

THE PETER MCKENZIE PROJECT: FUNDING UPSTREAM OR 'SYSTEMS CHANGE' WORK

Upstream, or systems change work, designed to impact the cause of poverty is an emerging area. Philanthropic funding has tended to be directed towards short-term projects with a clear story and measurable outcomes. In contrast, the Peter McKenzie Project (PMP) funds untested ideas of how complex, multi-generational factors that hold people in poverty might be tackled. This is the story of what we have learned about the conditions that support groups to be successful.

UPSTREAM WORK REQUIRES A DIFFERENT FUNDING APPROACH

On a practical level the PMP Committee believes addressing the causes of poverty and hardship, and supporting whānau to flourish requires a different funding approach, including:

Longer-term, multi-year resourcing: A longer-term funding commitment is needed as it is going to take time to understand, identify and shift the root causes of poverty.

Resourcing courageous and experimental ideas:

Untested ideas can struggle to secure funding from other sources.

SEVERAL CONDITIONS HELP SUPPORT SUCCESS

PMP believes the risk of failure is mitigated by the following conditions.

A strong relational approach between staff, the Committee and ngā Kaikōkiri:

Transparent and honest conversations between ngā Kaikōkiri and funders are an effective form of risk management. The approach, including long-term funding agreements, builds trust.

An evaluative approach centred on reflective practice: Ngā Kaikōkiri are encouraged to undertake an evaluative approach useful to their organisation in which accountability faces towards the communities they are working with. They are also encouraged to take a developmental evaluative approach which focuses on learning, being nimble and adapting. The approach works well in emergent and fast-changing situations as it is highly adaptive.

A flexible funding approach: Working long-term with complex systems requires a funding approach that enables ngā Kaikōkiri to adapt in real time to changing conditions and new understandings without having to constantly modify their funding agreements. Agreements are not tied to activities, enabling more autonomy and creativity.

A high tolerance for risk: Current approaches are failing whānau. While funding innovative, high-risk initiatives might be unsuccessful, if they work, they have the potential to deliver game-changing and long-lasting impacts.

Learning and sharing: PMP provides opportunities to meet together through a Community of Practice, learning hui and via a fund established to allow groups to connect with each other. These provide opportunities to learn together about what is being tried, what is working, what is not, to share progress and to deepen the collective understanding of what it takes to work in this way.

Leveraging the work: Sharing information, networking and collaborating is also helping to strengthen and leverage the work and create a more connected and powerful movement for change.

Shared purpose: Ngā Kaikōkiri are contributing to the overall PMP vision. In a more traditional model, groups are funded to carry out their work. There is no overall project.

There is evidence the PMP approach is supporting outcomes; that this high trust model actually lowers risk. While it is early days for some Kaikōkiri, others are reporting significant changes which are emerging from their work.

Their mahi is making a difference.

Source: PMP Outcomes Mapping report, June 2021.)

It's hard to shift funders' thinking from a tangible product, a widget, to funding a process.

There's so much knowledge in that [kaikōkiri] group. [We appreciate] the chance to get together, listen to each other's stories and find out what the learnings are.

Being connected to ngā Kaikōkiri fills my tank.

We're all part of the shared aspiration of ensuring our rangatahi thrive and flourish. That's totally different from just being a recipient of funding.



Peter McKenzie Project