

# Council–Māori engagement



## The benefits of building good relationships with Māori

Councils have statutory responsibilities to engage with Māori and to recognise the Treaty of Waitangi. Apart from these requirements there is an increasing understanding that early and meaningful engagement with one another can result in more informed decision-making, more streamlined processes and better quality outcomes.

For both Māori organisations and councils closer engagement can contribute to:

- a greater understanding of one another's expectations and aspirations
- increased opportunities to establish shared projects and joint ventures
- improved processes based on an understanding of one another's priorities, expectations, and available resources
- more efficient and effective use of council and Māori resources
- supporting Māori expectations and aspirations in order to promote the well-being of Māori and the wider community.

*"Local government in our small, rapidly changing country could never be easy. It is, I think, where the rubber meets the road. While so much of the so-called race debate is played out in national politics, it is at the local level that communities must resolve the real challenges of growing diversity. And they must do that not via media-driven sound-bites, but face to face. That is much harder. It is also far more likely to produce positive outcomes."*

Chief Judge Joe Williams. Chief Judge of the Māori Land Court and Chairperson of the Waitangi Tribunal.

Keynote address for *Local Government New Zealand's* annual conference, 2005.

## Statutory responsibilities

The Local Government Act 2002 recognises and respects the Crown's obligations under the Treaty of Waitangi by placing some specific obligations on councils. These obligations are intended to facilitate participation by Māori in local authorities' decision-making processes. The Act includes requirements for councils to:

- ensure they provide opportunities for Māori to contribute to decision-making processes
- establish and maintain processes for Māori to contribute to decision-making
- consider ways in which they can foster the development of Māori capacity to contribute to decision-making processes
- provide relevant information to Māori
- take into account the relationship of Māori and their culture and traditions with their ancestral land, water, sites, wāhi tapu, valued flora and fauna, and other taonga.

The Local Government Act 2002 charges local authorities with a clear responsibility to take an informed approach to how decision-making can benefit Māori community well-being. This means that local authorities need to understand Māori community values, issues and aspirations as they relate to economic, social, cultural and environmental well-being, just as they need to understand those of other communities. The intent is for both local authorities and Māori organisations to move beyond engaging on matters of environmental or cultural importance only.



## Council and Māori diversity

Local government and Māori are diverse and any relationship between them may begin from differing starting points. Each brings a unique history and understanding of that history. Each holds to a different set of aspirations, which the other may or may not understand. Each has differing resources and capabilities. Each has particular ways of implementing policy, practices and thinking.

The diversity within local government and among Māori and the differences between them predict that there will not be one right way but many ways for them to work with and engage with the other.

## Strengthening Council–Māori engagement

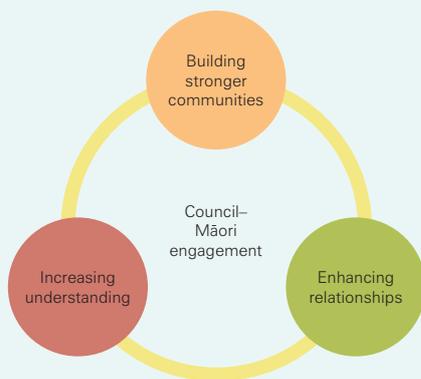
There are many practical ways that councils and Māori organisations can improve their engagement with one another. Lasting and meaningful engagement is built through working together across a range of areas and activities. This involves long-term investment in relationships and a comprehensive approach to policy and activities, rather than interaction on an issue by issue basis.

Strengthening Council–Māori engagement involves:

**Increasing understanding** – building the capability of councils to engage with Māori communities. Examples in this area are focused on awareness, knowledge and understanding.

**Enhancing relationships** – developing lasting and meaningful relationships. This involves formal and informal interaction across a wide range of activities and issues.

**Building stronger communities** – working together to develop and deliver policies, programmes and services that promote the well-being of Māori communities and the wider community.



## Who should councils engage with?

Councils have relationships with Māori at a number of levels: as residents and ratepayers, as a particular community of interest, and as tāngata whenua (the iwi or hapū that exercise customary authority in a particular area). When it comes to establishing relationships, it's important to engage at the right level, with the right people, on the appropriate issues.

While the Resource Management Act 1991 provided for participation of iwi, hapū and tāngata whenua as kaitiaki, the Local Government Act 2002 refers to "Māori". Māori are not defined in the Act, nor does it direct councils to any particular Māori groups. This difference means that participation in

decision-making may involve a range of groups and individuals beyond those affiliated to the local iwi and hapū. The Act does not refer to generally recognised and known collectives such as iwi, hapū, rūnanga or urban authorities. Consequently, the decision about who should be engaged and how these relationships will work needs to be identified and established at a local level to reflect the diversity of Māori collectives and structures.

*"What works is engagement – working with people and developing a relationship where both parties contribute towards resolving issues."*

Donald Couch, Deputy Kaiwhakahaere Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu and representative Te Hapū o Ngāti Wheke (Rapaki).

## Building capacity and capability

It's important for both councils and Māori to build their capacity and capability to engage with one another. Both parties need to be adequately informed and resourced in order to achieve positive outcomes for their communities.

The Local Government Act 2002 recognises this by including a requirement that councils develop and implement processes and opportunities which will strengthen Māori capacity to contribute to decision-making processes. Councils and Māori have identified many opportunities for joint capacity building including: skill exchanges and secondments, learning and development initiatives, and resourcing Māori participation.

Some councils have found it useful to develop a strategic plan or policy to support internal capability building. Such a plan can stand alone as an internal document or can be part of a wider plan setting out how the council and iwi, hapū and Māori groups will work together.

Councils may also have staff with a specific iwi liaison role. These staff have particular knowledge, skills and expertise and often take a lead role in promoting awareness and policy development to support engagement with Māori. In other councils iwi liaison roles fall to other staff that have a range of responsibilities, or the responsibility is shared by all staff and elected members.

Whatever the arrangement, it's important that elected members and senior management provide leadership and support, and ensure that appropriate organisational processes and resources are in place to fulfil the council's obligations to build Māori capacity and engage with the Māori community for positive outcomes.

## More info

For further information on Council–Māori engagement go to [www.lgnz.co.nz](http://www.lgnz.co.nz)



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