, and the importance of building strong, resilient communities. However, government support for community-level initiatives remains fragmented and unco-ordinated, and key opportunities to support communities to help themselves are being missed.

For example, Jennings (2014) notes a surprising lack of central government interest in community economic development (CED) and social enterprise, given the broad social, economic and environmental benefits attainable at little or no cost to the taxpayer: “There are many fine examples of CED and social enterprise in our communities...but the foundations and systemic supports are not in place to enable this space to grow and thrive as it potentially could” (Jennings, 2014, p 7).



Commentators note that government procurement policies and practices do not currently recognise or value the wider community benefits provided by not-for-profit social-service providers (Neilson et al., 2015) or social enterprises (Jennings, 2014). These benefits include employment, social inclusion, empowerment, and development of community capacity to address issues collectively (Burkett, 2010; Neilson et al., 2015). There is an opportunity for the New Zealand government to follow Australia and other governments in promoting a social-procurement approach, wherein government agencies harness their procurement budgets to deliver additional social value in communities (Burkett, 2010).

Central government also has an important role to play in creating a policy environment that supports the achievement of communities' objectives – for example, reducing alcohol harm, reducing family violence, or reducing unemployment. As previously noted, "Community initiatives depend on a supportive policy environment to make a difference in people's lives. Local-level action in isolation is unlikely to ameliorate the effects of a policy environment hostile to its goals" (Casswell, 2001).

In summary:

- A key role of central government is to create an environment in which community-level innovation and entrepreneurialism can thrive.
- Broader social and economic policies can impact on the capacity of communities to develop local action.
- The impact of community-level initiatives is enhanced when their objectives are supported by the wider policy environment.
- Social procurement may be an innovative way for government to support communities and deliver additional social value.

"Poverty is a complex issue shaped by multiple forces at multiple levels. Solutions will require effective collaboration between multiple stakeholders, careful attention to both local contexts and macro influences, a long term investment horizon, a commitment to learning, and patience and time to see transformative results."

– Collective and Collaborative Place Based Initiatives: What Works, What Matters and Why (Inspiring Communities and Tamarack, 2014, p 3)

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