

## **“Outside the box but kinda in the box”: Evaluating with a rural Māori community**

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Mount Ruapehu, locally known as Matua Te Mana, is the metaphorical ancestor of Māori living around the rural community of Raetihi. Matua Te Mana has a significant presence and is pivotal to the health and wellbeing of local iwi. Whānau are leading Te Puāwai o Te Ahi Kaa innovation project, based at Te Puke Marae, in partnership with Te Oranganui. The latter is the Whanganui regional Māori health and social services provider. This Ministry of Health-funded, 3-year, Whānau Ora-focused and innovative model of care seeks to enhance the wellbeing of whānau who maintain Te Puke Marae’s ahi kā. Whakauae Research for Māori Health and Development is evaluating the project alongside the project partners.

Using a kaupapa Māori approach to evaluation, this article explores how Whakauae has contributed to project outcomes being achieved. A key challenge to the successful conduct of the evaluation was Whakauae’s lack of an immediately available senior Māori lead evaluator. This challenge, and the strategies adopted to address it, are explored by including a strong focus on both internal and external evaluation capability building. Capability building spanned internal

support of an emerging Whakauae lead evaluator by the wider Whakauae team, as well as involving project kaimahi in developing and using whānau-friendly, interactive data collection tools, and in formal evaluation practice forums. We conclude that using a kaupapa Māori approach contributes to “growing” evaluation capability as well as to the sustainability of the marae-based communities that are key to whānau health and wellbeing.

### ***Te Puāwai o te Ahi Kaa: The project and its background***

In 2009 the Associate Minister of Health, the Hon Tariana Turia, launched the Ministry of Health’s Te Ao Auahatanga Hauora Māori: Māori Health Innovations Fund. The contestable funding for the period 2009–2013 was made available to Māori health-service providers to support the development and delivery of innovative models of care that were not currently in receipt of other public funding. Te Ao Auahatanga, the Minister explained, took “its genesis from two of the key strengths characteristic of Māori [health and social services] providers—the capacity to be innovative, and the vast experience our providers have in delivering on the commitment to whānau ora” (Turia, 2009). According to Turia (2009), Te Ao Auahatanga funding would contribute to innovative Māori models of care being identified, further developed and, ultimately, more widely shared across Māori communities for the benefit of all.

Funding eligibility criteria were refined in the 2013–2017 funding round to focus on innovation projects specifically aimed at improving outcomes for whānau and child health. Refinements were intended to ensure explicit alignment of the funded innovations with the state’s Whānau Ora public policy approach, launched in 2010. Whānau Ora, broadly translated as the wellbeing of the extended family, is expected to improve the responsiveness of the wider social services to Māori (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2015). Māori

health-service providers were invited to submit proposals, under Te Kākanō Seeding Innovation category, for the funding of the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of innovative models of Whānau Ora-focused service delivery (Ministry of Health, 2012).

Te Oranganui, a Whanganui-based regional iwi health and social services provider, was successful in being awarded Te Kākanō funding in partnership with the Ngāti Uenuku people of Te Puke Marae. Te Puke Marae is located on the fringes of the central North Island rural community of Raetihi. Mount Ruapehu, locally known as Matua Te Mana, is the metaphorical ancestor of Ngāti Uenuku and has a significant presence; it is considered by Ngāti Uenuku to be pivotal to their health and wellbeing. Innovation funding was awarded to the partners to develop and implement a kaupapa Māori innovation project, Te Puāwai o te Ahi Kaa (TPoTAK). The marae performs a role as the home base of the hapū, and a place of cultural sustenance and vitality for whānau. TPoTAK aimed to enhance the health and wellbeing of whānau who have remained “at home” in the Raetihi area, resisting the tide of urban drift. These whānau are critical to maintaining the sustainability and future of the marae.

TPoTAK was inspired by the desire of marae whānau to ensure their good health and wellbeing; wellbeing considered inseparable from that of the marae itself. Many whānau were struggling with health issues and with unmet health needs just as the marae was struggling to maintain its vitality with too few whānau engaged in contributing to its wellbeing on a day-to-day basis. The TPoTAK project set out to identify where whānau were struggling, and why, and to build on the strengths of the whānau, and act alongside them to bring about positive change at the levels of the individual, the marae and the wider community (Te Oranganui, 2014).

A TPoTAK advisory group was established by the partners to guide the project work. The group included two marae trustees—a

kuia and a koroheke—as well as a Te Oranganui senior management team representative. A 0.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) kaimahi and 0.6 FTE kaiwhakahaere (operations manager)/kaimahi were then appointed to lead TPoTAK engagement with Te Puke Marae whānau. Both kaimahi had whakapapa to Ngāti Uenuku. In June 2014, the project was officially launched with a pōwhiri at the marae.

The kaimahi and kaiwhakahaere initially worked with whānau to develop a whānau-owned TPoTAK project plan. As a starting point, it was agreed that a clear picture of the main health-related issues facing whānau was needed. For that purpose, the kaimahi designed a whānau health survey and needs assessment which they then implemented over a period of several months. The survey questionnaire was completed by 51 whānau, representing half of the 100 whānau still living around the area with identified whakapapa links to Te Puke Marae. The survey results, along with kaimahi kōrero with whānau, were used to determine initial priorities to support growth in whānau health literacy and healthy behaviours as well as in improving access to a whole raft of health and wider social services. Activities prioritised for immediate action included the following.

- Coordinating marae-based whānau health checks, using health workers with the competencies to work effectively with whānau, and supporting whānau participation.
- Identifying available health and social service providers, their range of services, access criteria, and referral processes.
- Increasing whānau awareness of the above service provision, and facilitating whānau access, with an initial focus on services including subsidised dental care for under 18s and smoking cessation.
- Increasing awareness of the hereditary health conditions common among whānau along with strategies for prevention and, where necessary, their management.

- Sharing the knowledge and tools to develop and maintain māra kai.
- Improving lines of communication between whānau and State child welfare services (Te Oranganui, n.d.).

A TPoTAK programme of action was framed around these key activities with the aim of reviewing and refining the priorities, at strategic points, over the term of the project.

### ***Evaluation background and approach***

The TPoTAK partners were required to appoint a Ministry of Health-approved, external evaluator to design and carry out an evaluation to run alongside the project. The partners were keen to commission an evaluator who would be a “good fit” with the project, having a sound grasp of its te ao Māori approach and intent. For the evaluation to be of use to the partners it needed to be conducted in a way that would resonate with the Māori worldview underpinning both TPoTAK and Te Ao Auahatanga Hauora Māori Fund. As Masters-Awatere & Nikora (2017, p. 57) posit, “programmes funded on the basis of a Māori worldview to effect change should also be evaluated against standards from that same worldview”. Additionally, the evaluator appointed would need to recognise and accommodate the realities of the project’s complex delivery milieu, including the socioeconomic deprivation of the marae community and its relative geographical isolation. The National Health Committee (2010) draws attention to these factors, noting “the potentially compounding effects of deprivation and ethnicity on health where there are geographic barriers to accessing health services such as long travel distances” (p. 6) as well as limited services available that are culturally relevant to users.

Te Oranganui endorsed the commissioning of Whakauae Research for Māori Health and Development, the Ngāti Hauti-*owned kaupapa*

Māori health research centre also based in Whanganui, to carry out the TPoTAK evaluation. That endorsement followed informal discussion between Te Oranganui and Whakauae senior managers. Te Oranganui's TPoTAK partner concurred that Whakauae would be well-positioned to carry out the evaluation. The partners' decision to pursue the commissioning of Whakauae was underpinned by the already well-established relationship between that organisation and Te Oranganui. The two additionally have a history of working together successfully on research projects including Te Puni Kōkiri (Ministry of Māori Development)-commissioned Whānau Ora action research during 2011–2014 (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2015), the Health Research Council (HRC)-funded 2009–2012 investigation *Facilitating Whānau Resilience Through Māori Primary Health Intervention* (Boulton, 2012), and the 2014–2018 HRC-funded Preventing Chronic Conditions: Learnings from Participatory Research with Māori study.

Whakauae, although already heavily committed to its other research activities, recognised that the evaluation of TPoTAK would be a good “fit” with its own research priorities. These priorities include carrying out research which supports marginalised Māori communities, builds Māori health research capability and advocates for robust, innovative approaches to better meet the wellbeing needs of Māori. Following the submission of a successful proposal to the Ministry of Health, Whakauae was formally commissioned to design and implement the evaluation of TPoTAK.

Being mindful of the TPoTAK social context and complexity noted above, a qualitative evaluation design, under the umbrella of kaupapa Māori theory, was developed (Whakauae Research for Māori Health and Development, 2014). Kaupapa Māori theory represents a transformative indigenous theory of change that has its roots in the lived experience of Māori (Pihama, 2010). Essentially

kaupapa Māori theory is a “political tool used by Māori to make space” (Curtis, 2016, p. 397) for Māori ways of doing things and of understanding the world. Principles including social transformation, Māori control, delivering benefits for Māori, decolonisation, and recognising that diverse Māori realities underpin kaupapa Māori research practice (Curtis, 2016). Kaupapa Māori evaluation is in turn described by Goodwin, Sauni, and Were (2015, p. 36) as evaluation that is “undertaken by Māori, with Māori, for Māori”. This description of the key characteristics of kaupapa Māori evaluation is consistent with principles of kaupapa Māori research practice that Curtis (2016) highlights, including being Māori controlled (“by Māori”), decolonisation focused (“with Māori”), and delivering benefits (“for Māori”).

The use of a kaupapa Māori methodology reflects Whakauae’s commitment to working with Māori communities in a way that resonates with Māori beliefs and traditions. Maintaining a focus on transparency, building purposeful and respectful relationships, recognising strengths, and contributing to positive social change are also concomitant with Whakauae’s ways of working. Under this broad umbrella, the TPoTAK evaluation additionally made use of methods described in the Western research literature. The blending of kaupapa Māori with Western methods in a single research design is common in the work carried out by kaupapa Māori evaluators; as Cram, Smith, and Johnstone (2003) note:

A Kaupapa Māori approach does not exclude the use of a wide range of research methods but rather signals the interrogation of methods in relation to cultural sensitivity; cross-cultural reliability, useful outcomes for Māori, and other such measures (p. 2).

The TPoTAK evaluation also drew on ways of working inspired by transformative participatory evaluation (TPE); a unique form

of participatory evaluation which Cousins and Whitmore (1998) describe as “[using] evaluation processes and products ... to transform power relations and to promote social action and change” (p. 87). Whakauae therefore set out to “evaluate with”, rather than carry out an “evaluation of”, TPoTAK; actively engaging and collaborating with participants (King, Cousins, & Whitmore, 2007). Moving beyond collaboration, Whakauae wanted to carry out an evaluation that would be empowering for participants involving them in building knowledge and further contributing to community transformation. TPE advocates for actively involving participants in evaluation processes with a view to supporting evaluation capability building and breaking down “the distance between researcher and researched” (Cousins et al., 1998, p. 90). Whakauae recognised commonalities between the TPE approach and kaupapa Māori evaluation in their emphasis on “supporting transformation in the interests of communities that experience discrimination and oppression” (Cram & Mertens, 2016, p. 162). Although the focus of TPE is broad, the transformative focus of kaupapa Māori evaluation is specific to Māori (Cram & Mertens, 2016).

### ***From theory to practice: Our journey to “making it real”***

Carrying out the TPoTAK evaluation ideally meant infusing all components with a kaupapa Māori approach inclusive of building evaluation capability. Whakauae faced challenges in achieving that ideal, the principal one being the dearth of senior Māori evaluators on the staff immediately available to carry out the “hands-on” evaluation work. Rather than turn down the commission, or default on the commitment to taking a kaupapa Māori evaluation approach, Whakauae opted to instead reframe that challenge as an opportunity to grow internal capability. The TPoTAK evaluation positioned Whakauae to extend the evaluation leadership competencies of a

team member, using the wider team to provide guidance. The evaluation lead role was thus assigned to an evaluator with extensive experience working within kaupapa Māori evaluation teams but with little experience in a lead role. Importantly, she brought with her to the evaluation leadership challenge a close cultural fit with the TPoTAK project kaimahi and participants. Goodwin et al. (2015) describe cultural fit as being critical to carrying out evaluations that work for indigenous communities, resulting in "more effective outcomes [for those communities]" (p. 36).

A Pākehā colleague who had had significant exposure to a kaupapa Māori evaluation way of working, coupled with evaluation leadership experience, played a key role in the team supporting the lead evaluator in the TPoTAK work. The Pākehā colleague's day-to-day availability, in the office space she shared with the lead evaluator, meant that the lead evaluator could informally draw on her support as an evaluation sounding-board and as a "critical friend" when the need arose. In her support role, the Pākehā evaluator honored the responsibilities inherent in having been "invited in" to contribute to an evaluation in a decolonising research space. These responsibilities included the requirement to recognise and work within her own cultural limitations (Curtis, Townsend, & Airini, 2012).

In keeping with kaupapa Māori practices (Pipi et al., 2004) the lead evaluator met *kanohi ki te kanohi* with TPoTAK team in the opening phases of the evaluation and thereafter. Meeting *kanohi ki te kanohi* prioritised *whakawhanaungatanga*, trust and relationship building. The Pākehā evaluator, though playing a primarily "back office" role in the evaluation, took part in several of these hui and contributed to ongoing relationship building. Similarly, she joined TPoTAK kaimahi and the lead evaluator at one of the first Whānau Days hosted by the kaimahi at Te Puke Marae with project participants. Whakauae recognised the importance of being transparent

about who was contributing to its TPoTAK evaluation work. Thus Whakauae ensured that all the faces involved were “known and seen” (Pipi et al., 2014, p.147) by TPoTAK participants, advisory group members, and the project team. Wrapped around the evaluation, including the relationship between the evaluation lead and her Pākehā colleague preserving Māori control of the research process in all its dimensions (Curtis, 2016), was the oversight of Whakauae’s senior Māori researchers. The challenge to the evaluation posed by Whakauae’s dearth of senior Māori evaluators immediately available to carry out the hands-on evaluation mahi was thus addressed through the various processes described above.

The kaupapa Māori approach to evaluation capability building activities with TPoTAK kaimahi was closely interwoven with Whakauae’s own internal capability building and took several forms. These included involving kaimahi in the development of evaluation tools and supporting them to carry out evaluation data collection, as well as to participate in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australasian evaluation forums. The evaluation mahi allowed the lead evaluator to try out some of the techniques she was learning about in her formal study with her learning having a flow-on effect to TPoTAK kaimahi. The kaimahi, through working closely with the evaluation lead, increasingly began to see evaluation as a useful tool rather than as a mandatory “add-on” to the project.

The building of a project logic model, in the early phase of the evaluation, offered kaimahi an initial opportunity to become familiar with an evaluation tool that they could opt either to make use of in the future, or customise for use. The project logic model tracked our common understandings of key project activities and what these activities were intended to achieve. In spelling out the expectations of the project, the logic model provided a framework for the evaluation and for determining the evaluation priorities.

Developing the logic model involved several steps. A draft model was initially put together by the two evaluators drawing on the information gathered through informal discussions with the project partners and on a review of the project-related documents. The draft model was set up by using a large blank sheet of butcher’s paper and adding coloured Post-it stickers to record key project activities along with their associated sets of outcomes: short-term, medium-term, and longer term. Directional arrows illustrated the assumed “cause and effect” relationships between the activities and their outcome sets. A logic-modelling workshop was held with TPoTAK representatives using the draft model as the starting point for developing a final version. The development process included discussing and “testing” various alternatives, moving Post-it stickers to new positions and adding and deleting others. This process served to further clarify TPoTAK project-outcomes expectations.

An added benefit of the logic-modelling activity was the creation of a visual tool that the TPoTAK team then used to explain their project to various audiences and to promote it among their whānau. The kaimahi put the logic-model diagram up on a wall in the marae complex where it was readily accessible to whānau on a day-to-day basis. This visual representation of TPoTAK provided a way of keeping the project in the “line of sight” of whānau, offering a constant reminder of what was happening and why. The model was independently reviewed by the TPoTAK team over the course of the project. The team drew on their emerging familiarity with model building, to ensure that it continued to provide a relevant “road map” that was useful both for them and for the project participants.

Evidencing project activity quality and achievements, for the benefit of marae whānau, was critical as was relaying accurate information to the evaluation commissioner. In developing and adapting data collection tools, the evaluation lead drew on her cultural

knowledge, values, and experience working in consultation with the kaimahi. Tools that the kaimahi could work with to further increase the likelihood of whānau taking part in the evaluation mahi were needed. The process of building and refining the data collection tools in turn contributed to building the evaluation capability of both the lead evaluator and the TPōTAK kaimahi.

Using one of the tools developed, a *kanohi ki te kanohi* whānau survey, the kaimahi independently collected whānau data. The lead evaluator provided support to the kaimahi maintaining contact primarily via Facebook messaging and texting. The established relationships kaimahi shared with whānau significantly contributed to successful survey administration. The kaimahi highlighted the important role of “cup of tea words” in their evaluation survey administration. “Cup of tea words” were about calling in to see whānau in their own homes and accepting the *manaakitanga* they offered; invariably including a cup of tea and a general *kōrero*. This paved the way for the kaimahi to move on to what had initiated their visit—offering support to whānau, sharing insights with them and, in the case of the survey, exploring whānau perspectives on the progress and impact of TPōTAK initiatives. The richness of the evaluation data the kaimahi gathered, as an outcome of who they were and how they went about their task, contributed significantly to addressing the evaluation questions. It also served to highlight for the kaimahi that evaluation was a process that they could readily engage with and adapt for use in ways that resonated both for them and for their community.

The kaimahi worked alongside the lead evaluator to collect data during the regular Whānau Days they hosted at the marae. Whānau Days additionally provided the opportunity for the lead evaluator to talk with whānau about evaluation results to date and to gauge the extent to which those results resonated for them. These events

were primarily convened to bring whānau together to connect, share healthy kai, share learning around keeping themselves well, and to facilitate easy access to a range of services including mobile health services. Whānau Days were also about strengthening the ties between whānau and the marae recognising that ready access to the marae, and other places of cultural significance, have a bearing on both individual and collective wellbeing (Durie, 2001). Rather than being a primary focus of these Whānau Days, TPoTAK evaluation activity was essentially an “add-on.”

In keeping with the tenor of Whānau Days, it was important to make sure that evaluation-data collection would be interesting and engaging for participants. One of the interactive and fun data-collection methods developed and used was mahi a-tēpu (table work), an adaptation of a muralling technique. Large, low-cost plastic tablecloths were laid on two of the tables in the wharekai with a key evaluation question being handwritten in large print at the centre of each using an indelible-ink marker pen. Whānau were invited to use the coloured marker pens to write, or draw, responses to the evaluation questions at any time they chose to during the Whānau Day. Although some whānau members individually jotted down their thoughts on the tablecloths, others talked together in groups of varying sizes before deciding on their combined responses. In some instances, whānau later returned to the tables to view the collective results or to amend or add to their illustrations and / or words as well as those which other whānau had recorded. Using the tablecloth muralling method accommodated whānau sitting around the table together taking their time to have wide-ranging conversations without pressure to focus only on the evaluation question and to hurry to generate instant responses.

At the same time as mahi a-tēpu was occurring, Whānau Day activities were taking place as were other forms of whānau data

collection. One of these was conducting “ratings” of project activities in terms of their impact from the point of view of whānau. For rating, a series of labelled, differently coloured bowls were arranged in a row on a table along with a collection of brightly coloured stones. Whānau were asked to consider what impacts they believed specific TPoTAK activities were having on aspects of their health and well-being and to rate their significance. The lead evaluator conducted these data-collection exercises, with both individual whānau members and with small groups of whānau who chose to participate, over the course of the day. Importantly, in the context of TPoTAK, these whānau data-collection processes were fluid and only a small part of the wider activity that was taking place.

Both the methods briefly described above resulted in the successful collection of data that was later used to help to answer the evaluation questions. The methods resonated with whānau as was reflected in their high levels of participation as well as in the interest expressed in replicating the use of these methods in other aspects of their own lives, for example, with a kōhanga reo trust board and, in another, with the staff of a Māori organisation.

As has been highlighted above, the evaluation lead adopted pragmatic and flexible approaches to collecting data. She was mindful of being responsive to the needs of participants within the context of TPoTAK. The approaches adopted by the evaluation lead resonate with Patton’s (2015) observation that:

Drawing on creativity and pragmatism opens new possibilities, the bricolage of combining old things in new ways, including alternative and emergent forms of data collection and combining inquiry traditions ... The creative, practical, and adaptive qualitative inquirer ... uses diverse techniques to fit the complexities of a fieldwork situation (p. 154).

The third, and final, form of TPōTAK evaluation capability building that we want to briefly reference in this article is formal evaluation-forum activity. TPōTAK kaimahi participated with the evaluators in conferences, including in the preparation of abstracts and presentations along with presentation delivery, further contributing to consolidating relationships of trust between the kaimahi and the evaluators. Kaimahi awareness of the ways evaluation could contribute to strengthening project work were heightened through participation in both formal and informal conference sessions. Through conference collaboration with kaimahi the evaluators, for their part, came to learn about some critical aspects of TPōTAK that may have otherwise remained “undiscovered” in terms of the formal evaluation work. The rōpū participated in three evaluation-specific conferences—the Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association conference in July 2016 (Wellington) along with the Australasian Evaluation Society’s international conferences in 2015 (Melbourne) and 2016 (Perth). The rōpū also participated in He Manawa Whenua conference (Waikato, 2017) as presenters. The lead evaluator played a central role in identifying conference funding opportunities to support the participation of the TPōTAK kaimahi and in working with them to prepare their funding applications.

In this section of the article, we have explored some of the ways that we collectively worked to ensure that the evaluation of TPōTAK was carried out in keeping with a kaupapa Māori approach.

## **Conclusion**

Effective evaluation capability building requires intensive resourcing and a willingness, on the part of all participants, to actively engage with the development process. Explicit values-based practice, a commitment to kaupapa Māori ways of working, and being open

to learning are critical elements of evaluating alongside Māori communities. We still see a need for external evaluators who can bring a different lens to a programme evaluation. However, we foresee a fast-approaching time when more indigenous communities will be positioned to carry out the evaluation of their own programmes and to further develop evaluation methods that satisfy their own local indigenous traditions.

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### ***Glossary of te reo Māori***

ahi kaa/ahi kā	fires of occupation
hapū	subtribe, extended kinship group, descendants of a common ancestor associated with a distinct geographical area
hui	meeting
iwi	tribe, extended kinship group, descendants of a common ancestor associated with a distinct geographical area
kai	food
kaimahi	worker
kaiwhakahaere	operations manager
kākano	seed, kernel
kanohi ki te kanohi	face-to-face
kaupapa Māori	Māori paradigm, ideology
kōhanga reo	Māori language preschool

kōrero	talk, discuss
koroheke	male elder
kuia	female elder
māra kai	edible garden
mahi	work
manaakitanga	hospitality, caring for people
Māori	indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand
marae	traditional meeting grounds of Māori with a shared genealogy
Pākehā	descendant of the colonising settler population, person of European descent
pōwhiri	welcome ceremony on the marae
rōpū	group
te ao Māori	Māori worldview
tēpu	table
Te Puni Kōkiri	The Ministry of Māori Development
whakapapa	genealogy, descent
whakawhanaungatanga	relationship building
whānau	extended family group
whanaungatanga	relationships, kinship, connection
wharekai	dining hall

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